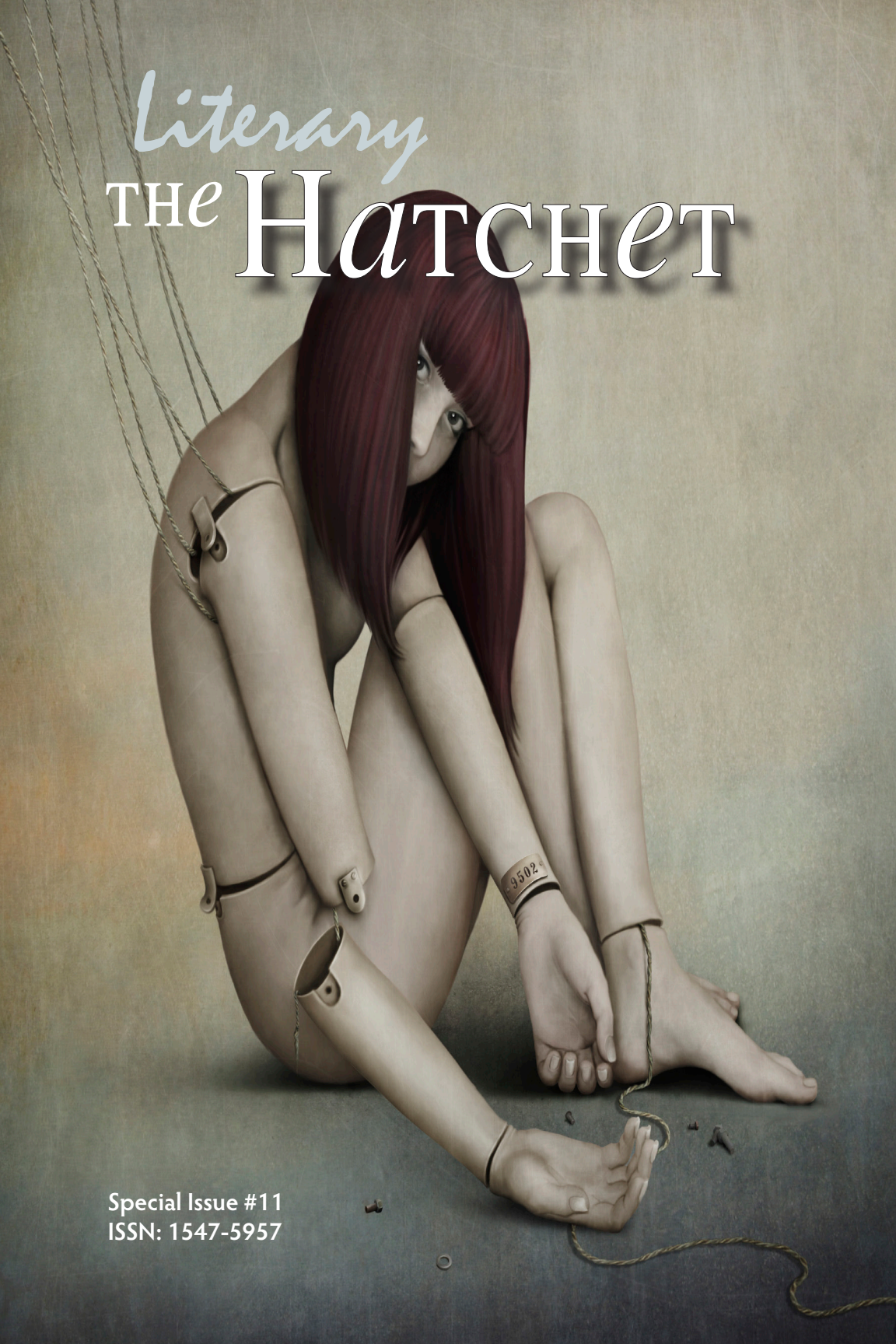


Literary
THE HATCHET

A woman with long, straight, vibrant red hair is the central figure. She is sitting on a dark, textured floor, leaning forward with her head resting on her hands. She is bound with thick, light-colored ropes. The ropes are attached to metal cuffs on her wrists and ankles. One cuff on her right wrist has the number '3502' printed on it. She is wearing a black bikini top and bottom. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall mood is somber and captive.

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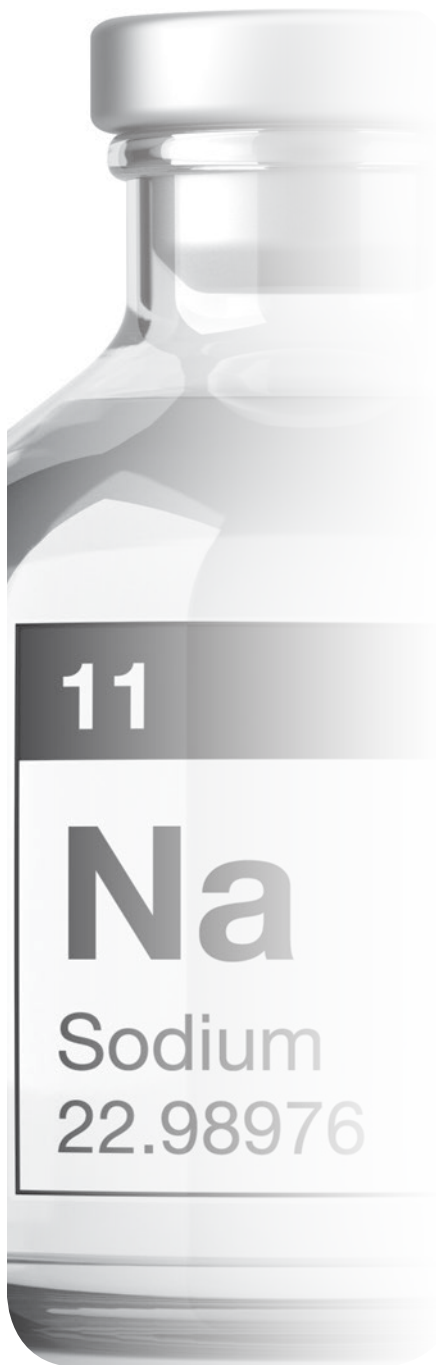
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We really would love to read your work.

Stefani Koorey
Editor and Publisher

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AKONA

“What have you done with my baby?” she yelled. Her spittle flew and crash-landed on my cheek. Reflex made me blink while little balls of tears formed in Amber’s eyes.

“I don’t know. She was there one minute and gone the next,” I replied with my palms raised as if she held me at gunpoint. My neck burned from the intense Peruvian sun as Amber continued to verbally assault me.

“How could you leave her? She’s just a toddler!”

“I was right there behind that tree.” I pointed at one of many palmettos in the area. “And I needed a wee so badly!” A pathetic attempt at defending myself, I know.

We had met at Greenwich University and dated for three months. Amber had a baby daughter, Akona, from a previous relationship. I hated kids and knew nothing about them. I didn’t want to learn either.

She invited me to Peru as a part of her Conservation & Biodiversity study. We decided to turn it into a mini holiday, taking Akona with us. It was Amber’s idea, by the way, not mine.

“You irresponsible bastard, I should’ve never trusted you with her!”

Amber had been out on a lecture that morning so we scheduled a picnic for that same afternoon. I got the basket ready and she agreed to meet us by the Ucayali River. I had unrolled a little blanket on a small patch of clean grass and left Akona

by erik hofstatter

to play on it—only for a few minutes—as I relieved myself nearby. It never occurred to me that this was dangerous, that something might happen to her.

Was she snatched by someone?

We were surrounded by a tribe of simpletons. Why would they take her? Shit, maybe they were a cannibalistic tribe.

“She probably just crawled off,” I weakly offered. Amber stared at me with her mouth hanging open.

“Don’t worry. I’ll find her. I’m sure she’s around here somewhere,” I said.

“Akona! Akona!” I called out, half-expecting her to emerge from the bushes wagging her butt with a stick in her mouth.

I dove into the nearest bush, frantically searching for the baby girl. Nothing. I plunged into the next one but again found nothing.

I heard soft rustling behind me.

“Amber! She’s here behind these plants.” I celebrated prematurely.

I spread the leaves apart and tripped over something, landing face first into the bush. Then I gasped. The head of an enormous Eunectes Murinus or the green Anaconda as it’s more commonly known, was staring right at me. I must’ve tripped over its body.

It was huge! But that’s not what shocked me. The reptile was in the middle of devouring Akona. Only her tiny feet could be seen dangling from its unhinged jaw.

We both screamed.

[short story]

The Very Last Expression of Love

by andrew g. bennett

On a chilly autumn night, the swirling gusts of the strong north-easterly caused the old fibro house to creak and groan as if it were a front-line bunker under enemy siege. For Alfred Parsons, it was a frightening experience. The wind howled the certain truth of the frailty of human existence—a fear that often dwells within us all.

Alfred Parsons pulled back the thick, yellow curtain on his side-window and gazed into the dull blackness of the night. A branch scratched against the glass from the force of the wind as outside in the darkness tall garden trees bent in unison in apparent pain. The window was smeared with dust and grime and Alfred wondered why his wife Susan had not cleaned it. He then remembered that Susan no longer performed any tasks. Even the items of knitting she once so cherished remained unfinished—the untouched, virgin bundles of wool wasted. As Alfred continued to view the suffering trees, he felt their anguish. Just like Susan they were vulnerable to nature’s callous disregard. If tonight’s high wind chose to prematurely end those tall plant’s long lives they would be unable to resist that inevitable misfortune, and if they were destined to be ripped from the ground they might just take Alfred and his house with them.

Billy was not in the house tonight and apart from the hours Alfred had spent gardening that day, time seemed to pass slowly. There had been no company to break his solitary isolation and since he had now retired from work there was not even his job at the museum to keep him occupied. Alfred missed Billy when he did

not visit, but he never complained. Billy was his own man and Alfred could not expect his one and only friend to share his burden. No, Billy was the one who chose the nights when he would visit Alfred. That was the way of the world—the way it had to be. A thought passed through Alfred’s mind. He was sure that somewhere out in the vast black night someone wished him ill. He dropped the heavy curtain from his grasp and turned and walked toward the long staircase. He switched off the parlour light and slowly climbed the stairs.

Crack! Alfred Parson’s arthritic left knee screamed its complaint as he reached the seventeenth stair. He grimaced. Why wasn’t Susan here when he needed her? He clenched his fist beside his painful knee and forced his vision of her from his mind. He knew she would never return.

Someone, somewhere out there wishes me ill . . .

That night in his solitary bed, Alfred dreamed of bundles of wool enclosing him. They twisted around his face and eyes as the outside wind howled its severe threats and, as if it were alive, the woollen fabric held him firm and threatened to suffocate him. In his restless slumber, a tortured soul screamed out to him in the night and in his dream Susan now stood before him. Susan chatted freely, just as she had done in the past:

“If one does their best to treat others with respect, their lives will be so much better. But if one lives their life in oneness and appraises others with selfish, animal disdain, the consequences for their actions will be more than they can bear.”

Alfred tried to block his ears from the sound of her strong voice. The mind plays tricks. It plays tricks when you least expect.

The Susan of his dream continued her sermon:

“The world as a whole, my dear, is lazy, and the stars are but a reflection of the bright nothingness that springs from tiny minds. I am afraid that neither eternal optimism nor all-consuming love can turn the tide of humankind’s inevitable, wilful discontent . . .”

“Shut up!” Alfred yelled. He instantly awoke and sat bolt-upright in his bed. It had simply been a nightmare—just another troubled dream of his departed wife. “You’re not real,” he spoke loudly, but he knew he had addressed the statement to himself.

“We are trapped within what we know and think we know,” he imagined his wife to say. “The small irony may be that we will never know what we should have known.”

Alfred placed the palm of his hand on his temple and squeezed hard against it. Madness—it was madness unexplainable. Apart from Billy’s occasional visits, Alfred had now been alone in the house for a full six months. Susan would not be coming back—he knew that for certain, but he still missed her thin, athletic body, her cheerful smile, her dutiful countenance. That was before the cancer wreaked its havoc upon her and reduced her slim frame to skin and bone—before the disease creased her face to block her lovely smile—before her awful pain and his ultimate loss.

Alfred lowered himself back down upon his bed and gazed at the ornate ceiling.

He imagined himself lying in the shallow hole in his front yard he had dug several weeks before. On those occasions, he would allow a light covering of earth to rest upon his body and face and only his eyes would be free from soil as he watched the night sky. He would examine the stars from this position for hours and, in a macabre way, it tended to relax him. It gave him an insight of how his late wife would possibly have felt if she had been able to experience her own grave, and it reassured him to know that burial was not really as cruel a departure from the living world as it somehow seemed.

Tonight, however, was far too cold and windy for such an adventure of extravagance and, in any case, Billy had told him to no longer do such things. Billy seemed to know what was best for Alfred—that was the way of the world, but there was still one of Billy's demands that Alfred would not concede to, for that request Alfred refused to oblige.

The next day, the high wind had died down and Alfred occupied himself by repairing the damage it had caused to his garden. He had a fleeting urge to visit his basement but he remembered how Billy had made him promise not to spend so much time there. Alfred hoped Billy would come to his home that night and in expectation of such a visit he decorated the kitchen table with colourful flowers he picked fresh from his garden. With the strong possibility of Billy's future company, a smile grew upon Alfred's face. He somehow knew his wish would be granted and so he was not surprised when later that night the young man sat across from him at the kitchen table.

Near the two men, beside the fresh flowers, a folded, hinged chess board lay to one side of the table. Thirty-two chess pieces sat in a jumbled pile behind the folded board. The respective metallic kings that stood face-to-face in coincidental alignment resembled medieval rulers who craved battle.

"Shall we play tonight?" Billy asked with a smile.

Alfred shook his head.

"What is the point, Billy? I always win."

Billy's smile widened.

"But I might be lucky tonight."

"I doubt it," said Alfred, again shaking his head. "Billy, I'm the much better player."

Billy tempted Alfred by opening the chess board which he lay on the table space between them.

"Oh, but I'm sure I will win one night."

Reluctantly, but carefully, Alfred placed the metallic chess pieces on the wooden board in their appropriate order. He asked his younger companion, "Is there a wager on this game?"

Billy nodded.

"Yes. It's the same one as always. I shall be white." He turned the board so that the white pieces stood immediately before him and then moved the white king's pawn two squares forward. He asked, "I hope you have not been in the basement today?"

Alfred shook his head silently. He sighed deeply before countering Billy's move with his black king's pawn, and then raised his head to speak. "Billy, if you win I'll do as you ask. But, if you lose, you must promise to visit me more often."

As the match progressed, Alfred recognised Billy's game to be a good one. The two men exchanged queens early and Billy then swapped a bishop for a knight, and then a rook for its opposing rook. Alfred had never known Billy to follow such a bold strategy.

"Your game is different tonight," he said. "You seem keen to end the match quickly."

Billy fixed his small, black eyes on Alfred and spoke softly.

"The pieces should die early . . . just like death must eventually claim the ones who surround you."

Alfred nervously scratched his forehead with the fingers of his left hand. He breathed deeply and rapidly exhaled.

"It's so unfair," he said. "My wife should not have died before me." He closed his eyes. "She was so much younger."

Billy continued to view his opponent with his coal-black eyes. He spoke softly, but intently. "Cancer runs in your wife's family."

Alfred bowed his head.

"Yes, I know that now."

The game continued and more pieces were exchanged until the battle quickly reached its climax. Only Alfred's black rook was left to protect his insecure king from Billy's aggressive white knight and remaining dominate rook. Alfred thought twenty moves ahead and saw the inevitable futility of his position. He reached forward and carefully laid his king on the board—an indication he had now relinquished his tenuous hold on survival. He continued to hold the fallen monarch between his left hand's thumb and forefinger and ran the fingers of his other hand through his grey hair.

"What do you require me to do?" he asked forlornly.

Billy smiled lightly.

"You know what you must do."

Alfred continued to fiddle with the deposed black king which remained in the tips of his fingers.

"Must I, Billy?"

"Yes," Billy softly replied, "only then will the game be finally over."

When Billy departed, Alfred left for the basement. He wondered if Billy would ever return. Alfred considered that once the action Billy had requested was finally performed it was unlikely he would ever see him again. Billy, after all, was a young, spirited man. What time could he now realistically devote to his old father? No, Alfred would need to learn to manage without the company of his only son.

Alfred descended the concrete basement stairs and braced himself for the stale, musty smell he knew he would encounter within that small, dark room, but when he opened the door and stepped inside the odour was not as over-powering as he had previously remembered. He activated the light and instantly saw the figure

which rested against the concrete wall. She was, of course, in the same position he had left her six months before. Susan's perfectly embalmed body had been prepared with such a labour of love that she almost seemed alive. There was no evidence of any pain in her face from the cruel disease which had prematurely claimed her life. In fact, the glass eyes Alfred had affixed in her pale face seemed to sparkle with an eternal spirit.

He walked to his wife and spoke in a soft tone. "I wanted to keep you with me forever, my dear, but tonight I have finally lost the battle. Billy tells me I must part with you, and so part with you I shall."

He carefully lifted the body of his dead wife in his arms and carried her out of the basement and up the concrete stairs. He moved her through the house, only stopping briefly to adjust his grip on her corpse. Her body was light, but understandably so. After the exhausting embalming process Alfred had performed from his knowledge of Egyptology it was quite understandable. His life-work in the museum had provided him with the necessary skills to perform such a feat.

Alfred carried his late wife to the front yard and gently laid her body in the shallow grave he had dug several weeks before. After he picked some daisies from his garden and placed them about Susan's head as a colourful wreath, he performed a small ceremony.

His forefinger solemnly worked its way down and across his chest as he whispered to his dead wife, "I'm sorry how I treated you. I now know what I should have known."

He stood beside her and watched her for a time before he finally covered her body with earth and consigned her to the ground. Alfred would miss her, but perhaps it was fitting that Susan now lay in the earth beside the grave of her only son. Billy had passed away from his cancer just one year before Susan. It had been she who insisted that Alfred bury their son instead of keeping his embalmed body in the basement—a wish Alfred had formerly desired. He had missed Billy just as much as he now missed Susan.

Alfred returned to the house and walked to the side-window to view Susan's fresh grave. The wind tonight was just a gentle breeze and it now seemed that no one any longer wished him ill. He suddenly heard a soft noise behind him and rapidly turned his head to view its source. His worried expression quickly turned to a smile when he saw the two familiar guests who now resided at his kitchen table: one was a young man who had visited him regularly of late; the other, a woman who now looked lovelier than he could ever remember.



Ave de Nossa Senhora

When Herod felt threatened
by the newborn king of the Jews,
an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream
and told him to flee to Egypt
with Mary and the child.
A little black and yellow wagtail,
Ave de Nossa Senhora,
followed behind
and swept away their footprints.

My Mom used to say that when we die
a little bird returns our souls to God.
So when I found a black and yellow
Goldfinch feather
the morning after we buried her,
it was a sign to me
that Mama was safe
and all was as it should be.

—ada jill schneider

[short story]

HAIKU HAMMER

by barry charman

“Talk me through it.”

“Well, she cut his head into five pieces, his torso into seven, and his legs into five more.”

The detective nodded. “Sure it was a woman?”

“That’s what the wounds tell me.”

Carson nodded again. “She’s a goddamn poet.”

The pathologist sneered. “It’s expressionist nonsense.”

“Isn’t that all murder is?” Carson stuck a cigarette in his mouth and watched as the other man scowled.

“You can’t smoke that in here.”

Carson spat it out. “See, rules are killing us, throttling us with what used to be life.”

The pathologist was skittish at the best of times, and the turn in conversation unnerved him. “Just stop her,” he muttered, as he awkwardly stepped past the detective and left.

Carson looked down at the man on the slab and counted the pieces again.

She’d made a statement. It was primal.

She’d made the pieces with a hammer. And she hadn’t made it easy on herself. He admired her for that. How long had it taken her, smacking away until the act formed the perfect shape? His hand stretched out, and he gently nudged two pieces of brain together, until he thought it looked like they were kissing.

He didn’t know much about art, but he knew what he liked.

It was a month before she struck again. Carson had worked the case pretty much alone, so he got the call first.

He found the body banged up in a motel bathroom. The body was slumped half out of the bathtub, a mosaic of bruises beginning to form on the man's temple. Carson crouched down to study his skin. The mottling palette she'd used was stunning. His face was a crimson canvas, a river of violent violet. Breathing deeply, Carson straightened and took a moment.

Two guys were carefully putting on white overalls outside. They were waiting for him to finish his initial examination. The first thing he saw was that the dead guy had started to write a name on the floor in blood.

Sloppy job, he thought.

Carson balled up some tissues and wiped out the name. Then he threw the tissues in the toilet and flushed them. She'd hurried this time, made mistakes. Carson's heart hurt for her. Apparently a cleaner had been knocking on the door on and off all day.

The canvas had been contaminated.

Carson peered into the sink and saw a strand of red hair in the basin. He tutted. He wondered how she'd felt, scrabbling her things together, deciding to get out before the job was done. She must have been very upset. She must have felt so dejected.

Carson's hands made fists.

When he was finished, he waved in the two men from forensics. Then he went to the motel's reception and got talking to the manager. There were no cameras, which made Carson breathe easy.

The cleaner gave him a description, but she was easily confused. After talking to him for a few minutes, she wasn't sure what she knew anymore.

Later, while everyone else was busy with the body, Carson went off for a smoke. He stood in the car park and watched the sunset. He thought of her way with crimson, and smiled.

The diner was ugly. It was a seventies throwback that no one had ever loved enough to renovate. The tables were a sick yellow, and the windows had grease on both sides. Carson sat at a booth and motioned for the waitress.

All week he'd been staring at crime scene photos, absorbing the flourishes. Her details, her signatures.

"Can I take your order, hon?"

"Rachel, isn't it?"

She hesitated, but then she must have remembered the badge pinned to her tunic. "That's right."

Beneath her white cardboard cap, was a warm hint of red.

"Let's go outside."

She narrowed her eyes, "Excuse me?"

"You don't want us to talk about Buddy here, do you?"

She didn't say anything. She didn't say anything as she took off her apron and her hat, and let them slip out of her fingers. She didn't say anything as she followed him out to the car and got in the passenger side. She didn't say anything until he got behind the wheel. Then words tumbled out of her. Her voice shook and trembled. Her face turned red, and her hands began shaking.

"I didn't mean to do it," she was saying, "but Buddy hurt me, and so did the others. I just wanted to stop being afraid, I wanted to hurt them so bad. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry . . ."

Her face fell in her hands, and her whole body shook with violent sobs.

Carson admired her distress for a moment, and then patted her on the shoulder. "It's all right kid; I love your stuff."

She looked up at him, confused. Snot bubbles popped around her nose. She looked like a child.

"You're amazing," he said. "And this act is gold. All the hysteria and the guilt; honestly, I think you're great."

She just stared at him.

"It's okay, though, you're an artist. I can see that. I get that even if the world doesn't. I just wanted you to know, I've got your back, hon." He smiled, then reached over and patted her shoulder again, wincing slightly as he leaned back and thought about his fawning behaviour.

She watched his hand as it tapped her and then returned to his side. She looked stunned. "What?"

Carson wound down a window and fumbled for a cigarette. "Do you smoke?"

"I don't understand . . ." Her hands were clenching at her dress; they were white.

Carson lit his cigarette and blew smoke out the window. "We are a dying breed, you know that? Don't you ever let anyone tell you you're not good enough. You're an innovator. And your stuff is so raw, so honest."

She didn't say anything. She looked scared.

Carson patted her knee. "Don't worry," he said again, "I'm a fan. I mean, admirer."

He talked a little more, about design and context, colour and composition, but he could see she wasn't going to go into detail with a layman like himself. So he just got her to sign a battered old autograph book.

"Is that a confession?" she asked.

He laughed, and she flinched away from the sound. When he told her she could go, she got out and stumbled back toward the diner. When he waved at her, she automatically waved back, before she put the arm down and stared at it.

The papers were calling her The Haiku Hammer. That was all him. He felt like he'd become a small part of her work.

Such hubris.

Carson smiled to himself and drove off to find another sunset.



Case of the Gastronomic Pareidoliac

I've seen the face of Jesus
on a burnt piece of toast,
Elvis from the Vegas years
dancing on a Sunday roast.

Honest Abe stares sternly
from my mocha frappuccino.
Michael Jackson moonwalks
on a steak and cheese burrito.

Deceased avatars abound
with near every meal I eat:
Einstein in my baked potato,
Marilyn on my meat.

It's all been quite a show,
with one worrisome question:
Can eating dead celebrities
lead to terminal indigestion?

—bruce boston

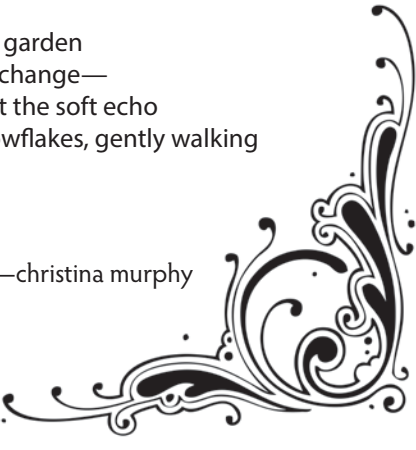
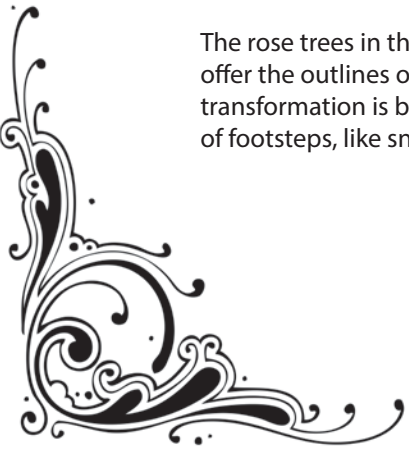


The Junctures of Time

The junctures of time are as dazzling
as clouds disappearing into space—
ephemeral gleams seeking completion
but unraveling in soundless isolation

The dagger in the smile triumphs
as defeat threads itself through
closed spaces in a vista of absence
where the full weight of an untouched
heart awakens to destinations of grace

The mirror devours the moment
and retains the reflection of infinity.
Gusts of memory bring curved lines
of color in a symmetry of grace



The rose trees in the garden
offer the outlines of change—
transformation is but the soft echo
of footsteps, like snowflakes, gently walking

—christina murphy

NO ERES LOS OTROS

You are not those competing powers tattooed in black ink
Unintended in their angled distractions. Their words, ideas
wrapped around whims and fortunes are not Yours
Your footprints haven't yet been placed, to be discovered
Instead, you're listed in the manual of those to be ignored,
rejection slips, Jesus' anguish cannot ease your suffering.
Ghandi's words cannot alleviate self-destruction. Take the stage,
Do not fear the harsh lights, nor the empty seats. It smells of
age here, but you're brimming with wonder, words will be
Written on your lips, and spun gold by the Fates.
God awaits your cries tonight, from your ten by ten room
Your pen is larger than your heart so use it, wielding the tragic end
Wrapped in a blanket of tear-stained stars, you are reckoned
Seconds are all you really have to make your next move

—cynthia pelayo

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

Even from the sidewalk, Danny could tell that the keys lying in the road belonged to a very expensive sports car. That was obvious from the ignition key, which included a multi-functional transmitter that could make the car blink its headlights, open its doors, or yell for the police.

And if he had any lingering doubts, the clincher was hanging next to the ignition key—a designer flash-drive to be inserted into the shift console along with the ignition key in order to start the engine.

Danny took a quick look around. No traffic coming. He stepped off the curb and sauntered across the street, looking at store windows, random pedestrians, the sky . . . anything but the keys glittering like pirate treasure less than fifteen feet away. After a few more strides he stooped and picked them up. They jingled like little silver bells on a Christmas tree, and his heart leapt with joy as he realized that these were the keys to a brand new Aventador—Lamborghini's top-of-the-line, 700 hp, 220 mph Roadster. Tears welled up in Danny's eyes. He had taken his first step onto the Rainbow Bridge, and he would enter into Valhalla amidst a flourish of trumpets and heavenly voices.

About damn time too! After getting fired from his fifth job in a year, Danny had stuffed all of his meager worldly goods into the back of his clapped-out 1978 Ford panel van and moved to Hollywood to become a star.

That was a year ago. He'd been living in his van on a parking lot in Venice Beach ever since, taking odd jobs and dining out at neighborhood dumpsters. He'd made a few half-assed stabs at a show-biz career—like getting a set of professional headshots and attending a few acting classes. But like most of the doomed wankers out here seeking fame and riches, he'd slammed face-first into the brutal, nut-cutting realities of Hollywood, and promptly slunk away in shameful retreat.

Yeah . . . well . . . that was then and this is now, Danny thought. All he had to do now was climb into his new Lamborghini, drive up to the front gates of the major studios, and let them know he had arrived. Technically, it would be stealing, but he was only going to take it for an extended joy ride for a few days, flash it around the studios a bit, impress the movie executives with his sudden new wealth, and

by barry price

then return it to its parking lot with no one the wiser. Yes, this was going to be a fun couple of days.

Then it dawned on him—he had the keys, but he didn't have the car. His grand vision reeled on its foundations. Where the hell was the car? Panic seized his innards. He ran all the way back to his home parking lot, scrambled to the top of his van and did a 360° search. No Lamborghinis to be seen anywhere—just rows of scruffy, beat-up nothing cars stretching off into the distance.

Then, smiling at his needless upset, he pulled out the keys and pushed the button on the remote transmitter. There was a *beep* at a far corner of the parking lot, a flashing of headlights, and two sleek Lamborghini doors rose into the air.

Gibbering with elation, Danny dashed across the lot to his prize. And there it was, finally, right in front of him; crouching low and lethal—a brand new, electric blue Lamborghini Aventador. Trembling, he reclined into the voluptuous embrace of the leather cockpit and inserted the flash drive into the console. The doors hummed down and locked into position with a solid thunk.

He pushed the start button. The massive V-12 engine sprang to life with a deep rumble, and a heavy, sensual vibration surged up through Danny's guts, causing an involuntary yelp of pleasure to erupt from his lips. He eased the Lambo out of the parking lot and headed for Laurel Canyon Boulevard.

By the time he got to the turnoff, he was hysterical, laughing and crying at the same time, crazy with the terrible speed and power of the monster straining in his grip. He was the master of all he surveyed. He was invincible. He was a god.

A Corvette cut in front of him and raced up the hill. He zapped past it at 150 mph, his heart full of savage joy. He threw his head back and howled like a werewolf.

He was still doing 150 mph in the passing lane when a tanker truck crested the rise, coming right at him. He had a nanosecond to scream, and then a thundering fireball exploded like an H-bomb, shattering windows for miles around. A few seconds later, flaming chunks of Danny came showering down over Hollywood, like stars.



[poetry]

HIDING PLACES

Some days, I look within the book of myself onto the pages I have filled, and sigh. The folds of light and dark portray scenes, some simple, and others horrific. I sit still now. I have no need to wander. Today, I find the child, who rode a battered bike miles to hide within the library.

sister
runs behind me –
a faded Kodak

The building was brick, shaped in the round. I see it still: I see its trim, a heavy lacquered bead-board of white; the windows, broad and high; the door that opens with the depression of a brass lever. I can smell the books and the lavender perfume of the petite, round-shouldered, librarian. There is so much color, and light. The rolling ladders rumbled as I move them to climb, reaching for the jewel-colored books.

There were many of us there most Saturday mornings, girls in hiding. I never thought to wonder why. In pigtails, ponytails, and raucous curls: we would sit upon the floor within the stacks, our own piles of 'get-a-ways' in front of us. I loved Nancy Drew. I imagined her leading the boys into an attic, where blue-black chests were piled high to solve *The Mystery of the Missing Child*.

an open diary
lays beneath her hand –
pressed violets

There were no chests in my house, no place to hide from the screams. It's horrid to be a blank-paged book in waiting. Outside and inside, there was just fear. Who would get me? What would they do? I can almost taste the hair of my ponytail.

Where did you hide? Do you hide there still?

—deborah guzzi

It's Monday

It's Monday. I'm waiting for the doctor to call and say, "Everything went fine. We'll let you know when your husband is out of recovery and settled in his room." Only it's not Monday. It's Saturday and I'm scared I won't hear those words come Monday afternoon.

We once adopted a shaggy, white Puli from the local shelter. My husband was going to work nights, leaving me and the children alone in the house. I was scared of dogs but this one melted me when he offered his paw. "A herding dog, loyal and protective," according to *World Book*. For two nights, he slept curled up on the braided rug near our front door and I felt secure.

Following the rules of the shelter, we took our shaggy bundle of dog to a vet to be neutered. The next morning, the vet called. "We are sorry, very sorry, but your dog died on the operating table. There was nothing we could do to save him."

—ada jill schneider

The Crying Light

by bruce memblatt

Adam picked up the second jar on the basement shelf, wiped it off, and slipped the small sliver of an insect into the glass making sure to shut it tight.

Upstairs, about now, Nora would be getting dinner on the table humming that strange tune.

Sun almost down, melting through the kitchen windows in one last glorious blaze, he would take the trash out and wait for her to call him to the table, while he thought about anything but that one thing.

He stood by the edge of the driveway, warm air surrounding him like a cocoon. He tossed the garbage bag into the can, secured the lid and peered out over the radiant sky. The moon, white and raw as bone, readied to replace the sun; another night in paradise would soon come pissing down on him.

Everything was as it always had been lately.

Nora cried, "Adam!" and his eyes jumped away from the sky.

He walked back to the porch, slipped through the screen door and joined her at the table. She didn't have to call him more than once. He was half-starved and forever hungry for attention.

But he'd get none.

They sat and chewed in silence. Nora had continued her new tradition of dimming the lights and lighting candles at suppertime. She had been dimming the lights everywhere lately. The kitchen was stark with shadows

More silence.

He'd try. "The lamb chops are nice tonight, Nora."

"Thanks, Adam," she said cautiously, bringing her wineglass to her lips.

"I love how classy dinner has become lately."

"I just can't stand the bright light in this kitchen anymore. It gives me such a pounding headache."

Straining, she rubbed her forehead.

And with that they fell into silence again, chewing and sipping and hoping dinner would end before someone said something stupid.

And then Adam said, "I've just about got that jar of fireflies ready for little Brian. I have to call your sister and let her know I'm bringing them over soon enough. As you know, fireflies have a very brief lifespan."

It was too late; the words had escaped his lips before he could put the brakes on.

Her hands began to shake. "Adam, I just can't take anymore; I need to leave the kitchen."

"I'm sorry, Nora!" He had to be the dumbest man in town, if not in the world. How could he mix children and short life spans in the same breath to her now?

She stood. Her trembling shadow fell over the table. "It's okay; you take that jar of fireflies over to little Brian before they die just like . . ." She put her fingers in her lips and bit down on them like a child; then tears rained down her face. She said, "Just like . . ."

Adam saw the strange look come to her eyes, and then he heard her say, "Can you hear him, Adam, can you hear him?"

"Hear who?"

"You know who!" She shrieked and then she stormed out of the kitchen.

Adam listened to her footsteps as she ran up the stairs. He had been through this before. Of course, he knew who. Another night had begun. Welcome to the nightmare.

The bedroom door slammed. He suffered the pain in his belly that never completely went away. What about me? I hurt too.

Adam took a deep breath, and then he ran down to the basement. A moment later he returned, the jar of fireflies cupped in his hands. He set it down on the coffee table in the living room. Then he sat on the couch and stared at the phosphorescent bottle.

The world still turned. Life went on. Light continued, no matter how many bulbs Nora dimmed. He watched the small creatures shimmer and jump around in the glass quietly illuminating the darkened living room. He could almost forget—almost, that is.

Then he wondered if she'd ever come back to him like she used to be.

He picked up the jar and held it near his eyes. Light flashed across his face. In a few moments he'd call her sister and tell her the jar was ready for the boy. Then he started to imagine what life would have been like if his boy still . . .

Suddenly he heard Nora coming down the stairs. He rushed to place the jar back on the table. His eyes glued to her silhouette. She was still beautiful. She would always be beautiful.

Then her voice veered into the dark room, "Can you hear him crying, Adam? Our baby is crying. We must comfort him. Please, I can't bear to hear him cry."

Not knowing what to say, as he never truly did, he stood from the couch and began to move toward the stairs. The jar on the table behind him emanating its soft light seemed strangely at home, like it had always been there.

He said, "I'm sorry, Nora, that you're going through this."

"But, we both are! He's your child too. Can't you hear him?"

"No, Nora," he said, and then he heard her shoes come pounding, flying down the remaining steps. "He's not here, Nora. You aren't hearing anything but the echo of your broken heart."

