

The Goody-Goody Girl
by Darby Patterson, 2008

Charlene finished packing bags of food for the homeless and disadvantaged by two on a Saturday afternoon. It was one of many volunteer activities she did throughout the week. Wednesday nights she visited a convalescent home to read to the residents, Sunday mornings she taught religion classes at the Neuman Center after Mass and she also did bookkeeping for a group that worked with troubled teens.

With few exceptions, Charlene had spent 40-some years of her life dedicated to being very, very good. This required lots of giving and sacrifice, no cursing or drinking, shunning impure thoughts, and the telling of no lies.

Charlene also stayed away from the sins of immodesty and vanity. Her skirts reached mid-calf, necklines always hugged her collar bone. Her only make-up was a touch of pink blush and lipstick.

She was neither attractive nor unattractive. Her light chestnut hair had dulled over the years and she wore it pulled back in a loose braid, much like her mother before her. Charlene had lovely green eyes with brown flecks that, in a certain light, looked

like gold dust. With near perfect teeth, had she smiled more often, she would have been perceived as pretty instead of plain.

Spiritual value fueled Charlene and she once believed that her life of good works and self-sacrifice would be rewarded. Still, when not busy with her volunteer work or her job as a data processor, Charlene spent her time waiting - waiting for romance, for happiness, for life to happen to her. Consequently, she didn't smile much and seldom laughed out loud. Premature frown lines had begun to form at the corners of her mouth and she sensed her whole face slowly falling.

Occasionally, as she'd gotten older, she felt a sense of disquiet building in the hollow of her chest when she saw other women. Women who swore, smoked, plastered on the make-up and were loose with men. Women with no morals. Yet, they were laughing while she sat in her neat little house alone reading mystery novels for excitement.

Slowly, over the course of months, new, disturbing feelings started to emerge. Feelings directed to those very people to whom she'd devoted volunteer efforts so faithfully for so many years. Saturdays, she found herself looking at the people in the food lines with disdain. She wondered how they could be so weak in character and so willing to take, take, take. Surely, some of them could find jobs and provide for themselves?

She felt repulsion creeping under her skin at the old folks' home as the smells of age and infirmity gnawed at her senses. Where were their families? Why was it up to

her to hold frail and wrinkled hands as addled minds spun nonsensical stories? Why did some of them even keep on living?

Her patience grew shortest with the troubled teens. Their self-centeredness, rudeness and utter lack of gratitude incited anger inside her. She, Charlene, had never behaved like that for one day in her life! If she had, her mother would have made sure it never, ever happened again.

In addition to the intrusion of these unwelcome thoughts a shadow of doubt descended over the core of Charlene's being – her faith. Increasingly, she doubted the truth of the lessons she taught to recent converts at the church. She heard herself mouth the words and then, simultaneously, ask herself the doubting question. She began to feel like a hypocrite.

And then came the month when everything started to change. The flow of good and truth came forth like water from a blessed fountain. The dark thoughts evaporated in the purity of sunlight as a page turned and someone entered her life to forever alter its course. His name was Dwight and he appeared one Sunday in her class, a Catholic convert wanting to learn more about the faith. That first encounter had been more like a thrill ride at an amusement park than a simple conversation about the beatitudes. Dwight had remained after class, one which Charlene thought she'd taught rather badly.

"Well then," he'd said from the school desk where he was sitting, "if God is all knowing and all good, then how can He let evil exist in the world?" He leaned back, folded his arms over his chest and smiled challengingly at Charlene.

She gave him an abbreviated answer about free will and man's ability "indeed, responsibility" to choose between good and evil. Throughout the exchange, she had moved closer to him and noticed that he had no sight in his left eye which was scarred and clouded over with a milky film. It made her soften her demeanor toward him.

When he introduced himself, Charlene extended her hand and he took it with his left in an awkward handshake. "Sorry," he explained. "Another little present I got in Nam. Not much on the right side of this body is much good." She noticed then, that his smile was charmingly crooked, much wider on the left than the right. Charlene sat down and the carnival ride began.

