

Unfinished Business

by John Wentworth Chapin

He plunks the paper grocery bag down on the coffee table, unceremonious and loud. If I didn't know him, I'd say he was drunk; I assumed he was sober, because I just arrived unexpectedly with a weekend bag, and neither of us had so much as a light beer at the crappy restaurant he dragged me to before coming back here, to his grandmother's house. He's in flux — she just died and he took care of her for the last two years of her Alzheimer's. Part of the reason I came was to condole. I couldn't make it to the funeral and I still feel like a dick.

Help yourself, he shouts over his shoulder — broad shoulders, baritone, hairy muscled forearms — how could I stay away? There's a little slur in that *ess*, a tinge of *yourself*, but I'm trying not to judge because I'm the one who not so long ago got out of rehab and I have no business jumping to conclusions.

As soon as I am done praising myself for not judging, I wonder what I am supposed to help myself to, so I tilt the lip of the grocery bag my way. A shapely, beige spike reveals itself: one moderately high heel. I scoot forward on the couch. The bag is full of women's shoes. We're in his grandmother's house, after all.

He comes huffing back into the living room, sweat on his upper lip. We're both fat and pale and out of shape and it distresses me. *This should do it*, he announces, sipping from a can of soda. I'm paying more attention to his voice than to what he's saying. I forget, every time I come back, how heavy his accent is.

He reaches into the bag and retrieves a surprisingly boat-like woman's shoe. It's canvas-colored, with a teardrop-shaped opening at the epicenter. He finds the other, and then they both go on his feet. I make a more-stupid face than intended.

I'm not a big screaming queen, he says, eyebrows raised rather than frowning. He still kills me.

I... I wouldn't care if you were, I announce. This is a lie. I care because I'm gay and he knows it.

Lighten up, he titters, fumbling for a cigarette, and now I realize that he is indeed drunk. *You should wear the spectators or the Candies*, he says.

Because...? I query. I query when I get stiff.

Because you are the most uptight pansy I have ever met, and nothing will remove that cork like a pair of high heels and a highball.

I'm not boozing anymore, honey, I say.

He smirks a private smirk that would have irked me years ago, but I let it go. He reaches into the bag and pulls out a pair of low-heeled navy blue shoes with white rosettes. He tosses them a little too aggressively into my lap.

We're going out for Chinese later and you're wearing those, he announces.

I doubt your grandmother's shoes will fit me, I say.

He grins and stands, at home in size twelve pumps. *They aren't hers*, he giggles. He teeters out of the living room, and I have no choice but to follow.

