

Submissions for Publication

For
“Outside the Lines”

By Mike White

3 poems and 1 short story

The Prick

Her fingertips caress the end of the stem.
Petals echo their scent with every breath.
She walks at a slow pace, staring at the windows.
Her reflection smiles beside the open bloom.

Clouds surround her feet as she thinks of the days,
When the world is better because he's near.
Each glance at another shows only his face.
Only his smile. Only his eyes. Only him.

She moves a little swifter. Her meeting is soon.
She sees the future kiss, standing from afar.
Her lips brush his. Her eyes touch his.
Their souls intertwine in the mist between them.

She glances in a window to view the gift.
That single flower glows brightly,
After having been touched by him.
She envies the rose, but she knows not long.

Beyond the shadow of the rose in the window,
She sees him.
Wrong place.
Another woman.
A passionate kiss.
She squeezes.
The prick.
It hurts.

By Mike White

The Birth of an Anticipation

Fingers, trembling, touched the glass,
My heart was racing, my eyes were searching,
Searching for that little one.

Breath fogged over the barrier,
My mind was remembering, hours before,
Before the clock turned 7:01.

Tears came welling over the rim,
My smile was breaking, my eyes still searching,
Searching for that little one.

Lips smiled wider, a pride in my eyes.
That time was forgotten, hours before,
Before the clock turned 7:01.

Hands settled on my precious gift,
For they'd found her. My eyes stopped searching,
Searching for that little one.

Arms held tight, tighter than ever,
Protecting the bundle from hours before,
Before the clock turned 7:01.

Ears hear laughter, of a little child,
My beautiful child, so my eyes go searching,
Searching for that little one.

Before the clock turned 7:01,
Searching for that little one,
My eyes find Nicole
Playing in the sun,
Mind and soul,
My little one.

Mike White

Cocoon of an Angel

On the white sheets lie shades of peach and crimson.
Her brown eyes see tears rolling through the room.
A framed portrait presents a denied future.
Aching, the pale lids close and absorb peace.

The progeny, cheeks wet, quit to another room.
One remains, trembling and daring to defy,
Fingernails dig into the flesh of numb hands.
His mind's voice screams to the heavens:

*My child will never know her grandmother!
She won't be held by her anymore,
Kissed by her anymore,
Spoiled by her anymore.
She'll never be able to sit in her lap,
Say 'I love you',
And feel the love returned ten-fold!
You!
You denied them both!
And you denied me!*

A sob escapes from his lips as legs buckle.
His eyes close in mourning.
Arms drape across shaking knees.
A beaten soul slouches in defeat.

A light flows over the soft grave.
His wet eyes search out the origin.
From within the now pale husk
The tips of feathers reach upwards.

Pearly wings spread from the carcass,
Followed by radiant robes of white.
The heavens draw the angel to them.
Her smile roots its love in the heart of a son.

He suddenly becomes aware of a spectator.
His eyes turn toward the clueless crowd.
Wrapped in the comfort of a mother's arms,
His tiny cherub watches with smiling eyes.

Mike White

Wal-Mart Made Me Do It

Matthew Corsair frowned as he watched the cops surround the bank. They pulled their guns and were pointing them straight at the door. This was the first time he had ever messed up while doing a job. He checked his pockets to make sure all of his tools were in place and then pulled the woolen mask off of his face.

* * *

It started when he was fourteen years old. He had just recently moved into the small town of LaPlace, Louisiana. His parents had been kind enough back in Georgia to ask him if he wanted to move to New Orleans. Since he was never in the same school for more than two years at a time due to his father always finding new and better jobs, he had answered with an emphatic “no.” The next morning, a yellow Ryder truck was parked outside of his house already being loaded. His dad finally got the big paycheck he’d been wanting.

Since his move to LaPlace, not New Orleans, Matthew hadn’t made many friends. He was a shy person. Instead, he would walk through the woods next to his parents’ house and right across the four-lane was Wal-Mart. He’d walk in and start looking around the place. He loved to look at the board games even though his parents never played them with him. His other reason for going was to look at girls. He had just reached puberty, and his hormones were kicking in.

