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"Debut"

Twisted Thistle Productions Presents . . .

Loquacious Placemat

www.loquaciousplacemat.blogspot.com

NO LIMIT HOLD 'EM

by Jason Stout
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*"God does not play dice with the universe."
-Albert Einstein.*

Johnny bet big, even though he was staring at a lousy hand--queen and ten of different suits--and was short on chips. He and Chang were the last two at the table and the tension was mounting.

The next three cards should have scared Johnny off: Ace, king, eight. He had no pairs, no chance of a flush, and only a long-shot at a straight. But Johnny was feeling lucky. He raised another \$200,000. Chang didn't flinch. He called the bet and they watched as the dealer flipped the next card.

Seven.

Still nothing for Johnny, and only one card left.

Chang glanced over at Johnny.

Johnny said a quick prayer, "God, please give me a jack." Then, as he looked heavenward, Johnny pushed his remaining chips to the center of the table.

"All in," Johnny said.

The crowd roared its approval as the two players stood up and waited. After what seemed an eternity, it was time for the last card to be dealt. Johnny and Chang watched as the dealer fingered the edge of the deck.

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"OK," a voice said. "Stop it there."

The clicking of an old-school projector slowed to a halt. The lights came on.

"So," the voice continued. "What do we do?"

"Seems like small potatoes," a second voice said. "Leave it to chance."

"You know there's no 'chance' when we have a prayer request pending. If he hadn't prayed, we could just let it go. But now, either we give him the jack or we don't. One way or the other, we own the decision."

"Give it or not. Make a call and move on. Who cares?"

"The boss cares. I got the memo this

morning. This is a juncture point."

"How big?" the second voice asked.

"Big," the first voice said. "If we go the wrong way, it leads to this."

The click and whir resumed and the room was again bathed in white and blue projector light. The pictures that flicked by could have been from a 1940s newsreel except there was no sound. Mass graves. Concentration camps. Mushroom clouds. Then a sticks and stones war among the ragged survivors--diseased, crippled, blinded. Finally, nothing. The pictures disappeared and the flapping of the film ceased.

"So," the second voice said. "This isn't just any juncture point; it's the juncture point."

"Yep," the first voice answered. "And the decision is up to you."

"Wait a minute," the second voice said. "I need more information."

"Like what?"

"What will happen to Johnny if he gets the jack?"

"What else?"

"What happens to Chang?"

"And?"

"What about their families?"

"OK. And?"

"What about the world?"

"Too far," the first voice said. "The Boss has given us a two-year forward look restricted to Johnny, Chang and their families. He's suspended everything pending your report. I've loaded the films. Let me know when you're done."

For twenty years, he watched and re-watched the two possibilities, studying in minute detail the potential future histories. He looked for some indication of what would happen to the rest of the world. But he couldn't tell.

"It's time to make a decision," the first voice finally said. "And the Boss wants you to take the decision to him yourself."

"OK," the second voice said. "Give me a minute to collect my thoughts and I'll go deliver the verdict."

He left the office and boarded the monorail

at the nearest station. He crowded in with other functionaries and administrators and stood holding a handstrap for the majority of the trip. At each stop, though, more and more of his co-travelers exited the train and fewer and fewer got on. By the time it reached his stop--the last stop on the line--he alone rode the train. From the station he followed a narrow path toward the white light at the center of the city and entered the throne room.

As he approached the gleaming figure on the throne, he wondered why he had been trusted with such a monumental assignment.

"Your decision?" the boss said.

"Right," the second voice said. "Here it is."

He handed a small bit of parchment to an attendant, who flitted back and forth on impossibly small wings.

The Boss looked at the paper, closed his eyes and sighed.

"Very well," he said. He snapped his fingers and the world started turning again.

"Is that all, sir?" the second voice said backing away from the throne.

"One more thing," the Boss said, opening his eyes. "Tell me how you made your decision."

He reached into a pocket of his robes and pulled out a small, red rectangle with dots on each side. He held it up for the boss to see.

