

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson

The young man with the
bicycle
short story



Urban Volcano

The young man with the bicycle

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson

Creative Commons (BY-NC-ND) – 2012

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Illustrations: Yana Volkovich

Publisher: Urban Volcano

<https://urbanvolcano.net/>

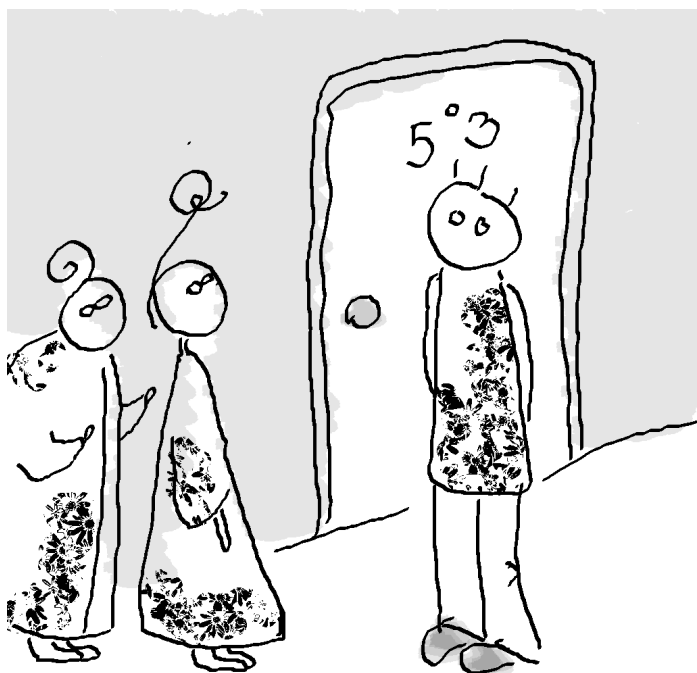
Illustration of Barcelona on the cover: (CC BY 3.0) “19 famous cities
skylines” | Vector Open Stock

<http://www.vectoropenstock.com/vectors/preview/74582>

Illustration of Amsterdam on the cover: © paulrommer | 123RF Stock

http://www.123rf.com/profile_paulrommer

This story can be reproduced by whichever means one can think of, such as, but not limited to, uploading to torrents, filming by a famous Hollywood director, or reading aloud on the New York Subway, provided that the author is referenced, the content is not modified and the reproduction is not done commercially.



THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE BICYCLE

I walked into the foyer carrying my bicycle down the hall. As I approached the door to my apartment I noticed a message had been slid between the door and the frame. I removed the folded paper and read the message written in neat handwriting.

“I’ve dropped some black underwear on to your patio. Regards, your neighbor in apartment 5-3.”

I carried my bicycle to its place on the patio. On my way back into the apartment I picked up a black pair of

women's underwear that lay on the floor of my patio. According to the note, it had fallen from my neighbor's clothesline – from the clothesline of apartment three on the fifth floor.

As I waited for the elevator to arrive it crossed my mind that this was the first time I had made use of it. In the year that had passed since I had moved to Barcelona I had never had any reason to visit my neighbors on the floors above me. In fact, come to think of it, I did not really know any of them. I recognized some by sight and greeted them if I met them in the foyer, but I knew none of them by name. I had given some of them descriptive names in my mind. There was the husband and wife who looked like brother and sister, the old man with the walking stick, the woman who always asked me if I had been away as she had not seen me in a while, the old couple with the grandchildren, etc. I felt a bit ashamed of only knowing them by their descriptions.

I left the elevator on the fifth floor and rang the doorbell at apartment 5-3. The door did not open but on the other side a dog barked enthusiastically. I wondered if it was trying to tell me to come back later. Perhaps it was telling me to stay away indefinitely. What did I know about dog language?

I was about to go back downstairs when the door of apartment 5-2 opened. An old woman with a wonky

wig walked into the hallway, followed by a somewhat younger woman wearing a bathrobe. I had seen them both before but I had no descriptive names for them in my mind. Let alone real names.

“Hello young man!” said the old woman with the wonky wig and turned to the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe. “It’s the young man who dropped the bottle of red wine in the elevator.”

“No,” replied the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe. “It is the young man with the bicycle.”

“The young man with the bicycle?” The old woman with the wonky wig did not immediately grasp who was being referred to.

“Yes, the young man with the bicycle,” repeated the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe. “The young man on the ground floor. The foreigner with the goatee.”

“Oh, yes. The young man with the bicycle!” The old woman with the wonky wig had seen the light. “I thought it was the young man who had dropped the bottle of red wine in the elevator. I can see it now. It is the young man with the bicycle.”

I nodded and smiled awkwardly. I guessed she was right. I was probably the young man with the bicycle. In any case, I was relatively young and used a bicycle for most of my journeys. I could also answer to being a foreigner with a goatee, living on the ground floor.

After I had been identified there was silence in the hallway. The two women looked at me with questioning eyes. I guessed it was time for me to explain my presence here on the upper floors of the apartment building.

“I’m returning the underwear to the woman in apartment 5-3,” I said and raised my hand holding the underwear so that the women could see it.