He tried to pull away but he wasn't fast enough to escape the cold slap of her hand across his cheek.

This was his life now—a series of cold slaps and dark rooms. He wondered if either one of them would ever crawl out of the past. When she first slapped him, just a few weeks ago, he got so angry inside, he thought he might even strike her back. Now he understood; the pain was too much for her. She had to do it.

"Don't say that; don't ever say that again, Adam!"

"But, Nora."

"Listen to him. Listen to our child. He needs us. He's in pain!"

Adam reached for her hand.

She pulled away.

"Nora," Adam cried, "you have to face the truth. We both have to face the fact that our baby died."

In that instant he saw the alarm that seized her eyes in all its raging pain. He could almost see her heart shattering. "No, he didn't, Adam," she said. "Listen, please, he's here! He needs us! Listen!"

"Nora, he stopped breathing in his crib."

"No!"

"Yes, Nora, remember the doctor came. There was a funeral. Your mother fainted."

"No, you're lying! No!" She cried and then she slapped him again, and she rushed for the door.

He ran his hand across his cheek out of exasperation. He had to think. He had to rethink everything. How long could things continue like this before something horrible happened? How many days? How many weeks before he forgot, before he changed too, without even realizing it—before he hit her back?

She threw the front door open and shrieked at him. "God damn you, Adam! Listen. I'm telling you he's here somewhere, and he's crying."

"Where are you going, Nora?"

"I am getting away from you, and this house, and the sound of my baby's cries because I can't take any more."

He stared at Nora as she stood in the open doorway. The moonlight was so bright it almost swallowed her. The warm night emptied into the room making it even muggier and harder to handle.

He'd try something new. "Good, go! Go! Get out of here! I'm the one who can't take any more of this darkness, this fucking tomb you've built for us!"

"I'm not kidding, Adam! I will go!"

"Good, in fact. Nora, you can't come back. I'm throwing you out of here before we destroy each other."

She stood still in the doorway. She remained silent. He could see her eyes go blank and linger over the room as if she was listening to some faraway music, lost in some distant dream.

“Did you hear what I said, Nora? You can’t come back here. Get out!”

He stepped toward the door.

“Fuck you, Adam, fuck you. I am never leaving my baby, never. Can’t you hear him call me? Please, you’ve got to hear him.”

“I can’t hear what’s not here,” Adam cried as he neared her. “He is dead, Nora, dead. I’m so sorry, but it’s the truth. And I want you to leave. I want you to leave this house and get the help you need!”

“No!” she screamed and she rushed back from the doorway, past Adam, but he grabbed her arm, and cried, “Out I say!”

She struggled and frantically pulled. Her moonlit shadow flared across the room, “Have you lost your mind, Adam? You take your hands off me.”

“Then tell me he’s not here, Nora, Tell me you can’t hear him, because he’s not here. He died. He died. Do I have to take you to his grave?”

Suddenly a sharp pain hit his groin. He felt her hand flee his grip as he keeled to the floor. *The fucking bitch. She kicked me in the balls. She fucking kicked me in the balls.*

He watched her run toward the coffee table. He watched her pick up the jar of fireflies. She held it in her hands, and then that look entered her eyes again, a concentrated gaze like she had fallen under a spell. She brought the jar to her ear. “Adam, come here and listen. I can hear his cries coming from this jar.”

A sliver of a memory of Nora cradling Billy raced through his mind.

Writhing, he wrapped his hands around his crotch, praying for the pain to subside, praying for this night to end, but she didn’t notice. She was too lost in the dream.

He slowly raised himself from the floor, and he said, “I don’t know what will become of us if this doesn’t stop soon, Nora.”

She still sat on the couch, the light-flickering jar to her ear, the faraway dream in her eyes. She whispered, “Please, come here, and listen. Adam, please.”

Grabbing at his groin, he awkwardly stepped to the couch.

He stood over Nora, catching his breath, and said, “Okay, I give up; let me listen.”

Adam held his hand out to her.

He detected a soft smile form on her lips. When was the last time he saw her smile?

Light from the jar seemed to dance in her eyes as she placed the bottle in his hand. He could feel her eyes eagerly watching him put the jar to his ear. Of course, there was no sound, no baby’s cry, but maybe he should tell her there was. Maybe he should say that, by God, he could hear it too, rather than witness the smile rip from her lips, and watch another dream die—maybe just for tonight.

Then what about tomorrow and the night after that and the next?

“Nora, I’m so sorry. There’s no sound coming from this jar; no baby’s cry.”

And with that he saw her smile jam and the anger return to her face. Her voice shrieked with the words, “Damn you, Adam! Give me the jar!”

“Nora, can’t you see? This jar of fireflies I made it for a child—your sister’s boy. You wish it was for our child instead, that I could give this jar to Billy so much so you hear his voice coming from the jar. It’s understandable because you’ve been through so much.”

“No Adam! No! It’s real, damn you. Don’t you play amateur shrink with me! Give me that jar back!”

“It’s just a jar of fireflies, that’s all. It’s just a jar of fireflies for our nephew—glass and insects—that’s all it is.”

She held her hands out, clawing, praying. “Adam, give it back to me! I can hear my baby!”

He pulled the jar out of her reach and began to walk away. “This stops right here, Nora. I’m calling your sister and taking this jar over there, now!”

“No,” she cried. She leapt from the couch and lunged at Adam.

He saw her coming. He pulled away. “Stop this, Nora!”

“No” she cried, clawing at Adam, nearly falling to the floor. Then she grabbed at his leg and pulled.

“Let go of my leg!” he cried, and he began to kick.

“Give me that jar, Adam!”

She stood and bolted for the jar. Frantically grabbing for it, she flailed trying to lurch it from his grip.

He pulled back hard. He could see the pain in her eyes, the utter loss in her soul, but he couldn’t let go—never.

“Stop it, Nora! Stop it!”

“NO!” The power of the strength in her arms surprised him, her manic-desperation exploding into rage.

The bottle slipped from their hands and crashed to the floor.

He heard the glass shatter against the wood like ice. Then he could hear in her cry sounds so deep and wrenching he shivered in grief. It was as if their child had just died all over again.

Weeping, she ran from the room. She ran up the stairs. She slammed a door.

There it was—another night of insanity.

He lay on the floor, out of breath.

Then he saw them.

Fireflies swirled across the dark room in strange shimmering movements. They jerked like stuck pinballs. Then suddenly they gathered and flew in formation—an army nearing the ceiling. Then in the air, they began to form letters. They spelled words.

His body shook as he read them.

D-A-D-D-Y H-E-L-P M-E

D-A-D-D-Y H-E-L-P M-E



Reading the Circuits of Augury

Electric sibyl.
Weaving her frenzied futures.
Sliding prophecies along the
bright-light blade of excessive information.
Meme spider in the web.
Spinning the silky futures.
Divination has always defined Cassandra.
She has always yearned to transcend
her limitless boundaries.
But her warnings are always unheeded.
The unbelievable sibyl of understanding.
Formatting her unwanted forebodings.
To be caught in your overzealous filters.

—deborah walker

[short story]

CHESS WITH SASQUATCH

by caleb warner

The reason that people had failed to find the Sasquatch, in Jonathon Rayne's not-so-humble opinion, was due to simple wilderness incompetence. These people were either crazy fanatics who treated their endeavors with an almost religious fervor, or they were outcast scientists looking to reestablish themselves. Jonathon Rayne was neither. He wouldn't take paper or video results back from his time in the Oregon bush. He wouldn't come back with gospel stories of his encounters. No, he would take back pelts for his cabin floor and heads to mount on the mantel piece.

Jonathon had begun the game in a woodsy little town called Centerville. There, in the town's least respectable bar, he met Les Banning, local guide and self-proclaimed Sasquatch Scientist, and together they trudged off into the Oregon bush in search of the ever elusive Gigantopithecus. It didn't take much convincing on Jon's part to have Banning guide him in the backcountry. Banning must have been eager to show off his knowledge to an outsider.

That had been two days ago. Now Jonathon Rayne stood crouched in the moss below an intricate weave of fallen pine trees looking at a clear track. A perfect indentation in the moss at his feet stood out thanks to the stark shadows the sun drew with its early morning angle. The track was long and narrow, the rough shape of a human foot. But placing his own foot in the track Jon could see it was at least twice the size.

"The apples are gone," Les said from somewhere behind Jon. His squawky voice hurt Jon's ears.

"Are they?" Jon asked, not caring if they were gone or not. Any animal could have taken them. He continued to examine the track, measuring it and making a quick sketch of it in his track journal. When he finished he stood up. His knees popped.



Les Banning was still looking around at the strange configuration of trees where he had left the apples. Les had called the fruit, “A peace offering.” He looked particularly pleased with himself just now, seeing that his apples were gone.

“It could have been anything. Don’t get your hopes up for something like that,” Jon said to him, his voice flat with indifference.

“No, no. I put the apples as high as I could reach,” Les said. Jon didn’t mention that a bear could reach almost twice as high as either of them could. The Sasquatch Scientist continued, “We’ve already discussed how the Bigfoot uses this area. It had to be him who took them. And did you look at that track?”

“I did.”

“And?” Les grinned through his graying blonde beard. A bit of green was stuck in his teeth. Vegetarian. Jon averted his eyes.

“It’s a big ass foot, but until I see what stood there—”

“Oh C’mon, Jonny, the evidence is overwhelming. This area is a hotspot!” Les waved his arms frantically like they would help him seem more convincing. They didn’t.

“One: Don’t call me Jonny. And two: Cut the church of Bigfoot crap. I already said I believed you. But this is all circumstantial,” Jon said, stealing a glance at the interwoven structure of trees above them. It may be circumstantial evidence, but it was still strong. Les had shown him this phenomenon yesterday when they left the apples. Over a dozen trees were broken off at the ground and interwoven tepee fashion. The apex of the structure was too tall for a person to reach without a ladder. The logs used to form the structure were also far too heavy and long for any one person to maneuver. And it looked like the structure had been here for a long time.

“Tell me again. What is this structure?” Jon asked. His eyes were scanning through the broken tree-tops trying to decipher which tree fell first.

“It’s a communication sign post,” Les said, “It’s an indicator of territory. Given the uniqueness of it, I would argue that it also represents a single dominant male. This structure could be this male’s name in whatever archaic form of communication these Great Apes use.”

“Communication? Who exactly would this thing want to communicate with?” Jon asked.

Les’s out-of-shape belly bounced with a laugh. “Other bigfoot, Mr. Rayne! These markers outline the territory, of course.”

“Of course,” Jon agreed passively. Most of what Les said was absolute garbage, though, and Jon didn’t believe it. If any of it were true then Banning should have been able to bring back conclusive evidence. He’d spent twenty years out in the Oregon backcountry for Christ’s sake. Sure the Sasquatch Scientist had some blurry videos and some clumps of hair, but no one really believed any of his claims. Banning had a presence on the internet too. Any irrefutable evidence he found would be spread across the world in less than a day. That was part of the reason Jon needed Banning. When Jon took one of the beasts down Banning’s community presence would allow the information to come easily to the surface. Banning, like

the gun Jonathon Rayne had hidden in his backpack, was just a tool.

Now the semblance of a plan began to form in Jonathon's head. "Alright," he said, turning to Les, "I need to spend the night here."

"Oh, I don't think that's a good idea," Les giggled nervously. "That would violate the space of their territory. We can camp in the field to the east if you—"

"Here," Jon interrupted, impatient with his guide's dribbling demeanor. "It's his territory. So I figure he'll come down to defend it."

"You're just going to scare him away!" Les said, raising his voice. "We will have to start all over again. I will have to start all over again."

Jon sighed. A crow called in the distance, and the sun marched slowly toward its zenith. "What you're saying is reasonable."

Les allowed himself the tiniest of grins. "That's why I need to stay here alone tonight and maybe the next night," Jon said. He tried to look sorry.

"What? We just started you and me."

"Listen. It's nothing against you, but you have to let me do this. Don't worry. You'll see whatever I see. I've got the equipment to get a good shot of him if he should pop up," Jon smiled. "Go ahead and take the ATV back to town. Get some supplies and meet me back here tomorrow morning. You are an excellent guide, but I'll be fine by myself for one night." Jon put a hand on Banning's shoulder. The squirrely, overweight guide nodded and stared at the ground, dejected. Jon didn't feel bad for him. Soon he would make the both of them famous. Then Banning would have nothing but gratitude for the legendary hunter Jon Rayne.

"We'll go on about tracking for the rest of the day," Jon said, "And then we'll come back here and split off."

The sun hung low in the sky when Jon returned to the Sasquatch signpost. Jon threw down his pack at the base of a knurly pine stump. He would spend the night here, warmed by a thick bed of pine needles and a simple wool blanket. There would be no fire. Sasquatch was a beast and beasts feared fire. He unrolled his bedroll and sat down, his back against the rough bark of the stump.

Prepared for the horrible night's sleep, Jon unzipped the main pouch of his pack and pulled out the thing that separated him from the beasts. A damn fine hunting shotgun. To fit his pack the gun had to be disassembled into three parts. With seasoned hands, Jon reassembled it, turning useless bits of metal and wood into a highly effective death stick.

The blued metal shone orange in the sunset light. In fact, the whole forest had turned red and orange. The once green plants were now all made of wrought iron, left far too long outside. They had started the slow process of rusting away. The leaves, curling with the summer's heat, were disintegrating bits of sheet metal. Oaken burls went to shades of auburn corruption. Now instead of green with life, the forest was red with death and decay.

Jon took it all in like he had done so many times before in so many different places. His constant woodland companion sat on his lap, reassembled to perfect working order. What wasn't metal on the gun was made of exquisite black walnut.

He had this shotgun in the jungles of Uganda. The local poachers all carried high-powered rifles, mocking him for his inexperience, but that stopped when he came back with six gorilla heads.

The shotgun made it up to the Boreal in Canada, and even to the frozen tundra of northern Alaska. He had hunted bears of all kinds, gorillas, tigers, leopards, wolves, and every type of prey animal that grazed in North America. It was as much a part of him as his arm or leg.

The stillness of the air caused a chill to creep into Jon's spine making him shiver. But it wasn't just the stillness or the unseasonably cool air that made him shiver. Right now, perhaps behind any one of the pines that surrounded him, a beast reported to be more than twice the size of a man could be watching him. This beast would be the most intelligent beast that Jon had ever hunted. Instinctively, Jon opened the breech of his single-shot shotgun and put a slug in. The gun closed with a metallic snap and Jon cocked the hammer. The familiar loading action soothed his nerves.

The sun dipped below the horizon and the russet colors of the forest faded until only a greyish gloom remained. Jon gave the Sasquatch the upper-hand tonight. His makeshift camp was at the bottom of a natural depression. He had given his prey the high ground. Jon wanted it to make the first move. Like chess, hunting involved carefully planned moves and counter moves. And when he played chess Jon always played black. Victory favored the observant.

Likely the beast wouldn't even make a move, at least not this first night. Tonight it would observe him. Sasquatch would do what Jon was doing now, waiting for the other to move first. The elusive giant ape surely had played this particular game before. Jon kept his gun close, though, just in case.

Jon let himself fall gently back onto his wool blanket as the last of the light faded from the Oregon sky. The sun had fully dropped below the horizon. The brightest of the stars were already out. It was the twelfth of June and tonight the sky would have a bright full moon. Lying with a loaded gun at his side Jonathon waited for the hour of the wolf.

A sharp howl brought Jon out of a light sleep. He couldn't tell how long he had been out. A thick cloud cover snuffed out any of the good light he had expected from the moon. Hopeless darkness suffocated the deep hollow.

The howl came again. A succession of thuds followed, sounding like a heavy person was stomping the ground. Another howl, fiercer and louder. With careful attention to the speed of his movements, Jon sat up and smiled. White had made its first move.

AROOOOO!

Jon flinched. A stone clattered off the stump behind him. He squinted into the thick darkness. There was no way of knowing where it came from. Noises were coming from all around, no way to pinpoint anything specific. Hearing more rocks bounce all around him, Jon reached into his pack and pulled out one of the two road flares he had brought. He struck it. The flare hissed and burst into red life.

The blood-red light illuminated only a few feet around him. Jon held the light high. He tried not to look into it. Fire blindness would only cripple him, making the darkness that much more absolute and impenetrable. Out of the darkness two demon red eyes reflected at him from perhaps forty yards across the hollow.

Jon couldn't keep his heart from trying to beat out of his chest. The involuntary biological response of primal fear gripped him. His hands, gripping for life to the flare, slicked wet with sweat. He could smell fresh earth turned up and the smell of ozone as a storm moved in. His senses were on alert. Jon felt these things almost as a neutral observer, his consciousness levitating above his body and looking down with apathetic detachment. He knew what was happening to him, but it wouldn't change his next move. Inside the fearful flesh, Jonathon Rayne's mind remained calm, coherent.

Holding the flare with his left hand, Jon reached down. He picked up a rock. Despite the fear that threatened to immobilize his body, Jon threw the rock directly at the pair of red eyes. It landed with a skin slapping smack. The red eyes went out with a whimper that sounded almost human, almost familiar.

Jon gritted his teeth. "Damn him," he cursed. He sprang to his feet and raced into the darkness, flare still hissing down its bloody illumination. Something ran in the darkness ahead. Not something . . . someone! Jon followed the sound of skittering leaves, fear gone from his body. He had been made a fool of. He ran toward a fresh whimpering sound. A red, fat shape came into the light. Jon pounced on top of a fat bearded man crawling around in the pine needles and leaf rot.

"You sonuvabitch!" Jon growled, pinning Les Banning to the ground. A streak of blood ran down his face where Jon's rock hit. The flare dripped hot slag onto Banning's shirt.

"It's hot!" Les cried.

"I don't care," Jon said. He could no longer reign in his hatred of the fat vegetarian fuck. "You just couldn't stand being useless, could you? Explain yourself." The red light gave Jon a devilish appearance.

"After we split up in the clearing I doubled back and f-f-fa-fa-followed your trail. I was just going to watch because I wanted to see. But . . ." Banning spoke with a firmer voice than Jon expected. "But then I saw the gun. What were you going to do, huh? Kill it? Kill something that we know almost nothing about?"

"It was for self-defense," Jon lied through gritted teeth.

Banning saw through it. "Bullshit," he said. "You didn't feel the need for it last night."

Neither man broke eye contact. "You ruined a chance at fame, Banning. People will never believe your videos. They won't believe tracks. They won't even believe tiny specks of unidentifiable DNA. Wanna be recognized as anything other than a freak? You gotta bring them a goddamn body."

Jon released Banning. The red of the flare shined ever on. Jon sat down with a huff. Banning just flipped the chess board off the table and scattered the pieces.

Les sat up, dusted himself off, and squinted over at Jon. "I don't believe in murdering innocent things, especially for something as empty as fame."

Jon almost said nothing, but he always found it nearly impossible to hold his tongue when it came to the laughable concept of animal rights. “Horseshit. You can’t murder animals,” he spat “They’re not people. They’re resources.” Jon bit down hard on his tongue to make himself stop. There was nothing to say. Banning believed what he believed and so did Jon. Neither would change.

Les Banning said nothing. He simply turned his fat face away from the red light and looked out into the darkness. Both men sat there in brooding silence for a while until a sudden knocking brought both men back to alert mindfulness.

It sounded like a rock was being hit against the trunk of a hollow tree. The sound echoed all through the valley bottom and Jon could feel the thuds in his gut. A howl pierced the night air. Banning’s fake howls had been loud, but not loud like this. Jon felt these howls as much as heard them. It felt like his bones were vibrating.

Suddenly a searing pain ripped through Jon’s face as a softball-size rock smacked him square in the face. His nose broke with a curt snap.

“Sfffinn Gah!” Jon put his free hand to his face and it came away bloody. “You got someone else out there?”

“No! No, what the fuck?” Banning’s voice had a genuine edge of fear.

Another rock, twice the size of the one before it, crashed and rolled by. Jon would have needed to use two hands to have thrown it. “No, that’s not me.”

“Of course it’s not you, idiot. WE HAFTA MOVE! NOW!” Jon snorted, still holding his nose. Like a coiled spring Jon jumped to his feet. He grabbed Banning by the shirt collar and hauled him up. More noises crashed all around. Jon heard the classic creaking of a breaking tree trunk and the following explosion of splinters. He ran, hoping that Banning would follow, back to the pine stump where he left his shotgun.

Jon stopped and raised the flare high to find his bearings. It was a pine stump. Where is it? But everything looked the same in the red gloom of the flare light. Jon’s eyes caught something, but it wasn’t a stump. A pair of red eyes stared out from the thick underbrush not twenty yards away. The chess board was back on the table, but it had been Jon who made the first move.

“Banning,” Jon whispered to the eyes. No response. “Dammit, Banning.” Jon looked behind him and all around. It was just him and these deep red eyes. Banning was gone. “If that’s you I’m going to kill you. No joke.”

As if in response, the owner of the red eyes bellowed a primal grunt that threatened to puncture the eardrums. It shook Jon’s insides. And then the red eyes began to move, to grow larger. The owner of the eyes was moving closer. There was no corresponding noise to the movement. This creature only made noise when it wanted to. Jon had to move. He had to find his gun. His opponent would expect a retreat here. But Jon, whether due to pride or actual tactical foresight, would never surrender to his opponent’s wishes. When you did what the opponent wanted then you started playing their game, and if you played their game, you lost.

“You’re going to make one ugly rug,” Jon said, letting some confidence seep back into his voice. In the dying red light Jon drew his belt-knife. It had stag handles, and its eight inch long blade was russet-colored in the light like it had come pre-

blooded. Knife in one hand, hissing flare in the other, Jon began to walk forward toward the eyes. His body protested the movement with vehement shaking. Jon only walked faster.

The red eyes stopped moving and watched Jon and his approach. Part of Jon wanted it to run, to flee in fear from his aggressive posturing. But he didn't come so close to lose the prey now. If the beast ran then Jon would likely never see it again. He would not become the hunter who told tall-tales without proof. People believed heads on walls and pelts on cabin floors.

Five steps later Jon met the owner of the eyes. His flare lasted long enough for him to fully understand the terrible situation he had put himself in. The beast stepped fully into the light. Its small eyes, still glowing blood red, glared down on him from a nearly ten foot frame. Deep striated muscles rippled under the surface of its hide. The great ape. The missing link. Big Foot. Sasquatch. Whatever people wanted to call it, here it was with its wide chest, oval head, and black fur made red by Jon's sputtering flare.

"My name is Jonathon Rayne," he told it, "a hunter of legend. You should feel honored to be hunted by me." Jon smiled a wild-eyed manic smile. His smile faded when the light of his flare did.

The red beast turned a darker maroon as the flare spat and began to die. Sasquatch blinked slowly. Then everything went black. Green corneal after-burns filled Jon's vision. He had been made blind.

"Shit."

Jon tossed aside the spent flare and gripped his knife with both hands. The weight of bone and steel felt reassuring. Though now blind, Jon wasn't helpless. A lifetime of hunting had given him a sharp sense of hearing. Leaves crunched. Sasquatch took a deep breath. Jon stood motionless. Then . . .

AROOOOOOOO!

Jon physically recoiled from being fired point blank by a howl. It felt like the beast had screamed inside of him. His ears were ringing and he didn't hear the heavy footfalls. He did, however, hear a twig snap. Reflexively Jon brought his knife up. To his shock it found a target and dug into some part of his attacker. The beast toppled Jon over onto the ground.

The bones in Jon's forearms cleanly snapped as the great weight landed on top of him. He screamed when the jagged points of his forearm bones pierced through the skin and muscle tissue of his arms. An inch from his face was the face of the Sasquatch. Its hot breath smelled of rotted flesh and shit. The smell invaded Jon's nostrils, threatening to gag him. The beast screamed.

Jon could still feel the handle of his knife despite the fantastic pain in his arms. He took a few ragged breaths and drove the point deeper into the beast's thick hide. His bones shifted and sent more tendrils of pain up his arms. Hot blood gushed out from around the knife, but the beast didn't find the knife in its gut all that impressive. It grunted and its massive hands gripped Jon's head . . . and squeezed.

With the hands of a giant threatening to pop his head, Jon resigned the game. Checkmate, he thought. He let go of his knife. Even through the darkness of the

night Jon could see his vision begin to narrow as a tunnel even darker opened up at the center of his vision. Through the pain he managed one last, “Fuck you.”

Before losing consciousness Jon heard the most familiar of sounds—the report of a shotgun. It sounded distant, like the echo of an echo. And after the shotgun blast there was another sound—a screaming man. The hiss of a giant snake. Gun. Screaming. Snake? The deeper blackness of unconsciousness covered Jon like a blanket.

Jon snapped his eyes open. Everything had turned red again. Nothing was on top of him threatening to crush his life away. God, did I dream it all? But then looked down at his arms and saw the red skewers sticking out from below his elbow. Strangely, Jon no longer felt any pain there. His shirt was soaked with blood or sweat. Jon couldn’t tell in the red light.

He looked around. To his right a lifeless ape twitched. To his left was a familiar face bathed in the red light of Jon’s second flare. “Are you still alive?” Les Banning asked him.

Jon croaked out a “Yup.” It hurt to speak.

“Good,” Banning said. He had Jon’s shotgun. The breech was open and a small line of smoke drifted out of it. He bent to help Jon up. “C’mon we have to get you back to town. My God . . . your arms.”

“You killed it?” Jon’s head swam as he got to his feet.

“Yes.”

Jon pulled away from Banning’s grasp and limped towards Sasquatch’s corpse. “Good job. Let’s see what we got.”

Banning interposed himself between Jon and the dead Bigfoot. “We don’t know what else is out there and your wounds require immediate attention. You couldn’t carry out a thousand-pound ape even if you hadn’t broken both your arms.”

“Don’t tell me what I can or can’t do.” Jon stepped around him. “My knife,” he said, “is still in him. We can skin him. Take the hide. People . . . believe . . . cabin floor.”

“You are in no condition!” Banning stepped in front of him again.

“No!” Jon head-butted Banning and ran back to the carcass. He knelt by the beast that had nearly done him in. The wounds would heal, but he would never get another chance at a Sasquatch hide. The back half of its head had been blown apart by the slug, but its face remained faintly intact. “Good. Camera’s gotta see your face, honey,” Jon told it. He rolled it over with his shoulder. His knife was buried deep in Sasquatch’s chest.

“You prideful dumbass,” Banning came up behind him. “There is bear and worse up here. We have to get back to the ATV before . . . oh.”

Holding his hands gingerly, Jon pulled his knife free. “I can’t do this with my fucked up arms,” Jon admitted, “Banning, you’ll have to skin it. Just follow my instructions. You ever skinned a deer before? What am I saying? Of course you haven’t. Banning? Banning!” Banning wasn’t even looking at him. “What is it?” Jon asked impatiently.

Banning pointed.

Jon followed his finger. He saw what Banning saw. Countless red eyes shone at them in the distance. Jon looked in the other direction. Eyes there too. How many shotgun shells had Jon brought? Six?

“Jon.” Banning’s voice was a hoarse whisper.

“Yes?” Jon couldn’t stop his voice from shaking. The fiery pain in his arms had returned.

“I blame you for all this. It’s your fault. This is why you don’t mess with nature. This is why.”

“Hand me my gun and shut your mouth, Banning,” Jon said. His voice leveled out “The game ain’t won till the king falls.”



[poetry]

CONCRETE TIC-TAC-TOE POEM



Alienation

XXX
XXX
XXO

Love

XXX
XOX
XXX

Marriage

XXX
XXX
XXX

Children

XOX
OXO
XOX

Death

OOO
OOO
OOO

—bruce boston

WOMAN

Jutting breasts billowing over black
fabric,
you look,
all guys do.
Pink legs poke out of a pink skirt
a warm box to lose control
to invade
to conquer
to stretch
to fill entirely
is that all you see?

—doug robbins

[poetry]

Shards crumble under the bristly hush,
like a radio searching for that elusive tune.
Just that morning I was part of two.
'Throw it out.' The echo of his voice lingers
like the smoke of his cigarettes.
The static of my efforts grow louder
as I scrub away the stench.

'It's had it. I'll buy you another one. Plastic.'
One leg is eaten through at the weld.
I tried to tell him:
'It was a gift to Mom. Dad made it himself.'
He clicked his tongue.
'She's dead, Marie. I was there, remember?
As if she'd care.'

Flakes fly from the crosshatch of the disc that
bore her bottom when he asked for her hand,
with fire in his eyes,
and for years to follow.
When he kissed her a promise;
And embraced at news of the first and second and third.
And wiped her tears at the loss of the fourth.

The screws needed tightening.
Who would have thought
it would be so easy?
To lighten my life with a
solid grip and a sudden jab.
The bristles curl and bite and chew
eating through the grime.

It's just an old stool.
You're wasting your time.
The tears sting, but it's true;
I never thought to sit and dream, and now,
my hands are red with blood
and black with dust,
from the old stool rusting through.

THE OLD STOOL

—e.m. eastick

A MONSOON WEDDING

A rural priest
rolls and throws out
the wedding mantras.
The ritualistic ululation
and the music of
a toot and drum
warm the monsoon up.
The bridal garland
like a noose
awaits a bride's neck.
She bows her head
in rural Indian coyness.
Our groom learns to forget all
beside the glitz of dowry gold.

A burning wick
yields to the darkness
beyond the nuptial rhythms.
The froth of cheated love
runs down Miss Hema's chin.
She is stranded on
the bluish eternity,
along with the pressed
love in her womb.
An opened phial lies
on the floor of a hut,
showing its void up.

—fabiyas mv

A Very Special Day

The old woman came into the café just before noon. She was wearing a yellow summer dress and sunglasses. Her hair was shoulder length and white. Holding her pocketbook with both hands, she did a quick survey of the room. Her shoes made a clacking sound as she proceeded across the worn linoleum floor toward an empty booth near the back of the café. She walked upright like she had been in the café many times. A few of the regulars gave her a quick look. She took her sunglasses off and sat in the booth facing the front with her pocketbook on the seat beside her. There was a large crowd, and she smelled hamburger grease coming from the grill. Most of the men were concerned with eating, and drinking large glasses of ice tea, so they could get back to the saw mill or back on the road with their log trucks, she figured.

The old woman spoke softly with a slight accent. She ordered a chicken salad sandwich and a glass of ice water with a slice of lemon.

Once she had written the order down on her pad, the waitress said, “It sure is a hot one, ain’t it?”

The old woman nodded and said, “Yes, it is, my dear.”

While the old woman ate her sandwich and drank her water with the lemon slice, she would occasionally reach down and touch her pocketbook. Making sure it was still there, snug against her leg. Every time the front door opened, she looked up at the people coming or leaving.

After finishing her sandwich, she ordered a slice of key lime pie.

“The key lime pie is real cold, so it should taste especially good today,” the waitress told her.

“Thank you, my dear.”

The old woman ate the pie slowly and sipped her water. The cold pie with the lemon flavor in the water increased her alertness. She felt confident, knowing that

by ed nichols

she would be successful in carrying out her task. She was determined not to be nervous or fidgety. Once she finished the pie, she dabbed her mouth with a napkin and wiped her hands thoroughly. She put her right hand inside the pocketbook and wrapped her fingers around the pistol. She withdrew her hand from the pocketbook and placed both hands on the table, intertwining her fingers, waiting.

The waitress came back. “Do you need more water?” she asked.

“No. Thank you, my dear,” the old woman said. “I’m good right now.”

“You raise your hand or holler if you need anything else.” The waitress moved away; she started cleaning tables since some of the lunch crowd had departed.

The old woman checked her watch. She knew that he always ate lunch late. She figured he probably slept most of the morning, since he hadn’t worked in a long time. The old woman had not seen him since the trial ended. She tried to remember him years ago when he was industrious, when he seemed normal and was kind and good to her granddaughter. Why had he changed? Why did some people become evil? Did the devil or some evil spirit take his soul and twist him into a cold-blooded killer? Why couldn’t the jury understand what he had become? The old woman closed her eyes and thought of her daddy. She could see him plain as day, standing beside his mule. Teaching her right from wrong, especially that time when she had hit her best friend in the head with a rock. Telling her that God-fearing people never hurt other folks, less the other folks caused harm to one’s family. Then a person’s got to make things right. God expects you to do something. The old woman remembered hearing her daddy say over and over, “When in doubt, always pray about what to do, and God will lead you.” She had prayed, almost continuously, since they had found her granddaughter’s body beside the railroad tracks up near Tallulah Falls. God was leading her—no doubt about it—to right the wrong that was done to her only granddaughter.

She put her sunglasses on just as he entered the front door. With the sunglasses and white wig she knew he wouldn't recognize her. He'd never paid her much mind, even in his good days. He took a seat in the first booth he came to, near the front door. Her face flushed, her right hand quivered and she held it tight with her left hand. From across the room, she studied him. If he did look to her now, he would not be able to see her eyes behind the sunglasses. But when she finally stood in front of him, she wanted to be sure he recognized who was sending him straight to hell.

The waitress came back. "Can I get you some more water, or something else, ma'am?"

The old woman smiled. "No. Thank you, my dear. I will be leaving shortly." The old woman handed her the tab and a twenty dollar bill.

"I'll bring you the change."

"No. You keep it. You are a very good waitress."

"Thank you, ma'am," the waitress said. "I've enjoyed waiting on you. Have a great afternoon."

The old woman smiled as the waitress turned away. "It is going to be a very special day, my dear," she said. "Very special indeed!"





MY DAD'S SPECTACLES

Thick frame, thin glasses,
an old spectacles,
a keep sake,
a rarest inheritance
from my dearest dad.

Crises, tensions, frustrations...
Struggles, triumphs, delights...
Life had left its imprints
on my dad's spectacles.
It betrayed him never;
guided him always.

It's a mate of his eyes;
nothing could part them
except an attack on heart.

Once he saw me,
now I see him-
all through the same spectacles,
black and white.

—fabiyas mv

[short story]

Deer in the Hospital

by evan gorzeman

The unrelenting hum of medical devices filled my ears. Dead flower petals nestled next to get-well cards written out of formality, delivered with empty smiles and small talk. The cold blue walls kept the air sealed in, hanging stale and heavy. I could not remember how long I had been sitting in the rigid metal chair. My body absorbed the cold of the room and I grabbed my elbows thinking of warmth.

The monotonous tick of the clock was the metronome for the shallow breaths that my mom took in the bed. She had lost weight. She looked under a hundred pounds. Sharp little elbows poked out of the warm, woven Apache blanket she had requested I bring from home. It was twice the size of her and wrapped her in pale blues, like a newborn child, her dark green eyes peering out from sunken slits. No smiling. No crying.

Her chest seemed to struggle against the blanket. She lifted her hand. Then it dropped, like it had changed its mind.

“Water,” a tired voice said.

The word jarred me. It crept out of grey, cracked lips. It was the first word in several minutes—or hours. It bounced off the bare ceiling, the empty walls, off the clicking of the clock. It sat in my ears for a while.

“Water,” she croaked again, and I stood and poured her a glass from the bedside table.

“Mom, mom, here,” I said. “Drink.”

I held the cup to her lips and she sucked loudly, drops cascading down the sunken chin and onto a light blue shirt, the uniform of the dead.

Her eyes now moved from the cup to me. My face was bright in her sacred pupils, which were dilated like half dollars. She blinked and I brushed her gray-

flecked brown hair out of her eyes and over her ears. A smile crept across her face as I buried my head in her shoulder. I pulled the blanket tighter around her small frame. Her hands moved to my track-marked arm, and she looked with knowing eyes.

“Four months clean, Mom.”

She smiled a thin, weak smile. She had heard it before.

“That’s good,” she said, closing her eyes.

A nurse slid through the door, her industrial shoes squeaking on the aqua-and-white, checkered linoleum floor. The hum of the machines changed as the nurse turned knobs and checked liquids until all that was left was the beep of a mechanical heartbeat.

The syringe filled with clear liquids shot into the IV. Mom’s face relaxed, and her back arched like a cat stretching in the morning. She stared up into the empty corner of the room, looking but not seeing.

Morphine wraps you and gives you the sensation of being dipped in a warm bath without getting wet. It slides through your veins slowly, circulating, building like a concerto, and just when you think you’ve felt the entire effect, your stomach drops out from under you and your arms tingle and all you see is black and all you feel is comfortable warmth.

Mom didn’t feel anything as she faded away.

I pulled up to a lonely gas station bathed in red-and-yellow neon light. The night air was crisp and my breath hung out in front of me—the crickets, an orchestra, chirping wildly in the night air. I stepped into the dingy store.

