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## Street View

by Cori Lynn Arnold

Ben's day started out just the same as any other, except for his cough and sore throat. The naked man, the marching band, and Mrs. Naylor covered in blood, they would all come later.

His wife wasn't in bed when he got up. Her drive was long and she occasionally went to the school early to grade papers or meet with parents or students to go over issues they were having. Teaching, he knew, was never ending, but she poured herself into work to escape.

He brushed his teeth in front of the mirror. Every day the chipped mirror reminded him of the promise he made to his wife to fix it. And every day he was reminded of his lack of commitment to so many promises. When he combed his hair he tried not to notice the decreased resistance from the back of his scalp. He liked to think he was only losing some hair, enough to make him seem mature, but not old. At thirty-eight he wouldn't be considered old, except by children.

Margret still hadn't stopped by the store to get more razors, so he felt each stubble pulled up by the root as he shaved. For each stroke he thought about whether or not to tell her, like a girl picking petals from a flower, "Ask her for more razors. Don't ask her for more razors." He feared upsetting her after all they'd been through.

The cough he woke up with was definitely a sore throat, probably a summer cold. He rooted around in the drawers in the bathroom for some throat lozenges. He stumbled upon his wife's purple diaphragm case. He held it up to the light, but the hard plastic revealed nothing inside: not the fear they'd had in the early years, nor the hope and excitement in the middle years and certainly not the depressing last few years. There was a fleeting thought about opening it, but instead he stuffed the case even further back in the drawer. He hoped his wife wouldn't stumble upon the forsaken device like he had.

He found one cough drop stuck to the bottom of the drawer. It's sugary existence oozed onto the bottom of the drawer like smooth ropey Pahoehoe lava from a long ago erupted volcano. His father, an amateur volcanologist, dragged the whole family to view volcanoes when Ben and his sister were teenagers. The only benefit he had ever found in learning that much about volcanoes was taking his lovely new bride on their honeymoon to Hawaii. Her eyes seemed to get bigger every time he used a Hawaiian word like 'Pahoehoe.' He hadn't even known from where those words sprung. Nine years later those words were only good for describing the cough drop's oozing state of decay.

He used his fingernail to release the drop from the bottom of the drawer and popped it in his mouth. Ben felt his forehead with the back of his

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hand. Was he feverish? How can anyone really tell? He was hot, but maybe that was just because of the sticky Connecticut late spring? Was it summer when the temperature reached the high eighties, even if the calendar didn't say so yet?

He walked the twenty blocks to the office. He used to drive, but his wife made him start walking when he tipped the scale at two-fifty. Now his pants were uncomfortably loose. He had to make an extra hole in his belt. Pretty soon he'd have to go to the store and buy a new belt and new pants.

A block away from his office the naked man was standing at the corner. He sighed. As the local lawman, it was his job to deal with vagrants, but he really didn't want to get involved with a naked vagrant. He pulled out his cell phone.

Debra picked up on the first ring, "What's up, Ben?"

"There's a naked man standing at the corner of Main and Maple."

There was a long pause before Debra said: "Why?"

"I don't know why, he's just, there."

"Ask him."

"I'm not going to ask him, Debra. It's our job to get him off the street. Come over here. Now."

"Fine," she said.

He stood there staring at the naked man. The man's muscles were so well defined he looked like he might have been a statue, except for the subtle movements. If he was trying to be a statue, like those buskers from big cities, he wasn't very good at it.

A few minutes later other people from Dullbury stood staring at the naked man. Before long, the bystanders were blocking his view and he couldn't decide if that was a good thing or bad. Good, he decided. While Ben had lost weight, he wasn't nearly as physically fit as the man standing on the side of the road.

Debra stopped her car next to Ben and then rolled down her window. "Where is he?"

Ben pointed down the road, toward the crowd. Why couldn't she see the throng of people created by this trespasser?

"Get in," she said.

He got into her car. The smell of stale, rotten grease gave his stomach a lurch. He wished for another cough drop, either to sooth his throat or hide the smell, maybe both. He thought about asking her for one, but decided he didn't want to put anything in his mouth that came from her car. He'd sucked down the cough drop from the bottom of the bathroom drawer, but this car was worse than a toilet.

The car barely rolled to a stop at Maple when Ben jumped out like he was on fire. But he stopped just a few feet away from the car, as he didn't want to accidentally bump into the naked man.

The naked man looked even more naked from up close. From a block away he couldn't see the man's penis, but this close he couldn't stop seeing it. He was young, probably mid-twenties. This was a guy that could get his wife pregnant.

Debra walked around the front of her car. "Hey, you gotta wear clothes here, mister."