That afternoon, they went for coffee at the donut shop near the Cathedral. He invited her to see a movie on the following Tuesday, dinner on Thursday and on Saturday he helped her fill bags of groceries for the poor. Within that first week, she memorized his face. Every line and crease, the outline of shadow where his beard started to grow at the end of the day. On Sunday before Mass, she lit a candle for him and said a prayer of thanks and of contrition for her former doubts.

The days flew by like Monarchs dancing gracefully on the wind and Charlene let love happen. She had no idea of what Dwight actually looked like to the rest of the world - only that he was beautiful to her. She listened to his stories of the war with compassion and understanding. He was a decorated hero, worked at the local VA hospital and had been born in Florida where some of his family still lived.

She let him become intimate with her, in fact wanted the closeness and was

embarrassed by her ravenous desire. It hadn't felt wrong and she wondered why she'd lived all those years condemning the passion she now craved.

Dwight, she realized, was the man she'd waited for, worked for, her entire life. And he for her. With his physical and emotional scars, he needed a woman of great capacity to nurture and care for him. There was no one more giving than Charlene and finally she had found someone to shower with her abundant compassion. Her reward was late in coming, but Dwight was worth the wait. He completed her.

Within two short weeks, they'd connected like lost pieces of a puzzle. "Funny," he mused while holding her hand, "I can't see out of one eye, can't use an arm and have a bum leg but, for the first time in my life, I feel complete." Charlene cried tears of ultimate joy and dedicated herself to his happiness.

Dwight talked about a day in the near future when they might become engaged. He said he was saving for a ring but had to get past a few financial challenges first. Charlene didn't want to pry, so she asked no questions about what those challenges might be.

They were marking their first month anniversary when Dwight told Charlene he would have to go away for a short time. The financial challenges he'd spoken about had become urgent, he said, and he needed to raise the kind of money that wasn't available to him locally. Charlene felt as if someone had licked her in the stomach. The thought of Dwight leaving was unbearable. She saw the turrets of her candy castle toppling.

Before she even knew the nature of his crisis, she offered him a loan. There was

ample equity in her house to cover his needs and Charlene quickly made plans to get a loan of one-hundred-thousand dollars. Dwight seemed amazed at her generosity, speechless. She felt calm and gratified.

"I guess there was a reason God left me that house," she said lightly. "He knew that *we* would need it someday."

Dwight vowed to pay it all back. He needed it for his brother, he explained. Heart surgery that would save his life. They would be married when this was all over with.

Charlene pictured the two of them, tucked away in her house, working together. They'd paint the walls a bright color, one her mother would have hated. They'd plant a garden; he'd fix the little things she'd ignored while living alone.

She called the bank. With her perfect credit history and home equity, she had the loan in only two weeks. Two weeks that had been like a fairy tale. Dwight treated her like a princess - cooking dinners, pampering her, fixing the squeaky hinge on the screen door of her house. It was with pride and deep satisfaction that she handed him the cashier's check for one-hundred thousand dollars.

Charlene knew the five days in which Dwight would be gone to Florida to help his brother would be tough for her. She thought about the adage "absence makes the heart grow fonder," and didn't believe it possible. She busied herself with housework and plans for their future.

Even with economizing, Charlene fully expected Dwight to phone her a few

times. He didn't. Nor did he return after five days. More than a week after his departure, Charlene set out to contact him, give him a chance to explain, and discovered information that, somewhere in the recesses of her mind, she already knew. There had been no Dwight W. Lucas enlisted in the U.S. Army. He had not served in Vietnam or anywhere else in the armed forces. His brother had never been in the Tampa Cardiac Center and Dwight never worked at the local VA hospital.

Charlene knew that she should call the police. However, the specter of being a middle-aged spinster fool in public was unacceptable, unbearable. Instead, she called in sick at work and stayed home for seven straight days. There, she sat in a chair facing her living room window and simply stared outside. At night, she didn't bother to turn on the lights and was satisfied to sit in the darkness until she moved into her bedroom to struggle with her dreams. She ate little and slept less, but thought a great deal.

