

the **UN**religious,  
**NON**family-oriented  
literary & art mag

CC&D

**v189**  
October '08

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## **Scars art**

7, 11 (images of: Mao Tse-tung picture at the entrance to the Forbidden City in Beijing China, the Great Wall of China, a Building at Confucius Temple in Shanghai China, a room in a palace in the Forbidden City in Beijing China, and a building at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing China). Cover art of metalwork



Hanging By A Thread,  
art by Nick Brazinsky



# the boss lady's editorial

## Too Many Laws

In Chicago, there is a law against driving your car on the streets of Chicago while using a cell phone. And you know, I remember an episode of *MythBusters* where they tested the responses of two people driving on a specially-designed course (with straight paths, curves and differing turns) (1) when they were sober, (2) when they were legally intoxicated, and (3) when they were talking, answering the same questions, on a cellular phone. They actually found that when both drivers were talking on the cell phone, their response time was even worse than it was when they were legally intoxicated. But, in such a liberal town, it seems to make sense to make it illegal to talk on the cell phone while driving (I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to kill people for the inadequate driving, to then find out they were talking on their phone).

BUT (yes, I all-capped that for a reason) when I think about it, there is already a law in effect that people on cell phones could be pulled over with. "Distracted driving" is what it's called, and anyone could be pulled over if their driving is at all impaired by talking on their cell phone, or putting on make-up, or eating, or I don't know, texting, or changing clothes while driving, or... anything else.

These laws are already in place. Why do we need a new law? I mean, I know members of Congress and the Senate can call themselves "lawmakers," but they really don't need to make a career out of creating additional repetitive (and therefore useless) laws.

As the years have passed, more and more laws have made their way into driving your car, and no one has questioned it. Consider the older law of wearing your seatbelt. It seems like a good idea, it will protect you in a car accident. However, what it comes down to is this: is that something lawmakers should really have control over? Insurance companies can charge more in their rates for people involved in accidents who were not wearing a seatbelt. See, that's how the market starts to solve the problem without adding more laws. I know that during some holidays (probably the ones where people will be pulled over more often for driving under the influence) cops also watch for people who are not wearing their seatbelt. What it then amounts to is a way for the cops to get more money into funding the police department. But my husband explained to me that he heard from his state police officer father that typically the cost of issuing of a ticket (even when the fees charged with the ticket were high) cost more than the actual fine received.

Wow, does that stat hold true even in Chicago? They have high fines with tickets in Chicago... Well, there were high fines in the state of Pennsylvania at the time, and that stat held true there. I don't know if it's the court time the processing of the

finer take up, or having to have an officer on duty to sit and wait for these violations to issue tickets, or what, but it's scary to think that these efforts with these laws might actually be costing us more money.

Oh, another law passed in Illinois: as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, people are not allowed to smoke in any public building – and in Chicago, you're not allowed to smoke on the Lakefront (so if you want to go to the beach to enjoy the water, you can't even smoke outside there).

Wow, they are restricting smoking in public, and the Lakefront. It's funny, at the Lakefront, they don't allow you to bring food or drink, and now you are not allowed to smoke (you know, where the wind from the lakefront will disperse smoke). I know people go to the beach in Chicago to either get some sun or walk your dog or play volleyball, but it seems a bit of a pain to force people to purchase water at an insanely high price from a beach vendor. So much for picnicking at the beach to enjoy time with your family.

And as for smoking in bars or restaurants ...I've been to a lot of bars and restaurants, and the smoke hasn't really bothered me. I can think of only one place where the smoke from people in the bar bothered me. This bar, right by our house, has people smoking right by me, and the smoke seems to be magnetically drawn to me every time they light up (which seems to be all the time). And like every other bar around in Chicago now, they have that big filter in the center of the room on the ceiling, but it doesn't seem to do much good at this one bar. So a part of me (at least for this one bar by my house) thinks this is a great idea.

But in the same respect, I know a bar in the Chicago suburb of Skokie (which I never had a problem with the smoke in) who had smoking allowed in their bar before it was outlawed in their town. They actually had provisions made for the smoking law to allow them to allow smokers in the bar – because they had a lot of business, and cutting smokers would cut a lot of people from this major social venue in Skokie. It sounds silly, but people decided to go there, and the smoking wasn't that big of an issue in the first place, and people who decided to go there knew what the environment was like. They were okay with it, and lawmakers adjusted the law to accommodate them.

And I think that's what it should really come down to. Smoking may suck for nonsmokers, but I made the choice to go to bars where people might smoke whenever I was old enough to drink. It was a choice I made, and I never felt like I should tell someone else they shouldn't smoke (in this relatively public place, I know it's privately owned, but they invite the public into their establishment...). If I really hated the smoking that much, I wouldn't have gone.

Which I suppose might apply to the bar by my place right now, but I have never complained about smokers while I was there. Smoke in bars was *my* problem that someone else was smoking at a place I decided to frequent.

I remember when I was little, by dad smoked, and when we drive anywhere, I always sat behind him in the station wagon. He always had the air on, the windows were rolled up, and then he'd light up a PallMall. The smoke could go right

toward me since I was behind him. I'd ask about opening the window, and he's say no way, we've got the air on, So there I sat. And no, that's not a cool thing, and I don't think people should have to be around smoke if they don't want to. But we're adults now, so if we have an issue with smoke in a certain public place, we could just stop going there. Smoking isn't cool, but it isn't illegal, so the choice should remain ours. It shouldn't be the choice of lawmakers to decide who can smoke what legal substances where.

Right after 9/11/01, lawmaker passed a slew of laws to stop such an atrocity from ever happening again to innocent people in our country. Everyone was in a fervor about this attack with our own airplanes on our iconic New York buildings and on the Pentagon, and everyone wanted to do something – even if all they could think of doing was passing a law or two to help stop future terrorist attacks.

And there were people out there who had problems with the way the Bush administration dealt with the 9/11 situation (like attacking Iraq because they actually thought that Iraq had something to do with the attacks, when it was pretty obvious to me that Iraq had nothing to do with it). Bush haters are probably still insanely mad that President Bush didn't get up from reading with kids immediately when he heard a plane struck a building in New York (sorry, but showing panic would instill more panic in everyone, which is *not* his job, and without adequate information there wasn't much he could instantaneously do anyway). These dissenting people (and probably a lot more than just the dissenters) saw problems with the then-passed Patriot Act.

I was originally going to write an editorial about only the problems with the Patriot Act. Because there are a lot of people who have found problems with it, and I have never been particularly fond of the idea of giving our government that much leeway in investigating anything, and possibly overstepping boundaries and infringing our rights as citizens of the United States. I found a web posting by Xeni Jardin 09/26/07 that quoted Kurt Opsahl (<http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/>) of the Electronic Frontier Foundation:

'Judge Ann Aiken of the Oregon Federal District Court ruled that two provisions of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), "50 U.S.C. 1804 and 1823, as amended by the Patriot Act, are unconstitutional because they violate the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution."

Our government conducted warrantless surveillance on an Oregon attorney whom they believed was possibly associated with a Madrid bombing. This assumption occurred because of mistaken fingerprint identification. Bloomberg even published an update to this story ([http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=email\\_en&refer=home&sid=aesy7F4nh.A](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=email_en&refer=home&sid=aesy7F4nh.A)), where people from our government state they believe with the Patriot Act is constitutional.

In "Judge Strikes Down Part of USA Patriot Act" (posted by Daniel J. Solove), he explains that "To understand the judge's ruling, a bit of background is necessary, and it is easiest to provide a brief excerpt from my article, *Reconstructing Electronic Surveillance Law*, 72 *Geo. Wash. L. Rev.* 1264 (2004):

FISA creates a different regime for surveillance to obtain “foreign intelligence” information than the ECPA regime that governs regular government surveillance. The regime created by FISA is designed primarily for intelligence gathering agencies to regulate how they gain general intelligence about foreign powers within the borders of the United States. FISA is very permissive; it provides for expansive surveillance powers with little judicial supervision. FISA permits electronic surveillance and covert searches pursuant to court orders, which are reviewed by a special court of eleven federal district court judges known as the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (“FISC”). The court meets in secret, with the government presenting applications for orders *ex parte*. If the government receives an adverse decision, it can appeal to a three-judge panel.

FISA’s protections against surveillance are much looser than those of the ECPA. Under the ECPA and the Fourth Amendment, surveillance is only authorized if there is a showing of probable cause that the surveillance will uncover evidence of criminal activity; under FISA, however, orders are granted if there is probable cause to believe that the monitored party is a “foreign power” or “an agent of a foreign power.” Unlike the ECPA, FISA surveillance is therefore not tied to any required showing of a connection to a criminal investigation. FISA does not have this safeguard since it is about gathering general intelligence about other countries and their activities within the United States. FISA orders can last for ninety days as opposed to thirty days for an ECPA order.

FISA was designed to address the issues left open by the Supreme Court in *United States v. United States District Court* (commonly known as the “Keith” case), 407 U.S. 297 (1972). In that case, the Court distinguished between three types of surveillance:

(1) electronic surveillance for domestic criminal investigations — the Court held a warrant with probable cause is required pursuant to the Fourth Amendment.

(2) “domestic security surveillance” — the Court held that “different standards may be compatible with the Fourth Amendment if they are reasonable both in relation to the legitimate need of Government for intelligence information and the protected rights of our citizens.”

(3) surveillance of “foreign powers or their agents” — the Court declined to indicate whether the Fourth Amendment would apply to this kind of surveillance but suggested that warrantless surveillance of foreign agents “may be constitutional.”

So, to sum up, there are three categories of surveillance — (1) domestic criminal surveillance gets strong Fourth Amendment protection (warrant and probable cause); (2) domestic security surveillance gets less stringent protection under the Fourth Amendment (reasonableness); and (3) foreign intelligence surveillance may or may not be covered by the Fourth Amendment, the issue remaining unresolved.

This set the stage for FISA, which operates in category (3) above. Congress sought to avoid Fourth Amendment problems by confining

FISA to situations involving the gathering of foreign intelligence from foreign powers or agents. That's why, in order to get a FISA order, the government had to establish that the purpose of the investigation was gathering foreign intelligence and that it had probable cause that those under surveillance were foreign agents.

