

My Life as a Part-Time Rapist, Full-Time Comedian

by Dean West

Bugs in Ice Cream

The rapist was caught on December 23rd, the day before Christmas Eve. Everyone in town was surprised to learn he had a wife and two children; a son and a daughter, the same age, and a yellow Labrador retriever. I'd never played with his son. Both his children were in Miss Bottlespot's third grade class and I was in Mrs. Walker's preschool. I'd never met his dog either.

My mother, sister, and two aunts described the rapist as living under a bridge, coming out only at night to climb through the unlocked windows of single and divorced women. Later, I found out the rapist lived in my neighborhood on Crystal Bay in a three bedroom house. That turned upside down most everything I believed.

I knew Crystal Bay well because it was within my walking distance, two streets over. I collected candy there on Halloween and a girl, much older than me, invited me into her garage. She showed me her private parts after I'd showed her mine. It was all her idea, to close the garage door, for both of us to stand naked facing each other on the gravel floor. She was pretty with pigtails and I did what she wanted but the garage was dark and I couldn't see much.

Now that I've had time to reconsider, that girl might have been the rapist's daughter for she sounded angry at me. Then, she looked at me funny as I slid my shorts down - like she'd found a bug in her

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ice cream cone.

The Women that Made Me Do It

Along with the town, I also felt surprised that the rapist lived on Crystal Bay and not under a bridge because I depended on women to tell me the truth. My sister, the least trustworthy, would have saved me if I'd been drowning but she would have complained that the water was cold and the air too hot. My aunts came into and out of my life on an irregular basis, predictable only by their unpredictability — they were the ones who convinced me that Santa Clause lived in the North Pole but mother made them do it.

Mother still grieved for my older brother — the one I'd never known; the one my mother told me was born dead. I would have liked an older brother and unlike me, he would have been strong and healthy. He wouldn't have been a blue baby with a hole in his heart, sick all the time. But he didn't survive and mother and I shared the hole in my heart.

When word of the rapist first got around, mother tried to keep it from me. Sis and I hid under the castor bean plants where she explained what a rapist was. "He's a man who will climb through your window and rape all the unmarried women. And, oh yeah, he lives under a bridge."

She looked me straight in the eyes so I'd understand the urgency. I picked my nose until she added, "He rapes little boys too."

I didn't admit to my sister that I didn't know rapists. She would have made fun of me but I locked all the windows until the women complained. It was late September and September in South Texas was like forgetting to turn off an oven in July. They protested the heat so I finally left the windows alone but barricaded my bed with my dresser

drawers. I thought the women might be either very brave or unaware of the danger so I talked to my mother one night before she went out.

The Duties of a Rapist

"What's a rapist?" I asked, opening the tops of tiny bottles and smelling the perfumes. My mother prepared to go face the world again; using a brush to apply colors to her face, red rouge to her cheeks, white under her throat - a soft checkerboard of camouflage for time. I tasted her lipstick.

"Leave my makeup alone ...where'd you hear that word? ... Never mind, I know... your sister. Alright, the best way I can explain is that a rapist is a man who can't get along with women and he's so angry that he hurts them."

"Are they men?"

"As a rule, yes."

"Like Daddy?"

"No, your Daddy was not a rapist. He was different."

"He couldn't get along with you and you're a woman so why's he different?"

"Rapists are not entirely normal men. Just take my word for it, you're father is not a rapist."

"I hate my sister. She gets everything she wants. Sometimes I'd like to hit her with a brick. "

"You're not a rapist either so don't hit your sister."

"Do rapists hurt boys?"

"No!"

"Can I have a dog?" My mother didn't answer. Dogs were a forbidden subject. My first dog had ended badly and I'd shaken so severely, mother thought I had a seizure. She wasn't going to take any chances but I'd sensed a weakness since Daddy left. It was worth a try.

"Can I lock the windows?" I rubbed my fingernail until it hurt.

My mother answered. "No, that's not necessary. We've got you to guard us from anything bad. You're the man of the house. Now hand me my drink."

I confronted my sister in the backyard later as we burned ants with matches. I explained to her, in as much detail as I felt comfortable releasing, the truth about rapists. They didn't hurt little boys. They only hurt women and girls because they were mad. I thought that last point might scare her and give me the upper hand for once but she was ready.