She looked back on her lifetime of good works, of resisting temptation and remaining true to the principles her mother taught her with such relentless, often painful, discipline. Charlene - the clean, pure, generous, sacrificing, selfless, helpful soul.

She let the anger build until it could be contained no longer and burst forth to rage within the beige walls of her house. "What has being good gotten me!" she demanded, shaking her fists at heaven. "I'm unhappy. I'm a fool! This is what the goody-goody girl gets!"

By the end of the week she had shouted and cried herself out and uttered every

cruel thought that marched across her mind. When it was over, Charlene emerged drained of unhappiness. Inside her there was an empty place where a reservoir of tears once waited to spill over in a torrent. She filled that void with new emotions, with growing determination to radically change her destiny. To put the goody-goody girl out of her misery like a mortally wounded bird.

By the following Monday, her plan was formed and she was ready to play out the charade of her former life. People wouldn't notice at first that she had changed - the physical transition, she decided, would have to be gradual. All those things she'd shunned as unworthy a good woman - the make-up, provocative clothing, a lifestyle of personal freedom and moral flexibility - would eventually be integrated into her new life. She wouldn't let it happen overnight because that might draw unwanted attention. She decided to start with something simple – maybe a new hairdo. (No more braids!) Little by little the mouse would be devoured by the lioness.

But, before she went completely public with her physical transformation, Charlene intended to alter the core of her being and commit the ultimate act of evil - an extreme that would counterbalance her past life. There was logic in her thought that, since radical goodness had reaped only loneliness and disappointment, the opposite might be a catalyst to happiness, pleasure, satisfaction. Based on her avid reading of crime and mystery novels, she began plotting the perfect murder.

The plotting wasn't difficult. In fact, she found it rather enjoyable. She carefully considered her own physical strength, what methods best suited her temperament, how

to dispose of a body so that it would never be found and other details that could be researched in her own extensive library of paperbacks.

Back at data processing again, she appeared with a new, but modest hairdo cut in a feathered style and lipstick a shade darker than before. No one took notice.

After two weeks of preparation, she was ready to launch a new life. It was a Saturday night when she cautiously applied a layer of make-up to her face. She then brightened her mysterious eyes to emphasize the golden flecks and painted a glossy red on her full lips, lining them with a shade darker pencil. She'd gotten books and practiced for days ahead of time after work, experimenting with different looks and colors until a nearly unrecognizable Charlene stared back at her in the mirror.

She pulled her hair up off her neck and pinned it atop her head in coquettish curls that reminded her of women in the Clark Gable version of "Gone with the Wind." The skirt and blouse she'd bought for the occasion was unlike anything she'd ever owned - youthful, bright, the skirt showing her knees and displaying the womanly curves of her body.

She was nearly stunned at the final product and stood in front of her full length mirror repeatedly turning and glancing at the reflection over her shoulder, as if it might disappear should she lose sight of herself. Finally, unable to contain the pleasure she felt, Charlene smiled provocatively at her reflection and said out loud, "You are what they call a knockout!" This, having a double meaning, made her laugh and feel a sense of power.

She checked her house to make certain everything was ready and went into the basement for one last look at the tools. She propped open the little door that covered the water heater right at the bottom of the cement stairs and obscured the rest of the basement from sight. She pulled the metal chain on the light and cast the basement into darkness; she then reached up and unscrewed the light bulb. The contrast between the living room where fresh flowers, elegant drink glasses, and seductive lighting awaited her guest and the stark basement with its power tools and bare hundred-watt bulb suspended from the ceiling was radical. Upstairs exuded feminine warmth and comfort while just below a cold, damp death chamber lie waiting for Charlene's guest.

For the evening, she'd chosen a busy nightclub with a packed dance floor and long chrome bar with high backed stools covered in burgundy velour. She was confident that none of the people she knew in her everyday life would frequent such a place and, if they did, Charlene doubted anyone would recognize her. She balanced herself on a stool near the end of the bar and ordered a drink minus the alcohol.

