

Potato Bug

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"I'd hit him again," I say. The thought continues, but I swallow it. I can see Doc searching for more words to write over my own. Something to soften his report.

"Let's do an exercise," he says.

He tells me to imagine myself fifty years from now.

"I am still in the warehouse," I tell him.

The left side of his face pulls tight, and his top teeth lightly meet with his lower lip.

"Alright, tell me about it."

I work in one of the squared-off stations in the packing plant. The manager reassigned me to belt eleven. It is a low-priority position for a low-priority worker. I turn each box, so the right corner is pointed in a diagonal. This assures the label will be scanned and processed correctly. I do this for twelve hours.

"The manager is a real prick," I say.

"What would the warehouse look like in fifty years?"

"Boxes and dirt, I don't know?"

I'd leave if I didn't have to be here. I start scratching my chin, itching at the stubble. I try to picture belt eleven all overgrown with thickets and thorn-covered vines.

"Maybe there would be some plants and stuff."

"What else?"

"I don't know, maybe a potato bug or something," I say.

"Ok. Would your anger still be there?"

I'm crouched down on my knees, watching the little guy trail about. The gradual movement of his antennae shows me his true nature, gentle and unbothered. I smile as he investigates the cracks in the deteriorating concrete.

The potato bug at my feet is then flattened by an Oxford-style shoe. My eyes climb up the pleated khaki covering the right leg of this man. It's Mike. His jaw is sliding up and down like a puppet's trapdoor mouth. Everything is muted, but I know he is saying,

"Off task again. I'm writing you up again!"

I curl my hand into a fist. In my ears, there is a faint ringing as I look at a bit of dried blood on my knuckles. Just a few spots that didn't wash off from earlier. I look back up at the doc.

"Is the anger still there?"

"Yeah," I say.

Doc then tells me to picture my body. At first, I can only see Mike. He's standing on my back, climbing his way to the top while I'm laboring away, box after box.

Doc says it again. He tells me to picture it. What will my body look like in fifty years?

It's disgusting. Deep purple, except for white on my lips and a greyish film clouding over my eyes. It is slumped over, oozing on the boxes of belt eleven, making the cardboard mushy. The smell of rotting flesh is overpowering.

"Is the anger still there?"

This time, Mike is taking a weedwhacker to the blue-eyed grass and ragweed tangled over me. My decaying gut is sinking to the floor, but beneath it, there isn't any visible concrete anymore. There are only clumps of moss and white mushrooms that rise to my swollen ankles.

"Ok, let's try adding another fifty years."

This time I am all bone. My teeth are crumbling away. My femur is splintering apart into small slivers that are peeling down toward the earth. The walls of the facility are gone. A few of the steel support beams are poking up from the field of grasses and wildflowers. Belt eleven is buried, and only my lower jaw and largest bones are exposed. I can't see Mike anymore, but I know he's close. Even when I am nothing, he is circling.

To hell with anger *management*.

My forehead is burning up, and my chest aches from using up all the air in this boxed-in office.

"Is the anger still there?"

"Yes. To the bone."