

# LOUD SOCKS

**By Dave Henson**

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *Brisk, literate, funny and sad. We like the adept use of contrasting mood between parts one and two and the author's keen and nuanced ear for dialogue. This is the kind of accomplished writing that looks easy to imitate but proves hard to master. Spots of word colour: 'She ta-da's.' 'I mock shock.' And then there's this: 'I pause a moment then check on Clementine. She's nursing her litter of six on the pile of dirty clothes in my closet. She looks at me and mews softly. If serenity had a sound, that would be it.' Good stuff.*

## Loud Socks

The sensation isn't pain exactly, but flashes yellow as Nurse Flanigan flushes my ear then works some kind of instrument deep inside it. She says the wax plug is thick and hard and goes at it again. It's as if she's using a firehose and sword when they're so close to my ear drum.

"There we go, Mr. James," she says finally and holds the culprit on a tissue. Looks like a roach. I half expect it to scurry up her arm. "Can you hear better?" she says.

"What?" I reply loudly, then chuckle away the look of panic from her face. Not sure if my humor landed softly or crashed and burned. She brandishes the firehose and Excalibur and steps ominously to my other ear.

“This one’s even worse,” she says and has at it till the sensation progresses to red. I tell her I need a break.

We sit in silence awkward as a first date. The paper sheet on the examining table crackles as I shift my weight. I read the poster on how to save someone from choking. Finally she mentions her son is starting college and asks if I have children. Three. Grand-kids? Six, I say, then tell her I’m ready to resume before she asks for names or ages.

After a few fierce minutes, she ta-da’s the piece of my brain she’s removed. I knew she was too deep. She looks at me and mouths something silently. I mock shock.

“Got you back,” she says, and we both grin. Then she warns I might be tender. She nods toward my feet. “Do those hurt your ears?” I see my pants have hiked up revealing my yellow- green- and orange-striped socks. “They’re so loud,” she laughs.

She can take a joke as well as dish out her own. Nice. She says if I have my ears cleansed more often, it won’t be so unpleasant. I suggest monthly, but she thinks yearly would be sufficient. I ask for her card as a reminder and make a mental note to come back in six months. Maybe sooner.

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I announce to the kids I’m home, write *Loud Socks* on the back of Nurse Flanigan’s card and put it in the silverware drawer with the others. One of my girls, Tabby, jumps off the counter and rubs against my legs. I pause a moment then check on Clemen-

tine. She's nursing her litter of six on the pile of dirty clothes in my closet. She looks at me and mews softly. If serenity had a sound, that would be it. No sign of Mr. Jinx. Probably prowling the basement.

For lunch, I fix my specialty, a — baloney sandwich with mustard, chips on the side. After a nap, I'm already feeling antsy for my next date and spread my cards from the silverware drawer on the counter:

— Shamala Jackson, MD, *Surprising Eyes*. Maybe tell her my acid reflux has gotten worse?

— Dana Thompson, Podiatrist, *Silence is Golden*. If I quit soaking my foot, my corn might come back, but I can't wait that long.

— Patricia Reese, PT, *Mona Lisa Hands*— It's always easy to fake a backache, but she seemed suspicious last time. I'm afraid she might contact Suzanne Barnes, PsyD, *Dangerous*.

I look through a dozen or so cards unable to make up my mind about whom to date next when my oldest kid, Tom, jumps onto the counter and drops a mouse next to Janice Keene, DDS, *I love Lucy*. I tell my boy it's a good choice but too soon for my six-month checkup, and hard to fake a cavity. I could chip another tooth, but that's bright red painful.

I continue flipping through cards unable to make up my mind about whom to be with next when a roach scrambles across the counter. I squash the bug, roll it between my finger and thumb and tilt my head ... then call Nurse Flanigan and tell her she missed a bit. I'm looking forward to my second date with *Loud Socks*.

END

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Loud Socks was inspired by my own experience in an examination room. Most of what is described in part one of the flash fiction really happened (including the nurse commenting on my loud socks) with a little embellishment. Part 2 of the piece is completely made up to explore the themes of loneliness and isolation in a quirky and humorous style. My goal was to portray a character who, though somewhat pathetic, is sympathetic. My main literary influences are probably Hemingway and Kafka. I like the straight-forward writing of the former and bizarre imagination of the latter.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** *David Henson and his wife have lived in Belgium and Hong Kong over the years and now reside in Peoria, Illinois. His work has been nominated for Best Small Fictions and Best of the Net and has appeared in numerous print and online journals including Hypnopomp, Pithead Chapel, Moonpark Review, Fictive Dream, and Literally Stories. His website is <http://writings217.wordpress.com>. His Twitter is @annalou8.*