

## **Small Defenders**

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This story also appears in *Ottawa Jewels*, 2006 ISBN 1-897357-09-5

No one at the station dared to make a comment as Sergeant Hank Rickman marched by. How surreal it must have appeared as this hunk of a bald and intimidating man had made his way through the police station halls. Out of the right hand pocket of his black leather jacket stuck purple fuzzy ears. Colleagues stopped grinning and quickly looked away as his steely blue eyes stared them down.

As he walked out to his car in the cold November evening, he pulled the toy from his pocket to have a look. It was a small stuffed rabbit with beady black eyes, pink yarn whiskers and a defiant look on his face. His pudgy paws were poised as if ready for a boxing match. Hank chuckled lightly, looked into its eyes and said, "You tough little purple bastard." then gently stuffed it back in his pocket.

He arrived at the recovery ward doorway but was stopped by the diligent nurses. Laying in a bed across the ward was the intended recipient of this gift. This small, plump woman was curled up under blankets, her long blond hair still bloodied, her neck heavily bandaged and her face covered by the oxygen mask.

He watched intently as the nurse took the small Ty bunny toy from him, strode across the room and gently woke the patient. She spoke to her softly and handed the toy down to her. He watched as small bandaged hands, almost like mittens reached up for the gift, clumsily grasped it like a small animal and pulled it to her chest. Hank and the nurse exchanged nods. He turned quickly to leave, blinking moisture from his eyes. His next task was to question the sick bastard who did this to her.

Almost an hour earlier he was in the Police department social worker's office where three children were being comforted and questioned. Hank knew her for years through their work with children, victims of violent crimes. Mona had a knack for talking with kids and no

patience for macho police officers. Their working relationship was one of respect and cooperation at times peppered with repartees.

She offered the girl and two boys to choose from a bag of stuffed animals - a method of helping them cope with tragedy. After each of them had chosen one for themselves, the eldest - a girl of 13 stopped suddenly, reached in the bag again and said quivering while her moist, brown eyes darted back and forth, "Can you give this to my mom? Please?" as she gently pulled out a small, stuffed rabbit.

The social worker looked at him and back at the children. She smiled, nodded at the girl and turned to Rickman, smirking and winking as she handed him the toy.

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Ann woke to the sound of medical instruments clanging and voices, some calm and assuring; some complaining about pain and moaning.

"Oh, god. Where am I?" she thought. The last she remembered were doctors and nurses in white, blue and green scrubs, surrounding her on an emergency room table, sticking needles and tubes into her body. Her stomach was now feeling the gurgles of approaching upheaval. She realized that she was laying in a bed in a recovery ward. The walls were white and seemed to glow in the bright lights. She tried to speak but her throat burned and was constricted by the pressure of bandages around her neck. Her face was covered by an oxygen mask. She moved her hands up to her line of vision as they hurt so much. In her stupor and nausea, what she saw were small paw-like appendages, wrapped in dressing and slightly soaked with blood. She wondered if and when she would be able to write or type again. As she made a mental tour of her body and its various aches, she felt sharp pulling pains in her chest and belly too.

A nurse in pink scrubs approached her and softly spoke her name. All Ann could do was mutter "I feel sick". Almost as if expecting it, the nurse removed the mask and brought a spit pan close to her head at the side of the bed. Ann vomited with two painful thrusts of her stomach and throat. She noticed the resemblance of macaroni and beef that she had for lunch that day. That day? What day was it?

It was becoming clearer now, as to the reason why she was here. She remembered the argument she and her husband had gotten into just before supper. She felt her heart quicken as she saw flashes of images in which he was thrusting and lashing at her with a kitchen knife. Now she remembered why her hands were bandaged as she recalled trying to foolishly take the knife from him, to stop him but he seemed so determined.

Her breathing became quickened and she struggled with her burning throat to whisper "I'm thirsty". Another nurse approached and lifted a glass of water to her, directing the bendable straw to her dry lips. She sipped a bit at a time, recalling from experience after three caesareans not to take too much in.

Her next awareness was being cold. So within minutes of whispering to the nurse, she was covered with warm blankets. Ohhh, that felt so good and comforting. Comforting. Cuddly and warm. She made a sudden outburst with that connection, "My children! Are they okay?!"

"Yes, they are okay." assured one of the nurses.

Ann felt a wave of relief go over her body. So many feelings, so many sensations all within a short period of time. She was alive. Despite the crazed exclamations from her husband during the attack, he did not kill her. She was alive. She remembered now the voice of the

police woman arriving on the scene. She remembered the flashing red lights and the dark uniforms of the paramedics. She remembered submitting herself to their care, letting her body go lax as they performed their well-rehearsed work. She was alive! Her children were safe. She felt so grateful.

“What is your name?” she asked the nurse who was checking her various tubes and attached paraphernalia.

The nurse paused then matter-of-factly said “Donna”.

“Thank you, Donna,” Ann whispered before she dropped off to sleep.

Hours later she awoke to a gentle voice saying her name and touching her shoulder. She heard a woman’s voice softly saying, “Ann, Ann. Your children sent a gift for you,” as she showed her a small, purple rabbit toy.

Ann gasped lightly with pleasure, reaching up for the toy, grasping it in her bandaged hands and pulling it to her chest. She smiled and started to cry. She saw the nurse nodding to someone waiting by the door to the recovery ward. The nurse proceeded to check her chart then administer more pain medication. She dropped out of consciousness again.

She woke to the sounds of a different, smaller room with lights dimmer and kinder than the last one. She was still in a blur. She fumbled around and located the toy bunny beside her chest. “Ah, my angel” she thought fondly as she hugged him.

