

Sisters

by Jack Swenson

Mimi and Nancy are sisters. They are immigrants from Vietnam. They do manicures and massage. They make a living; indeed, they do very well. They have a nice little shop on the Main Street of a suburb south of the Big City. Most but not all of their customers are women. It's the other ones—the men—who give them trouble. The men want their toenails clipped. They pay for the “special massage.” The massage is just that—a back rub. Inevitably the men are disappointed; they want more. Sometimes they get angry when they don't get what they want.

Nancy and Mimi keep a loaded .357 magnum in a drawer in the back room. If a customer gives them a lot of trouble, they open the drawer and take out the gun. The gun is heavy. The tiny women hold it in both hands. Generally, having a weapon the size of a cannon pointed at him is enough to discourage a troublesome customer. His eyes get big, and he vacates the premises. So far, the girls have never had to fire a round.

They would, though, if push came to shove. They are friendly and peaceful people. They pay their taxes; they are kind to small animals. But when they were little more than tots, they crossed the South China Sea in a tiny boat. They helped fend off pirates. They were armed then, too. Mimi shot a man between the eyes when he boarded their boat. Her father killed the others with an automatic weapon.

They are grown women now, but they are little and men are big. Most are bigger and stronger than they are, but not nearly as tough. When a man exits the back room and goes hurriedly out the door, Mimi follows and washes her hands at one of the sinks. She exchanges a glance with her sister. The women smile.