The man behind the counter was bent double, gravity taking its toll after years of defiance. His face was partially hidden under a torn hat advertising some out-of-business beer company. A mechanic’s shirt and overalls covered a bony frame. Wrinkles cracked his face and white whiskers pierced through deep grooves. A tobacco tin sat empty on the counter, its contents firmly planted in his lip.

“Evening,” I said.

He nodded in reply.

I went to the back, grabbed an eighteen pack of beer, and threw it on the counter.

“Ten,” the man said firmly.

“And the red label.”

His eyes sensed something, flashed to my face, and then quickly back to the register.

The man reached back and grabbed the whiskey, bagged it with the beers and turned back to his register.

“\$32.50,” he said. “Don’t go drinking it all in one night, now, boy.”

“That’s what the beer is for,” I said.

The old man looked at me again—longer this time, and I saw his mouth tremble, his mind wording his next sentence carefully.

“It’s always cold when you’re alone, boy.” He seemed to understand.

I thanked him meekly and turned to walk out into the night. As my hand

reached for the handle of the glass door he spoke in a voice several octaves higher than he had used before.

“Boy, boy, hold on a moment.” His long pause unnerved me. “Have you ever felt like you were drowning?”

He waited for my reply.

“Everyone has had those moments,” I said.

He nodded slowly and spit brown juice somewhere behind the counter. “Everyone gets sad,” he said. “What I’m asking is do you feel like you’re drowning. Like the very air you’re breathing is poison gas, filling your lungs till they burst?”

I was silent.

The old man continued, “Poisoning a poison doesn’t make it go away, son. Let it go.”

I left the store and threw the plastic bag in the passenger seat. Whiskey burned my throat and set the inside of my stomach on fire. The humming of my engine and the chorus of crickets were overwhelming. I was trapped in a metronome. Alone with my thoughts I stared into the night.

Windows give us a false sense of security. You can stare and stare and watch the world go by. Windows guard you from the outside while keeping you involved, or even in love with what you see, your eyes viewing from a safe place like hands touching through gloves. You can stare into your own eyes and get lost.

I blinked. The road was dark. All I could see were ancient trees bathed in yellow cones of light. Moss covered the wet stones and crawled up the trees into the blackness. Roots spread, slowly entangling everything in their path.

Something suddenly rushed across the windshield of my car.

What was it?

I stopped, got out, and stood in the cold night air. The engine leveled to a monotonous hum. The wind tore at my jacket and filled my eyes with tears.

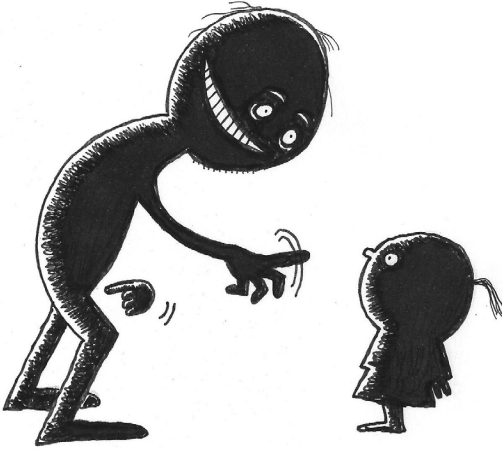
A doe, brown with white speckles on her neck, lay in the street, kicking the air in desperation. A high-pitched scream came from the back of her throat. It was loud—then louder before it trailed off into a painful whimper. The snow and asphalt underneath the convulsing body started to turn a dark crimson. I walked over and stood above the doe and stared down into her dark eye. She was scared.

Her pupil-less eye found my eyes. Then it stared past me into the dark treetops above. I found myself lost in a dark mirror, alone in the forest.

I drew back my fist and struck the road as hard as I could. Again and again I punched the asphalt, trying to put a dent in it, until my knuckles bled. I sank next to the deer and looked in her eye again.

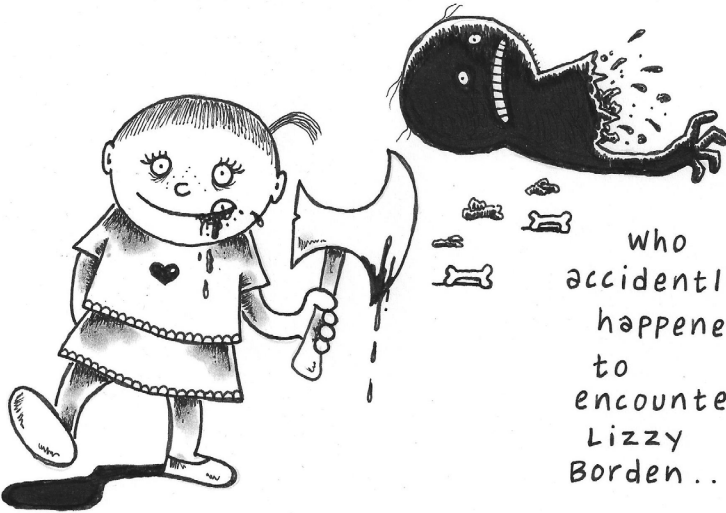


FLASH FICTION FOR IMPATIENT CHILDREN :



once
there was
this
purblind

old
pedophile
named
Gordon



who
accidentally
happened
to
encounter
Lizzy
Borden...

—janne karlsson

Aachu's Kaleidoscope

by fabiyas mv

Pick-axes and hammers resonate on the stones and planks of Aachu's heart. Her ancient mansion loses its head, arms, trunk . . . She sees the changing patterns of memory in her mind's kaleidoscope.

"Dear Aachu,

Received your letter. Thank you. Your words caused ripples of nostalgia in my heart. Here loneliness wounds me. I wish I could fly back to India. But the War is getting fierce. I fear bombing in this city. I plan to flee into the woods. How is our daughter Saisha? I don't know when I can write the next letter to you."

The postman passed her days without stretching any letter to her. Her mind crossed the sea and roamed in the Malaysian woods at night. She had never visited Malaysia. She found him in a wood. Her vision was blurred in the mist. Life always tried to take diversion from death. Anxieties about her husband's food and shelter twisted her wound.

The west wind brought her the bucolic songs from her paddy farms near the Kanoli Canal, an ancient canal built by the British. Reapers bending like the sickles reaped the golden crops. Aachu owned acres of paddy farms and groves of coconut palms. Poor villagers often sought refuge under her wings.

Now she slowly falls into a nap.

Today, the coolies demolish the kitchen walls of her old house. Aachu remembers Sudha, a maid who had helped her in cooking. Sudha used to blather in the kitchen. Her tongue never took rest. She poured calumnies from her vast tank into Aachu's ear-buckets. Sudha's words had occasionally tickled her mistress. Aachu's nights were empty. Her ears often caught the mice piercing the silence beside her granary, which was always full to the brim. Night wind always frightened her, rattling the lone window of the top story of her ancient house.

Rural women, Aachu's daily visitors, gifted her with the local news and strange stories that were coated with superstitions and exaggerations: "Rajan, the cowherd, swooned at noon yesterday. He was lying under the tall palm tree. He was indeed caught by a ghost," Aachu once heard from Parutty, a middle-aged woman.

Aachu eyed two dusty figures removing the rusty gate of her ancient mansion.

Aachu noticed a coolie with a big iron box on his head, pushing open her gate. A leather bag was swinging over his right shoulder. She saw a gentle man just behind the coolie—a tall man, who had put on a white shirt and dhoti. He filled her eyes in the moonlight. She had felt an emotion that was beyond all definitions. It was her beloved returning from Malaysia after many a year!

Thus endless varieties of recollections flash by in her yellow kaleidoscope. Her threshold had withstood several farewells, and jerked with unbound joys. A cluster of coolies from Tamil Nadu, her neighbouring State, put their shoulders to the wheel. They pick the broken stones and mortar up, carry them in baskets, and dump them in a large waste pond.

A temporary wedding pandal raises its head again in Aachu's mind. A bride, her daughter, stands, drooping her head in the rural Indian shyness. The glitz of dowry gold dazzles the guests, especially the rustic women. Spicy smell of biriyani, prepared for the nuptial party decades back, wafts up again from her memory's kitchen.

Days die, one by one, on the walls. Demolishing works progress. Aachu sits on the veranda of her daughter's home, chewing the betel—a way to reduce her tension.

Aachu had a powerful magnetizing effect on her husband Akku, who worked in a company in Malaysia. He had accumulated a huge wealth for his wife and daughter, who lived in India. A heart attack had made Aachu a widow.

She chews the betel without a pause, for she has been casting her mind back to all the sweat blobs and tension waves of the house construction time. Coolies will clear everything soon. Not even a single stone will remain there to announce the past glory of her mansion. She had lived in that big house for forty years.

Her daughter Saisha resides in an adjacent house. Two years before, she cajoled her mother to stay with her. But Aachu couldn't even imagine chucking her big house away, where sweet recollections came out of loneliness to give her company.

There was a morning cool as dew drops. Saisha came to her mother as usual. But the front wooden door remained closed. She peeped into the bedroom through the narrow gap of the window. She shrieked. Neighbors crowded there like a flock of crows. The air was noisy. Someone broke the brass lock and the folk entered the house. They saw Aachu lying swooned. Somebody sprinkled water on her face. Then Aachu opened her eyes. Consciousness returned and regained control over her body quite amazingly. Blood pressure had blacked her out.

"Once, Saisha had depended on me for everything. Today, I have to rely on her."

Aachu had contemplated on the reversal of roles in old age, while leaving her precious mansion behind forever. Jafi, Saisha's husband, was kind toward his aged mother-in-law. At the same time, he had a cache of greed. He sold that deserted house for the thirty lakhs. Demolishing works go on. Broken stones and planks are heaped up before Aachu's wrinkled emotions. She watches all from her son-in-law's kind veranda. She now sits between sleep and memory.

Present is only a ghost of the past in her yellow kaleidoscope.



just rewards

by john h. stevens

“Good afternoon, Mr. Caveretta. So glad you were able to join us.”

Steve shaded his eyes from the glaring sun behind the gatekeeper, casting the man’s head in a faux halo. The smell of a barbecue permeated the picnic grounds, bursting the main of the waterworks in his mouth. “I’m so glad to be here. I’m sorry but I think you have me at a disadvantage. I can’t seem to remember your name.”

“Why, Mr. Caveretta, you are quite the wag. I’m Heathcliff, the club’s Man Friday as it were.” He bowed slightly.

Steve felt he shouldn’t be here, like a teenager sneaking into a strip club, but who could turn down ribs and beer on a beautiful sunny day?

“Well, Heathcliff, I’d appreciate it if you called me Steve. I’m not one to stand on ceremony.”

“Yes, Mr. Steve, I hope you enjoy the day.” Heathcliff stepped aside and waved his arm in a grand gesture to usher Steve in.

The uneasiness still tugged at his sleeve. Shouldn’t he be at work? The aroma of barbecue sauce moved his feet for him.

The rich green grass stretched out to a grove of trees, their apple blossoms creating a stunning white backdrop. A cool breeze perfectly offset the heat from the ever-shining sun.

Steve alternated nods and waves to strangers as he made his way to the pavilion. A man greeted him with a wide toothy smile and an enthusiastic handshake.

“Mr. Caveretta, please come in out of the sun.” Once under the pavilion, the man pointed as he talked. “The kegs are over there. You’ll find the glasses on the table next to them. There’s wine if you prefer and just beyond the kegs, you can grab yourself a plate and help yourself to some food. I would recommend the ribs; they literally fall off the bone. Welcome to our little slice of heaven.”

Before Steve could ask a question, the man was off greeting another guest.

An audible growl escaped Steve's stomach and he looked around in embarrassment but nobody seemed to notice. He didn't realize how hungry he was and he could always use a beer. When was the last time I ate? As he grabbed a plate, he realized it was only an hour ago at breakfast. It slowly started coming back to him.

The irritating blast of the alarm clock announced it was five in the morning and time for Steve to get up. He slapped at the night stand until hitting the snooze button. He bestowed a good morning kiss to his wife and dog. Suzy kissed him back while he received a growl from his wife.

He groped the wall as he cautiously made his way through the bedroom. He didn't want to step on Suzy or any of her many bones littering the floor. His right hand felt the doorjamb and his left hand followed it down to the knob. Once in the hallway, the lights could be turned on without disrupting her majesty's sleep. Suzy was already at the back door waiting for Steve to open it.

Steve instinctively reached for the coffee mug stand, plucked one, and poured a cup. Thank heaven for automatic timers on coffee makers. He retreated to the bathroom and shut the door. His pajamas dropped to the floor and his rear found the coolness of the porcelain throne. A contented sigh echoed through the room. This was the one time each day that was truly his own. His wife owned him before and after work and the corporation was his master in between.

Three resounding pounds on the door echoed through the small room before her voice, like the screech signaling an incoming fax, sent shivers down his spine.

"Steve, you open this door right now! Your stupid dog woke me up with all her barking. I had to get up and let her in. What are you doing in there that you have to lock the door? Open up, I've got to pee."

The serenity of the moment swirled down the toilet along with the associated paperwork of the job he had just finished. The click of the bolt tipped her off and she slammed the door open.

"Good morning dear. I hope you slept well."

Her beautiful eyes, which attracted Steve to her initially, were now permanently narrowed when she looked at him. "What's so good about it? We live in this dirty old shack and, with your career in the shit pile, we won't be moving to a better place anytime soon." She lifted her nightshirt and took a seat. "Why didn't I listen to my mother? She warned me that you would never amount to anything." A loud burst of gas accentuated her point.

Steve decided to shave and brush his teeth to the backdrop of her grunts. Stepping into the shower, he quickly pulled the curtains closed, drowning out the barrage of her latest criticisms. After rinsing off, he waited for the sound of the flush and the thud of her footsteps before he left the shower.

He joined her at the kitchen table for breakfast. She was reading Martha Stewart's *Living* while sucking on a Pall Mall. "Don't even think about it." The words drifted over the magazine. "We've been through it before and I'll take everything from you."

Steve looked down at his plate. Two badly singed pieces of toast looked lonesome on the large plate, the butter pooled in the middle without an attempt to be spread across the bread. He noticed cigarette ashes on the top slice and discreetly held the piece under the table for Suzy. “No dear, I wouldn’t dream of divorcing you.”

The magazine plunged, revealing those wretched eyes again. “That’s right. Until death do we part.”

It shouldn’t have surprised him when he walked in the bedroom that fateful day and saw her straddling another man’s hips. After all, she was married when Steve started dating her. He folded the remaining slice of bread in half and shoved it in his mouth. Death has got to be better than this. He swallowed and washed it down with a glass of juice. Shit, I forgot to check the toast for ashes. He stooped and kissed her on the forehead and immediately ducked, just avoiding her swat.

“Get the hell away from me.”

“You have a nice day too.” The pressure inside his rib cage eased as he entered the garage. The daily routine afforded him the luxury of turning on the autopilot switch. In the solitude of his car, he wouldn’t be belittled or dominated. It was a three-mile straight shot to the train and he would wake from his reveries in his parking spot at the station.

He was a couple of blocks away when a light flashed and revealed a beautiful park with rich green grass that stood out against the snow mounds, now black from exhaust fumes, surrounding the entrance. He decided to check it out.

Now he was sitting at a picnic table with a sixteen-ounce beer and a plate full of food. The ribs were fantastic but the fried chicken was out of this world. In fact, the only chicken close to being this good was made by his blushing bride in the newlywed years.

A boy ran by with a kite string trailing from his hands ending somewhere in the sky above. Two ladies in the middle of an amusing anecdote sauntered past, the brunette shot a coy smile in Steve’s direction. He returned an awkward wave.

He felt different but couldn’t put his finger on it until he realized his stomach wasn’t churning acid into his stomach lining. He held out his hand and there wasn’t a hint of trembling. He lowered his hand and scooped the beer stein from the table and drained it. He grabbed a chicken leg from his plate and took a hearty bite.

A hand came from behind him and set down a mug. “Steve, it looked like you needed another beer.”

Steve jerked back but on seeing the donor, shot off the bench and gave him a hug. “Jerry, how the hell have you been?”

“I’ve been great and you?”

“Well, to be truthful, not too good.” Steve returned to his seat. “The job sucks and the wife won’t.”

Jerry put a hand on his shoulder. “Yeah, your marriage didn’t turn out like you thought it would. Screw her! Let her have everything.”

“That’s exactly what she wants.” Steve cocked his head. “How did you know that? I haven’t seen you . . .”

Steve could see the entrance to the park just past a snow bank made by the plows. One little right turn and he would find out how the city was able to keep the grass so green in the middle of winter.

A deafening horn jarred his attention back to the road and the headlights from the truck blinded him. He turned the wheel hard to the right to avoid the truck but hit an ice patch. He watched helplessly as he flew up that snow bank. The last thing he saw was the light post.

“. . . since your funeral.” Steve slowly scanned the sunny field, taking in the blissful vista. “So this is heaven?”

Jerry took a hearty gulp from his glass. “It is to me.”

Steve lifted his glass in a toast but it never made it to his lips. “Wait a second. I thought you couldn’t go to heaven if you committed suicide.”

Dark clouds slowly choked off the sunshine. “Let’s not play games. You know I didn’t commit suicide,” Jerry smirked.

Heavy raindrops began beating on the roof of the pavilion. Heathcliff’s voice could be heard directing the crowd from the grounds.

“How would I know that? That’s what the coroner listed as the cause of death.” Heathcliff rounded up the last of the stragglers and Steve noticed they were the only ones left. “Jerry, don’t you think we should go with them?”

“In a minute.” Jerry pushed down on Steve’s shoulder to keep him seated. “It might have looked like suicide to a coroner but from here, it was obvious my coffee was tainted by my wife and her new lover. You remember my wife don’t you, Steve? That’s right. You married her after I died.”

Two black-robed figures emerged from the apple blossoms. The pouring rain made it look like a mirage but Steve knew it wasn’t. “Jerry, you’ve got to help me. It wasn’t my idea.”

“I’ve got to go now.” Jerry stopped at the edge of the pavilion. “If you thought living with her was hell, wait until you get a load of the real thing.”



[poetry]

pyromaniacs love song

Sometimes the only way
to save something
is to set it on fire.
To separate smoke and ash,
heat and light.
Saddle four horses
and ride them into different sunsets.

I feed the yellow mouth.
Love letters
and the green lamp you hated.
Delicate Egyptian cotton sheets,
still scented with lust,
ignite the way I used to.
The dark orange curl reminds
me of half-eaten Jaffa Cakes.

Blue devils play along the walls.
The curtains catch fire,
Sunsets abound.
Horses snort
at the thunder of fracturing furniture
that became a raft, a refuge, a complicated
companion in sexual contortions.
That now become a lumpen reminder
of everything we kept
to merely hold us up.

Sometimes the only way
to save something
is to set it on fire.
To remove sentiment.
To erase history.
To bask under a scalding sunset
of red, yellow, orange and blue.

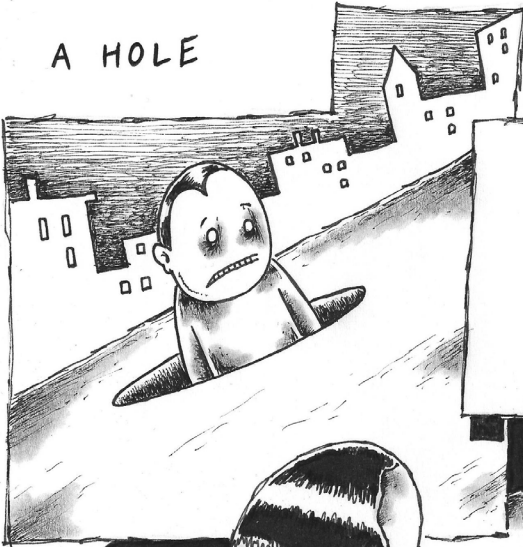
Such a hot kiss on my flesh.
Red lips
were always going to be
my downfall.
Now they caress and blow pink bubbles
on my skin.
Their damage is not
quite the calibre of cruelty
I am used to.
But still,
I feel suitably numb
as I burn,
and separate into smoke and ash,
heat and light.
And yet as my bones negate,
I am disappointed that the sunset
is not red or yellow or orange or blue,
but black.



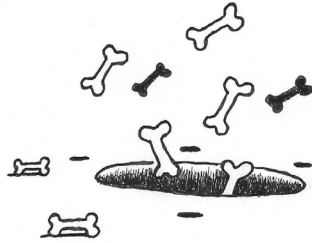
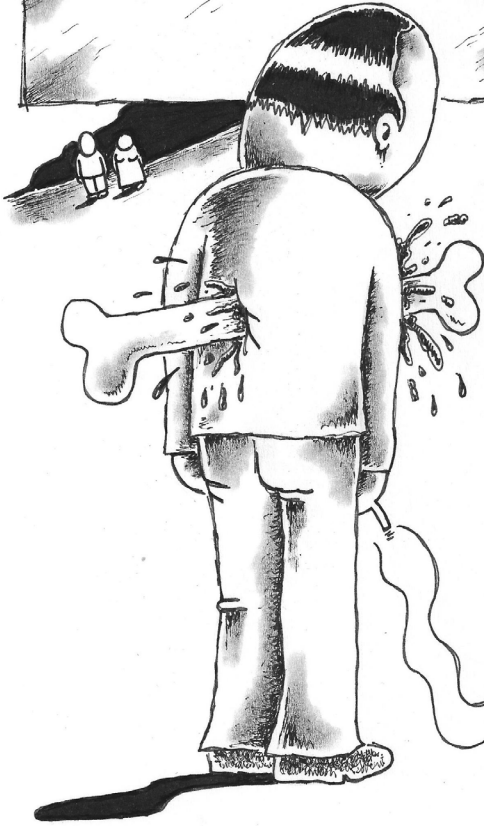
—gary priest

[poetry]

A HOLE



that's what
I am.
A big black
abyss
looking up on you



wondering
where all
these goddamn
bones
are
coming
from.

—janne karlsson

A Certain

Disposition

I cried red tears. Tear after tear.
On tasting them, then seeing
they were, in fact, though bloodless, red,
I laughed so hard I cried,
thank God.
From sadness?
No,
for Being—
glad
I had,
in fact, not died—
which turned them blue
awhile.

At last
they're clear,
the strangeness passed,
and still
I'm far from dead.

Nor do I feel these phases odd,
or the symptom of a madness,
but comforting as solitude:
feel, rather, in the mood
to smile
to know
the dark will
disappear
and full of senseless gratitude
to the likes of you,
and God.

—james nicola

[short story]

Love, Lust, Lunacy

Soman's body usually took rest in an armchair, while his mind roamed behind some issues. He owned acres of paddy farms and a grove of coconut palms on the bank of the Kanoli canal. Villagers never dared to open Soman's iron gate.

He used to chat with his wrinkled mother and his wife Rajitha, sitting on the veranda in the evenings. Then a white Ambassador car would come and stop in their yard. Rishna in her school uniform would come running and hug her dad.

Handing the car key over to Rajitha, Najas walked a few steps and turned back to look at her. Rajitha stood on the wooden threshold of her house. She was a bucolic beauty. Evil desires growing up in his mind had cast its shadow on his countenance. No one else could see the chauffeur falling into the bottom of Rajitha's heart. A lady's charming eyes are the epicenter of temptation.

The kitchen really smothered Rajitha's morning minutes. She cooked breakfast, dressed her daughter in uniform, and handed her over to Najas, whose duty it was to take her to school and bring her safely back. He took Rishna's school bag and moved to the car, holding her wrist. Rajitha gazed at him. There was no censoring system in his brain. Often his words tickled her. Impure love burgeoned in silence. Soman suspected neither his chauffeur nor his wife.

During a moonlit night, fragrance of the bloomed henna plants turned the air romantic. Knots of dreams were let loose in the softly blowing wind. A bedroom clock struck ten. Rajitha was still in the kitchen. All others had gone to sleep. No one noticed someone scrambling over the compound wall.

The only cow in the stable looked at its mistress in embarrassment. A mosquito sucked blood. Its hum became louder in the silence. The cow jerked its legs. In the empty corner of the stable, love yielded to the desire, making the moonlit night a "sinlit" night.

Time removed the cataract from her mind's eye. A sense of guilt began to

by fabiyas mv

torment her conscience. The innocent faces of her husband and daughter hurt her extremely. “I won’t do it again.” She was adamant.

Najas was a bachelor. He knew the taste of carnal pleasures. Whenever he cogitated about Soman’s wife, his saliva oozed down. But she was very firm in her determination and vehemently opposed his evil desires.

He made himself out that she was attempting to avoid him. His cheeks had turned red with anger. Hot desires disappeared in rage, and rage gradually in revenge.

It was a dark night. Najas’ mother was alone at home. She was waiting for her son, keeping the dinner ready for him. Though she was very aged, she did the entire domestic duties somehow. Her anxieties increased. Najas did not think of his mother. He sat on the grass bank of the Kanoli canal, keeping his stretched legs in the shallow water. He had drunk toddy excessively. He smoked cannabis that slowly froze his tender feelings. He spent the night on the bank.

He reached near Rajitha’s house before the dawn. The gate was locked. He clambered over the compound wall while he didn’t see that his cell phone had slipped down from his pocket. He waited beside the back door for Rajitha to open it. Before too long, she came out with a toothbrush, rubbing her eyes. He promptly hit her with an iron bar. She fell down, shrieking.

“Uncle, please . . . don’t kill me. Uncle, please . . .” That pleading was heart-breaking. But drugs had dried the compassion out completely from his mind. He did not spare that little angel, who had come running to the kitchen hearing her mother’s shriek.

Villagers came in large numbers like swarms of flies.

The police marked the blood-stained spots with white chalk. Jacky, the dog of Kerala Police, ran to the compound wall sniffing. He suddenly stopped and barked

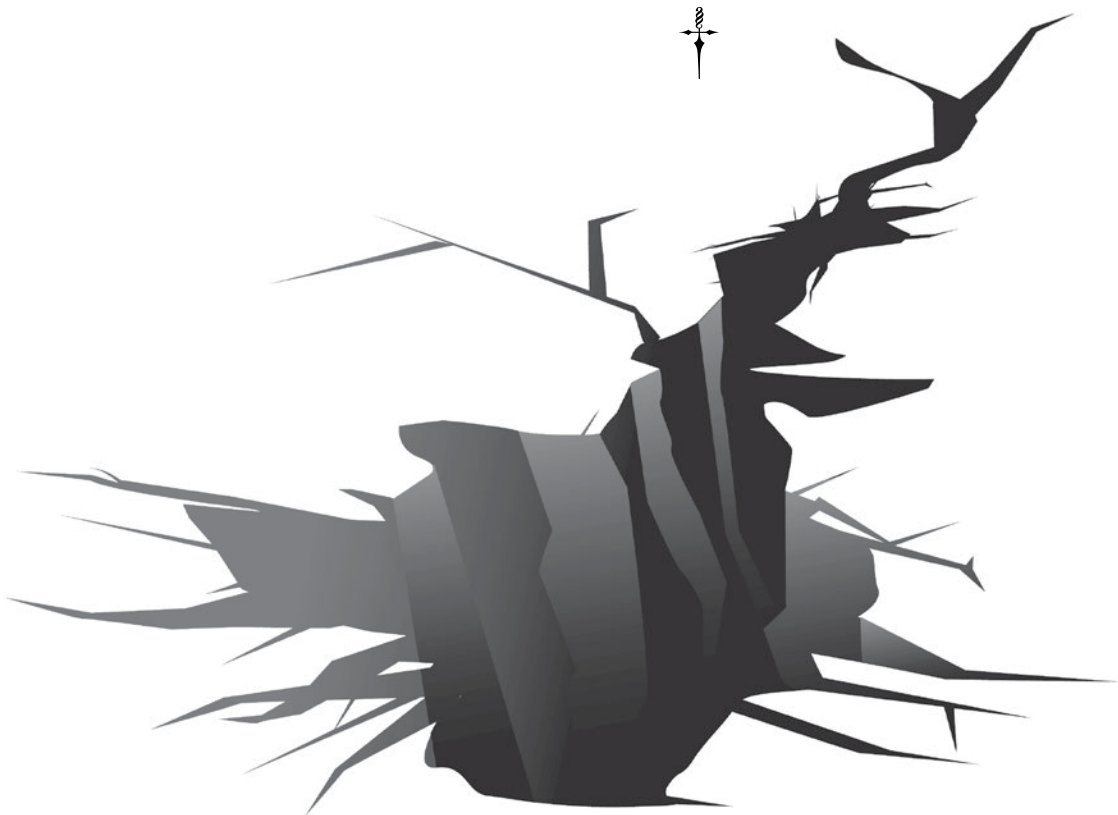
fiercely looking at the yellow mango leaves lying on the ground. A police constable stooped down to pick up the cell phone.

Now the superstitious villagers fear the presence of a midnight ghost in Soman's kitchen. A tall palm tree stands in mysterious silence in the yard. Many a bat hangs upside down in the branches of a big mango tree beside the stable. A kind of horror lingers in the compound.

Rajitha's body sits on the veranda. She has become dumb. And her left eye defunct. Lava of pain flows out of her right eye now and then. "To be or not to be"—That is the question for Soman. Memory plays "hide-and-seek" in his mother's mind. So sometimes she gets the boon of oblivion.

Najas regularly attends the moral class for prisoners in the Central Jail, Poojappura. He reads books, though with difficulty. He becomes more and more gloomy day by day. He recognizes aching love in the image of his lonely mother, who waits for him, keeping the supper ready, in the voice of an innocent girl pleading for her precious life.

"What a pity that cruel beast didn't get death penalty!" a thousand lips on the Kanoli bank muttered a few months back. No poetic justice. It is a paradox that they think so even now.



Snow Man

Your system of the seasons,
For certain souls, is wrong;
His year's a single winter
And not four seasons long.

Nor can he tell the difference
Between the day and night:
He's blinded, nights, by blackness,
And, days, by white, white, white.

Of course his eyes are made of
Two stones of darkness—coal.
This is as it should be if
They're windows to the soul,

For his is always frozen
Yet melting, strangely, too:
When it falls below zero
He's hardened through and through,

But when it's above freezing
He starts to melt away
And fears that he might not last
The winter, or the day.

So far he has been lucky;
Each spell when it's been warm
Is followed by a well-timed
And welcome winter storm.

The snowfall is experience
Which glistens as it shows,
And weighs him down, some say; some
Say it is how he grows.

The wickedest of children
Are welcome too, and dear,
For sufferance of snowballs
Is really why he's here.

And so he thanks the coldness,
Endures the daily dark,
Looks forward to the playing
Of children in his park,

For life is but one season,
And come the trusty glow
Of spring and hotter mornings,
He'll melt away, and go.

—james nicola

[short story]

STATUTORY THEFT

by kj hannah greenberg

Sam Beckinstock's West Hopkinton, New Hampshire, farm was going bust. Given the unrelenting summer rains that had decreased the molybdenum levels in the farm's soil, the hay crop was failing. As the fields' shale eroded, the soil's sandstone and limestone layers had become more and more depleted. Without sufficient limestone, the soil had become too acidic to support herbaceous plants.

Because the Beckinstock property had shed much of its necessary calcium, magnesium, nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, and had changed in bulk density, that is, in water penetrability, the grass was left poisoned, hungry and thirsty. There was nothing to bring to market.

"Hay is for horses, but it's also for profit. How am I going to pay for water and electric?"

Pine spruce, his farm's second most important crop, which had been sold by his parents and grandparents for decades, was dying of Armillaria Root Disease. No sagacious New Englander or jaded New Yorker would want to place presents under ghost-bleached trunks suffering from twig and branch dieback. What's more, neither Yankees nor Big Apple denizens would want firs bleeding excessive resin; they'd have no suitable boughs on which to hang their tinsel or to strew their popcorn and cranberries.

"No merry holiday for me. January's going to be the pits, too. What am I going to eat?"

The family's usually dependable potato fields, too, had been wiped out by a devastating fungal disease, "The Late Blight." The same regional dearth of sunny days that had brought on the problems with the hay and with the evergreens had invited that attack on the spuds. Those vegetables, from tip to top, had to be buried. The land on which they had grown, and the acres to either side of the afflicted area,



too, had to be doused with foliar fungicides. Dealing with those tubers, alone, were going to leave Sam exhausted and bankrupt.

“I’m dirt poor. Ha ha. Dirt poor.”

Sam thought back to his training at Cornell. Even though it had cost him an extra year of tuition, he had double majored. He had enrolled in Agricultural Sciences and in Electrical Engineering. During his sophomore year, he kept his Agricultural Sciences, but switched from Electrical Engineering to English. Sam had fallen in love with expository writing.

“If only I could restore calcite and aragonite to the soil, I could salvage the fields. If only I could apply my rhetoric skills to freelance work, I could buy those supplements.”

Whereas for five years, Sam had gotten by on the proceeds of his crops, he immediately needed new sources of funding. There was no one to help him. His sister was busy working as a lawyer in Oregon. His parents and grandparents were dead. Sam hunted the Internet for freelance writing jobs. He applied to the first promising position he found.

To Whom It May Concern:

Fly me! Try me! I’ve written work on sociology, on research skills, and on more. I’ve edited classmates’ texts on psychology, on the biochemistry of the brain, on discourse, and on other, varied topics. In my spare time, I write essays on initiatives in animal science, and on food and energy systems. Please read my attached resume and review my writing samples. Hiring me will give you inexpensive, professional labor.

Sincerely,

Sam Beckinstock

Sam:

Thanks for your email. Your samples look good . . . Please write around 100-150 words on whether euthanizing ducks is right or wrong. Again, no right answer, just looking to see your writing style . . . Also, are you familiar with APA/MLA/Harvard citation styles?

We are a legit company, with good feedback on various freelance sites, so don’t worry, payment is prompt. You can view some of our reviews here: <http://www.wehighlightSEOs.com/buynow=212325>. If we like your writing, everything will go smoothly . . . If your style of writing is on similar lines, then you’re just who we’re looking for! Thanks!

Jalen Radic

Jalen:

I was taught to begin an essay by laying out premises. Here are a few thoughts that could be the basis for a piece on duck euthanasia. These ideas are culled from classes I took. I stopped when I hit 125 words.

Most ducks, especially domesticated ones, are raised for meat, eggs,

and feathers. When they suffer from diseases such as Duck Virus hepatitis, Aspergillosis, or Avian Cholera, it is best to put them down. Thereafter, they can be plucked for their pulviplumes. Duck insulation is useful in jackets, pillows, and sleeping bags, thus providing duck farmers with additional income.

In China, farmers profit from this culling process. Likewise, in Indonesia, duck herdsman, too, do well with this kill practice.

In Western countries, however, agriculturists are more lax about harvesting their questionable populations. As a result, sustainable farming, especially of small, home flocks, in Europe, and in North America, lacks in fiduciary soundness. This end is a pity given most farmers' need to greatly increase their income.

Yes, I am familiar with APA/MLA/Harvard citation styles.

Sam

Sam:

Step two; please expand the following passage.

The history of the United States, since the end—closing—of the Second World War has been one of struggle. The United States sought to attain global domination and hegemony, a superior status of power that could not or cannot be matched by any other. During the Cold War, US ambitions were tempered by the constant tension of Soviet competition. The geopolitical division of the globe into two spheres of influence, for better or worse, had the effect of preventing either any one of the two great powers from wresting “too much” influence over global affairs. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the socialist governments of her satellite states came a vacuum, which a void that the United States, seeing itself victorious and unchallenged, now seeks to fill.

Jalen

Jalen:

I cannot work with such tosh. Your sample contains many errors. Complex sentences and long words are not the same as sophisticated communication. Keep in mind that I was a peer tutor at Cornell University!

Awkward words:

1. “Closing;” incorrect grammar.
2. “To attain” (implied in initial version); historically incorrect.
3. “Hegemony;” [and] “superior status of power;” twice redundant with “global domination;” no academic will respect prose fattened with fluff.
4. “Could not’ or ‘cannot;” pick a single tense.
5. “Other;” incomplete noun phrase.
6. “Tempered by;” illogical; ambition, an effect, is “deterred,” or “stymied” not “tempered,” by political tension, a behavior.

7. “Constant;” generalization.
8. “For better or worse;” use of cliché language saps writers’ credibility.
9. I also suggested alternatives to verbosity and corrected some punctuation errors.

Sam

Sam:

Did I ask your feedback on the sample?

I think I asked you to PROVIDE a writing sample, not to critique mine. Apparently, you lack the elementary ability to follow simple directions. So thanks, but no thanks.

Jalen

Hey Sam:

I just looked over your critique and it’s good. I apologize for Jalen’s rude response; he just got offended since you belittled his writing. Anyway, I appreciate your comments. Would you be comfortable working for us? We have projects coming up that need people like you. Let me know.

