

Portrait of an American Possession

“Dear, our son just killed Mr. Whiskers.”

Harry stared at his wife with a vacant expression. Better the cat than me, were his only thoughts. He returned to his Modern Science magazine.

“I think you should have a talk with him,” she continued. The excited scientific smile remained on her slender face. “Hunter needs a more active father figure, especially now that he’s eight. It’s time you reached out again.”

Sweat beaded on his upper lip. He twiddled the phantom remains of his fingers, remembering the last time he “reached out,” as his wife put it. The embarrassment of inventing a woodcutting accident still rankled. Harry Hausen knew an argument was useless; not only was she his wife, but a published child psychoanalyst as well.

“Sure, hon.”

He lifted out of his seat and kissed the crucifix he bore around his pencil-thin neck at all times, particularly the rare occasions he dealt with Hunter. He can smell the stink of fear, he reminded himself.

Olivia followed him back to the living room. She took her usual observation station: a tattered blue and purple vinyl lawn chair concealed behind three dozen potted plants of various sizes. She grabbed her journal off the floor resumed her perch, watching her husband and son interact in their natural environment. She continued collecting the data for her eventual cash cow: the psychoanalysis of her own possessed son.

“Heya, son,” he said as he glanced around the corner. The boy sat cross-legged on the blue floral print couch, slurping his nearly empty Juicy Juice carton. His eyes were glued to the blood-sprayed television screen. Even the wood-paneled walls bore evidence to the recent carnage. Harry stepped away from the doorway and walked closer to his boy.

“Your mother and I are a bit concerned about your little tantrum...” Hunter cut him off with a malevolent glare. Bits of cat fur and blood dotted the landscape of his tiny face and left his sandy hair tousled in the midst of the ichors. His eyes glowered in an intense red hue. Agamemnon, the 6,000 year-old demon, watched intently from within while floating in a belly full of cheaply produced cherry-flavored juices.

“...Which was obviously a means of getting my attention. We’re concerned about what you did, though, son.” He kept his mutilated hands in his pockets. “Mr. Whiskers was one of God’s living—“

“Pests,” Hunter interrupted. “An annoying pest who tasted nothing like chicken.” Hunter heard Agamemnon snickering inside.

“Well, I’m glad you cleaned up the big nasty parts, son. In fact, I’m proud of you. You’ve grown a little, haven’t you?” Grown into evil incarnate!

Hunter stared at the imbecile who sired him, then turned back to the television. The blood drops started to stream down to the carpet. He waited for Harry to leave.

“So you think that since you’re a big boy now, you can finish cleaning this up?” Harry asked. He shot a grin back at his wife, watching with rapt scientific interest in the fern bushes.

Agamemnon lent Hunter a jolt of kinetic energy. Hunter’s fist balled up, crushing the Juicy-Juice carton in response. The tips of flames danced through his knuckles, igniting the cardboard juice box. Harry’s eyes bulged to the size and shape of quarters.

“Or maybe your mother and I will just take care of this later.” He scurried out of the room.

Olivia met her husband in the kitchen.

“That seemed to go well. I’ve never seen a megalomaniacal streak in a child his age!” she gushed. Her binoculars were still around her neck.

“Yeah, I think we reached a new understanding in our relationship.” I used to be a man, he lamented in his thoughts.

“Well, good!”

“I’m going out.”

Hunter sat in the living room pretending to still watch The Happy Bunny Fun Time Hour. He stared at the screen but concentrated on Agamemnon, who floated within.

“I think Dad’s got something up his sleeve, Agamemnon.” The title was a mere formality. In reality, Hunter considered the demon his true father figure. The two understood each other in ways even his watching mother could fathom possible in child-adult relationships.

“I agree. The balding simian has not spoken to you for the past 7 years.”

“I noticed he’s been working on some paperwork over the past couple of days.” Hunter walked over to his father’s desk and picked up the document. “I doubt its work related. It has a lot of writing that doesn’t seem to mean anything.”

