

Raising Demons

By Caspar von Wrede

The sun was shining but it was still cold enough to make their breath steam. It was in fact perfect weather for working in, as Marco pointed out; no rain, and you didn't get too hot.

"Look," said Zed, adjusting his glasses, "it must work. You tell me why it shouldn't."

"I don't know why," sighed Dan, "but I do know that it *can't* work. I've told you before-

"Yes, but it *must*."

"Look, I really am sick of this. If you're so sure it works why don't you just make one, then sell it and you'll get loads of money...?"

Dan put down the spade he had been using and massaged his hand. "This is killing me, it's your turn now, Marco."

Marco reluctantly stood up and took the spade off Dan. "Explain it again, Zed," he said as he started to dig.

Zed brightened up immediately and adjusted his glasses again. "Look it's quite simple. You take a ball made of glass and then you coat the inside of it with the stuff they use to make one way mirrors. Then you-

"How would you do that?" Asked Marco, looking across at Dan.

"I don't know, but I'll think of a way. Anyway, you coat it with this stuff entirely and that would mean that you'd be able to look *into* the ball but not out. Then, you take a torch and you shine it in."

"So what?"

"Well, the light would go into the ball, because of it being a one way mirror, but it wouldn't get back out. It would just be reflected, again and again and again."

"So?"

"Don't you understand? You would still be able to look *into* the ball, and you'd see the light, but the light would never get out. It would just carry on glowing and glowing."

"Look, Zed," said Dan, "I asked my father about it and he said it couldn't work. He should know."

"Oh God, it's Plug," interrupted Marco suddenly. Dan and Zed both turned round to look in the direction he was pointing. A young man was coming towards them, looking at the ground in front of him with an expression of great concentration. He looked up at them and a foolish grin split his face. He waved. Reluctantly Marco, Zed, and Dan waved back.

"How the hell did he know we were here?" Hissed Dan. They all waited until the youth had reached them and then Marco greeted him, "Hi, Ron".

Zed said hello and Dan made a great effort to look pleased to see him.

"Hello Marco, hello Zed, hello Daniel. I want to help you build a house." He spoke very slowly and pronounced every word with great care. He had suffered from oxygen starvation at birth and was consequently heavily retarded. Dan's mother, who was a nurse, had told them that he had a mental age of five. All of their parent's had told them that if they *ever* made fun of him there would be severe trouble. Ron's physical age was 18 and he was heavily built. He was six feet five tall and had very broad shoulders. He could have looked quite intimidating if his mouth wasn't almost perpetually open revealing a line of very crooked teeth. His hair was scraped across his head from a

parting that was barely an inch away from his right ear. "Daniel, your mother said where you are and said I could help you," he said hopefully.

"Oh," said Dan.

"Sure you can help," said Marco. "We need someone strong like you."

Ron grinned again and for a moment it seemed like he would clap his hands. He didn't but instead asked what they were doing.

Zed explained that they were digging four holes to put four posts into. The posts would become the corners of their hut. He showed Ron the one hole that had the big stone in it that they couldn't move. They were intending to get a crowbar to move it later. "Or maybe you could move it?" asked Dan.

Ron's face became very serious and it looked as if he was in deep thought. "I think I can move it," he said after a long while just as Dan was about to make a comment. He slowly and precisely rolled up both the sleeves of his tracksuit top and then got onto his knees. Dan noticed that he had perfectly manicured fingernails and felt a twinge of shame. Almost automatically he clenched his own hands to hide his own fingernails which were brutally short and ragged. He had bitten them from a very early age but had never in his life worried about it until this moment. He was surprised to find that he felt angry with himself.

Ron reached down into the small hollow underneath the rock and started to pull. They could almost hear the muscles tensing like ropes in the cliff that was his back. Zed clenched his fists. Marco looked on with a bemused expression. "Go on," breathed Zed.

Ron's face turned red and his whole body began to quiver. Then, quite suddenly, with a kind of ripping sound the rock came upwards taking a large chunk of the earth and grass with it.

"Awesome," exclaimed Dan, putting a lingering emphasis on the first syllable. For a moment he was again angry with himself for letting the admiration become so evident in his voice, but when he saw the expression on Ron's face he couldn't help but genuinely grin along with the rest of them. Ron had fallen flat on his face, and was wiping dirt from his clothes. He looked like he had single-handedly-moved a mountain, which was not that far removed from the truth. "A crow bar would not have helped a lot there. That was bloody amazing, Ron," remarked Marco.

Ron looked like he was going to float away, but quite suddenly his face became contorted with a mixture of shock and pain. He yelped and grabbed violently at the back of his neck. Marco, Zed, and Dan simultaneously leapt backward in fright.

"What's wrong, Ron? Are you okay?"

Ron was holding the back of his neck with both hands and blinking rapidly in an effort to prevent the tears which were threatening to well up and overflow his eyelids. Earlier, Dan would have laughed inwardly at the heroic efforts that Ron was making to prevent himself from crying, but now he felt an unknown empathy for him. They all craned up to look at the base of his neck, gently removing his hands.

"It's not a sting," said Zed. They saw a small, very red mark, about half an inch across.

"I wonder if--"

"*SHIT!*" This time it was Marco. He was bent over clutching his cheek with both hands. "Oh my *GOD*, that *hurts*," he rasped, his eyes firmly screwed shut.

