

The Burden of Lust: *Mutinous Manhood*

By Hector Luna

Since I keep falling victim, daily, to carnal desire's intended effect of making me ready—and not just metaphorically—to inseminate Alice's ovum, am I reserving myself a suite in hell?

Right now, I am ready, in oh so many ways.

This unwanted ardor I'm suffering from seems licentious, but can't be. Reputable dictionaries say licentious is unprincipled in sexual matters, but when my matters are focused on this angelic beauty, they get very principled.

I don't know how long I've been kept from sleep this time. These prurient thoughts belabor me fervently. I try to keep my inhales and exhales in the here and now, trying to stay out of that fantasy world. I would love to go to sleep with her by my side. If only. Of course, if she were here, sleep wouldn't follow.

Already, I had learned, the touch of her body, to me, was electric. That first touch still haunts me most. Given the nature of these thoughts I can't evade, it should come as no surprise that her first touch, a neighborly thank you gesture, saddled me with what is often been called, a boner. My mutinous manhood startled me. Immediately, I looked up, but alas, I then fell victim to her devilish gray eyes, that have a touch of blue; her freckles pulled me in further still.

Don't get me started on her smile. It bewitched me even more, if possible. She unqualifiedly bestilled my heart, which wants to feel hers next to it. I want her glorious chest next to mine.

The gun that shortly preceded her second touch has complicated matters. There is now lots for her to think about and consider. Lots.

I don't want my imagination's vision enslaved to that heavenly beauty's magnificent ass. These callous wallops that keep whacking my tender heart, do not come at my bidding, but pulling my sight from her splendid posterior often fails.

I want her. I want Alice. If only there had been no gun. If only.

If only lust. Once more, reputable dictionaries provide no relief. When I think about lust, I think about Alice. Noun or verb, it doesn't matter, I'm thinking about Alice.

It seems bad enough that lascivious sounds like a dirty word but isn't, just that the desire expressed is overt—is that dirty? My mind wanting her this overtly must make me evil. Will my room in hell need a deposit?

Lust as a noun is an object that can take many forms, sometimes gargantuan. At times it's an obsession that engulfs me as *its* possession. I can't stop lust from continuously making me want Alice. Continuously.

As a verb, it's an action, and boy howdy, do I want to commit numerous actions upon Alice. I freely admit that at times, this want is clouded with the type of thought that allows this unworthy creature to wish himself upon a star.

Is something wrong with me?

Even though I'm wrestling with this carnal aspect of my desire, that desire wants more than just her body. It wants her soul, to take its place next to mine, for eternity.

If I could at least just kiss her. Just one kiss. No, if I received that joyous bounty, I'd want countless more. So why not start with one? Just one? For starters?

Ugh! What is wrong with me?

Through my bedroom's impish window, I can see flaming twitches along the horizon unleash themselves on Southern California's predawn sky. This day hasn't started yet and it already feels like it will never end. I would love for it to have one glorious end in particular, but know it won't.

That would make life good and at times, good doesn't seem to be allowed. Sometimes a gun complicates matters.

It takes a fair amount of encouragement, but I do manage to drag my sluggish ass to the kitchen to seek caffeine's awakening superpower. Since this isn't the week my daughters stay with me, I don't need to engage in the necessary mental gymnastics to make this unwanted erection go away. I enter the kitchen at full mast.

I was hoping for that day of her second touch to be different.

Back then was when I started thinking about asking her out, but didn't think I could. I didn't think she'd want anything like that with me. It did take some coaxing but I did manage to convince myself that it was ok for this single dad to approach that single mom and see if she wanted to meet for something, for coffee. I thought this would be a safe first date kind of thing. She could even just meet me there.

I was hoping she was going to Paul's that Saturday for our monthly PWP BBQ. Parents Without Partners was a group of single parents that kind of form an extended family, for support stuff. The parents in our chapter got chummy and we had these to foster fun. That month was at Paul's house. We liked it there. Paul had a pool.

When I saw Alice on Paul's patio, with some of our other moms, I became the Cheshire cat, all smiles; my wish she'd show up had been granted. Once my heart regained its composure, it almost lost it again when she caught my eye and broke into a grin. She excused herself, tucked her hair behind an ear then weaved through the other parents as she approached, her eyes never left mine.

