

Johannes de Silentio

The Revolt of David Luggard's Furniture

Sperm flew out of David Luggard faster than he could mop it up. He spent his days filling discarded socks, wads of toilet paper, and the napkins that came delivered with his pizza. He'd stained every piece of his furniture, including the lamp.

Twenty-nine, David occupied a one-bedroom apartment on the top floor of a building zoned for the infirm and unemployed. Dark pillows encircled his eyes, making him resemble a former boxer, or a drunk. He'd never been anything that dramatic. For a while he'd worked as a bicycle messenger, but he'd been let go for running into too many pedestrians. Now he spent his unemployment checks on junk food and porn magazines. The television across the room stayed on day and night.

Today was no different than most. David sat on his sofa with his shorts around his ankles, masturbating to a C-list actress on Home Shopping Network, demonstrating a lemon peeler. His concentration broke when a hand slapped something to the outside of his door.

David pulled up his shorts and shambled out into the hall. There was a notice on his door in bold italics, underlined twice. In seven days a Los Angeles Sheriff's would enter by force, the notice said. He was being evicted. He came back inside and dropped the eviction notice on a pile of unopened mail on the coffee table. Stepping out of his shorts once more, he returned his attention to the actress with the lemon peeler. Soon, the television turned to static.

David switched channels. He turned the power off and on. He tried adjusting the settings with his remote, but it was no use—the cable company had disconnected him. He turned off the TV and sat half naked in the silence. With only his mind to occupy him, he began confronting the nagging demands of reality.

The plastic vertical blinds clacked in the afternoon breeze. With the TV off, the living room seemed intolerably bright. There was nothing in it really, just the sofa, coffee table, and television set. A six-foot halogen floor lamp stood unplugged in the corner, burned out since the day he'd bought it



at a garage sale for a buck. A sliding glass door led to a balcony, but the ledge was too narrow for anything other than David's bicycle, its rims rusty, both tires flat.

David flopped glumly on his stomach and found a hollow pocket between the sofa cushions. He imagined the actress with the lemon peeler beneath him. Then the actress drifted away and it was just the sofa, protecting him in its fabric arms. A few minutes later, he'd managed to ejaculate. The experience left David even more deflated. He lay motionless on the sofa with something approaching shame. When he reached for some napkins to clean up, the coffee table seemed to jump away.

He'd become edgy—probably the eviction, together with the apartment's sudden silence. David used one of the sofa cushions to wipe himself off. Then he got up and headed to the balcony for air. He pulled the blinds and opened the sliding glass door, only to step back with his hand to his mouth. A dead pigeon hung out of the wheel of his bicycle, its head stuck in the spokes. While delivering a package downtown, David remembered, he'd once run over a human hand on the sidewalk. He'd stopped to apologize, but the hand had been attached to a dead man under a shopping cart.

David shuffled off to his bedroom. He thought it best to sleep for a few hours, to escape into his dreams. He hesitated at the threshold of the room, his eyes throbbing, his dirty blond hair pointing in all directions. All over the carpet, in an archipelago of encrusted paper towels, lay the repositories of each night's ejaculations. He could smell the thick, inescapable odor of himself. David had once dated another bicycle messenger, but after three months she'd complained that he rarely listened to her, that he barely looked at her, that he masturbated too often and treated her no differently than furniture. When she'd ended the relationship David decided to stop dating altogether. The smell of himself had collected on the oily door handle and inside the footprints he embedded in the carpet like a snake's molt.

Against the wall, David's mattress waited seductively on its metal frame. He loved the way his bed sailed above the carpet on its white plastic wheels. How could he account for his persistent feelings of attraction toward it? Was it any different from finding pleasure in his own smell? He had a second home inside his bed. No matter how many times he washed his sheets, a smudge remained in the outline of his body, like a silhouette at the scene of a homicide.

There was a sound of moving furniture back in the living room. Had the landlord come to kick him out early? His throat dry, his fists clenched, David ran down the hall. The halogen lamp wasn't in the corner any longer. It stood beside the television against the wall. The two of them were huddling conspiratorially, as if plotting their next move. David shouted, almost to himself. Nobody had entered the apartment. No—he

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wasn't dreaming—the furniture had moved itself.

David inched toward the sofa. He sat gingerly on the edge of the center cushion until he couldn't bear the silence any longer. "What is it you want?" he asked. The furniture didn't reply.

Was he losing his mind? Right in front of him, the coffee table started across the room on its little legs. It shook itself like a wet dog, discarding its pile of napkins and unopened mail. Then it rose on its hind legs and joined the television and lamp.

David tried to stop his lips from quivering. His furniture stared back at him defiantly, as if daring him to speak again.

"Tell me what you want. Please..."

David's ex-girlfriend had asked him the same question, in the weeks before she'd broken up. He hadn't been able to answer. He'd only been fit to take her to bed, to pleasure himself inside her, then cover her startled face with his semen.

Plunging his hand beneath his shorts, David began instinctively tugging at himself.

It was the most reliable method of relieving his anxiety. The sofa lurched under him. Leaning back, David dug the heels of his tennis shoes into the carpet. He couldn't blame his furniture for wanting to revolt. Still, he wasn't about to let it leave. His furniture knew him better than anyone. It wasn't only the sex—for years they'd shared countless meals, evenings of laughter and tears in front of the TV, the intimacy of sleep.

The sofa kept lurching. Blushing, almost apologizing, David held it down with all his strength.

After twenty minutes, David's temples dripped with sweat. Worse, he needed to pee. He spotted an empty soda can and reached for it with his sneaker. He'd almost dragged the can over when the sofa ejected him onto his back.

"Don't leave me," David cried, holding out his arms. "I'll take better care of you..."

He covered his face as pizza crusts rained down on him. The sofa pivoted on its corner, shaking its cushions of old candy wrappers, soiled magazines, loose change. It spun away and stood with the rest of the furniture against the wall.

David got to his feet and panted in the middle of the carpet. Maybe the furniture had just had enough of moving. He'd been evicted half a dozen times now. He'd lived in Studio City, Burbank, the stinking ghettos of Hollywood. Each time he moved, he hauled along his television, lamp, and cof

fee table. He shoved his sofa against the wall like a kidnap victim, rolled the bed into their private room and locked the door.

David crept into the bathroom to use the toilet. When he came out into the hall, the lamp sprang at him, pointing its bulb. Holding up his palms, David backed slowly into the bedroom. The coffee table scuttled after him and knocked the door shut. He heard it lean against the handle, blocking his exit.

Across the room, the bed regarded David with pity. He undressed in front of it sadly, like a husband with no energy for sex. He'd bought his bed brand new. Only he had embraced its pillowed top. Only he had dreamed on its plastic wheels. The bed had been his consolation gift after losing his girlfriend. David pulled back the sheets and tucked into the outline of his impression. When the Marshal forced the door open in seven days, the poor man would have to find him here, dying in his lover's arms.

