

## The Switch

By Lyman Feero

I wake up behind a desk. Some banal article about some equally inane fact is splashed across the monitor of the latest Intel enhanced box wedged beneath my desk. Coffee rings make java Olympic symbols on the blotter. It's one of those green leather trimmed calendar blotters that all mahogany slabs have. Each day lined up like soldiers. Their blocks crammed with thin green lines so I can write down all the mundane crap that I have to do during the week. By the looks of things, I have my share, as there is more ink than blotter. The funny thing is - I'm really not quite sure this is my desk. I'm assuming it is since I'm sitting behind it.

The desk is mahogany, sultry swirled mahogany, like the eyes of a lovely South Sea islander whose mother slept with one too many Frenchmen. The chair, however, is vinyl; the same stick-to-my-thighs vinyl that covered the chairs of my Mother's small, dingy, eat-in kitchen; the kind of vinyl that groans like flatulence if you move to stand up. Mom's name was Betty, like Betty Crocker. Obviously, I'm mid-management, as the seat is not leather. Nor is it some form of poly-blend stretched over the plastic frames that adorn the offices of the invisible mean-nothings. Flatulent chairs are reserved for the higher paid peons. Leather is only attainable by those who do the pissing.

I look at my watch and see that it's ten o'clock. A woman by a long row of filing cabinets sits there staring blankly at me. Before I know why, I flip her the bird and she smiles back and blows me a kiss. I think I hate her, though I don't know why. I don't know much of anything at this moment. I feel hungry. Then someone throws the switch.

I wake up and again and I'm behind a desk, or is it a table? It doesn't matter because my wrists are cuffed and my ass squeaks on vinyl. I get the strange sensation of home. Some sweating greasy little prick tries to tower over me. His coffee cup leaves hidden marks in the workaday jungle of stains. I think that maybe he is compensating for his stature. He flips open a folder, shoves it at me. A horror show spills out across the table and an auburn haired woman who I didn't even notice makes a retching sound beside me. Her cherry-red lips kiss the back of her hand. I touch the photos. The traitor between my legs twitches and I start to speak about Betty. She grabs my arm and advises me to stop talking. The silk of her blouse bulges right where it should, straining the middle button. I pray for a wardrobe failure. I close my mouth and think of her tits. She says something about a plea. Death penalty off the table. Waiting for that fucking button to pop may as well be waiting for death. The Greasy Prick lobs a yellow legal pad at me with its blue confessional lines, little priests lined up down the page. A pen slides up to greet it. Button slides it towards my hand. Betty Button. I push the pen away and blow her a kiss and give Greasy the finger. I start planning my last meal. Then someone throws the switch.

I'm at a restaurant. I think lunch is a good idea but I have no way of knowing how or why I know it's lunchtime. I check for a clock then look for a watch. I find one on my wrist and it reads 12:10 p.m. - just a dime after lunch. A waitress scurries across the

room, hopping from table to table like a hummingbird, her green t-shirt clinging too tight to her firm, supple body. I order some potato skins and a hamburger. I thank her and call her Hummingbird. She smiles a gapped-tooth grin which reminds me of Madonna and I'm reluctant to smile back, fearing I look like Jay Leno, though I have no reason to believe I do. I don't really remember what I look like.

I grab a spoon off the table and spit shine it while I'm waiting for my potato skins and hamburger. I squint at my reflection and only see a bug-eyed freak in the streaked and scratched stainless steel of ordinary mealdom. I flip it over and try the inside but my reflection is squashed and distorted. But at least I don't have bug eyes. The waitress returns with my meal and I call her Hummingbird again. She seems less enthused this time.

Across from me in a booth is a woman in a tight dress with brilliant red lips and flowing auburn hair. She raises a glass of orange juice. *Freshly squeezed*, the sign on the door says. Somehow I think it's the same watered down orange juice of every diner. She looks directly at me and blows me a kiss. A potato skin hangs from my mouth. I give her the finger, then draw a .38 from my sports coat. Some piece of shit Saturday night special that will most likely explode if I fire, but I do anyway. As my finger squeezes the trigger, I think I'm indifferent. Flip the switch.

