

Put the Thing

Mom wants us to take the couch from the old lady's house over here, nah, it wasn't a couch – it's a whole damn bed that she wants us to bring over when my chest has the ache. I'm on the bed and the dirty bed, at that, and the phone in my numbed brain, old tired thing that it is and worn bread in a bag.

It was the cup lady outside who threw the coffee out. It smelt cold out there and clean. It smelt good out there and I smelt the coffee, and maybe there was some coffee on my bagged sweatshirt. The coffee was nice. It wasn't curdled or gray or purple, it was golden brown licking at the air in the moment. It was like the wisp that fades out in the second and takes in the grass. I had the coffee in my hand, and I was touching the ground, so I threw the damn coffee I had, that was burning in the guts around in a circle coming up in acid burps, but I only threw it cause the cup lady had dumped it into grass. And I stumbled into the door early on and I stumbled in around three and into the bed but I didn't need any more coffee for any reason because I planned on sleeping, taking the cold nap in the cold with the clothes off, so fuck it, that coffee, fucking chuck it because the cup lady and I know it well enough. It is too late for the coffee but to take air and go into dirt because why would we drink it past noon, because then we'd be up all night, everyone knows that.

I had some damn time to just sit around. I had it but she wants Chase to have a better bed because the old lady wants her bed gone, for something. For some reason, she wants the bed gone from her house. It's got to be for my youngest brother.

“I need some strong men of God to go, you, I need some strong men of God to go out and get that bed and bring it back.”

Where will the damn thing fit in, like, in the back of the truck that sister has that isn't here? It'll go into the old man's truck, who is the husband of the old woman, mom says.

"I'm not doing that shit, why doesn't Chase go do it?" It's Harry and Harry is the second youngest brother, in his red beanie and his red stoned eyes and his swaying in the hall with a flapped arm to the corner. That's where Chase is. Chase is on the bed that folds from the couch like mine. He is quiet the way you might be quiet if you got someone talking for you, where mom is his wacky speaker and fervently so jabbered but who the fuck cares when I am stinking in the bed with the phone with three hours til the next class.

But mom when he shows the hand, it is the great and deepest sacred love of words she has, to bite her teeth like sticks together and lash the air, spirit tongue and shooting, gesticulating, passion that I do not feel in my weak form.

"This is my house," hot punching words, "Chase isn't feeling well, go do it right now, or you can get out."

I am naked in the bed and she is a beyblade turned over to me, haa, I never played with the damn things, but she is a tornadoed damn beyblade.

She bawls get up too. So, I get up and shake into a pant leg that is short for this cold weather and I whip the hands into the sweatshirt that could be coffeed and I almost hit my hand on the ceiling fan.

Do you remember where her house is, she is saying loud, but I am yelling and she is yelling,

“I don’t want to talk to you. Stop talking.”

“She’s in the street we used to”

“Stop talking to me. Stop talking to me, stop, I don’t stop talking god damn.”, and I shut the door to the inside and the outside is soggy.

Damn Harry is in the car now red in his red hat and red car and the blood that is in my nose from picking it damn too long and licking pennies and the sky is not to bleed but keeping sad gray and I reserve the anger and put the brick in my head and shut the fuck up, not to wriggle out of a bind but to take the walk to the car. To take the drive is what I do. I take the drive to go get the damn couch, bed, for the damn kid, I will do it because I am a man. I am a man. I believe I am. If it is not me and not Harry, who is left but dad out in the macho car he spent the money on, in the damn thing that dins bad to hurt the ears with his golden dog. Dad isn’t here for this and he won’t be back for a while.

And so, Harry’s car is disgusting. It’s got so much shit in it. Why? Why doesn’t he just clean the damn thing. It’s got trash from the taco bell in it and it’s got the blankets on blankets and the pillow. It’s for his girlfriend. It is mothbally, deoderant weed inside here. He’s bad in the head for sure, for sure.

Mom’s got her damn head out the door now, too.

I ask him, “Do you know where the bed is?”

Mom yells if Harry knows where the bed is.

Harry shouts yes and is irritated boned but glazed by the weed so he sounds dull knifed.

So, back up quick, and bump on the ground, past the spot where they had the shipping containers. Drive over the speed bump and past the cones and the old dudes with bad backs doing the job for younger men. Drive past the other shit like 711 and mcdonalds and bank and speedway which are all there, so what, and down the old road.

Harry wants the window up because it's cold because he is inured to his shitty car. My nose tells my body to tingle barfing out because the thing smells dank, but that kind that is under the deodorant and has stilled in the air, but he says not to be a baby. He keeps the window rolled up.