One day Matthew was over in the men’s department standing by a display of belts. He was looking towards them, but actually his eyes were focused across the aisle at a cute brunette about his age. He watched her for a little while, then started making his way to the board games.

As he turned corners through the aisles looking at items that caught his attention along the way, he noticed that the same two people kept showing up on the aisles with him. This went on for half an hour. He realized he was being followed. He decided to try and lose them but every time he turned the corner, there they were, acting like shoppers.

He had enough, so he headed to the front of the store and right out the front door. He still had that odd feeling of being watched, so he turned around. Standing behind him were the man and woman who had been following him.

“What do you want from me?” he asked.

The man said, “We don’t want anything from you. We were just told to watch you and make sure you didn’t steal anything.”

Matthew couldn’t believe what he just heard. Never in his life had Matthew even thought about stealing. He had been mostly a happy child and although his parents caused him some grief, they did manage to raise him to know right from wrong.

“Why? I’ve been coming here for a long time and no one has ever followed me before.”

The woman said, “Because you were standing by the belt rack for a long time and fidgeting.”

* * *

Girls are always the problem. Aren’t they?

Matthew smiled at that thought as his eyes counted the cops outside. Over twenty so far.

New technology has made my job easier and harder at the same time. I hate backup alarm systems.

* * *

After the incident at Wal-Mart, Matthew felt betrayed. He liked the store. It was his haven from boredom. But now it was stalking him because he stood by some belts too long while looking at a girl. His mother had blown a gasket when she heard about the accusation. She talked to a friend of hers at the store, but she only replied that it was procedure.

I wonder how many things were stolen from their store while they were busy "following procedure." People walk out of these places with two-hundred dollar televisions, and they want to accuse me of stealing a seven dollar belt? If they want to accuse me of something, I guess it's time to give them a reason.

Matthew decided that Wal-Mart and any other big chain needed a good thief to keep them on their toes. He went home and started working on his first plan. He needed a new sound card for his computer at home and decided the LaPlace Wal-Mart would be the generous donor of that card.

Matthew saved a large bag and a receipt from the last time he and his mother had gone shopping for clothes. He had asked her to buy him a pair of pocketed pants. They were khaki colored, but had pockets near the knees like military fatigues. They were baggy which made the pockets look empty even when they weren't. He rolled up the bag and put it in one of his special pockets. He then put the saved receipt in his front right pocket and made his way to Wal-Mart.

When he got there, he headed straight into the electronics department. He looked around until he found the perfect sound card for his computer. Matthew then watched the employees and determined when they wouldn't be watching the aisles that led from the

area. In Wal-Mart, you couldn't leave the electronics department with an item from it unless the employees didn't see you. When their attention was diverted to other customers, Matthew walked out of the department with the big box under his arms. Computer parts were always in big boxes even when the item was small. It was a theft deterrent.

He walked normally over to the furniture department where the black-bubble cameras wouldn't be watching. He looked both ways down the aisle, and when all was clear, he removed the bag from his pocket, opened it, and quickly slid the big box inside. He then rolled the top of the bag like the cashiers always did. He pulled the receipt out of his front right pocket and folded it in half across the middle of the roll. Holding it just right, the receipt looked stapled to the large plastic bag.

He knew quite a few workers at the store, especially in the automotive department. He had often taken his purchases to them because their exit door was closer to his house than the others. Matthew walked up to the counter in the automotive department.

"Hi, Brian," he said.

"Oh. Hi, Matthew. Browsing again today?"

"Nope," Matthew lifted the bag higher so Brian could see it over the counter. "I finally saved enough for that new sound card I told you about."

"Very cool," Brian said.

"Can you hit the switch for me? I gotta get home for dinner."

"Sure."

An audible click was heard as the door was unlocked for Matthew. He calmly walked outside and made his way home with a three hundred dollar sound card.

* * *

I still can't believe my first theft was a felony. I didn't start with petty crimes like the others. Matthew counted seventeen more cops outside of the bank. That made twenty-eight. Matthew smiled at how popular he'd suddenly become.

