



# Dinner at the Bobbits. You Are Invited!

by Shekhar Deshpande

Man bites dog! That's news for you. In the abject, pathetic and senseless sea of media menagerie, you can find an extension of your trash can. The garbage is everywhere. But hold on to it. Even that garbage is meaningful! It says a lot about what we process and can't process.

When a woman used a kitchen knife to achieve a penile dismemberment of her wedded husband, the media scene exploded. The tabloids, the network news shows, the Howard Sterns, the Geraldo Rivas and the Hard Copies of the entertainment industry just couldn't hold it. The woman has shown she is capable of making wise decisions, but she erred in one area. She should have waited till the sweeps weeks were over (the time when radio and TV organizations measure and accumulate ratings). She fed the frenzy almost unwittingly.

Speaking of wit, the episode generated a lot of it. It made poets out of passive couch potatoes. The event brought out all the talents of satirists, parodists, and humorists. Now we know, the talents for humor are waiting in the wing to make life interesting. The problem is that an event like

this rarely comes along.

But if you listened closely, there was some other sound, the sound of fear. It had gripped the consciousness of a culture where things are hard to get to the head. Usually, consciousness stops rising below the waist line. The sound was that of castration of a patriarchy. All of a sudden, everyone could find a story they could identify with. The Somalian misery didn't do it, the Bosnian massacre didn't achieve it, but one important organ was reduced to its pure excretory functions and the whole culture paid attention to it.

That explains why so much coverage was accorded to a domestic dispute. When poverty and misery are issues of individual lives alone, it is easier to accept stories of mayhem on the streets (or even on subway trains). But when you are talking about violence to a represen-

tative male sexual outgrowth, the issues of individual privacy goes out of the window. Now it is everybody's problem. What if it is me? Oh, God, I'm glad it isn't me!

The infantile cries of the castration were hitting hard on the realities of existence. People were searching for jokes on late night shows and morning rantings, because the event opened up so many possibilities that it was scary. Just beer wasn't enough. We needed some humor coated social narcotic to forget the possibilities this might generate on the "other side."

The "other side" takes in a lot of abuse, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence on a daily basis. It is such an ordinary part of our lives that it has ceased to become news. How do you think police would respond if given a choice between a penile elimination and sustained wife-beating that has blood on the floor? The women have no equivalent, because what is being done to them regularly has become an accepted norm of culture. If it were not to happen, that is if women were not abused daily, that would become news. At such a time, I suspect, the Bobbits of the world will provide all the thrills. Let's hope what Lorena Bobbit did, one day will not become news. Then, Man will bite dog every day.

