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## Untitled

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## Untitled

Bob takes off his John Deere hat, scratches his balding head, and looks at the damp ground.

"Well, Harold, what do you think? Can you guys work in this?" Harold does not answer immediately, but instead ambles over in the direction of the newly dug retention pond. Chuck is anxious to get the day started.

"Hell, this ain't no problem. I run that trackhoe in more mud than this before. Let's get a move on."

"Well, I don't know." Bob seems to forget the debate at hand, returning to his standard silence filler. "Let's see..." He watches Harold stroll back from the pond.

"What did it rain last night, two, three hours?" Harold asks upon returning.

"Not even that. I'd say no more than an hour," Chuck quickly replies, and stalks off towards his trackhoe. Harold squints at the overcast sky.

"I'd say we'd be pretty safe to go today. Might have trouble with those earth movers running through the mud in that new pond, but I'll just pull 'em out with my dozer." His two cents contributed, Harold turns and heads towards the mammoth yellow bulldozer parked at the end of the row of awaiting construction equipment. Chuck is already there, warming up his machine, awaiting the day's assignment. Bob walks gently over to the group of men standing by their trucks which have been parked in the dirt at whatever angles seemed appropriate for a Monday morning. He stands and talks for a few minutes, gesturing towards various locations on the mud plain of the construction site. When he is finished, the men saunter off to their respective vehicles, prepared for another day of dirt work. Adam and I watch the machines spit their first black clouds into the thick air and rumble across the site. We have been standing by my station wagon, surveying the scene with groggy heads and half closed eyes. Although we have pried ourselves from four hours of sleep, driven halfway across town and stood in the already muggy morning air for half an hour now, we would be more than happy to retrace our steps and sleep until noon. Bob rummages around in the bed of his red pickup, a well-worn vehicle which sports a faded "Corbit and Corbit Construction" label painted on the door. Perhaps he has forgotten us again, and we will stand invisibly by the station wagon for the greater part of the morning. This is a far better alternative to lassoing Bob's attention to find out if there is actual work for us to do. For thirteen-fifty an hour, we are more than content to stand and wait as long as it takes for the cogs in the old man's brain to work themselves free and tell him to glance in our direction. Adam hops up on the hood of the station wagon, but quickly jumps off.

"Your damn car's still hot from the ride over here."

"Yeah." I reply, "Everything's going to be hot today. And humid. I'm already stuck to my shirt." Bob finds what he is searching for, an ancient hand-sledge, turns in our direction, and motions for us to come over to his truck. I shake my head at Adam. "Shit. No sleeping today." We stumble in Bob's direction, and the mud begins to collect in our boot treads.

"Jump on in the back there," says Bob, climbing into the driver's seat. Adam and I scale the side of the pickup and begin to clear secure seats in the collection of wooden stakes, shovels, rakes, broken hammers, chains, and Diet Coke cans that litter the bed of Bob's pickup. We are almost seated when he drops the truck into gear, nearly throwing Adam over the side. Adam curses, recovers, and glares in Bob's direction. Bob, however, is busy navigating across the muddy plain, managing to travel directly through the path of every massive yellow beast that rumbles around the site. He dodges in front of an oncoming earth mover, and heads straight for a large ditch. I look at Adam.

"He sees that, doesn't he?"

"He's got to." Adam replies. As we approach the ditch, the truck's speed remains a steady twenty miles per hour. Adam braces himself for the impact, and I follow suit. Seconds later, we are both thrown forward against the cab of the pickup, which comes to a halt at a notably un-level angle. Adam looks at me, does a forehead-slap, and jumps out of the truck. Bob slowly opens the door, tries to get out, and finds that he cannot. He then looks down, unfastens his seat belt, and repeats the attempt. Free of the truck, he bends down and examines the front wheel, which is spinning free in the ditch. The truck rests on its frame and back wheels. Bob takes account of the situation, a completely blank expression on his face. He seems unable to comprehend what has just happened, and is slowly adjusting to the fact that yes, there actually is a large absence of ground under the front of his truck. "Let's see..." He turns to Adam and says, "Why don't you go get Harold over there." Adam rolls his eyes and stalks away, shaking his head. "You, grab a chain out of my truck there, and wrap it around the hitch there. Get the long one." I rummage around in the bed of the truck, unable to determine which of the three rusty chains is the "long one." I toss all three to the ground, jump down from the truck, and untangle them. They are all the same length. I check back in the bed to see if I have missed one, but no other chains are to be seen. Bob is gazing intently across the site, where Harold's bulldozer has changed direction and is making its way through the mud towards us, with Adam hanging off of the side. I envy him, because of all the tasks we've been given, riding on any piece of construction equipment is the greatest. Hanging on to a massive piece of metal for dear life is the most desired duty on the site, for pure excitement value as well as opportunity for cool movement through the stagnant summer air. The dozer rumbles closer, and I turn back to the dilemma of the chains.

