

SKIP'S TRIBULATION

by Chad J.

It was late evening on September 19th. The skies were a bit cloudy, but rain seemed a slim chance. Skip had been scanning the classified ads in the local newspaper for a part-time job. He'd found some opportunities with potential, but none of them were really driving it home as of yet. Honestly, his mind had been clouded lately. He found it hard to concentrate. Not in the "I'm a teenager in school, so I *must* have A.D.D." sense of the phrase. He just couldn't seem to quell the ever-shouting voice of one thought in particular. A seed had been planted deep within his skull. He had to *kill* his father.

His father, Ken, had done nothing but rest a detrimental beer-gut on Skip's dreams. He's mentally abusive, a terrible role model, and Skip suspected he was an alcoholic. Nothing Skip did was ever enough for his father, despite years of craving acceptance from his cruelty.

It's not as if Skip had done something wrong, either. His father had a bleak outlook on everyone. He felt as though he was the best at everything he did. His neglectful narcissism had pushed Skip to sleepless nights of anxiety. Wondering if his father would arrive home as angry as he had the night before. Skip had had enough. Just then, he heard footsteps moving toward him from down the hallway. Ken stepped into the room.

"Hey Skip, do y'wanna head to the movies with me?" he said. A false smile hidden beneath his glorious mustache. Skip had tried growing a mustache like his father's. He saw it as the only still-admirable trait about the man. All Skip had managed was a lone, pathetic whisker beneath his right nostril. His father had scoffed in his face.

"Heck yeah! Thanks, Dad!" Skip replied. Feigned excitement for spending time with Ken became inherent to Skip. Second nature. Regardless of how he felt for his father, Skip wouldn't dare anger him. Ken left the room and Skip placed the newspaper, filled with red X's and O's, aside. A deep sigh was summoned from his lungs.

After he had gotten his shoes on, Skip walked out to his father's car. Finding the motivation to spend 15 minutes in the car with this man had been taxing on Skip's psyche, to say the least. The mere idea of it had driven him to near-insanity. Ken pulled a cooler out to the curb.

"Okay, so you're gonna be in charge of the cooler," he said. Skip had known there would be a reason his father needed him there, "Pretend you have a hunch or something." Skip had to abide. He always did. He took the cooler from his father's hands timidly. Ken turned his attention back to the car. The idea flashed through Skip's mind like lightning. *I could kill him right now.* But he didn't. His feet were as anvils, anchored to the asphalt.

"Also this movie has a lot of sex and violence, so we'll need to be aware of that..." Ken said, turning to face Skip again. There was a camcorder in his hand, "...since you'll be filming all of those parts."

Skip took the camera. He forcefully smiled at Ken, but the contorted expression on his face took far too much pain to manage. Skip's heart pounded like a war-drum.

The ride to the movies had been silent. Skip stared out the window for the entirety of it. He had been able to tune out the 90's pop that Ken had been singing along to. Another reflex he'd gain from prolonged exposure to his father.

The two of them stepped out of the car, and retrieved the cooler from the trunk. Skip slouched over, and his father slid the cooler up the back of his shirt. Skip noticed a group of girls from his school a few parking spaces away. He managed an awkward smile and a distorted hand gesture that was meant to be a wave. The girls laughed as they turned and walked away. Skip wanted to vomit.

As he and his father made their way to the entrance of the theater, Skip had decided that tonight was the night. By morning, his father would have had his last breath in this world.

"What? Him?" Skip was able to gather the words spilling from his father's wretched jaws, "He was born with a birth defect called... uh... reverse...helea...spinal...scoliosis." Ken and the woman behind the counter shared a laugh at Skip's expense, and they were given the go ahead to enter the building.

Skip stared at Ken throughout the following walk to their theater. His spitefulness had grown to unbelievable levels. Skip was afraid of himself for the first time in his life.

The intro credits began to roll as they found their seats, but Skip's eyes couldn't be brought to the screen. He had the camera in his hand, as per his father's orders, but he had yet to hit record. The movie began, and Skip's eyes met the screen for the first time.

"Aw dammit! This movie's got subtitles," Ken said in response to the first line of dialogue, "Ugh, so many words," Skip heard a shush from the row behind them, but Ken had failed to notice, "Skip. Read the movie to me."

"Uh..." Skip verbalized in confusion. As if he hadn't been humiliated enough for one day, "Oh no, you shot me in the guts!"

"Haha! That guy got shot in the guts!"

At that, Skip hit the record button on the camera, aimed it at the screen, and rested his head against the back of his seat. Within minutes he had dozed off.

Skip awoke to the sound of his father exclaiming that he wanted his money back. He opened his eyes and saw that credits were rolling. His father was walking towards the exit without checking to see if Skip had followed. Another sigh, and Skip rushed after him.

Upon their arrival back at the house, Ken snatched the camera from Skip's hands and rushed into his bedroom. *Dispicable man*, Skip thought. He had yet to think of a way to end his father's life with clean hands. As he walked into the living room, he saw his mother sitting on the couch, a glass of wine in one hand, a book in the other.

"How was it?" she asked. Genuinely interested. Not like Ken at all. Just as Skip was going to answer, he had an idea. This was his ticket out, and he had to take it.

"I had a great time at the movies with dad," Skip said with a smile, "It was Rated R, so I learned a lot about sex and violence!" His smile was sincere.

"Hrm, well I should tell you that the sexy stuff you saw in that movie only happens between two adults who love each other very much," she responded. She couldn't have made this any easier on Skip.

"Dad says you can trade money for ladies doing love to you." Skip let the words flow from his mouth. His dreams becoming real before his eyes. Of course Ken hadn't really said anything of the sort, but if Skip knew his mother, this would send her over the edge.

"...I see," she said. Skip's smile grew stronger, "Why don't you tell me about the violence in the movie," and stronger, "I'll need some ideas."

Skip's eyes lit up. The weight of the world lifted from his shoulders. He told his mom all about what had happened in the movie. He knew he didn't have to, but he did it to humor himself. Sinister, yes, but it made him feel so good.

After talking to his mom, he went to his room. He found his way under the covers and rested his head on the pillow. His smile had yet to fade. He felt his stress alleviating, forever endless. He closed his eyes, and drifted to sleep for the first time in weeks.

Skip awoke to the sunlight, blindingly seeping through the windows. His smile still plastered on his face. He stretched his arms, and arose from his bed. This was the first day of his freedom. He would never have to see his father again. The rest of his life stretched like a paved roadway ahead of him. He could barely contain his excitement.

Just as Skip's feet touched the ground, he heard footsteps outside of his door. He rushed toward the hall to greet his mother. He wanted to embrace her. He wanted to cry tears of joy. Most of all, however, he wanted to thank her.

Skip burst through the door and sprinted out to the living room. What he saw, he couldn't have prepared for. He saw Ken, sitting on the couch in his briefs with a beer in his hand. Skip's smile disappeared like startled doves. Ken looked at his son with an equally bewildered look.

"You alright, Skip?" he started. His mustache fluttering with each word, "You look like you've seen a ghost."

Skip didn't sleep that night.