

# Bunny and the Boys: A Tale of Two Worlds

by [James Como](#) (February 2024)



Freddy was a third generation Jamaican child who lived in the James Weldon Johnson houses, apartment 5E, on Lexington Avenue and 112<sup>th</sup> Street, in Harlem. 'The Projects': mostly twelve-story brick blocks randomly maintained and haphazardly secured, sometimes nasty, often foul, with mostly good people but enough bad ones to make life dicey.

He was of average size for his age; at eleven he had yet to undergo his growth spurt. His narrow face was handsome, his hair cropped short, his gray eyes warm, his smile ready and

broad, of complexion darker than his mother but not quite as dark as his father.

Three kids mattered to him. He really liked a Puerto Rican girl from the next building named Sylvia. But he wasn't sure she liked him back. He asked her to teach him Spanish, but both knew that was a ploy. His best friend was Toody, a short, gangly child with a hair so unkempt he could have swept chimneys with it. He was helpless at sports but helpful in most other ways.

The third child was Freddy's nemesis and nearest academic rival, Tommy, Polish, a loner mostly, tall and gangly with curly black hair, who would always try to one-up Freddy. Tommy teased him about his big head, the back of which jutted out, so he (and others) sometimes called him 'moose head.' He was the best baseball player on the East Side uptown.

Freddy's father, a big man, was a bus driver, his mother a part-time kindergarten teaching aide, his older brother and only sibling Clyde a mischievous teenager. The father, James, who had won the Silver Star in WWII, did not mind his sons wandering about the city (though never alone). The Cosmos were city folk to begin with, and from a young age the sons had learned to ride the subways and the bus lines. Toody would say, "if we know the transfers and the links we can go almost anywhere in the city for fifteen cents!" He was a *proud* New Yorker.

And yet we must wonder if James was right in this. Mrs. Cosmo, Mabel, did not like her youngest son going hither and yon. All sorts of things could happen, and did happen, in the city. The news was full of terrible stories. "There are those disappearances," she would say.

James's brother, Uncle Henry (a bigger man even than his brother), knew all about those, since he was a detective sergeant, and several disappearances were his cases. He also

knew about the body parts that had been found, but those discoveries were not public knowledge and he had not told anyone. So if the projects had dangers on the inside, there were also evils from without.

This day, Freddy and Toody were headed to the Italian deli on Third Avenue (next door to the bakery where Freddy and Clyde had rescued that one-eyed kitten). Their plan was to split an Italian hero. At the door a man came up to them and asked, "hey kids, do you want to buy a watch, real cheap?" Freddy stopped to see what the man had, but Toody said, "no thanks" and pulled Freddy inside.

"Why'd you do that?" Freddy asked.

"*Why? Did you look at that guy? Where do you think he got those watches? And how?*"

"Not all Italians are gangsters you know."

Toody said, "first, I don't know if he even was Italian. Doesn't matter. Second, did you see how close he was standing? I mean, don't you read the papers? Third, everybody in your family already has a watch, and he could see that you do too, even if it is silly. Fifth, it's your turn to pay, so let's eat."

Freddy just smiled.

A week earlier, when Toody was being bullied, struggling against it but getting the worst, Freddy showed up. He didn't wait. He went right at the biggest of the three bullies and hit him with a straight right hand to the nose. The creep howled as blood spilled over his shirt, then he teared up and dropped to his knees crying. Freddy and Toody turned and left.

Without reminding his friend of the incident Freddy said, "don't you think *you owe me?*"

"Well, yeah," Toody answered, "but since I just saved you from

being kidnapped I figure we're even, which means you still owe me." And that was that.

The fact is that the mobsters who inhabited East Harlem, certainly bad people, would not, in any big way, trouble ordinary 'civilians,' as they called them. But What Freddy, James and Mabel did *not* know is that for some time Freddy had been stalked by a woman known to her devoted circle as Bunny, actually Barbara Bowes. Her reason for watching Freddy was his status as a pre-pubic specimen.

