

Porch

by Larry Strattner

"Emerald Leaf Borers, Dutch Elm Disease and Gypsy Moths blow through here like the Plagues of Egypt," said Rafe, sipping from his glass of Parallel 44 wine. "You'd think we'd get more than a few days of good weather for all the parasites we feed."

"Yep. Numbered among them those fair-weather Packer fans and Jake Braking truckers out on County R." Elmer opined, his Kessler's on the rocks sweating droplets onto the worn porch floor. It wasn't Elmer didn't like Parallel 44. Wine gave him a headache. The Kessler's whiskey smoothed him out just right. Rafe started drinking wine after they sewed up the hole in his stomach over to the clinic in Kellnersville. Rafe ought not to have started on anything again but had to quit the Marlboros, so what the hell, he'd said. Sittin' on a porch without some vices wasn't worth a tinker's damn.

"Heard Sid was going to marry Mattie Borscht," offered Elmer, while making sure he got a drop of Kessler off his upper lip.

"Christ on a crutch!" Rafe said. "This'll be number four. You'd think three times a widower would be enough. Either he's a donkey in the dark or he's got all those women handling barn chores when we're not looking. We should have him marry the Leaf Borers or the Gypsy Moths. He'd kill 'em off till you couldn't see their population number on a gnat's ass."

"Didn't you run around with Maggie when we was in High School?"

"Yep. But run around was all we did. For beer money ol' Ned Brown'd buy us blackberry brandy at the store by the stop 'n go light. Had a grand ol' time. If we did anything else I don't recall. Sid will make it up to her." He sipped from his jelly glass. He'd made the concession to wine but was damned if he'd drink from a funny glass. Once in a while he and his wife Polly might go to Green Bay. He'd seen people drink wine from those glasses. Not him, thanks. He bet the linemen with the Packers never used those glasses either, 'less they ate them after the wine. Since Polly passed he hadn't gone to

Green Bay anymore. On the porch with his jelly glass was fine. He'd thought about enclosing the porch so he could sit out year round. Watch a few of those Jake Braking assholes jackknife into the ditch when it snowed. Quite a sight. Happened every year but it was like watching for hummingbirds in the summer, happened quick, you had to keep an eye peeled.

"Heard Phil Reed's dog got loose." Elmer mused, almost to himself. "Ate one of Herb Metzler's chickens. Take a lot of that foo-foo farmer's market soap Phil makes to pay for Herb's chicken. Herb gets those chickens somewhere special. Cost a lot."

"Mebbe so. He gets a lot of squawkin' for his money. Wind blows right you can hear them here inside the house when the window's open. I'd like to get his rooster close enough for my 20 gauge once. Don't need a rooster. Don't know why he's got one. Must make him feel like a farmer, up at dawn. What happens when a city man tries getting back to the land. Getting to be less land to get back to every day. Maybe after that Kessler's kills you I'll go on down by Florida. Get me a condominium in that trailer park where Orville's at."

"That's a laugh. You haven't got the gumption. Your shoes are nailed to this porch. Tourists point at you on their way up north. You're, what do you call, a fixture." Elmer sipped from his third Kessler's.

Looked like it might be a long conversation, a long afternoon.