"Uh, Bob, which chain did you want?" Bob turns and points to one.

"The long one there." I look at him, then back at the chains, which are still the same length.

"Oh, yeah." I attach the chain, fastening the hook to make small loop around the truck's trailer hitch. The dozer arrives and comes to a halt just short of the truck. Harold looks down at me, shakes his head, and climbs down from his seat. He strides angrily over to my chain-hitch combination.

"This ain't no way wrap a chain! They teach you anything, son? Look, you've got to pop the hook in here between the links. And you can't put it around the hitch. That thing slips off, it'll kill someone, probably me." He unhooks the chain, reaches under the truck and wraps it around a towing hook that I had failed to notice. He then re-hooks the chain. "See, like that, between the links." I see no difference in his technique and mine, but choose keep this observation to myself. Harold seems to know what he's doing, or at least to think he knows what he's doing. He attaches the other end of the chain to a hook on the dozer's bucket, jumps back in the seat, and revs the engine. The dozer slides momentarily in the muddy ground. The tracks quickly find a bite, but the trucks wheels do not move. Instead, the dozer's force drags the truck out of the ditch with its wheels fully locked. Bob has forgotten to take the truck out of drive, and it's possible the emergency brake might even be on. Bob frowns at the failure of his truck's wheels to function. Harold has had enough. He gestures for me to unhook the chain, which I quickly do. Free of the situation, Harold spins his dozer and cruises away.

The morning passes by at a painful crawl. Adam and I have been given a stack of wooden stakes, a small sledge hammer, a tape measure, and a black permanent marker. Our assignment is to pound rows of stakes into the ground across the site and make a mark on the stakes one foot above the ground. Bob apparently has some greater purpose in mind for this task, but he has failed to share his vision with us. The sun still hides behind the overcast clouds, but its effects are unmistakable. The warm and humid air of the morning

has become the hot and humid air of the late morning. Our heads are clogged with the moisture, adding to the haze of our brief night's rest. By now our boots are little more than mud magnets, the added weight making our already difficult steps a greater challenge than we're really up to. Adam looks up from the stake he has just driven home.

"Union alert, twelve o'clock." I look up to see the black Cadillac of the union representative pulling into the lot. Being two college kids interested in milking the union wage without coughing up the union dues, we are not especially interested in talking to the driver of the Caddy. We've tolerated his hassles twice already this summer, and have managed to put him off for one reason or another. Today seems like a good day for outright avoidance. We duck behind a stack of pipes sitting in the middle of the site. Adam peeks out from behind them. "I think he's coming over here. Man, I can not deal with this guy today."

"Me neither." I reply. "How about that hole over there?" I point to a large hole situated at the far end of the pipes which Chuck dug last week, presumably for a manhole or other grand plan of Bob's. In any event, the hole remains empty and seems a good hideout. Keeping low behind the pipes, Adam and I commando to the edge of the hole and jump in. It is a deep hole. Definitely deeper than I remembered. It is also a wet hole, one that has collected a good bit of rain over the weekend. We are ankle deep in mud and a far enough away from ground level to realize that we're going to need some help getting out.

"What a lovely hole you've discovered," Adam smirks at me.

"Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time..."

"Man, my feet are soaking, my boots are probably going to be a permanent addition to this mud, and it's entirely possible that Bob will forget about us. We could be down here all day!" He is really unhappy with me.

"I'm sorry!" I reply. "So we'll be stuck in a hole for the day, so what? It's cooler down here, pretty shaded, and there definitely aren't any stupid stakes to be pounded into the ground. Except for lunch, we're pretty set." Adam rolls his eyes, shakes his head, and then slowly starts laughing. Soon we're both having a good chuckle at our predicament.

"Well, now there's a captive audience if I ever saw one." Adam and I look up to the top of the hole to see the union guy grinning down at us. It is not a good grin. It is the grin of a bear who has found a barrel of salmon. "So how about signing some papers for me, boys?" It is only ten in the morning.

—Tyler Smith