

The Society of Southwestern Authors



Volume 1

Story Snacks Plus

Two To Go
by Dan Baldwin

Girth and Harb pulled in on the dark side of the Earth's moon to double-check their hunting gear. The stars of home were just a blur, a faint smudge of a white stain on the obsidian unknown beyond. Their journey had been long, but buoyed through space by the anticipation of another great hunt.

Harb reached into the cooler and pulled out two cans of Smaltz. Girth accepted the gift with pleasure. They pulled the gravity straws and drank in silence.

Girth said, "The wives give you any spozzle about coming?"

"Nah. Just the same ol' same-same. 'You bag it; you clean it.' Shoot, I'm after trophies this trip."

"Humans are in season. The males anyway. A bloody mess to clean. And boney, but what are you going to do."

"Trophies. This year I'm angling for Anglos."

"I laugh every time you say that."

"Let's go. I want to try out my new blaster."

Harb engaged the engine and they left the moon's weak gravity like a scallop fish bouncing over the Dancing Seas of the homeworld.

They streaked to the Earth, a fast-mover headed straight down. Any pain in the ass radar operator would think them a meteorite. Civilians would think the same. At least they'd think the same unless captured, taken home and placed in one of Girth's Human-O-Farms. The boxy ship was ideal for space, but hellacious to drive in the Earth's atmosphere. Harb pressed a control button and fins flicked out to make the ride more tolerable. The ship stopped bouncing and began a slow glide just above the terrain.

Girth, in the driver's pod, maneuvered the craft down to a river practically glowing in the moonlight. He followed the water's path just above the surface. "The glory hole?"

"Where else?"

"A site that creates its own bait. We lucked out the day we found that one, my friend."

"Keep a few of those eyes out for the game warden."

"Just get us there and quit worrying."

Girth brought the craft up off the water and to ground level. He sat it down gently in the dust of an infrequently used desert road. The travel screen indicated New Mexico. Harb punched a few digits on a keypad and a readout appeared over the map. "Not much traffic. We could—"

"Better not take any chances." Girth pushed a few buttons and sat back on his spines as their vehicle transformed itself. Within a moment, the spaceship looked for all intents and purposes just like an

old Toyota 4WD truck with a camper shell. It was white and spotless. Girth punched another button and instantly the truck was covered in scratches, dirt and spots of mud. "Camouflage."

"I love this thing," Harb said.

"Our turn."

"Shatzbuckler! I damn near forgot."

Almost in synch they reached into their side cubicles and pulled out and dressed in their camo. Girth transformed into a large Nordic type with blond hair and a small moustache. He was now wearing blue bib overalls, a red plaid shirt, work boots, and a ball cap with a faded Bull of the Woods Chewing Tobacco logo on the front. Harb became a black man, clean shaven, but with long hair beaded with false sweat. He wore work boots, bluejeans, and a blue workshirt. A tattered straw cowboy hat pressed in on his hair.

The timepiece, now synchronized with local time, indicated eight a.m. Girth entered the town and drove the truck across a set of railroad tracks. The rails used to block traffic when the trains roared by seemed to be standing at attention, even saluting as they pulled into the shredded roofing shingle parking lot of their favorite hunting spot – the El Charro Restaurant. Harb reached for the door handle, but was stopped by his friend's hand.

Girth said, "We better check for game wardens."

"Screw 'em."

"Sure. One more fine and we'll both lose our hunting licenses."

"I did not come here to not hunt."

"And I didn't come here to get caught again. We're already breaking enough rules as it is."

"Yeah-yeah-yeah." Harb opened the door and started across the parking lot. Girth followed. Each carried a fully loaded blaster which to humans would appear to be a long and narrow coffee thermos. Girth twisted the top of his weapon.

"Don't strip it like you did last time."

"I know what I'm doing."

"I'm just saying."

"Don't say. We got hunting to do."

Harb stopped at the door. He looked around nervously. "I smell game warden."

"Stop that."

"I swear...."

"Just be cool and we'll bag our limit and then some. Won't nobody know how we did it."

"Okay, but let's watch our step."

A mournful bellow of a train horn sounded in the distance. "It's a warning," Harb said.

Girth shook his head and opened the door to their glory hole. He salivated with anticipation and before he knew it the acid had eaten away at his facial camouflage. Part of his lower lip was missing.” Oh, blasth.”

“Just pretend it’s what they call a war wound. They love that down here.”

“Sleathy for you to slay.”

“Just rest your arm on your face. I’ll do the talking.”

They stepped inside and smelled the awful aroma of bacon and eggs. But that was balanced by the fragrance of humankind – the smell of trophies. Unfortunately, most of the trophies were out of season. A big-boned blond in her late twenties waved them in. Her hair was a trophy in itself, a fat halo set off by a set of lovely gray roots. Another woman, a young Hispanic with dark hair and darker eyes, worked behind the counter. She had two arms perfectly decorated with colorful tattoos depicting some kind of flower garden studded with mythical creatures.

