



Reluctant Press presents:

BLISS



Nick Lorange

AN 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

Copyright © 2011, Reluctant Press

Mags, Inc/Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet

We need *your* help! We spend several hundred dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain.

Mostly, though, we just want to be able to keep offering this service to our authors and our readers.

Report stolen books by using the contact form at reluctantpress.com or call us at 800-359-2116

Thank you.

Bliss

By Nick Lorance

February 2002

My father died when I was eleven, and she remarried before the corpse was even cold. She was what they call a functional alcoholic; she wasn't really straight in the head unless she was drinking. She needed someone to be in control and Richard was that kind of person. He needed to be in control. The one thing he could never control was me. He wasn't abusive unless he was drinking, and he drank a lot.

I decided when I turned fifteen that I'd find a job, not easy since you need parental consent. Richard 'helped'. He knew a convenience store owner who let me stock the shelves and cooler for a hundred dollars a week. Great!

Yeah, great. The end of the first week came and instead of handing me some crisp 20s, he handed Richard a bag with a hundred dollars worth of booze. Richard gave me a ten, tousled my hair like a dog that had done a trick for the first time and walked out. I told the store owner to go to hell, and never went back there, even for a soda.

When you're a kid it is always easier to assume that being in charge of your life is a really big thing. I had always thought my mom and my step-dad had it all. They decided where the money was spent. What we ate, when we went to bed.

I wanted all of that control, and never could understand why I didn't get a say in the matter. Hey, it was my life, right?

But not until you're eighteen. An adult. I didn't want to wait, and Richard was like a tick, not letting go. I planned, and again, tried to find a job. This time I chose it, because of something Richard probably hadn't thought of. I was hired, again with parental consent, as a box boy at the local grocery. Richard had never gone shopping, leaving it to my mother and myself. I noticed that the older people, both men and women would not ask for help but were grateful when they got it. So grateful that they would tip you sometimes.

Like the old saying goes, you gotta kiss a lot of frogs to find your prince, and I humped many a bag of groceries from cart to trunk for nothing. But by the time I had finished my first month I had almost 50 dollars squirreled away. It's a good thing I did.

Richard, of course, picked up my checks; not a lot, about one fifty a week. He'd given the owner some song and dance about how I'd blow it all if I got it direct. Every Friday like clockwork he'd arrive, peel off a

ten to hand to me, and put the money to good use, I.E., getting drunk.

You know the old comment, no good deed goes unpunished? It fit me. There was this older woman named Mrs. Wagner, Gertie to her friends, among which I was numbered. It had taken her almost two months to convince me to call her that. She almost always came in on a Tuesday or Thursday, and ever since the first day I had been her box boy she had asked for me by name. She was a sweet older woman and I never had the heart to refuse her.

She came in a Friday right before January ended, and I helped her as I always had. She had relatives leaving after the holidays, and had decided to make a blow out dinner. It meant a full cart instead of only half full. I rolled her cart out, and immediately began moving the groceries into the back of her station wagon, setting them so nothing would slide in the small compartment after the seats.

I closed the door, and smiled, "There you go, Gertie."

How were your holidays?" She asked. I must have looked irritated or something, because she looked at me closely. "Was it a bad time Jimmy?"

I shook my head. "Same as always, Gertie." Yeah right. Ever since Richard had come into my life, the holidays were the same old same old. My mother had no surviving family, and my father's family had taken one look at Richard and made themselves scarce.

They did try, asking that I be allowed to spend Christmas with them, always refused, or sent gift certificates the first couple of years. Of course I never got to use a one of them, and that stopped when I was thir-

teen because when my grandmother had called to wish me a Merry Christmas she received a tirade from Richard because there was nothing at the local toy store he wanted, so why the hell was she sending him useless gift cards? His own mother had done the same until she received almost exactly the same speech. I had seen her only once on my 12th Birthday.