As the words left my lips I realized that they had not come out quite right. They could be misinterpreted. I felt myself blushing. The hallway was silent again and the women waited for me to explain my case further.

“Err, I mean. Err. The underwear fell off the clothesline,” I managed to stutter. “I found it on my patio.”

“It’s the dark haired woman with the dog,” the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe told the old woman with the wonky wig.

“Huh?” replied the old woman with the wonky wig.

“It’s the dark haired woman with the dog who owns the underwear,” explained the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe.

“Oh?” replied the old woman with the wonky wig who did not seem to be completely understanding the situation.

“Yes, the dark haired woman with the dog dropped her underwear while putting out the laundry and it fell down on to the patio of the young man with the bicycle.”

The old woman with the wonky wig nodded. She appeared to be starting to understand the mystery behind my presence here on the upper floors. I was relieved to know that the confusion had been resolved and it was time for me to head back downstairs. I said goodbye and waved to the two women – perhaps inappropriately – with the same hand that was holding the underwear.

“Give me the underwear,” said the somewhat younger woman wearing a bathrobe and grabbed the underwear from my waving hand. “I will give it back to the dark haired woman with the dog.”

I would have preferred to deliver the laundry to its rightful owner without the aid of middle men – or rather – without the aid of the somewhat younger middle woman wearing a bathrobe. Yet I did not know if it was appropriate to ask the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe to give the underwear back to me. Hence, I said goodbye and returned downstairs. My job here was done. The somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe would return the underwear to the – so-called – dark haired woman with the dog.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I was startled upon hearing the doorbell ring. I crawled off the sofa and turned off the TV. Apparently I had fallen asleep during the news. I headed for the door and opened it. Outside was a dark haired woman with a dog.

“Evening. I’m your neighbor in apartment 5-3,” said the dark haired woman with the dog.

“Uh-huh,” I yawned and thought that this must be the dark haired woman with the dog.

“I dropped some laundry on to your patio.”

Right! I was not sure how I should react to that. I did not know how to start telling her that I did not have her laundry anymore.

“I don’t have it,” I said knowing that it was not a sufficient explanation but not knowing how to continue.

“Huh?” The dark haired woman with the dog seemed surprised. This needed some more explanation.

“The woman in apartment 5-2 has it,” I answered blushing. If only the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe had not taken the underwear.

“Huh?” The dark haired woman with the dog did not quite follow. Who can blame her? This was a complicated situation. If only I knew how to explain it further. I did not know if she understood who I was referring to, but I could not think of any way to describe the somewhat younger woman with the bathrobe in more detail. Obviously, I could not refer

to her as the woman with the bathrobe since I guessed it was quite a coincidence that she had been wearing a bathrobe when I met her.

“The woman with the bathrobe?” asked the dark haired woman with the dog.

Exactly! The dark haired woman with the dog had solved the case. Apparently, describing her as the woman with the bathrobe would not have been inappropriate.

“Exactly!” I replied, happy that the situation was becoming clearer.

“Why does the woman with the bathrobe have my underwear?”

Good question. The situation was perhaps not becoming as clear as I had hoped. It still needed some clarification.

“She took it,” was the only thing I could think of.

“She took it?” replied the dark haired woman with the dog.

“Err, yes. She took it.” How could I explain it more clearly?

“From the patio?” asked the dark haired woman with the dog.

“No, from my hands.”

“Why was my underwear in your hands in front of the woman with the bathrobe?” asked the dark haired woman with the dog. Her surprise seemed to be turning

into anger. Who could blame her? It was a complicated situation.

“I took it upstairs. You were not at home. She came out. She snatched it from my hand and said she would return it.”

Now we were talking. That had not been so difficult, had it? I was happy that I had finally managed to explain what had happened.

“But she is weird!” the dark haired woman with the dog said after thinking about my explanation for a while. I did not know how to reply. She lowered her head to look at the dog.

“Why is my underwear in the hands of the woman with the bathrobe?” asked the dark haired woman with the dog. I did not know if she was still talking to me or had started talking to the dog. “Why her? She is weird! Just as weird as the old woman with the wonky wig. But not as old.”

I did not know what to say. I was not even sure if she was talking to me anymore. Her anger seemed to have changed into hopelessness. She went silent. I remained silent.

“Well. I guess that’s it,” the dark haired woman with the dog said as she looked up from the dog to me.

“I guess that’s it,” I replied.

That was indeed it. The dark haired woman with the dog said her goodbyes and called the elevator. I

said my goodbyes and closed the door. As I headed back to the sofa I passed the mirror. I stopped and looked at my own reflection and said: “So you really are the young man with the bicycle.”

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson is an avid storyteller with a keen eye for quirky characters, funny dialogs and vivid scenario descriptions. Much of his writing falls within the genre of realistic fiction and his stories are more often than not based on real events in the author's life. Although the tales contain grains of truth, they are melded with fiction, making the reader curious to know the line between reality and fantasy.

Books

Among Other Things, flash fiction (2024)

Talk To Strangers, short stories (2019)

Flash 52, flash fiction (2017)

999 Abroad, short stories (2012)

Links

Börkur Sigurbjörnsson

Urban Volcano