

Indy

By Eugene Boria

“There’s something wrong with the baby.”

Steph’s words were rattling in my head as I stepped out of the revolving door of the hospital and into the oppressive August heat. I had maneuvered through the maze of corridors in the hospital that lead to the main Converse Street entrance in a complete daze. I don’t remember speaking to anyone on the way out, certainly not Mr. McNamara, my supervisor, to let them know that I was leaving or why. I may have mumbled something to my friend Jackie as I put the phone down and reached for my baseball cap. Hopefully, he’d have sense enough to fill the boss in. At the moment, though, standing in the hospital’s main entrance in the heat, badly worried about my son, I really couldn’t give a shit about the job.

There’s something wrong with the baby, my wife said, over and over.

As I took that first step into the worst day of my life, there were two questions chasing each other around in my head like Tom chasing Jerry, knocking over expensive vases and leaving confusion in their wake. *What’s wrong with my boy?* That was the central question. It was accompanied by snap-shots and visions, like a mental slide show. I saw Indy’s big brown eyes, his nappy little head, his goofy smile. I saw his scrawny six-year old frame, so wiry and full of explosive energy. I saw his serious face as he struggled through “The Cat in the Hat” when he was only two and I saw the way he watched you while you were explaining something to him, absorbing every bit of information. I saw so many good images of my little Indy, including the darker, grainier ones where he played with his brothers, Michael and Devon. They were gone now, my first and second sons, but in my little slide show, they stood right behind him, bordering on his left and right, like two familiar shadows. They always clamored for equal time in my memories, but I didn’t want to look at them right now. That was a distraction I couldn’t afford.

The second thought nipped right on the heels of the first, and it was pulling along it’s own little slide show: *what’s wrong with my wife?*

Fortunately, the weather brought me back into focus. Coming out of that cool, dry hospital, colliding with a wall of heat, was just the smack in the face

that I needed at the moment. *Okay, keep it together, Monroe.* I thought, closing my eyes and taking deep breaths. I had to clear my head and think this through. Indy hadn't been sick in a while, so this was something new. This couldn't be the slow, agonizing sickness that I associate with Michael and Devon. Most likely, Indy must have fallen or acted up in some way and maybe I was over-reacting.

But...

That was it. There was always that little *but* that buzzed around my head like a bothersome gnat. Not anything obvious like a fly or a bee, but something smaller, harder to pinpoint, almost impossible to swat.

*But...*she sounded so distant, so lifeless, and so final. There was no hint of hysteria in her voice, such as you'd expect from a young mother whose child has been hurt and definitely unlike my Stephanie. "You have to come home, Monroe," She'd said, "There's something wrong with the baby." Then, *click*. No explanation, no further discussion.

*But...*I'd heard her sound this way before...

I had to get home, and quickly. My apartment was about 12 blocks away, straight down Converse Street, only a ten-minute bus ride, provided the bus came quickly. The bus stop was right down the stairs in front of the hospital's main entrance. Down the block to my left Converse Street was swallowed up by the largest cemetery in the city, an expanse of land called Cemetery Row. Converse ran straight through the heart of it. I went down the stairs and leaned against the bus stop sign making up my mind to wait no more than five minutes. After that I would start jogging.

It didn't take five minutes. Not two seconds passed when the bus *exploded* out of the cemetery. It bounced twice and sparks flew as its undercarriage struck concrete. It didn't stop or even slow down for the red light. It plowed right down the middle of the street, swerving madly as if the driver was fighting to keep control of a rampaging beast. As it got closer, I could see the driver sitting behind his big steering wheel. He looked like a crazy man; his eyes

were open wide, mouth hanging open, and he was about the whitest white man I've ever seen.

I had just enough time to think, *what the fuck?* when the bus zoomed past me, leaving me standing in a cloud of dust and dead leaves. I watched it barrel up the block and the brake lights didn't come on once, even as it sideswiped several cars. It passed two more red lights and blew by several stop signs before it turned out of my sight. Car alarms were going off all up and down the block

On any other day, I would be concerned, maybe rush back into the hospital and quickly report a runaway bus to hospital security so that they could alert the proper authorities. I might even stick around to recount to the police what I'd seen. Shit, that crazy bus was an accident waiting to happen, and I really didn't want any injuries on my conscience.