He looked straight at her, "I'm waiting." When he spoke everyone in the crowd stepped back a few inches. The mime illusion was broken.

"For what?"

"The car," he said. His faraway voice gave Ben the willies.

On any other day at six thirty a.m. in Dullbury there were no cars. Today there were no cars. Debra's car, parked across three metered spots, was the only exception. Ben was surprised there were even so many people on the street. He rarely saw another human being for the entire walk to work each morning. But then again, news travels fast. The smaller the town, the closer communication was to light speed. Communication in Dullbury could at least break the sound barrier.

Ben ignored Debra's stares. He didn't want anything to do with the naked man.

He worked hard on stifling the cough forming in the back of his throat. He wanted to swallow, but knew that would only make the scratching feeling worse.

Debra huffed. "Sir, either go get some clothes on or we are going to have to take you into the station." 'Station' was just a word that they liked to throw around; it was a closet in the town hall. The room was so small Debra and Ben had to take turns sitting at the desk.

Debra pulled out her handcuffs. The whole process of handcuffing the naked man and then stuffing him in the car took no more than a minute. Ben was surprised by the efficiency.

He let Debra complete the booking while he walked two more blocks to

the pharmacy. The pharmacist looked up when Ben walked in the door.  
“Mornin’, Ben.”

“Mornin’, Joe,” Ben grumbled and coughed.

“Did you see that naked guy a few blocks down?” Joe asked. His reading glasses were slipped to the bottom of his nose. His white hair was wild in every direction.

“Yeah, we brought him in.”

“Never seen him before. Never going to forget him either,” he laughed. “I haven’t seen Margret in a while, did you finally knock her up?”

“No, Joe,” Ben mumbled.

“Oh,” Joe said.

Ben walked over to the alcove marked with a sign that read: ‘Cold / Flu Remedies.’ He swallowed and then coughed.

“Got yourself a summer cold, then?”

“Yeah.” So it was summer.

Joe stepped from behind the counter. His aching joints hampered his staggered walk. “Try that tea thing. It’ll sooth your throat and break up the phlegm.”

When he found the box, with a teacup and steaming tea on the cover he heard a sound, like a little kid doing a solo on a triangle from the back of the orchestra. “What is that?”

“What is what?” Joe asked.

“That sound. Is there a radio playing?”

“I wouldn’t be able to hear it if there was.”

The sounds got louder. Soon there were horns and whistles too.

Ben ran outside with the cold remedy tea box still in his hand. Off in the distance he saw flags flying through the air. The drumbeats got louder as clashes of symbols struck like a thunderclap. Pretty soon the marching band was close enough to see. Women in the front waved turquoise flags wearing seashell bras and had sequined fins trailing behind them. He wondered how they didn’t trip on the fins. The band marched to a tune Ben didn’t recognize. The horn section synchronously swayed left and right, up and down.

Ben's mind was hypnotized, but his stuffy head was throbbing with pain. He walked back into the pharmacy before the drum section got even closer.

"Kinda early on a Tuesday for a parade isn't it?" Joe said.

"Yes." Ben paid for the tea, aspirin and three bags of eucalyptus cough drops.

As he was walking back to the station he popped an aspirin and then one of the cough drops in his mouth. He turned sideways to put the wrapper in the magical four thousand dollar solar trash compactor the town purchased last year in an attempt to clean up the streets of Dullbury. Litter has never been, and would never be, a problem in Dullbury.

Out of the corner of his eye he spotted a man in a wet suit and tutu crossing the street. Ben gave the man credit, for he was agile in the crossing despite the two-foot long rubber fins.

"Excuse me," the man said. The snorkeling mask covering his nose distorted his voice.

Ben looked around, thinking the man might be talking to someone else.

"Have you seen it yet? Did it already go by?"

"The parade?" Ben asked.

"No, the car." The man turned his head to look down the road.

"What car?"

"The street view car."

It all finally made sense, the naked man, the mermaid marching band and this guy with a wetsuit and pink tutu.

"Nope. Haven't seen it." He continued on his way to the town hall. He couldn't wait to tell Debra what was really going on in Dullbury.

When he walked into the station he saw that the naked man still had handcuffs on, but Debra put a newspaper on the bench and over his privates. Her hair was frazzled, her teeth were gnashed together and her hands held both the office telephone and her cell phone.

"Where have you been?" she said. "I've got two calls and another beeping in the background. What the hell is going on today?"

"Google Street View is driving through. People want to have their picture

taken.”

She held out the station’s phone receiver. “Here, you explain that to Mr. Richards.”

Ben held the phone to his ear, but didn’t really listen to the caller. Occasionally he’d say, “Ah, huh” when there was a break in the conversation.