"You're an idiot. Rapist put their pee-pee inside you and when your back is turned, they'll take things." Being four years older didn't make my sister four years wiser but she could reach the matches we needed to kill ants. She had a purpose.

Inside you? That worried me more than armadillos.

Armadillos in the Mist.

Earlier that summer, I'd woken in the dark from some dream to hear crashing in my parents' bedroom. I'd been dreaming of armadillos again. Armadillos always scared me, the way they rooted through

the oak leaves and never seemed to be afraid, ignoring me in their hunt for acorns. I'd thrown a rock once or twice but the rocks only bounced off their gray shells. Cats ran away from me when I yelled, why not armadillos? I heard my father screaming and my mother too. It was different that night, not the way they yelled at me when I walked into the house with mud on my shoes; more the sound of screeching brakes when my dog was run over - going on and on forever.

Avoiding returning to my dreams, I walked down the hall to their bedroom. My mother lay on her back on the four posted bed, my father's knee secure on her chest holding her hands, keeping her from scratching his eyes. I stood quietly hoping to see armadillos instead. She spit into his face and he released her, prepared to hit her face but paused when he saw me - his chest grew in and out, sweat like March rains poured from his head. Then my mother followed my father's eyes, spotted me in the corner and stopped her clawing.

"Go to bed boy, right this minute or I'll whip your bottom 'til you're black and blue."

After I crawled back into bed, my father came to say goodbye but instead he said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry", so many times, I fell asleep, listening to the gravel rolling in his throat.

Santa Claus and Wild Turkey

Beside knowing that Santa lived on the North Pole, I'd investigated his means of home entry. In pictures, I saw him dropping down chimneys but we didn't have a chimney. When questioned about this problem, mother said he'd come

through the door or a window if he couldn't find a chimney. That bothered me some.

I could see Santa and the rapist accidentally meeting at the window of my house. I wondered if Santa would give a big belly laugh and invite the rapist to go first or would they both be polite and argue.

"No Santa, you go first. You've got gifts to deliver and I can wait to rape someone until you're finished. Can I help you with your bag?

I didn't believe Santa would be in any danger. I'm sure the rapist knew he was married to Mrs. Claus but Santa lived at the North Pole and kept his windows closed anyway.

After the rapist was caught, Santa did come to my house on the night of the 24th. I remembered because he brought me a red fire truck and a bottle of Wild Turkey bourbon. He picked the fire engine off a gift rack in the liquor store on the evening of the 24th but the clerk had been busy and didn't wrap it with a bow - it being Christmas Eve, he put the fire truck in the same bag as the bottle to save time. I didn't mind for I liked wild turkeys walking through the brush. My mother grabbed the bottle and told me I was too young to drink. She'd been visiting friends at a place called, The Four Aces Club. She'd given me their book matches along with the fire truck and Wild Turkey - four aces painted with sparkles is how I remembered. I later learn that Santa Claus and my mother were the same and was relieved at that discovery for I had begin to worry that Santa Claus, my mother, and the rapist were all in it together.

Let the Games Begin

Christmas day, we made up knock-knock jokes, played games like Go Fish, and a new one the women figured out after finishing half the

Wild Turkey. They called the game, *Measure the Winkle*, and I started first.

"Take this ruler and measure your pee-pee," said Aunt Merle. I loved games and attention and took the wooden ruler into the bathroom and carefully locked the door. I could hear my aunts, along with my sister and mother laughing as I pulled my underwear down to the linoleum and placed my pee-pee on top of the ruler.

"It says number two," I yelled and pulled harder on my winkle until the number three met the end. "Now, it's a number three." Aunt Merle sounded like she was choking on a chicken bone, laughing so hard she couldn't breathe and that made me grin. My winkle made women laugh; the longer it got, the funnier I was and I realized I loved making women happy.

"You think a ruler's long enough? Maybe we ought to get the boy a yardstick," screamed Aunt Daisy as she fell on the floor.

