A Mother Who Could Raise a Son So Well
by Shawn Jacobson

“Jesse, why are you home so early?” mom asked.

“I got sent home,” I reply sheepishly, “for fighting.”

What about?” mom asked, but she had a good idea. This wasn’t the first time.

“Some jerk called me a freak and started poking me with a stick,” I explained; such things were common in my life.

“And what did you do? Mom continued with the interrogation.

“I kicked him in the knee,” I replied with naughty pride,” real hard to. He goes in for surgery tomorrow.”

“Son,” mom said, “If I told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times, if you want to get a human boy’s attention, you need to kick higher than the knee. Remember this for me please son.”

“And the teacher decided to teach me a lesson by kicking me in the knee,” I continued, “and he had on his steel-toed boots from shop class.” It was a good thing my lower legs had extra padding, a gift, like my ability to kick kids into the hospital, I owed to mom’s side of the family.

“OK,” mom said getting hot, like she did whenever I had school trouble, “I’ll deal with this,” She said as she kicked the end-table on her way out the door. She left unmindful of the pile of pictures that crashed to the floor as the table disintegrated.

“Do you think I’ll have to change schools?” I asked dad who had stayed home from work to help decorate for contact day, “like the last time mom stormed out like this?” No one was sure just what happened, but you couldn’t get within sight of the old school without a biohazard suit.

“It might not be that bad,” dad soothed, “it might be like Mrs. Rollins, the teacher who thought you were demonically possessed. All mom did then was spray poison on the teacher's arm. The one she used to whip you, to make it wither and fall off.”

“That’s reassuring dad,” I said. I hadn’t been, exactly, kicked out of school for that one. The principle merely suggested another school across town and hinted that their school could help pay the tuition.

“It wasn’t that bad,” dad soothed again. “It’s amazing what they can do with prophetic arms these days. She should be practically as good as new by now.

I helped dad hang contact day lights; contact day is when we celebrate the first meeting of two intelligent races in this part of the galaxy, a meeting described in *The Ethics of Spok*. While hanging ornaments depicting different races of the galaxy I had another thought.

“Dad, if something exploded at the school, do you think we would hear it from here?”

Dad scratched his head. I wondered if he was remembering the crater where Progress elementary school used to be. Once the smoke cleared, the hole was stunning, a local landmark that had still not been filled in.

“If it was big enough,” dad said slowly, “we might hear it.”

We continued with decorations in silence as we waited for the boom. Then dad turned on the ancient Earth music history show on the local radio channel.

“Up against the bar you redneck mothers,” intoned a twang-laden voice, “a mother who would raise a son so well.”

“I’d better call work,” dad aid. That was the song mom requested every time she went to war with someone. “I’d better see if mom picked up any weapons,” he continued.

Dad picked up the phone and had words with different functionaries at the office. Finally, he got the research department. Then dad set down the phone as if it were a loaded bomb.

“She got one of the wag-bots that Mangler is working on,” ad said. “You may have to tell your classmates that the dog ate the teacher.”

“What” I asked, “was-bots, what are they?”

“They look like regular dogs, but they’re cyborgs,” dad explained. “When their master gives the command, the claws and metal spikes come out and whatever the dog attacks have a real rough time. They come with signs saying they’re therapy dogs and, I guess,” continued dad, “that if they slice and dice your enemy, that’s therapeutic in a way. Mom must have thought you needed that sort of therapy.”

Just then, something pounded on our door. “Open up in the name of the law!” a scarily stern voice boomed.

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One game we had as children was the jail game. We’d pretend to be in jail and to put each other into jail. However, I was learning that adult jail is no fun at all. Fortunately, we didn’t have to stay there long. We were just absorbing the concept of a door you couldn’t open when a guard came for us.

“Great Anarch Covax wants to see you,” the guard said as he pulled us out of the cell and shoved us into line. “Right this way please,” he continued.

We fallowed down a succession of halls till we got to a lavish office with a desk the size of a small starship I recognized the great anarch from television. I didn’t recognize the avian creature standing with him.

“Birds,” dad groaned, “I’ve never seen one that didn’t have an attitude.”

“You won’t have to worry about it long,” the bird-thing Covax’s spokeswhatever, said. You’ll be leaving soon.”

“But our work,” mom, who’d been shown in about the time we had, said.