My birthday party was Richard and mom getting hammered while Grandmother Victoria (His mother) looking on in disapproval. I never got a chance to play with them Richard refused to let me open them except for the 'Hallmark Moment' when you rip off the wrapping for pictures. As soon as that was done they were taken away still unopened and I never saw the toys again. He stored them, then gave them to the children of his friends instead.

Grandmother Victoria never returned in person. The last gift card I had gotten was the same year the rest of the family abandoned me.

Gertie looked at me for a long moment, then took the keys she had handed me to unlock the back. She replaced them with a crisp 20. "Always remember, Jesus loves you, Jimmy."

I wanted to snap back that if Jesus loved me, why didn't he help? Why didn't someone help? Instead I bowed my head. "Thank you, Gertie."

"Merry Christmas, Jimmy."

I started to reply when suddenly I was lifted and slammed into the back of her car. A hand ripped the twenty from my fingers, and I heard Richard growling behind me.

Gertie raised her cane, and slammed him across the shoulders, I think. All I could see was her swinging. "Let him go, Richard Grady!" She shouted.

She swung again, then the cane was ripped from her hand and thrown aside.

"When I catch my son misbehaving, I punish him." Came the snarled reply. I felt his free hand rummaging through my pockets.

"I gave him that money!"

He'd found the money I had collected that day, about ten dollars more in small bills and change, and he held it up out of my sight. "Yeah, well after rifling through my wife's purse, do you think the little thief needed it? Always sneaking around and hiding things..." He dragged me from the car, then dragged me over as he walked over, picked up her cane, and returned it. "When it's a loving father punishing his child, you stay out of it or else." He spun me around, glaring at me.

I could have called him a liar, but thanks to other children lying where they just wanted to get their parents in trouble, most people were unsure who to support. The courts always seemed to come down on the side of the parents without physical evidence. Other than an occasional slap, he'd never raised a hand to me.

"Walk." He ordered, letting me go. I walked into the store taking off my apron as we did. Mister Carter, the owner looked confused when I handed it to him.

"Jimmy?"

"I caught him whining to old lady Wagner about how mistreated he is at home." Richard lied smoothly. I said nothing. "So he's going to finish school and wait until he's of age to start looking for work again." He

took my check, brusquely ordered that anything else should be mailed, and dragged me out again.

My nightmare wasn't over. Once we got home he ordered me to sit at the dining room table while he ransacked my room. I thought I had hidden it well, but he must have been a thief as he accused me before. He came down the stairs, counting my entire stash. "Three hundred dollars. The little bastard--"

"Don't call him that!" For the first time in a long time, mom was leaping to my defense.

"Shut up." He said it in an almost conversational tone. "I sweat my ass off and he stashes enough to keep us in what we need for a month!" He waved it under my nose. "Take a good sniff, boy. You won't see money again until you get your narrow ass out of my house."

I wanted to scream that it wasn't his house, it was my father's, bought and paid for before he even arrived, but when he'd been drinking he had a temper.

I spent the weekend grounded. Then on Monday it began again. He drove to school, and dragged me into to see the principal. He wove another tissue of lies; money and other stuff, suggesting with his words that maybe we were talking booze or knives, had come up missing at home. I was of course, the ungrateful kid who stole from his parents and neighbors. The principal called the custodian, and we arrived at my locker as other kids came in to watch.

"Open it." Richard demanded.

"No." I glared at him defiantly. "You want it open, cut off the lock."

He started to raise his hand but the principal stopped him, and sent the custodian to fetch some bolt

cutters. By the time he came back the hall was crowded with silent students watching.

The locker netted him another fifty dollars with a backpack full of clothes I had stashed, and he crowed about how the 'little thief' had failed yet again. I stood there silently through it all. If I had a reputation, it was ruined that day.

"You finish your day, and come right home. We'll have a long talk about how to end your thieving ways." He said loud enough that everyone heard. He ordered that the backpack and all it contained be thrown away, and marched out.

The day was a horror of whispers beyond range for me to hear. No one came up to accuse me aloud, yet no one came to offer any support either. I decided to run away that very night.

