

*The Seventh  
Acolyte Reader*



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# Pauly Joe

by William Barber

Pauly Joe never come up on me, but I knew what I knew. Pauly Joe thought he was puttin' one over. He was a *smooth* one. Always smilin' and charmin' Moma, makin' her think he did nothin' wrong, makin' her think that every bad thing that happened was all my fault. And him not even my own brother. Pauly Joe was just Moma's nephew, plain and simple, and a bastard on top of it, slick and city wise and a liar. But I knew. Up over the garage where Pauly Joe built hisself an apartment to stay in I knew he was takin' the neighbor boys up there and sexin' with them. All the time. Right under Moma's nose, and she just never saw it. Just 'cause he was always down at the fishin' hole every blam wasted hour while I was doin' the chores. Then, here come Pauly Joe with a bucket full of fresh trout and perch and catfish for Moma. Well, I knew what I knew. Used to make me so damn mad, Moma always goin' Pauly Joe this and Pauly Joe that. And him! Gettin' it on with every twelve to fifteen year old on the mountain.

When Pauly Joe first come up from Mobile to stay with us after his own moma, Aunt June Sue, died, he was just about fifteen, I'd guess. O, and he was a looker, too. Dark wavy hair and muscles like a man, curly hair on his chest already. Pauly Joe even had a tattoo of an eagle on his left shoulder, and then across his wrist, in dirty little letters that he made hisself was one just said "P.J.". Big nasty kid he was, too, always hittin' my head and spittin' in my face. Here I was no more than eleven, and defenseless, and he'd wait till we was alone and then he'd start cursin' me and tellin' me how he was goin' to hurt me if I didn't sneak him money and stuff like that. He was a real bastard, all right. But I got even with him, yes I did. Finally got good and even and rid of Pauly Joe, once and for all.

See, how it started was I used to get mad 'cause he was so mean to me. Then he'd be always havin' parties up over the garage and never let me come, and when he wasn't he spent every free waking moment down at that damn fishin' hole, all day long sometimes. He'd always come back with some neighbor kids, say one or two of them at a time, and they'd walk up the back way down the alley to the garage and go in the

back door and up to Pauly Joe's room. It was like a club house. Pauly Joe had girlie magazines up there, playin' cards with pictures of nekkid women on them, and a pen that when you turned it upside down a girl's dress would drain right offen her and you could see her tits and then her patch of hair. Pauly Joe loved showin' off that pen.

Then he'd put on Elvis Presley records and they'd all play strip poker. I knew because, since Pauly Joe never let me come up to his room, I'd sneak up over the tool-shed and climb up to the side window that looked down into Pauly Joe's room. I could see right in and watch them do what they did. So I know good and well what Pauly Joe was up to. He was a *smooth* one, all right. Playin' card games until they was all down to their shorts. Then Pauly Joe would say, "Okay, now we got to play for blow jobs." That's what he said. And, sure enough, somebody would loose the next hand and off would come the under pants. And then, when somebody lost after that, why they'd have to crawl across the floor and suck on Pauly Joe's big old dark and dirty dick. Ugh. He'd make them blow the other boys, too. Next thing you knew nobody was playin' cards no more and Pauly Joe would jump their bones and fuck them right up their assholes. Saw it a hundred times, I bet. Fuck them right hard up their butt. With Elvis Presley a-singin' in the background:

*You ain't nothin' but a hounddog,*

*Just cryin' all the time.*

*You ain't nothin' but a hounddog,*

*Just cryin' all the time.*

*You ain't never caught a rabbit*

*And you ain't no friend of mine.*

Used to make me so damned mad when Moma would tell me that I should grow up to be more like Pauly Joe.