Eventually she would be called a 'monster,' even by the press that had adored her. But before that she was a research professor of evolutionary biology who ran her own laboratory at the American Museum of Natural History. Her life's project was to "speed up evolution," as she put it, with a particular interest in androgyny. Her popular reputation derived from an article she had published in *Vanity Fair* titled, "Men Need Not Apply."

Now, as it happens, one of Freddy's favorite haunts was the great Museum. He would visit it with Toody a couple of times a month, just to wander around. They would take a cross-town bus to Central Park West then that bus downtown into the Eighties. James and Mabel did not have to know that sometimes they hitched a ride by standing on the back bumper of the bus, a dangerous maneuver, especially for the uncoordinated Toody.

At the Museum is where Bunny first noticed Freddy. During one Monday staff meeting she announced, "I've scouted a fine candidate. Or at least so I think. Cory has spoken to him informally." (Corey, muscled, with a penchant for wearing tight t-shirts under a sports jacket, was the only male on the team.) He has learned where the boy lives, so I've been able to observe him *in situ*, around and about those dismal projects on the East Side in Harlem."

There were murmurs of approval from the twelve team members, a

widely diversified group, at least demographically. Each had been personally chosen by Bunny, both for their elite scientific competency and for their sycophancy. For example, on the table were bagels and cream cheese and coffee, but nobody would eat until Bunny had.

“And this is the really good news. He seems to visit here often, maybe today. So we must watch for him. Everyone has a photo. Be vigilant!”

“And if we spot him?” asked Gloria, the youngest of the group.

“The usual with any prospective specimen. Work in teams, notify me and follow, but do not make contact.” These ‘operations,’ as the team called them, were always conducted in a military manner: strictly covert, disciplined, precise.

Immoral, grotesque, criminal, horrific, perhaps diabolical—these are words that any normal person would apply to Bunny’s work and methods. However, they were never used by her or anyone on the team, because none of them saw the ‘work’ in those terms. Many people claim a psychopath does not know he is evil. What those people fail to understand, or concede, is that not all evil, or even most of it—from private sexual violence to a genocidal holocaust—results from psychopathy, and therein lies the mystery.

Exactly what research did Bunny’s team undertake? What were its hypotheses, objectives, basic premises and, above all, its methods? Never mind. Only the methods really matter, because their project was not about science but power. All the ‘philosophy,’ as they called it, were smoke to hide that truth. Gender freedom, their Great Cause, required power. You see, though team members knew their enterprise was criminal, none of them ever thought they were part of an evil enterprise.

No. They were serving a higher good. They were fighting oppression and furthering liberation. The kidnapping,

mutilation (commonly with, but sometimes without, anesthesia) and the death of boys was unfortunate, but how else to get the genitalia they needed? Such is the price of liberty. Others had done much worse to further a cause. Such was their rationalization.

In fact, as they had de-humanized their victims so were they de-humanized, and their obedience to authority (their shaman-like Bunny) further de-individualized them. But they knew something, something damning about the mass of human beings: some people would follow any trend parading as a Just Cause, or, if not follow, support, or, if not support, tolerate passively. Few would actively protest, let alone resist.

By the next staff meeting, no one had seen any hint of Bunny's newest specimen. No matter: they had business, which was to formulate their appeal for a higher budget.

Corey reviewed the trigger words: "We have to include 'victim' and 'oppression', along with 'community' and 'human rights.' Oh! And 'sexual freedom!' Or we can mix them, like 'sexual oppression' and 'victimized community.'"

This went on for a short while, each suggestion blurted out more excitedly than the one before it. Finally Bunny raised her arms, and the room fell silent.

"Thank you all. Thank you. I believe Cory has all he needs to write the preface to the line items. Cory, just remember to replace 'sex' and 'sexual' with 'gender,' okay? I shouldn't have to point that out. And *nothing* about race." Cory nodded. "Now, operations. Dr. Eustacia, where are we?"

"One moment please." This woman, Beryl, the oldest of the group by far, rarely spoke. Now she was interrupting. Everyone stopped, turned, and stared.

