

Short Fuse

by Michael Gillan Maxwell

He flips through channels, looking for anything worth watching. Someone said a person's lifespan is shortened by 22 minutes for every hour of television watched. He should have been dead years ago.

Eyes glazed over, he gapes at flickering images, a kaleidoscope of catastrophe; pestilence, economic collapse, religious extremists, suicide bombers, civil war, revolution, record-breaking drought, floods, global warming, earthquakes, hurricanes and a wild fire out of control in Colorado. The bitter taste of bile fizzles in his throat.

He finds a movie about Vikings with flaming torches pitted against ferocious werewolves. The Vikings have Australian accents, the werewolves clearly actors dressed up in ridiculous wolf suits. A commercial advertises a remake of *"Towering Inferno."*

Abruptly, he turns it off, jumps in the car and heads for Walmart.

He turns on the radio. Nothing but bad news. He comes up behind a Dodge Caravan with a sign in the window that reads *"Baby on Board"*. It annoys him. He takes it personally, like anyone without a baby on board is a deranged, meth addled, demolition derby jockey. Is it to remind him to stop driving fast and taking chances? Or to interrupt the text message he must surely be composing? Will it be the tipping point in his decision not to push the pedal to the floor and sideswipe their vehicle, forcing it off the side of the road at 60 miles per hour? He sees the bumper sticker *"I brake for unicorns"* and his face burns with aggravation. Temples pulsating and hands clammy on the steering wheel, he shifts over to the passing lane, guns the engine and gives the van wide berth.

He stops for gas and wonders what it would feel like to rob a convenience store.

Still contemplating that question, he scans the headlines of the tabloids as he waits to pay. "*Dog Accidentally Shoots Man With His Own Gun, Elvis's Hidden Extraterrestrial Daughter, Swedish Man Bursts Into Flames on Train Platform.*"

Dammit! I could make better headlines than that.

His eyelid twitches. The smell of burnt gas station roller dogs is nauseating. Sweating like a stevedore, he pays and gets back in the car.

Walmart is where style goes to die. There's a man in *Sporting Goods* with a mullet haircut and a tattoo that says "*Do it in the dirt!*" He's seen that guy at the dirt track races. The man's trying out baseball bats.

His mind a screeching smoke alarm, he realizes what he must do. He grabs a bat and heads over to *Electronics*, his senses assailed by images on 27 televisions; break dancing, burning buildings, cooking shows Judge Judy, an oil spill, another school shooting.

He can already picture the headline. "*Man Walks into Walmart, Smashes 27 Televisions With Baseball Bat.*" He likes the way that sounds. The bat feels almost too hot to hold in his hand as he strolls over to a television showing a raging fire and starts swinging.

