

PASSING OUT VICTORIOUS

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by JOSH PEARCE

BIO

Josh Pearce is located in San Carlos, California and has seen his short stories and flash fiction appear in top publications such as *Electric Spec*, *Kaleidotrope*, and *Aoife's Kiss*. He has also had his poetry published in over a dozen magazines.

This is his first appearance in POV and we're happy to have him. Expect to see more from Josh on our pages in the future.

**You can follow Josh on twitter:
@fictionaljosh**

JONATHAN, he says, where did this bucket of Legos come from?

Look at it. red plastic, square bucket maybe five gallons, crenelated red top, plastic handle. Where'd you find it?

In the garage, while I was cleaning it out. Tucked behind those old gardening tools.

I never had Legos like these, looking at the peeling yellow label on the side, which picture the contents inside: simple, geometric bricks, primary colorful people without arms, like the hieroglyphs of an earlier time in the history of scandinavian child's playthings. The bucket weighs a lot and rattles when tilted from side to side. These bigger blocks sound different than the ones from memory, a drier sound as they clack together. Not mine, not yours. Must be from the previous owner.

That poor man. I thought he died alone, no family. Sold all his things in that estate sale to pay for the funeral.

Did they? The house did have the stink of seventy years of shag tobacco and carpet when we moved in.

The cat chews on the corner of the bucket, trying to get in, and he tickles it until it runs away.

The last depressing memory of someone else's sad life. I don't want to think about that. Come on, let's get rid of it.

Just throw it away? What a waste. What if they're worth something?

Okay, well, how about the Goodwill, or the preschool? Or even better, we'll give them to my nephews.

Now?!

Why not? Nice day out, you've been in that disgusting garage all morning. Come take a break.

But the prospect of getting rid of the bucket seems to sadden him even more, and more as we drive. The bucket on the floor between his feet. Everything around us reminds him: the sign for children xing, the preschool we pass, the neighborhood watch signs erected on every block during the abduction hysteria of the 80s. Even my sister's house will add to it, a home full of hyperactive boys who love him like blood.

And in a minute, I know him, I am him, and the bright neighborhood streets sadden me. So at the next intersection I turn the car around and he asks, What are you doing?

Ah, what the hell, let's keep the Legos, okay? For when we have our own kids. It'll be our hope bucket, I joke.

He's crying, but crying and touching his eyes and smiles. He nods, squeezes my hand once.

When the car stops, he carries the bucket inside like it's a precious thing and puts it on the table and says, Let's build something.

Laugh and say, We're too old for that. Ages 2-5, see?

Come on. Build me something. Build me a promise. The plastic seal around the lid is soft with age and comes apart reluctantly under his thumb. Build a dinosaur, build a flower, build us a life. The lid is almost off now. Build me a house we both can live in. I'll be the guy in red, you be the guy in blue. Help me build the rest of the world around us.

Kneel together on the carpet. The lid comes off, and we look inside.

Oh my christ, he gasps.

The first reaction I have is not any of the appropriate ones that a human being should have. The first thing I think looking at the stark white pieces is, What can we build with *that*? 🙄