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by Christopher Buck

In a paucity of garages, legend has it, mice still, indeed, do exist. This must not be so, according to my father. Swathed in the hollow of his musty garage, amidst sawhorses fleshed with a tangle of rags, rags of the past, of obsolescence, resurrected on occasion for some dirty sort of work, among Dutch Boy paint cans toppled by imbalance, or neglect, my struggling father was taming a plank of screeching redwood with one quite discreet saw. The strung up and hung carcass of a buck in a corner, flinched with shadows of my father's dark frame, instructing the redwood of my mother's concept of time and space, twittering that he mistook for an indictment of the saw, a twittering, a twittering.

A saw paused, to listen. Silence. Again, the charcoal of a shadow flamed across ribs of slaughtered buck swinging slowly in the corner, the saw twittering again, as if sick, or neurotic, twittering. My father knew, then, it could not be the saw.

Only the breathing, now, of 200 pounds of flesh, the huge lungs of my father, sawing oxygen in the pause. Outside, a car fills an instant, rushes a clock. The alert shadow of my father's head, poised in the abscission of noise, eclipses a photograph framing a moment on the wall. Captain George H. Buck, United States Marine Corps, promoted to the office of Major, awarded a brace of maple leaves, pinned to the dextra and sinistra of his throat.

Casters! Piano casters! "BOYS!" shook the nexus of kitchen, living room, hall, to the walls of our room. "BOYS!"

"Dad wants us!" my brother shuddered, interrupting our mythology of wooden building blocks. Knocking down our castle of salvation, Garter and I, in our bare and holey socks, rushed from our room, skated on momentum down the hardwood floor of the hall, zoomed through the living room and kitchen, burst through the door to the garage. "SHSH!"

We petrified at the command.

"Boys," whispered father, creating a panic of suspense. "Be as quiet as you can. I think there's a mouse in here, but I can't tell where. Lis —"

"A mouse?" interrupted Carter.

"Yes!" retorted father, as if his son had challenged the obvious. "Now listen closely so we can tell where it's coming from!"

The next few minutes were hours, as the carcass of the gutted buck swung in our eyes, Carter beginning to fidget, my foot being stuck with pins for loss of blood.

Casters. Squickleleaqueak-tpht,tfft. Piano casters!

A voracious pause tossed our eyes into a corner, below fly-scabbed cobwebs and the pendent neck of the buck, its head already mounted on the wall, circumspecting the garage with an impartial stare.

Squickleleaqueak,tpht,tfft.

"There it is again!" affirmed my father. "Hear it?" A hazy nod from Carter mirrored back the suspicion, our father zeroing tympanic membranes toward the corner with a twist of the neck, stern face cocked for incrimination, hammer of the middle ear poised as a gavel over his sentient anvil, with an accusing finger. I cried, "It's in the corner, Dad, it's coming from the corner!"

Dad's military hand motioned an order, as if it were war. Major George H. Buck and his company of two on special mission, pressing forward through rank jungles of the Philippines, through a confusion of webs and snarled rags, cold, oily linoleum rat with the slap of soles, lusting for a terse verdict, the squickling leakage of anguish, squirming beneath the feet of an immediate dream, "The tools, move out the tools!" as Carter grabbed a rake and a pick, and I a fishing rod clutching its gut. "Clear out those paint cans now!" The brush of the Dutch Boy flying across night, dubiously stacked cans shoved to

an epiphany of convincing dunts, Dutch Boy rolling from side to side, convulsing over a broken back, spades of light from the fanged tungsten filament of the overlord bulb, uncovering a sawdust nest and droppings of a mouse, fleeing the spear and net of light, the Day of Judgment too punctual, the mouse crashing madly against the wall, under the hulking, pendulum, tower of a deer, — the panicking mouse, infected with dread, racing against destiny — stabbing our ears with shrieks, squickleleaqueak, squickleleaqueak. Frantic paino casters, oh, Stop it! Stop!

A surprised silence. Dad's booted foot, sliding on the pulpy nest of sawdust and newsprint, shredded to an accessible guess. It was evident. The mouse had hidden behind a dead battery, long forgotten, inert, yet acid to the touch. Black throwback of another year.

My father's forecast of a shadow pointed to me.

"The oven pipe, Christ. Get the oven pipe."

A few days back, we had dismantled an old stove from one of dad's duplexes — "dumps," he would call them. It was the first time I had seen cockroaches.

