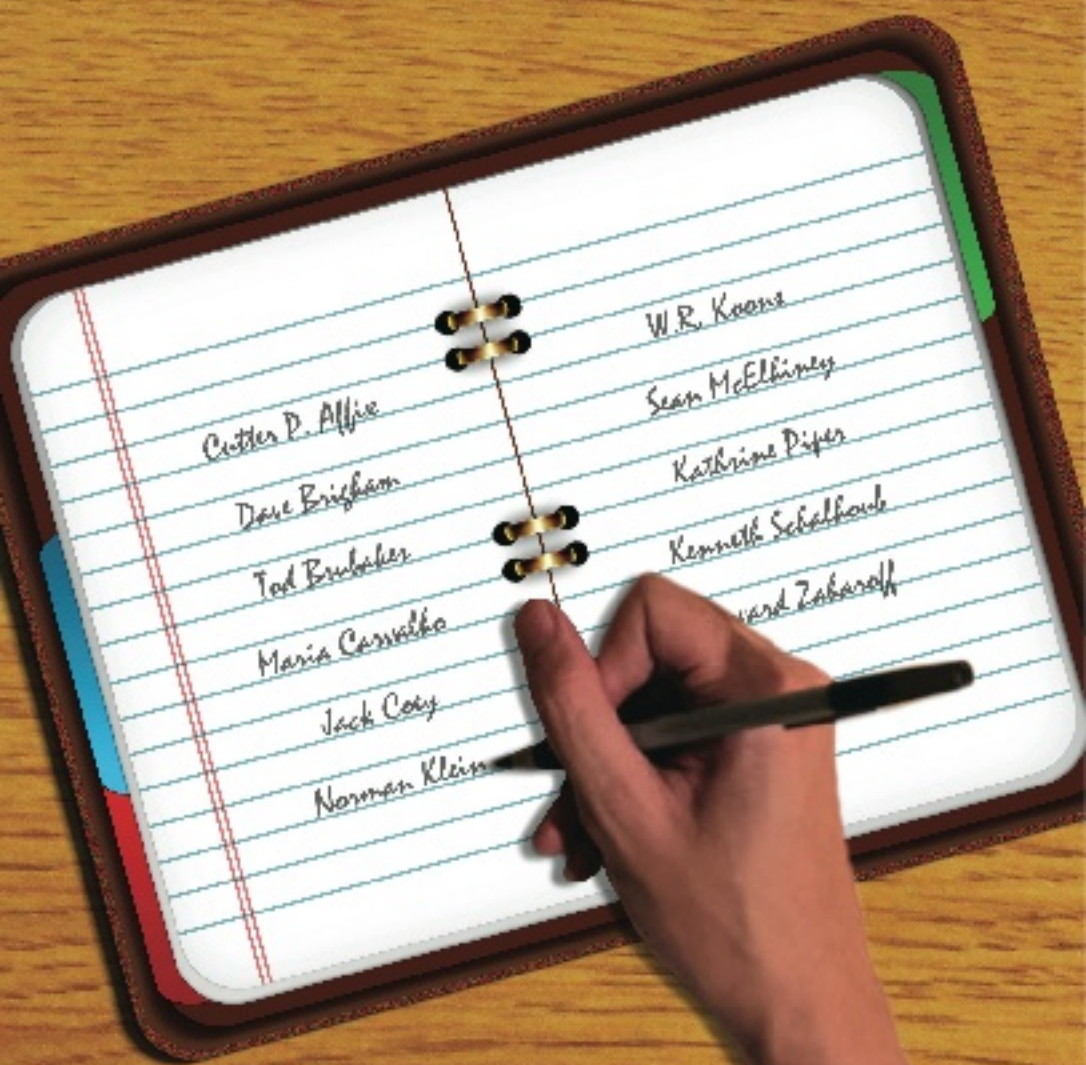
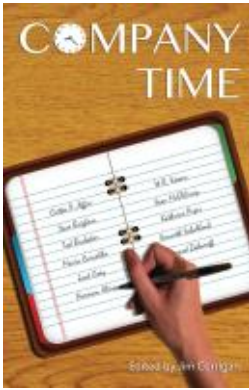


CCLOCKOMPANY TIME



Edited by Jim Corrigan



In this anthology, the characters are at work. A roadie tries working at home; a Mars mission takes a turn; a former teacher works for a ride service; and more. Company Time features stories by Dave Brigham, Tod Brubaker, Maria Carvalho, Jack Coey, Norman Klein, W.R. Koons, Sean McElhiney, Kathrine Piper, Kenneth Schalhoub, and Howard Zaharoff. The previous books in the series are Movable Feasts and Losing the Map.