She did not wait to be recognized. Beryl had been a candidate for Congress, an anchor on a local late-night news show, and

was a founding member of The Society to Save Science. Above all, she knew the Deep Pockets very well. So to this team she was necessary and useful, even though, as an Oompa Loompa look-alike, she could be an embarrassment. Bunny scorned her with low-intensity condescension. Beryl hated Bunny viscerally.

“We are running out of money. Worse, our supporters are running out of patience. Worst of all, *they are getting bored*, useful idiots that they are. I believe we need a huge display. Listen, people think in terms of bumper sticker clichés and flock to a cause that is the underdog, some abstraction that signals Justice. We must march, and when they see us marching, getting arrested, hopefully being beaten—then we will have them back.” Beryl was breathless.

Bunny, stone-faced, waited, then, grimly, answered. “Our Institute for Gender Equity presents many faces, and many are designed to arouse strong emotions in different groups, passions for a menu of ideals. Now, though, dear Beryl, we are at a stage that requires not merely privacy but secrecy. In short, we do not want close attention. We are at the verge of becoming a genuine movement, and once we achieve that we can do virtually as we please, no questions asked, no objections raised. No dissident voices.”

Gloria, nearly breathless as always, added, “They will love *you* Bunny, you will do *no* wrong!” Applause resounded, but after a short while Bunny cut that off and continued.

“So, Beryl, thank you for your ideas, but for now please organize some fund-raisers for our salon friends.”

Beryl slouched back into her chair. How she relished the activist drama. How much more did she abhor this grunt work—her reward for so sincerely, and bravely she thought, giving voice to her idea. Bunny. Bunny. bunnybunnybunny.

A week later, the morning sun seemed droopy with sleep, making

the day so dank that even the greasy puddles from the overnight rain did not sparkle. Freddy still loved puddles, even though he was too old to splash in them. That's fine. Sylvia, having heard of Freddy's punch out of the bully, was suddenly giving him the eye. But it was the conversation that Freddy could overhear happening in the kitchen of their 'cottage' (as Mabel called her apartment) that had his attention.

"Did you *hear* your brother, James? Body parts. From children, James. Little boys. Like our boys."

"I heard, Mabel. Of course I heard. And we both know the deal: sealed lips."

"That's not the *whole* deal, James." The pan she was holding clattered onto the stove. "The whole deal is that our boys go nowhere without us. You know Henry's out on a limb, and it's to protect his nephews." Now she got real close to her husband, looking directly into his eyes, her gaze withering. "So it's time to put your foot down with our boys."

This was stuff Freddy had not seen in the papers. Nobody had. And if Uncle Henry was worried that meant there was something to worry about. Uncle Henry did not scare easy. In fact, he didn't scare at all. And in the back of Freddy's mind his curiosity hummed along. Just what body parts did they find? But that was in the *back* of his mind. In the front was the Museum.

How well Freddy knew that particular tone he had heard from his mother. There was no arguing, no other side. He also knew his father wouldn't talk to him and Clyde until he got home from work that evening. That meant that he and Toody could squeeze in one more visit to the Museum that afternoon.

And so the two boys changed out of their school clothes into their after-school clothes (but still with their school shoes because this *was* the Museum after all) and rushed off. They



were well away when the ruckus broke out in front of Building Five.

The JWJ Homes made an effort at recreational opportunities for the children by placing short concrete barrels on their sides here and there, next to some monkey bars. They served as short tunnels for children to hide in, to climb on, or to play tag around. In one of those Tommy, who was even more alone these days than usual, found a garbage bag, which was unusual, because tenants kept the common area opening to Third Avenue very clean.

He didn't look inside because of the smell, a bitter stink that made his eyes water; instead he ran with it to the bus stop on Lexington Avenue and 115<sup>th</sup> Street, where he knew Clyde would be fishing through the subway grating for coins that people drop when reaching for bus fare. (He would stick some freshly chewed gum to a sinker tied to a thread.)

Tommy panted, "Clyde I found this. It's smells *real* evil!"

Clyde took the bag, held it at arms' length, and opened it. He saw the body parts—torn inside out were the genitals of young boys, perhaps from as many as twenty. Staying calm—his father always said "never panic" —he carried the bag to the rec center and called the police.

