

Fingernailbiter

It was quite sudden, really, when the religions of the world unanimously decided that it was morally wrong to bite one's fingernails. Almost immediately, countries around the planet followed suit by passing laws against it. Within a few short months, fingernail clipper sales skyrocketed. For the first time, their manufacturers took an active role; lobbying their respective governments to create even stricter laws to prevent this vulgar, animal grooming display. Law enforcement officials everywhere soon learned to spot the telltale remnants. Those who broke the law received swift justice, while those who didn't, including, of course, those who used to, proudly proclaimed the sanitary and moral virtues of slobber-free fingers. But it wasn't a perfect solution. Soon, a rogue aspect moved underground, biting their nails fiendishly in attics, toilet stalls, and late at night, in their beds. Others formed secret, underground fingernail-biting fraternities, espousing the virtues of chewing that tasty, thin cartilage covering the dorsal tip of each finger. Some of the most deviant of these went so far as to suggest its members sample the forbidden toenail as an added thrill.

Occasionally, people read in the paper about a prominent citizen caught in the act. Children, after a lecture from the school psychologist, or seeing the Surgeon General on TV, began to wonder how many of their teachers and classmates were "fingernailbiters" -- this becoming a favorite playground chide. Religious groups reacted quickly to such a dismal prospect as losing their members to "sins of the nails." Bible passages were re-interpreted. Preachers around the world proclaimed, "Jesus never bit *His* nails." Congregations were mortified, however, when they discovered it was a sin to even *think* about biting one's nails. Congregants began to wonder if the pastor had read their minds. "It's sick," they proclaimed, hoping their enthusiasm would convince their friends. "I agree," their friends replied, lest they, too, be found out.

Eventually, the word got back to the closet cases. Individuals and organizations alike discovered their favorite pastime had not only been dubbed "illegal," but "perverted" as well. This came as a great disappointment to the fingernailbiters, but as time went on, some learned to wear the label, holding their heads in shame—no longer a simple outlaw, but a morally tainted outlaw to boot. From this group grew a very small segment for whom the title "pervert" became too weighty a cross to bear. Believing themselves insane, some took to the streets, biting their nails in public places, leaving partially-chewed nail bits on park benches, or biting the nails of unwitting passersby.

But what of the law-abiding citizens, you ask. And my answer: a heartfelt "Ah. . .," for therein, my story lies. These people got along quite well. They worked, played, ate, and slept in a fashion very similar to the manner these things were accomplished before nailbiting had become insane. They tried to put it out of their minds, however. They never dared speak of biting their nails. At the occasional dinner party, the phrase, "Don't you ever think about how fun it would be?" was met with stern gazes of disapproval. "Of course not," they would say, a single eyebrow suspiciously raised. Literary works promoting nailbiting were summarily banned, the mere mentioning of the pastime thought to cause in people wild, uncontrollable orgies of frenzied fingertip chomping. Of course there remained, among the law-abiders, a smidgen of people who, accepting the sanitary dangers of *literal* fingernail biting, reveled in the thought, if not the act of munching one's metacarpals. Finding pointless the self-imposed attempt to put the forbidden thought out of their heads (whatever you do, don't think about a blue boat) these few courageous spirits chose instead to talk or write at length about it, finding the exercise strangely liberating, under the belief that thoughts should be free to think whatever they want.

-- Troy Carlyle