

Drunken Duck is the story of an Irish-American Catholic boy growing up in Sacramento, California during the 1950s and 60s with an abundance of forever friends. Later in life, as a Navy SEAL, he travels to Japan and Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Singapore. His childhood experiences of love and loss are precursors of the choices he makes in the women he passionately loves and the violent actions he takes in war.

## **Drunken Duck**

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A PADDY FRANCIS HARRINGTON NOVEL

# drunken duck

Forever Friends & Sometime Lovers

RONALD DAWSON

*"The truth is not always beautiful, nor beautiful words the truth." Lao Tzu*



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## Chapter 1: Alkali Flats

Sacramento, California, May 7, 1954

A Friday, a day of little historical importance, without any warning whatsoever, would be the day of her rebirth. Miss Laura Svobodová, a rather tall and slender twenty-nine-year-old gaunt faced assistant librarian, with cheerless brown eyes magnified by thick-rimmed bifocal glasses, worked at the Central Main Library located in the downtown area of Sacramento. Claiming the library as her sanctuary, she appeared an uninteresting woman with drab powdery tan-brown make-up covering her face, sans lipstick, auburn hair in a tight bun. Her long sleeved dowdy shapeless brown dress falling to mid-calf, matched by her brown nondescript flat shoes, her austere emaciated appearance and dour demeanor complete, a stereotype of a humorless librarian—characterless.

The library, a three-story thirty-nine-year-old Italian Renaissance-style building, festooned with bas-relief stone sculpture, became her choice of workplace eight years earlier. She spent much of her humdrum existence in the library, which served the dual purpose of a safe haven that she could hide within herself and the perceived, albeit sometimes real, dangers of the world outside.

She peered down at the little boy, the time-honored look of a librarian's trademark stern countenance upon her face while in her ascetic manner the uncompromising rigidity of a dedicated bureaucrat, somewhat paradoxically, blossomed forth.

Clichéd, but nevertheless true, appearances can be deceiving. She wore sheer seamless nylon 'Nudies' stockings on her shapely legs. Braless, her panties and slip were of white fine silky lace smoothly soothing against her burn scarred breasts and body. Determined by her strong-minded maverick will not to enforce the library policy on issuing a library card to a minor without parental permission, she resolved, on a whim, to take responsibility for any shenanigans the boy standing in front of her might produce. Usually not whimsical but prim and frugal, outside of her normal disposition, except for her choice of undergarments, she also decided she would pay the boy's late fees on any books or reimburse the library for any lost books on her own account. She didn't know why, but she liked this Irish scamp—a lie—she knew exactly why.

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As she typed his information on the new card, the boy with the strange penetrating grayish-blue eyes told her, “You have beautiful ears, a generous heart, and an unbelievably . . . uh . . . soul, Miss Svobodová.”

Did he say beautiful ears?

“If you weren’t being insulting, very funny about the ears, but what else did you mean to say?”

“I’m not being insulting or funny, you do have nice ears and I can attest to the fact that you have a loving soul, more loving than you know. Besides, even though my ears are not as nice as yours, we’re twins, don’t you know?”

“We’re twins?”

“Yes. You can see the scar on my right temple and you have a matching scar, barely noticeable under your make up, between your right temple and forehead, too—see, were twins.”

“You’re very observant.”

“Yes, that’s me all right. We hardly know each other, but when I grow up, will you marry me, please?”

At first taken-aback, this being her first marriage proposal, she soon could not help but being amused, bemused, and saddened. She told the boy, as he had suggested with his comment, they hardly knew each other, however, she would think on his proposal before she gave him her answer. Laura had hope of another offer of marriage from her long-time, long-suffering, boyfriend George. She could tell George, in all honesty, a Mr. P.F. Harrington asked for her hand in marriage and she had his proposal under consideration.

As she typed out his card, P.F., her would-be fiancé, as she now thought of him, said, “Your eyes are beautiful and you type fast, too.”

She thought, *humph*, beautiful ears and eyes, indeed. “Flattery will get you nowhere P.F., ten books maximum at checkout, understood?”

“Yes, ma’am, understood, but it’s not flattery when it’s true.”

The reality of library policy, clearly written, “On the issuance of a library card to a minor, parental written permission required, and the first checkout must be of three books only.”

While adjusting her glasses, she asked, “Aren’t you supposed to be in school?”

“I’m Catholic and I’m supposed to be home with a cold and the sniffles, my Mom had to go to work, so here I am.”

Not a truant officer, just an assistant librarian, and war refugee, the responsible thing would be to call the school or find out where his mother worked and give her a jingle. P.F, her would-be fiancé, should not be all alone. “P.F., you’re alone? No one is here with you?”

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“Sure, I’m alone, what’s wrong with being alone?”

Not waiting for an answer, he continued, “Even surrounded by people you’re here all alone, at least until I came along said the spider to Miss Muffet or in this case you, Miss Svobodová. Neither of us is alone now. We have each other. You and I will be forever friends.”

She could not bring herself to turn him in to the authorities or even over to his mother. Never an informer, the last thing in life she would ever become was an informant.

“Here, take your new library card. Congratulations, you’re now part of the system.”

Recognizing sarcasm when he heard it, he nevertheless excitedly took his new library card from his possible future fiancée, his newly found love, Miss Laura Svobodová.

As he started to rush up to the mezzanine floor of the library, Miss Svobodová admonished him, “Slow down, be quiet. Act with some decorum when you’re in the library, young man.”

Abruptly, he stopped running and quietly tiptoed up the stairs. The peaceful serenity of the quietude of the library fascinated him. He knew he found a new friend and possible fiancée, but he also found a haven, a refuge, a wee-bit of Paradise on Earth as it is in Heaven.

In a large abused old battered dictionary, he looked up the word decorum. “*Decorum: from the Latin, meaning literary propriety: applied to prescribed limits of appropriate social behavior within a set context; plural, the conventions of polite behavior.*”

Upstairs he politely inquired of another assistant librarian if the *Old and New Testaments* were fiction or nonfiction.

The young woman answered, “They’re historical novels, I think.”

After spending half an hour looking for the *Testaments* in both the History and Historical Fiction sections of the library, he gave up, went back down to the main floor and asked, “Miss Svobodová, are the *Testaments* history, historical novels or classified as nonfiction or fiction? I think, therefore I am, confused.”

Laura did not believe in God and had every right to her disbelief. “We keep Bibles in the nonfiction section with all religious or spiritual books. Poetry is nonfiction too, even if it concerns made-up events.”

