

FRIDAY AFTERNOON AND OTHER STORIES

by TD Johnston

ABOUT THE STORIES

"The Errand" Sent on an errand by his fiancée to pick up wine and a bridal magazine, thirty-year-old Robert Canton runs into an old teacher, bringing back memories which might reveal the crossroads which loom ahead.

"Friday Afternoon" In a hurry to get back to the city for his father-in-law boss's birthday party, Charlotte-based corporate executive Bryce Stanford's road rage inspires him to attempt a bad pass around the wrong pickup truck on a rural two-lane highway in western North Carolina. It is a calamitous decision, in more ways than one.

"Gratuity" An autistic adult who waits tables at an Italian restaurant reacts to the word "NADA" on the tip line of a rude customer's check. The events which follow present what might happen when cruelty meets well-meaning disorder in the realm of human conflict.

"The Closing" Set in the future, a well-educated professional sits on the stage at a human-resources auction, as the reader gradually discovers that the auction item receiving top-dollar bids is the man on the stage, soon to become a corporate-owned asset.

"A Game of Chess" Told through the main character's diary entries, a prep-school maintenance man experiences conflict with a school parent, leading to friendship and after-work chess with the headmaster. When the headmaster asks the maintenance man to teach a class called "How to Be" to freshmen, vehement opposition arises from parents and trustee against the idea of a maintenance worker teaching character and ethics to children.

"Sixth Period" Set in the future, schoolteacher Robin Tyree is ordered by her boss to discontinue the inclusion of Greed in discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins with her students, reminding her that in 2048 Congress passed a law which removed Greed from the English language and from all discussion of avarice unless as a virtue, and which reduced the sins to six. Robin must decide between her moral

convictions and her employ-ability as her teaching day wobbles back to the classroom from the headmaster's office.

"The Guest" A telecommuting former teacher's doldrums are interrupted by the early arrival of a dinner guest, his wife's handsome and successful co-worker. Carl's wife won't be home for nearly an hour. The guest's cocky aggressiveness unnerves Carl, causing him to consider a variety of unsettling reasons for the man's early arrival.

"The First Key" Told in dramatic monologue, a man describes his first day on the job long ago, in which he violates the first key in his boss's 'Five Keys to the Door of Success': Punctuality. All five keys are ultimately revealed on this first day on the job: as a hit man for the Mob, demonstrating the close similarities between the business ethics of organized crime and corporate culture.

"Carpool" Bank executive Charley Tolliver returns home to find his family missing...the dogs and fish and hamsters too. His evening's search takes him to the neighbors' home...and beyond, revealing a mystery that may be of his own creation.

"The Interruption of Thomas Darrow" Set at the July 1865 execution of the four convicted co-conspirators in the Lincoln assassination, including the innocent Mary Surratt (the first woman executed by the United States government), Union soldier Thomas Darrow watches the proceedings with a profound secret inside him: a Confederate spy, he is the man who lured police guard John Parker from his post outside Lincoln's box, making Booth's entry possible. Darrow also knows that for Mary Surratt's life to be spared, it is Darrow who must stop the execution...by taking her place.

"A Morning Along the Way" A black teenage girl with aspirations of going to college selects a teenage boy with the same goal. On the school bus together, she learns that her brother's suicide was caused by other teenagers, and that it may not have been suicide at all.

"Marco Polo" Told in interior monologue, a helplessly incapacitated boy who cannot speak or take care of himself "talks" to his divorced mother on the way to another boy's birthday party, a party which Todd fears attending.