

## AUNT PITTI-PAT IN THE TOWER

By David Simpatico

*A MAN enters, carrying a section of the New York Times. His name is Aunt Pitti-Pat.*

### AUNT PITTI-PAT

*"Scarlet, the Yankee's are comin', the Yankee's are comin', I've got to get out of Atlanta before they burn it to the ground, those nasty Yankee devils, Oh Scarlet, I tell you I don't know what to do, I don't know what to do, I simply do not know what to do--where are my smelling salts?"*

Atlanta fell all over again in 8 seconds. Floor after floor upon floor after floor of steel and concrete and desks and chairs and memos and pictures of the kids slamming down one upon the other upon the next upon ton after ton after ton on top of the heads of old ladies and MBAs and Billy in the Grounds department picking the onion off his bagel and all the mailroom clerks and CEOs--110 floors of life slamming down onto their heads just one floor below and flattening them, exploding them, smashing their cells apart like over-ripe tomatoes caught beneath a mile-high slab of smooth concrete.

In 8 tiny seconds Frannie Riccardelli, who was in charge of all vertical movement in both towers, who ran back into the building trying to save the people caught in the elevator cars who had already died behind the closed doors, Frannie Riccardelli with the bad breath and big smile who was my friend since the third week of the fourth grade and asked me to be his Holy Roman Sponsor even though he was 2 days older than me, Frannie Riccardelli who had five kids and a wonderful wife and a huge smile, Frannie Riccardelli who couldn't be buried because there was nothing left to bury.

His teeth and eyes and tongue and fingers and ass and blood and bad breath blown to the winds, in half a heartbeat blown apart unable to resist the mile of concrete crushing down upon his head. His big toothy smile

shattered forever except for the memories and videotapes his wife will play for his five fatherless children.

Frannie Riccardelli blown apart while I watched from my fabulous thank you God Greenwich Village loft on the ninth floor facing south with the spectacular three quarter views drinking coffee on my terrace facing south and loving the view, MY view with the clear blue sky and the smell of the morning and not thinking about that plane until it explodes the perfect view from my terrace in the blink of an eye.

On the phone screaming crying shaking watching Atlanta fall in 8 seconds, the only thought left in my head "how many people did I just watch die?", screaming in my beautiful loft with the wrap-around view.

Walking around staggering stunned in the sudden quarantine of 14<sup>th</sup> street roped off and filled with speeding tanks and militia and empty ambulances and tired firemen pulling their feet behind them while the rest of us give a standing ovation on the curb and Virginia the sexy Puerto Rican grandmother who cleans my apartment in the fluorescent green stretch-pants every other week runs out with water and throws her arms around some hunky Irishman covered in dust and death, throws her arms around him and kisses him, MY HERO MY HERO.

Walking around in the gathering dust, the dust in the gentle change of wind, dust and asbestos and concrete and something else floating up from the Financial District, a scent we all recognize in our guts, something sickly, something more than dust mixed in with the smoke and concrete.

Walking around the silent Village surrounded by thousands of smiling faces, Xeroxed in black and white and color, smiling faces of the Recently Lost plastered like wallpaper onto the A&P and Ray's Original Pizza, smiling husbands and sons and sisters and lovers and daughters and cousins and fathers and mothers and Frannie Riccardelli, all lost and waiting to be found, in some hospital probably, but the hospitals are sad and empty and waiting for someone, anyone to come in--smiling faces

blown apart all lost until we breath them in through our nostrils and down into our lungs. And then we spit them up, gagging.

I can't sleep anymore. All I want to do is get a gun and kill someone. I mean that in the good way.

Oh, the Times, the Times. I hate the Times, thank God for the Times. Everyday the Times picks through the rubble with far greater success than all the rescue workers combined, picking through smashed remains for the smiling faces, for the lives lost, finds them and reduces them to a smiling face and a headline. "Bronco Busting Boy Scout," "Loving Son and Broker." Today, they found Frannie Riccardelli, "Planner of Family Fun."

They left a lot out. They left out how Franny and I used to wait until the sun went down in my backyard and catch lightning bugs, how we used to think we could decode their little blinking language and understand them, caught forever in the eternal embrace of a pickle jar.

*Oh, Scarlet, Melanie, where in heavens is my sense of humor, I need my sense of--oh, here it is.*

*Looking in the newspaper.*

Why look, Katie Couric is getting an 80 million dollar raise, and I can't find my Metrocard. Katie stayed up 48 hours straight. So did her hairdresser. How much did he get?

Perhaps I'd feel more secure if I read the full story, and not just the headlines on the way to the subway.

How do I prepare for BioTerrorist attacks? How much Vicks Vaporub will I really need?

I thought I was lucky because I got through AIDS in one piece, but now I have to worry about Dirty Bombs in Times Square, just when my career is taking off. Everyone's a critic.

