

God's Love Poured Out in Texas
(in 3 installments)

by Tim J. Lord

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Characters

Part I.

The Warden
Johnson

Part II.

Shivvers
Moran

Part III.

The Prison Gravedigger
The Mourner

Setting

A prison in Texas

I. The Warden’s Office

II. A Cell

III. The Prison Graveyard

Time

Present

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I.

A prison in Texas. The Warden’s office. A somewhat dirty coffin standing upright.

THE WARDEN dusts it off a bit before opening it. JOHNSON is inside, apparently unresponsive.

The Warden:

Um... Prisoner Johnson. Look. We made a mistake and...I’m afraid you’re not dead. I know it may seem that way, but we made an error when we filled out the death certificate—well, it was the guard who made the identification really. He identified you as Inmate #55210, um, Jack Moran. So...

I know you thought that you died. You were cold and your face was this really ghastly bluish-purple color. Tongue lolling out of your mouth, eyes bugged out to here. And you made a really good noose out of that bedsheet and I won fifty bucks because of that by the way. I bet our Inmate Living Coordinator fifty bucks that these sheets were perfect for self strangulation, but he said, “Nuh-uh! No way! These are the finest anti-suicide sheets in the prison linen industry. There’s a guarantee!” But I knew, just by looking, we were going to have prisoners killing themselves left and right. So we lost you, but I made fifty bucks. And, as I mentioned, we didn’t lose you. Maybe if I just show you the certificate of death.

See here: Jack Moran. Doesn’t even sound like “Reginald Johnson.” Really, Johnson, I wish you’d quit playing around. Your name isn’t on the death certificate, so I’m afraid you’re going to have to come back to us. That’s right, “have to.” Have to, you see, because this certificate is only good for one passage to the other side—yes, one death per certificate—and this certificate belongs to Prisoner Moran; and, well really, I don’t have the means to deal with the paperwork of getting you your own certificate because we filled this one out for you but it’s not yours. It’s Moran’s. And the other thing is that under Texas Penal Code 153.67, we only get one coffin per death certificate, so this coffin too is rightfully Prisoner Moran’s.

All right, Johnson! I was hoping you’d cooperate. But if I have to I will evict you from this coffin. You’ll placed back in your old cell. With your old cellmate and everything. And when it comes your time to die, well, I’m sorry, but you don’t scratch my back and I won’t scratch yours. You’ll just

The Warden (cont’d):

have to go on living. No certificate, no coffin. Same old cell. Same old cellmate. For-ev-er...

Johnson:

Jesus Christ already! Take your damn coffin then. But I refuse to live with that stinky bastard anymore. Why do you think I tried to kill myself in the first place?

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II.

A prison in Texas. A rather cramped cell.

MORAN & SHIVVERS stare at each other from their bunks on opposite sides of the cell. SHIVVERS is picking various parts of his body and sniffing his fingers.

Shivvers:

Mmmm... Smells like last night. Yeah, the good stuff stays behind, you know. It gets stuck all over you and stays. In between your teeth. Under your fingernails. In your beard—if you’ve got one. And...your buttercrack—the goldmine. Not the anus part. The crack that surrounds it.

(He laughs.)

Because it’s the good stuff. The bad stuff goes away. No staying power. Down the shitter. Or out your pores, if you’re a sweater. Are you a sweater?

(No response.)

I’m a sweater. I break a sweat just thinking about breaking a sweat. But that’s okay. You know why? Cause it gets rid of the bad stuff, leaving only good stuff behind. It’s like distillation for us humans. You send us through the ringer and what gets left? Good stuff. Like whatever this junk is under my fingernails. Damn it smells good. Smells like the essential substance of the universe— whatever that is. Makes you know you’re alive and glad to be alive. You know?

It’s the good stuff got me in here. Yeah, my own stuff wasn’t enough for me. I had to go trying to smell other people’s good stuff. I guess they call it stalking or some such bunk. I just call it living.

Why’d they stick you with me?

Moran:

They have a death certificate without a death. They have a coffin without a body. It was some sort of deal

Shivvers:

You’re the bad stuff then.

Moran:

Sure.

Shivvers:

I won’t get too attached.

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III.

*A prison in Texas. The prison
graveyard.*

*A few tombstones and two open
graves. THE PRISON GRAVEDIGGER
is just climbing out of the graves.
THE MOURNER is sitting on a
headstone, smoking.*

The Prison Gravedigger:

Shouldn’t you be cryin’? You’re the mourner.

The Mourner:

They don’t pay me enough for tears.

(beat)

Killed each other, huh? With a shiv?

The Prison Gravedigger:

Oh no. Much more nefarious. This one’s name got on this one’s death certificate, only this one wasn’t dead. So...the law of “supply and demand,” you know? And then, because this one—however inadvertently—was the cause of this one’s death...the law of “eye for eye,” etc. Sad story, really.

The Mourner:

Boo hoo.

The Prison Gravedigger:

No, it is. This is one place you do not want to be buried. Don’t die in here. And don’t let them bury you here. I mean, look around. Look at all these headstones. You notice anything peculiar? Anything at all? Don’t look too close there, you won’t see what I’m talking about by looking too close. You gotta think big picture here. You gotta see the *whole* picture. Anything? Anything at all? Don’t see it, huh?

Well...all these headstones—all of ’em—and all the headstones at prison graveyards across the country—hell, maybe outside the country. Maybe they started doing this in the Old World, I dunno. But all these headstones, they face the same direction. So what? you’re thinking. What’s the big deal? Aren’t all graveyards like this? Don’t all the headstones face the same direction? And, if you think that, you’re right! But the difference between a prison graveyard and your everyday graveyard is that the headstones in an everyday graveyard all face East-West. But here, and in

The Prison Gravedigger (cont’d):

every prison graveyard across the country—and maybe outside the country too—the headstones face North-South.

So what? you’re thinking. But really think about that. Why would anyone do this? Why would anyone go out of their way to make such a distinction? Well, what travels, every day from east to west? Every day. East. West. The sun, of course. So if your headstone faces East-West, then every day, the sun’s first light and the sun’s last light touch the face of your headstone, the last earthly reminder that you ever existed. But if your headstone faces North-South... Nothin’. No light. Even beyond your time in this mortal realm you dwell in shadow. *That’s* crime and punishment. Borders on cruel and unusual, if you ask me.

So? Go on. It’s a sad story. And you’re the mourner. Cry.