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## Dirty Dishes

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*John Snyder*  
DIRTY DISHES

His satisfied and weary grunt harmonized with the creaking as the ancient rocking chair reluctantly received his weight. There was a tiny moment's pause, indicative of a decision being made, and another more subtle grunt as he arranged his bulging, after-dinner stomach. He grated into the chair's forced caress at the same instant his feet pushed down on the weather-troubled wood of the porch, and slowly, almost imperceptibly, the chair began to move. It moved backwards, balanced in a precarious position and squeaked; it rocked forwards and his feet shattered a few isolated splinters from the two neat hollows beneath his heels. The rocker increased its tempo until there was no starting or ending point; the movement of the man and the chair was so complete as to give the illusion of the two objects being one. The lulling-destined rhythm found no harbor at first within the opaque framework of the evening's neat restlessness. But as the rhythm became more pronounced and more urgent, it created an amalgamation, a kind of senseless fusing of the crickets and the summer's hum and the rocking chair, punctuated by the frequent wail of a roving freight train—and always underlying the unquiet was the quiet.

The only cacophony emanated from beyond the screen-door moat. He tried not to hear Maud's strident voice coercing the children into their nightly dish-gathering adventures or the provocative and slang-laced answers. His body tensed in the chair and he felt a rumble of green indigestion as the rattling, clashing disharmony from the leering yellow motif of the kitchen signaled the end of the dish-stacking ritual. A little dark cloud composed of dirty dishes hovered in his mind. A bubble of gas forced entry into his throat and he belched.

The moat was suddenly breached as his oldest son invaded the warm land of the porch. The boy stretched and yawned and ended the yawn with an inadvertent belch. He crossed the porch and threw himself down on a faded green and yellow swing—several squeaks went by before the rusty springs settled down to a well-spaced eeking noise.

"Hey, Pa! The dishes are stacked. Ma says you can do 'em any time."

He shifted his weight in the chair and grunted. He let his eyes focus on the blue-black silhouette of pine trees staffing the field across the road.

"Pa? I said the dishes are ready."

"Un-huh."

He watched the flight of something that wildly darted into the sky, circled the silhouette, and disappeared behind it. He let his mind dwell on the flying object—forcing a minor debate within himself as to whether or not the thing was a bird or a bat. Finally he reached a conclusion.

"Bats are weird creatures," he said.

"Yep, they sure are. Why, the damn fools don't know what they're doing from one minute to the next. They're blind, you know? That's why folks are always saying, 'blind as a bat.' Damn things are dangerous, too. Why, Milt Swanson . . . he's over in Washoe County . . . he . . . you know Milt, don't you, Pa? Well, he said a bat flew in his window one night and damn near drove his ma crazy. Got in her hair. Couldn't get it out. Had to call the humane people. Had the whole Washoe County on its ear. Funniest damn thing I ever heard. Yes, sir. Had the whole county on its ear, just on account of one little bat. Sure glad we ain't got any around here."

His chair squeaked and he let his gaze drop from the tallest tree to the dark blob on the swing.

"We ain't? I just saw one bigger-than-hell flying over those trees. I mean he was big. Going like hell he was. Yes, sir. Bigger-than-hell."

"We ain't got no bats around here, Pa."

"What do you mean? I tell you I just saw one. You keep watching those trees over there across the road. You'll see him. It's about time for him to fly again. Just keep your eyes on those trees."

"Pa, we ain't got none around here."

"I tell you I saw one."

"Pa, the science teacher over at the high school, Mr. Sawyer, says they don't happen in this county. 'Bout the only place around here where they happen is Washoe County—got something to do with the weather, or temperature, or something. . . . I don't know, but that's what he says, and he's a teacher."

"I've seen a few bats in my day."

"Nope! Ain't any around here, Pa."

He increased the rocker's speed and grunted as he managed his bulk into a more comfortable position in the chair.

"Well, it sure as hell looked like a bat to me."

"Nope! Can't be."

"Suppose it could be some kind of bird."

"Has to be."

"Must be one of those damn crows. You see those crows this morning running all over our field? Damn things would steal a person blind."

