

By Tony Rauch

up from the goo

I'm walking home late at night through the alley. It's been a bad week. I lost my job at the potato factory as the orders were slowing, and thus they needed to drop some employees. I was one of them. Then my girlfriend decided she didn't want to see me any longer. Tonight I thought my luck may have turned for the better. I was at a secret card game in the basement of a laundromat. I got on a lucky streak and was up quite a lot. I considered staying until morning, but then thought the better of it. I figured I might as well stop while I was ahead for once. So I cashed in and walked away. But an hour ago, on my way home, several meanies jumped from a shadow. They grabbed and held me while one of them got my wallet. Then they pushed me down and ran off. They didn't hurt me really, but they took all my winnings. Now I'm thinking about this as I continue walking home. I figure they were all in on it from the beginning - that they were signaled somehow, that they knew I had money from the poker game and were waiting for me.

The clouds have cleared and the moon is full and bright, casting a silver glow on everything. I'm on the back alley path, enjoying the moonlight, watching the random jumble of houses along the way when an unusual wagon rumbles past, splashing in the puddles of recent rain. It is a large wagon, the likes of which I've never seen before, with six strong horses churning along. Looks like a big wagon from the city, but I can't tell due to the darkness. I step into a shadow to avoid being hit. They don't see me. The wagon splashes through the puddles, swaying and bouncing on the rough path. I hear a rattling from the back of it. The canvas covering the back door is flapping loose in the wind as the wagon sways on by.

When I get down to my place, I see a jar lying on its side in the middle of the path. I kneel down and examine it. It looks like a mason jar. The lid has popped off and is lying in the sand. There is a strange trickle of dark yellow goo dripping from the jar. Or, well, in the moonlight the goo looks to be a dark yellow. I can't really tell. With my finger and thumb, I lift the jar to right it. I see a little of the goo has spilled into a mud puddle. I look into the jar. The goo is a thin liquid. I move my hand around to swirl the goo in the jar. There is nothing in the goo. Nothing at all. I figure the jar must have dropped off the wagon that just passed. They probably hit a rut and the jar must've just bounced out the back. I lower my head to give the jar a good whiff. It doesn't smell like food, more like some kind of chemical. Maybe it's a special kind of turpentine or industrial cleanser or lamp fuel or something. At the potato plant we had all kinds of new

chemicals and industrial solvents and cleaning solutions.

I set the jar in the dirt and replace the lid, turning the lid to tighten it down. I notice a curving metal object at my side. It looks like a set of tongs. Could be for food preparation, or maybe for some type of dental or medical use. I reach and grab the tong and look at it. I raise it to my face. Sure enough, it is a silvery tong. Maybe that wagon was a food supply wagon, or a hospital supply wagon of some type.

Then, in looking the tong over, I catch the swirl of dark yellow goo in the rain water before me. The dark yellow begins to slowly go thin and stretch out. It begins to curl in the puddle. Soon the thin string of goo is a foot long and slowly starting to circle in the water. This must be some kind of chemical reaction to the water, or to the very air itself.

The puddle is the size of an average wooden chair seat. I watch as the wee string of goo circles slowly. Then the dark yellow goo begins to collect itself and form into a small puddle of its own. This concentration of goo spins slowly on the surface of the dark grey water. The moon's reflection ripples as the late night wind skims across the puddle. The puddle of goo begins to bubble a little bit as it turns. I look around, to see if anyone else is out and about this late. I look down at the goo in the water in the rut in the path. Then I look in both directions down the path, figuring the wagon will be back this way for the jar at any moment. I listen but don't hear a thing. It must be very very late by this time.

I look back at the jar. I reach and raise it to the moonlight to get a better view of the contents. But there is really nothing in there at all, just a thin line of liquid, maybe a half an inch high. I swirl the jar around again, but there is nothing in the liquid. Nothing at all. The jar only has a little watery substance in it. At first I thought it was something drinkable, but now I figure it's a chemical of some fashion.

I look back down at the pooling dark yellow muck. It is still bubbling, more and more now. Steam or smoke is beginning to rise from it, and it seems to be getting a little smaller. It is collecting itself together, concentrating itself into something, pulling itself together and hardening. It is now half the size of my fist and still smoldering a mist of steam. Then the vapor stops and the goo coalesces. Strings wiggle from its four corners as the goo thickens, hardens, and coagulates. Something emerges from the top. Slowly the thing becomes more and more defined. It slowly forms itself to become a person. The little person raises its head. It appears to be a little man, down on all fours in the mud puddle. It rises up on its arms, as if doing a pushup. Its bald head shakes a little from side to side. Then it straightens, rising to its knees to stretch out. The little dark yellow figure gathers in some deep breaths, filling out and becoming more and more defined. It is still

half the size of my fist. It doesn't appear to be growing any. I wonder if I should pour the rest of the goo in the jar into the mud puddle. I wonder if that would make the little person grow bigger. Or would that only create even more of them? I don't know what to do. I just sit there, resting on the ground on my knees.

The small, dark yellow figure drags himself to the edge of the pool. He tries stretching himself out, his legs still in the water, the rest of him in the dirt. It's as if he's still forming, still inflating, still filling out. He looks up to me and says, "Hey, where can a guy get something to eat around here? Huh?"

I stare down at him in wonder. I can't breath.

"It's time," he speaks in a chirpy little voice. "We need to begin assembling the thing, . . ." he looks down and shakes his head as if to clear his mind, as if coming to. He looks back up to me, "Where're the others? Where's the rest of them? Huh?" he looks around, searching in the silvery moonlight, "Where's everyone else?"

[end] copywrite Tony Rauch