That was when things started getting fuzzy for me to remember. My therapist had recommended journaling stuff like this to keep it from clogging up my brain. It was the screams that suddenly erupted all around that stopped us all and put me on alert.

That was when I saw Bobby walk into the living room with a gun in his little hand.

Bobby was 10.

Our PWP chapter had a big brother program and he was my little brother. He was brave, but didn't like heights. Sometimes he liked to be first, sometimes he liked to be everyone's champion and sometimes the bully. He was resistant to orders but did listen, even though you sometimes had to tell him twice.

He was Alice's boy.

I stood in front of him, pointed at the ground and somewhat loudly but very firmly told him to put the gun down. I didn't yell, or maybe I did. He hesitated, but did put it down. I pulled him into my arms. Alice was right there and tightly hugged us both.

I kicked the gun towards the wall and it slid across the tile floor. Paul grabbed it and checked for ammo.

"Still Unloaded," he said.

I let Bobby and Alice go as I turned to face Paul. "Where's the trigger lock? Didn't you tell me you had one?"

"It's supposed to be here." He was looking down the hall to his bedroom as he was slowly shaking his head. "Trust me, I'll find out why it isn't."

Well, that afternoon got pretty nutty to say the least. The police arrived, then Child Services, it got to be a mess.

I keep trying to convince myself to keep from reliving that late afternoon last month but I don't seem to listen.

As I finish my second cup, I put the empty in the sink then head back to my room to shower and get ready.

I'm still trying to figure out how it was I let myself get tricked into working this Saturday. My team needs to have one of us there and it seems I didn't say "not it" in time.

I don't know what to call this obsession with Alice, but whatever that is, we can all agree that now is not the best time. I'm aching to ask her out but now she has a shit ton of things she needs to deal with. Putting up with me doesn't need to be one.

Maybe not ever.

A few days after the gun incident, I got a call from Kelly, our PWP chapter's lead. She was putting a few of us together to help Alice get through this. It seemed to have triggered more than one issue that needed to be dealt with. Paul's church let us use one of their meeting rooms. This was scheduled for later that night.

As that afternoon was shifting into evening, I headed over for the meeting. As luck would have it, I ended up pulling into the parking lot right behind Paul, almost like we were in a caravan.

"Fancy meeting you here," Paul shook my hand as we walked down the side path. The building the meeting rooms were in was not the same building as the chapel. Those old Methodist churches were sometimes like movie postcards, they looked pretty nice.

"You hear anything?"

Paul looked over at me as he shook his head.

We kept on that path till we got to the room. Kelly and Alice were there along with two more, Chad and Maxine. Paul and I greeted our friends as we took our seats.

"In the joint custody Fred and I had," tearfully, Alice seemed to have a hard time being able to speak, "one of the clauses he put in was for a situation like this, Child Services needed to hear from both of us before Bobby can be released, to me. It said either parent, but we all know it would never be him." Everyone nodded in agreement.

"And well, it took some effort to find him so I could take Bobby home. We had a private investigator calling around for the whole day to find him. He and his current wife were in Ensenada. In Mexico."

Nothing that ignoramus did anymore surprised me. If anyone were to read through the custody agreement he saddled Alice with I'm sure they'd find more of these doozies. Ditto on the divorce papers. It's too bad she crossed paths with that jerk. Bobby was a treasure, but it was too bad that treasure's father was such an asshole.

"Alice, you seem to need a moment." Kelly, sat next to Alice and put her arm around her. "Paul, what can you tell us about the gun?"

"Yeah, on that. The boys got to talking, like boys do, and one of them heard I had a gun. They asked my son, and he told them I did. I didn't want anything like this to happen, that's why I got the gun safe and the trigger lock."

This had me confused. "If you had both, how did Bobby get the gun?"

"That was my fault. It seems I had the bad habit of using the same 4 digit number anytime I need a passcode on anything. My son, Tommy, knew that code. They opened the gun safe and took off the trigger lock."

"Thank you for sharing Paul," Kelly needed to clear her throat then continued, "what happened the day before is what led to what happened next." Kelly hugged a tearful Alice then turned back to us. "It was Bobby's birthday and his father had promised to take him to Magic Mountain. He didn't. He called an hour before he was supposed to arrive to cancel. He promised Bobby to take him later this month, but we all knew about Fred and his promises."