Thus, FISA operates in a zone that is supposedly left open under Fourth Amendment law (which would require a warrant to engage in wiretapping and many other forms of surveillance). The Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) of 1986 (which incorporates Title III, commonly known as the "Wiretap Act") regulates domestic wiretapping and surveillance and is designed to comport with the Fourth Amendment's requirements (it is sometimes even more protective than the Fourth Amendment). If FISA doesn't apply, government surveillance is governed by the stronger protections of ECPA."

But the more I looked at the question of overstepping boundaries in the with the Patriot Act, the more I wondered if we were once again just creating more laws to restrict our own freedoms, when a lot of laws already exist. Consider that the United States was started in turbulent times, there probably were laws covering how to deal with these turbulent issues (I mean, we did start this country by battling another country, we weren't nonviolent objectors when this country was started). And when the Marine Corps started, they were even battling Barbary Pirates who were blackmailing the United States from across the ocean (in Tripoli, the first lines of the Marine Core Hymn are "From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli"). But apparently, when the United States was just starting, we "attacked Tripoli under circumstances that are eerily similar to contemporary times" (according to the Thomas Jewett article "Terrorism In Early America: The U.S. Wages War Against The Barbary States To End International Blackmail and Terrorism," [http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2002\\_winter\\_spring/terrorism.htm](http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2002_winter_spring/terrorism.htm)).

My point from all of this is that we started this country fighting battles like this, and although circumstances may be slightly different, we probably already have courses of action that have existed in our histories to solve our problems – and adding more laws might not be the solution.



*Janet Kuypers*®

Janet Kuypers  
Editor in Chief

guest editorial  
by John Yotko

# **Fascism and the Delivery of Democracy to the Middle East**

John J. Yotko

Before you go passing judgment about me based on the title of this piece, let me explain myself. I enjoy the blessings of this country and I have served in both the Army and the Marines so that others may enjoy the blessings that I have helped secure. I know that in the United States, we have the best form of government that the human mind is currently capable of creating. Maintaining it is a delicate balance between security and liberty. As Ronald Reagan said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.”

There are many ways of looking at Fascism. Generally when one thinks of it, those who remember and those who study history think of Mussolini and Hitler. They think of the dark side of the human condition.

Fascism is, in its primary state, a political philosophy, an ideology. It is relatively new, having its birth in the latter part of the nineteenth century and not really taking root until the 1890's. It is a Romantic philosophy. A philosophy based on intuition, emotion, and mythology. The corporate state is built around the strong leadership of an individual where industry is controlled by a combination of the workers and the owners under the watchful eye of a benevolent government. The heroic, omnipotent father figure is the embodiment of the will of the nation acting on a divine mandate. It espouses an extreme form of nationalism, which insists that citizens are subordinate to the state. We are merely a part of the national whole, which alone gives meaning to our lives. At its core, Fascism denies that humans are motivated by reason and logic but by mythological stories. Fascism promotes Social Darwinism, insisting that struggles between nations are natural and inevitable.

So here we are as a nation (divided) falling in line behind President Bush, to support him in his “mandate” to carry out His agenda in the Middle East. Irrespective of the quality of form of government that we have, it is still Fascism when we engage in the establishment of democra-



cies. I also oppose militarism. We have no right, no moral ground to stand on, to push our form of government on any other nation. This nation building that the White House has led us into is a form of Social Darwinism. One cannot use warfare to accomplish what that person feels is a morally worthy goal. Ethics would call that goal morally tainted.

We must let the people of Iraq select the form of government that they choose. Our forefathers rose up against the colonialism of the British Empire and shed their blood so that we may live free. You may say that the voter turnout at the polls in Iraq is an indication of the peoples will to be free and democratic. I believe they wish to be free. I also believe that the voter turnout is more a reflection of the fear of another imperialist cloaked in the benevolence of the United States military. In addition, are the people of Iraq aware of what freedom means? Do they understand the need for self-reliance and personal responsibility in a free society?

Fascism is delivering democracy to the Middle East whether they want it or not. Now that we have begun this campaign of nation building, are we prepared to pay the toll on this highway to a grand global democracy?



poetry  
the passionate stuff

## Two Not Mute Haikus

Janet Kuypers

I

Just sit quietly.  
Rapes, beatings, torture and pain.  
We can beat you down.

II

You can't be quiet.  
Try to fight the world's evils —  
Even with just words.

# (hate)

by rsshcheerer

stuffed with the propaganda of ignorance  
passed between generations like a starving gene  
nourished and fed by a society too blinded  
by its own greed for dominance to notice theirs  
they mark themselves with symbolic pride  
wear their beliefs upon their pale skin like screams  
bemoaning the wrongs inflicted upon them as if  
the world owes them a debt and *god damn it* they will collect  
through havoc and disaster until they have washed  
in oceans of violence and been baptized by blood  
and still it is not enough to vindicate them  
it is only a ripple when they long for a wave  
a thunderstorm when they want hurricanes  
it will never be enough to quell their hateful lust  
they are poison that has been injected into society  
consumed by fire and spread like an epidemic in its veins  
while the rest of the world sleeps with open eyes and  
blank stares before the televisions and radios and newspapers  
deluded by the belief that it will never touch them if they  
avoid the demon eyes and allow the pillage of its share of souls  
trying to ignore that cold breath against their own necks  
when the sun is clogged with the darkness of a world gone mad  
because this fucking war should be about power not fear  
they should be held as saints and martyrs for their roles  
this is what they tell themselves and those who might listen do nothing  
but play deaf and mute while the body count rises in the streets and  
blood pools and spreads to forge a path for that next generation  
of zealots and fools who follow without taking the time  
to ever ask why as they place their feet upon the bloody path  
of a map that leads to inevitable destruction and desolation  
refusing to learn from the past as these cretins usher themselves into  
extinction by fighting a war they swear they never started while  
ignoring the blatant fact that when day and night are one with the  
stench of smoke and burning flesh they will open their eyes  
to find that their fates have always been the same



Well they were married in June  
But the baby never came  
She said "You promised, you promised me  
You promised me you would

You said we couldn't have a baby  
Until I made you my husband  
Look at the pretty ring  
Now where's our kid?"

He doesn't go out drinking with his buddies  
He comes home after work  
Sits around in his grease stained shirt  
Waiting for his dinner

## **What She Needs**

If she asked him, he would give her the moon  
If she asked him, the stars would be hers  
He would give her damn near anything  
Just to see her smile

**Julia  
O'Donovan**

He just wants a little more affection  
Not that she ignores me  
He just doesn't get all of her  
Because she doesn't know what's hers to give

He criticizes the guy next door  
The jealous guy with no satisfaction  
The baby wakes up screaming  
He gets in the car and goes

Jealousy, well he's got it too  
I no longer come around  
To see my old friend  
Because he always puts on a show

In silence he lets me know  
'She's got me she needs no confidante  
I give her all the understanding she needs  
She doesn't need anyone but me'

# I Trip on My Poems (Version 2)

Michael Lee Johnson

In the night when poems  
are born, I search for the hidden words,  
secrets stretch inside my metaphors  
Even near my tender moments  
when the images blossom into rain flowers  
I trip on stems cut my way lose to nowhere.  
I go there to see what I can find.



## Untitled

John Francis



Image supplied by John Francis

A donkey ate a book  
Called "Teach yourself Chinese"  
He started talking Mandarin  
Then sang in Cantonese



# The Mirror Replies (Yawn of the Noose)



Joshua Copeland





The mirror projects a face that  
Flickers with self-doubt,



Absolutely nothing;



And fortresses hugged by three layers of fierce steel  
And golden handrails tracing sleekly marble stairs.

Instead, that face—it can't be my face—lacks a history,  
It lacks a past, it lacks a cursory, backward glance.  
Without the past, no present, without the present, no future.  
I will be until I quit being,  
Until I give myself over to the friction and the adversity  
Of *The Thousand Step Staircase*.

“Everything is wrecked and unmade and disposed of,”  
Says the mirror. “You must dream in order to become,  
And without the gelatinous fog of dreams,  
The noose awaits,  
The yawning and knotted loop an eager mouth...  
...spine into shards...”

---

## Knockdown

Eric Obame

Warmed up and ready to go  
Mind focused on the destination  
The journey will take care of itself  
I have a clear path  
I shift into Drive  
I roll switching gears—switching lanes  
Weaving in and out of traffic  
Doing well driving offensively  
Creating openings—spotting holes and shooting for them  
Black

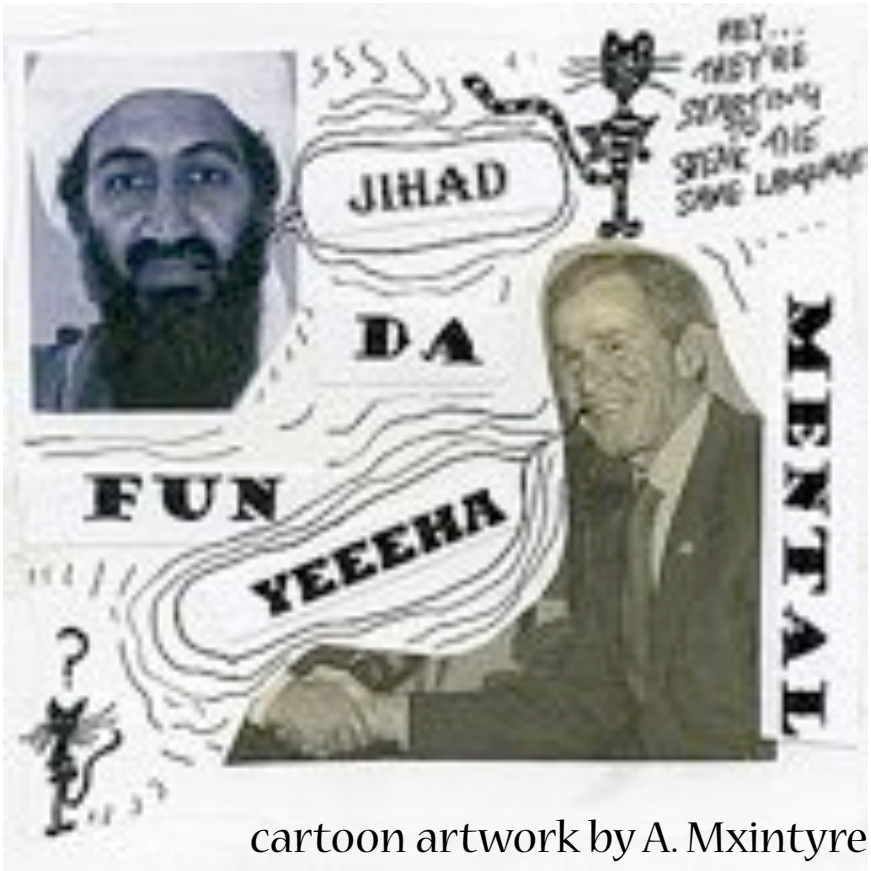
What?  
Slower  
I am off  
Must have hit a bump—driven over a pothole  
Battery connection came loose  
Get up  
Fix it  
Traffic is still coming and I am in the way  
I need time to get my system back on—to get back up to speed  
Not fast enough to cruise in this lane now  
I need to get to the side and roll to a stop, before I crash  
Drive defensively  
Move  
Switch lanes  
Keep moving  
Avoid getting hit  
Avoid getting caught by traffic  
Just get to the side, and roll to a stop

# Human On My Faithless Arm

David Thompson

I didn't recognize the name Wistan when he introduced himself to me up on deck. I was very young then, sailing to England for the first time. Lonely and up for adventure, I accepted his invitation to tea in his cabin though he wasn't my type, too old and almost comically jowly.

