

Sample From FORCIBLE, a novel

Leon Rollo was famished. It was nearly two o'clock when he'd finally wrapped up business at Joey's apartment. His stomach was steadily reminding him that, in his haste, he had skipped breakfast. He remembered a little hamburger stand just up the road that he had seen coming and going, and he wondered if they'd be open. Only take a minute to find out, he thought, and off he went.

Sure enough, he could see a couple of families with small children enjoying sodas and ice cream, seated at concrete tables and benches grouped around the little establishment. Rollo favored small time, independent burger joints like this one rather than eating at the big chain restaurants.

Generally, he found the food tastier and the help friendlier, though sadly this kind of eatery was becoming fewer and farther between. The faceless megacorporations were steadily winning the battle for America's fast food dollars. Leon strolled to the window, placed his order and took a seat at a table to wait. The sky hung low, overcast and gloomy, but the clouds offered a welcome respite from the heat. Nearby, young boys and girls laughed and played as their parents relished the cool breezes, as well as a short break from their kids. Off to the west, Rollo could see darker, gunmetal gray thunderheads forming. A few more hours and Lake Charles could expect a healthy drenching, he mused, as the counterman called his order number.

Rollo made his way to the counter, paid his bill, took some extra napkins from the dispenser and carried his lunch back to the table. Taking the food from the sack, he then smoothed the white paper bag flat, fashioning an impromptu paper plate to set his repast on. Large cheeseburger, no onions but otherwise all the way, crispy, golden hot onion rings, and a sizeable root beer float were all dispatched with gusto. Leon savored the poor man's version of dining al fresco.

Satisfied, Rollo kicked back and unobtrusively watched the people around him. He loved to while away the time just observing folks, with all their differences, quirks and nuances duly noticed and appreciated by him. It never ceased to amaze Leon that billions of the race called

human had trod this earth, yet each one of them was utterly unique, even down to their fingerprints, none of them the same, not one. The children in particular caught his eye this windy afternoon, so happy and innocent, completely content with nothing more than gamboling playfully under their parent's indulgent gaze. Rollo suddenly sobered, wondering how children get from this stage to being capable of engineering the personal hell so carefully constructed for Joey Fontenot. Watching these little ones now, it seemed inconceivable. Maybe one of these kids playing happily before him would grow up wrong, would become an abuser, a robber...maybe even a killer.

Heaving a large sigh, Leon rose and gave his body a good stretch. He would head back to Joey's place first for a catnap on that loveseat. It *had* to be more comfortable than Lon's guest bed. Leon would then take a late afternoon to the strip club called Philander's. Appropriately enough, he thought wryly.