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Editor's Note: Spontaneous Combustion

Jesus Christ, it gets hot in New Mexico. Although, it is summer, and I do live in the northern hemisphere, so I guess I shouldn't be surprised. But I am a pale, pale man and numbers like the one on the cover terrify me.

Anyway, stories. We've got them. And they're perfect for reading in the dark, air-conditioned corners of your domicile of choice. Or outside in the sun, if you're one of *those* people.

Speaking of people, our first story, "Golden Hours," comes all the way from Brazil, by way of California ex-pat Colleen Chen, and tells the tale of a man with a remarkable, if short-lived, gift. Next is the fairy tale retelling "Red," by Christopher Owen, followed by the Catholic dogma retelling "Jesus' Nephew," by Joe Thompson. After that is the sad, creepy "Mammy'd Give Me Minds To Eat," by Graham Tugwell, who wins the award for having the most porn star-like name we've ever published. And last, but certainly not least, is "Jolly Roger," by Michael Sions, a story that expertly combines corpses, pirates, and insurance salesmen.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to board up the windows before the sun realizes I'm in here.

– Eirik Gumeny

Golden Hours

Colleen Chen

After making sure no one was around, Cosmo unzipped his pants to relieve himself in the park gardens. Just then, a tiny female with wings popped out of a flower.

“Stop!” she cried.

Cosmo was so surprised, he did pause.

“Are you my conscience?” he asked. “If so, I gotta pass on your advice this time, ‘cause I really gotta go.”

“I am not your conscience. I’m a fairy. And if you withhold your urine from my home in these gardens, I’ll give you a marvelous magic boon.”

“What—you mean like make me really rich? That sort of thing?”

“If that’s what you want, yes.”

With difficulty, Cosmo controlled his urge. He ran to the park bathroom and made it just in time.

When he returned, the fairy was waiting for him. She took out a tiny wand and waved it in front of his pants.

“My flower and I appreciate your kind gesture. You have now been blessed—but remember, it only will last for twelve hours.” She disappeared inside the flower.

“Hey, wait—where’s my boon?”

But the fairy was gone.

Cosmo cursed under his breath and stomped off to get drunk at a bar.

After a good half dozen beers, Cosmo stumbled to the men’s bathroom. He was relieving himself at the urinal when he noticed something odd. His urine wasn’t making any noise.

He peered down. The urinal was painted a shiny gold color inside. It looked like real gold.

As he was examining the urinal, a single drop of pee splashed onto the floor. Where it hit, the floor shone gold. When he inspected it, he found it was dry; he scraped it with his nail and a fine gold dust shimmered on his finger.

His urine turned everything it touched into gold!

“My boon!” he breathed.

He tried to urinate some more, but he was dry.

“More beer!” he yelled as he ran out of the bathroom. He downed another six beers as fast as he could, then rushed back to the bathroom to see if it would work again.

This time he peed all over the wall. *I’m rich!* he sprayed in large, shaky letters. He climbed up onto the sink and sprayed a happy face on the mirror. All of it turned to pure gold. He danced a little jig, then left the bathroom whistling. The fairy had said he had twelve hours—he’d been drinking for a couple hours already, so that left him with a good nine hours left to go home and turn everything to gold.

He would have whistled his way right out of the bar, but then the bouncer blocked his way.

“Before you leave, you gotta pay your tab.”

Cosmo checked his pockets.

“Hey, I don’t have any money on me—but I just quadrupled the value of your bar while I was in the bathroom.”

“No money?” growled the bouncer, hands curling into fists.

“Hold on there, big guy! Seriously—take a look at the bathroom! I just turned your urinal to gold!”

The bouncer grabbed Cosmo and hauled him outside.

“I’ll give you a demonstration!” howled Cosmo, and then his words became unintelligible under the onslaught of the bouncer’s fists.

The bouncer deposited Cosmo into the back alley when he was done.

After Cosmo regained consciousness, he threw up. Feeling guilty about the mess he'd made, he peed a little on the vomit, turning it to gold. He began to stagger home.

As he passed a street lamp, he felt something hard poking him in the back. Two men wearing ski masks were standing behind him—he was so out of it he hadn't even heard them approach. One of them held a gun.