We are down the quieter road. The road is athwart trees. It is with a fire station and a church, and it is with a school. We turn into a quiet place for older people.

I need to do my class.

We get at the well-bricked house and the old man is there. He is poking behind his cherry truck. His truck in a driveway on the most beautiful lawn.

“Hey, hey, how're y'all.”

Harry says, “Hey, how are you?”

“How you doing?”, we are speaking from the same mouth a bit.

“Tired, most, but y'all doing the lifting anyway.” I never saw this guy when I lived here. He was only the house to me, and maybe the truck.

I say, “I'm jetlagged, too, sir, so hopefully I can lift anything, I might slip.”

He starts talking about something I don't hear. I just say, “I hope I don't slip”, like repeating again, and Harry looks mad and mouths to stop. I want to cut the shit and

say don't tell me what to do in front of this old man. He should know better. But we need to get the bed out the house.

The house is clean to that point where there isn't much to say, but there's an order, like mirrors hung on walls, maybe some pictures on walls, less things on the ground. I can say it has old people stink but no smoke.

Then the guest bed room. It's got the bed. It's a pearly bulk encrusting flowery house and gold lighted cozy. The bed is tough and firm but it is soft and bouncy. It is silk and springless, soundless. It is meant for a woman's back. I push my hand into the flesh and wrench the lapel, or the outer bedding, the skin of building, luminous chunk. It heaves on my back as I lug it and I love the ponderous loafed thing. It is for a soft hand that is much better than mine, Harry is lifting with his back.

"Watch the lamp, watch the lamp." I knew about the ceiling lamp before Harry said a thing.

We take multiple trips, in and out the house, so we get the whole thing which is the metal frame, the springed underbelly piece, and the mattress.

The old woman is standing and looking at her husband tie the stuff to the truck.

"Yeah, isn't this a great bed, its brand new, even, but my sisters don't like to sleep in the same bed together, when they visit, it seems, so we got to get them a new, two new beds, if we want them to visit at all, it seems."

"I understand that." Her words got to run off as I think of something else. "How's your new neighbors," I say.

She's nicely small and pretty when she says, "They moved a while ago."

Harry looks at me but I look at the grass in front of our old house. When we moved out of that house, mom said these people bought the place because the woman was selling it, but these gobs of people in the imagination – black and white – they took it from us so we could go somewhere else that is real and dark. But what, what is it, why is it that she lied, to me and the family, that the house wasn't sold but rented.

I am blank with this woman. There isn't anything to say but thank you. Old man follows in the truck when we ride the car out of the neighborhood.

I want to lie down.

Harry and I have heads and mouths plugged up on the drive and I wonder if he even remembers what he said before. That I shouldn't be the baby with the window rolled up since I want to throw up again.

Back into the apartment complex with the cars and things. We stand in the driveway. The man feels something like shallow pity, I think, but maybe he thinks we deserved this old place because we were always loud and drunk on something too strong. It could have been God that makes mom yodel or the kind of drunk that is getting high, the kind of drunken noise that grows in the garage. He shrugs in his head, I am certain. He's giving us a good bed and I got to go inside.

I break into the living room. I take my hard bed wrenchingly and fling up and tumble it in. The gears crank, sputter and shake, grumble and spit, they are sick. The black bar claps sick in. The loose sinew hanging, dirty white and orange, that is the loose

bedding and yoga mat, the whole thing coughs into a hole. The thing is a maroon bed. The bed is a couch.

My inside head is flipping.

“That fuckin thing won’t fit, we gotta move everything,” I’m stalking around the room. “If it’ll even fit.”

Chase and mom’s mouths are open dumbly.

“Let me through,” I’m moving, headfirst, tilted like those water birds, moving like a rocking chair, toward the Chase’s couch bed. “It needs to move, I dunno where, but it’s got to go.” They are standing affixed before the little baby bed.

I am tearing the futon’s cushions off. The door to the other room is open. That’s where we are taking it – Harry and Sarah’s busted-up room space, or something. They want the futon in there.

Mom turns her dumb into words, “He’s waiting out there so let’s just stick it somewhere in here – we are not going to make that man wait on us.”

I’m outside again and I tell Harry to grab the stuff out the back. We take the three pieces inside. We leave the man outside. The broken spots, dog hair, trash, and crosses are inside.

We lean the big stuff upright against my couch for them to almost fall over but we can’t let the man wait. We tell him to go and his cherry pickup rolls loud away.