“It’s called legalese, young mortal. I helped create it to spread decay and eventually render justice extinct. I’ll eventually have to add that to your tutoring regimen.” Agamemnon swam towards the corneal stalks and read through Hunter’s eyes.

“It appears to be something for the Denzel Public School Board. He is attempting to institute a mandatory broadcast of the National Anthem each morning from the Catholic radio station to all public schools in Denzel, Washington...”

“Now this is interesting...”

“What is it, Agamemnon?”

“There’s another name besides your mother’s inseminator on the proposal: a Father Wilson Phillips.”

“Who’s that?”

“Of course, your brain was still in development at the time as it was only one week after your birth. Fortunately I was there to prevent an almost disastrous situation. Father Phillips is the Catholic priest your father meant to baptize you. In that desperate situation, I reached into your mother’s mind and reminded her that she is an independent woman and does not need to be controlled by the dogmatic Catholic patriarchy. Your Rockwellian reject of a father heard her roar that day and has caved ever since.”

“Wow! Why did you stop the baptism?”

“When I possessed you at birth, it was by accident. Because I tapped into an under-developed newborn mind, I forgot how to de-possess. Although there are many abilities I bear over these ape decedents, there are still secret powers I have yet to recover. By baptism, although I would be freed by the secular act, I would go straight to Hell, do not collect \$200.”

Hunter giggled. Monopoly became his and Agamemnon’s favorite game once the demon learned to imagine tiny dwellers getting looted hand-over-fist in hotels of pain.

“Yeah, but you’re a demon. Don’t you like Hell?”

“Hell is a splendid place. The flames are astounding, the screams horrific and tantalizing at the same time, and they recently acquired a Starbucks. The problem is Lucifer: I owe him six bucks.”

“Six dollars?? That’s it?”

“Six dollars is an immense amount in the Dark Kingdom. Thanks to the remarkable economic prowess of Hell’s Treasury Department and the fact that only silver change can survive in the climatic conditions. Copper melts too quickly and paper money instantly ignites.”

“So that’s all it’ll take to get you back?” Hunter asked apathetically. He knew Agamemnon wanted to go back, but did not want to imagine elementary school without the demon’s company.

“You make it seem like paltry sum. Need I remind you that you are too young for the human work force?”

“What if we got it from the lunch money kids? They all get 10 cents in change a day. You can do your Jedi mind control stunt again, right?”

“And force your idiotic peers to go hungry? You and I wish. Unfortunately, I cannot remember how to do it. The situation was dire enough at your baptism ceremony that it was an instinctive act...”

Agamemnon looked back at the papers in Hunter’s hands.

“Your father may have provided us the means to convince the mortal brood at your elementary school to comply with our financial endeavor.”

“How’s that?” Hunter asked quizzically.

“We could plant a subliminal message in The Star-Spangled Banner recording that would entice the children at your school to willingly hand over their change. We would only need to get access to the tape at the Catholic radio station.”

Smoke swirled around the table in the Tony Danza Bar & Grill and loud eighties metal screamed out of a jukebox. Father Wilson Phillips concentrated on the eight ball. He slowly drew the cue back four times to plot a beeline to the corner pocket. The snake on the Marine Forest Recon tattoo on his forearm danced with its flexing muscles. Pressure is when I shine and mother fuckers die, he thought as he drove the ball into the recessed opening on the table. He nodded to the out-of-work sitcom actor busing tables, and then turned to the biker with an outstretched hand, waiting for his “tithes”.

“Hello, Father Phillips.”

The priest rolled down his sleeves, concealing the rest of the tattoos engraved in his skin by Vietnamese prostitutes during his three tours in-country with the Special Forces.

“What’s shakin’, Harry?” he responded. “How is our proposal to the school board coming along?”

“Fine, I got it done this afternoon. I need a favor, though.”

“I am here to serve in His name. What can I do for you?”

“It’s my son, Hunter.” Harry paused, and then whispered, “I have reason to believe he may be possessed.”

