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The Bible Belt Stretched Too Tight

Garrett Woolf

Years ago I was a young private assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. I was in processing, or doing the necessary legalities, required before I was assigned an infantry unit to belong to. The good thing is that I wasn't alone. At the 20th replacement battalion where every member of the 101st goes through to in process, there were plenty of single men to chase women with.

One particular night we all decided to stay local and go out to a country club in Clarksville, TN rather than drive the hour to Nashville. There were around a dozen of us. A dozen genetically blessed good-looking guys who were in fantastic shape. We were a father's worst nightmare.

Once we were all showered, shaved, dressed, and had strategically sprayed our bodies down with cologne, we gathered in the parking lot to decide who drove and who would ride with whom. Soon we were exiting the main gate to the base, and turned right towards downtown Clarksville.

The bar was called "Kickers." A large neon boot kicked back and forth on the front wall of the building. One of our Northern group members looked at the sign with confusion. His brain whirred inside his head that was cocked to the side.

"Kickers?" He said. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It refers to the boot. Also known as a shit kicker. Hence the name kickers," I told him.

The whirring intensified as the other group members who understood nodded and laughed, while those who were also from Northern heritage debated if us Southern Folk were yanking their Yankee chain.

"Are you sure man?" He asked.

"Yes I'm sure. I'm from Texas."

As we mozied towards the door a debate arose about

who sleeps with whose sister, who won the civil war, whose ancestors were conquered by the Moors, and a whole slew of Full Metal Jacket movie references about Texas, steers, and queers. Once at the door, a bouncer greeted us without a smile. He was a large bald man. A man whose whole life would be about bouncing. He probably went to bouncing conventions. He stood zero chance against us in a fight. Which explained the lack of a smile. There would be no killing us with kindness. We whipped out our military IDs. A dozen green identification cards of bald teenagers who looked like serial killers.

“Only one of you can get in here, gentlemen,” he told us.

My smart-ass attitude jumped at the chance. “Why not?” I asked. “Is this place full? There isn’t a line to get in.”

“Only one of you is nineteen,” he replied.

“So fucking what? We’re all older than eighteen,” I said.

“County law. You must be nineteen or older to get into the bars in Montgomery county.”

“Is this a joke? So where are we supposed to go?”

32 “You can go to Nashville. They’ll let eighteen-year-olds into the bars there.”

“I still don’t understand,” I said, with a confused look on my face.

“Bible belt brother. Christian values and such.”

“Nashville. Shit, dude, it’s an hour drive to Nash-Vegas. Is there anywhere we can go here in Clarksville?”

“There sure is.”

“Where?”

“Strip clubs.”

My brain was whirring now. We couldn’t get into a country bar. We couldn’t drink. However, we could get into a strip club and have tits and asses waved in our faces. Bible belt. Christian values. I had never been to a strip club.

“Strip clubs?” I said.

“Yes, sir,” the bouncer replied.

The idea of a strip club never crossed our minds. The group started looking up to the idea of a strip club. They talked amongst themselves, and slapped each other on the arms and back. We all talked things over. Someone suggested the club outside Fort Campbell. The group seconded the idea and moved to close. After a quick jog back to the three or four cars that brought us to Kickers, we drove back to base.

The strip club named Cat’s West awaited us.

I felt nervous. I felt wrong. I felt like I was letting my mother down. I felt like a man. I felt like I was in control of my own life. I felt silly. I felt like a little boy.

Dance music pouring out of the club met us as we exited the vehicles. The men cheered as the gravel from the parking lot crunched under our feet. The front door led to a small entranceway with another door. Inside the entryway sat yet another bouncer. This one was as fat as the last one. He had long black hair unlike the last bouncer. He looked like an internet geek. He looked stoned. I doubted that he was as dedicated to his profession as the last bouncer.

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I was last to pay the twenty-one dollar entry fee. I was shocked at how much it cost to gain access to a strip club. A private in the Army didn’t make a lot of money.

We all fear the unknown. Even those who are supposed to be fearless. The nervousness I felt was more than the first time I undressed a woman personally. With shaking hands, I handed the man my money.

“Enjoy yourselves, men. No touching the girls,” the fat bouncer said to us.

I took his words as a message from God. I felt like I was on foreign soil. I followed the rest of my friends into Cat’s West. My heart pounded as the music blasted out into the entryway when the door opened. “Candy, you’re needed on the main stage.”