



## "current generation..."

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current generation <sup>of</sup> liked or approved of the Convent women but that was way beside the point. The actions of Brood and Apollo had stunned and outraged them; Wisdom Poole was brother to their daughter-in-law and in his participation in a group intent on hurting women--for whatever reason--they would quickly see the monster's handiwork. And so they did. When Lone told them all she had heard and what she knew, Pious wasted no time. He instructed his wife Melinda to get over to the Beauchamps place; tell Ren and Luther to meet him. He himself would get to Deed Sands and Aaron Poole. Melinda said they ought to notify Dovey but they could not agree on how to do that if Steward was there. Lone didn't know if they had already started for the convent or were waiting for sunrise but said she would risk it and inform Dovey who could, if she wanted to, let Soane know what was going on.

Tired but happy by their dance the women returned to the house. They cleaned themselves and napped until 4:00 when they woke to prepare for the day. One mixed dough while another lit the stove. Others gathered vegetables for the evening meal and set out the breakfast things. The bread kneaded into mounds was placed in tins to rise.

The three women in the kitchen heard a shot. A pause. Another shot.

Sunlight was yearning for brilliance when the men arrived. The stone-washed blue of the sky was hard to break but by the time the men had parked behind shin oak and were starting for the Convent the sun had cracked through. Glorious blue. The water of the night rose as mist from puddles and sodden crevices in the road's shoulder. When they reached the Convent, they avoided gravel crunch by walking through tall grass and occasional rainbows to the front door. The claws, perhaps, snatched Steward over the top. Black and cracked they flanked the steps. Steward raised his rifle and shot open a door that had never been locked or even used in years. Sunlight followed him in when the door slanted inward on its hinges. There on the walls of the alcove, emerging from flaking paint, sexualized infants played with one another. A woman appeared and all he needed to see were her sensual appraising eyes to pull the trigger again. The other men were startled but not deterred from stepping over her and waiting for Deek's orders. Fondling their weapons they recall that guns served more than decoration, intimidation or comfort. They were meant. The men separated.



The three women in the kitchen heard a shot. A pause. Another shot. Cautiously they looked through the swinging door. In light from the slanted door shadows of armed men loomed into the hallway. The women raced into the game room and closed the door seconds before the men positioned themselves in the hall. They heard footsteps pass and enter the kitchen they have just left. No windows in the game room--the women were trapped and knew it. Minutes passed. Arnold and Jeff Fleetwood leaving the kitchen, noticed, then opened the game room door. An alabaster ashtry slammed into Arnold's temple, exhilarating the woman wielding it. She continued to smash until he was down on all fours while Jeff, taken off guard, aimed his gun a tick too late. It flew from his hand when a cue stick cracked his wrist and then, on upswing, rammed into his jaw. He had raised his arm first for protection then to snatch the point of the cue when St. Elizabeth of Sienna's frame broke over his head.

The women ran into the hall, but froze when they saw two figures exit the chapel. As they ran back to the kitchen, Harper and Menus were close behind. Harper grabbed the waist and arm of one. She was a handful and he did not see the skillet that swung into his

skull. He fell. Menus, struggling to hold the wrists of another, turned when his father went down. The stock that drenched his face was so hot he couldn't yell. He dropped to one knee and a woman's hand reached for his gun spinning on the floor. He yanked her left ankle. She kicked at his head with her right foot. Behind him a woman lifted a kitchen knife and brought it down so deep in the shoulder bone she could not remove it. She left it there and escaped into the yard with the other two.

Descending the stairs Wisdom Poole and Sargeant Person saw no one. They entered the school room where light poured through the windows. They searched behind the desks pushed to the wall even though it was clear nobody was small enough to hide there.

Down below Deek, Steward and K.D. observed in long, slow beams of flashlight perversions and violence beyond imagination. Evil lovingly drawn carpeted the stone floor. K.D. fingered his palm cross. Deek tapped his shirt pocket where sunglasses were tucked. He had thought he might use them for other purposes, but he wondered if he needed them now to shield his sight from a sea of depravity beckoning below. None dared step onto it. More than justified in their expectations, they turned back and climbed the stairs. The



schoolroom door was wide open; Sargent and Wisdom motioned for them to enter. Bunched at the windows, all five understood: the women were not hiding. They were loose.

Shortly after the men left Sargeant's place, the citizens of Ruby arrived at the Oven. The rain had stopped. The trash barrel swirled with debris. The stream had crested but didn't overflow its banks. Instead it ran underground. Where the rain had cascaded off the Oven's head it met glistening mud speckled with grout flakes washed away from bricks. The Oven shifted on one side as its concrete base sank into the soaked earth. The impacted ground on which it rested can no longer support its weight. In trucks and cars the citizens have gone to meet the men.