

A Side of Eggs

By Collin Breaux

Charles Westlin sat at the kitchen table, his curly chest hair now matted to his chest. It was three thirty in the morning; he had to be at work in two hours. He reclined in the comfort of the wicker skeleton of the chair and puffed on a cigarette. The grey, malodorous smoke dissipated into the air. Charles thought of what work would be like. He wondered if he should iron his uniform. His wife usually handled that. He should have spoken up sooner in the week. The taste of nicotine and tar once again touched his tongue.

Sweaty underwear could barely contain the beer gut he had gained, for it spilled over the elastic band. His feet scaped against the dingy floor. As Charles glanced down he could see a cockroach scurry across the floor. If he had shoes on he'd squish the pitiful little thing. Shivers took over his body. He hated when he'd get the chills, even if it only lasted for only a second. As they subsided the awful, ugly heat returned to his senses. It was an unforgiving summer night. His whole house was dark; the only source of light was the pale glow of the moon in the sky, which came in through the sliding glass backdoor.

Thoughts of all kinds came into Charles' mind. What was he doing up at this hour? What would work be like? What would he eat for lunch? He thought of his quiet son, who wore dirty clothes and rarely combed his hair. He was barely up right now as well, watching porn on his computer. He chuckled at the thought of it. Smoking more of his cigarette, he rested his elbows on the table cloth. It felt scratchy and rough. His mom never let him do this as a child. Whenever she served them soup she was the most vigilant. He laughed again, this time indulging in all the memories, especially when he broke the toilet handle and blamed it on his cousin.

Checking the clock on the wall, he saw seven minutes had passed by. Work would begin soon. Charles figured he should get a head start. Yeah, great idea, he mentally encouraged himself. Rising from his chair, he consequently hear the legs of it scratch the floor. Hopefully it didn't leave a mar, otherwise Laura would yell at him. Parting the pantry door, he rummaged through the shelves for something to fix. Nothing satisfied him.

The refrigerator's luminescent aura stunned Charles as he looked in there as well. His mouth felt dry and his hair itched. Reaching up to scratch it, he brushed aside the plates of leftovers covered in tinfoil to look for something fresh. He found a carton of eggs. Bringing them

to his nose and sniffing them, he deemed them suitable. Cracking them, he watched the yellow fluid drip into the skillet on the stove. He opened a drawer and peering through the assortment of instruments, he retrieved an eggbeater.

While the eggs were cooking he took two pieces of bread out from the bag of bread on the counter and laid them out on a plate he got from the dishwasher. Opening the refrigerator once again, he looked high and low for the butter. Finding it hidden behind a bowl of weeks-old corn, he took it out and popped open the top. It was half-full. Laura must have already gotten into it. Reaching for a knife, he slathered the two slices with butter.

“Charles, what are you doing?” Laura muttered from the bedroom, groggy and half-asleep. She usually just yelled at him if he was up at this time of night.

“Nothing, honey,” he called back, “just fixing breakfast.” For a minute he heard still silence. This must have meant his wife went back to sleep. As he flipped over the cooking meal he thought of his marriage. The first time he’d met Laura was a diner. He recalled he was sitting at a booth, sipping on a soft drink, adjusting his jacket as it kept sagging. She wandered near him, a comely, slender, fair girl in a white skirt and a pink shirt. She asked him for directions to an apartment she was supposed to go to; he said he had no idea about the place she was supposed to be going to. She laughed and said she was an out-of-towner with no money in her pocket. He offered to buy her a meal. They drank a soft drink together, like most re-runs of old comedies show. He opted to get directions from a nearby gas station and drive her there. Perhaps he was glorifying it a bit in his mind.

A sudden craving for a soft drink overtook his taste buds. Scanning the refrigerator once again like a savage madman, he found a two-liter bottle of murky beverage. Pouring himself a bottle of it, he gulped it down. It stung the tip of his tongue and burned his cheeks but was nevertheless an epicurean experience. He returned to manning the skillet. The eggs were coming along nicely. He smelled them, dragging the intriguing smell into his nostrils. He remembered his wife had bought the soft drink yesterday at the store. She argued with him in the aisle about whether to fix tacos or hamburgers. Matters like that usually ended up in her cursing him out and him reading the newspaper when they got home to avoid further complicating the issue.

He kept pushing the eggs around with a spatula. He thought of his other son, who as a kid seemed to only communicate in one-word answers or short sentences. He became strung out on meth and they rarely heard from him. Sometimes he’d call from different motels and ask

for money, but Laura instructed the rest of the family not to communicate with a drug addict. Charles wondered where he was right now. When he got to work he'd have to set things up for the rest of his co-workers. Today would probably be a slow day at the bakery, after the busy month they'd had.

Charles looked out the window at the pet cat they kept, which was sleeping curled-up against a potted plant. It meowed every so often, but mostly it just lazily sat there and lapped up milk from its bowl. The frying of the eggs was quite audible by now. Little bubbles of grease popped up in the skillet. Charles remembered how the kids in his neighborhood used to use this to fix their hair with this when he was growing up. Scooping up the egg with his spatula, he dumped them on his china plate. Also gathering up his buttered bread he set the plate down on the table. He didn't bother to turn the stove off.

As he stabbed at the eggs with his fork, and savored their taste, he remembered his brother was supposed to let him know when he'd be able to visit. He was a used car salesman in Ohio, with a thinning comb-over and outrageous suits, running up to people in the lot and bombarding them with contractual guarantees. He reasoned his brother was always good at selling himself. Once when he failed a year of school he talked his way out of it by making jokes. Instead Charles got yelled at it for encouraging his brother's delinquency.

A small flame rose from the stove. It was like a sudden burst, akin to fireworks going off. Charles stared at it in appreciative awe. He then ripped apart the bread with his molars, letting the butter dab his thick grey mustache. He chewed on the rest of his meal. The fire spread. Now the whole countertop was ablaze. The infernal beast devoured the ground coffee that his wife had planned to make. Charles stooped over the edge of the table, nearly burying his face in the plate.

"Charles, why are you making breakfast so early?" Laura said, entering the kitchen, dressed in a green silk nightgown that she was still tying the sash of, with squinty eyes and frizzy hair. "Oh my God, the kitchen's on fire!"

Charles looked at her as a grimace snuck onto his countenance. "Oh really? I didn't notice." Looking back, he observed, somewhat proud, that the entire back wall of the kitchen...the countertop, the cupboards, the sink... were all charred black by the flames.

"Come on, we have to get out of here!" his wife yelled, rather obviously. Dragging him by his hand, his wife ran to their son's room. He was slouched in a corner of his bed, watching some show on Comedy Central. She stepped on his iPod as she rushed into the room. He sat

up and looked at her.

“What’s up?” he asked in a curious manner. Then he sniffed the air around him. “Matthew, the house is burning!” Laura screamed. “We have to get out now!” She yanked him up by the arm. Together the trio rushed out the front door, narrowly escaping the intensifying heat.

As Charles stood on the front lawn in his tights-whities, noting how wet yet cooling the dew on the front lawn felt on the soles of his feet, he watched his house burn in the flames. His eyes lit up at the red, yellow, and orange streaks the fire brought about. He decided he’d have bacon for breakfast tomorrow morning.

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