

CATHY MCSPORRAN

Goldilocks

Davie prided himself, even while he was climbing through the Pakis' back window, that he was no kind of a racist. He knew at least one sick cunt who would shit on the beds just because the family were Pakis, *fucking Paki animals, man*. But Davie really didn't agree with that. After all, one of his best pals—Gotz, back in Third Year—had been a Paki. This was nothing personal at all.

Nothing personal—just getting by, he thought as he squirmed through the high window and dropped onto thick carpeting. He didn't bother to muffle his fall, but he did check the window frame; just as well, because there was a single bright blonde hair, caught on the latch. He pinched it between gloved fingers, worked it free and shoved it in his pocket. He was careful. He was still out and about, because he did his business carefully.

He glanced about the room—the polished table and chairs gleamed faintly in the light from the blinded windows. They had a dining-room, for Christ's sake. These people were loaded, everyone knew it. Their women brought all this gold jewellery back from India, and they never had to pay any taxes because if you asked them they'd start yelling

about racism. They could spare some of it for a guy on the dole. It was only fair.

Out of habit he crouched where he was, listening to the silence, but only for a moment. He'd seen them go out. He'd stood on the pavement and watched them: the wife, small and neat in bright pink floating silk, babbling away in Indian, fussing around the buggy; the lumbering husband, six-three (and looking paunchy these days, must be too much home curry), lowering his baby daughter into the buggy as gently as a carton of eggs. *They'll forget about the girl when a son comes along*, Davie's mother would sniff. But still, Davie watched them benevolently, as he stepped into a doorway so they wouldn't see him as they passed by. When they were out of sight he'd given them a good fifteen minutes, then went round the back of their enormous house and let himself in the back gate.

He imagined them now, well on their way down Paisley Road West, off to the Mosque or wherever it was they always went on a Saturday. The picture was clear in his mind, as he emerged into the hall and the fabulous hot curry smell. It should be clear—he'd followed and watched them often enough.

But if he had climbed to the attic, and peered from the highest window, with the view of all Paisley Road, he would have seen a different picture. He would have seen the trio stopping dead. He would not have heard the wife's cry of annoyance, but he would have seen her turning an empty nappy-bag inside out. He would have seen the husband nod patiently and turn the buggy around.

Davie was actually in the living-room doorway, but then the Ashoka smells in the hallway were just too much. He followed his nose into the kitchen, and had to admire the gleaming brightness on everything from the chopping-block counter to the rows of knives on the wall. You had to hand it to these Indian women, they knew how to keep a house. And there it was, the Holy Grail, lying on a wire tray: the biggest fucking nan bread he'd ever seen. *They laid on a curry for me*, he thought; he would say that later, to Stoney, when he took him the stuff. It would make Stoney laugh, and Stoney was generous when he was amused.

Davie tore off a corner of the bread, stuffed it into his mouth, and nearly spat it back out again. "Fuck, fuck, fuck..." Too hot. He didn't spit it out though, but blew on it and then stuffed it all back in, careful not to let any saliva-soaked crumbs fall to the table. Even when it was cooler than fucking lava the bread was disappointing, promisingly golden-yellow but dry and gritty to chew. What was he doing here anyway, eating like a houseguest? Time to get on with it.

The husband was standing on the pavement, solemnly pulling faces into the buggy. The baby gurgled and kicked with delight. Every once in a while she glanced after her mother into the shop.

Davie scanned the living room with some disappointment. Lots of porcelain figures and shit like that, and a TV and video (nothing special) but not much was any use. No golden idols or anything. Well, no worries, it would all be in the bedroom.

The wife emerged from the shop, shrugging with exasperation. Nothing there—wrong size maybe, wrong sex, too cheap or too rough—anyway, no good. They set off again up Paisley Road, towards home.

Davie's first look at the bedroom—the deep carpets and pine cabinets and plush bedcovers—said to him: money. His heart began to thump. He forced himself to be methodical, to open the drawers one by one and search thoroughly. His hands slipped on the handles. He didn't think he'd ever been so excited.

He had been through each drawer twice before he could admit there was nothing there. Just clothes; no gold, no jewels. Well, that was all right. He took a deep breath to stop the shakes that were starting to grip him. No need to panic. They'd have the stuff hidden, in the wardrobe maybe. He went to the wardrobe, started throwing piles of jewel-coloured satin onto the bed. His heart leaped when he turned up a black leather box; he prised it open, threw it aside with a curse when only hairbrushes fell out.

Nothing.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” He looked under the bed, then lifted the mattress and hurled

it aside. The bastards; they must have a safe. He pulled a framed print off the wall, let it drop and ignored the crash. Blank wall.

The kid's room. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He went down the hallway, tripping on the damn uneven flooring, into the room with yellow pastel walls. Green bunnies leered at him from a giant poster. They must really believe in fucking with a kid's mind, putting those nightmares up. The sun was way too bright; he needed to get out. He pulled out the drawers, tipping clothes and toys everywhere, and finally upended the cot. There was nothing there.

