Literary THE HATCHET





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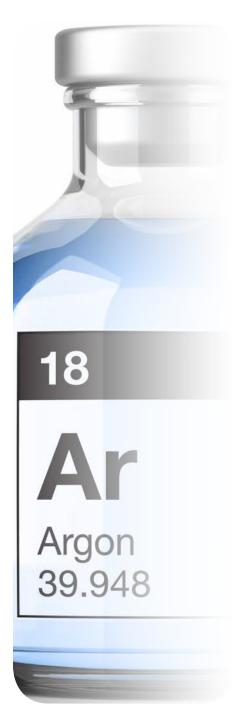
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You are reading issue #18, by the way. So if you haven't caught up on the other seventeen issues, you can do so at literaryhatchet.com.

If you read something you particularly like, or are moved by, or think is cool as hell, write us and we will pass along the compliment to the author. If you have a criticism of the magazine itself, write us, and we will take your thoughts under consideration and thank you for your input. All correspondence should be sent to peartreepress@mac.com.

But if you would like to write *for* us, please submit your poetry, short stories, reviews, or interviews to our submissions partner at this address:

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We really would love to read your work.

Stefani Koorey Editor and Publisher

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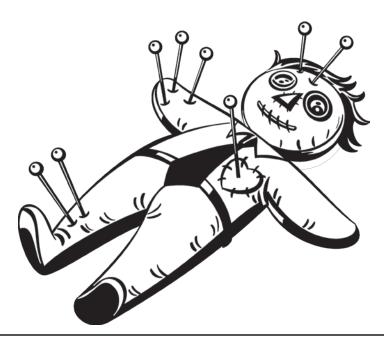


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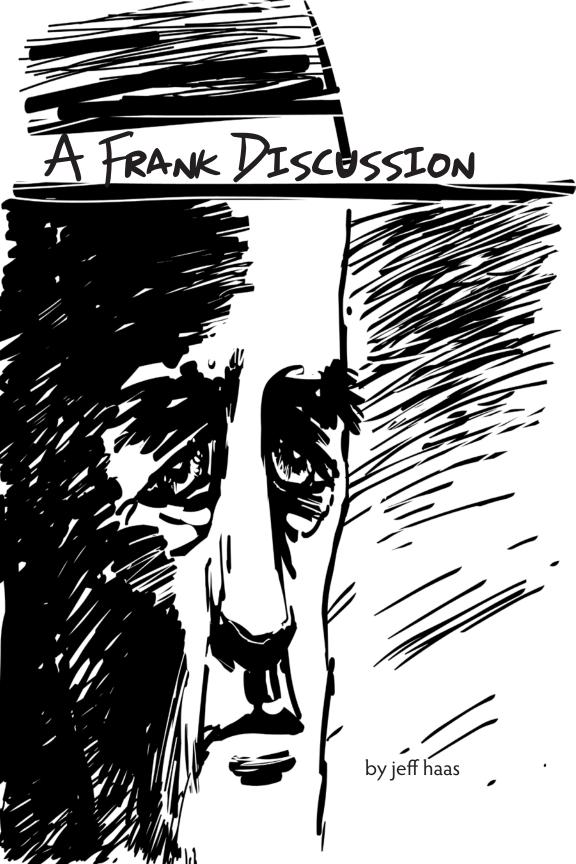
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As the cell door closed behind them, the new inmates sat down opposite each other on flimsy cots. They wore the orange jumpsuits provided to them by the Sugarville Correctional Facility. Both were named Frank, but one was older and the other younger.

"What're you in for?" asked Younger Frank.

"It's not my fault," said Older Frank. He paused. "I...I killed my wife."

"How can that not be your fault?"

"It was the gel. Look, I don't want to talk about it."

"What the hell else are we going to talk about? We're going to be in here for the rest of our frickin' lives—we have to talk about *something*. Besides, you can't just say 'It was the gel' and leave it at that. Now you've piqued my curiosity."

"All right, all right. It's just...embarrassing. It's sexual."

"Even better."

"Well, it started about a year ago. I went to the doctor's office for my annual physical, and he diagnosed me with low testosterone."

"Oh, you mean you couldn't get it up?"

"No, no, nothing like that. When a man reaches middle-age his metabolism starts to slow down, and some men can't produce enough testosterone anymore. As a result, they need to add it to their bodies artificially. I was suffering from depression and a lack of desire. The equipment was working just fine, but my desire to use it had diminished, which, as you can imagine, created a problem with my wife."

"That selfish bitch."

"Watch it, buddy. That's my wife you're talking about."

"The one you killed?"

"Anyway, my doctor prescribed testosterone gel that I had to rub on my upper arms and shoulders every day. At first, nothing much changed, but after a few weeks my depression lifted and I began to desire Melanie again. We started having sex once a week just like the old days, and each time was better than the last."

"So what was the problem?"

"Well, we enjoyed it so much that we both wanted more. Without telling Melanie, I started to apply double doses in the morning. Then we started to have sex two or three times a week, like when we first met. We felt like horny teenagers. So I started applying triple doses and looking for new sources of the gel because I kept running out. At first I went to different doctors for multiple prescriptions,

but then I found this one doctor who was willing to prescribe liquid testosterone that I could shoot directly into my veins."

"Jesus, a testosterone junky."

"I couldn't stop. Our sex life was going great guns, and our marriage was improving, but—"

"But what?"

"But then I started to see physical changes in my body. My teeth and nails grew faster and sharper and my hair became thicker and darker, and pretty soon my entire body was covered in brown fur. I had to shave three times a day and wear long sleeve shirts just to go out in public. It was like I was leading a double life—mild-mannered accountant during the day, and sex-crazed maniac at night. And it was every night, night after night, sometimes the whole night through. Melanie started calling me her 'caveman.' But the more I devolved the more she seemed to like it, so I kept on injecting myself, until...until..."

"Until what?"

"Well, one night I came home from work and Melanie greeted me at the door in a see-through negligee. The sight of her body drove me to distraction. I ripped off my clothes, hoisted her up in my arms, and forcibly carried her into the bedroom. I could tell by the look in her eyes that she was frightened and excited at the same time. Anyway, I couldn't have stopped myself if I wanted to—I was like an animal in heat, a wild beast in the throes of some instinctual force. I threw her down on the bed and tore off her negligee with a swipe of my nails. She had the greatest orgasm of her life. It must've lasted over an hour, wave after wave, again and again. As I reached orgasm myself, I started to bite and claw her with abandon. I couldn't control myself. The last thing I remember was plunging my teeth deep into her neck as I came and then passing out. When I woke up, she was dead."

"Oh, my God," Younger Frank said. "And they didn't take into account the extenuating circumstances?"

"How could I ever explain what happened? I can hardly believe it myself. The prosecutor was convinced that I had used a knife, and of course all of the knives in our house had my fingerprints on them. They technically never found the murder weapon, but the circumstantial evidence was overwhelming. So I pleaded guilty because...I am guilty. But it's not my fault."

Older Frank pushed back on his cot and leaned against the cinder block wall. "Um...you're not still taking testosterone, are you?" Younger Frank asked.

"Oh, no. I went cold turkey before the trial so I could fit into my suit." He paused. "Anyway, you're cute, but not *that* cute."





Monsoon Turbulence

Waves leap over his roof again. Coconut sentinels lose their heads. His breakwater breaks, but he won't flee to the monsoon refugee camp.

People and the press stand amid the lightning from cameras. Their rapture is with the waves rising high to touch the rain clouds.

They're on a spree in the sea spray. They're far-sighted, for they can't see this fisherman sitting like a crowpheasant in the remains of his yard.

He's no pension, but only tension. Yet he'll neither mutter nor murmur. Now he curls as a prawn on a wet sack inside his half-eaten hut.

If the sea doesn't swallow him tonight, he'll wake up early, pick up his net, and set out to catch sardine, mackerel, pink perch, tuna and the like, for them.

—fabiyas mv

a garbage bin

Spicy smell metamorphoses in the garbage. The same chunk that stimulates the taste buds induces nausea. This is a bin of dual relief. As the darkness falls on the bare reality, an arm stretches through the hole that nobody tries to caulk. The stray man picks up a gnawed chicken leg bone, a scrape of fried mackerel, some steamed rice mixed with reddish yellow curry... He recycles the junk. Hunger can burn away any disgust.

—fabiyas mv

SINKHOLE SWALLOWS FUTURE

No precipitating events prepared any of us for the vacant lot vacuum found here or rather, discovered missing.

What we can't describe we learn to ignore: the bad luck, the sudden absence too sweeping to avoid

Frozen feet risk the edge, I stare down as belongings become trash.

Books tumble with crumpled bills, houses collapse, spill contents into wide cracks. Dishes, shoestrings, cracked frames.

How everything that slips loses value.

What's mine or yours, gone.

This is how to

vanish.

-e.f. schraeder

STANDING ON THE EDGE

Standing on the precipice Flying into the sun Wondering about my life When my days are done

Spiraling out in endless circles Like a stone cast upon a lake Images flash before my eyes Are they real or are they fake

Once I cross that river And pay Charon his toll What will remain of my work When I am a wandering soul

*Charon - the ferryman of Hades who carries souls of the newly deceased across the rivers Styx and Acheron that divided the world of the living from the world of the dead.

-ann christine tabaka

[short story] by christina m. carrell

I got inside the car with her. Thrashing and screaming, she succumbed to the car seat. The vibration of the engine quelled our daughter's cries to a whimper. Whimpers gave way to baby snores. From the back, I leaned around the driver's seat to see the time glowing green on the dash: 2:03AM. The purr of the car was the only way to soothe our colicky infant.

Tim turned left onto another wooded road, flicking on high beams to watch for passing deer. Sometimes a brief stop was enough to wake Liza, so we headed away from Vincentown through a long stretch of back roads devoid of stop signs, traffic lights, or houses.

From the back window, I watched as we passed the only two businesses in this part of the county—a roadside shop called "The Tire Place," and a farm market called "Route 206 Produce." Then, on each side of us, nothing but the winding flat road, cedar and pine, and the occasional cranberry bog. There was the jangle of my bracelet and a lapse in my breathing as I waited to see if the sound would wake her. It didn't. Just more snores.

We drove through a break in the trees where a nineteenth century farmhouse stood alone in a field. By the light of our high beams, I noticed a blot of orange up ahead, which I soon realized was part of a construction sign. I tapped Tim on the shoulder and he nodded. Without any work trucks out here, they weren't working on the road this time of night. Still, Tim slowed the car.

I looked at Liza, so peaceful no one would know she had been screaming inconsolably a half-hour earlier. In the darkness I could see the outline of her head and the rise and fall of her sleep breathing.

When Tim gasped, I saw everything: Liza's closed eyes, her pale yellow pajamas, and the green and black car seat. "The fuck?" I heard Tim mutter. He stopped the car. I squeezed my eyes shut. From the street glared a spotlight, inching closer toward us. With one hand, I shaded my vision. With the other, I protected Liza's eyes. "The FUCK?" Tim said again, a little louder this time.

Ahead of us in the road, someone held the spotlight, which looked like the kind hunters use to intimidate deer and make them freeze in place. The stranger pointed the light at our car as he walked toward us. He could be someone who needs help, I thought.

We couldn't see the road anymore. The light was piercing our eyes. I tapped Tim on the shoulder again. "What do we do?" I said.

"Just relax," he answered. But as he spoke, I saw his finger reach for the lock on his door.

The light was only a few feet outside my door now; an arm dressed in dark blue flannel was holding it. The light blocked any view we could have had of his face. His jeans and work boots dragged through the wet grass as he sauntered forward. Soon the man was close enough that I could have touched him had the window been open. I considered opening it. I thought of him needing help again. Could he be a construction worker in need of a lift home?

"Should we see what he wants?"

Tim looked back at me, the light illuminating his beard. I looked again at the flannel arm holding the light. The man's hand reached for my door. I scrambled to find the lock. It was in the open position. Tim must have forgotten. On this car, the locks weren't automatic like they were on the car we drove before he lost his job.

I raised one shaking hand and stabbed the lock as the man grabbed the door handle. Above my own breathing and Tim's breathing and the whirr of the car's engine and Liza's snores (how was she sleeping through this?), I heard something deeper.

Was that laughter?

It was. The stranger's laughter bellowed through the dark woods.

"What do you want?" Tim shouted through the window, no longer caring if we woke Liza.

There was a pause—a moment of silence when I thought we'd finally get an answer.

There was just more laughter instead. It was deep and gruff, a belly laugh from a man who smoked too much. He turned away from me and approached Tim's door, still holding the light in a deliberate attempt to blind us.

I saw then how hunched over he was, his upper back sloping into a deformity that would have made me pity him had I not feared him so much. He was definitely too old to be a construction worker. Yet he was too fast to be so old. Nothing made sense, and I started to think this was all the hallucination of a sleep-deprived new mother.

He came back to my door, always with the light blocking my view of his face. He began to pace.

"Go, just go!" I said.

"GO!" I yelled. Tim floored it, and still I heard no sound from the car seat. In the rear view mirror, I saw the man set the spotlight on the ground, and I got a clear image of his face. Hair covered every part of his face—his chin, nose, forehead—all covered in hair. His eyes were yellow slits, and they stared back at me, as if they knew I'd be watching. A long tongue reached out and licked a set of drooling lips.

The man's body revealed soundless, shaking laughter. As we drove away, I watched the creature approach the open area of the road the construction workers had barred off with tape. He descended down a hole in the street.

After that awful thing behind us was swallowed by the dark and I felt my heart begin to calm, I turned away from the back window and put my hand back on the car seat and felt for Liza's tiny, warm belly. My hand met cold vinyl.

"What?" I flicked on the overhead light.

The car seat was empty.



THEY ARE STILL HERE

The ancient ones still walk this earth Their spirits wander far and near They still roam the sacred grounds Their whispers you can still hear

They left behind their mysterious glyphs On cavern and mountain walls You can hear their voices cry out Whenever the canyon wind calls

The cliff dwellings and painted caves
Tell the histories of their lives
Their many stories passed down by mouth
Are vanishing before our eyes

Their souls trek here among us
That fact cannot be denied
Open your mind and you will feel them
They are right here by your side

But their presence lives on forever Their wisdom man cannot erase You know they are still with us When you walk upon this place

—ann christine tabaka

4CY BURRI OFFERINGS

Creating a rhyme with the loss of my last dime; what cost be peace in a world without empathy. Preach to a deaf choir, amorous of heated desire. You give your last quarter all to hasten Jesus home. Eucharist served chilled just before the bugles call. Just give what you don't have to those who truly have it all. Memory of icy burnt offerings stoic gazes from shaded eyes open the Book to pages ablaze feel tears from darkened skies. Ply demons with poison candy Angel's breath now black vapor. Bravely drift to the altar gasping and choking upon the wafer.

-ken allan dronsfield

THE (ROSSIMG

Meteor and mystic cross in flight,

make my intestines leap and scream for the places they are going

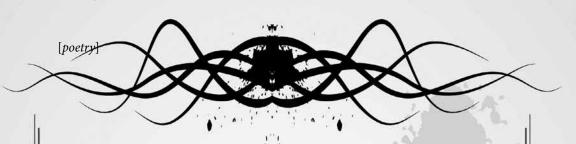
and have already been.

I lie on my back out of breath,

try to dream myself into some universe

where there is no sting of exile.

-darrell lindsey



the countess

Let the funeral draw down the moon; if wicked she was, at least allow her a spoiled feast in the tomb.

Complaints afoul about her deeds, her sullen face, teeth of sharp ivory; Stay for a go at bare bones, pig snouts, her red sea eyes slaughtering lusty louts.

All knowing, all officious, forget and come together, mount; you jesters have killed yourselves in judgment and in shout.

Her eyes spin as midnight ore spat by the Devil! Paralytics calm in loose surprise, will Countess Elizabeth rise in her stained-glass room to silence

all in strokes of ashen blood flame!

—john thomas allen

past perfect

I've made this journey whole-bent as a monk or trying to attain that whole—and strive to guard Perfection's gains. But I have sunk to new lows' thoughts which I must rue and shrive.

What are you doing with my hands between The two of yours? What are you doing *now*? That's somehting that was good when we were green, But something which perfection won't allow.

For I can recollect—though shall not dwell Upon—the past where lovers lost should lie, But also re-collect myself, and tell You Don't do that again (or I shall die)—

I try, that is, but find that I hold fast And relegate Perfection to the past.

—james b. nicola

a mild haunting

by madison garey

"Where's the body?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, arms crossed, not budging from his doorway.

I got up in his face and lowered my voice the way my mom did when her one ex would visit the house. It always breaks dudes like these.

"Listen to me. You and I both know there's a body hidden here. I know you're probably scared, and I don't care if you played a part in her death."

The man stammered without managing to form any coherent words. The smell of stale cigarettes wafted off him and he wore a dirty restaurant uniform. A bartender? His profession didn't really matter to me. I wasn't here for him.

I rolled my eyes. "I'm not here to arrest you, or whatever. I'm only here because the spirit won't leave me alone. I need to find the body and release the spirit so I can get one single night's sleep. Okay? Let me in your house or I'll tell the spirit I'll help her get revenge on your sorry little ass."

He took a step backwards. His eyes were wide. "S-spirit? The spirit is here? Like a ghost?"

I looked over his shoulder at the semi-transparent lady with purple marks around her neck in a dress that was in fashion when I was in high school. He whirled around frantically, craning his neck to try to see.

I crossed my arms and sighed. "I'm a witch." I never really know what to expect

from that explanation, since it has ranged from asking for a favor (inappropriate given the circumstances) to literally threatening to burn me, which is probably meant to be frightening. This guy didn't react much at all, but then again I wasn't totally sure just how smart he was.

"Her name's Monica. Ring a bell?"

I had made the mistake of letting Monica know that I could see her by offering her a smile across the room of a dingy bar. It was a moment of weakness. I should have known better if I wanted a real vacation, but ghosts are lonely and I can't help it sometimes. If I'd known the amount of attention she would want I might have reconsidered. And to make matters worse, she had told all of her ghost friends and then I was stuck with a list of ghosts to help put to rest with a proper burial. Really, I've got incredible arms from digging those graves. That's one of the plus sides to this line of work. A line of work I am not getting paid for much of the time, might I add. It's through the goodness of my heart—and the fact that I would never get a good night's sleep if I didn't help out.

"So, anyway," I continued in my low voice, "Brock. Chadwick. Whatever your name is. Where is the body and where is your family gravesite on this stupid old farm? I already have a shovel. You will be helping unless you want me to go to the police." Without waiting for a response, I pushed past him into the house and started tapping around the floor with my shoe, listening for a hollow noise. I've never actually called the police, since I am technically wanted for grave desecration around here. I was merely fulfilling the wishes of the spirit so it could properly rest, but that excuse wouldn't fly in court.

"There's normally some sort of creepy cellar in these houses. Where is Monica?"

Petrified, he went into the next room and pushed aside an armoire with rotting varnish, scraping the floor in his haste. He pointed to the now visible trapdoor (read: cave of dark family secrets), which I lifted and reluctantly peered into, shining a flashlight down. I could see her bones lying there on a cot, untouched and still wearing that dress.

"Thanks," I said, ignoring the fact that he was shaking. "Now show me the graveyard."

Monica was chittering beside me excitedly. I couldn't usually understand what the spirits were saying, since they're technically only half in our realm. The only exception was during the Witching Hour (AKA when witches, demons, and spirits are most powerful), or something else mystical and spooky. Sometimes I visited my aunt, the elder witch in the family, and did a ritual with her if I really needed to talk to one of the ghosts. The spirits usually did okay getting their message across, even though a few of them (including Monica) insisted we talk almost exclusively via Ouija board.

I remember the first time she made me do that. Monica placed her ghost hands over mine on the Ouija board. "So tell me about this guy that was worth killing yourself over," I asked.

"D - I - C - K."

I don't know why I was surprised. "Is that a name or a description?"

She moved my hand over to the yes, and I saw her laughing from across me. I sat back, grumbling at her.

"If you aren't going to take this seriously, I can just skip town."

She got up then, floating close to me and shaking her finger in my face, cold and creepy. I couldn't understand her, but that didn't stop her message from getting across.

I blew air at her and waved my hand, and her form dissipated around her middle, but reformed just as quickly. I was really hoping it would work that time. It didn't seem to help her mood. "Just get back to the board and tell me how to find this guy, all right? And then I'm going to bed. You know, most ghosts I help out are polite enough to give me some peace and quiet, not try to write a book via Ouija. You're something special, Monica."

Monica preened.

She was pretty funny, which I didn't expect after the whole "I committed suicide after my lover scorned me and then he hid my body," thing. Being stuck in limbo makes you settle for any sort of company you can find, I guess. Even the angry spirits had to soften up once they realized they couldn't hurt or even scare me. All I did was help them out, despite my initial reluctance to get into this business. But my aunt always likes to remind me that I could end up in the same position, and I would want help too.

I put the boyfriend to work digging the grave while I got the makeshift headstone out of my trunk, although I nearly dropped it on my foot in the process. Monica had put her stamp of approval on it after making a few critiques on my first attempt—she wanted glitter on it—and if I broke her headstone now after all her planning she would make her friends haunt my ass.

