

## Another Place, Another Time

By Tim Murr

We hurtle toward brick walls, like they were our life long goals. A sick child, warrants, devils sniffing my trail, a car that's about to fuck off and die, and a sawed off .410 in the trunk. We've Super-Glued our marriage together so many times that the wrinkles are beginning to look like pus-filled canyons. I've been sober eighteen months, but my hands still shake when the kid whines for ice cream or to go to the bathroom, and my woman lights my last cigarette. It makes me miss the simpler times, before doctor visits and parole meetings. The boys at the tavern'd buy me drinks. I had a different pussy every night. I at least got to *feel* like a hero. Even after that fucking Martinez finished me, my boys never thought less of me. Even Don never stopped calling me Champ. Gave me work, paid me damn good, too. Good ol' Don. I would've been a hell of a lot better off if I never got hung up on this chick.

My dad always said women were nothing but ruination for men, but he was nothing but a junkie fuck up. I've always been ten times the man he ever was. But I guess he couldn't be wrong about everything, could he? Besides, Courtney wasn't like any other chick I'd ever seen before. I mean, every cock in the room was throbbing for that action. Around Abel's Lounge, we'd never seen anything like her.

Mark had found her and brought her to Don. Out of gratitude, Don gave her to me (after he'd finished with her, of course). There I was, sitting at the bar, shooting my mouth off to the boys and the girls like usual. In blows Don, with Court - who we'd all been pining over for months - and he says, "Here he is! Champ, this is Courtney."

I said hello, she said hello, and damned if she didn't get on her knees and suck me off right there in Abel's Lounge in front of everyone. I never even had to kill anyone. I never expected to wind up with her permanent. I never counted on that deranged little monkey in the backseat either. I swear he couldn't be any kid of mine.

A roadside diner. I park around the rear and hustle the family in - with a nickel-plated semiautomatic weighing down my jeans...just in case. The kid doesn't want to eat here. He wants McDonald's.

"There ain't a McDonalds open at three o'clock in the fuckin' mornin'."

"Uh huh..."

"God dammit."

"Just ignore him. Honey, you can get a hamburger here."

"I want chicken nuggets."

"Of course you do."

"Leave him alone, he's just tired."

Nothing you wouldn't see in any other diner from Charleston to San Pedro at this hour. Lone people who don't look at anyone coming through the door, not directly anyway. They keep to themselves, don't make any trouble, don't draw attention, drink their coffee, and get the fuck out. Disappear into the night like ghosts. I would be one of them, but I draw attention. It'd be hard not notice a guy rolling out of nowhere with a family in tow. Everyone in the damned place can smell something wrong. And the joint clears out pretty damn quick. I got bad vibes like an earthquake.

The waitress brings us coffee, milk for the kid. He turns his nose up at it because it's not Mello Yello, but he drinks it...or I'll break his fucking arm. We eat in silence. Courtney glares at me over her burger, a dab of ketchup on the side of her mouth. Her green eyes speak volumes, but her mouth doesn't know where to begin, so I help her.

"The answer to the question you've been avoiding, is no. I don't give a fuck about anything anymore."

"Not in front of him."

"Why not?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't talk with your mouth full. We'll talk about this after he's asleep."

"Why? You mother him too much."

"I'm his mother. It's what I do."

"I don't like this?"

"Just shut up and eat."

"Don't talk to him like that."

"I've had it with the both of you. You had your chance to get out, but oh no, you were comin' with me, hell or high water. Now you're gonna complain every wakin' fuckin' minute. You knew we'd be on the road a helluva lot. Now--"

Fucking waitress looking at me funny. Talking to the cook, looking straight at me. He goes to the back.

"Hurry up and finish eatin'. Fuck it, just bring it with you."

"What is it?"

"Fuckin' hick assholes can't mind their own fuckin' business."

Courtney goes pale, almost chokes. Her eyes're big as saucers, looking right past me. I look over my shoulder. A cop is pulling into the parking lot. How the hell could he have gotten here so fast?

"Be cool."