Police cars came right away, some with lights flashing. Two other cars were plain. Tommy had been listening all along, starting with Clyde's call.

Soon, near his car, Detective Sergeant Henry Cosmo was trying to speak with Tommy, who found he could not speak while throwing up. In fact, Tommy did not have much to say. Yesterday the bag wasn't there, today it was. Was he in trouble? He didn't think to tell about the swanky white woman he had seen hanging around the past week.

Henry brought him to his mother. "Best keep him home, Mr.

Ratomski," he said, "the boy is upset. Not making much sense. He needs rest."

Sergeant Cosmo took his nephew home to Mabel, who screeched when she heard the story. "Where is Freddy? *Where is my Freddy?*" she kept shouting. Henry said they had patrol looking for Freddy right then and that they would find him and bring him home.

Tommy, now more angry than upset, could not sit still. He felt as though he were unraveling. His mother, who did not know what Tommy had heard, was making hot chocolate for him. They were both worried about Freddy, and Toody. As soon as he could, he squirreled out of his building and set out for the Museum. His mother called Mabel, who called Henry.

The Fifth Avenue penthouse overlooking Central Park was, one might say, bespoke sparkle, in white, gold and crystal. The twenty-five jeweled-draped guests all wanted a piece of Bunny.

"You look stunning, Bunny!"

"Bunny, you are so brave! So so brave. If only the world had more pioneers like you!"

"You must visit us in the Hamptons, Bunny, you simply must!"

"Bunny, I don't know what's sexier. Your mind, your spirit, those cheekbones, or that fabulous body." That from a would-be male paramour. Of these Bunny had what she thought of as her 'rotation.' She smiled, thinking, well, for some things men *may* apply.

The take was nearly \$200,000, ten thousand per guest. What those people thought of as Bunny's 'work' –research into the 'amplification of women's rights,' or even 'the restoration of goddess Gaia to her rightful stature,' which some did not think a metaphor–had very little to do with the actual workings of the lab, in which they had no interest. The

horrors of genuine human suffering, the sights and sounds of it, mattered less than The Cause, an abstraction, some future fulfillment: a habit of mind that evil feeds upon.

Beryl left early. "I'm going back to the lab," she whispered to Bunny, who said, "nice job Beryl. Certainly six figures," and offered her cheek for Beryl to kiss.

Nice job. Well, there was an even nicer job at hand.

Tommy was racing on his bike to the West Side along 115<sup>th</sup> Street. At Fifth Avenue he cut left, downtown, to 96<sup>th</sup> Street, then right into Central Park. Once through—that took him all of three minutes—he turned left onto Central Park South. He had to dodge traffic, but Tommy was a master at this.

When he got to the entrance of the Museum—there was Teddy Roosevelt on his high horse—he dumped his bike at the curb and raced to the door. He didn't even worry about the bike being there when he came back out.

But as he was about to rush in he stopped. His father looked nothing like Teddy, yet here, now, in his head, was his father. "Stay away from trouble, son. Not just out of it, because trouble is a vacuum that will pull you in if you get close. You gotta stay away."

Well, why hadn't *he* stayed away, instead of trying to help that lady at the A&P on 121<sup>st</sup> Street? He was stabbed to death, and now Tommy was alone with his mother, who had cried every day for the past six months.

"You know, dad," Tommy thought, "I'm gonna be just like you. I'm going towards trouble. Freddy may not know he's my best friend, but that don't matter, because he is." And at that he darted into the Museum, dodged the ticket counter, and went directly to the hall of dinosaurs, Freddy's favorite room.

No Freddy, no Toody. But—yes! —there was that woman! From the projects. Tommy would follow her, had to. Then it seemed as though they wound through the whole Museum.

At last she turned into a dark, narrow corridor off the primate room. That turned to the right and had doors along the left wall. None was marked. She entered the one furthest down the hall. Tommy waited a while then walked slowly, feeling colder as he did so, up to the door, real close, and listened, his right cheek pressed against the metal.

That was *very* cold. He could hear voices, all female except one. They were loud, arguing, some were angry. At first he couldn't make out the words, but soon one voice took over and the others stopped.