After a few hours of digging in the dark, we brought Monica's body through the house and outside, moonlight gleaming on her grinning skull. We buried her bones still on the cot while her spirit sat on her headstone and waited anxiously as we filled the grave. When it was done, I got out the Bible and flipped to the verse she had chosen, Proverbs 1:20-33, reading as well as I could in the dim light just before dawn.

"Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;
And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof;
I will also laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
When your dread comes like a storm

And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer..."

It wasn't the funeral she deserved, but her parents were already dead. The boyfriend and I were the only ones left to care about her, even though he seemed like a real piece of shit. Who knows? Maybe he eventually grew out of it. I'm not in a position to judge.

As I finished reading, she smiled, and she grew brighter and brighter until I turned way, waiting until the light faded, just as the sun started to peek out over the tall grain in the distance.

The boyfriend sat on the edge of the grave, probably dealing with some deep emotional trauma, but my job was done. I took my shovel and \$300 out of his wallet on the porch and pulled out onto the dusty road, bloody sun rising in my rearview mirror.





my illegible handwriting

All my letters are deformed, beyond a cure.

[poetry]

Contest judges trample over my clumsy curvy lines. Voice of my bruised verse is not heard.

Sentences zigzag with slow-moving fingers. Unanswered questions become coffin-bearers.

Ambition is lost in the cloudy chirography.
Black box sounds my broken dreams.

[poetry]

a fanatic's face

His face is ugly as his creed, rigid as his rituals, and black as the dark ages, with a Paleolithic look, but he doesn't realize.

His sneer is a reflection of bigotry. He slaughters smile for being tender. His frown is fathomless as his fanaticism. There's an imminent communal carnage behind his buffalo visage.

—fabiyas mv

I EDIT MY LIFE

I edit my life clothesline pins & clips hang to dry, dirty laundry, I turn poetic hedonistic in my early 70's reviewing the joys and the sorrows of my journey. I find myself wanting a new review, a new product, a new time machine, a new internet space, a new planet where we small, wee creative creatures can grow.

-michael lee johnson

STATIONS OF DESPAIR

Every midnight, when the train sets off,
From the starting station, sunk in murk,
You can hear the sough of its unusual passengers,
And through the night, that sough, will lurk.

No one knows who these passengers are, Nor where the city's midnight train goes, Many say that they are ghouls and ghosts, Who travel into the lost dark, among the crows.

They say the train passes silently,
Through many stations, on its creepy course,
They even say that, those passangers, were once like us,
But they got punished for showing no remorse.

When a person dies, he becomes a passenger, they say With one-way ticket for the city's midnight train, But no one knows on which station they'll get off, And whether light or dark will start their reign.

-haris čolić

Blood on Aces

"Could you make the cut for me?" Edgar indicated the glass of aged Scotch he'd been drinking. "My hand's a little unsteady."

Across from him, The Dealer smiled sardonically. Edgar could barely make him out in the dim light but he could tell he was big. Broad shoulders and an imposing physique could not be hidden by a suit and the dim lighting in the smoke-filled card room. He was certainly an intimidating figure.

"The cut must be made of your own free will," explained The Dealer as he leaned forward in his chair. "Were I to make it for you it could be perceived that it was my will and not yours."

Edgar could see his face now. He had a dark complexion, neatly trimmed Van Dyke, deep set black eyes, and hair slicked back neatly.

I don't even believe in God, Edgar thought to himself as he picked up the scalpel from the table. "What harm could it do?"

He brought the scalpel to his thumb and carefully touched it with the shining blade, but he failed to make the cut. He had always been squeamish about blood. As a child he saw his brother cut his foot on a piece of broken glass and fainted at the sight of scarlet oozing from the wound.

The Dealer's voice broke the silence. "Decide quickly," he insisted. "The harvest moon is almost at its peak."

Edgar made a quick half-inch incision from the tip. To his surprise, Edgar found himself staring at the blood as it started to bubble. He followed the crimson fluid as it traveled down the length of his thumb. He felt no pain.

Blood is life, he thought.

Edgar had been brought up Roman Catholic. He went to Catholic grade school, then Catholic high school, culminating at a Jesuit University. He was a regular church goer until the death of his father. He remembered praying and praying for a miracle to give the old man a little more time, but his prayers apparently fell on deaf ears—deaf ears or a god who simply didn't care to listen to him. Either way there didn't seem to be much of a point after that. His faith lapsed.

by mike isip & samson stormcrow hayes

"Quickly now!" Again The Dealer's smooth voice broke the silence and this time it startled Edgar. He hurriedly placed his bloodied thumb on the card lying face down in front of him leaving a ruby fingerprint. Then he traced a cross on his forehead.

"Very good, Edgar." The Dealer laughed then proceeded to cut his own thumb. He too marked the back of the card and his forehead. "I'll go first."

The Dealer flipped his card. Edgar stared at his good fortune. It was the five of clubs.

He had only to draw a higher card and he would win up to a decade of good fortune, all in exchange for his measly soul.

Edgar reached for the deck. Sweat began to gather on his brow as he reached to flip the card. Good luck or eternal damnation waited.

He'd always been a gambler, and fortune often smiled on him, but recently he'd taken one loss after another. He was due for a turn of luck.

He flipped over the top card. An ace! Any ace meant The Dealer would reward him with two decades of unbelievable luck!

"I win," Edgar exclaimed in relief. His hands were still shaking because he was overwhelmed with joy. Then he noticed The Dealer's expression.

The Dealer shook his head from side to side.

"But I drew an ace," said Edgar.

"Yes, the ace of spades. It's the only card that results in immediate forfeiture."

The Dealer smiled and his eyes blazed with delight.

"But..." Edgar stammered, "but you don't get it until I'm dead, right?"
"Exactly!"

The Dealer grabbed Edgar by the throat. Reaching through his flesh, he seized his soul and pulled him down. Down through the ground, down through the Earth, down through the dimensions until they arrived at The Dealer's domicile where Edgar immediately regained his lost faith.

WORDS

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug. –Mark Twain

They can be worn in mohair or lamé: Gold, silver, shimmery, rhinestony, moiré.

They can be lost and forgotten, discarded, or Become immortal: or, to use a metaphor,

Develop a patina over time, And yet increase in value. Like some rhyme.

They glimmer, flash, or blink. Some do all three. Or beam too high for mortal eyes to see.

Those spent and dark are easily entombed And now and then as easily exhumed.

—james b. nicola

Dark Night

Oftenly in the dark night, winds hunt the hights, And the flame of monotony burns through the dark, Clouds come down and float through the sky, While moonlight on its journey embarks.

In those hours of panic fear and huge sorrow, While the proud moon burns with black light, Destiny insidiously weaves harrowing stories, While the silence screams through the night.

One of those nights, when the stars go out,
A strange guest will come for me,
And I know it will hurt a lot more than it should,
When death with my soul, to the skies flee.

-haris čolić

19 syche

I am the crystal-clear moon Shining radiantly upon your face On the darkest nights

I am the endless abyss Devouring your dreams, your hopes engulfing your soul

I am the burning fire Scorching the earth with my flames Banishing the cold in your heart

I am the thin silky thread Between reality and insanity the softly spoken voice, taunting And haunting Inside your head

-kristyl gravina

PAIN

nurturing spores spreading raving rashes to infiltrate the hollow bark of craving

itching fungus spreading sickness penetrating the veins

ground control lost through girdling

cosmos lost and found through tears

emma-johanna henricksson

THANK THE CHIEF THE SURVEY THE

Desert Flower

by wayne scheer



When I was six, I wanted to be like Mama and smoke cigarettes. I ended up setting the living room curtains on fire trying to work her cigarette lighter. The flames jumped to my long hair and I had third and fourth degree burns over my face and body.

For the first couple of days in the hospital, it hurt so bad I thought I would die. After that, I wanted to die, especially when it began blistering and oozing. It felt like millions of fire ants stinging me at the same time.

Then came the scars.

One eye was partly closed and one side of my upper lip bulged so a smile looked like a sneer. Also, I had a brownish-red scar from my chest to my stomach. The first time I saw myself in the mirror after the bandages came off, I screamed. Just one loud, horror-movie scream.

I remember this one nurse saying, "It doesn't matter how you look on the outside, Rosa. It's what's inside that counts."

Had I known the word at the time, I would have said, "Bullshit!" Instead, I cried.

My mother said, "When you get older, we'll go to a doctor in Phoenix and get your face fixed. But God's gonna love you just the same."

I knew she was lying about the doctor and probably about God. I pretended to be asleep when Dr. Lopez told her how much plastic surgery would cost without health insurance. "Pray with her," he said. "She'll learn to accept it."

I remember praying to God, begging Him to just straighten my lip or open my eye. When I saw my reflection, I knew my prayers were as empty as the words of people telling me how pretty I looked.

As time passed, I grew tired of being alone and angry. I began playing with the girls I knew before the fire. I think playing with the freak was their way of being "good Christians." But sometimes it wasn't so bad, and we fooled with our dolls or giggled about boys. I tried to convince myself I was just like them.

I remember the time Rita Robinson told me I had pretty hair. Dark and wavy, my hair hung down to the middle of my back. It was the one thing that made me feel normal.

"Can I brush it?"

"Sure," I said

She brushed it back a few times and then pushed it to the side, trying to cover my bad eye I grabbed the brush from her and hit her in the face with it.

She cried. "I only wanted to help you look normal, scarface."

I knew they called me scarface behind my back, but no one had ever said it to my face before. She ran out of the room and I ran after her shouting, "How'd you like it if I called you fatbutt?"

The funny part was Rita was so skinny, I doubt she even had an ass.

Eventually, small breasts emerged from my scarred flesh and I'd stand in front of the mirror, naked, wondering if boys would like them. I admired how pink my

nipples looked against the dark red-brown scars. Once, I overheard mama say to a friend of hers, "You give a man some tit and he's your friend for life." Those words stayed with me more than anything the preacher or my teachers ever said.

But I should have known better than to listen to my mother when it came to men. None of her male friends stuck around much, including my father. He did a disappearing act the day he found out I was growing in mama's belly.

Imagine how fast he would have run had he known how I'd turn out?

There was this one boy, Eric Williams. He was fat and wore braces on his teeth. Sometimes, he'd walk me home after school, and tell me how the kids made fun of him.

"I know all about that," I said.

He was shy and didn't have many friends. To me, that made him perfect.

One day after school, I suggested we go to the abandoned car behind the old Potter Building on the edge of town. The car was notorious among the teenagers of our town. It was called the "cherry picker." Even those of us who only guessed at what that meant laughed knowingly whenever someone talked about it.

Eric took my hand and I thought this must be what normal felt like.

When we crawled into the back seat, and sprawled out on the dirty, ripped upholstery, he put his arm out and I put my head on his shoulder. We talked some and then we kissed. Although his braces rubbed the inside of my lips raw, I liked how moist and warm his lips felt. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to move around or do something with my tongue. My teeth tapped his braces, and I kept thinking this couldn't be right. But it still felt good, like I was growing up and everything was going to be all right.

Then I felt his hand touch the top of my shirt and slide over my breast. That was my cue.

I was wearing a padded bra. This embarrassed me more than showing him my little breasts and the pretty nipples I was so proud of. I made him turn his head while I took off my shirt and unsnapped my bra.

"You can turn around now," I said, certain that he was going to see me as beautiful and want to marry me on the spot. Instead, I saw the same look in his eyes I'd seen most of my life. He tightened his lips and turned away like he was going to throw up.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought it was just your face."

I got back into my clothes and ran home so fast I didn't have time to cry—at least until I got home.

Mama looked at me, my shirt misbuttoned and my lips all swollen and bloody, and screamed, "Who did this to you?" She thought I'd been raped.

When I told her what had happened, she held me and we both cried.

She had already explained to me how she didn't have health insurance at the time, and how they won't cover me now because it's a pre-existing condition.

"It's not fair, Mama."

"No, it's not, honey. No, it's not."

When I was almost eighteen, I met Sarah Flamingo, the woman the men at the Donut Shack called "the crazy painter lady from Santa Cruz." I started working at the Shack, part time, when I was still in school. After I graduated, I took on more hours. The owner used to go with my mother. He felt sorry for me, so he let me work there during the day until closing

The first time I saw Sarah, it was like meeting a movie star. Not because she was beautiful, but because she looked like a woman from someplace else. That made her a celebrity to me.

She was a large woman, tall and big-boned. She wore a loose-fitting floral dress that hung down to her ankles. Her dark hair was short and I could see a smudge of brown paint on her forehead.

"I'll have two glazed donuts and a coffee to go," she said, staring at me. I'm used to folks staring, but she seemed like she was really trying to see me, not just my scars. Something about the look in her eyes didn't make me feel like a freak.

She had a strange voice. Considering how big she was, she spoke in almost a whisper. I had to lean in just to hear her order.

She paid for the food and touched my hand when I gave her the change. Most people avoid touching me, afraid they might catch my ugliness. When I give them their change, they lower their hand a few inches and I have to drop the change into it. She raised hers, letting me place the money in her palm.

She came back every day about the same time. After a while, she sat at the counter eating her two donuts and drinking coffee while we talked. She said she had taught art at the college in Santa Cruz and now she was staying in town to paint.

"Nothing here worth painting," I said.

"On the contrary." She still whispered, so I had to listen carefully. "The desert flowers are beautiful, and I love withered cactus. The tall ones look like pathetic crucifixes to me. I painted one with a contorted face on it. The picture sold for two thousand dollars at a gallery in Tucson."

"Oo-wee." I didn't know what more to say. I wanted to ask what a person would do with a picture like that, but I didn't want to insult her.

"Crazy, huh?" She winked and sipped her coffee.

We even talked about my scars. I told her about the fire and how my mother didn't have the money for surgery. Instead of the usual "tsk, tsk" sound people make, she just nodded and took in the information, like I was telling her about a movie or a recipe for apple pie.

And I told her about the boys who, now that my breasts had grown, didn't seem to mind the scars like Eric did.

"At least when I take off my shirt, they don't throw up," I said.

She laughed and covered my hand with hers.

One day, out of nowhere, she said, "I'd like to paint you."

Although I imagined her brushes stroking my body, I knew what she meant. "Why?"

"Because you're a beautiful desert flower."

"More a dried up cactus."

She laughed and shook her head. "It's your sense of humor I want to capture. Your ability to survive, despite ..." She hesitated. "I'll pay the standard model's fee."

That did it, especially when she told me how much. It was a lot more than I was making selling donuts.

The first time, she posed me next to a rusted-out Coca Cola sign. Mostly, she liked to paint me in the desert, but not the pretty part with the mountains in the background when the sun sets. She'd paint me in the middle of the day with nothing but dried-out dirt and sagebrush around me. Another time, she painted me holding withered flowers.

"Slump your shoulders," she said. "And don't purse your lips. Let me see them as they are."

We spent almost every day out in the desert, talking while she painted. She told me a little about herself. She was thirty-eight years old and never married. Her parents died in an auto accident when she was young and she lived with different foster families until she inherited a life insurance policy when she turned eighteen. She went to art school, sold paintings, and won awards. Then she got a job teaching at the university in Santa Cruz. When I asked why she left, she changed the subject.

But mostly, she let me talk about myself. I told her I didn't have much to say because I hadn't had much of a life, but she seemed fascinated by every detail, especially about how I felt being a freak.

Sometimes we'd go back to her "studio," which was really two adjoining rooms at the Cactus Motel. There, she'd pose me completely naked. I wasn't sure at first, but she paid me more and made me feel so comfortable I figured there was nothing wrong with it. I remember one time she had me lying on the bed with my knees bent and my legs spread. She put her sketchpad between my legs and drew from that angle for what seemed like hours.

She painted a whole series of pictures of me in that pose, but she added cactus and desert cadavers as if we were outside and I was just one of the sights you see out there. "Desert Flower" is what she called the series and it won some kind of award. I was her muse, she said, and whenever she sold a painting, she gave me a bonus.

But I always thought the pictures were ugly. At first, I was afraid to hurt her feelings and tell her what I thought, but one day I said I wished she would paint me without scars since I thought my body looked pretty.

"Your body is beautiful," she said. "But it's the blemishes that make it unique."

"I don't want to be unique," I screamed at her. "I want to look like you or my mother. I want to look normal." I was so angry, I ran into the bathroom. I brushed my hair and cried.

Sarah knocked on the door gently "May we talk?"

I opened the door and threw the brush at her, hitting her on the hip. "You're just like the others," I said. "To you I'm just a freak."

Instead of being mad, she held me and let me cry. I hadn't cried like that for a long, long time.

That night, we became lovers.

She kissed me and caressed my hair. Then she cupped my breasts and licked the outline of my scar down my stomach. I tried to pull away, but she felt so warm and gentle.

Afterward, she just held me in her arms, expecting nothing from me in return. I felt loved.

She told me about a woman in Santa Cruz that she had lived with for over twelve years before moving here. She left when the woman underwent a sex change operation.

"I loved her so much, I even helped pay for the operation because she wanted to look like a man more than anything. But before the operation even started, when she was undergoing hormone therapy and growing facial hair, I was no longer attracted to her. I loved her as a woman, not as a man."

"But if you really loved her," I said, "wouldn't you love her no matter what?"

"You'd think so, dear." For the first time, I heard Sarah cry. "I just wanted to take care of her," she whispered. "I wanted to help her accept who she was."

"No," I said, surprising myself and rising on my elbow. "You loved her as a woman because as a woman she was a freak. She was really a man."

"And how do you know so much about this?" Her voice grew above its usual softness. "Your main concern before we met was whether or not a boy liked your breasts."

"Don't you see? It's still my concern. You think because I'm a freak I have a dark, beautiful soul. I don't. Down deep, all I want is to be normal."

I left Sarah that night when I realized that the bullshit I had heard all my life—"It's what's inside that counts"—was right after all. Sometimes you just need a good plastic surgeon to see it.

Sarah helped me find a doctor in Phoenix. She even offered to pay for the surgery, but I told her I had saved most of the money she had already given me. My mother, also, had been saving money.

I live in Phoenix now. I've already had my lip corrected so I don't snarl nearly so much. The next operation on my eye is scheduled for a few days. I have a job working in a supermarket and I plan on going to a junior college in the fall.

I saw Sarah not too long ago. She was in Phoenix, lecturing on "inner beauty," and I went to hear her. She looked shocked to see me, especially when I smiled.

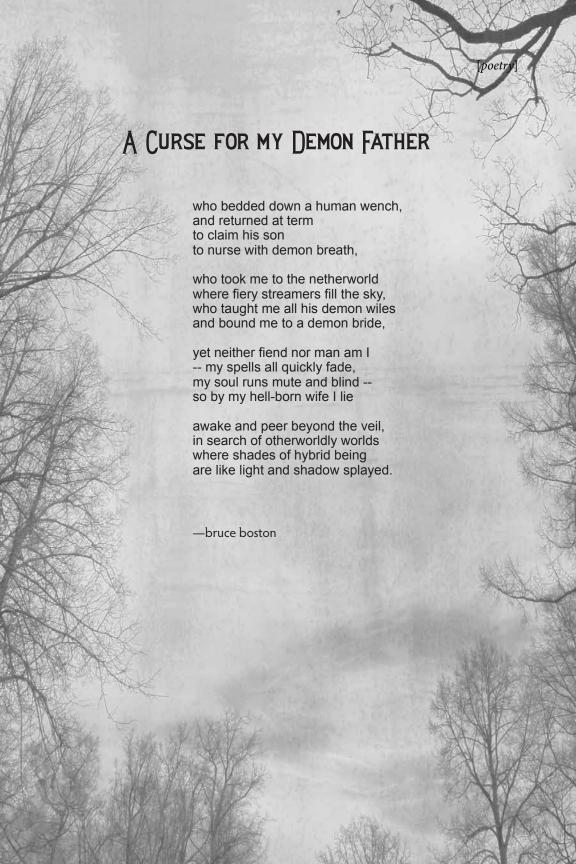




Dear Devil

Though blind as I seem to be, I know what you are, To whom never to be near, from whom to be far. I can, O master mine, sense some disaster fine — A havoc to be wreaked when you return to me. You, devil in a suit, the heart of whom I seek To keep my jagged wooden stake rapt company.

-shawn chang



THE DANCE

I came one day to Death's doorstep In younger days, when I still loved to dance And was greeted there with warmth I curtsied, smiled, and stepped inside The epitome of courtesy For Death was cunning and so very old And not to be offended In Death's grand home I found myself astounded No skulls; in fact, no bones at all No ominous timepieces No wailing souls No morbid birds His house was tasteful, clean and homely Warm yellow light Soft white carpets And creamy tablecloths "I like to keep things modern," Death remarked "Now come, my dear," He took my hand with easy grace And led me through his halls Through corridors and passageways Through rooms of every kind I kept my guard, even as we chatted pleasantly For Death was cunning and so very old So on he led me, quite polite, Until we came upon a great ballroom A checkered floor, a distant ceiling An orchestra, long since abandoned Heavy curtains of deepest red Grand golden balconies above And all of it afringed with dust "Tis a shame it's so unused," Death said, lamenting He caught my eye and held out his hand And offered me a dance I threw away my caution And did not hesitate

I did so love to dance Death gave a toothy grin I took his hand again and off we whirled The orchestra leapt up And the sonata of the haunt began The piano keys began to fall The harp began to strum The violins began their wail The cellos soon joined in Thus our dance commenced And what a dance it was We waltzed We tangoed We did the swing Every dance under the sky Ah, how I laughed The orchestra began to swell The notes became cacophonous The piano keys were crashing down The violins were shrieking As we danced the world away Swirling and dipping like the wind The pearls round my neck broke, then scattered My ring flew off and rolled away, my earrings too My shoes somehow tapped away from me My hair broke loose And fell out altogether My skin began to tear away, my flesh to follow My blood gave the checkered floor some color There in that tidy, pleasant house In my bones and crimson dress I danced with Death I danced the world, my life, away For Death is cunning and so very old

-vivian belenky

SCOPOPHOBIA



by brooke reynolds

My husband often calls me his little oyster because he thinks I am beautiful and delicate. He's my shell, always protecting me. I even have a tiny oyster tattoo on the inside of my right arm. It stares at me while I drink my Monday morning coffee in the living room. My phone buzzes and I click on an anonymous text message. I am greeted by two pictures. The first is me stuffing my face full of frozen yogurt and the second is me leaving the ABC store, with a bottle of liquor in hand. The text reads, "Eating and drinking your problems away solves nothing."