"Even number, Johnny gets a jack," he said. "Odd number, no jack."

The Boss smiled.

"Yes," he said. "That's about right. You may go."

#

The lights glared brightly on Johnny and Chang. The dealer flipped the card. A jack of spades.

Johnny made his straight and the world was safe.

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PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST WITH A RED CAR

by Nuala Ní Chonchúir
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Three Polish boys battle with their car on the garage forecourt; up they push it, down they swing it, but the car won't loosen up. It all looks as tough as waltzing with an anchor. I watch their dance through my murky windscreen, sodden in the smells of discarded food and damp; safe with an engine that always thrums to life, eventually. And I wish for better cars for all of us: for them, a Volvo estate, swift and reliable; for myself, a cherry-red Mini that will zip and glide, park in less than five arm-pulling points. Then I remember my last red car, and wonder if too much pride in its spanky redness left it a rusted heap in a Donegal scrap-yard; whether crashing it started the slow wreckage of our marriage.

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BEST AIN'T GOOD ENOUGH

by Mathew Klickstein
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Doing my best simply wasn't good enough. I don't know when this whole writing curse began, but I know that it was the cause of all my troubles as well as all of my joys. Suddenly, I was thrust into the world of trying to entertain others by my wits, my alleged talents. Thereafter, it was time not only to entertain them but to discover a way to sustain myself by entertaining them, by illuminating for them whatever it was I felt important to say.

I found myself in Los Angeles, going to school for it. I found myself working in television, traveling the Southwest and using it to document whatever it was we saw. I found myself on film sets, in production offices, working for papers and magazines, introducing myself to people twice my age but

who could never be my parents, running amuck through the streets and worlds of Hollywood, the Industry.

I was telecommuting to New York, to France. And meanwhile, I'm at home watching The Adventures of Pete and Pete with Joe and doing coke off of our coffee table. I'm suddenly living with some violent alcoholic pixie with broken wings and writing a book about my friend's family's restaurant, the very place Phil Hartman and wife were seen last in public before their murder-suicide incident.

I'm running the oldest free-weekly paper in Los Angeles, owned now by some company in China that, by all accounts, probably thought they were buying Entertainment Weekly. Chasing my tail around the country, to Israel even. New York, New Jersey, a West Coast tour, now they're interviewing us.

Sundance was a joke, celebrities are infuriatingly dull in person and all far shorter than one could ever imagine. I argue with collaborators and with the moneymen, who begin to look and talk the same and are starting to be the same age anyway. My work is re-written by Steven Seagal, I learn that all that matters is the one-sheet, the trailer, the star. Get asses into those seats. The publishing world is no better: middle-aged women running the show so that middle-aged women can buy books that are a fine supplement to television.

There's suddenly an ever-thickening line between a film with substance and a film that is entertaining, as though to have a film with both qualities were impossible or possibly just too hard to develop. I'm told outright, "We don't make good movies, we make movies that make money," as though there were somehow now a difference.

The money dries up. Suddenly, it's five years later. Five years into the muck, the mire. Point of no return is a real possibility. Everyone seems to be experiencing a similar Quarter-Life Crisis, and no one seems to know anything about how car insurance works with MedPay or how to cheat properly on one's taxes. What do we do now? Where do we go from here?

We all begin to find it troubling, disquieting that none of us seems to be able to find

sustainable work. We're not looking in the creative realm anymore. We don't have enough clerical experience or admin experience to find anything through the temp agencies. We haven't worked in retail since high school, and so we can't find anything at the local store or trendy fashion outlet. And the money keeps dwindling, it's cold season, I need a new book to read.

Everything's online now, and no one will meet with me face-to-face to see that I know how to work a phone, I know how to send a fax. I have to take personality tests that make less sense than an LSAT. I fail; perhaps I shouldn't have suggested that "I strongly agree" with it being appropriate for an employee to steal from the register. All these questions referring to "marijuana cigarettes" befuddle me with the contradiction that such a new-age concept as online personality tests could still be based in such archaic terminology.