My first mistake. I may need to retire. Matthew shook his head at the thought. *Nah. I'm too young to retire.*

* * *

Matthew was sixteen. He had no girlfriends. Every time he thought about asking a girl for her phone number, he remembered the belt episode. He wasn't ready to get caught. He feared a girl would cause him to. However, he did have five pairs of the pocketed pants in his arsenal. Each one was a different color. He treated them like a mood ring. The black ones were reserved for those times when he heard big business had cheated someone he knew. His mother still didn't know why he liked them so much. He planned on keeping it that way.

The large pockets had transported hundreds of computer and video games, videotapes, calculators, and other items from the stores to his home. He gave away most of the items to his friends or sometimes to people he didn't know. If he had kept them, his parents would have known something was going on. The grocery store he worked at didn't pay him that well.

It was getting tougher to open the packages unseen. Computer games always came in boxes too big for the discs inside. He came up with an idea. He would buy

security boxes. They were the ones that would normally be used for filing and locking up important papers. They had cardboard sleeves that served as their only packaging. He'd slide the sleeves off the boxes, open them, and then place two computer games inside. The games never added much weight to the security boxes, so the cashiers never wondered if they had anything inside of them.

He would purchase the security box after he replaced the cardboard sleeve. The box cost fifteen dollars. The games cost a hundred. Eighty-five dollars was a good price cut. Much better than the yellow happy face did during Wal-Mart television commercials.

* * *

It was always about picking the right cashier. You either had to pick one who'd smile when you smiled or one who was dumb as a brick. That last thought brought his attention back to the cops. He took off his pocketed vest and his black long-sleeved shirt. He pulled his favorite t-shirt out of his backpack and put it on. On the front of it was written, "01110000 01100101 01101111 01110000 01101100 01100101 00100000 01100001 01110010 01100101 00100000 01110011 01110100 01110101 01110000 01101001 01100100," which translates to "people are stupid." It was a geek shirt, but he liked the dirty-little-secret feel of it.

* * *

Sometimes Matthew didn't need a tool like his pockets or his sleight-of-hand techniques. He was twenty-one by the time he realized attitude played a major role in theft. He had been using it for years, just never realized it.

Matthew became more daring after his realization. One day he purchased a toy and returned an hour later. He walked into the store wearing regular pants, grabbed a shopping cart, and headed for the televisions after he had the lady at the door put one of

those little yellow stickers on his toy. They put those on items to prove ownership so the customer service people will refund your money or exchange the item. That sticker was insurance. He had never stolen something so big before. He wanted to prove to himself that he could, but he still didn't want to get caught.

One of his friends had a television that showed only green colors. Matthew felt he deserved a replacement. He also felt Wal-Mart could provide that replacement. He looked around until he found the perfect television.

"I think this one has the clearest picture," he said.

"I agree," said the employee who helped him put the large box in his cart. It sat slanted since the box was too big for the cart.

"Thank you."

"It's what I'm here for."

Matthew walked towards the front of the store. He placed the little yellow sticker on the television box where it was visible from the front. The toy was sitting on a shelf in the sporting goods department. It was a small price to pay.

When he made it to the front of the store, he walked towards the door he had not entered from. He smiled at the lady at the door. She smiled back and nodded. She never even looked at the sticker. He continued to his car, opened the back door, and shoved the television in. He had a delivery to make.

* * *

If you walk out with something like you own it, then people believe you do. One of the cops was pulling out a bullhorn from his patrol car.

* * *

Matthew was twenty-five when Wal-Mart finally got smart. They installed detectors at their doors. Little metallic stickers were put inside of merchandise. If those stickers were not run over a device next to the scanners, then a little alarm would sound when you walked through the detectors.

Matthew thought about the situation. He knew he couldn't steal televisions anymore, but he still wanted some of the newer computer games. He had money. Ebay had come in handy for selling the items he had stolen over the years. But he loved the thrill of stealing. He figured the challenge was to get the items he wanted to be passed over the device that would stop the alarm from going off. He had been used to making small sacrifices. This would require another.

He looked at low cost items and finally found exactly what he was looking for. There was a magazine that was described as "computer game" when scanned at the price check machines. He made a note of the bar code at the bottom of the magazine and then went home.

Matthew searched the internet for a program that could create bar codes. He then made a bar code image that matched the magazine. He printed out a few hundred of these on address stickers and then cut them to size. He placed a few in his pocket and headed back to the store.