But there's something wrong with the baby...

That had to be my first priority. In any event, as I turned around, idly wondering what that driver might have been running *from*, I saw a crowd gathering in the cemetery, apparently for a very large funeral. Most of those people were approaching the black wrought iron fence, apparently attracted by the car alarms. Surely someone there had a cell phone.

Fuck it, I thought, *jogging it is*. I turned away from the strange funeral crowd and started to sprint lightly up the street. I hadn't jogged in a couple of years and I had only covered a block or so when long unused muscles began to voice their outrage. I paid no attention to the storefronts and tenement stoops that I passed. My vision, my thoughts, everything boiled down to Indy.

Indy.

It's funny how Steph tells people the nickname came from some perceived obsession I had with Indiana Jones. Actually, I got the name from a book I read, which, in turn, was the result of a conversation I had with Indy's daycare teacher.

Once, when he was about four, I had to pick Indy up from daycare while Steph stayed in the hospital with Devon. Mrs. Eddings was waiting at the door – apparently I was late again. Mrs. Eddings was one of those older, new agey, ex-hippie kind of women that seem to gravitate towards childcare, and she was great with kids, if a little flaky. She shook my hand vigorously and ushered me into the classroom with bright eyes and shining teeth. “Please come in, Mr. Wilson!” she practically gushed, leading me to her small office with a hand on my shoulder. She was very touchy-feely, and after years of dealing with children had developed that habit of speaking to adults in the same singsong voice that worked so well with kids.

“I’m so glad to have a chance to speak to you about little Daniel. He is such a bright little boy.” He wasn’t *Indy* then, still Daniel. Never *Danny*, he hated when people bastardized his name.

Mrs. Eddings went on, reciting little anecdotes about my brilliant son and I smiled at the appropriate places. I appreciated the praise, but where our Daniel was concerned, it wasn’t really a surprise. I almost felt like I was being told my second grader was doing great with the whole potty training thing. Steph and I had, even then, amassed a large catalogue of amusing anecdotal evidence that our third son was a little brighter, a little more advanced than even his older siblings. We observed how he managed to avoid the whole little brother syndrome, usually by pitting one against the other. Tricks and practical jokes attempted against him always had a way of backfiring. I used to watch these little scenarios play out with a mixture of amazement and amusement. Those were much happier times before Michael got sick, before Devon died...

I got to him, being a rather masterful practical joker myself, and he would laugh along with me but I always had the sneaking suspicion that he was on to me all along, and was allowing himself to be fooled out of respect for his Daddy. I’m sure it’s just me, and he’s never, ever even implied such a thing, but he always seems a little too surprised, or he laughs a little too loud when I spring my clever traps.

Mrs. Eddings had also noted his brilliance, his ability to read far ahead of his grade, his extensive command of the language, but she called me in to discuss some behavioral problems, such as impatience, a certain aloofness around the other children which we hadn't seen when he was around his older brothers. Apparently, he refused to accept anyone's authority other than Steph and myself. We already knew this, of course. Even with us, Indy wanted explanations for everything. Standard parent answers would not do. And you could not tell him fables. He did not share his brother's belief in Santa Clause or the Easter Bunny (In one hilarious conversation, he pointed out that, since we didn't have a chimney, Santa would have had to make his deliveries via fire escape, and the last person that tried to do that got shot).

Mrs. Eddings got very quiet all of a sudden. She was watching me, as if gauging me, to see if I was ready for her to drop a bomb. Then she reached into her desk drawer and pulled out a paperback book, but held it so that I couldn't see the title. She asked, "Mr. Wilson, have you ever heard of the Indigo Children?"

"Excuse me?" I wondered what kind of progressive bullshit this crazy white woman was going to lay on me.

"The Indigo Children." She repeated. "There are some who believe that this latest generation of children are...special; more intelligent, more intuitive, more in tune with their inner selves. It's actually a fascinating field of study that is just beginning to gather steam. Here is a book written by Lee Carroll and Jan Tober. I think you'll find it very interesting." And she was right. I did.