Harb unconsciously fiddled with the top of his thermos/blaster.

Girth slurred, “Nooothh. Out of theasonth.”

The blond shouted, “Be right with you boys.” She busied herself finishing making a pot of sludge the humans called coffee. Girth blanched, but avoided upchucking and further disfiguring his disguise. They sat down and looked over the possible kills. A fat Anglo with short red hair sat at on a stool at the counter. He appeared to be reading a newspaper, but every time the dark young woman bent over he let out a grunt and a sigh. The only other person in the restaurant was a Hispanic man who had to be in his eighties.

“Slim pickins,” Harb said.

“Fluhhhh,” Girth said.

They ordered coffee and then waited. And waited. And waited.

“Looks like we struck out this year, partner. I guess we—”

Harb’s big grin shut down the rest of his comment. He flicked a boney finger toward the front door. It came off and fell to the floor. He grabbed it quickly and reinserted it into his hand and looked up as if nothing had occurred. Two men walked in. They were about the same age and size and were probably in their sixties as humans figure these things. They were dirty, scruffy, sloppily dressed as if they had been living for some time in the wilderness. Harb sniffed the air.

“Game,” he said.

Girth nodded and shoved his thermos/blaster forward on the table. It was his way of saying, “Let’s get ‘em” without having to vocalize with his sagging lower lip. The two arrivals nodded a friendly “hello” as they sat down at the next table and opened the orange, plastic coated menus. Girth and Harb listened

intently to their mumblings. Harb was especially interested in learning their call which could prove helpful on future hunts. He leaned back in his chair and listened.

One of the men tossed his menu to the table. "I don't see why you fool with that damn menu, Dan'l. You already know what you're going to get."

"Harvey, it gives the staff the impression that I'm a discriminating client."

"Yeah. You're trying to discriminate yourself between green or red sauce."

"It's important."

Harb and Girth observed their prey as the two men performed something they called "chowing down" on a pile of semi-solid goo called Huevos Rancheros. One plate was covered with a red sauce and the other's plate in a green substance of similar texture and appearance.

Harb whispered, "The sauces – it must be some kind of mating ritual."

Girth slurred, "Maybe they're voting."

"Either way, we got trophies, my friend. One each."

The beings from the far reaches of outer space nodded in agreement, paid their bill and stepped out into the parking lot to wait for the kill. A considerable amount of time passed before the two humans stepped out of the restaurant. "Don't that set you right with the world," the one called Dan'l said.

"Urrrp!" said the one called Harvey.

"Well spoken, young lad."

They walked across the parking lot toward a beat up old truck. Harvey stopped and threw his arm across Dan'l's chest. Each man stood still.

"Snake?"

"Nah. Them old farts over by the Toyota are aiming their thermos bottles at us."

"That ain't right."

Girth raised the thermos/blaster to his shoulder and aimed at the one saying, "Urrrp." A shockingly loud clanging followed immediately by an even louder horn from the railroad tracks caused him to jerk and miss. A ray beamed across the parking lot, barely missing the one called Harvey. Dan'l dove behind their truck. The clanging continued as the rails lowered and blocked the road across the tracks. An earthshattering blast of the oncoming train's horn rattled windows, doors and Harb and Girth's nerves.

"You missed!" Harb raised his thermos/blaster and fired toward the Harvey human, but his aim was off. The ray struck a dog standing at the corner of the parking lot near a telephone post. He was frozen in a ball of translucence in mid-pee. The Harvey human scrambled under his truck and came out next to his partner. Dan'l had opened the door on his side, had reached into the truck and retrieved two 9 mm semi-automatic pistols. He handed one to Harvey. Dan'l said, "What the *hell* was that!"

“I don’t know, but I ain’t putting up with it no more.”

“Let’s do it.”

The two men stood up, the truck a barrier between them and the hunters from outer space. Each man pulled the hammer back on his weapon and took aim. Harb and Girth saw the motion and as if a duo in synchronized swimming raised their thermos/blasters and aimed back.

“Fire!” Girth said.

“Fire!” Harb said.

“Fire!” Dan’l said.

“Shoot!” Harvey said.

Like two speeding freight trains heading toward each other on the same track bullets and ray blasts moved on their inevitable tragic path across the parking lot... until time... slowed... down.”

“Oh, hell,” Girth slurred.

A light brighter than the sun bathed the scene from directly above. Everything froze in place, except for the peeing dog who finished his business, yelped upwards and then scurried under a nearby 18-wheeler.

An authoritative voice boomed from above. “This is the Intergalactic Game Service, Warden Cro-lee speaking. Cease and desist all hunting activity immediately.”

Harb dropped his head. “Caught.”

