

Short Telling Stories

By E.W. Shaffer

WET FEET

Beside the door to the basement she grabs
a broom, marches to the front porch
and swipes it across the gray boards
as if she were teeing off at Avenel,
dust and fly ash flying. Keeping a clean
house with the factory a mile away
sending black grit day after day is a chore.
It's no wonder there are so many
brooms around, every morning dry black snow
covers everything flat. Adding to her problems,
kids running in and out bringing factory grime
on top of regular backyard grime in
to mix with the floors and rugs.

Eloise hated that factory, she hated mud
and dirt, and she hated those black specks.
She even hated the morning dew; to her
it was just dust magnet glue that made
the gritty dirt stick to everybody's shoes
and feet. I didn't know much then,
like how the factories that burned coal
spewed their ash particles out at night
but I did know to wait around the house
a good long time before making a break
for the morning and when I did,
it was a gamble. Eloise had super hearing
and could tell what I was up to
from where ever she was.

Don't you go out there yet, she'd yell when she
heard the screen door slam, you'll get your feet wet.
It was years before I understood
the fly ash dew connection and why it was
such a calamity to have wet feet.

YELLOW

People say all manner of things
when they answer the phone:
hello, yo, hi or hey—unknown voices
out of thin air. Maybe they'll say their name,
but to continue they have to say something,
a signal for the caller to start talking.
Eddie said, YELLOW!

Yellow? It took me years to figure it out
what he was talking about. He would
grab the phone like he wanted to ring its neck.
His words, like a pitcher too full, splashed
onto the floor and into the cracks where he
stood and came out some place else.
Maybe it was yell—oh, but hearing him say it
so many times led me to conclude
that the term must have started out
as yes—hello, maybe in the early days
of home telephones when he was
not quite sure what to say, then evolved
through yeah—hello and on to yellow.
YELL-o, he would say—accent on the first
syllable, rhymes with Jello®. Sometimes
he would say it twice, Yellow ... Yellow.

Eddie was Edward only on his drivers license
and bank accounts. A few folks who didn't
know him very well called him Ed but Eddie
seemed to suit him best. And when it came to telephones,
nobody answered them like he did.
He wasn't a hello kind of guy. Yellow
was his trademark, his audio logo,
a distinctive blip, two syllables run together,
a questionable etiology, but even when you
heard them and weren't sure what
they meant, if you had heard them before,
you knew who you were talking to.