Aunt Daisy was my favorite, her breasts were the size of watermelons and she loved to hug me until I almost passed out - I felt safe in the darkness, the warm folds of her skin. The talcum she used would cover my face after she released me; then she'd clean me with a tissue moist from her tongue, wiping the white powder away as she purred, "My sweet, sweet little ghost man."

"Hush now, he's only five and a half, give him some time. No use making him self-conscious." My mother worried about me being self-conscious for I was shy, painfully they called it as if shy and pain shared the same house. For some reason, I wasn't self-conscious about my pee-pee, but I was self-conscious about everything else in the world. Of course, up to that time, my pee-pee hadn't had much of an opportunity to be out in the world. That was changing.

"Your turn," I said as I handed the ruler to Aunt Daisy. The room

exploded with laughter and my mother said she needed ice for her drink and walked to the kitchen.

"Well you started this Daisy, let's see you finish it." Mother's head yelled from inside the refrigerator's freezer box.

"My sweet little ghost man, we don't have pee-pees." Aunt Daisy was always simple with her explanations.

"I told you all he was an idiot," my sister added as she flipped through 'True Confessions'. "He doesn't know anything."

Then I remembered the rapist's daughter standing in front of me naked and it all came together. She didn't have a wrinkle either but I'd let it pass at the time, the dark garage and all. Had the rapist come during the night when I was asleep? Did he hurt my women? Did he take their wrinkles? I was sick and turned white.

"Goddamn it Merle, see what you've done?" My mother stormed in, took my hand and quickly ushered me to the bathroom where I threw-up Christmas dinner.

"I'm sorry; I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. It's my fault the rapist took them." My face lay on the toilet's white porcelain's edge.

Christmas night was spent in biology class, my aunts explaining the birds and bees as I gasped the room's thin air. My sister acted like she'd heard it all before, pretending to sleep on the sofa. By ten that night, the Wild Turkey was finished as the first cold front of the year rushed in, its gray clouds racing the moon. My mother closed the windows but by then, the house was cold and I slept under a patch work quilt - images of Santa and his reindeers covered me in warmth. But again, I dreamed of armadillos in the mist.

The Joke's on Me

When spring arrived, I walked to Crystal Bay to find the pigtailed girl. I wanted to tell her what I'd learned; that there was nothing she could do about her Daddy, that Daddies shouldn't hurt kids anymore than mothers. A for-sale sign stood in the front yard, papers piled against the door. I'd missed saying goodbye and telling her the joke Aunt Merle had taught me.

"What do you get when you cross a rooster and a duck?" I would have told her the joke as we stood in the garage. I would have waited for her to think about it until she smiled and asked me what? "A bird that gets up at the quack of dawn."

I believe she would have giggled for I was becoming good at making women laugh.

All grown up and nowhere to go

Sixty years later, I saw a woman walking across Penny's parking lot; her pigtails as long as a yardstick. I couldn't tell if she was young or old from the back. In front of her was a man wearing a white turban.

"Is that a young girl or someone our age?" I asked my wife.

"I'm not sure but it's doubtful an older woman would wear pigtails. Why do you ask?"

"Oh nothing, she just reminded me of something, I mean someone I knew when I was a kid."

"An old girlfriend of yours?"

"Not exactly but we were naked in the same garage. Does that count?"

"Tell me more, I'm all ears."

I rolled the window down to get a better view of the couple.

"They look like they're members of some sect, her clothes and his turban. What makes people join cults? What horrible things happen in their lives to cause that?" I asked. The sun flashed against the pigtails and gray shown.

My wife answered, "I think she's our age, maybe older. See how hard it was for her to step up on the curb? Wait, did you see the gray in her hair. What bothers me about people like her is they're so serious about life. You ever hear a Moonie tell a joke? You could never join a cult,"

"Why?"

"Cause you're a clown."

"That reminds me of something else."

"What now, another night of debauchery when you were young?"

"My mother's idea of a rapist."

"What a strange thing to remember."

"She told me rapists were angry men who hurt women."

"I suppose that's true. Of course, she managed to leave out a few of the more gruesome details."

"I was only five and half."

"I see."

I turned and looked at my wife until she stopped fiddling with the car keys.

"I'm sorry for being a part-time rapist. Am I too old to tell you that?"