I bought a cell phone when we started bombing Kuwait, I mean Afghanistan.

Personally, I liked the theme music for the Gulf War better.

The night I became one with my Pitti-Pat Within—you remember PittiPat, Scarlet O'Hara's hysterical, snuff-swilling paranoid aunt with the sausage curls—anyway, I remember sitting in front of my television when the new kid on the block interrupted all programming, and stood in front of our American Flag, and said, Okay, come on now everybody, I won the election, that's all there is to it, let's eat. He interrupted all Friday night programming, including Buffy. And I thought for sure there would be a riot in the streets, I mean when was the last time we had our very own coup d'etat?

I was like a bird trapped inside a closet, bouncing off walls, flapping for cover, grasping at headlines or snippets or soundbytes for some refuge from my fluttering paranoia and the revolution going on outside my door--*Atlanta is burning, where are my smelling salts?*

But there was no revolution. No reaction. No crowds breaking glass and stealing jeans and torching cars. Nothing.

And don't you know that Good Ol' Boy got just what he wanted, like a spoiled little rich kid entitled to something he wants simply because he wants it. Daddy's little boy with the dime store eyes. Daddy's little boy. I didn't vote for him. I'd fuck him, but I wouldn't vote for him.

I remember thinking when we invaded Kuwait, I don't even like those people. They'd kill me just because of who I choose to sleep with. Like I said, everyone's a critic.

I guess someone somewhere must think that this whole thing was a good idea. I wish I could understand that, I truly do. Like David and Goliath. I mean, I guess David got tired of hiding in his stinking little caves while the Giant stomped around the villages, tired of watching his children play hopscotch with land mines and having his tongue ripped out and fingers cut off and vanishing with muffled screams into the night while the Giant gives a helping hand and blind eye to the loss of lives and fingers and tongues and gouged eye sockets, supporting regimes

and training fanatics who run riot until they bump into David practicing his aim, David who finally pokes his brown little head out of the cave and hits a goddamn bullseye.

Why did they have to do this. I like cab drivers. I tip well, don't I? I'm a nice person, right? Haven't I always been fair and just? Hasn't this country always been fair and just, hasn't it always taken care of her own? Just look at the Black thing. Okay, it kind of started on the wrong foot, but then we took care of it, right?

My grandfather came over on a boat, too, and he didn't get a mule. You'd think they'd be a little nicer, after all we've done.

Leslie Uggams is nice. Bill Cosby is nice. Why can't we all just get along?

I'm not a racist, I'm an American. Those people over there hiding in the caves, they're the racists, they're the ones who hate us because of our American lifestyle, our freedom, our HBO, especially Sunday nights. I mean, right? Acting like animals, like savages, like goddamn, like you know, like goddamn sand niggers, I'm sorry but it's the truth.

And Sand Niggers are just Niggers in sheets. Niggers and Sand Niggers. What is the difference between a Nigger and a Sand Nigger?

Maybe there is no difference. Maybe all niggers are the same. Maybe all niggers have the same chip on their shoulder about the "so-called" white man, the imperialist, the terrorist.

Oh my God, I didn't mean that, I'm not a racist, what am I saying, I like people, I like people, I like people, I like people, I like people, I like people. I'm so confused.

*Atlanta is burning. The sky is falling. Where are my smelling salts?*

Frannie Riccardelli. Planner of Family Fun.

All that fire, burning. Atlanta, Afghanistan, Wall Street, Kuwait. They all look the same. Those poor little children hiding in the hills, in the caves. Under desks. Running down the fire stairs. Roasting, trapped in elevators 94 stories high. Heroes sacrificing their lives smashed under concrete as they try to save the dead. They all look the same.

I shouldn't think too much. Stick to the headlines. Because otherwise I start to think too much.

I start to think too much about *why Atlanta is burning*. And why David hates Goliath. And why Kuwait and Afghanistan sound the same. And why it all seems to be about the deed to the Holy Land and stepping into 5,000 year old shit and the millennium hanging over our heads like the Sword of Damocles with a nuclear warhead and the Second Coming and Golden Parachutes and the Battle of Armageddon and Economic Globalization and the fall of Enron and the Oil concerns in the Middle East and Dick Cheney on the Board and will the real AntiChrist please stand up with the Sky falling down upon our heads and the world changing forever in 8 seconds and Frannie Riccardelli's bad breath.

*He picks up an empty pickle.*

I remember the night the wind changed, the night the air was filled with concrete and dust and death, I ran inside and found an old pickle jar. I took the jar out on my terrace, into the cloud of air swirling with the souls of the dead. I opened the jar and caught the air, like lightning bugs. I scooped as much air as the jar could hold, all the dust and death and pain and breath and hopes and dreams floating in the dusk. Scooped them into the jar so I could always have them. So I could always remember.

*He unscrews the jar, puts his face in it and breathes in deeply.*

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Smelling salts. They clear the head. They make you think.