Company Time

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Company Time

Edited by Jim Corrigan

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First Edition

Acknowledgements

These books are collaborative. The writers do the hard work, and I just nag them occasionally from my mountain lair. This one, however, has been more collaborative than the others in the series.

Dave Brigham is the only other writer with a story in each collection, and for this book he put me in touch with Kathrine Piper. It is fair to say that, without their involvement, this book would not exist.

Special thanks to Heidi Waugaman-Page for leading the design process, and to Abbey Kinder and Tia Carbone.

Deborah Liljegren, who made the great cover of *Losing the Map*, spent a long time helping me come up with the theme for this one. Our original idea, “the modern workplace,” is something I hope to revisit.

Howard Zaharoff has been supportive of my work for many years, and he even agreed to have his stories appear in two of these. Beth Chariton, Tod Brubaker, Cutter P. Affix, and Maria Carvalho have all appeared in more than one collection.

Finally, none of this would be possible without my wife Nikki and our daughter Sophia.

I hope you enjoy these stories. If this book does well I may keep the laser-equipped satellite I bought online, if I can get through to customer support.

Jim Corrigan

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Who Loves the Sun?

Dave Brigham

In Ogie's dreams, he cleaned Rivers Cuomo's glasses, using only the finest alcohol- and ammonia-free solution and softest microfiber cloth to keep the Weezer singer's trademark spectacles streak-free. Then he carefully tuned Cuomo's treasured robin's-egg-blue Strat, making sure not to curl up any of the lovingly applied stickers.

They'd travel the world together, the nerdy rock star and the roadie who majored in management and minored in music, rocking the screaming masses in Japan and recording albums in London and Montreaux.

In reality, it took Ogie a long time to break out of the single-A rock world. A kid he knew from the backstage crew of the annual high school musical drafted him to schlep guitars for Poison Crown, a mopey emo band. After a few months he fell in with the Sinister Ministers, a dance-goth brother-and-sister duo who pretended they were each boys, or girls, depending on their mood. He quickly tired of hoisting their keyboards, drum machines and make-up cases from food courts to tattoo parlors to sex clubs.

Then there was the One Second Trio, a pop-punk band who cared more about skating than they did about

rocking. They were spoiled Orange County punks who had enough money for two vans and three roadies, so Ogie called up Brassy, who played guitar in his college band, and Frito, who grew up across the street from him.

He loved driving the van, the freedom of the road. And the gigs were fun, the crowd chanting along with the band and diving off the stage. He, Brassy and Frito were ninjas on stage, picking up dropped mic stands, taping down loose cables, sliding the bass drum back on its rug, tossing kids into the crowd who lingered too long on the stage.

Load-in, though, was a bitch. Rolling heavy amps, hoisting guitars, uncoiling cables, testing the PA, dealing with jackass club managers, begging for a free beer or three.

“Lugging amps in the / hot sun. . . .”

“I fought the law / and the law won.”

Dropping the Marshalls so he could put his hair up in a ponytail, Ogie craned his neck toward the mid-day fireball in the sky. He was boiling inside his leather-jacket sarcophagus.

“You sing like shit,” Brassy hissed. She tore her flannel shirt off, mostly to beat the heat, but partly to impress the nerds hanging around the club with her Motorhead t-shirt. Frito shredded his jeans with a box cutter while they were still in the van.

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Six months later Ogie told the brats to piss off after they got busted for skating in a yet-to-be opened public swimming pool and asked him to bail them out.

Before too long, because he was good at his job and, at six-foot-three with long hair and a pair of shark's tooth earrings, just a tad intimidating, Ogie found a new job with a band out of Hollywood. After (name deleted due to pending legal action) finished their set one night, Ogie hung at the bar hitting on a chick who, unbeknownst to him, was dating the drummer of the headliner, Rock Solid. Imposing but slow on his feet, Ogie got beat up pretty badly, which amused his fellow roadies and Rock Solid's singer. In short time the drummer was gone, as drummers often are, and Ogie made it a point to buy Rock Solid's singer drinks whenever he saw him around town.

When the singer, Blaze, asked Ogie to be his top dog roadie, Ogie accepted on the spot.

"Better to be schlepping crap for a second-tier roach band than a fourth-tier bunch of rats," Ogie told his girlfriend, Donna, the woman for whom he took a beating.

