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Winner of the BC Federation of Writers contest.

Easter

Santa Ana, Calif. -An elderly women doused her wheelchair bound, cancer-stricken husband with rubbing alcohol and set him on fire because he ate her chocolate Easter bunny.

-Vancouver Sun

Him, my husband, that devil, a pitchfork under his teeth, a whole smelly Hell in his mouth. Wheeling his chair naughty into the kitchen where for thousands of years I have cooked his meals, the bedroom where for six hundred and sixty-six lifetimes I have frozen under his thick needs.

I have no hiding spots left.

No sugar. In all of this house, no Wunderbar, no Smarties, no Aero. Oh, the chocolate, bubbling in the tarnation of his gullet. The smell and colour of our marriage, his cancer yellow, my treats in his gut a deep violet like the underside of flame. And oh, the stink, the sickly sweet smell of putrefaction.

Alive, I am, perfectly, while that old doze oozes from room to room on the rubber wheels of his disease. Mama, Mama, he cries, give me chocolate! My bars are under the floorboards or sunk deep in the freezer chest or tucked up in the shell of a light fixture but he is intrepid, that old man who wafts, he finds them, fast and slippery out of his chair when I am gone. One more time, one more extension of that dying limb into my candy.

Oh holy. This time of year I can see Jesus knocked out every time my husband's foul mouth parts; Jesus lying on the lawn while white bunnies clipper over the triad of his body. While inside our walls my sneaky husband steals what belongs only to me and will not stop. I hate him every second. Mommy! he cries.

How I have put up. Fifty-one years this next June and every day that husband, exudate slipping from every crevice in him. Out. Out and in. Look what he takes in, year after year, how I feed him, the animal, the greedy pig, the endless mornings of bacon fat, the noons and nights of beef. In and out until now the aureate smell of cancer and diapers, the slit devil's eyes he casts upon me. Fire in his grasping, insatiate mouth, sparks on the steel of his wheelchair.

And Jesus on the lawn almost dead.

In the pharmacy I pick out a bunny for God, the biggest one. Dear inside her cellophane box, she wears candy pink ribbons, a yellow candy nose. She is so pretty, so sweet with her brown ears, her woven basket of tiny blue eggs in her paw. I love her enormously. And it is spring. I pick up a large bottle of rubbing alcohol; I have two more at home. Jesus will rise when he sees. Won't Jesus walk? Our front door like the stones of his crypt and he will walk inside with frolicking white rabbits, so pleased with me. I count out change, doling the mean pennies of my husband's pension to buy this tender body of God, the host, the blood. Then it is all mine. She is, my own chocolate Easter bunny clutched to my chest in benediction.

(Oh snailly husband, oh mincemeat, ruin, thing of nightmare, how you deplete me. Every breath is an agony as if cancer is the air and you are the bellows of my lungs, pushing your misery into me. We'll just see. I'll kneel in the flowerbeds this afternoon, weeding, tending, while Jesus's breath rasps and the daffodils nod their Eastery heads. I'll set hamburger to thaw. We'll just see, husband, won't we?)

Up the concrete path, up the three steps, turn the key. I call out, Darling, I'm home! I lie him tenderly out on the bed and change his malodorous wrappings, wash his wasted skin.

What a credit to womanhood I am, in Jesus's eye. I cook his lunch like a slave. Oh petunia, oh hunchback, what can I get for you, what would your pebble heart most desire? He eats the soup and I think, Once he was young and did not have inoperable cancer and a tremulant, skinny, loose-fleshed arm and I have grown old. If there is redemption, later I will be young and unmarried, a girl with limbs as smooth as satin.

I have hidden the Easter bunny in a low cabinet. Stupid man, slime of Hell, lips opening and shutting on flame flickers of damnation, he eats and then I put him down for his nap. Like a baby he blubbers little Hell bubbles, a sick wheeze. Every day his nightmare opens as he goes under, a thousand years of sin slipping him down, down, down. Where he dreams afternoon dreams of his inevitable afterlife.

I set the house to rights. Dishes, dusting, straightening, the full-bleach bath of fabrics he has touched. Then into the shed in my floppy gardening hat to find my spade and kneeguards. In another three weeks, tulips, blood sentinels, but for now these oh sweet daffs like yellow candy and their floppy green stems. Ground covers like aubrieta, little holy purples in a downy maze, all of which Jesus appreciates, beauty at his feet like all the bunnies. Jesus's bunnies don't nibble at foliage, don't even come near me, just romp in white puddles across him, loincloth and all.