Dan and Zed looked around, panic-stricken. "This isn't funny," half-whispered Zed, the shrill of hysteria very plain in his voice. All of them were in a half crouch, except for Ron, who had shut his eyes very tightly in a bid to exclude himself from the world.

Suddenly they heard the snap of a breaking branch in the hedge that ran the length of the field they were standing in. A voice called out.

“Ha ha, how does it feel? Can’t the little brats take pain like grown men?”

Dan straightened up. He was swearing repeatedly under his breath. Two figures leapt out of the hedge and started sauntering towards them. One of them was lazily waving a black air rifle with telescopic sight at them.

Dan, Marco and Zed immediately recognised them. They were known as Bill and Butch, and were physically almost exact opposites of each other. Bill was tall and slim. He had pale skin and very black, gleaming, long hair which was swept out of his face. He was offensively good-looking. Butch was shorter and stockier. His face had been savaged by acne, leaving prominent scars on his cheeks and still lingering around his mouth and on his forehead. His hair had been shaved off and was only just re-emerging in the form of a brown dusting on his scalp. Bill was carrying the air rifle.

“That’s assault, you bastards,” shouted Dan. He was dismayed to hear that his voice was shaking.

Bill and Butch came towards them. Marco and Ron still had their hands over their injuries. Bill walked up to Dan and stopped half a foot in front of him. He bent down until their noses almost touched and then said, very softly, “just watch how you address your betters”.

Bill straightened up again and looked around. “What are the little faggots doing here, I wonder?” He met Butch’s eye, who gave an idiotic guffaw. “Digging holes? How cute.”

“Leave us alone,” said Zed, who had taken off his glasses and was furiously polishing them with the hem of his jumper.

Bill turned to him and was about to take a step towards him when Ron spoke.

“What have we done to you?” He asked. Dan closed his eyes and wished himself a long way away.

Bill smiled. “Well if it isn’t Plug. I’m surprised you managed to string a whole sentence together there, Plug, with nothing but shit between your ears.” Ron remained expressionless. His mouth was not open.

Dan became aware of a single emotion that was beginning to fill his mind. It was hate and anger, somehow fused, and it was sweeping everything else out of his consciousness, cleansing it like a fire. Dan didn’t try to stop it, it was beautiful somehow, deliciously frightening. He had never felt anger like that before and suddenly he was looking Ron in the eyes. He willed Ron to feel the same, to drink his anger, to infect him, and that is exactly what happened. For the rest of his life, even though he never mentioned it to anyone, he truly believed that this is what happened. Dan would become a scientist, to his own mild surprise, but he had always been a rational thinker. What happened in that moment was not rational. In his later life it would embarrass him to think about it, or even contemplate what happened, so much so that he eventually managed to block it out of his mind. What he believed was that somehow, for one fleeting instant, his and Ron’s mind touched and that during this moment he was sucked bare; in the next moment his mind felt as empty as a vacuum.

Ron took one step forward and began to reach for the spade. Bill calmly levelled the gun at him from the waist.

“Watch it, moron, or I might just have to remove your last brain cell.”

Ron picked up the spade. Butch shuffled uncomfortably. Dan calmly took in everything. He was thinking like a machine; there was no fear, no hate, no anger. *He knows he can’t shoot Ron at this range, he thought, from over by the hedge the pellet wasn’t going to do much damage, just leave a bruise. But from this distance it’s going to puncture the skin and’ll have to be removed surgically.* He could tell that Bill was thinking furiously, even though his face was as expressionless as ever.

Ron very slowly began to raise the spade; he was standing about six feet from Bill and holding its shaft halfway up with both hands. Dan was aware of Zed's and Marco's breathing beside him; it was quick and shallow.

"Er, Bill-" began Butch.

Bill ignored him. "Drop the spade, dude," he said gently. Ron was still raising it. Its shaft was parallel to the ground. Bill was pointing the gun at Ron's thigh when he pulled the trigger.

A fraction of a second before the gun gave its mechanical cough, Ron moved the spade down to cover his thigh. The pellet was harmlessly deflected. *There is no way that Ron could have reacted so quickly to that shot,* thought Dan, *he moved before the shot was fired; he anticipated it.* Bill grabbed the barrel of the gun with both hands and set it swinging in an arc that would connect with Ron's head. With an almost supernaturally fast motion Ron raised the spade up to his face and harmlessly gathered up the rifle's blow, then using the momentum he had gained from the gun he slashed Bill across the face with the blade of the spade in one fluid movement. Bill sank to his knees making a kind of gurgling sound. None of them had ever seen so much blood before in their lives. Ron calmly raised his weapon and again it connected with Bill's head. The stroke was short but powerful. *No time wasted, just getting right down to business. Like a natural.* Bill died.

Butch overcame his paralysis and started running, he almost tripped, but made it. Ron didn't notice. He was still laying into Bill, with that same alien mindless, efficiency. After a full minute he stopped. Bill was unrecognisable. Ron turned towards Zed, still holding the dripping tool. Zed hitched in breath to scream, but nothing came out, just a dry, choked cough.

Ron dropped the spade and without turning back began to run across the field. Marco was standing very still, his eyes firmly shut. Zed tried to take off his glasses but his hands were shaking so much that he dropped them. Dan was watching Ron, running away into the distance. His movements were smooth and cat-like, foreign, like something from another world.