He sat very close, handed me a sheet of fine onionskin and began to rub my shoulders. I'm a poet, he said. Do you like this? After I read the opening lines, *Lay your sleeping head, my love, Human on my faithless arm,* I answered him with a slow kiss, let him push me down gently on his soft, unmade bed.



cartoon artwork by A. Mxintyre



# Whore of Babylon

Je'free

Mother of harlots  
Arrayed in purple and scarlet,  
Decked with precious stones,  
Gold and pearl,  
Raise your golden cup  
Full of abominations  
Sway your cradle of filth

Fornicatrix, wantonly violent,  
And bloodthirsty entity,  
Kings of the earth commit fornication  
Inhabitants of the earth are drunk  
With your wine

Ishtar, goddess of fertility,  
Sexual love and war,  
Antichrist, vampire erotica,  
Divine personification of Venus,  
Courtesan of the gods,  
Cult of sacred prostitution,  
Sit on many waters, peoples,  
Multitudes, nations & tongues  
Ride the seven-headed beast

Your apocalyptic downfall  
Is prophesied at the hands  
Of the same beast



Oaxaca street art,  
photographed by  
Brian Hosey and  
Lauren Braden

prose  
the meat and potatoes stuff

## Simon and Papa John

Ed Coet

Simon Gaunt wasn't your average teenager, even though his circumstances resembled the experiences of some of the most troubled of youth in modern-day America. Simon was the second oldest of three children. Their father, Henry Gaunt, was an alcoholic who couldn't hold down a job. He deserted his family when Simon was just two years old.

Simon's baby sister Tammy had just been born. Simon's older brother Martin was still just a youngster himself. The responsibility of providing for three children was not in Henry Gaunt's plans. When he left, he never called or visited his family again.

Henry Gaunt did not provide for his family in any way. He didn't even send birthday or Christmas cards much less presents. He was an irresponsible and self-serving bum. He didn't care about his family or anyone else.

Simon's mother, Mary Gaunt, had become pregnant with Mark, Simon's older brother, when she was a 16-year old high school student. She dropped out of school to marry Simon's father. Mary believed Henry Gaunt's love proclamations and surrendered her virginity to him while under the influence of some cheap wine. Henry had encouraged her to drink to intoxication.

Mary Gaunt convinced herself that Henry would love and take care of her and their child. She ignored every warning that family and friends tried to tell her. Mary refused to believe that Henry was only interested in sex. Henry reluctantly married Mary only because his parents told him that it was the right thing to do. His parents pressured him to "do the right thing."

Henry Gaunt kept Mary barefoot and pregnant for five years as they survived on welfare, food stamps, and family handouts. He remained unemployed and in a perpetual state of drunkenness the entire time.

When Mary finally had enough and insisted that Henry stop drinking and fulfill his family responsibilities and obligations, out the door he went! Without a high school diploma, Mary Gaunt was forced to work for minimum wage if she could get a job at all. Half the time she was out of work.

Mary tried to provide for her three children as best she could. She understood the huge mistake that she made in her youthful indiscretions. That mistake would define her life, and that of her children, for many years to come. Without an education Mary Gaunt was destined to a life of poverty living in the Five Points area on the East Side of Denver, Colorado.

Five Points was the projects area that most often was referred to as “the slums” or “the ghetto.” The area was infested with poor sanitation, rodents, and numerous health hazards. On every corner, one could see alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, and freeloaders. All manner of violence and crime was commonplace daily, especially after nightfall. It was an ugly and dangerous place to live. Still, rent was cheap in these run down and rat infested tenements and it was the only place Mary Gaunt could afford to live as a single parent of three children.

Concerned about what would happen to her children if she lived in “the ghetto” too long, in desperation, Mary turned to prostitution to support her family. Mary Gaunt was an attractive woman. She reasoned that with the money she could earn through prostitution she could save up and move her family out of Five Points.

Mary dreamed about finishing high school and picking up a trade of some kind. She fantasized about someday having a socially acceptable job that would enable her to move her kids out of poverty without her having to sell her body.

Every day before she came home, Mary would pray that God would forgive her for the sinful manner in which she earned her living. Her work filled her with shame and guilt. Mary’s parents disowned her. They even turned their back on her children, their own grandchildren, upon learning of Mary’s immoral lifestyle. Mary was terrified that her children would also find out that she was a prostitute. She feared losing their love and respect. Sadly, her secret would have to be revealed to them.

Shortly after Simon’s 8th birthday, Mary was diagnosed with HIV. Her many liaisons as a prostitute would prove to be fatal. A week before Simon’s 12th birthday his mother, whom he dearly loved, died in incredible pain from AIDS.

Now homeless, Simon’s grandfather, John Gaunt, whom they lovingly called “Papa John,” was the only relative that Simon, Mark, and Tammy could turn to. Papa John happily and lovingly accepted them into his humble home despite the fact that he was poor in health and in wealth.

That hadn’t always been the case. Once Papa John had been a true specimen of a man. He was an army paratrooper, a ranger, and a Special Forces intelligence officer. He mastered a variety of martial arts styles while stationed in Japan, Korea, Okinawa and Brazil. Papa John was an accomplished expert in Korean Tae Kwon Do, Okinawa Kaji Kempo, Japanese Sho Do Kan, and Brazilian Ju Jit Su.

He was also a Special Forces master fitness trainer and self-defense instructor. Papa John was not one to boast about his extraordinary physical attributes. He was a humble man, a man of faith.

Only his wife and a few select people knew that that Papa John was the foremost martial artist in the United States Army and perhaps the best in the world. He was so fast and deadly that he could thrust his hand in to a man’s chest, pull his heart out, and show it to him before he died. The Special Forces considered Papa John to be a human secret weapon.

Once, while on a secret military mission, Papa John was shot twice while saving the lives of two fellow soldiers. They were being held hostage by terrorists. Papa John killed five of the seven terrorists in hand-to-hand combat, all by himself, prior to being shot.

The two remaining terrorists, upon witnessing what happened to the other five, didn't stick around to see if their bullets had killed Papa John. They were too afraid of Papa John's extraordinary martial arts abilities. Papa John received America's highest award for valor, the Congressional Medal of Honor, for the heroics he displayed on that particular mission.

Few people took notice when the President presented it to him. The citation had to be classified due to the secret nature of the operation. While presenting Papa John with the Medal of Honor, the President openly wept. He said America had never had a more courageous, selfless, and patriotic hero than Papa John.

Sadly, because of the secrecy involved in his military missions, the public could not know about his heroics. Papa John was medically discharged, under honorable conditions. His combat wounds forced his medical retirement. He was provided with a small veteran's disability pension.

Papa John recovered from the bullet wound in his chest but the second bullet lodged in his spine. It paralyzed him from the waist down. Beth, his wife, worked as long as she could to help out financially.

Sadly, Beth Gaunt was diagnosed with breast cancer. She died just two years after Papa John's discharge from the army. Papa John was devastated. He loved Beth so deeply that he would never fully recover from her loss.

It was hard for Papa John to go on living. Wheelchair bound, Papa John lived on his small VA pension in a tiny Five Points apartment where a seemingly ungrateful society could care less about his war wounds, heroism, and national service. Only Simon and Tammy, and his deep faith in God, gave him the will to go on.

Time passed by quickly and Martin, Simon's brother, turned 19 while serving a 20-year sentence in the Texas State Prison. He had been convicted of trafficking in illegal drugs and narcotics. Martin Gaunt had already served two terms in a juvenile detention center for possession of illegal drugs, involvement in gang activities, and repeated expulsion from school for poor attendance, failing grades, and a long history of inappropriate behavior.

Unbeknownst to Papa John, Martin had already been involved in drugs and gang activity while his mother was still alive. Martin was a drug addict. He developed his drug addiction through involvement in the East Side Raiders or ESR as they called themselves. ESR was a gang that recruited its members locally. They tried to establish a sort of perverted community bond.

The ESR recruited young. They focused on teenagers who were immature, impressionable, gullible, and easily led. Gang leaders slowly initiated and grew them into the gang. By the time they were old enough and mature enough to understand what they had gotten themselves in to, they had already developed a drug habit and a history of involvement in criminal activities. The gang was like an "evil" family that they needed to feed their out of control drug habits. They also needed to maintain a protective gang shield because rival gangs soon targeted them.

Once in the ESR you were committed for life. You could never quit or leave. The gang, fearful that you would tell what you knew about gang activities, would kill you and even members of your family if you tried to leave the ESR. The ESR

was extremely violent.

For its youngest members, the ESR leaders made gang life seem like a brotherhood that looked out for each other. Nothing could be further from the truth. All loyalties were for the ESR, even before family and God. Few members actually believed in God. Those few who did have faith dared not mention God in gang circles.

Papa John was determined not to let Simon and Tammy fall into gang activity and drugs like their older brother Martin did. He decided to teach Simon the many martial arts skills that he himself had mastered. Although Papa John's disability prevented his performing many of the techniques he had mastered, he still had them committed to memory. He still knew how to explain and teach them. Papa John wanted Simon to be able to protect himself and his younger sister.