I couldn't stomach what she told us. I had no idea how anyone could possibly lack a soul in such a glaringly obvious way.

Alice was trying to talk as she wiped her tears. "Now, back to the gun. Bobby wanted to hurt his dad." New tears arrived. "At the counselor yesterday, I heard him say that he thought him holding a gun would prove his father was a bad person."

Without even realizing, I had taken to my feet. I was pissed. What he did to Bobby was shitty on so many levels. If that asshat had been right there I'd have leveled him.

I needed some air.

I saw the courtyard outside with pine trees. The pine trees had a nice, calming scent, right? And I needed to be calmer. "I'll be outside." I said to no

one in particular as I walked out into the courtyard. Metaphorically, my blood was boiling, even though reality kept it at the standard 98.6.

What the hell was Fred thinking? Getting to be a dad is a special gift.

There were some events in life that got hard coded into your DNA. For me, that was the day I had learned I was going to be a dad. Up to that point, life had essentially been a pre game warm up. Life had started when I came to learn I was going to be a dad. It would be up to me, and Sally, my ex, to guide our kids through the glorious mysteries of life.

My marriage with Sally didn't work out, but, oh my, these daughters of mine were the world to me. I used to jokingly say they meant the world to me, but I knew that wasn't the case, they were my world.

It wasn't as if being a dad was easy, there was a lot of hard stuff that sometimes had to be dealt with and get done. It was rough when Sally filed for divorce. But being a dad, well, that was always a role I had fully embraced. I didn't know how I couldn't. You looked at Fred and wondered if some of us didn't get the memo. Or maybe he got it and just hadn't bothered to read it. But seriously, why make a promise you wouldn't keep?

"Evan, you out here?" I saw Paul in the walkways that led to the meeting rooms. How was it he didn't see me?

"No, I'm not." I stepped up behind him.

He started laughing. "Dude, can you believe this? At least they found him."

"At least."

I followed him back inside the room. My marriage didn't work out, but at least Sally was a good mom. I never had to worry about my girls. I felt bad for Alice. The grief I saw on her face I'd felt before. Ugh! I just wanted to give her a hug. To let her know how we other parents were there for her but knew I shouldn't. I was afraid that the dastardly boner would brazenly declare itself to everyone that had the misfortune of being in that room.

Paul was shaking his head. "Didn't Fred know the 11th commandment? The promise of an amusement park to children shall not be unmet."

I couldn't have agreed more but felt my anger returning, which I didn't want. "How was it that he could call himself a father? Didn't Bobby's birthday mean anything to him?" I take a deep breath, I didn't want to lose it like I almost did earlier. "I remembered planning on what I was going to do for Tracy," I could see some confusion on Alice's face, so I turned to her. "My youngest, on her

birthday. I started planning for that a whole month before.” Alice smiled and for just a second, her eyes got a soft look I didn’t know how to read. She quickly looked down at her hands. Kelly glanced between us with a knowing look.

I put my bag on my shoulder and could see that my antics had brought the room’s attention. Channeling my inner Ted Lasso, I decided to play to my audience. “Didn’t Fred know what each of us knew? Kids were gifts from God. Not to us. We didn’t get them because we were special. They were gifts to the world. Sure, we’d been legally tasked with their care until adulthood, but, if you just thought about it like that, well, you’d missed the whole point. We had been blessed with this rapturous joy of experiencing the wonders of humanity through their eyes. Marvelous.” I had everyone’s attention, I could sometimes get carried away with these thoughts. “I’m sorry for going off like this. Being a dad means everything and sometimes I just can’t keep that to myself.”

Kelly had to nudge Alice, who looked almost spellbound, for some reason. She had to wave her arm at Alice with an amused look then stepped in front before she got a response. Her cheeks had gone pink—too warm? But that whole time Alice looked right at me. She didn’t seem mad or bothered, so I didn’t know what I did to get her attention like that.

I probably goofed it somehow, that had happened before. I sure hoped I didn’t leave some lunch on my shirt, that’d happened too.

