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## Same As It Ever Was

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## Same As It Ever Was *by Andrew Burke*

Outside the shops the footpath is  
thin and interrupted  
by parking signs. I tell you this because  
along comes an up-market gopher  
with tall zipped-up plastic walls  
like an oblong of shower curtains  
driven through the drizzle of  
a spring day. It parks outside the chemist  
and an old hand unzips a side panel  
carefully. Tall and stooped, rickety on  
frail legs, Merv leans on his walking stick  
and steps out, then just as carefully  
zips the panel up. He travels slowly  
on worn slippers, his stick as third leg.  
Down the path come two lads,  
twenty or so, cocky, sure of  
their balance and future.  
Mrs O'Reilly, grandson's hand  
in hers, moves closer to the wall.  
The boys don't notice. On legs  
swift and sure, a teenage schoolgirl  
walks past, hips alive, and as she passes  
she bends and waves at the boy.  
The big boys wave back,  
mockingly. They know her sister,  
the one with a rose tattoo. This one's  
younger, solitary, waiting  
at the lights, balancing first on

one leg, then the other. Just now  
a gleeful burst of young children  
runs down the street, gold and green  
streamers flying. Merv pauses  
in the doorway to let them pass.  
No respect, he thinks, no respect anymore.  
His gopher has left a thin stream  
on the footpath and one whooping boy  
takes a tumble, no worse than  
a fall at footy but today  
it's a fright and he rubs  
his coccyx. The chemist's girl  
comes to help. Merv waves  
his stick to Shoo! them away,  
then slowly zips up a panel,  
walking stick on his arm  
Hoagy Carmichael style. I  
watch from the prompter's pit  
how they play their roles so truly. I'm  
at The Globe when my wife returns,  
shopping bags in each arm. I start  
the car. She says, 'This lot'd cost  
a pretty penny without a pension card.'  
I steer out and over a speed hump,  
windows up tight against the wind.

**Andrew Burke** is an Australian writer with books of poetry published, small plays decades ago, short stories in literary mags, and a novel waiting to be published.

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