

THE WHORES OF BABYLON

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Deidre McSwain looked upon the ladies of the night with both disgust and pity. They were hookers, prostitutes, and derelicts. The girls considered themselves *entrepreneurs*. Men had a need and they fulfilled it, providing reasonable compensation was met. She assumed the hookers did not take checks.....maybe PAYPAL but, no checks. It was pretty much a cash-only business.

She grew more and more disgusted with them every time she drove by. Perhaps they were simply a sign of the times. She used to take her son, Oliver, to the park across the street when he was a boy. She would push him on the swings and they would laugh together. It seems like a lifetime ago. Back when the world made sense. Back when people still had manners.

Back when porn and sex were reserved for the backroom of video rental stores and dark alleys. Back when the majority of humanity still had their senses about them.

The ladies would simply huddle around one another and try and keep warm. Some were smoking. Some were talking on their phones. Some were only girls, not even 18. Deidre had called the police on several occasions. Sometimes they would show up. Once in a while, they would arrest the ladies. The police seemed more interested in nailing their clients, rather than stopping the ladies. If the ladies were arrested and no cash changed hands, they could only be charged with vagrancy. A sting usually required several officers working in unison and this city simply couldn't afford it.

Deidre liked to think of the whores as simply a very visible decline of what was once a great city. It was like having a giant tumor on an Olympic athlete. The ladies were an eyesore. They had rubbed Deidre the wrong way and had gotten underneath her skin. Deidre began to resent them more and more with each passing day.

Some nights, she would simply sit in her car and watch the ladies. She recorded the license plate of every car that stopped and a girl got in. She had dozens of numbers on her sheet of paper. Some of the vehicles were very expensive. Clearly, paying for sex was not exclusively reserved for the lower classes.

At some point, she wasn't quite certain when she decided that she and she alone was going to have to do something about these ladies. It was up to her and her alone to remove this tumor from the city. She knew it was going to have to be something drastic. She knew it was going to be extremely unpleasant.

It might even be downright violent.

The plan more or less kind of came into its own one night at her widower's support group. They were a very tight-knit group of gals who had one thing in common: *their husbands had been*

taken from them without their consent. Not all the ladies in the group were widowers. A few were divorcees. For one reason or another, their marriages had fallen apart. Deidre had not been to Mass in years. The sudden death of her husband Clark, 18 months ago changed all that. She went to bible study and had gone on several Catholic retreats with nearby churches. Their marriage hadn't all been letter-perfect. She loved him but she also hated him at times. She was caught in a very unpleasant situation many people find themselves in at her age. Too old to start over, too young to waste her life going on like this. Still, he had provided a decent life for her and Oliver. Clark and Oliver had always been close. He took his father's death pretty hard, as would any boy in his situation. She didn't realize just how bad things had gotten in their marriage until she was talking to one of her friends at his funeral and it just kind of came out.....without any warning.

"At least it was quick. My husband died of cancer, Clark just died of a sudden heart attack," she said.

"He didn't die of a heart attack."

"What do you mean?" she asked perplexed by her response.

"He died from being an asshole. The heart attack was just the final straw."

There it was. Somehow, someway in the two decades that had passed since their marriage began, it had soured. Clark had gone from a gamer nerd who plays Frisbee football to an overbearing, middle-aged, nightmare of a boss. He had turned into a tyrant. He just couldn't leave his personality at work, it followed him home. Clark had turned into the kind of person she would avoid talking to. It had gotten that bad.

Deidre didn't want to monopolize everyone's time. She knew the divorced ladies were hurting as well. The plan kind of just popped into her head one night, when she was listening to Sabrina discuss why her marriage had soured after almost twenty years together.

"I found out he got a hooker.....a goddamn junkie. He did drugs with her and had sex with her, then came home to me and the boys. I only found out about it by accident. I'm glad I found out. I took the son of a bitch for everything he had. Sad thing is, it was only a few blocks from our house, down at Babylon."

"Babylon?" asked Deidre.

"Yeah. Used to be a nice place. Until the whores started showing up. Now, I don't let the boys go anywhere near there. We'd move but we're broke. Can't afford to go anywhere else."

"Wait, the girls down at Babylon ruined your marriage?" asked Deidre.

"No, my husband ruined our marriage. He did meth and coke with a sixteen-year-old runaway, then tried to have sex with her in his car. It's kind of hard to come back from something like that." she said.