“Beryl, why did you do it? You know we save the remnants, as an homage, for cremation. After all, they were just boys, and they should be memorialized for the higher good they served.”

A second voice answered, impatiently. “Bunny, it was scraps, garbage really. You know that. Still, I did the right thing. I put them in a place where little boys play, as a sort of gift.” That's how crazy she was.

Then there was silence, until the first voice, Bunny's, said, “you are insane, Beryl” —this without irony— “Did you not know they would be found and brought to the police, and what will happen now? Or *did* you know? Is *that* it? Were you *that* angry, dear dear Beryl? At what, exactly? With whom?”

Tommy was trembling. Was that the woman he had seen by the Homes? Or was it the other one? His concentration was such that he was no longer aware of his surroundings, another thing his father had warned him about. “Always be aware of your surroundings, son,” he had said a million times.

So he had not heard the person creep up the corridor and was now standing next to him. When he heard the whisper he jumped,

and for less than a second was terrified. But only a second, because standing real close was Toody.

“Toody, how— “

“Tommy, they have Freddy in there. They’da had me too but they didn’t see me. I ran to a phone, but I had only one dime. I got a bad feeling, Tommy. What do they want with him.”

“I think I know, a little bit at least, and it’s really really ugly. We gotta do something, right now.”

And right now, for the first time, Tommy had an experience that many people have, of time slowing down. What went through his head took less than five seconds, but it was two memories of hours from his life.

He had seen something ugly in the papers once, about massacres and slaughter and about a ring of perverts who tortured women and used little kids. It seemed never-ending.

When he asked his father about it, the man did not dismiss it. “Son,” he said, “there is more evil in the world than you can ever know, or should know. Cruelty for its own sake, or for a cause, or because for some people it’s fun. I saw a lot of it in the war. In fact, I’ll tell you this. You know the word ‘civilization,’ what separates us from the animals? Well it’s thin, son. We who are more or less safe, and look at art and read books and admire great buildings, we see the world inside out. On the other side it’s mostly evil, and the layer between the two sides is like tissue paper. People blame the devil. I’ll tell you what I think. Yeah, maybe, but if so it is the devil working through people. We do the evil to each other. He just leaves us alone. It’s a kind of sickness, son. It takes work—do you hear me?—*work* to stay on the right side.”

And Tommy thought, whatever is going on in there is on the wrong side. Then he remembered something else, his second favorite movie (his first favorite being *King Kong*). That

movie was *Gunga Din*, one scene in particular. He had seen it many times, but only on their tiny set. (That didn't matter. If he sat one foot away it was like being at the movies.)

A bunch of fanatics are meeting to worship a blood goddess, and their leader is really whipping them up. They plan to slaughter some British soldiers and then take over the world. What they don't know is that one soldier and another unofficial one (that's *Gunga Din*) are hiding there listening. The soldier has to do something, anything, *right now*. So he barges into the crowd of killers singing some army song and tells them they're all under arrest! Of course they overcome him and take him prisoner, but the distraction allows *Gunga Din* to escape and go for help.

All of that in five seconds, at the end of which Tommy knew exactly what to do.

"Toody, go out the main entrance. I left my bike there. Go bring help."

"Tommy— "

"Now Toody, *go now!*" And Toody, seeing Tommy's giant eyes, ran off.

Now, we must remember Tommy was a child, still lacking in the cultural and intellectual contexts that make for sound judgment. But his moral compass was sound, and he was brave—or so people would say. He tried the doorknob, it turned, and the door opened, and everyone in the cold room went quiet and looked at him as he walked in.

Like the man in the movie he strutted in, chest out, waving his arms, singing "no gal made has got a shade on Sweet Georgia Brown" (which he learned after watching the Harlem Globetrotters) at the top of his lungs. Then, "all right, you're all under arrest! Sergeant Cosmo and his team are waiting outside, so best you go peaceable. *Can you hear me*

*Freddy?"*

That's when Tommy heard banging from inside a door across the room. And that's when he darted towards that door, only to find the women from the Homes in front of him.

She shouted "help me with this trash!"

Most of the room seemed either frozen or bemused, but Corey ran to her, saying, "I'm here Bunny, I'm here for you."

