

matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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DEDICATION

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,
mine, and ours—and
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

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11 Robbin' Hood



The furrows above Pettirosso “Petey” DiCappello’s mono-brow plotted all his meager concentration, intent on the fiberboard tray between his porcine hands. His lips formed unuttered words as he left Italian People’s to cross Butler.

Lemmesee—two milk, one sugar; one cream, no sugar; one double-mocha, half-caf... He blinked. That Billy. What a fessacchione—coffee is coffee, right?

BEEEEEEeeeeeeep!

“*Madre del Dio!*”

The red SUV’s glancing pass caused a comic bull-fighter’s pirouette. Panic forced Petey to collapse his grip, sandwiching the tray and crushing the bagged baked goods in the middle. Only one lid popped, but half that cup sloshed onto his left hand.

“OWWWW! Sonafa—”

He faltered in pain momentarily, but the insistent rush hour restored his grip and he waddled to safety through the remaining maelstrom of cars and curses.

He laid the tray on a trash can, dug out his handkerchief, and pressed the throb out of his wet flesh. He picked the errant lid off a mummified rodent corpse in the gutter, cleaned it deliberately with his handkerchief, and replaced it. He mopped vainly at the cups, their ochre stains already preserved in the absorbent Styrofoam, and turned his attention to the crumpled bag. It was stained through and clung to its gelatinous inner mass like clothing to a burn victim. He tried a careful separation, tearing one seam top to bottom. He poked at the amorphous mess but only managed only to separate the Danish shale into an approximate number of indistinct units. Rearranging a few raisins and relocating some jelly at random helped, he thought.

Petey lifted his project, exhaled, and headed for the door of the *Ereditare di Italia* (Sons of Italy) Social Club, a storefront that grew more anachronistic daily as Butler Avenue and the rest of Chambersburg—known with affection to its denizens as “The ‘Burg”—was dragged by gentrification toward that REALTOR® kind of respectability that typifies 21st-Century urban renewal. The Club’s ugly, squat elevation could illustrate “eyesore” in Webster’s on the natural; nearby pastel-oak-and-fern renovations and re-openings just made matters worse. It was anchored to the sidewalk by four courses of the blond brick last popular when Buicks were classified by their number of fender “holes.” The shin-to-hairline plate glass and aluminum-frame door were all sheathed inside by vertically-applied rolls of contact vinyl that looked less like the intended stained glass than a blizzard of Technicolor confetti. One small corner offered the only promise of a glimpse inside but most of it was taken up by an old duochrome of John Paul II, which by now—being outside the beaten awning’s daytime

penumbra—looked more frail than its subject. Up above, the paint-starved *basso-rilievo* featuring Jupiter, Juno, and a gaggle of lesser deities might still have lent a modicum of dignity, had time and perching pigeons been kinder.

Petey put his beefy shoulder to the door and stumbled inside, underestimating as always the spring's degree of exhaustion. The Club's dim interior was consistent with its public face. Light came from sputtering fluorescence, beer signs, and the clanging glare of *macchine del pinball*. Sludge from generations of grease, grime, and tobacco smoke had paralyzed the beaten-tin *cherubim* in the ceiling tiles. Even a trained eye could produce at best a guess as to what color they—or the walls or the floor, for that matter—were. The kitchen, bar, and corner stage had long ago ceased to pique or satisfy gustatory and carnal appetites; about the only evidence they ever had were the odd bottle of Grappa or Galliano and the few remaining dingy portraits of regional headliners and ecdysiasts. The place's ambience had fallen so far below its own traditions or bare potential that it seemed to magnify the suffering of the occupant of the Crucifix in the far corner. A brand-new, imported brass espresso machine stood as sole evidence of the Club's present utility—a day room where mob *soldati* congregated for morning roll-call and family business assignments. Like its possible users, all it lacked for efficient performance was the proper connections—but who was to call the plumber was an assignment that always seemed to fall between the stools. So, after the ritual of accusations and throwing up of hands, Petey was pushed into traffic every morning to fetch breakfast for those without domestic resources.

The cascade of light punctured Giovanni Nonnula's concentration as he pounded his hip into the *Star*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



E. G. Fabricant

writes and lives in San Jose, California. This is his first collection of short stories.

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