

Fourth Directive Triple Classified

And then there's the miracle that a body can be pieced together from parts. After the soul's death, for instance. Or a shooting incident. Blood splattered everywhere. Ankle screws and titanium plates. Shunts. But just break a person down and build her back up, and she's ready to get back to work towards the common good.

That was a while ago, though. People around here want to think only about the distant past. The days of sippy cups and onesies. The gurgles and coos. Every new day a seemingly-smooth dance routine. They see the copper pans and coffee kettles—all the modern-day metals—and they forget that I'm the one who cleaned the drainage wounds: Nan managed the boo-boos and the no-nos and the bad, bad thoughts.

So, yes. What I'm saying is, Those Who Shall Remain Nameless think Robocop's a "toolbox." A "real 404."

I think he gives 110%. I think Robocop is everywhere. Look more carefully, up and down the block. Open the crackable bowls of bone and you'll see how many brains have been tinkered with. How many people stay consistently clocked to external commands. Watch the invisible waves of clicks and pops that barrel down on us through the air. So relentless sometimes it makes you want to yank your brains out of your head through your rebuilt nose.

For instance. Into the low-ceilinged cell of a family room: there goes a grease-fingered man. He swoons into an overstuffed lounge chair. His jaw splits pretzels, his throat guzzles bubbles, his eyes snap predictably wide to every cleavage close-up and assassination gone wrong.

Now float up the stairs, follow a song down the hall. Into the half-bath that squats right above the *ping-ping-ping* that's powered that man's skull so long—and you'll see an earlier model of me. Nan Weller, twenty years younger: no-nonsense, on her hands and knees. She whistles "Pretty Polly" to the time-keeping squeak of pink rubber gloves.

How soundly she polishes the sides of that bowl! Hopeful and naive. Stupid, maybe. It doesn't look like a genie's going to show up any time soon.

Would that miracle have happened with a commode made of gold? With

an electro-bristle spike perched on each pinky finger? Sometimes I think, *If I had concentrated more, I bet I could have found the precise location of every germ I needed to kill. . . .*

But that's silly. Anyway, it was easy back then, to find an honest day's work. One crystal-clean toilet? Sir, yes sir.

Now Past Nan empties her bubbling bucket. Soaps her hands like a surgeon before attending to the death in the kitchen. Chicken, of course. The one thing the household could agree to love.

And it's become clear to me only lately what Nan was doing back then. She thought life was good—really *good*—with just a spray and a swipe. Sprinkle, baste and pinch. Arguments exchanged in silence. Dependable subroutines.

Keep it simple, that's what they taught us. So Gene was in charge of civic funding and Past Nan policed. Together they kept the peace, united by two metal bands: a pair of tiny golden handcuffs.

ROBO-BRIDE'S PRIME DIRECTIVES

First Directive: Observe the Family Trust

Second Directive: Procreate the Innocent

Third Directive: Substantiate the Law

Shhh. They're shuffling into the dining hall. Miracle of miracles, it's going well: no hoodies, no half-hidden handheld devices, no bubbles being blown. They just grip their knives and rattle the aluminum tumblers. And look: every movement wonderfully controlled. Nobody dares anybody to take offense. Nobody has the energy to give it.

Funny. Even behind that perfect pancake makeup, you can see tiny cracks of Nan's struggle. Her thoughts winding around and around: *Why am I disappointed? They aren't thieves and druggies. The girl isn't turning tricks with every third tuba player on the marching band.*

Here's the situation. Future Nan's been breathing down my neck. So relentless sometimes I can't even say.

And in the new millennium, we're no longer naive—we're no longer stupid, are we? Robocop wasn't a story about the common good. Look more closely and you'll see: he soon forgets his general mission. His plot line twists.

Not that we can blame him. He is part human. And there are always people to be taken care of. Those who killed him, for instance, must be identified, punished. Civilly. Legally. Methodically.

So, yes. You simply have to believe in the power of positive thinking. Past Nan spent months researching features and brands. Present Nan polishes the chambers until they gleam. Future Nan will be fussy about loading each bullet berth with gold-plated care.

No surprise, really. Just another humbly-wagging tale of the American dream. Consumer supplies readily available. The underdoggedest of the bunch finally blowing everybody's mind.

C.B. Auder's work can be found in such places as *Cleaver Magazine*, *Random Sample Review*, *Jersey Devil Press*, and *3Elements Review*. Follow Aud on Twitter at [@cb_auder](#).