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## Named

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**Named**

D. M. WILKINS

It was around one in the afternoon when I got my first and only confession of the day. I heard the curtain draw back. Then the person entered the booth. When I heard two steps in a woman's heeled shoes, followed by the crinkling of a frilled dress against the wooden bench and the resting of a purse against the floor, I knew it was her. She had come in twice before in the exact same way. Only, previously, she never had said a word. She just had sat there for a few minutes, both times, before getting up to leave. Today was different. Immediately, she began a confession.

"I ain't a religious person, Father. This is only the second time I've ever been here. In fact, I really don't know why I've come today. It's just that it's my baby's first birthday. And as I was idling around at the foot of

**"DOESN'T EVERY GIRL  
DESERVE TO FEEL SPECIAL?"  
SHE PLEADED.**

the steps in front of the building, something told me I should come inside. I went to the altar, and I don't know if what I did counts as a prayer, but I gave it my best shot anyway, for my baby. Still, it didn't feel like the thing was quite complete. So, seemed all that was left was for me to sit down here."

She said the whole thing had started because she had wanted to feel, "just once" in her life, "so very special. Doesn't every girl deserve to feel special?" She pleaded. Then, I tried to count the number of times she said the word special, but I couldn't keep up.

She found idol worship deplorable. "A princess is born with a crown on her head into a society with mansions, and inherits a whole country to bow down to her and answer to her every beck and call. And the female celebrity is put on the pedestal of some kind of goddess, with all kinds of men wanting to kiss her feet or the ground she walks on. It's all so useless." She disparaged. She expressed a queer disdain for silver. "It may not seem to make much sense, Father, but I hate silver. Silver this, silver that." She said, and went on.

"A precious, little daddy's girl receives the wonders of the world on a silver platter, and eats as much as she wants with a silver spoon in her mouth. And her life is so grand carried on beneath clouds with silver linings. Not to mention, she wastes silver by the

buckets full." She continued, loathing, "But the main reason I don't like silver, plain and simple, is 'cause silver don't like me.

**S**ome women have known special their whole lives long." And as these women know special, she said she simply had wanted to know for herself that kind of special she only had read of in "storybooks telling about handsome, well-to-do knights, riding in on white horses to rescue damsels in distress. You know, the kind of thing every girl dreams about."

He made her feel the kind of special she never had known. Her lover. She said he had been around for eight months, far longer than the rest. He told her all the time that she was pretty. He pampered her unendingly: paying to get her hair and nails done; feeding her romantic candlelit dinners he had prepared; and treating her to indulgent massages after they had shared long, steamy baths together. No man ever had done any of those things. He bought her all kinds of fancy dresses. She relished the attention she got whenever she donned the dresses during their nights out on the town.

"He moved all his stuff in. He wanted to make a home with me. Plus that, I like his kind of affection. Kinda controlling, you know. And his possessive, dominating, physical love. That hearty rock of his, taxing my body. Just so strong. Penetrating the physical and runnin' right through to my spiritual. Maybe you know what I mean, Father. Maybe you don't. And well, I know it ain't godlike, cause we never got married. But a woman's got needs, and I ain't no saint. Ain't trying to be, neither.

**B**ut I guess I don't need to keep going on about it, except to say that the things he did made me feel like I belonged to somebody. Call me crazy but it feels nice, even to be owned, if it's by someone who really wants

you. He said he would take me to Hawaii some day. I never seen the likes of anywhere besides this Podunk town, except on TV. He paid for that too. I'll never forget the day he made me well up with tears so that I nearly burst. When he called me his Special Gal. That's what it was. That's the very thing that done me in for good, and he didn't even know it. You see, Father, special is like a kind of blanket for me. How can I say it so you'll understand?" She stopped to think for a moment. Then started again. "It's the blanket that covers all my poor and ugly imperfect. He did special to me. And it shot the moon.

Everything was fine, until one day when he took note of my belly. I had kept it hidden from everyone for a good long while, even him. Nobody was wise to it but me. I figured it was best just to keep quiet about it. I mean, yeah, he noticed it. He thought I was just puttin' on a little weight, and I was seven months in before he figured it out. When he did, he barely said anything to me, just that he didn't want no children. Even though we had laid and made one together, he said he hadn't any use for a child.

From that day on, the pain of what he said grew in me like the terriblest thing you couldn't imagine. I already had started to feel an affinity for my unborn child. It felt like the best part of me. But it burned in my head like liquid metal, the thought of that man someday leaving me. And I knew that he would without him ever having to say it. He had left other women for far lesser things. It really was from then on that things started to be different; although, I guess I just hadn't wanted to see it. Looking back, I ignored the signs. We fought a lot. He stopped buying me stuff. Started coming in later and later all the time at nights, and leaving earlier in the mornings. And when the phone rings at three in the morning, you can bet it ain't somebody calling about the

weather. But I wasn't going to accept any of it. I kept right on anyway. For the three months after Baby was born, I tried all I knew to make everything work out alright for the three of us. But in my heart, I knew it wasn't to be.