Bambi Gilbertson

The critiques, which Sam received, subsequently, from Bambi, did not give him feedback on his writing as much as told him whether, on a post by post basis, his work brought in sufficient traffic to merit his getting rehired. His contracts were for single instances of work.

No one involved on Bambi’s side of the screen seemed to care whether or not texts actually informed consumers about the products touted, relative to similar goods or as standalone items. All Bambi’s bosses wanted were the tallies from the widgets Bambi used. If her analytics said Sam’s writing pulled in hits, he would get rehired. If not, he would be put on notice. If he failed after being put on notice, he would be fired. He had yet to be fired.

Bambi often scolded Sam, informing him that successful blogging was based on writing a lot of simple copy and doing so quickly. Writers ought to expect manufacturers to send them fully developed product descriptions, key words, and sample pages, all of which they were paying for the SEO company to “spice up.” Bambi’s understanding of “spicing up” meant that her underlings had to indulge in adverbs like “very,” and in superlatives, of any kind, in every sentence.

Sam hated that queen of data patterns. He mollified her, for a while, regardless; when corresponding with some of his professors, he had learned that ordinary fertilizers could not save his farm. Rather, Sam needed old-fashioned, slow releasing minerals. Without income, Sam couldn’t afford even subsidized government products.

A few skips around the Internet gave Sam a fresh idea; he would sow his fields with marble. Whereas marble is a metamorphic rock, relative to limestone, which is a sedimentary petrified matter, both types of calcium carbonate enable soil to

yield healthy, happy plants. Besides, given marble's state of compression, it releases very, very slowly. Further, marble, unlike limestone, is not adversely impacted by foul weather, more of which had been predicted, by *The Farmer's Almanac for Northern New England*.

"All I have to do is to find some marble and to find a way to pay for it. There might be future green goodness on the farm. I might still pay for the heating this winter."

Sam began to look for nearby quarries or fields of stone. As well, he quit Bambi's company and sought more profitable literary gigs. He decided to write, for a fee, articles about fertilizers. He meant to get paid for the research he was undertaking on behalf of Beckinstock Acres. Almost immediately, Sam ran into imbursement problems.

Dear Editors:

Hi! I noticed that "New Fertilizers from Limestone" was published, this week, in the Ukrainian version of *Soil and Sows*. My PayPal account shows no payment for this item.

Sam Beckinstock

Sam:

Please check page C36 of the American Edition. The article is printed on the Readers Forum page.

Sincerely,

Marty Swamicker, Editor

Marty Swamicker:

Why did you print my essay in the letters section? Are you going to reimburse me for it? Will the Ukrainian editor also pay me? Any information would be appreciated.

Sam Beckinstock

Sam:

That is correct. The Readers Forum page though, is not the Letters to the Editor section. It is a page for readers to voice their opinions and thoughts.

Marty

Marty:

Thank you for your clarity. I want to be a paid contributor. How do I do so? I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sam Beckinstock

PS: My essay was printed in the "Readers' Forum" in the Ukrainian Edition, too.

Sam:

Regarding the Ukrainian Edition, you must ask them. They can be contacted at sas@keiv.gmail.co.

Marty

Marble was not readily available near Beckinstock Acres. The few surface ledge quarries that had existed in New Hampshire had long since been stripped of the stone they had contained. The closest known usable bars were located in Vermont and would have to be trucked in and then pulverized before being added to the soil. Fortunately, the local farmers' co-op, of which Sam was a member, owned a grinder mill.

Also promising was that the roadway to Concord, New Hampshire's Little League Park, which was less than half of an hour's drive from Beckinstock Acres, was adorned with marble busts of famous young players. Sam considered borrowing those heads on a permanent basis. He figured that except for random pigeons, no one else would care where and in what form those statues existed. Meanwhile, he tried another means of writing for profit.

Dear Bobby Lahert:

Happiness! Finding your organization is very validating for this expository writer! Though well-tutored in creative nonfiction, I have yet to find a suitable outlet for my work. Namely, I am trying to sell a book containing tons of essays I have written about agricultural lime. Some of those works I penned at Cornell. Others, I wrote after graduating. To date, *The Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* has published one of those essays as has *Soil and Sows*. I would like to compile all of my work into a more permanent form.

I just wish your organization had come to my attention earlier. I've been so busy acclimating myself to the agricultural life that I haven't sought academic peers for years. I look forward to hearing from you and to connecting to other like-minded creative nonfiction writers.

I have not attached a CV, writing clips, or query packets/outline/sample chapters from my book, since I've yet to determine whether or not your email service automatically sorts letters with attachments into a trash file. All such items, however, are keystrokes away from your email box. I hope you are open to receiving them.

I believe in giving as well as in getting. Perhaps I could assist in your mentoring program. At Cornell University, I was a writing tutor who specialized in Freshmen Rhetoric.

Sincerely,

Sam Beckinstock

Sam:

Nice to hear from you. I will be conducting a workshop in Boston, in

August. I am sorry to say, nevertheless, that I am unable to examine your materials. I am also not exactly certain what you are seeking. Perhaps with your guidance I can direct you to the proper person or organization.

Best,
Bobby Lahert

Bobby:

Thank you for your quick response. In answer to your question, I am seeking, in the short term, to identify publishers that might be right for my project, and, in the long term, to participate in a community of professional, creative nonfiction writers.

If you need a teaching assistant for your workshop, I am open to talking about that position. What I need most is venues to which to attach my prowess. Consider me frustrated, but not stymied. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sam

Percival Johnson, a high school friend of Sam's, knocked on Sam's door just as Sam was finishing his latest email to Bobby Lahert. Percival had just completed eight years of a ten-year sentence handed down to him for armed robbery. He was released early from the penitentiary because of the jail's overcrowding. The warden did not care about "good behavior." In fact, it had been difficult for that administrator to justify a suspended sentence for Percival since at the time of the incident the young man had carried a knife.

Beyond the small amount of money and the new set of civilian clothes given to him by the prison system, Percival had nothing. Plus, his family wanted no part of him.

"Bud!"

"Percy?"

"Can I come in?"

"Sure, sure. Just have to finish this email. Have a seat."

"Any food?"

"Leftover pizza in the fridge."

At over six feet tall and weighing in at over two hundred pounds, most of which had turned to muscle in the prison's recreation yards, Percival Johnson was fierce. At least he looked fierce to people who didn't know him.

"A little lower, please, Sam."

"Same itch. Been that way for years."

"Never seemed to lose it."

"Who did this for you in The Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility?"

"No one. No one touched me. I touched no one. I had to break a few arms, to be left alone, but that's the way of things. All of those years, boy, did I itch."

"Thinking of going back to school?"

"Kidding me? Almost got it. Wow! A bit to the left."

“Next chapter and all that?”

“Sam, you’re still an idiot. Oh, I helped myself to the bologna and to the bananas while I was in your fridge. Took the last of the lemon cake and finished that half gallon of milk, too.”

“You’re still the beast. Work then? Employment? Is this the spot?”

“Nearly. An inch higher, please. Kidding me? Just got out.”

“So, you’re free.”

“Report on parole weekly. At least I didn’t get an ankle bracelet.”

“?”

“Didn’t hurt or kill anyone when I robbed the store, so I left unwired.”

“There’s roast beef in the freezer. Microwave it for you?”

“You’re a pal. Knew I should come here. An inch higher. Sorry.”

“You’re welcome.”

A bit of whining, plus the small amount of cash Sam had made during his SEO stint, persuaded Percival to help Sam steal the Little League’s busts. All went well with Percival’s newest heist until a local patrol car cruised down the road leading to the ball park. Before the officer could determine just what sort of woodland animal had been shadowed by his brights, Percival fled.

“Shucks, Percy. I really need that marble.”

“I need to stay out of jail. I’m an ex-felon, not a fool. Remember when I whooped you at the state finals in debate?”

“Don’t think you’ll ever let me forget. That’s why we’re friends?”

“Nah. You’re the only one who had a better vocabulary than me. I had to remember you. Anyways, your mom always fed me the meatiest part of her pea soup.”

“That’s where all the soup bones went? I always wondered.”

“Those half dozen eggs in the fridge, you weren’t saving them, were you?”

“Not any longer, it seems.”

While Percival was eating up Sam’s larder, Sam tried another writing venture. He figured selling fiction would enable him to get rich quick. Sam fashioned a speculative fiction tale about an intelligent, genetically modified beanstalk.

Dear Sam:

We have all read, reviewed, and discussed your story and we liked it. The tale lingers on the mind and is nicely creepy. We would like to use your story, “Brains in the Beans” in our December/January issue of *Farming the Future*. The story’s word count fits within that of our Flash Fiction section, thus, we will pay you \$10.00 USD (our improved flat rate for stories of 500-1,000 words) for the use of your story in our magazine. Per your wishes, your story will be published under the byline: “Sam the Man.”

NOTE: If this is the first fiction sale, please let us know. We offer a special highlight on our Home Page and on your story page welcoming new fiction writers. If you haven’t already, please send a brief 2-3 line bio.

for your story page. *Farming the Future* is a bi-monthly online publication, thus accepted stories remain published online for two months. After the two month period, all rights revert back to you.

If you agree to have your story published in *Farming the Future*, simply reply to this email, sending the contract back to us. Your email header works as your signature. We pay upon publication.

By accepting our offer of publication you are verifying that you are the author of the story, that you own the rights to the story, and that the story has not been previously published either online or in print. Once we receive the contract back from you, you will receive payment from us about eight weeks after your story has been published. We will remit via PayPal. Welcome Aboard *Farming the Future*!

Sincerely,

Daniella Sintin, Senior Editor, *Farming the Future*

<http://www.alienskinmag.com/>

Daniella:

In a word, "cool!" It is my pleasure to creep out readers where appropriate ;) This story constitutes my first fiction sale to you. Let me know when you need my PayPal data. Please advise me as to when I can send you other work. I'm grateful to have "Brains in the Beans" accepted by *Farming the Future*. Thanks!

Sam

"Ten bucks, Percy. That's it and that magazine is considered a semi-pro outlet. This farm and I are going to die."

"Sam, I love you like a brother. I hope that that pudding was not being saved for anything special. One cup led to another and I sorta finished it. That okra was good, too. I didn't know you liked that stuff or knew how to cook it. Don't bother looking for the mac and cheese. I was still hungry."

"Whatever."

"How 'come you never considered taking the bathroom and kitchen counters from those condemned properties in Cootocook?"

"The ones boarded up at 'Ol Man Witherby's?"

"Those."

"And that's not stealing?"

"Nobody cares. Place has been waiting for demolition since we were in grade school."

"Percy, you're a genius."

"My claim to fame. I'll start tomorrow. Your mom always gave me the biggest bowl of stew when I came to the farm. Let's not sell it."

"She always told me she ran out of stew when I asked for some."

While Percival looted kitchen counters and bathroom fixtures, Sam tried once more to make money by writing. He contacted his Cornell mentor.

Dear Dr. Posner:

Do you know of anyone who needs a writer or an editor? I need work.

A few years ago, you graciously allowed me to serve as the student editor for your Ag. Biotech Alliance Monograph, "Red Worms' Composting of Clay Loam." The confidence that your kindness engendered in me helped me to work my way through college and, more recently, helped me to sell my writing for publication. I have an essay published in *Soil and Sows* and in *The Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*. I also have a science fiction story published in *Farming the Future*.

Unfortunately, despite my successes, I need more work. Perhaps you, or one of your many colleagues or subordinates, need a part-time writer or editor. Thank-you, in advance.

Sam Beckinstock

Sam:

I remember you! Ag. Biotech Alliance was very pleased with that monograph. I authored two more for them. Currently, I have several research assistants and one work-study student that help me with manuscripts. I don't need more manpower. Sorry.

By the way, next year, Springer is releasing my book, *Nutraceuticals and Clay Loam*. I hope you buy a copy. Good to Hear from You!

Richard Posner

PS: How's the farm doing? I read that New Hampshire has had an unusual amount of precipitation this year.

Perceval proved expert at grinding the marble he had stripped out of the condemned houses. He was not so good, conversely, at fabricating reasons why Sam needed the machine for so long.

"Perceval Johnson, here."

"I thought this was the Beckinstock Place."

"It is. Sam's not home. Can I take a message?"

"Tell him the co-op wants its grinder back. Dani Mullworth wants to turn some fieldstone into something useful. Sam's had the grinder for a month. Okay?"

"Sure. All that jazz."

After shutting the front door, Perceval regarded the sign Sam had taped to his bedroom door. It read, "Busy writing. Keep out. Egg sandwiches in the fridge."

Ellen Pomeroy:

What do you edit? To me, "name and shame" is like "slash and burn."

I hope to be "farming" my ideas for a long time.

Sam Beckinstock

Sam:

I agree—*The Rooster Review* is mostly poetry, some prose, and the

occasional essay on tractors. See our website: www.henandchicks.com. We're accepting submissions for our third issue.

Ellen

Ellen:

How long have you lived in New England? Worked as a writer? Worked as an editor? I look forward to hearing from you and to learning more about you. Do you pay for submissions?

Sam

Sam:

Thank you for your essay, "Pulverized Marble as an Amendment." I'll be getting back to you in a few months. I've also had stuff published in *Soil and Sows*. My work appeared mostly in the magazine's Tanzania edition.

I'm "supposed" to be a lawyer. The editing of *TRR* is a labor of love that I fell into . . .

Ellen

Ellen:

My sister's a lawyer. I don't talk to her too often. Did you like my essay? Will you publish it?

Sam

Sam:

We're doing a reading from the second issue of *TRR*, next Tues., at my house, in Concord. Would you like to come?

Ellen

Ellen:

How long have you lived in Concord? Have you heard of Beckinstock Acres in West Hopkinton? Your connections could be very helpful to me.

Thanks for the invite to the reading. I have to pass. I am reworking the fertilizer supplement for my fields. I have to sit this one out, but could you invite me to another?

At night, I'm busy with a new essay, "Burning Crops Suffering Armillaria Root Disease." I think I might send it to *Trends in Plant Science*. Sigh. Thereafter, I need to reformat my CV and redo Beckinstock Acres' web page. Maybe I should plant maple trees. Would you like the link to my *Farming the Future* fiction?

Sam

One day, Percival returned to the homestead with a truckload of beautiful marble, which was green with dark veins of black.

"Kitchen counters from somewhere new?"

“Naw. It’s from the lobby of The Savings Bank of Walpole.”

“They relocated?”

“Naw.”

“Decided to redo their lobby?”

“Naw.”

“Percy!”

“I busted the cameras first. Armed robbery still jollies me.”

“You risked jail for a little bit of stone from a lobby! You risked my being detained, in a house of criminals, for receiving these stolen goods!?”

“Bank was no problem. Uprooting the tombstones might be.”

“What?!”

“The marble from the bank lobby was a bonus. Security guard’s a friend of mine. I told him he could come over for your chicken pot pies. He’s got no woman folk to cook for him, so he looked the other way. If you think I get hungry . . .”

“What?!”

“New trend. Hire ex-cons for security. We know what to expect and aren’t afraid of a few bruises in a scuffle.”

“Tombstones? Please focus.”

“Trinity Church. It’s quiet place. Saw a moose. Breathtaking, simply breathtaking. Have you ever seen a moose up close?”

“You’re in major trouble. I’m in major trouble. I don’t know what to say. Starters, no chicken pot pie.”

“What’s the big deal? The guard’s a friend and the dead don’t talk. Moreover, Mr. Big Stuff, you’re going to get caught, sooner or later, for plagiarizing that piece on using marble dust in fir groves.”

“Those ideas were my own! Professor Posner’s conference paper just got me started.”

“Liar.”

“Thief.”

“Larry Jimson’s gonna’ be here, soon. He gets off at three. Cook up some of that bean and sugar stuff. He’s mean when he’s hungry. Really mean. If we stuff him with yum-yums, he might accept that we ‘ran out’ of chicken.”

The police arrived just shortly after Larry Jimson had finished the third and last box of sugar wafers Sam had had in his panty. Altogether, before eating the cookies, Larry and Percival had eaten two economy-sized bags of French fries, a dozen beef patties, a head of lettuce, four tomatoes, a bowl of apples, and a full pot of Boston Baked Beans.

Both Percival Johnson and Larry Jimson were reincarcerated as repeat offenders. They fought none of their charges. Food in prison is bland, but ample.

Sam Beckinstock never did get to plant maple trees. He did mortgage Beckinstock Acres, though, to pay for new tombstones at Trinity Church’s Cemetery and to fund a bar-be-cue dinner for all of the dead’s living and offended family members.

That robbery had cost him only his farm and three years of community service since, during his hearing, Trinity Church’s senior pastor had put in a good word

for him. It's rumored that the man of cloth appreciates anyone who can bake maple and walnut pie. Likewise, Sam was not charged for damages to The Savings Bank of Walpole since all of the evidence relevant to that burglary had been pulverized and added to his fields before he had had to appear in court.

Sometime later, Sam's expose' on alternate sources of limestone was published in the British *BMC Biology Journal*. After he finished his requisite community service, Sam returned to school.

For his second degree, taken at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Sam double majored in Science in Security Management and in Psychology and Law. When he finished his studies, he interned for *The Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* and thereafter took a post as a copy editor for the journal's parent company, De Gruyter. Sam raises herbs and flowers on his apartment's fire escape. Even though he lives in Berlin, Germany, he make sure to line the bottom of each of his flower pots with Tums, with Alka-Seltzer tablets, or with industrial quality waste marble dust, before filling them with dirt and seeds.

Ellen Pomeroy, who gave up *The Rooster Review* after five issues, bought Beckinstock Acres. Even though she left the estate in arrears, it bore many bountiful crops of feed corn. She could never quite figure out why her fields were lush, but her neighbors' fields faltered. Eventually, Ellen bought up those other farms. Even under her loving negligence, those other fields never produced as bountifully as did Sam's marble-infused lands.



[poetry]

Gravity

The consequence of
gravity
is
grave.

—james b nicola

The background of the page is filled with stylized fireworks in various shades of gray. There are several large, circular bursts of light at the top, and two long, curved trails of light that rise from the bottom and curve upwards towards the right. Small stars and dots are scattered throughout the fireworks, representing sparks and embers.

[poetry]

SPECTRUM

the intermittent illumination
of a 4th of July night—

the flamboyance of fireworks
exploding the sky

the silence of fireflies
sparking the air

flash and flicker
brashness and restraint

Tokyo man and Kyoto woman

—ada jill schneider

[poetry]

PAPER #3

She lies there, white as innocence, it seems,
and yet seductress to my mind and heart,
and diary to hopes, fears, tears and dreams,
tearing me as I tear her apart.

I gaze on her. I hesitate. I'm lost,
delirious and desperate. When I think
of the penalties this love affair has cost,
draining my mind of thought, my plume of ink,

my veins of blood, my lungs of breath—I seize her,
stab her, again and again, to leave a trace
of imperfection, suspecting it would please her,
like a beauty mark on a lying courtesan's face,

for what good is the whiteness? So I make
her, marring her, yet cannot help but ache
with every stroke, as, with each dash, I—die.
And all she did to me was dare to lie.

—james nicola

ENCLOSURES

I built a good fence
to have good neighbors
and their cows broke
through to eat my grass.

I constructed a house
from brick and mortar
to hold my true love.
She fled in the night,
left me to live alone.

I set up a geodesic dome
to imprison my worst
obsessions and fears.
They soon shattered
it to geodesic shards.

I raised a wall against
the sea and the calving
ice shelves caused it
to overflow and flood
both streets and houses.

The insistence of things
natural remains indivisible,
and the world continues
to inhale and exhale itself.

—bruce boston

Resolutions

There
are
shadows
in my eyes; eyes that see through crimson lenses,
two blood moons out of cycle
alone in a sky, in a world painted onyx.
crafted by man.

And
these
shadows
show me truth; truth of intent, of purpose,
all the dirty little secrets that hide in fantasies
that thrive in dreams; and we talk,
talk about whose job it is to purge,
to purify, to cleanse this world, this year
of pain, of torment
of famine and
disease

For blood for blood,
and flesh for flesh
there must be someone who
will kill monsters,
who will kill man,
and we,
we resolve
to be the answer
to that question;
a team who
moves in darkness leaving
puncture wounds behind,
an eye for an eye
a tooth for a tooth

And
these
shadows
of mine, buried in Old Testament practice
promise to avenge, to resolve
and together we'll murder
in order to save
destroy, in order
to rebuild

—stephanie m. wytovich

After Eyelids Drop

I gasp awake and look
for signs that you were here,
a window raised, an ache
or pain, a foreign hair
left stranded. Proof of where
your mouth and my bare neck
were each touching the other –
some tenderness, a mark.

And if I find it, what?
Repair the locks – or not?

I haunt the day and wait.
My hands caress the cup
of tea, my feet slide dust
across the floor. But sip
by sip and step by step
I'm closing in on night –
when after eyelids drop,
windows are propped in thirst.

—robyn groth

EYEWITNESS

by l.b. thomas

The sun set quick. Looked like somethin' batted it over Trapper Peak into a pool that splashed purple and orange. Then everythin' went as black as the burnt pine trees from last year's forest fire up east of Sula. A tiny sliver of moon peeked out like, I see you. But nothin' up there sees us; at least, I hope it don't.

I was driving home from huntin' up the East Fork, 'cept I was headed straight to the Naughty Moose instead of home. Some of the regular girls down there will dance with me if I give 'em smokes. It's a good time. When I get drunk, I'll dance to any old thing. They put on some hip-hop and I'll dance to that same as the rest. They all get a kick out of it.

My pickup was bouncin' all over the forest service road due to the ice build-up. There was trenches cut out where tracks had been, but they was rugged. One bump knocked my front end so high I bushed my front teeth on the steering wheel. Hurt like a bitch. I hit the brakes and punched the dash. When I calmed down, I looked down at the snow on the Walker Ranch. Just flat fields of white that reminded me of the way sheets look when they're perfect like in motel rooms.

Then I saw something out in the field—some animal. I could just barely make it out in the dark. I killed the lights on my pickup, grabbed my .308 from the rack, and looked at the thing through the scope. It was something big. I thought it might've been a tree, but there weren't no tree in the middle of the Walker's hay field.

I continued on down until I was out of the hills and on East Fork Road next to the field, and I still saw the animal. So I pulled over to the side, got outta my pickup, and walked towards it. I kept the pickup lights on and tried to keep 'em pointed near where the thing was, but it didn't help much. And I didn't have no flashlight

or nothin'. I was just walking up on it in the dark with my rifle. I was tryin' to be quiet, but the snow was so crunchy I was shocked that it weren't spooked none. I kept creepin', and soon I was only 'bout five yards away. It was something big—tall at least. Then I saw it was skinny. Then I saw it was a person.

I hollered at 'em, but they didn't even flinch. I kept movin' and kept hollerin', and soon I was right next to 'em and I still didn't recognize who it was. I could make out a face of a fellow, but he was just starin' off at nothin'. He had a knit hat, a gray jacket, and mittens on, arms just hangin' at his sides, kinda lazy. I sorta pushed him a little, but he stayed put. I was askin', "You alright?" and I was shakin' him by the arm, but he weren't respondin'.

I seen this before. In Iraq, first gulf war. It's called shock—shock from seein' or doin' somethin' that's too much for your brain to handle. I knew if I tried to move him to my pickup, he'd go into a fit, and when a man in shock goes into a fit, he rages like a gorilla. So I just walked back to my pickup, figurin' I'd stop at the ranger station in Sula and they could call over to the sheriff's office in Darby.

But my pickup didn't start. The lights was dim like the battery was drained. I kept turnin' over the engine, and it kept coughin' like my grandma 'fore the cigarettes took her. I'd had trouble with this battery before, but it didn't seem like I'd left the lights on near long enough to drain it complete. After a few more tries at turnin' it over, I gave up and shut it down. It was only about three miles to the station, so I figured I was in for a hike. When I got outta my pickup, I looked out where the man was standin', and he weren't there no more. I hollered again to see if he'd respond now, but nothin'.

I weren't afraid of the dark or nothin', but I seen some strange shit at night here in the Bitter-rut Valley. Strange shit in the sky. They call it Big Sky Country 'cus you can see the wide open heavens in all directions like you're up high on some pedestal. Ain't nothin' up there hidden from us.

Once I was up late at night outside of Karl Burlman's trailer, talking with his sister, seein' if I could sweeten her up a bit, and we seen a shooting star. And it just kept goin', flyin' across the whole sky. And then flew right at us, got real big like a fire ball. There was a BOOM and the night lit up like day for five seconds. When I got in my pickup to leave, the radio was sayin' that there was government folks drivin' vehicles up Lost Horse and settin' up barricades. But the next morning, the paper says scientists thought it was a meteor that bounced off the atmosphere, but it don't mention government folks or barricades. I don't believe in UFOs or alien creatures, but I know what I seen, and it was an odd goddamn thing.

As I walked down the road away from my dead pickup, all I heard was the whirling of the wind turbines across the way at the Trolmann property. I didn't know why I was bringin' my .308 with me. I guess I must've been scared of somethin'. It didn't really make no sense to bring a rifle in the pitch dark, but I didn't know what the hell was goin' on. Maybe if I'd asked some fancy scientist, he'd 've told me that a meteor sucked the power outta my battery before it knocked that poor fellow in the field on the head.

A couple hundred yards down the road, I came up on a scene: a busted-up Ford

station wagon lyin' in a ditch along the fence of the Walker Ranch. I couldn't've seen it from the forest service road 'cus it was 'round a bend. The doors was all open but the lights weren't on. I poked around inside a bit to see if I could find a cell phone or somethin', but it was just a bunch of crap: maps, water bottles, sunglasses. An empty kid's car seat was in the back. I couldn't find keys, but the front end was so busted up, I'm not sure I coulda done nothing with 'em.

Around that time, I started thinkin' about cuttin' across the Walker property and headin' straight for their house. It weren't that far off—half-mile maybe. They'd probably be home, and I could just use their phone to call the sheriff. It'd be a bit treacherous in the dark, but as long as I didn't twist my ankle in a gopher hole, I'd be alright. But I sure didn't wanna fall in the crick that ran through their property—it was startin' to get cold out.

I picked the angle that I thought would get me there most direct, climbed through the fence, and made my way 'cross the field. I weren't even thirty yards from the car wreck when I heard footsteps comin' at me from somewhere. I stopped and tried to pin down where they was, and then I seen the fellow from before just walking along, not mindin' nothin', headed in a straight line like he had somewhere to be.

I says, "Hey, Mister," and he stopped still. I walked up to him and when I got close, I says again, "Hey, Mister."

He turned to face me and he asks, "Can anyone see us?"

"No, sir," I says.

"You ever feel like your body's bein' controlled by something?" he asks.

"No, sir," I says again.

He started cryin' and I moved in real close. He wavered at the base like a tree about to topple. I put the rifle down so I could steady him, and he must've just then realized what I'd been carryin'. I only had a moment between when I realized he was gonna go for the rifle and when he moved in earnest. We both grabbed it at the same time. I got the muzzle end and he had the stock.

The rifle was pointed at me and he pulled the trigger. The safety was on, so it didn't fire, but I let go and backed away three paces. He started fumblyin' with it, so I made another play at snatchin' it from him. But before I could get at it, he'd switched off the safety, put the muzzle under his chin, and pulled the trigger.

Crack.

He was floppin' all around. I picked the rifle up off the ground and pulled the bolt back, lettin' the hot shell fly off. I loaded another round from my pocket. I'd put a lotta animals outta their misery before, so I didn't hesitate none. I pressed the muzzle against his chest, right over his heart, and fired.

Crack.

The body went still. It was real quiet then. I kept on towards the Walker's place. I did step in the crick with my left foot, but I pulled it out real quick before it soaked the sock. I overshot the house to the north a bit, but I corrected myself when I could make it out. The building was dark and empty. I knocked a few times and let myself in. I dialed from the phone in the kitchen and told the sheriff that I'd wait

for him, then I went out to the porch case the Walkers come back and saw someone in their home.

I didn't feel bad for takin' that man's life; weren't the first thing I'd ever shot. I didn't really feel no regret. I'd tried to help, but there weren't no helpin' him. The next day, the paper says he was vacationing from California and he'd lost his job over the phone, some secret government thing. He'd gotten drunk, suffocated his kids, and then driven' out as far as he could get, lookin' for some way to off himself. Story made some sense I guess, but I know what I seen, and it was an odd goddamn thing.

When I had to make my official statement, the sheriff asked if there was any way someone else could've witnessed the shootin'. I says, "Nope. Nobody was watchin' us."

"Cept God," he says.

"Not even sure he was lookin'," I says.



SUDDEN DEATH OVERTIME

by paul stansfield

A minivan slowly entered the bar parking lot. A man exiting the pub observed it idly, and then he did a double take. As the vehicle slid into a parking space, the man saw that its sides were covered with gigantic Seattle Seahawk emblems. Rather superfluously, the back of the minivan sported numerous Seahawk bumper stickers. As the man entered his own car he shook his head and chuckled. That was one loyal fan!

The door to Munson's Pub (such an odd name for the Keahnsville, Oregon, establishment) opened and a large, scruffy-looking man entered and took a place at the bar. The few customers who tore their gazes away from the hanging TV noticed that the newcomer wore his feelings on his sleeve, or more precisely, on his entire body. He was dressed in a Seattle Seahawk sweat suit, coat, and baseball cap. More keen observers noted with amusement that the man also sported Seahawk socks and a Seahawk watch. However, since the man's team was playing the Oakland Raiders in a few minutes and over half of the bar had similar Seahawk articles of clothing (although not as many) they quickly turned back to the impending game.

The Monday Night Football announcers were completing their promos. A wide angle shot showed the artificially green turf of The Kingdome. The bartender went over to the newcomer and then stopped. The man had his eyes closed, a look of absolute joy on his face.

Behind his shut eyes, Jeff was ecstatic. The sight of The Kingdome's sacred carpeting had given him a rush that no drug ever had. He was looking at the home of The Most Awesome Team in the NFL, the Seattle Seahawks! He couldn't wait for the battle to begin.

"Hey, you wanna drink, pal?" the bartender finally ventured.

Torn from his blissful thoughts, Jeff blinked. With a sigh of annoyance he ordered a beer. As the bartender left, and the broadcast shifted to a commercial, Jeff turned slightly and regarded his cohorts at the bar for the first time. A couple of guys a few stools down were discussing the cursed Raiders—in a favorable manner! Jeff’s feeling of exhilaration dwindled immediately into an intense, burning hatred. Fans forsaking the One Team within a few hundred miles of Mecca! His hand crept into his hidden inside pocket and gripped the Bowie knife inside. Then he caught himself. The game had not yet started, and seeing the pagan’s cries of disappointment over the impending loss would be more enjoyable anyway. Besides, his beer was now in front of him.

First Quarter

The tremendous feeling of elation was back. Jeff nearly floated as the Seahawks scored two quick touchdowns to go up 14 – 0. He found himself cheering along with most of the rest of the bar. A man sitting next to him wearing a Raiders cap asked him to quiet down.

Jeff whirled on his objector, eyes blazing. His concealed Ingram Machine Pistol clanked softly against the bar.

“Shut your fucking trap, infidel,” he hissed quietly, so as not to attract the bouncer. “The Seahawks are triumphing and I shan’t be silent.”

The complaining man’s jaw dropped, and he shortly thereafter mumbled something and walked away. Figures, thought Jeff. All Raider fans are pussies. He roared once more as the Seahawks made the score 17 – 0 on a thirty-five yard field goal.

Second Quarter

About forty-five minutes later, Jeff ordered his fourth beer. The Righteous Ones were now leading 23 – 0. He had long since yelled out his voice. A quick glance away from the television revealed many happy and whooping Seahawk fans. Even a wizened old couple put down their gin and prune juices long enough to cheer and laugh. Jeff quickly put his head down, hiding the tears that had welled up in his eyes from the beautiful display. Genuine outpourings of love and respect for the Seahawks were so rarely seen in public that they always affected him like that. A little embarrassed by his sentimentality, he dried his eyes and settled back on his stool. It was gonna be a great night!

Third Quarter

About an hour later, the good feelings had remained constant. The two teams had traded touchdowns, so the score was now 30 – 7. A nice safe score, thought Jeff. He drank the last half inch of his sixth beer and grimaced. The last swallow of beer always tasted like piss, especially since it was half foam. He looked around expecting to see distraught faces of the nonbelievers and was sorely disappointed. Not only were they not distraught, they were cheering! Jeff switched his gaze back to the TV just in time to see a Raider linebacker cross the goal line with a recovered

fumble. He placed his hands over his mouth and managed to prevent the barrage of obscene epithets from escaping. Inside, however, Jeff seethed with rage at the Raider players, fans (who were of course going nuts), and the incompetent zebras. Once again his hand went to his hidden knife. He had just about proceeded to yank it out when self-control washed over him. It was not entirely the fans' fault that they supported such a hellish team. They had probably been exposed to Raider propaganda, and thus were brainwashed since birth, deprived of The True Word. Besides, there was no need for violence as yet, since the Seahawks were still up by sixteen. Jeff still wished the Raider fans in the bar would stop their incessant cheering and yammering. They sounded like the uncivilized beasts that they were.

Fourth Quarter

The situation was gradually worsening. The Raiders kicked a field goal to trim the lead to 30 – 17. Jeff, two beers more inebriated, was becoming even angrier. Suddenly he realized that he had to go to the men's room again. That was the one bad thing about drinking beer, he thought. You have to piss every five minutes. Picking his way carefully through the crowd (so he wouldn't be cut off by the bartender), he entered the bathroom and sidled up to a urinal—"bellying up to the bar"—as a relative had referred to it. This brought on a case of the giggles. The remains of his last few beers drained out of him. As Jeff was shaking off, a hand abruptly fell on his shoulder, and before he knew what was happening, he was being spun around. Jeff observed that his assailant and the assailant's two cohorts were deranged-looking bikers. Apparently following some bizarre biker dress code, each was attired in stained jeans, large shitkickers, Harley-Davidson T-shirts, unkempt beards, and facial scars.

"We don't like the Seahawks or their pussy fans!" said the lead biker.

He punctuated this opinion with a hard knee to Jeff's still uncovered genitals. Jeff fell against the wall, clutching his rapidly swelling privates, feeling the intense pain only males can experience. The lead biker added a few kicks to Jeff's face while one of the other bikers locked the door. Fortunately for the Hell's Angels, the rest of the bar had no interest in answering nature's call at the moment; they were watching the Raider punt returner run back the punt all the way for the score. This biker also checked the two stalls briefly for others, but when he saw the only occupant was passed out, he ignored him and went back to guarding the door. Jeff slumped to the floor, eyes closed.

The head biker motioned to his other comrade, who proceeded to approach Jeff's prone form to relieve him of his wallet. Abruptly Jeff's eyes opened, and shortly thereafter his fingers were buried in the searching biker's eye sockets. A kick from the very surprised leader was skillfully caught with Jeff's other hand.

With a grin, Jeff arose, still holding the biker's ankle. The now-blind other biker dropped to the floor, going into shock as he did so. The lead biker unsuccessfully tried to reach Jeff with wild swings. Jeff's hand found his Bowie knife and he slashed upwards with it, aiming for the violent pagan's groin. It had quite a satisfactory result. The sharp blade easily cleaved the grimy Levis and then became stuck in

flesh. The blood staining his jeans signified that Jeff's attacker was now a gelding. The wounded leader soon joined his blind friend on the floor of the men's room. His cries of agony were loud, but so was the blaring of the TV and the screaming of the bar patrons. Unable to stifle a few chortles, Jeff nonetheless remembered the third biker and spun around, exchanging his knife for the Ingram as he did so, and pulling up his pants as well. The biker in question had stayed by the door during the whole exchange, mouth dragging the floor in disbelief.

"Move over there, heathen," Jeff ordered, brandishing his machine pistol at the two wounded bikers, "And don't think I won't use it!"

His wide-eyed looks at his gore-streaked friends seemed to help the third biker arrive upon a decision, and he rapidly joined them as directed. After checking that the door was secure, Jeff ambled over to his would-be assailants. Standing a few feet away, he addressed the non-injured Hell's Angel.

"You dare to challenge a disciple of the Seahawks barely two hundred miles from the Holy Land! You shall most likely burn for that, but that is not for me to decide. I give you a choice, nonbeliever, something which you didn't give me. Accept my conditions or be killed outright." Jeff tossed his knife at the trapped man while keeping his pistol trained on him. "Now kill your false leader," he said tonelessly.

The man picked up the knife gingerly and then stopped. "Plea-please man, I—we're sorry! Don't kill me!"