I stare at the first picture again. A pig, shoveling the food down. The camera angle shows that the photo was taken from inside my car. But how is that possible? We had one of those GPS in-car assistance devices installed last week. Do those cameras work both ways? Who is doing this?

The second picture was taken from the liquor store security camera. Whoever this asshole stalker is, he has access or some sort of government clearance to even get these pictures. I text back but receive some sort of error message.

My husband Patrick walks up to me and kisses my forehead. "I'm off to work. What are you looking at?"

I click to open the message to show him. "I think someone is messing with me again." I hand him the phone.

"Who? I don't see anything."

"Really?" I grab the phone back and click open the message. "I don't understand. There were two pictures here a minute ago."

"Maybe you deleted them?"

"This stupid phone. But still, someone is watching me."

"I'm sure it's nothing. We can discuss it more tonight. Love you."

I wave as he leaves. Patrick is the new Vice President for an up-and-coming manufacturing company called KAYNIX. I can never remember what the company makes. Something with technology, I'm sure. He took this job about three weeks ago, forcing us to uproot and move to suburbia. Even after the move, I was able to keep my interior designer job since I often work from home.

I call my mechanic. "Hello? Yes. I need that spying navigation device stripped out of my vehicle."

"Ma'am, we just installed that for you last week."

"I don't care. Someone is watching me through it and I need it gone."

"Lady, it doesn't work that way."

"I'm bringing it by and I need it out. I don't care if it takes you all week. I want it gone."

I peek out the window by the door and search the street. The neighbor across the way is seated in her van. It looks like she has a camera. Not wanting to be spotted, I wear a hoodie, sunglasses, and a hat. I bring Patrick's 9mm handgun he keeps under the bed with me. I slip out of the house and rush off to the mechanic.

After the car service attendant drops me back at home, I call my husband and tell him I'm not going to work, taking a sick day. I'll crawl back in my shell and hope the problem goes away.

My husband arrives home that evening with a stuffed teddy bear. I am curled on the couch, hiding under a blanket, reading articles online about protecting your privacy. He hands me the bear. "I thought this might help you feel better."

I take the bear. It is cinnamon brown, soft, and wearing a blue and yellow polka dot bowtie. I hug it and tuck it under the blanket with me, giving the appearance that I am still sick.

"Where's your car? I noticed it wasn't in the driveway when I pulled in?"

"Oh, it was rattling so I took it to the mechanic."

He sits down next to me and slips his hand under the blanket, rubbing my thigh. "So, are you feeling better?"

"A little."

"Maybe you should take it easy for a few days. Stay inside." He touches the ape statue we keep on the coffee table and rotates it so its large, condescending smile is facing me. That statue creeps me out. "Does this have anything to do with the text messages from this morning?"

I reach and spin the ape back around so it's not watching me. "I know what I saw. I'm going to hide out for a few days until things settle down. It will give me a chance to keep an eye on the neighbors."

"Anna, are you sure you're not just being paranoid? This is a nice neighborhood. You're safe here."

The next morning Patrick leaves for work and things quiet down. No text messages and no emails. I keep checking out the windows for the neighbors. A lawn crew is outside but I don't see any cameras. I grow bored and restless. I want to get out of the house but it's too risky. The perpetrator is still out there. I walk to the kitchen to grab a bottle of wine. Just a glass or two will calm my nerves.

I use a stepstool to reach the bottle. We keep the good wine up high. Patrick's shadow box collection of mounted blue and yellow butterflies is on the same shelf. Even with the stepstool, the shadow box is just out of my reach. The butterflies are so beautiful, a perfect blend of colors preserved forever. Patrick reminds me constantly that I am never to touch them. Maybe he thinks I will break something so fragile. I take a wine bottle instead.

Halfway through the second glass, an all-too-familiar tingling starts between my legs. With the stress of moving and Patrick starting a new job, we haven't been intimate in close to a month. I wander up to the bedroom. As I sit on the bed, contemplating what I'm about to do, I smile back at the bowtie bear sitting, facing me from the nightstand.

I down the rest of the wine and walk over to the bedroom window, drawing the blinds. I sit back down on the bed and reach my hand underneath, blindly searching until I find what I need.

Wednesday morning delivers another strange message, this one by email. A video pops up with the title "I'm Watching You." The video is zoomed in close on a woman's waist. I watch as hands undo the button and pull down the zipper. A hand slips down between the legs. The video hovers on a small tattoo positioned on the underside of the arm. My oyster.

I slam down the lid of my laptop. Who sent me this video? How many people have viewed it? Oh, Shit. I hope it wasn't sent to my coworkers or my husband. I'm so ashamed and my stomach looks so flabby. This could ruin me. I know my laptop has a camera installed for video chat but I didn't think the laptop was even in my bedroom during that single moment of weakness.

I lift open the laptop and stare at the tiny round lens that taunts me, located above the screen. I nab a piece of duct tape and place it across the lens. Fearing that the tape isn't enough and that my life may now be completely ruined, I seize the rolling pin from the kitchen and beat the device into submission. My face heats up and tears stream down my face. I fling the bastard against the wall, discovering just how thin the plaster is as the laptop sticks in like one of those ninja stars.

I steady my breathing until I can feel my blood pressure return to a reasonable level. I reach for my cell phone and start searching for ways to protect myself. I read about the benefits of aluminum. Is there really any truth behind those silly hats I've seen in movies? The foil idea is just ridiculous. Then I read about the benefits of Faraday cages. The design is similar to chicken wire or even the door of a microwave. All the windows in the house need to be covered for full protection. I don't think I have enough copper wire for that, but maybe I can just cover the main floor, focusing on the living room which is the most exposed out of any room in the house.

I start working on the Faraday cages. I twist copper wire pieces together, interweaving into a diamond pattern that interlinks to form a chain link. As I hang the first cage, Patrick arrives home.

"Woah. I didn't know we were redecorating. What is all this?"

I start twisting more wire together. "I'm making Faraday cages to block radio signals. I need protection."

"From what? I thought I was your protector."

I step back from the wall. "Check your phone. Tell me the number of bars you have."

"I have one bar."

"And you'll have no bars when I am done hanging the rest of the cages."

"And what if work needs to contact me?"

"You should still be able to get a signal upstairs."

He starts walking toward the stairs before he turns back to face me. "Are you coming to bed?"

I continue to twist wire. "I have to finish this." Once I form another two-foot by three-foot rectangle, I place it on top of the other cage to line the window all the way to the top. I secure each cage with duct tape.

"Come to bed. Don't let this get out of hand. I know how you can be."

I set down the wire and look at the stern expression on his face. He seems serious, so I comply and follow him up the stairs.

Later in bed, I wait for him to fall asleep. I try to sleep myself, tossing and turning, but after a few minutes I decide to sneak back down stairs to finish the work. I work throughout the night, hanging cage after cage.

The next morning, I don't even notice when Patrick comes down.

"What time did you get up?"

"Early. I couldn't sleep." I sweep my hand toward the cages. "These were more important."

He walks down the stairs and over to where my smashed laptop is sticking out from the wall. "What the hell happened here?"

I haven't told him about the video yet. Since he didn't see the smashed remains last night, I thought I was in the clear. "There was more evidence that someone is spying on me. I had to get rid of it."

"We just bought this house, Anna, and now there's a hole in the wall."

I continue tying the copper wire. "I'll get it patched up."

"This has gone too far. You're getting like you were last time. I'll call the doctor while I'm at work and see about getting you some help."

My self-built sanctuary of copper is doing a great job at blocking signals. I haven't seen a single bar of service since I placed the last Faraday cage. Patrick is at work but he said before he left that he would be texting to check on me. I think he is genuinely worried about me but treats me like a child instead of his wife. I decide to venture upstairs where I can still check my messages.

I stand by the window near the bed and look out to make sure no one is nearby. Once I know I'm alone, I turn my phone back on. The alert notification rings out. I have one new message from an unknown number. Patrick has three different work numbers so it must be from him. I click to open the message. A live video stream of our house appears. The camera angle is from above, like its being filmed from a hovering device. The video zooms in to show my shadow across the very window where I am standing. Another alert notification: "I see you."

The carpet beneath my feet feels like the fibers are growing hands, holding me in place. I shake my head to clear it and race back down the stairs, cell phone still in hand. I dive to the ground and lay face down, spread eagle, on the ground. My nails reach up and claw at the back of the phone, ripping out its innards. I roll

toward the ceramic ape statue. Picking it up, I slam it down on the phone screen, leaving a crevice that spider-webs to the outer edges. The base of the ape slams down again twice, once on the phone's battery and once on the sim card.

I scoop up the remains and carry them to the kitchen. Filling the sink with water, I force the phone and all its parts into the water, drowning it to remove any remaining spark of life or tracking ability. I pause. Then I hear a whir and hum from outside.

Something is out there right now. It's watching my every move. I can feel it. All the birds have stopped chirping, the flies have stopped buzzing. Silence. I knew this day would come.

I throw the light switch off, race to the living room and pull the blinds. My legs take me to the largest window that faces south, over the back deck. This is where I will have the best view.

I slide into position, sitting with my back against the wall. My fingers flip open the blind and I turn to look. The outside light burns my retinas. My eyes are too dilated to handle the direct beams of sunlight. I squint and blink back tears as I let the blind snap back down. Even if the light didn't melt my corneas, I can't make out anything through the caged windows. I glance about the room and look for anything to defend myself.

A basket of decorative stones sits next to the door to the deck, each one no larger than a paperweight. The 9mm handgun, lying in its place underneath the bed upstairs, is too far away. Plus, I would have to run by two exposed windows to reach it. Both my phone and computer are destroyed. My car is in the shop and Patrick won't be home for at least one more hour. My options are limited.

I bow my head and stare down at my hands, worried that I might not make it out of here. The oyster stares back up at me. I reach down and scratch and pinch at the mark, willing the oyster to disappear. Still, it remains, mocking me. I look up as shadows spin about the room. Something is hovering right outside. I can make out the contrast in light as the shadows twirl about the room. It's not loud enough for a helicopter. I don't hear the whipping of a rotor. I hear a kind of hum or whir that breaks the silence.

As it drifts closer to the window, I can make out an outline of the shadow it casts on the wall in front of me. A kind of spider-like object is suspended in midair. It dangles and sways from an invisible silk thread. The shadow waits on the back wall, slowly turning, surveying the area and waiting to strike.

My heart is pounding in my head, thumping louder and faster with each beat, the adrenaline surge overtaking me. I try to swallow but it gets stuck in my cotton-filled mouth. A white, pasty substance forms at the corners of my mouth and I wipe it with the back of my hand. My throat clenches tight and my breathing becomes shallow. I huff and puff, only able to take in short breaths without enough oxygen to sustain my racing brain. If I don't act soon, I may be stuck in here forever. I look back at the basket of decorative stones lying next to the door to the back deck. This gives me an idea.

I crawl on my hands and knees across the carpet, leaving brush burns on my kneecaps as the rough carpet claws my flesh. I clutch a stone and face the door. The stone fits in the palm of my hand. It's limestone and uneven, with sharp edges. Sweat makes my palms slick and I fear I won't get a good enough grip. Just one good strike and maybe I can push it off course. A headshot and maybe I'll bring it down. I slow my rapid breaths and open the door. Taking action is my only option.

My non-stone hand immediately reaches up to shield my eyes from the blaring sun. There, dancing and spinning in front of me, hovering and taunting as it rides the airwaves, is a drone.

It looks like a mini spaceship. Four propellers sit atop a wide platform. It has two legs or braces that straddle the heart of the evil device, the camera. I scan my surroundings but see no one. It's just me and the machine.

The drone rises and falls as the camera swivels below, zooming me in its sights. I bend my arm at the elbow, plant my feet, reach back, and let the stone fly. It soars toward its target about to strike true. At the last second, the drone swerves to the left. The stone hits the outer edge, spinning the drone in a circle.

I need something with more velocity. The gun. I run back inside to safety and slam the door behind me. Taking the stairs two at a time, I race toward the bedroom. My toe catches and I trip. My face smacks the stairs and my teeth slam together on my lip. A metallic taste fills my mouth. I push myself back to my feet, smear blood across the back of my hand, and continue running.

Under the bed, I find the 9mm. I check to make sure it's loaded and flip the safety off. This will work. My feet are moving again and my hand slides down the railing on the stairs, guiding me safely down.

I fling open the back door to the deck and stand with both arms outstretched and feet shoulder width apart. My left arm steadies my trembling right arm. My index finger finds its position. Keeping both eyes open, I align the sites with my target as it rises and falls. I follow it. Up. Down. Up. I squeeze the trigger.

The upper right propeller explodes off and the drone tips and dives to the ground just as I hear the crack of the gun. It lands in the grass directly below where it was hit.

I race out of the house to fetch my kill. As I approach it, the left propeller still rotates. My foot reaches out, kicking the drone over, exposing its belly. An inscription is there. I lean closer for a better look. It reads, "Property of KAYNIX, Inc." My husband's company. Has he been spying on me all along? Was this a joke? Why would he do this?

I leave the remains of the drone lying in the grass and race back inside. I lock and deadbolt the doors. Sun spots dance in front of my eyes as my eyes adjust back to the darkness.

I hear a voice scream out. "ANNA!"

I spin and point the gun toward the voice. As my eyes finally adjust, I turn to see Patrick standing by the open basement door, watching me.

My heart skips a beat as I confront him. "Patrick! What are you doing home?"

He rips the gun from me, ejecting the mag, and unchambers the round. "Jesus, Anna. What are you doing running around the neighborhood with a gun? The neighbors are going to think you're crazy." He sets the empty gun down behind him.

I'm still out of breath from running and my response is choppy. "A drone... someone spying...your company...was it you?"

He reaches with outstretched arms and pulls me into a tight hug, pinning me against him. "Now, now sweetheart." He has a smile on his face. "We talked about this. No one is watching you."

My nails dig into my palms and I begin to shake in frustration. "Stop treating me like a child. I have proof. The videos, the text messages, and now there is an exploded drone lying in the back yard."

"Anna, come on. I have never seen a single one of these messages. You haven't been sleeping." He leans in close and whispers into my ear. "Maybe, you're just confused."

I pause a moment, thinking back to the video filmed in our bedroom. The bear. "Not this time, Patrick. I have proof. You thought you were so clever, giving me a stuffed bear. I know about 'Nanny Cams'." I run and get the bear from the bedroom and bring it back down to show him.

As I pull and rip at the stuffed animal, shredding it. I fling stuffing about the room but find nothing else. "Where is it? I know there's a camera in here."

My face is boiling and I'm crying again. Patrick takes the bear away. He wraps his arm around me and leads me down the basement steps. I start sobbing and I can't see through the tears as he guides me down the stairs. "It's over now, Anna. I got you. You'll be safe down here. No one can see you down here."

He guides me to the cool concrete floor. I sit and shake and tremble. I cover my head in my hands. He drapes a blanket over me and lets his hand linger on my shoulder a moment before patting it and slowly stepping back. I hear the creak of the steps as he makes his way back upstairs. Through tear-soaked eyes, I look up to see him staring down from the top of the steps. He shuts the door and I hear the click of the door as he locks me in. I finally feel safe, hiding in the depths in my shell.



ENGLISH

We explore – earn and exist – with a language of old exploitation.

Like a mulatto, Indian English is a hybrid. It's as our culture – there's a unity in diversity. We winnow ideas out of dialectal chaff.

Language mustn't be imposed. Linguistic extremism is a myopia.

Wherever you grow, your mom and hue remain the same, but your tongue can be changed from the cradle.

English thrives above creeds and colors, connecting continents, never demanding a passport.

—fabiyas mv



A lady of true beaut, that lady once was I, Like th' Golden Apple fair, the apple of His eye; But by a slip of tongue, a Freudian slip of doom, To decadence I fell, decay befell my bloom — Reptilian, writhing coils all gorgeous curls became, I'm not amused, although amused is in my name; Forever in despair, for my offense atone — And all who me regard cannot escape from stone.

-shawn chang

writers and readers

The pages have lain dormant in a stack of faces, skins we've worn. The pores are ink and so our freckles are not red. but black. Try one. Wear it awhile. See what you think.

Not that the mask can really make the man. Still, it's been shown that smiling makes a person want to smile. . . . So try one on—read! Can you feel the thing affecting your inner

self—blood, and so forth? You should see your face. Your red complexion's ours, I know. But more than skin, a poem's an exotic place you can inhabit, visit or ignore.

This journey, rest assured, can be as real as you allow it to be. Then, leave word you've read, and thought, or have begun to feel. And we'll let you know, somehow, that we've heard.

—james b. nicola

THE MOONS OF URANUS

After: Hamlet Act 2, scene 2 by William Shakespeare

crash into the celestial ceiling, Tinkerbelle with the orbit of planets far

follow Alice down the hole with drink fair regard Titania for the sly bard

Oberon [pawn to King] upon the boards knight don Quixote's windmill's sailing vain

pluck the Eye of Horus with wooden sword let your anus have its blustery say

while mooning Pope's Ariel on the stage and Umbriel, for what's in a name?

gibberish from donkey's heads, laughter's rage for Puck's afoot, the fairy takes the blame

the play's, the thing wherein and all to blame and how Uranus' moons gained their names

—deborah guzzi

THE LOVE BOTT

by mary donaldson-evans

It seemed like a good idea. For his wife's fortieth birthday, John decided to surprise her by inviting her parents and siblings and their families and six of her best friends on a Caribbean cruise at his expense. It would be a week-long birthday party to celebrate the woman who had cured him of his cynicism. Well, no good deed goes unpunished, as the saying goes.

They had been married only two years. John, a salt-and-pepper 52 year-old with very deep pockets, had already seen two marriages wilt and die. Resolving never to marry again after the second fiasco, he had thrown himself into his work, had put in sixteen-hour days and had risen through the ranks in his small company. He'd enrolled in a weekend MBA program for busy executives. Within a year and a half, he'd had his degree. With it came a raise and, after several more years of intense work, a promotion to CEO.

For fifteen years, he'd lived the good life. Women, never in short supply (he was, after all, both handsome and rich), became even more eager to please him after an article in *Philadelphia Magazine* listed him among the area's most eligible bachelors. Intending to remain just that, he'd studiously avoided long-term relationships. As soon as he sensed that the woman he was dating was getting attached, he would become distant and thoughtless. He would "forget" her birthday, flirt openly with other women in her presence, cancel plans at the last moment, and fail to return calls. Romantic at heart, he hated to behave this way, but he had only to recall his two painful marriages in order to assume the role of the egotistical playboy.

And then it happened. He fell in love again.

Kelly Anne was sassy, slender and sexy. More importantly, perhaps, she

seemed completely indifferent to him. Passionate about her career as an addictions counselor, aggressively independent, she had no desire to marry. At thirty-six, she had casually dated many men, claimed she had slept with only three, lived with none. A master at avoiding pressure, she slipped away before her would-be boyfriends had a chance to apply any. Her biological clock? Digital, she specified. No ticks, no tocks, and on this model, no alarm. She insisted that she loved kids but didn't feel the "need to breed."

John, completely smitten, was determined to overcome her resistance. Except for the absence of physical intimacy, their relationship followed the usual course. After that first meeting in a line at Starbucks one rainy Sunday morning (he blushed at the banality of it), they met for lunch, then dinner. She was a brilliant conversationalist, guiding him along the path of self-revelation while skillfully deflecting questions about her own life. She loved to discuss politics, travel, and technology, but of her own family, her background—scarcely a word. It was a month before he even learned her last name: Kelly. He thought she was kidding. Kelly Kelley. What kind of people would saddle a kid with a name like that? She laughed, reading his mind: "It could've been worse. They could have given me a middle name like Kristen or Kathryn, and I would have carried the initials KKK through my life. KAK isn't so bad. My friends call me Khaki."

Friends? What friends? It took him another two months to learn their names, yet another month before he met any of them. There were, in all, three married couples, all met during her adult life, as far as he could gather. They were nice people, cultured, urbane and witty. Meredith and Charles were accountants; Christy and Bob, an interior designer and a landscape architect respectively; Ellen was a radiologist, Josh a stay-at-home dad. None of them seemed to know Kelly Anne's family, who, she had told him, had a dairy farm just north of Milwaukee. Nor did Kelly Anne seem eager to introduce John himself into the family circle, despite the fact that she was not estranged from them. In fact, she spoke to her mother once a month or so, always from work. There were two brothers and a sister—that much he knew. Both brothers were married and had kids of their own. Meghan, her sister, was single.

