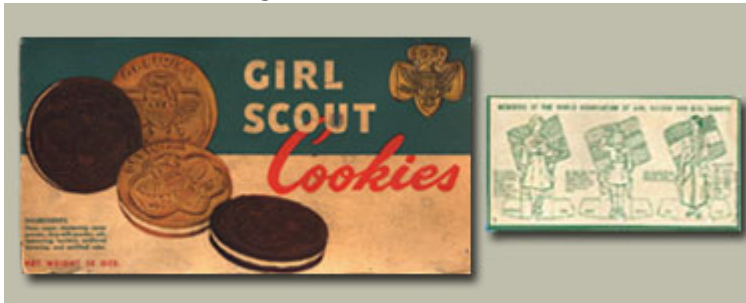


A Night Ride With the Girl Scout Legbreakers

by Con Chapman

Girl Scouts in Akron, Ohio are taking vigorous steps to collect debts owed by adults who fail to pay for cookies. Associated Press

It's two o'clock in the morning, and I'm lying in bed, wide awake, drenched in sweat. I know what I need—a Thin Mint cookie—but I don't know where I'm gonna find one.



I finished my last cellophane roll of the Girl Scouts' signature brand yesterday afternoon, and even though the girls were out taking orders this weekend, the sweet treat that Akron police refer to as “brown dynamite” won't appear on the streets again until the spring. I can't wait that long.

I have only two options: One, drive to the 7-11 and buy a legal pack of Keebler Fudge Shoppe Grasshopper Mint Cookies, a poor substitute for Thin Mints, the most addictive cookie known to man. “Grasshoppers” are methadone to the Girl Scouts' heroin.

Two, try to score some black market “Thins” on the street.



I put on some clothes, stagger out to my car and head to the corner of Main and Mill in downtown Akron, a 24-hour bazaar of the illicit late-night snack trade. Here, dealers operate openly and without fear of retribution from cops who have been bought off cheaply with Caramel deLites and Samoas—low octane stuff that hard-core addicts look down their noses at.



I pull into the parking lot of the convenience store and head to the entrance when a short figure emerges from the shadows.

“You want the real thing, man?”

I jump, and the hair on the back of my neck snaps to attention.

“Sure,” I say innocently. “We’re talking Thin Mints, right?”

“You think I’d be out here at this hour of the night hocking Tagalongs and Do-Si-Dos?” the dealer asks sarcastically.

“Sorry—I was just making sure.” You never want to alienate your source. “How much you asking?”

“Ten dollars a box.”

“Ten dollars! That’s armed robbery!” I say, my voice shaking. “Girl Scout cookies are sold for \$2.50 to \$4.00 per box, depending on the troop’s location, to cover both the current cost of

cookies and the realities of providing Girl Scout activities in an ever-changing economic environment. Check the website.”

“A wise guy, huh? If you're so smart you oughta know that National Girl Scout policy prohibits the sale of cookies over the Internet. When you buy online, there is no guarantee that your seller is in fact a member of the Girl Scouts.”



She's got me there. “Okay,” I grumble, and start to reach in my back pocket. As I do so I feel the rough grip of a hand on my wrist that pins my arm against my back. From the smell of the Peanut Butter Patties on her breath, I can tell without looking that my assailant is none other than Mary Jane “The Hammer” Macomber, long-time enforcer for the Greater Akron Girl Scout Council.

“Nice to see you again—scumbag,” she says menacingly into my ear. “I believe you owe us \$24.50, not including late fees and penalties.”

I'm not about to escape the grip of the woman who has grabbed many a young girl by the bicep and told her to settle down—right now!

“Look-Mary Jane,” I say as she slams me up against the wall. “It's been a tough year for me.”

"It's about to get a whole lot tougher," she says as she pushes me into the back seat of her Dodge Caravan SE minivan. "Girls—get in and buckle up," she yells at her charges, and in an instant we are zooming down an entrance ramp to Interstate 77, the girls holding me down, singing camp songs at the top of their lungs.

"Oh, Noah, he built him, an ar-ky, ar-ky, ar-ky. . ."

"There are three and a half million Girl Scouts throughout America, including U.S. territories," Macomber says to me over the din, with a tone of disgust. "Stiffs like you think we're patsies."

"I had a good job when I bought the cookies," I say. "Then I got laid off."

"Remind me to buy an extra-large box of Kleenex, so I can cry along with you," she says contemptuously.

The girls keep singing. *"The animals, they came, by two-sy, two-sy, two-sies."*

"We've got summer camp lifeguards to pay, gimp to buy--we're a big business."

"I'll pay you back, I promise, I just need a cookie."

"'I just need a cookie'," Macomber says, mocking me. "Nobody can eat just one--nobody."

"That's the problem," I say. "You're pushers!"

"Elephants and (clap) kanga-roosies, roosies!"

We pull into a driveway and Macomber turns off the engine. The girls push me out of the car and into a split-level ranch house, then down the stairs into the rec room. Down here, nobody will hear me scream.

Macomber orders me to sit down in a Fisher Price Kitchen Play chair, and I comply. What choice do I have?



"Now," she says, "we can do this the easy way, or the hard way."

"What's the easy way?" I ask.

"Do you have a major credit card on you?"

"I barely had time to change out of my pajamas," I whimper.

"Bonnie", Macomber says to one of the girls. "Show him the polar bear trick."

The girls giggle as Bonnie takes my hand, opens a drawer of the play kitchen cabinet and positions my knuckles on the edge of it. "Now," she says, "Don't think about a polar bear."

I'm puzzled. "Why not?" I ask.

"Just don't, okay?" She waits a second. "Are you thinking about one now?" she asks.

"Well, yeah, 'cause you keep talking about . . ."

The words are barely out of my mouth when she slams the drawer shut, causing me to cry out in pain.

"I bet you're not thinking about one now!" she exclaims with glee.

The other girls burst out in laughter, and Macomber does nothing to stop them. So much for building character—the "new" Girl Scouts nurture skills for success in the real world.

“Maybe you've got some money back in your car,”
Macomber suggests.

“Just some change for tolls,” I reply.

“That's not gonna do it,” she replies coolly.

“Elizabeth—let's make the nice man a Creeple Peeple.”

A second little girl brings her vintage Thingmaker out
from under a table and plugs it in.

“Who's your favorite Creeple Peeple?” she asks as the
machine warms up.

“Uh, I guess I'd have to pick Gangly Danglies,” I say.

“Okay—let's make one of those,” she says sweetly as she
pours the melted goo into the mold. A few seconds later, she turns
to me and says “Ready?”

“Aren't you supposed to let it cool?”

Elizabeth flips the mold onto my hand, causing the hot
goop to sear my flesh.

“I'll pay—I'll pay!” I cry. “Just stop it—please!”

“All right,” Macomber says with a satisfied air. “Julie, put
some ice on his hand. Vicki, get his money.”

Vicki fishes my wallet out of my back pocket, where she finds an ATM card. "What's your PIN number?" she asks methodically as she prepares to write it down on a Big Chief tablet with a no. 2 lead pencil.

"It's my birthday-0-1-1-4-7-6," I say, fighting back tears.

"That's not such a good idea," Macomber says, playing the role of good cop now. "Anybody who knows that could rip you off."

"What would you suggest?" I ask.

"How about D-E-A-D-B-E-A-T?" she says with a smirk.

For some reason—I don't find her funny.