“Is no longer required,” beak-face replied. “There is peace between the libertarian socialists and the socialist libertarians, a glorious end to the war that has ravished this world for too long.”

“Congratulations,” mom sneered. The two groups, one believing in freedom and community while the other believed in community and freedom, had been at war since I’d been born. Forging a peace between these bitter enemies was an achievement, but I didn’t feel like saying that to mom. Who knew what she would do.

 “Anyway,” the bird continued, “part of the deal is that Mangler Corporation is banished from the planet. Both sides strongly believe that peace will have a better chance with your company gone. So take your plagues, pests, cyborgs,” he looked at mom with disgust, “and the rest of your weapons off this world. And get your toxic waste,” it looked down its beak at our family group, “human and/or alien,” it continued, “off this planet. Your filth is not wanted here!”

“That’s the problem with arming both sides in a war,” dad explained philosophically as we waited in the spaceport’s holding cell, “they catch wise,” he continued, “then they both want you dead.”

“Don’t worry,” mom scoffed, “we’ll be back before you know it. Everyone wants peace, but everyone wants to defend themselves. Once they’re reminded of their wishes, they’ll be begging for our services.”

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The planet we ended up on was called Blueridge. New Wheeling, the capital of the place looked like a ramshackle mess, as if it’d been thrown together folk. Who didn’t go in much for city planning.

They also didn’t go in much for modern medicine, and that was a problem. To understand why, you should know that I take a lot, and I mean a lot, of meds. And they are hard to keep in balance.\In turn; this comes from me being part Human and part Hakkah. Putting together the biological heritage from two races is a bit like putting together a car using parts from two companies, what you end up with is something that does not fit together well that needs a lot of general monkeying around to keep going. In my case, the monkeying around is done by pills, a lot of pills that have to be delicately balanced so that they’ll play nice. Right after our arrival, they stopped playing nice.

I found that out when I blacked out at school and found myself in the hospital. The doctors took a look, learned what they had and threw up their hands in despair.

“How am I supposed to deal with this mess?” the head practitioner at the New Wheeling community hospital asked. “It’s a blue miracle he’s alive at all,” he continued looking at dad.

With the medical community in confusion and us in a desperate place, we turned to an herbalist who claimed she could help chimeras like me.

Tigerlilly was a chimera herself; this added some hope to the mix.

“Let me try something that works for some of my friends,” she said. “I can’t make any promises, but this helps me and the other chimeras I treat. Maybe it will help you.”

“We tried her herbal concoction, and, wonder of all wonders, I started feeling better. I found I could actually cut the number of pills I took down to a reasonable number.

“What’s in that stuff?” I asked a couple of weeks later. “It’s a wonder. I’ve never felt this good in my life.”

“Extract from preggerbarries,” she said. “The things are deadly when eaten whole, but they’re real useful when properly killed.”

“What are preggerbarries and why are they deadly?” mom asked. She was always on the lookout for things that could be turned into weapons.

“You eat them whole,” Tigerlillie said, “their seeds plant themselves in your gut and suddenly you’re eating for two, or two hundred if you gorge yourself on them like old man Jephro.”

Old man Jethro, a recluse who lived on the edge of town, he’d gotten too much of the old devil water one night, ravenously hungry and went out to eat barriers. The next day, he had what felt like the mother of all hangovers, only with the biggest case of the munchies in history. He was getting big by the time he realized it wasn’t a normal hangover.

“You should have seen how many critters came out of his body when it was time,” Tigerlilly said. “It was an impressive sight; gruesome, but impressive.”

Healing the body left the problem with the soul unresolved or rather, the problem with religion. We were told that we would have no issues with our faith, and this was, technically, correct. The problem was with The Church of Him and its problem with half-breeds like me.

“You shouldn’t be alieve,” one of the devotees of this faith, himists, said, “God meant for our races to be pure.”

That church felt like anyone who was a chimera like I was didn’t have a soul and you could do with such as me whatever you wanted including any kind of violence that turned you on. I had to kick my way out of a lot of trouble. Then mom had to get involved.

I didn’t learn much else about the church, and, indeed, I didn’t want to now. Our faith taught that churches that defined themselves by who they hated were synagogues of Satan and were to be shunned. I followed that teaching of our faith to the letter. This is why I didn’t know that ugly alien contests were associated with the church.

