

*The*  
*Arlington*  
& Other  
Short Stories *Club*

**ANTHONY MAIZE**



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# *Acknowledgments*

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# Contents

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Foreword .....	ix
Introduction .....	xi
Pallet Jack.....	1
The Last of Linsey.....	5
Doing Clendenin.....	13
Gabriel's Blues.....	19
Patty and Gert.....	23
Candy-Coated Popcorn .....	31
Abrams or Amy.....	33
The Cave.....	37
Lou's Place .....	45
The Arlington Club .....	57
My Name is Ishmael .....	65
Bosco Jones.....	69
Now Comes McCafferty .....	91
One Night Outside Buda, Illinois .....	101
Old Men, Old Memories.....	109
Crows .....	117
The Charcoal Flat.....	123
Want Ads.....	129
The Gasman's Tale .....	131

## Foreword

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Writer Anthony Mark Maize, called Tony by all who know him, has stories to tell. An avid reader, traveler, and photographer, Maize commands an exacting vocabulary in his descriptive prose, with dialogue and details that are sometimes terse, often understated, and always true to his varied characters—whether he’s relating a ghost story within a ghost story (“The Gasman’s Tale”) or bringing an archangel vividly, humorously, and lovingly to life when he takes a break from Heaven and decides to hang out with musicians in New Orleans (“Gabriel’s Blues”).

Maize’s plots constantly surprise. In “Abrams of Amy,” Maize puts gushy details aside, and, with laser focus, he explores the delicate balance of the relationship between a West Point cadet who is encumbered with major decisions to make: about her lover’s disease diagnosis, what to do about her dream career, and how to plan ahead with events dissolving beyond mortal control. The setting begins this way: “Two young women sat at a table on the terrace of The Thayer overlooking the Hudson River. It was a mid-August afternoon. The breeze off the river and shade from the table’s umbrella provided a comfortable place to talk. One of the women wore the dress-gray uniform of the U.S. Military Academy. The other was smartly dressed in a red silk blouse and designer jeans...” Immediately, the rhythm in those first tight sentences draws the reader in, compelled to read on, like a fish swimming toward a tempting line in clear water.

Throughout this compact volume of short stories, the reader will encounter themes of justice, love, lust, labor, redemption, retribution, fear, ghosts, and the spirit world. Some of Maize’s characters exist in interiority, in solitude, as in “The Cave,” interacting only with nature, memories, and a dog named Sue. Others meet in what can only be described as serendipitous good fortune, like the vagabond Bosco Jones and the elderly Miz Thibodaux (Maisy) who gives Bosco shelter, food, and clothing for no other reason than she is filled with wisdom and goodness, and instinctively recognizes the young man’s innocence, innate dignity, and pure heart. The underdogs and the downtrodden mingle with evil-doers and everyday miscreants, while rescue-types and accompanying characters come onto

the scene wearing anything from threadbare work clothes, camo ball-caps, and waitress uniforms (“Doing Clendenin”) to gentlemanly polo shirts, khaki pants, and loafers (“Want Ads”).

Using a photographer’s keen eye and a writer’s love affair with words, Maize paints compelling portraits of human interactions and relationships, powerfully brushed by rich descriptions of the natural world counterpointed by the ups and downs of human memories, emotions, and actions. These stories expose, explore, and energize each page. They don’t stay in one place, either, so strap on a seat belt and get ready to enjoy dropping into the streets and alleys of Reading (Pennsylvania), a cozy bar in Brooklyn, the world-famous Le Chat Noir in New Orleans, the political streets of Washington, D.C., the remote west slope of the Appalachians, and many other delightful destinations way off the beaten path but definitely on this writer’s inspiration list.

—*Marian Frances Wölbers*  
*July 2022*

## *Pallet Jack*

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For years I'd been telling myself that I had to photograph a particular half-street in the city where I lived. The half-street ran behind a block of stores on the main drag. The buildings were all brick and most of them a hundred years old or more. The storefronts facing the main street were what one would expect of any retail district: plate-glass windows showcasing mannequins wearing the season's fashions, appliances, sporting goods, and other wares. It was the rear of the stores that had caught the photographer's eye in me—the dumpsters, the barred windows, stacks of shipping pallets, the entrances to small businesses operating out of the backs of the main stores, the pawn shops, check-cashing services, payday-loan windows. But the first thing that had caught my eye were the shadows the fire escapes cast on the brick walls as the sun broke over the city at dawn.

I had my camera and tripod set up at a spot I had scouted years before. The picture was perfectly composed in my viewfinder. I was just waiting for the light. The sun finally shone between two buildings, lighting the scene as I had always known it would. I took a quick light-meter reading, set the exposure, and—just as I was about to release the shutter—an old flatbed truck pulled into the middle of the scene and stopped. A scruffy-looking man got out, trotted around the back of the truck, and started tossing shipping pallets from a stack that was a key component of my photograph onto the back of his truck. He had half the stack on his truck before I thought to shout, “Hey, what are you doing?”