So, one day as I prepared Baby in the carriage, I tried hard to think of my options. As it was, nobody but me and my lover had known about the birth of my baby. Not even my mother. I guess I hadn't told anybody because in the back of mind I still didn't know what I aimed to do about things. So, even though there were the homes of relatives, I had to figure they would ask too many questions. There was the hospital, but hospitals have too much traffic to and fro, and cameras watching everywhere. Then, I thought of this here church. This building has been so good to me. But this didn't seem like the right place either. Then I remembered a small detail. It came to me how Baby loved the blankets. He loved the fuzzy, soft blankets, those ones hanging near the back corner of that expensive, department store. It was one of the only times me and Baby would leave the apartment, to go to that big department store to cash my government checks. Baby loved to be out and about. He would kick and laugh and make baby talk to people walking by. He liked that department store. Strolling through the aisles of that massive place was like a walk in wonderland for him. But it was funny how he always seemed most content in one little corner of that big ol' store. The other mothers and their babies hardly ever came back there. There weren't so many name-brand things over there and displays all fixed up with mannequins, you know. In fact, the most beautiful thing in that corner was the big, pretty, multicolored blankets that hung like a waterfall against the wall. I would wave them around, and Baby would go

### Calibration

EVAN HINTON

Eight bits  
like the eyes of a spider  
cannot weigh  
your smile  
transcending every  
dimension  
impossible to decipher

### Façade

HALEY WALLACE

Honeyed words soak your lips;  
a sign of trouble, of eminence,  
ensues and drift to my ears  
and there it plants and doubles my fears.

Your eyes, black diamonds, stare through my breast,  
invade my heart, and multiply my distress.  
Though your smile is sweet my tears are sweeter,  
innocent as the doe and rejoice us neither.

You have no tears, only cold honey—  
thick and sticky and unsettling.

crazy in his carriage. That day before leaving my apartment, I thought long and hard then decided I had the right notion.

As I approached the corner of the department store, I could see the pretty blankets were just as they always had been. Only, this time they were draped around a 700-dollar, solid-oak crib, that had been clearance marked to 475. This was the most out-of-place thing I ever had seen in that little corner. But, it was so much the better. I told myself Baby could sleep in style.

I took Baby from the carriage. I squeezed him so tight that I believe some of his very soul must've rushed right out into mine. In fact, I knew it was true because I had not felt him so strong within me before then. And I've felt him in me, just like that, ever since. For most of that day Baby had been cranky and fussy, but when I laid him down on that lavish bed and wrapped him in those soft, fuzzy blankets he began to ease. There was a hush that fell over him. Still, I waited a short while. By and by, Baby didn't make a sound. He just looked up at me, stretched a big Baby stretch, smiled then fell into a peaceful sleep. I reached down to give him a kiss, but I couldn't. I knew to leave well enough alone. Then, that was it. It was over. And it was time for me to leave the big department store again.

**O**n the bus ride home I thought hard about a lot of stuff. Aren't we all, everyday, just looking for our own, individual kind of special? Once she finds it, doesn't a body do whatever's necessary to keep it? What is the taste of silver? I mean, what does it taste like? What is it like to breathe the air that swirls about in big ole mansions? How is it to go about everywhere with a crown perched on top of your head? I can say I know for a fact that lips tickle when they kiss the underside of your foot?" She snickered strangely.

Finally, she broke. She broke down, crying inconsolably. In a wild rash of insufferable emotion she began to rant, praying futility that it was still

warm inside Baby's blankets. In that corner of the store where Baby was no more. She wailed out loud and horrifically. Her cry was shrill and unabated. At a point I was not sure I could stand beneath the gravity of her confessing, how not a solitary day goes by that she doesn't think of him, and of the eternal nightmares about a floating black speck representing the hole in her soul. I believe that was the place in her from which the howling arose. That terrible howling. Until, eventually she stopped talking, and there was nothing more. Just the bellowing. The sound that seemed finally to break out after having been buried forever beneath a thousand tons. At first I tried to placate her with words. It was no use. So, I left her alone. And she would go on like this for a tiny eternity.

**T**hen, it seemed out of nowhere when, by and by, she did gather the pieces of herself and went right back to telling her story. Only, when she had started back, there was the sense about her spirit of something renewed, as though a critical weight had been lifted. With care, she mentioned how she has visited hers and Baby's corner of the department store many times since that fateful day. And that she can feel somehow that Baby is well looked after. I kept expecting she would conclude her confession with incessant ramblings about the man she loved and the countless wonders of their revived relationship. She did not. In fact, she didn't speak another word about her lover, except to say that he never again did ask about his Baby. It felt awkward not knowing their resulting status; but then, I figured somehow that I already had known.

Then she was silent. She began again, saying, "You know, Father, I learned something about special. Sometimes it just ain't what you thought it would be. And, more often than not, that storybook with the fairytale prince in it ain't worth the paper it's written on. But, that's just how I see it." She paused again.