Girth nodded. “Damn government.”

“Do as he says.”

As if well-practiced, the two hunters placed their weapons on the ground. Harb looked up. “We were just—”

“I know what you were doing. Get in your vehicle and follow me to headquarters.”

“But—”

“Now! I will clean up the mess you have made.”

“We were just—”

“Git!”

Harb and Girth stepped into their truck. A second later it was transformed into a boxy thing with wings which floated out of the parking lot up into the heavens and into the stars.

Dan’l and Harvey woke up inside El Charro with steaming plates of huevos rancheros and cups of deep, dark coffee on the table before them. Although the clock on the wall and the watches on their wrists indicated that half an hour had passed, neither could remember anything of it. The waitresses and

patrons had a dazed look, but things seemed normal. Dan'l and Harvey shook it off and enjoyed their second plate of huevos rancheros of the day.

Far, far, very far away in a galaxy unnamed by humans Harb and Girth met with the game warden. They apologized profusely and promised never to break the rules again. Cro-lee, who had experienced their hunting violations before, suspended their licenses for a year.

“A year!” Girth said.

Cro-lee said, “You want to make it two, bub?”

Harb said, “Why so harsh, Cro-lee. We were hunting in season.”

Cro-lee slapped his electro-pen down on his desk with some force. “Because, you dummies, by staking out the El Charro you violated one of the primary rules of hunting. We don't tolerate hunting over a baited field.”

Fool Me Twice
by Therese Griffin

My generation believed “Children should be seen and not heard.” A 15th century clergyman named John Mirk is credited with coining the phrase. In 1955, we were expected to sit, be still, and not speak.

It was two days before my 9th birthday. My Dad answered the phone late at night, around 9 pm. It was Campbell Soup where my mother worked the 2nd shift. He couldn't leave me home alone. We arrived at St. George's Hospital before the ambulance. I jumped on the bumper to wave to Mom. I didn't understand when she didn't wave back. They took her away swiftly; it was like a bed on wheels.

I was separated from my dad. He said, “I must talk to the doctors.” I don't remember being frightened. Mom went to the hospital every so often. Children weren't allowed inside. There was a park across from St. George Hospital. I picked a bouquet of dandelions for Mom. My mom would go to an open window so that I could wave back. Later, the nurse asked, “Do you want me to throw away the dandelions?” “No, those flowers came from my baby.” But this time was different.

The staff took me to the hospital lobby that had an enormous staircase with faint lighting as in a scary movie with a couch and chair. The old clock talked to me with a different tone of gongs counting the hours one at a time with a different tone every fifteen and thirty minutes. It gave me comfort because in my childlike imagination the “Old Clock” was with me.

Suddenly, a nurse in a white hat and uniform came galloping down the stairs rushing towards me. She said, “I'm taking you to see your mother because she wants to see you.” She swiftly picked me up to take on the huge staircase two stairs at a time. We reached the elevator landing. I saw mom on the bed with wheels, she was spitting into a cup. Mom said, “Therese, I'm going to be okay, don't worry.” Then the door opened Dad and my sister Barb went into the elevator with Mom. I returned to the lobby. I must have fallen asleep on the couch.

I woke up at my Grandma and Aunt Anne's house. I heard people crying in the kitchen. I peeked around corner from the bedroom. My Aunt Rita screamed, “Therese, you don't understand. My sister died!” I was quiet. I saw Mom before I got here. What are they saying? As Rita continue crying wallowing, “You don't understand my sister died!” I felt alone and no one came towards me. Here comes the old rule of

ages, "Children are seen and not heard." I was mixed up from the words my mom said, "Don't worry, I'll be okay." The two aunts and grandma continued their grieving and crying. I was the stranger on the outside. I didn't understand what they were saying. **She's, my mom. Fool me once...**

Dad came to pick me up from Grandma's. Dad was a gentle mountain-man from the back-hills of Tennessee. Everyone loved my dad. On the way home he did his best to explain that mom passed away. He asked me to tell the neighbors when we got home. I went next door to my friend Bonnie's house. Mrs. B was shocked that she died at age 44 years old. She told Bonnie to go with me to tell Mr. and Mrs. E. My friend Diane's parents. Mrs. E started screaming at me, "STOP Lying!" Mr. E came out to support his wife and yelled, "If you don't stop lying, Diane can't play with you anymore." I was confused. I repeated mom died at the hospital last night. He screamed get out of here with your lying! I laid down on the grass pretending to be like a dead cowboy holding fake flowers in my hands. "No, she's dead like this." Finally, Bonnie and I walked away back to Mrs. B. I went home and told Dad Mr. and Mrs. E. didn't believe me; they thought I was lying. This is how I spent my two days before my ninth birthday on July 3rd. We had a three-day wake because there were no burials on the 4th of July. She was placed to rest on July 5th.