“Aha!” He exclaimed. “Now I know where to look.”

A number of library patrons looked up and frowned.

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Shaking her head, common behavior when around Patrick, she said, “*Shhh*, here, take my hand. Let me show you exactly where to look and please be quiet.”

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As she thought about the last time, she had held a little boy’s hand—remembering her brother’s hand in hers, when a German Waffen SS Officer tore him from her grasp—she took the boy’s hand in hers and escorted him to the bookracks where a number of bibles along with other spiritual works were on display.

*Remembering . . .* In July of 1941, at fifteen, she joined the communist partisans, the Resistance. At the time, she lived with her father, mother, and her seven-year-old brother in Lidice, Czechoslovakia.

She fought the Nazis with her fellow travelers for nearly a year when the assassination of Reinhardt *the Hangman* Heydrich, Hitler’s *Blond Beast*, in May of 1942, led to the execution of her father and all of the men over the age of sixteen in her village. The women with most of the younger children disappeared into concentration camps. Some children, as her brother, vanished into a mystery of history. The buildings were destroyed, the ground plowed under, and the village of Lidice disappeared as if the village and its people never existed.

After her arrest for her guerilla activities, she saw the absence of God as her Nazi captors repeatedly raped and tortured her. The first day, they stripped her naked, tied her to a cot, and an old Major, her chief interrogator, as well as his young Lieutenant, took turns raping her. The next day a half-dozen other German Officers of various ranks raped her. The third day the guards took their turn. The fourth day, the Major tied her to a chair and started the interrogation by slapping her in the face, backhanding her twice, in his cold rage, slicing open her right cheek and temple with his SS Totenkopf Deathshead Honor ring. The Lieutenant beat her body with a rubber hose. When the Lieutenant tired, the Major would question her. When she refused to answer, both interrogators, chain smokers, used her as an ashtray with the Major particularly fond of putting his cigarettes out on her breasts.

She confessed to being a resistance fighter, but refused to become an informant. Her communist partisan mates made up for her reticence by informing on everyone at the mere threat of torture. Her refusal to reveal useful information led to unspeakable suffering. Her youth gone, her bloodied face and cigarette burned scarred body undesirable, her Gestapo interrogators’ no longer took pleasure in the cruel questioning. Of no further use to her bored captors, they would have killed her, but felt she deserved worse.

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After a train ride in a putrid crowded cattle car, Laura arrived at Ravensbrück concentration camp. Upon arrival, the Nazis tattooed a prison serial number on her lower left arm. At Ravensbrück, the guards used her and nine other women as incentives for the male prisoners to work at hard labor. A forced prostitute in the brothel of Ravensbrück, from June of 1942 until April of 1945, within the first week, Laura lost count of how many times her fellow inmates raped and sodomized her. Why count?

When she became pregnant, a butchered abortion left her no longer able to bear children. In her captivity, during her degradation, she made the choice to live. She knew any self-respecting woman would have committed suicide or at least had the good manners to die. In her own mind, she would always be a filthy coward living a meaningless existence. She lacked courage as she hid in the library, fearful of life, and hid within herself, fearful of love.

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He felt safe holding Miss Svobodová's strong-gentle hand. He trusted this woman with the haunted eyes magnified beautifully by her glasses. He could see her eyes moisten. A teardrop trickled down her right cheek.

"The books in this section can't be checked out. You must read these books while you're here in the library, understood?"

Responding gently, he replied, "Yes, Miss Svobodová, I do understand." He didn't understand completely, but loved her, and empathized with her sorrow, regardless of his understanding.

She removed her eyeglasses, took a white lace handkerchief from the sleeve of her blouse, dabbed at her eyes, and wiped the teardrop off her cheek. As she wiped her cheek, some of her make-up came off. Another scar, on her right cheek, below the scar on her temple appeared.

Readjusting her glasses, she removed the *King James's* version of *the Bible* off the shelf, and found him a private nook, a quiet place in the library to sit and read.

She wondered why his eyes were moist. Had she been too harsh? With her handkerchief, she dabbed at his eyes, even though no teardrops followed, and as their moisture mingled on the cloth, not wanting him to feel embarrassed, she said, "It must be your cold. Let me help you dry your eyes, sweetie."

Blushing at the thought of being her sweetheart, he knew he had made the right choice of asking for her hand in marriage. He didn't confess there was no need for the handkerchief, as he never, actually, ever cried.



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Laura bent down to whisper in his ear quietly, librarian-like, “Are you positive you can read *the Bible* with understanding, honey? I have children’s classics of *the Bible* available for checkout.”

“I can understand the lessons in *the Bible* as well as most, I suppose. I want to read from the original translations. Someday I hope to learn Greek and Latin, even. It’s the principle of the thing, you know.”

“You’re a man of principle, P.F.?”

“I’m not sure, Miss Svobodová.”

“You think you’re unprincipled?”

“My teacher, Sister Mary, thinks I’m an unprincipled, unrepentant, sinner, but when it comes to you, or others whom I love also, I always behave with honor, I promise.”

“I’m honored. I believe you are a man of principle. I also believe you’ll behave yourself while you’re in the library.”

Patrick spent an hour reading and contemplating on the *Book of Genesis* in the *Old Testament* and the *Sermon on the Mount* in the *New Testament*.

He spent another half-hour selecting the ten-book maximum allowed for checkout. Miss Svobodová had disappeared. The woman at the checkout desk explained he could only check out three books.

Searching the library, he found Miss Svobodová on her lunch break in a room behind an *Employees’ Only* door. He saw she had reapplied her make-up.

Motioning him over, she pulled apart her tuna sandwich, handed the biggest portion to him, and poured him some of her hot-honeyed tea into her thermos cup.

Even though he told her he suffered from a cold, he observed they shared the same cup. He sipped where she sipped, tasting where her lips had been. For the first time in his life, he added the sense of taste to his repertoire of evaluating someone’s character. He noticed she gave him the biggest portion of her sandwich. He thought people often do things to show how generous they were or to show the world how good and righteous they could be. Others, as exemplified by Miss Svobodová, showed their true goodness, their hidden-nature, when they were not even thinking they were being loving, generous, or good. When they thought of themselves as “less than” what they truly were.

“I hope you get over your cold. This hot honeyed-tea should help. You must be famished. Eat, drink, and be merry.”

He responded, “For tomorrow we shall die.”