So anyway, like I was sayin, I made up my mind I was gonna get Pauly Joe good and be done with it. Don't think for one minute I ever wanted any part of all that faggoty goin' on up there. Not me. I was raised a Christian and I knew what the Bible said. I knew God didn't allow that kind of animalizin'. It didn't sit right with people, either. If they'd known what Pauly Joe was doin' with their sons up in that room of his, there'd be plenty of trouble. I wanted to warn Moma, but some things you just couldn't discuss with Moma. Like snakes. And blood. And the things that people does in their bedrooms. You daren't ask questions or nothin', and that was right because she was my Moma, and that's how things is on the Mountain. And that's the way I mean to make them stay if I have anythin' to do about it. I got Pauly Joe good and it's

none can say that he didn't deserve it, neither.

So I told Pauly Joe once, right after he had hit me, I told him, "You look here, Pauly Joe. I know what you been doin' up in your room and I'm tellin' Moma!" Pauly Joe got real mean and grabbed me by my hair. He spit in my face and pushed it right up against the wall real hard and told me, "You mind your bidness or I'll Murder you!" Threatened me Dead! Right there on the Spot!

Pauly Joe never much talked to me after that, which was just fine with me. But things quieted down for a while. I figured he'd learned his lesson good. But not Pauly Joe. Word to the wise just wasn't goin' to do. Pretty soon he started up again, bringin' kids younger than him up to his room. I'd see their bikes out by the oak tree behind the garage, two and three sometimes at a time. And I'd wait till dark and climb up on the shed roof and look into Pauly Joe's room and watch until they started takin' off their clothes. Sometimes they'd be right in the middle of it, doin' sex things, Pauly Joe gettin' his dick sucked which is what he liked most, I guess. Just layin' on his back and some neighbor kid slurpin' down on his dick. I tell you, it was just plain dis-gus-tin'. That's what it was. I watched for hours and hours, so I knew.

After I just about couldn't stand no more of it, I told Preacher. Went right down to the Church and waited outside his office. When he come got me and we went up his office to talk, I told him that the story I was about to tell him was the Devil's own story, and it hurt my mouth to say some of the words. He was real good and told me we was private and it would be okay for me to say the words to him. So I told him what Pauly Joe was doin'. Told him right out. Preacher didn't believe me right away. Said maybe I was imaginin', so I told him, "Sure, you don't believe me! You come and see for yourself!" Told him how I climbed up on the shed roof plenty and watched with my own two eyes. Preacher said, "Show me." So I took him off in his car up the back way to our place and around where we could park in the orchard. We walked real quiet like up and around the oak tree so we would approach the shed without Pauly Joe could hear us comin'. Then real quiet we climbed up on top of the shed roof and over to Pauly Joe's window. Sure enough, Pauly Joe was playin' poker and Elvis Presley was singing,

*Well, since my baby left me  
I found a new place to dwell  
It's down at the end of Lonely Street  
At Heartbreak Hotel.*

Preacher looked at me and whispered, "They're just a-playin' cards,

boy."

"You just wait," I whispered back.

Sure enough, pretty soon Pauly Joe was twistin' around on his bed, playin' with hisself and then the neighbor boy was a-blowin' him good. Preacher made a noise in his throat and scooted me down offen the roof. He come down behind me and pulled me over to the tree.

"That's Devil's work, sure as Hell," Preacher said. "I better get back up there and pray for Pauly Joe's soul." He kept turnin' and lookin' up at the window. "Think I saw the Devil Hissself," he said. "You run along to bed now, hear. I'm sure it was the Devil up there in that room, and I'm climbin' back up to check for Gospel sure." Preacher seemed real agitated and upset like. He was breathin' hard. I helped Preacher get back up on the shed roof and then I went back toward the house. I turned and saw him lookin' through the window again. He was prayin' *real* hard.

