

Gary chills.

Written by Robert Stokes, edited by Tim Larsen.

Their living room was sparsely furnished. A ratty sofa under the front window, a scuffed coffee table in front of that, and in the corner stood an older television on a rickety stand. Gary McClellan, age 25 turned on the room's only lamp after kicking his boots off, each one landing with a pronounced clunk that seemed to reverberate through the room. Here, in his ranch house he rented for \$414/month 100 miles north of Albuquerque, he hated feeling at loose ends when out of work, and it seemed more uncomfortable with Tanya gone for eight hours.

"Fuck," he muttered, fishing through an empty pack of cigarettes, and tossing it into the wicker trash can. He discovered the unfinished roach in his leather jacket, and lighting up, he inhaled deeply. "Yeaaa..." he exhaled a long moment later. Without Tanya, even now, this being early August 1974, he had to fight unwanted memories of Viet Nam five three years ago, memories that wouldn't stop playing over and over inside his head.

Sometimes losing himself in music helped. He knelt down to riffle thru the collection of LP's that his wife had accumulated over the years. Their sound system wasn't much. BSR turntable, an ancient pioneer receiver and a couple speakers. Grinning, he remembered Tanya nagging him to make shelves, and seemed satisfied with cinder blocks 'n' planks he came home with from some local job. Her two philodendron plants were set, one on each end, above stacks of albums. Going through some of the older ones, he found a worn favorite from Steppenwolf, recorded live at the Matrix.

The roach and the concert album helped to ease his mind, but it was still blazing hot outside. The sun was going down, but there didn't seem to be a sign of let-up from the heat. Gary let the album play again and went out to the well water pool he set up outside. The house came with city water service, indoor plumbing, all up to date -plus an old windmill that was attached to an artesian well. Gary kept the old contraption built in the 1930s, it fed a six-foot circular tub. It also had a propane heater attached to it for winter but sitting out all day the water stayed just a bit under skin temperature. Gary eased himself into the cool water, as he looked up towards the darkening sky, sprinkled with stars. Must be a new moon, he thought, gazing at the horizon, which seemed to go on forever. A rhythmic thunk-thunk from the short windmill, which fed the huge water trough, lulled his already buzzed state.

His horny mind went to his wife Tanya, who just earlier that afternoon was sleeping peacefully nude in front of the fan before heading out to her twilight shift as nurse on call. His thoughts slid even further, to about four months ago when The Rat Hole was still intact...

He remembered two young faces, two fights, and one winner, himself, who sat across from Maxine. Maxine French was a tough, lean well-endowed red-haired hellion who had a sort of love/hate relationship with their club President Slade. Slade was out on business frequently from The Rat Hole, and Maxine would pass the time with the other club members, loyal Banshees all, who wouldn't dare lay a hand on her. Maxine took a liking to Gary. She called him 'Tonk', after the card game they liked playing together there.

"Where'd you learn to fight?" she asked over the noise. He seemed dangerous, in a gentle way that appealed to her. "Here, it's on me" she added, pushing a shot towards him.

"You don't wanna know," he answered, tossing it in one gulp. He felt his skin beginning to crawl, and his left leg began to fidget. "Where'd you learn to ride a bike?" He slid the shot glass back to her. "Hey, I wonder if you can help me score some stuff?"

Maxine filled the shot, and swallowing it smoothly, filled it for him again.

"Watcha looking for?"

She noticed his leg bouncing slightly, drawing her conclusion.

"Smack," he answered quietly, and gulping his shot, slapped the glass back down. "I'm in need of a good hit, can you help me out?"

Maxine excused herself and went to the back room. She retrieved a small pill bottle. Methadone. She emerged back to the bar, beckoned Gary to join her at the wall counter farther back, near the pool table. It was a bit more discrete. She handed him the bottle. He downed his dose. She watched his expression as he nodded off slightly.

"I'll give him a minute or two, he'll level out," she thought.

