

Smite the hindmost of them

by Larry Strattner

I was doing some housework, cleaning the bathroom and kitchen floors, when the doorbell rang. I bought this new steamer gizmo. It actually shoots steam out to clean the tile and linoleum floors. I'm telling you, it works! The only problem is as soon as you buy one they come out with another one with more adjustability and cleaning pad shapes so you can get into tighter and odd-shaped corners. Having the outdated one pisses me off.

"You're paranoid." My wife said. "Get over it. That's the way it always is. You're paranoid about everything."

Fine for her to say. She goes to work while I'm home cleaning the house, doing the wash and cooking dinner. I'm thinking to myself. *How did this happen?*

I go to the door to answer the ring but can't quite see who's out there. I open the door.

"Hello, I'm Marlene, and this is April," says the older of two women. Both Marlene and April wear ankle length taupe dresses. The name Hester Prynne flashes through my mind. Marlene smiles at me with her lips pressed together. The young girl standing with her can't be more than fourteen or fifteen although she is tall for her age. She too smiles. She has an intricate set of braces on her teeth. I can't tell if Marlene has teeth. I return their smiles cautiously.

"We are calling on folks to promote reading of the Bible," says Marlene holding up what appears to be a King James version in paperback. "The world is changing, yet God continues to love us. You, April, me. All of us. His love is described in His book. There are verses we all should read."

"I do that." I say. Untruthfully. I don't want to argue. "Thanks for stopping by." I move to close the door.

"I also have a booklet here." Says Marlene. "Highlighting the verses most helpful in guiding your life." She produces a nicely done color pamphlet. I recognize the handiwork of a sect that has always pissed me off. "We would urge you to read this."

"Certainly." I say, taking the brochure. "May I ask you a question?"

"Of course" says Marlene. April hasn't said a word and continues to smile through her braces.

"Didn't you predict the world was gonna end three times now and it hasn't? Do you think someone might be trying to tell you something?"

Marlene's face changes halfway through my question from serene to apoplectic. "I am so sick of you stupid heathen unbelievers! I walk my ass off all day and all you can think of is some stupid rumor! I've had it! Answer his question April!" April is pulling an ugly black pistol out of the folds of her dress, still smiling.

I slam the front door and dive into the hall closet. I can hear the pow! pow! pow! of the pistol out on the porch. Thank God I put the metal sheathing on the inside of the door. The bullets make little bumps where the metal stops them. The bumps are pretty big. Good thing she wasn't firing those machined-bronze, armor-piercing slugs. Damn.

I lie on the closet floor for a while amidst the winter shoes, galoshes, dust bunnies and my paranoia, listening to the floor mop hissing steam where I propped it up in the kitchen. The directions said if you leave the mop in one spot too long it will discolor the floor. Oh well.

I finally get up, hanging coats framing my face as I carefully peek out the side window beside the door. Marlene and April are standing on the porch of the house across the street talking animatedly to Mrs. Newman. I hope their doctrine has a little more flexibility over at the odd numbered houses.

