

Easter

by Marcus Walton

Robert Easter only bought the best in suits, ties, and wrinkle-resistant white shirts. He had calculated his diet to allow for these other more necessary expenses, buying frozen meat in bulk at the supermarket. With his homely crock-pot he brewed makeshift stews (his wife giggled in her grave). The stink of them starched his perfect shirts. His tone was ironically the same with the men at the clothing store as the women at the grocery, an issue of injustice to the consumer always waiting there for him to find.

"You think you can fuck me, huh?" said off from the side of his face into open space, but still begging pardon.

"Excuse me, sir?"

Robert would pause to compose himself, raising his turtle head erect and capping his cane off with both hands like a knowing wizard, quickly finding the clerk's eyes.

"I said," he said with slow, perfectly calm, business-like enunciation,

"You *think* you can *fuck* me."

This was how he took the helm, the clerks falling sideways with apologetic streams set flowing. This was how he circumnavigated people, bartering like a viking setting prices on the edge of an ax-blade. He did it with a bottled serenity though, as befitted perfect victimhood.

Lesson #37: "Keith! Are you listening? People will pull one over on you, then two and three and they'll just keep pulling. Unless? Unless you push back. So? Are you listening? You gotta beat them to the punch. Push, push, and don't even give em the chance to start pulling. You follow me?"

Robert's one eye was always on Nature, Man, God, the Devil, and You, always in the scope of the eye because he knew better than to not look. He never exposed his belly. That was how he had survived inside his hermitage, thick with the smell of beef, talcum, sweat and piss. He thrived on sealed-in odors, ran on ancient fumes, all by

controlling his exposure. Robert will insist upon counting all the money twice before sliding the promised suitcase across the floor to the devil.

The old man's curiosity was rampant, but not free, as when a child wonders why the sky is blue. Every question was just one piece of an End, and that End had its End, too. Every End was circularly related to every Means until the shape had shrunken into a microscopic, invisible point that was itself pointless. A refinement of thought too expensive, like his fine suits. There were sticky, successive strings of intention and causality all bound together, his future becoming one warm, stylish plan woven tight from the plain cloth of life as he had processed it, stripped of all its raw, green verve and devoted to another new ruin. He found them wherever he went (that, he didn't even seem to know, was where he was essentially predestined to End up).

What drew the grey bear from the coveted privacy and closeness of his cave and woke him from the sleep of his densely academic interest in sociology? Discovery was the old tune he sang, but it was clear, from talking to him, that he spent more time trying to cover up the unsightly things of the earth than anything, pawing up the dirt and grass to cover the shit. Now, getting on a plane and taking off for Philadelphia, that was unheard of for creatures with habits like his. It was like sending a domesticated exotic bird on a safari, the bird wearing all the vestigial glories still born by its wings' undimmed colors.

Keith watched out the window as the plane gained speed and his anus puckered when the tires suddenly lost the ground. Robert's eye seemed to swell in its socket like the belly of an Ethiopian child, with all its sad, explosive threat, before closing on the cabin for the remainder of the flight. Robert could sleep at will, solid proof of his dual citizenship in the countries of life and death.

