

Sweet Dreams

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He didn't know whether to panic and flee, attempt to hide the body, or blast that motherfucker in the face one more time, just for the enjoyment. As not to draw any more attention, a boot to the mangled face would have to suffice. Another dead body isn't anything new in this town, but blood on his hands is. Best get rid of this here pistol John John thinks. He commences the decommissioning of that piece of steel till rust covered head of the sledge he had pulled from the bed of his '94 Ford cracks. Good enough. He kicks the remains of the gun away from the crumpled body. Hoping the abrasiveness of the dirt and grass would wipe the gun clean. Upon returning to the body, he just stood there hulking over the lump of limbs and torso that lie dormant on the ground. Grabbing the sap by the cuffs of his dungarees, John John drags the body over the hard October ground; leaves and twigs crumbling under the dead weight. Mobil, Alabama was still in its warm season, but tonight in a trailer park about twenty miles south it would be frightfully cold.

"You shoulda stayed gone when you left" he mutters with exhaustion as the legs dropped from his hands. "I bet Ricky won't miss yer sorry ass one bit." His red and grey Ford came nearer and nearer as he walked away from the bush. The door is almost as loud as the gun shot. Not really, but that sucker is loud. The result of the deadbeat in the bush t-boning John John's truck in one his grand drunken entrances to the home front. The ride back to his mother's trailer rattles his brain.

I didn't get that gun to do this, what a waste. Now how am I gonna get money? Oh well, I give it a couple days before she starts asking questions.

The commotion comes into ear shot from the drive just after

he kills the big Triton v8 under the hood. His half-brother Ricky and cousin Stephanie were probably just finishing a round of one there made up games. Stretching their imaginations as far as you could stretch the wooden kitchen spoon they were using as some sort of wand.

“Johnny!” an excited yet tired voice calls as he pulls open the trailer door. It no longer latches in a proper manner. A beam of inside light creeps out in to the darkness of night.

“Nugget! What are you doing up so late?” he questions with enthusiasm as the small brunette girl swings from any moving limb of John John’s.

“Well after you left to go play cards, Aunt Jan took some cough medicine and fell asleep, so me n Ricky just been havin fun” she beams at him with her big brown eyes; knowing he couldn’t bring himself to reprimand her.

“She passed out again?!” shoots out of his mouth as he patted his cousin’s head. Unconscious on the couch, his mother receives a long scold from across the room. Good thing she is totally aware who is in her house while her children are unsupervised. Luckily John John is the one instead of someone else. “Why don’t you two run off to bed now that I’m home, I’ll see you guys in the morning?” The two youngins scurry off to the tiny room they shared. They were still at the age where they didn’t need separate rooms. John John hoped he wouldn’t still be around when that day came.

Hands fishing through his pockets, a petty wad of cashed appears in the left; his winnings from tonight’s poker game. A measly seventy five bucks, but hey that’s better than losing. A six pack of beer awaits him on the grime covered coffee table. It was just the way he liked it, sitting in a pool of its own condensation at room temperature. The bitterness of the first few swigs smacked his palate with authority; surprised to find his last doobie still in combustible fashion after riding out the night’s eventfulness in his dirty flannel’s breast pocket. He touched a match tip to the end of the bent spliff and puffed away, gathering a cherry as the small living room fills with smoke. His mom hadn’t paid the cable bill that month, so his next best option for a drinking company fell to the loud honking that was his mother snoring. He sat reclined in the big leather chair

caddy corner to the couch, one beer left on the table and a little bit of vomit on his chin. Why can’t I just have my old life back?

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“Gooooo morning Crass Valley, it’s another muggy clouded day, I hope you weren’t expecting anything..”

“Fuck off you uppity jerk, it’s 8:30 for god’s sake” grumbles a groggy John John. He’s sending the old black Casio alarm clock sailing the length of his mother’s small bed room. He pushes through the cardboard door into the narrow unlit trailer hallway. A few feet to his right he could hear the gentle snores of Ricky and Stephanie. His mother hadn’t moved since he had left the living room and fell asleep in her room. “Must be one hell of a cold” he muttered with her in sight. After a bitter cup of coffee and an unsatisfying Paul Mall he snagged from his mother’s jacket, he had to know if the body had been found.

Cruising down the highway in his trusty rust bucket he has the sudden urge to flee. I know it would be suspicious for me to just up and leave but this place is gonna ruin my life if stick around too much longer. His mind wanders back to his recent glory days at Pomona-Pitzer University. Beautiful women, a beautiful beach front school, and more football than he could have ever dreamed of playing back at Crass Valley Community College. Left tackle wasn’t exactly the most sought after player by the ladies, but he did alright with them and everyone else for that matter. In fact not just the football team, but the majority of the school had a tough time bidding John John adieu, in the beginning of his junior year; when his mother asked him to return home to help the family. She was in severe financial trouble, again. This is why you don’t give high school outs a credit card, or five for that matter. Normally Ricky’s father Don was around. He had a steady enough job at the mill. By steady enough, I mean he worked as hard as any man did three or four days a week. The remaining days of his week were spent sitting in some bar or brothel after being sent home from the mill for showing up sauced. Even with his excessive drinking and self-made schedule, if he was around, Jan’s bills weren’t a problem. John John resents his mother to the point of disgust for this. The mother John John knew, before his dead was found dead in a dumpster at just

eight years old, would not have put up with the kind of behavior that Don exhibits for the park on a daily basis. His mother had loved a man named John, giving John John the desire to be twice the man his father was. He wonders what had changed in his mother during the four years between his dad and Don.

