

# The Bulldog

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Our old lady was more fucked up than a soup sandwich on the bourbon and had been ever since our old man took two bullets through the mustache on Christmas Eve, 1986.

We were too young to understand the disastrous possibilities of drunk driving, so we looked at ridin' around with the ol' gal more as a roller coaster ride than a weavin' Sunday drive. We were goin' out to Auburn, KY; to the piss-puddled old folks' home where my grandmother lived. Before pappy was killed, she was referred to as Granny Gerty, but after our old man got put down, ol' Gerty sorta went cracky and slid into a constant ornery state, and the name changed to Gravel Gerty.

Our momma swerved, dodged trees in the hilly Kentucky countryside, dodged the rocky walls that had been demolished for roadways, and careened that boat of an Oldsmobile into the parking lot. It was summer; bird-sized mosquitoes, damp air pressing shoulders, that cursed sun blistering all open skin.

No shirts in summer. We brothers—"we" meanin' my seven-year-old brother Smitty, my eleven-year-old brother Bear, and my nine-year-old self—stood there in our cut-off sweatpants, cowboy boots, duct-taped sunglasses, pristine blond, brown, and black mullets, and we followed our stumblin' old lady into the old folks' home.

When we got into Gravel Gerty's room, chaos had ensued long before. It was a tiny room, fit for a pampered poodle or some kind of misbehaving criminal, but they had managed to squeeze in two senile buzzards.

There was a poor little nurse hunched in the corner, trying her damndest to dodge the bedpan, IV tower, food tray, and old lady feces that Gravel Gerty was heaving.

Gravel Gerty's skin was gray, hair was falling out, the veins in her arms bulging, pumping purple syrup blood slowly, but blood that still

had plenty of piss, lightning, and vinegar. She reached under the sheets, yelled out, “Burn in hell cocksuckers!” pulled out a spilling handful of loose fecal matter and splattered it all over that nurse’s white getup. As us boys stood gaping, our momma chuckled, fell into a chair that barely fit in there, and fell cold asleep.

We brothers grew Christmas morning smiles because we didn’t exactly know what “cocksucker” meant, but we knew it was bad, and we were delighted with the raunchy knowledge. That poor nurse made the hysterical mistake of ambushing Gravel Gerty’s bedside. Now, I mentioned that Gravel Gerty had aged, had turned frail and ghostly, but the ol’ gal was always hardened—chewed tobacco in her younger days, once got punched in the nose by Uncle Garland at a drunken family gatherin’ but pulled herself together and beat the cross-hangin’ Christ out of ‘im. So when the nurse came bedside, Gravel Gerty had a bear trap headlock in store.

That’s when she finally noticed that we were there for a visit. With the nurse’s face shoved into Gravel Gerty’s breast, she looked at us with her angry old, toothless face and announced, “Boys, I gotta joke fer ya!”

“Okay Granny!” we answered simultaneously.

With her free hand she shoved down the blanket and yanked the pink nightgown up under her chin. She had on no undergarments. We shouted out, “Oh no!” and covered our eyes.

“Ask me what I got up my skirt boys!”

“Whatcha got up yer skirt, Granny?!”

“At’s muh Goddamned bulldog! Now ask me if that’s so boys!”

“Is that so Granny?!”

“You bet your bottom buck that’s so. Now ask me if that’s one mean cocksucker of a bulldog, boys!”

“Is that one mean cocksucker of a bulldog Granny?!”

“You bet your skinny little asses it is...got blood in one eye and shit in the other!”

It was so beautifully shocking and remarkable and confusing that the three of us boys were rendered into a spastic state and were unable to make audible sounds as we tipped like falling trees. We blew snot out of our noses and, peeking through fingers at ol’ Gravel’s unspeakables, fell into a brotherly heap on the floor. We gathered ourselves after Gravel Gerty had been tranquilized, and purloin’t a rolling mop bucket as a means of transporting our sleeping mother out to the back seat of our car. Bear sat in the driver’s seat stretching to operate the pedals, I sat in his lap as a booster for Smitty, who was seven but had damned steady hands, and he guided us home.