Father Wilson’s gaze cut through Harry. “Are you certain?”

Harry nodded, and then showed the priest his mangled hands.

“Very well, my son; the little bastard of Satan won’t know what hit him.”

Later that night, Hunter and Agamemnon listened to the Catholic Devotional Broadcast on the radio. Harry Hausen believed that if his son refused to go to church, then this should at least keep him out of damnation. There was no way he could force Hunter to listen; he and Agamemnon usually pretended to do so to throw off his mother’s observation notes. How would she explain an eight-year old devout megalomaniac? Tonight they listened for the news that would give their project a green light.

“...is why abortion doctors don’t deserve to breathe the same air we do. This just in from the ZLOT radio news desk: I have news for the faithful! Thanks to efforts by Father Wilson Phillips and lay clergy member Harry Hausen, the Denzel Public School Board voted unanimously to have all schools play our daily broadcast of the National Anthem every morning. God bless us all and God bless America!”

Hunter clicked off the radio.

“Houston, we have lift off.”

Father Phillips sat in his 1982 Chevrolet Cavalier outside the Hausen home. He watched the three-foot black-clad commando descend down from a window by a rope made from bed sheets.

Just like the goddamn V.C.s... Have to sneak everywhere, he thought.

He got out of the rust-bucket and trailed Hunter into town.

Although considered a small town, Denzel, Washington was home to many notable bars and nightclubs. College students stumbled inebriatedly to each establishment, killing more brain cells on a hunt for venereal disease. Hunter skulked from shadow to shadow in darkened alleys, avoiding the pedestrian-filled Main Street.

Agamemnon extended his senses out of the boy's body, keeping track of Father Phillip's progress behind them. The boy's father obviously sent him after the cat incident.

Hunter arrived at the backdoor of the ZLOT radio station. He pulled a lock picking kit out of his pocket and tested out different tools on the door.

"When did you learn to pick locks, Hunter?" Agamemnon asked.

"Actually? Never. It just looked easy on TV."

Agamemnon sighed and then sparked an energy jolt to Hunter's stubby index finger. A tiny wave of kinetic energy blasted through the lock's inner workings. Upon exiting the other end of the doorknob, the subatomic wave particles exploded, casting the door to the other end of the alley.

"Well, I guess we're making this look like a hate crime to pin it on the Klan again," Hunter mused.

"You brought the spray paint and flammables, right?" asked Agamemnon excitedly. "It's been a while since we've had those ignorant buffoons needlessly accosted."

Hunter ignored him and climbed up the stairs to the archived tapes. The Star-Spangled Banner sat on the first shelf for quick location. He climbed up the bottom three shelves and snagged the tape. He made a beeline for the studio.

Father Phillips examined the charred remains of the door. He checked his coat pocket for his bible and holy water. From the other pocket, he took a swig of bourbon from a silver flask.

"Lord, give me the power to send this motherfucker back to Hell; Thy will be done, amen."

"Okay, so I think I put the tape in here, press these buttons and we can start."

Hunter ran into the recording portion to get to the microphone before they ran out of tape. He relinquished control of his vocal cords to Agamemnon, who spouted out, "Give your lunch money to Hunter Hausen or you're a double loser weenie," three times.

"The priest is drawing near," Agamemnon warned. "He cannot exorcise me yet; but he is too strong for you. I will need full control to take care of him for the time being."

Hunter nodded and surrendered his body in whole to Agamemnon's whim. The demon coursed energy through all of the boy's extremities, preparing the young body for the assault.

The priest launched himself through the doorway, holy water poised at the ready. Upon contacting the boy, Agamemnon released all the kinetic energy coursing through Hunter's body, propelling Father Phillips back against the tape shelves. He slumped onto the floor. Cassettes fell all around him.

"Sonova bitch!" the priest called out. "I'm going to fuck you up good now, boy."