Laying on her right side, she could see an old man propped up in a bed a few feet from hers. His head was bandaged and his right arm was in a cast. Behind her she could hear a

nurse talking to another patient.

She stirred slowly trying to stretch her legs and tried to clear her sore, burning throat. She heard a chair push back from what must have been the nurses station beyond the foot of her bed. A short nurse approached her bed. She was wearing a uniform with a pattern of colourful butterflies. "So you're awake. Good. You're in the recovery ward now. It's Monday morning."

"What's your name?" asked Ann.

"Amanda," replied the nurse as she checked Ann's tubes and fumbled with a machine beside her bed due to its incessant beeping. "Damn thing!" as she opened the cover and pushed some buttons and closed it again.

"Many people have called for you. We told them you were in recovery."

"Thank you," whispered Ann before she dropped off into unconsciousness again, still holding her gift close to her heart.

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Ann awoke as the machine beside her had started beeping again. Amanda went over to it, opened its mouth and fed it a few direct taps to the keypad. It kept beeping. Another nurse came over to help her reset it and quiet it down.

"What is that thing for?" asked Ann.

"It's for regulating your pain killers."

"Oh, my god", exclaimed Ann hoarsely, "I just read about those things in a book.. before the... Patients have died due to overdose because they are difficult to program."

Both nurses stopped and gave her puzzled looks. The machine beeped, beeped again.

"Seriously," panted Ann. "I... I recently read about this". She felt a wave of panic go through her and wondered if she was indeed going to die, if not at the hands of her controlling husband then at the fault of a poorly-designed machine.

The nurses replaced a bag of fluid, punched in a few more keys on the control pad and the beeping stopped. Satisfied, they closed the cover, gave it a tap and came back to check on Ann.

"I'm cold", she said shivering, still clutching on to the bunny.

"All right, we'll get you some more warm blankets". Within minutes she was sleeping again.

She awoke to a succession of doctors coming to visit her one by one. She tried to remember their names as they introduced themselves and described the particular area they had operated on. One was a well shaven man in a leather jacket. Another was still in blue scrubs. As far as she could count, she had more than four working on her from top to mid-drift; her face, neck, throat, arm, hands and intestines. As was her nature, she politely whispered, repeating their names and thanked them before they went on with their busy schedules.

After she woke again, Ann struggled to turn to the door when she saw the old man from the other bed smile and nod as people approached quietly. Now she could see her brother

James, his wife Emily and her three children. She smiled and whispered painfully "Well, hello!" as her right hand reached out to them.

They were wearing the same clothes as on Sunday. They looked a little frightened and confused. Her daughter, Jillian started to chatter nervously but happily, "Hi, Mom! I'm so glad to see you! Are you okay? Did you receive our gift?"

"Yes," whispered Ann tearfully, smiling while struggling to grasp at the toy beside her. "He's so cute. Thank you."

The boys were very quiet. The youngest, Gregory had tears in his eyes. She looked at them, smiled the best she could and said "I love you. You were very brave. Thank you for calling 911. I'll be all right. I'm in good hands. You'll be in good hands too.", she turned to Emily, smiling weakly and said "Thank you, Emily", turning to James she said, "Thank you, James. Thank you." The middle one, Aaron did not speak but nodded his head in agreement. His eyes kept creeping back and forth to her neck and her hair.

"Look," said James matter-of-factly, "There's a social worker out in the hall who wants to speak with you about the well-being of the children. She seems persistent about it all. I told her they would be staying with us. They had the police call us after the incident for pete's sake." He paused, "I'm glad you're alive, sister and.. you're welcome."

"Okay," agreed Ann. "Thanks for bringing the children. I'll talk with her."

She bade farewell to the visitors, smiling tearfully as they left the room.

"Ah, yes." she thought to herself, "The tireless Children's Aid". She assured herself that it was just part of the process after a violent domestic incident such as this. It was just part of

the system, just like the police, paramedics, doctors and nurses. As she was calming herself down and quelling any unnecessary fear that damn machine started beeping its alarm again.

As the nurse Amanda swept over from her station, she was intercepted by a large woman in a brown winter coat. She introduced herself as an agent from Children's Aid and needed to speak with "this lady", cocking her head towards Ann's bed. Amanda nodded in agreement and continued over to the machine.

The conversation was brief and tiring. "The children will be fine with their aunt and uncle," Ann assured her with her weak voice competing with the complaints from the machine.

"We'll be contacting you and your brother in a few days," said the woman handing her card to Ann. Ann looked at her card, at her own bandaged hands and back to the woman's face. "Ah, yes. Well, um, I'll just leave it here beside your flowers".

Ann didn't bother to watch the woman leave but struggled to turn her aching body to the left and chortled, "Wow, I have flowers?"

"Yes, you do" said one of the other nurses as she approached from the station to fix her blankets, "three vases of flowers and one basket of of goodies!"

"Jeezus," thought Ann. "How many people have heard what went on in my life recently? I'm touched but shit! I'm so embarrassed."

She felt embarrassed but she had felt that way during the last few years in the marital hell she was bound to with that controlling, selfish man. She felt proud that she had recently

started standing up to him. She felt angry at what he had done and attempted to clench her fists. “Ow!” she exclaimed in pain.

“Do you want me to increase the dosage on the machine?” asked the nurse.

“Gawd, no!” Exclaimed Ann as she recoiled, hugging her chest. She stopped to look at the purple bunny in her patched up mittens. His paws were raised and clasped together as though he was getting ready for a fight. She smiled down at his defiant little face and whispered, “I’ll be all right”.



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