

Creep

by Meg Tuite

I study my face in the mirror. It has etched circles of whispering wrinkles that move around like pulling the stopper from the sink and watching water spiral down the drain. Many secrets are buried in these caverns.

I survived four wives and brats hover around me that are kids of my kids and I smile and act like I care. Some of them even look like me, but only one stands out from the mob. Whenever Tory comes around, she gives me the once over and asks me how many times I've shit my pants this week and we roar with laughter while the others stand around and fidget with their minds.

I don't know where Tory fits in the line-up. I whacked so many of those good-for-nothings over the years. Every one of them will tell you I drank so much malt liquor I could barf up a distillery and that wouldn't be a lie. I still fed the grubs until they were old enough to legally kick out of the house. Now they've got me where they want me. I'm sitting my fat ass in a wheelchair at some hell camp for all the assholes you'd never want to meet in some cheap, piss-smelling-kill-you-off-slowly home for dying, deranged, broken-down bodies.

Well, they don't know a damn thing about me, except for Tory. She's tall and thick as a redwood and we speak the same language. She shot out of one of those fat whales I called wife. Tory was always the quiet one when everyone else was blathering and she laughed when no one else did. I like that in a kid. When I took the belt to her she'd look me straight in the eye. She'd say, "No, sir, I'll take my beating head-on." Damn, she was a beast.

So, what is it that gets into the bones and jangles them up into a knot of confessionals? Every wrenching pain persists on dragging out some vagrant memory from my spine that knocks off vertebrae

like dominoes. I get smaller every day while those flickering corners of my film have set up the projector and keep rolling the tapes. Not enough beer in the world could erase those visuals.

One daughter threw a lit cigarette at me, swore up and down about the shit I'd done to her for hours while I sat dead-eyed in my chair. Other daughters came and went screaming all kinds of things. At least five of the kids disowned me and that saved me some time. A few sons and sons-in-laws smacked me in the face for botching up lives they never had a chance at. You get too old to fight back. I'm a creep. I come from a long line of creeps and I'm sure a few of those sperm banks I launched into this world are creeps, as well. So what. The world's full of us with more crawling out every damn day.

But, it's Tory that rewinds before me. She barrels into my non-descript room with a window that opens out to a garden I never look at and tells me I resemble the gorilla in that movie. The one that terrorized a city with a blonde crushed between his black, hairy claws. "King Kong," she screams and we both belt out howling. Tory breaks my heart. She sees something, but it's a something I've never been. She yells and swats at me sometimes, but it's the quiet in her that unnerves me. She can sit with me for what seems like hours and not say a word or blink. She stays when everyone else is running in the other direction.

"I got one for you," Tory would say. "How many creeps does it take to screw in a light bulb?" I was always drunk, before I was stuck in this hellhole, and would stare back with a menacing look. "Not even one," she'd say. "This creep is so full of his own fireworks that he lights up the room with his own farts." And somehow that would set me off and I'd lose the battle that had started in my brain. Tory could break me up and stand strong as a tree trunk in front of me, cackling and shrieking at her own bad joke.

And I've always been the bad joke. All those years of terrorizing these bastards that swelled and popped out of their mother's bodies like Jiffy Pop, were now imprinted in my face. Every child was another ruptured capillary on my double-wide, flame-flaring snout.

Tory sits in front of me and hollers, "You're an old fool with half a brain and you didn't even have to get a lobotomy!" She slaps her thigh and smacks my scrawny, bald head.

I wander through the halls of my fingerprints and know that they have imprinted Tory with far more than a dusting. I look down the scope of my camera and see her pregnant at some point in time, long before her time. "Tory," I say clutching my chest like a demented half-wit with tears slithering down my cheeks.

Tory narrows her eyes and studies me. "Look, you old creep," she says. "You're like a bad penny that keeps turning up! Who gives a shit about a penny anymore? You think I'm going to pick you up?"

I stare at her in horror. She stares back with that ominous silence that seems like the long, dark tunnel that the rest of my spawn tell me I'm marching toward. I get ready for whatever she's going to give me or not.

She sits down in her chair and starts fishing through her pockets. She pulls out a handful of pennies and starts whipping them at me one by one. Then when I am covered, surrounded by coins, she throws back her head and lets out that deep guttural roar that always gets me going. I'm ridiculous. I start to giggle along with her.