What I thought was that *that* would cure Pauly Joe once and for all. Cure him good, with Preacher prayin' right outside his window. I asked Preacher about it, too, but he told me I just better keep my eyes on the flowers and the trees, and be careful not to ever be lookin' into Pauly Joe's window again. Ever! Lest the Devil Hissself should catch me there and turn me into one of *them*. Scared me right good, he did. Just imagine the Devil lookin' up and catchin' me in the window and then turnin' me, Blammo, into a ho-mo-sexial! I went and stayed away from that damn window, long as I could. I did Church work and prayed a lot. But by summer I just started thinkin' and wonderin' if maybe Pauly Joe hadn't been saved at all. It started concernin' me, even though once or twice I saw Pauly Joe and Preacher talkin' and bein' friendly, which *looked* like he was cured and saved. Well, he weren't.

See, it was that summer the Mitchells from over on Zion Road set up a trailer home on their back lot that come right up to our back lot. Prettiest trailer home you ever saw, too. Blue as a new lamp, with a Pitcher Window and everything. And they got them some renters. The Barnstables, they was. Good country people, but simple. Clean, kept to theyselves.

But they had this boy name of Ben, must of been fourteen, maybe fifteen. 'Bout my age, I cipher. Real purty, if you can say that about a boy, with blond hair and eyes that sort of stood wide apart, calm, like a cow. And Pauly Joe, Christ, he must have been almost eighteen by then.

That summer was a hot one. Gypsy moths had got us good in the Spring, so the trees was damn near bare of leaves. Almost no shade

anywhere to get in out of that heat. Pauly Joe was workin' down at Busy Busby's on the Kennedy Expressway by then, the chicken place. Got hisself a motor-bike with some of his money, and, boy, did he think he was a hot shot, rippin' up the dirt road late at night, makin' all hell's own noise with that bike.

And then I started noticin' it, that lots of times when Pauly Joe would get home the Barnstable boy would be over there at the garage just a-sniffin' around Pauly Joe like a puppy, and followin' him everywhere. They'd be runnin' around in cut-off shorts with their shirts off, wrastlin' and the like. Then they'd go upstairs to Pauly Joe's room and pretty soon on'd come the Elvis Presley records again. I started to guess what they was up to.

Sure enough, one Saturday night I waited till old Elvis started moanin'

*Are you lonesome tonight,  
Do you miss me tonight,  
Are you sorry we drifted apart?*

I went and climbed up on the shed roof and over to the window and looked down into Pauly Joe's room. Him and Ben Barnstable was layin' on the bed in the middle of the room, and they was a-smoochin' just like the way only men and women is supposed to do. A-smoochin' and a-kissin' and the like.

I looked around to see if I could see the Devil, but I wasn't sure I could. I watched Pauly Joe and Ben take off their clothes and roll around all over the bed, just like pigs. Pretty soon they was lickin' each other's pizzles, like a dog does his own sometimes, and a-suckin' on them as if they was candy sticks. All slick they was, those dicks, and hard and red, goin' in and out. Just dis-gus-tin'! Why, at one point I even saw Pauly Joe stick his nose right up into Ben's butthole and sniff it. Sniff and lick it just like a dog, he did. Almost barfed when I saw that. And pretty soon Pauly Joe was up and mountin' Ben like a bull on a cow. I looked around for the Devil again. I'm sure he was there, somewhere. I looked back over at the bed and couldn't believe my eyes. Elvis was singin'

*Love me tender, love me true.  
Never let me go.*

Pauly Joe rolled around on his own belly, laid hisself out face down, and Ben got up on him. I watched that pretty-lookin' neighbor kid stick Pauly Joe right up his behind. Pauly Joe let Ben Barnstable cornhaul him. I damn near fell off the roof!

*That* was precisely when I got my Idea. The Lord Hissself

whammed me right over the head with it.