Mrs. B made a homemade birthday cake with ice cream for me, Bonnie, Diane, and David. Mrs. E took up the neighborhood collection in 1955 even the Good Humor Man gave a dollar. She must have felt bad for not believing me. Yet, she never apologized because "Children were seen not heard."

My mother worked at Campbell's Soup. At the wake, quietly I was standing next to dad when I saw a sea of her Black union co-workers. She brought home Black friends from work, and I would play with Li' Minnie. I didn't realize at the ages of 4-7 years that we lived in a Lilly-White neighborhood. A man walked up to dad asking, "It's our tradition to take photos of our loved one in the casket. Is it all right with you if I took a few photos?" Dad stood quietly while he pondered the question, his response, "Yes. It's not our tradition, we don't want any photos sent to us. Thank-you, for asking." My learning was it's okay to agree to disagree without giving up their traditions or wishes. That became a part of my lifestyle. I didn't know what my role was supposed to be because it didn't work with Mr. & Mrs. E. I accepted the role of being seen and not heard until I got home. Then, I could ask my dad anything.

Now, who will watch me while dad works? Grandma was really working on me with, "This is what your mom would have wanted, for you to stay with me during the school week. She would want you to be with her mother." A couple of neighbors wanted that roll too. It would mean for me to go back to Chicago from the suburbs to Grandma's house. They had sidewalks that I could roller skate on. My brother and sister

who were 13 and 11 years older than me went to that school. I went to kindergarten, 1st and ½ of 2nd grade there until we moved to Burbank where I changed schools twice in the 1 ½ year. So, I decided to believe Grandma and lived out of a shopping bag back and forth.

I was in 5th grade when grandma said, “If it wasn’t for your mother having you later in life, she would still be alive.” Did I kill my mother? I was age 9 when she died. Years later, I started drinking in bars at age 18. I was with my sister, 29 and brother 32. With one more drink I said, “Mom didn’t die of childbirth!” They were surprised, “Where are you coming from now?” I told them the story. They never knew how to respond as a child when I would try to tell them how mean grandma was because they had loving memories of her. Plus, their communications skills weren’t the best because they were taught “children were seen and not heard.” Even as a child, it seemed that they leaned on me. **Fool me twice...** Now, I had to learn skills to become guarded with a voice.

At 18 years old, Dad asked, “Do you want to meet my relatives at a family reunion?” What? “Your grandmother made me promise that you wouldn’t meet the hillbilly side because your mother wouldn’t like it. But now you’re 18 that’s your decision.” Yes! I loved them immediately! There was fiddle playing, banjo pickin’ and alcohol flowing. My kind of family! I started hanging out with my new kinfolk. Four of my dad’s female 1st cousins kept surrounding me because they saw my raging side that I was an angry young woman. The women noticed that I had a gentle side hidden. The Southern rule was anyone older in the family to be called Aunt/Uncle. “NO!” I don’t call my mother’s sisters Aunt; we go by first names only because they believed we’d be better friends! That wasn’t true. I lost the vote; I started calling them Aunt and Uncle. They loved me even when I fought back continuously. Aunt Pat said, “You’re the youngest person I know that would argue with a fence post.” “What?” She continued, “That’s what I mean.” I started learning that I have kinfolk who loved me when I was good or misbehaved. They noticed when I was hurting and needed a listening ear with positive feedback not put downs.

I started working at Libby’s Meat Packing at age 19. It was a large factory with at least 300 employees. Addie Wyatt, Union Leader, would ask me are you keeping up your resume? In 1965, I had never heard that term resume. As I started attending Labor Leadership workshops, conferences, etc., I kept all my certificates in a large envelope in case I needed them for a resume. I moved up the ranks even though I struggled with reading. I had a strong voice when I would hear others. I am my Union mother’s daughter. I have a “Boom” of laughter. I will stand up for underdogs.

I was elected UFCW Financial Secretary, Local 247-P. Later, I was elected President in the middle of a strike because it was messy, they were threatening to close the plant. During the negotiations, they wanted to take away 25 cents per hour from our paychecks or they would close the plant. In the past 6 years they had already taken away some health benefits, money, and vacation days. I stood up and the whole Union Negotiation team followed as I spoke, "I'm done! I'm feeling like I'm being raped without a kiss over a quarter!" Our Union Lawyer threw his arms around me for walking out. Libby's took our plant closure off the list in Washington DC. We returned to work for a period.

Today, I believe Grandma pushed me in a corner to become a survivor. Instead, I grew into an angry – raging woman. Addie Wyatt, the first Black woman to serve as UFCW International Vice-President, continued to be my mentor from 1965-2012. Overnight, I had kinfolks who loved and walked with me. As a child, I didn't have a positive family/woman in my life after age 9. My Playful God gave me many women to walk with me and the ability to trust, take risks and love. **Gift of desperation...**