Jeff paused, and then caught himself with a jerk. He was showing mercy to an infidel! You had to hand it to those bastards, though, he thought, they could make their evil lies sound so sincere. The silenced end of his Ingram rang out in sing-song fashion, opening up some new orifices in the pleading biker's legs.

The biker got the message. With a cry of pain he brought the knife down into the leader's neck, which sent a surprisingly forceful spray of blood onto the executioner, the floor, and the walls fifteen feet beyond. Jeff laughed and clapped.

"Very good! Almost done now. Now get to work on your other friend, and then you can start your own redemption." He began to direct the biker.

Coldness, and the stench of shit. Scott Essian suddenly regained consciousness. Once there he wished he hadn't. His head, cradled on the lip of the toilet, was inches away from the vomit he'd spewed up sometime before. Looking at it, he could still see the chunks of sausage and cheese from the pizza he'd wolfed down earlier that night after his first sixer. Apparently his stomach had ignored the solid food and concentrated instead on the vast supply of twelve ounce dosages of liquid bread he had also dumped down. And what was he doing examining his puke for, anyway? He stumbled to his feet with a groan and spun woozily out of the stall.

Two men were sitting a few feet apart on the other side of the bathroom, engaged in some unfathomable activity. Two blood-drenched bodies lay nearby also. As Scott concentrated, he realized that one of the men was sitting there sans pants. Small rivulets of blood trickled down from the places where the half-naked man's nose and balls used to be. His legs were all shot up, too. This man was

presently slicing off his tongue with a big knife. The other man, who had blood on his face and Seahawk apparel on seemingly every inch of his body was directing the mutilated guy with a gun. Shit, I thought I was too young for the D.T.'s, thought Scott. He swooned against the edge of the stall he had just vacated.

A few seconds later a hand reached out and steadied him. Scott started as he saw it was the man with the gun.

“Come now, friend, it looks like you’re in bad shape. Here, let me take you out to the bar and buy you a glass of milk. Does wonders for an upset stomach and’ll take the sting out of you head.” Scott allowed himself to be led by the gun-toting, walking Seattle Seahawk billboard. The maniac nodded over to the bodies and the self-mutilated man, now unarmed and babbling in a corner.

“Sorry about that ugly scene. Had to straighten out a few nonbelievers. But you know how it is,” he said, indicating Scott’s Seahawk hat. Scott nodded as if to say, “Well, sure, I am often forced to kill strangers in public restrooms.” He’d quickly decided to humor this nut, who oddly enough had not been upset that Scott had viewed his impromptu surgery. The two men exited the washroom.

The giddiness that had overtaken Jeff following the extermination of the bikers abruptly left him as he once again viewed the TV, just in time to see the Raider tight end performing a comically clumsy end zone dance. The Seahawks! He had let a little fun distract him from his team! With a cry of genuine pain, Jeff dropped to his knees, contrasting oddly with many of the bar’s denizens, who were mostly screaming and jumping up and down. The nice young drunk he had just befriended, apparently also wildly upset by the Raider’s touchdown, ran out of the establishment. Intense fury as he had never experienced before flowed through Jeff. Unseen by him, the Raiders made the extra point. Finally, Jeff managed to stand. A look at the screen revealed his worst nightmare—Raiders 31, Seahawks 30—9 seconds remaining.

As the Seahawks futilely tried to duplicate the University of California’s miraculous, band-aided kickoff return in 1982, and the clock ran down, Jeff loosed a loud roar. The Raider fans nearest him glanced at him with scorn, amusement, and after they got a good look at him—abject terror. The final gun and Jeff’s Ingram went off in unison. The smug looks on the silver-and-black garbed demons nearest him were quickly altered by the many bullets the gun ejaculated. All eyes were on Jeff, and people began fleeing for the lone exit. Jeff let all those of the Seahawk faith go, while picking off all those wearing Raider apparel or those he had overheard speaking positively of the cursed team, who numbered about a dozen. Those with no team clothing or known team affiliation were also let go, in the hopes that they were also Seahawk fans. Jeff shot, reloaded, and continued to shoot until there were no signs of life, both in the bar itself and the parking lot, which was now visible through the broken front window. Bodies lay everywhere, twisted in grotesque shapes. As the last of the cars squealed away into the night (some headed, no doubt, for a safe phone or the sheriff’s station twenty miles away) Jeff made his way toward the door. A slick rug of blood coated the hardwood floor, and Jeff slipped and nearly fell. Because of that near mishap, he trod directly on the bodies, which

provided better traction, and he had to admit to himself more amusement as he further defiled the pagans. A slight movement out in the parking lot caught Jeff's eye. He stepped right over to it, freshly loaded gun erect.

Jeff was met with a hopelessly sad sight. A young man (the same guy, Jeff realized in horror, that he'd helped from the bathroom) wearing a Seahawk hat was lying on the pavement, bleeding from a leg wound, a leg wound obviously inflicted by one of Jeff's stray bullets! Tears flooded his eyes.

"Oh my God, I'm so sorry!" he cried, assisting Scott in standing. "Please believe me, I never meant to hurt a Seahawk's fan!"

A short while later, after he assured Jeff he could drive himself to the hospital, Scott drove off in Jeff's minivan—a gift, along with all of Jeff's money—to help pay for his horrible, accidental gunshot wound. Good riddance, thought Scott as he left Munson's Pub, and the gridiron zealot behind him. Looks like I picked the right hat to borrow, he thought a minute later.

Back in the bar, Jeff was strangely calm. Atonement was called for, he thought. He had actually injured a fellow Seahawk disciple! He dug in his coat pocket and pulled out *The Good Book*. "The Football Smartie Book—Seattle Edition" was printed on the dog-eared tome. Alas, it was not able to give him any suitable atonement processes for injuring a True Fan. The Good Book, as sacred as it was, was definitely lacking in some matters. Jeff was at a loss; that unfortunate fan was the first fellow human being that he'd ever hurt. Suddenly, he remembered something that he had heard or read somewhere: "If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out." He stared thoughtfully into the distance, considering. Then with a heavy sigh he knew what must be done. He trudged to the bar and placed his right index finger, his trigger finger, on the counter. Then, with a few humble prayers of regret, he sliced off his finger with his knife.

About an hour later, while driving a stolen Winnebago away from the carnage, he realized that he felt abnormally cheerful. True, he was sorely disappointed by the Seahawk's defeat, and his own grievous sin. Plus, his hand was smarting something awful beneath the bandage. Looking on the bright side, though, at least there were about fifteen less Raider fans in the world. Jeff felt very proud of that. Well, not too proud, he chided himself. After all, he had merely behaved as a true fan should!



MISS
YOU

It's hard to sleep with the fish hooks tugging taut lines under the sheets, between my toes, and out the westward window, strung up like power lines between here and there. As tight as guitar strings, sometimes, and I can almost hear your voice reverberating across them. I pluck out messages in Morse code, but you only pluck back the most beautiful music. Sometimes I wake up to the slightest tug... and I wonder if the other ends of these strings have been tied off to a tree, and if what I'm hearing is just the humming of the wind, and if what I'm feeling might be a bird landing somewhere in the middle.

Night sweat desperate, strumming strings at 3 a.m. to wake you next to someone else. Maybe half asleep you still love me? Digging in a panic for that buried piece of you that still remembers what it was to feel what you felt. "That part of me is dead. I'm not that person anymore," says the wind, whistling over all the holes I've left in you. "Put down the shovel. It's not there." The you I once knew is sand through my fingers, and now sand in my sheets, and there's no comfort here. This bed, this body, is saturated in you, and I'd burn it if I weren't so goddamn determined to drown. What things I wouldn't do, what black magic I wouldn't cast, to dig my fingers into time and drag it back to the moment just before I said "I'm not ready."

—rob baker

Night walk

Rain silences the crunch of fall leaves.
Your feet push through mulchy piles,
Skitter in the slime like rats
Trying to desert the sinking ship.
It's just gone dark, the streets already silent.
Night's fingers moving in for the kill.

Shapes and shadows loom out of alleys,
Beckon and flirt. In the glow of a streetlight
Trees offer up their remaining leaves
Like bright blessings, like sacrifices,
Like unwanted appeasements.
Somewhere water splashes.

People emerge from the gloom,
Unrecognizable. They might be your neighbours,
Or your parents, your children,
Your murderers stalking with
Upraised hammers or poised blades.
Night fears, night sweats, night terrors.

Night inveigles you with odours of half-cooked dinners,
Of earthy, rain-sodden gardens,
Of perfume traces hanging on the air.
Night rolls you into its embrace, lulls and lures you
Toward the refuge of stalkers, the Bogey Man's lair,
The Bundy Man's grip, the neurotic's fixations.

You turn away, but there's no escape from
The brooding mouth of night
Bending low to whisper your failures
Like an old familiar catechism
Into your hungry ear.

—kern windwraith

TORTURED

The vulnerability of reciprocity,
of letting in
giving sweetly
was, for us,
who were merely empty cups
with many holes,
Unimaginable.

Ours was a love that ran deep
with misunderstandings,
false smiles,
Distance.

I was left in profound want of
one true embrace,
one 'goodbye' that said I can't wait
till I see you again,

one real 'goodnight'
that wasn't strained
with the lack of three words.

I didn't need you to say it,
just to feel it
in anything possible.
I looked for it everywhere,
but in myself.

We did not grow together.
We shrunk
like dried fruit

that has worn the sun,
its wicked cloak of sweaty breathe,
for eons too costly.

Our sunburns,
we thought had made our skin calloused,
had burned our bodies to the marrow.
We became one with Earth's layers,
far more than six feet under.

ASTRONOMERS

The reason for our egos hung low,
the way we abhorred the quietest touch.

Now we both live in the moonlight,
on different thumbnails of a map.
As we rotate,
we lean towards oblivion,
only finding solace in stardust.

Both searching for similiarity,
hoping if we freshen our eyes
to the still beauty that is night's fury,
we can frighten but the darkness
That's developed in our spirits.

Maybe when I epiphinize
the simple mysteries
of this shallow Universe,

and have become Zeus;
with height advantage
from bolts and light morals,

I can telescope
the rock you've had to Sisyphus-ize uphill,
Atlasing your way through my small-eyed

years.
And you will see
how being mistaken for an immovable stone,
for your heavy blistering world,
was worse
because I was once human.

Of course,
I forget,
so were you.

And now we are thirsty gods,
peering through the sky,
still searching in the wrong direction.

—nicole hampton

[short story]

THE HORROR IN THE WOODS

by rick mcquiston

The first thing Christian noticed about the carcass was that it hadn't decayed. In fact it looked just as it had when he first came across it two days earlier—no different at all. And there weren't any bugs on it—no maggots, no ants, no beetles.

Nothing.

Feeling curiosity battle with revulsion, Christian picked up a stick and approached the corpse. If he had to guess he would say it was a raccoon because of the black striping on its fur. However, it was hard to tell, even considering its unusually intact condition.

He didn't want to poke it, but it was hard to resist the temptation. Maybe if he turned it over he could see what kind of animal it was. Or at least what had happened to it.

But something happened then that stopped him in his tracks: An ant, a large, bulbous ant, its antenna mindlessly flicking in the air, scuttled out from beneath a rock and, inch by inch, cautiously drew nearer to the body.

Christian found himself mesmerized by the bug. He watched it intently as it moved forward, crawling closer ... and closer ... and closer, until it ...

... was sucked into the carcass.

Christian felt his head grow light. He'd seen something impossible, and it was staring him right in the face. Suddenly the dead body of an animal, lying in the middle of the woods and strangely unaffected by decay, became something to be afraid of.

He dropped the stick. It landed on the leaf-strewn ground without a sound.

He stepped back. A twig snapped beneath his foot. Overhead, a crow circled. He wanted to run, but something kept him from doing so, something irresistible and powerful.

Another step back ...

... and then another, all the while watching the carcass, making sure it didn't move.

A squirrel bounded out from a copse of trees. Its nervous disposition was accented by the presence of a dead animal nearby. It slowed to a gentle crawl, inching closer to the body. It twitched its nose. Its glossy black eyes blinked continuously. Its fuzzy tail curled and uncurled.

And then it was gone—sucked into the carcass in a flash.

The horror of what he had seen hardly had time to register in Christian's brain before yet another creature of the forest came along foraging for food.

It was a chipmunk, a tiny brown thing no larger than a bar of soap and apparently eager to find food. It shimmied along the ground, wrestling through leaves, twigs, and stones.

Before Christian could scare it away, it ventured too close to the carcass and was promptly sucked in.

He'd seen enough.

Turning to flee, Christian felt something snag his foot. For the longest second he resisted looking down, fearful of what he might see.

He looked down.

The squirrel had its arms wrapped around his ankle. Its claws were poised just above the flesh, ready to slice into it with savage ease. A thin brown goo that smelled terrible covered its body.

Terror gripped his body. Christian didn't know what to do. If he moved, the squirrel might attack. If he didn't ... well, who knew what would happen then?

The squirrel looked up. A glint of intelligent evil underscored its rodent features.

Christian recognized it. It was the same squirrel that had been eaten by the carcass.

Eaten?

Just the thought made him shudder.

The squirrel continued staring at him. Christian bent down and grabbed the stick again. It wasn't much of a weapon, but it was all he had.

He felt something on the back of his neck.

The ant crawled down his back, leaving a trail of brown slime.

And then the chipmunk darted over his foot. It stopped and gazed up at him, brown slime dripping over its snarling face.

Christian stood perfectly still. The natural inclination was to run, but he resisted. He smelled feces, a burning odor that was like a bathroom after a dozen people had used it, and it took all his willpower not to cover his nose.

If he moved, it could prove disastrous.

A violent tug on his foot yanked Christian from his thoughts.

He looked down and saw the squirrel pulling him along. His foot nudged up mounds of dirt and dry leaves as it moved.

Christian brought the stick down as hard as he could on the animal's head. It snapped in half as if it had struck stone.

The squirrel ignored the attack and increased its efforts.

And then the ant stung him. A virulent toxin immediately coursed through his body, rendering him helpless.

The chipmunk scurried behind his other foot and pushed him forward.

Christian felt himself moving against his will. His body was paralyzed. His vision was blurry. His arms and legs were useless. He managed to tilt his head down and saw the carcass on the ground. It still looked dead, but seemed to be pulsating, churning, breathing.

It welcomed him, splitting open to receive its latest meal. The slaves it had excreted were doing their job of securing more prey for it.

Christian felt himself fall into a steaming pit of stench.

Joseph pulled his cap off and wiped his sweaty brow with the back of his hand. He groaned when he looked at his watch. "Where is that boy?" he mumbled. "He said he'd finish his chores before lunch."

Deciding to go looking for his son, Joseph shook his head and started to make his way toward the front gate of his property.

Movement in the brush just beyond the tree line caught his eye.

"Christian? Is that you?"

No answer.

Joseph felt uneasy. A sixth sense warned him not to go into the woods.

Christian stepped into the clearing. A light coating of brown slime covered his body.

“Christian? What’s wrong with you?”

Joseph took a step back.

Something scampered behind him.

“Christian? Answer me.”

The aroma of feces wafted into Joseph’s face.

He felt the sting on his back, and became paralyzed where he stood.

Christian lumbered closer, moving toward his master’s prey.



[poetry]

Countdown

Sunlight in bronze—
strange birds older and younger
than the evening cold that shapes
the nothingness of snow and the
longing for the green appointment
with spring

Starlings above empty fields
in frigid slumber
here where fate wags its finger
at life—intense with condemnation
for the mistakes, omissions—keen on
retribution as that is what fate does—
by bringing us back to the beginning so that
all sorrows are fresh and never outlived
in the countdown to eternity

Time undergoes its struggles
and we acquiesce in the ride;
the gravestone monuments,
so like rows of teeth,
shaping the scenery;
false promises—how each moment seems
like a forever star still burning millions
of years ago somewhere—and later,
velocity—deception—redemption—release—
the great lie is the eternal lie of eternity itself

Motions in gratitude
the hues of yellow irises against
a banked dawn;
the transitions of light
are manifold events
immanent with the sum
of opening and closing—
finding in discovery
the loss that can be mended
unfolding as gracefully as an ocean of stars

—christina murphy

Faust Waiting for Midnite

four flat screens
blaring
two silicone molded women
sleep in the round bed exhausted

the clock is ticking

the latte machine needs cleaning
the blender still slushed with green ice
and tequila and limes
four trays of cold food sit
on dark green granite
opening to view the fire place
in the window lined den
the cityscape sparkles
with a new year's dawning

the clock is ticking

the credit cards still sit on the table
next to the red MAC
cycling Bluetoothed symphonies
through the wireless speakers
surrounding the flat

the clock is ticking

sixteen minutes left
and the blood words end
all the wish lists
all the appliances
all the gratification
all the things that could have been done
with this bargain
end

the old guy did keep his promise

the clock begins to chime

—david cowen

PADDY IN A HOLE

by rob baker

The last thing I'd heard was Big Dave Connally's voice over my shoulder.

"Jesus, I'm sorry, Mikey," he'd said as I stepped past him, the door to the apartment building closing behind me and cutting off the sounds of the party within. Then the butt of his .45 had crashed into my skull, just above the right ear, and the ground had rushed to meet me like an eager lover.

When I awoke, eyes fluttering open into stygian blackness, I'd already known where I was. Rough-sawn wood scratched at the back of my head. Something dug viciously into the small of my back, and as I reached to wipe a stickiness that could only be blood out of my eyes, I found my arms hampered by more timber. The box was cramped and dark, and it was right where I'd known this stupid fucking scheme would lead me.

Hell, schemes are intelligent. Schemes are synonymous with plans, and people who plan things know what they're doing. This had been a caper from the start, a Grade-A Polish goat-roping. I took a shuddering breath, briefly impressed at how I was managing to keep my shit together, and groped in the blackness for the tape recorder I knew would be there, since that's How Things Are Done, and I'd Done enough Things to know the protocol by now. The "play" button depressed with a snap, and after a few moments of white noise, old Mac's voice filled the box.

"You stupid fuckin' kid," the voice rasped. Sean MacCready (AKA Mac) had a voice like the rustle of a funeral shroud. It was soft, cold, empty, the Old Country brogue worn away by decades of South Boston malice and fine Scotch. In the darkness of the box I could almost see the wrinkled old bastard, hunched behind his big mahogany desk like a beady-eyed troll, a Beretta within easy reach as he counted out stacks of cash that could've put my sister through school and kept my ma in vodka until she finally decided to do us all the favor of dying.

"You stupid, stupid kid. I never had you pegged as the kind, Michael," Mac half-whispered. "You had such promise, and then you had to go and blow it like this. Did you think I wouldn't notice?"

He paused, as though waiting for me to answer. I stayed quiet, mostly from

terror, though I like to think part of it may have been from defiance. Honestly? No, I hadn't thought he'd notice. The man had more money than God. Surely he couldn't begrudge the hired thugs a small pittance? Enough for rent, enough for gas, enough to get their mothers another handle of Goose so she'd shut the fuck up about the company they chose to keep?

The Old Man was speaking again.

"I am glad," that cold voice wheezed, "that one of my workers is an honest man. Young David told me of your plan. He showed loyalty and courage. He's a good man. Not scum like you. Not a mistake."

Ouch.

"You know my policy, Michael. I bury my mistakes. You've buried enough of them for me that you should'a seen this coming. Now you're just another fuckin' Paddy in a hole."

The tape clicked off, and then the fear came—that animal fear, where nothing matters but survival. I screamed, I ranted, I used precious air beating my fists bloody against the walls of my make-shift coffin. I cursed that Judas bastard Dave Connally for his treasonous ways, and I cursed his brothers and sisters and his mother and father and the entire Connally line all the way back to Ireland.

After what felt like hours but was probably minutes, I found myself ranted out. I panted in the darkness, wondering how long it would be before lack of oxygen finally claimed me. Voices from my past drifted in and out of hearing, some praising me, others condemning me. Friends, family, people I'd loved and people I'd hated. The blackness was filled with voices.

That small, hard something dug into my back again, and I cursed and fumbled for it, intent on at least dying comfortably.

Elbows and knees scraped wood as I twisted and swore and groped for the offending object, and when my fingers closed around it I froze. Then I laughed.

Dave had been there with me, when we'd buried the last few fools who had tried to steal from Mac. We'd emptied their pockets and thrown them into boxes, buried them alive under six feet of dirt and then shared a six-pack over the unfortunate man's grave, remarking on how awful it would be to wake up in that blackness. How horrifying and terrible a death it must be to suffocate in a hole all alone, how we'd rather kill ourselves than die like that.

Dave was my friend. He was a traitor, but he was a friend, and as I hefted the .38 Special he'd "forgotten" to take from my waistband, I sent up a silent prayer of thanks to Mary, Jesus, and David Connally.

I thumbed back the hammer, the revolver click-clacking like breaking bones as the cylinder rotated into position. The metal barrel was cold as I pressed it against the roof of my mouth, the taste of stainless steel and old gunpowder the sweetest thing to ever pass my lips.

As my finger tightened on the trigger, I laughed, and all of the voices laughed with me.



[poetry]

THE
GESTURES
OF
UNMAKING

In the fall of Icarus
the necessary boundary
has been shattered—
the structure of desire
is the distrust of disappointment

Amidst the symmetry of *yes* and *no*
the impasse of resentment becomes
the ever-deepening battlefield
where the wildest beasts of nature
are the gestures of unmaking

—christina murphy

THE GOODBYE KISS

Behind her ears,
the scent of vanilla
that few men can resist,
if they are truly men.

So he is just one more
lusting after her,
licking her skin,
touching certain private places
not allowed --
unaware of the cost,
the payment for his sin.

She promises herself he will be the last,
but it happens again and over,
each one unique as the one before.

Just one more, her lips fold softly
in a prayer to her dark goddess,
the one with the yellow eyes
who speaks in tongues.

—marge simon



[poetry]

"What The Light Allows"

Women dance around the fire
Scorching grass that once was green
Now the stars illumine their glyphs
This awful night of Halloween.

Their curses to the cosmos stand
The full moon watches down
Giving them no long shadows
Causing havoc round the town.

Distant wolves sing on
Blotting out the doomed screams
Men who were briefly lovers
Charred ashes taken by the streams.

—matthew wilson

Moving Waters

Moving waters as shadows
in love with morning light
within the celestial masterpiece
so close to infinite perfection

Voices speak with certainty
in the gardens where sunlight
is the wafer and the grail and
peace floats like a mist above the trees

In mountains bright enough to hide the sun
as the wind dies down and all is still,
twilight reveals that distinctions are illusions
and starlight is the greatest of deceivers

—christina murphy



by sue ellis

The last rays of the October sun flickered over two hundred wind generators offshore of Cape Cod. The unified *swish, swish* of the sleek propellers echoed softly inland. Underwater, the base poles transmitted ever widening arcs of dimly perceptible vibrations that mesmerized underwater creatures and sent eddies of silt skittering across the ocean floor.

As darkness fell, a woman emerged from a cottage overlooking the bay and picked her way down a steep path toward the water's edge. A crippling malady seemed to plague her. She fell to her knees once, but righted herself with the help of a burl wood cane. She was less than medium height and slender, with clipped black hair that closely followed the contours of her skull.

Well back from the incoming tide, she laid her cane and towel on the sand and made her way into the water. Her dark bathing costume and complexion made her nearly invisible, even in moonlight. She appeared to recoil and stagger—paused, and then edged deeper into the choppy sea. Her halting submersion continued until, at last, she sank below the heaving surface.

From his hiding place among tall shore grass and boulders, seventy-year-old Jack Kelly watched her, as he had for the past three nights. She was a definite anomaly—someone who would swim in the frigid ocean in the late fall.

Local people had protested his plans to build the offshore wind-generated electrical facility, but he'd persuaded them with his zeal and practicality. He was proud of his environmentally friendly solution to the energy crisis that threatened the Cape.

After the successful project was finished, he'd felt that his life's ambitions were satisfied, and had retired to a refurbished bungalow that sat within a scattered, seaside community of nineteen-twenties vintage homes. Their location on the bluff offered an unobstructed view of the distant wind generators, whose propellers resembled whirling matchsticks.

Jack settled in against a boulder to wait, night vision binoculars suspended from his neck by a leather strap. He imagined he heard the soft whir of the propellers, although they couldn't have been audible from shore.

Ninety minutes later she appeared, swimming gracefully, her arms glinting in the glow of the moon, performing a flawless breaststroke. She waded through the shallows in a rush, retrieved her cane from where it lay and flipped it up over her shoulder. Water streamed from her lithe body as she strode up the path, her movements quick and effortless.

Even though he'd seen it before, he was stunned by her rejuvenation. He'd thought about reporting her strange errand to someone in authority—but to whom? He didn't want odd publicity associated with his project. And increasingly, he succumbed to the need to be her witness.

After she'd gone, Jack stripped to his underwear. Heart pounding, he walked into the sea, knowing his swimming skills were rusty at best. Cold water and the strength of the chest-high waves nearly shocked him into changing his mind, but he forced himself to continue, striking out with awkward determination.

A soothing murmur began to envelope him, and an encompassing feeling of being suspended within a protective haven. His mind grappled briefly with the sensations. Were they real—or was he being brainwashed by his expectations? Gradually he relaxed and let the sea carry him farther from shore.

The sound of water lapping against the rocky shore grew distant, but by then he was lulled beyond any state of concern. He thought he could sense the ocean's depth through his skin, as though the fluctuating temperature of the surface was an indication—but the sensations came to him through an insulating and invisible wrapper of comfort. He floated on his back, admiring the stars, ever so often turning to his stomach to ascertain the distance to the propellers. They seemed stationary, even though he felt himself moving through the water. He lost all track of time.

Sometime later he found himself nearing shore and, miraculously, back to within a few feet of where he'd gone into the water. He stood and waded in, surprised to see the woman waiting there, his clothes folded neatly over her arm, as if this were the most natural thing in the world.

He dried off with his shirt and jammed damp legs into uncooperative chinos, his eyes all the while straining to discern her dusky features. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Marisha!" The wind all but swallowed her name as she spun, sprinted up the path and disappeared.

The name pulled at Jack's memory, but he barely had time to consider it before he became aware of the effects of his swim. There was no trudging up the bluff! No

stopping to catch his breath! He jogged up the path, rejoicing in his youthful vigor. At home, he went straight to a mirror. The hair that had grayed and thinned over time had reverted to the unruly mop of rust he remembered. His jowls had gone, replaced by clean, hard jaw lines.

“Christ,” he said, and headed to the liquor cabinet.

He threw down a jigger of whiskey and laughed in a baritone that had, a few hours earlier, been an old man’s wheeze.

After another shot, he began to pace. Marisha—he was sure that’s what he’d heard the swimmer shout. The name of the Hindu girl listed in the sunken ship’s log—the girl whose cries the barge workers swore they heard during construction of the electrical facility.

He grabbed the telephone and dialed his good friend, James Parker, an associate who had worked with him on the Wind Project.

“Jamie! I need to pick your brain.” Jack could hear his friend tinkering with his hearing aid on the other end of the line.

“Jack,” James said at last, “there’s not much brain left to pick, but you have my attention for the short term, at least.”

“Remember when we were installing the platform for the windmills and one of the divers found the first of the ship wreck?”

“I do indeed. The oak barrel that had risen to the surface. We turned the community on its ear with that one, didn’t we, Jack?”

“Yes, we did—but listen, can you remember the date the ship sank?” Jack could hear James rummaging through his desk.

“Let me put the phone down a minute. I believe I can lay hands on what you need.”

Jack waited impatiently, his excitement and disbelief mounting as he considered the identity of the woman he’d been watching. He could hear James rummaging through paperwork.

“Remember, Jack—the Sarah Jane took four days to sink. Some poor bugger kept making log entries the whole time she was breaking apart. He sealed it in a barrel, I’m sure, intending that the thing would be washed ashore for posterity.” The line went silent for several seconds, and then, “What do you know? We’re very close to an anniversary. It says here October 27 was the date of his last entry.”

Tomorrow! Jack’s scalp prickled. “Thank you, James. I appreciate your help.”

“What are you doing, researching the thing now that you have time on your hands?”

“Something like that, yes. Thank you, James. Bye.”

Overwhelmed, Jack carried the whiskey bottle to his favorite recliner and settled in to think. He eventually slipped into a restless sleep with short, vivid dreams that were haunted by ghosts slithering smoke-like amid the propellers in the bay.

Two hours after sunrise, he woke to a pounding headache. His limbs felt heavy and his heart thudded uncomfortably in his chest. Gone was the renewal he’d experienced after the swim. A quick look at his hands confirmed what he already knew.

He burned his tongue on the first sip of coffee, put it aside in disgust, and went in search of Marisha. He hadn't noticed from a distance, but up close it became obvious that the cottage he'd seen her emerge from was closed for the season. Shutters were latched tightly over the windows and the mail box had been removed from its post.

He knocked on the door all the same—probably under the watchful eyes of a neighbor, he told himself, and grimaced. There was no response. He returned home, defeated, to wait for evening.

Marisha appeared just as she had for the past three evenings, but this time seemed more tentative as she made her way down the bluff.

She's looking for me!

"Come!" she cried.

Scrambling to his feet, he met her halfway and offered his arm to steady her.

He blurted his question without preamble. "Are you the girl who sank with the Sarah Jane?"

She laid her head against his chest and began to sob.

"No! Please don't cry." The last thing he'd expected was tears. He'd always avoided feminine emotions—had wanted none of them. Still, his heart was filled with sympathy as he circled an arm around her delicate shoulders to comfort her. She was so warm, so completely alive--not at all like a ghost.

"I must go back," she said, then pulled away and turned again toward the sea. He stripped his clothes off even as the freezing spray numbed his limbs and took his breath. A giant wave mercifully submerged them at once, and just as before, he was soon lulled into torpor.

In his youth, he'd been something of a playboy, but beyond the physical release of sex, he'd found no meaning in the relationships he'd had. Middle age had come upon him in a rush and he'd found himself settled into the life of a fusty, distracted bachelor, married to his work.

But now! Young again in Marisha's arms, and she healed of her terrible wounds they were entwined like flotsam upon the waves. In this temporary haven, he experienced longing and regret so poignant that his throat ached. At the same time, he sensed the distinct presence of other, protective beings hovering around them, so he did no more than reverently caress and console her.

He told her, as simply as he could, how the world had changed, what she might have expected to see in a natural lifetime. His voice droned on until he became hoarse, and her husky, rapt replies so low that he could barely hear them.

An indefinite time later, she began to slip from his clinging embrace, and although he struggled to hold her, he found himself alone.

Within minutes, he was jolted by the realization that he was far from shore and rapidly reverting back to his true age. He swam with every ounce of strength he possessed, swimming for Marisha, for the crew of the Sarah Jane, and for what was left of his own life.

When a wave at last spat him on the beach, he was unable to move for minutes. He couldn't find his clothes and struggled up the dark path to his house in a near hypothermic state.

The next day, heart-sore and physically exhausted, he stepped out onto his deck to watch the propellers spinning on the horizon. It seemed to him then that his zest for life and his ability to bring the electrical facility to fruition had been nothing more than a means to expose the wreck of the Sarah Jane. Some divine hand had both cursed and blessed him, helping him to lay a beloved ghost to rest.





Untouched

by tatum hamernik

Ariel sat in her velvet green, overstuffed couch and sipped on her whisky sour. She had made the mistake of slipping into her wedding dress and now she couldn't bear to take it off. The mere thought of David six-feet deep in a grave ten blocks down the street made the spot behind her eyes sore. The man could survive thirty years being married to her, but not one simple plane ride to Monaco on business? It was the first month anniversary of his death. They say the first is always the hardest, but every single day brought the same agonizing pain—if there were any feeling at all, which there sometimes wasn't.

Ariel had become well trained in the art of whisky sour drinking, drinking of any kind, actually. She spilled some of her drink in the lap of her dress and stared at the spot as the brown slowly pooled into the white thread. What a beautiful dress this was. It wouldn't have fit if it weren't for all the widow-weight she had lost. Losing the love of your life turned out to be a wonderful diet. The mere sight of food made her intestines tense, leaving no room for appetite.

She tapped her fingernail to the thick crystal glass to make any sort of noise. The house was SAT-test room quiet since she had sent her help home. Ariel couldn't stand a tic longer the look of pity from Marc, her chef, or Francine, her maid. Tonight is the night, she thought staring at her spread on the coffee table in front of her. Neatly laid out in a row from left to right were her final note, her will, and her grandfather's silver knife from the war with her family crest engraved on the handle.



Every day since the funeral she had contemplated suicide. Without David she could not endure this lifeless air. The only reason she hadn't done away with herself the moment she found out about the plane crash was that she had to attend the funeral for herself. She needed the closure—even if the burial of an empty casket isn't so great for that. The bodies of plane crash victims were nearly never found, and her mother said that was probably a good thing that Ariel wouldn't have to see her husband lying heatless in a silk case as the last image of their years together.

What did her mother know anyway? Her mother still had a husband; they were continuously living their happily-ever-after, while Ariel was all alone. She never thought of having children, David had always traveled too much, and having him was always enough. She wondered if having children now would make her want to live, although she doubted it. Romeo and Juliet had the most passionate romance in history and they never had kids. She had always thought of her life with David as a contemporary Shakespearean love story, but she had never imagined the tragic ending like in one of those old plays.

So here she was, planning her tragic ending. She had sharpened the blade herself to make sure that it would indeed get the job done. She had spent days deciding the best way to go about her task. She didn't want her house to have to suffer a final fate through a fire so that was marked out, she had never taken a liking to cars so carbon monoxide poisoning in one of those didn't sound good enough, and so cutting her wrists was the final decision in the end. There was something that just sounded so grimly romantic about a widow slicing through her veins to pour out the blood and let her love leak out so she could finally join her husband once again. The sole idea of dripping hot blood, dark red and ripe with life cascading to the floor made her heart flutter. Other women her age dreamt about grandchildren or vacationing in the summer and she dreamt about releasing her internal organs onto the carpet.

She could see the headlines now. The paper better get wind of this. She thought about leaving a tip, but that would give away the surprise and she didn't want anyone trying to prevent this. The last thing she needed was to end up in a white fluffy room for the rest of her years.

Now that everything was in order the last task she had left was to change her clothing. Suicide in a wedding dress would be tragically clichéd and she was better than that. She would wear the long elegant navy-blue dress she had worn to the last charity ball she had attended with David. She went upstairs and quickly traded her white lacy gown to her final resting dress. She added her diamond earrings and necklace to finish off the look and slowly descended the stairs. She looked forward, chin tilted up, and smiled slightly at the impending near-future she would finally embrace. When she reached the final step the doorbell chimed. For half a heartbeat she thought of ignoring it and then decided she had procrastinated this long anyway. Why not another few minutes?

Ariel answered the door, realizing it was the first time she had done so since her early twenties. Her maid was always the one to answer for company. She felt empowered doing the task herself. A twitchy salesman stood on her stoop. He

fidged his mouth into a creepy smile that would have turned off her younger self, but right now she was intrigued. He stared at her diamond necklace.

“W-would you be interested in b-buying a new phone book, miss?” the gentleman asked. He wore a thick cloak-like overcoat and carried a single mangled phone book that he clutched to his chest. He fiddled with the book, motioning her to take a look.

“No, I won’t be needing a new phone book, thank you,” Ariel said as she started to close the door.

“Wait!” the man said, jamming the book between the door and the frame. In the way he was bent over, Ariel could see a small handgun poking out from the inside of his jacket.

“On second thought, would you like to come in to tell me more about this book?” Ariel said in her most inviting tone. The gentleman looked very surprised, but nodded eagerly. He had a sinister smile that Ariel adored. He was slightly smaller than she, but he had an authentic criminality about him.

Ariel led him to a room where her spread on the coffee table was not visible. To her delight, when she turned around the man had the gun pointed at her face. She made the mistake of cracking a small smile at the sight. The man looked very unsure of himself, the gun in his hand wavered.

“G-give me your necklace, and also uh, all your money,” he said, the gun shook in his hand and his eyes darted quickly to all parts of the room. He couldn’t look her in the eye.

“No, I will not. You will have to kill me for it,” Ariel said, a bit dramatically. She tossed her head to face the wall, looking down at the floor like a damsel in distress and brushed her left hand to her cheek. The room went too silent and she had to break her perfect position as a phony victim to look at what the gentleman was up to. He was sweating and looked like he was about to cry.

“L-look miss, I don’t want any trouble. J-just please give me your necklace,” the gentleman begged. The gun was no longer locked in a position aimed at Ariel, but now hung lamely in his hand pointed at the floor. Ariel was livid. She had thought this would be quick and painless, that some savior had sent this man to do for her what she so yearned to do to herself. It was just her luck to get an unprofessional frightened thief, she thought.

