

Police to the Rescue

Paul Sheldon sat in his room, working the typewriter, looking out the window as Annie cut the grass on her big ride-on lawnmower. He watched her in wonder. Annie had done it! Paul was now cut down to size. *Be good, Pauly. Be good.* He sat footless in this bedroom, an old man now – typing away obediently at Annie’s ridiculous *Misery* story. And each time some idea of manly rebellion rose up in him, a little voice interrupted his impulse with a *Behave now – don’t make Annie mad. She’ll chop off more of you. Do as Annie says.*

And so he typed away obediently as he watched Annie’s work.

And there on that big and awkward lawn was the freshly dug grave for Annie’s cow – Bossie – who had died in agony as Annie went away during one of her depressions. Annie held a wooden cross in her lap as she drove her tractor-like lawnmower back and forth across that oversized lawn of hers. Having buried the cow (right there on the lawn!), she was going to offer a memorial service for the animal – complete with that big pointy ended cross – just as soon as she finished cutting the grass. Her big lawnmower had the big letters – *Lawnboy* – painted across the length of the machine. Lawnboy indeed.

And then it happened. Looking out his window, Paul saw the sight he never expected to see. Finally, the world had taken notice. A police car had arrived at Annie’s farm! He could hardly believe it. The world was moving in on this pagan idol of death – this Annie Wilkes. *Call out Paul!* But Paul was afraid to call out. It would make the Annie mad. She would cut him up – like some avenging goddess. He must stay quiet.

‘I won’t scream!’ I won’t. I won’t scream.’

He sat at the window, totally awake now, totally aware that the police car he was seeing in Annie’s driveway was as real as his left foot had once been. *Scream! Goddammit, scream!*

He tried to open his mouth and couldn’t.

Tried to raise his hands. Couldn’t.

There, within plain sight, was salvation: all he had to do was break the window and the doglock the bitch had put on his tongue and scream “Help me, help me, save me from Annie! Save me from the goddess!”

At the same time another voice was screaming: “I’ll be good, Annie! I won’t scream! I’ll be good, I’ll be good for goddess’ sake! I promise not to scream, just don’t chop off any more of me!” Had he known, before this had he really known how badly she had cowed him, or how much of his essential self — the liver and lights of his spirit — she had scraped away? He knew how constantly he had been terrorized, but did he know how much of his own subjective reality, once so strong he had taken it for granted, had been erased?

Don’t scream! the panicky voice screamed just the same — as the cop opened the door of his cruiser and stepped out, adjusting his Smokey Bear hat as he did so. He was young, no more than twenty-two or-three, wearing sunglasses as black and liquid-looking as dollops of crude oil. He paused to adjust the creases of his khaki uniform pants and thirty yards away a man with blue eyes bulging from his white and whiskery old-man’s face sat staring at him from behind a window, moaning through closed lips, hands rattling, uselessly on a board laid across the arms of a wheelchair.

Paul oh Christ are you dead already? Scream, you chicken-shit motherfucker!

SCREAM YOUR FUCKING HEAD OFF!!!

His lips pulled apart with a minute tearing sound. He hitched air into his lungs and closed his eyes ' He had no idea what was going to come out or if anything really was . . . until it came.

'AFRICA!' Paul screamed. Now his trembling hands flew up like startled birds and clapped against the sides of his head, as if to hold in his exploding brains. 'Africa! Help me! Help me! Africa!'

His eyes snapped open. The cop was looking towards the house. Paul could not see the Smokey’s eyes because of the sunglasses, but the tilt of his head expressed moderate puzzlement. He took a step closer, then stopped.

Paul looked down at the board. To the left of the typewriter was a heavy ceramic ashtray. Once upon a time it would have been filled with crushed cigarette butts; now it held nothing more hazardous to his health than paper-clips and a typewriter eraser. He seized it and threw it at the window. Glass shattered outward. To Paul, it was the most liberating sound he had ever heard. *The walls came tumbling down*, he thought giddily, and screamed: 'Over here! Help me! Watch out for the woman! She's crazy!'

The state cop stared at him. His mouth dropped open.

'Oh, shit!' the cop exclaimed. 'It's you!'