A few minutes later they were playing Tonk again. "Hah!" Gary slammed his cards on the table. "Son of a bitch!" Maxine counted her points. Even though she was quickly loosing, her attraction to the war-torn veteran was growing. The methadone had done the trick, really smoothing him out. Maxine retrieved a bottle of Jack Daniels from behind the bar and re-filled his shot glass. "Here ya go, champ. This is how ya got the nickname, right?" she added, watching his handsome face light up. "Yea, great times In Country," he grinned, tossing it back. She may be rough, but damnit I'm horny, he thought, slapping his empty shot down. "Hit me again, woman!" She loved his infectious smile, something she hadn't seen Slade do in a while. Suddenly she caught his sly wink, as she poured another out for them both. The alcohol was making him happier. Maxine too. She could drink with this guy. Slade would just get ornery and violent. One gave him a wide berth when Slade was on a drinking binge. But Gary ('Tonk') was different. He was a mellow drunk. Gary also was in better shape physically than any of the club members, Maxine observed, as he leaned back in his chair...

The night drew darker as Gary's thoughts in the pool played themselves out to what also transpired later that evening a month ago. All he could retrieve were furtive flashes of erotic display: a perfect ass, red painted fingernails on a delicate female hand stroking his face. The rhythmic slosh of the windmill seemed to blend with a sound of a motorcycle, the pan-head Harley he knew so well. Gary's eyes were slits that took in the glare of a headlight, the silhouette of the big breasted woman, tousling her hair free when she removed her goggles. Was he still dreaming?

"Hey..."

Yep, it's Maxine, Gary thought. Not dreaming.

"Where's Tanya?" Maxine assumed she'd be there if the Impala was.

"Working."

"Is she really pregnant?"

"Yep, she's knocked up all right!" he grinned.

"One of the girls said something, so I wanted to make sure. I was thinking of a baby shower, 'n' I wanna find out when she's off work, or make sure she takes the day off we have it." She leaned on the edge, dangling fingers in the water.

Gary saw her cheek swollen up to her eye in the dim light cast from the porch.

"Where'd ya get the shiner?"

"Wow, ya see it already?"

"Yea, looks like a good one!"

She paused a moment, then her shoulders sagged.

"Slade 'n' me got into it..."

For a minute, Gary wasn't sure what to say. What a biker 'n' his old lady did was strictly their own business. Interference, even opinions from outsiders made matters worse.

"It's easy to piss him off, I guess..."

"I clocked him good with a skillet in the end, 'n' left 'im on the floor. He came home with a cactus up his ass...." she scowled at the memory of him throwing her small TV set against the wall. "I was watching my stories, I didn't know he would come home today... an' it was MY tv set, it cost me a hunnert bucks! He snatches the TV, turns to the news. Out of the blue he gets so mad he throws it against the wall!"

"Ya gotta take care of your man, you know he's a skunk with a spike up his ass most of the time." Gary advised. "If he's being a dick, get the hell outta the way. "

Maxine thought a moment. "I'm not some some fuking J-Cat, that's for damn sure!" She gently sloshed her hands in the water, a rhythmic thunk-thunk came from the windmill. "Wanna hand me my cigs?" Gary broke the silence. "My jeans are in the laundry room," he added. Earlier that evening Gary went into town and bought a carton. She found his pants, and cigs, suddenly catching site of his belt buckle. USMC letters, in heavy brass, suddenly took her back to the night she met him. Looking furtively at Tanya's panties in the dryer basket, she lifted the denims, fondled the heavy belt leather, and gently rubbed the brass letters. Impulsively, she buried her face into the heavy cloth, at the crotch, inhaling. "He even smells cleaner 'n' Slade," she thought. Sudden guilt mixing with cold fear enveloped her body, and she gently folded his pants, placing them on the swing.

"How long is she?" asked Maxine.

"She says about a month," Gary answered, gently splashing water on his face. "She's been kinda cranky tho."

Maxine couldn't help laughing.

"What?"

"Get ready for a wild ride son, that's part of having a kid. She's gonna be fuking crazy sometimes!" Maxine remembered her own experience, sadly ending in miscarriage. "Slade 'n' me got into some big fights when I was only two months along."

"Damn," Gary muttered. It was probably as well she lost the baby, he thought. No kid deserves this kind of life, with a mom like her.

Gary got out of the tub and moments later they were inside the house sitting together in the dark on the couch. Gary had on a t-shirt and jeans. He

carried out a twelve-pack of beer from the fridge and set it down on the coffee table. Maxine wasn't used to silence and could only see the outline of his muscular shoulders made by the feeble porch light emanating into the room from just above the window ledge. "Just been thinking..." he gently stroked his face. "... remembering shit."

