

Eviction

by Robert Crisman

Tell me your hero and I'll tell you what's cooking with you.

Michelle came into the coffee shop, saw Sarah, and went and plopped down at her table. They passed some small dirt, which got Michelle ready to move to the big news: Roanne's eviction.

Roanne had been gone off the face of the earth for nearly a week. Then, early yesterday morning she'd crept into her pad like a burglar. She stayed at the Boylston Terrace, in the unit over Michelle's, and most of the tenants were people who'd gotten off dope. She'd gotten loaded, which is why she crept into her place. Everyone knew that she'd gotten high--clean dopefiends don't just disappear--and as soon as the manager, Nick, caught up with her ass, she was gone.

Michelle had to gather herself for the story. Had it been anyone else she'd have rolled out the Hot-News-Brass-Balls-And-Giggles approach, but this was Roanne and something more serious was called for. Plus, eviction is one heavy number, at least when you're not on the streets where eviction's an everyday thing.

Also, Michelle had seen this eviction take place. It was one ugly scene. Roanne had scared her a bit, truth be told, and had also sent roiling some other emotions Michelle either couldn't or wouldn't pin down.

"I'd just gotten up," Michelle said. "I wasn't even awake yet, and I hear this pounding on Roanne's door. She's right up above me and her door's next to mine, and it's Nick. And Bob's with him. And Nick's knocking pretty loud and then he's like, 'Roanne, I know you're up there.' And she doesn't answer and he knocks again, a little louder this time, and nothing, and then it's, 'Roanne I've got a key, and if you don't come down we're coming up.' And then, it's still nothing, and then I heard Nick, you know, unlocking the door, and then Roanne yelled, 'Just a *minute!*' and she sounded, you know, all pissed off. And then it was quiet, then Nick yells up, '*C'mon, Roanne!*' and she yells, 'I'm *coming*, goddamnit!' and I heard her

moving around up there, and then finally she comes down."

"I'll bet Nick was pissed."

"Well, yes, I don't know. Bob was laughing and he tells him, 'She's flushing her dope, Homes,' and Nick was kind of laughing at that but...anyway, Roanne came down and opened the door and said, 'What?' like, why are you *bothering* me at nine o'clock in the morning?"

"God!" Sarah laughed. "*That* took some balls!"

"Yes it does," Michelle said. "It was, I couldn't, it was actually kind of funny, you know, because--anyway, so I just kind of walked out there, you know, to see, and there was Nick, and Bob, and I couldn't see Roanne because she was on the other side of her door there and--and Nick, he was just, you know, 'You got loaded, Roanne. You've got to go,' and he's like, all calm and--"

"I doubt this was his first time."

"Well, *yes*, I mean, it *is* the deal. You can't live at the BT if you get loaded. That's the deal right from the start and, Roanne...she got high.

"But now, she's all of a sudden, she's just *yelling*! 'I am *not* loaded, Nick! I am not *loaded*!' And Nick says, 'Yes you are, Roanne,' and she says, 'I am *not*! Where did you *hear* that?' and Nick says, 'Your eyes are pinned.' 'They are *not*!' And then, finally, Nick says he's not going to argue with her, he knows she got loaded and she's got to go and that's it.

"And *then*, that's when it really started to, you know, blow up. Roanne tells him she's not letting him go in her apartment and if he tries she'll call the cops, and he can't evict her unless she doesn't pay rent, and she's got five days from the first, and she's really yelling at him now, and then *Bob* jumps in and he's, you know Bob, and he's right in her face and--"

"Wow!" Sarah said. "That must have been, *whooo-o*!"

"Oh yeah, it was. And he's, right off the bat, he's yelling at her, and cussing, she knew what the deal was, and he *knows* she's loaded, and *fuck* all this lying-ass bullshit, and Nick had to step in and kind of chill him away and--And *then*, Roanne--I mean, that

would have freaked me right *out*, having Bob in my face like that. I mean, he's a big guy--"

"He looks like the Grim Reaper!"

"Yeah!" Michelle laughed. "He sure does. And when he gets mad. I mean, Bob's a good guy, I like him, and he really helped me when that fucking Victor kept coming around here that time, but, yeah and--but, so he gets in Roanne's face and, I swear to *God*, you should have seen it! She *exploded*, Sarah, I mean just, *wow*. She started just *screaming*, like '*Fuck you, motherfuckers!* You *can't* kick me out! I'll call the city! and, I mean, she was really just, you should have seen it. And Nick--by now *he's* starting to get mad. He was trying to stay calm, but Roanne--it was too much."

Michelle shook her head and sat back. The scene at the pad had really gotten her blood in an uproar. Set her back a bit, too. She'd never heard Roanne just, on fire like that and it scared her. The ferocious, ugly *suddenness* of it.

Until right at that moment, Michelle, in a vague sort of way, had seen them all in that building as, well, sort of family or something, though if you'd asked her she might have said that was corny. But still, recovering junkies and all, in a fight to the death in the trenches with big, bad addiction... The *drama*... And Roanne, a fighter for sure, and the closest Michelle had ever felt by way of connection with someone and... And, sure, Roanne had gone out--it *happens!*--and now she was getting the boot, but still--and then *this*: nuclear *war*, Roanne throwing *bombs*. And *Bob*--

It had scared her alright. And only later, back in her pad when the dust had more or less settled, was she able to even start sifting the things that she'd seen and felt.

Roanne, Roanne, her rage and contempt... *That's* what had shaken Michelle. It had lodged in the pit of her stomach, as if *she* was the object. Ugly, repellant contempt...