"Your money or your life," said the one with the gun.

"I don't have any money!" cried Cosmo. "I just got beaten up because I couldn't pay my bar tab."

"I guess it just isn't your day." The gun pointed at Cosmo's face.

Cosmo wet his pants. Or he would have—except his pee turned his underwear and pants to gold.

"Look at his pants! Is that real gold?" said one of the men, reaching forward for a grope.

"Take your pants off! The underwear too!" said the other.

Cosmo did so. The two muggers ran off with his pants and underwear, laughing madly.

He'd only gone four blocks when a policeman accosted him.

"You there—hands up. You're under arrest for indecent exposure. You oughtta be ashamed of yourself—there's still kids out here this time of night."

"But I got mugged—my pants were stolen!"

"You can explain that downtown."

In jail, Cosmo was given a pair of orange pants to wear, but that didn't stop the three men in his cell from pawing at him.

"Hey, new boy, let's have some fun," the largest one said. Two of the men held Cosmo's arms while the large one began pulling at his pants.

Cosmo kicked and screamed, but to no avail. The guards seemed completely uninterested. Soon his new orange pants were off. The men holding him were going to turn him around for the

large one's attack. He had one chance. He let loose a spray of urine, directly at Large One's face.

Large One fell, his face frozen into a mask of pure gold. The two others, surprised, loosened their hold on Cosmo, and he ripped free of them and sprayed their faces as well. They toppled without a sound.

Hours later, Cosmo was released without charges. Upon discovering the three gold-faced felons, the guards had made Cosmo drink several gallons of water and pee all over the bodies as well. Only then, gloating over their new gold statues, did they let Cosmo go.

Cosmo ran all the way home. Checking his watch, he saw that he had minutes left. Unzipping his pants as he ran up the apartment stairs, he flung open the door.

His pee sprayed out and hit a bouquet of flowers sitting in a vase in the entryway, turning them to gold. Then the twelve hours were up.

Cosmo looked at his gold flowers and the events of the past day overwhelmed him. He'd been beaten up, almost shot, arrested and then almost raped. He hadn't turned all his possessions to gold like he'd planned, but the fairy's boon had saved his life and more. He decided that he would be grateful for what he had, and moreover, that he would never pee in the bushes again.

As a side bonus, the flowers were worth at least a million dollars.

COLLEEN CHEN is a suburban Californian relocated to a small hill in the countryside of Brazil. By day she raises chickens and children, and by night she usually sleeps, but she dreams of raising hell, and sometimes she writes about it. She has a fledgling website at www.colleenchen.com.

Red

Christopher Owen

"Here," said Red's mother, a half-smoked and ash-laden cigarette dangling from her well glossed lips, "take this basket of ennui to your grandmother."

Red took the basket with both hands. It was quite heavy. Her mother had been busy.

"Are you quite sure grandma will want this?" Red asked.

"I don't care if she wants it," said Red's mother. "I simply want it gone. And there's a woodsman coming by later, and I'd like you gone as well. Two birds with one stone, eh?"

"Quite smart there, mother," said Red, and she took the basket, left her house and started down the path through the woods to her grandmother's house.

Red walked for a time through the woods, but the basket was quite heavy, and she was quite lethargic, so she decided to sit for a while with her back against a tree alongside the path. Soon she was slumbering hard.

When she awoke, it was pitch black around her. A pair of yellow eyes stared at her through the darkness. She heard the slightest hint of a wolf's growl.

"Well, if it isn't a little girl," said the wolf.

"Well, if it isn't a hungry wolf," said Red.

"How do you know I'm hungry?" asked the wolf.

"Aren't you always?"

"Yes, that's usually true. And a little girl would probably subdue my appetite quite nicely, don't you think?"

"I suppose so," said Red. "Though why eat me when I've a basket of fresh meat here by my side that you could have."

"Fresh meat?" asked the wolf.

"Yes, it's quite rare and bloody. Prime and well marbled. A carnivore like you should love it."

Red's description had the wolf's mouth watering. Before he could think better of it, he plunged his snout into the basket and gorged himself. Red laughed. At length the wolf pulled back from the basket, which was now empty.

"Hey, that wasn't meat," said the wolf. "That was your mother's ennui."