"Like what?" She answered, wetting her face. "Damn, I should jump him, but with my luck Tanya would show up early from her shift," she thought. Gary drew on the cigarette. He stared into the dark. "I been having dreams 'n' memories come back..." he began, "... some of it In Country 'n' other shit, shit between you and me."

"Memories?"

"Yea, I can remember shit when I was pretty fuked up..." He avoided looking at her. "We balled, right? An' I don't mean once; I mean we went at it for a while."

Maxine wasn't sure how to answer. She took one of Gary's cigarettes out of the box and lit one for herself. She'd been on the outs with Slade a couple weeks at the time. "Let's just say you needed the same thing I did, to forget something that we couldn't." She leaned close to him and whispered, "Some of the things you saw back in Viet Nam were pretty fucked up, and I wasn't exactly having a good week myself."

He nodded gruffly. He saw a vivid image of her astride his hips, gyrating with ecstasy, shuddering as she reached climax. Then he fucked her doggie style, as she begged for more, and after that, seemed to recall eating her out, under moonlight.

"You disappeared when I fell asleep, when you got your last fix," she said, letting her cigarette describe whirls of smoke in the dark air.

"I thought I was living out something in the Bible, like I had to wander for forty days or some shit!" Gary laughed at that sudden memory. "I had this piece of wood an' summoned fire from the sky!"

"That's pretty far out, I wondered what you might've been doing.." Maxine chuckled. "They found you, passed out near Acoma Creek. You were way out of it!"

That was four months ago, May. Gary remembered the long weeks of rehab, and of getting some decent paying job dry walling, locally at first but then pulling a long-term gig for what seemed then a good long gig in L.A. before being cut loose. His thoughts came back to Tanya, who wasn't supposed to be still working as a nurse by this time but was.

"Hell, she picked up an extra shift tonight, got a ride to work with a friend, I gotta pick her up 'round 1 am." Gary lit another Marlboro, and stretched his tall frame on the couch. "Says driving the Chevy makes her puke," he shrugged, blowing a few smoke rings.

"Well, shit, I was hoping to get some ideas for shower gifts.."

"Come by tomorrow, we'll be here."

Maxine found herself studying his neck as Gary drained the Bud. "Slade..." she began, "he's out of control. Something about what happened last Sunday, seeing more about it on the news today just set him off. Never seen him this angry. I was going to ask him what he did with my dogs, I assumed he'd taken them out to play at some club member's house. He stormed out before he could answer, and I was too upset about the broken TV to press the subject. Then I

come over here and see you still hanging around, I assumed you were out with Slade, assembling the troops and all.” Maxine took another drag on the cigarette.

“Nope. I seen enough bullshit In Country, ‘n’ I’m not gonna chase it here. One errand out to the MVD’s enough for him. He can take care of his own problems for a while. Don’t need my nights blowing up inside my brain, and not about to feed ‘em.”

“Slade’s always on some bullshit quest or another,” said Maxine. “MVD? She asked.”

Gary said “Yeah. Deke came and got me, saying we had to shake down a local station to get a name attached to a license plate -Honda motorcycle. It was easy. Clerk was queer, and Deke obliged him. Half hour later I’m back at Slade’s handing him the paper with the owner’s name.” Gary chortled. “Looked like a fuckin’ raccoon when I saw him.”

Maxine roared. “YESSSS! Some kid spray-painted him in the face! Yah should’ve seen me bust a gut when he told me what happened. It was by Skull Canyon, I pulled over seeing him wipe his face.”

“Really?” smiled Gary.

“Slade never could take a joke,” replied Maxine, reaching for another beer and cracking it open. “He sent a crew right there and then to climb the ridge to chase him. I heard the kid had a Honda 750. He was gone like a shot, and those fuckers with their long-fork choppers tried wheezing up the hill. I tell ya, Tonk, it was comical sumpin’ out of Three Stooges.”

Gary smiled. Now he could put the pieces together in his head. First Slade’s face, and then... .. blowing up the Rat Hole?” Maybe Maxine didn’t know about that one yet, he decided to keep it under wraps.