The highway signs had ended a few miles back and the hastily paved road had turned into a loose gravel/dirt mix. The trees on either side of road enclosed him in another realm as he hauled down the way. I didn't realize this was so out of the way. The red Ford slides to a stop in the center of a rising dust cloud. Don's body hadn't moved an inch since John John left. Not that it could anyway. It seems a one of the lower members on the food chain took advantage of this most delicious opportunity for his ring and pinky finger were missing. All that was remained of them were two small blood stained nubs. The mangled face must have been too much to stomach, even for the scavengers round these parts. John John grimaces as he planted the steel toe of his tattered Brahma's square into the crotch of the corpse.

"Hopefully you'll feel that one in hell you prick." He spits and returns to the truck, confident that he wouldn't have to leave town. The morning frost had dissipated, the temperature was rising, and the sun sits high in the cloudy sky. As far as he could tell pulling into the drive, life in the trailer had yet to stir. Placing his finger between the ajar door and the door frame, he pulled it open and ventured inside.

"Ma?" She had moved from the couch John John notices.

"Are you just getting in? Musta been a late night." She responds with a hushed tone as she exits Ricky and Stephanie's still quiet room.

"You would know if you could lay off the damn sauce for one night. I mean hell Ma when I got home last night you were already zuited and out for the count. Ricky and Stephanie were just out here with the door wide open."

"Well Don was supposed to come over after he worked so he could watch them for a bit. I'm surprised he didn't wake me when he got here.

"That prick probably never even came over" he retorts. "He's

probably passed out face down in some broad's rank bowl of muff cabbage." Convincing himself that's what had actually happened and that there was no body. It wasn't too hard for John John to forget about Don seeing as how he was always more a figment to John John anyway. He knew he was there physically, but as far as a decent human being goes, to John John, he was non-existent. She stood at the sink with her back turned to him. Her faded pink terrycloth robe sagged on the floor, the cuffs absorbing excess water from the previous nights' dishes.

"I wish you wouldn't talk about him that way. He is your little brother's father you know."

"Bullshit!" anger foamed from his mouth. "I'm my little brother's father. That shit head hasn't done dick for Ricky. What father would beat his son's mother in front of him while verbally harassing his son with each fist planted on his mother? What kind of father spends is money on whiskey and oxys when his son is as skinny as a rail?!"

"We all could eat more, but times is tough! Don't go blaming your stress on Don."

"You're sick. You're seriously going to defend him still? He hasn't even shown his face in the past couple days. Probably cuz he's out breaking his back and bleeding for this family, right? Oh that's right, it's more likely that he got his dumb ass shot in the head following one of his brilliantly rigged card games. Probably used the money you thought was for food and shit. Class fucking act Ma."

She turns her back to him knowing his words weren't inconceivable. She just wonders how he could be so specific. The off white Frigidaire door creaks open exposing its pathetic contents. Her "medicinal" case of whatever piss brand beer was on sale, three string cheese sticks. One already green and blue with mold and the other two not far behind. Some grayish pink lunch meat from the corner stop sits alone on the top shelf. A quarter dozen of eggs rests next an almost full gallon of apple juice, you know, something for the kids. She pulls out a frosty can of PBR and pops the top. "Gotta have your nectar in the morning don't ya?" he scolds. A bony and trembling middle finger comes inches from his face as she pushed past his hulking mass.

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Ricky and Stephanie had been gone for a few hours now, giving John John ample time to figure out his plan. They are down at the edge of the trailer park, by the Miller's trailer. There is a small patch of woods with a small brook cutting through it. It is their favorite place to play. Filled with plenty of tree stumps and fallen limbs, they could stay there for hours making up game after game after game. On weekends they would be there all day, only returning to the trailer when Jan would sound the dinner call; which was no other than the Nuge shreddin' some good ol' boy tunes. Too bad they won't get to play there anymore. John John had never been so sullen. He always loved his mom, like any son, she had just become weak in her recent years and he couldn't stand watching her do so. It's not like she was a bad mother either, but this self-pitying rut she had gotten into jeopardized the well-being of Ricky and Stephanie. He wondered where Stephanie would go. Hopefully not to a foster home, she deserves better than that. This was beyond his control though; he could only finish what he had set out to do. Protect his little brother. The golden hills and crashing surf had been shouting his name since he headed back east to Alabama a few months prior. All he wanted was to be back there and not worry about this shit hole and all its problems. He wanted Ricky with him, knowing he was the only one who ever really gave a shit about the poor kid. Stephanie would be a nice addition to their pair but he feared a little girl may be too much for him to handle.

He hadn't seen his mother since their tiff earlier that morning. He found her passed out on her bed. He thought about how this would be easiest. The answer was easy, his gun. Too bad Don done fucked that up. He had an idea. He concocted his mother's favorite drink, the same one that led to his own conception; black velvet with a splash of diet rite. She normally didn't take it with rat poison but he had decided today was a special day. Drink in hand, he exits the kitchen. He pushed through his mom's door and stood quietly at the foot of her bed watching her slumber. As he shook her ankle he spoke.

"Ma wake up, I made you a drink. I thought we could talk about earlier. I said some things that need clearing up." He waited

for her response, nothing. He leaned in closer to see if he could hear breathing. As she lay there not making a sound, his eyes ventured up from her feet to her hands where he could see her holding something. Prying he stiff fingers apart he gets her to lose her grip, revealing Don's infamous script container. Empty.