"That's great, Ogie," she said. "I'm pregnant."

Over the next year, Ogie worked harder than James Brown, doing everything for Rock Solid short of wiping their asses. He booked their gigs; brought Frito and Brassy on; upgraded the band's amps and guitars;

secured them promotional deals with string and drum stick companies; promoted the gigs to radio stations, cable access TV shows and 'zines; and worked the merch table whenever Blaze's girlfriends fought over him instead of selling t-shirts and CDs.

Blaze was happier than Mick Jagger rolling in money. His band was getting local radio play and headlining the Whiskey on a regular basis.

"Ogie, my boy, you're a genius!"

"Thanks, man," Ogie replied as he stood on the singer's front steps after dropping off a new t-shirt prototype. "Can I come in, man? It's hot, hot / hotter than hell out here!"

"You sing like shit," he said, slamming the door. Ogie was still standing there when Blaze whipped the door open again. "Oh yeah, we're going into the studio next week. My girlfriend's brother's gonna record us and he's got a few dudes to help us out. We'll let you know when we're ready to tour again."

The band broke up shortly after, just as Donna was going back to work at No Drones About It after a very generous maternity leave.

When Donna asked him if, after four months of fatherhood, he was ready to change a diaper, Ogie told the truth.

“Nope.”

“Ever watched anyone change a diaper?”

“Nope. Wish I’d added ‘wiping butts’ to my list of Rock Solid jobs.”

And so Ogie’s tenure as a stay-at-home dad began.

He tried, for a short time, to keep up the pace of loading in and out three nights a week for whatever fill-in job he could find, while changing diapers, warming formula and doing the cooking and cleaning during the day. He relied on a neighbor’s college-aged daughter to babysit on occasion.

He burned out.

“Better than fading away,” he quipped to his babysitter.

“Huh?”

“You never seen your old man’s Neil Young DVD’s?”

She stared at him like he was runny cheese on a post-gig, backstage platter.

“I know he’s got some....”

Ogie gave up the roadie life and settled into pushing Junior’s stroller around the neighborhood, singing songs and reading books to the boy, and watching old videos of

Company Time

Pearl Jam and Weezer while the little dude napped. He fell into a comfortable routine, and even joked with people that he worked as a “stay-at-home roadie.”

As Junior got older, the two of them spent time at the playground, Ogie pushing his son on the swings and chasing him through the tunnel maze. They also hung out with lots of moms and a few dads and their little ones at Gymboree, and sat quietly (most of the time) as the librarian read stories.

After a while, though, Ogie started going a bit “crazy train,” as he told one of the dads he knew. He hung scarves from the light post in their front yard. When the kids next door cranked up their mother’s karaoke machine in the backyard, Ogie wrote set lists and obsessively ran mike checks.

“Ogie,” Donna said to him one night as they sat on the porch after Junior had fallen asleep. “You’re not a roadie any more.”

“Always and forever,” he said.

“You can’t be,” she insisted. “We can afford a part-time nanny but I want you here at night, so you can’t go back. You can find a new job.”

“I know, I know. Junior’s gonna be in preschool soon.”

Donna convinced her company to hire Ogie to manage a small staff that ran alcohol and prescription drug

Company Time

delivery drones for actors and musicians. He brought on friends from the bands he used to lug equipment for, including the reunited Rock Solid, with whom he patched things up. Ogie called Weezer's management company, but got the brush-off like an underage kid with a fake ID.

It was fun coordinating drops of everything from \$3 bottles of MD 20/20 Blue Raspberry wine to \$1,800 magnums of Krug Brut David Sugar champagne with engraved "Quail Design in Flowering Tree," from legal marijuana with names like Afghan Diesel and Jupiter Kush, to Prozac, Vicodin and Viagra.

Ogie grew the business quite a bit over his nine-month tenure, and took great pride in the thank you emails that his clients sent.

Ogie,

Blaaaahhhhaaahhha.....your da man.

Blaze

Then one day Donna appeared in his office. She rarely crossed over into his business unit, so he knew something was up.

“Good news and bad news,” she said, flashing the slyest of smiles.

“We’re going through a merger. Your division is redundant, but mine is expanding. Turns out there are more people who want diapers delivered than there are semi-famous alcoholics.”

“So I’m out on the streets again.”

“Well ... ”

Ogie had three months to shut down the unit. Three months after that, Donna gave birth to Ramona.

The nanny refused to care for two children, and the agency they used, and all the other reputable ones, had waiting lists, so Ogie was back on the job as Domestic Overlord. Junior was in school from 9 to noon, but Ramona kept him on the clock from dawn ’til dusk and quite often from dusk ’til dawn.

