

# The Widow Teasdale and the Ineffable Warmth of Personal Services

*by* Drew Jackson

First, I was the widow Teasdale's pizza delivery guy, the real pizza delivery guy. She slipped the money through her mail slot, told me to drop the box on her doormat and leave. Her cash. It smelled like seven-dollar-a-quart gardenia perfume and cave aged cheese—like hope overgrown with mildew. Later, after I coaxed her into opening the door to her rent-by-the-month efficiency at the Saguaro Arms, I became her soot smeared firefighter, her bedroom eyed Venezuelan landscaper, her baton thrusting motorcycle cop, all while cranking some of the finest dance hits ever recorded through my Panasonic boom box with detachable speakers. This is what I do for the women who have become too frightened to turn up at The Big Dance: I bring it, sultry and righteous, straight to them in their small rooms. I drop it right in their laps.

Today, she knows me by my knock; she won't answer the door for anyone else. "Get in quick, Sugar Pants." The unmistakable Bronx in her voice is darkened by the smoke of ten thousand Pall Malls. "This swamp cooler doesn't work for shit," she says, the loose pink skin of her neck fluttering with each harsh back-East consonant. She closes her door and my eyes grow accustomed to the high noon darkness of her living room, a darkness only made possible in this glaring desert city by the blackout curtains she ordered from the Home Shopping Network. I am the only other beating heart in the widow Teasdale's close walled world.

I slip past her and into the bathroom with my thrift store Lady Foot Locker sports bag full of dance gear. Her medicine cabinet is a shining cookie jar bursting with short-dated anti-anxiety medication: Lexapro, Cymbalta, Valium, Ativan. None of them gave

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her the legs to venture beyond the stucco walls of her rented hermitage. I swallow a couple Klonopin to get my moneymaker good and loose, and lash on the ass-less chaps that are the cornerstone of my raunchy cowpoke rig. Of course, all of the real cowboys rode out of this valley long before the Circle Ks starting popping up like mushrooms in a dung heap. Now it's a catch basin for people like me, the widow Teasdale, and our tacked together lives.

She has taken her usual place on the two-cushion loveseat. The cushion to her left is showroom new. A cloud of blue smoke wreathes her too orange hair. I cue the box to track nine, thinking, "Time to see if the widow Teasdale likes what I do with a little something from Rob Base and DJ E-Z Rock." The steroid Adonis cartel at Chippendales sure didn't. No, those breakaway pants wearing divas couldn't see past the lapsed Gold's Gym membership, the slight limp, the shy inverted nipple. Could they not see that a thing with heart is a thing of unspeakable beauty? Does passion count for nothing in their bow tied and waxed pectoral world? No, I was denied their stage, their Jolly Rancher candy colored lights, their bronzing lotions, their mustachioed *esprit de corps*. They left me to dance in sad rooms for the dollars they'll never see.

I press play. Rob Base owns my four-inch speakers: *Dunk. Duh Duh Duh*. I start the grind, the slow build up to tasteful finale of crotch feints and double bicep isolations. *It takes two*. The widow Teasdale takes in the show. *It takes two to make a thing go ri-iiight*. When our eyes meet, I see that for the first time all of the ricocheting fear has vanished from hers. Emboldened, she takes my hand in hers breaking the "look don't touch" rule of respectable outcall lap dancers everywhere. "My husband's hands, they were so strong. My Sheldon, he could make beer cans disappear in them. Yours," she says, "yours are shaking."

