

# AISLE 7

By Kevin Barbosa

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *It's just business as usual in the corner convenience store when a wealthy man steps in and things change forever. We like the way the author segments incident and experience, reality and imagination while maintaining a credible model of real time. Prose is 'outsider' but impactful and the use of bold and light font visually rocks. There's a heart beating underneath this powerfully conceived social satire and at the end you hear it breaking. Good lines include: 'Silence is heard.' (Amazing!). 'Four eyes bulge out. Adam's apples rise and fall in dry gulps.' And 'Hearing footsteps coming, his blood-spattered face looks upside down to notice an aproned store employee running on the ceiling toward him as time slows. His vision blurs when his eyes water. Once the tears burst from bleeding out, Chien stares into the fluorescent lighting above.' A lightly published young author with lots of fuel in his tank and talent to burn.*

## Aisle 7

The party is going great so far. Richard Chien thrives on celebratory events, but this one has missed a beat. A half-Asian half-Caucasian wealthy businessman so bored with life he doesn't know where to go, this is a man who has the desire to buy something missing, so he has to abscond his own celebration from the trancelike atmosphere and ass-kissing guests he grows tired of. He feels that without his personal favorite snacks the surprise party thrown for him is tedious. All he needs is some chips and dip for the occasion, and it'll be perfect.

Rich walks into the supermarket wearing his tailor-made suit: a coal gray sports coat, black dress shirt, loosened tie, dark ironed slacks, and mahogany Oxford shoes from Johnston & Murphy. Even though he just got promoted, he's already aiming for the next advantageous raise.

With tremendous swagger, he struts on towards the grocery aisles, whistling aloud his commercial happiness. A new attainable happiness that will lessen his stress at his American dream occupation. However, his wealth will not come without a price.

He turns the corner, and before he enters the potato chips section, that's when Rich sees him. His feet halt at the lane's entrance. At the other end is a man just standing there. Glaring at him. Completely still with intensity.

Rich is caught off-guard because he is bothered as to why a random person has startled him to stop in his tracks. The stranger doesn't look like someone Chien would know. He's wearing a faded gray sweater, the hoodie covering his pale face donning an ungroomed beard, along with relaxed-fit khaki joggers tucked into a pair of Doc Martens. For some odd reason, Rich undergoes a sense of discomfort.

What is now their arena are two outstretched rows of colored bags, a plastic rainbow on racks produced by corporations the businessman has become part of.

Rich chooses to break through the tension and begins walking through the aisle. The other man copies his gesture, and soon the sounds of Oxfords clacking and boots thumping eventually harmonize, the acoustics escaping out of the artificial passage. Chien becomes paranoid as more alarming assumptions are implanted, and his sense of discomfort turns into a sense of danger from the nearing man. His growing appearance makes Richard's eyes linger as if this is a normal scenario, only to roll back and lock onto the visible hazel eyes currently watching him.

Steps decrease as both men continue strolling, still matching the same pace. Their bodies approach each other and stop in the center surrounded by branded chips paired with common

dips. Synchronizing their body language as they inspect the different flavors, Richard can't focus on anything except the other guy who is simply shopping for chips since there's obviously something going on, leading him to wonder if he's somebody from his past. After feeling so uncomfortable for so long in this distressing situation, Chien finally decides he's had about enough.

His head cracks sideways, and in a disguised macho voice, he frantically confronts the male.

**“Look man I don’t know who you are or why you’re following me but if you have something to tell me just say it so we can resolve this shit like men.”**

Silence is heard. Four eyes bulge out. Adam's apples rise and fall in dry gulps.

Suddenly, a motion is made. The stranger slowly reaches out his hand. . .

*Crunch!*

The shopper grabs a sour cream and onion bag as he gives a weird puzzled look and awkwardly walks off passed the businessman.

**Wait, hold on. What just happened?**

**Nothing. Absolutely nothing!**

That's what Rich thinks. After the encounter, this wave of relief washes over him. He finds a casual condiment and clutches it. He pauses for a breath, smiles to himself, and chuckles out of embarrassment at how he probably looked like a damn fool. A rich fool who felt less rich for a moment. He feels fortunate again to move.