Then, I heard what sounded like two hollow pieces of metal clinking together, then the sound of her purse resting against the floor again. The metal clinked softly, on and off while she continued.

"I had tried to figure out exactly what I came here for. I wasn't sure about my reasons. I just knew I needed to come. Now I think I know." She revealed.

"Have you not come here for absolution?" I searched.

"No. I mean, well, I thought I had. But I already felt that burden fly from me a moment ago. I may not know where my baby is, but I do know his name and that he's alright. Don't ask me how, I just know. I guess that's all that matters to me. Ain't no use wondering whether I'm right with God. I figured a while back that I ain't got it in me to aspire to something so complex. In fact, I can tell you surely that when I last left here, I never thought I'd see this place again."

## AT FIRST I TRIED TO PLACATE HER WITH WORDS. IT WAS NO USE. SO, I LEFT HER ALONE.

It was then that I wondered if the woman had grown up in this church, until at last she finished her story.

"Early that morning before the sun came up, I had started to feel my baby coming. And I got so scared I didn't know what to do. I just got off the bus and started walking, and walking. Then, when I thought I couldn't go anymore, I saw the cross on the backside of the steeple. And I stumbled up onto the back steps of this building.

I tried to be quiet, but I could not hold my screams. I was in agony. A Sister had heard me and came out to see. She talked about calling for help, but I told her I would leave if she told even a single other soul. She made a cross on her chest. I knew then that she was well with God.

## How to Make Your Own Hell

NICHOLAS McLEAN

"From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire"  
Robert Frost, *Fire and Ice*

The Fire always burns away  
The sins committed without measure,  
Churning, burning night and day

The strange feeling that you get,  
Too much pain and too much pleasure,  
The fire always burns away.

Excess knows no bounds but the ones behind it,  
Leaping off the ledge and diving into the abyss,  
Churning, burning, night and day.

So far from the sheets of lace  
Down below in the blackest darkness,  
The Fire always burns away.

And in this lonely, hollow place  
The heart builds itself a pyre,  
Churning, burning night and day

Secrets this heart might betray,  
Lost in the tongues of desire,  
Sins the Fire always burns away,  
Churning, burning, night and day.

Then, she went back inside. When an old bum wandered by, I told him to beat it and hoped that he wouldn't bring anybody back thataway. He never did. The Sister came out again quickly with a big bowl of warm water, a beautiful crocheted blanket, and some towels. She laid me out longwise on one of the large steps then dampened one of the towels. She told me to bite down on it each time the pains came. I did. And ever so often she would ask me a question that had nothing to do with childbirth, and it aggravated me a little. The only question I rightly recall is that she asked me what my favorite way to pass the time was, while she rubbed my hand in hers. But I was so gripped with pain I couldn't give her no answer.

I really don't know quite how it all fit together--the trick with the towel and the idle questions about myself. But it did, somehow it all helped me through. She helped me through the hardest thing in my life. Funny thing was, since shortly after she gave me that crocheted blanket, I've carried it wrapped in a small bundle in my purse. It's never left me, not the blanket nor my gratitude for what she did.

**A**fter the thing was over, she cleaned my baby up and wrapped him in the blanket. She wrapped me in the towels, and attended to me for a little while longer. I don't know how I done it, but I was, surely enough, getting up to leave when she begged me to let her get someone to take me home. I would have nothing of it. I was turning surely to walk away, and she thought certainly that I would give my baby a name. I could not. She gave me some suggestions, but none of them seemed quite right. And as I was leaving, I couldn't help but notice that it was the thing about the name that had saddened her the most.

In the end, it made me feel bad that she had given me so much and that I had given her nothing in return. I guess my heart couldn't leave it thataway. I realize now it's the reason I am here today. I am here to beg a favor of you, Father. I never had much to offer anyone. And I ain't got much to offer now. But there's something I would like you to deliver for me today. Her name was Sister Cheaney. When you see her, please deliver this message: tell her that in my free time, I like to crochet."

**W**ith that, the woman grew silent again. And shortly after, I heard the crinkling of her dress and the knocking of her heeled shoes against the floor as she left the confessional booth, drifting gradually towards, then through the front church doors. Later I thanked the Lord that was the only confession I got all that day because I can be sure I could not have handled even a shard more than that.

At the end of the evening, as I was tidying the booths, I came upon the booth where the woman had sat. At the far end of the wooden bench, I saw a crocheted blanket neatly folded. On top of it lied a crudely fashioned paper tent. I took the piece of paper. It read, simply, For Sister Cheaney.

I put together that the metal clinking sound I'd heard earlier must have been from the woman crocheting as she'd spoken to me. It was then that she had been struck with the crucial epiphany. A guarded memento of some sort. And I could not resist knowing what she had added to the blanket. So, with a quick prayer that God might forgive my wayward curiosity, I opened the blanket to see inside that the three tiny words she had stitched thereupon were ones that would forever remain impressed upon my own heart, Landon Michael Scott.