He walked over to the little coffee pot in the corner, dumped the stale coffee into the sink, the grounds in the trash and then filled the carafe with water.

Mr. Richards didn’t like the song the band played. He didn’t think a band could march down Main on a Tuesday morning without a permit.

“Ah, huh,” Ben said.

He broke open the cold remedy tea box. The smell of the stuff hit him like slap in the face with a lemon. He poured brackish water into a mug over the tea bag.

“What is that?” Debra asked with her hand over her cell phone’s mike.

“Tea for my cold,” Ben said.

“What?” Mr. Richards said.

“Smells terrible,” Debra said.

There was a sudden, frantic knock at the door. “Police?”

“Door’s open,” Ben said.

“What?” Mr. Richards said.

A man rushed into the office, but stopped in his tracks. ‘Google’ was embroidered into his shirt. He took one look at the naked man barely covered with newspaper, the frazzled policewoman, and Ben standing there with his mustache teacup. “What the hell is wrong with this town?” His voice shook.

“Mr. Richards, I’m going to have to call you back.”

“But -”

Ben clicked the talk button and put the phone on the counter.

“What seems to be the problem?” Ben asked.

"I was rolling through Pine street, okay? Then I stopped when I got to that huge band at Main. I was scanning through the shots from earlier on Chestnut and I found this, okay?" He pushed the tablet into Ben's hands.

Ben didn't look down at the image immediately. "Name please?"

"Steve. S-T-E-V-E. Can you just look at this picture?"

Ben pulled out a form from the desk. He carefully selected one of the pens he knew would write smoothly. He didn't want to work with a stubborn pen. "Sure, Steve. Last name?"

Steve let out a groan. "Why did they send me to this personal hell?"

Ben's look was unwavering, expectant.

"Lyon. L-Y-O-N."

"Thank you." Ben wrote down the name at the top of the form. "Phone number?"

Steve rattled off the numbers and Ben repeated them back as if he was a parrot learning a new phrase.

"And what would you like to report, Mr. Lyon?"

"I'd like to report a murder."

Ben put the pen down. "Why didn't you say something?"

"Well..." Steve hesitated. "I'm not sure it's a murder exactly, but just look. It doesn't look right, okay?" Steve pushed the tablet in front of Ben.

There was a picture of a house Ben was familiar with, the Naylor's. He'd been called out there by the neighbors on a number of occasions, usually on Friday nights, when Mrs. Naylor would break out the booze. "It's the Naylor's house," Ben said. "I don't see a murder."

"But zoom in, okay?" Steve took the tablet back and then zoomed in with his fingers moving the picture to show specifically what he wanted. "Look, right there."

The picture became more pixelated, but Ben could see Mr. Naylor standing in the window with a large butcher knife. "Is that...?"

"Blood, right?" Steve tapped his fingers on the screen. "Do you think that's a woman there?"

The thought of the gorgeous Mrs. Naylor stabbed by a kitchen knife frightened Ben, but at the same time he was excited. He wasn't even

sure why. He stared hard at the pixelated picture. He could see the outline of something, but he couldn't be sure it was a woman. "It's a little blurry. Do you have something with more detail?"

"No, okay. This is as good as the picture gets." Steve grabbed the tablet back. "Look, I need to finish my route today and get the hell out of this..." He stumbled, "hell."

"Is there anyway you can make me a copy?" Ben asked.

Steve poked through a few items on his screen. "Email alright?" He readied himself for the email address.

Ben looked over to the archaic computer. He couldn't remember when he turned it on last, but the smoke it emitted smelled worse than the brackish water tea he was holding. He gave Steve his personal email account and hoped Debra wasn't listening.

Steve picked up his equipment from the floor. "Fine. Now I gotta go finish this town before it finishes me." When he opened the door several people stood blocking his way. "Julie is never going to believe this."

Ben saw a knight, a plastic robot, a heavysset woman in a super heroine bikini and another man with white painted tires wrapped around his body, as if the New York City Comic Con spilled out into Dullbury.

Steve let out a raging groan and pushed through the crowd. "Where did you freaks come from?"

The rabble started talking all at once, but Ben closed the door. He popped another cough drop into his mouth.

"Debra, I'm going to check on the Naylor's. Can you handle things from here?"

"What if I said no?"

Ben shrugged. He took the back way out of the office.

The Naylor's house didn't seem out of the ordinary as he walked up to the cobblestone facade. Paint peeled off the picket fence and empty flower box. He wondered if the Naylor's might employ a young Tom Sawyer to spruce up the front lawn.