Maybe that could be my new job: updating antiquated verbiage in online personality tests that, like the SAT's, ensure that only the best and brightest may gain admittance... or at least those who happen to be proficient at taking tests.

And now I'm here, at the bookstore, selling my books, just as I had sold all of my CD's and DVD's, my very mind, my very soul that took me 20 years to build, at Amoeba before leaving Los Angeles. I sell the last two books I have here, the hardest to part with being Flannery O'Connor's letters; I don't want to let go of her, she got me through the tough transition period of the last few months. She was my only friend throughout, always there for me, giving me advice and encouragement and honest candor with every word. Then nothing. I tap her spine and let her go for \$4.50.

I'm sitting at a table in the bookstore, looking online for work, and though normally I'd be plopped down next to a bum or a gutter punk hogging the two outlets in here by playing Warcraft on his laptop, this drizzly morning, I'm sitting next to a guy with a book called Six-Figure Freelancer and peering at a random website. I hope he doesn't see me emailing naked pictures of myself to a friend who can get me some money for the photos from his people in Germany.

THE MEDIC

by Ilan Herman

www.scribd.com/ilan-herman

Monday, April 16, 6:00 A.M.

For sixty years, Rosemary always woke up fifteen minutes before her alarm clock rang, but that Monday morning, the buzzing reached deep into her sleep.

"Oh dear," she muttered and struggled to consciousness. Feeling foggy and lethargic, she stood up and donned her pink robe—faded and worn, white threads showing through at the elbows.

I really should get a new robe, she thought, while shuffling into her cloth slippers, but she didn't mean it. After all, she surmised, at eighty-six-years-old, what was the point of getting anything new?

She sat at the kitchen table, sipped chamomile tea, and nibbled crackers. Eating had become merely habit, necessary sustenance void of spontaneity. Even reflecting on her past had become monotonous; she had lived alone for so long, too long, and had reminisced about everything many times, too many.

Feeling exhausted, Rosemary stared out the kitchen window and whispered, "I'm not feeling well, not well at all. Maybe I should call for help." Dizzy and nauseous, she reached for the phone and dialed 911. Then she staggered to her bedroom, where she lay on her bed and fell asleep.

Rosemary awoke to a knock on the front door. As she walked through the hallway, she noticed that she wasn't nauseous or dizzy anymore. She cracked open the door, and peered past the chain lock. A young man in a paramedic's uniform stood on the porch.

"Morning madam," said the medic. "We received a 911 call from this address. Was it you?"

"Well, it was me, but I feel much better now," Rosemary said and smiled nervously.

The medic nodded and smiled. "That's good. What's your name?"

"Rosemary, but you can call me Rose"

"I'm John. May I please come in, Rose? I need to check you to make sure you're okay."

"Of course." She released the lock and opened the door. The medic entered and placed his medical bag on the living room table. Rosemary sat on the couch while the medic checked her vital signs. She enjoyed the

touch of his warm, gentle fingers on her dry, liver-spotted skin.

"You're fine, Rose," he said and placed the stethoscope back in his bag.

"I feel good," she said. "I was about to make tea. Would you care for a cup?"

"Thanks, my shift is over. I'd love a cup." John sat at the kitchen table and wrote his report while Rosemary steeped the tea.

"Milk and sugar?" she asked.

"Just sugar, please." His brown, compassionate eyes and square jaw reminded Rose of her husband Dave, when he was younger.

"Have you lived here a long time?" John the medic asked.

She set the teacups on the table and took the seat across from him. "I've lived here sixty years and raised a daughter, but my husband passed away twenty years ago."

"That's a long time to be on your own," the medic said and shook his head.

Feeling unusually hungry, Rose offered, "I'll make sandwiches, too."

"That'll be great, Rose. I'm starving," he said and nodded.

Rosemary was feeling better than she had in years, her mind clear, and her finger joints nimble and free of arthritis. John seemed content to sit at the kitchen table and attentively listen to her talk about her life with Dave, and what a good husband and father he had been.