On Simon's 16th birthday, Papa John finally told Simon about his years in clandestine Special Forces operations. The stories intrigued Simon, but he wondered if it could all be true. Papa John also showed Simon the Medal of Honor that was given to him for bravery above and beyond the call of duty. Simon admired it even though he didn't understand the medal's full significance.

Papa John made Simon promise to never reveal the secret skills he would teach him. Simon promised to keep the secret always, and Simon's word was his bond.

Papa John combined social skills and morality lessons, based on his Christian faith, with Simon's martial arts instruction. He taught Simon the evils of drugs, alcohol, and gang activity. He taught Simon that no matter how poor he was he could never justify getting involved in criminal activities. He taught Simon the importance of studying hard and how a good education would be his ticket out of poverty.

Simon listened carefully. He was a very good student. He was also a very good person. Papa John explained that the martial arts were for self-defense and defense of the weak only. He explained how many people fight out of pride and lose their honor as a result. He explained the importance of being non-violent and humble.

Papa John said there was no shame in walking away from a fight. He said that it was dishonorable to stand and fight, out of sheer pride, just so that other people wouldn't think you were a coward. Papa John said, "Doing the right thing is much more important than risking hurting someone or getting hurt yourself, just so others will think that you are a tough guy." He also said, "If there is any means of escape, you must leave, even run away before standing and fighting."

Papa John taught Simon to fight only as a last resort when he had no possible means of escape. The only other time fighting was permissible was in defense of the weak or the defenseless. Examples included coming to the aide of an elderly person who was being assaulted, a defenseless woman in peril or a handicapped person being attacked. Papa John made sure that Simon understood and believed these important values before he taught him any of the deadly martial arts skills.

For two years Simon learned the martial arts in secret from Papa John. He learned advanced techniques that were not taught in local karate schools, techniques that weren't even known by other martial arts instructors. His

training was intense and rigorous. It involved a great deal of conditioning.

Other than school, homework, chores, and church, Simon spent all his remaining hours learning, practicing, and studying martial arts from the world's foremost martial arts master: Papa John.

At the age of 18, Simon had learned everything that Papa John had to teach him. He was even better than Papa John had been in his prime because Papa John also taught Simon how to avoid those few mistakes that he himself had made. Simon was now the most accomplished, the best, and the most dangerous martial artist in the world. But nobody but he and Papa John knew it. That's the way they both wanted it.

Two weeks after Simon's 18th birthday, and eight weeks before he was scheduled to graduate from high school, Papa John died of a massive heart attack. He was given a poor man's funeral, but with military honors. Simon wanted to do more, but this was all he and Tammy could afford. Only Simon, Tammy, and a priest attended Papa John's funeral service.

However, much to Simon's surprise, an official-looking staff car with four shiny silver stars imbedded in a red plate pulled up to the burial site at the veterans' cemetery where Papa John was being buried. As the bugler played taps, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, America's highest ranking general, got out of the staff car and walked up to Papa John's coffin. For several minutes he solemnly stood at attention giving a rigid and respectful hand salute to the coffin where Papa John laid in rest.

Receiving a folded American flag from the honor guard, he walked up to Simon and said, "I am here representing the President of the United States, myself, the United States Army, and the American people. On behalf of a grateful nation, I offer this flag to you in memory of Papa John, the greatest secret hero in American history. May he rest in peace." Then the general departed. Simon now knew with certainty that all the stories Papa John had told him were true. He and Tammy cried uncontrollably.

All through school, kids picked on and made fun of Simon. They made fun of his clothes and his shoes. Being so poor, Papa John could only afford to buy second-hand clothes from a local thrift shop. They also made fun of Simon because he studied and received good grades. They called him a geek, a nerd, and a number of other profane names. They called Simon a coward because he would walk and sometimes run from fights.

The so-called good kids would have nothing to do with Simon because he was poor and lived in the bad part of town. They knew Simon's brother was a convicted criminal. Many of them heard the rumors that Simon's mother was a prostitute and that his father was an alcoholic bum who deserted them. They joked about it in pure meanness. Their cruel objective was to offend and upset Simon.

The local gangs, especially the ESR, left Simon alone because they thought he was a coward and weakling. They didn't want to recruit such wimps into their gang. They also knew Simon would have nothing to do with drugs, tobacco, or alcohol. Simon was spit on, tripped, pinched, poked, scratched, bitten, slugged and had

objects thrown at him. All he ever did in response was to turn the other cheek and just walk or run away. Simon did this even though he knew that he had the ability to wipe them all out if he really wanted to. Even on those few occasions when Simon became angry enough to fight, he remembered the promise he made to Papa John. Then he would back off, controlling and composing himself. Simon loved and respected Papa John more than anyone. He could never break his promise to him.

Simon and Tammy still lived in Papa John's apartment after he died. One day as Simon approached the apartment, he heard a horrifying scream. It was Tammy pleading for someone to help her.

Simon dropped his books and rushed to the apartment door with world-class sprinter speed. The door was locked. Simon yelled "Ki Aii!" Then he leaped into the air and did a turning back kick into the door. His kick landed with such power that the door burst into slivers. The sound of the cracking hard wood door could be heard a block away.

Simon saw three members of the ESR holding his sister. Butch, the gang leader, was unzipping his pants. They were about to gang-rape Tammy. Simon instinctively knew this was one of those rare occasions when fighting was acceptable. He knew that Papa John would approve of his intervening to help his desperate sister.

Simon quickly went into action as Butch called out to the gang members - "Get him!"

The first gang member to reach Simon was the recipient of a flying sidekick into his throat. All one heard was a quick "ugh" sound as his limp body flopped to the floor with blood flowing from his mouth. Two gang members tried to hold Simon as the third attempted to stab Simon with a knife.

Simon did a flip between the two-gang members who were holding his right and left arms and shoulders. This caused them to crash their heads together. They were both knocked out cold. Simon then did a crescent kick with such speed and power that it knocked the knife through the wall while breaking the arm and dislocating the shoulder of the gang member who was holding it.

Then Simon cupped his hands and with lightening speed hit another gang member's ears so hard that the pressure caused his eyes to pop out of his head, blinding him. His pain was agonizing. It was a scary, bloody, ugly sight.

Engulfed in fear and horrified by the lightning speed with which Simon had utterly destroyed four of their fellow gang members, all of whom were known to be big and tough, two of the remaining three ESR gang members jumped out of the nearest window. They jetted away with the speed expected from anyone who genuinely feared for their lives. Both gang members soiled themselves from shear fear and the terror of what they had just witnessed.

Now all that was left was the ESR gang leader Butch. Butch was the biggest, meanest, baddest, toughest, and the most feared of any gang member. At six feet seven inches tall, Butch towered over Simon. He weighed 275 pounds. Every ounce of Butch was solid muscle from many years of heavy bodybuilding and illegal steroid use. His muscles bulged everywhere. When he flexed, his shirt split open in the chest and in the arms. It seemed as if his muscles popped out of other

muscles. His fists were huge, like fire plugs. He hit like a sledgehammer. As if this were not enough, Butch was also a black belt karate master in his own right.

Butch gritted his teeth. He shouted to Simon, "Prepare to die, punk!" Then Butch lunged forward. It didn't matter. Unbeknownst to Butch he had just picked a fight with Simon Gaunt, grandson and student of Papa John Gaunt. Butch was about to find out that Papa John had trained and developed Simon into the most dangerous man alive.

Simon met Butch with a flurry of reverse punches, chops, and backhands that were so fast that they would have looked like a blur on even a slow-motion camera. In a split second, Butch's face looked like it had been through a meat grinder. Blood splattered everywhere. This was followed with a jumping front snap kick, turning back kick, and two roundhouse kicks, all delivered with lightning speed.

The final spinning back kick and reverse punch to the side of Butch's face knocked out both rows of his teeth and fractured his skull. The crackling sound of broken bones and body slams could be heard by police approaching from across the street. Tammy had called the police while the fight was in progress.

Butch's entire body flew through the air. His body hit the wall with such force that it imprinted in the wall before it fell to the floor totally limp, like a huge bag of potatoes.

As the police ran inside, they pulled a gun on Simon. Simon was standing over an unconscious and utterly defeated mass of blood and broken bones previously known as the ESR gang leader Butch.

As Simon was preparing to thrust a final spear hand in to the chest of Butch, he paused when hearing the voice of his sister. Tammy cried out, "No Simon! Stop! You're all I have left in this world. Please stop, Simon!"

Simon looked at the police and then at his sister. "Are you alright Tammy?" When she indicated that she was just fine, Simon backed away and said, "Okay, Sis. I won't dishonor you or the memory of Papa John: enough is enough." Simon then held out his hands so the police officer could hand cuff him.

The police officer said, "That won't be necessary, Simon. Your sister explained everything to us. We also caught the two ESR gang members who fled during the fight. They've confessed everything too. It was clearly a matter of self-defense. Thank God you were there to protect your sister. You saved her life Simon. These guys weren't just rapists, they were also killers."

Tammy ran to Simon. She firmly embraced her brother. She cried, hugged, and kissed him on his forehead and cheeks. All the while she cried in relief saying, "Thank you, Simon. Thank you, my dear brother."

A rival gang murdered Mark, Simon's older brother, in a prison gang fight. Simon graduated from high school with honors. So did Tammy a year later. Tammy married a doctor. She went on to become a schoolteacher who specialized in working with troubled children. Tammy was very happy and she kept in touch with Simon regularly.

Simon became a Special Forces intelligence officer in the United States Army. He was honored to follow in Papa John's footsteps. Simon was also happily married.



He had a son of his own whom he named “Little John,” after Papa John.

A lot of kids thought Little John was a bit of a patsy who always ran from fights. One day a neighbor heard a loud “Ki Aii” from behind the privacy fence next door. As he climbed to look over the fence, he saw Simon shaking his finger disapprovingly at Little John.

Little John stood curiously silent with a sorrowful look next to a tree that had just been split in half. There was no ax or saw in sight.

