

Yellow Pages

by Steven Gowin

Those yellow pages won't keep Gina off my back; she bitches, and the old man worries.

I'm workin' for Jimmy Chen. He usually hauls recycle cardboard to the Sunset Scavenger. They bundle it and send it to China or Vietnam or somewhere. The Asian boys reprocess it and send it back flat to Reno.

Then those Amazons stuff it with the stuff you order and ship it to you, and you knock the cardboard back down, and Jimmy collects it again and takes it to Sunset and on and on like that, like how the days turn and the water cycles through the world, and all.

But Yellow Pages season is on us now, and Jimmy's drivin' a contract route. He'll head out to the San Joaquin where they print, and load 'em in the back of his Tundra with the high side walls until the whole damned rig sags low, and he'll probably lose a muffler with it dragging on the ground like he did last year.

When he gets here, he picks up me and Hugo Cortez, who is a Filipino alcoholic, not a Mexican, and we walk along with the Toyota and either me or Hugo throws down the directories to the other who hustles 'em up to your steps to collect. That's how you get them Pacific Directories.

You got everything in there, all your heart desires. Sometimes I just open one and plop a finger, and maybe it's furnace repair or dog boarding. All those things could make you happy; you got a need and find a solution... Can't find it in the Paciic Directory, probably can't be found.

My girl, Gina, says this is nowheresville, and how can I hang with Jimmy Chen... he's like sixty years old anyway, idn't he, and spits everywhere and smokes those Chesterfield straights all day long. And how the hell do I understand him, his bad English? Pathetic.

But, Jimmy'll pay eighteen fifty a hour and end of day take us over to the Lucky Empress up Chinatown off Stockton where his daughter, Lilly Lee, waits table and serves us a big bowl of greasy

chow fun with them little pecker shaped shrooms and broccoli tossed in.

Lilly Lee feeds us in the back pantry so's Jimmy can light up, and she'll always toss in a handful of fortune cookies for dessert, toss 'em right on the table, so I got one that says, "For success today, look first to yourself," with lucky numbers, 5 19 23 1 68.

I save all of 'em, them fortunes, in a Bible the old man gave me. And when we're full of noodle, we're quiet, and lounge away on big bags of rice, and all you hear is a bubbly Chesterfield rattle in Jimmy's chest and the mahjong ivories' clitter clatter next door.

Gina's going to quit me. She'll finish up JC next spring and go on to State or maybe get in at Davis or Irvine and will get work at a bank or something with her finance education and all, and marry some finance guy, move to financeville, and have finance babies.

And even though the old man's been a mechanic and done OK, but just barely, freelancing diesel all these years, he'd like to see something steady for me. We went for that underwater welder thing with the pipe fitters, but they gave it to somebody else, damned unions.

So slinging the Yellows with Jimmy and Hugo's where it's at now. Not bad really although, damn it, Gina's right about phone books.

Three weeks after delivery, those water logged volumes, pathetic yet on the stoops, sloppy and wet, do bug me a little... just a little... Yes they do.