I put my school books in the locker, not even caring if they were stolen. But in the locker was a small envelope and a new padlock. The envelope contained a letter and a key. The letter was from Mr. Lopez, the custodian.

"You want to run away, use the key and go to my gardening shed. If I never see you again, *Via con dios.*"

Tuesday morning I dressed warmly and took my heaviest jacket. I left early, almost an hour early. We were back to 'if you want to go to school, you can fucking walk to school' so Richard didn't say anything. There was nothing left in the house I wanted anyway.

The gardening shed was about the size of a two car garage, and the key opened the door. Right inside was my backpack with an old Marine Corps sleeping bag I had never seen, one of those down filled ones good for

winter weather. Atop it was another envelope, with a twenty and a note.

“It’s all I can afford, Jimmy. Good luck.”

I walked off the campus, broke the twenty at the corner convenience store so I had some hot coffee and donuts to go with two dollars worth of quarters, and walked six blocks to a bus stop none of my fellow students would use. I climbed aboard the bus, buying a copy of the bus route book, and as it rolled, checked the buses. It took me three routes and eight dollars, but finally I got off near the edge of town.

March

Being on the road is cold, hungry, and tiring. It had taken me almost three weeks to leave the state. I wished I knew Mr. Lopez’s first name when I saw snuggled into that sleeping bag. I only survived because of it when it got really cold.

I would hitchhike only between six and seven in the morning (‘I was at a friend’s house and have to get to school’ if it was a weekday, or ‘I’m going to my relatives for the day’ on a weekend) and between 4 and six in the afternoon except this time I was going home from the same places.

The rest of the time I either hid, or walked, always heading west. I had no plans, and that twenty had barely lasted four days. I spent part of each day after that going from small convenience store to gas station, always when school was out, since if I should be in school, the owner or cashier might call the truant officers. In each place, I would offer to help, sweeping and mopping, picking up trash, anything to get some snacks or drinks.

I had a success rate of about 30%. Half the time I got a flat no, or an apologetic 'the owner is here, and he would be upset', though sometimes the cashier would have me pick some stuff and paid for it. One big black guy in a store outside El Paso had me pick the stuff, then handed me a ten. "Get your clothes washed." He winked "Don't want anyone to think you're a run-away."

The other half of the time they would say yes, but a lot of them just ran me off or threatened to call the police. But I was able to eat enough to keep body and soul together.

Hitchhiking is terrifying. I'd heard the stories of kids disappearing; who hasn't? But I had assumed that this was another way the adults kept us down. Like the old original fairy stories, where Goldilocks gets eaten by the bears. If you don't listen and obey, bad things happen. But it wasn't so bad. Maybe the monsters that kill or rape children are sleeping or eating their dinners when I was out there.

Then the trucker who was giving me a lift a mile back dropped me before he hit the scales and Immigration checkpoint. He explained apologetically that I would be spotted by the police if he took me all the way there. He gave me a couple of sandwiches he had in his sleeper, and left me standing there. As the sun set.

I looked up at the sign ahead of me and the exit ramp going off into the New Mexico darkness. It was dark, I was cold, and all I wished for was a warm place to sleep and something to eat. Those sandwiches were the first food I had eaten in almost two days, and barely kept the pangs of hunger at bay. I got off the

highway, and took the road heading North to find someplace to sleep.

I would have stuck out my thumb, but the traffic had thinned to a car or truck every fifteen minutes or so. There were no farm buildings nearby, so sleeping in a barn was out. Instead of just standing in one place, I walked. Every now and then I looked for a place to hide while I slept but I have seen pool tables with more geography than that stretch of desert.

I didn't know how far I had walked, but it was really late. I saw a sign sitting in the middle of nowhere, and staggered over to it. BLISS 2 MI.

I hadn't even seen a sign on the highway for someplace named Bliss. Must be some extra wide crossroad kind of town. I kept walking. Two miles sounds like a lot, but hell, have you seen a kid run around in play? They do two miles without even noticing. I knew I could walk it, even freezing my ass off.