"So what does Meghan do in life?" John asked one day.

"She works on the farm. They all do."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously! But my family's story has nothing to do with us, so why should you care?"

"Because I do. You're like a damned fortress, Kelly Anne."

"That's cute. Weren't we going to go out for a run?"

Intrigued by the strong sense of privacy of this enigmatic woman, keenly aware of her history with men, John was not going to risk the relationship for the sake of information that he didn't absolutely need.

"Sure. Let's go." He put on his sneakers.

Kelly Anne was an avid runner. They'd start their runs together, but at some point, she'd always pull ahead while he, no longer the athlete he once was, would

slow to a walk. It's almost as if she's running from me, he'd reflect, as he watched her spandex-clad form disappear in the distance. But afterwards, she'd be affectionate and playful, smiling broadly as they climbed into his fire red Ferrari for the ride into town. Sometimes he worried that she liked his car better than she liked him. In fact, he often wondered if she liked him at all, given her reserve and her refusal to allow him more than a casual goodnight kiss. What a challenge this woman was! John's love for Kelly Ann grew in direct proportion to her apparent indifference to him. Somehow, with time, he would win her over.

His patience paid off. A full eight months into the relationship, on February 17th, her thirty-seventh birthday, Kelly Anne finally lowered the drawbridge. It was on a four-poster bed at the Queen Victoria B & B in Cape May, New Jersey, after a chilly walk along the deserted beach, that she submitted to his gentle seduction. A month later, on St. Patrick's Day, he baked her a cake with green icing and then watched as she put her fork into the piece he had cut for her.

"Ouch!" she cried, biting into something hard. She pulled it from her mouth. An engagement ring.

"But I told you...."

"Shhh!" He put his finger to her lips. "Don't spoil the moment."

Picking the cake away from the ring, Kelly Anne gasped. She'd never seen a diamond that large.

But she resisted.

"Is this really what you want?" she asked.

It was

"Remember your first wife?"

Of course he remembered. She was a prom queen; he, a promising gymnast. They'd scarcely finished high school when they got engaged. It wasn't surprising that their marriage hadn't lasted: they were so young, so naïve! Way too naïve for the crude realities of married life.

"Why bring *her* up?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. And remember Wife Number Two?"

John sighed, and thought back to his second wife. She'd come along eight years after he and his first wife had divorced, when he was 30. A country and western singer he met one night in a dimly lit night club, she had seduced him with her voice. The bawdy lyrics of her songs, the suggestive looks she threw him as she sang, even the way she held the microphone, with her long, slender fingers tapping it rhythmically, had excited him and brought him back, night after night, until she'd finally agreed to have a drink with him on closing night. He'd married her a year later. But she was a restless sort, and she quickly tired of him and began reserving her smoldering looks for other men. One of them became her lover. John, apprised of the situation, thought wryly of that country and western classic, "I gave her the ring and she gave me the finger." He tried unsuccessfully to save the marriage. Six months later, they divorced. John was not yet 33 years old.

"Kelly, she was nothing like you. What are you driving at?"

"You're impulsive, John. No offense, but you don't think things through. You didn't with Wife Number One, and you didn't with Wife Number Two. I mean...a prom queen? And a night club singer? A little superficial, are we? Do you even know *why* you want to marry me?"

"Because you're beautiful and sexy and..." He groped for another adjective.

"And what? You can't think of anything else, can you? I rest my case. Honestly, I don't think we know each other well enough yet."

"Well, maybe that's because you're so damn secretive, Kelly. A cruise missile couldn't penetrate your defenses."

"Be that as it may, the fact is that you don't know me. Not really. If we married now and it didn't work out, this'd be Strike Three for you. Hello? Doesn't that give you pause?"

John scrutinized her face, tried without success to read her thoughts. She had spoiled the moment, all right, but there was something hard, even a little cruel, in the way she'd done it, bringing up his first two marriages like that. She knew that the subject of his past failures was painful to him. And she hadn't stopped there. She'd laid the blame at his feet: he was impulsive, superficial. Couldn't she have let him down a bit more gently? Couldn't she have spared him the moral lesson, at least?

John had to admit that there was something callous about Kelly. He couldn't put his finger on it, much less try to determine its origin. One day, she'd told him about a client of hers, Johanna, a 24 year-old woman, who'd died of a heroin overdose. He expected her to be devastated, especially since she'd just seen the young woman the previous day.

"Oh, Kelly, I'm so sorry," he said.

"Don't be. She got what she deserved," said Kelly.

"Kelly! You're a drug and alcohol counselor. Surely you don't believe that!"

But she did as far as she was concerned. She'd given her client all the tools she needed to stay clean and sober. Johanna hadn't used them. Her death wasn't tragic; it was stupid.

John had read that the most successful addiction counselors were those who had been addicts themselves. As far as he knew, Kelly had never had an addiction problem. Perhaps that's why she was so unsympathetic toward those of her clients who relapsed? Whatever the case, she was not lacking for clients. She must be doing something right, he thought.

He chose to ignore these occasional glimpses into Kelly's inner reality. She'd obviously been scarred somewhere along the way, and the scar tissue had hardened and made her inscrutable. Yet he wouldn't give up. Just as the hardest stone will eventually be worn down by the drip, drip, drip of water pressure, so also would Kelly finally be worn down by the steady flow of his tenderness and love.

It took six more months, but she finally accepted his marriage proposal. They were married in September, at City Hall, in Philadelphia. Since it was John's third marriage, a big wedding would have been unseemly. No sense inviting family:

Meredith and Charles would stand up for them, and they'd all go out for dinner afterwards at The Fountain to celebrate.

Happily exchanging her last name for John's, Kelly Anne Kelley became Kelly Anne Foster and moved into her husband's elegant Society Hill condominium overlooking the Delaware River. The months passed. And the rest, as they say, would have been history had not John become obsessed with meeting his wife's family. His own parents were dead, and his sister had married a Moroccan and lived in Marrakesh. It was perfectly normal that Kelly hadn't met her yet. But people who lived in Wisconsin? No comparison. The forced separation was just plain weird. Kelly didn't seem hostile to her family. She stayed in touch through her mom, sent Christmas presents, remembered birthdays and anniversaries. And her mom reciprocated as she was able, usually with a gift card to Target. Clearly, they were not sophisticates. That was okay with John. He might not choose them for his friends, but he could certainly get along with them for a few days. He tried to imagine what Kelly's mother looked like. Except for a badly fading, sepia-tinted photograph of her parents on their wedding day, Kelly had no family photos, no albums. But they were her family, for God's sake, her biological context. Could he really know her properly without knowing them? Where did she get her hazel eyes? Did the genes for small feet come from her dad or her mom? What about the way she thrummed her fingers on her cheek and bit her lip when she was concentrating? Or her hatred of the scent of lilies-of-the-valley? All he needed was just a single get-together, and he would be satisfied.

Little by little and no thanks to Google, for these people flew beneath the radar, he had garnered more information from Kelly: they worked hard, rose before dawn (as farmers do), struggled to keep food on the table, home-schooled the kids. John was entranced. He imagined the smells of their farmhouse kitchen, the coffee and bacon and fresh-baked bread. In his mind's eye, he saw his motherin-law, an older version of Kelly herself, the kind of woman about whom you'd say, "She must have been beautiful when she was young." She'd be slightly plump now, perhaps, and her grey hair would be pulled back in a loose bun. She'd wear housedresses with microprints and a bibbed apron. Her dad would be slightly stooped, but his arms would be sinewy and muscular, the kind of arms you have when you pitch hay and chop wood all day. His face would be deeply lined—too many hours in the field under the hot sun—but he'd have piercing blue eyes and a mop of brown hair that was scarcely beginning to grey. John didn't linger on what the brothers and sister would be like, but he could clearly see the kids, little girls with blond braids, boys with freckled noses, going about the household chores, scattering seed for the chickens, collecting eggs from the henhouse.

"Hey, Kelly," he said one day. "You haven't seen your family in over two years. Don't you miss them? I mean, it's not as if they lived in Tokyo or anything."

Kelly stiffened. "What's your point?"

"Well, I was thinking that it might be nice to fly to Milwaukee for a long weekend, rent a car, pay them a visit."

"Who? Me?"

"No. Both of us. I'd really like to get to know them."

"I don't think you'd have a lot in common. But sure. Let's do that sometime." John pressed on. "Kelly, 'sometime' will never come if we don't make plans. And why don't you think we'd have much in common? They're your family. They love you. So do I. Isn't that enough?"

"They're simple people, John."

"So? What do you think I am—a snob? My dad didn't even finish high school." Kelly blanched, recovered quickly. "OK, you win. Next summer. Promise."

It was October. Next summer was a long way off. Still, the fact that John had finally extracted a promise from Kelly was encouraging. It wasn't that she didn't want him to meet her family; it was that she feared his judgment. He'd show her that he could get along with Midwestern farmers, that he wasn't the elitist she seemed to think he was. He'd like them immediately, these earnest, hard-working people. Maybe he could even help them out a bit financially. Times were tough for independent farmers. He'd be magnanimous, they'd be grateful, and Kelly would love him all the more.

That's when he hit upon the idea of a birthday surprise. Why wait until next summer to meet these humble folks? Why not offer them the trip of a lifetime, and simultaneously give Kelly a surprise she would never forget? Except for a brief foray into Minnesota one summer when they had travelled to northern Wisconsin for the tri-state county fair, her parents and siblings, Kelly had told him, had never even been out of Wisconsin. They'd never seen the ocean. What a thrill this would be for them! John would foot the bill, not only for the cruise itself and the travel to and fro, but also for the caretakers they'd have to hire to run the farm in their absence.

John invited the friends first, via e-mail. They accepted immediately. He then phoned Kelly's mother.

"Mrs. Kelley?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"This is John Foster, Kelly's husband. We've never spoken before, but I'm hoping that we'll get to know each other very soon. I'm calling to invite you and your family on an all-expenses-paid week-long cruise in the Caribbean from February 12th to the 19th. It's to be a surprise for Kelly, a present for her fortieth birthday."

Silence, then a husky laugh. "Is this for real?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kelley. And I'd like an answer as soon as possible."

"Kelly don't know about it?"

"No. It's to be a surprise. And I want you to know that in addition to paying all your travel expenses, I'll be happy to assume the expense of caretakers so that you can leave your farm in good hands."

"Excuse me?"

"Mrs. Kelley, I know that there's a lot for you to think about. Why don't I call back tomorrow after you've had a chance to consult with your family?"

"Yes, I think that's a good idea."

The next day, the entire family was on board—so to speak. John was elated. That evening, over a dinner of lentil chili (not John's favorite, but Kelly had become a fervent believer in *Forks over Knives*), John took his wife's hand:

"I've been thinking about your birthday," he said.

"It's four months away yet!"

"Yes, but it's a big one."

"No kidding. So?"

"So I'd like you to take the week of February 12th off. Can you manage it?"

Kelly's eyes glistened. A trip to Bora-Bora? Skiing in the Alps? With John's bank account, anything was possible.

"Yes, I think I can manage."

Four days before her birthday, John presented Kelly with tickets for an eightday cruise on Fiesta Line's *Caribbean Star*. They'd sail from San Juan and would have ports of call in Saint Lucia, Barbados, Martinique, Antigua and St. Thomas. It would be Kelly's first cruise.

She frowned. "But I'm on a diet."

"So?"

"So cruise ships feature non-stop eating."

"Don't be silly, Kelly. There's something for everyone on a large cruise ship. Even skinny vegans like you."

Kelly looked skeptical. "OK, if you say so." Then she laughed. "Thanks, Sugar Daddy."

John's plan was simple. To avoid a premature encounter, friends and family would board the ship at 2 p.m. and go straight to their cabins; Kelly and John would wait until the last possible moment—4 p.m.—and would take possession of their penthouse immediately. Their cabin assignment ensured that they would be on a different deck for the safety drill, which was scheduled for 5 p.m. Two hours later, the group would make their way to the Starburst Lounge on Deck 9 and prepare to yell "Surprise!" when the birthday girl with her husband arrived 15 minutes later.

The ship had left the calm waters of the port of San Juan and by 7:00, there was some serious pitching and rolling. John followed Kelly down the long corridor, laughing as she weaved and bumped against the sides. She was wearing a floral print sundress and strappy white sandals—dress code tonight was "resort casual"—and he felt a surge of desire as he watched her swaying hips. The birthday surprise had ended up costing him far more than he'd anticipated, but Kelly was worth it. What a woman she was! Even after two years of married life, there was something about her that made him want to bow down before her, like some crazy medieval knight, and beg her to send him on a dangerous mission so that he could prove his love. His pulse raced when he thought of the surprise he had in store for her. If she had had any doubt about the depth of his love, this would erase it in an instant. He pictured her reaction. She'd be stunned at first, incredulous, and then she'd throw her arms around him, tears streaming down her cheeks, while her family and friends rushed to her side. The thought made him almost giddy.

He had suggested that they go up to the Starburst Lounge for a cocktail before their 8:30 (late-seating) dinner, and she had agreed readily. It would be only minutes now before she was reunited with her friends and family. "Hey, Kelly, wait up!" he cried, as the distance between them widened. It would not do for her to enter the lounge ahead of him. One of the ship's photographers had been hired to "capture the moment" as they walked into the lounge, hand in hand.

"C'mon, slow poke!" she teased, as she turned to wait, then lost her balance and fell into his arms when the ship pitched forward. "Serves you right!" John laughed, as he held her close, his face buried in her fragrant hair.

A trio composed of a singer, a drummer, and a pianist was well into a jazzy rendition of "How will I know?" as they entered the Starburst Lounge. The lighting was low and the ship's roll had intensified, so that they had to hang onto the railings affixed to the wall to keep from falling. John glanced around the lounge as they entered: their couple-friends, gathered on the left, were smiling nervously; to the right, John spied a motley assortment of passengers and flushed with anger: he had specifically asked that the lounge be reserved for their group, and he'd paid a hefty rental fee. What had happened? Suddenly, he felt Kelly tense up beside him, and he turned to face her just as a shout of "Surprise!" went up and the waiters uncorked the champagne. Kelly was looking at the group on the right with disbelief. He followed her gaze, only momentarily blinded by the flash of cameras. About a dozen people were gathered there, the kind of people you'd expect to see in a trailer park, maybe—not on an up-scale cruise line like Fiesta. A wizened older man with a missing tooth and a vein-streaked nose—Kelly's father, as it turned out—guffawed when he saw Kelly: "She don't know what to say!" he yelled. Then, turning to his family, "Look at them eyes! Our little Kelly Kelley don't believe what she's seein'!"

John's eyes scanned the group and came to rest on an older woman—Kelly's mother, he realized, his heart sinking. Poured into a sleeveless red mini-dress that emphasized every lump and roll of her sixty-something body, she was the perfect illustration of what his sister used to refer to as "mutton dressed up as lamb." Apparently, the cabins' harsh fluorescent down-lighting had not destroyed her belief in the power of her sex appeal, as she winked and blew him a kiss, the winglets of her upper arms flapping as she did so. Embarrassed, he looked away. To her left stood two younger men—the brothers. The first one, dressed in a Confederate flag T-shirt, had dull eyes and a crew cut. Next to him stood a broken wreck of a man, hunched and unshaven, with cauliflower ears and a lazy eye. In the good eye, there was a wild, hunted look, as if he were expecting to hear the click of handcuffs at any moment.

"Hey, Kelly!" shouted Kelly's father, "Lookie lookie! See who's here?! Ritchie just got sprung from the slammer last week. Do you believe it? Ain't that good timin'?"

So that was Ritchie. John felt a dull ache behind his eyes and a weight in his chest. He fought the urge to flee the room and concentrated instead on trying to pick out Kelly's sister, Meghan—to no avail. She wasn't here yet, having made a

detour to the bar on the way to the lounge. The other assembled strangers and spouses—he guessed—and their pudgy, snub-nosed children who ranged in age from about 5 to 15, stood uncomfortably against the wall. With great trepidation, John turned to meet Kelly's gaze. She had recovered from her initial shock, and a smile was frozen on her face. "What a hell of a surprise!" she exclaimed through clenched teeth.

The chill persisted. With the exception of Kelly's mom, who bounced over to her daughter and kissed her noisily on the cheek, the family went back to their drinking while hugs and photos continued. Kelly began circulating tensely among her family members, introducing John to each one in turn. Ritchie pulled John aside at the first opportunity.

"Hey, uh, I wonder if I could ask you a small favor? I'm in a bit of a bind right now and wonder if you could, uh, float me a loan. I wouldn't need much, just ten grand or so to get me back on my feet."

John was stunned.

"Sorry, can we talk about this another time?"

"Well, it is kind of an emergency—you know what I mean?"

John was about to reach into his pocket for a \$100 bill just to get rid of him when Kelly appeared at his side and whisked him away to meet her sister-in-law who was standing off to the side with her fifteen year-old daughter. It was while they were chatting that Kelly's father sidled up to the group. Out of the corner of his eye, John saw him whisper something in the girl's ear and pinch her bottom.

God! Did this vile excuse for a family have any more surprises in store for him? He looked at Kelly. She'd seen it too, and she looked on the verge of nausea.

And this thought—searing—came to him: Perhaps she'd been abused as a child?

As the socializing continued, the photographer, who had been asked to take a group photo once Meghan arrived, kept checking his watch. Finally, at 7:30, just as he was gathering the group for the shoot—to hell with Meghan, he had another appointment at 8:00—a slight, deeply tanned woman in fishnet stockings and a short white dress with a plunging neckline wandered in. It was Meghan. "Oh, am I late?" she asked in mock horror, clapping her hand over her mouth. Then, spying her sister, she shrieked, "Kelly Anne!" and weaved her way across the room, already three sheets to the wind. Kelly recoiled at first, but managed to give her a perfunctory hug before pushing her into position for the photo. The camera clicked, and clicked again as the guests, smiles plastered on their faces, waited not so patiently for the ordeal to be over so that they could escape to the dining room where, mercifully, they had no assigned seating and would thus have the option of mingling with other passengers.

The photo shoot finished just before 8:00. A good half-hour to kill before they could go down to the dining room for dinner. Meghan, though bleary-eyed with drink, wasted no time in identifying her sister's husband and sidled up to him as soon as the group dispersed.

"You mush be Luke," she slurred, her tongue lingering on the "L."

"John," corrected John, struggling to keep his eyes on her face, even as she seemed almost deliberately to be thrusting her breasts up under his nose.

"Oh, thash right," giggled Meghan. I knew it was one of them Goshpel writers. And then she recited:

"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Blesh the Bed that I Shleep On."

Another giggle, this one ending in a hiccup. A whiff of alcohol assaulted John's nostrils.

"Sho where'sh Kelly been hidin' ya? Don't youse guys ever get to the Midwest? Not fancy enough for youse?"

Running her tongue over her teeth, she had moved in closer, and had started fingering the top button of his shirt. Fortunately, at that moment, Charles and Meredith joined them and John was able to extricate himself. He made his way over to the bar and ordered a second double scotch on the rocks. Acutely aware of the disaster he had unwittingly created, he downed it in three gulps and asked for another. By the time 8:30 rolled around, he was beginning to notice that Kelly's mother was almost pretty—or rather must have been, when she was younger and trimmer.

Dinner would have been a somber affair had it not been for the red wine. That waiter didn't let thirty seconds go by without refilling the glasses. When they got up from the table, John's legs felt rubbery and the room was spinning. He clutched the table for support. Kelly, on the other hand, was stone cold sober. After taking a sip of the celebratory champagne at the party, she'd switched to Perrier and had continued with the sparkling water right through dinner.

"How about a walk around the promenade deck?" she suggested to her husband as they left the dining room. John stumbled over a chair leg and lurched forward. Then he looked at Kelly, trying to focus. These were the first words she'd spoken to him since they left the Starburst Lounge. A flash of hope glinted in his eyes. He'd messed up; he knew that now, but what the hell? Everybody makes mistakes. Maybe she could bring herself to forgive him? Maybe, as they leaned against the rail and listened to the swish of the waves against the ship's hull, she would turn to him and say, "It's okay. Your heart was in the right place." She'd embrace him and somehow, they'd get through the next seven days.

The promenade deck was deserted, and Kelly did not seem to be in a playful mood. The set of her chin was not promising. John tried to speak, couldn't form the words. He had blown her cover, destroyed her carefully crafted fiction. These lowlifes—hard-working farmers? Yeah, right! How could he have been so wrong? How could he have forgotten that these were the people who named their daughter Kelly Kelley? They were probably under the influence of cheap vodka when they came up with that one, he thought. He turned to face his wife.

The look in her eyes scared him. What was she thinking? What scenario was playing itself out in her head? He staggered to a deck chair and lay down, willing himself to stay awake.

Kelly leaned against the railing and gazed down at the waves that burst into

a phosphorescent glow as they battled with the ship's wake. Filled with rage and humiliation, she fought to hold back tears. After what seemed to John like an eternity, she turned to him and said, "Let's go back to the cabin. I'm cold."

