

More Than Anything, He Wants to Be Believed

Charles Harper Webb

No, he didn't change the date on his visitor's pass, as Parking Enforcement Officer B. Frawley states. He never asked, "Where is that leftover spaghetti?" to make his ex feel fat for eating it. He mourns

the death of his new girlfriend's cockatiel, even though, as she details it, his eyes snag on a review lampooning a book about a psychic psychoanalyst—subject of the book he's slaved on for years. Yes,

he's divorced, looking to marry again. No, he didn't have an affair at the Love & Work Conference in Detroit; he spent the whole conference detesting his work. He'd willingly rip out his heart to prove its crystal

purity. He'd pop open his skull like a locket to show his thoughts kneeling in prayer, or asleep in their cribs, all innocence. Every week or so, he dreams he's outside his apartment, calling "Step right in,"

as mobs pound through his door. Inside, Led Zeppelin rocks out, live. The food's divine. The conversation coruscates until Joyce, his accountant, points at a bank-vault door with a dozen combination locks.

"What's in there?" she demands. (Faint screams bleed through gray, tempered steel.) "That's the sick-and-twisted room," he says—then, as Joyce backs away, "You have one, too. Everybody does. It's true. . . ."

Museum of Wasted Time

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My two kids boast their own displays: A wax model of Lichtenstein Alexander on the potty, swearing that he has to “make.” Sarasota Sue sunk in a sleep-coma when we’re all dressed up to see the Blitherville’s.

Still, the real star is Me: Me at the bank, a dozen bag-people demanding that the tellers de-electrify their change. Me at the library, three thousand Special Ed kids signing up for their first cards, ahead of me.

Me at the doctor’s, reading *Golf World*, including ads for Ben Hogen coffins and GENUINE spurious SPANISH FLY, while Doc squeezes in a last few holes, and my big toe swells to minor-planetary size.

My buddy Clark dominates “At the Playboy Mansion”—stuck between a social worker and a priest. There’s Dottie Sfuig, sobbing on the bathroom scale. A host of folks are figuring their income tax, waiting

for planes, spreadsheeting New Year’s resolutions, buying parakeets guaranteed to talk within six weeks. Still, I’m Grand Gorgonzola here: Me, *Grow It At Home* in one hand, trowel in the other, planting a mail-order

papaya tree. Me, alphabetizing my bookcase. Me at my desk sharpening pencils so I can triple my income writing birthday cards. Me and my ex at a weekend workshop: “CPR for Love.”