



Margaret Elysia Garcia

The Warfare

Cheryl Marie Jenkins was fond of placing Bible verses on strips of paper next to her kids' lunches at noon. On this particular day, Smith, Wesson, Indiana and Dakota sat down to one apple each, sliced and plain cheese sandwiches on plain white bread and one of her favorite verses: "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

"Devour," Smith said to Wesson as he bit into his sandwich. Wesson smiled an open mouth smile, with just come in teeth.

They, of course, were used to a lifetime of their mother. She had two lines of work: homeschooling them and being a spiritual consultant for those in her town in need of guidance. Her business card had another bible verse on it. "*We are to resist the devil and be stedfast in our faith.*" A shield, helmet, breastplate and belt arranged in the center right above her phone number. She was serious about her armor and the need for it, in this day and age. Armor, in fact, was everywhere.

Above the mantle of the fake fireplace of their three-bedroom stucco, two-bath and a half home (with the attached garage that had no door between the house and the garage which annoyed her husband but made Cheryl Marie feel that much safer from demons), was a giant cast iron early 1970s shield and helmet and breastplate and sword underneath. Cheryl Marie's in-laws thought they were decorative and odd for a house of Ikea modern, but in truth, Cheryl had every intention of using them someday.

"Eat the food presented before you; honor they mother and father. I rid



this town of many demons to bring this to the table.” Smith looked at his mother as she spoke and tried to get a sense of whether she believed her words. They hadn’t had meat in weeks and he began to wonder whether she needed bigger demons to fight. Wesson was way ahead of him.

“If you fight Satan himself, do we get steak?” That cracked both teenage boys up and left Cheryl Marie looking strained, her blonde hair curled tight behind the back of her ear. She hoisted Dakota into her high chair and placed peeled apple slices on her tray. Indiana picked at the cheese and licked off the mayonnaise. She liked drawing pictures of the demons after her mother snared them. She kicked her heels against the table leg and smiled.

Both Smith and Wesson had once been to public school; they knew that people had mothers who worked in offices, or Target, or didn’t work at all. But Indiana and Dakota had no clue. Smith had gotten in trouble for threatening other kids too many times and Wesson was sent home from school for peeing on the playground. In Cheryl Marie’s mind Wesson had just been misunderstood. He’d been trying to pee in a curve like a jump rope the girls could use on the playground. "He's being creative, can't you people see that?" she yelled at the principal. When she asked Wesson about it he said he was just trying to write his name with it in the sand.

“There were demons sitting on that principal’s desk,” Cheryl Marie told them by way of explanation as to why Wesson was expelled.

Sunday is the Lord's Day and she takes everyone to church and before church they go to Denny’s on Pioneer Road below the 605 freeway off ramp next to the Christian bookstore. She’s been having some trouble with the eldest one. He's didn’t want to go out much these days. He's inherited her side of the family's bad adolescent acne and his father’s huge stature. For awhile he was trying to exercise at everybody's request, but ever since the time he was on bike riding to the comic book store and those kids yelled back to their mommy, "Hey look! Is that Bigfoot mommy?" he’s given it up. He stayed inside now and slipped secular DVDs into the DVD player when she's wasn’t looking. Thank the Lord, she still thought anything animated was for children, he thought. She never stopped and studied animated content. As long as it was animated he could see anything and get away with



it.

Recently that's meant a Japanese anime of tied up school girls being tortured by salary-men in exchange for Gucci and Prada. It has occurred to him to learn Japanese.

"Mom, can we do a Japanese component the last semester of homeschool?" He'd asked that morning.

"Why? They are not a Christian country, Smith."

"But maybe I could go and help spread the Word of the Lord one day."

"We'll see. That might not be a bad idea." Smith was pleased. He didn't like lying about motivations—he was still a Christian in that sense, but he liked arguing with her and breaking her heart even more.

