

Three Short Shorts

by Jake Barnes

Uncle Dan

When Uncle Dan got sent to the Alzheimer's ward, the ladies licked their lips. Fresh meat. A handsome fellow, too, they all agreed. And nice; very friendly. And, oh, when he sang and played his ukulele, they came from upstairs and down. He knew all the old songs, all their favorites: "Skip to My Lou," "Tiptoe Through the Tulips," "Love Is Just Around the Corner," and many more. They were enchanted; they were smitten; they wanted his body. When Dan died just before Christmas, that put the kibosh on the annual Christmas party. Nobody felt much like partying. Mort sang Christmas carols in his quavering tenor, and Chester kept trying to grab the microphone away from him, but Mort kept it just out of his reach and went right on singing. Then Dottie started to cry. Claudia, too. Then the dietitian wheeled in a cart with the ice cream on it, and everybody cheered up.

War Effort

We all helped out with the war effort as best we could. My dad was an air raid warden. My mother and the other ladies knitted socks and sweaters for the soldiers. I saved my pennies and bought stamps, and when I had enough, I traded the stamps for a war bond. I had three twenty-five dollar bonds by the end of the war.

One day a Very Important Person came to our town, and we all went down to the high school gymnasium to hear him talk. He was the governor of our state. After his speech, he stood by the door and shook everybody's hand as we were leaving. He was a little man with a big, round head. He looked like a carnival freak. My father said he was going to be President some day. I must have made a face or something because my father looked at me and frowned. Anyone would be better than Roosevelt, he said.

A Night at the Opera

I picked out a book to read on the airplane. The title was *The Function of the Orgasm* by Wilhelm Reich. I didn't intend to read it; I was trolling.

On the way to Doc's house, we stopped in a bar on Franklin Avenue. The bartender kept looking at himself in a mirror behind the bar. "Everyone in Hollywood is an actor," Doc said.

Doc stood up, crossed the room, and sat down on a bar stool next to a smallish youngster with red hair. She looked like she took dictation for a living. Doc said something to her, and she laughed.

He had her bra off five minutes after we got in the door of his house. He took her downstairs. Her oh oh ohs floated up the stairwell like an aria.

I fell asleep that night thinking that if hell is other people, just how, pray tell, do any of us get to heaven.

