

The Poisoning

by Joey Delgado

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I used to call my dad Serpico. Thirty years on the police force, and though a respected officer, he never fit in. He never had beers with the guys at the end of a shift or engaged in the more lewd locker room talk. None of the other cops were privy to which dispatcher my dad felt had the nicest tits.

We spent every weekend together. In the morning we'd have herbal tea and listen to NPR's Weekend Edition. In the evening, we'd listen to A Prairie Home Companion. My dad enjoyed the homespun, midwestern humor in Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon stories. In the final years of Clinton's presidency, as Mr. Keillor's political leanings became more overt and my dad's political beliefs diverged, NPR was no longer a mainstay in the Delgado household. Neil Diamond replaced Garrison Keillor. I noticed the change, but, at twelve, didn't think to ask why.

Once my dad retired from the department, he taught himself to build websites and established a modest client base, consisting mostly of, for reasons unknown, therapists. He also started a blog.

Bob Delgado is a talented, funny writer, but when he sent me a link to his blog site, the first piece listed was titled, 'A Case for MAGA.' (We're now in 2016.) I've yet to read any of his posts. I love him too much. The man who raised me would have hated Donald Trump. Or maybe not. Maybe he'd been waiting all those years for a man like Trump to run for president. I choose not to believe that; both his parents are Mexican immigrants, his son is gay, and his daughter—my sister—is dating a trans man.

At our most recent Sunday night dinner—one of our more lasting traditions—I was saying my goodbyes, and suggested my dad walk me to the car since he had to walk his dog, Frodo, anyway, and I wanted to finish a story I was telling about my recent Paris vacation. He had me leash the dog so he could grab a jacket from his room.

He came back with the jacket. And a gun. He noticed the look on my face. "What, Joe? You know, this isn't like Paris. It's not a homogenous society." I reminded him that neither was Paris. He shook his head. "You know what, you're always so down on American culture." Please tell me American culture is more than guns and fearing the "other", I said. Diversity is a strength. My stepmom, who'd been listening to the exchange cut in. "That's your opinion, Joe. You don't want diversity, anyway. You want everyone to think like you." Dumbstruck, I kissed her on the cheek and wished her goodnight. When we got to my car, I hugged my dad, wished him a goodnight.

It's like my family's been poisoned and hugs are my only treatment, a maudlin, weak stabilizer, until I can find the real antidote.

