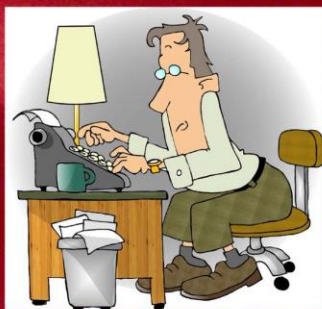


**SHORT STORIES
TO TICKLE
YOUR FUNNYBONE**



**EXCERPTS FROM
THE LADY JUSTICE
MYSTERY/COMEDY SERIES**

ROBERT THORNHILL

Short Stories To Tickle Your Funnybone



Excerpts From The Lady Justice Mystery/Comedy Series

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Series

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1. Fiction, Humorous
2. Fiction, Mystery & Detective, General

**Everyone knows that laughter is the
best medicine-----**

So ---

**Take a few moments to chuckle
along with**

Walt and the gang from the

Lady Justice Series.

Robert Thornhill

Why I Go Somewhere Else For Thanksgiving Dinner

One year, Maggie and I decided to host the traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

Although we were both in our sixties, neither of us had done it before, but how hard could it be. I'd watched my mom and grandma do it for years.

The special day finally arrived.

“Ok, I'm ready to tackle this beast,” I proclaimed, and I ripped into the shrink-wrap.

After the bird was fully exposed, I noticed the corner of a bag sticking out of his rear end.

“Hey, somebody hid something inside our turkey,” I exclaimed.

Maggie came over to take a look. “Oh silly, nobody hid anything. Those are the giblets.”

“The what?”

“Giblets! You know, some of the inside parts of the turkey.”

“What am I supposed to do with them?”

“Well, I think you can make things with them, like stuffing and gravy.”

“Hold on a minute. I don't EVER remember Grandma putting giblets in her gravy. That just

doesn't sound right."

So I dried my hands, grabbed my dictionary and looked up 'giblets'. According to Mr. Webster, "giblets are the edible offal of a fowl including the heart, gizzard, liver and other visceral organs."

I nearly fainted.

"I'm sorry Maggie, but no giblets will ever be eaten in my house or in my presence. I hope that's not a deal breaker."

"I think I can live with that," she replied.

I returned to the turkey, shoved my hand up his butt and pulled out the bag of giblets. For curiosity's sake, I cut open the bag to take a look.

I shouldn't have done that. There's just some things that ought not be seen.

Sure enough, the inner plumbing of Tom Turkey spewed forth onto my countertop --- and something else too.

A stiff piece of grisly meat about six inches long sat there staring me in the face.

"Holy Crap!" I exclaimed. "Come here and look at this! That looks like --- No! Surely they wouldn't put a turkey's ----- in the bag!"

"No, silly" Maggie replied. "That's his neck."

"This is just WRONG in so many ways."

After disposing of the offending offal, I turned my attention to the cooking instructions I had pulled off the Internet.

“How To Cook A Turkey in 3 Easy Steps.”

Step 1: Preheat oven to 325 degrees and select a 3-4 inch-deep roaster pan with lid. Cooking time: 15 minutes per pound.

Step one seems pretty easy.

Step 2: For golden brown skin, spread butter evenly and season to taste with salt, pepper, garlic or rosemary.

No problem.

I dipped into the ‘I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter’ tub and under Maggie’s watchful eye, started lathering the bird’s ample breasts.

“Hmmm, this feels kind of good,” I murmured and gave Maggie my ‘sly, whadda you think’ look.

“Don’t even THINK about it, Buster,” she shot back.

“OK, OK, I’ll be good. Can you get me the salt and pepper and see what’s in my spice rack?”

“Nothing here but crab boil and taco seasoning. But you do have salt and pepper.”

“Well it says ‘season to taste’ and we both love tacos. How about we make Mexicali Turkey?”

I'll bet nobody's tried that before.

So I liberally coated the buttered breasts with salt, pepper and Old El Paso, and he was ready for Step 3, bake and baste.

“What about the stuffing? Aren't you going to make stuffing?”

“O yea, stuffing. I almost forgot. How do you make it?”

Seeing the blank look on Maggie's face, I muttered, “Well, back to the Internet.”

After an exhaustive search, we discovered there were two methods of stuffing preparation, pan and bird.

We went back to the kitchen and took a look up Tom's rear end.

“Isn't that where the offal came from?” I asked.

Getting an affirmative nod from Maggie, I made an executive decision on the spot.

“Pan it is!” I said.

Maggie didn't argue.

Besides, I can't ever remember my grandma digging stuffing out of the turkey's butt.

Satisfied with our preparation thus far, we plopped the bird in the oven and turned our attention to the stuffing.

“OK, it says to chop up onion and celery and sauté in melted butter. Let’s see what’s in the vegetable bin.”

I had an onion, but the only other green thing was a head of lettuce.

“Aren’t celery and lettuce in the same food group?” I asked. “I mean they’re both green and both a vegetable.”

How can you argue with logic like that?

So we chopped up the onion and lettuce and while they were boiling in the butter, we checked out the next ingredient, bread. More precisely, stuffing bread.

“What’s stuffing bread?”

Another blank look.

I checked the breadbox and found a loaf of Wonder White Bread fortified with vitamins and minerals.

“If we use this in our stuffing, doesn’t it then become ‘stuffing bread’ by definition?”

Again, how can you argue with the logic?

So we cut the Wonder Bread in little cubes and added them to our boiling vegetable mix per the instructions.

Next step, ‘add two cups of stock’.

“What’s stock?”

“Well, I think it’s some kind of meat juice or gravy that comes in a can. I remember seeing cans of ‘beef stock’ and ‘chicken stock’ on the grocery shelf next to the soups.”

We looked in the cabinet and found a can of Campbell’s Beef Barley soup and a can of Campbell’s Creamy Chicken Noodle soup.

“Since this is a fowl dish, I vote we go with the chicken noodle.”

More culinary logic.

We opened the can and sure enough there was a creamy liquid.

“Looks like stock to me,” I said.

“Are you going to drain it?”

“Why? Aren’t bread and noodles almost the same thing? We’ve got a huge crowd coming today. This will add a little more body to the dish.”

So into the pan went the soup.

The final step was to add poultry seasoning.

Having already exposed the deficiencies in my spice rack, we knew the only thing left was crab boil.

We looked at each other.

“What do you think?”

“Well, it’s going to be pretty bland without some kind of seasoning.”

So into the pot it went.

After mixing the gooey mess, we plopped it in a baking pan. Ready for the oven.

So far, so good.

The remainder of the morning was spent with last minute cleaning, showering, shaving and make-up sandwiched around our hourly basting duties.

The directions said to remove the lid during the final hour of cooking to ensure a golden brown skin. So off came the lid.

Our creative recipes had produced a rather unusual aroma that permeated the apartment. There was the essence of Taco Bell laced with a hint of Joe's Crab Shack. Not exactly what I remembered from Grandma's kitchen.

By 12:30, it was time for the bird to come out of the oven.

Beautiful!

Guests would be arriving soon, so it was time for the final preparations.

Then it hit me.

GRAVY!

I can't ever remember a Thanksgiving without turkey gravy.

OK, think. How did Grandma make gravy?

I remembered seeing her add three ingredients, milk, flour and the greasy stuff out of the bottom of the turkey pan. We have all of that --- I think.

We pulled Tom out of the pan and several inches of rich, greasy turkey broth covered the bottom of the pan.

I went to the cabinet to look for flour and came up empty. I couldn't remember when I had bought flour. I don't bake.

But there on the shelf, next to my Top Ramen Noodles was my answer --- Aunt Jemima.

OK, so it's pancake mix, but flour is flour, right?

I kept dumping Aunt Jemima in the turkey grease until I had a thick brown paste. I put the pan on the stove and added milk. I was ready to cook it down to a rich smooth texture. It made my mouth water.

At last everything was ready.

Our guests had arrived, each with their own special dish, and sat expectantly awaiting the holiday feast.

I looked at the food on the table: Mexicali turkey: Wonderbread crab paste: Aunt Jemima gravy; hockey puck rolls, chitlins, and enough

pumpkin pie with strawberry Cool Whip to feed the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

And, of course, we had the perfect wine paring, Arbor Mist. It goes good with everything.

Not exactly the traditional Thanksgiving I remembered from my youth, but I wouldn't have traded it for anything in the world.

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Lost Tapes*

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<http://amzn.to/1cDeiMK>

The Colon Cleanse

Sometimes, no matter how much you think you know about a person, they will surprise the heck out of you.

My sweetie, with no fanfare, and in her quiet unassuming way, had been gently steering me into a healthier lifestyle.

While I hadn't violently resisted, I hadn't exactly embraced the idea either.

Maybe it was time to give it a try.

I leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

"Thanks for caring," I said.

"You're welcome," she replied.

I had thought that the path to an enlightened way of living was not so bad: just eat healthier food and take a few pills each day, but I soon discovered that I had only taken the first few baby steps in my transformation.

One evening we had just polished off a large pepperoni lover's from Pizza Hut. I was wiping the grease off my fingers when Maggie delivered her next salvo in my lifestyle overhaul.

"Walt, we eat entirely too much meat and grease. We need to do a colon cleanse."

"Say what?"

“A colon cleanse. Over the years, especially as we grow older, mucous and fecal material build up in your colon.”

I looked at the glom clinging to the bottom of the pizza carton. That thought wasn't how I wanted to finish off my meal.

“There's nothing wrong with my colon.”

“Oh really? And just how do you know that?”

“Well, everything I eat seems to come out—eventually.”

“Experts say you should clean your colon of mucous, fecal matter, and parasites every year. Have you ever done it?”

“Parasites? What are you talking about?”

“You know, tapeworms, stuff like that.”

I looked at a piece of stringy cheese on the side of the box and noticed a queasy feeling in my stomach.

“Is this all really necessary?”

“Let me tell you a story. When Elvis died, they did an autopsy. His colon was filled with over seventy pounds of impacted fecal material—mostly old cheeseburgers and fries.”

This was way more information than I wanted to hear about my most cherished idol. “So

how does this cleanse thing work?”

She produced a bottle of pills. I guess it was a foregone conclusion that we were both going to be cleansed.

“We just take five of these at bedtime, and in the morning nature will take its course.”

Dutifully, I swallowed the pills.

At 6:00 a.m. the next morning, I had a rude awakening. It felt as if a volcano was about to erupt in my lower regions. Fortunately, the bathroom wasn't far, and I waddled toward it with my cheeks clinched shut.

My butt hit the seat just in time, and in the next three minutes everything I had ever eaten from last night's pizza to the hot dogs I ate after my senior prom came pouring out. I staggered from the bathroom, a beaten man.

Maggie greeted me in the kitchen.

“Now doesn't that feel better?”

Actually, it felt like my asshole was on fire, but I smiled and said, “Yes! That was just grand!”

I opened my paper, drank my coffee, and ate my cereal, but before I had finished the comics, the fiber kicked in. I felt another rumbling in my stomach and made a beeline for the bathroom.

I was in the midst of another colon scourge

when I heard the phone ring.

“Oh, swell. Here I am pouring out my guts, and I have to share the experience with someone on the line. This day just isn’t starting well.”

I opened the door just far enough for Maggie to hand me the phone. I thought I heard her cough and mutter, “Oh my God!”

“This is Walt.”

“Ox here. I was so excited about what we learned from Dr. Pearson I just couldn’t sleep. Can I pick you up a half hour early?”

“Just then, an enormous gas bubble reverberated from the porcelain throne.

“What was that noise?”

“Never mind. Where are you now?”

“I’m actually on the way.”

“Give me a few minutes. I’m just --- uhh --- finishing up a project I started last night.”

By the time Ox arrived, I thought I had everything under control, but two blocks from the apartment, mother nature struck again.

“Ox! Quick! Pull into that 7-Eleven!”

“What’s the emergency?”

“If you don’t pull over, we’ll be giving our car to Hazmat!”

After one final cleanse, I emerged from the

can and saw an elderly gentleman who had been patiently waiting for his turn.

As I was walking away, I heard him mutter, “Good Lord!”

An excerpt from the *Lady Justice and the Avenging Angels*

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<http://amzn.to/1i2yFDz>

A Trip To The Market

It had been a long day and I had been looking forward to a nice meal and a quiet evening with my sweetie, but it wasn't to be.

I opened the door and was met by Maggie. She planted a big kiss on my cheek.

“Do you want to go now or after supper?”

“Go where?”

“Walt, what day is this?”

I thought for a moment. “Uhhh, Wednesday. So what?”

Then it dawned on me. “Oh crap! Grocery store!”

She nodded, “I knew you could figure it out eventually. Now, back to my original question, before or after supper?”

I sighed, “Let's get it over with.”

Wednesday had been designated as ‘grocery day’ in our household because the local HyVee supermarket had proclaimed Wednesday to be ‘Senior's Day’ with all shoppers over fifty-five receiving a five percent discount.

Since we routinely spent a c-note stocking up, we saved a whopping five bucks.

Another reason we go on Senior's Day is

that the music that is piped into the store is all 50's rock 'n' roll. This brilliant marketing ploy was a blatant attempt to pander to the tastes of old farts like me and it worked.

If I have to shop I would much rather be serenaded by the likes of Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis than Taylor Swift or Justin Bieber.

I absolutely love the music of the 40's and 50's and as far as I'm concerned, the recording industry had very little to offer after 1965.

I have a fantastic collection of 45's and LP's dating back to my high school years of the fifties.

I know every song by heart and much to Maggie's chagrin, I am constantly singing around the house.

The fact that I am tone deaf only adds to her frustration.

On more than one occasion she has pleaded, "Please, not this morning. Anything but Little Richard!"

We grabbed our shopping cart and dutifully performed our pre-shopping ritual which consisted of Maggie securing her purse into the cart with one of those cursed straps that we can never get undone and me wiping the handle of the cart with a little sanitizer wipe just in case the previous shopper had

picked their nose and left a booger for us.

A part of my wiping ritual involves intoning a mantra that I devised to remind me why this is so important.

I boogied in the parking lot
I boogied in the mart
I boogied on my finger
And I wiped it on my cart

Having completed our pre-shopping ritual, our first stop was the produce department.

Maggie and I have developed a shopping strategy that seems to work for us.

I do the fruit and she does the vegetables.

The bananas were on board and I had headed to the grapefruit section when Gene Vincent's raspy voice filled the store.

I immediately felt compelled to sing along and I began bouncing to the beat singing, "*Be bop a lula, she's my baby. Be bop a lula, I don't mean maybe.*"

Then I noticed out of the corner of my eye that a young mother had grabbed her child and was hurrying him away from the old guy bouncing up and down with a grapefruit in each hand mumbling

strange words.

On reflection, I probably would have done the same thing.

Maggie joined me with the lettuce and tomatoes and we headed to the meat counter.

An old guy about my age was standing behind a skillet where little pieces of something that looked like doggy doo were sizzling in hot grease.

“How about a sample of our link sausage?” he asked proudly.

I looked into the pan and swore that I saw strands of LDL cholesterol swirling around.

“No thanks,” I replied. “I’m trying to cut back.”

My first time shopping with Maggie had been a traumatic experience for me.

After sixty-some years of bachelorhood, my shopping habits consisted of roaming the aisles and filling my cart with stuff that looked good and tasted good.

On our first outing together, she grabbed my Twinkies out of the cart. “Sorry, artificial sweeteners, hydrogenated corn oil. It’s filled with poison.”

Thus began my induction into the world of healthy eating.

Since then, I have dutifully studied the material she gave me to read and I have become a convert.

I'm not saying it's easy when the Ding Dongs are calling my name from the shelf, but I know it's the right thing to do.

When our basket was full, we headed to the checkout.

Another of our rituals is to split up and head to two different checkout stands. The one who has found the shortest line signals to the other.

We probably should scrap that part of our ritual because it rarely works.

There was only one woman in my line so I gave Maggie the high sign.

I had just loaded everything from our cart to the counter when the checkout girl picked up the microphone."

"Price check on five."

"Oh crap! Not again!"

Of course the store was busy. After all it was Senior's Day.

We waited and waited and I was able to glean from the conversation that the woman ahead of me thought that she had been charged twenty-five cents too much for a can of peas.

Finally, I couldn't resist.