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# The Foot From Egypt

Jim Meirose

Anyway. Before I tell you what’s in the box let me tell you where it came from because that’s the best way to start. Let me tell you where I first saw it. Up at Solly’s—you know, that other bar up the side of the hill? Right, that one—right the place with the big white sign. I think it’s still there—sure its still there. I used to go there every day after quitting time. What do I do, you ask? Hah. I work for a living, like you and everybody else. What else. But anyway—I was in Solly’s at the bar there, in front of that big stained glass window Solly had. And in came a really pale guy. With this very box. Right. This one right here. He went and set across, in the back of the bar, in the dark part. He set next to a man with a big wide face who’d been in the back there chugging down beers. When the pale man sat he let a hand of silver coins roll onto the bar.

—How about a round for my friend and I here, he called to the bartender.

The wide faced man glanced over, then turned back to his beer. The pale man slid this box onto the bar. Yes that’s right—this very box.

—Guess what’s in this, he said loudly. You’ll never guess.

The wide faced man looked over from his beer. He must have wondered what I was wondering—how this man with this box would be so forward, to a perfect stranger. But to me, they both had the look. You know—of having had a few. The pale man with the box wore his hat all wrong. It was crushed down and cocked to the back and the side.

—Go on, he said. Guess what’s in it.

—I can’t. How should I know what’s in it, said the wide faced man, before taking a drink and shaking himself as if trying to come awake. The pale man grinned.

—Here, I’ll show you. Look.

The box opened and the wide faced man dully ran his eye over whatever was inside. From where I sat, I couldn’t see it.

—Okay, said the wide faced man. So?

—What do you mean so? Look at it. What do you think?

—That can get you in trouble, is what I think.

—Why?

—If the cops knew you had that - they’d take you downtown. There’d be trouble.

—Well let's pretend I don't have it then, said the other brightly, flipping the lid back closed.

—That's better, grinned the wide faced man. He rubbed a hand over his stubble. They quietly sipped their beers for a minute. The light above them flickered dully. The figure of the bartender cut across them from time to time as other patrons were served.

—So where'd you get that anyway, asked the wide faced man.

—Where'd I get what?

—You know - that thing in the box.

—Oh, sure I know, he winked. Just joking around. I mean we said it's not here, you know, remember. Need to stay out of trouble and all.

He winked a second time.

—Oh—right, said the wide faced man, shifting on his stool. But really. Where'd you get it.

—You mean how does one get such a thing, I think is what you're asking. Aren't you?

—I guess - what difference does it make -

—Because it seems like a much more complicated question that way, said the man with the box, gesturing broadly. You know—how does someone get one, versus where did you get it. Don't you think?

—I guess so—but what's the answer already, said the wide faced man, with a blank look.

—It's that—getting a thing like this always starts with some funny idea. Know what I mean?

—Oh sure. Right.

—It's like—like you can get an idea of what your life should be about. For me, it was the idea that becoming an Archaeologist would be fun. People choose things because they're fun, you see. Not because they're work. So—that's the first thing. To get one of these, you need to have made a conscious decision to go into Archaeology. That's what I did. And I told my Mother about it.

—Why do you want to do that, said Mother, holding her pink coffee cup. Is there money in it? What is it good for?

—It's important to learn about the past, I said. It's important to learn about it and then to teach other people about it.

—So it's a teaching kind of job then. There's no money nowadays in teaching kinds of jobs. How about that?

Mother sipped her coffee bit by bit and Father sat watching silently from across the table.

—Its not just teaching, I said, waving my hand. You get to travel and see faraway places and get paid for it. It's what I want to do.

Mother turned, shrugged at Father, and he nodded to us both. So they'd been told. And once they were told, in time they forgot their objections. This is how it always goes— traveling and seeing exotic places—who can argue about that? But on to the next thing; next, you need to decide what specific area of Archaeology

interests you. After looking over a lot of glossy pictures in big reference books in several libraries, you decide on Egypt. There's a lot of these things here in this box in Egypt. So to get one, that's where you need to go. You get your parents to put you through school and you get two degrees and a job. You're set to work under some big professor to go over and dig up things in Egypt. You pack two soft bags, one to be checked, the other for carry on, after fixing the strap on the small one with grey duct tape. You pull your used compact car into the airport long term lot—or, if you want, you can have someone drop you off; maybe your parents, maybe not—but at this point none of that really matters because now you're an adult. You can go where you want any way you want. So you have them pull the family sedan up to the long curb out front of the International terminal, in a crowd of large buses blowing black fumes out their backs. You shake your Father's hand, kiss your Mother's cheek, and go in. From left to right out of sight both ways stretch airline checkin counters trimmed in chrome and bright paint and airline names in neon. You find the line to the one you're taking and the line moves very fast.

—Any luggage, says a slight man running his fingers over a keyboard hidden down behind the countertop.

—Oh—yes. This one.

You put the brown square bag on the scale and he deftly ties a cluster of tags to it marked up with indecipherable scrawls.

—Gate nine, he says, handing you a folder containing boarding pass and tickets. You've got forty five minutes. Cigar smoke wafts by as you move toward the gate. Look around. There's no smoking here—but you've quit long ago and you're glad. So it's meaningless. Follow the signs and clear air toward the gate number and pause smiling at a security baggage x-ray and metal detector. Brown clad short men surround you, with nametags on their chests and wide visored caps.

—Here sir. Place your bag on the conveyor.

—Now step through here sir.

The bag goes in the X-Ray machine, you step through the detector frame, your bag comes out, and you get on the plane. It's a window seat. Your finger runs down the rubber gasket. The takeoff is smooth. All the way across to Egypt, it's cloudy. You keep the shade down. One, two cold airline meals. Nothing out the window. Slight unthrobbed earache. It doesn't matter how long the plane took to get to Egypt because years later, it's just a trip to Egypt anyway. Just those three words. In Cairo, the airport is tall stained concrete. A red bus takes you to the hotel and you go to the checkin desk, lay a credit card on the black veined marble desktop, and press your foot against your bags as you hoarsely say your name.

A dapper wide-labeled clerk answers you in Egyptian.

You gesture and speak, so they know you just speak english. And a taller, darker man approaches. The front desk edges are trimmed in narrow bands of turquoise and gold. You scratch at them as he checks the desk computer.

—There's no room reserved under your name, he says.

—But there must be.

Helplessly you watch him clicking the computer keys, flicking his hard eyes

across the screen.

—Well, the tall man says. I can't find it. But I'll take care of you. What is your name?

You tell them. And more. The keys click endlessly and finally the tall man takes your credit card and runs it through the credit machine.

—Welcome to Egypt, he says, handing you back your card, and a key. I hope your stay will be fulfilling.

Palming the key you follow a strongly built red clad bellboy up to your room and you give him a long yellow Egyptian banknote for a tip after he throws your bags on the long soft bed and opens the curtains of the wide window. Out the window, it's all sand colored with tall spires tapering to nothing in the distance. Room service brings cold meat and fresh greens. In the morning you wake and tie up your boots to go to the dig, and go down and get coffee and a bun. There's a small yellow bus outside with one headlight bent down and a glossy black grille. You get on with many others, and the dust boils and your teeth come up gritty, and at a wide sand field you follow the others to a cluster of squat unpainted grey sheds with open fronts and antenna masts leaning shakily. The pyramids stand off in the distance. The pyramids; all sunlit dust colored and black shadowed sides; lord God, there really are such places; shielding your eyes from the hot glare, you step toward them but a hard sharp voice stops you.

—Come on over here. We're working over here today.

A wide belted man gestures you forward. Nodding, you follow the others down a path around a bluff of red rock into a pit overshadowed by a high dirt wall. Tools stand to the side. Everybody takes one. You take a tarnished spoon-like instrument.

—All right lads, says the wide belted man. This is it. Dig in—and good luck to you. Give a yell if you need help.

—What are we looking for, you ask, tilting back your pith helmet and quickly scratching below the hem of your shorts.

—Whatever we find, he says sharply. What else.

You nod, turn around, go over, hunker down in the shade where the sandstone wall comes down, and start to scrape up the dirt, spoon by spoon. Scratching gritty sound. You start defining a bowl-shaped hole; pebbles scrape up, roll away—sharp grains, dry sand, dry dirt, glasslike sharp grit. You lick the salt from around your lips. Go over and chug from a large wet canvas wrapped water tank. One pale plastic cup for all hung by a thin chain. Ground glass was once used for killing. Grime in your teeth. The sun comes around beating you in the back. You're bathed in sweat before you know the shade's all gone. The air sighs with dirt scratching from the huddled helmeted figures. For three days you enlarge your bowl shaped hole at the base of the wall. Three days of sweat on the bus and endless hot nights in the hotel. On the third day the wide belted man pulls up his Jeep and calls down to you.

—We're going yonder. There's chambers to explore. Come on, he says, pointing—you, you and you. In the Jeep.

Jouncing through high ruts, you pass a field of dead palm trees. A pile of

skulls sets at the side of the road.

—Buffalo, says the wide-belted man, wrestling the roaring Jeep around the deep red ruts.

—Oh.

The jeep pulls up in the shade of a tall tent. The tent's pitched against a red stone bluff. Inside there's the door to a long carved hallway. You follow the wide belted man and the others in and under a string of clear hot bulbs. One, two, three, four; about thirty bulbs into the tunnel, you start counting.

—How far does this go, asks the man nearest the leader.

—You'll see.

The hallway widens into a low square room full of old unpainted caskets.

—All right now, lads, says the leader. One man to a box. Open 'em and inventory 'em!

You take the one furthest to the left. Bare light bulbs swing. Your tool belt clatters. The wood is cold. There are no hinges. How to open this? Your hand runs roughly along the curve of the box. Your full-bearded professor in the air conditioned lecture hall stood fiddling with the lapels of his cool blue suit, as he told you how to handle such matters.

—If there're things to be opened, open them as designed. Don't smash them open, don't crack them open. Don't mash them, don't slash them—

—Tell you what lads, booms the wide-belted man, his hands on his hips. First one to open his, and open it correctly, can keep something from inside for his own.

A thin slot's hewn in the side of the casket. Dust tickles your nose. You probe the slot with a stainless steel rod, then thrust in a thin key blank. Keyhole—the full-bearded professor leans on the podium—on this slide is shown examples of the most common sorts of latching devices, he says, thrusting a silvery sheet in the overhead projector, then turning, snapping his pointer to his side. Note the delicate mechanism of this one—all hewn wood, elegant in its simplicity, but fragile—gently you pry, rise, step around the casket, circle the problem; the dust around the casket packs with rough bootprints. Metal tools tap throughout the wide low space.