Deidre sat back and continued to listen. Heather Spacek said pretty much the same thing. She followed her husband one night when he told her he was going bowling. She had to watch him get the hooker and have sex with her. She walked up to him and knocked on his window right in the middle of it.

"I told him I wanted a divorce. I never said another word to him. Maybe I should have. If he had just said something to me, I would never have been so mad. We're supposed to be partners for God's sake and I can't even trust him not to nail hookers. I just wonder how long this went on before I realized something was wrong."

"How did you know something was wrong?" asked Deidre

"The dumb ass never took his bowling balls with him," she added.

There it was, in black and white for the whole world to see. Those whores had ruined two marriages. Sure, you can blame the husbands to some extent but, she knew it was those whores who took advantage of their weakness. She wondered if they had some kind of magical power over men. Some way to put them into a trance and make them forget about their families. Kind of like a *fairy hooker* that uses magical hooker dust on their customers. She wondered if Clark ever visited the ladies. She'd rather not know. She didn't know her husband well at all as she discovered about two months after his death, when she got a call from a storage unit, informing her that the rent was due at the end of the month.

"Storage Unit? What storage unit?" she asked the caller.

It seems that Clark had paid cash for a 10x10 storage unit where could conceal some of his activities from his wife. He had only listed her name and number because the storage unit required it. He had rented it for years and she had absolutely no idea.

"What the hell is in there?" she asked.

The unit manager met her and gave her a key.

"If you're not going to renew the lease, everything has to be out of there by the end of the month."

"That's in three days?"

He said nothing and got back in his truck. It took her a few minutes to work the lock and open the door. When she saw what was inside, it almost took her breath away.

Guns, ammo, bulletproof vests, and helmets. Not your typical shotguns and hunting rifles, no Clark wasn't interested in those. These were your mean and nasty, mass shooting types guns, like AR-15s and AK-47s. Clark had been preparing for war.

She had no idea that the man she had been married to for over 24 years was a gun nut.....or *firearms enthusiast* as they liked to call themselves. She realized that even after sleeping next to

the man for over two decades, she had absolutely no idea who he really was. He was a complete stranger to her.

She had to move everything. Oliver was working and couldn't come. She had to ask the other ladies to help her move the crates and ammo. Sabrina knew something about guns. She picked one up and held it as if she were going to shoot it.

"Dee, I'd say you've got about ten thousand, maybe even twenty thousand dollars worth of hardware right here. These guys don't even look like they've even been fired," she said.

"You want it, it's yours. What the hell am I going to do with this crap? Shoot those stupid whores down at Babylon?" she said casually

The three ladies just looked at one another. They had a moment. A very profound, life-altering moment. None of them laughed or dismissed the idea. Deidre then realized that she wasn't alone in wanting to do something about those whores. The other ladies had been thinking much the same thing, only they never said a word about it.

"I mean.....shooting a whore is wrong, isn't it?"

"Is it?" asked Heather.

Deidre just laughed and moved on. Only, she hadn't moved on. The idea had been planted and was beginning to sprout. Deidre realized that she no longer saw the ladies of the night as human beings anymore. They were only characters in a play who were not needed anymore. Their entire existence at this point was completely unnecessary. The more she thought about it, the less insane it became. She wasn't a murderer.....*she was just a human exterminator.*

She toyed around with the idea for weeks. She would watch the whores and their Johns. She would record their license plate numbers and what kind of car it was. She would call the police and complain but, at the end of the day, the ladies always won out. You could arrest the whores and new whores would simply take their place. They were kind of like human mold, destroying what had been her refuge of happiness. She and Oliver had so many happy memories at the park. Back when all that mattered was making him happy and putting dinner on the table. Somewhere along the way, it had all gone wrong. The train had come off the tracks. Somewhere along the way, it had all gone horribly wrong. She didn't even know where or why. She knew that the happiest times in her life were playing with Oliver at the Babylon Park. Watching him play basketball with his friends. Watching him climb on the monkey bars. He was so happy back then. They would sit and talk for hours about everything. Those were the happiest moments of her life. Not like her miserable childhood, or her miserable mother. She can clearly remember being twelve years old and asking her mother about what she should do with her life at the dinner table.

"Well Dee, it's pretty simple. Just decide which lie you are going to believe in and live it. The God lie, the happy marriage lie, the work hard and retire lie, pick your lie.....cause kiddo, they're all fucking lies. The only thing you can count on is that you are going in the ground.....and no one is going to remember you."

