



"They shoot the white girl first..."

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They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need for hurry out here five miles from Fairly which has seventeen miles between it and any other town. Hiding choices are plentiful in the Convent but there is time and the day has just begun.

They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obliged to capture or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, crosses of palm, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses along with their clean, handsome guns.

They have never been this deep into the Convent. Some of them have parked Chevrolets near its porch to pick up an order of honey or have gone into the kitchen for a gallon can of barbecue sauce, but none has seen the halls, the dining room, the chapel, the school room, the works room, the bedrooms. Now they will. And at last they will see the cellar and expose its filth to the light that is soon to scour the Oklahoma sky. Meantime they are startled by the clothes they are wearing--suddenly aware of being ill-dressed. For in the dawn of a July day how could they have anticipated the cold that is inside this place? Their t-shirts, work shirts and dashikies soak up cold like fever. Those who have worn workshoes are unnerved by the thunder of their steps on marble floors; those in pro-keds by the silence. Then

there is the grandeur. Only the ones who are wearing ties seem to belong here and, one by one, each remembers that before the place was a convent, it was a gambler's folly. Bisque and rosetone marble floors segue into teak ones. Ising glass patterns early morning shadow on walls stripped of fabric and white-washed thirty years ago. The ornate bathroom fixtures which sickened the nuns were replaced with good plain spigots, but the princely tubs and toilets they could not exchange bordered on corruption. The excess that could be demolished was, particularly in the school room where stilled Arapajo girls once sat and learned to forget.

Now armed men search rooms where macrame' baskets float next to Flemish candalabra; where Christ and His mother glow in niches trimmed in grape vines. Nuns chipped away all the nymphs, but some of their hair is still entangled in the grape leaves. The chill intensifies as they spread through the building, taking their time, looking, listening, alert to the female malice that hides here and the yeast and butter smell of rising dough.

He looked back, this young one, forcing himself to see how the dream would go. The woman, lying uncomfortably on the tile, waved her fingers--or seemed to. So his dream was doing okay, except for its color. He had never before dreamed in such clear color.

The leading man paused, raising his left hand to halt the silhouettes behind him. They stood measuring their breath, making friendly adjustments in the grip of rifles and handguns. The leading man turned and gestured the separations: you four over there toward the kitchen; that four upstairs; four more into the chapel. He saved himself, his brother and the boy for the cellar.

They parted gracefully without sound or haste. Earlier, when they blew open the Convent door, the nature of their mission made them giddy. But the outrage was manageable now. Shooting the first woman (the white one) had clarified it like butter: the pure oil of hatred on top, its hardness stabilized below.

Outside the mist was waist-high. It would turn silver soon, even yield a rainbow or two before the sun burned it off, exposing acres of clover and maybe ~~with~~^{witch} tracks too.