Father Phillips sprang up, the leap throwing cassettes in all directions. His cassock smoked from several scorch marks and his regulation crew cut was smothered in the back. He ran at the boy to spear

him into the shelves behind.

Agamemnon sprang the boy up into the air, pogo-jumping onto the back of Father Phillips' head. The preacher slammed into the shelves and was out for the count.

Agamemnon released his control over Hunter.

"Can we do it again?"

Agamemnon briefly considered it, but said, "No, we have to get back home."

The recording device continued to record until the abrupt end of tape.

Hunter and Agamemnon eagerly awaited the morning announcements in home room. As they suffered through children phonetically stumbling through announcements written in third grade vocabulary, they looked at the posters of kitty cats and celebrities telling kids to stay in school "'cause it's cool."

"Interesting, except attendance is enforced by law . . . And the apes actually think this place prepares their brood for real life?" Agamemnon extolled.

Finally, the Pledge of Allegiance was over.

"And in accordance to a decision instituted at last night's school board meeting, please remain standing for the National Anthem," the principal's voice squawked through the loudspeaker.

A hiss issued over the intercom for five seconds, followed by:

"Give your lunch money to Hunter Hausen or you're a double loser weenie. Give your lunch money to Hunter Hausen or you're a double loser weenie. Give your lunch money to Hunter Hausen or you're a double loser weenie."

"Okay, so I hit the wrong button. I'm not a record exec!" Hunter rapidly apologized.

A loud crash, intermingled with a cacophony of small objects hitting a concrete floor blared from the loudspeaker.

"Sonova bitch! I'm going to fuck you up good now, boy."

Half of the class gasped; the other half giggled at the obscene language.

The recording cut off immediately.

"Hunter Hausen, please report to the principal's office," followed quickly over the speaker.

Hunter walked in to find his parents, the school psychologist, and a police officer in the principal's office.

"Hunter, this is Officer Peterson," the principal told him. "He's going to ask you a few questions."

"Hi, Hunter," the officer began. "You were at the radio station last night, weren't you?"

"Stay calm," Agamemnon coached Hunter. "We don't have to lie. . . . Yet."

"Yes, sir," Hunter answered, assuming the role of a groveling child. He spent countless afternoons perfecting the tone from Opie on The Andy Griffith Show.

"Who else was there?" Peterson continued.

"Father Wilson Phillips."

Each adult in the room gasped, except for his parents. Olivia furiously scribbled notes; Harry dropped his head, and then tried to back farther into a corner of the room.

The school's child psychologist stepped forward, whipping a doll from behind his back.

"Can you show us on Snoopy where he touched you?"

Hunter and Agamemnon watched the Six O'clock Action News that evening. After The Happy Bunny Fun Time Hour, the news was their favorite program due to the inordinate amount of footage of fires, car accidents, and detailed reports on multiple homicides.

“ . . . killed forty-seven people in one fell swoop. Police are still working to find the monkey’s owner. Also in the news, the Denzel Police Department arrested Father Wilson Phillips on charges of breaking and entering, vandalism, violation of FCC language ordinances, kidnapping, and attempted child molestation.

“The Catholic priest kidnapped a young boy, Hunter Hausen, and used an explosive to break into the radio station to record himself raping the boy. Fortunately, the boy got away unharmed.

“The recording, originally The Star-Spangled Banner, was accidentally played this morning as according to a new school board measure to play the national anthem each morning in all Denzel public schools.

“At the time of his arrest, Father Phillips made repeated statements that Hunter is possessed by a demon.

“When asked about Father Phillips’ twisted behavior, the Archbishop of the local diocese replied, ‘Sounds like one messed-up Marine to me.’”

Hunter ignored the rest of the broadcast.

“I’m sorry it didn’t work, Agamemnon,” he apologized.

“Do not worry. As you grow older and stronger, we will find more opportunities to get me home. In the meantime, we will just continue to exploit these fools surrounding us.”

As they looked through a picture bible for illustrations of lepers, the news broadcast cut off with an urging to stay tuned for Jeopardy!

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