Her mother had died young. The cause of death was never really determined. Deidre knew. Her mother had canceled her own show. Deidre sometimes wondered where she was and what she was doing. She wondered if her dead mother and finally found some happiness in some faraway world for miserable people. She tried not to become like her mother, only to discover that every girl eventually turns into their mothers, no matter how hard they fight it.

She watched the ladies on Friday night. It was cold and raining and the girls were still wearing skirts and heels. They were all huddled together, trying to keep warm.

Birds of a feather flock together. she thought

In between the rain and thunder, she would sit in the car and simply reach boiling point. She took a 9mm with her and two clips. She had gone to the shooting range and had been practicing with the guns. She was no longer afraid of guns. They were only tools designed to do a particular job, a very important job. A very thankless job. She could picture herself driving up to the ladies and getting a few of them to come over. She figured she could hit two or three of them before they scattered. Not enough to make it worth her while. She had to remove the license plate from her car. She needed a different car altogether. Some of the ladies must surely be on to her by now. They probably assumed she was a cop. Why else would she be parked across the street every night?

Everyone in her life had failed her to some degree or another. Her family, her friends.only to discover that some of the most poisonous people you will ever meet come disguised as family and friends. Snakes in the grass, waiting for the right moment to strike. She had known these people all her life....or so she thought. She had known Suzie since high school. She came to her one night after the funeral, after several glasses of wine, and just blurted it out. Sometimes words hurt just as bad as bullets.

"Hey, Dee.....I'm sure Clark had a really good life insurance policy. I've gotten myself into one hell of a mess and I could use some help. Not much, just like thirty thousand or so."

Deidre threw the wind bottle at her and told her to get out. She hasn't spoken to her since. Why bother? Why bother talking to anyone nowadays? They're all the same. All they ever do is let you down.

The one bright spot in her life was Oliver. That boy was going places. She knew he would make her a grandma someday and she could start all over. She was going to raise her grandchildren as if they were her own. She and Oliver were going to be so happy. All they really needed was one another.....and a girl....or maybe just her ovaries. Marriage is such a gamble nowadays. They would take their children to the Babylon Park and lay with them for hours, just as they had done. Still, she was surprised by their last conversation at the dinner table last night. She was surprised by Oliver's statements.

"Mom.....I wish you weren't so hardcore sometimes," he said between bites.

"What do you mean?"

"About those hookers. Why do they bother you so much?"

"I don't know.....they just do."

"Come on mom, you know why."

"No, really.....I don't."

"I mean, I know they're gross but they're just trying to make a living, like everyone else," he said.

"Ollie.....you're father and I tried to make a living. Those girls are trying to get their next fix, there's a big difference."

"I just don't think you should be so hard on them. Nobody's perfect."

"That doesn't give them the right to give blowjobs to strangers for pocket change either."

"Mom, everyone pays for sex, whether they realize it or not. Those ladies aren't pretending to be something they're not."

"So, you think it's okay to pay a hooker for sex?"

"I wouldn't do it, that doesn't mean someone else wouldn't. Who am I to say?"

"Ollie.....you'll understand when you're older," she said.

"No mom.....*you'll understand when you're older*," he replied and went back to his meal.

She was hurt but more annoyed. Her son was entitled to have his opinions, just like everyone else but, certain only certain opinions. She was no different than the rest of society. We're allowed to have opinions on meaningless subjects like gay marriage but, the important topics, like paying a hooker for sex, well that's another matter entirely. Watching the ladies huddle around the expensive truck that had just pulled over, only made her angrier. She recognized the truck from her church. She might have to drop the unsuspecting wifey a little note during mass, to alert her to her husband's extracurricular activities. Guess there won't be any donuts after church for that poor family.

She watched the ladies and she could feel something inside of her move. Some kind of switch had been pulled. Some magic lever that kept her sane was now pulled and she was no longer capable of rational thinking. Deidre blamed the whores for everything that had gone wrong in her life. She would rather be dead than be one of those ladies. We define someone's life by the goals and success they have achieved. We define someone's life by how high they've gone. A whore is defined by how low she has gone. A whore has no pride. A whore will never say no, as long as the price is right.

A whore is the shortest distance between two points, not a straight line.

In the days that followed, Deidre did what any completely insane person will do and justified her actions to those around her. She had a very deep and very sobering conversation with her priest. She didn't hold back.