I'm sweating like a pig in a beat up Chevy Malibu headed down a highway in what I can only assume is the desert southwest. The heat leaps off the pavement frantically, distorting everything. I feel distorted as well. Where the hell am I going? All I know is that I need to get away from whatever is behind me and I have to get away now!

There's a .45 Smith and Wesson on the seat beside me, bullets spilled out of a half-empty carton of hollow points. A bottle of Smirnoff sloshes on the floor. The dashboard has a gaping hole in it that is vomiting out its cheap foam filling. The bench seat is maroon vinyl, the slick ass-varnished vinyl of a high-mileage car. This one's tallied up well over two hundred thousand. The back window has three holes in it, which I'm assuming are bullet holes and which I'm assuming explains the ragged puking hole in the dash.

A moan comes from the back seat and I almost lose control of the car. It's her, dressed in a white t-shirt loosely tucked into her too-tight jeans. I can see she isn't wearing a bra due to the way the blood from the gaping wound in her chest makes the cloth of the tee stick to her nipples and form to her breasts. For a second, I think: *this must be how a vampire wet t-shirt night must go and she'd win*. I just know it.

With her mouth bloodied and her eyes wild, she looks at me. I think she's dying; I blow her a kiss. She coughs and blows blood across the back of the seat and the side of my face. I think I love her. The switch.

I'm in excruciating pain. Oh, Christ. Nothing has hurt like this in my life. Pit-of-your-stomach sick pain. And it's dark - very dark - ink black dark like a woman's mascara, black like a windowless basement. I can't tell what hurts anymore. It feels like my body is in pieces. I can't move.

Four lights overhead flip on. A woman in army-green nurse's garb leans over me, her auburn hair tucked into her surgical cap. I think there must be red lips beneath the

mask. Searing pain from the shrapnel wounds in my gut, my ass, and my legs due to a Bouncing Betty. I wonder if her name is Betty, but now she's the doctor and the scalpel gleams like the spit-shined silverware in my mother's dining room. Utensils untouched by the stained enamel of relatives and the pot-bellied belching co-workers Pop used to bring home.

She slices into me and her soft crepe shoes make a farting sound on the tile that reminds me of sweaty thighs on vinyl. I gurgle blood out onto my shirt. I must look like a vampire buffet. She gives me the finger, then drives it deep into my gut, digging for the shrapnel buried in my bowels. I gasp for air like a freshly caught mackerel and she thinks I'm blowing her a kiss. She puts a bloodied hand to her mask and mimes a kiss back. My mind wanders, wondering if she's a Bouncing Betty. Maybe a Bobbing Betty. Did I say that out loud? A stabbing pain rockets to my brain. Switch.

I'm on a table. I'm strapped down, unable to move, with some sort of rubber chuck driven into my mouth. It has a hole so I can breath. I feel vinyl beneath my hands and beneath my ass where the hospital gown doesn't quite close. I also notice that the braces that hold my head still are also coated in unnaturally green vinyl. I try to twist free but the vinyl clings to my cheek like a kitchen table chair on a naked ass. I wonder why art deco was ever so popular. It was the art of chrome and strange squared angles, repeating, repeating, repeating, and forcing you to like it.

I'm sweating and I can feel it plastering the material of the hospital gown to my chest. I think it's a shame I don't have breasts, as I'm sure the thin material would show the darkness of my nipples and the doctor would get a hard-on. I hear her crying from the corner. I can see her in my mind's eye. Her lips red and her eyes just as red, crying what I am sure are crocodile tears. Her mascara running down her cheeks like some cheap imitation of Tammy Fay moved by the spirit of Jesus. I once thought I was Jesus. Hallelujah, I was wrong. The doctor, as if speaking through a mouthful of crackers says: "Only one more." and I grasp the vinyl. I hear my fingers squawk across it as my teeth clamp down reflexively. For some reason I think of baked fish. He throws the switch.