—I'm told, said the professor, that such things are like big mystery puzzles—in fact, all of Egypt is. Never do you know what's next. Any moment you can look on something no one's looked on for an awful number of years. Imagine the feeling—

Pushing off from the casket, you scramble across the chamber to rummage in a long toolbox with rope handles at the ends for a specially made slightly bent razor sharp rasp. Get it and scramble back.

—Imagine the feeling! said the professor, snapping the pointer against the podium. That is why this field's for me!

—I hope you know what you're doing, chimed in Father. The green card table's spread with balsa wood sheets scored in the shapes of airplane model parts. A thin tube of glue drips uncapped. You kneel by the casket and gently press the rasp into the slot of the mystery lock.

—Do not split the balsa wood—look out—like this.

He takes it.

—Do it like this—

The lid pops softly. You freeze; the pop's embedded in a tiny splitting sound—but no damage is done. Stay frozen until sure no one's heard the split, then the casket creaks open. A clear dry smell boils out refreshingly.

—Mine's open, you call to the wide-belted leader. Come look. Look at this.

He strides over. The others come and lean down.

—Well done, said the leader. Now it's mine to live up to the deal. Take that part there, for your own.

—Are you sure?

—That's right. I said the first man to open his casket would keep something from inside, and right is right; and fair is fair—

—No, what I mean is—it's still attached.

—Oh. So it is. One minute—

He moves to a pallet of packing boxes by the door, selects a small one, and brings it back to you. Leaning then, he grasps into the casket, snaps off the gift to give you, and slips it into the box you hold.

—Keep it lad. A souvenir of your first dig.

And closing the lid, you accept it; blackened and stiff with a thin leather skin.

The wide faced man shifts on the barstool and leans close, clutching his half full beer.

—This box here, he says, pressing a finger to it.

—Yes, that's right. This box right here. That's how you get one all the way from Egypt, and—you know what?

—What?

—It's a hell of one great feeling; something all yours that you finally got after getting past your parents, and school, and all the digging in the dirt, and the heat and the smell; now something's yours. But, getting off the Jeep at the end of the day at the end of the road back to the camp, an official stops you.

—What's that, he says, clutching the drape of his robe.

—Here, look, you say, tilting open the box.

—Our law says you can't take that with you.

—I was told I could.

—Who told you?

—There. He did.

The official calls the wide belted leader down from the Jeep and they step to the side talking. The official waves his loosely-robed arms. A light dust cloud encompasses he and the leader. You walk off toward the bus to the hotel, the box under your arm. It bounces lightly on the cracked black bus seat. At the hotel, you put it in the small grey safe in your room. Then, all of a sudden, after some weeks go by, all of the digging is over. The wide belted leader stands at the front of the crowd waiting for the shuttles to take everyone to the airport.

—Say—hello there, he says, tipping back his cap. You step over.

—Still got that thing? he asks.

- What thing? you say, slyly.
- Ooh, he sighs. You're a card.
- I know.

Atop your toes lies a large strong duffelbag within which the box lies swathed in green rags. You've still just got two bags but you threw out the smaller one wrapped with duct tape and replaced it with this bigger one, which makes the bigger one from before now the smaller one.

—Whew, muttered the wide-faced man, glazen-eyed.

—I know—and that's only about the half of it. Your bladder's near bursting all the way to the airport. Once there, there's one men's room. It's closed for cleaning. You go in anyway and a distinguished looking turbaned man in a striped dress gives you hell in a high pitched squeal. The smell of urine follows you out the bathroom and into the sitting and standing crowd waiting in the concrete terminal building for the various flights. The walls are tall and smooth with fine cracks. Beyond the low windows loom large bright white airliners. Your nail scrapes along the pitted metal windowframes. Out the window, the airport buildings are sand colored cubes and mounds stretched to the distance. Tall spires taper to nothing in the air shimmering at the horizon. The men's room is reopened for general use. But you know you couldn't have held it this long. After checking your watch you kick a loose tile across the floor and bring your bags toward the metal detector and X-Ray machine. Your bags disappear on the X-Ray conveyor. Lightly you step through the red metal frame. A slight woman in nametag and peaked cap watches white ghosts of toothpaste and cameras and brushes and the shadows of wispy underthings and a box filled with a vague glob of grey pass on a large computer screen. Your bags come out and slide down to a stop. The X-Ray scanning instructor tilted his cap to a jaunty position and gripped the redwood podium solidly. The small woman sat in the front row intently marking a narrow yellow pad.

—Look for solid objects, said the instructor. They can't make guns of cloth, or bombs of air. Not yet at least.

The woman motions you to take your bag from the conveyor. A hand shoots from the farthest row of students.

—Yes what is the question, glowered the instructor.

—What do you say to the traveler then, asked the student, if on the screen you see a gun or a bomb?

The instructor rapped the podium edge.

—You say Excuse me sir. Your bag is suspect. Stand aside, please. It is only a formality.

You pull the bags from the X-Ray belt and she smiles at you in a friendly manner that says Enjoy your flight.

—And what if they resist?

—If they resist, they are taken to a small bright room and pinioned to a chair.

—By whom?

—By you, and one or two others who will be sent up for that purpose.

You turn from her smile. A row of doors lines the wall beyond the X-Ray sta-

tion. A thin grey man pushes a cart of boxes by you. You follow to the gate and up a pastel walkway to the plane. Run your hand down the glossy curve of the plane's skin as you go in. Find your seat. The number's in a box on the boarding pass that's half Egyptian. Read the seat numbers riveted above. Red on black ink—see the aisle seat. Red green woven fabric. It hits you you are going home. A cold breeze swirls around. You sit. The steel safety belt buckle snaps coldly. She has too much makeup. She gives you a pillow. You've stashed your bag in the beige overhead. The box, its there, above beyond the air vents and tangled up unseen oxygen masks and the plastic stewardess button with the stylized female shape molded in. The takeoff presses you back. The wheels bump up below into the plane's belly. The light dims. You are going home. The ground drops off. A meal comes, in a black plastic oval saran wrapped tray. It turns to a tray of wadded-up trash, set to the side. You are going home. The seatback before you is woven basketlike brittle plastic. The next meal's unknown blonde meat dabbed with white sauce. Snap shut the seat belt clasps; the ground comes up through the clouds and you roll to a stop at a gate like you left from. Long lines of noisy people fling bags across their shoulders and pack the airliner aisles. You follow the others off into a narrow corridor smelling of burnt oil and cigarettes. In the airport stands a great sign in rolling script; Welcome to the United States—CUSTOMS. Line up here, it continues in small print; you go on the end of one of ten multicolored lines of people waiting to have their things gone through. In an hour you step beside a long narrow steel table with burnished edges. At the end of the table rolls the X-Ray machine belt. A broad and deep-voiced khaki customs man in sharply creased clothes motions you to set down your carryon. —Unzip the bag please sir.

Unthinkingly, you obey. He snaps on yellow rubber gloves and runs his hands in and out over your belongings somehow not disturbing how they're packed. His hands slide through clean white clothing, brown-bagged tooth paste and brushes and disposable razors. There's a rattling deep within the bag. A clot of wrapped green rags rolls into sight between parted folded clean shirts. The line of others waiting impatiently to be searched snakes behind from side to side and hazily off out of sight below the white ceiling. The deep voiced man glances down the line and at his watch; your watch tells you its five to twelve; he talks into your face.

—What is this mass of green rags, he says, half pulling the wrapped box from the bag. His eyes capture yours.

—Underwear, you say.

—Dirty, or clean?

—Both. I packed in a hurry.

—Then pass!

Releasing his grip, he steps back, waving you on. The zipper pulls back shut and the bag glides across the smooth steel onto the X-Ray belt. It disappears in the machine. Now you are really going home. After stepping through the tall metal detector you step up and get your bag. The metal detector frames the line of other travelers receding onto the distance. A burly woman in heavy fur behind you argues with the customs man about a small pink carry-on dog. Down



one flight you snatch your checked bag from a whirling carousel and outside, your hand waves down a taxi, the air flowing cleanly between your fingers and your fingers cutting through familiar water towers in the distance.

Home.

A sour-smelling cab with a baldheaded driver brings you from the airport past rows of factories and over railroad crossings jarring the tires to the rims. To your parents' house; large square and brick peeling frame buildings pass by, here and there a tree, finally fields. There's no conversation with the taxi driver. Since you've now seen the world, there's no need. Watch the faded floormat; the taxi meter racks up the miles. The floormat's corner's cracked clean off and fragments of rubber litter the floor. You'll be arriving at your parents' unannounced, meaning to surprise them. It's easier because you never knew when you'd be home. But you knew what you'd be. The taxi leaves you and the bags at the curb before a narrow tall pink house numbered 182. The houses one either side are closer than you remember and the curb's crumbled more at the edge than you remember and thick tufts of grass grow from cracks in the street. A new porch rail's all bright wood and shiny nail-heads - Father comes out craggy-faced. You go up.

—Boy, he says brightly. That your cab leaving there? Why didn't you call us? We'd of picked you up. We got all your letters. You look thinner now. And that tan—Mom! Mom, come out. Look here. Our boy's home.

Your Mother comes out the open door and hugs you. You're on the top, last step; it's hard to hold your balance; later you will not remember the hug. Father brings in your bags and you're set in a chrome chair across the table from Mother with a ham sandwich in your hand.

—So, she says. You weren't going to be home for a week yet. What happened?

—Right, says Father. What happened—

—What is it? Is something wrong?

—No, nothing's wrong, you say. The dig's over is all. The meat of the sandwich is tender and juicy.

—Good ham, you add.

—We still get our ham at Bronson's, she says.

—Right, says Father. You know Bronson's.

—Sure I do—

—You know old man Bronson just passed away? His boy picked up the place. Remember you played with the Bronson boy, Billy—

—No, you say, mouth full. That was Peter that played with the Bronson boy. They're six years older than me.

—Oh. That's right—say. What was Egypt like? What did you bring us from Egypt?

—Oh, you say, getting up, swallowing. Let me get the bags, I'll show you. Where'd you put the bags Dad—you put them upstairs?

—No, no, sit, says Father pushing out a hand. Eat your sandwich. I'll go get it—which one you want?