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She felt as if she were in *Alice in Wonderland* in the presence of this boy as things got “*Curiouser and curiouser.*”

They ate lunch together, similar to a tea party, for the first time. They were at ease in each other’s company. He decided to come clean. “Miss Svobodová, I have a confession to make. I don’t have a cold.”

“I thought not. I have a sneaking suspicion you’re going to be quite a handful for me to deal with, P.F.”

“A hand-full of what, are we going to play cards?”

“Never mind your silliness. You know what I mean.”

She reached over and took his hand. She felt protective of him, innocent of her past when she held his hand. “Promise me, no more showing up at the library during school hours on school days.”

“I enjoy the library much better than school and I like you so much better than I do my schoolteacher, Sister Mary. I’d never ask her to marry me. Oops! I forgot she’s already married happily ever after, to *the Christ.*”

Miss Svobodová shook her head.

“Never be rude or a smart aleck. You have no idea what she may have been through in her life. Treat her with respect.”

In the tradition of boys everywhere, he swore, “It’s not my fault, I swear. She started the war, not me.”

“What war?”

“The warfare between us . . . she will never give up and neither will I. Do you want me to tell you how it started?”

“I suppose.”

“One day in class she asked us about the meaning of life.”

“She asked the students, what’s the meaning of life?”

“No, she asked, two questions actually. How does one determine one’s life and how does God evaluate it?”

“A trick question based in assumption, if I ever heard of one, P.F.”

“What does assumption mean, Miss Svobodová?”

“It’s *a statement that is assumed to be true*, true or not, *from which a conclusion can be drawn.*”

“Yep, right out of the blue everyone assumed they got it right, but I knew the answer.”

“You did?”

“Yep, or I assumed I did. Some answered praying to God, or following the *Ten Commandments* or the *Golden Rule*. One student answered we determine our life by doing good works and God gives us a grade. Another answered following the United States Constitution and voting Republican.

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Everyone laughed, even Sister Mary. I think my friend Michael got the closest when he answered playing baseball while God keeps track of your batting average: hits, runs, and errors. Everyone laughed again.”

“See Patrick, even Sister Mary shows she has a sense of humor. Your answer must have been very offensive.”

“That’s just it. She never let me finish my answer. I said how one determines one’s life is by accumulation, counting the . . .” pausing, for effect, he jumped up, as he continued, “then she grabbed me and ended up whacking my hand with a ruler for being so materialistic.”

Still holding his hand in hers she responded, “You can tell me. Complete your answer. I won’t interrupt and I promise I won’t whack your hand with a ruler.”

“It’s kind of tricky in a way, simple, yet complex. You know the answer, but you just won’t accept it. Hardly anyone ever truly does.”

Pretending consternation, or perhaps not pretending, she asked, “You really are being rude. Are you going to tell me, or not?”

Concerned, he asked, “Promise you won’t get angry?”

Laughing, good-naturedly, she responded, “I promise I won’t get angry or whack your hand with a ruler, but I’ll pour tea over your head if you don’t tell me your answer right now.”

He giggled. He really liked her, a lot.

She took his other hand, now holding both of his hands in hers. She looked into his eyes and said, “Tell me.”

“Okay, Miss Svobodová. The answer is, we determine our life by accumulation, counting the good and weighing it against the bad, but only find redemption when we ask God to see us through his Son’s eyes, and he asks us back . . . then why are you still counting?”

Miss Svobodová let go of his hands, stood, told him not to go anywhere, and ran through a door marked, “Women.”

He heard her crying and knew he had hurt her feelings. He wished she had gotten angry and poured tea over his head. He chastised himself for being a rude know-it-all. Sister Mary had been right not to let him complete his answer and to punish him, as well.

She came back and immediately scooped up his books in one arm, took his hand once again, and told him to come with her to the checkout desk.

“Hey, I can carry my books, a girl, I mean, an attractive young lady, is not supposed to carry books, not even her own.”

Laura chastised him. “Please, stop with the compliments. If you want, I’ll work-up a reading list for you this summer.”

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“Okay, but no kid’s stuff for me.”

“Don’t worry. I see one of your selections is Saroyan’s *Tracy’s Tiger*, a fable of a young man, Tracy, and a young lady, Laura, coming-of-age, going from innocence to experience and knowing what it is to find love. I think you’re ready to read the great classics of literature.”

She checked-out the maximum ten books allowed, or not allowed. The remainder of her lunch hour she spent driving him home to a ramshackle, in need of repair, apartment building nine blocks away from the library in, Alkali Flats, the predominately-Hispanic part of town.

He jumped down out of the car with his books in his arms, slammed the car door shut, leaned into the passenger’s window and expressed his true thoughts. “Thank you. You are more beautiful than you know, both inside and out. I love you, Miss Svobodová.”

Miss Svobodová, responded with some disdain entering her voice, said, “*Humph*, beautiful, indeed. Am I supposed to say I love you, too?”

He thought . . . *good, rather anger than tears* . . . what did she mean, by *humph*, or by what she asked? “I’m sorry I made you cry. It’s my rude behavior. I just can’t seem to help myself. Sometimes I may practice the sin of omission, but I never outright lie to a friend or someone I love. You think I’m playing a con, when I say, I love you?”

Somehow, she did not know how, or when it occurred, she knew he had given her part of his heart and shared his soul with her. He had given the answer to the meaninglessness of how she had been measuring her life. She had to go beyond just surviving, existing day to day.

Laura apologized. “You have my apology P.F. The truth is, having known you for such a short amount of time, I love you already too, sweetie.”

Blushing, once again, at the thought of being Miss Svobodová’s sweetheart, to hide his embarrassment he waved good-bye, quickly turned, and rushed up the stairs to his apartment, lickity-split, two steps at a time.

He loved Miss Svobodová. The scars on her face, barely noticeable, simply added to her beauty. Someday he hoped to see her gorgeous brown sad eyes sparkle with pure joy. When he grew up, he would marry her and they would live happily ever after, until death do they part unless of course she married someone else and he married Sachi or, perhaps, one of his favorite movie stars, either Dorothy Dandridge or Ava Gardner, instead.

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Laura, on her return to the library, asked her *Self*, “Why now?” She missed her childhood. Since she turned sixteen and her capture, she felt powerless, unable to give or feel love, and incapable of experiencing or

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expressing joy. Why would anyone, even such a giving person as her George, want her as a life-long mate?

Most of her scars lay hidden under her clothes, her facial scars barely noticeable from afar. She knew some would think of her as attractive. For the first time in nearly thirteen years, Laura, the sixteen-year-old young girl lost within her, came back with power. Finding herself weeping profusely, she parked her car so she would not cause an accident.