“Ha! kid’s hijinks take me back to my days, Max. Now I REALLY don’t give a shit about Slade. Petty asshole.” Gary said.

“You can say that again,” replied Maxine, taking a draw from the beer.

They were both silent a few minutes.

“I should go.” She suddenly stood, stretching her tight body. “If she’s off tomorrow, I’m gonna stop by.” It wasn’t lost in her that his eyes had that hungry look, similar to that first night she noticed him at the Hole. “Dammit,” she thought, “gotta stop re-living what went on there.”

Minutes later Maxine’s Harley roared off into the darkness as Gary sat alone on the couch. He put the record on again.

When Gary got to Lovelace Medical Clinic thought her day must have been boring but on the contrary her shift at work was anything but calm, culminating with a suicidal patient who had ingested rat paste at least an hour before...

“Why are you wearing scrubs?” Gary asked, barely recognizing her as she waited outside the ER entrance.

“Never mind just get me the fuck out of here!” She bitched, wrapping her legs behind him.

They were driving home. It was a long commute, but the rent at the ranch house was dirt-cheap. During the one-hour drive in the dark he glanced over to her side in the Impala and was surprised to see her squirming in her seat, trying to get comfortable. When they turned onto the gravel road he leaned

close to him, grabbing for his man-part in his trousers. "I wanna fuck," she whispered.

They got home and tore off their clothes. Gary was enjoying himself, as his rough skin taunted, teased, and tickled his wife into heights of pleasure he'd never seen before. Giving her control, she directed him to where she wanted, and how much. He remembered a saying, something about two in the pink, and one in the stink, and he presumptuously tried that, but she kicked his leg.

"Get the fuk off if your gonna do dumb shit!" she snapped. "Now get back to where you were..." He obliged, and happily slid his hand under her, softly parting her lips. He felt her shudder, as he found the spot, and gently touching her and there, she moaned, and cried, then reached a sudden climax.

"Holy FUK!" she yelled, suddenly relaxing, but keeping a firm grip of his hand. Tanya felt every fiber inside of her practically buzzing as Gary gently slid his fingers up and down between her cheeks, pausing gently over her asshole, tickling the darker center, then smoothly tracing downward into her thick pubic hair. "This is why I love his calluses from work," she smiled thinking to herself. A moan softly escaped her.

Gary lay on the sofa, blissfully semi-conscious. His face and beard were still damp from Tanya's wetness, reminding him of a sweet apricot flavored chutney he once had In Country, one of the very few decent memories of his deployment. Tanya sleepily wandered to the bathroom and started a hot bath. Gary heard the water hissing as he unwound on the bed. His wife, physically spent from the sex, fell half asleep soaking in the tub. He carried her to the bedroom later and tucked her in, going to the couch 'cause he knew he snored. She slept peacefully through the rest of the night after that.

With the bright morning sun pouring into the bathroom, Tanya jumped in the shower. The bath the night before had cleaned her up, but her hair dried funny so she needed to shampoo the kinks out.

"Babe?" she called out, "Bring me some towels, will ya?"

Quickly rinsing off, Tanya could only see others smudged with grease and dirt, lying next to the toilet. "Damnit," she said as she stepped out of the shower. "This goon can't get me a fuking towel, 'n' I gotta clean these!"

Naked and wet, she strode to take one look at her 'Goon' snoring in the living room. She turned in a huff, and on her way to the laundry room she saw his black handprints on the kitchen wall by the phone and noticed empty beer cans on the coffee table, several of which were smudged with lipstick.

Feeling cold and hot spread outward from her chest Tanya stomped back to the sofa and slapped a filthy wet towel squarely on his face, startling him awake with a gasping *whuff*

"What the hell's your fuking problem?" He yelled.

"First off, I'm tired of cleaning up your messes, how the fuk did you do that on the fuking wall?! And who's the bitch you're drinking with when I'm at work?"

"God damnit, it was Maxine, an' she was looking for you, something about a baby shower!" Gary explained as he followed her to the laundry room. Tanya was shoving towels and Gary's greasy clothes into an ancient washer.

"So ya don't have to give away our beer, she can get plenty of at Slade's. And why the hell does she come here when I'm at work, anyway?!" She snarled back, dumping detergent into the machine.