And then her reaction, the repulsion that she, Michelle, felt--that scared her too.

Roanne, her friend, her *hero!* The stuff dreams are made of...

But, that contempt, Michelle's own revulsion... Reality,

threatening to break dreams to bits.

In the coffee shop now, Michelle blinked, bit her lip, looked away. Sarah watched her go through these changes and guessed at her pain. The addict's empathy brought the guess close to the truth.

Sarah had always felt that Roanne was an itch Michelle had to scratch. She could well understand; Sarah had felt it herself those times that she'd seen Roanne.

Roanne had swum in those waters that called to her and Michelle. She'd capered with Marlins and sharks, had known them by name. She was tough, a survivor, or so it appeared, with a wild air about her--a cachet to girls raised in places where any adventure was something they shopped for in malls. Capping it all, her anomalous Mediterranean beauty, so different than that which was bred in those Madison Avenue labs and then proffered on billboards, a beauty somewhat akin to their own. Roanne was a rose growing up through the cracks in the sidewalks of mean downtown streets. And the way that she brought out the hunger in men...a junkie hunger they'd never quite seen in the eyes of the boys that trolled at their feet... It made her remote in a way, untouched, pristine, like a star in far heaven.

Now, after the blowup, Michelle dug through the morning's events. She *had* to dig. She wanted her old Roanne back. She'd lost her.

Roanne loaded, evicted, out there and gone...

Michelle chewed the cud. What she'd sensed early on was this certain...something Roanne possessed. A *willfulness*, really, a steely, ruthless kind of desire to--what? To have it her way.

Her way or the highway...

Michelle had seen the way Roanne had approached certain guys. She had this quick, sort of clipped little stride. She'd come up, stop on the dime, then lean slightly forward, kind of in the guy's face, eyes fixed on her target, a bit shy, calculating...searching the breach in the wall she could march through, take over, and get what she'd come to get.

And then, this morning, there on the stairs, faced off with Bob,

Roanne stood her ground and bit back. That took some *balls*.

The nastiness was...*nasty*. Scary. But--eviction! Yes, she got loaded, but now, what, she's *homeless*, and--

That evil dopefiend *contempt* she'd spewed, though. Michelle had never seen it before, not like that. Well, maybe, from street scuts she'd known, but, that was their act. This, though was...wow.

Michelle was bounced this way and that way by popcorn emotions as she sat trying to suss out events. And then, something else, past shock and awe: euphoric tendrils, shortening her breath.

Roanne on those stairs had said in effect, *fuck the world*.

A manifesto for dopefiends living and dead. Fuck the world! *Cry freedom!*

Freedom from all obligations that kept them from flying to some other, unspecified place...

Michelle wanted freedom.

"So what happened then?" Sarah said.

Michelle blinked and fell back in the world. "Well, it was just--finally--they were going at it and then, finally, Nick told her, if she wanted to call the city, why not just call the police, and then they could see what they'd have to say about, you know, Donny's van, maybe, how that turned up missing, and--"

"Nick knew about that?"

"Everybody did. Donny, you know, he told people"

Roanne had borrowed the van and then, three days later, traded the thing for some dope. That's what Donny had figured at least when the cops called him up with the news that they had the van down at impound.

"So what did she say about that?"

"Well, she just, that was it. She didn't want the police coming up there. She finally just said, okay, you know, she'd leave. But then, it's like, I guess Nick and Bob were gonna go up and check around for damage or something, and she said, *no*, uh uh! She said she didn't want Bob up there fondling her underwear."

"*What?*" Sarah started laughing.

Michelle had to laugh too. "Yeah, she said that and--God! Bob, he

was just, he went *white*, and then his lips curled up and--I thought for a moment he was just going to *kill* her. And Nick, he kind of put his hand out, you know, to stop Bob from doing whatever, and then, Bob finally just went back to his place."

Sarah shook her head.

"Yeah, Michelle said. "And then, anyway, Nick said, okay, go pack your stuff, and I guess he gave her like an hour or something, and then, that was pretty much that."

"What about her furniture and stuff?"

"There wasn't much, really, and most all of it was stuff she'd got out of the storage garage down below there, so. And she couldn't carry it with her and so, she was just going to leave it."

Michelle had gone up the stairs after Nick left. A bit timidly, but how could she not say goodbye to her friend?

Roanne shot her a look when she came in the room and continued throwing the stuff she was taking into a haphazard pile in the middle of the livingroom floor. Michelle didn't know what to say.

Roanne started cussing Nick and Bob, especially Bob, calling them all the different kinds of cocksuckers there are in this world.

And then, done piling, she started to stuff it all into black garbage bags, dopefiend luggage since time started ticking.

Michelle asked if she wanted some help. Roanne looked almost confused for a second, then said, yeah, sure.

Michelle did what sorting she could; Roanne didn't bother. The packing didn't take long.

At the end, Roanne said, "I'm sorry, girlfriend." She stood there a moment, a hesitant moment, then reached out and hugged Michelle. It was almost as if she found such a gesture distasteful. It would have been brief but Michelle hugged back tightly, half-formed thoughts and emotions pinging away. They held a moment, then Roanne broke the clinch, almost abruptly, looking away.

Roanne had three bags. Michelle carried two of the bags out to the street. Roanne had a ride coming soon; she'd made a call, and Donny'd be there in maybe 10 minutes.

Michelle watched the van drive away.

Roanne gone.

Free...

Michelle *cooked*, her eyes fixed on something a long way away.
Those euphoric tendrils licked at her very last nerve.