—The small one, you say, sitting back down. A shred of crust fallen from the

sandwich lies on the table. Mother pours you another milk. The floor spreads under you, black on white, out of sight to the left, out of sight to the right. The yellow wall runs around to the corner where there'd been a birdcage before.

—Where's Nicky, Mom? you ask, taking a bite.

—Nicky died last month.

—Too bad.

Father comes in with the bag and it goes on the table. Sliding your paper plate aside, you half-rise and zip the bag open while chewing hard on a small piece of fat. Swallowing, you bring the mass of green cloth out onto the table and it sits where your plate had been, with the box in the dark inside.

—We still talking about this same box here, said the wide-faced man, sliding his hand out through a thin puddle on the bar.

—Yes, this same box here. You roll it from one side to the other in the cloth and it uncoils and comes out squarely between you, your Mother, and Your Father. The loose green cloth falls out of sight under the table. A cheap tin latch clicks free and the top swings open. Mother's hand goes to her lips, and Father gapes toothily.

—What is it, she says through her fingers. Father's face slackens.

—Is that what I think it is, son?

—That's right. It's what I found.

—Well get it out of the house.

You step back.

—What—why?

—Because can't you see how upset it's got your Mother?

Mother sits on her chair edge and half turns away.

—Just look at her—her face, continues Father. Lord God at least close the lid down for her, will you?

Mother rests her chin in her hand, her fingers together over her mouth. Obediently, you flip shut the lid.

—That's good, says Father. Now take it somewhere. Anywhere. Just so long as it's not in the house.

—Okay.

You rise and bring the box out in the garage. It slides back under a low bench in the corner. The box goes far in out of sight between the black stained bench legs. The bench is oil and paint stained and has coffee cans of nuts and bolts on top by a great box full of heavy rusty tools. Before sliding the box in and under, you wrapped it in two plastic bags. Underneath, it's a shadow that's been a shadow forever, in with all the rest under there. Satisfied, you step to the galvanized garbage cans by the garage door. Loudly you slam one of the lids up, then down, as though something's gone in the garbage, then back in the house across the clean rug you go sit back down between Mother and Father. Mother asks if you want another sandwich. You accept and as she turns to make it, you zip the bag up after wadding the green rags back into it. The bag goes to the side under the table.

—We'll forget you ever showed us that, okay son? says Father softly.

—No problem.

He nods. You fold your hands on the table as Mother clatters the bread cabinet, opens and closes the refrigerator door, and swiftly unwraps the ham.

—What did you do with it, asks Father.

—I threw it away.

—That's good.

The air lies cool. You're home.

Mother comes up and slides the second sandwich before you. You take a bite, and bite by bite, it's gone, like the first; as is the night before you—and the next day and the next, and all the days that ever went before. After several years, you move out to your own place. The box comes along because you can't leave it behind, they'd be sure to find it; the garage is sure to be cleaned. If it wasn't to be cleaned until the passed away, it'd be all right, but they won't wait. You'll be gone from their house, and that's a change, and it'll lead to other changes—and things will get cleaned. You know what I'm talking about, right?

—Oh sure, said the wide-faced man, as the bartender he called over brought up new beers.

—So, said the pale man. That's about it. And of course, there's other stuff—but nothing more worth mentioning.

The wide-faced man scratched under the front of his shirt, silently burped, and spoke with an eyebrow raised.

—So. Is that really a true story?

—Oh sure. That's it. And it didn't even seem as hard as I thought it'd be to answer it—you know, telling how does someone get one, versus where does someone get one.

Nodding, the wide faced man tipped back his beer, as the pale man with the box went on.

—It was a better way of telling such a story. Don't you think? I mean—I could of just said I got it in Egypt, and that'd be that, but that wouldn't have been near as interesting. You know?

—Oh sure.

The pale man grinned quickly and touched his cheek.

—But wait. Ho. What are we even talking about? Silly me—it's not even here, remember?

—What's not here—

—The box isn't really here, remember, he repeated, winking. He reached and laid a finger on the box top. We can't be having something here that the law would frown upon. Remember?

—Oh. Right. I remember, said the wide-faced man, cracking a slight smile, seeming visibly relieved at having understood. The light fell about them. Their thick full beers drained slowly into the shadow. The bartender cut through the pale thin light and brought them refill after refill, until slowly, the pale man with the box laid some money on the bar. Each man sipped further until the pale man stood, cracked his knuckles, took up his hat, and

stood before the other with a solemn look.

—I need to go to the bathroom, he intoned. Watch the box?

—Oh sure.

—Thanks.

Quickly, the pale man stepped away toward the rest rooms around the corner near the bar front door. The large faced man straightened, shaking himself, as if clearing his head. He must of been wondering what I'd been wondering—what this guy with the box must be about, to tell so much, and to a perfect stranger. Time passed, his drink drained, and finally he knew intuitively, as such things are always known, that the man with the box would not be coming back. He'd seen him put down money, take his hat—he should have known. Plus on top of everything else, the guy'd left the box behind. It just sat there. So, he left; and I took it. And here it is, right here and now—but hey—how about that big stained glass window at Solly's, eh? I bet it cost him a lot; and I bet it's still there. And that big white sign out front—sure I bet the place is still there—but hold it, say there! Bartender! Another Ballantine here—and another of what my friend's having. Thanks—but hey, wait, listen—I need to go to the bathroom a minute, okay.

Watch the box?

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## A Man Has Fallen...

David B. McCoy

A man has fallen in love and married the candle he met at the lighting shop. On their marriage night, they get into an argument over who will be the penis in the relationship. The man insists that he is the man and, thus, the penis. The candle laughs and blurts out, "Please, my length beats yours hands-down." Frustrated by this unexpected turn of events, the man rushes out and returns with a blow torch. When the candle is melted down and spread out all over the floor, he strips and humps away. By morning, the bridal suite is covered with hundreds of little flames which the man is finding impossible to snuff out.

Light of  
Auzulund,  
art from  
Aaron  
Wilder



# Suzanne the Bitch

Pat Dixon

Suzanne Roberts stared down at me with her mouth open, blood streaming freely from both nostrils, and large tears streaming less copiously from both eyes. Then words began to stream from her mouth as well.

“Ronald! Hit him! Castrate him! Kill him! You saw what this little bastard just did to me! This little bastard! Hurt him bad! Kill him!”

She said a lot more, but I was looking at Ronald to see how he was reacting. I felt scared, but not about being hit by him. We had been having a really great time, he and I, until *she* had ridden up on her skinny-tire three-speed English bike, the girl’s equivalent of the kind Ronald rode. We’d spent about forty minutes scooping tadpoles out of the shallow half-acre pond, putting them into the quart mayonnaise jars we’d brought with us on that cloudless July day. I was ten then and happy and proud that Ronald, who was just thirteen, was my best friend and liked hanging out with me.

He and I and my beige half-pug Beige had been in the woods just having fun the way kids in that part of southern Connecticut used to do after World War Two, before housing developers came in and changed things. The woods there were criss-crossed by colonial-era stone walls where there’d once been farms, and we knew where three dry stone-lined wells and two empty stone family crypts were, as well as a couple of small family graveyards and deserted houses and barns—all deep in the woods, sometimes as much as two miles from the nearest modern house where people were living.

That day Ronald and Beige and I were only about a quarter of a mile from my home. Behind us, on the deep-rutted dirt road leading to the pond, I’d heard Suzanne’s voice about a hundred feet away calling out a big cheery “Hi, Ronald!” We both looked around as she rode up and parked her bike beside ours. Ronald seemed glad to see her, though I was not.

Suzanne was twelve years old, about five inches taller than I was, had medium-length dark auburn hair, and wore light blue shorts and a yellow short-sleeved cotton pullover sweater. Form-fitting T-shirts as women’s outerwear hadn’t been invented yet, but the effect of her sweater was probably nearly the same. In any case, Ronald seemed unable to take his eyes from her, especially the front of her yellow sweater, which covered two of the four largest breasts in our school, not counting those of the grandmotherly seventh-grade teacher, that is.

“I was hoping to find you here, Ronald,” she said. “Your mom thought you might be over at the school yard, but your sister said you’d left about an hour ago with this peanut and had a couple of jars and your fish tank net with you.”

“Yeah,” said Ronald, unusually tongue-tied.

I didn't say anything, but my dislike for her must have radiated from my eyes. Suzanne glanced at me, met my unblinking stare, and walked towards me with jocular confidence and determination.

She stopped about eight inches from me, smiled down at me, and said, "Well, little boy, why don't you just hop on your little bike over there and let us big folks have a chance to talk in private for a bit?"

I felt as if I had been put into some horrifying variation of the typical Charles Atlas ad on the back of most comic books where a bully at the beach kicks sand all over a little guy or otherwise shoves him around. I glowered up at Suzanne and said nothing.

Then the deadlock was broken. She put both her hands on my chest and pushed me backwards. Tears of fury and frustration and hatred formed in the corners of my eyes. At that point something, as they say, must have snapped inside my brain the way it has done only twice in the years since then. I remembered the advice my father had given me four years earlier when I'd been having some trouble with a little neighbor girl: "If a female doesn't act like a lady, don't treat her like one." My brain seized on that advice, and my mind and body became one—my fist shot up. I punched Suzanne in the nose.

As she was shouting for Ronald to do me grievous harm, I was chiefly afraid that he would take her side and I wouldn't have him as my best friend anymore. I was right about this. He beckoned me aside and said in a low voice that he thought it would be best for me to get on my bike and leave because he really didn't want to hit me for her sake. I felt betrayed and swore at him and her and the whole world as I stomped over to my old fat-tire bike beside their two tall, sleek, expensive English jobs.

I called to Beige as I pedaled down the dirt road. She, Beige, disregarded me, as was her custom, choosing instead to remain with Ronald and Suzanne. About two hundred feet away, I skidded to a stop, turned, and shouted towards the three of them, "You damn bitch! You damn bitch! You—bitch!"

I was looking at Suzanne, and we all understood I meant her, not Beige. Then I sped out of there and rode furiously home.

In September, when school began again, I made a point of sitting in the back of the school bus and loudly saying "Bitch!" without moving my lips whenever Suzanne climbed onto the bus. She would sit beside Ronald near the front of the bus, and it irritated me considerably that neither one of them acknowledged my insults. Except for when she or I missed school because of illness, which wasn't often, I did this five days a week all the way up to the middle of December.

