

Insurance Man

The telephone rings in the middle of the night.
Wifey answers then cries: “All right!”
I wonder if I should wonder,

what’s going on?
So, I go: “Who is it?” I mean like,
HOLY COW! It’s frickin’ 1:00 a.m.,

I hit the rack at 9:00 p.m.,
the alarm begins blaring at 5:00 a.m.
It’s *exactly* the middle of my night.

She answers softly, “It’s the insurance man,
he’ll be stopping by in the morning. One can
never be too cautious about protecting one’s assets.”

I get to work at 6:00 a.m., take lunch at 10:00
a.m., which is *exactly* the middle of my shift. I clock
out at 2:30 p.m., make it home by 3:00 p.m. only

to find the house empty, totally void—
no furniture, no future. My guess is the ol’
lady took this insurance thing to the next level . . .

as a matter of policy, of course.

Call it what you will . . .

Davenport, sofa, couch, whatever; mine left with the ol' lady and the kids. Er, I should say, future children. We didn't conceive any though it wasn't due to a lack of effort, at least not at first, not on my part. I found my davenport, or what is left of it, abandoned just north of the highway; where the roadbed crests the apex of Jack Wright Pass. I figured it must have fallen or been tossed from my ex-wife's moving van.

I first noticed it when I pulled off the road to relieve myself—I assure you it is not what you think. I stopped to wipe my eyes—it's hard driving away from a final judgment without spilling blinding tears of regret. The stuffing is scattered across sage and cheat grass. Obviously, the sofa has been repurposed as a target. How could anyone help but not score a direct bulls-eye, big as this thing is?

Who could possibly have missed my couch more than me? I spent the waning days of our toxic relationship sleeping on its cushions. It was the only piece of furniture I brought into this marriage. I had picked the davenport from a curb outside my college fraternity. The notorious party house lost its accreditation and was subsequently banned from campus; too many keggers catering to the under-aged and overwhelmed.

I hadn't realized my wife was jealous of this couch; it was my place of refuge during her ill tempered and continued attempts to emasculate me. She wouldn't agree to the divorce unless I signed it over. I later learned she took my shotgun, another negotiated item aiding and abetting our settlement, and pumped out a magazine's worth of buckshot—effectively slaying my nighttime consort; one more victim of a fractious relationship.

My remaining share of community property consists of a pickup truck used for dump runs and a closet full of clothing—but no dresser. Of course I got the house along with its accompanying mortgage. I was left with nary a bed or furniture, not even a blanket. I drove to a landfill to dump the remaining detritus of love gone wrong—old letters, post cards and the like, when I spotted it, a battered robin's egg blue futon. The sign at the entrance to this facility said: NO PICKING. Of course, I ignored it.

I bought a wool blanket from Sally's (Salvation Army Thrift Store). Goodwill was absolutely no help—I wasn't feeling any and besides, there wasn't anything there with my name on it—oh wait! I forgot the discard pile—discard being the new me. I drove home with my new (old) bedding. When I folded the futon out that first night, a card fell from a crease in the sewn canvas mattress:

Treat me with respect and you will be respected. Give me your tired and you will be well rested. Give me your poor yearning for freedom, and you will be free.

The First Step? . . Denial

I was abruptly separated
from my mount resulting in a face
plant—it wasn't an intentional flop on my part.

My hipflask spilt wilting rangeland grasses and
upsetting the trail boss. He's well
known for saddle sobriety.

There I lay,
with nary a horse,
lariat, or cache of liquor in hand.

The gathering ranch hands smirk,
rolling eyes along
with smokes.

It is utterly impossible—obtaining
secure footing amid steaming slurries of
manure and quickening freshets of horse piss.

Cookie carried me to his chuck wagon; saying
I best sleep it off. Another miscue would
get me booted from this roundup.

I didn't really fall off the wagon; I merely took a
sip—resulting in a downward spiral. I don't think
drink is the problem—it helps keep me grounded.

The First Step? . . . Denial # 2

The rancher's wife
arranged an intervention,
saying my penchant for drink
helped drive her intention; "You need to
get it together, or else . . .," she mentioned.

The foreman said; "Tippling is crippling."
Is the hitch in my git-along that obvious?
Dad-gum-it, I blame my leg's gimp
on the splay-footed nag
who left me limp.

Will I get canned?
Be forced to salvage my life
as trailer trash? Have I spent too
long with a bottle? I've never driven
cattle dry—to stay employed, I guess I'll try.

My buddies, heeler and header; both, ponied
up funds for fuel, lodging, and fare, so I
could make my way to Serenity
House, a building lonely,
squat, and spare.

My pulse, booming,
intake counselors, looming,
staff members insist that I own my
affliction—it's not part and parcel of my
Western diction—I won't, never will . . .

I tell them I'm a Cowboy's cowboy
who, just once, lost his seat. Brandy
was involved—three fingers—neat.
T-twelve s-steps I stammer, entails
a journey I'm unlikely to complete.

Liquid Brunch

I'm giving a shout-out to the Lone Star Saloon, aka the Cowboy's Chapel; there's no finer place to take in a Sunday service. At this watering hole, one can worship with his own kind, await the barkeep's blessed sacrament, and choke down a breakfast of rank pickled eggs and pig's feet.

The man behind the bar is a little harried—his swamper no-showed. The resulting extra work causing him to break into a sweat; now he's running behind schedule, his demeanor a little off-putting, his mood less than upbeat, but he soldiers onward—much to my relief.

Don't get me wrong, it's not as if the bartender's vestments aren't reverential—the required white dress shirt is freshly laundered and sharply creased. The bowtie, a standard clip on affair, is a contrast in black satin and his cuffs, though unbuttoned, are uniformly rolled mid-forearm.

I'm the first to arrive, having slept off last night's drunk in the bed of my pickup truck. I'm still expecting company, as there is at least a half-dozen other vehicles scattered around the saloons' perimeter. Mother's Against Drunk Driving has been successful in educating us about *its* perils.

Being the only customer, I tell the barkeep to set up a round for the house, I never tire of my stab at amusement, but this bartender doesn't crack a smile—he's heard it all before, especially from me. I haven't missed a service in this particular chapel in a month of Sundays.

This, of course, is about to change—my boss has given me thirty days to clean up my act, that is if I still want to stay employed on his ranch. We cowboys are a transient bunch, a cause and effect of shrinking cattle prices and the rancher's own good humor.

I'm planning to quit drinking cold turkey when my month's up—toughing it out without the self-medicating benefit of booze. I've done the same with regards to roll your owns and chew. I need to prevail; one less nail dedicated to the construction of my coffin is a good thing.

The bartender places a shot and a draft in front of me, wrinkles his nose and exclaims; “Your smellin’ a bit sour there, pardner, like a mule that ain’t had a chance to take a roll in the dust. You’re welcome to bathe in the horse trough out back, I’ll loan you a towel and bar of soap.”

“Like hell, you say. I already undertook my Saturday night dunkin’. I’m here for my mornin’ constitutional or two. Don’t worry, my essence won’t drive away your cliental, by the way, where’d they go?” I turn and look out the doorway; nary a pickup truck is parked in the lot.

“It’s Mother’s Day, management over to the Long Branch Saloon is putting on a feed—free drink and grub. Good of you, though, to remain my loyal customer.” He’s saying this as I grab my Stetson and head for the doorway, hands busy searching for the key to my truck.