"It was," said Red.

"You lied to me? Why?"

"Well, it could be because I am full of malice, or malevolence, or rancor. Or perhaps I merely wished to save my skin. Or both."

"This is terrible," said the wolf. "Now I don't feel like eating any more. Or running through the forest, or howling at the moon-- or anything."

"Perhaps you could write poetry," said Red.

"Now you're just being facetious."

"I'm terribly sorry. But you were planning on eating me."

"That is the way of wolves. There is nothing wrong with it."

"And I have beguiled you, and that is the way of humans, and there is nothing wrong with that."

The wolf slowly nodded, then wandered listlessly off into the woods. Red collected her basket and, deciding it was too late for a visit to her grandmother's house, returned to her own.

When Red reached her house, she could hear loud snores coming from within. One of her mother's woodsmen, she surmised, spending the night. Red sighed, then took out a crumpled pack of cigarettes which she had stolen from her mother's purse. She lit one and took a long drag, then blew the smoke out into the night air. She looked down at her empty basket, and thought of the many times she had ferried things of her mother's to her grandmother. Sadness, melancholy, guilt, anger, despondency-- they had all been sent by her mother to her grandmother over the years.

“Grandmother is getting too old for this,” Red thought as she stared at the basket. “And I certainly don’t want any of mother’s cast offs.”

She looked back toward the path that led into the woods.

“Perhaps I can find some more hungry wolves,” she mused as she smoked the last of the cigarette, then flicked it to the ground, where she crushed it out with the heel of her small shoe.

CHRISTOPHER OWEN lives in Texas with his wife and two cats. After recently retiring from a long career in aviation, he now writes full time. He has fiction forthcoming at Daily Science Fiction and Mystic Signals. He has previously appeared in Perspectives and The Zephyr.

Jesus' Nephew

Joe Thompson

I'm with Sherri in the handicap stall of the ladies' room. She's cursing a rotten blue streak while I brush her hair from her eyes, sitting on the floor in front of her. Her jeans with the special elastic front stitched in are crowded around her ankles and her shirt is pulled up to her boobs, her bulging belly protruding like a fleshy hot air balloon atop a porcelain basket. My child is soon to enter this world and I can't do much more than hope none of the patrons outside the door hear us and call an ambulance. Things weren't supposed to be this way, but then again nothing ever turns out the way a person plans it.

Sherri interrupts my thoughts intermittently with cries that she attempts to stuff back down her throat. She curses me, she spits my name out like it's used dip, she sprinkles each outburst with my brother's name, which always sends me teetering back into the real world, if such a thing exists. If my stepfather knew what I was up to now I'd never be able to live it down, although I realize with a blossoming suspicion that he is already fully aware of my plight. The baby continues to burrow downward from Sherri's swollen stomach. I like to imagine it's head is like a drill bit, body and all twisting like a screw until it peaks from the warm tunnel, perhaps never stopping even after being born, perhaps drilling through the tile and cement and foundation and dirt and rock and fossil until it reaches what would probably be considered the greatest womb of all, the center of the earth.

Again my thoughts are broken by the screams, although this time it's mingled with the scent of Beef n' Cheddars being crafted a few yards away from me in the kitchen. I swear I can see the trail of fast food stink leak through the crack under the door and encapsulate this moment around Sherri and I in a fog bank of

brown sludge. I swear silently to myself and my brother that if I get out of this predicament in one piece, I will never enter an Arby's again for the rest of my life. I figure that after my next death, I'll be reincarnated somewhere that isn't America. It would truly be a delight to uphold, somewhere not steeped in depression and obesity and pride and mistrust. Again, I realize too late that such a place does not exist in this world, at this time, or most likely in any time following. The seeds have been planted.

Being the brother of Jesus Christ has its perks, as one could imagine. The roundabout immortality is at the very least amusing. I can die like any of the fat sloptarts eating week-old roast beef in the plastic coated dining room outside the door, although I'm guaranteed an instant resurrection in another new body. My brother seemed to have gotten the short end of the stick, what with the 'one body' thing. He hasn't resurrected in a couple thousand years, and the last time he did was only for a few days. According to his calendar, he won't be back for a couple thousand more. I hear heaven is a pretty awesome place from his accounts of it, although I've never been inside the damned place. My stepdad keeps me at the gates until my next body is ready. Sometimes it feels like I've been sidelined from a family get together, like I'm watching one of the many families I've learned of eating Christmas dinner through a frosted window. I suppose it comes with the territory of the lives I lead.

