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AFTERWORD

It was important to me that all of the stories in this collection be written in 2021. I wanted a snapshot of the year and blah blah blah—I explained this in the foreword. I hadn’t planned on an afterword, but I want to mention some of the pieces that didn’t make it into the collection. The year ended before I could write them.

From my notes:

In 2021 Texas banned abortion in cases where a child’s heartbeat can be detected in the womb. That gave me the idea for “A Man’s Right to Choose,” a title suggested by the pro-abortion argument that women should have the right to choose what they do with their own bodies. The story would have taken place in a California clinic and opened with a woman being counseled about her pregnancy. The counselor encourages her to terminate, but the mother’s reluctant. She’s older and may never get another chance to have a baby. The big twist in the story is that California has gone so far down the path of birth control that in some cases it aborts the mother along with the child. Once I revealed that, I would have shifted attention to the man in the room, the baby’s father. The counselor pushes him to authorize an “enhanced” abortion. It includes the parties at “both ends of the umbilical.” The counselor points out to the father that if he agrees, he’ll receive a tax credit for saving the state the cost of delivering the baby. He’ll also earn some extra ESG points for removing two carbon footprints from the planet. And of course he’ll be free to get married

again, maybe to a younger woman. The wife is crying hysterically by now, and the husband looks at her puffy face and runny nose. Then he looks at an attractive young nurse who's walking past. That's as far as I got in my notes. I would have explained the ESG system during the course of the story, but since I didn't I suggest you look it up. You'll be shocked at what's being planned for you.

"Is There a Doctor in the House?" This story is about the current phenomenon of people self-identifying as a different gender, a different race and so on. The setting is a court trial, where the judge breaks down and admits that he's not really a judge. He's a diesel mechanic. And the two lawyers are a beautician and a busboy. Then there's a medical emergency and a tracheotomy is performed by Dr. Something-or-other, who's really a septic maintenance man. His tracheotomy misses the windpipe but gets good suction on the stomach. I'm not sure where the story would have gone from there. We already have that level of absurdity in our court system.

"The Other Mike." There are stories about Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway in this collection, and I was hoping to do one featuring Philip K. Dick. He was a famously paranoid sci-fi writer. The story would have been built around masks, because of the Covid stuff, and the mask motif would have helped highlight Dick's paranoia. I would also have used the motif to address something that's troubling me personally at the moment. A man with my name (same name, exactly) has recently begun publishing novels on platforms that I've been using for years. It's like he just appeared out or nowhere wearing a mask with my face on it. Normally this wouldn't bother me, but the new-

comer's writing is awful. It reads like pig latin translated by a dyslexic. I put a lot of effort into polishing my work, but the other Mike doesn't. And I worry that people will mistake his books for mine. So I tell P.K. Dick about this when I meet him in my story, and he asks what I write about. "Politics, lately. Anti-government stuff." "Then the other Mike is an agent," he says. "He's a G-man who's been assigned the task of discrediting you." He tells me we need to find the agent, and we set off through a Dickian world of swibble and flapples and autofacs. We question several of the masked inhabitants. None are who they claim to be, and quite a few are space aliens. Then we come across a downed surveillance drone. Dick prepares to stomp on it, but he withholds the boot when the drone tells us it has the information we've been seeking. It says that the other Mike is the product of an artificial intelligence program. The government is using A.I. to churn out bad writing in my name and the names of thousands of other dissidents. The aim is to discredit us, like Dick surmised. He contacts some friends in "the resistance" and they release an artificial stupidity program, to counteract the A.I. The A.S. finds its way onto government computers and goes to work writing stupid legislation, stupid presidential speeches and so forth. And, surprisingly, the work it puts out is more intelligent than anything coming from our actual leaders. Our society begins to heal. People toss their masks, bad politicians are driven from office, and the other Mike's books disappear. Then at the end of the story Dick revisits some of the shrinks who treated him for paranoia. He doesn't go for therapy, he just wants to say, "I told you so."

"The Groom." I hate the subject matter of this

piece. It begins with a man admiring a flower girl at a wedding. She's seven or eight and cute as a button. The reader assumes that the man doing the admiring is the husband-to-be, but then I reveal that it's Joe Biden. And the word "groom" in the title refers to his history as a pedophilic child groomer. Search online for video of him abusing children. He assaults them physically by invading their space (thrusts his face too close to theirs), and by touching them inappropriately. He violates them verbally too, by making inappropriate statements about sex. That's how pedophiles groom children; they start with little violations and work up to rape. Our overlords are forcing pedophilia on us. We've given them technology that they believe will allow them to live forever by merging with machines, and now they want to get rid of us. So they're reducing our numbers by steering us into unproductive sex. Sterilization, abortion, starvation and disease are also in their population reduction toolkit. Look up "transhumanism." The people who run the world really do plan to merge with machines. I don't know how "The Groom" would have ended, but to serve justice there would have been blood. Maybe an angry mob merges Joe Biden with a wheat threshing machine after he gropes a kid in Kansas.

I think "Out Among the English" would have been fun to write. The title comes from the Amish. When they have to leave their community of trusted friends to deal with outsiders, they're going "out among the English." And in my story two young brothers need to make their first trip to the Big City to take care of some business. They put on their Sunday suits, comb their beards, and set off as their elders admonish them to beware of

the devil. After navigating through a suburb with its painted women and good soil going to waste growing carpet grass, they make it downtown and see a soda vending machine. They're flabbergasted that people would use such a thing, and they lecture a man who stops to buy a Coke. They tell him he shouldn't pay money for things he can obtain through honest labor. If he's thirsty he should dig a well so he can taste the sweetness of God's water. The man walks off belching and shaking his head, and the brothers walk off shaking theirs. They agree that nothing could be more outrageous than the soda machine, then they turn a corner and step into a BLM riot.

So those are the stories I didn't have time to write in 2021. I hope it was the craziest year I'll ever see, but I don't think it will be.

M. Sheedy

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