

# Moving On Out

Huddy Marr is a family man, seeking a better life for himself, his partner, Christie, and their toddler son. But his pawnshop is in trouble. His neighbor, Mister Barnes, is moving his liquor store to a better neighborhood. And Huddy is going to have to call upon his landlord—his big brother, Joe—for a helping hand.

An excerpt from *Bluff City Pawn*, the debut novel by Stephen Schottenfeld, the James P. Wilmot Assistant Professor of English.



**A** hollow boom outside—Huddy jumps, the shop rattles—then screeching metal. The two sounds, explosion and collision, confuse, and Huddy waits for more noises to point it somewhere, screams or curses, horns or sirens, and when he hears nothing he rushes out to see what accident or mess. He looks to his left past the grocery that's gone, and instead of chaos and flames there's a semi in the driveway, hydraulics raised, the offloaded Dumpster behind it.

Three Mexican laborers sitting on a truck bed, a contractor at the storefront. About time, Huddy thinks. The building's been abandoned for over a year, so at least it's activity. Maybe they're putting in something helpful, like an auto-parts store, which always works perfect with a pawnshop, brings in the working man. Or maybe some neutral business, insurance, whatever, neither help nor hurt. But don't let it be public assistance—or some nightmare like a methadone clinic, addicts hanging around peeing and crapping over everything. Once that scenario pops up, Huddy finds himself walking over there just to confirm what's not going in. He goes straight to the contractor, who's posting a permit on the wall, and then he sees another worker appear in the middle doorway, a set of plans tucked under his arm, looking

like the superintendent, so he slides over. "What you putting in here?" Huddy asks.

The man untucks the plans, squeezes his hands over them. "XGC Services."

"What's that?"

The man squints. "Blood bank."

Huddy's face smacked with the news. "Blood bank?" he says, just sick to repeat it. This building, long and low, same size as his own, but now it's a tower, grown colossal.

"Manny!" the man shouts, decisive. "Wreck out the front room!" He jerks his thumb behind him and Huddy watches the lead guy turn and translate instructions to the other two, who climb back to the toolbox. "Who you?" the man says, chin up-twitched, eyes fixed and narrowed.

"I run a shop next door."

The man glances to his right, eyes passing around, then back at Huddy, annoyed to have searched. "Well, I guess you're getting a neighbor."

Huddy's lips pinch together. He scans the building's three doorways, the work crew going in to start the demo. "Where's it going?"

"Everywhere," Huddy hears back. "It's the whole place." And when he looks over, the man's eyes are wide.

"We already got a blood bank downtown."

The man shrugs. "Got another one now."





City of [Illegible]  
Department of [Illegible]

**BUILDING PERMIT**

Project No. [Illegible]  
Address: [Illegible]  
Owner: [Illegible]

[Illegible text]

“Three months,” the man says casually, but to Huddy it comes out like a warning. “Gut it out, frame it. Could be six.”

Huddy winces, like he’s a donor getting his arm pricked without payment.

He hears the sledgehammer knocking down a partition wall.

The man’s teeth flash as he watches Huddy leave. “Guess you ain’t giving any blood.”

Huddy thinks, Blood bank. A bunch of people with nothing. They’ll hang around and harass—need a drink of water, need the bathroom, need the phone. “When’s it going in?”

“Three months,” the man says casually, but to Huddy it comes out like a warning. “Gut it out, frame it. Could be six.”

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The man’s teeth flash as he watches Huddy leave. “Guess you ain’t giving any blood.”

Half of his meal uneaten, but Huddy can’t touch it. It’ll take less than a week after the bank’s opened before it’s wall to wall in there. And then they’ll be here. On a rainy day, a crowd’s gonna be all up under his canopy. Two hookers stroll by, one in red spandex, bright and tight; the other in jeans, whale-tail underwear peeking out the back. A car honks, hips sway and turn, but the driver doesn’t stop, was only teasing.

He calls home again.