There was a lot of new age bullshit there, to be sure. There are people who believe these children were sent to us by angels to usher the human race into a new age of prosperity and spiritual growth. There are parents who treat their seven or eight year old indigo kids like little Buddhas, turning to them for advise on how they wanted to be raised. A lot of it was ridiculous, yes, but some of it was a revealing description of gifted children who were too advanced for standard methods of education. These kids were routinely diagnosed as having ADD, simply because they didn't fit in with the other students, or they actively

opposed their teachers. They didn't conform, so parents were advised to put them on Ritalin.

A few nights later, while I was putting him to bed, I kissed his little forehead and before I could stop myself, I said, "g'night, Indy". He took my hand, and I could see him searching my face for any sign of an insult. Then he quietly asked, "Why you call me Indy, Daddy?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly; "I think it means 'very special kid'".

He seemed to consider that for a minute, searching my eyes for any hint of dishonesty. Then his eyes softened and closed. He sleepily said, "I like that name, Daddy. Can I be Indy from now on?"

I smiled and tousled his hair (which only I was allowed to do) and replied, "Sure, Indy. From now on." After that, there was a maddening period where he wouldn't respond to anyone who didn't call him Indy. Needless to say, the name stuck.

Four blocks now, and I had to stop running. I bent over, leaning on a streetlight and breathing hard. My legs felt like they were about to fall off and my heart was going to explode. I'd just made a mental note to begin jogging again as soon as all of this was over when I noticed a couple making out up against a brick wall next to an alley across the street. The one whose back was toward me – and I knew from the set of his shoulders that it was a man – was wearing a dark blue ski parka that was at least three sizes too small. A large rip on the back was being held closed by what looked like duct tape and the fur on the collar was matted and greasy. On his feet were a pair of battered Pro Keds, and I thought, *I had had the exact same outfit when I was 14, only it was much cleaner and I didn't wear it in eighty-degree weather.* I'd never seen homeless people display affection in public like that – although, to be crass, where else were they going to do it? As I was examining them, waiting for my breath to return, I realized that they were not really making out as I had originally assumed. The guy in the parka was vigorously nuzzling his partner's neck; the partner wasn't reciprocating much, just blandly letting it happen. And the partner was a man.

This was apparently a morning filled with Things-You-Don't-See-Every-Day. First the crazy, runaway bus, then the largest funeral I've ever seen, and now homeless homosexuals in love.

And let's not forget, an inner voice reminded, *the phone call from the wife that started this all off*. And that brought it all into focus again. I couldn't afford to be distracted again.

I was about to continue my run, when I happened to glance at the homeless man's partner. From what I could see, he was dressed in a very upscale jogging outfit, expensive running shoes, bright matching tank top, very high-tech Walkman in one hand. As I watched, the Walkman slipped from the jogger's hand, which hung limp at his side. I realized then that what I was witnessing was a mugging, or at least an assault. I started to cross the street toward them, just getting ready to yell, when I saw a fine red spray shoot from the jogger's neck, painting the wall beside him. I stopped short.

"Hey?" I really was about to yell, but it came out sounding more like a question. The homeless guy showed no sign that he heard me. "Yo." I said, still not ready to commit to a shout. The rational part of my mind reminded me that a shout might actually get this guys attention, and that might not be a good thing.

But, of course, my "Yo" did get his attention. The homeless man lifted his head from the jogger's neck and let him go. The jogger fell to the pavement and I saw that his neck was almost half eaten away. What remained was a gaping maw filled with blood, bone and shredded flesh. Deep crimson liquid still pumped from the wound, spreading into a large puddle on the sidewalk.

The homeless man turned his attention to me, and I saw that his skin was a pale gray and his eyes were rolled up into his head. Fresh blood dripped from his bottom lip and covered his chin and the front of his shirt like a dark red bib. His head hung askew, as if it was too heavy for his neck to hold, and he shifted with the stiff, jerky movements of a zombie right out of the movies. There was no recognition in his eyes when he looked at me, no alarm at being caught ripping out someone's neck with his teeth, no anything. I don't think the man was looking at me so much as he was looking through me. Apparently finding

me beneath his notice, he gave me his back, fell to his knees and bit deeply into the jogger's cheek.