He stood on the moldy welcome mat that no longer spelled 'welcome' but 'we com' and knocked on the fiberglass door. There was no answer. He started to turn around, thinking about his next move, when he heard a piercing scream. The scream echoed in his hears.

He pulled the gun out of his holster. His head throbbed with every pound



he laid on the door. "Police! Mrs. Naylor? Are you in there?"

The knob jiggled. Ben took a few steps back. He tried to get his shaking hands under control.

When the door opened, Mr. Naylor stood staring at him with steely eyes. "What do you want?" His hand held a stack of papers. Ben swore they had red fingerprints on them, but maybe it was ink.

"I need to speak to Mrs. Naylor," Ben said.

His face contorted. "Get that gun out of my face. She's busy."

"I heard a scream," Ben said.

"So?"

"I need to speak to her."

"Fine." Bits of spittle flew from his mouth as he said it. The door was left open as Mr. Naylor turned away from Ben. "Abby! That impotent town deputy wants to talk to you."

Ben cringed. He put his gun back in the holster. His shoulders hunched over.

Mrs. Naylor came out of the darkness of the house into the doorway. Her body was covered in blood, but she smiled like nothing was wrong.

"Ben? Something wrong?" Her eyes were blood shot. Her face looked like she'd taken a beating. Like she shouldn't have been standing. Her wrists bore outlines of rope marks in blood.

"No... I... Mrs. Naylor?" Ben's mind couldn't form a question.

"What?" She asked, smiling even brighter. "You look like you've seen a ghost." But her smile had a hint of wicked, or was it just the bruises and blood?

"You're covered in blood." He spit out the statement with a few coughs for emphasis. The back of his throat felt like he'd swallowed barbed wire, but he didn't want to fish out a cough drop in a time like this.

She put her index finger on an exposed part of her chest. He hadn't noticed her open blouse until now. Ben winced as she brought the finger up to her mouth. She licked off the blood. "Corn syrup, red food coloring, corn starch and chocolate syrup. But the real secret is the cough syrup. Without that, the smell is nauseating."

Ben's mind wandered. It wasn't Halloween, the traditional time for fake

blood.

Mrs. Naylor stepped back into the darkness. But just as quickly she reached her hand out holding a postcard. "Here. I'm going to be in a production of 'Bound' this weekend in New Haven. You should come."

He took the postcard, noticing the bloody fingerprints smeared on the corner.

Later that afternoon, or was it late evening? He sat at his favorite chair drinking a beer in front of the fan. Through the white noise he barely heard Margret walk through the door. She hadn't called out, probably not expecting him to be home.

She stumbled upon him in the living room. "Oh. How was your day?"

"Fine." He said, a reflex.

"Did you see it?" she asked.

He looked at her, but he was too stunned to say anything.

She went on. "Because the marching band had special outfit created."

He let out the breath he didn't know he was holding.

"When Julie told me her boyfriend, Steve, was coming to Dullbury..."

His teeth gritted together. He looked down at the floor.

"Well, we had to get the plans together quick."

"Julie?" Ben asked. His teeth gnashed together still.

"Yeah, the new speech therapist from New York?" she asked, but didn't wait for an answer. "Anyway, half of the school staff took the morning off to go hunt down the car. Mr. Hubbard said he was going to wear a wetsuit, but I said that had already been done, so he planned to put his granddaughter's tutu over the top."

Ben coughed.

"I hope he got a picture," she said. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." He reached into his pocket and then pulled out a cough drop. The crinkling noise filled up the momentary void in the room.

She continued on. "Do you have any plans the next few days?"

Ben's jaw clenched. She'd said this same thing many times over the

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past year. This is the code she'd used when the calendar or thermometer said she was ovulating. Or when her best friend, the aspiring astrologist, said she was in the correct alignment with Venus or some other celestial body.

"Sorry." She'd known she used that phrase, the one she shouldn't. "I just wanted to see Mrs. Naylor in the play in New Haven. They are doing a murder mystery, I think. I can't remember the name of the play, though."

"Bound," he said.

"That's right. How'd you know?" she asked.

The medicinal eucalyptus coated the back of his throat. The fire that burned within his head cooled down to a simmer. The summer cold would pass, maybe even before summer officially began.

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**Cori Lynn Arnold** is the author of the novel *Scalding Deceit*. She has worked as a hotel housekeeper, handy woman, laundry attendant, radio disc jockey, library clerk, historical photographic archivist, mathematics tutor, teaching assistant, art work framer, photo lab junky, portrait and wedding photographer, high school algebra teacher, internet security researcher, security analyst, computer programmer and ethical hacker. She currently resides in Connecticut and can be found roaming from coffee shops to bookstores wearing the same cheap 'good luck' sweater ripping apart at the seams.

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