Here I've run into some trouble though; I'm not supposed to procreate. Technically speaking I should be celibate, although there is absolutely no fun to be had there. I don't see the point in living through the last two thousand years without the occasional century-specific one night stand. It worked the first few lives, but then everything seemed to drag on endlessly until finally I broke the seal. For someone who claims to demand sex only as a means for procreation, my stepfather sure made the act one hell of a good time.

Sherri was the only exception over all these years. I can't believe this hasn't happened earlier to be honest, but the fact remains that this is the first woman I've gotten pregnant. After a while I figured I was infertile, fruitless, a demigod that can never pass his abnormal seed down the line. Sherri proved me wrong. And try as I might, I just couldn't talk her into killing the thing while it was still growing. I know just thinking that sends some terrible mojo towards my family, but I can't help it; I'm more human than they'll ever be. A child created by me should not be born. And yet here it is happening, in this Arby's, on this cold Tuesday night, against the backdrop of shit and piss and used tampons.

In a different life, I would have married a woman like Sherri. I would have explained that I had a particular ailment that meant I had to refrain from direct intercourse. If she were one of the Middle Age women, that would've been able to fly no problem. As the years tread by though I've come to understand that in some ways, women want the same things men do, and their repression by my gender for so long has only made them more outward with each life I live. Sherri was and is no exception.

I'm watching the baby's head crown and I'm suddenly filled with emotions I've never felt before. I wish I could father this baby, I wish that I didn't have to drown it in that toilet as soon as it falls out. There's simply no two ways about it though. Not even my brother knows what the fuck it'll be. For all I know it could pop out spitting fire and reciting sections from the Psalms. At this point in my life nothing would surprise me. I feel worse knowing that Sherri will have to go too. She certainly won't stand for the murder of our child. If I hadn't waited, if I could've made up my mind at any time of the last nine months, I could've killed them both at once and saved myself the turmoil. It's hard to feel too strongly about life and death when you've seen and done both so many times. My family understands the dire necessity of my situation.

They'll come to forgive me in time, although how many centuries it will take is uncertain.

Then I hear this screech.

Amid a sea of obscenities from Sherri comes this otherworldly retch, this gargling scream of life that is suddenly in my hands, bloody and writhing. It sounds inhuman and awful, something from the bowels of hell, something that I know simply should not be. But in that moment, I want nothing else but to hold it. I take my jacket from around my shoulders and wrap my son in it, him still yelping and screaming and crying and Sherri weeping and smiling in spite of herself, one still tethered to the other by the umbilical cord, one being with two minds and hearts and needs and wants and tears.

And then I start to cry.

JOE THOMPSON is an undergraduate senior studying at prestigious Binghamton University, one of the State Universities of New York, which is located somewhere within the lower rings of Hell. He aspires to do nothing more than write every day for the rest of his life, which falls in line with his career aspiration of grizzled homeless man.

Mammy'd Give Me Minds To Eat

Graham Tugwell

I'd be told that there was something gone wrong with my mouth or my hands again or that the light out there was far too hot for me or that it just wasn't a *good* day after all and so I was to stay in, go down to the Cowboy or play with my train in the corner and *not*, I'd be told, *not go anywhere near the windows.*

Not when the light was on *outside.*

Not when the lights were on *inside.*

In the corner with my train, that's where I was to be.

Round and round and round and round the train would go, and there would be no stops and no passengers because there would be no people.

What's wrong with me today, Mammy? I'd ask, looking up past her knees at the glow of her cigarette.

And she'd look down at me and say—she'd say *your neck's gone crooked. Or wrists shouldn't work like that. Or your hands are too silver. Or the skin is growing down your lips again.*

And some days she'd look at me close and say *your shadow is showing a different shape.*

And I'd look behind to see my strangeness crawling up the walls.

Don't scare them, she'd say, pushing me into the corner, pushing me down the stairs, *you must never scare people.*

They wouldn't understand.

