

## The Unmarked Grave of a Yellow Blazer

By Mark James McDonough

1

The scattered pattern on the ceiling revealed the silhouette of a fish. I fought my blurring eyes but eventually I blinked and it managed to get away from me. I lay there tracking different creatures to pass the time, hoping they'd stay, hoping I wouldn't wake her up. It wasn't her sleep that I was worried about but rather the repercussions of her not being asleep. Once she was awake she would talk until she lost her voice, saying things like "this is what I'm getting for my next tattoo." Then she would show me a picture of Sylvester from *Looney Tunes* or a flower she passed on the street. Once she showed me an ampersand and said she was getting that inked on her leg. I had seen every inch of her multiple times and yet I didn't even know where the first tattoo was.

Despite its diminutive size, her leg was heavy and pinned me against the wall. The fish on the ceiling was almost back on my line when I woke again. Any attempt at lifting her leg through telekinesis proved fruitless. I then transitioned to the more traditional method of subtly shifting my body in an attempt to clue in the motor functions of hers. Her sparing movements never resulted in the full roll required for my freedom. I resorted to a forceful push which brought her back into full consciousness.

"I'm cold. Where are your blankets? I thought a place like this would have heat."

I pretended to be asleep but she shook my shoulder powerfully, not affording me the same courtesy I had given her. Even with my eyes open, I refused to speak and hoped she would follow my lead. She didn't. She got out of bed to retrieve my blanket from the floor. I rolled to face the other direction, only turning back when I heard her rummaging through my belongings. She happened upon a box of clothes that I had packed up but not put away. One by one she took each item from the box and began slipping them over her legs and shoulders. In a challenge to herself she struggled to get the last few articles on. Like an Inuit woman, she waddled through the room with the layers covering her. Finally, she reached for the last piece in the container and pulled out a woman's blazer.

"Whose is this?"

"No one's. Put all that stuff back, you're driving me crazy."

"My apartment is warmer. I'm leaving," she said.

"Thank God."

When she stormed out I felt sleep tremble inside of me. It was still in reach for an instant, but then, like her, it was gone. I couldn't stop thinking about the yellow blazer and how it sat slumped on the floor like a discarded doll. It was only ever officially worn once, by an ex-girlfriend who I hadn't seen in a long time. On the one night she wore it, a homeless man called her SpongeBob and that was that. Afterwards, I would periodically wear it around the house to tease her. She would chase me and tug at me and eventually a button was the casualty of our playful scuffles. The cavernous hole where the button once was called out to me, shrieking. If I was not careful I would fall forever into that siren's pit.

With gloves on, holding the blazer away from my body like radioactive waste, I walked down to a dumpster behind a grocery store but couldn't bring myself to throw it in. Next to the garbage was a clothes donation bin, so I opened the latch and released the yellow coat inside of it.

2

The coffee made me sick. It was all I had put in my body that morning and because the person I was meeting was running late, I kept anxiously drinking more. At first I was just checking the time on my

phone and staring out the window, but then I found something else to hold my attention. A woman in her early twenties had entered the shop wearing tight maroon leggings and when she bent over the Lululemon logo on the band of her pants blinked incandescently like a transmitter. Her ass wasn't the gift of genetics, some survival of the thickest selective breeding, but rather one molded through hard, long hours at the gym. I couldn't not say hello. I would do what I always did- ask her if she lived in my building. I knew she didn't, but it would let her know that I lived in one of the most sought after and expensive high rises in the city. The conversation would continue from there.

I checked my phone and email one more time. The person who had set up the meeting, the person who had gone out of their way to headhunt me and try to poach me from my company, had either forgotten to come or was full of shit in the first place. *Oh, well. God bless the broken road that led me to this girl's ass* or so I thought. When I was about to make my move, I detected a vibration on the sidewalk outside as something darted past the window of the shop. Undoubtedly it was a yellow blazer. The chances it was *the* blazer were small, but how could I be sure? I shot out of the coffee shop and pursued.

Her long legs moved quickly and I had to break a sweat to keep up. I was cognizant that there was more than one yellow blazer in the universe but this one looked familiar. I could not tell if it was missing one button but was compelled to find out. Yes, even if it had once been absent one button, the new owner could have mended a replacement, but I thought if I got close enough I would instinctively know if this was the authentic article.

Though the woman was unaware she was being followed, she moved as if she knew. Perhaps this is the way all beautiful women glide, and in any case, the brisk pace added to the excitement. Before I knew it we had both turned into a used book store. Paperback novels were strewn everywhere with a variable crowd of freaks and crumpled derelicts flipping through them, women with canes and nubbs for knees, men blowing waste into handkerchiefs that had been in their pockets since Aldrin landed on the moon. It was difficult to remain inconspicuous because, aside from possibly the woman in the yellow blazer, I was the best looking person inside. I couldn't be sure exactly how attractive she was until I saw her face of course, but I knew I was in for a treat. She stayed at the front of the store looking at the books under the glass front counter. I imagined they put them under there so that their clientele couldn't muddy and desecrate them with their unwashed fingers. As she bent over to examine one, the blazer spread backwards as if to gloat that all of its buttons were securely in place. Sewing a button back on would be the reasonable thing to do. It didn't mean anything. What did strike me as strange at that moment however, was that a seemingly well-to-do woman had received a women's blazer from some sort of donation group. Maybe she was masquerading in a different socio-economic bracket. The octogenarian behind the register asked her if she was interested in buying anything, and in a state of embarrassment my yellow clad friend promptly exited the store. I dropped whatever book I was pretending to study back into a pile, unsure if I had even been holding it right-side up.

She took off down the street and I shadowed her for blocks on end before we came to another stop. Entering an apartment building, she let the door swing close behind her. I put enough space between us and caught the door in stride with such precision that not even the most paranoid schizophrenic would have been alarmed. She pushed a button for the elevator and, to buy more time, I bent over to imitate tying my shoe. *The elevator is broken.* I don't know how I recognized that but I was so overpoweringly sure. I told her that I "thought" it might be out-of-order.

"Still?" she said without turning.

"Stairs it is, I guess. I suppose the exercise is good for us," I said. People like when you say stupid things like that. That's how I got my corner office.

Step by step she climbed up the stairs as I respectfully tailed her, never glancing up at her legs. Her head turned at one point and she peripherally acknowledged that I was indeed doing my best to be a gentleman, but because of my averted gaze, her face continued to be a blind spot. I prayed that she would stop at any floor before the top one. Thankfully she left me at the penultimate level and I continued higher so as to not disturb her sense of normal. At this point, I had improvised as much as possible. I considered retiring for the day. As I descended the staircase I only just scaled, I stopped and peered onto that second highest floor. Down at the end of the hall a door sat ajar. The pale light coming from the room birthed the contour of an arrow on the carpet. I crept down to see who was inside.

Directly inside the apartment, a bottle of milk lay on its side spilling onto the carpet. I lunged to pick it up and the door closed behind me. I wanted to scold someone for making such a mess but couldn't find the right words or anyone to blame. Then, in the corner of the room I saw her in the chair. She was older than when I last saw her and older still. Aging impossibly before me so that she looked more like her mother might look than how she should. The long legs I had followed were varicose and swollen. The veins were the unforgiving blue of the water you drown in. Her flesh was squash and it grew dense and sank.

"It can't be you," I said.

"Why not?"

"You know why," I said.

"And who else knows?"

"No one. I'm... I'm sorry. Okay?"

I woke up pinned against the wall, chasing fish on the ceiling. The leg pressing me down feels heavier than it should. I don't want to open my eyes and find out who it belongs to.

The END