Ahead I saw a string of lights, and my heart leaped. Either a truck stop or a diner. Either one meant food. Of course I didn't have money, but three weeks on the road had eroded any scruples I had about stealing something if it meant I would eat.

Half an hour later, I staggered into the parking lot. It was one of those small diners with a facade of a pair of old railroad cars side by side on the front of the building. I reached the door, grabbing the handle. Locked. Blearily I looked at the sign. They closed at midnight, and according to the clock I could see, that had been an hour ago.

Cold, hungry; I didn't care any more. I picked up a rock from the landscaping, and smashed the small window in the door. I cleaned the glass away, and climbed

inside. The smell almost drew a whimper from me. Stay away from anything that needs cooking. Not that I wouldn't have liked a burger, but I didn't have cooking gear.

I pulled a pie out of the cooler. Peach. It could have been labeled Industrial Waste, and I would have stuffed it in my mouth, I was that hungry. But it was heaven. Glass after glass of milk followed the pie down. I ate the entire thing, and a slice of pecan to hold it down. I opened my bag, and threw a half loaf of bread in it, followed by a block of cheese slices, a jar of mayo and a butter knife. That would see me through a couple of days.

I flipped the thumb latch, and walked out the front door. As I went down the steps I heard a click.

A man stood there in a gray uniform, and the gun he held wasn't aimed at me, but he had cocked it to get my attention. I immediately gauged my chances; he looked like he was in his fifties, but a very fit fifty. Could I outrun him? Sure. But he'd have back up pretty soon, and trying to hide in the scrub would have been as futile as hiding on a pool table, and as the old saying goes, you can't outrun a bullet. Slowly I raised my hands.

He nodded as if he had expected it, and twirled his fingers as if to say turn around. I turned away from him, and could hear the crunch of gravel as he approached. "On your knees, hands on your head." His voice was business like. I dropped to my knees, wincing as the gravel cut into my threadbare pants. I felt the cuff lock around my right wrist then he whipped my hand down professionally, lying me on my face, but almost gently. He locked the left wrist, then his hands

went down, frisking me. He found the two knives I carried, and I felt them being taken.

"I hope you ate five years worth of food, kid." He said helping me up. "Because burglary is not tolerated in this county." He walked me over to a police car in a beige and black, with the words Mariposa County Sheriff's Department on the door. He put me in the back, got behind the wheel, and started it. The engine ran smooth almost silent. That was how he'd been able to sneak up on me. He flipped on his computer, and looked back at me. "Want to give me a name?"

"James Connors." I told him.

He input it, and read the screen. "Runaway from Texas." He mused. "Hitchhiking?" I grunted. He shrugged, then put it in gear and pulled onto the blacktop. As he did, I saw a sign;

BLISS POP 250.

He drove quietly, and I couldn't think about anything to say. Sure I was a minor, but the stories about provincial sheriffs are legion. If I whined he'd either beat the shit out of me, or he's toss me in a cell with some hard case looking for a little young meat. I decided that shutting up was my best option.

The town was larger than I expected. With less than 300 people, why would they need a Wal Mart for instance? The police station was off the City Square in a modern glass and field stone building. He pulled in, took me out of the car, and walked me inside. The guy behind the counter was short and fat with a jolly expression. "What you catch, Deit?"

“Burglar. He broke into Moe’s and scarfed one of the pies.”

“Not the peach!” He gasped as if I had pissed in the holy water font. At the nod the man’s jolly expression became a little cold. “Boy, you’re in a heap of trouble now.” He turned to the phones as Deit led me back. Processing took only a few minutes. Fingerprints, pictures, then he led me back to an empty cell, and opened the door locking me in.

“Get some sleep, kid. Tomorrow is a brand new day.”

I was so tired he could have put me in a ditch and I would have dived under the blanket. I curled up, and went to sleep.

The choice

They woke me up around eight in the morning. But with six hours of sleep and a good meal before I crashed, I felt almost human. An officer named Ramsey tapped the bars. “What do you want for breakfast, kid?”