Paul's attention had been so fiercely focused on the trooper that he did not see Annie until it was too late. When he did see her, he was struck by a real superstitious horror. Annie had become a goddess, a thing that was half woman and half Lawn-boy, a weird female centaur. Her baseball cap had fallen off. Her face was twisted in a frozen snarl. In one hand she held a wooden cross. It had marked the grave of the dead cow named Bossie — Paul didn't remember if it was No. 1 or No. 2 which had finally stopped bawling.

Paul had watched her plant the cross and then read the Bible over the cow's grave by the light of a new-risen spring moon.

Now she was holding the cross like a spear, the dirt darkened point of its vertical post pointed squarely at the trooper's back.

'Behind you! Look out!' Paul shrieked, knowing he was too late but shouting anyway.

With a thin warbling cry, Annie plunged Bossie's cross, into the trooper's back.

'UHG!' the cop said, and walked slowly onto the lawn, his pierced back arched and his gut sticking out. His face was the face of a man either trying to pass a kidney stone or having a terrible gas attack. The cross began to droop toward the ground as the trooper approached the window in which Paul sat, his gray invalid's face framed by jags of broken glass. The cop reached slowly over his shoulders with both hands. He looked to Paul like a man trying very hard to scratch that one itch you can never quite reach.

Annie had dismounted the Lawnmower and had been standing frozen, her tented fingers pressed against the peaks of her breasts. Now she lunged forward and snatched the cross out of the trooper's back.

He turned toward her, groping for his service pistol, and Annie drove the cross point-first into his belly.

'OOHG!' the cop said this time, and dropped to his knees, clutching his stomach. As he bent over Paul could see the slit in his brown uniform shirt where the first blow had gone home.

Annie pulled the cross free again — its sharpened point had broken off, leaving a jagged, splintery stump — and drove it into his back between the shoulder blades. She looked like a woman trying to kill a vampire. The first two blows had perhaps not gone deep enough to do much damage, but this time the cross's support post went at least three inches into the kneeling trooper's back, driving him flat.

'THERE!' Annie cried, wrenching Bossie's memorial marker out of his back. 'HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT, YOU OLD DIRTY BIRD?'

'Annie, stop it!' Paul shouted.

Annie looked up at him, her dark eyes momentarily as shiny as coins, her hair fungus-frowzy around her face, the corners of her mouth drawn up in the jolly grin of a lunatic who has, at least for the moment, cast aside all restraints. Then she looked back down at the state trooper. 'THERE!' she cried, and drove the cross into his back again. And his buttocks. And the upper thigh of one leg. And his neck. And his crotch. She stabbed him with it half a dozen times, screaming 'THERE!' every time she brought it down again. Then the cross's upright split.

'There,' she said, almost conversationally, and walked away in the direction from which she had come running. Just before she passed from Paul's view she tossed the bloody cross aside as if it no longer interested her.

Paul put his hands on the wheels of the chair, not at all sure where he intended to go or what, if anything, he meant to do when he got there — to the kitchen for a knife, perhaps? Not to try to kill her with, oh no; she would take one look at the knife in his hand and step back into the shed for her .30-30 rifle. Not to kill her, but to defend himself from her revenge by cutting

his wrists open. He didn't know if that had been his intention or not, but it surely did seem like a hell of a good idea, because if there had ever been a time to exit on stage left, this was it. He was tired of losing pieces of himself to her fury.

Then he saw something which froze him in place. The cop. The cop was still alive! He raised his head. His sunglasses had fallen off. Now Paul could see his eyes. Now he could see how young the cop was, how young and hurt and scared. Blood ran down his face in streams. He managed to get to his hands and knees, fell forward, and then got painfully back up again. He began to crawl toward his cruiser.

He worked his way halfway down the mild slope of grass between the house and the driveway, then overbalanced and fell on his back. For a moment he lay there with his legs drawn up, looking as helpless as a turtle in its shell. Then he slowly rolled over on his side and began the terrible job of getting to his knees again. His uniform shirt and pants were darkening with blood — small patches were slowly spreading, meeting other patches, growing bigger still.

The Smokey reached the driveway.

Suddenly the noise of the riding lawnmower was louder.

'Look out!' Paul screamed. 'Look out, she's coming!'

The cop turned his head. Groggy alarm surfaced on his face, and he grappled for his gun once more. He got it out — something big and black with a long barrel and brown woodgrips — and then Annie reappeared, sitting tall in the saddle and driving the Lawnboy as fast as it would go.

'SHOOT HER!' Paul screamed, and instead of shooting Annie Wilkes with his big old *Dirty Harry* gun, he first fumbled, then dropped it.

