

Fast Food

(and other tales of delicious consequence)

Written by Gary Huerta

Illustrated by Stephen Wright

On behalf of Stephen Wright, I am excited to share the last sneak peek – the **Prologue**. The story follows Steve Bacon’s quest to find financial success and emotional happiness. It explores an enduring moral question: If you knew there was no chance of getting caught, what crimes would you be willing to commit to find justice, fame and fortune?

The Preface tells the story of a little boy, tortured by a recurring nightmare, and the reaction of his mother, unable to comprehend how it is even possible for her son to render such horrific visions of brutal violence.

Separated from the rest of the story by more than four decades, the prologue poses a dark possibility: the demons we battle in this lifetime may be ones we’ve met before. And they might be following us, looking for another fight.

Enjoy!

©2023 Gary Huerta and Stephen Wright. All rights reserved. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author’s imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.





Prologue

April 27, 1968

They had promised and they had lied. Someone turned off the light while he was asleep. Too young to tell time, this is all he knows: the dark is where all the bad things are. He just turned six. Why the dark petrifies him doesn't matter. It does.

There he is. Do you see him? Eyes wide. Covers pulled up to his chin. Underneath the sheets he wears white flannel pajamas with Babar the elephant printed on them. They have footies. His hair is short. One front tooth is missing, the shiny quarter he found under his pillow spent on sweets from the Helms Truck that drove through his neighborhood every Tuesday and Saturday. He examines the open space with his tongue – a bigger tooth with jagged edges was making its way through the gum. A small cow lick points straight up from the top of his scalp. His eyelids are slits. No one or not thing can know he is awake. He scans the black void of his bedroom for anything terrible that might have found a way out of his dream and into the real world.

How will he gather the courage to get out of bed? Frightening as it is alone in the dark, the prospect of what surely waits for him under the bed or in the closet is far more terrifying.

He must get up. He needs to run. Get to the door. Into the black hallway where undefined monsters lie in wait. Tiptoe past the bathroom where the thermometer and children's aspirin hide and then a last sprint into his mommy and daddy's bed. His arrival will be a surprise to them. But not completely unexpected.

He slowly takes one footie out from under the covers and feels for the floor. There is risk. Before he finds the carpet, something wicked could grab, bite, and gnaw with glee at his tender flesh. Extending his leg, then his foot, then his toes, he feels the rough shag between his toes and makes his move. Past all the bad things, he is away. But the panic doesn't stop. It grows and grows and grows like Jack's beanstalk. At the end of every road, before every happy ending, there is always something giant, something evil.

He stands at the foot of this parent's big bed. Daddy snores. Mommy stirs the way all mommies do when they sense something is amiss with one of their own.

"What's wrong?" She asks, even though she knows the answer.

"I don't want to be the cowboy!" he shouts in utter terror.

Daddy rolls over and opens one eye. Nope. He'll have none of it.

"I don't want the arrows! They hurt!" Now he's crying.

Mommy's outstretched arms are all the invitation he needs. Sobbing, he jumps on the bed and wedges himself between mommy and daddy.

Mommy tries to find a way to explain to her baby boy. Nightmares are not real. For more than a year now, this dreaded vision has pulled her son from quiet slumber to nightmarish ruminations and she's damned if she knows why.

Why would a child, in the very first years of his life, know such savagery? It occurs to Mommy – it would be easy if his phobia were limited to ghosts and goblins. Folklore is nothing compared to the brutality he imagines in a hellscape he is led to night after night. Fantasy can be explained and reasoned. But her son fears horrors brought by men upon other men. Night after night. Cowboys and Indians doing the unthinkable by the light of the moon. Not just killing, but tearing flesh, desecrating their enemies. Her little baby's nightmares are composed of a brutality she's never read in print or seen on the movie screen. And the way he describes himself – screaming and satanic – covered in blood – actively participating.

She has no words. So she holds onto the boy. He falls asleep. She carries him back to bed, tucks him in and sits by his side, thinking.

Where is this coming from?

Down the hall, daddy snores.