



By

Niles M. Reddick

WHY I LIKE IT: Fiction Editor **JOEY CRUSE** writes...

There is slow acceptance in Niles Reddick's, "Agitator." The acceptance of a dull pain that you can't describe but only experience. Like reading a story and looking out the window and seeing the flowers blow in the wind and the sun makes the orange just slightly more orange and you look more closely, because your eyes suck, and see a crumpled, shit t-shirt in the driveway across the way because I guess that is where you put t-shirts instead of flowers.

Our protagonist is agitated, physically and mentally, into the mundane. There is a problem with the sink, there is a problem with the condition of the country, there is a problem with having to have bone shaved off of your foot, there is a problem with being exhausted by the language of mendacity and the no man's land of small talk that somehow only seems to sharpen what is already dull into simply sharper dullness.

That is agitating.

I suppose being agitated is what we need to have the hope of acting, to say what we have on our mind in the face of a differing opinion, to take a breath in the calmness of being alone and sigh at the humor, knowing the fool is the one who is always right.

"He said we aren't any better than cats and dogs. We just think we're in charge."

Reddick manages to capture a finger and thumb of a piece of cultural spirit here, one that I think any human can connect to.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

He nodded, the toothpick bobbing up and down between his lips, and told me we were in the end times, the aliens would be back, and he felt like those aliens had planned the whole damned thing. He said we aren't any better than cats and dogs. We just think we're in charge.

AGITATOR

My repairman is not sitting on his fat ass like the one in the commercial. He put in a new agitator in the washer last week, I have him coming back to install a third ice maker in my refrigerator, if he can get the parts, and if he finishes that project quickly enough, I'll get him to change the lock on the front door, since it broke in the locked position.

If I get a package delivered, I'll have to go through the garage and walk around front, but I don't mind since that's about all the walking exercise I'm getting with my cane after the doctor shaved the bone on my hammer toe that was agitated from rubbing up against the sole of my shoes. I didn't know much about toe pain until post-surgery.

The doctor really didn't bother sharing with me how long it would take for improvement. I think he was more concerned with milking my insurance to pay for that new sports car he looks ridiculous driving with the top down. He ought to befriend a dermatologist with that sunburn on his bald spot.

I can ride my stationary bicycle in the closet without much pain if I use the soles and heels of my feet to push the pedals, but the wheel inside the plastic covering has so much dust that it aggravates my allergies, and there's no way to clean that dust without disassembling.

When the repairman arrives, he wishes me a Happy New Year, and I tell him I've seen better. He tells me he understands and that this supply chain problem is wreaking havoc on everyone. People have been waiting on parts for months from stoves to cars, the big boys don't care about repairs as long as the sales keep coming, which is where they make their money (In fact, there's speculation the supply chain problem was created to drive sales), and I tell him that I blame the government, both sides.

On the one hand, we've got Biden who doesn't know if he's coming or going any more than old horse-riding Ronald Reagan did, and on the other hand, the House seems to waste time voting on a leader. I tell him I know how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie roll pop more

than I know how many votes it takes to elect a majority leader, and the government needs to stop spending borrowed money from China and take off their cufflinks, roll up their starched shirt sleeves, and get to the work of helping the people who sent them there instead of helping themselves.

He nodded, the toothpick bobbing up and down between his lips, and told me we were in the end times, the aliens would be back, and he felt like those aliens had planned the whole damned thing. He said we aren't any better than cats and dogs. We just think we're in charge.

I figured the pharmacy had run out of his meds since there had been that pharmaceutical problem with production in India, since the tampering incident, and I hobbled back to the den where I found I'd been locked out of Facebook and had somehow uploaded a business version that I couldn't figure out. I almost asked the repairman if he knew how to get in, but aside from the extra charges, I figured he'd think I was recording him or something. I entered shut down mode, turned on the television, and watched a rerun of an Andy Griffith show, the one where Earnest T. Bass is breaking windows, and I thought old Earnest T. might may have been the smartest character of all.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Some pieces take a long time and some come very suddenly to me, and "Agitator" came out literally in a flash. I had recently had a repairman come to work on my washing machine, but I was not home at the time, but I simply imagined a conversation and how that might have unfolded, particularly the negativity on the part of the narrator in his perception of everything from other household items to politics. To me, it's a very humorous piece, but I also know that not everyone sees humor where I do.*

AUTHOR BIO: Niles Reddick is author of a novel, three collections, and a novella. His work has been featured in over 500 publications including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *PIF*, *New Reader*, *Forth*, *Citron Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Nunum*, and *Vestal Review*. He is a three time Pushcart, a two time Best Micro nominee, and a two time Best of the Net nominee. His newest flash collection *If Not for You* has recently been released by Big Table Publishing.