Darn lucky the sky is overcast or I'd be burning up in the sun. Suffer the marriage, suffer the eternity with my husband, suffer the cancer that won't kill him it seems no matter my patience. Here the smell of spring, clammy soil upturned, worms that aerate: is it true he's inside and I have to go in there? I stand and brush dirt from the knee of my housedress. One of the things he inhaled: my youth, my middle age, even my decrepitude, snarfed inside that weasly, fire-spitting mouth like all my chocolate bars. Entirely gone, the old turd, the old blankety-blank, the old pitchfork penis. I move creakily, and past Jesus who now is right gone, I'd guess dead, with all the bunnies curled up for nappies under his arms and between his legs. If it weren't Easter the son of God dead on my lawn would be a fuss as far as the neighbours were concerned.

Hush of the day. Three o'clock already. Six hundred and sixty-six bets on whether my husband's raided the cupboards yet. Big surprise ahead. I smell like God, I notice, when I'm up at the door, all earthy and whole from the yardwork. And I've got to open it to him and his Hell smells stinking up the universe and too close by half to heaven. Bid Jesus adieu before I turn the knob.

Oh, and if the power of God anointed any inch of this forsaken house. He's in the the kitchen of course, got into that wheelchair of his own accord and rolled like Hades onto the tile nearest my hiding place. Oh, I see that scared and doomed expression on his face when I catch him; oh, I see exactly that he has ripped my bunny's cellophane, broken her box, snapped off her ears and her pink ribbons; oh, I see the smear of chocolate alongside his mouth like devil's excrement; oh, I see his brown and guilty fingertips. Jesus on the

lawn catching the sleep of eternity in a couple easy hours and this Satan in my kitchen, in my cupboards, in my chocolate Easter bunny, gobbling and glutting.

He drops it you bet when I douse him with the rubbing alcohol. You bet. My bunny tumbles in flammable liquids, knock of cardboard on the tile, crinkle of cellophane. Beautiful sound of alcohol spilling and I even get some in his mouth, upturned, crying Mama, what are you doing? No, oh Mama! And I expect he ought to self-incinerate he's so full of the devil's work, light up from the hot hippy flames he's got inside. I just stand above him, slightly out of reach, waiting, pack of matches at the ready. What a picture! He's out of his mind grabbing at me, trying to get the chair going anywhere on the slippery floor, grunting and puking up complaints and fear. Empty another bottle for resurrection. And a third for luck.

Looks like I'm going to have to ignite him. It's not like my labour ever has been done, with this one.

Sound of the match scraping on the back of the match pack, sizzle into flame, and his ridiculous panic screams. I just hold it, let him look at it a minute before I throw it, casual toss that strikes his lap and sends him up, up, up, a human torch, a sparkler in my kitchen. I have to edge around him to pass by, for goodness sake, right close by the flames in their three-spiked climb up him.

In the living room I find I'm exhausted. I sag into my favourite chair thinking Jesus will just have to wake me up from a snooze. I could use a chocolate bar. Not that blasphemous bunny but a Hershey bar with almonds, dark chocolate. Lucky we don't have a smoke alarm. Still, I have to get up and open windows so I don't asphyxiate, if you can imagine, which lets, besides smoke, my sly husband's screams out. Lord's on my side if nobody hears. I lie on the couch, hands under my cheek, and try to ignore the dastardly smell. As if I'm cooking for a banquet, whole side of beef on a charcoal spit.

When I wake it's after eight p.m.. I slept right through the supper hour. Jesus isn't here yet. I'm stiff, so I move slow to see he isn't on the lawn either, least as far as I can see in the dusk. Possible I could miss him, but not likely given he has white rabbits with him and they'd show up even in full dark. I suppose he could have had errands to run first.

I go check on my husband. He's done to a turn after five hours, all right, but not dead, hardly dead, still puking and mewling under his bubbly black skin. No flame. All that's gone though I see the ceiling's filthy with soot, bad soot I'm not agile enough to get at anymore. I'd try torching him again if I wasn't out of rubbing alcohol. I go past him - I think he doesn't even notice me but I tell him I won't call an ambulance for him till nine, till it's been a full six hours - and pick up my poor, amputated, alcohol drenched bunny. Dear little lamb of Jesus, I cradle her in her busted box, and wait.