I start pulling the old couch that has been somewhat decapitated. Mom is saying to keep the cushions because that’s what Chase uses when he sleeps on the futon, so we

took that off, but where is the thing going to go. We could put it in the room if we move the stuff around. I say, “You gotta move the stuff around in there, if you want to keep this, the couch.”

His room is through half-a-hallway. It is blocked up by pictures that hung in older houses. We did not put them on the walls, ever, not while we’ve been here. They are thick. They keep the stocky couch frame out. They would be for us to take our hands and arms and legs to the paintings and push them, but not to where the bike is lined up against the table, and not to the bathroom with the toilet water floor, and not to dirty clothes piles in dad’s room, and not to my corner of jazz, books, and horror.

Though Harry ignores the pictures. He is trying to move sister’s mattress from the dog floor to make room for Chase’s couch. He wants to put her mattress atop his mattress.

But his mattress is already dominated. “Fuck it.”, he says. His mattress has two thousand dirty clothes and uncertain yellow crust. His mattress is really a place for many things and cannot be helped. I say, “We gotta throw it out.”, because the apartment is too full. I can’t do my class with it. I can’t lie down. It has to go right now.

I grip tight the arm of the cushion-less couch, and it isn’t decapitated, it is degummed, it is just a bottom jaw, where I feel my tooth ache and my chest, and I pull hard through the room, and they all stare and buzz, and we blink fast; they look like they don’t want me to do it. I say, “Harry, grab that—” and my neck goes flicking at the other arm rest, but I mean the bottom. “Grab that bottom. Mom, Chase, this is his.” But she says nothing. “Chase, help us do this.” But we are already through the door way when

the thing is wilting over because Harry can't get a grip. He's been high for days. "Grab that bottom, grab it from there."

Chase is in the door way behind Harry. I say, "Help us, dude, come on." He shifts back and forth, and his breath gets tighter, but he doesn't move forward because he is stuck. When my flabby arms can't hold the damn thing, it limping over my kneecaps, I hurt. "You don't do shit", comes out my mouth bad. He doesn't say anything, but he probably wants to say something to me for that. He wants to say, fuck you, in the door way to the apartment while the two black grounds keepers in their golf cart are looking.

I see them and give an affected reaction as they see the moment of our family. I try at insouciance but it's wet and thin. We are young and lame. We are different all more clearly now carrying this thing, stumbling. They've been inside the apartment. They know, but I take on a different air with any person who sees me carry mottled couches in dark weather. Harry does too. He is taking the face of a worker that thinks lowly. He is saying wordless, *I work with my hands, my hands pay for my weed, my car, and my life*, all that is in his stern boy-to-man face as we shuffle silly to the far-off dumpster.

Half way on, Harry says, "Lift it over your head. It'll be way easier." He tries to do it, but I don't. The couch is the heaviest thing today, it is tugging on the muscles harder than the rest. Didn't anyone ever tell him to lift with his legs? He will lose his back at the ship yard after trade school. "That's retarded, dude, dude, you have to lift with your legs, man, not your back, that's retarded." He is a guy who is young and uses the word. I use the word around him. I feel the word in my head strong.

He is flushed with shame. “What do you know,” he adjusts the grip and the gray road moves under our feet, the cold with our bare hands and our heads but not our hatted hair, “You never worked anywhere with your hands, except food places.”

Oh, hoh hoh, so that is what it is, is it, that’s where your head is at. Well, I did more, “I worked at the flow team at Walmart, for a damn fucking long time. Whatdoyouthink—” I breath with my back, “—we carried there?”

He goes quiet and we get to the dumpster.

We drop the thing on the pavement. Maybe the stubby legs crack. Harry asks if that’s it and I say, big and declarative, fuck this.

But there is yelling from behind. It’s the two grounds keeping managers on their golf cart. We can’t leave the thing here, they are shouting. We can’t do much with this thing against the titanic dumpster that’s biggest hole is high up and the futon could not shrivel further to fit inside the ear holes. We shrug as big as we can because it is a shrug that needs to carry to them, where they are far away, so they putter over to us, and they grab the bottom, and with eight man arms we are an octopus of many colors and kinds, and we pull the poor bed that was alive a moment ago, that was spread out against the inside of a rainless dry child’s place, and we take it to the great gravity’s suction, and we let it fall to the bottom of a dark and forgotten bin with pounding thunder, and the legs do snap from their spot though it was as light as a feather for a moment before becoming the heaviest amputated jaw, as Chase is the spot of a child, as Chase is the hair of a flea, caught in the apartment’s façade, as he watches us kill his years-long thing, with sadness all over. Chase says, “It’s so weird to see it go.”