Or she'd just look up from the table and say softly: *not today.*

Tomorrow, she'd say. *Maybe tomorrow.*

And I'd watch the train go round and round and go nowhere at all.

Babies had no ideas in them and always left me hungry.

Old people had more but were so full of memories crackling and thin like the pages of the golden pages. Sometimes they would make me so sick it'd seem as if I'd never eaten at all.

And she'd have to go out into the other rooms again.

BLANCHARDSTOWN 15

Or—

ASHBOURNE IND EST ASHBOURNE

She'd have to get me more of them.

But if it was someone who was the same size as me, I'd smell the ideas and the mind coming off them, even across the room, even before Mammy broke their heads open on the edge of the sink.

It would all come out— lovely minds, lovely ideas, lovely tastes.

And then I'd get fat and happy, for a short while at least, and by then she'd have stopped crying, stopped washing her hands over and over again.

Full now! I'd say and I'd do my best to smile for her.

Rubbing my belly and smiling for her.

In my basement when water flooded in from other rooms, some nights I'd wake to find my cot had been carried across the room to softly bump against the hips of the Cowboy painted on the wall there.

The Cowboy'd be smiling down at me from the dark, plaster face cracked in half, dust making his teeth black, hand in a fist with his thumb sticking up and I'd put my hands on the smoothness of his yellow shirt and lay my face against him and I'd smell the sour sweetness of his damp.

He understood. He smiled at me and he understood.

It's okay, I'd think he'd tell me, *It's all okay.*

He was never scared of the shape I'd be.

You're wrong, she'd shout, *you're wrong, nothing but wrong,* and the cord of the kettle would come whipping down again and

though I'd try to curl into a ball, she'd always find the spots that hurt the most.

What did I ever do to deserve you?

I'd try to say *I love you* but she'd beat the words down with every stroke.

And I'd sit cross legged if legs allowed me, there in my corner, and I'd go through the golden pages again and again and again—all the names all in just one book.

I'd hold the weight of it, smell the soft and golden pages.

Such secret mysteries—other rooms with such strange names: BATTERSTOWN and KELLS and MONASTERY RD CLONDALKIN and CRÈCHE & MONTESSORI.

And sometimes I would check to see if my name was in there somewhere.

Check if I'd appeared on the list of rooms yet, if I was known, if I could find the name for this place I was in.

But I'd never see it written there in that maze of black on yellow.

Just the room called BEAUPARC.

Called PAROCHIAL HOUSE.

Called CHILDCARE – COUNTY CHILDCARE COMMITTEES.

She'd come down to me in my room and wake me, tell me jokes sometimes: *What did the Mammy say to her baby?*

I dunno, I'd say, with sleep in my eyes, What did the Mammy say to her baby?

And she'd say, *We shouldn't have been born.*

And she'd laugh and laugh.

We shouldn't have been born.

And I'd laugh *Ha ha, Mammy*, and she'd laugh *Ha ha ha ha*, and she'd hug me too, *Ha ha ha*, so tight every time I thought she'd break me into bits.

This is what I'd see from my corner: the brown carpet, the cream wallpaper, the wood panels along the breakfast counter, the

chairs and table, the couch, the light stand , the door into the hallway and there the door to the room Mammy called Outside.

Every now and again I'd get a chance to look into the Outside.

It was a very big room, bigger than the kitchen and the basement combined. The carpet was a dark green with a grey stripe down the middle and in the distance, like a big skirting board, was a black stripe. Along the wall opposite was a painting, like the Cowboy, but not as nice, just white and brown boxes and triangles and things.

But there was special wallpaper above that called sky and that could be blue or white depending.

Outside was another room that I wasn't supposed to go into, like her room or up in the attic where she put the people to lie down for a while when I was finished with them.

And so I didn't ever go into the Outside, not even when she stopped waking up and not even when I'd get so hungry parts of me would come away.

And I'd sit in the corner and watch Outside through the hole in the boards that covered the windows.

And there was that thing like in the shower that she'd called the rain.

And there were things out there I had no words for, moving things and noisy things and once it sounded like the walls were splitting, that everything was coming down on top of me and someone kept flashing the lights on and off and even the Cowboy couldn't calm me down.