I pulled a quarter from my pocket and handed it to the lady.

“Ma'am, I feel your pain. Here, let me take care of this and we can all get on with our day.”

The lady grabbed the quarter, finished checking out and huffed out of the store.

She didn't even thank me.

When it was our turn, the checkout girl asked the usual question, “Paper or plastic?”

I looked at Maggie and she shook her head, but I couldn't resist.

“Actually,” I replied, “I could go either way. I'm bi-sackual.”

I learned that line from a customer when I was undercover at a BuyMart store.

Maggie hates it but I have to throw it in once in awhile just for grins.

The checkout girl looked at me and then at Maggie.

Maggie just shrugged her shoulders and the checkout girl gave her a look that screamed, “My sympathies, you poor girl.”

The rest of the checkout went without a hitch but when we reached the parking lot I stopped. For the life of me, I couldn't remember which lane

we had parked in.

“Uhhh, Maggie, do you remember where we parked?”

“Not again! Wait you’re the one driving. It’s YOUR job to remember where we parked.”

“Well you were riding shotgun. You were there too. Why can’t you remember?”

This had always been a sore spot in our relationship.

I think we both hated the fact that we were constantly losing our vehicle because it was a persistent reminder that we were getting old and losing some of our faculties.

The worst was one evening when we had attended the Starlight Theatre.

After the show, as we looked over the thousands of cars in the lot, we realized that we didn’t have a clue where we had parked.

We roamed the aisles, dodging cars, and finally just waited on the curb breathing exhaust fumes until the lot was nearly empty.

Not the greatest way to end the evening.

We were just standing there with our cart full of groceries looking befuddled when an old guy my age approached.

“Lost your car, didn’t you?”

“Is it that obvious?” I replied.

“I used to do that all the time until I got one of these,” he said holding up his phone. “Watch this!”

He punched the phone a few times and showed us the screen.

“There’s my car,” he said proudly.

“How did you do that?” I asked amazed.

“Do you have a smart phone?”

“Yes.”

“Then you can download this app for ninety-nine cents. It’s called ‘Find My Car’.”

I turned to Maggie, “We gotta get one of those!”

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Watchers*

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The Bedpan

Everyone wants to visit you in the hospital.

The guests kept coming and finally, Nurse Ratchett had had enough.

If this gal hadn't been a nurse, she probably could have been a linebacker with the Kansas City Chiefs. Her arms were about the size of my legs. She had the demeanor of a linebacker as well.

“Okay, all of you, clear out! I've got work to do here.”

My friends stared in amazement.

When no one moved, she raised her voice an octave. “Maybe I didn't make myself clear. Why don't you folks go to the cafeteria and get a snack. I need to check Mr. Williams. You can come back when I'm finished.”

On the way out of the door, Jerry quipped, “Walt, maybe you can save her some time. If she needs samples of your urine, blood, semen, and stool, you can just give her your underwear.”

Dad chuckled, and Nurse Ratchett glared as they filed out of the door.

Things were going better than I had hoped for. She checked my blood pressure, took my temperature, and listened to my heart. As she was

packing away her goodies, I rose up and swung my feet over the edge of the bed.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“To the bathroom.”

“Nope. Your chart says you might possibly have internal injuries, so you have to stay down until the doctor runs some tests.”

“But I have to—uh—you know.”

“Then you’re going to have to—uh—you know in this.” She pulled a bedpan off the closet shelf.

I looked at the plastic contraption. I’d seen them before, but I’d never used one. “Look, I’m fine. There’s nothing wrong with me. I can certainly walk to the bathroom.”

Then she got that look that I’d once seen in the eyes of Mean Joe Green.

“You’re fine when we say you’re fine. Do you understand? Now get your feet back in that bed.” She plopped the bedpan in my lap.

When I didn’t respond, she gave me the look again. “Well?”

“Well, I’m not going to use this thing with you standing there watching me. I’d like some privacy.”

She shook her head and started for the door.

“Oh, say, I haven’t eaten since lunch yesterday. Am I permitted to have breakfast?”

She picked up my chart again. “I’ll see what I can do.”

When she was gone, I picked up the bedpan. The first thing I noticed was that it was cold. Brrr. I turned the thing over, hoping that instructions would be printed on the backside, but there were none. With my luck, they would have probably been written in Chinese anyway.

They must figure that everyone instinctually knows how to use one of these things. Like it’s something innate that’s passed down through our DNA. If so, there were definitely some deficiencies in my gene pool. So do you lie down on the thing? I tried it and nearly broke my back.

So do you sit on it? Do your legs stick out in front of you on the bed, or do you turn it sideways and let your legs dangle over the edge?

I tried it both ways, and the only way that it was comfortable was to dangle my feet over the edge.

By the time I had turned it and climbed on top, I had exerted more energy than just padding the six steps to the bathroom.

So there I sat, perched on my plastic throne,

and to my dismay, nothing happened. It was obvious that my bowels were balking. I was tempted to just chuck the whole thing and march over to the real toilet, but to be quite truthful, I was scared of Nurse Ratchett.

Then I saw it, and an idea formed in my head. On the little table next to my bed was a box full of rubber gloves. Normally, I hate seeing those because it usually means that someone is going to be sticking something somewhere I don't want it stuck.

I grabbed a pair of the gloves, slipped them on, and put my ear to the door listening for footsteps. Hearing none, I slipped into the bathroom and did my job the way it's supposed to be done. Fortunately, the resulting deposit was solid and a floater.

I reached in with my gloved hand, scooped up what was left of yesterday's lunch, and plopped it in the bedpan. Nurse Ratchett would never notice the difference.

Being a cop, I realized that if I was going to commit the perfect crime, I would have to destroy the evidence.

I peeled off the gloves and was about to throw them in the wastebasket but checked myself.

She might see them there. I looked at the stool. If it could handle some of the stuff I've deposited over the years, surely it could handle two little latex gloves.

What I hadn't thought of was that these little gloves, unlike my previous deposits, had fingers. Evidently, one or more of those little fingers had clutched the innards of the stool, and I watched in horror as the water, instead of circling and disappearing, steadily rose to the top of the bowl.

“No! No! Nooo!”

I heaved a sigh of relief when I heard the water stop. Another drop would have put it over the edge.

I looked around and saw a plunger in the corner. I grabbed it and slipped it into the water. Of course the Law of Archimedes took over, and the water displaced by the plunger overflowed into the floor.

The waves caused by my plunging sent more cascades over the edge, and by the time the gloves had been dislodged, there was a mess to clean up.

I grabbed a towel and was on my hands and knees mopping up water with my butt hanging out of the stupid hospital gown when I heard, “Mr.

Williams!”

I looked up, and Nurse Ratchett was staring at my bare behind. I cringed, expecting a tirade that would make a sailor blush, but instead her attention had been directed to my little gift in the bedpan.

She just had a bewildered look on her face. “I’ve been a nurse for twenty-seven years, but this is a new one.” She got me a clean gown and fresh towels, and I climbed back in bed.

By this time she had regained her composure.

“Apparently you have difficulty following orders, and you definitely have authority issues.”

I was about to argue, but I figured I’d better just clam up. As they say, there’s no such thing as a perfect crime.

“Mr. Williams, you *have* to stay in bed until after your tests.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She emptied the bedpan, rinsed, and flushed. She returned with the bedpan and a gizmo that looked like the thing my mechanic uses to put oil in my car. “Now, if you have to urinate or defecate, please use these.”

She had said please, but the tone in her voice said, “Do it or else.” Just then the door opened, and

an orderly brought in a tray.

“I ordered you some breakfast.”

The orderly set the tray on my bed table. I was starving, and all during my bathroom escapade I had been envisioning eggs, toast, bacon, maybe even a pancake. I was shocked to see a pile of quivering green stuff, a bowl of yellow swill, and a cup of something barely darker than water.

“What’s this?”

“Your breakfast, of course. Lime Jell-O, broth, and tea.”

“Don’t I even get toast?”

“No, Mr. Williams, you’re on a liquid diet until after your tests. Bon appétit.” I know she was grinning when she walked out the door.

I looked at my breakfast. I like Jell-O. I just don’t like *green* Jell-O. I know they make Jell-O in other colors. I’ve seen it. Green just isn’t my favorite color. I’ve tried green shampoo, but I like white better. I love a red, ripe tomato, but I just can’t do a green one. I absolutely hate the green stuff that grows on your food when you leave it in the fridge too long. I was perilously close to digging into my liquid breakfast when my friends returned.

Dad looked at the pitiful pile of glop on my tray. “I thought so. I’ve been where you are before.

Bet you're hungry, aren't you?"

I nodded my head.

"Willie, watch the door."

Dad reached into a sack and pulled out one of those fluffy, golden brown biscuits with egg, cheese, and bacon.

I almost cried. "I love you, Dad." It just came out, and it surprised both of us.

Maggie almost came unglued. "Dad! How could you? The hospital has rules...and the tests... Walt has tests to take...and..."

"Tests, shmefts. The kid's fit as a fiddle. And look at that swill they gave him to eat. If he wasn't sick before, he sure would be after he ate that."

He looked at Bernice for approval, and she obligingly nodded her head.

Maggie turned to Jerry and the professor for support, but they just shrugged their shoulders.

"You're all incorrigible," she muttered.

After I wolfed down the biscuit and Dad tucked the wrappers away in his pocket, I had an idea.

"Dad, before you leave, could you go to a vending machine and bring me a Mountain Dew?"

"Sure, sonny. Be right back."

I had just stashed my Dew under my mattress when Nurse Ratchett returned.

“You folks have to leave. It’s time for Mr. Williams’s tests.”

We said our good-byes, and as everyone was leaving, the professor, who had been unusually quiet, turned to speak. I was expecting some words of wisdom or comfort from the old man.

“Walt, I hope your tests come out better than those of a friend of mine.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes, he went to the doctor with a sprig of greenery sticking out of his bottom. He said, ‘Doc, I think I have lettuce growing out of my rear end.’ The doctor examined the greenery and said, ‘I’m afraid I have some bad news—that’s only the tip of the iceberg.’”

Without another word, he turned and left, leaving me with my mouth hanging open. The professor was obviously spending too much time with Jerry.

My tests went well, and the doctor proclaimed me fit to resume my normal activities. I returned to my room and started preparing my parting gift to Nurse Ratchett.

I dug the Mountain Dew from under my

mattress, popped the top, poured it into the funny little beaker she had given me, and placed it on the bed table.

I had just finished when Nurse Ratchett popped in.

“I’m going off duty in ten minutes. I just wanted to check and see if you needed anything before I left.”

“Why thank you. Here, you might want to get rid of this.” I picked up the beaker of yellow liquid and started to hand it to her, but instead I brought it back and chugged every last drop.

Nurse Ratchett blanched, gasped, “Oh my God!” and fainted dead away.

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and Dr. Death*

http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-and-dr-death_351.html

<http://amzn.to/H20ErX>

Cleaning Day

After a week that had included three grisly murders, I was looking forward to a couple of days off.

Sometimes, when man's depravity becomes too intense, you have to just back away from it all, focus on what's good in your life and put things back in perspective.

Maggie had let me sleep in and I awoke to the smell of coffee brewing and bacon sizzling. I could tell that this was going to be a good day.

I ambled into the kitchen, gave Maggie a big hug and kiss and headed for the coffee pot. After a year of marriage, I had learned how to order my priorities.

Maggie was busily whipping Aunt Jemima with a spoon.

"Pancakes, too! What have I done to deserve all of this?"

"You're going to need lots of energy today, so I figured I'd better start you off with a good breakfast."

Suddenly, a cloud darkened my prospects for a good day.

"Energy? For what?"

“Don’t give me that ‘for what’. Surely you remember when we talked about cleaning the apartment today.”

Now I’ll be the first to admit that sometimes --- not often, but sometimes, Maggie’s little chats will zip right by, especially if I’m reading the sports page or otherwise intellectually occupied, but surely I would remember something as ominous as cleaning day.

I had to make a split-second decision --- should I refute us ever having that conversation and try to wiggle out? No, I knew that either way, I was doomed to cleaning, so why add insensitive, non-listening, boob into the picture.

“Oh, right --- sure --- cleaning. Must have slipped my mind. How much cleaning are we talking about, exactly?”

“Everything! Top to bottom. It’s been months since this place had had a good cleaning.”

I tried one more tactic. Maggie is still an active Realtor and has a woman that cleans vacant houses for some of her clients.

“How about Consuela. Did you think about giving her a call?”

“Consuela charges three hundred bucks to clean a place this size. Why spend all that money

when we can do it ourselves? Do you realize how many meals at Mel's Diner you could buy for that three hundred bucks?"

I had to admit that she was good.

I'm not opposed to saving a few bucks if it's a job that I can handle, but a man has to know his limits.

For instance, I can change light bulbs and replace light switches and sockets without electrocuting myself and usually everything actually comes on when I'm finished, but I learned years ago that plumbing of any sort was not my cup of tea. No matter what I tried to fix, it always leaked when I was through.

Cars are another thing that I have never mastered. I have friends that brag about changing their oil or putting on a new set of brakes, but there is not a doubt in my mind that if I tried, I would be washing my windows with 30 weight.

Consequently, I'm on a first name basis with the guy at Jiffy Lube.

House cleaning. Not a lot of experience, but how hard could it be?

I drug breakfast out as long as possible, but I finally had to face the inevitable.

"Ok, boss. What's the plan?"

“Why don’t you start with the ceiling fans and give them a good dusting.”

“Ceiling fans?” I protested. “They’re up in the air. How could they get dirty?”

“Have you even looked at them lately?”

I had to admit that I had not. I climbed on a chair and discovered that the blades had grown a fluffy coat of fur.

“I see your point,” I said. “What are you going to do?”

“I’ll dust and polish the furniture. I don’t want you touching our breakable stuff. No offense.”

“None taken.”

I found our stepladder and a rag and climbed up to the first fan. I wiped the blade clean and gave it a shove. Blade #2 whacked me in the back of my head.

“SON-Of-A ----” I muttered.

Just then Maggie came into the room.

“What are you doing?”

“Cleaning the fans just like you asked,” I said, rubbing my head, “and trying to decapitate myself in the process.”

“Why don’t you use the thing?”

“What thing?”

“Hang on.”

She came back into the room with a big furry circular thing on a pole.

“Here, this is what you’re supposed to use to clean the blades.”

“Where did that come from?”

“You bought it when you bought the new fans.”

“I did? Really? Where do we keep it?”

“In the utility closet.”

That explained a lot. The utility closet is where we keep things like the vacuum, the squeegee mop and the broom. I don’t go there.

The thing actually worked pretty well and when I was finished I reported to the crew boss.

“Fans are done. What’s next?”

“The toilets and the floor around the toilets. Scrub them all.”

“Why do I get the toilets? You use them too.”

Maggie grabbed me by the arm, drug me to the bathroom and lifted the lid.

“See all of that yellow stuff? How do you suppose that it got there?”

Nothing sucks more than that moment in a discussion when you know you are going to lose.

“Okay, okay, you made your point.”

I was up to my elbows in Lysol disinfectant when there was a knock on the door.

“I’ll get it,” Maggie yelled.

A moment later, Jerry and the Professor were standing in the hallway watching me wash the yellow spots off of the floor. Not one of my prouder moments.

“We were on our way to Mel’s for lunch and we thought we’d invite you to accompany us,” the Professor said, “but I can see that you’re --- ummm --- otherwise occupied.”

“Yes, cleaning day, unfortunately. Sorry, I’d love to come.”

“One of those necessary evils,” he continued. “Were you aware that most of the dust particles in a home are from the 2 to 3 pounds of dead skin that we shed each year?”

I had to admit that I didn’t know that.

He forged on, “And did you know that the dead skin and dust mites in a mattress can double its weight in ten years?”

I didn’t know that either.

Jerry had been watching me scrub the offending stains.

“Walt, do you know what a clitoris, an anniversary and a toilet all have in common?”

Maggie poked her head around the corner. “I know the answer to that one --- men always miss them!”

“Very funny,” I mumbled. “Don’t you guys have somewhere to be?”

“Indeed we do,” the professor said. “We’ll eat a piece of Mel’s banana cream pie for you. You know, the one with the meringue this high.”

“Thanks a lot!”

Maggie stuck her head back in the door. “When you’re finished with the toilets, you can run the vacuum.