"... and another thing, motherfucker, now I gotta do all the cleaning, after you leave your grubby ass jeans and clothes!!" She turned to face him after slamming the washer door closed, her arms, hands, and flat tummy smeared black.

Her husband, lost for anything to say, stood watching, then shrugged..

"Wadda ya want me ta do?" he asked, as Tanya disappeared into the bedroom, quickly reappearing, this time in denims and one of his shirts.

"Where ya goin'?"

"I'm gonna pay Max a visit, an' I'm gonna get some air after that," she growled, grabbing his keys. "An' I'm taking the bike !"

"Babe, will ya just wait a fuking minute?" He followed outside. She hopped on the panhead, and jammed down on the starter.

"Get the hell away from me or I'm gonna run you over, ya goon!" She yelled, and gunning the bike, she did a half donut, kicking dirt 'n' gravel at him, and was gone.

Dumbfounded, he watched his motorcycle disappear thru the dust. "Man," he thought, "I'm going to talk to her sister again, this is batshit crazy. Maybe I should start spiking her food with weed or something. Maybe I should follow her." Another voice of caution inside his brain countered with "hell, you really wanna get killed? Stay the hell away from females when they scrap over a guy." He sat down, rolled a joint, and lit up. Man, this place is kinda messed up, he mused, seeing the grease-smeared on the kitchen wall. A half hour later, he was finished scrubbing his handprints when the phone startled him.

"Yea," he answered.

Immediately he recognized Tanya's voice, sobbing between hiccups.

"Babe? Where are you? Are you ok... .. babe?" Gary pleaded.

"I'm at Max's place, and I..." She began crying again. "... I need you to come help... come help... help... meee..." the last word came out a prolonged childish wail. Gary's heart kicked into overdrive, as it pounded up thru his throat. "What happened, calm down 'n' tell me, what the fuk's going on!?"

There was just silence on the phone, save for sobbing sounds. After a minute Tanya spoke again. "Come get me in the Impala and I need that pick and shovel out by the back porch. We need to bury some bodies." She hung up the phone with a loud clunk heard on Gary's end.

Gary spent enough time as a Marine in the rice paddies to go into the logical step by step process every grunt does when confronting horror and death: don't panic. Plan your next actions. Assemble your gear. Okay. Cover. Tools. Clean-up, sterilize. He grabbed a ragged canvas he used to cover the bike for the body. The pick, and two shovels, one a flat spade for the dirt. He heaved a bag of Hydrated Lime for lining the grave. Okay, sterilize. He grabbed a gallon of Clorox under the sink, some towels, and the mop plus the bucket. In all it took about 45 seconds. He was ready.

Throwing the gear in the back seat, he went back into the house and checked their weed supply. There was maybe a quarter lid left, along with one joint. "Damn it," he griped, "I'll have to catch up with Kazz 'n' get another, maybe I can sell some shit for 'em. I'll have to fuking feed her this last joint

when I get there, tho'." How's Slade going to react to Tanya murdering his wife? He'd probably be more pissed than sad, but there'd be some sort of repercussion. Women killing each other over men usually elevated the status of the club member they fought for.

Even so...

He cranked the Chevy and backed it slowly out, then headed out.

It was about 45 minutes to Maxine's -or Slade's shack at the trailer park. The sun was high up in the sky as he slid past the light traffic. Glancing at the shovels in the back seat took him back to In Country, another incident involving a shovel...

... His name was Mr Po, Gary remembered, a short snaggletooth villager who ran a brothel of sorts: 'Po's Ho's,' as Kazz referred to, was three small huts linked by a sort of trellis covered with vines sat on close to jungle growth. It was frequented by a few members of his platoon. It stopped with the owner's betrayal to the northern guerrilla units. Two soldiers lost their lives in that skirmish, and Kazz was adamant that old man Po pay with his own life.

Recalling the rage behind this quick judgment, Po was beheaded on a miserable rainy afternoon with a flat spade, witnessed by the rest of the unit. About 8 of them were Latino, with Mexican or Central American heritage. They took sides and staked out a soccer field. For the next hour they played soccer with Mr. Po's head in the mud.