Cold? On this balmy night in the Caribbean? John struggled to his feet, weaved his way over to the railing, and put his arm around his wife's shoulders.

"Don't touch me!" she hissed.

Stung by her rejection, John stepped back sharply, almost falling in the process. He returned to the deck chair and sat down with his head in his hands, fighting to stop the spinning sensation. And then, through the fog of his alcohol-soaked brain, he had an idea: He knew what he had to do to win back her love and earn her forgiveness.

He breathed in deeply, letting the salt air fill his lungs. Then, dragging himself out of the deck chair again, he walked unsteadily to the railing and started climbing the metal rungs.

"What in God's name are you doing?" Kelly spat out the words in a voice filled with hatred rather than alarm.

"Kelly! I was a gymnast, remember?" said John. "Watch this!"

He continued his climb; then, with considerable difficulty, rose to a standing position on top of the wooden rail. Tottering, his arms extended, he carefully put one foot in front of the other.

One....two...three...

Suddenly, as she watched, the ship pitched and he stumbled, momentarily regained his footing, lost it again. "Shit!" he yelled, reaching out to her for support. She stood there a few feet from the railing, arms crossed over her chest, her whole body trembling. His eyes, meeting hers, registered more disbelief than panic. And then he was gone, his body tumbling through the warm tropical air and hitting the water with a distant splash. She watched his flailing arms as he was swept into the ship's turbulent wake. His head broke the surface twice before the waters closed over his body for the last time. She remembered what they'd been told during the lifeboat drill. "If you see someone fall into the water," the crew member had instructed, "shout 'Man Overboard!' to the person nearest you." Kelly looked around. There was nobody in sight. "Man Overboard," she said softly, turning again to gaze at the roiling waters of the ship's wake as it plowed inexorably on through the Caribbean night.



The Mystic

She comes out of nowhere And vanishes into the same No one knows her true age Or from whence she came

There is an aura about her Her wisdom knows no bounds She is unlike any other Her grace and artistry astounds

To everyone she encounters She is a healer and a friend She is a true shapeshifter No one can know her in the end

-ann christine tabaka

first date always an adventure blind date I can see you're a tad cold. cold feet? shivers I've got shivers in the spine it's a fine thing that I've got thick skin now where to begin our night?

empty stomach? (that calls for analysis) heart on your sleeve? (or in the vicinity) can I pick your brain? (a little prodding is sufficient)

but first there's the meat slab silver platter take the knife carve carefully after that I'll find out all about you I always do on first dates it just takes precision

—david f. shultz

winters in detroit

The poor man whistles his fervent tune In the powdered streets where dreams slumber Ladies of the evening come out to play Their knees crimsoned and skin blue

In the neglected streets where afflictions slumber Blackened children roam and play Starving junkies crimsoned and blue The blind man wails his melancholy tune

—razzae degeest



Eleventh Hour

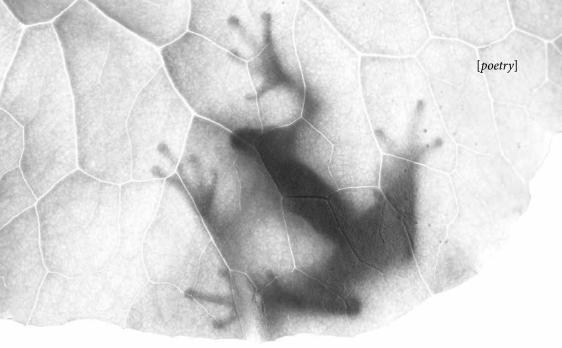
Wrapped in darkness we can no longer deceive ourselves. Our smiling masks float away. We snake here, there from one side to another. How many times do we rip off blankets only to claw more on?

Listening to zzzzzz of traffic, mumble of freight trains, fog horns. Listening to wheezing, feeling muscles throb. How can we find comfort?

Say same word over and over again again falling falling to sleep. I will stop measuring what was lost. I will become brave.

Let slumber come covering me. Let my mouth droop, fingers tingle. Wishing something cool...soft...sweet. Now I will curl like a fetus gathering into myself hoping to awake new born.

—joan mcnerney



green

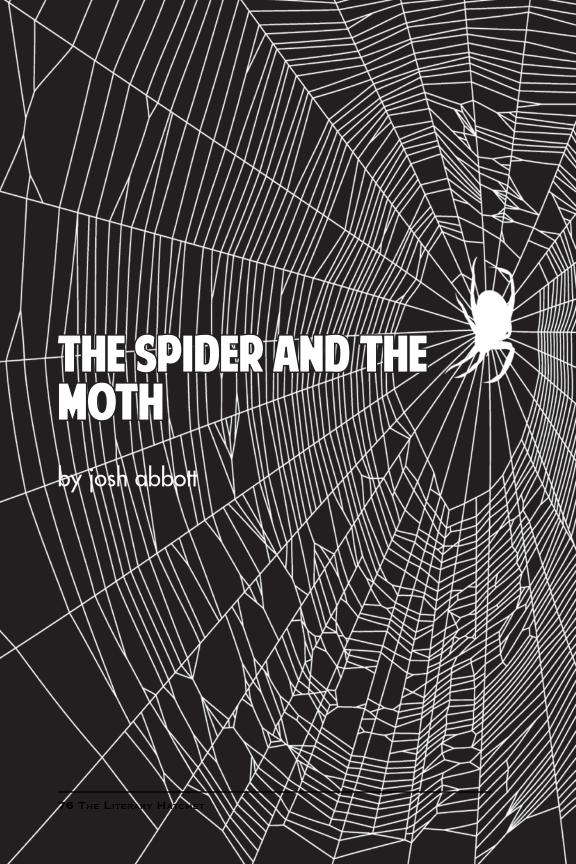
He wakes up, face in humus, blind with green, decaying and aware, aware of rot, alive with rot, to leaves their sheen, he pries his eyes and rests, it's all he's got,

another night, another blink, he stirs and pauses, strives and stalls, in time he makes it to a papered knee, confers with summer's light outside the dripping lime,

he staggers, treelike, over weeks and months to sojourn with the whispering evergreens, it takes him years to make it near the paths where tourists speak of long lost Halloweens

and smile and sigh and pass his effort by, he croaks, the woodland creaks, the rivers cry.

-marshall pipkin



"I can free you," the spider said. Its voice resembled the breeze, light and wispy. Martin tried not to listen, but its voice grew louder by the day, and its smile, once imperceptible, grew wider and warmer, and inviting. Martin looked away and huddled in the corner, a sweat stained blanket draped across his knees. Fleas scattered as he pulled it closer to his chest. He scooped one up in his palm and squished it between him fingernails, delighting at the soft little snapping sound.

"What do you think of the tall one?" the spider said.

"The... tall one." Martin's voice was raspy and exhausted. Barely recognizable as his own.

"You know. The tall blonde one with the easy smile. You like him, don't you?" "He's kinder than the others," Martin said. "Brings me food sometimes."

"He gave you chocolate last week," said the moth. It hung from a thread of web, wings twisted awkwardly, spinning slowly in the breeze from the vent. "He's a good man, trapped in a culture of evil. Not really like the others. No reason to hate him."

"If he was good, he'd let you go," the spider said. It smiled warmly, bearing its fangs the way it always did. "I can let you go. If you want me to."

"No," Martin said. He shivered at the thought. The door opened on the floor above him. The floorboards creaked overhead, through the living room, to the kitchen. Maybe they would bring him food. He'd like whoever brought him food.

"Don't fall into that," the spider said. "They stole you away, remember? And why did they do it? For money?"

"Shut up," he said. Too loudly.

"Hey, what's going on down there?" One of them kicked the floor above him head. *Stomp, stomp, stomp.* He clamped his ears and closed his eyes.

"Don't judge them too harshly," said the moth. "The spider caught me in its web, as is its nature. Those men caught you in their web, as is their nature."

"With this, I agree," the spider said. "But is it your nature to be caught? To be prey?"

"I was weak and privileged," Martin said. "Maybe I did deserve it."

With a loud creak, the door swung open, slamming against the back wall. The short man tromped down the stairs, hair freshly trimmed. He had a plate in one hand and Debby in the other. Debby was a clear plastic baton with glitter and water inside—a toy intended for children. Martin whimpered, brought the blanket up to his mouth and bit the fabric as hard as he could.

"Hey, little rich boy," the man said, tossing the plate at his feet with a clatter. A cold pile of meat looked up at him, liquid fat congealed around the base, gold and gelatinous. "I'm in a good mood today. Last night's leftovers. I'd eat it myself but I'll be wining and dining tonight, bitch." He pointed Debby at Martin's face, poked him in the nose. It reeked of blood and excrement. "Enjoy it."

He left Martin in a daze, the boy's mind running circles around the thought of Debby. His legs felt cold and he struggled to focus on the food.

"You should eat," the spider said. "Get your strength back."

"And be grateful," the moth said. "He didn't have to feed you, or spare you the baton. Imagine the restraint that must have taken, knowing his nature."

"So it would be wrong to judge them," Martin said with a nod. He pinched a bit of meat with his thumb and forefinger, placed it slowly in his mouth. It was rich and savory. "They treat me well enough. They've given me a place to sleep. Food to eat."

He looked at the spider, expecting it to argue, but it only looked blankly at him. That made Martin feel guilty.

After that first cautious bite, he shoveled the food ravenously into his mouth. Though it was cold and a little dry, it reminded him of fresh cooked meals from his other life. He recalled yellow sunshine, pointy blades of green grass, the earthy smell of moist soil, and the feel of the water from his own swimming pool.

The other Martin wouldn't have sympathized with the kidnappers. The other Martin was stronger, more resilient. But the other Martin hadn't suffered in the same way. He hadn't felt such tangible despair; he hadn't thought about dying or killing, day after day, hour after hour. The other Martin had pride. He had education, family, matching clothes, and daily showers.

The other Martin was dead.

"There comes a time when the struggle isn't worth it," the moth said. "When the spider first caught me, I tried to loose myself, but the harder I tried, the more tangled I became."

"Yes," Martin said with a nod. "I have a new life now." The floorboards creaked and squealed above his head while he ate the last bit of food and sucked the drippings off his finger. In the absence of kindness, it tasted like love.

The spider smiled at him, showing off its big, shiny fangs. "It would be better to let me free you than to forget who you are. Don't you think?"

Martin shrugged, wrapped the blanket around his shoulders and closed his eyes. Sleep offered the best respite. The worse his life became, the sweeter his dreams.

Before he could drift off, the door opened again. It was the tall blonde one. The one Martin liked. He looked at Martin, then said, "You're gonna be moving on. Putting you on a truck, and they'll take you to your next stop."

"Oh." Martin looked to the spider and the moth, but they didn't like to speak around other people.

"You want to survive, you need to keep your head down and your mouth shut." He grabbed Martin by the wrist and pulled him to his feet. The blonde man was different than usual, smelling of spicy cologne and wearing a silk indigo shirt. Martin waited for him to smile, offer some sort of reassurance. What had Martin done to be sent away?

The blonde man looked toward the spider, seeing the web through the corner of his eye. "Big fucking spider," he said. He kicked it down and stomped on it,

swiveling his foot to make sure he finished the job. When he pulled away, the spider twitched a bit, curling its mangled legs. Then it was motionless.

Martin was in a daze as he stumbled up the stairs, barely remembering how to walk. He cocked his head back to get a last glimpse of the spider, but the blonde man pulled him too fast, yanking his arm when he wouldn't keep up. The old Martin could have resisted. The blonde man wasn't much bigger than him, but every ounce of muscle had atrophied. When they went through the door, the lights and colors overwhelmed him.

"Shit," the blonde man said, tossing him to the floor. He glared out the window where a brown truck loudly idled out front. "Stay right there."

He marched from the house, yelling profanities at the top of his lungs. Martin wondered what he'd done wrong; wondered why he'd send him away on an ugly brown truck. And the spider. He thought of the way the blonde man had crushed the spider with the front of his boot, mashing it into the cement floor to make sure it died, died, DIED.

Martin stood up slowly, his arms trembling as he watched the blonde one shout and gesture to the driver outside. His heart raced as he drifted across the carpet, almost floating, not really feeling his feet as they shuffled step by timid step. He set his eyes on an old white telephone that had turned ugly and yellow from age. It sat on the kitchen counter, in plain sight, angled toward his fingertips.

Was it a trick—or a test?

By looking at the phone, he wondered if he betrayed the men who had protected and fed him since his transition from the old prideful Martin. These men had educated him about his place in the world and had fought hard to pull themselves out of their own squalor. The house, after all, was filled with garbage and smelled of stale smoke. *Anyone* would do what they did to escape such a place.

And yet, he could hear the spider whisper to him gently, "I can't free you now, but you can still free yourself. Pick up the phone."

His fingers trembled and hot tears rolled down his cheeks as he lifted the telephone and listened to the drone of the dial tone. How long had it been? He pressed the big plastic buttons one at a time. Nine—One—One.

"Hello? This is Martin Gregory. I've been kidnapped." He glanced out the window, saw the blonde man turning around while the truck pulled out of the driveway. He threw the phone down and backed away.

"He's going back to get the damn camper cover," the blonde man said. His face was red and his brow gleaming with sweat. "Go back downstairs and wait. It's going to be another ten minutes."

"Okay," Martin said with a nod. He felt his knees wobble and his arms and hands tremble. And his eyes. He didn't know where to put them. He couldn't look at the blonde man. Couldn't look at the telephone. So he looked at his feet, watched his toes grip the carpet.

"What are you standing there for? Get back downstairs."

"Yes," he said, lowering his head and turning around.

He heard the voice of the moth, beckoning to him from deep down in the basement. "That was a foolish thing you did, struggling like that, pulling against the web. And think about the hurt you may have caused, if you hadn't hung up in time."

He craned his neck around and felt his heart thudding against his sternum. The blonde man was looking around, puzzled at first, flashing panic when he noticed the phone lying limply on the counter. Martin hadn't hung it up.

When the blonde man looked in Martin's direction, he saw hurt in his eyes. His mouth hung open, and his eyebrows arched. Martin inched away, feeling tears on his face.

"Who did you call?" the blonde man said.

"I'm sorry," Martin whispered.

The blonde man shook his head. "Who the fuck did you call?" He picked up the phone and slammed it on the hook.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to." He slapped Martin wildly across the cheek, the sound ringing in his ears before the pain rushed through his teeth and up his jaw. It was a kinder punishment than he deserved.

"I'm not going to ask again," he said, his face inches from Martin's. "Who did you call?"

Martin sobbed, saliva oozing from his mouth, snot rolling down his chin. "I called the police."

The blonde man put his hands on his head, tugged at his hair. "You..."

"I'm so, so sorry. Please, just kill me." So much guilt. So much pain. "I deserve to die. Kill me. Kill me." His body slid against the wall, collapsing into the fetal position. Why had he listened to that spider? That stupid dead spider.

In the corner of his consciousness he heard the blonde shuffling through drawers, yelling and cursing. When he looked up, the man had a gun in his hand. Martin sat up, eyes burning, looking at the gun like it was some kind of salvation. He could see light emanate from the barrel, beckoning to him.

"Please, just do it," he said. The blonde man looked at him, pointed it toward him, and pointed it back at himself with trembling hands. The sirens came soon after, and he ducked down behind the couch.

The blonde man fired first; a loud pop that shattered the window. Blue and red lights danced around the room, reflecting off pieces of plastic garbage, making the blonde man flash in different colors. Gunshots rang throughout the room until Martin couldn't hear. He held his head in his hands, watching the blonde man, hoping he would fight off the cops forever. Bullets flew in random directions, popping through garbage bags, embedding themselves in the furniture and the walls.

The door burst open, and Martin gasped, unable to move as a monster in black stepped through the door. The blonde man stood, and the monster shot. Martin wanted to jump up and take the bullet, wishing to save the man who had protected him. But he couldn't move.

The blonde man fell backwards, dead before he hit the ground, gone without a last word, without a loved one to mourn him, without a goodbye kiss.

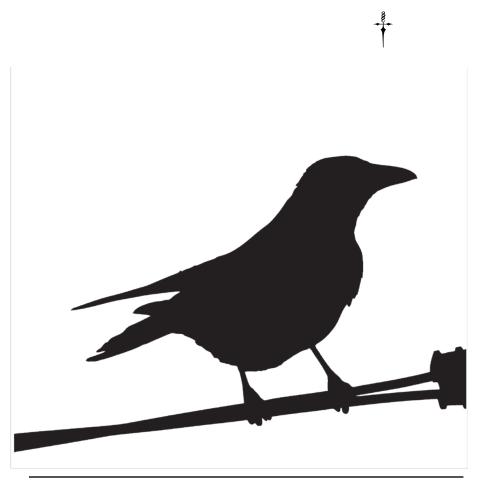
On his hands and knees Martin crawled to his side, scooped him up in his arms, didn't care about the blood, didn't care about the monsters watching and circling around like vultures. "I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry."

"It's okay, it's over now," said one of the monsters, its voice as sweet as honey.

Martin clung to the blonde man, his fingers wrapped around the soft silk of his shirt. For a sweet moment, it felt like true love.

"Mr. Gregory? Mr. Gregory? Martin?" A heavy hand grabbed his shoulder and he brushed it off.

He recalled yellow sunshine, pointy blades of green grass, the earthy smell of moist soil, and the feel of the water from his own swimming pool—things that didn't belong to him. "Martin's dead," he said. "Martin was a caterpillar who got lost in his cocoon. I'm the moth that emerged, and I have broken wings."



EREBUS

Wild-eyed ravens claw at every raw place

as moonlight licks on thick brambles

caught in the high winds of a nightmare.

Should I wake in time, I will pluck the thorns

from my rattling skull, let Hell itself swallow them whole.

-darrell lindsey

LOST CASES

Drawing, drawing hands on faces Fingernails for eye hole spaces Sawing, sawing fingers and thumbs Knives on noses; bloody places

Yawning, yawning palms are yawning Upturned teeth for your good graces Dawning, dawning realizations What to do with these lost cases?

—hannah marier

stilled —skeltonic verse Lungs flare—breath's spare. Fixed eyes stare where Rats wage warfare. Insect hordes pair Side-by-side. They're Poised to draw their Starved maws wide. Tear Mortal share, bear Frenzied fanfare. Light's unbidden. Scuttling's hidden. Maggots' nascent Hunger's blatant. Swarming violence, Quelled defiance. Flesh subsidence, Corpse compliance. Beasts' alliance Forges silence. -mindy watson

You Will Remember Vienna

You will remember Vienna when I'm knee deep in daisies. when I'm lost in the meadow, when I'm swallowed by toads.

That moment on the bridge, surrounded by artists, besieged by handbag sellers and cheap jewellery.

Do you remember the cursing policeman in the shop and the sharp laugh of his comrade?

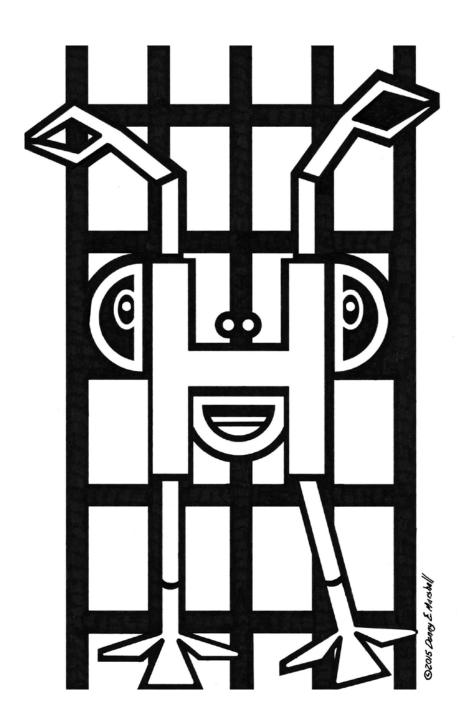
I don't.

I'm lost in daisies, folded into petals. with veins full of leaves and chlorophyll foam,

bending in the breeze, waiting in the meadow, remembering Vienna, hoping to be picked.

-mark farley





THE VULTURE

When I was a child, the vulture soared above my head, waiting for its time, knowing that I was the kind that it could hook its claws into

The welts on my back ached, like a million bee stings.
The belt hissed as it ripped through the air, slapping against my skin, like a venomous snake.

My father's iron fist slammed into my face, with the force of a freight train.

My mother ignored my suffering.

The world turned a blind eye to my cries.

The vulture made its circles overhead.

Now I come out in the blackness of night, Like a cockroach in a seedy hotel room. Some lonely soul's worst nightmare. I've hurt so many, stomping out their light, with the thoughtlessness that one turns off a switch.



I am a man running through an open field, with a hungry vulture circling up above, bringing me into its darkness.

Emotions rise up inside me, like steam in a pressure cooker, the vulture always circling, taunting, mocking me with its cries. The only way I can ever earn a reprieve from the vulture, is to inflict my pain on the souls of others.

-shelley fleming

WATCHING THE RIVER FLOW

Two old friends sat on a park bench overlooking the Chattahoochee River in downtown Sugarville watching the muddy water flow downstream like it had for thousands of years before they were born.

"Did you hear the news?" Leon, a retired scientist, asked.

"What news?" Noel, a retired minister, answered.

"The probe! It finally reached the edge of the universe. They've already analyzed the data."

