

Temple's Rock' N' The House

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In the medieval darkness within iron and stone, light seldom prevails over the never weakening grip of evil. Hardened men, each set to live in their own class, that level of existence be it a proud or shameful place. Prison is the one place where the eyes tell the history. Lesser men never look at another directly for fear of confrontation. Men of charismatic power, good or bad, looked directly into one's soul. These have earned their Rights-to-Passage so-to-speak. So is the scene on visitation day when friends or families come to tack the felon to a world that he no longer belongs to. Curious visitors look up at every man that enters, to see the face of a reasonable individual. Other times, they find cold hate-filled eyes, lifeless, with the blazing flames of a rage. I entered, stopped at the guard's post feeling the eyes. The cacophony of casual conversation fell into a lull. Enquiring whispers, barely audible crossed each table. I was not a bad guy, and I was certainly no Rambo, yet, I had survived "The Vacuum". Those days when the prison system had fell into disarray. Complex filled the void of power. Gangs rose up to send soldiers to recruit new members. They sent out warriors to battle the independents, those who would be dubbed 'Gladiators'. Though we became chattel of one faction or another. The truly strong chose who to help remain free of these predators, we chose who walked about without an escort. This was where I had come from. I had earned my own Rights-to-Passage. And for every right, I had a mental of physical scar giving the rank.

So the whispers echo, my reputation had been strangely exaggerated and publicized. Men thrown into a cannibalistic world were evil wore a million faces. Where Dante's Inferno had somehow become satiric to the Christians vestige of civilized society. There was only one truth to this ironic blessing; "All are born to die, also for the event between the Alpha and Omega.

Most families kept their conversations low and within the confines of their own little temporal worlds. Fathers, brothers, uncles, or grandfathers held out babies for inspection. Older children darted to and from the soda pop and candy machines or person-to-person. I like to watch these tiny little worlds while sitting with a so-called friend, the new wife that developed a tyrant's attitude. She too spoke of her world. I sat eating a myriad of snacks and sipped Big Reds. On this particular day, set an inmate I had taken under my wing to a degree.

He was a short-timer, doing a simple little for possession. His wife was not the prettiest woman, but she was acceptable for country boy. She held a three year old in her lap. His son, maybe five set to one side. His daughter, perhaps eight, sat opposite her brother. The boy seemed distressed

in his tiny suit, but his daughter, and natural charmer, sat energetically in a pink floral dress hemmed with rippling lace.

I watched these two children, mentally escaping to a better day so many years earlier. For a moment I pictured the foundation of my faith, my first wife. Our two kids acted very much like all kids starved for the affection of an incarcerated father. The vision came, and for a brief moment, I was human again.

The Dragon of my own choosing droned on about her social affairs. I fell under the spell of this little girl. Her smile made me want to smile. Her giggles coerced me to laugh. It was easy to see the world through her brown eyes, twinkling jewels that flashed brilliant shards of hope into the darkest of souls. Most enchanting was the multi-roles of spring like coils of auburn red hair. Suddenly I noticed the entire room had become captivated.

She was an actress on cue, glancing around with mischief smile radiating a powerful confidence. Hopping off the chair, she took to the spotlight of her own personality. She bent at the waist leaning forward, clasped her hands together, then began pointing an accusing finger at each man.

“You boys are soo—bad!” She said with pouting lips. “But! Don't worry. God'll give you another chance. And you'll smile again.” She turned and eyed me. With hands planted firmly on her hips and squinting one eye, she asked; “What's the matter mister don't you know how to smile?”

Suddenly, she began sidestepping swinging the hips and tossing her shoulders to some imaginary beat. Then she sang out, “On the Good Ship Lollipop. . . It's a sweet trip to the candy shop. . .” She began in a strong yet sweet innocent voice. Without instruction or interruption, the acting queen spun, twirled and danced with such ambitious energy that one forgot where they were.

Hard-nosed inmates lost their composure. The guards having the authority to evict disturbances, stood awe-struck behind their own table. Upon ending the solo, she whirled about and seductively turned her head to one side and put both hands upon her belly. With great finesse, she dipped to give a grand cursive. The room erupted into applause. Overjoyed, she leaped into her father's lap and said; “I love you daddy!” She sat proudly in his lap squaring up his collar.

I swallowed hard and ducked my head to avoid eye contact with anyone else including my so-called friend. The room became extremely solemn. Every man wished he were this man with Shirley Temple. All could hear her words.

“Jesus loves you daddy and so do I and mommy and bubby and chippie.” She rambled on.

I noticed this young man wiping his eyes. I envied him. Several minutes passed before the casual yet cacophony of jailhouse conversations resounded.

My visitor returned to her own drama. I pretended to listen while mentally turning back the years to a decade earlier when I had just such a daughter. Lost in time, my visitor noted my lack of interest. She became silent and studied me with disdain, throwing the daggers of resentment toward my memory. Again for a second time, I recalled what it was like to be human. I remembered what love was. I temporally returned to a world that was all right. The cold world I lived in vanished long enough to feel the warmth of a forgotten thing, love.

As if on cue, the angelic voice came to life. Once again, all eyes turned to her. Her voice rang out with such irony; “Bad Boys, Bad Boys, What’cha gonna do? What’cha gonna do when they come for you. Bad Boys, Bad Boys. What’cha gonna do? What’cha gonna do when they come for you?” She pranced about the room, skipping, sidestepping, spinning and always ready to put a narrative gesture to every word. She sang on, the twinkling brown almond shaped eyes coming to rest temporarily on every man at least once. She played the game of taunting so well that none even cared. Her mere interrogation forced each to smile. From man to man, she danced on, pointing with the finger with every question, as if casting a spell. Amazingly, she knew every word and kept the beat, in the absence of lyrics, she sang; “Dada-dada-dadada-.” Nearing the end, she planned a great finale. Whirling across the floor in a series of spins, she came to a stop directly in front of the Sergeant on duty, the Rank, as he is called. Her tiny finger flew up and her eyes narrowed with conviction. “And what’ choo gonna do when they come for you?”

Silence grew heavy, foreboding, threatening. The disruption had come full circle and the finger now pointed at those that normally pointed us out. All held their breath hoping the Man wouldn't escort this Queen of personality out. The Sergeant, lost in the theatrics glared down at her with his usual hardened scowl.

Cautiously Shirley stepped closer and leaned on the table. She focused on looking this grouch squarely in the eye. “What’cha gonna do when they come for you?”

Sarge came to his senses, realizing that he was now in the spotlight himself. With a never before seen smile, he looked down at her and said; “I’m going to run.” Then he winked and Shirley winked back before running to the safety of her father's lap.

The end