Damn, he thought, staring ahead into the desert, I wonder if Tanya would know how to play soccer?

Two hours before, Maxine lay curled up on the ground and sobbing as Tanya rumbled up in Gary's bike. Her two Dobermans, encased in plastic body bags, were delivered earlier, with little explanation. "They were put down by Law Enforcement Officers, that's all I know," she said to Tanya. Maxine remembered the heavy-set driver who merely shrugged at her. "I need ya ta sign this receipt of delivery," he finished, thrusting his clipboard in her face.

"I love you Boxer, I'm so sorry I let this happen to you, my sweet little pup-pup" she whispered to the younger male dog. A huge hole was blasted through his neck. She opened the other bag, revealing Boxers mother, Sadie, almost unrecognizable, as the top portion of her head was blown away.

Tanya knelt beside Maxine and hugged her tightly. "It's so fucked up," Maxine said between sobs, "I should-a never let him take my babies, I'm gonna de-ball him if I have to CHEW 'em off!"

Three hours later Tanya and Gary stood as Gary finished shoveling loose soil and sand over Boxer and Sadie. Gary walked off and made three trips getting some heavy stones. He laid them over the mound. "What's that for?" Tanya whispered.

"Makes it harder for varmints to dig 'em up," he answered. "Damn, you're sweating like a stuck pig." Tanya got a wet washcloth from the kitchen. She dabbed it on Gary's face. She kissed his sweaty cheek. "You smell so good sometimes, even when you stink, babe!"

Sensing another mood shift, he delayed things. "Come on, I brought a joint, it's the last of that Red Road shit I got from Kazz." He took her hand and pulled they walked up the slight hill beside the trailer. Maxine was slumped on the rusting iron steps, sniffing. Gary rolled a joint, lit it and the three of

them shared taking a toke. Maxine's nerves smoothed out a little now where she could talk. She looked at the fresh grave Gary made under the willow tree down below. "I wanted to take 'em over to the creek, but I think they'll like that shady spot more. They was always sleeping there during the afternoon heat."

"You wanna come home with us?" Tanya asked, not catching her husband's silent expression at that.

"Naw, you kids go home, I just wanna be alone. I got some things to think about." She waved them away but they stayed put, not moving. "I might pop by tomorrow though, I still wanna talk about the baby shower." Tanya leaned in and hugged her, then Gary did the same.

"Love you, Max," she whispered.

"Save it for your man, sweetie. An' try not to be so hard on him, those hormones make a new mom real trigger happy." Tanya smiled as she turned to Gary, who nodded approval, handing Maxine the joint for her to keep.

"Gotcha. You call us whenever you wanna come over. Anytime!" She urged. Maxine watched Gary slide into the Impala and Tanya stretch over the Harley. They drove off down the access road and their dust plumes slowly drifted up into the noon sky as they vanished.

Maxine spent the rest of the day sitting at the burial mound in a folding lawn chair finishing the joint and drinking scotch. She went to bed early and cried herself to sleep. The next morning, she got up, showered and made herself coffee. Slade wasn't home. She read the paper and found out why, the carnage through downtown Albuquerque must've kept him busy. To think he would stoop so low as to use the Dobermans for a weapon. True, they were trained to kill on command but that was only for defense -and only if there was no other way for her to protect herself at home. That was the agreement. To do this, sic them on a stupid punk boy, was cowardly. Evil.

Whatever semblance of respect she had for Slade was gone now, and while she steered clear of Club politics in general, killing or sacrificing animals was something else altogether.

In the ramshackle cabin Maxine, slightly hungover, searched their small medicine cabinet for some Excedrin. She came across a few staples she kept for Boxer when he was growing up. The emetic she remembered, was used a few times during his 'teething period,' when he ate a couple condom packages, and another instance after one of her sex toys disappeared. It only took a very small dose for Maxine to watch her 'lil' boy convulse and heave till he managed to vomit. Happily, he was a bouncy pup-pup only seconds afterwards.

The fog of sadness suddenly cleared as her reflection in the mirror shined back with an evil grin. Slade! She needed to practice some subtleness. He'd get his! Deke would be a good test-case to try first. There's other shit here too she realized. "Damn, this old lady is gonna have her some good times watching!" Maxine thought as she laughed at her own reflection.