“Swell,” I muttered.

As I fired up the old Kirby, I remembered a one-liner that Jerry had used in his comedy club act.

“Is it a good thing if a vacuum really sucks?”

It brought a smile to my face and I really needed it.

I had just finished the bedroom and had started on the closet. The shoes were lined up neatly on the floor, but I saw a big piece of lint under one shoe.

I bumped the shoe with the Kirby to move it out of the way and suddenly, “THWACK!”. The Kirby had sucked up the shoelace which had wound

around the revolving head. The poor shoe was lodged against the head and the motor began to smoke.

I quickly shut the thing off and surveyed the damage.

The sweeper head looked like the first time that I had tried to cast an open faced reel --- nothing but a tangled mess.

I was just getting the thing undone when Maggie came in.

“Don’t ask.” I said.

She looked over my shoulder. “How long have you been working on that?”

I looked at my watch. “About fifteen minutes.”

“How long would it have taken you to pick up the shoe?”

She didn’t wait for an answer. I hate it when she does that.

After the mess was untangled and the smoke cleared, I finished the vacuuming and headed to the kitchen.

“Let’s clean out the fridge and we’re done,” Maggie said.

“Really?” At last there was light at the end of the tunnel.

I pulled the wastebasket to the fridge and opened the door.

I don't spend a lot of time in the fridge. I get milk for my cereal and Arbor Mist from the shelves in the door. Everything else is pretty much a mystery to me.

I did recognize the first thing that I pulled out. It was the remains of the burrito grande that I couldn't finish at the restaurant a couple of weeks ago, so I had had them wrap it up for me. I was pretty sure that the green stuff on it now wasn't verde sauce.

Maggie told me to get rid of anything that had expired.

With most of the stuff, I didn't even have to look for a date. The penicillin growing on the surface was a good clue.

I saw a carton of sour cream and wondered if they even bothered to put an expiration date on it --- isn't it already sour?

By the time I had removed all of the offensive stuff, the shelves were nearly empty.

I was tying the trash bag when Maggie came into the kitchen.

"Are we finished?" I asked, trying to sound as weary as possible.

“Just one more thing,” she said with a sly smile.

“What could possibly be left to clean?” I asked, exasperated.

“The shower. I was hoping we could work on that together.”

Maybe it would be a good day after all.

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Book Club Murders*

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<http://amzn.to/1aWGg3K>

Why I'm Not A Cross-Dresser

I couldn't believe that the Captain had asked me to go undercover as a transvestite.

I figured if I had to dress up as a dame, my best bet was to enlist the aid of Maggie, my sweetie.

After supper, I saw my opening.

“So what exciting things did you do today?” she asked.

“I’ve got something to talk to you about and I don’t want you to interrupt me or ask any questions until I’m completely finished, OK?”

Her look of bewilderment turned to astonishment and finally to amusement as I laid the whole story on the table.

I could tell she was doing her best to keep from laughing.

“You think this is funny, don’t you?”

“Well, yea!”

Not exactly the reaction I was expecting.

“I’ve always wanted a girlfriend I could shop with and share make-up secrets. This is going to be fun.”

Yeah, a real hoot!

For reasons I’ll never understand, Maggie attacked her role with a vengeance. She composed a

list of all the accoutrements we would need for my transformation and then started checking off items she had on hand.

Apparently, women are loath to throw away make-up, even if its stuff they haven't used for ages and Maggie produced a plastic tub full of jars and tubes that she pronounced as perfect.

Evidently the same rules apply with selected articles of clothing. Maggie is a svelte 120 pounds now, but sometime in the distant past, she must have been a few pounds heavier. A box from the spare room closet labeled 'save' contained frilly relics from her heftier days.

After comparing items on hand with her inventory list, Maggie was satisfied that the only articles we were lacking were a dress, shoes and a wig.

Tomorrow, we would shop.

Just to be sure everything was right, Maggie insisted on a trial fitting of the undergarments and proceeded to pull a pair of lacey panties, a bra and pantyhose from her stash.

“OK, Buster, strip.”

On more than one occasion, those very words from Maggie were music to my ears.

Not this time.

I'm definitely not a prude, especially when it comes to Maggie, but I'm more accustomed to us getting nekkid together.

"I'll just do this in here." I said as I grabbed the panties and bra and headed for the bathroom.

As I slipped off my BVD's and picked up the panties, I encountered my first dilemma.

Is there a front and a back to these things? How can you tell without a fly? Then I saw the little tag and assumed that was the backside.

So far, so good.

Next came the bra.

My previous experience with this garment had focused on removal rather than installation and I nearly dislocated my shoulders trying to hook the damn thing behind my back.

I concluded that one had to be either a contortionist or double-jointed to master this, and I, being neither of those, gave up and retreated to the bedroom.

I explained my problem to Maggie and she gave me a quick lesson on 'hook in front and rotate to the back'. A valuable lesson.

Since my chest wasn't exactly designed to fill the size 'C' cups, Maggie augmented my bosom with wadded up pantyhose.

While in the pantyhose pile, she selected a dark pair she described as ‘smoke’.

“Try these on. I think they’re dark enough you won’t have to shave your legs.”

“You damn right I won’t. That’s where I draw the line. I’ll just tell people I’m from Sweden.”

She handed me the pantyhose and I looked at the tiny ball of material.

“That’s not big enough for one leg. How am I going to get two, plus my butt in there?”

“Just put them on. Trust me. They expand.”

So I sat on the bed and started pulling them up one leg at a time and sure enough, they did expand.

But as I stood, I was beginning to get signals from Mr. Winkie and the boys.

“Kind of crowded in here.” I complained.

“Yea,” she quipped. “Pantyhose are a lot like cheap hotels --- no ballroom.”

She was having way too much fun with this.

Now that I was all decked out in my bra and pantyhose, Maggie stepped back to take a look at her handiwork.

“Not bad.” She declared. “In fact, I think I’m getting a little turned on.”

The evening wasn't a total loss after all.

Maggie had no appointments the next morning, so we headed to the Salvation Army Thrift Store to complete my outfit.

I've never been much of a shopper. Guys don't have to be. I have two kinds of pants, dress and casual. If I need a pair, I go to the store, grab my size off the rack and check out. No need to try it on. It's exactly like the one I'm replacing.

But I've never bought a dress.

As we rummaged through the racks, Maggie would pull one out and hold it up in front of me. I found myself saying stuff like, "No, that's just not right for me" or "I think we can do better."

What was happening to me?

I actually tried one on and asked Maggie if it made my butt look big.

Where did that come from?

Finally, I found one that felt just right. It was the perfect shade of brown to bring out the color in my eyes and while not slutty, was just tight enough to accent my figure.

My God, what did I just say?

Our next stop was the wig rack.

There was a huge selection of both colors and lengths.

I had always heard that blondes have more fun, so I tried on a saucy blonde pageboy with bangs.

I looked like Phyllis Diller.

I told Maggie I needed something shoulder length, fuller, with more body.

What was happening to me?

I finally settled on a dark auburn with flirty bangs that matched my dress perfectly.

Shoes were a different story.

I wear a size nine and a half which is average for a guy. By comparison, Ox wears a size twelve.

But finding a woman's shoe in a low heel that would fit a guy proved to be a challenge. We had to hit three thrift stores before we found something I could walk in.

'Walk in' might be too generous. 'Wobble in' would be more accurate.

My new footwear sported two-inch heels, nothing remarkable for the ladies, but a definite challenge for me.

Maggie and I love to dance and we watch 'Dancing With The Stars' on TV. I had always marveled at how the lady professionals could execute all those fast and intricate steps wearing

four-inch spike heels. I have even greater respect for them now.

Walking on my ankles in my two-inch heels was reminiscent of my first experience on ice skates. It wasn't a pretty sight.

Our shopping concluded, I called Ox, told him to meet at Maggie's apartment with the surveillance equipment and we headed home.

After lunch, Maggie suggested we start getting my make-up on. She said that we might run into some issues. I wondered what she meant by that.

We sat at her kitchen table and she spread her whole array of jars and tubes and brushes.

"When did you shave last?"

"This morning."

"Go do it again. I can only cover up just so much."

I shaved and when I returned she had made her selections.

"OK, foundation goes on first." And she started smearing this light-brown pasty cream all over my face.

"Now the eyebrows." And she started drawing on my forehead with some kind of grease pencil.

“Hold really still or I’ll poke your eye out.” and she outlined my eyelids with a little pencil thing.

“Now don’t blink.” And she came at me with some kind of pliers which she clamped on my eyelashes.

“Now for the lip-liner and lipstick.” And she coated my mouth with ‘cinnamon rose’.

It occurred to me that it was much more fun getting the lipstick off her mouth.

“Now for a little blush to give you some color and a pat of powder so you don’t shine.”

Oh good. I really didn’t want to shine.

She stood back to admire her handiwork.

“I’m afraid that’s as good as it’s going to get.”

Just what every gal wants to hear.

I looked in the mirror and ‘YIKES’ I looked like a cross between Ronald McDonald, Howdy Doody and Raggedy Ann.

It’ll be better with your wig on,” she said.

I certainly hoped so.

Just then, a knock on the door.

Maggie opened the door and Ox strode in with an armful of electronics.

He gave Maggie a hug, took a look at me,

and to his credit, pretended that nothing was different.

I noticed though, that he quickly turned away and headed for the kitchen with his box. As he went through the door, I know I heard him snicker. I know he did.

He returned, composed, and with an air of professionalism said, “I see you’re ready for our evening out, Mrs. Williams.”

Maggie had witnessed the exchange and finally could hold it no longer. She burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter that sent Ox over the edge and the two of them collapsed on the couch.

As I watched their frivolity at my expense, my first reaction was hurt. Then I felt a wave of resentment. But as I was about to lash out in protest, I saw myself in the mirror and I caved in too.

If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Lost Tapes*

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<http://amzn.to/1cDeiMK>

A Fine Dining Experience

AFTER MY HARROWING EXPERIENCE

with Li'l D and the Hound from Hell, I was exhausted.

Three days undercover and a drug bust hadn't left much time for my Sweetie. We had talked on the phone, but we needed an evening together. We decided we would go out for a nice dinner and see what developed from there.

My definition of a nice dinner and hers sometimes differ. My definition of fine dining is Mel's Diner on Broadway. I eat there a lot.

At Mel's you can get a platter of biscuits and gravy and two eggs any way you want them for four bucks.

When Mel fixes my favorite lunch, he plops a BIG glob of real butter on a piping hot grill and sautés sweet onions until are all gooey and sweet and don't taste like onions any more and he piles them high on a half-pound ground beef patty with fries. All for six bucks.

In the evening, you can get a ten-ounce T-bone, a baked potato as big as a football and Texas

toast for \$9.95.

What a deal.

Mel has a sign over his cash register that says, “If you leave here hungry, you didn’t clean your plate.”

And gravy! WOW! For me, gravy is one of the major food groups.

White cream gravy with ground sausage over biscuits, a hot beef sandwich with rich brown gravy and best of all creamy fried chicken gravy with the little pieces of the chicken coating floating around.

“Healthy?” you ask. Well, nobody’s died at Mel’s in 20 years so it can’t be too bad. I once read that a person would be much healthier eating natural foods, so I tried. Then I read that most people die of natural causes, so I quit.

I think I just missed Mel.

I picked Maggie up at her apartment and as we pulled away I asked if she had any preference in eating establishments, secretly hoping for Mel’s.

No such luck.

Maggie had heard of a new restaurant that had just opened in the old garment district downtown. That area had once been all factories, but as more and more labor was outsourced to our friends in China, the factories closed and sat empty

for years. Then came the rebirth of downtown. Old factory buildings were converted to luxury apartments and condos and gobbled up by the yuppie elite.

Apparently, this new restaurant, Chez Francois, was opened to cater to the tastes of the new downtown gentry.

When we drove up, I knew we were in trouble right away. A large sign on the curb said “Valet Parking Only.” I hate valet parking. I hate turning my keys over to a pimply faced kid with a stud in his lip. I hate waiting in line while they try to find where they hid my car. I hate tipping some jerk for something I’m perfectly capable of doing myself.

Thanks, I’m glad I got that off my chest.

We were escorted inside and as I looked around, my suspicions were confirmed. I’m in trouble. The building had once been one of the big, fancy hotels of the era. But with the decline of the district, it closed. The interior had been restored to its’ former grandeur with high ceilings and ornate woodwork. Tables were set with fine linen cloths and sparkling crystal, and from somewhere the strings of a Bach fugue, or some such thing wafted through the dining area.

We were seated in a quiet little alcove and were soon approached by a waiter dressed in a starched white shirt and black tie and had on trousers with a pleat so sharp it would cut your finger. His demeanor was somber and he walked like he had a broomstick up his butt.

He bowed and said, “Good evening, my name is Rolph and I’ll be serving you this evening.”

“Evening, Ralph,” I replied.

“Excuse me, Sir,” he said. “It’s Rolph, not Ralph.”

Oh shit, this can’t be good.

“Uhh, yes, Roolph,” I replied and muttered under my breath.

“Whatever.”

He laid a book the size of the Kansas City phone directory in front of me, “Our wine list, Sir,” he said. “Would you like a moment?”

Well, yea!

I looked at page after page of wines but I couldn’t find the Arbor Mist.

“You do have Arbor Mist, don’t you?”

Rolph looked aghast. “I don’t believe we have that in our wine cellar, Sir.” and stuck his nose in the air.

How can you have eight pages of wine and not have Arbor Mist? Go figure.

Maggie came to the rescue. “We’d like a bottle of your house chardonnay,” she said.

“Very good, Ma’am,” Rolph replied. He bowed and walked away.

I might as well share some of my other idiosyncrasies. I am neither poor nor uneducated. I didn’t just fall off the turnip truck. But I am a simple guy. I come from a middle class, blue-collar background, but I have made a comfortable life for myself. However, the affectations of the wealthy bore me and in my humble opinion are a real pain in the ass.

Maggie knows me well and I thought I saw a smile cross her face as Rolph and I did our verbal thrust and parry. She would have to be on her toes this evening.

Just then, a bus boy arrived with a woven basket of bread.

Hot dog.

Now we’re getting somewhere.

He laid the basket on the table then produced two small platters and a jug that was filled with some viscous liquid that resembled 30-weight motor oil. He sprinkled some green stuff on the platters and proceeded to pour the Quaker State on top. “For your bread, Sir,” he said and bowed.

I don’t think so!

“You wouldn’t happen to have a pat or two of butter back there, would you?” I asked.

“Very good, Sir,” he replied, bowed again and headed off to the kitchen.

I opened the cloth cover of the breadbasket anticipating warm soft yeast rolls.

Yikes! It might as well have been a basket of hockey pucks. In my mind, I could see Mel’s Texas toast. Thick slices of soft bread lightly buttered and grilled to a golden brown and served piping hot to your table.

Dream on.

Have you ever tried opening one of those things? A hammer and chisel should come with them as standard equipment. And, if you do manage to penetrate the outer shell, crumbs are everywhere. I tried and, sure enough, crumbs were everywhere. No sooner had my roll exploded in my lap,

Rolph approached with a tiny silver dustpan and a tiny whiskbroom.

“Excuse me, Sir,” he said, and proceeded to whisk away my crumbs.

Just think of all the labor they would save by serving soft bread.

I wonder if they have a suggestion box?

Soon Rolph returned with our bottle of wine, a bucket of ice and two glasses. He set one glass in front

of me and with the skill of a surgeon he whipped out his corkscrew and popped out the cork. Gotta hand it to old Rolph. It came out in one piece and he didn't even need the Black & Decker.

He poured about one swallow in my glass and stepped back. I thought, "Well hell, I paid forty five dollars for that bottle. I ought to get more than that. And even worse, he didn't even give Maggie any."

I looked at Maggie. She grinned at me, nodded her head toward the glass and said, "How about you give it a taste and make sure it's right for us."

Oh right! Maggie saved my sorry ass again. I tasted and Rolph waited for my response. "It's Ok," I replied. "But it's sure no Arbor Mist."

Rolph turned and walked away.

He returned with menus.

"What's good tonight, Roolph?" I asked. Just friendly banter with the waiter. Right?

He stiffened, "Sir, everything from our kitchen is good."

OK then. It was really just a rhetorical question.