My cry caught the man by surprise, just as he was lifting a pallet onto his truck. He looked in my direction, lost his balance, stepped off the curb, and fell flat on his back. The pallet came crashing down on his head.

I ran over to him and flipped the pallet off his head. Blood was oozing from what appeared to be a nasty gash in his forehead. I helped him to a sitting position. He pulled a handkerchief from his coat pocket and held it to the wound.

“I'm really sorry,” I said. “I didn't mean to startle you like that.”

“It ain't your fault, Sonny. I just lost my footing, is all.”

“Here, let me help you up.”

I took him by his arm, helped him to his feet, and steadied him as he sat on what remained of the stack of pallets. The man dabbed at his wound with the handkerchief which was none too clean.

I ran across the street to my car and got the first aid kit from the trunk.

“Here, let me clean that cut and get a bandage on it for you,” I said.

The man said nothing. He simply folded his hands in his lap while I plied my first aid. Once cleaned, the wound proved to be more of an abrasion than a cut. A simple gauze bandage and some tape did the trick.

“There,” I said. “That should hold you, but you probably should get a tetanus shot. No telling what might have been on those pallets.”

“How old are you, Sonny?” the man asked.

“Sixty-two. A little old to be called Sonny. The name’s Bob.”

“Well, they call me Pallet Jack. I’m eighty-four. I’ve fought in two wars, fallen off’n a barn roof and broke my pelvis in three places, totaled a car at a hundred and ten miles an hour, and been gut-shot and left for dead. I survived it all. I’ve had hangovers that were worse than this.”

“Uh-huh, I guess I believe everything except the part about getting gutshot,” I said.

The old man stood up, stuffed his hanky in his pocket, unbuttoned his coat, and pulled his shirttails out of his pants, revealing a puckered pink scar the size of a nickel on his lower left abdomen.

“There!” he said. “You believe your own eyes, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I guess I do. You get shot in one of those wars you were in?”

“No—it was Agnes—my second wife. She was an elementary school teacher. Taught the third grade. Well, they had early dismissal one day and she came home to find me *in flagrante delicto*, as they say, on the sofa, with some sweet young thing. She failed to see the humor in the situation and got genuinely annoyed when I suggested she join us. She stormed out of the house, slammed the kitchen door so hard she broke the window, got my revolver out of the glove box in my truck, came back, and shot me. I think the fact she actually hit me scared the hell out of her because she screamed, threw the gun at me, and ran out of the house.

That was nigh on to thirty years ago. I ain’t seen her since. Nearest I came was when I got the notice to defend when she divorced me. I told her attorney I wouldn’t press attempted murder charges providing she agreed to a no-fault divorce and didn’t ask for alimony.”

“Sounds fair,” was all I could think of to say.

“Hell yeah, it was fair. You ever been shot, boy? I don’t recommend it. It’s like being hit with a baseball bat. And the blood! Absolutely ruined the La-Z-Boy.”

“So whatever happened with that sweet young thing?”

“Oh, she called the cops, gathered up her clothes, and hightailed it. The last I saw of her was her bare bottom going out the kitchen door. I guess I fainted after that. The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital.”

“So was it worth it?” I asked. “Getting shot over a quickie on the La-Z-Boy?”

The man was silent for a few seconds, bowed his head, and looked at his callused hands, still folded in his lap, then looked me straight in the eye.

“You see,” he said. “I’m what the church ladies call a womanizer. I love the ladies—I surely do. Tall ones, small ones, fat, skinny, blonde brunette, redhead, it don’t matter, I love ’em all. It’s a virtue none of my wives ever learned to appreciate.”

“How many times were you married?”

“Three. Don’t ever get married, Sonny. Wives are expensive—getting shed of them more so. Last time I got divorced, the damn shyster lawyer charged me for the phone call to tell me the judge signed the decree. I didn’t ask him to call me. Hell, I hadn’t laid eyes on the woman in three years. I would have gladly waited to get the decree in the mail.”

He paused. “Cohabitation. That’s the ticket. The church ladies may call it living in sin. I consider it a matter of convenience and sound economic planning.”

Jack threw the last two pallets onto his truck, jumped up onto the truck bed, and added the pallets to the stack. He jumped down and cinched the pallets in place with a ratchet strap.

“Thanks for the first aid,” he said, then climbed into the cab and drove off, leaving me in a cloud of exhaust and a state of disbelief.

I walked across the street to my camera and looked through the viewfinder. The missing pallets left a hole in the composition, and the sun had climbed too high. I had missed the light.