

# Friends

by Timmothy Merath

There are only two types of tomato soup to choose from. Low sodium and regular. The kind with lots of sodium. It's not such a hard decision to make, but I am standing and staring for longer than is normally necessary. A store employee notices my predicament and asks if I need any help. It must be common for people to get confused by such a selection of soups. He's comfortable and familiar with asking him about my soup problems.

Any help, hey? Any.

I shake my head without turning away from the cans. He really can't offer any help. Not with the soup. Not any.

I remember when I was happy. Months ago, when my hair was shorter and my temper longer. We could have been friends back then. Meet at the bar after he's finished stocking shelves with soups and cereals. We'd throw back a few beers and then look for something pretty to pretend we're brave enough to talk to. He'd be brave, though. He would ask her if she needed any help.

I reach out and grab a can of soup with each hand and spin them around to dive into this much-heralded sodium situation. It's a landslide. I almost smile as I put low sodium back and continue to hold tightly onto regular.

I look down the aisle and my friend is still putting cans of soup on a shelf farther down. He seems content. The kind of guy who picks up the tab at the bar while I am pissing. Tell me it's no big deal. I'd think about his crappy paycheck at the grocery store and feel a bit guilty. Not enough to return the favor next week.

There is no next week. He's busy. Got a date.

I walk hesitantly towards him. He doesn't see me until I'm next to him, waiting. He startles and clumsily falls over from his squat position, his left arm sliding on the recently waxed floor. His face is shifting.

He's pissed. He tells me to fuck off.

That isn't any help at all.

I smash the can of soup into his face, splitting his nose and busting at least a few teeth free from his gums.

He wouldn't have picked up the tab. She wouldn't have let him do that for me.

