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# Five Very Short Stories by Diane Williams

## Diane Williams is the author of seven story collections, most recently Vicky Swanky Is a Beauty. Read the five pieces of micro-fiction she wrote for VICE's latest fiction issue.

by [**Diane Williams**](https://www.vice.com/en_us/contributor/diane-williams)

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**GREED**

Each child had a claim to a pile of jewelry when my paternal grandmother died—and how did they determine who was to have which pile?

The heirs were sent into an adjacent room and a trustee called out loudly enough to be heard by all of them—"Who will have this pile?"

My father said he shouted—"August Wilhelm will have this pile!"

Thus, my mother eventually received two gem-set rings that she wore as a pair until she achieved an advanced age and then she amalgamated the two of them into one—so that the diamonds and the sapphires were impressively bulked together.

I had to have it. It was a phantasmagoria. I selected it after my mother's death, not because I liked it but because it offers the memory of my mother and of the awkward, temporarily placed cold comfort that she gave me.

It's hard to believe that our affair was so long ago.

# THE THICKENING WISH

Typically, he walks far enough north so that he sees the bridge, and he appears to be so casual as he passes objects, the people, rusticated arcades, and heavy keystones.

Here's how it is—he had just gotten as far as Childs & Son Excavation Company, which has a colonnaded facade.

His wife, back at home, sat in front of their hole-in-the-wall fireplace.

If her husband is delayed, she'll prepare for herself a nice shirred egg.

Has he anything in mind when he nears Mitchell's Sheet Metal and the Nelson Fuel Company?

*You have got a lot of nerve!* comes to mind. Somebody in his childhood said that frequently, but who was it who said it?

His wife is thinking, *I am usually in a rush, but I am not in a rush today*.

She stows a spool of thread and a needle threaded with the thread. And didn't she put away her ring? It had been prized and placid on the bureau top, with its many little rough points—the prongs—that in the course of time had never gone and worn themselves down smoothly.

This is how her husband's feet move his body—it's a spring-like action.

His wife hunts for more objects to put away. Many are made of cheap metal—boat-shaped or cube-shaped.

She enjoys their real fireplace, sitting by it, studying the in-and-out curve of it and the projecting stub of its mantel.

She tells herself, "Take all the time to clean up that you need."

By chance, her husband has not yet come up against the bridge he seeks—but he has seen many towers and domes, porches and arches and doors, and he always enjoys the step-gabled buildings in the old town.

Then, at last, he sees the bridge that seems to him to be sinking. The bridge has become a boob, or a drunk, or a bum.

His wife puts an egg into a greased custard cup, dots it with butter, salt and pepper, and a drop of milk. She slides the egg—that had spent nearly the entirety of its life stone-cold and refrigerated—into the hot oven.

Her husband is now uncomprehending. The road he'd been on was pointing toward the bridge, so now how did the road suddenly take a sharp turn away from the bridge and head over toward this warehouse?

His wife begins to eat, but she cannot swallow.

You blockhead, you ass!

And her husband is back at the business of piling up the sights that have been left lying around.

Typically, her husband has an air of confidence while he attempts—at each important stage of the trek—to take everything in.

**PERSONAL DETAILS**

On the avenue, I was unavoidably stuck inside of an uproar when the wind locked itself in front of my face.

Nevertheless, I had a smeary view of a child in the whirlwind who was walking backward. He was carrying his jacket instead of wearing it. And he kicked up his feet with such aptitude.

In a luncheonette that I took cover in, I overheard "Yes, I do mind..."—this while I was raising and rearranging memories of many people's personal details, tryst locales, endearments—faces, genitalia, like Jimmy T's, or Lee's, which I pine for.

This is regular work with regular work hours that I do.

Through the window pane of the coffee shop, I could see clearly into a hair salon across the street, where two men—both with hairbrushes and small, hand-held dryers—together—down-stroked the mane of a cloaked woman.

The men were performing feats of legerdemain. Streamers sprang up around her head, as if snakes or dragons were busy eating their own tails.

And then, weighing down her shoulders, there was the golden hoard—for future use—of bullshit.

**WHEN I WAS OLD AND UGLY**

The creature had come absurdly close to our window. It had lifted its chin—face—specifically toward mine while we were at breakfast in the country.

I'd say the animal looked and looked at me and looked, ardently.

I was reminded how to fall in love by meeting its eyes and by how long the rendezvous lasted—until doomsday, say.

I am unhappily married. Today I was dressed up in red-fox orange—orangutan orange—apricot orange, candlelight orange. I had on a wool plaid coat and had been racketing around my city precinct doing errands.

Returning home, while in the elevator of our building, facing the closed door, I combed nearly every hair—all that thinning hair—along the sides of my skull.

That massive man that I didn't know at all, who had a stiffness of manner at the back of the elevator, he acknowledged me. And the doorman Bill had not averted his eyes.

No, not the sort of thing that I usually report. No, that I had withdrawn the tortoiseshell comb from my purse to do the smoothing with and then re-stowed it on the way to 3A, our apartment.

The comb I keep in the quilted sack, where I also conceal a tiny toothpaste, the easy-to-carry traveler's toothbrush, and my eyeglass-lens polishing cloth.

The carpet was unmarked by dirt, but one important thing in our foyer was missing—the color with the green leaves in a vase. The old floor gets better with age, but boy it needed to be cleaned up—then it will shine.

I also have affectionate and friendly wishes for the brass, crystal, silver dishes, vases, and pitchers.

My conversation with my husband was as follows: "Are you all right? What do you want? You're looking at me."

In the park I had wanted to talk today to a bird who wasn't interested in talking to me.

Lust and temptation are sometimes personified. I heard the bird cry— *Chew! Chew!* I took pains to say *Chew! Chew!*—loudly, too.

**CINCH**

My back started killing me and Tamara asked what else did I want and why? Oddly, she was suddenly unenthusiastic about me and she revealed resentment, of all things, and possibilities for her revenge.

But how busy I was!—building the 12-by-16 rec room at the rear of the house.

I made bedplates and cut boards. And this was the day that Tamara baked her standard sponge cake.

When I reached for a taste of the cake, she took the plate away.

So I slapped her and drilled holes for anchor bolts, used a shim to level bedplates and my half-inch nuts to secure the bedplates.

"Have I seen that before?" I asked her, for by then Tamara smoked a cigarette near the site and she was waving an arm on which slid—up and down—a bracelet of lumpy blue glass.

A beautiful beam of light—perhaps it was aqua—was produced by the sun poking through the dangles at her wrist.

And then again that woman behaved unfavorably toward me, for I had laid my hands on her small-size, stooped back, or I had prodded her.

By the next May, Tamara had departed and Hesper, her replacement, carried a tray of old-time spring tonic for the two us. Yet Hesper is so perfectly content to pursue me, seeing as how I expected she'd soon lose interest in the project or not have any real knack for it.

At this point we marched around the yard attentively, and I could tell from her remarks, and from how she laughed seriously, that I would not need to worry too much about her—as if I'd considered all of the pitfalls and avoided them.

There was a green glow from the thin, scratched surface of the lawn.

And there was that underlying melody when Hesper groaned because she saw the gopher hole—rather, we saw that typical mound of soil.

We had to set a cinch trap.

After you catch a gopher, you tap it headfirst, dead, right back into the hole! That's good fertilizer.

This isn't just a big joke. Pests move in from other areas and damage can occur in a short time from new ones who reinvade the world of nature.

But after I put to death a friendship, a marriage?

There are people to take their places, who move in from other areas, of course. There are people who are dedicated to the true good, who work toward this goal. There are animals that may not.

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