

Close To The Bone

presents...

Close To The Boneyard

A Collection of teeth splitting fiction from 2012

Featuring

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Joe Clifford

Candy Green Gustavson

Dana C Kabel

Len Kuntz

Benoit Lelievre

Tom Pitts

Andy Scoriah

Gareth Spark

Liam Sweeney

Edward Vaughan

Eileen Wharton

Charlie Wade

Swing And A Miss

By Erik Arneson

I told my nine-year-old daughter Abby she wasn't getting any SweetTarts just before I heard his booming voice from across the convenience store.

"Give me the fucking money!"

I turned and saw a tall, broad-shouldered man with a black stocking stretched over his face and his hand in his windbreaker pocket pointing something at the clerk.

"Don't make me use this fucking gun. Give me the money. Now!"

The clerk, pale and sweating, exhaled a grunt like an extra in a bad zombie movie. He showed no ability to move.

"Hey, asshole!" The thug reached across the counter and grabbed the clerk's uniform shirt, bringing their faces to within inches. "Give me the fucking money!" I thought the clerk would puke.

The man standing near us in the candy and chips aisle sat on the floor, pulled his knees to his chest and whimpered.

I said to Abby, "It's alright, sweetheart. I want you to get down and crawl to the bathroom back there." She nodded and started crawling.

I was confident I could take down the thug — I'm a two-time Women's Collegiate Sport Pistol National Champion, and I still shoot at the range twice a week — except my gun was locked away at home.

But of course he didn't have a real gun in his pocket anyway. Who does that anymore?

“Damn it, I’m not joking. Give me the money or I shoot!”

I leaned over and whispered to Whimpering Man. “I’m going to put a bag of potato chips on the floor. Count to 10, then stomp on it. Understand?”

He whispered back: “Are you nuts, woman? He’ll kill me!”

“Listen. He doesn’t have a gun, but he could still kill us. And I won’t let my daughter get hurt. So you need to grow a pair, pal. You hear me?”

“Shit. Fuck. Yeah, yeah. Whatever.”

I put a single-serving potato chip bag on the floor. “You do this or I kill you myself. Start counting.”

I moved to the end of the aisle, grabbed a two-liter bottle of soda and headed toward the cash register. I was counting, too.

“You have three fucking seconds to open the damn cash register! Do it or you die!”

I reached “nine” in my head and sprinted at the thug. He caught me in his peripheral vision and began turning just as Whimpering Man, bless his heart, stomped on the bag. Hell, even I thought it was a gunshot.

Then I heard real shots as the thug pulled a pistol — a Ruger LCP, to be precise — out of his pocket and fired three rounds toward the candy and chips aisle.

I wound up and clocked him in the head with the soda bottle. As he wobbled, then fell, he dropped the gun. Better yet, his head smacked the edge of the counter on his way down, hard, knocking him out cold.

“You OK?” I asked the clerk. He nodded weakly, his eyes wide and unblinking. I picked up the Ruger.

“Ahhhhhh!” Whimpering Man screamed. “I’m shot! I’m shot!”

I looked at the clerk. “Call 9-1-1, now,” I said. He

stared at me. “Now!” He turned and picked up the phone. I think he even blinked.

When I reached Whimpering Man, he was writhing on the floor, his face and hands crimson. “I’m shot!” he screamed. “This is your fault!”

I knelt beside him to examine the wound. I saw it immediately.

“I don’t want to die,” Whimpering Man whimpered.

“You’ll be fine. I promise.”

I slid my index finger through the red on his cheek and popped it into my mouth. I smiled. “Delicious.” The thug’s bullets had missed Whimpering Man, but they’d decimated a pile of baked cherry pies. The greatest kind of pie.

I called to my daughter, “Abby, can you please bring this nice man some paper towels from the bathroom?”

Erik Arneson



Erik Arneson lives in Pennsylvania with his wife and editor, Elizabeth. He hosts the Title 18:Word Crimes podcast. His comic book *FORTUNE* is available from Comixology, Indy Planet, and NoiseTrade. Watch for his short story collection *THE THROES OF CRIME* and his novel *DRAGONFLY*. Find him at ErikArneson.com.