The two of them dragged Tommy, struggling, towards the door that banging came from and opened it to throw him in. In that instant Tommy felt the freezer-like cold coming from inside, but also, as the door opened, four children, including Freddy, rushed out and grappled with Bunny and Corey.

One was a big fourteen-year-old, the others were like Freddy, and all had that mean combination of fear and anger that makes for adrenalin. Tommy was free in no time, threw a wild right hand, and caught Bunny smack in the jaw. She dropped to her knees shouting, "Beryl! Help me!" But no one did.

The big kid jumped on Corey (who was no fighter: all gym muscle, no street), got him to the ground, and kept beating him as he tried to cover up. The rest of the team just watched.

The five boys backed towards the door to the hall and walked out. When they were clear they ran for the front entrance to the Museum, where they stopped. Only Freddy and Tommy knew each other, but they agreed to go together to the police. Sergeant Cosmo had not shown up. Toody, not the greatest cyclist in the city, had rammed into a car and had to stop.

Tommy and his mother, Freddy, Clyde, Mable and James, and the other three boys who had been in the freezing room with Freddy (their parents or grandmothers were on the way), were with Sergeant Cosmo.

The three had been drugged but were coming out of it when Freddy showed up and shook them. Then they heard Tommy. They told Henry Cosmo what they had seen. It turns out they were in an operating room, along with the body parts and whole corpses of other boys.

Four of them, including Tommy, were crying. The oldest wasn't. He said, "the kid with the moose head rallied us and saved us all." Tommy looked up but said nothing. Henry Cosmo's instructions to his team were to stay outside the childrens' houses. They would be in protective custody until further notice. He would get a warrant to raid the Museum.

But the next morning—just that fast—the *New York Times* had a headline, "Teen Thugs Vandalize Museum Research Center. Much Data Lost. Millions in Damage," and Bunny said, "we could never afford that kind of publicity."

During the night Bunny's team had gotten rid of the body parts and the corpses in the Museum crematorium. Reports and data were secured, along with photographs. In short, the police found nothing in the lab, which smelled of bleach. That convinced them that the team, especially its leader, were fishier than a can of sardines. Everyone on the team was brought in for questioning and finger printing.

Yes, there was the testimony of the boys themselves, but there was no forensic corroboration, and Bunny claimed that the boys had fled into the operating room when they were caught trespassing. After all, it was Bunny who opened the door and allowed them out.

Bunny and the team—but not Beryl—cried harassment, and much of the press echoed that. There was a candle light vigil at the Museum, after which the protestors marched through Central park to the fund-raising penthouse on Fifth Avenue. They were The Society to Save Science, without Beryl.

But the next day the *New York Post* had a front page headline,



with photo, that read "Youthful Mutilated Male Genitalia Found Thrown Into Garbage Bag."

Bunny's fingerprints were on the bag that Tommy had found. She answered that hers weren't the only prints there and that her prints would naturally be on other garbage bags as well. She had no idea what those body parts were or how they got into that bag.

What she did not know was that Beryl had made a plea deal and was singing like the bluebird of paradise. She mapped out the whole grotesque operation, including its philosophy (as she echoed it).

In the end, the team members each got twenty years, and Bunny, who faced the electric chair, cut a deal and was sentenced to several sequential life imprisonments. The head of Museum Research was allowed to retire; he should have known everything knew but in fact knew nothing.

Eustacia, the surgeon, standing on 'principle,' did not cut a deal and, showing no remorse, was compared to Dr. Mengele by the prosecutor ("he is always with us," she said), the notorious Nazi butcher, and Eustacia was executed.) The press and Bunny's former supporters dismissed her as an 'extremist outlier' and soon forgot about her. She, like some other team members, would be killed in prison: too many inmates were parents.

Beryl would enter the Witness Protection Program. But soon after the sentencing of the other team members, and just before she was to be taken to her new home, Dennis Cosmo handed his brother a slip of paper.