Within the first hour several appealing men offered to buy her drinks and tried to strike up conversations. It wasn't until after nine o'clock, however, that Charlene made her selection. He fit all her criteria. Michael was not particularly attractive and not nearly as smooth as many of the men who had approached her. That was how she had planned it. For her act of evil to have full significance, she wanted a genuine victim. Someone basically good, perhaps even a little pitiful. If she were to eliminate a slime like Dwight, she would be doing the world a favor and that was not Charlene's

intention.

She let Michael buy her drinks but only sipped at them, dumping the contents now and then to keep the appearance of partying along with him. When he was clearly affected by his drinks, Charlene suggested they go to her house for a "nightcap." She'd had to practice saying that word ahead of time as if it was a foreign language. Michael seemed stunned by his apparent good luck and easily accepted her offer along with the suggestion that they take her car, leaving his in the parking lot.

Once inside her house, Charlene noticed that Michael seemed more relaxed and in command than he had in the bar. He lounged on the mint green, brocade couch as if it were his own and looked at her with undisguised lust. She began to enjoy herself and smiled with anticipation of the evening they would have. Michael sipped his drink and reached out for her, confident his move would be welcome. Charlene let herself slide down on the couch beside him and fingered the silk handkerchief that decorated the pocket of his jacket. "Since we both know where this night is going to end up," she said in a voice rich in promise, "why don't we make it as pleasurable as possible?"

Michael's eyes glowed with intensity and she felt his body flush warm as she suggested they take a bath together. "I have some bath oils and candles. I'll rub your back and other places you might enjoy," she purred, rolling the handkerchief around her index finger. "But, I need your help with one little thing. The pilot light on the water heater went out and maybe you can light it for us? By the time we have another drink, there'll be plenty of hot water for a long, deep bath." Her red lips parted and framed her

perfect teeth in a smile lavish with promise.

Michael pulled the silk from her fingers and stuffed the handkerchief back into his pocket. "Water heaters just happen to be a specialty of mine," he said with a grin, "along with lighting several other things." Charlene noticed that more confidence and sexual innuendo had crept into his voice and she wanted to slap him. She could hardly wait.

They walked into the kitchen where Charlene turned on the light which cast a beam down the basement stairs. She handed Michael a box of wooden matches and held a flashlight in her hand, explaining the bulb in the basement had burned out. Another project, she laughed, for a handy man, emphasizing the "handy" for effect.

Michael removed his sports coat and draped it over the back of a kitchen chair. He let Charlene lead him down the stairs where she spread a sheet of heavy mil plastic on the floor for him. "So you don't get your pants soiled," she said. He dropped onto his knees in front of the water heater.

He took the flashlight from Charlene and peered behind the metal cover at the foot of the cylinder. Charlene used the time to reach behind the open door and grab a 25 pound sledge hammer. She held it with both hands behind her back until Michael propped up the flashlight to illuminate the pilot and opened the box of matches. With his attention entirely focused on the task of reaching into the small space with a lighted match, Charlene raised the iron mallet over her head and swung.

There was a muffled cracking sound as his skull crushed into his right temple

and his body collapsed into a ridiculous position that nearly made Charlene laugh. The rounded edges of the hammer hadn't broken much skin and, as she had planned, the initial loss of blood was manageable, caught on the plastic beneath him.

Energized by her success, Charlene easily dragged the body on the plastic to the center of the basement where she was prepared to complete her plan. She added more plastic and arranged it to form a channel leading to the laundry drain in the middle of the cement floor. Heavy-duty garbage bags and ties were laid out next to the rain gear she'd found at the surplus store - a long yellow jacket over matching bib overalls. A piece of half-inch plywood stood propped against the window that faced her backyard. After the hard part was done, Charlene would use it as a ramp to pull the bags up from the basement and out to the yard for loading into her small truck. The Sawz-All was plugged in and the rest of the night stretched before her.

It was nearly three in the morning when she finished. She'd filled five doubled-up garbage bags with Michael, her work clothes, the plastic and anything else used in the project. She arranged the load at the bottom of the window attaching a rope to the first bag so it would easily slide up her ramp. She closed the door to the basement with a sense of satisfaction, and ample energy to clean up any shred of Michael left in her house. She immediately noticed the jacket draped over the kitchen chair and fetched another plastic bag to hold it. Her only indulgence was to remove the silk handkerchief from the pocket to keep as a memento of her total transformation.