We studied the menu. When I say studied, I'm serious. You'd have to be fluent in three languages to read the damn thing. "Do you know what any of this

stuff is?” I asked Maggie.

She shrugged her shoulders and frankly I was relieved when she said,

“Not really.” I hated being the only dummy.

Rolph returned with order pad in hand and looked expectantly in our direction.

Maggie spoke first. “I’d like a shrimp cocktail and your house salad with creamy Italian dressing, please.” Maggie had been watching the calories, so I didn’t know if her order was weight watching or a cop-out on the menu selections.

Now understand, I’ve got nothing against salad. I even eat it sometimes. But man didn’t get to the top of the food chain by grazing. We’re carnivores, after all. I needed meat.

I pointed to the menu and said to Rolph, “Maybe you can help me out here. Where’s the beef?”

I thought I detected a slight flinch, but Rolph replied without hesitation, “May I recommend, Sir, our beef tenderloin medallions, garlic whipped potatoes and vegetable medley.”

“Sounds good to me,” I replied. Meat, potatoes and vegetables. Can’t be too bad.

Our dinners arrived. A huge bowl of salad and a glass with shrimp butts sticking out the top was placed in front of Maggie.

I looked at my plate. Yikes! There were two

tiny pieces of meat, each about the size of a fifty-cent piece and each was covered with a teaspoon sized dollop of mashed potatoes. On the left side of the plate were two carrot spears and on the right, two asparagus spears. Yellow gunky stuff was dribbled around the edge of the plate and a sprig of something that resembled the weeds I spray in my yard was sticking out of the mashed potatoes.

“Lovely presentation, isn’t it, Sir?” Rolph gushed.

“Presentation my ass!” I thought. “Where’s my dinner?”

But to Rolph I replied, “Lovely, just lovely. You wouldn’t happen to have some gravy back there, would you?”

Wounded, he replied, “We don’t serve GRAVY here, Sir,” and he walked away.

It didn’t take long to finish dinner.

Rolph returned with another menu. “Would you care to order dessert, Sir?” he inquired.

I was still hungry and I was thinking of Mel’s pies. Lemon, chocolate, coconut cream. Six inches high with creamy filling and fluff y white meringue. “Sure,” I said and took the menu.

OK, they had flambé, brule and a torte. Where’s the pie?

Rolph returned. “Your order, Sir?”

“Two tortes,” I replied, “and two cups of coffee.” And off he went. He returned with a dainty little cup about the size of a big thimble.

My heart sank as I thought of the giant mugs of steaming coffee at Mel’s. You could sit and drink all day for \$1.95. I was paying \$6.00 a gulp.

I turned to Rolph, “Do you give refills?” I asked. Without even a nod he turned and walked away. I think I was getting on his nerves.

He returned with our tortes. Do you know what a torte is? Well, I didn’t either, but I soon discovered it was a little square piece of pastry not much larger than a postage stamp. It doesn’t even have icing. But, all kinds of colored syrup were dribbled around the plate in a fancy design. Humph, Picasso torte. But what good was it. The only way it could be that eaten was to lick it off the plate and after what I’d seen so far, I didn’t think that was an option.

Oh, yeh. Presentation. Bullshit!

By the time I had paid my bill, tipped Rolph and the valet, I had dropped a couple of c-notes. I could have eaten at Mel’s for two weeks for that kind of money.

Probably won’t be back.

An excerpt from *Lady Justice Takes a C.R.A.P.*

http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-takes-a-crap_308.html

<http://amzn.to/16lfjnY>

The Airport

Finally, after days of agonizing over airline schedules, hotel reservations, and car rentals, it was time to go.

Vince had the only vehicle big enough to haul all four of us and our luggage, and he volunteered to take us to the airport. Maggie had spent the night so that she, Willie, and I could be picked up at my apartment. We heard the *toot* from his horn, grabbed our bags, and headed downstairs.

Knowing my friends as I do, I should have expected what was awaiting us on the front porch, but it took us totally by surprise.

Dad, Bernice, Jerry, and the professor had set up a card table with a small cake and champagne.

Dad spoke first. “We may not be able to be at the big shindig, but we sure as hell aren’t going to let you get away without a proper send-off.”

With that, he popped the cork and poured the bubbly.

He raised his glass. “A toast to my son and his lovely bride. First, let me say how proud I am to have a son like you. I wasn’t a good dad, and I know it. You probably turned out better than if I

was around. I weren't a good husband, neither, so I hope you learned from my mistakes and take good care of this special lady."

After his brief lapse into morality, Dad reverted to his usual self. "At least I didn't name you Sue," he said. He proceeded to tie tin cans to Vince's back bumper and placed a "Getting Hitched" sign in the back window.

Then came the airport jokes.

The professor blessed us with the Confucius classic, "Man who fly upside down have big crack up."

Jerry, not to be outdone, droned, "A vulture was boarding an airplane with two dead raccoons. He was stopped at the gangway by a flight attendant. 'I'm sorry, sir; only one carrion per passenger.'"

Once the toasting, joking, hugging, and crying were dispensed with, we stowed the bags and headed to the Three Trails to pick up Mary.

As expected, she was waiting for us on the porch with—yikes!—four huge suitcases.

"Mary! What's all of this?"

"It's my stuff. We're gonna be gone for three weeks, and I gotta have my stuff."

She had more than the rest of us put

together.

“One bag, Mary. That’s it.”

“Hell, I can’t get my underwear in just one bag.”

I looked at Maggie. “This is your department. I don’t know about women’s things, but we’ve gotta have a shakedown.”

Maggie and Mary took the bags inside, and after a prolonged struggle peppered with language that would have made a sailor blush, they emerged with one suitcase that probably weighed eighty pounds. I decided at that point to utilize the curbside check-in. The skycaps aren’t as fussy about weight if the tip is big enough.

Willie had been unusually quiet, and I noticed on the forty-five-minute drive to the airport that he sat rigid, fists clenched, staring straight ahead. Instead of enjoying the trip to a tropical paradise, he was experiencing what I would imagine a convict would feel on his way to the gas chamber.

We arrived at the airport, and after a bit of wrangling with the skycap and a huge tip, we made our way to the gate.

Naturally, the line extended down the hallway.

I took this opportunity to educate our novice

flyers on the security procedures instituted after 9/11.

“You means I got to undress befo’ de let me on de plane?” Willie said.

“Well, not everything, just your belt and shoes and anything metal in your pockets.”

Maggie and I went first to show Willie and Mary how it was done.

No problems.

Willie was next, and I heard him mutter, “Dis is worse dan when I went to visit Louie de Lip in county lockup.”

Three down, and one to go.

Mary placed her enormous purse on the conveyor and stepped through the metal detector.

Brring! The detector lit up like a Christmas tree.

“Ma’am, would you step over here please?”

Mary followed the slender TSA matron to a small cubicle.

“Please stand on those footprints and raise your arms.”

So far so good. Mary hadn’t threatened anyone yet.

The TSA gal grabbed a wand and started running it over Mary’s body. No problem until she

put the thing between Mary's legs.

"Hey, girlfriend. You making a porno movie or something? Hey! Get that thing out of my—"

"Sorry, ma'am."

"Walt, this skanky bitch is poking my doodah with that dildo!"

"It's okay, Mary. She's just doing her job."

The TSA gal ran the wand up Mary's torso. The wand came to life as it passed over Mary's chesticles.

"Ma'am, do you have anything metal on your body?" She laid the wand down and started feeling around Mary's protruding breasts.

"Walt! Now she's feeling me up." Then she addressed the TSA matron. "Of course I got on something metal. You don't think these babies perk out like that on their own, do you? You're feeling the wires in my push-up bra."

Finally satisfied that Mary wasn't a threat to national security, she directed her to the conveyor belt.

A TSA guy pointed to a leather object that could have doubled as a duffel bag. "Is this your purse, ma'am?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"We're going to have to take a look inside."

Mary looked at me, and I just shrugged my shoulders.

The poor inspector started unloading Mary's purse.

I doubt that Fibber McGee's closet held as much crap.

He held up a big bottle of Jergen's lotion.

"Sorry, ma'am, you can't take this on the plane."

"But I have dry skin. Do you want me to itch all the way to Hawaii?"

Then he held up a metal flask. "What's in here, ma'am?"

"That's my medicine."

"What is it for?"

"It keeps me calm."

He unscrewed the lid and took a sniff.

"Smells a lot like vodka."

"Yeah, but it sure keeps me calm."

He just looked at Mary and shook his head.

By the time he was finished, Mary's purse didn't weigh as much.

It was still about forty-five minutes before boarding, so we found seats and busied ourselves reading, all except Willie who stared transfixed at the planes landing and taking off. I wondered if it was any comfort that none of them had crashed so

far.

My attention was diverted from my reading by the emergence of another security guy being led by a huge German shepherd on a leash.

The dog went from bag to bag sniffing each one for explosives or drugs or other contraband. He was totally focused on the carry-on bags and seemed oblivious to the people around him until he came to me. After sniffing my bag, he poked his big nose between my legs and snorted.

What is it with big dogs and my crotch?

Finally, it was time to board.

The desk girl started barking boarding orders, and we dutifully queued up in our designated lines. Just as we were about to surrender our boarding passes, another TSA guy approached me.

“Sir, has anyone put anything in your luggage without your knowledge?”

I just stood there for a minute thinking about his question.

“If it was without my knowledge, how would I know?”

He was still thinking that one over as I backed slowly away and boarded my flight.

I had booked the seats with Maggie and I

sitting across the aisle from Willie and Mary.

I whispered to Maggie, “Maybe I should sit with Willie this first time. He’s kind of freaked out.”

She agreed, and we swapped seats.

The huge jet engines roared to life, and the flight attendants warned us of all the terrible things that could happen. The plane backed away from the jet way and began to taxi down the runway. There was a brief pause, and the plane shuddered as the pilot goosed the engines for takeoff.

I had briefed Willie about the barf bag, and he clutched it tightly in his hand.

The big jet sprang forward and picked up speed as it raced down the runway.

I looked at Willie. If there is such a thing as a black man being white as a ghost, he was it. His eyes were as big as saucers, and just as the plane lifted off the ground, he grabbed my arm and squeezed. It was all I could do not to scream. I was sure it would leave a mark.

Finally, the plane leveled off, and Willie released the death grip on my arm.

Presently, the captain spoke over the intercom. “We have reached our cruising altitude of thirty-two thousand feet. It should be a smooth ride

to Dallas. The temperature in Dallas is seventy-nine degrees with partly sunny skies. Enjoy your flight.”

Willie whispered in my ear, “How much is thirty-two thousand feet?”

“That’s about six miles.”

“Up in de air?”

“Uh, yeah.”

Willie just closed his eyes, and I think he was muttering a prayer.

The flight attendant announced that beverages were to be served. When the cart reached Mary’s aisle, she ordered a diet coke. The attendant was about to move on when Mary asked, “What about nuts? Don’t I get a bag of nuts?”

“No, ma’am, we don’t serve nuts anymore.”

“Okay then, how about some pretzels?”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. Kansas City to Dallas is a short flight, and we only serve beverages.”

“Well damn!”

Yes, Mary, flying ain’t what it used to be.

About a half hour into our flight, Mary leaned over the aisle. “Walt, which way to the can?”

I pointed the way, and Mary shuffled down the aisle.

About ten minutes passed, and I heard a loud buzzer at the rear of the plane. A man jumped

from his seat and headed toward the lavatory. I looked back just in time to see Mary backed up against the wall with the man in her face.

This couldn't be good.

I unbuckled and made my way back just in time to hear Mary declare, "I was not smoking."

I tapped the man on the shoulder and Air Marshal Grant turned to face me.

"You again!" He looked at Mary. "I suppose this is one of yours."

"Yes, Mary is with me. What in the world did she do?"

"She set off the smoke detectors in the lavatory. I thought the flight attendant made it clear that this is a nonsmoking flight."

"I already told you I don't smoke."

"Then what set off the smoke detectors?"

Mary looked sheepishly around. Of course every eye on the plane was on her.

"It's kind of personal."

"Please elaborate," Grant said.

"Well, if you must know, I took a dump. When I was done, it was awful ripe in there, so I just lit a match, you know, to get rid of the smell. I knew there was people waiting to come in after me. It was the polite thing to do."

Grant just rolled his eyes.

“Here,” he said. “She’s all yours. Now you owe me two.”

I thanked him, and as I herded Mary down the aisle, I heard her mutter, “He probably thinks his shit don’t stink.”

Three weeks to go and this is just the first day.

What have I done?

An excerpt from Lady Justice Gets Lei'd

http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-gets-leid_309.html

<http://amzn.to/15P6bLg>

The Kidney Stone

Since Maggie had been planning our ‘healthier’ meals, it had been awhile since I’d darkened the doorway to Mel’s Diner.

I needed a fix of real ‘comfort food’.

Reluctantly, Maggie agreed.

I had a chicken fried steak and mashed potatoes smothered in white cream gravy. Yum! It doesn’t get much better than this. I can’t remember what Maggie had, but whatever it was I’m sure it didn’t fit in her diet. We were, after all, at Mel’s.

I was enjoying a mug of steaming coffee with a piece of chocolate cream pie when a sharp pain in my back hit me like a bolt of lightning. My arm involuntarily jerked, and I slopped steaming coffee into my lap. That got my attention. I couldn’t decide which hurt worse, my back or Mr. Winkie.

“What in the world is wrong with you?” Maggie cried. She’s used to my idiosyncrasies, but this was outside the box, even for me.

“Wow! Don’t know,” I replied. “It felt like someone just hit me in the back with a rubber hose. It’s easing up now. I’ll be okay.” I started drying myself with a napkin. Good thing I had on dark trousers. At my age, someone might mistake my

little accident with incontinence.

I had just polished off the pie when the pain in my back intensified and spread around my left side. It would subside and then return with a flourish. Every time it struck again, I would squirm. I finally was squirming so much I was distracting everyone around us.

I paid the check and we headed to the car with me wincing in pain every few steps.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Winkie and I had discussed the possibility of him becoming Mr. Happy, but as we drove home Mr. Back had the final word, and the message to Mr. Winkie was, “No way!”

I spent most of the night pacing the floor in pain. In the morning I dressed and went straight to Doc Johnson’s office.

After spending what seemed an eternity in the waiting room, the nurse called me back, took my temperature and blood pressure, and had me stand on the scale. She took the reading and gave me a glance. “It’s the chicken fried steak,” I muttered.

She asked what had brought me into the office, and I told her of my night’s ordeal.

“Here,” she said, “go pee in this cup and

wait in room three. The doc will be right with you.”

First of all, I don't like doctors. Not Doc Johnson though. He's okay. Just doctors and hospitals in general and all those places that smell funny. And I especially don't like peeing in a cup. I don't really know why. When I was a kid, my buddies and I would write our names in the snow and see who could pee the highest and farthest. But somehow that's different than peeing in a cup.

One reason I like Doc Johnson is that he doesn't have the 'God complex' that is the dominant personality trait of many physicians.

He actually has a sense of humor.

I remember one of his comments that endeared him to me: “There's more money being spent on breast implants and Viagra today than on Alzheimer's research. By 2030, there will be a large elderly population with perky boobs and huge erections and absolutely no recollection of what to do with them.”

Anyway, I finished and waited in room three. Pretty soon Doc Johnson came in. “Got blood in your urine, Walt,” he said. “You might be passing a kidney stone. I'm going to send you across the street for a CT scan. Let's see if we can find the little bugger.”

Swell!

I'd heard about these things, and nothing I'd heard had been good. In fact, I didn't know anyone who had said, "Gee, I wish I had a kidney stone!"

So I went to the radiology lab and was escorted into a little room. The nurse said to strip and put on this little gown hanging on the door and someone would come get me. Who invented these gowns, anyway? Why don't they go on like a robe, with the slit in front? And why is there only one tie and it's in the back? You put the thing on and then you have to walk around with your hand clutched behind your back so your butt won't hang out.

Then Nurse Ratchet walked in. Why do all my nurses have to look like her? My hiney did a little pucker as I watched her prepare for my ordeal.

She led me to a room with a sliding table that I was to lie down on. The table would then slowly carry me forward into this giant tube with whirling lights. "This won't hurt a bit," she said.