One of the fanciest ugly alien contests was put on by The Burgermeister, kind of an Earth-retro restaurant that served hamburgers, hotdogs, and other sorts of traditional Earth fair. The proprietor was a staunch himist, but he was sneaking about it, outwardly welcoming, but a secret bigot, a true snake in the grass.

One day I came in and he offered me a free desert. “A berry sundae,” he said placing a particularly scrumptious dish in front of me,” on the house. Your kind of folk like treats like this,” he continued.

“Thanks” I said tearing into the treat. “This tastes good….”

“Don’t eat that!” a voice screamed at me, then”Oh dear lord! It’s half gone. Get the doctor fast.”

Tigerlilly later explained that the dessert was made with preggerbarries. “There is a way to avoid death if you acted fast,” she said as they brought me into the hospital, “they feed you medicine to bring the eggs, back up kind of like worming a dog, effective, crazy unpleasant though.”

When mom found out, well, you can guess what happened.

“They need to learn not to mess with mama,” she said as she stormed out the door furniture crashing around her.

“Wait for the boom,” dad said in the quiet that followed, but there was silence.

The next time I went by the Burgermeister, I saw someone from the health department putting up a “CLOSED” sign.

“You don’t want to go in there,” the man said. “All the folk you ate here today are in line to get their stomachs pumped. Bad intestinal bug,” he continued, “so we’re closing it down till we learn the cause of the problem.”

Later, mom explained that preggerbarries were not the only food in the galaxy that could bite back. Mangler was good at serving such fare to unsuspecting customers. “I think the Burgermeister crows got their just desserts,” she commented. “They won’t have the guts to pull another stunt like that.”

After that, life settled down. The folk of Blueridge did not believe that people who picked fights had the divine right to defenseless victims; mom found this philosophy particularly enlightened. So, the himists who picked fights were encouraged to take out their aggression elsewhere. As long as Mom was around, no one bothered me about being a chimera, or looking like a freak.

Then the day came that mom and dad were called back to the planet of our childhood. It had not surprised mom in the least that this might happen only that it had taken this long for them to see the need for Mangler’s services.

By then, I was settled on our new planet. I’d found a group of friends who didn’t see me as a freak or didn’t care. More to the point, I was in college well on the way to a career working with computers. Besides, I couldn’t get the preggerbarry potion that made me feel, well, human, anywhere else in the galaxy.

Before my folks left, I sat with mom and dad. I had to get some things straight with them.

“Was I conceived as part of your religion, to be some sort of sacred child?” I asked.

“Well,” dad said, “I think all parents view their children as sacred.”

“But was I conceived apart from the common reasons to be your idea of a holy person?”

“I think all parents want their children to be holy, to have a purpose for good” mom replied. It surprised me that she jumped into the conversation here since she was never one for abstract philosophy.

“But did you give me birth because you wanted a child or just for your religion?” I pressed on, not sure I was getting the answers I really wanted.

“Creation of life is a sacred part of any religion I’ve heard of,” dad said. “We want you to be holy and sacred and have a purpose in life. But know that we love you are and who you have become. Mom sure shows it every time she goes to war for you. You don’t think she’d cause all that destruction for you if she didn’t care.”

It was obvious that I wasn’t getting anything else, so I let that go, and I’m not sure just what I wanted to know, how to put it into words, anyway. So, I left it at that. We exchanged tearful hugs as we parted at the spaceport, the last time I saw mother while she lived.

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I heard about mom’s death from a Mangler representative I’d never seen before. He told me that mother had died on her home planet fighting in one of those honor duals that the Hakkah believed in. I didn’t understand the detailed reason for the duel save that it had to do with mom’s religion.

“She killed twenty-seven of her enemies in the fight,” the Mangler rep gushed. “Too bad there were twenty-eight.”

Somehow, I got the impression that the representative was happier about the valor mom displayed then he was sad about her passing. Mangler folk were weird that way.

I saw her dying moments, recorded by drones for the war channel, as we traveled to her home planet for the funeral. I didn’t count the number of Hakkah she’d killed, so I can’t verify that the kill count was twenty-seven. I can say that it was a lot. She’d demonstrated all of the combat skills she’d taught me and a few tricks I sure wish she had. I had to agree with the company representative that it had been an impressive battle.

