

*We welcome Gerard Houarner back to our pages with this truly remarkable story.*

# Captivity

by Gerard Houarner

When Rafael was born, he imagined, colors bled from his mother's uterus and stained the obstetrician and nurses with the spectrum of his future. On the surgical gowns and masks, the IV stand and bag, the monitoring equipment and surgical instruments and delivery table, his emergence painted all the acts he was to commit, all the lives he'd touch, every word he'd have to utter, the places he'd sleep and, ultimately, when, where and how he'd die.

But the colors were wiped from the instruments. The gowns and sheets and masks, destroyed. Someone erased the primitive intern training videotape of his birth. No trace of his future remained, and no one present at his birth dared speak of what they'd seen. Rafael knew because he'd asked.

His mother wept at his questions; his father grew impatient and once slapped him; his pediatrician prescribed medication and sent him to special play groups with other visionary children. So Rafael never knew what he was supposed to do or say.

But he always knew, from the moment he opened his eyes and understood his own wails, gurgles and giggles, that he was special.

Once he saw a movie in which Indians kidnapped two girls. A bunch of white cowboys, and a black one, went after them. Something unspeakable happened to one of the girls, who was never seen again. The other girl, when finally recaptured, did not want to come back.

Rafael imagined he'd been kidnapped, and that out there somewhere his true father and mother were hunting him down with savage resolve, and that one day they would kill the people who said they were his parents and return him to his rightful village. And he worried that he would not want to go back with them, that he would prefer the mystery of what he was supposed to do, the anxiety of never knowing who to be, over the certainty of knowing and the dread of not wanting to do what he was always meant to do.

He waited at street corners to be rescued. Policemen often brought him home. Occasionally, older kids beat him up. Strangers stopped and offered candy, promised toys. Twice, he was taken, once in a truck and another time in a car. In the truck, a lone man tried to touch him places he didn't think

his true parents would, so he talked to the man about what was happening between them. He spoke specifically to the child inside the man, the wounded thing drowning in a pool of its own tears, trembling with so much violence at the memory of sensation that bones broke, organs ruptured, skin tore. Rafael survived the truck's crash, unharmed, protected by the child inside the man. To the couple in the van, Rafael sang the lullaby they'd always wanted to sing to the children they never had, the ones they missed more than him. If the couple really were his parents, he thought, they'd understand. But souls of their unborn, cheated and angry, churned in her gut, and in his scrotum, and delivered themselves into the world without consent, eager to hear the song Rafael gave them.

Rafael survived that crash, as well. The children gave themselves to save him, grateful for the lullaby.

He stopped hanging around street corners after that, deciding that if his true parents wanted to, they could damn well find him. It wasn't like the family he lived with moved with every season, like a restless tribe on the run.

Shadows advised him that the adults taking care of him were his true parents. Rafael argued. He broke the television set, smashing the screen with a heavy lead glass carafe in which his father kept the good brandy. How he reached the carafe in its locked cabinet and found the strength to heave it through the screen with such destructive force that pieces of glass were embedded in the wall behind the television were mysteries to his parents. But the shadows, hiding between the screen's 400 lines of resolution, had helped, in part because they were sorry for interrupting Rafael's favorite cartoon show to bring him the news. They also thought Rafael should not watch so much television, since the events that happened on screen were not real, and were in fact lies of time and place and consequence, like the movie with the cowboy and the Indians and the kidnapped girls.

Rafael argued with the shadows for quite some time. He beat up Hank Palomer, the first grade bully, because the boy's shadow said Rafael should be nicer to his parents even