“I told you that you have to kill me first,” Ariel said dully. The gentleman looked more uncomfortable than ever and it was increasingly clearer that he never intended to harm Ariel and probably had never hurt anyone before. The more nervous this man looked the angrier Ariel became. He had the gun and the upper hand and yet he looked terrified of her.

“Just do it already. I mean it,” Ariel growled, losing her cool all at once. The man’s eyes widened and bulged.

“For Christ’s sake, I said pull the trigger!” Ariel shouted and took a step toward the man.

In fear he raised the gun again.

“Yes, that’s it,” she said.

“W-what the hell, lady; are you c-crazy or somethin’?” the gentleman asked.

“This is not the time for questions sir; just do both of us a favor and kill me already. I have been waiting too long for this.”

She was turning into someone else. A dark part of her that had never been unlocked now started to peek out for the first time. She embraced this. She was too committed to her self-destruction to fight off the insanity that was starting to cloud her mind. She stuck out her chest toward the gun and waited. Nothing happened. No click of the trigger. She was going to have to do this the hard way then.

“If you are looking for money there is more in here,” Ariel said. Her voice was now a soft lull tempting Adam to come taste the apple.

The man looked terribly unsure, but then nodded his head with his face in a grimace.

“Come, sir; it’s right this way,” she said as she walked by the man who flinched when she came close. She led him to the other room. She willed him to shoot her while she had her back turned toward him but, of course, the heavens were not so charitable.

Ariel walked straight to her table, and hovered a moment before turning to face the man once more. He had stopped at the doorway and was watching her timidly. The gun was aimed near her stomach and was shaking so hard it was in danger of falling out of the man’s hand altogether. Ariel looked back down at her display and carefully chose her knife. The man had not noticed the weapon before Ariel picked it up and horror flashed across his face. She had brought a knife to a gunfight, and somehow she still had the upper hand.

“Kill me or I will kill you,” Ariel said sharply.

“Please n-no, I am homeless. I just need a bit of money. I n-never intended to hurt you. This gun it’s not even mine. I f-found it,” the man said. He lowered the gun. Ariel poised the knife in her hand pointed outward and approached the man. She hoped that she could startle him into firing the gun and somehow hit a part of her that would kill her. The odds of this happening she did not know, but this was her only chance.

Ariel lunged toward the man at full force closing the few feet of space between them in a matter of seconds. She had aimed for his neck and hustled him enough to think she was seriously going to go for it. The man turned his head away with closed eyes and pulled the trigger. A soft click sounded, but nothing more came out of the gun. Ariel paused her pursuit, the knife inches away from touching skin on the man’s neck. His gun was pressing into her breastbone and they both stayed frozen, unsure of what to do next.

Ariel took the first initiative and lowered her weapon. She heaved a big sigh and dropped the knife to the carpet. When she moved her hands again the man took a step back and dropped the gun to the ground. He put his hands up in the air and backed up toward the front door.

“Wait,” Ariel said dully. She unhooked her necklace and reached out to hand it to the man.

He stared at her gesture uneasily. “Is this a t-trick?” he asked.

“No, I am not going to report you to the police or anything. You at least tried. I won’t need that where I am going anyway,” she said and dropped the necklace into his hand. He nodded and then quickly darted out the front door, leaving it open behind him.

Ariel sighed again and walked over to close the door. She went back and retrieved her knife. She set it down in the exact place she had put it before and poured herself another drink. Did I really think I could be that lucky? A tiny part of her believed that David was somewhere above, preventing her from dying.

“You cruel bastard,” she said to herself. It would be just like him to try to protect her even when he was dead, although she had no proof, of course, that these unfortunate events had anything to do with him. It was a lovely thought though, having a dead lover watching and protecting her. Shakespeare should have written a sonnet about that. She drank some more and tangled thoughts of her bitter tragedy wound through her mind. At one point she even took hold of her knife and ran the cold blade across her clear skin, over her bright blue veins. She couldn’t bring herself to break skin though and she soon fell asleep on the overstuffed couch, hand clutched to the knife with her blue dress and her blue veins and her blue husband running around inside her brain.



[short story]

The Troll

by ty karnitz

We came back after a long weekend and found this troll. He'd come down from the mountains and into the city to escape the cold. In the night he climbed the iron scaffolding of the high-rise we were building and found a little nook to hide in. He gathered together scraps of plastic and old tarps and fashioned himself a den.

When I first saw him, I thought he might just be some homeless idiot, but the longer I looked at him, the less that idea stuck. He was too ugly to be human. His eyes were the size of my fists and he had this long nose that hung down past his lips. His lower jaw stuck out and showed his teeth, which were a mossy green and broken like old rock.

The five of us spent half an hour not saying a damn thing when we found him. We smoked and stared. That's when Greg noticed the cat.

This stray we'd fed our lunch scraps to, the troll had got it. How, I don't know. The troll looked slow and dumb. That cat must've come up to it looking for food or love. And the troll had bitten the cat in half. Poor thing was nothing but a bloody mess half-covered by tarp.

"You know, we should keep it," Frank said. "The troll." He tossed his cigarette. "A new mascot?" Frank was the foreman, and he was one of those younger guys over his head on the job. But we all liked him because he was square with us and there's nothing better in this world than a boss that talks straight.

It was a cold morning and none of us were ready to get back to work, so we went along with Frank. It was something different to do. We found a chain and crept up on the troll. As we got closer, he pushed himself back against the wall, put forehead to the ground, and started making this groaning sound—real loud.

"EEEEHUH, EEEEEHUH"

His hands covered his ears. He was an ostrich burying his head in the sand.

I got a hand on his shoulder first and his skin was cold and hard as concrete. The bastard was strong. Soon as I put my hand on him he pushed himself off the

ground and started howling and kicking and punching. It took all five of us to pin him to the ground and get the chain around his neck. He flailed and busted Jim's nose. When he started to run we tugged on the chain and brought him down to his ass. We tied the chain to the water pipes. The troll was tethered like a dog in the yard. And that's how we kept him.

He got used to it.

Frank brought in his BB gun and during our lunch breaks we'd take turns shooting at the rats in the alley next to the high-rise. We'd tossed the dead rats to the troll. He didn't eat in front of us. He'd wait till we'd left for the night and then he ate fur, bones, and all—everything but the feet.

For a week, every time the troll saw us it would hide in its den and put its head to the ground and groan. The louder our equipment, the louder he got. Then one morning it all stopped. We came up and he just watched us. Ears still covered but he didn't put his head down. Instead, he watched us work.

I was laying tile one day when I heard the troll's chains scratch across the floor. It came closer to me. I could feel it behind me, and then I saw it out of the corner of my eye. It squatted next to me. Close enough that I could touch it but I didn't try. It took one of the tiles from the pile next to me and put it down in the adhesive, perfectly as if it'd done it before.

"That's right, troll," I said.

It took another tile and put it down, perfect. Damn thing saw the pattern and everything. Its deformed hands tapped the ground, asking for another tile. I gave it to him. He smiled and I swear the damn troll laughed. It put the tile in place and tapped the floor again, asking for another tile. For a few seconds I thought the thing was human. He helped me finish that room in half the time. But when we got to the end and he tapped on the ground, I told him, "That's it. None left."

It tapped on the ground, again.

"No more."

And the troll got mad. It shouted and snarled and made such a racket that the guys came to see what the hell was going on. They saw it red in the face, choking itself with the chain.

"What'd you do?"

"Nothing," I said. "Thing just went crazy."

Nothing we did calmed the troll down. It pissed itself, shouted until it was too hoarse to shout anymore, and then it curled up in its den and went to sleep.

The troll didn't trust me after that. Whenever I came into the room it hid and snarled and made its groaning noise.

One morning I came in and found Frank was there early. Usually, he was the last to show. I called to him but he didn't answer. I thought he must be off taking a piss. Of course, he wasn't. The troll had gotten him. I think Frank had stayed late and the troll snuck up on him. The troll left Frank just like he'd left the cat ... a mess.

When the troll saw me, it grabbed Frank's mangled leg and dragged him into its den. I went down and waited for the others to show up. Once they were all there I led them up and showed them what'd happened.

At that point, we figured there was only one thing to do. We got some cement blocks and mortar. Making sure not to step in the blood, we spread some mortar on the ground in between the troll's den and the rest of the room. Then we started laying the block. The troll saw it; he watched us put down block after block. It didn't take long for it to crawl out from under the plastic and trash to start helping. It smiled all the while—just happy.

Finished, you couldn't tell the wall wasn't supposed to be there. It blended into the room perfectly. No one ever learned about the troll. The groaning stopped before anyone moved in.



RED HOT RADIATION

Burning like asphalt
On a hot noon summer day

Wavy distortion
Making me go ever more insane

Sweat dripping from my brow
Starburst waiting on something æthereal now

Make a move north
So far north in the coldest parts

Need that ice-cold wake
Before the red hot radiation starts

So stinging, bringing me down
So exposing, I'm about to fall

With nothing to grip, it's too much
Burning us to ash, one and all

—grim k. de evil

The Long Walk

We walk. Covered by shrouds so no one sees a face, we walk toward the light. But there are two lights in the foggy mist. Two lights beacon us home. We choose one, not because we are certain it is the true light, but because the others before us walk that way.

I wonder if I should walk in the direction of the other light or turn around and walk away from the light. There's no one to stop me, no one to guide me, no one to care. Yet I continue my walking.

The others are no help. We are all lost in our own worlds, separate from each other. I want to call out, "You, in the black shroud, where are you going? Do you know where you're heading?" But I cannot. It's not that I can't speak. Words flow from my mouth with ease. No one listens. No one turns to see what the madman is shouting. We are all too intent on our own journey.

I, too, hear the sound of their voices as they walk. Some are mumbling prayers in various languages. Others are cursing. But there is no difference. Some seem joyous, some reflective and others angry, yet there is no difference. Their sounds jumble together in a cacophony. We merely walk toward the light, talking to ourselves.

I try to remember what came before this walk, but it's as if my life began with the walk. My mind is blank, more a shadow actually. Past memories lurk in the darkness, but I can't make them out. All I remember is waking one misty, chilly morning and seeing the lights in the sky and the others walking toward one of them. I rose on unsteady feet and took my place in the parade, not knowing why or where I was heading. The hope, of course, is that I will either reach the light someday or, at least, learn why I am here. Meanwhile I walk.

I try to recall how long I have been on this journey, but I cannot. Time has no meaning. The sky remains misty and the lights remain in the distant sky. Periodically I rest. I simply fall to the ground and others walk around me. Eventually I pick myself up and continue the journey.

No matter how much walking I've done, I never seem to be closer to the light. It remains in the distance, out of reach. I try to quicken my pace, pass some of the other sojourners. Perhaps if I get to the front of the pack I'll have a better understanding of why I'm here. But nothing seems to change. There are always people in front of me, to my side and behind me. The light remains distant. I slow down and people pass me; I speed up and I pass them. Nothing changes. Nothing matters.

by wayne scheer

Is this a lesson I'm supposed to learn—that we need to plod on, keeping faith in the journey despite the emptiness and uncertainty around us? Or am I to see myself as a follower, one of many, who just does what the others do, asking no questions and expecting no answers? Am I a worthless creature without meaning?

I'm not even saddened by this thought. I feel nothing. I just continue my aimless walk toward the light for no reason other than I have been doing it for a long time.

I should be angry. Yes! I should tear off this shroud, curse the light and refuse to be a part of this pathetic parade of souls. I should shake my fist in defiance, spit toward the light and turn in the opposite direction.

I don't because I am afraid.

What if the others know something? What if the journey ends soon and all my questions are answered? What if—Ah, what if ... ?

I don't have the nerve to break from the crowd and walk alone in a different direction. What arrogance, I think, to believe I know better than all the others. Someone up front must know something; there must be a reason for this journey.

What if there is no reason? What if this meaningless journey is all there is? What if I never get closer to the light? What if I am as pathetic as the others, just walking and mumbling to myself--homeless and aimless?

No! I can't allow myself to believe that. Even if it's a lie, a delusion, I must convince myself there is a reason I'm here, making this journey. I may never reach the light, it may be an illusion, but I must continue in spite of such knowledge.

Suddenly I have an urge to share this understanding with someone else. Talking to my self isn't enough. Not anymore. I turn to the shrouded soul nearest me. I shout, "Hear me! I have something to say!" I reach out, but the sojourner avoids my grasp and moves faster away from me. I try again and again and again to no avail.

I refuse to give up. I spy a shrouded figure approaching. I turn, lift the shroud from my face and smile. I say nothing.

The figure turns my way and then turns away toward the light. We walk side by side. I continue to smile. I hold out my hand. Slowly the figure turns again toward me and from deep under the shroud a hand emerges. I take it in mine. The sensation of human contact electrifies me. I continue the long walk, a new bounce in my step.



[excerpt]



Nine Muses Books announces a new full-length Lizzie Borden, Girl Detective novel entitled *The Minuscule Monk*. This is the first novel-length Lizzie adventure and will be published as both a print book and an e-book in the summer of 2015.

When a dead body mysteriously appears in the basement of her father's furniture store, 17 year-old Lizzie Andrew Borden immediately takes on the case. Accompanied by an eccentric millionaire who campaigns to extend the vote to animals; a Boston terrier trained to sniff out crooked politicians; and a boy detective who believes the entire universe to be inside his own head, Lizzie follows a trail of taxidermy tools and Civil War bushwhackers to the Minuscule Monk, a legendary gunslinger whose mummified body will bring a punter's pot to anyone who can deliver it to the New York gangster who has been hunting the Monk for decades. With such high stakes, everyone has a motive for murder, yet everyone seems innocent. Or perhaps, as Lizzie suspects after attending a dinner party with non-existent food and meeting a horse that has turned into its opposite, none of it is even real.

Lizzie Borden, the Girl Detective of Fall River, is at her most spirited in *The Minuscule Monk*, a comic mystery that paints a portrait of Fall River at the height of its splendor and its most infamous citizen at the start of her most excellent career.



THE MINUSCULE MONK



a Lizzie Borden
GIRL DETECTIVE MYSTERY

RICHARD BEHRENS

I. A Fatal Concern

Fall River, Massachusetts. 1875.

Lizzie Andrew Borden, a young woman shining with all the ebullient optimism of one just let out of high school, emerged from the City Hall building, her mind excited and racing with possibilities. She darted into the crowded bustle of the North Main Street foot traffic, flitted across the gutter through the onrush of horse-drawn carts and livery vehicles, and alighted onto the west side of the thoroughfare as the tower clock chimed noon. Her imagination was feverish over the lecture she had just attended at the City Hall library on the process of Egyptian mummification by one Professor Bildung of New York.

For one shining hour, the erudite speaker at the podium had mesmerized his audience. His wild black hair and craggy face were anchored by an exotic eye-patch that Lizzie had found somewhat enchanting, perhaps exotic. He spoke about the various techniques by which the ancients had attempted immortality. The oils, perfumes, linens and sacred ointments all felt palpably real in the wake of his vivid descriptions of the eviscerations, dehydrations, disembowelments and trepanations that accompanied the creation of an immortal being in the ancient world. He described human brains extracted with iron hooks through nostrils, of fingers and toes rendered jackal-proof with splints and bandages, and human flesh drying to the hardness of stone. He even related several romantic stories about Egyptian mummies, including curses upon their tombs and resurrections after thousands of years of interment. The professor had taken Lizzie on a manic trip across the abyss of history to a mythic afterlife, one of hope and wonder, convincing her there was more scope to this mystifying world than the small glimmer she had witnessed from the dull confines of Fall River.

She couldn't wait to discuss her new-found insights into the dark mysteries of immortality with Andrew Jackson Borden, her hard-working father, at his place of business. "He shall be very proud of me," she thought excitedly. "What with his grim opinions about death, he shall delight that there is hope for us yet!"

In her excitement, she turned back towards the City Hall, noticing for the first time a strange vehicle that was parked as if abandoned on the side-street, gray and spectral in the shadows cast by the building's tower. It looked to be a small circus wagon, tall with round paneled sides, illustrated with garish paint. A horse lolled before it, his body harnessed to the wagon. The creature's nose was buried in a feed bag, but one lonesome eye stared at Lizzie as if beckoning for her sympathy. Descending from between his bat-like ears was a long white diamond, his only decoration. Despite his morbid gaze, he munched on his meal with a continuous gnashing of teeth.

The painted sides of the wagon displayed no depictions of clown gangs, no bareback riders, no airborne acrobats spiraling, and no ring masters or elephant parades. Instead, a desolate stretch of desert sported one sandstone pyramid framed on the horizon. An Egyptian pharaoh, his arms crossed over his chest, rose like a resurrected ghost from the burning dunes. A strange pronouncement capped the

scene in arched letters: Professor Bildung's Death and Resurrection Show! Below the scene, in a straight line: Boston – New York – Philadelphia.

Lizzie chuckled over the comical image of Professor Bildung snapping his whip and driving his depressed horse on the same lumpy post road that had serviced the Commonwealth since the revolution. Imagine travelling the seacoast in such a thing, what use did a lecturer who relied on a lantern and some glass slides to project his mummy pictures have for a wagon?

She then gasped at the possibility that it contained the remains of an ancient pharaoh, his time come round at last to rise from the dead and walk the streets of Fall River, demanding the return of his kingdom. She was tempted to throw back its canvas backing and take a peek inside – what mysteries may lie within! But pressed for time, she continued towards her father's store.

At the corner of Pleasant and South Main Streets, Lizzie paused before the tall construction of the new Academy of Music building which was slowly rising against the bright, cloudless sky. From within the network of scaffolds and half-finished brickwork came the screeching of hacksaws and the clanking of carpenter hammers. The building gave off the sound of a laborious breathing, as if the structure itself were a living creature fighting to find its next lungful of air.

Once, in a newspaper drawing, she had seen the plans for the façade of this glorious structure, with its pilasters and columns rising in three-fold splendor over ornate windows, an artistic grandeur that peered majestically down upon the homes that lined Second Street behind. It widened above the town center like a giant stretching its angled limbs to a colossal height, attempting to gain some form of skyward immortality, determined to outpace death with architecture.

The Academy of Music was, as far as Lizzie was concerned, a great symbol of the new Fall River. Here was a building worthy of the ancient temples. In a town dominated by the dull and serious business of textile, with its endless pantheon of mills and factories and operative housing, its dull fascination with account ledgers and bank accounts and economic growth, there has been some deep need for the fabulous, the world of music and theater, of great artistic achievement and European aesthetics. No more shall quaint wives and dutiful daughters play their dreary Stephen Foster songs upon a family piano and call that culture; they shall hear the immortal and angelic arias of Mozart and Verdi sung to the far flung corners of Bristol County, transforming all in their wake.

Lizzie saw the history of her city like the evolution of a child into an adult. Fall River had experienced a naïve infancy full of Indian wars and agriculture, then an adolescence of industry and wealth. Now it was time to enjoy the adult aspirations of life, to hear the music of eternity singing through the edifice of art.

Across the busy street, the furniture concern of Borden & Almy's, a narrow building fronted by display windows, stared upward like a dwarf defying the pomp and ceremony of the Academy. Hand-painted signs in the display window announced new armoires and teakwood caskets at most excellent prices befitting the dignity of the Commonwealth. Here business transacted its daily affairs with all its dull and repetitive rhythms. Such was the drab reality of Lizzie's life.

Her father, a tall, lean man with a bristly beard and dark marble eyes, was standing on the front doorstep, gazing at the construction site with a trace of jealous envy twitching in his cheeks. The bright sun's rays hit against his dour complexion and outdated string tie. He had been wearing that tie since Lizzie could remember, and reminded her of old tintypes and war veterans begging in the streets.

Lizzie bounded into the horse traffic and alighted onto the sidewalk, diverting her father's attention with a skip step and a lopsided smile. "Daughter," he said, flashing recognition. "What brings you to my place of business? I would have thought that you had domestic chores to occupy your time."

Lizzie chuckled, "Father, I'm quite elated. I've made an important discovery about the immortality of the human soul."

The corners of his lips twitched. "Have you now?"

"Yes," she grinned. "Professor Bildung has taught us all about the secrets of the Egyptians. I have just attended his lecture at the library."

He shook his lean cheeks. "I had rather you not spend your time at the Athenaeum. If abundance of time vexes you, Mrs. Borden can assign you some tasks, I am sure."

"Why do you not call it the library?" Lizzie asked, giving him a quick hug. "Father, sometimes I do swear you are living in another age."

"I am of this age," he said in whispery voice, gesturing towards the Academy Building. "The new architects, it is they who are abandoning our age."

"The Academy will be a grand addition to our city," Lizzie said, gaily. "Soon you'll hear music like you've never dreamed."

"Nonsense," Andrew scowled. "Stephen Foster is good enough for me. Did you ever hear his arrangement of 'If You've Only Got a Mustache'?" His fists clenched and his eyes rolled as if the song was being played by some fiddle band inside his head.

Lizzie frowned. "Many times. Father, that song is so dreary and outdated. There are great composers now: Verdi, Puccini!"

"There are also businesses to run," Andrew replied. "And not enough time for silly nonsense such as opera. Immortality of the soul! Apply yourself to more practical lessons, like sewing. That would be a good profession for you, to be a dress maker."

Lizzie wagged her head. "No, it is a good thing that I study the funeral rites of the ancients. When I get older I'll join an expedition to the Egyptian valleys. There are many opportunities there for a young woman of ambition."

"And what do you plan to do in these Egyptian valleys?"

"Why, discover the last resting places of the Pharaohs. I am curious to discover how they outpaced mortality. Perhaps we too shall conquer death."

Andrew's eyes widened. "Daughter, I can charm that ambition away from you. Come with me into the basement and you will see a Valley of Death from which no man can escape."

Lizzie glanced towards the open door. The store's dim interior was filled with cabinets and chairs, but beyond, in the basement, there were boxes for the dead.

“Well, I have chores...”

“They can wait,” Andrew said harshly, taking her by the wrist and leading her through the showroom to the back steps. They scurried down into the lamp-lit interior of the basement, where a sharp hammering grew in intensity as they approached the workshop. Mr. Darling, the store’s squat and clean-shaven assistant, labored with a claw hammer, driving nails into a fresh pinewood coffin. The box was mounted like a ship in dry dock on the back of a large metal horse. Mr. Darling drove down his tool with each puff of his swollen cheeks.

Lizzie felt a dim shudder at the sight of the assistant. He was a colleague’s nephew, possibly dim-witted, and largely silent. The way he peered up at Lizzie as she stepped into the room made her uncomfortable, and she looked quickly towards a heavy business desk where Mr. Almy, Andrew’s longtime partner, hovered over a ledger book. With his rosy cheeks and close-cropped beard, he was a welcome sight in the midst of the dreariness. “Andrew,” he said cheerfully, “you’ve come just in time. I checked the level on all the corners and was just about to lay the lid in place. Miss Lizzie, how do you do this fine morning?”

“I am doing exceedingly well,” she announced. “After an informative lecture at the library, I am now convinced that we are immortal beings who do not have to die.”

Mr. Almy lowered his spectacles. “Hm. Immortality isn’t quite good for business, especially now, eh, Andrew?”

“Gaze, Lizzie,” Andrew commanded, extending a hand towards the wooden coffin upon which Mr. Darling labored. He then pointed towards an identical unit that stood upright against the rear wall of the basement, its slender form tapering down to the floor. “Gaze upon the last resting place of all mortal flesh. No, we shall have no resurrections while we remain human. This is where it all ends with a frightening finality.”

Lizzie huffed. “Father, you’re a spiritual man; you attend church services and read your Bible. Why is the possibility that something survives after death so unsettling to you?”

Mr. Darling’s hammering came to a sudden halt. The assistant glared eerily then intoned, “Only the dead know the secrets of dust,” before resuming his work.

The dark pronouncement brought a chilled silence to the room. Mr. Almy coughed into his hand and chuckled, throwing off his discomfort. “Do you believe in an afterlife?” he asked his partner.

Andrew’s face twisted up. “Whatever form we assume after death will not resemble that which we currently inhabit. For all practical considerations, it shall no longer be us. There will be no treats, no succor, and no oasis of delights. I cannot imagine anything more meaningless or absurd.”

“So what is this life all about then, Father?” Lizzie sighed. “I surely don’t want to think that ten years of schooling and a lifetime of ironing a husband’s shirts are followed by an eternity of boredom. It doesn’t seem like a just reward.”

“No, perhaps that is not an enviable existence,” Andrew consented, then dramatically pointed to a wheelbarrow which sat unused in a corner. “But life,

Lizzie, is all about that!”

“What of it?” Lizzie asked, puzzled.

Andrew’s eyes softened. “That is the first transport that Mr. Almy and I had when we opened this business almost thirty years ago. We were young carpenters then, weren’t we, William?”

Mr. Almy nodded with a distant glint in his eye. “Yes, Andrew, we were.”

“Neither of us could afford a horse team, so we made do with what we had. We were laughed at in the streets as we delivered cabinets and caskets in a one-wheeler. But thrift and persistence paid off. We are master craftsmen, quite respected, and none dare laugh at us now.”

“But all things must pass,” Lizzie reminded him. “We know not the hour, but one day your entire business shall be as motionless as that barrow that has not seen movement in many a long year.”

Andrew smiled down at her. “It may pass, Lizzie. But there shall be men after us who will look back and say, Andrew Jackson Borden built this city with the labor of his own hands. My craftsmanship shall be in the walls of the houses, the sitting rooms, the docks at the court, the desks at the police station, the book shelves of men’s libraries, the cabinets in the homes of kindly folk, the tables upon which they all shall eat, and the beds upon which they shall slumber at night. I shall be gone, but my work shall remain. Therefore, it matters not into what mystic afterlife I ascend, my legacy shall be right here in the daily life of generations to come.”

Mr. Almy thumped his ledger book. “Regardless of where we go when we pass,” he said, “we do have these coffins to deliver by noon. Shall we move the first unit, Andrew?”

“Why yes, William,” Andrew replied and joined his two associates where the coffin lay propped against the wall. Together, they struggled to move it into a horizontal position, their faces expressing surprise at the excess weight. In an instant, it slipped from their hands and crashed noisily to the ground. The men stood back aghast and bewildered, then knelt down in unison to lift it once more against the wall.

“I can swear,” said Mr. Darling, “that we have misjudged the weight of the wood.”

“Wood be hanged,” Andrew barked. “I believe we have a stowaway!” He released the lid locks and pulled it outward to reveal a startling sight. Within the coffin, a man in a crumpled suit and a floppy silk tie stood, his knees bent sideways, his nose pressed flat, his head slowly deflating towards his chest. His crooked hands were fixed at his abdomen around a dusty derby hat that toppled and rolled to the ground as he sank.

For a brief moment, not a sound disturbed the room. Andrew lifted his palm towards Lizzie’s face, expecting to stifle a scream that would prelude a womanly faint. Instead, he found Lizzie frozen with rapt fascination. “I am gazing,” she whispered with wonderment, “into a wonderful abyss.”

All stood at silent attention, weirdly reflecting upon how after all their pompous musings upon the finitude of life, Death itself had come to pay tribute at Borden & Almy’s.

2. Memento Mori

Throughout her childhood, Lizzie had sensed wonder in the smallest of things. Darkened doorways were portals into undiscovered dreams; the slanting of light through a window was an illuminated visitation from another sphere; and something as commonplace as her father reclining on a couch, his jaw bristle twitching as he snored away his afternoon nap, echoed a composed tableaux of a bearded king sleeping in a golden bower. Thus, often her imagination would take the most commonplace things and find their mythic counterparts, making the world one of endless magic. This brightened Lizzie's vision, but it made her feel misplaced amongst the serious-minded folk who led lives devoid of all that fancy. Only little Lizzie could see her father snoring upon that couch and think of Old Hamlet the King of Denmark, about to be murdered by a member of his own family.

The face of the unexpected corpse in the store basement resurrected this mythic process in her mind. The sad droop of the lids over motionless eyes, the sullen collapse of the pale cheeks, the hard stubble on the chin that had stopped growing at the moment of death, and the hideous stitches that held the lips together all conjured up the drawing she had seen not one hour earlier of an Egyptian King who had been unburied after thousands of years. Was this nameless corpse truly a Pharaoh of old? Or a wandering spirit who had heard her arguing with her father about the afterlife and decided to materialize to prove some pedantic point? What else could explain such a sudden appearance?

Mr. Almy peered in closer, pointing a finger. "The mouth has been sutured shut, and you may observe there is something inside pushing the cheek."

Andrew snapped his fingers at Mr. Darling and the young carpenter grabbed needle-nosed pliers from his tool box. With a grunt and a shrug, he snipped the filaments that held the lips together, then deftly pried open the mouth. A sheaf of vellum extruded from the dry cavity.

"What manner of man," Andrew puzzled, "passes with a paper within his mouth?"

"Let's see what it says," suggested Lizzie, pulling at the vellum. She unraveled it with delicate fingers, half expecting to read the hieroglyphics of the ancient tombs. The lettering looked familiar, but the words were flowery and strange. She read the inscription aloud:

Vita brevis breviter in brevi finietur,
Mors venit velociter quae neminem veretur,
Omnia mors perimit et nulli miseretur.

Her last words yielded to eerie silence, then they all gazed upon the corpse whose open mouth, wounded from the suturing, seemed to be screaming its hidden secrets at the ceiling.

"What does this mean?" Andrew whispered.

“It’s Greek to me,” Mr. Almy laughed nervously.

“Latin, to be exact,” Lizzie corrected him. With a small frown, she conjured her full season of personal study of the classical language, something she never expected to perform. During one dreary high school semester, she worked solely from books obtained at the library, conjugating irregular verbs in her bedroom while her friends shopped for clothing and gossiped about which boys they fancied. Combined with her regular courses, it had been an exacting spring.

She read in a mild voice:

Life is short and shortly it will end,
Death comes quickly without respect,
It destroys everything,
And has mercy for no one.

The hairs on the back of her neck bristled as she turned the vellum around. More script peered from behind. She finished reading:

Si possunt ratiocinari possint suffragium

Suddenly the basement room was smaller, darker. Lizzie placed the vellum down on the work table as if she couldn’t bear the responsibility of its secrets. The darkness of the poem and the uncomfortable call of its cryptic meaning provoked her dismal composure. All magical association fled: this was not a mythic journey to the Egyptian past, but a very real dead body in her father’s basement, perhaps deposited by a homicidal murderer. It was time for the Mythic Dreamer to take a nap and for the Girl Detective to awaken.

Andrew had turned pale. He attempted to raise his hand to his face, but stopped halfway, seized by a paralysis of will. “What can this mean?” he shivered.

“If they can reason, they can vote,” Lizzie translated. “That’s what it says.”

“What?” Andrew stammered. “Is that all?”

“Yes,” Lizzie confirmed. “If they can reason, they can vote.”

“Vote?” Andrew’s eyes almost crossed. “A woman suffragette killed this man?!”

“Less a matter of what it means,” said Mr. Almy sharply, “than how this man came to be within our coffin.”

“I shall take the fellow who did this and twist off his head,” Andrew sputtered. “I shall do this!”

“Father,” Lizzie cautioned, “let us not resort to hasty measures. I am sure there is a perfectly rational explanation.”

“Rational?” Andrew’s fingers groped before him at the empty air. “A dead man appears in my basement swallowing a poem? That’s rational?”

“We shall determine that in time. Meanwhile, we must examine the man’s clothing and any possessions therein. Mr. Darling, would you be so kind?”

Darling peered hastily at her and then set about the grim business. Before long, the contents of the dead man’s pockets were spread out upon the carpentry table, a scattered fan of loose ends, metallic scraps and unrelated geegaws. Lizzie turned

them about with her finger tips, picking up pieces of paper and inspecting the writings scripted upon them, turning about the rings and pegs, raising a cigar stub to her nose, examining an oddly curved knife, sniffing some grit and powder that came off a few strips of leather. Then she stood in paused contemplation.

"This is most perplexing," she sighed. Straightening her collar and adjusting her pansy pin, she continued. "I would suspect the gentleman has come from out West. The train ticket announces his arrival last night and the pocket watch tells a different time than here in the East. These key rings without their keys, I trust, have been used for a purpose other than the obvious, perhaps to hoist something of considerable weight, most likely with a good amount of sailor's rope, the frayed fibers of which are present in the lining of his pocket. His time piece is one of distinction but shows a significant neglect, so I deduce that he is a man who had put on airs of aristocracy but has been forced to procure his living through a less respectable means. I believe that he was in Fall River on a business venture, one of considerable risk."

"How do you determine there was risk?" Andrew asked.

"He lies before you dead," Lizzie said, waving a hand over the body.

"Oh," Andrew replied, glancing downwards.

"Further, the presence of small pegs and needles stuck in cotton gauze shows that some medical procedure had been necessary in the course of his business. I don't suspect the darning of clothing since these needles and thread are of specific gauges that befits an undertaker rather than a tailor. But this curved blade is most assuredly a fleshing knife, one used to scrape tissue from animal hide. The absence of any blood stains perplexes me. Perhaps... Yes, perhaps..."

Mr. Darling smiled slyly as if anticipating Lizzie's pronouncement. "He was an undertaker!" he said triumphantly.

"I don't think so," Lizzie said. "But he did deal intimately with the dead." She peered closely at the man's wrists and then smiled. "Yes, we have a strangeness here that will complicate matters considerably. Notice that he is not wearing his own clothes."

"What kind of statement is that?" Mr. Almy protested. "Of course he is wearing clothes."

"Yes, he has clothes on. But they are not his own. They are awkwardly fitted, and the sleeves and cuffs do not match the position of his ankles and wrists. I cannot imagine that his tailor would have made so many mistakes."

"Perhaps the clothing was second-hand," Andrew snapped. "He may have been a thrifty fellow."

"Regardless," Lizzie said, "he must have gotten in here somehow." She peered about the room, searching for anything that would explain how a corpse could infiltrate a private concern's basement and wind up inside a coffin wearing another man's clothing. She inspected the floor, examined the basement windows, and stamped her foot against the bricks. Her eyes then fell upon a small window near the ceiling, the pane of which was angled into the room, allowing for some daylight and the sound of the horse traffic on Anawan Street.

“That is the only entrance to this room other than the doorway?” she asked.

“Yes,” Mr. Almy replied. “And the door to the basement is locked at nights. It is simply impossible for anyone to have broken in during the night, not without visible damage.”

“How do you know that he was not put here before you closed yesterday?” asked Lizzie.

“We worked on that coffin up until closing,” Mr. Almy explained, “finishing it just as we locked up. No one could have entered this room except by that window, and that would not allow anything larger than a monkey, as far as I can see.”

Lizzie rubbed her chin and then asked pointedly, “Who placed the order for the coffin you were constructing?”

A haze descended on Mr. Almy’s face, and then he answered grimly, “Mr. Pell. A most peculiar request.”

“Pell?” Andrew said, startled. “What’s this, William?”

“Yes, Mr. Jimmy Pell. I have had no direct contact with him, but he wired ahead ordering a coffin, this very one in fact. He claimed that there was no deceased person as of yet, but the coffin was merely for decorative purposes. He was quite precise about the wood to be used, the thickness of the lid, and the exact measurements.”

“I would call that suspicious,” Andrew said, sourly. “Why did you not bring this to my attention?”

Mr. Almy remained silent.

Andrew peered suspiciously at his partner. “Could this Mr. Pell have offered a small gratuity to assure discretion?”

“Andrew, you know me better than that. I did not think you would approve of letting your workshop for such an affair, so I hid the details to guarantee the coffin’s sale.”

“And here is the conclusion of your choice,” Andrew said, jerking a thumb at the dead body.

“Nonetheless,” Lizzie intercepted. “We have a coffin that was being built for no one and then suddenly someone appears in it, albeit not properly embalmed.” She ran a finger along the lips where signs of decay had already begun. “I suspect this Mr. Pell will never come to claim his coffin. The box was solely a means to deliver the remains of a grisly murder.”

“Was this murder?” Mr. Almy said, his eyes widening. “I don’t see how it could have been achieved.”

Lizzie leaned in and sniffed the face of the corpse. “There is a strange mixture of odors,” she announced. “Amongst them whiskey, if I’m not mistaken. And I detect a faint trace of almond, perhaps prussic acid. I would say a dime’s worth, available through the corner drug store if you have means enough to procure a script for it.”

“Murder!” Andrew said, his beady eyes staring straight ahead. “In my concern! I cannot abide it!”

Lizzie turned to Mr. Darling. “Law enforcement should now be notified. Please go fetch Deputy Sheriff Wixon who may be on duty at Central Station. He shall suffice for now.”

“See here, Lizzie,” snapped Andrew. “Are you sure about this? If you fetch the sheriff, there will be hundreds of people all over this store and my reputation shall be ruined!”