Mom’s home-world was a heavy chilly place, a place where the high gravity made my cobbled-together body seem especially rickety. We traveled far from the spaceport across the interminable grasslands where the Hakkah had ascended to intelligence. The funeral place was within sight of the mountains that separated the grassy terrain from the artic wastes to the north.

As mom’s body was broken for the ecosystem, they did not go in for putting remains into boxes, an icy wind blew down from the snow-capped peaks, a wind that hunted for gaps in the layers I wore seeking out any exposed skin. I couldn’t ware enough layers to be warm.

When it came time for me to give the eulogy, I told the assembled crowd about my childhood, about nursing from my mother’s breast while a joey in her pouch. Then I told of sitting in her lap as a child as her capacious body sheltered me from the insults of other children and tried to give me comfort from the pain of the medical procedures used to patch up my patchwork physiology. I told of how she fought for me and taught me to fight for myself. She died fighting for my right to live against those who wanted me, and anyone else like me, to be exterminated, the last gift of life a warrior can give.

She said I had a purpose, to bring healing to a fractured galaxy and told me to find my place in the purpose. And so I told them of my resolve to fight for those who could not fight for themselves against the bullies that prowled the galaxy. I do not know if it was the excellence of my words or my obvious struggle to stand proudly before the crowd, but the assembled throng who had come to pay respect, even warriors who shunned emotion as a weakness, was moved by my words. I was glad to have spoken for my mother, but I was glad to leave that place for my lighter home among the stars.

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Home was lighter but not safer for word of mom’s passing had reached those who wanted me dead.

“What you donna do now that your mom isn’t here to protect you?” one obnoxious himist asked as he shoved me off my feet.

“I hadn’t had a chance to get any of Tigerlilly’s preggerbarry concoction, so I was still working off a shaky mix of meds, still, I was able to put enough behind my foot that the himmist creep felt thought it wise to drop the matter.

And then there was my promise to fulfill the purpose I’d sworn at mom’s funeral. Blueridge doesn’t have many chimera mixes like me, but Tigerlilly and I are not the only ones. So, people who want to have a go at abominations have a choice of targets.

Just this afternoon, I was walking down the street and I surprised a bunch of racial purist wannabees going after this girl who had more than a few bird-like features indicating an interesting biological heritage.

“You’re too pretty to be a half-breed freak,”the chief goon said. “Taking you down would be a real feather in my cap. In fact,” he continued as his buddies whooped and hollered, “I may just take some of those feathers and stick them in my cap. Just like,” he said as he grabbed her neck, “plucking a….”

I took aim remembering what mom had said about kicking human males above the knee. Mom was right to; I had his absolute attention as he crumpled to the ground surrendering his neck hold and his lunch to his cause. “You won’t have the guts to do that again,” I sneered.

I looked around as his mates scurried into nearby stores or scuttled into side streets. They wouldn’t have the guts to pick fights, at least for a while. There’s something about getting the boot where I’d put it that takes the fun out of harassing folk. This was a good thing to; that kick had taken it out of me something fierce.

“And that,” I say to the bartender, “is why I am here. I’m not into drinking; I mostly just need a rest.”

“Understood” replied the barkeep, “I don’t approve of fighting, but if you stopped those punks from beating on folk, well, you did a lot of folks a favor. By the way,” he continued, “I saw your mom on the war channel.”

“How’d you know that was my mom?” I asked.

“Not many folk around here with as much body hair as you,” he said. “If you don’t mind me saying, you shouldn’t wear a muscle shirt if you want to pass for human.”

“Thanks for the advice,” I said.

“Besides,” the barkeep said, “I served your mom from time to time. She was a hellacious fighter. I wish she hadn’t caused so much collateral damage though. Some of the folk who ate at the Burgermeister didn’t want to serve you preggerbarry pie.”

“That’s the problem with war,” I say in response, “people get confused about which the bad guys are.”

“War is Hell,” the barkeep says.

“But self-defense is necessary,” I say back.

I spot a jukebox and look through the listing of songs, old Earth classics that somehow have followed man out into the galaxy. I put in my coin and make my selection. As the final chorus wraps up, I join in to add my own life’s work to the song. “He’s thirty-five and drinking in a honkytonk / just kicking bullies asses and raisin’ Hell/in New Wheeling, planet Blueridge/Milky Way.”