The tunnel of tin limped through the dark, invaded by the feeble bulb that kept champing from the ceiling, destiny marching toward its conclusion, a king and two pawns advancing on the checkerboard floor of the garage, the king wielding his sceptre of tin. We inched round the battery. The mouse, surrounded by a mountain range of toes, and our father's boots, its possibilities hocked by our feet.

Silence. Dad's right hand lowering to a grip on the battery, deus ex machina, his left hand armored with tin, snapping back at the viper of light, the right hand ready, impervious to black acid, ready, ready.

AAAAH CLANG! The battery tugged out with a shout, the barrel of tin slammed to the floor, father collapsing to his knees with glee, robbing the mouse of escape, whirring in the cylinder, the mouse bolting in our stomachs to the flang of cinched tin, bitten at last into tile, lobs of its peewee skull pranging against a reality metaphysicists deny — thumping squeaks piss-wet tail scurrying against time, its tinny voice pitting its wind against the sniggering Fates, its pleas and shrieks quivering our lips, oh, God, make less a monster of our father.

"Get a can, Carter, the peaches, hurry!"

Carter whimpering to the shelves of canned goods, over towards a pretense of order, grabbed a four-pound tin of peaches with his quaking fingers, presented that mercenary metal to Dad, fighting tears, Carter and I, sucking hot globs in our throats, the oven pipe squeaking like casters, dad's taranular hand suspending the can, craning over to the mouth of the pipe, the mouse, that dumbstruck runt of flesh, paused in its tracks, rose up on its haunches, peered at the tombstone of tin rolling overhead, eclipsing the monster eye, an eye that could gobble its head, dad, why are you waiting, do it now or don't make us go through it, the mouse now spinning in tin, cringing at the ceiling of peaches, recounting all of its hours in a blur, paced by the arc of a carcass, holding its final Sabbath with black, baptising our foreheads with an unbearable sweat. The mouse pummelling its own shadow, which is now the shadow of the world — the shadow its fresh effigy, all tasks too treacherous for the asking, demanding an epic of a guess, the peaches shrink to a ratching scream, a ratching metal squit that rips our gristle to an erupted flood, vomit the crumpled pulp sliding from under itself, the cancellation of all doubt, the death warrant affixed by the squishing sound, the globules of hammered fat crawling in our brains, oh, how can we escape that god-awful sound that bolts in our veins, yes, yes.

Mother was glad it was done. Hickory-dickory dock. Our hearts limp.

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This must not be so, according to my father. Swathed in the hollow of his musty garage, amidst sawhorses fleshed with a tangle of rags, bags of the past, of obsolescence, resurrected on occasion for some dirty sort of work, among Dutch Boy paint cans toppled by imbalance, or neglect, my struggling father was taming a plank of sea-weathered wood with one of those disc-saw. The strung up and hanging carcass of a buck, like a conveyer belted with shadows of my father's day, framed, insulating the redwood of my mother's concept of time and space, twittering that he was fool for an indictment of the saw, a twittering, a twittering.

A saw paused, to listen. Silence. Again, the charcoal of a shadow flamed across ribs of slaughtered buck, swinging slowly in the corner, the saw twittering again, as if fool, or not fool, twittering. My father knew, then, it could not be the saw.

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Casters! Piano casters! "BOYS!" shot the mouse of kitchen, living room, hall, to the walls of our room. "BOYS!"

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"Yes!" retorted father, as if the son had challenged the obvious. "Now listen closely so we can tell where it's coming from!"

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"There it is again!" announced my father. "Here it is!" A heavy nod from Carter mirrored back the suspicion, our eardrums vibrating toward the corner with a twist of the neck, stern face cocked for incrimination, hammer of the middle ear poised as a gavel over his patient mytil with an accusing finger. I bowed. "It's in the corner, Dad, it's coming from the corner!"

Dad's military hand motioned for order, as if it were war. Major George H. Buck and his company of two on special mission, passing forward through rank jungles of the Philippines, through a curtain of cobwebs and tattered rags, cold, oily linoleum, lit with the clap of a floor, lusting for a true verdict, the squickling leakage of anguish, quivering beneath the feet of an immediate dream, "The tools, move out the tools!" as Carter grabbed a rake and a pick, and I a fishing rod, clutching its gut. "Clear out those paint cans now!" The brush of the Dutch Boy, flying across night, dubiously stacked cans, shoved to

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