And there were people.

Travelling through Outside, on their way to MILESTOWN DUNBOYNE, on their way to OVERNIGHT & SAME DAY DELIVERIES & COLLECTIONS.

There were strange people in that other room...

Sometimes she'd come down to me and sit with me for a while and tell me stories.

About the lanes where I was found and why there was nothing anyone could do for me and why she wasn't to blame, she wasn't to blame for any of it, how she had wanted a different wish.

But hadn't the wish been made for her?

And I wanted, oh how I wanted to know what she was talking about.

What all those words in sequence meant.

And she'd smile, and she'd feel so much better and I'd feel so much worse when she left, blowing the candle out.

What's wrong with me today, Mommy? I'd say and she'd breathe a curl of smelly smoke out over the carpet towards my corner and she'd look at me

Shoulders should be level, she'd say.

Your knees should bend the other way.

Your feet don't match.

You shouldn't ever look at me that way, she'd scream.

And I'd say to myself: *Why?*

Why do I keep getting everything wrong?

And the heads would lie opened on the draining board.

Eat it, she'd say to me, pointing with the dirty hammer, eat it—I'm not going out again, I'm not going out again—

I won't keep doing this for you.

I won't keep doing this.

I won't. I won't.

I won't.

And some nights, some nights that were far apart and few between, for no reason, no reason that I could think of, she'd sing.

Sing for me, and sing for herself—

And she'd be beautiful then—

And the words, the beautiful words—

Come by the lanes and by the fields,

And walk no more the world alone,

And seek no more the heart of home,

Come by the lanes and take the gift of love so ever changing.

And listening, listening in the corner, feeling the warmth of it, I'd be happy. I'd be so happy.

As if all I had in that moment would be all that I would ever need.

GRAHAM TUGWELL is a PhD student with the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, where he teaches Popular and Modernist Fiction. The recipient of the College Green Literary Prize 2010, his work has appeared in *Kerouac's Dog* magazine.

Jolly Roger

Michael Sions

There is a dead body in my basement. At least I think it is dead, but I have not checked for a pulse, so it could just be sleeping every time I go down there. It has been there since the day that I found it there and I have not moved it since that day. I thought I should move it out, but instead I kept it, just in case I ever needed it.

It has been there, in my basement, for a long time now, but I still have not moved it. Sometimes I go downstairs to get something and it is there, because dead bodies stay in the same place if no one moves them. I wonder if it will talk to me, but it never does. It just sits there, not moving, and not talking either. By this point I know it is dead and not sleeping, because it has started to decompose.

An insurance salesman comes to my door to try to sell me insurance. He knocks once, but I do not hear it, so he knocks again. This time I hear his knock, and I answer the door.

“Hello,” he says.

“Hi,” I say back.

“How about I sell you some flood insurance for a real dandy price?” he asks, in a southern accent.

“Why do I need flood insurance?” I ask back, without an accent.

“Well,” he says, “this house you got here’s real near a floodplain, and so you’re at risk of a flood.”

I still do not know what a floodplain is, but I know that I should, so I just nod and he keeps talking.

"If a flood were to come in right now," he talks, "then you'd lose everything you got stored up in this real nice basement I see the hatch for."

I tell him that I do not have very much in my basement except for a dead body that I found down there.

"You have a corpse in your basement?" he asks. He looks horrified.

"Yes I do," I say back, "do you?" He still looks horrified.

"Why, n-no. No I certainly do not," he says.

"Well," I say back, "then I have more dead bodies than you do."

I am at a yard sale that my neighbor is having, and I am buying a picture of cats playing Scrabble. I tell him that I wish I had a cat to play Scrabble with, because all I have is a dead body in my basement, and I don't think it knows the rules to Scrabble.

My neighbor tells me that cats do not know how to play Scrabble, but it is a shame that I only have one dead body in my basement. He tells me that he has five dead bodies in his attic, and he calls them corpses.

I remember that the insurance salesman called it a corpse too, instead of a dead body. I decide to start calling mine a corpse, but I do not move it to the attic, because the attic is already mostly full.

I am out jogging when I see a man who lives down the street walking his dog. He tells me that he is glad to see me keeping healthy, because healthy people make better leaders.