Laura determined to stop wallowing in self-pity, the self-indulgence of measuring her life in terms of what happened to her. She knew it would not be easy. She wanted to teach. She loved children. She couldn't have children of her own, but she could adopt. She would adopt older children, harder to place children, countless children, lost children, in honor of her lost brother. She decided to pursue her relationship with George. She had not been sexually involved with anyone for nine years. In her heart, and in the depths of her soul, she never freely made love to anyone in her life as her body, ravaged thousands of times, became nonexistent, empty of all feeling, her world a void—of nothingness— while God asks, “Why count?”

She could hardly wait to tell her boyfriend George of Mr. P.F. Harrington's marriage proposal. She decided to practice the sin of omission and not tell George his rival for her affections, her new beau, would soon be nine years old.

Passion, once again, entered into her life. George best ask her to marry him. Mr. P.F. Harrington would not be nine years old forever. Her tears turned into laughter at such a thought. Unpinning her hair, she vigorously shook her head, and let her flowing auburn locks gently cascade down past her shoulders. Notwithstanding, her history, the scars on her face, and the burns all over her body, life's accumulations, she exuded beauty—both inside and out.

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Patrick dropped off his books at home and walked back downtown. He didn't have the heart to tell his newest friend he didn't want a ride home, rather he wanted to see the movie *Frogmen* at the *Roxy Theater* around the corner from the Central Library.

He told the cashier at the theater, “School may have let out early,” paid his twenty-five cents, bought popcorn and a cola at the concession stand for two-bits more, and entered the darkened theater.

As Richard Widmark, played Lt. Commander John Lawrence on the screen, Patrick saw himself marrying Miss Svobodová, joining the Navy, and

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becoming a UDT frogman one day. He found himself humming the tune to *Anchors Away*.

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The Battle of Dien Bien Phu ended on May 7, 1954, in a French defeat. While Patrick watched and waited for the movie *Frogmen* to reach its climatic end, Ting Mei Hualing watched and waited for her parents, Viet Minh insurgents, to come home not realizing they were dead, killed during the last attack on the French garrison. Hualing, a dark haired slender girl, playful and often dirty-faced, but pretty, some would describe her as beautiful, had a full heart and compassionate soul. She would soon be traveling north with her paternal grandparents to Hanoi.

For Patrick and Hualing, coincidentally born on the same day 13,300 kilometers apart, without knowing their future's future, "*the die had been cast*," their paths would cross, their destinies shared. One day, as God or fate willed, perhaps by their life choices, one would kill the other.

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Staring into the illusionary depths of a mirrored reflection, his thoughts on Miss Svobodová, he saw a scrawny nine-year-old birthday boy with an outwardly angelic face, penetrating clear gray-blue eyes, winter white skin, and poorly home-cut blondish-brown hair, but today his appearance seemed different.

Taking a deep breath, exhaling slowly, concentrating on the eyes in the mirrored image staring back, a mild confusion and haunting discontentment reflected back at him in those eyes.

Acknowledging a whispered thought, with another deep breath and a sigh, he murmured, "I'm a stranger to myself."

Not knowing why, but in defining his *Self*, he saw, within those stranger's eyes, his eyes, half a heart and a fragmented soul, far less of a heart, with a soul more fragmented than his father's or brother's. How could this be? He had no answer.

He took in then let out another deep audible breath in resignation, not knowing fully the stirrings felt within his being, his heart beating rapidly, his thoughts still on Miss Svobodová, with a slight ache in his groin and heart, puberty arrived early.

From the age of three and his first memory, he had an awareness of his ability 'to know' people within a single glance, in an instant, even at a distance. When he peered into the eyes of others, especially girls, he could see what possessed their hearts with clarity. He did this looking usually, but not

always, without judging. Using sight, sound, touch, and smell, to date, two days earlier, taste for the first time, when he concentrated, he could see what others were like inside.

He found this *gift of knowing* costly. Others did not believe him when he told of it. Some laughed. Some ridiculed. Most dismissed him as a strange little boy. His observations from looking into his eyes in the mirror were somewhat perplexing. He realized with his youthful understanding or misunderstanding of the differences between wrong or right, evil and goodness, he never would see a heart with less purity or a soul with less virtue than his own. What would become of him? Even with his gift of knowing, he had little idea of what God willed for him, what fate would bring, or what would be his destiny.

First scrubbing, then rinsing his face, drying off with a towel, he sighed once again as he folded the dampened threadbare grayish-white towel and placed it neatly over the rim of the dirt-encrusted rust-streaked sink. His time of solitude and sighs over, he burst out of the bathroom, threw open the door with a bang, turning left through another doorway, he leapt into the living room with a poetic shout, “Hip, hip, hooray, it’s my birthday today!”

Not of his choice, his immediate family seemed to be just the luck of the draw, as most things in life appeared to be.

Big John, his father, a thirty-eight-year-old Anglo-Saxon Dutch-German Irishman, a six-foot two-inch muscular-lean mean bartender-bouncer spent his earnings on gambling, booze, women, hunting forays, and family in a specific order of preferences depending on his many shifting moods. This morning he sat on the sofa with his face hidden, as usual, behind a horseracing form.

He could not see his face, but knew his dad’s eyes were bloodshot after a night of drinking at the *Alkali Flats Bar* where his dad worked. The entire household and many neighbors awoke in the early morning when his father came crashing through the front door screaming about the injustices in the world, both injustice and his father’s drunken rage, a common occurrence.

Because of his father’s reputation, the neighbors were afraid to call the police. They were right to be afraid as Big John had once been a professional boxer and had killed a man in the ring. His father collected debts for local bookies and loan sharks. A neighborhood rumor persisted that he once beat a man to death outside the ring as well.

Frying a dozen large eggs and a half-pound of sizzling bacon, with buttered cinnamon toast on the side, Mary Evelyn, his thirty-five-year-old Scot-Irish mother did this with ease as she supplemented the family’s income as a fry-cook or sometimes night manager-cook of a cafeteria in *Sacramento’s*

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*Greyhound Bus Depot*. She spent her meager earnings on rent, food, utilities, and clothing in a specific order of preferences whether she preferred a specific order or not. Medical and dental care, past due bills, haircuts from a barber, and other frivolities were luxuries paid for by the Gods of good fortune, if paid at all.