We thank them and I say, “That’s it.”, and they go away.

Inside the apartment, I assemble the bed in the emptying corner, but not before moving the miniature bookcase stuffed with mail precarious and to the spacious kitchen center. The thing is coming together. My chest is throbbing, I think. I want to lie down. I am rushing to the end, and mom stops me. She is standing between the frame and me, and I am holding the springed piece real awkward.

“You’re not going talk to him that way, Sam.” She’s lidding the anger here for some reason, like this is some formal but preschool admonishment with thought to my effort. I want to yell because I am purple. Purple inside, purple, not white, not red, I was purple and I am purple from many deadly feelings but I stay quiet. I want to put the bed together as Chase is in the kitchen looking for something to eat.

She takes my silence well, sometimes, but this time she wants my expression of defeat. “Do you understand?” I nod and that’s all. She steps out of the way as slow as she can.

I put the damn thing together. The soundless, soft mattress is the finish on it. Harry puts it down with me and sighs and stretches, smiling as he stumbles into his room with the outline of the weed pen in his sweatpants. And while I am showing disdain, and while I am holding the purple in, it is coming out anyway because it leaks through as I step pressured from foot to head, and I can feel it as I begin to unpack my bed that was the twin of the brother who is now shit in the dumpster and another landfill. The hard-maroon color. I fucking say, “I would love to have a bed like that. Why does he get the bed?”

It is quiet then the split. Mom comes down hard. She is going to start punching the back if I say another word. The couch pounces out with the black rods, with the springs that pop out. The springs that catch the bedding in itself and prick fingers. It locks with the carpet with a clunky pop that meddles with mom's vituperation, I've tuned it out. But Chase stops her.

"Mom, don't worry with him, leave the baby alone."

Purple come out, purple comes out, "What the fuck did you say, you bitch." Purple eyes and ears. The medication don't know nothing about this purple caught in my throat. "You think you can just say that." And mom is standing in the way like before, but I am pushing around her. I put my hands on her and the purple is the mixing up. I push and twist my arms around her, threading her stupid, dumbass arms, and her pious face, to reach Chase's whitened ass, where he looks to fall on the bed. My leg raises like a powerful kick, but I hold myself. I take my foot and push him. He falls slow on the bed. I take an open hand and smack his back just right. "You think you can say that to me? Shut the fuck up."

She's ululating Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, this house is so full of the Devil. She is so overwhelming loudly.

I retreat to my ugly bed. I pull the phone out and I feel the purple go into the phone.

"Do you have medication right now?", she says sickly. "I can sue you, I can sue your ass."

Harry is in the half-hallway again. “Don’t get mad at him when he put his hands on you when you taunt him like that.”

She tumbles over in a torrent past. A wave that cartwheels conical sideways. Blackened and whitened in age and on him. “It’s really time for both of you to move out. It’s really time, he’s threatening Chase, pushing me out of the way. I’m gonna cancel the trip.” I feel good lying down. “Seeing someone blessed is a joyful thing except in this family. This family is so full of the devil.” She says it when she flails at me. I love it when she says stuff like this. “When someone in authority is talking to you, you look at them.” I look at her fish like in the face. I don’t smile or frown, or move, and this makes her stop.

She says, “You know what’s wild?” She’s at Harry now. “The enemies are of your own house.” She’s at me. “Ever since you got back, you’ve been a bat outta hell. You have a month. You better find someone to live with cause you can’t live here.”

I say, “I’m jet lagged, I’m sorry, because, I’m sorry, there is no excuse.”

She goes on and on. I am quiet for a long time while Chase is quiet for a long time. Harry has shut the door. And she burns out.

“You guys live in the past, too. You all live in the past.”

After fifteen minutes, I feel colder than before. I smell the coffee again, and I do not get up, but lie in the bed and feel sleepy. I miss the class.

Chase comes past me and goes to the door outside. Chase looks down at me. He says, "I'm sorry."

I don't look at him for more than a second when he is in the door way with the door hanging open and his white and lettered shirt caught in the outside to somewhere else blue.

I am quiet but then I say, "I'm sorry for hitting you."

He is fifteen years old and I am twenty-four.

"I only said what I said because you said that I didn't help at all."

The phone falls at the side. The phone gets lost in the limpid, fluted covers and I feel the hardness under and on a back. I feel the tearing in a chest and a neck, the nothing in a head.

"I'm happy for you."

He is the man and I am the baby.