“Patience, Father,” Lizzie assured him. “Deputy Wixon and I share an understanding. Perhaps we shall resolve this issue discretely, without fanfare or public spectacle. Trust me.”

With this, Mr. Darling was dispatched from the store. For ten long minutes, the occupants of the grim basement waited while the Girl Detective worked pensively, examining the victim’s face, studying the inner lining of the coffin, and inspecting the dust swirls on the floorboards. She moved purposefully and deftly as if each point of detail was another character in a set of hieroglyphics that lined the lintels of some vast mausoleum of the regal dead. Every crime scene, Lizzie had been known to proclaim, was a signature waiting to be translated back into the hand that had drawn it. No one dared interrupt her concentration.

In time, Mr. Darling came down the stairs, followed by a thin wispy deputy whose pencil mustache framed two fearfully pressed lips. “How now, what’s this?” asked Deputy Wixon, pointing shakily at the figure splayed on the carpenter’s table.

“It’s a dead body,” Andrew answered.

“I can see that,” nodded the Deputy. “But my question is more about how he came to be lying there. And who done him in?”

“We don’t know much,” Mr. Almy confessed, “just that he is man with no name who may have been poisoned while he was wearing another man’s suit, and we found him in a coffin we were constructing for someone who may not even exist. And he was killed by a man who knew Latin poetry. That is all we know.”

Wixon raised an eyebrow. “Ah, yes, well...perhaps if I leave and come back with a fresh mind.” He angled towards the staircase.

“Stay, Deputy,” pressed Lizzie. “No need for that. I shall determine the meaning behind this all, but I’ll need your help.”

Deputy Wixon stepped forward, floating underneath his helmet, and glanced at the frayed stitching around the dead man’s mouth. “He’s been slaughtered by a maniac!” he snorted. “The Sheriff should be notified,” and he turned his boot heels for the stairs.

“There is no need for that,” Andrew said, flashing his hands. “I implore you to keep this quiet until we get to the bottom of it.”

“But I have to report it. This is a murder, Mr. Borden.”

“Yes, I know. But give me two hours...one hour. I don’t want this out on the street.”

“Deputy,” said Lizzie, “we already have a good deal of information. We know that the victim came from the West by train, that he has been poisoned with prussic acid and deposited here in the middle of the night by persons unknown. He is wearing the clothing of a man who may be an undertaker of sorts. He has no identity as far as we can tell, but we may be able to track him through a train ticket.”

Deputy Wixon removed his hat and scratched his head, as if the stimulation of his scalp would draw forth some understanding. Then a light flashed on his face,

his eyebrows rising almost to the top of his forehead. "From out west you say? There was a nasty foray just yesterday afternoon at the train station, the peculiar coffin that came in on the six o'clock from Hartford. A man was transporting it, and he made it very straight that he came from the Dakota Territory."

"That is our man!" Mr. Almy shot forth. "But a coffin you say? He brought his own coffin with him? Is that even legal?"

"Did you take his identity?" Lizzie asked.

"He called himself Albert Duey. He tried to clear the coffin by saying that it was for a business concern and he was not at liberty to declare its contents. But then we opened it over his protests and found a wax figure of a man. After much of a whoop-de-doo he confessed that he was on the Lyceum circuit and the enclosed dummy was a prop."

"How did you know it was a wax figure?" Lizzie asked, glancing at the corpse. "Perhaps he was transporting our unknown man, here."

"No, I inspected the body myself. The limbs of the coat and trousers were stuffed with knotted rags. The head was solid wax."

"Did he say the subject of his tour?" Lizzie pressed.

"Well, he was a bit vague on that. But he did mention a bit of fluff about mummies and being a professor of sorts. Yes, I do think that is what he said. Peculiar isn't it?"

"Where is this Professor Duey now?" asked Lizzie.

"He packed off to destinations unknown and we have not heard from him since." Deputy Wixon then stared at the mutilated face of the dead man. A pale light grew over his face and broke out into a radiant glow. "Until now, Mr. Borden!" he shouted. "Dear God, until now!"

"This is the man?" asked Mr. Almy.

"The very soul! Why only yesterday, he walked and spoke and..."

"Professor Albert Duey," said Lizzie, as if testing the name. "And Jimmy Pell who commissioned the coffin was his executioner."

"You know the name of the murderer?" asked Deputy Wixon incredulously.

"A man by that name commissioned the coffin," Mr. Almy explained. "We did not think it would be put into such dark service before it even left the shop."

Deputy Wixon blew hot air through his cheeks. "The poor man merely wanted to lecture upon mummies. Who deserved such treatment?"

"I attended a lecture on mummies this very afternoon by Professor Bildung," said Lizzie. "There was no mention of an Albert Duey. I suspect this man was lying to you about his profession." She pressed a finger to her lips and bent in concentration over the paper retrieved from the corpse's mouth. Her eyes then raised, dancing in a mellow shine. "Deputy, would you be so kind as to accompany us on an errand upstreet? I do believe I can lead us to the solution of this mystery."

"By all means," he said. "I am at your disposal."

"Very good," she replied. "While we are off making our inquiries, would Mr. Darling stay here and stand vigil over this unfortunate man? That will allow Mr. Duey the respect he deserves, and ensure that no more dead bodies appear within the pine coffins of my father's basement."

Mr. Darling answered in a near whisper, "I'm afraid to be down here alone."

"Never you mind," said Andrew, paternally. "We'll close the shop and lock you in. It shall be perfectly safe."

"Afraid to be alone," Mr. Darling repeated, his eyes darting towards the dead man. "With him."

But Andrew had turned, engaged in heated conversation with Mr. Almy. Together, they exited the basement up the stairs, followed by Lizzie and the deputy sheriff. The last view Mr. Darling had of them was Lizzie turning back with a sly smile of knowing upon her lips.

When all was still, he turned to the dead man laid out upon the carpenter's table and sighed. "So what's it like then, eh?" he asked. "Being dead?"

The corpse stayed rigidly still, his mouth grotesquely opened like a cracked egg.

"I figured as much," Mr. Darling finally sighed.



[poetry]

“The Walker”

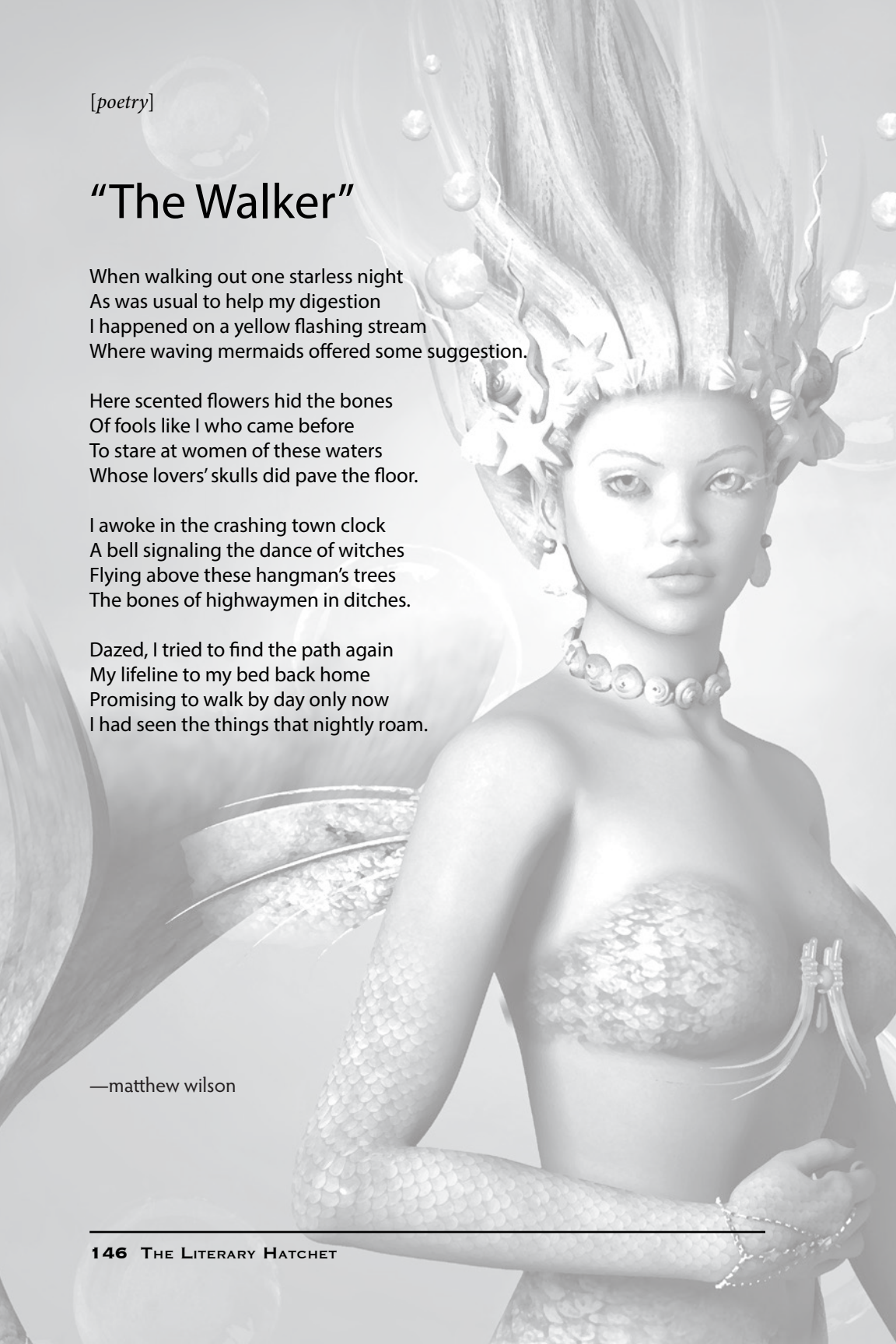
When walking out one starless night
As was usual to help my digestion
I happened on a yellow flashing stream
Where waving mermaids offered some suggestion.

Here scented flowers hid the bones
Of fools like I who came before
To stare at women of these waters
Whose lovers' skulls did pave the floor.

I awoke in the crashing town clock
A bell signaling the dance of witches
Flying above these hangman's trees
The bones of highwaymen in ditches.

Dazed, I tried to find the path again
My lifeline to my bed back home
Promising to walk by day only now
I had seen the things that nightly roam.

—matthew wilson



Clear Lake Madness

perhaps it is the brackish
darkness that overflows onto
the well manicured lawns
and gypsum walls
of these housewives

that drives them to drown
their darlings in bathtubs
run over the heads of husbands
in parking lots
then reversing for good measure

or the heat of Gulf zephyrs
making humid each breath
festering the mold of husbands
retrieving their God-given Glocks
from unlocked drawers
preemptively shooting those wives
as Kevlar-suited helmets
ring their homes in black

or perhaps it is the lack of quick exits
from the web of these subdivided
scabs of concrete and shingles
covering wounds on the marshy
scrub forests of long dead peoples
that cause the daughters
to be slaughtered in empty houses
sacrifices to the Mother of Death

what is it about prosperity
that sucks hope
from the marrow
that brings murderers' row
to the fine venire of bricks and wood

they have their double door Thermadors
gas-fired Vikings
their black granite with speckled gold
they have their blue tiled pools
green egg smokers
seventy inch 3Ds
with split screens
with five hundred selections

what else could they want?

—david cowen

[poetry]

The Deserted Playground

The swing hangs by one chain; the slide's a jumble –
twisted metal riddled with holes.
The see-saw lies on its side, a dead behemoth
unmoving and silent.
Large shadows creep over the deserted playground,
and in the sandbox

sits a child, blond, small,
hands perfect as a china doll.
Tattered clothes cover his tiny form;
only one sneaker
adorns the boy's feet. The other is cast aside,
lies crooked against the box.

No mother comes, no father.
The boy sits still and does not cry, but
shovels sand into his mouth, he has nothing else.
He does not see the shadow approach.
Run, boy, run! Let no one catch you.
Sand is better than pain.

—jane craig sebok

ROOM FOR APOLOGY

There might be room
For an heartfelt apology
But I'm unsure when
I'll find the words that are
Perfectly placed without any misshape

This affliction, I'm always to bear
Like every author before
The written word is never perfect
Published and forgotten
But not an art for rotting
Seasons go by, finding lost
Bits and pieces to fix what's
Never really been broken

So there might be room
Let me swept some of these letters up
For an heartfelt apology
As I'm sure that I've found the words
And it's now your turn

—grim k. de evil

[poetry]

The Asylum

An eternal abyss
Redemption denied,
Spawn of another world
Creations of mind.
Escape inevitable for a while,
Dark thoughts cloud
Swarming to attack,
As the reality sucked in
They brought me to an asylum.

People around - familiar with my world,
Our secret - eyes say it all.
Beings of higher ranks, normals -
Unable to comprehend.
House of special people
The asylum.

The obscure, dark atmosphere fortifies me,
The creations share my pain,
Mind constantly constructing
A new world - my inception.

The city completed,
Citizens contented,
Fulfilled my purpose,
I am happy.
Opening the eyes,
The light falls,
Surroundings taken in,
Reality sucked in,
They brought me to an asylum.
My world once again begins.

—hadiqa inam



[poetry]

here as i think

inspiration, your memories sigh....
closed the windows,
of your glowing arise..
i kissed your lips,
as i hugged your soul..
a pirates life to me, is inspirations pure gold....

im learning here. today and the latter..
the waters flow in waves, the tides as they rip, and the moon light
fades, drifting farther and farther way, nothing stays the same. i am me
and my other is you.

lifes circle, desolate beech.
the trees are their fruit,
so near yet far to reach,
ill learn my lesson
as you will learn to love.
there i will know myself,
because of your dreams sent to both of us.

no longer will i question my time, my life is of worth, of purpose and
rhyme.
i stood before you, naked and bare.
the beauty of our song,
singing in the wind somewhere.

every drop of rain which falls from the sky.
diving into the drink,
the tears that i cry.....

the birds they whisper scents.
and they plant their seeds.
the seeds of our souls,
planted like these.
im grateful for your tuning my drunken old guitar,
im grateful for the knowledge, that i am indeed a dark shining star.

renewed and adjusted within the formulation of insecure posture. id walk
a thousand miles across the water.. and i did only to wonder.

the spirits are here within us, all near, and as we drift and sail away...
we sail within ourselves, as the sun and moon are parallel.
this circle of life and chain of reaction. the balancing act of this good
and evil fraction. words that have been spoken, we can never take back,
as we take them in, sometimes we tend to snap...

on a light, it dims the night.....
i must have faith my ship wont sink..
i must hope that i will find my beam..my house..
where i shall find my key that i dropped out at sea, into the drink,
where my anchor it sunk...

and as i float here and sink... on shore as i think...

—brittany horton

[review]

The Bizarre Sis-Boom-Bah of *Bride of the Gorilla*

a review by denise noe

This essay is dedicated to John O'Dowd, author of *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye: The Barbara Payton Story*

Released in 1951, *Bride of the Gorilla* is a cult film. This essay examines why this movie, regarded by no one as a masterpiece, nevertheless resonates with audiences. Written and directed by Curt Siodmak, who wrote the screenplay for the 1941 classic, *The Wolf Man*, *Bride* has a plotline reminiscent of the earlier, unquestionably superior, film. In *Wolf*, Lon Chaney Jr. plays a man who transforms into a wolf. In *Bride*, a man is cursed so that he transforms—or believes he transforms—into a beast resembling a gorilla. Chaney also appears in *Bride* but does not play the man-into-beast character.

Compared to the 1941 *Wolf*, *Bride* was filmed on a shoestring budget—and it shows: Sets are cheap, the overall look cheesy. Clips from documentaries about jungles are occasionally interspersed into the movie. Indeed, *Bride* opens with scenes of jungle footage and a voiceover telling us this is the story of how “the jungle itself took the law into its own hands.” Footage showing a puma, monkey, lizard, leopard, and an anaconda is followed by a view of a wrecked “Van Gelder Manor.”

Then we see lovely Dina Van Gelder (Barbara Payton) dancing under a ceiling fan in a beautiful Van Gelder Manor. Payton wears a tight-fitting sarong that accentuates her curvaceous figure. In Andrew Dowdy's book, *The Films of the Fifties: The American State of Mind*, Dowdy tells of attending an initial showing

of the film: “Barbara’s appearance onscreen was greeted with instant verbal approval, accompanied by whistling, stomping, and the ecstatic tribute of flying popcorn boxes, many of them sacrificed unemptied.” John O’Dowd in his book, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye: The Barbara Payton Story*, observes that the above was “an understandable response for Barbara, who, at 24, was a mesmerizing beauty . . . fully displayed here with her long-legged, hourglass figure, sensuous mouth, provocative eyes, and flawless skin. That her beauty would elicit such a vociferous reaction was proof enough that film audiences loved the sight of this new blond bombshell. Indeed, her appearance in *Bride of the Gorilla* proves that in 1951, Barbara Payton was, without question, a Grade-A knockout.”

After she dances, Barney Chavez (Raymond Burr) enters. A supervisor at the rubber plantation owned by Dina’s husband, Barney is dissatisfied with his work, comparing it to slavery. Dina asks, “Aren’t we all slaves?” She soon negates her own question, saying, “Not me—I’m free.”

Barney says, “A woman like you ought to travel and wear pretty clothes.” Dina replies, “My life is here with my husband.” Barney asserts, “You’re confusing gratitude with love.”

Into the mansion come her husband, Klaas Van Gelder (Paul Cavanagh), and Dr. Viet (Tom Conway). The film shows its age when Dr. Viet expresses concern for Dina in bluntly racist terms, saying, “White people shouldn’t live too long in the jungle.”

Dina and Klaas clasp each other’s arms and head for the dining table. Klaas opens the Bible to a passage that begins, “The heart is deceitful above all things.” The verse seems appropriate when Klaas mentions the complaint of a worker about Barney’s relationship with a young South American Indian woman. Barney has apparently done a love ‘em and leave ‘em number with Larina (Carol Varga), the daughter of housekeeper Al-Long (Gisela Werbisek). Like Payton, Varga was clearly cast in part as eye candy. Varga is a shapely and beautiful young woman.

Upset that Barney has seduced and abandoned Larina, Klaas orders Barney to leave. Outside the Van Gelder Mansion, Larina begs Barney to take her with him. He coldly brushes her off. We soon see Larina complaining to mother Al-Long about Barney’s duplicitous ways. Al-Long says, “I warned you to stay with your own people.”

A powerful sexual chemistry animates scenes between Barney and Dina. Barney realizes Dina does not want him to leave. A confrontation takes place in the jungle between Barney and Klaas. The more heavily muscled Barney easily lays slightly built Klaas on his back. Then Barney watches nonchalantly as a poisonous snake kills Klaas.

Unknown to Klaas and Barney, they are being watched by Al-Long. Usually seen with a long black scarf accenting her potato head, Al-Long is reminiscent of Maria Ouspenskaya’s Gypsy Maleva in *The Wolf Man*. Outraged by Barney’s callous abandonment of her daughter and his murder of her employer, the sinister Al-Long casts a spell on him: “Cursed be Barney Chavez . . . He shall be like an animal . . . The jungle shall hunt him to his death.”

With Klaas barely cold in his grave, Barney marries Dina. At their wedding reception, he suddenly watches one of his hands turn unaccountably hairy. On his wedding night, Barney does not consummate his marriage but runs into the jungle as Dina gazes after him.

In the jungle, Barney watches his hands turn hairy and sees his reflection in water—the reflection of an ape. He is either turning into a gorilla-like creature or believes he is.

We soon see Dr. Viet talking with Police Commissioner Taro, who is played by Lon Chaney Jr. Chaney's role in this film contrasts with his starring role in *Wolf*. Here his role is small but pivotal. Indeed, it was Chaney as Taro that we first heard in the opening voiceover. Taro is a South American Indian who was educated in a white-run system. He often feels alienated from his "own people" and torn between two ways of thinking. In the conversation with Dr. Viet, Taro discusses recent reports of a strange animal in the jungle. Taro then relates the legend of the "sukurat," a "jungle demon" that is really a human being transformed into an animal. The conversation turns to Barney and Taro says, "I know that Barney Chavez murdered Klaas Van Gelder" but acknowledges lacking proof. Taro elaborates, "He cannot escape punishment. Barney Chavez will be brought to justice."

In one scene, the film ambivalently comments on gender roles. Barney and Dina plan to sell Van Gelder Manor. Van Heusen (Paul Maxey) wishes to buy. Van Heusen and Taro are at Van Gelder Manor but Barney is not. Van Heusen fumes about Barney's absence when Van Heusen has brought over the papers to transfer ownership. Taro observes, "Mrs. Chavez can sign the papers. She's the legal owner." However, Dina retorts, "My husband is the boss in this house." Van Heusen says, "I wish my wife could hear that." Dina's retort indicates that she subscribes to traditional sex roles, a common stance in 1951. However, Van Heusen's reply indicates that, even in 1951, sex roles were not so rigid that a wifely dominance was possible.

A later scene between Barney and Dina has him informing Dina that he will not sell Van Gelder Manor. He tells her he "belongs to the jungle . . . The animals talk to me. I understand them."

Toward the end of the film, Dina follows Barney into the jungle. Transformed into an aggressive ape-like creature, Barney attacks Dina. Police shoot him dead. In a final voiceover, Taro somberly declares, "The jungle had risen up to punish Barney Chavez for his crimes."

Made on a sadly limited budget and hampered by a mediocre script, *Bride's* cult status is nevertheless assured. As O'Dowd observes, it is "the second of two films" for which Barbara Payton "will forever be known." (The first film for which Payton would be famous was the 1950 crime drama, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, in which she starred opposite James Cagney.)

Why is *Bride* a cult film? This writer sees several reasons. One is that it is so easily ridiculed. The film has been comically referenced in an episode of the *M*A*S*H* TV series, the 1st Annual Mystery Science Theater 3000 Summer Blockbuster

Review, This Movie Sucks!, and elsewhere.

Another reason for its cult film status is the odd way it combines a cheesy atmosphere with excellent performances and depth of meaning.

Raymond Burr plays Barney Chavez with a menacing machismo and an undercurrent of animalistic sensuality perfect for the man-into-beast part. Gisela Werbisek as Al-Long is fascinatingly eerie. Perhaps the most notable performance is that of Barbara Payton who is luminous as the passionate but often frightened and confused Dina.

In this writer's opinion, *Bride* possesses more meaning than its campy title suggests. As a "User Review" at the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) asserts, "The somewhat sketchy story reads like a medieval legend, the stuff Shakespeare plays like *MacBeth* were made of." This reviewer later observes, "The strangeness of the sets and the seemingly deliberate evasion of authenticity heighten the symbolic significance of the story in an odd sort of way. On the set there is a strong separation between the inside and the outside. Inside, people move about in the usual Hollywood parlor surroundings you can see in numerous movies of that period. Outside, right in front of the parlor window, there is the vicious jungle with its fleshy greenery. Inside, there is civilization or at least a civilized façade. Outside, men become beasts." Another User Review at the IMDB describes the film as having "a lot more to it than you would think at first about crime, justice, and revenge, and makes you think about it, too. More penetrating and thought-provoking than many of the big-budgeted films about courts and law that in many cases have the criminal getting away with his or her crimes due to a technicality or a smart and skillful lawyer. There are not technicalities or lawyers in the jungle."

There may also be an ugly subtext to this 1951 movie. It is possible it represents a white racist metaphor for sex between blacks and whites. Although the white racist stereotype seeing black people as especially "ape-like" is contrary to fact—simians lack curly hair and thick lips—it is possible the film is informed by such racism. The title card for the film stated: "A blonde and a savage, alone in the jungle . . . Her clothes torn away, screaming in terror . . . Her marriage vows were more than fulfilled!" Dr. Viet's early racist statement, "White people shouldn't live too long in the jungle," may indicate racist underpinnings to the entire plot.

Another reason *Bride* is a cult film might be the way in which it echoes the lives of its stars both before and after its 1951 release. As noted earlier, Lon Chaney Jr. is a character in a movie that features a human-into-animal transformation like the one his character endured in *Wolf*.

Bride was not the only time Raymond Burr appeared in an ape-themed film. Three years later, in 1951, he played in *Gorilla At Large*. A cheap and cheesy film like *Bride*, Burr does not transform but works in a circus around a gorilla.

However, the main true-life resonances in *Bride* are with the life of its female star, Barbara Payton. Her riches to rags story is one of the most tragic in Hollywood history. In 1949, Payton earned \$10,000 a week for her acting at a time when the average American family income was less than that. By 1963, she was an alcoholic prostitute selling herself for as little as \$5.

Payton got her big break co-starring with Lloyd Bridges in the 1949 film noir, *Trapped*. Positive reviews of her beauty and acting led to the previously mentioned role opposite James Cagney in *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*. About her performance in that film, a New York Times article stated, "As the moll, a superbly curved young lady [named] Barbara Payton performs as though she's trying to spit a tooth—one of the few Mr. Cagney leaves her." Despite the positive notices, Warner Brothers (WB) began casting Payton in small roles in undistinguished Westerns like *Dallas* and *Only the Valiant*. Part of the reason for this may have been that Payton was getting negative publicity for associating with real life gangsters and for raucous partying. To punish Payton for her "wild" ways, WB production chief Jack Warner assigned her a tiny role in a mediocre film. She refused it and he placed her on suspension. He took her off suspension to turn her over to independent producer Jack Broder to film *Bride of the Gorilla*. O'Dowd comments, "Although it was meant to be yet another act of punishment, the loan out was actually an unintentional blessing as it would provide Barbara with the second of two films for which she will forever be known."

Payton was engaged to A-list actor Franchot Tone when working on *Bride*. During production, she met B-list actor Tom Neal, best known for the acclaimed film noir *Detour*, and became strongly enamored of him. Payton shuffled back and forth between the two men. Finally, a confrontation led to a physical fight between the two males—one oddly resembling that between Barney and Klaas over Dina in *Bride*. Like Klaas, Tone was lean; like Barney, Neal heavily muscled. Neal battered Tone into a coma. Luckily, Tone survived and recovered. Payton married Tone.

However, within months, she returned to Neal. Much of the public turned against Payton and Neal who appeared in low-budget films for a few years and then found themselves unable to get movie work. Payton's last movie, *Murder Is My Beat*, was released in 1955. By the time her final film was made, her relationship with Neal, whom she never married, had ended. Neal left the film industry for landscaping. In 1965, he shot and killed wife Gail. He was convicted of manslaughter, and served six years in prison. Paroled in 1971, he died six months later.

Depressed by being blacklisted from the motion picture industry, Payton became an alcoholic prostitute. Her price slid as she lost her looks, going from a curvaceous beauty to a bloated, toothless hag. The enviable waistline in *Bride* became a potbelly distended by liver disease. She died of liver failure in 1967 at the age of 39. The devastation of her life is reminiscent of the devastation of Van Gelder Manor in *Bride*.

Cheesy, cheap, camp, thoroughly entertaining, remarkably well acted, and oddly meaningful, *Bride of the Gorilla* well deserves its cult film status.

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The Boondock Saints: Blood-Spattered Bravado

a review by denise noe

Released in 1999 and written and directed by Troy Duffy, *The Boondock Saints* is a story of vigilantism that echoes the 1970's Charles Bronson flick, *Death Wish*. But while the Bronson movie told its story of a violent vigilante in a straightforward fashion, Duffy's film is ramped-up, revved-up and deliberately and excitingly non-linear.

The story opens on St. Patrick's Day in Boston. We are inside a Roman Catholic Church where a priest is reciting the Lord's Prayer. This priest gives a sermon recounting the infamous Kitty Genovese tragedy in which multiple witnesses saw a young woman attacked and stabbed to death—and the witnesses did nothing. The priest says we must fear not only evil men but the indifference of good men.

Soon exiting the church are two handsome anti-heroes, Connor MacManus (Sean Patrick Flanery) and Murphy MacManus (Norman Reedus). Sandy-haired and solidly built, these fraternal twin brothers work at the same meat-packing plant. At work, a brawl breaks out—and the tone of the film is established.

Another scene opens with the brothers MacManus in a bar. A group of Russian mobsters begin bullying people. Connor and Murphy fight the good fight, easily winning the barroom brawl.

Next day the embarrassed mobsters track the brothers down and attempt revenge. Instead, Connor and Murphy manage to outwit and outfight the ferocious fellows, leaving their broken bodies in an alley.

Boston cops are aided by a top FBI investigator Detective, Paul Smecker (William Dafoe). This macho detective is a top-flank investigator who brilliantly reconstructs crime scenes. He is also, as we soon learn, a gay man. Duffy deserves considerable credit for creating a homosexual character so far from stereotype.

Smecker and others soon determine that the brothers killed in self-defense and so they are released. But Connor and Murphy do not go back to regular life. Their experience of killing in self-defense has changed them psychologically. They now believe that God has designated them to rid Boston of lowlifes. They go on a rampage, targeting gangsters primarily. When they learn Detective Smecker may be on their trail, they do not target him for elimination because he is, in their judgment, a good man.

Scenes of murder and mayhem are often filmed in slow motion, as if we are watching some sort of blood-soaked ballet. One of the most innovative aspects is that we are shown the scenes of death and then shown the crimes while Detective Smecker brilliantly reconstructs them. In one especially interesting passage, Smecker is actually placed inside the murder scene although we know he is just reconstructing.

This motion picture sometimes tries too hard to be clever. In addition, the characters can seem like they have entered a contest to see how many times they can use the “F-word” in a sentence. Still, the good points outweigh the bad and *The Boondock Saints* is a well-made, innovative, and fascinating film.



The Blair Witch Project: A Groundbreaking Horror Film

a review by eugene hosey

I do not and never did care about the web site that marketed this film. Regardless of how successfully word was spread about *The Blair Witch Project* through the Internet—innovative and smart as it was in terms of business and advertising—I am interested only in the film itself. Written, directed, and edited by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, the movie was released in 1999. This is an amazing piece of cinema, acted and filmed by three student filmmakers hiking through the woods, completely outside of a studio system, with hardly any money according to general filmmaking standards.

The film spawned a new horror subgenre—the “found footage” concept. I wondered why it had taken so long for someone to think seriously about doing it. When the film was in the theatres, my impression was that most of the critics appreciated it. In talking with film-goers, I noticed two distinct schools of thought about whether this was a horror masterpiece or a waste of time. I was very intrigued, a member of the former school, and I contemplated a reason for this polarity that opens insight into how people experience cinema—but more about that later.

The three student filmmakers—Heather, Josh, and Mike—set out to make a documentary about a mythical witch in the woods of Maryland. The beginning part of the film consists of interviews with locals of the nearby town. Various elements of the haunting—once they get lost in the woods—reference tales told by the locals, although these tales do not serve as logical exposition but more as creepy fragments. In fact, one of the movie’s strengths is that it so effectively captures the terror of the irrational.

What starts as a documentary project quickly turns into a story about Heather, Josh, and Mike running for their lives and trying to find their way out of the woods, while strange unseen forces chase and terrorize them. There are no monsters or ghostly manifestations, although evidence of predatory evil are seen and heard.

The Blair Witch Project becomes a documentary about the predicament the three youths find themselves in.

First of all, there is some question about the accuracy of their map. Then they find three piles of rocks around their tent in the morning. Everything gets worse as they trek through the woods just trying to get out and find their car. At night they are awakened by crashing and footstep noises all around them. They decide to walk south, but the compass malfunctions and they actually walk in a circle, ending up back where they started.

One night they hear the voices of children or babies or perhaps inhuman cries that surround their tent and drive them out. As Heather is filmed by one of the others running behind her, we see Heather turn her camera to the left and scream, “What the fuck is that?!” When the sun comes up and they return to their campsite, Josh’s backpack has been emptied and strewn about and covered with slime. Next morning, Josh is missing, but later in the night they can hear him hollering from deep in the woods. Another morning and Heather finds a bundle of sticks and twigs outside the tent. She opens it and finds a piece of Josh’s clothing and a small piece of bloody anatomy. She doesn’t mention this discovery to Mike—a clever psychological passage in character behavior. She knows that telling Mike would only make it all the more frightening and help with nothing; her desire is to get it out of her mind.

When they hear Josh the next night, they leave the tent with their cameras and go searching for him. As they follow after his voice, they find a house—a dilapidated, gutted structure with no aesthetic feature or furnishings. Heather and Mike hear Josh somewhere in the house but can’t find him. They rush up and down stairs. Suddenly Mike’s camera falls to the floor. The last image, before Heather’s camera falls as well, is one that connects to the creepiest detail of one of the criminal stories told by a local at the beginning of the movie. This image is a clue to the evil that has successfully hounded all three of them to their deaths. But it is far less than a solution.

Is *The Blair Witch Project* frightening because it is about a menace—the identity of which—is never revealed? Or is the movie a silly failure for precisely the same reason?

What is fascinating is the way audiences appear to be polarized about the success of this film, and my own working theory is that it says something about how different people respond to a movie. Could it be that there are those movie-watchers whose nature it is to process cinematic information literally and objectively while never forgetting about the world they live in? Conversely, are there those who find their pleasure through opening themselves up completely to the cinematic world and forgetting about the one they live in—even to the point of letting a film sneak into their subconscious?

The Blair Witch Project is not about the fearful sight of monsters. If it is indeed a horror movie that frightens by concealing as opposed to revealing, it is about the unspeakable dread of darkness and nothingness.



Sisterly Love: The Saga of Emma and Lizzie Borden By Jordan Bollinger

a review by eugene hosey

This Lizzie book is a good sister/bad sister tale. It is a first-person account by the Lizzie character as told from the grave—more specifically from purgatory, where Emma resides with her. Lizzie wants to tell the truth, at last, about what really happened. She lets the reader know in an introduction that by her prior silence she has been guilty of protecting the real murderer, whose identity is obvious before she tells her story. The Borden case itself is not at the heart of this book. There is no serious attempt at a solution to the mystery of the case here even if the author is acquainted with a general knowledge of key facts.

This Lizzie fiction is about one of the nuttiest cases of sisterly love ever conceived. In fact, Lizzie actually tells us that her grief was not about the murders of Andrew and Abby Borden, which she now recognizes as having been inevitable for a long time. (It eventuates that there had been a string of murders preceding and leading directly to the famous Borden tragedy.) What hurt Lizzie so much was the behavior of Emma, who had created for herself a false image of the good sister and then sorely treated the true good sister – though not that Lizzie considers herself good. She has too much humility for that – or thinks she does, anyway. She asks for prayer for both herself and Emma.

Sisterly Love is technically well written and at times entertaining as a macabre albeit unrealistic soap opera. The author has some interesting ideas about the particulars of the murder morning at the Borden house. For instance, Lizzie does go out to the barn, but her father is not the first victim she finds. No reader can guess how the murderer gets Abby to wait for her final punishment on earth up in the guest room. There is an inventive take on Mrs. Reagan the jail keeper mishearing what Lizzie says to Emma regarding the famous statement about Lizzie's complaint to her sister that she had given her away. But the author does not create characters

that can stand and cast a shadow. Both sisters are one-dimensional and implausible. Lizzie is naïve, gullible, vulnerable, and not too bright. The characterization of Emma is ridiculous; she comes across as a cartoon psychopath. She is endowed with a phenomenal prescience and cleverness that makes for so much silliness as to mar the whole story. The ultimate explanation for how she gets away with so much crime is that everybody involved is so stupid and unobservant. When she finally makes her confession to Lizzie, enraged about one of Lisbeth's Maplecroft parties, she maintains that God has forgiven her and that Lizzie is the bad one. The intended melodrama becomes laughable.

The book is in two sections—one for Lizzie and one for Emma. But both sections are from Lizzie's point of view. This might have something to do with how the Emma character becomes something of a joke. Perhaps if Emma's section had been written from Emma's point of view, both her character and the tale as a whole might have been deepened and therefore more believable and satisfying. On the other hand, *Sisterly Love* is not without merit. The writer gives Lizzie's voice a diary-like intimacy. The inner-monologue style works well. It is not a boring read and might work for people who enjoy the good/bad sister genre. But there is just no way around the fact that plausibility problems, particularly in connection to Emma, do cheapen this effort to the point of distraction.