Sometimes Big John won at his gambling and with the generosity of the rich, he spent his newly acquired wealth by going on a spending spree. The creditors received payment, the family received presents of good health, good teeth, good grooming, or even a good working new appliance from *Sears* as the result of his good fortune. For Big John, his winnings enabled him to have longer drinking bouts, make larger wagers, go on more hunting trips, and bed additional women.

Twelve-year-old, blue-eyed, red-haired, freckle-faced Johnny Wilson, his brother, sat on the floor listening to *The Lone Ranger* on the radio. Johnny Wilson, called JW, knew about the three one-dollar bills their father gave him for his birthday. Cracking his knuckles, beginning the intimidation process, JW, a local ruffian with a reputation for brutality, a would-be gangster who preferred conflict to peace, and anger to calm, supplemented his life's existence with a penchant for general violence. Enumeration of his misdeeds included: punching his brother in the stomach, getting into fights, playing hooky from school, and stealing from family, neighbors, and local stores. JW's pre-teen history of criminal activities, included arrests for shoplifting, vandalism, bicycle theft, drug possession, burglary, and a pending strong-armed robbery charge. In September, he would turn thirteen.

He sat down by his brother saying, "Hello, *Kemo Sabe*," to show Johnny Wilson intimidation wouldn't work. Besides, he wanted to hear the radio program. "*Hi Ho Silver, away*."

Mary Evelyn served her family in the living room. She went back into the kitchen, fixed a cup of coffee, lacing it with milk and two spoons of sugar, lit a cigarette and sat at the small dinette table to eat her breakfast while she picked up her book, *The Robe* by Lloyd C. Douglas, continuing her adventure into the Holy Land.

His birthday presents included a *Radio Flyer* red wagon from his mother, a *Mr. Potato Head* from Michael Kihara, a bag of russet potatoes from Michael's mother, a dozen pencils with a spiral notebook from Sachi Kihara-Cassini, and a *Duncan* yo-yo from Isabella-Theresa Lopez.

Putting Sachi's gifts away for future use, he played with *Mr. Potato Head* for ten minutes, became bored and gave the potatoes to his mother as she could make the most delicious greasy French fries this side of France. He



played with his yo-yo, mastering a few tricks including *the sleeper, the throw away, around the world, and walking the dog*, became bored and went outside, deciding to take a spin over to Kihara's Market.

His parents never shopped at Kihara's Market, or the Mexican or Italian markets in the neighborhood, but he did. In spite of his preference for Irish stew, and cheeseburgers with french-fries, he loved to shop at the Japanese, Italian, and Mexican markets in his neighborhood with his own hard-earned money. He loved food. His favorite restaurant, Chinese, and his favorite treat a simple five-cent large kosher pickle he bought from an eighty-three-year-old Jewish Rabbi who made pickles in a garage down the alley from where he lived. The Rabbi reminded him of his mother's father.

The nine-year-old birthday boy had three friends since kindergarten, ones he called his "forever friends."

Sachi, a Japanese-Italian American, his best girl friend, mesmerized him with her lovely face, creamy white skin with pale yellow undertones, straight black hair, and luminous deep-brown gentle eyes. Her eyes accentuated by the longest black eyelashes he'd ever seen, and by heavenly eyebrows slightly hidden by her neatly trimmed bangs. Since kindergarten class, whenever she entered the room, graced him with her wonderful smile, looked into his eyes, or simply touched him, his heart would quicken as his knees weakened.

Her ethnicity and race fit perfectly within the prejudices of post WW2's America along with the recent Korean War's unresolved conflict. Whether viewed as Japanese, Korean, or Chinese, her antagonists did not care what character she might possess. In spite of being the target of racial slurs, sexual taunts and cruel name-calling by the children in classes ahead of her at school or on the streets, her own classmates, children of her own age and younger, admired her for her gracious manner and loving spirit.

Michael, Sachi's cousin, pure-race Japanese, and a natural athlete, was his best pal. Michael and he were constantly playing sports and competing against each other. They would get into wrestling matches that Michael usually won because he took judo lessons from one of his uncles. Win or lose, both boys were good sports, whatever the outcome.

Sachi and Michael were straight 'A' students, obedient children, and reliable friends. The cousins worked in their family-owned grocery store on weekends and he worked part-time in the produce or meat department sections of the grocery. Sachi's father shared duties with Michael's father as butchers in the meat department. One of his friend's uncles, the judo expert, worked in the produce section.

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The market opened at seven in the morning and stayed open until nine at night, every day of the week, only closing on four major holidays and at noon on Independence Day, Armistice Day, and Christmas Eve.

A first generation Azteca-Spanish-American, Isabella-Theresa, his second love, a love close to his heart, but not the same as his love for Sachi, had wavy long flowing black hair, pretty hazel-eyes, lovely dark creamy-olive skin in the winter, and tanned-bronzed skin in the summer. Isabella lived with her *Madre y Padre, y tres hermanos*, including a four-year-old younger brother named Richard and two older brothers who called themselves *Pachuca* or *Chicanos* depending on their moods. Her older brothers were members of the Mexican only, 'C Street' Park gang.

Isabella, even though gentle in spirit, would slug him in his arm in response to his constant teasing. If she ever stopped slugging him, his arm may not be as sore, but his feelings would most certainly be hurt. When he peered into her eyes, he saw a gentle-strong spirit embedded in her heart, and a soul full of grace. Isabella and he were 'B plus' students.

In his mind, his three friends were as essential to his existence as breathing in air, drinking *Coca-Cola* or *Pepsi-Cola*, eating cheeseburgers along with greasy salted french-fries, or partaking in a delicious Irish stew, sometimes better known around his house as "boiled leftovers from the fridge."

To this group of friends and food, he added Miss Svobodová, hot honeyed tea, and tuna sandwiches.

Outside, on his way to Kihara's market, he saw a photographer with a *Polaroid* instant camera, black and white pinto pony, and cowboy paraphernalia. The photographer took his picture as he pretended to be the WW2 hero Audie Murphy playing the desperado Jessie James in the movie *Kansas Raiders*.

After paying a dollar for his picture, he raced over to the market, thanked his friends for his presents, and asked Michael's mother to put his two dollars on his personal grocery account as he thanked her for her present of potatoes.