I couldn't help it. All notions of bravery and civic duty deserted me. I leaned over and noisily vomited everything I'd eaten that morning. The smell of fresh vomit was soon joined by the smell of human waste as the jogger evacuated his bowels in death. I backed away, wiping my mouth with my sleeve, unable to take my eyes off of this grisly scene, even after the jogger's left eye popped out of his head, right into the homeless man's mouth. I turned away then, fully intending to run, but uncertain as to way to go. There were always cops in the hospital, and this guy definitely had to be put away. At the same time, I had to get to Indy and Steph. My family needed me. I found myself standing in the middle of Converse Street trying to decide which situation to handle first, my son's possible danger, or the homeless man eating the dead jogger at my feet and I was suddenly struck with the absurdity of the whole thing. I started to laugh while I backed away, just shaking my head in denial and that saved my life.

Car horns were still going off up and down the street, and I had been so engrossed with the hungry homeless man that I hadn't noticed that the crowd in the cemetery, the large funeral crowd, had spilled out onto the street and was almost upon me. The closest of them was no more than thirty feet away, and now I could see them for what they were. Some of them were naked, most were clothed, but even then, the clothing hung off of them in rags and tatters. All of them moved in the same halting shamble as the man in the parka, heads lolling to one side, mouths open, eyes dead. They probably would have gotten to me had I not spotted them in my peripheral vision.

And there were hundreds of them.

They were dead. I could clearly see that. I've worked in hospitals in some capacity or other, for most of my life. I've seen corpses in all stages of decomposition and I knew that's what I was looking at here. I could've stood there, trying to rationalize the existence of hundreds of dead bodies walking up Converse Street towards my house...

Shit. I had to get home. I had to get my family out of here. I had no idea what was going on, or why. There was no sense trying to deny the obvious. There were dead people in our neighborhood walking around, eating the living. When my wife and child were safe in some kind of shelter far away from here, I would gladly debate the veracity of what I was witnessing with anyone willing to argue, but first and foremost, I had to get my family out.

I turned to begin the sprint of a lifetime and felt something snag my shirtsleeve. I looked, and there was a little old woman holding my arm. Her thick, white hair shot from her head in all directions. She had a peculiar expression on her gray, mottled face, like she was about to ask me for directions and she was staring at my arm with undisguised hunger. She opened her mouth wide and I'm pretty sure I screamed, but I managed to yank my arm away, just as her teeth came together on air with an audible click. I looked around wildly, and to my horror, discovered that the mob was faster than I thought. There were other hands reaching for me now and I jiggled backwards, shook off several grasping hand and broke into a run. I snuck a glance backwards and saw that they were not chasing me, but they were following. I also saw something that almost did make me scream.

The faceless jogger was shakily getting to his feet.

After that, I really don't remember what I passed, not in any great detail. I know at one point a police car passed me slowly on the street. The cop behind the wheel started to ask me a question, but I paid him no mind. I didn't warn them. I didn't warn any of the other people I passed while I ran home. There were more zombies, and I wasn't surprised to see them. This is Cemetery row. I've heard it described as a sea of graves with occasional oases of living people. I'd just come from the largest cemetery in the city, but there were other, smaller ones scattered throughout this region. If the dead were rising, we were fucked, unless we thought fast and moved quick.

When I finally reached my building, a five story walk up, I ran up the stairs four at a time. I forgot about the stitch in my side and the ache in my legs. The words *Save Indy, Save Indy, Save Indy* replayed in a continuous loop in my

head. I didn't even stop to think about Steph, who I loved with all my heart. First and foremost, I had to rescue my son. My only remaining son.

I came off the stairs and turned into the corridor that led to my apartment and there he was, my brilliant six-year-old son, sitting cross-legged in front of our door. He held the little pillow person doll I'd won for him in Coney Island last year. He held it tight to his chest, burying his head in it, rocking back and forth and humming.

