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Still Hanging

by David Galef

Daddy said he slept on the living room floor because he liked it there, but I knew he wasn't long for our fourth home in five years, not the way those crescent eyes of his would swivel past the furniture and out the window, down the driveway, toward Route 98 and the chug-chugging of trucks and beer. Breakfasts around the kitchen table were like a poker session, Daddy hungover but bluffing behind his newspaper, Momma upping the ante with a platter of fried eggs and grits, and the kids ready to fold any minute.

At school, people would tell us where they'd seen our daddy: In a borrowed Cutlass Supreme, barreling down a dirt road with a bottle attached to his right arm. Staggering about the lanes at Kiamie's, bowling gutter balls as often as he scored strikes (he'd been the league champion before he'd been our dad). Or just coming out of Doc's Eat Place at noontime, wiping his hands on those grease-stained overalls, staring down the alley and licking his lips at Sheryl's Live XXX Girls before heading back to his job at the bodyworks. Or not heading back at all.

"Son," he told me in one of his rare in-between moods, halfway between the loose grin and the flinty silence, "you take my advice. Get out when there's still time."

"Where?" I asked him. I angled my head toward the pine-fringed horizon, but he was mostly

blocking my view.

"Shit." He turned and spat in a wide arc that boomeranged against the wind. "If I knew, I'd tell you."

He finally lit out when I was twelve, leaving in the middle of the night when he thought everyone was sleeping. He packed most of his clothes in a cardboard suitcase but left his greasy overalls to dangle on the wash line like a headless daddy scarecrow. Weeks later, Momma cut them down with a pinking shears. Six months afterwards, Roy moved in. He was decent, just not sparky—the kind of guy who'd give you a pen set for your birthday. We never saw Daddy again, except in shadows from the basement and a sometime-ghost in the closet. My sister Angie got a job at Beulah's Beauty Supplies, but I stuck out school until I graduated, then left for Chicago. Moved four times in five years while passing through six jobs and lost touch with almost everyone. Now I work the graveyard shift at a printing plant.

When Momma died last month, I got a much-rerouted letter from Roy too late to attend the funeral. The letter also said that he was sifting through her old stuff and found some clothes that might've belonged to my father. I hear Angie lives way to hell-and-gone in Pasadena, but I might swing by.

I want those overalls back.