"Yeah," I thought, "*that's easy for you to say!*"

As the table slowly moved me toward that gaping hole, all I could think of was James Bond in *Goldfinger*. He was strapped in a similar machine that was moving him and his privates toward a

burning laser.

I closed my eyes and gripped the side of the table. The machine whirred and I disappeared into the depths of the huge cocoon. Lights flashed and as I felt myself being pulled out, I reached down and gave Mr. Winkie a quick pat. It was over, and I still had my equipment. What a relief.

I returned to Doc Johnson's office and again waited in room three. The doc came in and said, "Yep, Walt, you're about to give birth to a 4mm kidney stone."

Lucky me.

"So what do I do?" I asked.

"Just drink a lot and pee a lot," he said. "It will naturally come out by itself. I'm going to give you a prescription for an antibiotic. We don't want you getting an infection. And also a pain killer, if you need it."

Great. Painkiller. Just what I wanted to hear.

So I took the prescription to Wally Crumpet, the pharmacist at Watkins Drugstore. I handed Wally the prescription and said, "What's he giving me, Wally?" I can never read what a doctor writes. They must have a special class at pharmacy school to learn to read doc-write.

"Well, it looks like Sepra and naproxen."

“What is it and what does it do?”

“Well, the Septra is an antibiotic, and Naproxen is Aleve, a painkiller.”

“Why didn’t he just say Aleve?”

“Most drugs have two names,” he said. “Tylenol is acetaminophen, Advil is ibuprofen, and Aleve is naproxen.”

Right.

He thought for a moment and with a sly smile said, “I bet you don’t know the other name for Viagra?”

I shook my head.

“Mycoxafloppin.”

Pharmacist humor.

“Oh,” he said, “you’ll be needing this too.” He whipped out a tea strainer. “Use this to catch the stone. The doctor will want it to have it analyzed.”

Great. Now I get to pee in a strainer. That’s worse than a cup.

I paid for my prescriptions and returned home.

Willie was sitting on the porch. “Hey, Mr. Walt,” he said. “Where you been all day?”

I told him about my physical impairment.

“Oh, Mr. Walt, I knowed a guy had dem stones. Like to damn near killed him. He moaned

and groaned for days. Had to pump hisself full of dat Valium stuff to keep from scremin'. When he finally passed 'em, it was like shootin' BBs out his wiener."

Willie, you're such a comfort.

I spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening drinking and peeing through a strainer. I had just started a stream when I got the feeling that someone had put a blowtorch to Mr. Winkie.

Then *plop*, there it was. Right there in the strainer. I had given birth to a tiny little piece of gravel. My very own kidney stone. It looked like it might be a girl, so I named it Pebbles. You know, like Fred and Wilma's kid

An excerpt from *Lady Justice Takes A C.R.A.P.*

http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-takes-a-crap_308.html

<http://amzn.to/16lfjnY>

The Christmas Party

Mary's arrest and trial had affected everyone in our little circle of friends.

Naturally, we were concerned about her and all of us were in court every day to give her moral support.

The trial ended five days before Christmas, but with everything going on, holiday preparations had taken a back seat.

Now that Mary was off the hook, we were free to turn our thoughts to more festive pursuits.

We decided to have a get together on Christmas Eve.

Everyone was invited including Ox's new squeeze and Ed, our new recruit.

Our little circle was growing larger.

The only no show was Vince who was going to Arizona to spend the holiday with his sister.

It was to be a simple affair. We would order pizza and Maggie and I would serve the drinks and everyone else would bring their favorite holiday goodies.

Jerry wanted to do the 'Secret Santa' thing, so we all put our names in the pot.

Maggie and I started assembling our

assorted libations.

She mixed up a batch of holiday punch and I made sure there was plenty of Arbor Mist --- it goes great with pizza.

Of course there was the traditional eggnog and we had a bottle of Kahlua on hand in case someone felt that their nog needed an extra kick.

Ox and Judy had spent the day baking cookies. It was hard to imagine my robust friend rolling out dough, but I sensed that their domestic time together was a positive thing.

The Professor brought a fruitcake. I guess that was a throwback to his generation. I just hoped that somebody would eat a piece so that he wouldn't feel bad. I knew it wasn't going to be me.

Jerry brought a cake from the Price Chopper bakery that said 'Happy Birthday J'. He had rubbed out the rest of the name.

His justification was that Jason's family hadn't picked up the cake, so he got it for a really good price.

He then reminded us that Christmas was really a celebration of Jesus' birthday and that's what the 'J' stood for.

How could we argue with logic like that?

Willie brought a sweet potato pie.

He said that when he was a kid growing up, there were some years when all his family had were the vegetables that they had grown and stored, and his momma would bake that pie for their Christmas dessert.

I guess each of us have our own special memories of Christmases past.

Ed had stopped by the Cheesecake Factory and bought a Butterfinger cheesecake.

My mouth started watering the minute I saw it.

Dad announced that he and Bernice had spent the whole day making her fabulous ‘female fudge’.

“What the heck is female fudge?” Jerry asked.

“No nuts!” Dad replied.

“So how do you know its female fudge and not eunuch fudge?”

“Because we didn’t make the fudge with nuts in the first place and then pick them out, smart ass. This fudge was born without nuts!”

The pizza guy showed up bearing boxes of the tasty pies and we all dug in.

As we were filling our plates, Jerry asked Willie if he knew what would happen if he ate the

Christmas decorations.

Willie, of course, didn't have a clue.

"You'd get tinsel-itus!

"You're crazy, man! Get away from me!"

When we were all stuffed to the gills, Jerry announced that it was time to exchange gifts.

Apparently he had drawn my name and he looked on expectantly as I opened my gift.

It was a little box that had a guy on the front with the word 'Poof!' coming out his rear end.

I looked at him quizzically.

"It's a fart machine!" he announced.

"Remote control --- you can put it under someone's chair and make it fart from across the room. Very high-tech --- much better than a whoopee cushion."

Maggie gave me the 'look'. "Don't even think about it!"

"Maybe you could use it at your squad room. I'll bet it would be a big hit."

"Yeah, I'm sure it would. Thanks, Jerry, I've always wanted one of these."

He beamed.

Dad had drawn Bernice's name and judging from the box, he had spent some time in Victoria's Secret.

Bernice squealed as she pulled the lacey

thong from the box.

I had to look away. The last thing I wanted was the image of eighty-six year old Bernice wearing the thing burned into my memory.

Ox had drawn Judy's name and everyone 'awwwwed' when she pulled a charm bracelet from the box.

The charms were all miniature handguns, revolvers and automatics of every description.

"I love it!" she gushed and gave Ox a big kiss.

He blushed.

After all the gifts had been exchanged, Jerry strode to the center of the room with a small tablet in his hand.

"I wrote something special for our evening together. I hope you all enjoy it."

Tw'as the night before Christmas
And my friends are all here.
We'll laugh and have fun
And spread holiday cheer.

We're all overjoyed
To see our friend, Mary.

She just went through a trial
That was really quite scary.

There was a good lesson
That each of us learned.
Don't mess with this gal
Or you're gonna get burned.

There's Dad and Bernice
And I hope there's a chance
That before they arrive
He'll zip up his pants!

This year our friend Ox
Has got a new squeeze.
From what I've been told
The girl's quite a tease.

She'll laugh and she'll giggle
And call you sweet names
But if you get her pissed off
She'll blow out your brains!

And here's to Ed Jacobs
Our newest recruit.
He can kick a guy's ass

And he really can shoot.

As a brand new cop
He could sure raise the ante
If he could somehow arrest
That old vigilante.

And who could forget Willie
The guy from the street.
He's mended his ways
And he's really quite sweet.

Throughout our fine building
He's been known to roam.
All that we ask is
Keep your chitlins at home!

Then there's the Professor
Our venerable sage.
He gets around pretty good
For a man of his age.

With a good constitution
And a strong, healthy heart
He's in pretty good shape
For such an old fart!

Here's to Maggie and Walt
Our newly wed pair.
They've built their new nest
Up here in the air.

We all wish them well
In their life that's ahead.
And may they be happy
Especially in bed!

As I look around
At my friends that are here.
I know in my heart
They're the presents most dear.

And my Christmas prayer
And I know that it's right.
Is Merry Christmas to all
And to all a goodnight!

Everyone sat in silence.
The guy could be so goofy one minute and
so lovable the next.

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Vigilante*
http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-and-the-vigilante_362.html

<http://amzn.to/1d3FLK6>

The Bachelor Party

On the night of the party, I headed over to Ox's apartment to pick him up. It wasn't my idea. I told Maggie that Ox was a grown man and could find his way to the Union Hall all by himself, but she insisted. She said that as best man, it was my duty. So off I went.

We arrived at the Hall right at seven o'clock.

Dad and Bernice had been in charge of the decorations and when we walked in the door, I thought I had been whisked back in time fifty years to my senior prom.

Helium balloons graced every table and crepe paper was strung from anything that was fastened down.

There was one of those goofy things that fold out and make a noise when you blow into them, and little bags of confetti at every chair.

I didn't know who was going to be responsible for clean up after the shindig was over. I just hoped that it wasn't me.

Maggie was in charge of the food. At this late date during the holiday, she couldn't find someone to cater the event, so she opted for one of

those ‘covered dish’ deals.

She had made a run to Kentucky Fried Chicken for buckets of wings. Guests were to bring a favorite dish of their own.

We had warned Willie to leave his chitlins’ at home.

The buffet table was loaded with salads, desserts and casseroles of every description. Someone had even brought brightly colored Jell-o cubes in various shades and flavors.

The Professor had been drafted to be the emcee for the evening, and at the appointed hour, he called the gathering to order and welcomed everyone.

After a word of blessing from Pastor Bob, everyone made a dash to the buffet line.

The wedding party was first in line.

I marveled at the food heaped on Ox’s plate. He’s a big dude with an appetite to match.

Being the first in line, we were the first ones finished.

I was stuffed, but Ox went back for seconds and then thirds of the BBQ wings and little Jell-o cubes.

“I didn’t know you were such a Jell-o fan,” I observed.

“Me neither,” he said with a goofy grin. “but this stuff is REALLY good. Never had this flavor before.”

Dad leaned over and whispered with a smile, “That’s not just Jell-o --- that’s SUPER Jell-o. Made it myself.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Jell-o shots. You make them with vodka instead of water. They pack a mean punch.”

I looked back at Ox as he was stuffing another big green blob in his mouth. He gave me another goofy grin.

I had never seen Ox loopy before. He was obviously going to be a silly drunk.

When everyone had polished off their dessert, Jerry took the podium.

He had volunteered to be in charge of entertainment and that could mean anything.

Naturally, being a stand-up comic, he had to begin with a whole succession of marriage jokes.

After a few zingers and one-liners, he handed Ox a little bag.

“Here buddy, this is for you. Keep it as a reminder of a very important principle in married life.”

Ox pulled a pair of lace panties out of the

bag.

“Two newly-weds were on their honeymoon,” Jerry began. “As they undress for bed, the husband tosses his pants to his bride and says, ‘Here, put these on.’ She puts them on, but the waist is twice the size of her body. ‘I can’t wear your pants,’ she says. ‘That’s right, you can’t, and don’t you ever forget it. I wear the pants in this family!’ The bride grabbed her panties and threw them at the groom. ‘Here, try these on.’ The husband tried but found that only one leg would fit. ‘Hell’, he says, ‘I can’t get into your panties.’ ‘That’s right,’ his bride replied, ‘and if you don’t change your attitude, you never will!’”

The crowd roared.

I had heard the old joke a hundred times, but knowing Ox and Judy, it was the perfect fit.

Jerry forged ahead, “Another thing. You have to be really careful what you say. I heard about a guy who told his wife that black underwear turned him on and she didn’t wash his shorts for a month.”

Jerry was on a roll.

“Every married couple have a special story and Ox and Judy are no exception. In fact, I’ve written a little ditty about a special evening in their lives.”

I wasn't sure where this was going, but I had a pretty good idea.

Last Christmas, Jerry had drawn my name in our 'Goofy Santa' gift exchange. He had proudly given me a 'fart machine'. It was a little box that emitted really gross sounds and could be activated remotely by pushing a button. Maggie forbade me to use the thing, so I put it in my sock drawer right beside my nose hair clipper and lint brush.

Before the party, Jerry had asked if he could borrow it.

Jerry solemnly read from a spiral notebook.

"Tis the season to be jolly
Lots of mistletoe and holly
Christmas tales we love to hear
Are shared in families year to year.

Tonight, I'll share another tale
That will make the others pale.
It's a story that will warm your heart
The story of the old mare's fart."

Ox grabbed me by the arm, "You didn't!
Tell me you didn't!"

“I did,” I said sheepishly. “It was just too precious not to share.”

Ox buried his head in his hands, “Good Lord!”

“It started in a lovely carriage
Where Ox’s thoughts had turned to
marriage.

So carefully he made his plan
This clever, marriage-minded man.

The setting he had planned with care
The lights, the fountain and the old gray
mare.

When the time was right, he pledged his
heart

Just as the horse decided to fart.”

Jerry must have pressed the button, because
a loud, ‘PLTTTTTT’ reverberated through the
room.

Everyone cheered except poor Ox who slunk
farther down in his chair.

“In the stillness of that moment sweet
An odor did their noses greet.

The lady longed to say, 'I do'
But all that she could smell was poo."

Judy had tried to hold it in, but finally gave up and cackled with the rest of the crowd.

"When at last the breeze had cleared the air
'I do' came from the lady fair.
'The moral', said the lucky guy
'Is best laid plans can go awry'.

"But if true love fills their beating hearts
It will overcome an old mare's farts!"

Everyone in the audience was on their feet clapping and laughing.

When order was restored, Jerry said, "Ox, you're a good sport and we all love you. That's why we chipped in and got you this special gift."

Jerry pointed to Dad and he flipped the switch on a boom box.

The raunchy notes of David Rose's, *The Stripper*, filled the room.

The door swung open and a tall brunette in a tight red dress and those black lace stockings with the seam up the back strolled seductively into the

room.

“Oh, crap!” I said. “I thought I told you --- no girls!”

Dad looked over and smiled, “You did, sonny, and we listened. That ain’t no girl. That’s Bruce!”

I looked closer, and sure enough, it was a Bruce --- a damn good looking Bruce!”

As the music blasted, he wiggled his way through the crowd and headed straight for Ox.

He pushed the table back and when he raised his skirt, it was obvious that he had a good-sized package under those pantyhose.

Ox turned three shades of red and Judy laughed hysterically as Bruce straddled Ox’s lap and gyrated his junk inches from the big guy’s face.

Mercifully, the song came to an end.

Bruce planted a big kiss on Ox’s forehead, waved to the crowd and disappeared into the night.

That pretty much wrapped things up for the evening, but I noticed that right after Bruce’s departure, Ox made another trip to the Jell-o shots.

Most of the crowd had left except Willie, who had volunteered for the massive clean-up detail.

Ox was a bit unsteady on his feet, so it was

probably a good thing that I was driving him home.

He was in pretty decent shape by the time we arrived at his apartment, but I walked him in, just in case.

As I was headed back out to my car, I reflected on what a lovely evening it had been.

Good fun --- good food --- good friends.
Who could ask for more?

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Book Club Murders*

http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-and-the-book-club-murders_370.html

<http://amzn.to/1aWGg3K>

A Day in the Country

We decided that if we were going to have a day in the country, we should start with a good country breakfast, so we jumped in the car and headed to the Crackerbarrel restaurant for a plate of biscuits and gravy.

When our tummies were full, we pointed the car in an eastward direction and found ourselves on Blue Mills Road.

We had decided to just drive the rural roads until we found what we were looking for --- we weren't exactly sure what that was, but we figured that we'd know it when we saw it.

Suddenly, there it was --- a sign read, 'Straw - \$5.00 a bale'.

"Sounds right to me," I said, turning up a gravel road.

There were fields on each side of the road. On one side we saw the remnants of a cornfield and a few stray stalks were still standing along the edge. On the other side, was a pasture with a small pond and at one end of the pond, cattails stood erect with their brown heads gently blowing in the breeze.

"Looks like we might be able to get everything we need right here," Maggie said. "One

stop shopping!”

We drove almost a mile before we came to a farmhouse with the same ‘straw’ sign on the fence.