The room is too bright. Even under the hood that is supposed to obscure my vision, I can tell the room is way too bright. I hear the deep voice of the warden swearing in the background. Jon Doe Executioner's voice counters back. Something about the juice. Weak juice. I wonder if the sign on the door read *Fresh Squeezed*. The warden cries, "For Christ's sake get it right this time." I hear women crying and a man say this is seven. My hands hurt from the leather straps that hold them down. Something smells burnt, fishy...and I know it's me. So here I am in the death knell. I somehow thought it was grander, like waiting for a button to pop, or maybe a cherry, cherry red. I can smell the remnants of my last meal, fishy fish, the most fragrant of fish, baked mackerel with potatoes and peas. A special tribute to all my bouncing and bobbing Betties. I can feel the leather of the seat and back of the chair. I'm finally important enough for leather.

I think of her with her auburn hair and her lips so cherry red. She swished and swayed in her tight tee-shirt, braless and unashamed. Her ass poured into her too tight jeans. Her thumb was cocked up in the air like some pagan phallic symbol and I stopped

to give her a ride. And that I did. She offered me a blowjob if I took her to Houston. I balked. She offered me vodka. I shot her with the .44 Magnum I had under the seat. She squeak, squeak, squeaked against the seat of my station wagon, occasionally making the vague sound of flatulence as her skin caught on the vinyl. The blood from the single shot to her chest stuck me to her with each thrust. It plastered my tee shirt to her breasts. I held her dead hands above her head and when I was done; one fell to her mouth and bounced away almost like she blew me a kiss. I gave her the finger and pulled out my .44 and shot her again just to be sure. I held her and kissed her forehead and called her Momma even though she said her name was Christa and I new I'd left Momma for dead long ago. I buried her in the desert.

I hear the click before the jolt hits me. I hear the leather squawk as my shoulders strain against the backrest. Funny how I was wrong about flatulent chairs. Even leather sticks to searing flesh, fart, fart, farting as each jolt of electricity flows through me.

I wake up. I'm bound to a kitchen chair. Red vinyl on chrome. Mom's kitchen. It's Wednesday. Market-fresh mackerel cooks in the oven. The scent of orange juice heavy on my lips, its sticky sweetness running down my cheek. She touches me as my naked ass slides and groans back and forth. Sweaty vinyl, farting out my shame. The juice-hidden Stoli is a hot coal in my stomach even though it was ice cold from the freezer. I think of the weight of her tits on my thighs, her lips, her frantic and perverse suck, suck, sucking. I beg her to stop. Mom please don't. She stops then slaps me hard. She won't look me in the eye. She takes a drag off her cigarette and a haul off the bottle. Her breasts loll in her threadbare blouse, nipples like dark half-dollars peeking out. She grins and blows me a kiss. She reminds me sweetly to call her Betty and that she loves me. I'd give her the finger if my hands weren't bound. Then her auburn hair bobs away again. Vodka-driven pressure builds then bursts, shooting. Shooting. Shooting into Betty, betrayed by my own gun. I love her even though I hate her. I close my eyes and succumb to the darkness, dark, like Betty's mascara. Whore black like my soul. Maybe someday I'll find a way to shut off the pain. Flip it off, you know, like a switch.

*Lyman Feero graduated in 2006 from the University of Southern Maine Stonecoast MFA program in creative writing. That and a dollar buys him a beer on buck night. He is also a published author with works in several genres including crime, horror and science fiction. Most recently he participated in the Blog Project #3 and L.A. Noir's Mugshot Challenge. He is currently working on a science fiction novel for lack of anything else better to do. He can be found at <http://spaceraven.blogspot.com>.*