He stretched out his hand for it. Annie swerved and ran over both his reaching hand and his forearm. Blood squirted from the Lawnboy's grass-exhaust in an amazing jet. The kid in the trooper uniform screamed. There was a sharp clang as the mower's whirling blade struck the pistol. Then Annie was swerving up the side lawn, using it to turn; and her gaze fell on Paul for one second and Paul felt sure he knew what that momentary gaze meant. First the Smokey, then him.

The kid was lying on his side again. When he saw the mower bearing down on him he rolled over on his back and dug frantically at the driveway dirt with his heels, trying to push himself under the cruiser where she couldn't get him. He didn't even come close. Annie throttled the riding lawnmower up to a scream and drove it over his head.

Paul caught a last glimpse of horrified brown eyes, saw tatters of brown khaki uniform shirt hanging from an arm raised in a feeble effort at protection, and when the eyes were gone, Paul turned away.

The Lawnboy's engine suddenly lugged down and there was a series of fast, strangely liquid thudding sounds. Paul vomited beside the chair with his eyes closed.

He only opened them when he heard the rattle of her key in the kitchen door. His own door was open. He watched her approach down the hall in her old brown cowboy boots and her bluejeans with the key ring dangling from one of the belt-loops and her man's tee-shirt now spotted with blood. He cringed away from her. He wanted to say: If you cut anything else off me, Annie, I'm going to die. It won't take the shock of another amputation, either. I'll die on purpose. But no words came out — only terrified chuffing noises that disgusted him.

She gave him no time to speak anyway.

'I'll deal with you later,' she said, and pulled his door closed. One of her keys rattled in the lock — a new Kreig lock that would have defeated even Tom Twyford himself, Paul thought — and then she was striding down the hall again, the thud of her boot-heels mercifully diminishing.

He turned his head and looked dully out the window. He could see only part of the trooper's body. His head was still under the mower, which was in turn canted at a drunken angle against the cruiser. The riding mower was a small tractor-like vehicle meant for keeping larger-than-average lawns neat and clipped. It had not been designed to keep its balance as it passed over jutting rocks, fallen logs, or the heads of state troopers. If the cruiser hadn't been parked exactly where it was, and if the trooper hadn't gotten exactly as close to it as he had before Annie struck him, the mower would almost surely have tipped over, spilling her off. This might have caused her no harm at all, but it might have hurt her quite badly.

She has the luck of the devil himself, Paul thought drearily, and watched as she put the mower in neutral and then pushed it off the trooper with one hard shove. The side of the mower squalled along the side of the cruiser and took off some paint.

Now that he was dead, Paul could look at him. The cop looked like a big doll that has been badly treated by a gang of nasty children. Paul felt a terrible aching sympathy for this unnamed young man, but there was another emotion mixed with that. He examined it, and was not much surprised to find it was envy. The trooper would never go home to his wife and kids, if he had had them, but on the other hand, he had escaped Annie Wilkes.

She grabbed a bloody hand and dragged him up the driveway and through the barn doors, which stood ajar on their tracks. When she came out, she pushed them along their tracks as far as they would go. Then she walked back down to the cruiser. She was moving with a calm that was almost serenity. She started the cruiser and drove it into the barn. When she came out again, she closed the doors almost completely, leaving a gap just wide enough for her to slip in and out. She walked halfway down the driveway and looked around, hands on her hips. Again, Paul saw that remarkable expression of serenity.

The bottom of the mower was smeared with blood, particularly around the grass-exhaust, which was still dripping. Little scraps of khaki uniform lay in the driveway or fluttered in the freshly cut grass of the side lawn. There were daubs and splashes of blood everywhere. The trooper's gun, with a long slash of bright metal now scarring its barrel, lay in the dust.

She picked up the shreds of uniform and then the cross. She broke it into two pieces, and dropped it into the plastic bag. Incredibly, she genuflected after doing this. She picked up the gun, rolled the cylinder, dumped the slugs, put them in one hip pocket, snapped the cylinder back in with a practiced flick of her wrist, and then stuck the gun in the waistband of her jeans. She plucked the piece of paper off the saguaro and looked at it thoughtfully. She stuck it into the other hip pocket. She went to the barn, tossed the garbage bags inside the doors, then came back to the house. She walked up the side lawn to the cellar bulkhead which was almost directly below Paul's window. Something else caught her eye. It was his ashtray. She picked it up and handed it politely to him through the broken window.