"So?"

"So?! They finished mapping the entire universe, that's all. And guess what? They found absolutely no evidence of God whatsoever. Zero, zilch, nada."

"That doesn't change anything."

"What do you mean—it changes everything. Without God as a crutch, maybe mankind will finally accept responsibility for his own existence, stop waiting for an afterlife that will never come, and try to make life right here on earth worth living."

"My life is already worth living, thank you very much. Anyway, we've been over this before. God is a supernatural entity. He's above reality, a meta-reality, if you will. Of course they didn't find any evidence of Him. They never will. So your socalled 'news' isn't going to change my beliefs one iota. But it might change yours."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, Leon, you were an astrophysicist for what, thirty-forty years?" "Uh-huh."

"And you spent a lot of time seeking physical evidence that humanity wasn't alone in the universe. First it was aliens, and then it was God."

"That wasn't my primary responsibility—"

"Yeah, but it was more than just a hobby. And you never found anything, did you?"

"Well, no."

by jeff haas

Noel faced Leon. "Then maybe you were looking in the wrong place. Instead of searching for meaning in outer space, maybe you should have been looking at *inner space* all along. During this century science has proved that there are no intelligent life forms other than human beings, that man is physically alone in the universe. Do you really want to cut yourself off from God as well?"

Leon faced Noel. "Facts are facts. There's no such thing as a meta-reality. You might as well claim that there's a bearded man in the sky. If there is a God, then He provided us with our minds for critical thinking and science as a tool for discovering Him. But since we didn't discover Him, it only follows that science was man-made and that God never existed."

Noel stood up. "Don't give me that bearded man in the sky crap! Your scientific beliefs require as much faith as my religious beliefs. The problem with you atheists is that you reject God but you don't have anything to replace Him with—so you don't believe in anything. You're just a goddamned nihilist!"

Leon stood up. "I'm not a nihilist! The problem with you believers is that you adamantly refuse to change your beliefs in the face of new evidence, evidence that's right in front of your nose."

"Go to hell!"

"There is no hell!"

They started choking each other, and before they realized what was happening they stumbled down the embankment and fell into the river. Leon, who knew how to swim, hit his head on a rock and was knocked unconscious. Noel, who didn't know how to swim, simply disappeared beneath the water. They both drowned within seconds and were swept away by the current.

The muddy water continued to flow downstream as if they had never been there, like it would for thousands of years after they were gone.



the runaway moon

An ancient soul searches the four wind, just as the one who has lived so long looks at some braided sunlit rigging, falling on the shoulders of seasoned timber admiringly.

Just as the wooden block answers to the sculptor's chisel. The chips fall, putting new life into an old place.

Use your eyes as narrator of this story, your taste, for a protagonist and realize the chemistry of water and it's Creator, the deep, black waters reflecting the night.

Deep water

the moon pulls this way and pushes that way the same waves from the start. The moon is a rare Blue, sailing on, toward the southwestern ocean. Jonah is the name, carved on the prow of this runaway moon, quickly disappearing into the mist of a far horizon.

—dirk james

[poetry]



trick shot in the cosmos casino

Corner pocket of a side universe, the 8-ball falling before the rack's broken, before the first cue stick's chalked by some being with a strange and fading face.

So much for running the table of destiny like a natural born hustler with his tongue out.



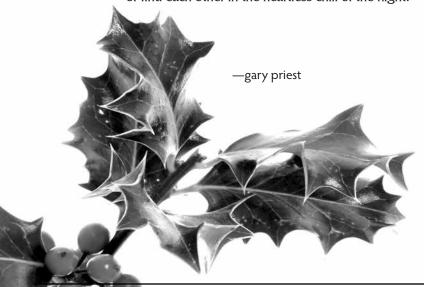
—darrell lindsey

A LONG AGO CHRISTMAS

You left on a long ago Christmas Eve and now all these festivities bleed into tinsel, torment and serrated memories. Remember the novelty jumpers we mocked? How you came to me with your heart unlocked? When we spent the day on a sickie from work making love listening to 'Fairytale of New York'.

You left all your presents under the tree and now all these mementos are haunting me, badly wrapped sentiments that you didn't receive. Yet another biography of Sylvia Plath. A scarf and a hat that really didn't match. Parallel Lines by Blondie, The Slider by T. Rex. A handwritten poem scrawled with sadness and sex.

You left on a long ago Christmas Eve and now all these celebrations mean to me are the mistakes I made and the signs I didn't see. How we both avoided standing under the mistletoe and didn't lose ourselves in the soft drifting snow. How we never bothered to fix the fairy lights or find each other in the heartless chill of the night.



Role Models

One of my grandfathers became the oldest man in town outliving all his friends, but almost every day we called or took his call.

My other grandfather, retired and moved to Florida, took college courses on both coasts. He drove everywhere and loved to wink at nurses.

I think I'd love to find out how to turn out busy and content. You think the secret is to love, to love to learn, or learn to wink?

-james b. nicola

WHITEWASHED

by niko spanos

I unfolded the paper covered with store names and addresses, everything lined out except the street of the minimart I'd just left. It didn't have a name. Giant beer cases and cigarette cartons were stacked against its scuffed walls. Someone had taped a plastic Christmas wreath to its door. I crumpled the paper and threw it against the windshield.

My phone rattled in the cup holder. Tammy, my ex-girl's name, flashed on the screen. Two weeks ago, when I told her I was looking for a legitimate job, she'd responded with a smirk.

I let her ring through but she called again. The phone's light glowed against the aluminum barrel of a bat wedged between the passenger door and seat. On the floor next to its handle was a crusty softball mitt and pair of cleats. The phone kept ringing. I answered.

"I need my car before work tomorrow," Tammy said. Before I could respond, she added, "Hold on a second."

"Hey, Dad." It was Becca, our daughter. She sounded just like Tammy.

"Hi, Becca. How is everything? Enjoying winter break?" I still talked to her a few notes higher than I did with everyone else, like I used to before I went away.

"Mom said I can't stay with you this weekend."

The air conditioner was blowing heat. Muggy air and mosquitos floated through the duck-taped rear window. It had been a warm December, even for Central Florida. I poked buttons on the dashboard, unaware of their corresponding actions. The windshield wipers scraped against glass; the overhead lights clicked on.

"I'm working this weekend," I said. I wasn't. I didn't tell her I was sleeping on a friend's couch, which I'd been doing since I got out.

I kept pressing buttons and didn't hear Becca's response. The left turn signal blinked, the steering wheel shifted forward. Outside, a light flicked on and shadows stretched across the parking lot, empty except for Tammy's car and a pair of gas pumps. Pine trees leaned over the one lane road that passed by the station.

Becca said goodnight and Tammy got back on the phone. A breeze ran through the line.

"A job," she said. I could hear the smirk in her voice. She had developed a cynical yet accurate intuition from years of dating drug addicts and compulsive liars. I didn't talk so she continued. "I wasn't going to mention it, but you say you got a job. The girls on Becca's team are all taking lessons this winter. The coach said it's optional, but you know how it is." A long exhale, and then, "Maybe we could split the cost, give Becca a week or two for a Christmas present."

Tammy's father had been in the hospital for over a month. Her last boyfriend, the one who'd bought Becca all the softball equipment, ran off a couple months back. An administrative assistant—a secretary—couldn't pay for her dying father, herself, and her daughter. I knew that. But I couldn't even cover my own gas and bus fare. I was borrowing money from some church program, the same place where I was renting interview clothes.

"Hello?" Tammy said.

I loosened the tie that wasn't mine and unbuttoned the shirt that wasn't mine. Chest hairs sprouted from under my wife beater. Tattoos that I used to think were cool revealed themselves when the collar spread apart. As teenagers we had believed that we could sell our physical labor, make it through high school, get jobs in construction, and support our families. We soon enough realized the jobs our fathers used to work couldn't even fund decent drinking habits anymore.

"Hold up," I said. I didn't think my next words. "A week's worth." I said. "I'll cover half." I didn't ask how much the lessons would cost. Fifty dollars or fifty thousand dollars—I didn't have the money.

The hazard lights flashed, the left turn signal blinked. I kept pressing buttons.

A few minutes earlier, I had been in the minimart, standing across the counter from a clerk skimming through my job application. He had tried to read silently but whispered my excuses back to me.

When he reached the criminal history section his jaw tightened. The paper creased between his fingers and thumbs. I waited for his promise to call if interested, or an explanation of store policy, rushed and suddenly polite, but this

clerk didn't do any of that. This clerk glanced at the other guy in the minimart, a skinny man wearing neon running clothes who was looking in the drink coolers.

The clerk looked back at me, at my oversized outfit and my half-assed smile. He raised his eyebrows and tucked in his chin and laughed.

I just stood there, smoothing my temporary khakis. No one had reacted this way before.

The clerk said, "Half Polk County's looking for work, and you think someone's going to hire you?" He shook his head to composure and said, "So what'd you do?"

Maybe there was a gun under the counter, or maybe the runner's presence comforted him, I don't know, but he started laughing again, his face going blotchy red like when pale people get cold. I didn't say anything. I walked out the store.

The runner left the minimart as Tammy hung up. He drained an oversized can as bright as his shirt and tossed it in the trashcan. He shook out his legs, jogged to the road, and shrunk into night. I tried not to imagine him running home to a family.

I'd missed three quarters of Becca's life and she was almost a teenager. I figured I didn't have long before she rejected my invitations to walk in the park and play catch. A Christmas present wouldn't make up for lost time, but if she remembered the lessons, she might remember me.

I twisted and flicked buttons painted blue and red and with wavy lines, but hot air kept blasting. Sweat trickled down my forehead, my back, and my crotch. The kind of energy that makes you want to yell for no reason pulsed through my body.

Becca suggested that I listen to music when I felt like this. I turned on the radio. A pop version of "Drummer Boy" faded out and the host came on. They were giving away presents for the holidays. People were calling in, telling their versions of my life, complaining, whining, begging. I shut them off.

I reached for the softball bat another man bought my daughter. "Hammer" was splashed in red across the silver barrel. My fingers sunk into the spongy leather grip. My world contracted, until it was only me in Tammy's car and the clerk inside the minimart. I wouldn't rely on being the ninth caller after "Drummer Boy." I would get to work.

The clerk was scrolling through his phone when I entered the store. He didn't look up when the bells jingled, but he did when I tapped the bat on the counter, a metallic click, click, click.

He squinted. Shook his head.

"You wanted a job," he said.

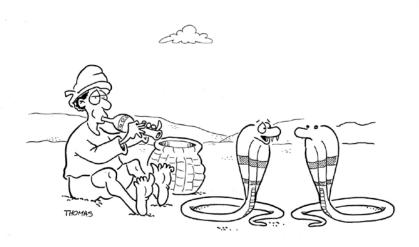
I raised my left leg and dropped it for momentum, like I'd taught Becca at the park, my entire body and all my frustration swinging towards the clerk's face. He hit the ground before I finished following through. His mouth gurgled blood. His limbs twitched. I walked out carrying the cash drawer.

Back in the car, I reached for the paper I'd thrown against the windshield. I

had a few more stores to hit. First though, I would drop off the money at Tammy's. It would be enough to pay for a week's worth of lessons. The second store would buy another week, and the third, a new bat, glove, and cleats.

I wouldn't watch the lessons and they wouldn't let Becca bring in the bat during visits, but she would wear the mitt and cleats, clacking her way between families to our reserved table. This was back when Tammy drove her out to see me every few months, before they moved me upstate and then out of state, when I'd only begun to watch with dread and relief as my life was explained away, as I melted into the system, fading, whitewashed.





"Honey, he's playing our song."

—bill thomas

hungerford Bridge

We always met in the middle of Hungerford Bridge. A lover's niche made especially for us. Where the diesel smoke lingers, and the Thames barely breathes. We declared our love would always be as dirty, dangerous and near-derelict as London's most unsung span. Where beggars and bureaucrats are forced into cosy cohabitation with thundering freight and the acrid nosegay of the city's mouldering veins.



It injected our quaint suburban hearts deep into the artistic abandon of the South Bank. We fell out over Goddard versus Hitchcock at the NFT, and made up in the dark compromise of Apocalypse Now. We nursed our Sunday hangovers with Guinness and smooth jazz in the Festival Hall foyer, before finally trudging back over Hungerford thinking ourselves the ultimate in bohemian freaks because we stayed up all night.

These days, long since our love was junked. I walk the Golden Jubilee. A turgid artefact, castrated of threat. With the architectural panache of a fridge. and wonder how the murky charm of young love and the eternal grime soaked heart of Hungerford were lost in this cruel metropolitan dinge.

-gary priest





HOW MANY FLIES?

How many flies will fit in a baby's eye? How many flies will fit in a baby's nose? How many flies will answer a baby's cry? How many flies will tickle a baby's toes?

How many flies will sip at a baby's pee? How many flies will feast at a baby's bum? How many friends and teachers have to see before they make a social worker come?

How many flies at a mama's weeping breast? How many flies capsized in a baby's burp? How many babies under house arrest, swaddled in insects, snuffling, red with croup?

Flies, flies are, they will be, always was. Loudly in the manger did they buzz.

-marshall pipkin



on the wrong side of moon forgetting tides of ocean lunar wax wane

only madness was cultivated there underground tubular roots corpulent veins

flowers called despair gave off a single fruit...

I ate it my laughter becoming harsh my eyes grew oblique.

-joan mcnerney

Andy's Chest

by john rodzvilla

When my parents arrive, I am in the middle of dragging one of the wooden chairs I bought last week at a multi-family yard sale a block over into the living room. I bought the chairs specifically knowing they were coming up. I wanted to have a place where the three of us could sit and talk. After hugs and handshakes, my mother asks where the facilities are, adding that it was a long trip from Delaware and my father, of course, didn't want to stop after they got past the City.

I point her down the hall and explain how she will need to hitch up the door so the lock can catch. When I look back at my father, he is already stuffing his pipe, a turquoise bowl on a caramel-colored stem that he's had for as long as I can remember. He's adding some of the special blend from Leavitt and Peirce. I can tell by the smell: a mix of spice, lavender, and soap. I usually mail it to him, but I've been too busy to get to Harvard Square for the last six months.

"Where did you get the tobacco? Is that still the last batch I sent? I thought you only liked it fresh from the shop."

"I do like it fresh, but to be honest I finally gave up smoking for your mother. I only have some on special occasions, and today is one of those occasions."

"It is. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Yes, you are physically able to, aren't you?"

"Honestly," my mother interjects, taking her seat by my father.

"I'm sorry. Would you like something to drink?"

I would like some . . . well, whatever you have."

"And for you, Mother?"

"Just some water. Tap is fine."

I grab two bottles of an IPA from the fridge and, thinking better of it, turn back and pour them into the pilsner glasses drying on the rack on the counter. When I come back in, my father has his right hand on my mother's thigh. He smiles a slightly embarrassed smile and my mother averts her eyes to the floor. I let the moment pass and hand my father his beer. After a few seconds, my mother asks for some ice for her water.

"So after the long ride up here you must be famished, do you want to go out

somewhere around here? Or we can go to Davis or Porter Square, they have some nice restaurants over there," I say as I return into the room with my mother's glass now full of ice water.

My father starts his charring light while my mother answers, "Oh, I was hoping that your father and I could, well, if we could, eat here tonight. Everyone enjoys a nice home-cooked meal once in a while."

"Um, sure, I guess," I reply. "Except I don't really have anything to eat. With my schedule I haven't had time to go grocery shopping on a regular basis."

"The young bachelor's pad. Hmm, remember it well, only I always had a nice dry bar with some modestly-priced scotch and an ashtray. Do you happen to at least have one in the kitchen?"

As I head to the kitchen to find something to use as an ashtray, my mother calls out, "We figured as much and brought some things. Think of it as our little surprise. A housewarming gift of sorts." I return with an old aluminum ashtray that someone left out on my deck. As I hand it to my father, I notice a look pass between them. A few minutes pass and my father excuses himself to go down to their car that is parked across the street. While I'm asking if he needs help, I notice my mother slink off to the kitchen. I hear water start filling up a pot and refrigerator door opening. I imagine my mother finding the few wrinkled red potatoes, a bag of mushy carrots, and condiment packets that reside inside. I'm left standing alone in my living room with my beer in my hand, not sure if I should help her or my dad.

"Do you need any help, Mom?" I call into the kitchen, but make no movement to go in and help. I just sit down and end up turning on the end of the Sox pregame show. During the National Anthem, my father comes back with three bags of groceries. I grab one of the bags and show him into the kitchen where my mother is putting some of the puny potatoes into the eight-quart stockpot that they sent me for my birthday.

My father and I sit back down to watch the game and drink our beers. Just as the Red Sox score against the Yankees at the bottom of the first, my mother lassoes me to the chair. She quickly wraps the rope around me, using a half hitch on my biceps. I struggle a bit against the ropes and knock over my beer. My father pulls out one of those bungee cords with metal hooks from my mother's purse. He attaches one hook to the chair legs and then binds my legs. They gag me with an orange super-ball and some duct tape.

After the ambush, my mother is back in the kitchen sorting through my pots and pans. I hear continual increasing pitches of pots as they fill with water, and then nothing.

My father goes into the kitchen and comes back with the ceramic knife sharpener and a large butcher knife.

"You can't even keep your knives sharp, can you? It's a good thing your mother and I got here when we did."

My father sits in front of me sharpening an array of kitchen knives while watching the game. Down one side and then the other in a quick pull from base to tip. Absent-minded. Rote.

"Did you see that? Those bums. No wonder the Yankees beat them in the playoffs last year. You know they have electric sharpeners now? Takes about twenty seconds to sharpen a kitchen knife. Your sister got me one for Christmas. It's amazing." He tests the last blade on the hairs on the back of his wrist.

"That'll do."

My mother comes back and sits beside my father. She has four or five Vidalia onions, a celery stalk, a red cabbage, and a big bowl I've never seen before. She takes a small paring knife from the layout in front of my father and start peeling the vegetables.

My father finishes his beer and goes into the kitchen for another. It's the top of the second inning and the Yankees have the bases loaded.

From my mother's purse, my father pulls out a hacksaw and puts it on the chair.

"Dear," my mother says, addressing my Father, "we forgot the plastic sheet in the car. We don't want to make too big of a mess, you know how blood stains wood."

My father leaves, grumbling something about beer stains. He returns with a brown paper bag overflowing with plastic. From it he pulls 3 folded shower curtains and a sponge. He unfurls the curtains on the floor in front of me, first making sure to wipe up the spilled beer. My mother tips the chair back so that my father can grab the upraised legs and carry me to the center.

I hear the water boiling over and hissing on the range in the kitchen. My mother gathers her vegetables and disappears.

"We're going to have a real home-cooked dinner tonight. Just like we used to have before you kids left," my father says, leaning back in his chair and absent-mindedly puffing on his barely lit pipe.

I'm panicking and my Dad covers most of the pipe bowl with his thumb and takes a few deep puffs.

Once his pipe is fully lit, he picks up the hacksaw from under one of the bags and lines it up with my knee. He starts to say something, but I can't focus on what he's saying as the teeth cut into my leg.

I come to with a throbbing pain; it's the bottom of the sixth. The Sox are losing 5-2. My legs are in front of me. I see both of my calves and one of my feet. I smell meat cooking. There are now more utensils around me: scalpels and weird serrated tools that I've never seen before. I also see various casserole dishes that my parents gave me when I left home, and the food processor they gave me as a Christmas gift, a grater, some cloves of garlic, and ceramic salt and pepper shakers in the shape of 2 people kissing.

The ropes have been redone. My arms are bound behind me and I'm wearing a pair of handcuffs, I think. There are tourniquets on my legs, stumps now. They itch like crazy. My mother comes on and sees me squirming and shoots my father a look.

"Hey son, how ya doing? Your mother's making a great stew. She's a bit mad, because I forgot the sausage casings, but we'll just have patties instead, eh?"

He picks up a small hacksaw and disappears behind me. I feel it bite through the soft fleshy part right above my elbow. The Sox are rallying for a comeback, but this late in the game and down by three runs, it's highly unlikely. But if anyone can do it, this is the team.

I wake up to the smell of something savory and the sizzle of something cooking in a pan. She smiles when she sees me open my eyes; she's petting my face, wiping the tears away. I've been crying in my sleep and she's there to comfort me like she used to when I had nightmares. She smiles at me as I loll my head around. I'm still somehow tied to the chair but the chair's tipped over and I'm on my back. My mother sits cross-legged at my head. She pushes the stray hair from my eyes. I feel nothing.

"I hope you don't mind, but we had to break your neck to stop you from squirming. Luckily, your father knows his stuff. There's a reason he graduated first in his class from medical school."

I begin to cry again, I think.

"It's going to be all right. Yes, it is. Nothing for my boy to worry over. Nothing at all."