I jumped down quiet offen the roof and ran into the house. I went up to Moma's room and fetched the big old flash bulb camera she kept there for picture takin' on birthdays and Easter and such. I remember I got me a brand new bulb and put it in the flasher and then I run back out to the garage. I had to loop the camera strap over my neck so's I could climb on the shed roof. When I got back up to the window and looked in, I saw Pauly Joe layin' on his back with his legs right up in the air, knees bent all the way back to his own damn ears, and there was pretty-boy Ben just a-huffin' and a-puffin to the beat of Elvis singin'

*Well It's one for the money,*

*Two for the show,*

*Three to get ready*

*Now got cat to go,*

*But don't you step on my blue suede shoes.*

*You can do anything but lay off my blue suede shoes.*

My heart was poundin'. I held that camera up to the window and aimed it right at Pauly Joe's bed. I tapped the window pane real loud – *Ka-bloom* – like that. Pauly Joe and Ben both looked right up at the window, and I backed off a foot and pushed down the clicker. The flash went off like lightnin'. Lit the whole damn room right up, it did, Devil and all. The look on Pauly Joe's face was like a horse seein' a bear. I'll never forget it, long as I live.

Tarnation and Thunder was hollerin' inside Pauly Joe's room all of a sudden. I jumped down offen that shed roof and I was runnin' back to the house fast as I could, hangin' onto that camera real tight till I got to the porch, and then I turned around and here come Pauly Joe runnin' after me so fast like to break both legs. I ran in the house and locked the front door and ran upstairs to the bathroom and locked that door too. I could hear Pauly Joe shoutin' and banging' on the door. Then I could hear Moma's voice. Pretty soon she was callin' me to come down there right that minute. I hid the old camera on a shelf behind some towels and went downstairs. Moma wanted to know what in Heaven's name was goin' on in her own backyard and I told her right plain out.

"Pauly Joe's been touchin on the neighbor boy," I said. "And the neighbor boy's been touchin' on Pauly Joe, too. Just like a woman. And I got a photy-graph to prove it."

That was it. Moma screeched like I'd never heard, and she picked up her broom and turned it on Pauly Joe so hard she chased him right out the kitchen door like that. Screamin' and cursin' him to beat Jesus.



I can't tell you how proud of me I was. Moma screamed and cried all night long. I saw her hit her arm across the wall and she kept sayin', "The sins of the father... The sins of the father..." over and over. I wondered what she was talkin' about.

Next day I went and got Preacher and told him what I'd done. He was mad, 'cause I had not listened to him and had gone and looked back through the Devil's own window again. I told Preacher I got a good picture of the room, and maybe if we was lucky, the Devil would show up in the photy-graph. Preacher told me to bring him the film, that the church had a special developin' process that could materialize the Devil better than the ones they had down at Parker's Drug Store on Kennedy Expressway. So I hurried on back to our house and fetched up the film container. Pauly Joe's motor bike was nowhere to be seen.

Anyway, a few days later when I went by Preacher's to see about the picture, he was real upset. He showed me a bunch of photy-graphs, like me holdin' a new basketball, Moma in her Easter dress next to the oven, Uncle Jim Bob at Christmas dinner wavin' a drumstick in the air. And then *The Picture*. *The Picture of the Devil Hisself!* Preacher told me, sure as Jesus, that I may have got the best photy-graph of the Devil had ever been took in These Parts. My heart was thumpin'. It was so powerful and frightenin' I could hardly stand it.

There He was! This Big White Burnin' Light. That's all you could see. Not even Pauly Joe, nor Ben Barnstable, nor nothin' they was a-doin' on that bed. None of that come through. Just a great big circle of white light surrounded by black. Preacher explained that nobody could really get a picture of the Devil's face 'cause He was too smart for that, so He just used his Energies and glowed a big hole right in the middle of the picture. You could see a bit of the window frame around, but that's all. Scared the livin' be-jesus out of me. I dropped the photy-graph on Preacher's floor, my hands was tremblin' so.

