

Party w/Your Parents' Siblings

by Smiley McGrouchpants Jr.

Dan was at an impasse; he could either whip his dick out, and jerk off *right here*, or — and get this, this was the best part — he could go home and PARTY WITH HIS PARENTS' SIBLINGS!

He chose the latter.

(Bad move, right there!)

Eleanor was fed up. It was a warm, brisk summer night and her dress — only \$7.50 at the thrift! — was, sadly, (a nice pattern of a white with purple small lilies strewn around it, and a tie-around-the-back-of-the-neck strap configuration) was going unseen, 'cept by these be-polite-or-you'll-hurt-our-feelings lot, a bunch of relatives whose shoes (out-of-date though they might've been — was *that* guy wearing Zips?) seemed to press down, harder, onto the ground, as though the weight had *shifted* from what you pressed with yourself *outward* into the World and . . . just . . . went . . . *down*.

“You okay, honey?” Offhand, just making conversation — they always seemed to be on the verge of checking that someone wasn't going to run away from them, just to make conversation, just to pass time — and Aunt Simone scrutinized her a bit *too* closely, just to make sure she was still there, that she wouldn't disappear.

On Labor Day.

At 4:15 pm.

In Eastern Massachusetts.

James put the gun in his mouth. (He'd never killed a fuckin' *deer* with the thing, anyway — except for that goddamn *doe* he'd used up 36 Polaroids of film documenting, his one victory in life, his Lockhorns™-esque and Honeymooner™-esque wife smirking the whole while while she took pictures — “No, no, really, it looks *good!*” (everything with a goddamn glimmer of *know-better*-ness layered over it, if it wasn't for that goddamn *house* in the woods that was

owned by “everyone” these people'd be no better than anyone else, how the hell had he *married* into this clan—)

He pulled the trigger.

Constantine hated his fuckin' name.

Lookit me, hands in pockets of dress-up slacks . . . all this for a family vacation, for chrissakes, to play miniature *golf* (???) . . . “Well, it's on the way home from church, so,” The Dad said. (*pregnant pause*.) “So.” That was the punchline. *That* was the groaner — the joke-without-a-joke, the *we're so helpless* looks amongst each other that mirrored church. Was pinioned by church. (“We can't *not* go!”) Constantine looked at his loafers. His sister's dress rustled against his leg. His sister was boring.

He looked out the window, pas the locked car-door knob, sunk in the panel below the window, open, blowing sea air on his face and recently-cut hair . . .

. . . “Constantine!”

Constantine picked up his putter. (Whatta family, whatta sport mini-golf was — nothing but *putters*! Nothing to “reach for the stars” with, as the corny Casey Kasem guy's signoff went each week, after playing this week's Top 40 of Christopher Cross or Blondie or Juice Newton.) He putted. He did alright, and his family got perfunctory, feigned-but-it'd-never-get-better-than-this excited, like a “Test Your Skill!” meter of 10 that'd never get past 3.

How could it?

Tornado? Cataclysm?

And so it went . . .

Sally felt the numbing — the hour after hour after *hour*, when, as the show broke for commercials (as if to say, “Well? *O-kay* then!”) and then broke back and then broke again for commercials it was like she . . . was making decisions but she . . . wasn't and then it was time for *F-Troop* . . . anyway so why not watch a comedy it was . . . some bugle music was one with some guy grinning and the car . . . pulled up into the driveway and it was still . . . another . . . hour and a half 'till dinner so she . . . might as well wait she'd do her homework after anyway and . . . the sprinkler started up and . . .

went *splut! splut! splut!* against the downstairs basement window but it was . . . real quiet and the TV went *hahahahaha!* and . . . nothing was the matter and the sergeant blundered into the screen and said: "Wow! We've *gotta* — "

What was wrong?

Nothing.

4:35 pm, EST, Tuesday in September.

Barbara stared out the window.

Her parents had one of those sprinklers that made a mini-waterfall — not the *whsk-whsk-whsk* machine-gun kind — and she was watching it sweep an arc of many, simultaneously, parallel water—

"Barbara?" Her mom asked, her mom knocked, like the two together made it o.k. to not ask — since, obviously, her door was open.

Rituals are for hiding into, she thought, having read some of her older sister's *We Are All Cannibals (and Other Essays)* book by some Claude Lévi-Strauss guy her sister, home from the Univ. of Chicago, seemed all too happy to let her eat up. "Ugh! Common core."

She was an Econ. major.

Or, err, *concentra* —

"There's that faraway look in your eyes again," her mother said, imposing her own reverie on *The Daughter That Hadn't Gotten Away* — *yet*.

I was just watching the sprinkler . . .

Her mother sighed, fingering the faux-pearls around her neck. Barbara's neck tensed, almost as though the hair on the back of it would stand up: *Here comes a platitude . . .*

"They grow up so *fast*," she said to a potted plant on a shelf (Barbara's leftover science project), or an angel, or some other adult who wasn't there who couldn't contradict her.

Barbara had her period. *Now this?*

And yet, everything was fine.

