

**CLUTCHED in the  
TALONS**  
and Two Other Stories

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# Clutched in the Talons

For she sitteth at the door of her house,  
on a seat in the high places of the city,  
To call passengers who go right on their ways:  
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither:  
and as for him that wanteth understanding,  
she saith to him,  
Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is  
pleasant.  
But he knoweth not that the dead are there;  
and that her guests are in the depths of hell.

Proverbs 9:14-18

Jordan Weaver eased himself down into his Acura, his pulse already beginning to race. His hand trembled as he inserted the key. He knew better than this. He had been taught the virtue of purity from childhood, but he just *had* to do this.

The crumpled magazine hidden under the seat had started it all—something a coworker had loaned to him. In all his eighteen years he had never felt quite like he had when he went through that magazine for the first time. The images were seared into his brain like fire, along with other images from other magazines since then.

Now it was Friday again. The next issue should be out at the drugstore today. Even though adrenalin fired him to the point of shaking, the deadness inside him was planted like a stone.

He merged into the four-lane highway, barely noticing a flashy GMC Duramax beside him. Before, he had always noticed Duramaxes—before he'd begun to carry this dead weight within of purity defiled.

Ahead a yellow VW Beetle changed lanes abruptly, and Jordan stabbed his brakes. “Man, just get yourself to the drugstore in one piece, dude.” How he craved this fix. It could be gotten on his work computer too, but that had some risk... and he couldn't take it to his bedroom with him.



The young chipmunk sat on its haunches and looked out from the concealment of his perch on the evergreen limb. He could see the corn, a handsome ear. It had fallen from the farmer's wagon when it turned into the barnyard gate. The old style farmer still stored his corn on the ear. An Amish man, really, but the chipmunk had no concept of such things.

But he could see that corn. Oh, golden beckoning corn! But he would be so exposed out there. Was it safe? He leaned forward on the limb, his tail twitching slightly with desire. The slanting rays of the fall sun illuminated the ear with splendor. Such beautiful corn. Should he? Dare he? He inched back along the branch closer to the trunk of the tree.



The long freight train eased forward ever so slowly, shouldering into the weight of the forty-seven flatcars behind it. Walter Heinrich moved the controller ever so gently so as to jar the cars the least. In the glory days of passenger trains, such care had provided the smoothest ride to all. A good engineer back then was a man to be respected—a man of stature. Even now though, he still prided himself in those feathered starts, sliding into it oh, so gently. *Like the ox leaning into the harness*, he mused.

*Easy does it.* The tiny bumps were barely perceptible as the cars tightened into each other. He smiled. The speedometer began to climb slowly but steadily as he cleared the mill yard. Behind him the wheels of forty-seven flatcars, each loaded with one hundred tons of new metal sheets, began to click steadily. He relaxed somewhat. "Now just clear this little hick town, and Michigan, here we come."



The peregrine falcon was hungry. He glided at four hundred fifty feet above the rolling farmland and wooded hills. He had been released into the wild just two and a half weeks ago. Raised in captivity, his hunting skills were not as sharp as they would otherwise have been. He didn't know, couldn't know, that he was just one of many peregrines released by the conservation services on the East Coast. It was all part of the larger plan to reestablish native predators to their historic lands. The poisoning of small rodents had nearly wiped them out years ago. The sick rodents would wander out into dangerous places where they fell prey to the falcons. The poison, already in the rodents' systems, would be transferred into the falcon. The result was almost total annihilation of some birds of prey. But the falcon didn't know or care for such facts. He was hungry and primed to kill.



Jordan eased to a stop and scanned the parking lot. All was clear. Just what he didn't need right now was one of his nosy Mennonite relatives or "friends" to come around and spoil everything. Once before he had to abort a magazine run for just such an emergency. Aunt Martha had bumped into him inside the store. She, of course, beamed up at him congenially and had asked about Dad and Mom. Then also about little Billy and then ... Oh, it went on and on for at least forever. All the while he had to stand there politely and smile. *Try to act interested*, he had urged himself. So he had focused on his overweight little aunt, in her solid-color knit cape dress that he was certain she considered modest, but which should have been several sizes larger. He had been interested, of course, very interested, but not in his aunt. He yearned for the magazine rack just behind her. For women too, but not red-faced, fat little women in knits. Oh, if he could just get to those magazines ...

But this time the parking lot was clear.

He pushed the car door open and stepped out onto the baking asphalt. *I won't need any excuses about sore throats and cough drops this time. This is the real thing.*

