

Dangling About

by Michael J. Solender

It was hardly the post-coital afterglow he had read about.

Staring at the ceiling, he noted where the soot of a long-forgotten room fire had ignited the curtains sending acrid fumes in a northbound retreat. Some asshole had left his Camel on the window ledge while he wiggled the rabbit ears on the sorry excuse for a TV that was wedged into the corner. But he didn't know any of that, all he knew was he'd just spent \$30.00 for a spin with a working girl who refused to even take off her skirt, it was much more efficacious to just drop her panties, which she did after he produced his end of the transaction.

He'd spent another \$30.00 for the room. His check hadn't been in his hands for 30 minutes and he was doing his best to piss the whole thing away in one night. He stood up and caught his reflection in the mirror.

It was the only piece of glass in the room that wasn't cracked. The windows were scratched and had spidery fingers into their corners and the lone glass on the nightstand had a chip that he spun to the other side as he poured himself a shot of bourbon earlier. A small pellet or BB had nicked the surface of the television which probably hadn't bothered many of the room's prior patrons.

Looking at his pale and pimpled flesh, he was repulsed by his flaccid and lifeless member. The accompanying bits, dangled about far from his frame as the summer heat drew them away from his sweaty and unwashed body. Nature's way of preserving and keeping viable the life bearing fluid they were prepared to secrete. In Jack Spence's case the only exodus they would see in the upcoming days would be at his hand or as a result of another three sawbuck expenditure.

Most men had some kind of sorry love affair with their equipment; Spence was not so attached to his that he wasn't willing to put it inside of some very questionable receptacles.

Work. Eat. Sleep. Screw. Repeat.

He lay back down on his back and began to contribute his own layer of grime to the ceiling as he fired up a smoke. He played with his lighter, flicking it on and off, on and off, the click of the hinged Zippo sharply cracking against the dead air in the room. His *girlfriend* long gone, the place still stank like bad sex, stale cigarettes and Binaca.

The flame off the Zippo flickered against the greenish-gray TV. He tried not to notice his own image as it flicked off the set into his retina in time with his opening and closing the lighter. The butane was running low and the flame receded to the quick, barely a blue orb capped with a slight yellow crown.

40 years old and Spence was barely more than a day laborer at a Compton manufacturer. His \$180.00 a week was good for rent, a bottle of bourbon, lunches at Nicks, a few groceries and one or two working girl visits.

His Friday evening ritual long ago became habit and saved him from driving cross-town to spend the evening listening to his neighbor's cats fighting and drinking in the emptiness of his by-the-week studio rental.

He'd been there going on six years and the landlord had offered him a break on the rent if he went annual or even monthly. Saving money was pointless to Spence. He didn't have anything to spend it on.

Philosophical he wasn't. He'd never read Descartes. Never been to the theater. Mozart was never been played on his car radio. Those pleasures for other people, not him.

Once, he read a book. It was in high-school, before he dropped out in the tenth grade. **The Outsiders**. He really like it and felt he could relate. Then his pals told him that SE Hinton was a girl and that was that. He wasn't reading books written by girls.

He had something to look forward to once, several years back. He wasn't always a loner and actually had peeps that cared about him. He was actually some little girl's father, cooing, talking baby talk, acting suburban and all that shit. Things really mattered. For a while.

Spence had a wife then. He had in-laws, car payments and fescue with brown patch. He played softball with the guys from church and at 22, had already surpassed his father in annual earnings, working tool and die for the factory machine shop.

He didn't have big dreams or false allusions about being anything other than a working stiff with a wife and kids that loved him. His missus was cute and turned plenty of heads when they went out. That didn't bother Spence; in fact he thought it was validation that he had made a good choice. He felt good when he caught other guys checking out his wife.

She was a good little cook too. Always making his favorite, corned beef hash, potatoes and she knew how to bake, that one.

Turned out, she had a boyfriend. Things didn't matter after that.

Fridays were death for Jack Spence. Forty-eight hours with no purpose or structure meant he was left on his own to feel the void

that existed until Monday morning. He had forty-four hours left to go and no matter how much he drank, he could never really sleep.

At least at work he felt some sense of purpose. He didn't say much and didn't have any friends, but nobody gave him any shit and the boss threw some extra hours at him when he had them available.

Forty-four hours to go.

The Zippo was out of butane. Spence continued to click the hinge.

Maybe tomorrow he'd figure it out. Maybe tomorrow he'd get the jump start he needed. Maybe tomorrow. They could write that on his tombstone. Jack Spence left through the front door of the Motel 6, drove his car 8 blocks to the intersection where the Blue-line train passed every 18 minutes, parked on the tracks and waited for tomorrow.