"They would and that's a fact."

He let calm and hum of summer press in upon him. He relaxed deeper into the chair and slowed its tempo, letting his feet rest on the porch. The chair stopped. His head tilted forwards and his chin found the exposed hair of his chest.

"Pa. Pa! Pa? You asleep, Pa?"

He pushed his feet down hard on the porch.

"Huh-un."

"Pa? The dishes are stacked and ready."

He put his hand to his throat and wiped the hot moisture out of the creases of his neck and with one continuous action mopped his fingers on his pants.

"Staying pretty damn hot tonight."

"Cool out here, Pa. The kitchen's an oven."

"This is just like the weather they have in Hawaii sometimes."

"You ever been to Hawaii, Pa?"

"I know lots of folks who's been there. They say it's hotter than hell."

"They get those trade winds, Pa. Kind of cools things off."

"There're times when the folks can't stand it. I heard they sit around and pray for a storm or tidal wave or anything to cool them off."

"I read in a book somewheres, where they have a pretty even type of temperature most of the time, and when it gets too hot the trade winds blow in and cool things off."

"I heard they run around nude most of the time 'cause of the heat—that ain't no decent way of life."

"I read where they don't need all the clothes we do 'cause of the even type temperature, but I didn't read about them going around naked. I might like to move to Hawaii and see some of that."

"Ain't decent."

"Boy, Pa, I sure wish we'd have some of those trade winds right now. Cool things off so a person could get a good-night's sleep."

He rocked. He watched the trees across the road and the moon resting on the tip of the tallest one. Something wildly darted into the sky, framed itself for a darting few seconds in the moon, and disappeared behind the blue-black silhouette of the trees.

"Pa? The dishes are stacked."

"There! I saw him again!"

"What's that, Pa?"

"That damn thing that looks like a bat."

"It ain't, Pa."

"Well, I didn't say he was one. But he sure as hell looks like one. Keep your eyes on that clump of trees, you'll see."

"You know Maynard Williams, Pa?"

"Think so."

"Well, he's got a sister who went to Hawaii . . . two, three, maybe four years ago . . . I don't know. But he says he's going next summer . . . says she talked him into it. Boy! I might go with him if they run around nude all the time."

"Ain't decent."

"I don't know how they could run around with no clothes on, Pa. Maynard says his sister said they have a church on every corner there."

"Some church, letting folks run around naked. There! There he is! There he goes. Did you see him?"

"I didn't see nothing, Pa."

"Keep your eyes on that clump of trees."

"Maynard says his sister said that they go to church all the time in Hawaii. He says she said they worship idols and trees and rocks—just about anything they can get their hands on."

"There ain't but one God, boy."

"Say, Pa?"

"Huh."

"What do you suppose old Reverend Watson would do if everybody showed up next Sunday naked?"

"Why, he'd damn their souls to hell, that's what."

"Boy! I bet he'd split a gut trying to save souls and keep people from looking at other people."

"You ain't never going to see folks show up at our church nude—we got a lot of decent, intelligent folks around here. Folks who ain't a

bunch of ignorant savages. They know better than to look at evil things. No, sir, you ain't going to see nobody naked around here. Ain't decent. Damn it! There goes that sonofabitch again! Did you see him?"

"Pa, can't you just see the look on old Reverend Watson's face? I bet he'd be just as bug-eyed as the next man when the women started pouring in—that would be the funniest thing in the world."


"Did you see him?"

"See who, Pa?"

His head nodded in slow motion, in rhythm with the rocking chair. The boy stretched and walked across the porch.

"Well, guess I'll turn in. Good night, Pa."

He did not hear his son's parting remark. A faint smile played at the corners of his mouth. He stared at the trees across the road. A slight breeze ruffled the hairs on the back of his neck and he shivered.

 JOHN SNYDER, now a teacher in San Jose, California, has, during his varied career, been radio producer, director and writer; a news commentator, announcer, and publicity writer. Young Publications this year published a book of his poetry, *World A Go Go*. His fiction has appeared in *Lyke* and he has been the recipient of several writing awards.

