Scuffle

by Jeff Landon

Last Christmas Eve, my Nana shot my grandfather in the foot because he wouldn't stop boning the woman up the street. So on Christmas Eve, after Nana drank a bunch of those baby-sized Miller Hi-life beers, she went upstairs, got her pistol, and said, “I'm gonna shoot off your pinky toe because you cheat like a double-dicked dog.” But she was pretty loaded, and missed her target. She shot him in the middle of his foot instead.

Before that, we were just sitting there in the dining room, eating roast beef and corn pudding, and watching them scuffle. It was just me, mom, and her new, terrible, boyfriend, Bob. Nobody thought Nana would actually fire that pistol, but she did.

In those nearly peaceful moments before the shooting, Bob kept laughing and saying, “Y'all people are fuckin' crazy around here.” But he quit talking when Nana fired the pistol for real, and my grandfather started howling and going, “My foot, my good foot,” and proceeded to roll around and bleed all over the carpet.

Nana drove him to the emergency room, and my grandfather told the nurse that it was an accident. He was cleaning his gun, he said, not paying attention. “It wasn't her fault,” he said. “I'm a dope.”

The next night, on Christmas, we stayed in a motel room. We were the only people there: Mom, Bob, and me. We opened our presents and watched something religious on TV. Bob kept saying, “This is a joke, right? Merry Christmas to me.”

When it got dark the manager of the Red Robin Motel knocked on our door. His daughter was with him. She was small, maybe five-

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years-old, with a terrible overbite. The manager said, “We have some leftovers,” and he handed a platter to my mother. The platter was heaped with Greek spaghetti, steamed shrimp, cornbread dressing, cranberry sauce, Jello-o salad, rolls, and green beans.

“For free,” the manager said. “Merry Christmas.”

The food was amazing. On the TV, fake snow dropped on the fake angels, and they sang love songs to the fake baby Jesus. Spirits watched over all the people left alone on Christmas. In snow-capped churches, hands joined other hands while whole families sang carols together. Old hurts collapsed and the church bells never stopped ringing.

But in our motel room, a few miles outside Birmingham, Alabama, Bob ate all the shrimp, and my mother called him a selfish dirty bastard. Bob looked at the snow on the TV. He looked at my mother.

“Hey, Kitty," he said. "How do they do that?”