In mid-December that shallow pond near my home used to be a good place for ice skating. The pond has all been filled in for thirty years now and has five or six identical development houses where it used to be. Back in those days, however, when it got cold, many of us would check the thickness of the ice to

see if it was ready for us or not. That was what Suzanne did one Saturday afternoon—rode her fancy English bike there all by herself.

Well, not entirely by herself. My stupid, faithless dog Beige, who would always leave our yard every morning to beg for food from every house for about half a mile around, did her usual Beige thing and followed Suzanne to the pond in the woods.

When they got there, I later learned, the ice was still too thin for a person, but ol' Beige just trotted right out onto it and was somewhere near the middle when she fell through. She dog-paddled to the edge of the ice and put her paws on it to try to get out, only each time she tried the ice broke under her weight. And each time she started to get up on the ice, she got a little weaker until she barely could keep afloat, let alone climb out.

I'm pretty sure it crossed Suzanne's mind that if Beige went under and she herself said nothing, it would remain a mystery until next summer or even longer. She probably thought that the little punk who had bloodied her nose and who had called out dozens of insults from the back of the school bus deserved to be punished in some manner. What place was more fitting than the scene of the first atrocity he had committed against her? The way she chose to punish me, however, was more fitting.

Wading out into the pond, breaking ice as she went, Suzanne was chest deep in the numbing water when she reached Beige. She scooped Beige up in her arms, returned to the shore, and wrapped the dog in the dry coat she'd had the presence of mind to take off and leave on the frosty bank. Then Suzanne carried Beige the quarter of a mile in the cold gray afternoon to my house.

Around five-thirty that afternoon, when I returned home from playing with a couple of friends my own age, my mother told me how Suzanne had arrived at our doorstep with my dog. My mother had put them both into a hot bath together, had given Suzanne some hot tea, a large bowl of vegetable clam chowder, and one of her own dresses and a pair of shoes to wear, and then had driven Suzanne home, where Suzanne's mom had put her to bed. Suzanne's dad drove their station wagon down to the old pond to retrieve her bicycle.

The next Monday when Suzanne got on the bus and sat beside Ronald, she didn't have even a trace of a cold. I watched her to see if she would look at me, but she didn't. I was still convinced in my almost-eleven-year-old mind that Suzanne was basically unfit for human consumption, but over the weekend I had revised my thinking slightly. Instead of being a *total* degenerate, she at least had a partly decent spot in her as far as some small animals were concerned.

A year and a half later, Suzanne Roberts' dad died. About four months after that, she and her mom and her kid sister all moved away somewhere and were never heard from again that I knew of. In all that time, I never did walk up and thank her or even speak to her—but I never again called out "Bitch!" when she got on the bus.

And I never forgot what she did, though as of now it was half a century ago.

# Into my Unmade Bed

Pamela Fox

I walked in and she threw a look at me that I couldn't deflect. Looking down her bulbous nose she sized me up. I saw how she saw me, white and weak. Flimsy. Like a soda cracker. I couldn't hide how I saw her, grotesque like maggoty meat, like that bucket of hot dogs that I'd used for bait but left in the garage when I was nine. She was thick, every part of her, parts that I or any decent woman would have tried to hide. Or have removed. Girls are supposed to be skinny and delicate and she was so unapologetically thick. Her fuzzy teeth were orange under the red lights, framed by her thick sausage lips. She never stopped grinning. She balanced herself on that bar stool and something heavy and invisible steamed out of her, filling up the room. I started to choke on it.

She was a collage of contrasts. Her skin was green. Her immaculate red hair was in a style like Jackie O. used to wear. She leaned back with her knees spread. The dress hanging off those thick shoulders bulged like two abscesses where it should have been flat or at least smashed down. Her nose belonged to an obese woman, broad and swollen and so upturned that her mother could've been swine. The sunny yellow dress with purple flowers that tangled their way around her form, the kind of dress that I would've worn to church, hung like a peep show curtain between her knees. It billowed in and out like it were breathing. Yeast and vinegar drifted across the room and up my nose.

Her appearance was both shocking and repulsive but what scared me were the eyes.

They were like mineshafts. There, in the place where it should've been twinkling and bright were these two light-swallowing chasms. I stood across the room teetering over their edge. They were like black holes. They were like wormholes. They were infinity over naught. I could not understand what she was, but she had pinned me there and she wasn't gonna let me go. I breathed deep and hard and was afraid that someone had noticed but I couldn't turn my head to see.

Her sexuality was thick like the rest of her. Thick and shameless. The smell had already gotten into my clothes. She threw back a drink, a shot of something that I wouldn't know about. She smiled at me and I threw up in my mouth. She wanted to fuck me. She blinked and I ran. I left her in my bed and went to my job at the hotel.



I was a maid. I cleaned up people's sex.

Evidence of other people's fucking is supposed to be offensive and it's usually more work to clean up. The sheets twisted around themselves. The chairs rearranged or overturned. Every last towel crumpled up on the bathroom floor. It's supposed to be offensive and the other maids complained about it. But not me. I found it erotic, and dampeningly so. I liked these rooms. I pulled the air in slowly to savor what was left of the sex. I surveyed the room to gather how it must have went. I imagined how he pushed her back onto the bed, flung her dress up, ripped her panties at the seam and drove his hand into her pussy. She always had perfect creamy thighs with no stretchmarks or blue veins like mine. And when she was dripping, he would grab her by the hips, pull her to the edge of the bed and slam into her with a force that made her scream. It made us gasp. Our eyes rolled into the backs of our heads. Her shivering hand slid down her stomach and he yanked her head back by her hair and bit her throat. These rooms made me think twice about Oscar, the guy who stocked the linen closets.

I needed a cigarette.

I hoped for these rooms. I loved where they took me. But the feel of real skin with its sweat and texture was unbearable. I couldn't wait to get it over with. I couldn't wait to get them off of me. But more than that, I hated their faces. It was easier to ignore what was far away but their faces were always right there, twisted and whimpering, heaving with their tongues curled. Real sex was repulsive. But by the time their tongues curled, you couldn't just stop. Ohbabyohmygodohitfeelssoooogood. You had to wait it out, pinned there with my fingers tearing into the skin on my hips and my teeth clenched. Once I even cracked a tooth. You had to wait it out, but then you could slip out from under him and scald it off in the shower and be sure he'd be asleep by the time you got back. And in the shower you had the time and privacy to examine all the things you hoped he didn't notice, the cellulite, the scars, the little blue veins. Real sex was humiliating. I envied the prostitutes and whores I cleaned up after with their pubic hair and their aggressive hips and their lack of apology.

Outside, Oscar was already smoking. He was ten years older than me, at least, with brown skin and brown eyes. I had driven him home a couple of times to his spot in the projects. I liked the way he looked at me, sometimes biting his lip. I threw my hips when I knew he was watching. He followed me inside and then down the hall into my next room and shut the door behind us. You're not supposed to do that. If Mary, my supervisor, came around and saw us in that closed room we would have

both been fired. I'd never been fired before. The room was a suite with a king sized bed and a stocked minibar. They had checked out already. No one would be coming back. I worked with my back to him. He sank into the arm chair with his legs stretched as far as they would reach, I think trying to trip me. I stripped the bed and threw the bundle on the floor. He watched as I stretched, pulled, bent and lifted. His watch terrified me. I stopped and turned to confront him.

"I'm just a kid," I said. It was more like a squeak.

"I know," he said. "I can see that." I wasn't sure what he meant but I didn't like it. The humiliation burned my face.

"I can't do this," I said, feeling exposed.

"Come 'ere," he said. I couldn't say anything. The terror had taken my tongue. I waited for something bad to happen. It was the moment when you see it coming but there's nothing you can do about it.

"I can't," I managed as a whisper. "I have to make this bed." If he had touched me I think I would have thrown up. If he'd touched me, he'd have felt my body throbbing.

His eyes pinched. He wasn't smiling anymore. He stood and shook his head and left the room. As he walked past me he grabbed my right hip and shoved me toward the bed just hard enough to make me lose my balance.

"Cunt."

I was cold. I didn't stop shaking until I got in my car to go home.

We, the maids, had thirty minutes to do each room. We stripped it like vultures erasing the evidence like a crime scene clean-up crew. The twisted sheets were rolled into a snarl and disappeared down the laundry shaft. The used condoms were flushed away. The room was restaged. This is where I learned to make a bed, straight and tight, creating the illusion, day after day, that nothing real ever happened here. That every day was the same as the one before and the one after. That every event is erasable. That a bleached white sheet is a pristine denial. It took me longer than most of the other maids. I tended to be a little perfectionistic.

At home, the green-skinned sausage-lipped woman from the bar is still there. I don't see her but as the light blue uniform dress drops to my ankles, her hot salty scent rushes upward and clouds around my head. I inhale slowly to capture it. But I don't touch her. I run from her into the shower where I scald her skin. I reach down my throat and heave her out of me. I carve out exit wounds and watch her trails slide down my arms and legs until and I am exhausted and collapse, still dripping and red, into my unmade bed.

ISSN 1068-5154



7 771068 515003

ISSN 1555-1555



7 771555 155502



the unreligious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine

**Produced By** Scars Publications and Design

**Editorial Offices** Children, Churches and Daddies; Scars Publications and Design  
829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA

**Internet** ccandd96@scars.tv ▶ <http://scars.tv>

**Publishers/Designers Of** Children, Churches and Daddies magazine; cc&d Ezines; Scars Internet Radio (SIR); The Burning mini poem books; God Eyes mini poem books; The Poetry Wall Calendar; The Poetry Box; The Poetry Sampler; Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters; Reverberate Music Magazine; Down In The Dirt magazine; Freedom and Strength Press forum; assorted chapbooks and books; music, poetry compact discs; live performances of songs and readings

**Sponsors Of** past editions; chapbooks; books; past Poetry Chapbook Contest; past Poetry Book Contest; past Prose Chapbook Contest; past Poetry Calendar Contest; Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites); Collection Volumes

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by clinical groups and writers from the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium, England, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malta, Norway, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey (as well as input from both Japan and Slovenia). Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues (via news and philosophy) as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. Children, Churches and Daddies is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published monthly by **Scars Publications and Design**, Janet Kuypers.

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