"We were happily married for forty-two years," she proudly said.

"Good for you, Rose," the medic said. "So few people stay married these days, there are so many problems."

Rosemary spoke about Suzan, their daughter, how smart and beautiful she was, talented and special. Suzan was attending medical school, when, one night, on the way to a party with a group of friends, their car was hit by a truck. The truck driver had fallen asleep. Suzan and two of her friends died instantly.

"Dave was never the same after his little girl was gone," Rosemary whispered, a solitary tear rolling down her wrinkled cheek. "A year later, he died from a stroke, or so the doctors said. But I know he died from a broken heart."

Tears in his eyes, John rose from his chair. He knelt by Rosemary's side and hugged her thin, fragile body. She leaned on his strong shoulders and wept as never before, a cleansing, liberating cry that released her from the sadness that had been her daily toll for so long.

After her tears, Rosemary felt light as a feather. She brought out photo albums she had avoided for many years. John was eager to see pictures of her wedding day, Suzan's baby pictures, family events, and even photos of their Golden Retriever, Rusty.

Rosemary chuckled. "Rusty never tired of fetching a purple beanbag that Susan tossed to him, until one day, the bag ripped apart. Susan was quite upset as was Rusty."

John stayed with Rose all day. They drank lots of tea, ate sandwiches, and even had ice cream and cookies for dessert. When twilight settled, John apologetically said it was time for him to leave, as he needed shut-eye before his next shift.

Rosemary smiled. "Thank you, John, for a wonderful day. It's been so long since I've had company."

"Thank you, Rose, for sharing your life with me," John said. They hugged at the door.

Rosemary stood in the doorway, waving goodbye to John the medic who walked away into the gathering night.

She shut the door and murmured, "What a nice young man."

Feeling tired, Rosemary returned to her bedroom, and lay down for a nap.

Monday, April 16, 6:45 A.M.

Medical Report by Sue Griffith, Unit 17

Responding to a 911 call at 426 Cherry Lane, we received no response after knocking on the door. In accordance with Section E4, we forced our way into the residence, and found Rosemary Whitney, a Caucasian female, in the bedroom. She had been deceased for about fifteen minutes.

Efforts to resuscitate proved unsuccessful. Time of death was determined to be 6:30 A.M., April 16. The body was transferred to the morgue at St. John Hospital for autopsy to determine cause of death.

LOQUACIOUS PLACEMAT MANIFESTO

http://www.Loquaciousplacemat.blogspot.com

Loquacious Placemat is here to resuscitate the lost traditions of the broadsheet, the pamphlet, the scribble and the screed. The central idea is to get writing off of the shelves, out of the drawers and into the streets.

We want to give literary fiction the power to ambush the public. We want our stories to

be read by as broad a range of people as possible. If this means that it is read through a haze of cigarette smoke, gets splashed with coffee or stained with whiskey, then so much the better!

Our words can live long, healthy and quiet lives nestled away in the literary corners of the internet; they deserve to be lovingly bound in traditional journals and stored on the shelves of connoisseurs and academics. But, they need to get out every once in a while. We want to give the works published in Loquacious Placemat the opportunity to get tattered around the edges, folded in fourths and stuffed in someone's back pocket.

Loquacious Placemat is here to put strange words in front of those who would not otherwise seek them out. Online, we will be a concise and tidy journal. Out in the world, we will be something not so easily defined; something a little strange put out there with the hopes that our strangeness will rub off on the world.

What's more, Loquacious Placemat can serve as a launching pad for your own explorations. Check out our writers online. Do not let this fleeting contact with them be the last you hear from them. In addition to the URLs listed with their bylines, you can visit the Loquacious Placemat website to read profiles for all of our featured authors.

An hour ago, you had probably never heard of Ilan Herman, Mathew Klickstein, Nuala Ní Chonchúir or Jason Stout. Just changing that has made our mission a success.

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