

# —CHARLOTTE’S FREQUENCY

*by Ian Rogers*

Morris Hardy was standing in his front yard watching the delivery truck with SHARF ELECTRONICS printed on the side back into his driveway when Eddie Giles came over.

“Hey, neighbor. How they hangin’?”

Eddie wore a plaid bathrobe and moose-slipper ensemble that might have been stolen off a homeless person. He held a coffee cup with TEACHERS DO IT NINE MONTHS OF THE YEAR printed on the side. Eddie taught history at the community college—a fact that confirmed to Morris that education in this country was going right down the toilet.

He and Eddie had lived next to each other on Alder Lane for two years—two years that, to Morris, felt more like ten—and at some point during that time Eddie had come to the debatable conclusion that he and Morris were best friends.

“Hi, Eddie,” Morris said evenly. “I thought you were going up to Groverton this morning.”

“We’re leaving this aft.” He scratched himself with his free hand and yawned. “Kim’s got morning classes. You can’t believe how much I miss that kid.”

Morris nodded sympathetically though he was pretty sure Eddie’s daughter didn’t reciprocate the feeling.

Kim had escaped to university the previous fall, and, after landing a waitressing job at a seafood restaurant, had stayed on through the summer. She had been home to visit only twice. Watching her father openly scratch his balls in his bathrobe that didn’t quite cover his scrawny shanks, Morris understood completely.

“Tell Kim that Jude and I say hello,” Morris said.

“Will do,” Eddie said distractedly, staring at the truck.

That, Morris realized, was what had lured Eddie from his fortress of suburban solitude. Here in the suburbs, the arrival of a delivery truck was to adults what the arrival of the ice-cream truck was to kids. As if to accent this little-known truth, Morris spied a face peeking out an open living-room curtain from a house across the street.

The truck stopped and two men in brown coveralls climbed out. One of them held a clipboard with a piece of flimsy attached to it.

“Mr. Hardy?”

Eddie slapped Morris on the back. “He’s your man.”

The deliveryman gave Eddie a passing look and handed the clipboard to Morris.

As he signed, the other deliveryman pulled up the rear door of the truck and started shimmying out a large cardboard box--the widescreen television Morris had wanted for years but had only recently been able to afford. Jude had tried to kick up a fuss, but couldn't come up with any specific reasons against the purchase. Morris knew she was sore because he hadn't consulted her before placing the order. But the way he saw it, if they had to move out of the city--against his own wishes--then he should be allowed to take the necessary measures to make himself comfortable.

Morris returned the clipboard and the deliveryman tore off his copy.

"I knew you were getting a new toy," Eddie said slyly.

"How'd you guess?" Morris said, going along.

"The dish," Eddie said, and jerked a thumb over his shoulder at Morris's roof. The new satellite dish gleamed in the early-morning light. "But what's the antenna for?"

Morris nodded absently. He wasn't really listening. He was watching the deliverymen. They were speaking in low, furtive voices. A moment later one of them came over and said, "Uh, Mr. Hardy, I'm afraid we have a bit of a problem."

"What's wrong?"

"Well." The man took off his hat and raked his fingers through his greasy hair. "It appears we left the cart back at the store. And we need it to--"

"Couldn't we just carry it in?" Eddie piped.

The deliveryman gave Morris a questioning look. "Well...we *could*. It's not so much heavy as it is awkward. But..."

Morris understood what the other man was trying to say: Yes, it could be done. But do you really want to put your new toy in this guy's hands?

He looked at Eddie, trying to see past the patchy robe and grungy moose slippers. He didn't hate Eddie, but he felt something, and irritation seemed too small a word to describe his feelings for a man who punctuated his every accident with the word "oopsie." As in, *The other day I was in the front yard taking a few test swings with my new five iron and--oopsie!--now I need to replace the windshield on the Subaru.*

There had been an oopsie just a month ago, in fact, on a Sunday afternoon when the couples had gotten together for a barbecue. Eddie had maneuvered Morris's new hibachi next to the hedge wall that separated their backyards--*to give it some shade*, was Eddie's oblique explanation--and a large section of it had caught fire. Morris would never forget the expression on Eddie's face that day: a look of complete and total perplexity that seemed to say, *Damn, were those things flammable?*

If Eddie helped with the television, the odds were there would be an accident (an oopsie, if you like). But, with the deliverymen helping... and it only had to go into the house...

"Okay," Morris said finally. "Let's do it."

The deliverymen used the hydraulic lifter to lower the box to the driveway, and when everyone was ready, each man took a corner and lifted with an enthusiastic grunt. To his surprise, Morris found himself to be the weakest link. While Eddie and the two deliverymen hoisted their quarter of the box effortlessly, Morris struggled to keep his end off the ground. His arms began to tremble, and finally he had to set his corner back down. It wasn't heavy, as the deliveryman had said, but he felt inexplicably drained.