It’s been a month since that meeting at Paul’s church. I wanted to stay as Bobby’s big brother, which Alice said she wanted too. For a planned trip to an arcade this past week, Alice texted to see if I could wait; a session with a counselor was running late. It was my ex’s week to watch our girls, so I texted back: no problem.

I got to her house just after the normal time and they showed up not long after. Alice pulled her sky blue minivan into her driveway. Bobby barely waited for the minivan to stop before he got out and raced to my SUV.

“It’s open Bobby, back seat, we’ll be taking off soon.” Alice was getting grocery bags out of the back, I picked up the rest. “You lead, I’ll follow.”

“If you insist.” She said laughing as she carried her bags in through her kitchen door.

“How’d the session go?”

“Ok, I think.” Alice shrugged. “This is just so rough on him. I just wish we didn’t have to do this.” She was looking down for a bit, then back up with an earnest and bright but tired smile. She stepped closer a bit, I could smell her

shampoo—lilacs, jasmine? “How are you, how are your girls, Becky, Tracy? Are they still finger painting? Tracy loved it, but Becky, didn’t seem as excited.”

Nobody ever asks about my girls. Not even Sally's friends. But Alice always did. “Becky loves it too. I guess she came around. There is just so much of their art on my fridge now, again, thank you for teaching them.”

“And thank you for taking Bobby, he needs some fun.”

“Anytime.” I looked outside and could see Bobby being his restless self in my SUV. “I better go now, your son is sure to get impatient, we both know him.” Just then we both heard my SUV’s horn getting honked.

All of this is going through my head this wonderful morning, which is positive since it keeps me from getting angry about having to work on a Saturday.

Once dressed, I grab a muffin then put some more coffee in a travel mug before starting the dreaded drive in. When traffic releases me from its grip on freeway one, freeway two takes up the slack. Delightful. There are days when traffic on all three of the freeways I need to use is nonexistent. On those days I get to drive all the way in unencumbered. They’re rare and today isn’t one of them. This adds to my irritation about working a Saturday, there should be no traffic. No one else should be stuck working on a Saturday and so they should all stay off the freeway and let me just drive myself in.

If only everything ran the way that I want. In all honesty, the world will be a scary if that happens.

This month’s PWP thing will be another BBQ at Paul’s this afternoon. And I did make sure he changed the codes on the gun safe and trigger lock.

I ended up getting to work 30 minutes after I was supposed to arrive. I can’t really blame traffic, I’m pretty sure I left 30 minutes after I should have. But, since I manage the department I work in and don’t have to clock in, no one will know I’m late, is that an abuse of power?

There won’t be anything for me to do anyway but push one button, twice. Each quarter, each of our 4 nationwide teams needs to have someone onsite for a disaster recovery test. I actually don’t know if all the teams need people onsite or if it’s just our North East Los Angeles team, but we need someone here to push the button.

The light comes on and I hit the button. That light will come back on in a couple of hours. But no matter how long before it lights up, I’m unlikely to stop thinking about Alice.

I remember when I started thinking about her as more than Bobby's mom—seven weeks ago, on a Saturday. Several parents had volunteered to do fun things with our kids.

I had offered to take some on a hike in the local foothills, about six, including Bobby, signed up. Alice was teaching finger painting, both my girls signed up for that. Tracy was very excited. I think she might be considering herself as an artist—she said maybe when asked.

When I brought the kids back from the hike, Alice, along with some others, were waiting for us in the car lot at that park. My daughters were with her. Once I stopped, all the kids jumped out of my SUV. She was standing out front, waiting to hug Bobby. Her minivan was parked behind us and as she was getting Bobby in, I was getting my girls in the SUV.

After buckling Bobby in, Alice walked behind her minivan around to her door, and as she was walking by, she gave me a boner.

She touched me as she said thank you when passing by. Her hand rested on me a beat longer than expected. Her thumb brushed against my forearm—so light a touch, I thought I imagined it. She pulled away, glancing back at me, and thanked me again, almost like in a sensuous whisper. My unit then announced its presence.

In all honesty, none of this makes any sense. If I had to fill out her description on an Action Item Report for work I'd say she's cute, collar length hair, dark brown, if not black. She's in her early to mid 30s, slightly pudgy with your standard childbearing hips—ugh, again? See, when I try to sound non lust filled, if my mind goes anywhere near that mouthwatering ass of hers, I lose myself to those thoughts again.