I tell him that I am not a leader, and he tells me that I should try running for office, because I have a strong build, and people like their leaders to have charismatic skeletons. I ask him what a charismatic skeleton might look like, because I used to have a corpse in my basement, but now that it has been decomposing for a while it is mostly a skeleton, and I would like to know if I have a charismatic one. He tells me that he does not think that having two charismatic skeletons will be better than one.

“But,” he says, “you should put it in your closet. All the good politicians have a skeleton in their closet.”

The insurance salesman is back at my door.

“Hello,” he says again, “how about I sell you some tornado insurance at a dandy price?”

I ask him if my house is on a tornado plain too, and he says no, so I ask him why I should buy tornado insurance.

“Because,” he says, “since we last talked, I’ve collected six dead bodies, and, now that I have more of them than you, you should listen to me when I tell you things, and I’m telling you this: you need to be ready for a tornado.”

I am now ready for a tornado.

I am trying to sell my house so that I can move into an apartment, because my house is too big for just me to live in. There is a young couple inside my living room, and they ask me why it is they should buy my house and not any of the other houses.

“You should buy this house,” I tell them, “because it is the only house on the market with a skeleton in the closet.” I do not know if this is true, but my neighbor is not selling his house so I think that it is.

"That's horrible!" they say. They tell me that they would not want to buy a house if there was a skeleton in the closet. I tell them that that is good, because I was probably going to take the skeleton with me when I moved out anyway. They ask me if this is an area prone to natural disasters, and I tell them that it is near a flood plain, but it is not in a tornado plain.

"Oh, good," says the wife, "I'm terribly afraid of tornados."

They do not buy my house, because they want to buy a different one. Instead I sell my house to a family of four whose kids are named Chad and Robert. Chad and Robert want to see the skeleton, but their parents tell me to take it with me. I take it with me when I move, but there is not a closet for me to put it in so I just put it in the living room.

I have met two of my new neighbors. One of them is a pirate, and the other one is a first grade teacher named Renee. Renee is very fond of her dog, and so I tell her that I have a skeleton in my living room if her dog wants a bone. She asks me if I can get one right now, so I bring her back a bone.

Her dog loves the bone, and so later she asks me for another bone. I bone her three times before I tell her that I cannot give her any more bones, because my skeleton is starting not to look like a skeleton anymore. She tells me that if I do not have a full skeleton, the next best thing is a skull and crossbones, so I should keep boning her until I only have the skull and two other bones. I do it, and I put the skull and crossbones on the counter.

The insurance salesman is at my new door. I do not know how he found me again.

“Howdy,” he says, “how about I sell you some greyhound insurance at a dandy price?”

I tell him that I do not live in a greyhound plain, and I have never heard of insurance for greyhounds.

“Well,” he says, “say a greyhound comes in and messes up all your stuff. Well then, if that happens, we cover it!”

I ask him what he thinks the chances are that a greyhound would be able to break into my apartment and mess up all my stuff. He tells me that if I do not buy his insurance, it is almost certain that a greyhound will come in and mess up all my stuff, but if I buy his insurance, then it probably will not happen.

I am no longer insured for tornados, but I am quite prepared for greyhounds.

I have the pirate over for dinner, and he sees my skull and crossbones.

“Arrrrrrrrrr,” he says, “that be quite a jolly roger ye got there.” I tell him that I didn’t know his name was Roger, and I ask him why Roger is so jolly.

But he just says “arrrrrrrrr” again and changes the subject.

I run into my old neighbor at the grocery store, because my new apartment is not very far from my old house. I ask him how the five dead bodies in his attic are doing.

“Not so good,” he tells me. “The cops are investigating things and it’s only a matter of time before they start sniffing around too much and figure me out. How’d you get away with it?” he asks.

“Get away with what?” I ask.

He tells me that I am clever and he winks at me.

Later that day I hear sirens.

When I come home from the grocery store I find my door open, and all of my stuff messed up. I look at my skull and crossbones and both bones are gone, so I go to Renee. Her dog has one of the bones, but the other one is nowhere to be found.

“Say, what breed is your dog?” I ask her.

She tells me that he is a golden retriever.

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