Ogie hung in there for a while, happy to be the cool dad with leg tats and pierced ears at preschool drop-off and pick-up. But he was getting antsy.

“I’ve been thinking about it,” he said to Donna one night as he loaded the dishwasher. “Rock Solid is going to Europe in a few weeks and they haven’t replaced me yet.”

“Europe ... ”

“Hear me out. They’re going to London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam and a few other places.”

“How nice for you!” Donna jumped up and down, her rust-colored ponytail catching the fading sunlight coming through the bay window. “I hope you have a great time.”

“Seriously, babe. I don’t need to be there. I can do it all remotely.”

“You can’t be remotely serious.”

“Ha! Good one. But, yes, I’m serious. I can run things using EyeLet.”

“What the hell is EyeLet?”

“You run drones for a living and you don’t know what EyeLet is?”

“I’m guessing it’s a Google Glass-type thing.”

“Nail on head!”

“OK,” she said. “Give it a shot, but if it doesn’t work after a week, Blaze and the boys are gonna have to find an actual person to coordinate their rock and roll sexy time.”

That night, Ogie texted Blaze:

O: *Gonna tour wit u.*

B: *Whot? Leaving wifey?*

O: *No, idiot. Virtual tour manager.*

B: *What the funk is that?*

O: *Tell u tomorrow.*

“I don’t get it,” Blaze mumbled as he dragged off an e-cig the next day.

“You don’t need to, man. You just have to trust me.”

Ogie spent all his free time over the next week chasing down Frito and Brassy; securing equipment and booking flights; writing hopeful contract riders (“honey-lemon tea for Blaze, fifth of whiskey for drummer, one live turkey and two dozen sharpened pencils for bass player”); learning the ins and outs of EyeLet, a pair of Internet-connected glasses (“OK, EyeLet, get recipe for hand-breaded chicken nuggets and organic dinosaur fries”); teaching Brassy how to use her new video-call software so she could be his eyes in Europe; and convincing Blaze not to fear the “crazy 25th century robzoid technology.”

“Don’t worry, man. This is gonna work like Sam & Dave,” Ogie was saying to Blaze one afternoon via Skype.

“It better, Ogie. Or we’re gonna be deader ‘n Hendrix.”

“Daddy!!”

"In here, buddy."

Ogie was online ordering duct tape, guitar cords, cases of water, drum sticks, picks and anything else he could think of that they'd need when they arrived in London.

"Ogie?"

"Just a second, Junior," he said, distracted by a report on CNN.com about a solar flare erupting and flinging gases and intense storms earthward.

"The flares, or coronal mass ejections, will likely only magnify the intensity of aurora borealis, or Northern Lights," said the talking head.

"OK, what is it, Junior?"

"Uh, maybe you should call me Senior," Blaze said. "I am sorta your boss."

Standing in the doorway, buck naked, Junior laughed. "Senior! Can you call me that?"

"Uh," Ogie said. "Blaze, we're all set with the order. Skype ya later!"

"I need you to wipe my butt," Junior giggled.

"So, genius," Donna said to him the next morning as he washed a bowl of Cap'n Crunch down with some OJ.

"Huh?"

“All set for the Rock Solid tour?”

“I believe I am. Blaze’s putting his trust in me, and the rest of the band does what he says. Frito and Brassy know their parts. I have risen to the level of black belt in the fine arts of EyeLet. The advance team has been promoting the gigs across Europe with full steam ahead. Gonna be great!”

“So happy for you all,” she said as she rinsed her coffee cup. “One little question.”

“No, I don’t want to use your drones to deliver drinks from the bar to the band in the green room. Stop asking.”

“We’ll talk about that later. Different question.”

It was too early for this, Ogie thought. 5:30. The kids will be up soon. Busy day getting everything in order.

“Whatcha gonna do about the time change?”

“Yeah, I know, I know. What is it, seven or eight hours? They’re setting up at 7:30-8 o’clock in Merry Old England, I’m here having a marmite sandwich with some tea and coordinating it all.”

“Junior gets out of school at noon, my friend. And Ramona, when she’s not napping, will be screaming, pooping, eating, crying, pooping, eating and being too cute for words the entire afternoon. How’s that all gonna work?”

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"I'll set up some play dates, and bring in what's her name from next door for a few hours," he answered smugly.

"Seriously, Ogie? You can't remember the name of the girl who helped you out when Junior was a baby? It's Melissa. And she's got a real job now."