"Indy?" I almost whispered, afraid to startle him. He looked like so many of the abused children I've seen come into the hospital, so ready to snap, to explode.

Still rocking, he said in a small voice that broke my heart, "I couldn't keep pretending, Daddy. I tried and I tried, but I couldn't..." His voice trailed off and he began to rock harder. He wasn't crying, though, and that worried me. A lot. That meant shock, and that scared me. Very slowly I knelt down in front of him. In the back of my mind, a voice was yelling, *gotta go! Gotta get Steph and go. Don't forget what's waiting outside.*

"Indy? Is Mommy inside, honey?" I asked softly.

He looked me in the eye then, and I saw so much that should never be in the eyes of a six year old. He said, "Yeah."

"Okay, sweetie..." I said, "Is Mommy okay?"

"She ...she didn't believe I was sick anymore."

And, just like that, I knew the whole story. It was laid out for me in the brown eyes of my son, who saw all of the same things that I did, but didn't deny them or lock them away. Instead he confronted them in the only way he could.

I would have to go inside myself and speak to my wife.

"Indy?" I said, holding him by the shoulders and speaking directly into his hurt face, "I'm going to go inside and speak to Mommy. Could you do me a favor and just stay right here? Wait for Daddy, okay?"

He nodded slowly, but when I let go and started to get up, his little hand shot out and grasped mine. When he spoke, it was with an urgency and intensity I had never seen in him before.

“Be careful Daddy...pleeese be careful.” I could see tears welling up in his beautiful eyes. He was holding my hand so tight.

“I will, honey, I’ll be careful.” I said as calmly as I could although my heart was hammering in my chest.

He let me go then, and what I saw on his face scared me deeply. It was resignation. It was the look of someone who knows the end is near and is powerless to stop it. I’ve seen that look on the faces of so many terminal patients, but I wish to God that I would never again have to see it on the face of my six-year-old son.

I went to the door slowly, pressed my ear against it. There was no sound in the house. The door was unlocked, so I opened it and stepped inside. I was afraid, so afraid of what was going to happen next, because a threshold had been reached, every bit as real as the one I just stepped through. I was entering a place where all pretenses failed, where all facades came down. A spotlight shone on all of my suspicions, forcing me to face them. Under that light was my beautiful wife, who I loved more than life itself, because she completed me. She had borne me three beautiful children, and she had wept bitterly and brokenly in my arms as we buried, not one, but two of them.

My wife Stephanie murdered my first two sons.

She murdered them slowly, so as to escape notice, and she hovered over them like any doting mother concerned for her children, all the while she was poisoning them. And she would have done the same thing to Indy, but he foiled her. He foiled her by getting sick.

He was always coming home with bruises and scrapes or he was always complaining of headaches or toothaches. He would come in to the kitchen where we both sat, holding his arm and looking miserable. I saw through these acts most of the time, figuring it was his way of getting attention, which we

always showered on his sick siblings. But Steph would be on him like a hawk, showering him with motherly concern, whisking him into the bathroom for bandages or bactine. It was simple; it was brilliant. He beat her to the punch.

But he couldn't keep it up. For all his intuition, he's still just a child. He couldn't know that Munchausen by Proxy could not be staved off for long. Soon his Mommy would sink into her black moods. And today was the day it was going to begin, but he stopped it somehow.

"Steph," I called, in a calm, neutral tone, "Honey, I'm home. Everything's going to be okay now." I lied. Nothing would be okay ever again. She had taken my most precious treasures from me, and I could not forgive her for that. I hated her.

But I loved her so much.

And I was going through thresholds here, leaving lies behind. How could I not have known? How could I not have seen any of the signs? The answer was very simple. The signs were in front of me. The similarities between the inexplicable illnesses of both boys, the suddenness of their onsets, her sullen depression that would last a few weeks before someone would get sick. All of these things had been laid out before me, but I shut my eyes. I didn't want to face the fact that my wife was killing our sons. So I looked away from all of these things, and let my sons die. I was just as much a murderer as Steph was.