Her bust is on the smaller side. Not that it matters. I know I keep talking about her glorious chest, but seriously, it's glorious because it's hers. She could be flat or with boobs so big they're hauled around on a flatbed truck; I, would, still, want, her.

Besides, it's not as if I'm not adorned with love handles myself. If I ever find the courage to approach, I hope she doesn't just laugh.

The second light comes on, I hit the button again and leave.

I am so hoping to see her at Paul's today. I know Fred's got Bobby this weekend. Sometimes if a parent doesn't have their kid that week, they don't come to our event. We make sure to let them know they can come alone, but still, some don't. I really, really, hope she's there.

When I get to my ex's house to pick up my girls, Becky and Tracy, I find them in their mom's pool. As the girls dry up and put on t-shirts and shorts over their suits, we grab their towels and head out the door.

My girls and I get to Paul's and they are thrilled to meet their friends, who are just as happy to see them. Seven and eight year old can be so full of energy. If only we could tap into that as a source of power.

We get there a bit before most. Paul is busy on his patio with his two grills, cooking us up ribs and chicken. I greet him and wander off to the pool area. I just want to get lost in some of these thoughts. Staying poolside while the girls play will give me some cover as to why I'm by myself right now.

And my thoughts go here: she doesn't need to waste any time on me. She's got more to deal with Bobby and Fred and Bobby's counselor and hers, and well, stuff, things that matter. I'm not one of them. And now is not the right time for Alice to put up with me. She's got enough on her plate.

When Sally split up with me, I ended up seeing a therapist to help me get through that. He showed me the here and now meditation technique. That helped a lot. Maybe I can schedule another appointment and he can help me get rid of this unwieldy infatuation.

Just then the vision of beauty that's captured my heart comes into view. Alice passes by the patio, greets those with Paul, grabs two beers from the cooler and walks straight towards me.

She sat right next to me on the bench, even though there was more space. "Bobby told me I have a challenge." She hands me a beer as she opens hers. "He said you can't be beat at air hockey."

"I thought it would be foosball he'd be bragging about. He always beats me when we play that."

"Oh, foosball came up more than once. I just thought it was funny, he loves air hockey. He was sad when his broke." She laughs as she touches my arm again, I'm starting to think maybe not accidentally. "But again, thank you."

She is about to touch my forearm yet again and this time I just pull my arm back. If I'm going to beat this infatuation, it will be easier if I'm not encumbered with an erection.

Alice looked startled and hurt.

"I don't want to be a burden for you." I just don't know what to say. "I'm sorry, this isn't you, it's me." I take to my feet. I already decided. Now is not the right time.

“Evan, stop.”

I turn around as she squares herself in front of me.

“Why am I here? I know I’m not the only one that has trouble sleeping.”

I don’t know how to respond but it doesn’t matter since she put her hand on my lips to keep me quiet. And yeah, her touch gave me a boner.

“I wanted to see you.” She grins at my look of bewilderment then looks down at my pants and smiles. “It surprised me the first time I saw this reaction on you. But now, I kind of like it.” She giggled a bit. “You’re cute when you get embarrassed. It’s charming.”

“But...”

She puts her hand up to keep me quiet. “I know that things for me right now are a mess, there is a lot to deal with, but I’m not letting that keep me from telling you this.” She looks down for a second then back up at me. “I have feelings for you, this almost makes me feel like a school girl because I haven’t had a crush on a boy this strong since then.” My cheeks gets a gentle caress from her thumb. “And by seeing this reaction on you.” My arms are pulled apart by her hands on mine as she looks down at the bulge in my pants and lets a giggle escape. “I can see you feel something for me too.”

A check to see if the girls at the pool are looking at us is done, and when she sees that they’re not looking, she brings my hand to her cheek then kisses it, never taking her eyes from mine. “It shocked and surprised me when I first saw that, but now? It’s sweet and lovely.”

“But, this is still a bit of a shock for me.” She starts to looks down again but instead just lets out a sigh. “I can’t believe fuddy duddy me gives the guy that makes my heart race an erection.” She smiles mischievously then turns to see if the girls are still not looking, and when she sees that they’re still not, she turns back to me then reaches down. “But really, what’s not to like?”