Well, sir, that was all the evidence Preacher needed to start the Sermon off that Sunday with the Damnation, Tarnation and Brimstone of the Invasion of the Devil Hisself in our own Righteous Community. The Fathers was bustin' to lynch Pauly Joe, hang him right up offen the oak tree, they was sayin', and the women folk was either cryin' or cluckin'. The Barnstables moved right out of town, they did, way the hell and gone over to Beaverton on the other side of The River, they was so sore ashamed, but not before that pretty boy Ben got whipped till his skin looked like leather. Saw Papa Barnstable do that, too, Ben stripped down to those cut-offs and standin' up against the a tree on our lot line,

screamin' and yellin' to bust everybody's ears. Served him right, messin' like that with the Bible's own Law.

Moma was real proud of me for gettin' a picture of the Devil and helpin' Preacher save us all from a Fate worse than Death. Moma even said it was just too bad that Pauly Joe couldn't have grown up to be more like me. That was the best part of all. She told me then that Pauly Joe's father had been a Cajun-type that her sister June Sue had fallen for when she was waitressin' in Mobile durin' the War. Moma said the Cajun was no damn good, and that after he'd gotten June Sue in the family way he run off and left her. Left her for some Fancy Boys he knew over in New Orleans. Fancy Boys! Poor Aunty June Sue must have died of a broken heart, and all this while Moma never lettin' on that she knew what she knew. I told her plain out how she'd practically invited the Devil Hissself to live in our garage. Told her Pauly Joe had never left a hand on me and if he'd even so much as tried I'd of killed him. Moma was glad of that, for sure. Told her *I*, not Pauly Joe, had been the man of this here house and from now on we was doin' what I said. And first things first, I told Moma that we was gonna burn that damned garage right down to the ground. Burn the sight of the Devil right back to hell, I told her. Moma cried because Popa had built that garage with his own hands while he was livin'. But I was *right*. No use to keep the Devil's workshop or our back lot. Told her I'd build her another garage on the other side of the house.

So I invited Preacher out and we had a barbecue out back. Cooked hog jowels on the grill. And while the women was fussin' to get the potato salad and chips ready, we men went and poured gasoline all over Pauly Joe's old bed. I personally took those stupid Elvis Presley records of his and put them right in the middle of the bed, along with what was left of Pauly Joe's clothes when he'd cleared hisself out fast before we could catch him and lynch him. We poured gasoline right down the stairs to the little back door where Pauly Joe would go in and out with the neighbor boys. Preacher made some high and mighty prayers to Jesus to ban the Devil out of our midst. And then, when the place was ready, I threw a lighted match into the door. The old garage went up like all Hell's blazes. That fire rumbled and crackled all through the old wood frame of Pauly Joe's garage, whippin' the Devil right back to hell with its burnin'.

Just about then Toby Hannah come a-yellin' offen the hill that we'd caught a faun in a bear trap on the ridge. Broke its hind leg, so Toby put a bullet in its brain for the misery. Some of the men run up the hill to

fetch it back. Preacher said it was God's Provender, for rightin' the Devil's work. We butchered that faun then and there, hung up the flanks to drain the blood offen the sweet young meat, and then with our knives we cut out venison steaks and cooked them on our still-burnin' barbecue grill. Women folks steered clear of us 'bout then, fussin' in the kitchen and all, but we men ett good that night, on God's Provender, and Preacher sayin' plain out for all men to hear, "This day this boy has done the Lord's Own Work, and he has become a Man." That was my finest day. It was my finest hour.

Hear tell Pauly Joe's livin' up outside Mobile now, workin' in some Fancy Bar, livin' with some Fancy Man from the Big City. One of them bars where the men hold their wrists real high and wear make-up and all. Sounds to me like a perfect place for him. Hell on Earth. I hope he stays there forever. Doin' that dirty, awful stuff with the neighbor boys for hours and hours and bringin' up the Devil Hissself, and on my property, too. I know. I saw it with my own very eyes. Sometimes I'd even dream about it at night, Pauly Joe snuffelin' around that pretty boy's butthole and lickin' up on his pizzle, and I'd awaken most sore ashamed, with a wet spot where it shouldn't ought to be. What Pauly Joe did was unholy, that's what it was. Unholy, and just plain dis-*gus*-ting!