

MRS. HOOD UNLOADS

by Mike Resnick

Yes, Mrs. Grobnik, it's a new set of tiles. My son the Most Wanted Felon gave them to me. Probably they used to belong to the rabbi's wife.

He just gave them to me last week. He'd been keeping them for me for three months. Two nights a week he can sneak into the castle and annoy the King, but can he come by for dinner with his mother more than once in three months?

You think you've got _tsouris_? Well, God may ignore you from time to time, but He _hates_ me.

I don't mean to complain...but what did I ever do to deserve such a _schmendrik_ for a son? I think they must have switched babies at the hospital, I really do. 26 hours I spent in labor, and for what? You work and you slave, you try to give your son a sense of values, and then even when he stops by he gulps his food and can never stay for dessert because the army is after him.

So at least you can write and tell me how you're doing, Mr. Big Shot, I tell him. And do you know what he says to that? He says he can't write because he's illiterate. Me, I say he's just using that as an excuse.

You break the wall, Mrs. Noodleman. Can I bring anyone some tea?

Well, of course he robs from the rich, Mrs. Grobnik. I mean, what's the sense of robbing from the poor? But why does he have to rob at all? Why couldn't he have been a doctor? But he says no, he's got this calling, that God told him he has to rob from the rich and give to the poor. When I was fourteen, God told me that I was a fairy princess, but you didn't see me going out and kissing any frogs. Anyway, I tell him that maybe he's misinterpreting, that maybe God is telling him to be a banker or a real estate

broker, but he says no, his holy mission is to rob the rich and give to the poor. So I ask him why he can't at least charge the poor a ten percent handling fee, and he gives me that look, the same one I used to smack his _tuchis_ for when he was a boy.

Pong! Very good, Mrs. Katz.

No, we're happy to have you here, Mrs. Katz. I just couldn't take any more of that Mrs. Nottingham. She's so hoity-toity and walks around with her nose in the air, and acts like her boy is a lawyer instead of just a policeman. My son the criminal gives away more in a week that her son makes in a year.

You heard _what_, Mrs. Noodleman? You heard him say that he moved to Sherwood Forest because he went off to the Crusades and came back to find out he wasn't the Lord of the Manor? Well, of course he wasn't the Lord of the Manor! Was my late husband, Mr. Hood, God rest his soul, the Lord of the Manor? Are my brothers Nate and Jake the Lords of the Manor? Probably ten thousand boys came home and found they weren't Lords of the Manor -- but did _they_ go live in the forest and rob their mother's friends?

He was an apprentice blacksmith, that's what he was. He probably made up all this Lord of the Manor stuff to impress that _shikse_ Marian.

And while I'm thinking of it, what's all this _Maid_ Marian talk? She doesn't look like a maid to _me_.

Not so fast, Mrs. Noodleman. I have a flower, so I get an extra tile.

Anyway, you work and you slave, and what does it get you? Your son runs off to the forest and starts wearing a _yarmulkah_ with a feather in it, that's what.

And look who he runs around with -- a bunch of merry men! I don't know if I can bear the shame! just wish I knew what I ever did to make God hate me so much.

Thank you for your kind words, Mrs. Grobnik, but you just can't imagine what it's like. I try to raise him with proper values, and look how it all turns out -- he's dating this Marian person, and his closest friend is a priest, Friar someone-or-other.

Oh, it's not? Now his best friend is Little John? Well, I don't want to be the one to gossip, but the stable girl told me what's so little about _him_.

Chow, Mrs. Noodleman. I lost track -- whose turn is it now?

So he comes by last Thursday, and he gives me these tiles, and he says he can only stay for five minutes because the Sheriff's men are after him, and he gulps his _gefilte_ fish down,

and I notice he's looking thin, so I ask him if he's getting his greens, and he gives me that look, and he says Ma, of course I'm getting my greens, I live in a forest. So sue me, I say, better I should just sit here in the dark and never even mention that you're too skinny because you never come by for dinner unless the Sheriff's men are watching your hide-in.

Hide-out, hide-in, what's the difference, Mrs. Katz? At least _your_ son comes by for dinner every Sunday. The only time I know I'll see _my_ son is when I go to the post office, and there's his picture hanging on the wall.

Oy! You're showing four white dragons, Mrs. Noodleman! You see? I _knew_ God hated me!

And he says the next time he comes by -- if I haven't died of old age and neglect by then -- he's going to bring his gang with him. And I say not without a week's notice, and that I'm not letting this Marian person in the house, no matter what, and even if I do, she isn't allowed to use the bathroom. And he just laughs that Mr. Big Shot laugh, ho-ho-ho, like he thinks he can wrap me around his little finger. Well, I'll Mr. Big Shot him right across the mouth if he doesn't learn a little respect for his mother.

Mah Jong!

All right, so God doesn't hate me full-time, once in a while He blinks long enough for me to win a game.

By the way, what do you cook for seventy merry _goys_, anyway?

-- The End --