I pulled into the driveway and as soon as we stepped out of the car, a big yellow lab trotted up to meet us.

I just stood there awaiting the inevitable. To this day I have never met a dog that could keep its nose out of my crotch.

I wasn’t disappointed.

The big dog buried her snoot right between my legs, gave me a sniff and licked the back of my hand. Apparently I had passed. Naturally her drool had left a wet spot right beside my zipper.

“Looks like you and Daisy has become friends,” said a voice coming from the direction of the barn.

An old guy in a straw hat and Big Smith overalls came striding up.

“You city folks lost?”

“No, actually we saw your sign. We’d like to buy two bales of your straw.”

He looked us over skeptically, “What’s a city feller want with straw?”

“Decoration. We’re decorating for our fiftieth reunion and having a fall theme.”

He spat a big wad of tobacco juice, some of which splattered on my shoe.

“Long as you got the ten bucks, I guess I don’t give a rat’s ass what you do with it.”

“We also noticed driving in,” Maggie said, “that you still have some corn stalks standing in one of your fields. We’d like to buy some of those too.”

“Can’t sell ‘em to ya.”

“Why not?” Maggie asked surprised.

“Cause it wouldn’t be right. Got no corn on ‘em. It’s already been shucked. I can give ‘em to you though.”

“Thank you very much. That’s very kind of you. We also noticed some cattails by your pond. Could we buy a few of those?”

“Nope! Don’t sell weeds. Damn things is a nuisance. They’ll take over a whole pond if’n you let ‘em. Take as many as you want.”

The farmer was being generous so I decided to forgive the wad of tobacco stuck to the toe of my shoe and the slime dripping from my crotch.

We paid the man and backed up to his barn. After the straw was loaded, he said, “Take care around that pond. With all the rain, the ground is kinda soggy. Don’t want to have to come pull your ass out of the mud.”

I had brought a couple of Willie's trimming tools and we cut the cornstalks without incident.

I pulled to the side of the road beside the pond and climbed through the fence.

"Remember what the farmer said about the mud," Maggie shouted as I approached the pond.

I walked gingerly to the edge, but the cattails were just out of reach. I tested the next step and it seemed solid enough, so I put my weight on that foot and reached for the nearest cattail.

I heard a 'SCHLOOOP!' and my foot sunk a good six inches in sticky, muddy goo. I immediately felt the cold water seeping into my shoe and reflexively lifted my leg.

My leg and my foot came easily out of the mud, but my shoe was still being held firmly in the muck and filling with water fast.

So there I was, standing on one leg like a gray-haired flamingo, holding Willie's tool in one hand while trying to keep my balance.

I tossed the tool and took a step backwards searching for solid ground. By the time I had regained my footing, my shoe was almost out of sight.

I got down on my hands and knees and fished around in the muck hole until I found my

shoe. I pulled with all of my might and finally, ‘SCHLOOOP!’ the shoe came loose.

I emptied the water and wiped away as much mud as possible on the grass. I gritted my teeth and slipped the thing on --- not a pleasant sensation.

Maggie had witnessed the whole debacle from the road and as I sloshed back to the car, she exclaimed, “Walt, are you all right?”

“I’ll be fine, but the Polk High School reunion is just going to have to survive without cattails!”

We headed back down the road and after a few hundred feet, Maggie pointed into another field. “Look hedge apples! Those are definitely fall things. Since we didn’t get cattails, how about picking up a few of those. Do you think the farmer would mind?”

I was pretty sure that he wouldn’t. I remembered from my days on my grandfather’s farm, that the big green balls were even more of a nuisance than cattails.

“No, he won’t care. I’ll go grab a hand full and we’ll head home before my foot shrivels up.

I crawled through the fence and headed to the big tree about a hundred feet away.

I had to walk carefully because the pasture was littered with meadow muffins. The last thing I wanted to do was step into a fresh pile of cow poop.

It took a few minutes to sort through the hedge apples that had fallen and find a half-dozen that were still in pristine condition.

My arms were finally loaded and I was about to head back to the car when I heard Maggie scream.

“Walt! Look Out!”

I looked in the direction that Maggie was pointing and fifty feet away from me, one of those big ugly bulls with a hump on its back was pawing the dirt, snorting and giving me the evil eye.

It suddenly dawned on me that meadow muffins just don't magically appear in a field out of thin air. Something put them there, and in this case, a big, mean something.

My last encounter with a bull was on my first day on the job. A perp was pointing a gun at my head, and like me, failed to notice a three thousand pound behemoth that had zeroed in on his butt.

That bull saved my hide, but this one seemed to have other ideas.

As I slowly backed away, I remembered

something about dogs being able to smell fear. If it was the same with bulls, he was probably getting a snootful.

I would walk backward a few steps and he would advance a few steps. I figured that if I could keep doing that and maintain the space between us, I would soon be within sprinting distance of the fence.

Everything seemed to be working according to plan until I took a step back and landed squarely on top of a hedge ball.

Naturally, being round, the ball rolled, my feet flew into the air and I landed on my back.

While I was momentarily suspended in mid-air, my fear was that I was going to land on one of those hard round hedge apples. When I didn't, there was a moment of relief until I felt a warm, sticky substance oozing into the back of my shirt and trousers, followed by a pungent odor that nearly cost me my biscuits and gravy.

I had done a back flip into one of Mr. Quarterpounder's meadow muffins.

At that moment, the term, 'Bullshit!' took on new meaning for me.

This turn of events seemed to push the bull over the edge, like maybe I had violated his sacred

depository or something. He ceased pawing and started galloping. I looked over my shoulder and saw that I was maybe thirty feet from the fence.

I jumped to my feet and sprinted as fast as I could. I remembered that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Unfortunately, that straight line bisected a half dozen more land mines and by the time I hit the ground and wiggled under the barbed-wire fence, I was covered from head to toe with the remnants of my adversary's latest meals.

Maggie rushed to my side. She has always been quite supportive when my life has been in danger --- but not this time.

She took one look and one whiff, "AAAAAKKKK!" then sprinted twenty feet upwind.

I just stood there in shock, looking like the tar baby in *Song of the South*, only it wasn't tar that I was covered with.

"W - W - Walt," she gagged. "Get out of those clothes!"

"Right here?"

"Well you're not getting in the car like that!"

I could see her point.

I stripped down to my skivvies, but the pungent goo had soaked all the way through.

“Those too,” she said.

“But Maggie! I’ll be buck naked!”

“Do it,” she said, handing me a blanket that we carried in the car for emergencies. This certainly qualified as an emergency in my book.

The bull, who had followed me to the fence had been watching the whole episode with great interest. I swear, I think he was smiling!

Figuring that I would get in one parting shot, I hung my clothes on the fence, fashioning them in such a way as to actually look like a man leaning against the fence. I put my poor shoes that had been hocked on, sunk in the mud and buried in poop, right under the pants legs. I hated to say goodbye. I really liked those shoes.

I thought that might give the bull something to think about for a while, and I knew for darn sure that when the farmer found my little surprise, he would have a story to tell around the cook stove that wouldn’t be topped for years to come.

Even stripped naked and wrapped in a blanket, Maggie made me ride in the back seat.

It was a quiet ride home. Neither of us wanted to open our mouths or take a deep breath.

One thought that popped into my mind was that there weren't going to be any hedge balls at the reunion either. No cattails --- no hedge balls. I hoped that wouldn't be a deal breaker.

When we pulled up in front of the building, my worst fears were confirmed. Willie, Jerry and the Professor were all sitting on the front porch.

None of the three are normally at a loss for words, but the apparition that crawled out of the backseat definitely left them speechless --- until I got within smelling distance.

“Whoooooie!” Willie said. “You sho’is ripe!”

I knew that I wouldn't have a moment's peace until I had satisfied their curiosity, so I plopped down on the step and told them the whole disgusting story.

Jerry, of course, couldn't wait until I was finished. I could see him mentally sorting through his poop jokes as I was talking.

He didn't let me down.

“There are two flies sitting on a pile of poop. When one fly farts, the other fly looks at him and says, ‘Hey do ya mind? I'm eating here!’”

Wearily, I struggled to my feet, and as I was climbing the stairs, naked, wrapped in a blanket,

leaving a noxious trail behind me, a thought popped into my mind. “If only my classmates could see me now!”

An excerpt from *Lady Justice and the Class Reunion*

http://booksbybob.com/lady-justice-and-the-class-reunion_387.html

<http://amzn.to/17S9YE0>

NEW MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGH

FACT:

More people are getting medical treatment, taking more drugs, having more diagnostic tests and having more surgeries than ever before in history, yet more people are getting sick than ever before.

FACT:

There are over 200,000 nonprescription drugs and 30,000 prescription drugs on the market and doctors write over three billion prescriptions each year.

FACT:

People who laugh actually live longer than those who don't laugh. (Dr. James A. Walsh.)
Laughter research has shown that humor and especially laughter can help keep our bodies strong and disease resistant.

FACT:

Laughter has been shown to relax muscles, increase oxygen flow, promote circulation, and reduce tension as well as lower blood pressure, ease stress

and boost your immune system. (Dr. Michael Cutler)

FACT:

Spending an hour with a close friend is as effective as taking a pain reliever in treating headaches. (Willie T. Ong, MD)

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Four years ago, Robert Thornhill began his research on the first novel in his Lady Justice mystery/comedy series.

After months of research and field study across the country involving thousands of patients (readers), the fifteen volume Lady Justice series has been approved by the FDA (Fun-loving Doctors Association) and is available for world-wide distribution.

(Note) This is the only series endorsed by the AMA (American Mystery/Comedy Association)

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This new medical breakthrough is administered in fifteen doses:

Lady Justice Takes A C.R.A.P.* (This has nothing to do with bowel movements. It is an acronym for City Retiree Action Patrol)

Lady Justice And The Lost Tapes

Lady Justice Gets Lei'd

Lady Justice And The Avenging Angels

Lady Justice And The Sting

Lady Justice And Dr. Death

Lady Justice and the Vigilante

Lady Justice and the Watchers

Lady Justice and the Candidate

Lady Justice and the Book Club Murders

Lady Justice and the Cruise Ship Murders

Lady Justice and the Class Reunion

Lady Justice and the Assassin

Lady Justice and the Lottery

Lady Justice and the Vet

OUR GUARANTEE

When taken as directed, we guarantee the following

results:

1. You will smile, giggle, chuckle, snort and possibly break into uncontrollable laughter.

2. You will love the characters who will capture your heart and become your personal friends with whom you may spend many wonderful hours.

3. You will have a positive attitude that all is right with the world, that common folks can be heroes and that life doesn't end at age sixty-five.

WARNING!

POSSIBLE DANGEROUS SIDE EFFECTS!

Extreme caution should be used when drinking beverages or if your bladder is full since reading a Lady Justice novel may cause spontaneous outbreaks of uncontrollable laughter which may cause liquids to squirt from bodily orifices.

Lady Justice novels may cause insomnia. Never start a Lady Justice novel just before going to bed. You won't be able to put it down.

Be cautious of reading a Lady Justice novel in a public place. Your outbreaks of giggles and guffaws may disturb those around you.

1 TESTIMONIALS

"This book marks the first time a mystery story has made me laugh out loud. I laughed until tears were running, and my sides ached! I laughed so hard that my husband came to see if I was OK." Beverly B. Independence, Mo.

"An excellent book. It is hilarious with numerous 'one-liners' that made me laugh aloud and brought tears to my eye in laughter." Dan, La Porte, Indiana.

"This book is laugh-out-loud funny, on par

with today's most popular writers." Marilyn D. Santa Clara, California.

"Very funny and fast-paced. Exactly how I love a mystery. I actually got choked up I laughed so hard yesterday." Rose, Rockton, Illinois.

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If you're feeling down in the dumps, you can spend \$265.00 for a prescription of Cymbalta, (If you're lucky and you have insurance, your co-pay would be about \$50.00)

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Buy the prescription, take it once and it's gone, or buy a set of books you can enjoy and laugh with over and over again and share with your family and friends.

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**STEPHANIE
PLUM
FAN?**

**CHAPTERS
YOU
HAVE
NEVER
READ
BEFORE!**

**YOU
GOTTA
READ
THIS!**

ROBERT THORNHILL

Welcome Stephanie Plum Fans!

I'm an old retired guy who lives with his wife, Peg, in Independence, Mo.

We read a lot.

A few years ago, a friend turned us on to *Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum* series and we fell in love. We read all 14 books that were available at the time and laughed till we cried.

I had never written a book, a blog or anything of substance, but I was so fired up when I finished *Fearless Fourteen*, I had to do something.

I went into our office, sat down at my computer and pretended I was Janet. I wrote three chapters and gave them to Peg who had also read all 14 books.

I heard her laughing and thought that was a good sign. After she finished, she came to the office and said "Janet doesn't need any help. You should write a book of your own. Stop writing Stephanie Plum, develop your *OWN* characters and plot. I know you can do it."

So I did, and the Lady Justice mystery/comedy series was born.

Currently there are eleven novels in the series:

[Lady Justice Takes a C.R.A.P. City Retiree Action Patrol](#)

Lady Justice and the Lost Tapes
Lady Justice Gets Lei'd
Lady Justice and the Avenging Angels
Lady Justice and the Sting
Lady Justice and Dr. Death
Lady Justice and the Vigilante
Lady Justice and the Watchers
Lady Justice and the Candidate
Lady Justice and the Book Club Murders
Lady Justice and the Cruise Ship Murders
Lady Justice and the Class Reunion
Lady Justice and the Assassin
Lady Justice and the Lottery
Lady Justice and the Vet

Following are the three Stephanie Plum Chapters that I wrote.

Please remember ---- I was sixty-six years old and this was the *FIRST THING* that I had ever written.

Hope you enjoy them!

Chapter 1

It was Christmas time in the Burg. Shopping Malls were decked in holiday tradition; city fathers hung plastic bells from lampposts; miniature elves cavorted on front lawns; shoppers of all ages and descriptions scurried about looking for that perfect gift and, of course, petty crime was on the rise as shoplifters used the bustling crowds to mask their petty thievery, and break and enter complaints flourished as burglars relieved unhappy shoppers of their Christmas treasures from their homes and cars.

As regrettable as this crime surge may be, it's kinda good for me. I'm Stephanie Plum and I'm a bounty hunter or, as we put on loan applications, a fugitive apprehension agent. I work for my cousin Vinnie's Bond Company.

When a neer-do-well is apprehended by police, they call Vinnie to bond them out of jail until their court date. If the slacker shows up for court Vinnie's bond is returned and he collects a fee for his services. If he doesn't appear, he forfeits his bond (meaning Vinnie's money) unless he can be found and persuaded to return for a court date. That's where I come in. My job is to find the FTA

(failure to appear) and persuade him or her to return to the police station to get a new court date and be rebonded out.

Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it. Right!

A few FTAs legitimately forget their court dates, but most are adamantly opposed to incarceration and will go to any extremes to avoid the lockup. I've been punched, tased, shot at, bombed and generally maimed by these fugitives and if ,by chance, I happen to be successful in bringing one to justice, I am paid a percentage of the bond for my trouble.

In a way, I'm like a real estate agent or a car salesman; they only get paid when they make a sale; I only get paid when I return a scumbag to the police booking desk. Unfortunately, I'm not a real superstar bond apprehension agent. You might say I'm just a shade under mediocre and my income reflects my apprehension shortcomings.

So here we are. It's Christmas and I'm broke. I'm driving a yucky brown piece of crap car that barely passed the vehicle inspection and probably wouldn't have except my cousin Jenny's husband is a mechanic at the inspection station.

Reluctantly, I told myself that now is the time to correct my financial woes. Crime is up;

FTAs are skipping their court dates at an astounding rate and best of all, most of them are just petty thieves: no rapists or murders or gangbangers. Easy Money! I probably won't even have to use my pepper spray, stun gun or cuffs and I certainly won't need my little 38 caliber pistol which mostly stays in my cookie jar.

As I pulled up to the bond office on Hamilton, I noticed that Lula was already there. Her red Firebird was parked in the prime spot in front of the office. Upon reflection, I decided not to park my heap next to her fine ride, so I drove around back and parked next to the dumpster. Appropriate! Maybe if I'm lucky the trash man will load it up and haul it away.