Silence.

"Did you really not think about all of this? Were you so excited about virtually hanging out with Blaze and his band, and reconnecting with Frito and Brassy, that you forgot you had kids to take care of?"

"Of course not. I just, kinda, didn't, uh, prioritize them."

Rock Solid's first gig was in a small pub about 10 miles outside London. Brassy Skyped Ogie as soon as the band was settled in their tight little hotel.

"Blaze's not happy."

"He rarely is," Ogie laughed. "Tell him you bought him a new scarf to hang on his microphone, then just put the brightest one at the top and he'll never know it's the same old silk."

"Ok. Club wants us there for sound check at 6:00."

“Get there at 5:30. I can get a look at the place after I drop Junior off at preschool. Make sure you load in the mic stands, microphones and Blaze’s monitor first.”

At noon, Hollywood time, as Rock Solid was hanging out backstage, Ogie made mac and cheese for Junior. The kid splashed some out of the bowl and burned his hand. Ogie rifled through the freezer trying to find his son’s favorite ice pack — the “Star Wars” one with “100% real Hoth ice crystals” — while simultaneously applying numbing spray on Junior’s wrist and cooing to Ramona that he’d get her out of her porta-crib in just a second.

Brassy was in the bathroom, so Frito was reminding him through EyeLet that the club owner needed Ogie to sign off on some extra cables.

“He’s really pissed,” Frito said. “And not the fun, British kind of pissed.”

“Sweetie baby, I’ll be right with you.”

“Uh, what?”

“I just need to fix Junior’s boo-boo and clean up the mac and cheese. Daddy’s coming!”

“Is that some kind of code?” Frito asked. “The owner can’t hear you, dude. You can just speak normal.”

“What?! Oh, sorry Frito. Man, I’m trying to keep shit, er, stuff, together in my kitchen. Tell the owner to beam

me over the contract and I'll e-sign it. Man, I wish I'd cloned myself."

"Wait, was that an option?"

They pulled off the first gig pretty well. Brassy and Frito didn't like Blaze hurling obscenities at them, and Ogie got distracted and yelled at Junior three times, successfully louder each time, to stop hitting on the bartender, before his son kicked him in the shins.

"Daddy, what're you talking about?"

While he made dinner for Donna and the kids that night, Ogie cranked "We Are the Champions" and danced around the kitchen. The local news was blaring something about a solar storm and satellites. Didn't that thing already blow over? Ogie thought.

"OK, EyeLet, tell me about the recent solar flares."

"Take those stupid nerd traps off!" Donna yelled at him.

The next show was slated for Liverpool's world-famous Cavern Club.

"OK, EyeLet," Ogie said to his new toy as he brewed coffee early one morning. "Show blueprint for the Cavern Club."

And in the blink of an eye, he was looking at the floor plan for the Cavern Club...in Boston's Hard Rock Café.

“OK, let’s try this again. EyeLet, show blueprint for the Cavern Club.”

“No blueprint available,” came the notice just above his right eye. “The Cavern Club is where you’ll find dynamic drag shows that go beyond the usual lip-syncs and laughs,” said the *L.A. Weekly* review that popped up over his left eye.

“EyeLet! Seriously? Show me the goddamn Cavern Club in Liverpool! It’s where The Beatles played!”

Despite Ogie’s EyeLet frustration, the Cavern Club gig went smoothly, or at least no worse than a typical stateside gig. Brassy scratched a guitar, Frito left the EyeLet in the bathroom, so Ogie ended up talking to himself in the loo for just a little too long.

“OK, EyeLet, call Blaze.”

“Calling fire department,” the lovely female voice said.

“No, no, no!!”

“Mate,” Blaze was saying gruffly a little while later over Skype. “I can’t trust Frito. He left your gizmo in the loo.”

“Listen to you being all British-y,” Ogie laughed. “Don’t worry. Everything’s under control.”

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Surprisingly, Ramona had no trouble napping to the smashing and grinding of Rock Solid blaring through her father's fancy glasses. Junior asked his "mates" if they fancied "going 'round the pub" after preschool. Ogie loved it; the teachers were not thrilled.

Donna didn't like him sacrificing quality time with the kids in favor of reliving his wilder, crazier days, albeit virtually. He wasn't drinking after gigs like he used to, but he'd leave his special goggles on after the gig, wandering around the house half-participating in family life while shouting out at random times, "Bottoms up, ya limey!"

"I'd like to take those EyeLets off your face and grind them into the dust," Donna would threaten on occasion.