“I have a choice?” I asked, still bleary.

“Why not? This isn’t the big city. We can afford to be nice if the prisoners behave.”

“Then how about a lumberjack breakfast?”

“Where you going to put it all?” He asked.

I wasn’t that big. Five foot five, about a hundred and fifteen. I merely smiled shyly. “High metabolism.”

“One heavyweight breakfast coming up. The Judge will see you around three in the afternoon. He’s out

fishing. We have a questionnaire you'll have to fill out before you see him." Then he was gone.

The breakfast was huge. Bacon, sausage, ham, three eggs, hash browns, a short stack of pancakes, coffee and milk. I gorged. It was the first decent meal I'd had in the better part of a week now. When I was done, he gave me the fifteen page questionnaire, and a pencil, and left me to it.

It was an odd document. Almost an aptitude test really. Some of the questions struck me as odd:

You are in a room naked and someone enters unexpectedly. Do you;

A: Shout at them to leave

B: hide

C: cover yourself

D: run

E: your own option

Every question had E above, with space to actually write down an answer. I finished it around ten and Ramsey took it. The cells of the jail were clean, recently painted, and neat. Man, if every jail were like this, I'd break the law more often.

Ramsey came for me at 2, and took me to a shower. The soap was kinda sweet, and so was the shampoo and conditioner. But I wasn't in the mood to complain. I was really squeaky clean for the first time since I left home. He patiently waited outside without looking at me, and I was thankful for that. There are so many horror stories about kids in jail. It looked like I had fallen into a good one.

Ramsey took me out and walked me across the street to the Court House. Upstairs, we came to a door marked Superior Court.

The inside was a small version of what you might see on TV. The judge was an older man reading a file. There was a court recorder seated at her desk. Ramsey walked me down the aisle, and stopped me in front of the Judge.

“So, you broke into Moe’s diner, ate an entire peach pie, stole half a loaf of bread, some cheese and mayo.” He looked over the edge of the police report. “How was the pie?”

I smiled shyly. “It was so good I couldn’t stop at one piece.”

He gave me an answering smile. “I know the feeling. But I pay for mine. How do you plead?”

“Guilty.” I said softly.

He looked at me. “Do you want to go for a full scale trial or do you want to just go straight to the sentencing?”

“I was hungry, and it was wrong, but I did it, your honor. Let’s just cut out all of the stuff in the middle.”

“All right. We have some things to clear up before I can pass sentence. Deputy Ramsey, take him away.”

I spent the next four days in the jail. Good food, a soft and warm bed, and questions. They were understandably confused when they discovered that I had run away on one day, but hadn’t been reported as missing for over a week; not until the police came out to ask Richard where I had been, since the school had reported me truant. That only happened because Richard was evasive when the school called. I had offered

to help around the station and the desk man, Hennessy after warning me that it would not go well if I ran, had supplied either a broom or mop and bucket so I could do the floors. Every night he'd repay me by buying a slice of that dreamy pie.

Then I was back before the judge There was a strikingly attractive woman in an old fashioned dress seated in the gallery when Deputy Dietrich brought me in.

The judge nodded as if to himself, then tapped the papers in front of him. "First, I spoke with Moe. While he is understandably upset about the broken window, you limited your theft to a small amount of food instead of trying to break into an empty cash register or filling your bag.

"We spent the last few days corresponding with the police back in your home town and they also talked with people who knew you. With a few exceptions you come out of it as a good kid with nothing bad to say about you, and you have no previous record.

"With Moe's permission the charges are reduced to vandalism and petty theft, but you get three years in Mariposa county for vandalism, and since you ate an entire peach pie, I am adding two years for the theft. Is that understood?" I nodded. Now the hammer would come down. "Therefore I am sentencing you to five years total, all charges to run consecutively. That's the good news.