'Here, Paul.'

Numbly, he took it.

'I'll get the paper-clips later,' she said, as if this was a question which must already have occurred to him. For one moment, he thought of bringing the heavy ceramic ashtray down on her head as she bent over, cleaving her skull with it, letting out the disease that passed for her brains. Then he thought of what would happen to him — what could happen to him — if he only hurt her, and put the ashtray where it had been with his shaking, thumbless hand.

She looked up at him. 'I didn't kill him, you know.'

'Annie — '

'*You* killed him. If you had kept your mouth shut, I would have sent him on his way. He'd be alive now and there would be none of this oogy mess to clean up.'

'You bitch,' he said.

'Crazy bitch, isn't that right?' she asked, still smiling.

'Oh yeah — you're crazy,' he said.

'Well, we'll have to talk about that, won't we? When I have more time. We'll have to talk about that a lot. But right now I'm very busy, as I think you can see.'

She unreeled the hose and turned it on. She spent nearly half an hour hosing blood off the mower and driveway and the side lawn, while interlinked rainbows glimmered in the spray.

He heard her come up again and he rolled back to the window. As her boot-heels approached his door, as the key slid into the lock again, he thought: She's come to kill me. And the only emotion this thought engendered was tired relief.

The door opened and Annie stood there, looking at him contemplatively. She had changed into a fresh white tee-shirt and a pair of chinos. A small khaki bag, too big to be a purse and not quite big enough to be a knapsack, was slung over one shoulder.

As she came in, he was surprised to find himself able to say it, and say it with a certain amount of dignity: 'Go ahead and kill me, Annie, if that's what you mean to do, but at least have the decency to make it quick. Don't cut anything more off me.'

She pushed him into the pantry, where the door to the basement stood open. Yellow light staggered up the stairs and fell dead on the pantry floor. The smell of the late-winter rainstorm which had flooded it still lingered.

Spiders down there, he thought. Mice down there. Rats down there.

'Uh-uh,' he told her. 'Count me out.'

She looked at him with a level sort of impatience, and he realized that since killing the cop, she had seemed almost sane. Her face was the purposeful if slightly harried face of a woman making ready for a big dinner party.

'You're going down there,' she said. 'The only question is whether you're going down piggyback or bum over teakettle. I'll give you five seconds to decide.'

'Piggy-back,' he said at once.

'Very wise.'

She carried him down and into a thickening smell of old stone and wood and flood and rotting vegetables. There were three naked light-bulbs. Old spiderwebs hung in rotting hammocks between bare beams. The walls were rock, carelessly chinked — they looked like a child's drawing of rock walls. It was cool, but not a pleasant cool.

'We have to talk,' she said. 'Or, rather, I have to talk and you have to listen.'

'Annie, when I said you were crazy — '

'Hush! Not a word about that. Maybe we'll talk about that later. Not that I would ever try to change your mind about anything you chose to think — a Mister Smart Guy like you who thinks for a living. All I ever did was pull you out of your wrecked car before you could freeze to death and splint your broken legs and give you medicine to ease your pain and take care of

you and talk you out of a bad book you'd written and into the best one you ever wrote. And if that's crazy, take me to the loonybin.'

Oh, Annie, if only someone would, he thought, and before he could stop himself he had snapped:

'You also cut off my fucking foot!'

Her hand flickered out whip-quick and rocked his head over to one side with a thin spatting sound. 'Don't you use that effword around me,' Annie said. 'I was raised better even if you weren't. You're lucky I didn't cut off your man-gland. I thought of it, you know.'

He looked at her. His stomach felt like the inside of an ice-maker. 'I know you did, Annie,' he said softly. Her eyes widened and for just a moment she looked both startled and guilty — Naughty Annie instead of Nasty Annie.

'Listen to me. Listen closely, Paul. We're going to be all right if it gets dark before anyone comes to check on that fellow. It'll be full dark in an hour and a half. If someone comes sooner — ' She reached into the khaki bag again and brought out the trooper's .44. The cellar lights shone on the zigzagging lightning-bolt the Lawnboy's blade had chopped into the gun's barrel. 'If someone comes sooner there's this,' she said. 'For whoever comes, and then you, and then me. We'll die together Paul.'

How romantic, thought Paul, *We'll die together — unless I can kill her.*