Sachi's mother, tending the cash register, handed him a cherry-flavored *Tootsie Roll Pop* covered in cherry-red crinkly paper with a chocolaty chewy surprise inside. She wished him a happy birthday, "*Otanjoobi omedetoo gozaimasu, Patrick-san.*" Patrick bowed, thanking her with a Japanese phrase Sachi had taught him, "*Hai, Dooomo arigatoo gozaimasu.*"

On his return home, he treated his *Radio Flyer* as a foot-powered scooter while imagining driving a racecar tearing up the oval track at West Sacramento's dirt track races. It made for an extra exciting evening at the

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races when the drivers crashed into one another, jumped out of their racecars, and got into fistfights. When the drivers' families, and pit crews, along with their fans joined the fray, he enjoyed the fracas even more. When he arrived home, JW punched him in the stomach. Not finding any money, his brother left for places unknown.

Not known for consistent behavior, JW came home in the late afternoon and gave him a forty-six inch tall *Bozo the Clown Bop Bag* with a red squeaky nose, and sand-filled base with bounce-back action. The deflated clown came enfolded within a large yellow cardboard box with Bozo's picture on the front. JW shoplifted the large box from *Woolworth's* five-and-dime store.

He placed the deflated clown in his newly acquired red wagon, wheeled it over to Isabella's home, thanked Isabella for his yo-yo, and gave Bozo to her brother Richard. Inflating the clown, he showed the siblings how to punch Bozo in his plastic inflated body and bopped Bozo in his nose, causing the clown to squeak.

The siblings clobbered the poor clown as he and Bozo looked on laughing as if they were crazy. Any discontent seen in the mirror earlier, now gone from his eyes. He admonished the two siblings to keep *Bozo the Clown* away from sharp objects, and bid the clown and his two friends, "*Adios.*"

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In complete obedience to her directions to do so, on Friday, this last day of school before being unleashed on the summer, he held his hands out in front of him in acceptance of her just punishment.

Sister Mary, in undignified habit, shouted at him, "Get that smirk off your face, young man. I won't tolerate any of your rude insolence."

Responding, as usual, in cheekiness, one of many bad habits, he claimed, "I'm not smirking. I'm grimacing from the pain of life's predestined tribulations, Sister Mary."

His obedient-disobedience, along with his sense of humor and use of vocabulary legendary at his school, with a smile on his face, he looked into Sister Mary's stunningly ice-cold blue eyes. He saw her inner-self definitely did not match her almost Audrey Hepburn-like flawless outer beauty.

The effort expended by Sister Mary as she whacked away at his hands resulted in his hands turning blush-red, some minor stinging, and a wee-drop of blood appearing as the metal trimmed edge of the wooden ruler dug into the palm of one of his hands. Immune to corporal punishment, the wars' at home and in the streets often left him bruised, sometimes bloodied, but seemingly unfazed.

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He thought Sister Mary must know that he saw a hint of what lay behind her eyes: the pride she hid within her heart, the lust for power entrenched within her soul. He knew she wanted her will to dominate the unwilling. He knew he would never surrender.

The battle with Sister Mary continued in a summer's catechism class she taught as a prerequisite for Confirmation. A class he graced with his presence because Isabella took the class and asked him to accompany her on her road toward sanctification.

After seeing his own interior's patchy design, he did not usually judge what he saw in anyone. However, testing people to see their reaction became one of his favorite activities. While testing, he used his gift of looking into another person's eyes in ascertaining what type of heart the person had and what kind of soul peered back at him. Seeing no forgiveness in Sister Mary's eyes, reflecting on his nature, he did not seek or want forgiveness.

In catechism class, after she finished whacking his hands one day, he said, "Thank you, Sister Mary of Magdalene."

Believing wholeheartedly in the *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, she explained to him the difference between the *New Testament* women of the *Bible* named Mary. She said her baptismal name of Mary came from the Blessed Virgin Mary, *the Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven*, and not the oft-suspected redeemed prostitute, Mary of Magdalene. He noticed she used the words "repentant sinner" when describing Mary Magdalene while avoiding words or thoughts of prostitution all together.

Repeating his mistake of talking during class, while getting his hands whacked, he called her Mary Magdalene once again. She pointed out to him his identification error as before. When he made the same 'mistake' a third time, she called him "a vicious boy" recognizing his disdain for her.

He replied, "*Au contraire*, my favorite character in *the Bible* is Mary of Magdalene, and I think Jesus loved her best, don't you?"

Not surprisingly, this revelation put Sister Mary into a furor. He knew she would one-day find a way to punish him more severely for "his blasphemy, his sin of pride, his self-important smugness."

In class, the children learned the *Lord's* and *Hail Mary* prayers, among other Roman Catholic theological doctrines, including the necessities of repentance and doing penance to atone for one's easily forgiven venial sins. After his challenge to her, he knew Sister Mary would feel these necessary doctrines were going to be important for him to learn.

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She taught him these necessities of repentance and penance by whacking both his hands with a ruler as often as he sinned, which, as it turned out, would be often. She made him do further penance by having him recite not only the *Lord's Prayer* and *Hail Mary* prayer, but the *Act of Contrition* in an attempt to get him to repent of his many misdeeds.

One day, to humiliate him further, she demanded he say an *Act of Contrition*, in front of the class.

He replied, "No, *problema*, Sister."

In one breath by intended rude-rote mistake, he blurted out, "O my God, I am hardly sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all, who would know better than you, because they offend Thee, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, and of course Sister Mary, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen." His newly formed prayer said in five seconds flat.

His speedy contrition, his exchange of hardly for *heartily*, his addition of words, his smile and his cheekiness act did not convince her of his repentance, but did persuade her of his lack of righteousness.

She predicted he would end up in Hell. The look on her face convinced him she wanted to drown him in Holy Water. He understood her frustration. She knew boys grew up to be men and, in his particular case, this bothered her no end. He thought she may be a Prophetess with a premonition of his future's future, or she may be the reincarnation of the Witch of Endor, predicting his doom.

Often in trouble for talking to Isabella during class, Isabella never got her hand smacked with a ruler, as he quickly admitted that such a mortal sin as talking in class was his alone.

Isabella, a confessed devoutly religious Mexican-American Catholic, attended church every Sunday. Patrick, an un-confessed Irish-American Catholic, devoutly attended church services every Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday, religiously. Together, they celebrated their First Holy Communion. Kneeling next to each other at the altar of God, Isabella telling him, as they knelt, she felt they were kindred spirits, soul mates in the religious sense. He thought kindred spirits possibly, but given the state of his soul compared to hers, he knew her second postulate could not possibly be true.

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By September, with few shenanigans, no late fees or lost books, Patrick and Laura were definitely kindred spirits. He would visit her at the library on

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weekdays. On Sunday's she invited him to her small nondescript apartment for tea and talk. Her living quarters were near the State Capitol building and the well kept lush green landscaped park. They would discuss the book or books he had read during the previous week.

