

Blank Checks

by Foster Trecost

Just Wendell, nothing more. If you used *Mister*, he'd say save your misters for someone else. I worked a few doors down and stopped in most mornings, but never for the coffee. I went for Wendell.

Before the door could clang shut behind me, he'd call my name. This may seem unspectacular, but considering he was blind it was a curious feat. He'd been blind ever since the accident. He woke up and asked the doctor how long he'd have to wear the bandage and the doctor asked, "What bandage you talking about?" Wendell answered, "The one on my head, the one covering my eyes."

There was no bandage then and there's no bandage now, but he's still wearing it.

I walked to the counter and asked how he knew it was me and he said I smelled like diapers.

I said I could take that as an insult and he said to take it any way I wanted.

I asked how long he lived here and he wouldn't say, said I may as well ask his age and he don't tell that to nobody.

I asked how come he never left and he said he never had a reason. And that's when he gave me what I was looking for, that morsel that kept me coming back. He said moves like that for folks like him come with a price and he's fortunate he never had to pay it. He asked if I understood.

I said I didn't.

He said sometimes the reasons for leaving are the price for leaving, said if he was run out, then the reasons weren't his, they were someone else's, but he'd still have to pay for them. He asked again if I understood and this time I said I did.

Then he said something that really made sense, said he kept a blank check in his back pocket, said he wrote one a long time ago when he lost his eyes, and hoped he'd never have to write another.

I finished my coffee and said I had to go open up, jingled my keys and said I'd see him tomorrow.

He laughed and said I'd see him, but he'd smell me.

And that's how it went with old Wendell. All that day I thought about blank checks, but by the time night came, I'd forgotten all about them.

