

Courage Under Fire

by Mark Budman

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Once upon a time, my friend and I met a nanny pushing a baby carriage and reading an e-book. She wore a plaid dress, blue stockings and a white barrette. A set of wrinkles marred her tanned brow. Multitasking seemed too hard on her.

Inside the carriage sat a raccoon. Its head was constructed from Legos except for the teeth that were white-painted nails. It extended its front paws to my friend and said, Mama. I think it was mistaken.

"Man is nature's sole mistake," my friend said. Her eyes were clear like FL diamonds. She used to be a Tea Party member once, but now she was a liberal. I had always admired flexibility in women.

"Sir William Schwenck Gilbert," I said.

"Be that self which one truly is," the nanny said. Her eyes were too big and too shiny, like lab-grown emeralds.

"Søren Kierkegaard," I said.

"Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the wild frontier," the coon said.

"Tom Blackburn and George Bruns," I said.

"Oh, let me pass and taste the great surprise," my friend said. I had always admired breadth of perspective in women.

"William James Dawson," I said.

"Please forgive him," the nanny said. "He comes from a long and unbroken line of rednecks."

"Please forgive him," my friend said. "He comes from a long and unbroken line of know-it-alls."

The nanny winked at my friend, took out a cigarette and lit it. The flame of the lighter billowed in a wind like a tango dancer.

"You shouldn't smoke next to a baby," my friend said. I had always admired courage under fire.

"Shot up, bitch or I'll kick your ass," the nanny said.

My friend snatched her lighter and stomped on it.

"Will you marry me?" I asked my friend. I wanted to do it for years. Her courage was the last drop.

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“Yes, I would.”

I took out a ring, which I bought the day I met my friend, and kneeled. The nanny and the coon clapped. So did Kierkegaard in his current abode.

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