Lula is something! In her former life she was a ho. She had been severely beaten and almost killed by a deranged prizefighter

As luck would have it, I happened to be nearby and helped save her. Actually, it happened on my balcony, but it wasn't my fault. Since then, we have become friends. Lula now does filing in Vinnie's bond office; mostly her nails, but sometimes real files and on occasion, she is my sidekick as we seek out fugitives. Kinda like Batman and Robin; Roy Rogers and Gabby Hays;

Well actually, its more like the Two Stooges.

I entered the office through the rear door and waved to Connie, our office manager. Connie runs the place. Without her, Vinnie would be up a creek. She puts the FTA files together, searches databases for current information on the perps whereabouts, assigns the files to one of us agents and best of all, signs our checks when we actually bring someone in.

Connie looked particularly harried this morning and I noticed the stack of file folders on her desk.

“Busy day?” I said.

“You gotta be kidding me,” she replied. “I’ve been busting my ass since 7:00 this morning trying to get these files ready to assign.”

“What have you got?” I asked

“Mostly small stuff, but there’s a lot of it. Two B&E’s, 3 shoplifters, indecent exposure, and a traffic violation.”

“Great!” I said. “Sounds like something I can handle.” She handed me a stack of files. “Don’t be shy about assigning files to me for awhile,” I said. “I am sufficiently motivated by the lack of funds in my Christmas savings account and I’ll take as many as I can get.”

“Glad to hear it,” Connie said. “Because you and Joyce are about it right now.”

There are 3 bond enforcement agents in our office: myself, Ranger, and Joyce Barnhart. Ranger was my mentor and had taught me the few apprehension techniques that I actually used. He is a Cuban hottie. Besides being an agent for Vinnie, he owns his own security company and has been doing more for himself and less for Vinnie lately. Joyce is my arch enemy. She has been since grade school. She has made my life miserable in so many ways, the worst being getting caught by me, boinking my husband shortly after our honeymoon. Too bad we work in the same company. It doesn't do much for office morale.

“OK,” I said, “I'm off. Today is going to be a good day”.

“Hold on there a minute,” Lula said. “Don't I even get a Howdy Do? Anyway you gonna need me if you gonna try to get through that big stack.”

“Sorry Lula, I was just so focused on work. I didn't mean to ignore you. But don't you have filing to do?”

“Wow, I've never seen you that focused,” Lula said “ You must really be broke. And besides, there ain't no filing here that can't wait a couple of

hours. Plus, it's my special time of the month and I'm feeling kinda cranky. It would do me some good to thump on a few of them perverts."

"NO thumping," I said. "These are all just petty thieves and first time offenders. It should be a piece of cake."

"Speaking of cake," Lula said, "if I can't thump nobody, maybe we can stop on the way for a bite to eat. Food always helps me get through the cramps. I could sure use one of them breakfast sandwiches, you know, the kind with the big fluffy biscuit with eggs and bacon and cheese inside. Matter of fact, I could probably use two of them."

It did sound kinda good. I had overslept this morning and had woofed down a TastyKake and a cup of coffee as I went out the door.

"Fine by me," I said, "let's get rolling. My car is parked out back."

"Hold on there girlfriend," Lula said. "You don't expect me to go riding around town in that brown turd of yours, do you? In my previous profession, I was a well respected ho. I got a reputation to uphold. It's degrading to be seen in that thing. What if I see someone I know?"

"Well," I replied, "we can certainly take your pristine Firebird, as long as you don't mind our

fugitives peeing or puking in your back seat.”

After a long pause Lula replied, “Hmmm, maybe we should take your car. If I see someone I know, I’ll just hunker down in the seat so I won’t be noticed.”

Sure. Making Lula’s 200 pounds, bright orange hair and fluorescent green tube top unnoticed will be a cinch.

So off we went. Two professional bond apprehension agents out to save the city. But, of course, first things first, and we headed to the McDonald’s drive through.

I pulled into the drive-through lane and inched my way closer to the order speakerphone. As I rolled the window down, a muffled voice came from the speaker “Mlunth drsjp?” Having been here before, I figured that was speakerease for “May I take your order?”

“Yes,” I yelled into the speaker, “we’d like three breakfast biscuits with egg, bacon and cheese and two large coffees.”

“Tufshk leabn,” came the reply.

“Oh yeah,” Lula said, “give me one of them little crispy potato cakes, too.”

“Beavun yusfh,” was all I heard.

I saw the amount of the bill registered on the

digital readout by the speaker and it looked about right, so I pulled through to the pickup window. The window flew open. I looked up and “YIKES!” The girl at the window looked like she had lost a fight with a nail gun. Each ear was pierced three times, each hole adorned with large hoop earrings. There was a stud bar through her eyebrow, a diamond stud on her left nostril, and two studs protruding from her lower lip. When she opened her mouth to speak, her tongue flopped out sporting a stud the size of a pea.

“No wonder the girl can’t talk,” Lula said. “Her mouth’s stapled shut.”

I handed her a ten and tried not to think about the fact that the food I was about to eat had been prepared by a practitioner of self mutilation.

I pulled out of the line and out into traffic. Lula was opening the sack of goodies and distributing the food when I heard her exclaim, “Oh crap! That little bitch put sausage on my biscuit instead of bacon. I don’t want no sausage. I want bacon.”

I thought about having to sit through the line and talking to studface again and I said, “Sorry about that. But we gotta get moving. How about you eat your biscuit with just egg and cheese and

maybe we can get a bacon cheeseburger for lunch.”

“Dumb bitch,” Lula murmured. “Now this sandwich reminds me of one of my customers when I was a ho. The dude was all eggs and no meat.” She flopped the greasy sausage patty on a napkin on the dashboard.

Lula had finished distributing the food and placed my coffee in the one cup holder on the console. She had just taken the lid off of her cup when a black SUV swerved in front of us and hit its brakes. I jammed on my brakes to avoid running into its rear end, causing Lula’s hot coffee to pour into lap

“Oh God,” Lula shrieked. “I’ve scalded my twat and ruined my skirt. I don’t believe this.”

The SUV and I came to a stop. The door of the SUV flew open and Joyce Barnhart marched up to Lula’s window. Lula was frantically trying to sop up hot coffee from her private parts when Joyce banged on her window.

“You!” Lula screamed. “I shoulda known only a dumb bitch like you would pull a stunt like that.”

“Pipe down fatty,” Joyce sneered. “I need to talk to you,” she said to me.

Oh oh! The one thing you absolutely don’t

want to do is call Lula fat. She can take almost any verbal abuse except that. I saw that look in her eye and I figured she was getting as hot as the coffee in her lap.

“What do you want, Joyce? We’ve got work to do,” I said.

“That’s the problem. You have work and I don’t. You came into the office this morning and cherry picked all the good FTA files. I have nothing to do till Connie gets new files ready to go. Now give me half of those files and I’ll be on my way.”

One thing about Joyce: she always wants to look the part of the TV bounty hunter. She wears tight leather pants and an even tighter leather button front top with most of the buttons undone. I hate to admit it, but she does have a great bod. Her boobs are about two sizes bigger than mine and with the aid of a push-up bra, her ample cleavage spills out the front of the leather blouse. It was this bosom at this very moment that was inches from an infuriated Lula’s face.

“You ain’t getting no files, bitch,” Lula roared, “but you can have this.” With one quick sweep, she grabbed the greasy sausage patty off the dash and stuffed it between Joyce’s cleavage.

Joyce pulled away from the window fishing

between her boobs for the greasy sausage.

“Oops, We better get out of here,” I said, and I shoved the car into reverse and peeled away leaving Joyce on the side of the road screaming and shaking her fist. As we drove away, I grinned at Lula. She grinned back and we did a high five.

It was time to get to work. I checked the mirror to make sure Joyce wasn't following and pulled to the curb to look at our first file. The FTA was Winnie Taggart, a single woman with a history of shoplifting busts. I thought the next statistic had to be a misprint. It said she weighed 300 pounds. Her M O was to wear loose baggy clothing under which she would hide her pilfered merchandise. This last time she was nailed at the Piggy Wiggley she was caught with a slab of bacon tucked under each breast. “WOW!”

Winnie lived in a small apartment on the second floor of a dingy walk-up. The front door opened into a foyer with apartment doors on each side and a staircase directly in the middle led to the second floor. Lula and I decided that her being a single woman with a history of smalltime busts, she

would know how the system worked and would cooperate with us. We decided that the direct approach would be best.

I got my bounty hunter gear out of the back seat; pepper spray clipped to my belt, stun gun in my pocket and cuffs looped over the back of my pants. As we walked up the sidewalk, I happened to notice a UPS truck parked a few spaces ahead of us. The driver was loading some heavy packages on a two wheeled dolly to deliver around the neighborhood. He smiled and waved and I waved back

We entered the foyer and climbed the steps.

We stopped at the door of apartment 2-B and knocked.

“Whadda you want?” came from within.

“My name is Stephanie Plum. I’m a bond enforcement agent. Winnie, you missed your court date and I need to take you down to the station to get another court date and get re-bonded.”

“Screw you and the horse you rode in on,” she yelled. --- So much for cooperation.

I looked at Lula. We rolled our eyes and thought, “Here we go again.”

I tried the doorknob and was surprised to find it unlocked. I cautiously pushed the door open

and stepped aside. On a previous bust we had been greeted with a blast from a shotgun. See, we are learning.

I peered around the corner and there was Winnie, all 300 pounds of her, sitting in a recliner with a giant size bag of Dorito chips and a diet coke. Go figure.

I entered the room with Lula right behind me.

“Listen Winnie,” I said. “You know the system. You know what’s going on. You know we have to take you back to the station. How about we just get it over with.”

“How about you take a flying leap out that window over there,” she replied with a sneer.

I could sense that this was not going well. What a surprise. “Well Winnie, here’s the thing. We’ve got to take you in. It’s our job. We can either do it the easy way or the hard way. It’s your choice.”

“You can try and do it any damn way you want, but I ain’t going nowhere,” she said as she stuffed a handful of Doritos in her mouth.

I had noticed Lula start to bristle and I figured her time of the month was starting to kick in. “Put that bag of chips down. Quit stuffing your

face and get your fat ass out of that chair,” she yelled.

“You’re one to talk,” Winnie yelled back. “Your ass ain’t so petite either.”

“What you talking about?” Lula fumed. “I just happen to be a full figured woman. You just FAT.”

I could see this was going nowhere fast. I knew we could get the cuffs on Winnie, but if she refused to get up on her own, there was no way Lula and I could lift her. As I was pondering our situation, I glanced out the window and saw the UPS driver returning to his truck with his empty dolly. A light bulb went on in my head and I made an executive decision. I whipped out my stun gun, flipped it on, walked over to Winnie and gave her the shock of her life. She slumped in her chair and the bag of Doritos fell to the floor.

“That’s a damn waste of good chips,” Lula remarked. “Now what?”

I pulled the cuffs from my pocket and tossed them to Lula. “You cuff her and I’ll be right back.”

I took the steps to the first floor two at a time. I didn’t want to miss the UPS guy. He was just getting in his truck when I waved him down.

“Pardon me, Sir,” I said. “I know this is an unusual request, but I wonder if we can borrow your dolly for just a few minutes?”

“Sorry ma’am,” he replied. “It’s against company policy. I could get fired.”

I knew it wouldn’t be easy, but I was prepared. Although most of my skills as a bounty hunter aren’t very sharp, I am a fantastic liar. I’ve found it often comes in handy.

Like now.

I reached into my back pocket and pulled out my fake badge that I had bought at the dollar store and flashed it in front of his face.

“Let me explain,” I said. “My name is Stephanie Plum and I’m a bail bond enforcement agent for the City of Trenton and I need to use your dolly in the apprehension of a fugitive.”

Sounds good doesn’t it?

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’ve never heard of anything like that before.”

“Sure you have,” I said. “You watch TV don’t you?”

“We’ll sure,” he replied. “Who doesn’t?”

“Then I’m sure you’ve seen police officers chasing a criminal and stopping a motorist to commandeer his car?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen that before,” he said.

“Well, this is the same thing only I need a dolly.”

“I--I just don’t know. This seems kinda weird” he stammered.

“I understand,” I said. “Let me clear this up for you. I’ll just call my Captain and have him give your supervisor a call and we’ll get the OK from him. What’s your supervisor’s name and number. I’m sure we can get this cleared up in the next half hour to forty five minutes.” I whipped out my cell phone.

He turned and looked at the mountain of packages yet to deliver, grimaced, did some mental calculations and said, “How long would you need to borrow it?”

“Ten minutes tops,” I replied.

“ Well OK, but hurry,” he said as he unstrapped the dolly from the truck.

I pushed the dolly up the sidewalk, propped open the screen with a rock and drug the dolly to the second floor.

When I entered Winnie’s apartment, I found Winnie cuffed and Lula scarfing down Doritos.

“These are damn fine chips,” she muttered.
“What we gonna do with that thing?” she asked

eyeing the dolly.

“This,” I replied “is our mode of transportation for Winnie.” I laid the dolly on its back next to Winnie’s chair. “Here, help me get her onto this thing. We’ll just roll her out of the chair and on to the dolly and roll her down the stairs and out to the car.”

Easy—Right!

We huffed and puffed and pulled and then gravity took over and Winnie toppled out of the chair, but she hit the dolly and rolled off. Gravity was on our side but inertia was not. We each got next to Winnie, me at her shoulders and Lula at her butt and we pushed and pushed some more until she was finally on her back on the dolly.

“Whew,” Lula gasped. “Please don’t let me eat no more of those chips. I don’t wanna get like that.”

We then realized our next problem. Winnie wasn’t going to stay on that dolly by herself. We needed something to tie her on with.

At this point, rope was not part of my bounty hunter gear and I made a mental note to visit the local True Value. We started looking around the apartment for something to use as a tie down. I was rummaging through her drawers and pulled out a

pair of black pantyhose. You can only imagine how big a pair of pantyhose has to be to fit a 300 pound woman.

“Jesus,” Lula exclaimed. “These babies are big enough seine fish!”

We took a sniff and concluded that someone already had. But they were perfect. When spread out from toe to toe there was ample material to go around Winnie and the dolly. We found two more pair and proceeded to wrap Winnie to the dolly like a mummy.

“OK, now what do we do?” Lula asked eyeing our handiwork. “You think we can move this tub of lard?”

“Well sure,” I replied, “I’ve seen guys move refrigerators by themselves with one of these things. It can’t be too hard.” Right?

Lula and I each grabbed a handle and lifted with all we had.

“I better not get me a hernia over this,” Lula gasped.

We finally got her in a semi upright position with the weight balanced over the wheels, just like I’d seen the refrigerator guy do it. We wheeled her out the door to the head of the stairs and looked down.

Oh oh! Gravity and inertia again.

We eased the wheels to the edge of the first step, held on with all our strength, muttered a prayer and forward we went. WHUMP! The wheels dropped to the second step and held. So far, so good. Encouraged, we went for number two. WHUMP! Hey, this isn't so hard. One step at a time. WHUMP! Rest, WHUMP! Rest.

We were about four steps from the bottom when all hell broke loose. We heard a dog bark. We heard a cat screech and suddenly a big yellow cat comes busting through the open door and leaps through the air landing on Winnie's big tummy. The cat's next leap was right between our heads. We ducked, Lula screamed and let go of her side of the dolly and gravity took over. WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP!

As fate would have it, just as Winnie hit the foyer floor, Joyce Barnhart walked in the door. We could see the sheer terror in her eyes as she looked up and saw 300 pounds of Winnie and 50 pounds of dolly coming straight for her.

One more WHUMP! and a bloodcurdling shriek as Winnie and Joyce collided in the doorway. Good old inertia gave Winnie the advantage of forward momentum. We hurried down the steps to

find Joyce spread eagled on her back with the mummy Winnie directly on top.

“Get her off! Get her off!” Joyce screamed.

Lula and I each grabbed a handle and lifted with everything we had. We had just lifted her high enough to get the weight off of Joyce when we heard a gurgle and a rumble and Joyce looked on in horror as a stream of orange bile erupted from the depths of Winnie Taggert. A half of a bag of chips and who knows how many diet cokes covered Joyce from head to toe.

“UGH!” Lula said. “Guess I won’t be eating any Doritos for awhile.”

We finally got Winnie upright again leaving poor Joyce in shock, gagging and crying on the front step.

