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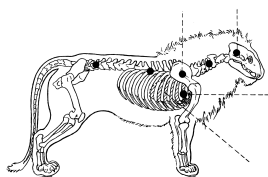
# **THE LAST WILKIE'S**

AND  
OTHER  
STORIES

BY  
**JON  
STEINER**

with illustrations by  
ZOE SADOKIERSKI

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# ROBBER

1

THE CONVERSATION HAD STALLED, so when the CD finished playing there was an awkward silence. Eric cleared his throat and said, 'Jamie, man, it's really great to see you.' He reclined on the couch, the still-smoking bong perched on his belly, his sandalled feet splayed across the coffee table. 'Seriously. We don't see you enough. You gotta come over more often.'

Jamie leaned forward on his chair and rested his elbows on his knees. 'Yeah, totally, man, it's so fucking great to see you guys, you know?' He looked from Eric to Ann and back again, nodding earnestly. Ann blinked several times and chewed on her thumbnail.

'I should put on more music,' said Eric, and commenced the involved process of getting up. 'What do you guys feel like listening to?'

'Some, like, jazz, maybe?' said Jamie.

'Yeah, sure, that can be arranged,' said Eric, and left the room.

Jamie turned to Ann. 'You've been pretty quiet over there in that armchair,' he said. 'How you doing?'

'Um, okay,' said Ann. 'Sorry, I'm just stoned I guess.'

He grinned and nodded. 'Yeah, huh? Totally.'

Some minutes passed. Jamie tapped out a little rhythm on the



coffee table with his index fingers, and then closely examined his pack of cigarettes. Ann coughed quietly and cleared her throat, then shifted a bit in her chair and looked at the floor. There then commenced the tinkling of a piano, joined presently by a trumpet and drum kit, and Eric returned to resume his supine position on the couch. 'It's weird, man,' he said as he settled himself back down.

'What?' said Jamie.

'I got totally spooked when I was in there looking through the CDs. There was some freaky noise just outside the window and I totally thought someone was lurking out there, casing the house. A robber.'

'A robber!'

'Yeah, or something. My heart was in my throat. I was like literally frozen with fear for a moment.'

'So what was the noise really?'

'Well, I finally forced myself to go and look out the window, but I couldn't see anything. I'm sure I just hallucinated it or something. But it really sounded like crunching leaves underfoot and crinkling nylon windbreaker and the creak of a person's weight being supported by the windowsill and maybe a boot clunking against the side of the house as they hoisted themselves up to look in.'

'That's pretty fucking specific, man. You're kind of freaking me out now. Like what if there seriously is someone outside casing the house, and he sees three totally stoned wusses in here, easy prey, and fucking comes in and kills us?'

Ann hugged her knees to her chest and closed her eyes.

Eric said, 'No, come on, man, there's not. I don't mean to freak you out. I'm sure it was all in my head. The wind probably blew some leaves and maybe a branch fell from the tree out there. I'm just so stoned, I imagined all that other stuff.'

They sat quietly for a while, listening to the music. Then Jamie said, 'Wouldn't it be fucked up, though, if that really happened? Like, if some crazy guy just came bursting in, yelling and stuff?'

'Well, yeah it would be fucked up,' said Eric. 'I am so fucking stoned right now, I have no idea how I would react. I think I would just sit here and watch the guy, like he was in a movie or something. Completely detached. In a way, it would be kind of interesting just to see what it was like.'

'Yeah, it would. Hey, you could start like a service or whatever, where you can hire someone to go to stoned people's houses and pretend to be a robber so they can see what it's like to have that happen.'

'Hey, that is such a cool idea! You would be good at that.'

'Yeah? I would?'

'Yeah, you definitely would. I could totally see that. Hey you should do it, man! Do it right now for us!'

'Yeah? Seriously? You want me to pretend I'm a robber?'

'Yeah! Come in and be all scary and stuff.'

'Okay! I'll do it.' Jamie scurried off to the kitchen and they heard the back door slam.

'This is gonna be cool,' said Eric.

Ann smiled feebly.

Several minutes went by. 'What's he waiting for?' asked Eric. Then, 'Should I pack another bowl?' Ann nodded, so he did and they had some bong hits. Eric put the bong on the coffee table and tossed the lighter down beside it. Just then, there was a loud bang from the kitchen and Jamie stormed into the room holding a garbage bag in one hand and brandishing a long carving knife in the other.

'Alright, don't pull any shit or I will cut your fucking throats! I swear to god! I want everything of value. Everything of value in