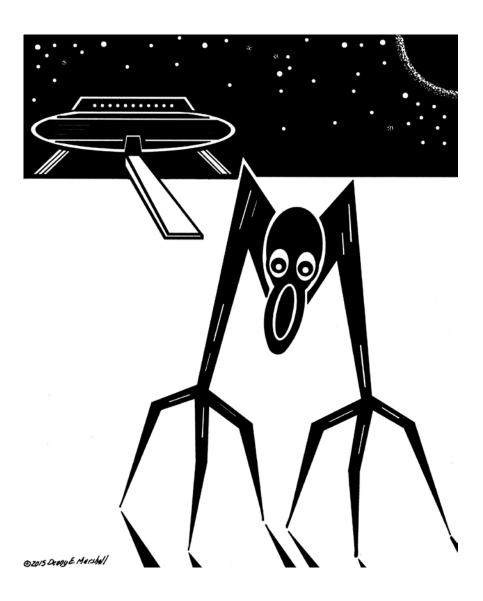
The Sox are no longer on TV. Instead it's time for the five-day forecast. It's supposed to be sunny tomorrow morning, but there's an 80% chance of rain in the early evening. Hope my parents can get an early start to beat the rain.

"Well, it looks like we'll have to get an early start tomorrow if we want to beat the rain, son. So I better just finish this up," my dad's voice says somewhere above me and then I see him. His silver scalpel glints above me for a second then I imagine feeling it slide down my chest over my sternum, but really there is an absence of any feeling. I wake briefly to the unmistakable smell of liver and onions and think back to my grandmother who used to cook it every Sunday to help with her anemia.

When I wake up in the morning, my parents are gone. The kitchen is spotless, the chairs are back around the table; everything is in its place, and there's a place for everything. I think that's how it goes. My mother must have swept and vacuumed the rest of the house while she was cleaning. The windows are open just enough for a cross-breeze of morning air to come in. I hear the phone ringing, but before I can get it, the machine goes on.

"Hi Honey, it's Mom. Hope you're okay. We're just outside the city, it looks like the rain was moving up the coast faster than they reported. Thank you for the lovely dinner last night. It was delicious... Much better than your sister's. Talk to you soon. Love you, bye." As soon as she hangs up, I hear the first drops hit the windowpane. Soon the rain is coming in through my windows but I'm still too sleepy to do anything about it.





SWEET TOOTH

I thought her pointy teeth looked sexy when she gleefully accepted my offer of dinner

afterwards when she invited me in for a drink I did not realize she would and I was

published in Grievous Angel

-john reinhart

what do i call it if not beauty?

What do I call it if not beauty? Though, you are not the play of colors in the sky with rising sun my one year old.

When I keep your soft, small right palm, yes it has to be the right palm for reading, with mine, and look at the three thicker, longer lines with their tributaries, narrower, shorter, many; when I take pride at the similarities, and am happy with the differences, then I can see only beauty.

When you O little one, climb my back to ride horse and gleefully shout *tica-tica-tica* in your own tongue, and bend a little time and again to look at me and smile when our eyes meet;
When I rock you gently to sleep, stroke your forehead softly, comb your soft, thin hair with my fingers, touching your scalp with all the affection, that I never knew was dammed in there somewhere, that my being can hold, dripping from my fingertips as blessing, as love, upon you all the time, I can see only beauty.

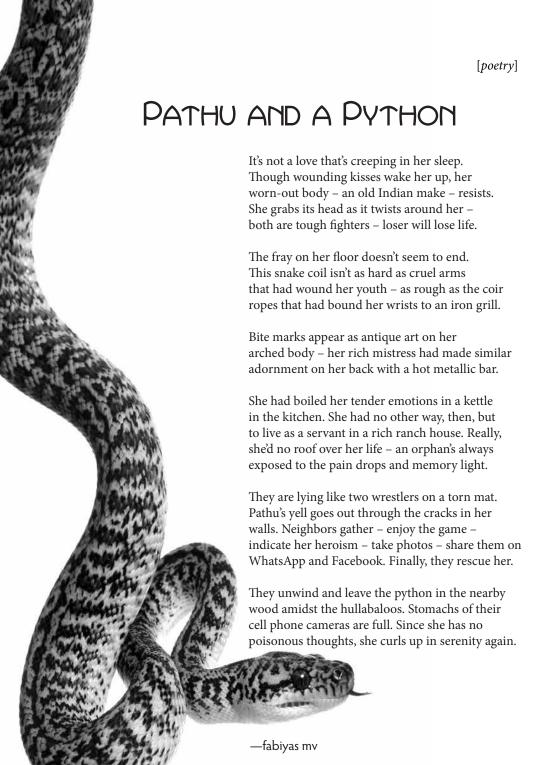
I'm not very sure whether I know what beauty is.

Let's say beauty is what it does to us, and call you beautiful, for you make me feel blessed, just by your presence, at least sometimes.

Angels, even God, cannot do better than that.

No, they can't make me feel blessed in their presence, even sometimes.

-rajnish mishra



call the locksmith

peer into the depths no computer can glean, no boat can sink, no auger unearth, and see with the clarity of blind vision the shimmering, simmering truth compacted by a thousand thousand years into one beautiful kernel, perfect, tired, but content

doors need not be locked if the knowledge for crossing their thresholds is lost –

outside, the world goes by in rapid, dreary form, then, momentarily

blank.

collusion against binarism confusing inner from outer

we generate imaginary doors purely for the pride of crossing under lintels the lock, lost, forgotten, discarded, still locked the key is gone; the lock holds tightly to the nothing in its grasp and the nothing, in time, becomes its everything, gripped obsessively

she stands in the doorway, lost in thought: future and past meld into infinite and infinitesimal – she opens her eyes and steps

knock, knock who's there? nobody

—john reinhart

published by Meat for Tea

children in the sky

There is a full moon, distant in this sky tonight,

Gray planets planted on an aging white, face.

Children, living and dead, love the moon with small hearts.

Those in heaven already take gold thread, drop the moon down for us all to see.

Those alive with us, look out their bedroom windows tonight, we smile, then prayers, then sleep.

-michael lee johnson

The Imprecations of a Tell-Tale Heart

"True! Nervous —very, very dreadfully nervous I have been and am! But 'why will you say that I am mad?" —Edgar A. Poe

He spends his time looking into the void, and always keeps things clean; the bloodless rugs on the floor show no sign that he's annoyed. His evil's motiveless, the reader shrugs; this obsession can't be explained by Freud.

The lamplight falls perfectly on the eye, which seems to see beyond its hellish veil. He's unreliable, you can't deny; yet there seems to be some truth to his tale: There's evil at the core of you and I.

What sound resides inside the brain apart from one's calculating and conscious mind? What noise, what throbbing sound, what anxious art infects the vision rendering one blind? The imprecations of a tell-tale heart.

-michael c. seeger

THE EMBRACE

I sleep in these mansions of death an eternal slumber, not hot or cold

the wind blows softly the lullaby of rattling bones

oh, I am not touched by death but embraced,

feel its silver thorns that pierce my skin flower petals on pale lips

the scent of flesh like dreams so sweet dark verse that sings of a shallow grave

—stephanie smith



by mike murphy

Elderly Mrs. McGrady didn't know that the sweet sound of Patrick Connolly's crib mobile would be the last piece of music she would ever hear.

She carefully walked into the nursery. The little one was sleeping soundly. She smiled, remembering her own kids' childhoods long ago. Feeling a slight chill, she buttoned her sweater and, in the dim glow of the Barney nightlight, went to get another blanket for her charge.

In the darkness, she tripped on something. She stumbled uncontrollably for several feet before crashing through the window and falling to her death.

In the nursery, a young child—not Patrick—giggled, and a few wooden blocks clicked together.

About an hour later, the baby's parents, Pete and Lisa, came home. They called the police immediately. It took Lisa a while to stop crying. As the officers left, Pete wheeled his son's crib into their room—out of the night chill. In all the excitement, Patrick didn't even coo.

"Poor Mrs. McGrady," Lisa said, dabbing at her moist eyes with a tissue. "What could have happened?"

"She must have tripped on something," her husband suggested.

"But what? We don't have any rugs in here. It's all hardwood."

"She was getting up there in years. Maybe she tripped over her own shoelaces?"

"I feel so bad," Lisa said after a heavy sigh.

Pete knelt beside his wife and touched her arm. "Honey," he told her gently, "it was a terrible accident. Accidents happen."

"What are we going to do?"

"I called her son, Harold. He'll let us know if we can do anything."

"It's like a bad dream."

"I'll have the window fixed tomorrow. Why don't we. . . Lisa?"

"What?" Pete pointed at the floor where the crib had been. A few wooden blocks lay all alone. "How did they get there?"

"We must not have put them away before we left."

"No, I'm sure I did," Lisa insisted. "You don't think those are what Mrs. McGrady tripped on, do you?"

"I hope not!"

Lisa screamed and pointed. Neither of them had noticed that the blocks read D-I-E.

They didn't sleep well.

"I threw those blocks in the trash," Lisa told her husband over coffee.

"Why?"

"I can't bear the thought of keeping them in the house after what happened."

"We don't know for certain that Mrs. McGrady tripped over them."

"But she could have! And how about what they said?"

"If Patrick had spelled out 'dog' or 'cat,' you'd be saying he was a genius," Pete protested. "He loves those blocks."

"I'll buy him a new set."

"My sister spent a pretty penny on them. They're not cheap plastic. They're wooden—probably made a long time ago."

"I'm sure she'll understand."

"Pete! Come here! Quickly!" Lisa called.

Pete ran to his son's room. Patrick was sitting on the floor, happily playing with blocks. "Say, they look just like the old ones."

"They are the old ones."

"Huh?"

"Did you fish them out of the trash?"

"Not me."

Pete entered the kitchen from outside. "The garbage truck just took them away. They're gone for good."

"Thank God!"

The sound of Patrick's crying came filtered over the baby monitor. "Right on cue," his dad remarked.

"There, there," Lisa said to the now-smiling boy in her arms. "Did you have a nice nap?"

"L-Lisa," Pete said, pointing under the crib. She gasped. The blocks were back, but now they spelled out S-T-O-P I-T.

"That's enough!" Pete said, storming toward the blocks. He scooped them all up

and put them in the center of the room. "I'm going to grind these things back into tree bark!" For several seconds, he stomped on them—accomplishing nothing. Finally, he screamed in pain.

Lisa rushed forward. "What's wrong?" she asked, as the sound of a baby giggling came again. Neither of them heard it because of the commotion.

"My foot!"

"Can you put any weight on it?" He tried, but it wasn't happening. "I'm calling Dr. Ponde."

Hobbling on crutches, his foot booted, Pete entered the kitchen followed by his wife and son. "Careful, dear," she said.

"I've been on crutches before," he told her.

"Dr. Ponde said you should be off your foot as much as possible."

"And I will be. . . as soon as I do one thing."

"What?"

"I need you to go upstairs and get those blocks and the metal wastebasket in the bathroom."

"What on Earth for?"

"I'm going to barbecue those damn things in the driveway and get them out of our lives!"

The flames were coming under control as the firefighter approached Chief Humboldt. "We got the report: The house belonged to the Connolly family: Mother, father, and baby boy."

"Baby? Are you sure?" the chief asked.

"The neighbors said he's about seven months old."

"Tell the men to keep looking."

"Will do, sir."

The chief heard the child's giggling, but it sounded like he had company now. "Did you say something?" he asked the firefighter.

"Not me."

Monica was reading when the phone rang. "Ms. Connolly," the voice said, "my name is Saunders. I'm an attorney representing the estate of Amelia Griffith. You were at the estate sale a couple of months ago in Boston."

"Yes," Monica answered tentatively.

"You bought some children's toys?"

"Just blocks. A lovely old set. I was told that they date back more than a century."

"You were told correctly. The blocks were a gift to young Jeremiah Griffith in 1913," Saunders informed her. "We'd like them back. They never should have been put up for auction. I'm prepared to offer you double the price you paid for them, plus something for your trouble."

"I don't have them anymore. I gave them to my nephew." Monica grew concerned

at a sudden thought. "Could they hurt him?"

"Oh no. It's more of an issue of . . . embarrassment. The Griffith family gained some notoriety during the early 1900s for alleged dealings in Satan worship. Some said that even young Jeremiah was involved."

"I've never heard of this."

"The family has tried to keep things hush-hush. There are always some people, however, who are anxious to resurrect the tale, and the blocks being auctioned off could start tongues wagging."

"Let me call my brother and see if I can get them back."

"Thank you. The family and I appreciate your help," Saunders commented. "May I call you again in an hour?"

"Certainly." No sooner did she hang up than the phone rang again. She could faintly hear the sound of a lightly crackling fire and the occasional wail of a siren. "Monica Connolly," she answered uneasily.

"Hello, Ms. Connolly. This is Chief Humboldt of the Milford Fire Department. Are you related to Peter Conn—"

She screamed and dropped the receiver. She faintly heard the chief calling for her as she sobbed.

The charred and still-warm remains of the house were framed by yellow police tape, but ten-year-olds Bobby and Tim snuck in at nightfall. They looked around in the light of the moon, impressed by the devastation. "You should have seen it, Tim," Bobby said. "Big, big flames!"

"There's not much left of it," he said as they walked about.

"My dad says they're going to bring in the wrecking ball and knock it down."

"Won't take long."

"Look at that," Bobby said, stopping suddenly and pointing to a corner of the house. The blocks clicked together as Tim touched them. "Why didn't they burn?"

Tim looked around guiltily. "You think anybody would miss them?"

"You're gonna take them?"

"Why not? My sister would love them."

"I don't know if you ought to do that," his friend advised him.

"Somebody may as well play with them. That's what toys are for."

Bobby took a minute to contemplate this. "I guess you're right," he said.

Tim unzipped his backpack and reached for the blocks. "Looks like some other kid was here before us."

Bobby noticed that the blocks were spelling out a word: F-I-R-E. "Boy," he said, "what a sick sense of humor." Together, they put Jeremiah Griffith's unburnable wooden blocks into the backpack, various noises masking the faint sound of giggling children.



THE JAR

To this day she can't eat beets or spread jam on a slice of toast without a small shudder stuttering her spine. Most things grown and preserved in jar. Not since finding her great-gram's cataracts on the shelf, way back when she was just a girl. They were spring cleaning at the old farm, and her mom and dad charged her with the fruit cellar. A room set in the stone foundation just off the main space. Dirt floor. Smell of earth and damp. She pulled the chain and cast the dull light. Shelves lined three sides, from ground to the low beams above her. Each stocked deep with canned eats. Hundreds. Caked lids and web-strung glass. Carrots and currants and beans. Dozens of things from a long gone garden, all turned into dark and rotten mysteries, but for their faded labels. She'd filled bags, the stink from a few broken Bells making her stomach rise and tumble. The sick light spilling toward dank corners. And then, what she'd forever remember as The Jar. Crusted shut with rust and calcified water, the outside dripping in. Label curled and yellow. The liquid inside was cloudy, gray. Like watered down milk. An old woman's blindness, kept. She ran upstairs. What on Earth? Her parents said. She begged them. Please. Don't make me go back in. They had a good laugh about it. That woman never could throw anything away, they said. She finished the room without looking, without reading what had been written. The whole time wondering, what within each could be. The volume of a drained mass. Fatty plaque from a plumbed out heart. Pickled tumors. What else, and why? Words shaped themselves in the light cut shadows. Amputated became Vestigial became Stillborn. And now, with all the distance of turning clocks, preparing her son's lunch, peanut butter and jelly, raspberry, seedy and thick and spread with averted eyes, she still wonders. A Shudder. A Tumble. What else there could have been

-william r. soldan

out of orbit

with sullen glances they tolerate our indiscretions, the flitting trees and fickle wind, sitting silently in communion with comets shot across the sky

the stones do not speak any more to blighted beings lost in motion. They wait and sing their hymns of sacred sorcery transforming layer by layer this simple rock forgotten in the sandy bay of hesitant stars and certainty

—john reinhart

published in Songs of Eretz Review

MAKEUP



Lipstick glue is what I use to adhere her face to mine, a flab of skin resembling plastic satin, ripped edges curled blue, fat bruised—a petal lost in breath.

Peach pink is a good concealer, makes the imperfections natural, hides the wire molding our flesh together and the dimples around our noses as they kiss each other.

Such heat melts into me—
red honey paste
smudging the face,
the residue
of who I was
because being myself was never enough;
and I hope that girl fades,
buried deep beneath,
rotting under the girl
I've dreamt of being.

-mckinley henson

the fires of summer

For K. A. O.

The fires of summer burned into next year, And lasted through the harshest winter chills. My heart enflames for only you, my dear. The stars alight in your sweet eyes, and thrills Of love ignite my soul at your mere touch. Tonight we drink again to love, to us, And to the years that yet await, and such Romantic letters scribed by calamus.

—ashley dioses

That Color

The color I see is so pretty at night against the beer bottles, mixing with the crystal white of the shot glasses; it's what I imagine all roses to be: soft and scented, a stem crooked and dangerous, an allure so tempting I often hold the flower between my fingers to recreate that color dripping down my wrist.

It's when I see it the brightest—that streak of light which intoxicates my eyes and sends my body longing for the matted fantasies of reality; the peaked interest of a child whose curiosity never wanes or runs away, no matter how many days pass.

And he. the way he draws the color out of me with cigarettes and a crass tongue; I've been scarred by his beautiful artwork enough times it's tattooed on my heart: I love the taste of his bruises, the warmth pinching my bones, wishing the skin would crack and paint me more— I wish he would paint me more—in the color I've come to admire, the color my mind craves like sugar, the color I see that's so damn pretty at night, that rich color I always write about.

—mckinley henson

IN THE BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

When righteous men die, skulls severed by dark horsemen are returned to necks, limbs torn from torso by ogres rejoined, dragon burns healed, claw gashes sewn neat as new. They are young and handsome, prime of life, in death.

Meanwhile, the warriors of the dark side, must drag their missing heads and legs, the mangled tails, crushed fangs, all the way down the catacombs to Hades.

The good go to heaven for reward, the evil to hell for further instructions.

—john grey

BEYOND THE BORDERLANDS

When the midnight hour descends, the silence grows, the familiar ends, and darkness gathers everything within its reach.

The world forgets the temporary names that identify things by the light of day; in the midnight hour, once again, everything known fades away.

Ushered into that strange realm of unknowing and uncertainty: there, fancy may hijack all common sense, bolt the stable and trample the fence, then gallop off into the twilight country of silhouette and shadow; where beyond lies the boundless darkening plain of mystery and magic; here, dreamscapes play out to an audience of countless stars that wink and watch in soundless repose against the backdrop of eternity.

-allan rozinski

Brown Recluse

How I envy that hard exterior,

the stillness of a small life spent retreating to that loose, milk-white web of your own design.

Self sufficiency mapped by a fine woven urge to hide, to nest.

Then, of course, your bite.

—e.f. schraeder



all light is temporary

by rick mcquiston

"It's a simple concept, really," Janice said while steeping her teabag. A thin plume of smoke swirled up from the hot liquid. "I mean if you think about it, the cosmos is lit by what?" Her eyes bore into her friend's.

Leanna looked away from the stare. It was only one of Janice's habits that annoyed her. Sometimes she wondered why they were friends at all.

"Well, Anna, what lights the universe?"

Anna—what an irritating play on her full name.

"I don't know, Janice, stars?"

"Yes, stars. They are the chief sources of light in the universe. I mean there are others of course—heated dust, explosions, etc., but stars, like our own sun, are the givers of light."

"So what's your point?"

"Anna, Anna, Anna," Janice replied after a dainty sip of her hot tea. "My point is that all light is temporary. Darkness is absolute; it always wins out in the end."

Leanna had to admit that Janice had an interesting point. She'd never really thought about it before.

It made her shudder.

"Take this room for example," Janice continued, oblivious to her friend's

uneasiness. "During the night the only way to light it is to flip a switch on, or a flashlight, or maybe light a candle. Otherwise the room stays in its natural state: darkness." She set her cup of tea down on the coffee table. "So what would happen if something came along and took the ability for humans to artificially light a room?"

Leanna reached forward and picked up her own cup of tea. "I don't follow you." She attempted to take a sip but couldn't. It was still much too hot to drink.

"Anna," Janice continued, while brushing aside a stray curl, "you can't be that dense." She held up her cup of tea. "You see how hot this is? Well, it's the same principle. Warmth is fleeting. The cosmos is infinitely cold, only sporadically punctuated by points of heat, which inevitably run out of energy and resort to their natural state: cold."

"I see," Leanna said with a forced smile. She was so weary of these philosophical discussions with her friend. She wondered why they couldn't talk about books, or movies, or clothes.

Janice raised her cup of tea to her mouth, and without so much as blowing on it, took a long swallow. Mostly clear, hot tea dribbled out either side of her mouth, lightly smearing her lipstick. Several small blisters formed on her lips.

Leanna stared in disbelief at her friend who seemed oblivious to her injuries.

A slight breeze with an unmistakable chill in it ruffled Leanna's hair then. There was an underlying aspect to it that pawed at her bare flesh like an insect nibbling away at a discarded piece of fruit.

"Do you feel a draft?"

Janice ignored the question. She continued sipping her tea.

Leanna glanced around the room. "Is there a window open?" Deep down she knew there wasn't but she still asked. And even if there were it was warm outside. The draft she felt was too cold to be coming from outdoors. It definitely had a tinge of winter chill to it, unlike the summer wind blowing through the trees.

"The energy is running out," Janice said. "They're using it up, and quickly too." Leanna felt a knot form in her gut.

"Everything will go back to its natural state: dark and cold. Light and warmth are temporary." She looked up. "I was chosen to be a beacon for the arrival of their hunger."