The poor UPS driver who had witnessed the disaster rushed up to us as we got to my car.

“I hope my dolly is OK. I need it back NOW,” he said.

“Look buster,” I replied. “If you want your dolly back help us get our fugitive into the trunk of my car.” and I popped the lid. My car may have its shortcomings, but it has a huge trunk.

As we looked at Winnie and at the trunk Lula remarked, “Good thing we took your car. Her

fat ass wouldn't of fit in my trunk.”

We untied Winnie and the three of us rolled her into the trunk. WHOOSH! The shocks dropped to the springs and the back end of the car came to rest with the tailpipe touching the ground.

The poor UPS guy looked at his dolly that was covered with orange glop. “What am I gonna do with that!” he wailed.

I reached into my pocket and handed him a quarter. “There’s a carwash three blocks away. Here, it’s on me. The City of Trenton thanks you very much for your help.”

Boy, will he have a story to tell back at the garage.

We closed the lid, jumped in the car and took off. All the way to the police station sparks shot out of rear end of my car as the tailpipe dragged along. A big brown turd, rolling down the street with sparks coming out its ass. So much for being inconspicuous. Lula hunkered a lot on the way back.

We pulled into the police lot, I parked and went into the booking desk. Carl was on duty.

“I may need a little help with this one,” I said. “Any chance we can get a couple of uniforms out there?”

The officers came out. Most know me and delight in giving me a hard time. Today was no exception.

“Whatcha got in the turdmobile, Stephanie?”
Murphy asked.

“A little present for you guys,” I replied, and I popped the trunk.

“JESUS! What’s that smell?” Murphy said as he gagged. “You bounty hunters can bring em back dead or alive. I think this ones been dead for awhile. I’m not touching that.”

“I just bring ‘em in,” I said. “After they hit this parking lot, they’re all yours.”

I went back to the booking desk and picked up my body receipt. ONE DOWN!!

Chapter 2

Encouraged by the fact that we had actually brought in an FTA the first time around, we were ready for round two.

I pulled the next file. The FTA was Wally Beaker. A single guy, 32 years old who had been picked up for indecent exposure and urinating in public. He ran a small bookkeeping office and lived in a small efficiency in the back.

“Sounds to me like we got us one of them Pee Wee Herman types,” Lula said. “Let’s go get the little pervert.”

We pulled up in front of the bookkeeping office and a sign on the door said ‘OPEN’.

“We’re in luck,” I said. “Let’s get this over with, and please, let me do the talking.”

We entered the office. It was a large room with two chairs for clients and a small divider that separated the client area from an office desk. A small bell sat on the counter with a sign that read ‘Ring bell for service’. I stepped up and gave the bell a couple of dings. No answer. I dinged it again and from somewhere in the rear of the building a wavering voice came back, “Please have a seat. I’ll be right with you.”

A few minutes passed and a small neatly dressed man appeared from the back room. Lula wasn't far off from her Pee Wee Herman description although on second look he more resembled Mr. Peepers. Your typical CPA/bookkeeper.

“Good morning ladies,” he said. Then he grimaced, bent forward, grabbed his back and let out a low moan. After a few seconds he tried to stand upright and managed an obvious forced smile. “How may I help you today.”

“Wally Beaker?” I asked and he nodded yes. “My name is Stephanie Plum and my associate and I are bond enforcement agents. It appears that you missed your court date. We're here to help you set a new date and get re-bonded.”

His head drooped, he sighed, and again doubled over, grabbing his back.

“Are you OK?” I asked.

“Not really,” he replied. “I'm having a bit of a medical situation. Nothing life threatening, but really uncomfortable. I'm really sorry about missing my court date. I run a respectable business here and I was just too embarrassed to go. If it gets around that was arrested for indecent exposure, my business will suffer.”

“Well it’s your own damn fault,” Lula barged in. “If you’d keep your business zipped up in your pants, you wouldn’t be in this mess.”

“See,” Wally replied, “already you have prejudged me as some kind of sexual deviant. I’m just a bookkeeper, for Chrissake. I’ve never had so much as a parking ticket. ---I’m –Ugh – Ugh, just going through a personal crisis right now.”

“Wally, let me explain how the system works,” I said. “You’re a CPA. If a client tells you he won’t pay his taxes, will the IRS just forget about it?”

He shook his head.

“Well it’s the same thing. You were arrested and given a court date which you skipped. It’s like missing an IRS audit. Get the picture? You can’t just ignore this. It will only get worse. If you don’t reschedule, the judge will issue a bench warrant for your arrest. How would you like to be sitting here with clients and have the police come and take you away in handcuffs? How would that be for business?”

He started to respond, but as he did his eyes glassed over, he bent double again, emitting a low moan.

“What in the world is wrong with you?” I

asked.

“It’s kind of personal,” he replied. “I’m in the process of passing kidney stones and its really messed up my life.”

“Oh shit,” Lula said. “When I was a ho, I had a pimp who had them stones. He moaned and groaned for days. We had to pump him full of Valium to keep him from screaming. He finally passed them. It was like shooting BBs out his pecker.”

“Isn’t there something we can do to make this go away?” Wally asked. “Let me tell you what happened so you won’t think I’m a pervert. I started getting these severe pains in my back and side and I had to pee almost constantly and sometimes without warning. The doctor sent me for a CT scan that confirmed I had kidney stones. There is nothing to do but tough it out until they pass. I was leaving the doctor’s office which is downtown when my bladder started screaming at me and I knew if I didn’t relieve myself I’d be wetting myself right there on the street, so I ducked down an alley, got behind a big dumpster where no one could see me, pulled my pants down and begin to urinate. Just then a back door from one of the offices on the street opened and a girl came out with a bag of trash

for the dumpster. She saw me there fully exposed, dropped the bag of trash and started screaming.”

“Well I can dig that,” Lula said. “If some Dude was standing by my trash can with his wanger in his hand, I’d scream too.”

“That’s not the worst part,” Wally moaned. “Just when she started screaming, a cop was walking by the entrance to the alley. As he ran up to us, the girl pointed to my private part, still straining to find relief. The cop tackled me, cuffed me, and stood me up. There I was with my hands behind my back and my winkie still hanging out. It was so embarrassing.”

“I think I may have a solution for you,” I said. “You’ve never been arrested and have no previous history of sexual perversion. What we have here is a case of extenuating circumstances--- actually a medical emergency.”

“That’s right,” Lula chimed in. “I’ve heard of pregnant women riding a bus and their water breaks and they go into labor. There they are with their legs all spread out and their doodah all hanging out for everyone to see, but there ain’t no one arresting her cause its, like she said, extenuating circumstances, a medical emergency.”

“Do you think that would work?” Wally

asked.

“I’m sure it would,” I replied. “I would get a letter from your doctor explaining your condition. What happened that day has a logical explanation. I’ll bet the charges will be dropped. But you will have to go to court to explain. I think your clients will understand and forgive kidney stones. But now, we’ll have to take you downtown to reschedule.”

“Shall I cuff him?” Lula asked.

“Doesn’t look that dangerous to me,” I replied. “Let’s give him a break. He’s been through enough embarrassment.”

“Hang on a second,” Wally said. “I have to get a few things and lock up.” He came back a few minutes later with a set of keys in one hand and a strainer in the other.

“What the hell you gonna do with that strainer?” Lula asked.

“Until the stones pass, I have to pee through this strainer. It will catch the stone and the doctor will send it off to be analyzed. Apparently there are several kinds of stones.”

So, Wally locked up, we all piled in the turdmobile and headed for the police station. Wally’s office was just across the river from the downtown area. It wasn’t a long bridge, but it was

narrow. Just wide enough for one lane of cars each direction. We had just reached the bridge when a scream erupted from the backseat.

“ OH GOD, it’s coming, I can feel it!” Wally screamed. “Quick pull over. I’ve got to get out of the car. Oh God, my pecker’s on fire! I’m gonna piss all over myself and the car if you don’t let me out.”

I quickly reviewed my options and decided my poor car had enough problems without the back seat smelling like a urinal, so I flipped on the flashers and pulled to the side of the bridge. Unfortunately there wasn’t enough room for the traffic behind me to pass, so the whole bridge full of cars came to a grinding stop. Wally jumped out of the back seat, strainer in hand and started working on his zipper.

So there we were, a big brown turd stopped in the middle of the bridge, traffic honking up a storm behind us, and Wally on the side of the road with his flinger out, pissing through a strainer.

So much for being inconspicuous.

We heard a blood curdling scream, a pause, and Wally exclaiming, “I got it, I got it. It’s out!”

Wally tucked himself back in and headed for the car proudly carrying his strainer and kidney

stone. The car directly behind us suddenly laid on his horn startling Wally and the strainer fell from his hand and the precious stone rolled under the turdmobile.

“Oh no,” Wally shouted, and he was down on his hands and knees under the car retrieving his errant kidney stone.

Lula was hunkered down and I have to admit, I had hunkered some myself. We looked at each other, rolled our eyes and Lula muttered, “He outta name that damn thing Mick Jagger, cause it sure as hell is a Rolling Stone.”

Alls well that ends well. We got Wally back in the car. I called Connie at the office and had her meet us at the station to bond Wally out. Connie took Lula back to the office and I drove Wally home.

On the way back, I had a very satisfied feeling as I reflected on the day’s events. We had delivered two FTA’s without anyone getting shot or maimed. I had two paychecks in my pocket, and Joyce had gotten slimed with Dorito puke. It doesn’t get much better than this.

Chapter 3

As I was driving toward home, I passed the First Baptist Church and saw numerous workman on the front lawn.

“Oh crap,” I thought. “Tonight is the opening ceremony for the live nativity scene and I’m supposed to be there with my family.”

You have to understand that in the Burg, the opening night of the nativity scene is a big deal. It’s like turning on the plaza lights in Kansas City, or lighting the mayor’s Christmas tree. It is the one singular event that officially launches the Christmas season in the Burg. EVERYONE is expected to attend the ceremony. See and be seen. Merry Christmas.

Some carpenter in years past had constructed a wooden manger consisting of a backdrop, a cradle for the baby Jesus and a small fenced area for the live animals. Life size statues of Mary, Joseph, the Angel, and three shepherds were accompanied by a live sheep and a donkey.

Obviously livestock kept penned up for a month needed care. This was provided by Moses Thacker. He was a farmer from upstate New York.

He had retired and moved to the Burg to be near his family. Missing the farm life, he had volunteered to care for the animals, bringing them food and water and cleaning the stall daily.

Over the years, the Nativity scene had experienced some problems. Vandals of both the two legged and four legged kind couldn't seem to leave it alone. City creatures of the night such as raccoons and large rats were constantly foraging in the animal's food and once a possum was found curled up in the cradle with the Baby Jesus.

Trenton is famous for its population of taggers: that's guys who paint things on the side of buildings and on bridge overpasses. One year the taggers painted the sheep red and green and hung a big Christmas bell from its tail.

Old Moses was up to the task. He cordoned off a huge section of lawn surrounding the Nativity and set the area with snare traps. This area came to be known as the DMZ and anyone or thing who dared to enter was found the next morning in Moses' snares. The critters were carted off by Animal Control and the taggers were carted off to jail.

I headed toward home.

Where is home you ask?

Well, it depends. I'm sort of a nomad. I move around a lot. I rent a small, one bedroom apartment in a no frills building which I share with my hamster Rex. I stay there when I want to be alone. I also have an on again off again boyfriend, Joe Morelli. He has his own house that he inherited from his grandmother and I stay there when I don't want to be alone. I still have a room at my parent's house and I stay there when I'm hungry and have no money for food because Mom's a great cook. On rare occasions, I have stayed in the apartment of Ranger, my mentor. It's built like a fort and has all kinds of security. I mostly only stay there when someone's trying to kill me. Fortunately, my hamster is portable, so he goes wherever I go.

At this moment, I'm with Morelli. He's a Trenton cop. We both have weird demanding jobs that make having a regular life and schedule almost impossible, but we've learned to adapt.

The only thing that's set in stone is Friday night. Joe & I are expected to have dinner at my parent's house. If we don't show, there had better be a life threatening explanation.

So tonight will be a double whammy. It's Friday, so dinner will be at 6:00 sharp and then we'll all make our way to the First Baptist Church

for the Nativity ceremony.

Good times!

I went home, jumped in the shower, threw on some mascara, put a grape in Rex's cage and headed for Mom's house. Morelli was to come there directly from work.

I pulled into the driveway with Mom and Grandma Mazur standing in the doorway. I sometimes wonder if they ever go anywhere else, because they're always there when I arrive.

Mom and Grandma are exact opposites. It's hard to believe they're related. Grandma is a free spirit. She would have made a great flower child. Mom, on the other hand, is wound tighter than a drum. Mom's life is ruled by what's the proper and respected way of doing things and Grandma couldn't give a rat's ass.

Dad is just Dad. Living with these polar opposites has taken its toll over the years and he has retreated into a lifestyle consisting of his meals, his newspaper and the TV. When he just can't take it anymore, he has a part time job driving a cab to get him out of the house. Occupational therapy, I guess.

Morelli came in right behind me. I was five minutes to six and all was well. We took our seats and Mom and Grandma brought in the pot roast,

potatoes, green beans and slaw and we all dug in.

“Well, what’s been going on around here,” I asked, trying to initiate some dinner conversation.

“I baked a coffee cake yesterday,” Mom said. “It was my refreshment day at the Garden Club.”

Dad just grunted and dug into his mashed potatoes.

“I had a great day yesterday,” Grandma chimed in. “Beulah and I went shopping in the afternoon and I bought me one of those thong things. I thought if I could wear one of those, it might make old Ernie down at the Senior Center come to life. I came home and tried it on and the damn thing got stuck in my crack. Most uncomfortable thing I ever wore. So I took it back and traded it in for a push-up bra.”

I shuddered at the mental image of Grandma’s saggy boobs in a push-up bra.

I heard Dad mutter, “Jesus H. Christ.”

Grandma wasn’t done yet. “Then last night we went to Stiva’s for Edna Zarinski’s viewing. It was a real hoot. Edna was a Red Hat lady and all her friends showed up in red hats. They were real pretty. I may have to get me a red hat. Scooter had baked Snickerdoodles cause they were Edna’s

favorite. Those boys really know how to have a wake. Them cookies were good, so Beulah and I snuck a few in our purses.”

Grandma sure knows how to have fun.

Dinner finally came to an end. There were no disasters and everyone left the table still speaking to each other, so for my family, it was a success. We decided to hold dessert till later as the Nativity ceremony started promptly at 7:00. We certainly wouldn't want to be late.

We all piled into the car and headed to the First Baptist Church. We should have started earlier as a huge crowd had already gathered and was pressing against the rope to the DMZ. No one wants to miss this event.

Even the Presbyterians showed up.

Fortunately, we have Grandma Mazur. With her many years of elbowing her way to the open casket to view the body, she has developed a technique for parting a crowd and worming through. She always gets dirty looks, but who's gonna hassle on old lady?

So Grandma did her thing, pulling all of us behind her in single file until we reached the rope barricade.

And there in all its glory was the First

Baptist Church live Nativity Scene. Flood lights shone on the Holy Figures and the livestock. City Fathers were present to pontificate on the significance of the event and the Pastor of the First Baptist Church stood proudly looking on.

Suddenly a collective gasp went up from the onlookers. I craned my neck to see what had diverted everyone's attention and my eyes were immediately drawn to the donkey who was obviously a male.

It was at this most inopportune time that he had apparently become aroused and his schlong was extended so far it almost dragged the ground.

In school there was a boy who the other kids nicknamed 'Donkey Dick'. At the time, in my innocence, I thought it was an insult. Actually, I guess it was more of a compliment.

"Wow ain't that a pip," Grandma exclaimed. I wish old Ernie had one like that. I'd spend a lot more time at the Senior Center if he did. I might even wear that thong even if it does go up my crack."

Mom crossed herself and Dad just shook his head.

As if that weren't enough action for one ceremony, the sheep suddenly hunched back,

bleated, and dropped a load right there in the Manger.

Little girls giggled. Boys hooted. The elders were appropriately shocked.

Happy Holidays! Christmas had officially started in the Burg.

Hope you had a laugh or two.

A smile brightens everyone's day!

Robert Thornhill