“Huddy, what you doing? It’s naptime.” Christie whispering mad.

But the clock says earlier. “I thought I was calling before that.”

“I put him down an hour ago. The time change.”

He shakes his head, forgot. “Why didn’t you turn the ringer off?”

“I left it on, in case Harlan called. Was he in Florida last night or did he call you from the road?”

“They’re putting a blood bank in the next building.”

“Damn, he’s getting up. He’s always up.”

Customer comes in. “I gotta go,” Huddy says.

The man dragging his way over to the counter. He holds out a necklace that’s all kinked and damaged.

Huddy gets the scale, weighs it. Six pennyweights. “I can give you forty bucks.”

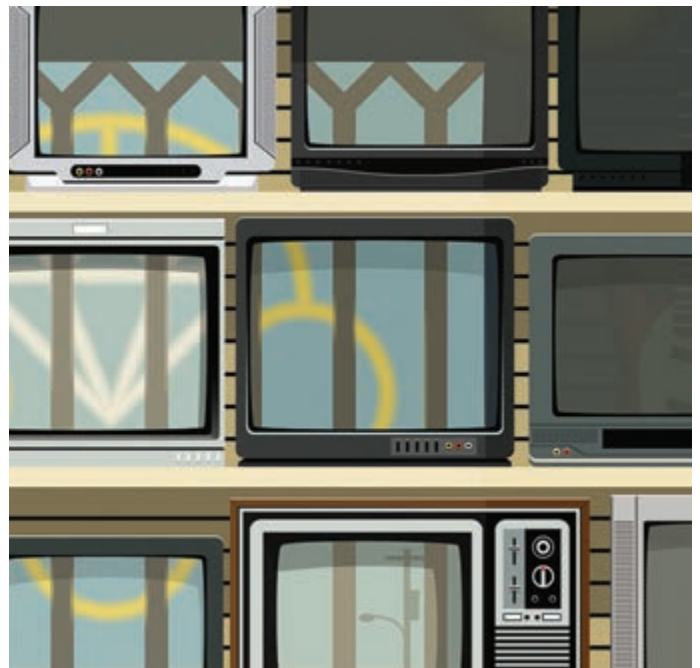
“Forty?”

“This has no value as a necklace. I can only sell its weight. It’s not a necklace anymore.”

“Come on now.” The man flings out a hand and glares. Points at the necklace like it was fine jewelry until Huddy smashed it and cheated with the scale. “That’s more than forty.”

“Not from this side of the counter,” Huddy says and he pushes the scrap back. “Thanks for stopping in.” The man’s anger spreads to confusion, then grief. “Maybe you got something else you can bring me,” Huddy says, and the man nods, slips inside himself, “Yeah, okay, might.”

Huddy wants to shut the door and unplug the phone and think about his worries—Barnes plus blood bank—figure out how to tell them both to Joe. He calls Joe, gets the voice mail, hangs up, tries the



office, gets the secretary: “Do you want his voice mail?”

“Just tell him ... not to forget about my lights.” But that’s not enough of his worry anymore. *Tell him I’m tired of him getting his rent but me not getting my living.* Joe with his monthly rent and his weekly cash. And his shopping sprees, cherry-picking the best jewelry from the showcases, only paying cost so Huddy can’t make a profit. Just saying, “Book it,” then stepping to the back to tape his name on sale items that haven’t cleared thirty days.

Huddy frowns at the bulky analog TVs on the shelf. He’s in no man’s land with televisions; the flats ain’t coming in yet, and he’s stuck with those.

Then a lever-action collector comes in, mentioning the L. C. Smith double-barrel he’s just seen at Liberty Pawn, over on Summer, a gun he knows Huddy would want for himself. “Your eyeballs gonna jump when you see it. Man named Keller—he’s got it locked away ‘cause he ain’t letting the yahoos play with it. It’s so clean and smooth, you gonna think it’s a reproduction.” Huddy decides to close up and chase down a special gun. **R**

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