That night, mild with a drizzle, a large man met her as she exited her building on the Upper East Side. He struck a furious left hook to her midsection, and Beryl collapsed, gasping for air. Before he left her lying on the sidewalk, he whispered in her ear, "for you there's no escaping Original

Sin. I will always be able to find you." The next day she was released from the emergency room of Lenox Hill Hospital. The day after that she was re-located. About her attacker she would never say a word. She lived happily, for a while, though not ever after (but that's another story).

The next evening Tommy and his mother, Suzie, accepted an invitation to supper from James and Mabel Cosmo. It was a Friday. Suzie was next to Clyde, with Tommy and Freddy together across the table. It was covered by a red and white checkered oilcloth.

Mabel served roast beef.

"I wanted to make my special pot roast for you, Mrs. Ratomski, but I didn't have the time. And James here assures me that everybody loves roast beef as much as he does."

Tommy was staring to his right, into the living room. "Mr. Cosmo, are all those books yours?" He was gazing at the three shelves against a far wall.

"Yes, Tommy, well, ours. We all like to read. Would you like to look them over?" Mabel, Clyde and Freddy were looking at each other.

Tommy stammered a 'yes', but his mother said, "after dinner, Tommy." As though snapping out of a trance Tommy said, "Mrs. Cosmo, your kitchen smells like Heaven, like my favorite colors, amber and blue, if they were covered with gravy and had mushrooms inside."

Freddy answered, "we already know you're weird, Tommy."

Tommy: "How are those Spanish lessons coming along?" Freddy blushed. "Hey, where's Toody? Where's he been?"

Clyde answered. "He says his granny put him under house arrest. Home, school, home, school. That's it."

“Good for her! Mrs. Ratomski, would you care for some mashed potatoes? Clyde, please serve Mrs. Ratomski,” James said, looking at his son, who did so with a smile.

“I hope you like sweet potato pie, Mrs. Ratomski, for desert.”

“Sweet potato pie!” Freddy shouted, stretching out the vowels.

“Well, I’ve never had it, Mrs. Cosmo.”

James was grinning ear to ear. “Well, Mrs. Ratomski, it will change your life!”

Mrs. Ratomski, shyly, asked, “would you mind if I say grace. There is so much to be thankful for.” And with nods and smiles from Mabel and James she did just that, remembering to pray for the souls of all the dead boys.

There was a short silence before Clyde asked, “Hey Tommy, I’m curious, why did you bring that stinking bag to me?” And without hesitation, Tommy said, “because that’s what Freddy would have done.”

There was another silence, this one a bit longer. Finally James said, “Tommy, you saved my son’s life, and not only his. You are a very, very brave boy, Tommy, like your dad, and just like him you didn’t hesitate. We’ll never be able to thank you.”

“But we do,” added Mabel, “from our hearts.”

And there was a third silence, when Freddy said, loudly, “but Tommy, ‘*Sweet Georgia Brown?*’ Really? And marching in like that telling them they’re *all under arrest?* Are you—well, never mind, I know you’re nuts, I could hear it all. But where’d you get *that?*”

So Tommy told them about *Gunga Din*, and much laughter followed and would continue into the night, especially when, after dinner, they all sang, or tried to sing, *Sweet Georgia Brown*,

except Tommy who was making himself at home looking into book after book after book.

As Suzie and Tommy were leaving, Tommy said, "I really like your home, Mrs. Cosmo, and your books, Mr. Cosmo. Thanks for the loan, and thank you very much for having us." To his embarrassment, Suzie tussled his hair.

Mabel hugged Tommy and answered, "you're always welcome here, Tommy" and Suzie Ratomski said, "thank you for a wonderful evening, for your good spirit."

"And thanks for saving me, Tommy," Freddy said, and Tommy answered, 'Oh Syyyyylviaaaa'" and dashed out giggling.

Eventually the inevitable happened. People who believed in the stated cause, the abstraction, began to spread the belief that none of it had happened. Not only because liberal people who believe in human rights and equity could never ... but also because, well, such things—so over the top—just do not happen. A monumental misunderstanding had led to a horrible miscarriage of justice.

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James Como's new book is *Mystical Perelandra: My Lifelong Reading of C. S. Lewis and His Favorite Book* (Winged Lion Press).

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