Sunday was again filled with nervous anticipation that fueled her energy. She

attended Mass and taught the religion class with renewed enthusiasm, striving to keep her emerging personality from bubbling forth. Occasionally she pictured what she'd left behind - the air conditioner blasted air from the dining room to the kitchen and into the open basement door, keeping the environment cool. The garbage bags were covered with other clear bags of ice to further insure the delayed disintegration of the contents. After dark, she would load the pick up and go to the food bank, unlock the dumpster and toss her load inside. At approximately 6 a.m. on Monday morning the garbage trucks would come and haul the entire contents to the landfill. The bags would be mixed with tons of other bags in an untraceable garbage heap of unidentifiable smells.

The entire plan proceeded without a single snag. Charlene enjoyed the physical work and felt more alive than she had in years. Driving home from the food bank, Charlene thought of how clever and thorough she'd been, using leverage to compensate for her lack of physical strength, making several small packages from one large and unwieldy object, using effective tools and, still, remaining the mild mannered, helpful spinster that everyone knew her to be. She'd done all this and accomplished her goal - she'd done an evil act to a somewhat ordinary man and was going to get away with it. She could feel her fate changing and a world of possibilities opening up to her. Charlene was a woman with a new attitude and, soon, she'd start enjoying the rewards.

Over the next two weeks she occasionally thought it strange that there had been no news about a missing person, although she generally avoided newspapers and TV reports finding them too filled with violence and negativity. Finally, she assumed her

victim had been an out-of-towner and put him out of her mind. Then the knock came on her door.

"Hello Miss, it's Deputy Clipper from the Sheriff's Department. Could we have a word with you, please?"

Charlene briefly froze in her tracks and then slipped the chain from the door. She was absolutely confident about the integrity of her work and decided there was nothing to fear. She faced two deputies who smiled apologetically.

"Sorry for bothering you ma'am," said the officer whose badge identified him as Ted Clipper. "But we're talking to every woman in the neighborhood as a precaution."

"What about?" Charlene politely asked. "This is a very quiet area and we never have any trouble."

"Well, that's been the history," Clipper said, "but I'm afraid we've had some incidents you need to be aware of. Give her one of those flyers, Dave."

The other deputy had Dave Mendoza printed on his ID badge. He peeled a piece of paper from the top of a small stack and handed it to Charlene. "This is an Identikit composite of a man who has been raping and murdering women in the city," Mendoza said. "Last month, he hit a victim only four blocks away from here. We found her car in a parking lot downtown. It was pretty brutal."

Clipper again took over. "Honestly ma'am, this guy is a sicko. I won't go into details but let me tell you we have trouble putting the pieces of his victims together. We need to advise you to have extra caution; lock your doors and call us right away if you

hear or see anyone suspicious."

Charlene looked at the black and white image and held her breath.

"This one's real dangerous ma'am," Deputy Mendoza was saying. "Seems to really enjoy himself. Just to let you know how serious he is, the guy writes a few of words in the victim's blood and then ties the note on the body with a fancy silk hanky ... I'm not at liberty to say what he writes."

"I'll tell you, when we get this guy, there's a bunch of us who would like to see him drawn and quartered," Clipper said, shaking his head. "You be careful now, hear?"

Once the officers left, Charlene leaned against the closed door and let reality seep through her body. It could have been her. Michael - or whatever his name was - had picked *her*. And, *she* had picked him. She had executed a killer. Done the world a favor.

The longer she thought about it, the worse she began to feel. She went to the dresser drawer where she had the souvenir silk hankie tucked away. She ran it through her fingers and brought it to her lips. Then, watching herself in the dresser mirror, she bit the end of the red silk and began to tear at it. Furiously, as tears fell, she shredded the trademark memento and went into the bathroom where she watched the filmy pieces of silk circle the toilet bowl and flush into oblivion.

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