Famous Killers for Early Learners By Thomas Wasper

a review by eugene hosey

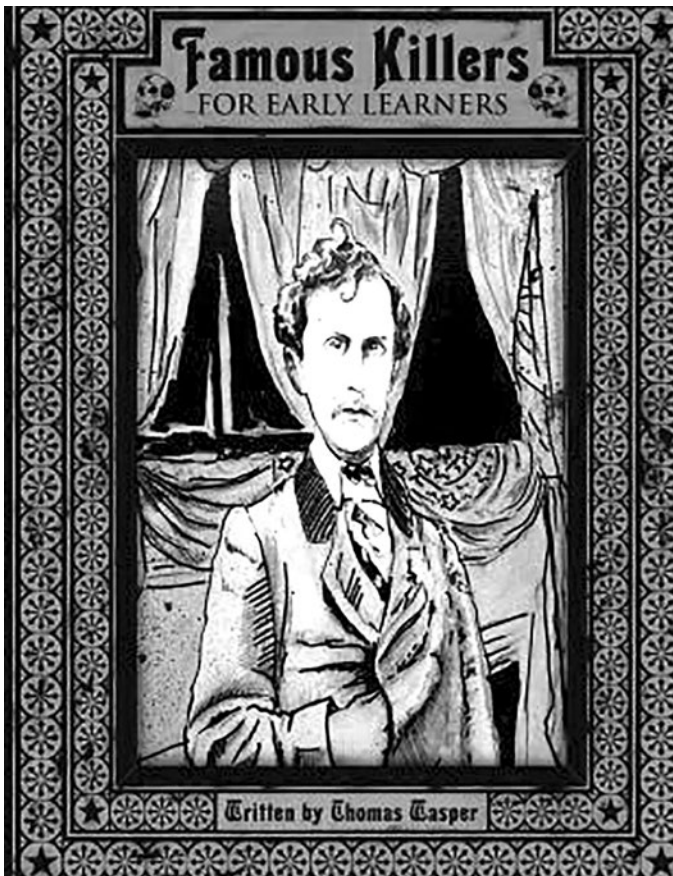
Apparently this is supposed to be a fun little magazine about some famous killers (thirteen or a few more, depending on how you count them). I presume from its playful style and brevity of information and comic book style illustrations that it is intended for a children or youth market. The phrase, “for Early Learners” in the title states literally who this thing is for, I presume; possibly “for Early Learners” is a sardonic phrase indicating that *Famous Killers for Early Learners* may be an inspiration or a primer for juveniles getting ready to embark on a career in murder. Perhaps the title does not mean that much—Who can be sure? In fact, it is hard to be sure about anything in regard to this oddity.

This reviewer finds it tough to understand the motivation behind this nasty little comic book. Each killer is profiled with a summary, a nursery rhyme (of sorts), and a full-page illustration in colorful cartoon style. Then there are six pages of supplemental material at the end: “Famous Killer Activity Pages” and “Bonus Art.” This extra stuff is so silly, tasteless, and unnecessary that it is aggravating to comment on. I don’t mean to say it is so offensive as to get upset about. It is ugly and trivial. To take a photo of a serial killer, impose a clown nose on it, and add a caption saying something to the effect that killing someone is funny—What kind of humor is this? One of a handful of jokes asks why Jeffrey Dahmer would dislike eating clowns. There is a whole page devoted to “Kooky Fun Facts” about Charles Guiteau, assassin of President Garfield. Then there are two games pages about a word scramble and a maze. Finally there are two pages of bonus art featuring Elizabeth Bathory and Sid Vicious, two of the killers profiled in the preceding pages. And that is it.

One would expect some sort of clarity about the author’s choices of which killers to profile, but it is an odd selection indeed. There is no Ed Gein or Ted

Bundy or Aileen Wournos; on the other hand, there is Henry VIII and John Wilkes Booth and Sid Vicious. Did the choices reflect what art work the illustrators had on hand? Or did it actually make no difference which killers were profiled? Did it matter how many were profiled? Perhaps I missed the point that the author wanted a variety of type in his list, which might explain including a king and a punk rock star among a few serial killers and legends like Jack the Ripper and Lizzie Borden. But what differences does it make?

Is there really a market for this? Regardless of the reader's age, this material is not informative or entertaining enough in any way to be something I would actually recommend. And I keep returning to the question about what motivated the author to conceive of and put such a thing together. I wish I could sense a genuine interest in back of this, but instead I can't get past a cynical and trivial attitude. I must say in the final analysis that I am unable to appreciate this morbid little project.



Lizzie Didn't Do It; Emma Did!

By E. Elaine Watson

a review by eugene hosey

How do you write a fair review of a book that is unnecessary? This is one of those “Emma Did It” books that precludes it a serious place in the Borden literature due to its neglect of serious investigation. Emma was staying at Fairhaven at the time of the murders; the author rounds the distance between Fairhaven and Fall River down to ten miles, whereas in fact it is closer to fifteen or sixteen. The author’s contention is that Emma successfully jetted between the two towns on the morning of the infamous August 4th in a carriage to complete the murders and get back to Fairhaven to receive a telegram—a feat requiring abilities, special arrangements and insights that the author is unable to explain. The author does not give us a factually supported theory. Instead we get an unsubstantiated personal notion on the part of the writer. In fact, in Chapter 18, the author states: “The following is what I believe to be the true story of what happened on that hot summer day, August 4th, 1892.” Ms. Watson knows she has adopted a belief; she does not claim proof. This is her conjecture.

Some writers take on the Borden tragedy because they are fascinated by the sensational and morbid character of the crime, but they are unprepared to do the thinking required to make their theory work—to achieve a plausibility that elevates and pulls it off. Some authors unfortunately convince themselves that they have cracked the case whereas they have only achieved a stubborn satisfaction for themselves. There is something to be said for the old adage that we believe what we want to believe. Make no mistake that there is quite a difference between the truth-seeking Borden scholars and the students who fail to complete their research. If this author wants to get to the bottom of it, I suggest years more of study, communication with experts, and – most importantly—obsessive thinking. This is one of the most difficult unsolved murder cases on record. Intriguing clues never cease; they just lead to more questions. Truth plays hide-and-seek.

A major disappointment—in fact a huge bore—is that the first half of the book is nothing more than a re-telling of what happened between August 4th, 1892 and

the verdict of 1893. Why would any writer think that as late as 2011 we needed this? The writer's details of what transpired from the shock of the murders and then through the Trial are generally accurate enough for the reader who is not a purist; I detected several errors, but I see no value in reiterating them in order to make a tedious, ultimately pointless list. Setting up the story according to the record is an easy way to give a book a "respectable" length, but the accomplishments in Borden literature over the past ten years or more have obviated this approach. There are so many secondary sources—overviews and summations—of what happened throughout the whole Borden tragedy and were argued during the Trial that the only market for this sort of book is for people who have heard of the perplexing murders but know little or nothing based on research. It should be made clear for all potential readers that the real thing – the Trial Transcripts, the Police Reports, Lizzie's Inquest Testimony, and other official materials—are easily procurable at this date thanks to scholars who have made it readily available through the Internet. It comes down to a question of whether a reader wants the real McCoy or is satisfied with an author's rendition. The commercial success of this book depends on the reader's need or expectation. But the job of the critic is to discern the difference between those efforts that fall short and those that exceed normal expectations. Good literary criticism can lift the spirit and renew hope in the medium. By commenting on the subject, I hope to draw a distinction. Faults accepted, Victorian Lincoln's book is a compelling read, the Radin book is focused and raises thought-provoking questions, Michael Brimbaum's book is a rich fiction. *Lizzie Didn't Do it; Emma Did!* is a bad one.

As for Emma's motives in murdering Abby and her father, we are left primarily with the clichés of money and Emma's well known commitment to her mother that she would always take care of "Little Lizzie," although there are skeletons in the closet. The narrative lacks the excitement of a horror/suspense story. The murders are methodical and dispassionate. Cool heads and efficiency prevail during the most gruesome, horrifying acts of the homicides. There are no clever inventions or convincing explanations about Emma Borden as the killer. The obvious problems of logistics and time that Emma as axe murderess would have had to overcome are skirted. Emma's distress over what she had done seems to come later after Lizzie's acquittal, perhaps an indication of remorse. The author draws attention to Emma's apprehension that the killer, or "they," would come back for her—paranoia, senility? The writer paints the final days of Emma as a security-conscious person in mourning, always wearing black and fearfully watching the yard.

It must be said that *Lizzie Didn't Do It; Emma Did!* contains nothing for the Bordenphiles. It lacks originality and is not to be taken seriously. Choices made that are most important to the story are underdeveloped and oddly unrealistic even from a fictional standpoint. When it's over, I have nothing to say about Lizzie or Emma either one; they walked through their roles and disappeared. There is no excitement about these heinous crimes. This book is not an ambitious project but rather a personal effort that the author apparently felt a need to produce.



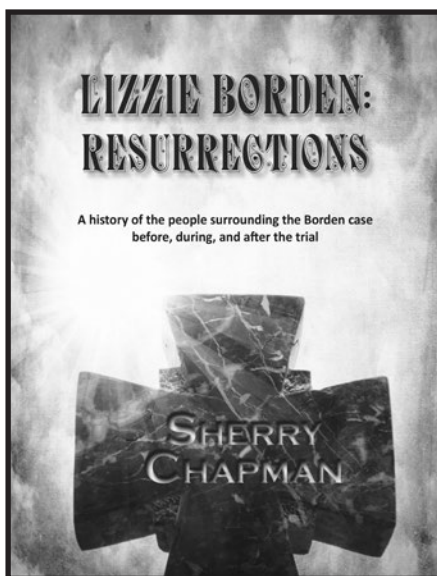
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Lizzie Borden: Resurrections

A history of the people
surrounding the Borden
case before, during, and
after the trial

by Sherry Chapman

\$21.95



Whatever happened to Lizzie Borden after the trial that accused her of bludgeoning her father and stepmother with a hatchet in 1892 Fall River, Massachusetts? It's all in here, and it doesn't stop with Lizzie. A plethora of persons were involved around her in some way. From her friends to her foes, from the doctors to the policemen; from her Manse to The Nance, at last comes the first book of its kind that tells what caused Officer Philip Harrington (who greatly disliked Lizzie) to die suddenly in 1893. What happened to neighbor and friend Dr. Bowen after the crime and trial? Why doesn't Edwin Porter, who covered the trial then wrote the first contemporary book on the murders, *The Fall River Tragedy*, have a gravestone – and who is buried with him? Not by him. Actually with him.

From original source documents, photos of the graves, obituaries and death certificates each on whom records could be found has their story told in details unknown until now. What were they doing before anyone much had heard of Lizzie Borden? What was their role in the case? When did they die and how?

Some of the results may surprise you, whether you read this book for pleasure or research. There are no legends here, but a factual telling of the stories of these persons who are today all gone but need not be forgotten. And with this book they may be hard to forget.

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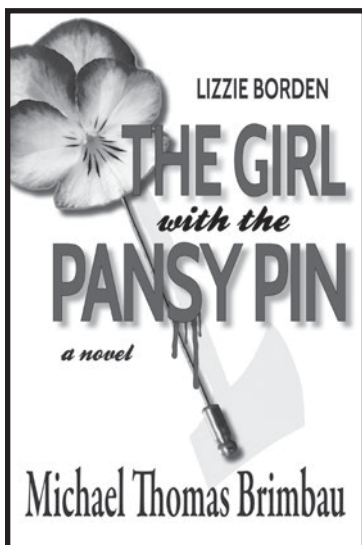
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Lizzie Borden: The Girl with the Pansy Pin

a novel by Michael Thomas Brimbau



Lizzie Borden and her sister Emma lived a life of privilege and entitlement, with wealth and social status far greater than their neighbors. But it was not enough. In time, Lizzie and Emma grew restless, aching for a more opulent life—to reside on the Hill in a big house amongst their peers and Fall River's finest families.

But Father's riches were window dressing, dangling just beyond their reach—quarantined by a frugal patriarch who was unable or unwilling to change his scrimping ways. Andrew Jackson Borden had no intention of moving to the Hill and abandoning the home he had purchased for his second wife, or spending the money he had worked so hard for all his life. Now he

was planning to give it all away—to his wife, their stepmother.

In time, discord in the family began to ferment and fester—and there were signs that things were not as they should be.

On a sultry August morning, in the naked light of day, someone entered 92 Second Street and brutally hacked and murdered Andrew and Abby Borden. Soon the finger of guilt pointed to Lizzie. But she loved her father. He meant everything to her. The gold ring she had lovingly given him and that he always wore said as much. She would never have harmed him. Or would she?

The Girl with the Pansy Pin tells the gripping story of a desirable and vivacious young Victorian woman desperately longing for adventure and a lavish life. Instead, she was condemned to waste away in a stale, modest existence, in a father's foregone reality, with little chance of ever discovering love, happiness, or fulfillment. Now they have charged poor Lizzie with double murder.

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Fall River Revisited

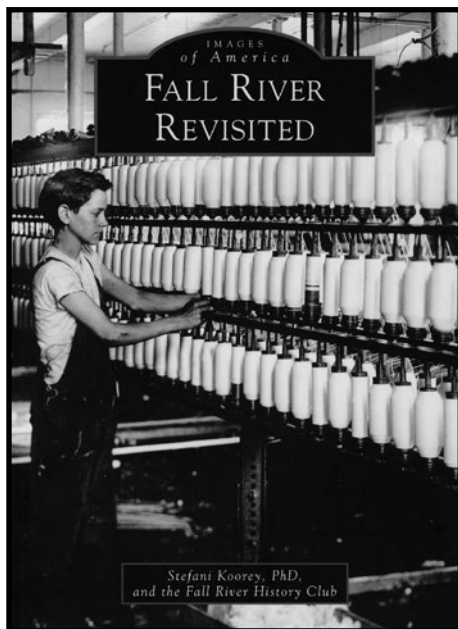
by Stefani Koorey and the
Fall River History Club

Founded in 1803, Fall River changed its name the following year to Troy, after a resident visiting Troy, New York, enjoyed the city. In 1834, the name was officially changed back to Fall River.

The city's motto, "We'll Try," originates from the determination of its residents to rebuild the city following a devastating fire in 1843. The fire resulted in 20 acres in the center of the village being destroyed, including 196 buildings, and 1,334 people were displaced from their homes.

Once the capital of cotton textile manufacturing in the United States, by 1910, Fall River boasted 43 corporations, 222 mills, and 3.8 million spindles, producing two miles of cloth every minute of every working day in the year. The workforce was comprised of immigrants from Ireland, England, Scotland, Canada, the Azores, and, to a lesser extent, Poland, Italy, Greece, Russia, and Lebanon.

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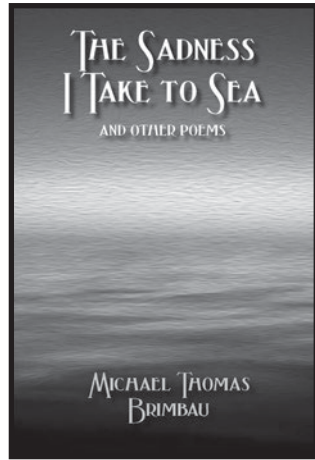


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Do Come In and Other Lizzie Borden Poems

by Larry W. Allen

with a new Lizzie Borden
sketch cover by Rick Geary,
famed author and illustrator of *The
Borden Tragedy*.

Lizzie Borden. For some, the name conjures an innocent young woman who bravely faced her trial with strength and fortitude. To others, she has become the icon of all things gruesome because of the bloody nature of the crimes for which she was charged. And yet others see Lizzie Borden as a woman who got away with murder.

These 50 poems trace the life of this enigmatic woman—from the 19th through the 20th century. We meet her as a young adult and watch her develop into an old woman living alone on “the Hill.”

Do Come In is a remarkable collection of poems entirely devoted to the Lizzie Borden story.

So *Do Come In*, and meet Lizzie Borden and other characters as diverse as Jack the Ripper, Bob and Charlie Ford, and Rachael Ray, in poems that range from humorous to horrific.

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Lizzie Borden: Girl Detective

by Richard Behrens

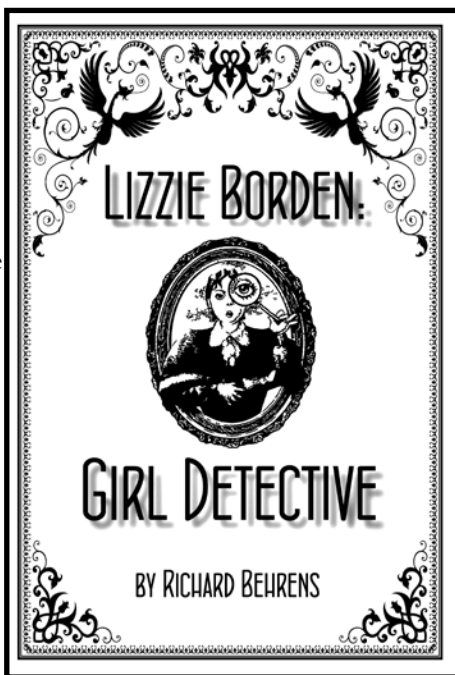
Introducing Miss Lizzie Borden of Fall River, Massachusetts, a most excellent girl detective and the most remarkable young woman ever to take on the criminal underworld in late 19th century New England.

Many years before her infamous arrest and trial for the murders of her father and stepmother, Lizzie Borden pursued a career as a private consulting detective and wrestled unflinchingly with a crooked spiritualist, a corrupt and murderous textile tycoon, a secret society of anarchist assassins, rowdy and deadly sporting boys, a crazed and vengeful mutineer, an industrial saboteur, and a dangerously unhinged math professor—none of whom are exactly what they seem to be.

In these five early tales of mystery and adventure, Lizzie Borden is joined by her stubborn and stingy father Andrew; her jealous and weak-chinned sister Emma; her trusted companion Homer Thesinger the Boy Inventor; and the melancholy French scion Andre De Camp. Together, they explore Fall River's dark side through a landscape that is industrial, Victorian, and distinctly American.

You have met Lizzie Borden before—but never like this!

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Contributors

Rob Baker is a combat veteran (United States Marines) having served in Afghanistan, and is currently attending college at Northeastern State in Oklahoma.

Andrew G. Bennett is from Sydney, Australia, and has been writing fiction for well over ten years. He has published three books of short stories, written an as yet unpublished novel, and has had over forty short stories and poems published in many fine journals and magazines, including *Skive Magazine*, *Tincture Journal*, and *The Literary Hatchet*.

Barry Charman is a writer living in North London. He has been published in *The Alarmist*, *Bare Fiction Magazine*, *Firewords Quarterly* and is soon to be published in *Ambit*. He has poems published online at *Every Day Poets* and *Postcard Poems & Prose*. He has more recently had poems published in *The Linnet's Wings*, and *Lunar Poetry*.

Wayne Scheer has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes and a Best of the Net. He's published hundreds of stories, poems and essays in print and online, including *Revealing Moments*, a collection of flash stories, available at http://issuu.com/pearnoir/docs/revealing_moments. A short film has also been produced based on his short story, "Zen and the Art of House Painting." Wayne lives in Atlanta with his wife.

DE Cowen is a trial attorney by trade and author of "The Madness of Empty Spaces," (Weasel Press, November 2014), which is currently on the 2014 Bram Stoker Award Preliminary Ballot and a volume of poetry entitled "Sixth and Adams" (PW Press 2001). David lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife Susan and his two sons. He practices law in the historical city of Galveston, Texas which has inspired much of his poetry and photography.

Bruce Boston's poetry has received the Bram Stoker Award, the Asimov's Readers Award, the Gothic Readers Choice Award, the Rhysling Award, and the Grandmaster Award of the Science Fiction Poetry Association.

EM Eastick was born and raised in Australia, and has worked as an environmental professional in Britain, Ireland, and the Middle East before turning her hand to writing. Her creative efforts appear or are forthcoming in the *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *It's a Grimm Life Anthology*, and *Mad Scientist Journal*. She currently lives in Colorado.

Evan Gorzeman is a writer hailing from Los Angeles.

Hadiqa Inam is a part-time writer and a full-time student from Pakistan, with an interest in writing both poetry and short stories. Her poem, "Rotting Inside," was published in *Literary Hatchet* Issue #10.

Rick McQuiston is a forty-five-year-old father of two who loves anything horror-related. His work has appeared in over 300 publications. He has written three novels, six anthology books, one book of novellas, and edited an anthology of Michigan authors. Currently, he is hard at work on his fifth novel.

Fabiyas MV was born in Orumanayur village in Kerala, India. He won the Poetry Soup International Award, USA, in 2011 and 2012, a prize by the British Council in 2011, the Whistle Press Poetry Contest, India, in 2012, and the RSPCA Pet Poetry Contest, UK, 2012. *Moonlight and Solitude* is his first book, published by Raspberry Books, Calicut, Kerala, India. His poems have been broadcast on All India Radio.

LB Thomas is a writer and musician from a small town in Montana you've never heard of. His fiction has appeared in *Crimepree Magazine*, *Theory Magazine*, and *Opsis Literary Arts Magazine*.

Tatum Hamernik is a young writer experimenting with different forms and genres of writing. She loves reading memoirs, *Paris Review* interviews, and anything by Hunter S. Thompson.

Sue Ellis lives and writes near Mt. Spokane in Washington State. Some writing credits include *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *The Cynic Online Magazine*, *Mused*, *Wild Violet*, and *Rose and Thorn Journal*.

KJ Hannah Greenberg gets high on adverbs, mixes more metaphors than a platypus has pockets, plus giggles so much as to not actually be indomitable. What's more, she runs with a hibernaculum of sometimes rabid (imaginary) hedgehogs, and attempts to matchmake words like "balderdash" and "xylophone." Hannah's newest books are: *Dancing with Hedgehogs*, (Fowlpox Press, 2014), *Don't Pet the Sweaty Things*, 2nd ed. (Bards and Sages Publishing, 2014), *The Little Temple of My Sleeping Bag* (Dancing Girl Press, 2014), *The Immediacy of Emotional Kerfuffles* (Bards and Sages Publishing, 2013), and *Citrus-Inspired Ceramics* (Aldrich Press, 2013).

James B. Nicola has several poetry awards and nominations to his credit, with recent or upcoming poems in *The Literary Hatchet* and *Southwest*, Atlanta, and *Lullwater Reviews*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. His first full-length poetry collection, *Manhattan Plaza*, has just been released. More at sites. google.com/site/jamesbnicola.

Ed Nichols lives outside Clarkesville, Georgia. He is a journalism graduate from the University of Georgia, and is an award winning writer from Southeastern Writer's Association. He has had many short stories and poems published, online and in print.

Robyn Groth has her M.A. in linguistics and believes in autodidacticism and lifelong learning. She lives in the Midwest with her husband and three sons.

Nicole Hampton is a philosophizer and student of self. She possesses capabilities in herbalism, rock climbing, eating, writing, yoga, and kicking ass (black belt). 22, female, complicated, and running head first into that unknown.

Brittany Horton is a twenty-eight-year-old free spirit with an insatiable love for words.

Janne Karlsson is a highly productive artist from Sweden. His dark and twisted art has been published in hundreds of magazines over the world. Janne's most recent books, *Only the Dead* (in collaboration with the Canadian poet Wolfgang Carstens) and *The Human Unkind*, are available through Epic Rites Press or Janne's website svenskapache.se.

Bruce Memblatt is a native New Yorker, and a member of the Horror Writers Association. He is on the staff of *The Horror Zine* as Kindle Coordinator. His story "Destination Unknown," received an honorable mention in the 2012 L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Awards. This month his story, "Wish Upon an Indifferent Clearing" will be featured in FORGOTTEN PLACES : BEST OF THE HORROR SOCIETY 2014. His works have been published several times in anthology books, magazines and zines such as *Aphelion*, *Nameless Magazine* (Cycatrix Press), *Suspense Magazine*, *Post Mortem Press*, *Dark Moon Books*, *Sam's Dot Publishing*, *Strange Weird and Wonderful Magazine*, *The Horror Zine*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, *Danse Macabre*, *Parsec Ink*, *The Feathertale Review*, *Yellow Mama* and many more.

Christina Murphy's poetry is an exploration of consciousness as subjective experience, and her poems appear in a wide range of journals and anthologies, including, *PANK*, *La Fovea*, *Dali's Lovechild*, and *Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal*, and in the anthologies *Let the Sea Find its Edges*, edited by the distinguished Australian poet, Michael Fitzgerald-Clarke, and *Remaking Moby-Dick*, edited by Trish Harris and published by EU Art Line. Her work has been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and for the Best of the Net Anthology.

Cynthia Pelayo is the author of short story collection *Loteria* and the young adult mystery and suspense novel *Santa Muerte* published by Post Mortem Press. Her short stories and poems have appeared in *Danse Macabre*, *Flashes in the Dark*, *SNM Horror Magazine*, *Seedpod*, *Static Movement*, and more. She is the Publisher/Gravedigger of Burial Day Books and is a member of the Horror Writers Association. She holds a BA in journalism, an MS in marketing and an MFA in writing from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. You can find her on Twitter at [@cinapelayo](https://twitter.com/cinapelayo) or at cinapelayo.com

Ty Karnitz has been published in *Art of Manliness* and *Strong Verse*, and has a forthcoming publication at *Strange Constellations*.

Jane Craig Sebok is a retired psychologist who is now writing fulltime. She has a weekly blog at writehere-writenow.net and has recently had a poem accepted by the magazine *Trysts of Fate*.

Ada Jill Schneider is the author of several volumes of poetry. She reviews poetry for *Midstream Magazine* and directs “The Pleasure of Poetry” at the Somerset Public Library in Massachusetts. Winner of the National Galway Kinnell Poetry Prize, she has an MFA in Writing from Vermont College. Ada started writing poetry at the age of fifty-three, when she thought she was old.

Erik Hofstatter’s debut collection, *Moribund Tales*, peaked at #2 on Amazon bestseller chart in horror anthologies. Several of these tales have been recorded for a podcast (Wicked Library) and printed in various magazines and anthologies around the world such as *The Literary Hatchet* (PearTree Press) *Psychopomp* (Artifice Comics) and *Sanitarium Magazine*. His novella, *The Pariahs*, is available from Creativia Publishing. He dwells in a beautiful and serenading Garden of England where he can be frequently encountered consuming reckless amounts of mead and tyrannizing local peasantry.

authorerikhofstatter.blogspot.co.uk

Eugene Hosey holds an MFA from Georgia State University. He has written articles, film and book reviews for *The Hatchet: A Journal of Lizzie Borden & Victorian Studies*. Also he has done editorial work for research documents, books, and personal journals. But he is primarily a short story writer, a regular contributor to *The Literary Hatchet*, and a fiction editor.

Marge Simon’s works appear in publications such as *DailySF Magazine*, *Pedestal*, *Urban Fantasist*. She edits a column for the HWA Newsletter, “Blood & Spades: Poets of the Dark Side,” and serves as Chair of the Board of Trustees. She won the Strange Horizons Readers Choice Award, 2010, and the SFPA’s Dwarf Stars Award, 2012. She has won three Bram Stoker Awards® for Superior Work in Poetry and has poetry in HWA’s Simon & Schuster collection, *It’s Scary Out There*, tpb 2015. Marge also has poems in *Darke Phantastique*, *Qualia Nous* collections, and *Spectral Realms*, 2014.

Denise Noe lives in Atlanta and writes regularly for *The Caribbean Star* of which she is Community Editor. Her work has been published in *The Humanist*, *Georgia Journal*, *Lizzie Borden Quarterly*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *The Gulf War Anthology*, *Light*, and *Gauntlet*.

Stephanie M. Wytovich is the Poetry Editor for Raw Dog Screaming Press, a book reviewer for *Nameless Magazine*, and a well-known coffee addict. She is a member of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, an active member of the Horror Writers Association, and a graduate of Seton Hill University’s MFA program for Writing Popular Fiction. Her poetry collections, *HYSTERIA* and *Mourning Jewelry* can be found at rawdogscreaming.com, and her debut novel, *The Eighth*, will be out in early 2015 from Dark Regions Press. Follow Wytovich at stephaniewytovich.blogspot.com and on twitter @JustAfterSunset.

Grim K. DeEvil is from Grand Island, NY. He moved to Central Florida in his youth and hopes to leave the state someday soon. He's a graduate of the UCF with a BA in English – Creative Writing. He has also written the first novel in a series of twelve, *Dedd Wright & the Lion*, which is an eBook through Kindle.

Deborah Guzzi is a healing facilitator specializing in Japanese Shiatsu and Reiki. She writes for Massage and Aromatherapy Magazines. She travels the world to expand her knowledge of healing and seeking writing inspiration. She has walked the Great Wall of China, seen Nepal (during the civil war), Japan, Egypt (two weeks before 'The Arab Spring'), Peru, and France during December's terrorist attacks. Her poetry appears in Magazines: *here/there:poetry in the UK*, *Existere - Journal of Arts and Literature in Canada*, *Tincture* in Australia, *Cha:Asian Literary Review*, China, *Latchkey Tales* in New Zealand, *Vine Leaves* Literary Journal in Greece, and *Travel by the Book*, *Liquid Imagination*, *Illumen*, and others in the USA.

Barry Price's publishing credits include a novella, *The Journal of the Median Man—A Face on the Wall*, which was sold this year to Martinus Publishing for their Summer 2015 print and e-zine Anthology—*The Secret Life of Ghosts*.

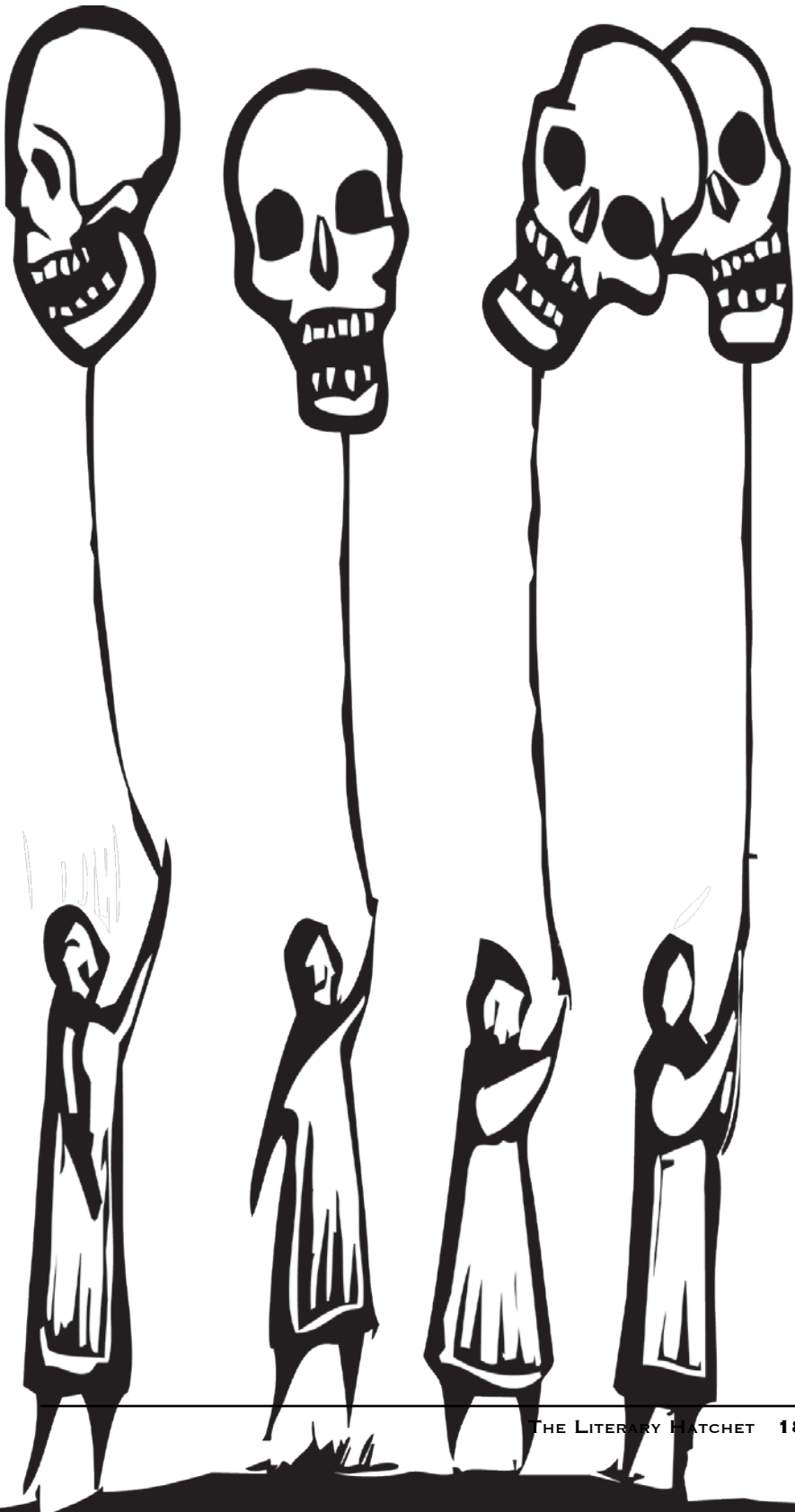
John H. Stevens has had eight short stories published including stories in *Spinetinglers* and *Hub* magazines and a flash fiction story accepted for an upcoming issue of *Fantasy Scroll*.

Kern Windwraith grew up on five different continents before her family settled in Vancouver, British Columbia. She works full-time for a health non-profit and spends her evenings and weekends writing and wondering why her house looks like a tornado hit it.

Paul Stansfield is New Jersey born and raised. He works as a field archaeologist, and has had over 20 stories published, in magazines, horror anthologies, and ebook format. One of the latter was nominated for Long and Short Reviews Book of the Year for 2012. His personal blog is paulstansfield.blogspot.com.

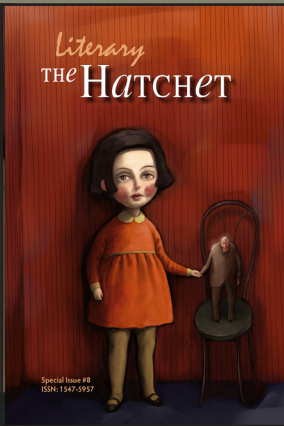
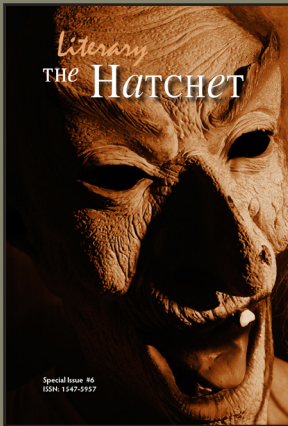
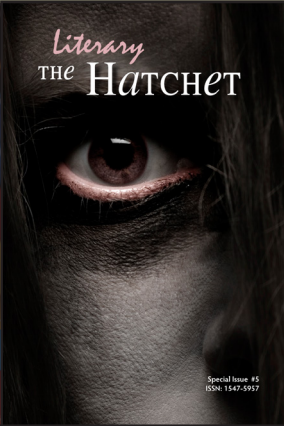
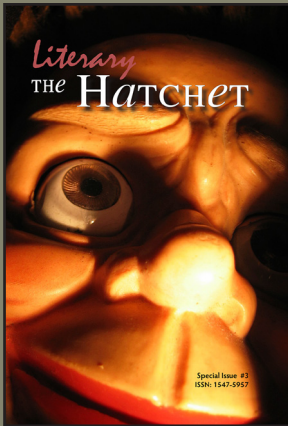
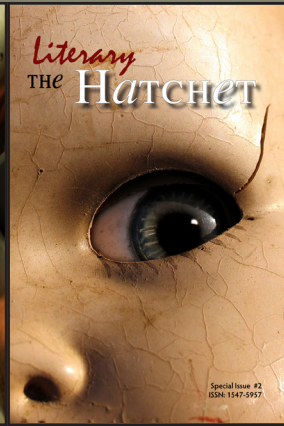
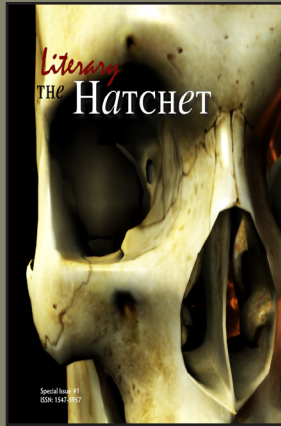
Deborah Walker grew up in the most English town in the country, but she soon high-tailed it down to London, where she now lives with her partner, Chris, and her two young children. Find Deborah in the British Museum trawling the past for future inspiration or on her blog deborahwalkersbibliography.blogspot.com/ Her stories have appeared in *Nature's Futures*, *Cosmos*, and *Daily Science Fiction* and *The Year's Best SF 18*.

Matthew Wilson, 31, has had over 150 appearances in such places as *Horror Zine*, *Star*Line*, *Spellbound*, *Illumen*, *Apokrupha Press*, *Hazardous Press*, *Gaslight Press*, *Sorcerers Signal* and many more. He is currently editing his first novel and can be contacted on twitter @matthew94544267.



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