She seemed amazed at how fast he could read while capturing the content and essence of what he read. After tea and talk, while at ease in each other's company, they would sit quietly and read for hours, or go for walks in the park discussing the past, present, and future. She never invited George to her apartment, or for walks in the park. In spite of the advantage of having the privilege of his Sunday visits, Laura turned down his proposal of marriage, deciding to marry her older beau, George, instead.

Shortly after her revelation, during one of Patrick's visits to the library, she asked him to be her ring bearer, telling him she could hardly wait to see George's face when a certain nine-year-old boy, namely Patrick, marched down the aisle with her ring.

With a bow, he responded, "It will be my poetic honor to march down the aisle and stun your fiancé's face, free of charge with no past due-fines-due, just for you, so goodbye, *sayonara*, *adios*, *adieu*, and most certainly since I'm not the one marrying you, this calls for a *boohoo*."

A dedicated bookworm, a follower of the rules, demanded that the two laughing maniacs be quiet. "We're all trying to read in peace. Be quiet, we're in a public library for *Christ's* sake.

\*\*\*

"Mom, I don't want to go to no dumb Halloween party at school," he whined to no avail.

On Halloween, Mary Evelyn insisted her boys attend a celebration of All Saints Day at his elementary school.

The brothers had been looking forward to trick-or-treating, scarfing down copious amounts of candy, scaring other kids out of their candy-loot, and adults out of their wits-end. JW enjoyed performing a little vandalism, especially on Halloween.

At the school, the boys dunked for apples, carved jack-o'-lanterns, and participated in a number of other useless lame activities. When the festivities were over, the lateness of the hour and their mother prevented them from going trick-or-treating, spreading terror, or having any vandalism fun. The day after Halloween, JW found a solution to the lack of Halloween cheer the night before.

"Listen you little twerp, you're going trick-or-treating."

JW explained the con. “People will take one look at your pathetic waif-like appearance and they’ll give out the leftover candy. Some will even give you money. Can you dig it? I call it my infamous *woe is me* con.”

Correcting his brother, he said, “You mean the *woe is I* con. I can dig your frigging grave. I’m not going trick-or-treating after Halloween is over. People will think I’m a frigging moron.”

JW punched him in his stomach, explaining, “You are a frigging moron. You’re going trick-or-treating, or else.”

After an hour of trick-or-treating, he had to admit the *woe is me* con worked. He relieved his *marks* of leftover candy. Many felt so sorry for the tragic figure he represented they treated him to a nickel, dime, or a quarter. A woman gave him thirty-seven pennies rolled in some silver aluminum foil.

The *take* fairly split accordingly at eighty percent for JW, the brains of the outfit, and twenty percent for the risk taker, Patrick.

He evened the takings from the con by immediately eating some of the candy and hiding some of the proceeds in his shoes.

JW checked his pockets, forgetting to check his shoes, when he returned with the loot. His brother should have known better since he thought he was so clever in knowing how the world worked.

His shoes were a-jingling as the profit rolled in with the only cost being a loss of dignity and pride, hardly worth mentioning.

The over-confident duo decided to try their luck at the Governor’s Mansion, a white three story with tower, Second Empire-Italianate Victorian building with expansive lawns, security fence, gated entrance, and intruder detection system.

Republican or Democrat, the Governor opened the Mansion on the night of Halloween for trick-or-treaters.

One minor flaw in the plan, the celebration of All Hallows Night had taken place the previous evening. As he squeezed past the gate and moved up the driveway to the Governor’s Mansion, the State Police came out in force to find out who violated the *Keep Out* and *Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted* signs.

To their credit, when he waxed poetic, “Trick-or-treat, smell my feet, give me something good to eat,” the seven troopers did not shoot the trespassing budding poet. He named them in honor of the dwarfs in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, as they appeared to be: *Annoyed, Disconcerted, Incensed, Nervous, Pained, Relieved, and Troubled*.

The Sergeant, *Relieved*, the Trooper in charge, a skeptic, bellowed, “Hey, kid, Halloween is yesterday’s news. Somehow you missed out on the last edition.”

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Gazing up toward the trooper, he asked, "Oh, I missed Halloween, Honorable-Captain-Sir?"

"I'm a Sergeant, kid. Don't push your luck."

"I'm not a young goat, but I'm sure full of dumb luck, Honorable-Sergeant-Sir."

The cop took him by the hand, did not put him in handcuffs, and he trooped up the backstairs of the Mansion with the State Trooper.

They arrived in a kitchen and a cook gave him a slice of yesterday's leftover pumpkin pie accompanied by a glass of chilled milk. He consumed the pie and drank the milk as if it were his last meal.

The Sergeant handed him a dollar.

"Wow, a whole dollar. Thank you Sergeant-Sir, you're a real trooper."

"Very funny kid, don't try to con me. I should arrest you on charges of trespassing, stupidity, ungratefulness, *and* bad acting. You better get out of here, before I change my mind."

"Ah, yes, Sergeant, bad acting or being obtuse, what's worse?"

As he saw the Sergeant shake his head, without waiting for an answer, he fled down the steps, taking them two steps at a time, lickity split. Prior to squeezing through the gate, he hid the dollar in his left shoe.

A brief account of his adventure to his brother did not include the part regarding the dollar. He told JW, "State Troopers are somewhat cheap. Not a nickel, dime, or a quarter from the six of them, but the pumpkin pie and chilled milk was a treat. Sorry, JW, no take-outs allowed."

He never told a lie when part of the truth coupled with the sin of omission would suffice. Besides, if necessary, he could always say an *Act of Contrition*. He would remember from this night onward to reward a good con out of respect for the artistry.

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Christmas Eve, Patrick went to *the Alkali Flats Bar* to shine shoes. He charged ten cents a shine, but with tips, he made over seven dollars from the largesse of the intoxicated patrons in less than three hours.

He bet a drunken patron, a drunk that looked a little like Jackie Gleason, of *Honeymooner's* fame, that the inebriated one could not make an impossible pool shot. The impossible happened and he lost his dollar.