Redneck cop. Must be somebody's nephew or brother. He looks dumb as a brick. Fat, out of shape. I could break him without a sweat. He speaks loudly with the waitress. The cook comes back out with a bag of frozen french fries, all smiles and hellos, how ya doin's. She serves him coffee, asking about his wife. What kinda fat pig would've married this joker? I watch them in the reflection in the window. Courtney tries to eat quickly, without looking like she's eating quickly. She succeeds in looking extremely suspicious. Chuck has that look in his eye that says 'I'm trying to figure out what would piss dad off the most right now.' I tell him, under my breath, not to start.

"I didn't do nothin'!"

That shrill little voice...

A chill goes up my spine, and my head begins to throb. I stare ice picks through the little fucker, until that fat bastard is standing by our table. His gut sticks out over my damn plate.

"How you folks doin' tonight?"

"Just fine! We're on vacation!"

I could punch Courtney right in the fucking mouth.

"Where ya'll headed?"

"Atlanta. Six Flags."

"Oh, that's great. Young'un must be excited."

“Oh yeah, yeah.”

He still has that look in his eye.

“So, where ya comin’ from?”

“Maine.”

“Wooo! That’s a drive. Ain’t there a Six Flags up there?”

“Well, yeah...”

“We thought it’d be educational for our son, to show him more of the country.”

“Yeah, it’s good for kids to get to see different places. Well, ya’ll have a safe trip.”

“Thanks.”

He goes back to the counter. I doubt he believes a word of it. Even a bad cop could smell that lie. Courtney blew it. But at least Chuck kept his damn mouth shut.

The waitress drops the check on the table. I wait for her to walk away before I pull the roll of cash out of my pocket, keeping it to my side, so she nor the cop can see it. I peel off two twenties.

I stand at the counter waiting for my change while the fucking cop eyeballs me.

“Headin’ out?”

“Yeah.”

“Stayin’ round here?”

“No. Movin’ on.”

“Nice motel down the road.”

“We’ll be movin’ on.”

“Well, be careful. Fallin’ asleep at the wheel causes a lot of accidents. Don’t know how many wrecks I worked, all because somebody was tryin’ to make good time or just didn’t get enough sleep...”

He trails off and sips his coffee, looking off into space, like he was remembering each wreck he worked involving people who fell asleep at the wheel.

“I’m alright. My wife and I drive in shifts.”

“Oh, well, that’s good. Good. Say, where ya’ll parked at anyway?”

“Outside.”

He grins.

“I mean where at outside. I didn’t see a car when I pulled in. Don’t see one now.”

“It’s around back.”

“Why’d ya park back there? That can be dangerous, this time of night, this close to the interstate.”

“Guess I wasn’t thinking.”

I realized that bitch has been hesitating giving my change because she was listening in on our little chat. She looks up into my glare and quickly hands over my change with a crooked nervous smile. I give her back three dollars.

“Ya’ll have a safe trip. Come back.”

“Thanks.”

“Why don’t I walk out there with ya’ll, just to be safe.”

“It’s really not necessary.”

“T’ain’t no trouble a’tall. Jimmy’s gonna take all night with my dinner anyway.”

Jimmy turns around with a big yellow toothy grin. The cop holds the door open, tips his hat to Court, tussles Chuck's hair.

He's going to see the license plate and call it in. It's not going to match the car. If he looks at the registration, he'll track the car back to a dead man in Philadelphia.

None of this happens though, because as we turn the corner, I spin and hit him with a right cross that flattens his nose. As he goes down, I jam my left into his gut. He pisses himself. Once he's down, I split his skull with my boot.

Courtney already has Chuck in the car, trying to shut him up.

Without a choice, I go back into the diner. Jimmy and the waitress will eventually be found in the freezer. Shot through the head execution style. I empty the register, turn off the lights, and turn on the closed sign.

I park the patrol car around back and put Fat Ass inside. I put a bullet through his head, just in case.

Worst thing that ever happened around here, I imagine.

*Tim Murr is a thirty one year old truck driver and artist. He has a wife and son. His first novel, Conspiracy of Birds, will be out this fall from St. Rooster Press. He's written for two websites and published nine short books of vignettes, essays, rants and poetry.*