Cheryl Marie spends all week praying but Sunday is the day to take that praying one step further. She worries about the boys especially. They had their daddy in them—a lot of him. And their daddy Frank had Satan visit him more than once to leave a demon inside him. One time the demon was stuck in there for months. Cheryl Marie had to leave the kids with her Mama in El Monte and go back to the house everyday to exorcise it. She prayed over Frank and watched as his nostrils flared and his eyes grew beady and hands grew shaky. She jumped around his erratic body hoping to catch the demon off guard. Finally, in the middle of the night after three weeks of Frank gardening till three am and hammering away in his workshop until 5 am, he emerged from the backyard exhausted and Cheryl Marie had one demon surrendered and beat—tossed in a pillowcase sack and ready to drown like a kitten.

She moved her children back in the following week after she'd bleached the kitchen and swept the garage and made sure there were no more demons. A couple of them she caged and kept in the far corner of the yard, chained in despair. They reminded her of what she'd read of Tower of London heads—warning other demons to consider the power of the household before they come into the yard. She threw out little baggies of demon droppings that she found here and there. She caught a couple with a mousetrap where Frank had stashed his marijuana she'd found. From top to bottom, the house was now demon free.

That was what she lived to do, for her family and for the members of



her congregation. They believed in her. People were so generally good and kind, Cheryl Marie told them. The problem wasn't with the people. The problem was with the demons. They could get into the house too easily—through the TV, cracks in the foundation, whispering through holes in the screen door—and they brought terrible plagues with them: drugs, homosexuality, oral sex, the sloth of unemployment, you name it, the demons brought it with them and subjected good honest people to dangerous ways.

Smith lost track of time. He believed himself to be a scholar—he didn't need school or college. He spent a good deal of his time reading the classics. Cheryl Marie was okay with that too. Anything a hundred years old or more had some value to it. She never read anything but the bible but if she didn't know that a book had been banned it was safe for that book to be in Smith's room. As long as there were no witches, idols, or demons.

Even though she felt that it was a woman's job to fight the demons, she trained her sons, nonetheless, to at least be able to look for them. She couldn't be too careful—or sure that they would find women to marry who had been trained to her level of expertise. Smith was already seventeen and had shown no interest in dating any of the younger girls at church or even talking to them.

She got her kids out on Saturday afternoons, with plastic bags and gloves to hunt for demons. She'd pick easy places to find them for her sons, like behind bars, and cheap motels dumpsters.

"Here's one. See it?" She'd ask. The children would nod in agreement. Dakota and Indiana were the best at it. They'd find them in empty beer cans and coke bottles and lock them up like fireflies, running around the yard when they got back with the demons tucked inside. Cheryl Marie covered the openings with Saran Wrap and secured them with rubber bands. The demons always seemed to have a stunned bewildered look on their black



swirl of a face, then slowly their green eyes would dim as they ran out of air and died. No air holes for these fireflies.

But Smith didn't fair so well at the hunts. Often times he just couldn't see them, even when they were right in front of him. Cheryl Marie accounted for this being because Smith had reached the teenage years of doubt. Sometimes he tried to fake it, pretended to see them, telling his younger brothers that he didn't catch them because he was letting them catch the demons instead for practice.

He always told Cheryl Marie that he could see them when she'd come in and say "Smith! Wesson! Are those demons sitting at the edge of your bed telling you not to do your homework? Are those demons sitting on the edge of your dresser telling you not to clean your room?" And then she'd shoo them like she was swatting flies or getting a cat down from the dinner table and watched as it guiltily crept off in a corner. Cheryl Marie wasn't so easily fooled. But with prayer, his eyesight she hoped would improve. And this is what she spoke most often to the Lord about. Was it best to leave Smith be and find his calling to the Lord on his own? Most certainly that must be part of the plan. But would he know when the demons were upon him?

In all likelihood, there wasn't much to worry about within the home. She kept things clean and bright and only a skilled demon could cast a shadow in such a bright place.

He drew the mini blinds on the window above him. And closed the door. It was acceptable to pray at home, you didn't need church for that. The bible said as much and he told Cheryl Marie, he felt a call to be home. He needed to wait for a sign. She left him alone. Let him stay and dragged the rest of the boys and shook Frank awake from the couch and left for church.

