That Painted Up Whore
by David James

Some things stay with you.

I got off the bus, petted my dog, Nick and walked in our house and saw Mother at the kitchen table, crying and clearly angry. I asked her if she was sick. She works. She said that she didn't go to work today and might not go tomorrow either, unless she could get to the bottom of it. I asked her something like, "bottom of what?" She asked me had I ever heard my Dad speak of someone named Cox. I said, " No, I don't think so." She said, "try real hard." I said, "why do you ask?" Then she asked, "what about a woman by the name of Ruby?" Again I told her, "No."

Mother sighed deeply, stood up, took a step, turned back around and blurted out, beginning to cry once more, "Well, your father wrote Ruby Cox this check for fifty dollars. She waved it in my face, and she's either a *girlfriend*, a *painted up whore or both*." I was young, eleven. I wasn't quite sure what a painted up whore was, but I knew Mother meant a woman. It just didn't make sense for my Dad to have a girlfriend or to need another woman because he was obviously married to my Mother. He had a wife. Paying a painted whore fifty dollars? No way.

I told her I didn't understand how she knew he spent the fifty dollars on Ruby Cox. Then, I remembered that Mother always opened the mail and balanced the checkbook each month. My Dad didn't care *diddley* (his term) about that kind of "household stuff", That's how she found out. I told Mother I was surprised that he would pay a girlfriend or a painted up whore with a check for fifty dollars. I said, Wouldn't he know she would find out when she balanced the checkbook?" She answered, "Men do crazy things when s-e-x is involved."

As soon as Dad walked in from work she jumped him, waving the fifty dollar check in his face. Dad confessed. He used it to buy a second hand refrigerator for the company fishing camp from an old

woman who was moving into a nursing home. Her name? Ruby Cox.

Mother went out the back door into the yard and lit a cigarette.