*Sshhlucktzz!*

A jar of salsa falls and shatters across the floor.

It happened so fast that Richard didn't see it coming.

A faint grunt expelled out through the slight opening of his mouth as his stomach sucked in from a piercing sensation the instant it struck. An unknown figure had charged at him, a firm hand at his lower back and Richard's head resting upon a broad shoulder for what seems like forever.

In shock, Richard feels lost along with his breath and vulnerable because he doesn't know what's taking place. Then his mind goes blank. No more thoughts. The absence of anxiety allows him to feel only the pain of a blade.

The heavy exasperating breathing against Richard's right ear keeps him from drifting away. His acromion gets pressed up by the figure's burly chest; beneath a scrunching leather jacket is the sweatiness dampening Rich's clothes as his blood soaks through his shirt, ruining his formal blazer. Chien begins losing all feeling that his being weightlessly drops, causing his legs to wobble yet still manages to cling onto the stabbing arm. The mysterious man puts his own chin on Richard's shoulder and gently lowers him to the floor with his left arm instead of letting him collapse to the ground.

As he lies him down, the outsider forcibly grabs Chien's gripping hand and covers his fresh wound with it. At last, he angrily whispers into Richard's humid ear.

"You deserve this, Dick."

The anonymous murderer pulls out the knife swiftly before fleeing the empty aisle. . .

Blood is starting to flood his throat triggering Richard to uncontrollably spit thick cherry droplets while streams of red drip across his flushed cheeks. All of a sudden, he senses something between his thumb and pinky during his attempt to breathe. He picks up his skull with barely any strength left. His head tilts down and his hand lifts simultaneously.

A bloody photograph in his palm.

Eyes widen. Richard's cough intensifies, splattering blood up in the air after he plops his head to the tile. Whereas he's choking, he places the photo back onto his wound. He has the urge to drag himself but is too weak. The muscles in his shaken expression give out.

Hearing footsteps coming, his blood-spattered face looks upside down to notice an aproned store employee running on the ceiling toward him as time slows. His vision blurs when his eyes water. Once the tears burst from bleeding out, Chien stares into the fluorescent lighting above.

Although Richard doesn't want to die, he is gradually accepting his tragic fate.

The employee rushes over to kneel and sit *seiza*-style beside a pool of blood, propping Richard's head onto his lap and sort of cradles him. As Richard Chien's life topples over consoling legs, he realizes the glass shards nearby symbolize his shattered soul now leaving the scene.

The sympathetic employee cannot help but mouth the words "poor guy."

Afterward, he directs his attention to the spilt salsa at a distance and releases a sigh.

A monotonous female voice announces on the intercom: "*Clean up on aisle 7.*"

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** As a kid growing up in the Rio Grande Valley, my mom would often take me to the local H-E-B, so we always visited the chip & dip aisle for my favorite snack: potato chips with salsa. As an adult, I began viewing life as a series of random occurrences filled with darkness and humor, separate or mixed. Different ideas and genres just spawn from the imaginary spectrum inside my head. I wanted to highlight the gap between rich and poor along with the mystery behind such a random act. Paranoia, guilt, and tragedy all factor in without reason. One would eventually question if a person deserves such a death. How it can all be taken away by someone who probably has nothing to lose and how none of it matters in the end anyway because things like this happen every day, a story without a story. High class or low class, greedy or grateful, we're all still human beings. I've been reading a lot of Chuck Palahniuk's work, and I love Kurt Vonnegut's satirical style. I guess I was trying to create something similar as oppose to the bittersweet poetry I usually write.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Kevin Adam Flores Barbosa is an English graduate who has been writing poetry and short fiction since he existed. He has been published in The Rio Review, University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley's Gallery 2016-2018 magazines, The Chachalaca Review, and a couple of zines. He is a bittersweet poet who has an Instagram and Tumblr.