Davie ran from bathroom to spare bedroom to guest bathroom, opening and scattering, all over the top floor. He half-fell down the stairs, and whirled around the living room and kitchen. He ended up back in the bedroom again, among the open drawers and overturned clothes, opening and turning over and over again.

The bastards. The tight fucking Paki bastards. It must be in a bank. All of it. He screamed his rage, kicked an empty pine drawer so that it took off and smashed into the long mirror. There was a sharp pain in his foot but he took no notice. He screamed again and again.

Then he had to lie down, curled up amongst the slippery satins on the bed. The light was too bright. He felt sick. It wasn't fucking fair. Everything locked away from him in rich man's banks. Nothing for him. Nothing. He shut his eyes tightly, just for a moment.

A shriek like a parrot brought him back into the blinding light. He sat up, his stomach lurched and he vomited onto the bed. The shrieking redoubled. Everything was blurred. There was a bright pink creature in front of him, screaming. It would not stop.

“Fucking shut up,” he said to it, but heard only a mumble where his words should have been. It screamed all the louder.

Davie managed to get up. He pushed past the pink thing out into the hallway. That’s where it was waiting for them. A massive shape looming over him, roaring like a lion. Its great paws swooped and it would have had him, but there was another shrieking cry behind him and the creature paused. Davie hurled himself away, down the stairs in two stumbling steps.

The screaming began again, and the creature was behind him. He could almost feel its breath. He fell to his knees at the foot of the stairs, sobbing loudly. There was a puppy whimper not far away; he crawled away from it, towards the door. The whimpers turned to wails. Incredibly, the huge creature paused again.

In that instant Davie was scrabbling at the door. He screamed, waiting for talons to rake his back. But the door opened just in time. He staggered out into a blaze of white light, crying for help, shrieks and wails and roars following him out into the street.

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WPC Ginda was bloody sick of it. The others at the station got some variety—forensics maybe, fraud stuff, homicide. Once upon a time, she had too. But then the Chief heard the phrase *ethnic officers*, and now her life was an endless round of victim support. Moslem?

Hindu? Didn't matter. Indian? Pakistani? No difference. Black? Brown? White with a deep fucking sun-tan? Send for Ginda. After all, they'll talk better to one of their own, won't they?

Well, the woman was talking all right, in rapid tearful Urdu, of which Ginda didn't know a word. Ginda tried to keep her bitterness to herself. She'd seen the mess upstairs, the one McDonald and his boys were going over; even McDonald, who could find something amusing on a murder scene, was straight-faced. The family were sitting stunned at the kitchen table, the wife sobbing, the husband silent except to translate for his wife. "She says she wants to go home," he was saying, tonelessly. Half-heartedly he bounced the child on his lap—the baby was staring from one parent to the other, bottom lip quivering. "She's only been in this country two years. She says this doesn't happen in Pakistan."

Ginda doubted this, but nodded sympathetically. "Have you seen anyone hanging around? Any strangers?"

No, they hadn't. They'd seen nothing, had no-one to suspect. They had scarcely even seen the guy's face—just dark clothes and blonde curly hair. Ginda knew that McDonald wasn't finding any prints; already she could see how this was going to go. She pushed on anyway: "Someone you've seen before, then? A—"

The sobbing stopped abruptly. Ginda looked up sharply, prepared to catch the woman if she fainted. Husband and wife were staring in silence to a point over Ginda's shoulder. Ginda turned, and saw nothing but a piece of nan bread on a cooling tray, one corner torn and ragged. Ginda was faintly irritated—after what this guy did to their bedroom, they were upset because he'd eaten some of their lunch? But then she turned to

the husband, and saw how pale he had gone.

“It was for the rats,” he whispered. “It wasn’t for... it was for mice and rats.”

The wife got up and opened a high cupboard. She pulled on a pair of rubber gloves, and then lifted down a white cardboard box. When she thumped it down on the table a little yellow powder spilled out, and the man quickly drew the child away from it. Ginda peered at the box. It was covered with script that she didn’t understand—but quite unmistakable was the printed skull-and-cross-bones, and the red-ink drawing of a large rat.

The man made a sound like a groan. The child began to cry quietly. The woman suddenly began to laugh—she pointed at the box and said something to her husband, who groaned again. She laughed even more, quite merrily.

Later, Ginda’s report would put this down to shock. Privately, Ginda didn’t think the woman sounded too shocked at all.

Davie staggered along the road, still blinded by the light. He had no idea where he was. He was surrounded by animals. Their dark shapes lurched towards him. He could hear them growling and snuffling around him. Their cubs squealed and yapped around his feet. He cursed at them, but they would not keep their distance. His head, his guts, his foot, everything hurt. He couldn’t go on.

Then he found it: an open tenement door, cool and dark as a cave. He crawled in. The floor stank but it was cold; he curled up, pressing as much of his forehead to the cool

stone as he could. The door slammed, muffling the howls and rumbles from outside.

He could still hear the wail of sirens, or monstrous birds, getting louder and closer. Just for a moment, he didn't care. He would sleep now. He would stay in this place. He would stay as long as he could. This place was just right.