"Father.....I have come to the unpleasant realization that the world will be a much better place if certain people are not in it," she said in the confessional.

"Why do you say that?"

"If we kill the wrong people, we go straight to prison. If we kill the right ones, we have streets and high schools named after us. I went to Enrico Fermi High School. He created the Atomic bomb. He was a mass murderer and my high school was named after him."

"Are you telling me you want to kill people?"

"I'm saying that God just kind of screws up sometimes. The quality control up in heaven went to lunch or something. Defective units sneak across the assembly line and make it out. It's up to us to find them and return them."

"God doesn't make mistakes my child.....we do."

"I really wish I could believe that father.....I really do."

No one would understand. No one would even try to understand. There are no innocents, just believers, and non-believers. Those who will be saved and those who will not be. Those who will go to heaven and those who will be sent to hell. It all makes sense to a six-year old.....

She made Ollie his favorite meal. she watched him eat. He told her he was finally going to do something with his life. He was accepted to Notre Dame on a full scholarship. She couldn't believe it. She threw her arms around him and kissed him. This kid was going to make something of himself. He was going to live a much happier life than she had. He could be their next mayor or congressman. He was going to be a success, instead of a failure. He had made her very proud.

"I'm going to celebrate with some friends. I've got a lot of packing to do."

She didn't tell him she was going to execute a mass murder this evening. She would only have to tell him if she got caught, which she probably wouldn't since there are never any cops around Babylon anymore. She was going to use Clark's car. Take the license plates off. He always kept it at work and took the train home. He hated traffic. She wasn't sure if anyone would recognize the car or not. It was a chance she would have to take.

She waited until Ollie was gone. She loaded four 30 round magazines and some clips for the Uzi. She had three full clips for the 9mm. She even had her *Suzie Q*, a fully functioning fragmentation grenade, just in case, things didn't go according to plan.

Deidre was going to blow those unsuspecting whores to pieces.

She didn't even realize what she was doing, she just knew why she was doing it. She loaded up her arsenal. It was a warm night in the valley and the moon was out. Lots of people out on the town. She noticed that most of the girls came out after midnight, once the bars and clubs started shutting down and the boys realized they were going to go home alone. Being alone for some

people is torture. Deidre could never understand why, unless you aren't comfortable with yourself.

She parked and waited. She watched one car after another slow down and stop. She watched the whores get in the cars, then get returned to the corner of Babylon and Main. There had to be a dozen of them, Jezebels.... Harlots.....scoundrels.....no whores in heaven, that was for certain. There would never be any whores in heaven. If you can't get into heaven.....*then why the hell do you exist in the first place?*

She drove by a group of ladies and their Johns. There was a big crowd on the corner. She took out her AR and rolled down the window. The first shots hit one of the whores and killed her instantly. She only regretted that she didn't have any help. If someone came from Main street, they could cover the whole area. She continued firing. The noise was loud. Everyone tried to scatter. She had hit over a dozen people. She fired again and again, watching the bullets rip through their bodies. It was as if she had just cleaned a very dirty stain that everyone noticed but, everyone ignored. She got out and made certain they were dead. She fired more rounds into those on the ground, killing them in a second. Some were screaming. She noticed a black whore, crawling on the ground, holding her leg. She watched her crawl over to a man who was clutching his chest. She grabbed the whore by her hair and threw her on the concrete. Then she looked over at the man on the ground. He was wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses, trying to conceal his identity. She dropped the gun when she saw who it was.

"Ollie?" she asked softly.

"Mom?" he said clutching his chest. She could see him coughing up blood.

"Cracker just wanted his first piece of ass.....why do you have to go and shoot everybody?" asked one of the whores.

"Ollie.....I'm sorry.....mommy's here," she said and helped him up. They stumbled across the street to the park, where they used to play. He was barely breathing at this point. She put him on the carousel and began to spin him, getting some of his blood on her hands.

"Everything's going to be alright Ollie.....don't you worry.....momma's going to make everything alright."

"Mom.....why did you shoot everybody? Why did you do that?" he asked wincing in pain.

She heard the sirens and saw the police lights from the park. She knew the cops would be coming for her.

They were coming for them both.....cause no one is ever allowed to be truly happy in this world. The only ones who are truly free are the criminals....and that's all she was, a common criminal, who thought she was exceptional.

"We'll be joining you soon, Clark, just you wait.....just you wait."