

# Blink

by David Borcharding

-- and then he's standing in a parking lot, and he is cold.

In the past three days, he has set foot upon every major landmass on Earth. He is tired and dirty and sunburned and possibly a bit frostbitten. His stomach cramps from hunger and he is dangerously dehydrated. He is very nearly mad.

And now, his right shoe is missing.

It doesn't happen every time, but once in a while, something vanishes during what he has come to call a "blink." The first thing to vanish was his cell phone. Then it was his limited edition Jerry Garcia silk tie. His boxers disappeared from beneath his pants after he blinked out of Africa. And now his shoe.

He takes a deep breath, shivering in the frigid air, and looks around to get his bearings. This time he is standing in a Joltin' Joe's parking lot, and the flag above tells him he's still in America. Looking for flags is one of the few tricks he's learned, even though it does him little good to know where he is; he's never there for long.

He tries to will himself calm; the blinks come faster when he's nervous or scared. It's not easy to slow your heart rate, however, when just seconds prior you found yourself in the path of a speeding dump truck.

He pulls his stocking foot out of the puddle of oily snowmelt and walks carefully toward the café's front door. There's a payphone in the back; he can see it through the window. He can place a collect call to Lara, tell her -- what, exactly? That three days ago, he started spontaneously teleporting around the world? That he hasn't spent more than fifteen minutes in any one place since? That he is not, in fact, on a drinking binge/shacked up with his secretary/avoiding her and the baby for any other reason she's already imagined?

The door chirps as he pushes it open, and a few patrons glance up. Then they look up again, staring. He doesn't blame them; few days ago, he'd be staring right along with them. He is acutely aware of the stains on his suit, his three-day stubble, the sharp tang of

body odor wafting from every pore. All he needs is a cardboard sign and a tin cup to complete the look.

He stands straighter and walks toward the phone in the back, near the bathrooms. His wet sock slaps loudly against the tile floor. The buzz of conversation dims to whispers, barely audible above the roar of the espresso machine.

"Sir." One of the baristas, a tall kid with a wispy goatee, calls to him. "Sir, bathrooms are for customers only."

"I'm just using the phone," he says, feeling his heart rate starting to increase. Thankfully, kid says nothing else, but he can feel the eyes boring into the back of his skull.

He picks up the receiver, breathes slowly in and out, and then places a collect call to Lara. He manages to keep calm as the oddly lilting voice of the automated system guides him through the process. His voice is hoarse when he's prompted to speak his name. Finally, the phone begins to ring. Lara's phone. His phone.

"Hi! We're not home right --" his own voice says, and then is cut off.

"Caller, it appears the party you are trying to reach is not at home," says the calling system's own recorded message. "Please try your call again later."

"Goddammit!" He slams down the phone, heart pounding. So close. He picks up the receiver and starts to dial again.

"Sir, I need you to leave now." It's the tall kid again, standing just out of arm's reach.

"I'm not a bum," he says, fighting for control. "My car broke down and I don't have any change. I'm trying to call my wife. It's been a bad day."

The kid stares at him, impassive. "There's a gas station a block down the street. Try there."

"Come on, man. It's cold. I lost a shoe, for chrissake." He points to his foot.

"I'm sorry." Clearly, he wasn't.

"Fuck you. I need to make this call." He starts to dial again. His hands begin to shake, so he takes a deep breath and holds it.

The kid shoves him hard, and he loses his balance. He stumbles against the wall, dropping the phone, and comes back angry and scared and ready to take the last three days out on this punk's face. He swings hard and --