"You want to take food out of your babies' mouths?" Ogie countered.

"You don't *need* this job! I make enough money, and if you want to work so badly, you can come back to No Drones About It. Deliver diapers to rock stars, or, uh, maybe you can set up a new unit delivering drinks backstage at festivals, or, or, better yet, water bottles to kids in the crowds at these mega-festivals!"

Ogie shook his head.

As for his current charges, they quickly crumbled in the face of some minor setbacks. Two gigs were

cancelled, one due to “piss poor ticket sales,” according to Blaze, the other because of a sudden club closure.

Blaze yelled at him a lot, frustrated to negotiate with his tour manager through a “goddamn fancy pair of spectacles worn by a useless moron.” The rest of the band took to just doing their own thing, ignoring Ogie’s suggestions and commands since he wasn’t physically there.

He tried to book Rock Solid for three nights in a hotel before their third gig, but the band had drunk too much of their money. After a night in “some crazy bloke’s shagging caravan,” as Blaze put it, and two in the backroom of a friendly pub, they played the show. The crowd was wired and the band played their hearts out. Ogie watched the whole thing through Brassy’s phone, pumping his fist and high-fiving Junior.

Great show! Frito texted.

I know! Ogie replied. *I was there (sorta).*

Oh, right....

Before she signed off for the night, Brassy panned the green room of the club. Blaze was in his element: holding court with the band and some fans, a Union Jack draping his scrawny shoulders, a girl on each arm.

"I think he's actually happy," Brassy said. "At least with the show. He still hates EyeLet and not having you here."

"Daddy, I want dessert!" Junior was standing there in his Superman underwear, a fork in one hand and a giant piece of ice cream cake dripping from his other.

"That's great, man. Is he gonna shag those birds or what?"

"Who, daddy? Superman?"

"Yeah," said Brassy. "He's gone through a few chicks a night. I've got a question for ya."

"DADDY! I WANT DESSERT!"

"Oh, Jesus! Sorry, Junior. Hey, whoa whoa whoa! You can't eat that. Put that back. Have a Gogurt."

"Who's gonna shag a bird, daddy? Can I shag a bird? I love birdies!"

"Yeah, daddy," chimed in Brassy. "Can Junior shag a bird?"

"Shag a bird! Shag a bird! Shag a bird!"

"Thanks, B. What's your question?"

"What do I need to do to get these guys into Paris?"

“Uh, well, they have passports. And Eurail passes, right?”

“What? You’re breaking up a bit on this end.”

Ogie took his EyeLet off, found the power button. He turned it off for a few seconds, and then back on. The screen in front of his eyes flickered, bringing up his most recent searches for kid-friendly restaurants, G-rated movies and nude pictures of the girl from *Sinister Minister*, after a buddy told him she’d joined *Suicide Girls*.

“Brassy, you there?”

The next morning was quiet, which in a house with two children under four means either: a) Donna took them to work to give him some rare peace and quiet; or b) the TV is on and the little brats have medicated themselves into a stupor with chocolate chip cookies.

He switched onto his back, his arm flinging over and smacking Donna right in the mouth.

“Hey!”

“Sorry, baby.” He couldn’t hear the TV. The telltale blips and bleeps weren’t coming from Junior’s little game gizmo. His neighbor wasn’t in his driveway yapping to his landscaper or handyman or anybody the way he does every single morning. Everything was quiet.

The clock by the bed was dead. The touch screen on his phone stared at him blankly like a Deadhead on a bad trip. His toothbrush had lost its spin. The nightlight was useless.

“Did you hear a car crash?”

“Nope.”

“Did a road crew dig unsafely?”

“How the hell should I know what’s going on?” Donna barked. “Go check on the kids.”

The white-noise machines were silent, the monitors stood mute sentries over the kids’ beds.

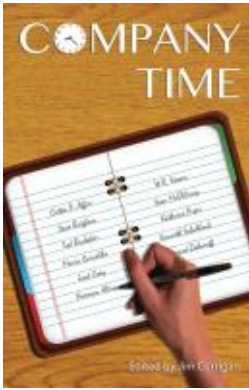
“Huh ... Did it rain last night?” he asked Donna when he got back to the hallway.

“It doesn’t rain here. Totally dry outside, beautiful sunshine.”

“Sunshine,” Ogie repeated. “Yes, sunshine.”

He picked up his EyeLet.

“Sun. Shine. Sun. Spot. Sun. Solar. Flare. Ah, crap ... ”



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