Sharon, his upstairs neighbor, a pretty Moira Shearer, *the Red Shoes*, look-alike, occupied a barstool by the window that some thought she rented on an hourly basis. Passersby could easily look into the bar through a dirty glass window and a light haze of smoke to see her wares on display deciding



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whether they wanted to purchase her goods by the half hour, or not. She called Patrick over and gave him a roll of nickels to put into the coin operated Wurlitzer jukebox telling him to play *I Wanna Be Loved*, by the Andrew Sisters, in between other requests. He thought, cheap but effective, advertising on her part. As she put it, “My nickel gets a fiver, and a fiver gets some lucky man a half hour of a sure thing.”

He told Sharon, “There’s no such thing, as a sure thing.”

Giving him a wink, she asked, “Wanna bet?”

He declined, knowing if he bet her he would probably end up losing his five dollars to Sharon leaving him with only a *buck*.

Bar patrons requested *How High the Moon* by Les Paul and Mary Ford three times, and *Cry* by Johnnie Ray, *Unforgettable* by Nat King Cole, and *Tenderly* by Rosemary Clooney twice each. He selected *White Christmas*, by Bing Crosby at his own request. Adding his own nickel to the jukebox, he played the scratchy sound of the Andrew Sisters oldie *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, and danced with Sharon on the bar’s waxed-red-stained concrete floor. He put another nickel in the jukebox, played *I Wanna Be Loved*, asking Sharon to dance once again. His father told him, told them, that if he heard *I Wanna Be Loved* one more time he would throw him and Sharon out of the bar.

In between such shenanigans as eating, drinking, playing the jukebox and dancing, Sharon left the bar four times with her paying customers and returned, all four times, in exactly thirty minutes. The patrons joked she must have an employee’s time clock machine in her apartment or, better yet, probably one stuck up her butt.

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Home from his bartending duties on Christmas morn, Big John full of Christmas Eve cheer and in a drunken rage, threatened his wife with mayhem. He also threatened his family with his perfectly maintained well-oiled 1943 Remington fully loaded .30-06 caliber deer hunting rifle with a 3-10X40 tube style optic scope.

JW sat on the sofa stoically staring at the silent radio in complete silence, seemingly oblivious to the situation.

Feeling the immortality of his youth, Patrick surreptitiously picked up a heavy sharp-edged clear glass square ashtray, spilling out cigarette butts, ashes, and half-burnt wooden matches in a modest pile on the carpet. He stood in the living room, in front of his mother, not fearful of his own possible imminent demise. Holding the ashtray in his right hand, casually hiding the

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weapon behind his back, he thought if David could kill Goliath with a small stone, then he should be able to kill his father with a heavy glass ashtray. As his father pointed the steel-grey barrel of the loaded rifle at his youngest son's heart, his father shouted, "You want to be first you testifying little *rat-fink-prick*?"

With this first ever pointing of a rifle at his half-heart, strangely calm, he dared his father as he looked into his eyes, gripped his weapon of choice tighter and said, "Take your best shot."

Mary Evelyn grabbed him by his right arm before he could unleash the ashtray at his father's head and yanked him away from the rifle's threatening aim, screaming at her husband to put the firearm away. Patrick realized he made the mistake of talking, giving warning, when his best bet would have been to heave the ashtray at his father's head without warning—lesson learned.

Lowering the rifle, Big John dizzily stumbled over to the hallway closet where he carefully put the rifle back in its molded case with plush velvet black lining. Passionate about all his guns, especially his deer rifle, drunk or not, he didn't want to damage or scratch the flawless wooden stalk of his most precious possession. His father staggered back into the living room, puked much of his Christmas cheer, promptly slipping in his own vomit. Angrily, he struggled to his feet, picked up the Christmas tree, dragged the trembling tree to the front door, yanked the door partially off its hinges, and tossed the sap-laden festooned tree out into the silent night. Reentering the disheveled treeless living room, kicking shattered ornaments and broken lights out of his way, stumbling into the bedroom, his father barked at his mother, "Get the *hell* in here."

He saw his mother enter the bedroom. His father slammed the door shut. After much noise, silence. She exited twenty minutes later, late for work and told "her boys" she would have to work a double shift because of her lateness and left.

A stoic, handy at hot-wiring cars, breaking and entering, and fixing certain things, JW appeared impassive as he casually got up off the sofa and fixed the front door.

When his mother arrived home at 6:30 p.m. on Christmas Day, after working a double shift, she gave her sons a *sawbuck* each, her own twenty-dollar Christmas bonus, to purchase their own Christmas presents.

The unbearable stench of vomit remained on the carpet of the living room floor from Christmas until New Year's early morn. Patrick told his mother he would clean the carpet. Her response, one he had heard on more

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than one occasion, “Your Father can clean-up after himself. It’s the principle of the thing.”

\*\*\*

Big John never got drunk on New Year’s Eve, on what he referred to as “amateur night.” When he arrived home on New Year’s morn, Mary Evelyn had his dinner prepared for him, an Irish stew.

She insisted he get rid of the carpet.

He asked, “Why don’t you clean the carpet yourself?”

“I’m not touching the carpet. It’s the principle of the thing.”

“Your high and mighty principles make me sick.”

“Get rid of it John or I am moving with or without you.”

Knowing her threats real, after she left, he rolled up the carpet, went into the back yard, and tossed the filthy carpet over the fence into the adjacent alleyway. He knew his wife moved from place to place as if she were a Bedouin nomad. Once, she had moved to Woodland, stayed with her brother, and started divorce proceedings. His youngest son supported her allegations of abuse in divorce court. It took six months of wooing with many false promises to get her to drop the divorce proceedings and win her back. Her brother said he would never help her again.

Big John, a master of New York Times crossword puzzles, thought about a ten-letter word, *contiguity* meaning *things, which occur in proximity to each other in time, or space, are readily associated*. He did not want to move as there were too many extra benefits attached. The local beat cop let him run book and beat up deadbeats with immunity. His bartending duties kept him in booze, and Sharon, his neighbor upstairs, a low-priced prostitute and her daughter Rose, a free whore, kept him entertained.

He thought about the *contiguity* of family, gambling, fighting, drinking, and women—life could not be any better. Retrieving a bottle of JWB whisky out of the glove compartment of his car, he walked up the rickety backstairs to his neighbor’s apartment. Big John negotiated a discounted price for Sharon, her fat ugly daughter Rose thrown in free.

Drunken Duck is the story of an Irish-American Catholic boy growing up in Sacramento, California during the 1950s and 60s with an abundance of forever friends. Later in life, as a Navy SEAL, he travels to Japan and Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Singapore. His childhood experiences of love and loss are precursors of the choices he makes in the women he passionately loves and the violent actions he takes in war.

## **Drunken Duck**

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