Smith could feel the demon within call to him. He circled his room like a caged dog, The demon within felt like it was clawing at the muscles in his legs and up his thighs. He looked around the room for them now. But the house was quiet. The wind from the open window dropped goose bumps on his skin. He shivered and felt awake and restless.

Smith tried to read. He wasn't the most focused kind of boy and nothing had the right kind of passages so he'd pick up and toss down books and magazines and the bible. He read a rape scene in Edith Hamilton's



Mythology. He hunted under his bed for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* —he kept it hidden as it was written by a Roman and they'd killed Jesus along with the Jews. It was a good thing Cheryl Marie didn't know squat about the classics. He flipped through it for more scenes of god rapists and their mortal prey. He read through sections of the epic poem stopping on words of thrusting, passion, taking. One hand slipped down his pants.

He took down his parakeet out of its cage and went over to the bottom of his brother's book case where all the *National Geographic* and *Highlights* were kept. He picked three issues in print long before he was born and brought them over to the bottom bunk bed. He could feel the demon swelling again as he flipped through the airline and photo ads and pictures of dolphins until he came to the dog-eared pages he'd been looking for. The bush women with the dark saggy breasts that he'd heard his aunt say once that could be rolled and tucked into a bra. He stared a long time but that didn't seem to appease the demon or Smith. He got up and went to the kitchen, the parakeet perched on his shoulder.

He wasn't even sure he was hungry. The kitchen was looked like the bulk department of a supermarket. Maybe he'd eat his favorite. Salami and mayonnaise sandwiches on sourdough. It was bright in the kitchen though. And he decided to picnic in his bedroom. He brought all the fixings and set them on his desk. And made a submarine salami and mayonnaise sandwich and licked the last bit of mayonnaise off the butter knife and got some on his chin. It was hard to tell where the white heads stopped and the trace mayonnaise drops started on his chin. He took a few bites of his sandwich when it came to him--the thought of what he really wanted.

The cold linoleum floor gave his Bigfoot body a chill as he walked across it to the bed. He stripped naked and lay on top of his bottom bunk. It was too light in the room. He picked up his Greek sailor's hat his grandparents brought him back from their trip to Greece. Smith could be a literal boy. And though much was said about Onan spilling his seed in the Bible, he wasn't touching it directly and therefore felt that even in his momma's interpretation he wasn't sinning. He picked up the sandwich and ate out the salami so there was nothing left but wet sourdough.

“I'm getting rid of this demon, Momma,” he said to himself grittily as



he moved the slippery sandwich with a tight grasp up and down in front of him. The parakeet nipped at his shoulder, whistling as Smith moaned.

Cheryl Marie followed the scent of demons to her son's bedroom and didn't stop to turn on the light. She was infrared with those demon things and saw, in the darkness, that something was sitting on top of her son's lap causing him all kind of convulsions. In a second she was at the bunk and grabbed hold of the demon from the base freeing it from its soggy and flaking sourdough.

"Be gone Satan!" she cried as she slid her hand tightly from the end of Smith's demon to the tip. She beat the sandwich from its perch and it fell in chunks on the linoleum floor.

"Momma!" he gasped trying to cover himself. But he'd already reached the end. The demon evaded capture by Cheryl Marie but left evidence all over her hands.

After all the yelling and the cleaning and the calling on the Lord to give her a sign and tell her what to do, she sent him into the garage to talk with Frank. Frank just smiled at Smith and shook his head.

"Don't give your Momma cause to fret over you, son." Things calmed down a bit. The Lord told her while she was wrapping pig in blankets and putting them on cookie sheets that she should burn the magazines and books she'd found in disarray on the floor. Smith would sleep in the den where there was no door and plenty of sunlight until she was sure there were no more demons in the room.

As for Smith, he had a new scenario playing endlessly in his head. He could finally see the demons. They were his friends.