"Honey, everything cool," I repeated through my tears. I walked slowly down our long hallway, from which the kitchen, then the bathroom branched. The hall opened onto the living room, and the bedrooms could be reached from there. I heard no sound in the house, but I knew she was there. I felt it. I approached the kitchen doorway cautiously, leaning up against the wall and peeking my head into the room, like the cops did on TV. I was not being overly cautious, I didn't know what her frame of mind would be, especially if she thought I knew what she had done.

The kitchen was empty. A half eaten bologna sandwich, Indy's favorite, lay on the table next to a small glass of apple juice. There was a good-sized

puddle of a blue liquid on the floor coming from a bottle of stomach medicine that lay on its side. I wondered if that was the poison that she used to kill our children. I started to turn away from the sight, wiping fresh tears from my eyes, but there was another, smaller puddle on the floor. This one was a deep reddish color. I knew that if I bent down and dabbed it with my fingers, then raised them to my tongue, it would have a slightly salty, metallic tinge to it. As long as I didn't do any of those things then, everything would still be all right. I continued down the hall, calling to my wife softly.

The Bathroom door was mostly closed and when I got to it, I pushed it open and there she was; my wife, Stephanie Wilson, mother of three, sitting on the toilet fully dressed. She was wearing one of her big floppy black tee shirts, the one that was three sizes too big and hung off of her slight frame like a drapery. Her head hung low, her hair concealing her face. When I entered the room, she looked up and her face held such an expression of regret and pain that I had to rush to her. I decided there and then that we would get through this together, as we had everything else. She was sick, but I had married her in sickness and in health. Besides, the blame for this tragedy had to be shared. Because of my inaction, my boys were dead. By my attentiveness and concern, my last boy would live. I would heal my family.

I knelt in front of her, holding her shoulders, just as I had held Indy just a few minutes before. "Don't worry, Honey," I said through tears that were flowing freely now, "I love you, baby, and everything's gonna be fine."

I pulled her close to me, and she came freely, so that we could cry on each other's shoulders just like we always did, but there was something nudging against my stomach, preventing me from getting close. I pulled back a little and was completely baffled by what I saw. There was a wooden handle protruding from her belly, very low in her stomach. About shoulder height for a six year old boy.

Oh, Indy.

I looked up in dawning horror, and really saw my wife, who now had her arms around me and was pulling me close to her pale face. Her face was so pale, and her teeth so white.

All of the strength drained out of my body. I began to sob in great heaves. How had everything come to this? How could I have let things go so wrong?

Steph's head was coming closer and closer to mine, as if she was going to whisper some consoling words into my ear. I wanted desperately to hear those words, whatever they were.

"Daddy!"

I heard Indy's cry at the same time I felt Steph's teeth sink into the flesh on my shoulder. I put my hands on her arms and pushed with all of my might, simultaneously propelling myself backwards with my legs. I could feel the muscle and sinew of my shoulder shredding. The pain was blinding. Steph, or the dead thing that had been my wife, fell into the small space between the toilet and the bathroom wall. She moaned dolefully and struggled to get to her feet and I scrambled on my asscheeks and elbows to get out of the bathroom. I collided with Indy on the way out, both of us crying out upon impact. I managed to get to my feet just as Steph extricated herself from the toilet. I slammed the door closed and took Indy by the shoulders. I spoke directly into his face hoping my intensity would add weight to my words,

"That," I said, nodding toward the bathroom door, "Is *not* your Mom."

"I know." He whispered, hanging his head "Mommy's not in there anymore."

I was about to ask him what he meant by that when the bathroom door began to shudder.

"We've got to go now, Indy." I said, pulling him after me as I made my way down the long corridor towards the door. Blood was flowing freely down my

arm and the muscles in my shoulder began to throb ominously, “It’s gonna be okay now. Daddy’s gonna take care of everything”.

“Yes Daddy.” He said, looking at me with those big, intelligent eyes as we made our way downstairs, leaving everything we knew and loved behind. He looked at me and through me, and he saw the truth beneath the lie.