

Welcome Home  
by John Yi

Moving is always a pain in the ass. No matter how advanced we have supposedly become as a species, experiences recur which remind us that we're still bounded by the confines of physical law. To sedentary people, it might seem odd to philosophize so, while lifting unwieldy boxes up San Francisco stairwells. But to the urban nomad it is second nature. Misery and philosophy go hand in hand.

Returning to San Francisco had always been a happy time. Having traveled extensively, Nathaniel Brougham had heard this confirmed often. Everyone wanted to live in San Francisco. Midwesterners, Southerners, Canadians, Parisians, Persians - the postulate of San Francisco as a dream residence crossed cultural and national boundaries. San Francisco, to the rest of the world, represented vibrance, a pioneering spirit, an openness of ideas, California sunshine and beautiful geo-vistas.

Of course it couldn't all be good - earthquakes, fog and exorbitant real estate prices also came to the conversation but were usually forced to wait in line outside until the more positive sentiments had moved on.

"Need some help?"

Nate lowered his arms a bit and peered up and around the right side of the box. His forearms were straining now but he didn't want to put it down. It would be too hard to pick up again. He could feel his back straining improperly and knew immediately that he'd pay for it tomorrow.

"Oh." he said.

Wow she's hot. Does she live here? Lucky sonofabitch I am, she must live here! I wonder if she's single. What floor does she live on? This is the 3rd floor? No the 4th! Crap I have to say some...

"Thanks. No. I... think I've got most of it."

Being half Greek, Nate's complexion was thankfully dark enough to preclude obvious blushing. Nate tried to remember this fact as warmer blood rushed to his head and neck and nervous sweat beaded on his forehead. He'd already been sweating (thank god) - this was the 12th trip so far up six flights.

"Ok. Suit yourself."

She disappeared into the building behind the thick metal door. A single black circle was spray painted on it, with a much smaller circle inside. A nipple? Above the circle was a small framed window - the kind you see on doors at the library or at the DMV, where the

safety wire criss-crosses diagonally between 2 small panes. Next to the window, on the right, was the number 4, spray-painted with a stencil. The grey speckled overspray told the story of a Mexican painter making minimum wage, in a hurry, left handed...

"What a loser! Why didn't I say yes?!"

Bam! A door slammed hard on the 2nd or 1st floor.

"Oh shit."

Pupils already dilated, he ducked down and ran up the next 6 steps. On the top step, his toes regretted not having exercised more attention to detail. There was not quite enough...to..stand on...his foot began to slide back. Instinctively shifting the box's weight, his left foot sought to re-balance his center of gravity. Drops of sweat rolled down the center of his back as he reached the 4th floor landing, dropping the box onto the flat section of concrete behind the door. He threw his body behind the box, his shoulder slamming into the cinder-block wall adjacent to the door. A dull thud radiated through his left side and then down his spine and through his legs.

Metal clanged inside the box as it hit the ground - bookends, probably. A corner of the box went concave with an audible squish.

The door tried to open. Teresa heard the "ffff" sound of a rubber sole dragging along concrete, as the door slowed to a stop. She pushed against the door once, twice, but it wouldn't budge against the accidental doorstop. Unable to fit her entire body through the gap, she poked her head out into the stairwell looking first down towards the 3rd floor landing, and then back to the left.

Nate was sitting on the ground, breathing hard. She watched his chest rise and fall rapidly under the "Beastie Boys" t-shirt, damp with sweat.

"You okay?" she asked.

Not hearing her, he stared out across the sandy landscape of his mind.