There was a new computer game at the store he really wanted to try. He picked it up, and as he walked around the store, he secretly put one of his stickers over the bar code on the box of the computer game. He watched the cashiers for a moment. This part always seemed like x-ray vision. He felt he could see straight into their brains to see what kind of information they had learned in their lives. He searched until he found one he

knew would be computer illiterate. Someone once told him that geniuses were people with excellent pattern recognition skills. If that's how it worked, this one's "pattern" reeked of computer game ignorance. She scanned the box, passed it over the security device, and placed it in a bag.

"Your total is five dollars and sixty-three cents."

He handed her the money, smiled, and walked out of the store. No alarms went off.

* * *

No matter the situation, when the store is open, it's always about the people who are employed there. I wouldn't have gotten away with all those thefts if it wasn't for picking the right people to dupe. But people are too easy. Matthew Corsair smiled at that thought as he watched the cops move around into better positions. A few had disappeared behind the bank. He figured it wouldn't be too long before they tried the back door.

* * *

At the age of twenty-six, Matthew got bored with tricking people. He got bored with department stores. He had made a lot of money off of them, but the thrill was gone. Every job was too easy. The more people relied on technology to do their security for them, the easier it became to trick them into letting it do the work for them.

Banks had more money than department stores. Actually, banks had the department stores' money. The challenge of a bank when it was closed appealed to him. He wouldn't have his greatest tool to rely on: people. Machines were tougher. Machines

couldn't be tricked. Sure he had done the bar code scam, but it wasn't the machine he had beaten. It was the cashier. Cashiers were people.

Matthew prepared for his first bank job. He surveyed the local bank until he knew where every security camera was. He watched the police patrol the area at night. After three months, he came up with a plan, but he needed supplies. Stores were easy.

A week later, Matthew had all the tools he thought were necessary. He had a safe cracker keypad custom built. When the safe's keypad had its face removed, the device could be attached and would simulate typing in codes until it found the right ones. The simulation was the important part. He was most proud of that aspect of his device. If the keypad got a wrong code, bad things could happen, but his device tapped into the testing features of the keypads, so the keypad never truly "knew" the codes were being tried, but they'd still send a response.

The first few jobs he did went smoothly. All of his tools did their job. He always had to watch the bank for a few months before attempting to steal from it, but the payoff was worth it.

Except for the first one, he never hit a bank where he lived. He would travel for miles, stay at a hotel, and do his planning from there. The bank managers were getting furious. He knew this because he never left the area until two days after the job was done. He wanted a newspaper as a souvenir.

* * *

A noise sounded from one of his tools. He pulled it out of his pocket and looked at it.

They set off the motion sensors I put near the back door. They are doing their job. If only I had done mine.

This job had gone wrong. He tried to do it with less surveillance than the other times. He wanted to see if he could do it without preparation. Even the machines had started to bore him. He had wanted more of a challenge. He had gone into the bank expecting it to be like every other bank he had robbed.

I got too cocky. If I had paid attention to what I was doing instead of gloating about the job in my head, I wouldn't have failed this time. I won't make that mistake again. I guess I'm a guy who needs to prepare. I'll settle for that. It's better than being caught.

Matthew Corsair carefully packed up the rest of his gear into a worn black leather backpack. The last item, his trusty safe cracker keypad, went into its protective case. He slid it into the backpack slowly.

I'll need to reconfigure you, my friend. Seems keypads have gotten smarter these days.

The safe's keypad at this bank had a backup system installed. The alarm had gone off when his safe cracker keypad was only half finished with its search for the correct codes. The cops had been slow to respond. He had made it out of the bank before they started showing up. But not before leaving a cardboard silhouette of Steven Seagal standing in the middle of the bank. He had appropriated it from a video store years ago. He always brought insurance.

He turned back towards the cops down the street who were now shouting at the bank. He gave a quick salute and a smile.

*I wonder when they'll figure out they're shouting at paper. Cops are people.
People are easy. And after a couple more of these, maybe I'll use my people skills on a
good woman. But not until I retire. Can't chance distractions.*

Matthew walked around the corner, put his gear in the trunk of his BMW, and then drove to his hotel which was a block from the local Wal-Mart.