"This leaves me with two choices. First I can send you to the County road camp for five years. You're a juvenile, and we don't have the facilities to handle the few we get. But I warn you the road camp is where we put everyone else; thieves vandals and those that like to fight, all of the low lives. You might not be a crimi-

nal when you go in, but it is my experience that you will be when you come out.

“Twenty years ago, we added a different place to send you. It is as strict as the road camp, but after five years there I can pretty much guarantee that you will be rehabilitated. But one infraction of the rules, and you will be in the road camp before you can say ‘I was only kidding’. Interested?”

I nodded numbly. He nodded as if he had expected it. “Madam Sofia?” I heard a whisper of cloth, and the woman that had been seated came forward. “I turn him over to your care. Boy, you have a chance to turn your life around. Use it.”

Madam Sofia looked at me coolly then opened her purse. She brought out a cameo choker with a pink ribbon. “Put this on please.”

“What?’ But that’s a piece of woman’s jewelry!” I protested.

“The first step to entering my facility is obedience. Put it on, or go to the road camp.” There was steel in her voice. I gulped, and took the choker. “Officer Ramsey, if you will assist?”

He reached past me, taking the steel rings at the ends and put the choker on me. Madam Sofia adjusted it so that it covered my Adam’s apple, and I heard the click of a lock. It fit tightly, and underneath the smooth velvet I could feel what might have been wires.

“You have heard of restraint bracelets such as they use on sex offenders?” She asked me. I nodded. “This is the same basic thing. If you try to remove the choker, it will immediately send a signal, and the police will pick you up. If you go outside of the bounds I set, it will signal them. Either will get you sent to the road camp. Un-

like the bracelets I mentioned, this has a secondary function." She held up a small black box. "At need this will give you an electric shock like a Taser. Now come with me." She turned, and I followed that wide skirt out of the building.

There was a large 1972 Cadillac limo, and the driver opened the door. Madam Sofia motioned for me to get in, then climbed in herself. Up close the attractive features looked a little cold. Her auburn hair was in a tight bun, and the blue dress with its high collar set off her eyes.

"Now, have you any questions?"

"What kind of, place are we going to?" I asked.

"It is a correctional facility of course. It is also a school that handles all of the nonviolent problem children of the county which is why our inmates are called 'students' rather than prisoners. Because it is a private school you are expected to excel.

"It is merely called the Academy here. We have at present forty-two students ranging in ages from fourteen to twenty-one. There are four levels of student in the Academy. There are the Pinks, which is your designation at present. They are the ones that have been in the Academy for less than a year, or who prove recalcitrant. Then there are the Yellows who are students that have been there more than a year, or have proven compliant. Then there are the Greens who are the ones that have been there for more than half of their sentence, have been compliant as well as good students or have excelled. Last are the blues, who are merely counting the days before their release, or have proven themselves in other ways.

“As they are considered senior to you, all of the girls of higher ranked colors may give you instructions. However, they cannot order you to do anything you consider morally repugnant. Only one student has been physically assaulted in the twenty years I have run the facility, and that miscreant went to the road camp that very day. You do get the equivalent of time off for good behavior, but I am the final arbiter of what good behavior is.

“There are other things you will need to know, but I will wait until we have reached the Academy.”

The miles went by, and soon I could see what looked like a Victorian mansion on the horizon. As they came closer, I could see it was actually a series of buildings, barns, out buildings and in the center the actual mansion itself. Then I saw the fence. It was razor wire and electrified.

“That is to forestall the idea that you can merely walk out.” She told him. “Not only would you get quite a jolt from the electricity, and cut up by the wire. You would also get a trip to the road camp immediately.” The driver thumbed a contact, and the gate rolled back. The entire facility sprawled over about thirty acres of land, with trees and grasslands. There were cows and sheep, and near one of the barns I saw pigs chickens and geese. Horses moved around a small corral, and I saw girls out there grooming them, riding them. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad here.

The car pulled up to the mansion, and half a dozen girls came down to meet us. They were in dresses not unlike Madam Sofia’s, something out of the late 19th or early 20th century, and each had a choker except theirs were on either green or blue ribbons.