"Are they aliens?" Leanna forced out. Despite the situation she still felt somewhat foolish for asking.

"It's all relative. To a species other than mankind we are the aliens."

"But how? How could you?"

Janice looked at her friend, an oily grin spreading across her pretty face. "Because I've been acclimated to see the truth. Didn't you hear what I've been saying? Light is temporary. Warmth is temporary. They are anomalies in a sea of natural order."

Leanna had heard enough. The draft she felt had evolved into a frosty chill. She could see her breath. And the light in the room was fading fast. A gradual darkness was creeping in, slowly (and no doubt deliberately) overtaking the daylight that had lit the room just a moment before.

She jumped to her feet and flung her cup of tea at Janice. The hot liquid splashed

across the woman's face, raising angry welts on her skin. But she didn't seem to care, merely continuing to smile through her reddened flesh.

"Anna! Sit down!"

Leanna sprinted toward the door. "My name's Leanna, not Anna!" she cried as she desperately tried to turn the handle.

It wouldn't budge.

"Let me out! Let me out now!"

Janice stood and casually sauntered over to her friend. Her face sported painful blisters; she didn't bother wiping away the tea. "Can't you see what's happening? They are turning everything back to the way it once was, to its natural state. It's how it should be. We'll grow cold together, Anna, you and I."

Leanna spun around and lunged for a lamp, narrowly dodging Janice's outstretched hands. She yanked its cord from the wall and held it above her head, wielding it like a weapon.

"You can't stop it, Anna. They're feeding, absorbing all the light, all the warmth. Earth is darkening, and soon you too will see as I do."

"No!"

"Yes. I resisted at first as well, but I came to embrace the cold and the dark like I used to the sunshine. It's all relative, as I said before; everything is relative."

Leanna dropped the lamp and stared at her friend. Cold was seeping into her pores and darkness wrapping itself around her body. "No! No..." The words trickled from her mouth, steadily losing their conviction until they were nothing more than gibberish. "I can't…no."

Then the words began to change, gradually shifting from rejection of what she was facing to acceptance and understanding. "I see now. Yes. Yes, now I know; now I understand."

Janice embraced Leanna. She was pleased that her friend had joined her in the cause. She knew that sooner or later everyone would learn Nature's truth, but was glad that Leanna was one of the early ones.

The room slid into darkness. Bitter cold followed, gradually seizing any residual warmth and swallowing it whole.

Janice and Leanna stood in the center of the room. They tried desperately to enjoy the unpleasant sensations they were feeling but found it impossible to do so. They had been taught to love darkness and cold, to revel in its natural state, but couldn't. It was simply too uncomfortable.

So when the light and warmth in their bodies began to dissipate they resisted. The instinct to survive dictated their actions and thoughts, overriding the control from the dark forces. But by then it was too late and they became frozen statues in a pitch-black void, the first victims of Earth's fate.



on self-esteem

To swallow a bucket full of stones, take them to the mouth one at a time.

But first, hold them to the sky to see how each catches the moon.

What glimmers at night may vanish by day, sunk into the fractured self everyone hides:

too this, not enough that. Take off the glasses. Shave. Do pushups. Or don't.

Now watch. Those hard lessons bulge in the throat like an ice chunk,

so many stuck words caught in a lie everyone believes.

-e.f. schraeder

an elephant in must

There's peril in the signage, vet visitors enjoy the turbulent black sea. A benign lust grows malignant in chains. The elephant thrusts at the ground with its tusks, as though saving itself from the violent voltage current. It hurls its trunk up the sky amidst a thunder as the loudest slogan of protest in the universe. It doesn't need a calendar. A mahout can never conceal its honeymoon season. A lunatic liquid flows down the side of its head like the lava of suppressed love. Hormones of creation are wasted in the void.

—fabiyas mv

in the flowering year

Before came the flowering year, nearly a lifetime passed me by; thought all I had left to do was die, in the moldering year.

At first the summer breeze seemed false in that late, flowering year: out of sequence, out of season, unlike earlier flowering years, when youth was a riot of heat and treason that age now distrusts with frosty reason.

Eras, like wrinkles on a weathered face, are etched deep inside the mind. No rebirth redux: there is no undoing the rude avalanche of gravity and time.

But as long as the heart and mind have not yet surrendered to winter's rime, to the lure of the state of somnambulance, when courage is sacrificed for the comfort of sleep disguised as the safety of a smothering cocoon; even yet, a mummy may stir and wake, longing to break forth from chrysalis, and soon soar into the welcoming arms of a warm sunlit sky.

—allan rozinski

mary lynn

Why must I wait in silence here With nothing but the darkness near? The cold my only company Why won't these shackles let me free? Why must I be left here alone? Surrendered to surrounding stone Abandoned without a mission Imprisoned by the haunt vision The vision of she beloved most Whose image follows, a silent ghost A pale face once of ivory skin Imprisons me still, my Mary Lynn O Mary Lynn dressed in fine lace I wish to reach and touch your face Though when my fingers brush your cheek I never find the warmth I seek When I close my eyes, you remain You linger on my sight, a stain And no number of tears begin To wash away my Mary Lynn Why must I wait in silence here With Mary Lynn in darkness near? My love my only company Why won't Mary Lynn let me free?

—hannah marier

SMUDGE

Turning a page, I saw a smudge of red pop up, a pinhead, suddenly on the marge, verso, not large, but surely growing large.

Was it my paper cut come to a head? my muffin's cranberry, out of control? a message from the author, drawn and bled?

Of course not, though it seemed straight from her soul as if she were, well, not entirely dead.

I tried to catch it quickly lest it seep into the leaf, and dabbed a handy tissue, but the tome absorbed too quick, a vintage issue.

I turn, with reams to read before I sleep, both leaves and self, bemoaning my excess: forever, in the stacks, the stain, my mess.

—james b. nicola



the night after the full moon arose

The night after the full moon
When everything I touched was tainted
I scream; in perfect silence
To get away from it all
The lies, the deception
Once more
The fool; living in paradise
The bubble; intact again
An endless woe in my decaying heart
Hidden beneath the beating flesh
And not one sign of betrayal
From the porcelain skinned corpse
Which my soul inhabits
Not one glimmer of the pain
But for the quivering of my lips

-kristyl gravina

A Starfish in Her Hair

The tide rises soaked with failure's longing a siren's song reaches across the land to me. The moon added pull speaks of not belonging, I am drawn on astral screams to an inky sea.

small waves submerge pale ankles to my knees: a gull cries

The weight of cloth, cumbersome, impedes, arching down, I let go, each shrouding bit from me. Salt sea in, the salt sea out, my life concedes choosing to leave this go-round in a turgid sea.

eyes stare into a brown brine: bubbles rise

Sinking-down, expressionless my sadness abating, strands of silvered seaweed coddle engulfing me. My limbs entwined in death's sweet embrace abiding, minnows greet me with a kiss from the womblike sea.

starfish in her hair -fog horn

—deborah guzzi



Andalusia the Home of Flannery O'Connor

by sherry chapman

Reading Flannery O'Connor is an experience. Said to have written some of the most powerful and disturbing fiction of the twentieth century, she is known as one of America's most gifted writers whom we lost at the height of her powers. Three times she won the O. Henry award for best short story of the year, and for "The Complete Stories—Flannery O'Connor" won the National Book Award in 1972. She wrote some 30 short stories and two novels in her brief lifetime.

She wrote using characters she created, or had observed, in the South. She wrote in the dialect specific to mid-Georgia, using phrases they used and having a high old time of it. Her particular sense of humor entertained both her readers and acquaintances. She is famous for outrageous confrontations between characters. To name just a few-a Bible salesman steals a girl's wooden leg; an old woman lacking moral judgment invites a nymphomaniac into a peaceful home with tragic consequences; and a woman is attacked by a girl in a doctor's waiting room for no apparent reason.

Flannery O'Connor was Roman Catholic in the South, where Baptist churches outnumbered them by far. Though never preachy, she was a firm believer in God and often used a religious angle to her works. God was such a part of her life and, as she knew it, of so much of the Southern population. So she enchanted you using her various characters with her narration and their talk, and you're having a delightful time reading when out of nowhere something incredible will happen—often violent, always eye-widening, never normal. You don't know when it's coming.

Still popular today, she is taught in many classrooms; professors lecture on her work and her books continue to sell worldwide. Flannery O'Connor wrote



in the late 1940's until the summer of 1964. There must be something timeless about her work that is still entertaining readers after 50 years. It is good to know something about her when you're reading her, such as why this world-famous writer was living on a dairy farm in the middle of Georgia.

She didn't plan it that way.

Born in Savannah, Georgia, March 25, 1925 as Mary Flannery O'Connor, she was an unusual child. Early on a man from Pathe Newspapers in New York came to her home to do a newsreel on her with a chicken that walked backwards. Ending up with only a few seconds of usable film, the rest was finished with a man-made flick of the reverse switch that showed cows and other barnyard personalities appearing to walk backwards. The one minute, twenty-seven-second piece was named "Unique Chicken Goes in Reverse" but was not released in Savannah and, therefore, Flannery never saw it. It did, however, spark in her a life-long interest in birds, collecting unique ones.³

An only child, she was born into an Irish Roman Catholic family. Her mother, Regina Lucille Cline O'Connor, came from a family of some wealth, though Regina had none of her own. Flannery's father, Edward Francis O'Connor, Jr., was very good with people and dashingly handsome. He was in the military and served honorably before meeting and marrying Regina. He wanted to get into the real estate business but, until he could afford to, his bride's cousin, Katie Semmes, gave him a private mortgage to buy a townhouse on Lafayette Square in Savannah. The house still stands today and is recognized as Flannery O'Connor's Childhood Home. There is a lovely old fountain in the middle of Lafayette Square, and for the week of St. Patrick's Day the water in it, and in others, is dyed green.

Flannery had called her parents by their first names since she was a child—"Regina" and "Ed." Her father had her listed in the city directory separately as "Miss Mary Flannery O'Connor," and he put her name down as a contributor (instead of her parents) in the 1936 "Roll of Female Orphanage Society" diocesan bulletin.

Her childhood is peppered with anecdotes showing her as if she were an adult in a child's body. She was eccentric. She was probably showing signs of genius even then. If you ever get the chance to visit her childhood home in Savannah, Georgia, please take advantage of it. When I went, my tour guide was full of stories bordering on the incredible that I later found to be true.

In 1938 she and her parents moved to Milledgeville, Georgia. Flannery completed the 7th grade at Peabody Elementary. "A Town of Columns," Milledgeville was the capital of Georgia from 1803 until 1868. It is a fair-sized city, and driving through it many of the buildings and homes are head-turners. About 40 are antebellum.

For a time, Ed rented a small house on the outskirts of Atlanta in Buckhead at 2525 Potomac Avenue in the Peachtree Heights neighborhood. The 1939 premiere of "Gone with the Wind" was held during Flannery's Atlanta stay. She got pretty tired of hearing people tell her to stop writing the weird stuff she was doing and write another "Gone with the Wind." She was weary of the Civil War. Later on, a story in the local newspaper about its veteran would prompt her to write one of her short stories, "A Late Encounter with the Enemy."

Flannery was not happy with the high school there, and her mother took her back to Milledgeville, once again to live in the Ward-Bell-Cline Mansion. For about a year, the lovely home was used as a Governor's Mansion. Built in 1820 by General John B. Gordon, it was on the State Garden Club's tour list every year starting in 1939. Flannery would sign the guest book with herself and all her chickens, listing their joint address as "hungry." The inside is said to be grand. Eventually Ed lost his HUD government job in Atlanta and fell ill. He spent his last months in the Cline house, dying on February 1, 1941, of lupus erythematosus, when his adoring daughter was fifteen. He was buried at the Memory Hill Cemetery in Milledgeville, Georgia. Flannery wasn't told what was wrong with her father. She only watched him waste away.

The Ward-Bell-Cline Mansion still stands at 311 West Green Street. Since 2011 it has been the Mary Flannery O'Connor Charitable Trust.

When Flannery started high school, Regina contacted the adviser of the school newspaper and asked if he could give her daughter something to do. Flannery told the man she couldn't write but could draw, so she was made art editor and there began her years as a cartoonist of the Peabody Palladium. In 1942 she graduated from Peabody High School.

After graduation, she continued her education at Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville (GSCW, later called Georgia College.) She continued to live at home in the Cline mansion. She took a three-year wartime program that required students to attend in all four seasons of the year. She soon became the "campus cartoonist." She created a cartoon a week and took over as art director. The same man that took her on as cartoonist at Peabody High School also ran the program at GSCW.

By the time she was 18 she was making plans to live away from Milledgeville by going into journalism or maybe to be a newspaper cartoonist. When she started writing short stories in class, one student recalls that "...all of the teachers adored her and were constantly around her." 5 She graduated from the GSCW with a B.A. in Social Science. Thanks to her own writing talent and one of her teachers, Dr. Beiswanger, lobbying his contacts in her support, she received a full scholarship in journalism from the University of Iowa. She was accepted into the Writer's Workshop and attended Iowa from 1945 until 1947, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts.

This was her first time living away from home, and she felt the pangs of homesickness. She wrote daily to Regina; Regina replied daily and sent her the town newspaper from Milledgeville. She found solace at St. Mary's Catholic Church around the corner from campus and the daily masses, even though she did not get to know other members of the church.

She had decided to take "Mary" out of her name when she started at Iowa. She would be known by teachers and students as Flannery O'Connor. And the author would be Flannery O'Connor as well. She joked to the writer Richard Gilman: "Who was likely to buy the stories of an Irish washerwoman?"6

In 1946, while at Iowa, she got her first short story published in Accent. It was



The water tower in back of the main house.



The screeened-in front porch with white rockers at the main house.



The Hill House at Andalusia.

ANDALUSIA, HOME OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR **Main House**

The Main House is a circa 1860 Plantation style structure with several additions including a one-story front porch, a suite of rooms added to the rear of the original building, a shed addition behind these rooms, and another extension on the north corner. Guest bedrooms were located on the second floor With the exception of some signs variations, the exterior of the Main House looks very similar to the way it appeared when Flannery O' Connor lived here with her mother, Regina Cline O'Connor. In recent years, the house has undergone considerable restoration; however, the interior still requires a great deal of attention.

Main house historic sign.

called "The Geranium." It was about an old Southerner who lived in New York City and was homesick. The symbol for his past home was in a geranium potted plant. She used shock and violence in an already good story. She would become well known for this shock and violence. She was just about 21 years old when she learned of its upcoming publication.

Accent was a respected literary magazine. After "The Geranium" was published in it, she then concentrated on the short story and the writing of fiction. When she came home for the summer, two of her short stories were rejected by the literary magazine, Southwest Review, the notice made out to "Mr. Flannery O'Connor." She began work on her first novel, "Wise Blood," while at Iowa.

Also at Iowa, she wrote "The Train," published in *Sewanee Review*, vol. 56, April 1948; "The Turkey," entitled 'The Capture,' published in *Mademoiselle*, vol. 28, November 1948; and three other short stories that were not published until 1970/71.

She continued to grow professionally and personally, making good friends with students and professors. One arranged a teaching fellowship the following year. Another brought up her trying for a summer residency in Saratoga Springs, New York, at the artists' colony, Yaddo, and collected a power list of recommendations and endorsements. She began her residency at Yaddo the following June. Most importantly, she made friends with people who had real connections in the literary world and would later introduce her to professionals that made a difference in her life—not because they liked her personally but because they recognized her exceptional talent.

Flannery enjoyed her residency there in 1948/49 and afterwards secured a small apartment in New York City. She found her Roman Catholic church, as she did wherever she was, and mostly worked in a room with few distractions from her work. She worked diligently on "Wise Blood," writing and re-writing, letting professional writing friends read and suggest.

In 1949, Flannery saw the publication of three more of her short stories: "The Heart of the Park," in *Partisan Review*, vol. 16, February 1949 (rewritten and revised for "Wise Blood"); "A Stroke of Good Fortune," published as "A Woman on the Stairs," in Tomorrow, volume 8, August 1949 (reprinted under a new title in *Shenandoah*, vol. 4, spring 1953); and "The Peeler," in *Partisan Review*, vol. 16, December 1949 (rewritten and revised for "Wise Blood.").

She rented a room from literary friends Sally and Robert Fitzgerald in Connecticut, where she kept working at "Wise Blood." She retyped the entire novel to work in the main character's self-blinding. Her arms became heavy and were getting worse. She had been having strange symptoms for a couple of years, mentioned them to no one and more or less shook them off. Sally took her to a doctor, who diagnosed her as having rheumatoid arthritis but was not positive. She had decided to go home to Milledgeville for the holidays anyway, and would see a familiar doctor there. By the time she got home via train, she was very sick and looked it.

Regina became frantic when she saw Mary Flannery. Flannery was hospitalized

by the family doctor who at first thought it might be rheumatoid arthritis too. The cortisone injections he had prescribed were keeping her alive it turned out, but her spiking fevers worried him. He talked to Atlanta's first kidney specialist at Emory Hospital in Atlanta, and the doctor there mentioned lupus, the disease that had killed Flannery's father. The doctor at Emory talked to Regina and was blunt about Mary Flannery's chances.

Flannery was transferred to Emory, and the first blood test taken showed she had lupus of the same type suffered by her father. She also had a floating kidney. Regina, not wanting to tell Mary Flannery for fear the news might make her worse yet in her serious condition, told her she had rheumatoid arthritis.

Lupus is in the same family as arthritis. This type of lupus is known as "disseminated lupus" or "systematic lupus erythematosus." The body forms antibodies that attack any organ or bone. She had multiple blood transfusions and a cortisone derivative. Lupus was still in the experimental stage then, and it had made little progress since Edward O'Connor's day. The blood test to diagnose it only started being used in 1948.

Flannery's hair fell out after the fevers. Her face was swollen from the cortisone. She had to be dehydrated and put on a salt-free, milk-free diet. The cortisone derivative she was taking had a side-effect of racing the mind.

When she was finally sent home in the spring of 1951, she had to give herself four cortisone shots a day. She was weak and could not climb stairs. It was then that Regina moved herself and Mary Flannery to Andalusia, which was to be their home for the next thirteen years.

Flannery did use much of her experience of this first flare-up of lupus in her short story, "The Enduring Chill." In this story, a young man moves to an apartment in New York with literary ambitions—only to realize that he will spend the rest of his days ill—back home, which is the last place he wants to live.

The former Stovall Place plantation was owned by Flannery's uncle, Dr. Bernard Cline of Atlanta, a prominent physician, who purchased it in 1930. He bought the farm as a weekend getaway, a place where he could raise horses and entertain. Farm workers he hired came on weekends from Milledgeville. He acquired more wooded tracts to the north. In the 1940's he sent Regina to Atlanta to train as the farm bookkeeper. He changed the name to Sorrel Farm because of the sorrelcolored horses he had there.

In summers, as children the Cline cousins would regularly congregate there. Mary Flannery was never "one of the girls" by her own doing. For some reason she held back. Maybe she realized that she was different from them. She didn't welcome them as friends. She had a little kid's nasty sense of humor, as she gave new horse riders wild horses and laughed when they fell off; or got kids who didn't know what was coming to get inside the pig pen.

When Flannery was on a bus to Atlanta in 1946, she met a descendant of the original family that owned Sorrel Farm but told her in the eighteenth century the original name was Andalusia. Her Uncle Bernard, upon hearing it, liked it and renamed the farm Andalusia.

Bernard Cline died in 1947 and willed Andalusia to Regina and one of their brothers, Louis Cline, who worked out of Atlanta. Uncle Louis could only make it there on weekends, and the primary management was left to Regina. She was very successful. Andalusia was a sizeable dairy farm in the 1950's, and she had an earned reputation as a competent businesswoman.

When Regina and Flannery moved to the old plantation house, they lived on the main floor. The upstairs rooms were for guests. Her mother's bedroom was right in back of hers with a doorway connecting the rooms. Regina took excellent care of her daughter, always "Mary Flannery" to her, but Flannery took after her father more. Her mother didn't understand her writing and was quite the talker; a yeller at times, walking through Flannery's bedroom whether Flannery was in there or not and hollering through the window at a worker outside. Friend, Robie Macauley, said, "With me, Flannery tended to be a bit joking and sarcastic about her mother ... But the idea that Regina was a tyrant—though a beloved one—also came through."

Flannery had to use metal crutches from about 1955 on. She eventually mastered them. Either the lupus itself or the medicine used to treat it made a hip bone go soft. The lupus always came back. Sometimes Flannery was fine. Sometimes she was sick at home. Sometimes she was sick in the hospital. Eventually she was cut down to two shots of the cortisone per day, and at one time seemed so improved that she didn't need her crutches—for a while. Much of the time she was a sick girl. But she was not a recluse as many assume.

Visiting her friend in Connecticut, Sally Fitzgerald, Sally told Flannery she had lupus. "Well, that's not good news," Flannery said, after a few silent, charged moments. "But I can't thank you enough for telling me ... I thought I had lupus, and I thought I was going crazy. I'd a lot rather be sick than crazy."8

She had a lot of correspondents. Many would chance to write her a letter with just "Flannery O'Connor, Milledgeville, Georgia" as the address, and it would get to her. Often she would answer and often she would invite the person to Andalusia, and often they'd come and end up as regular visitors. Old friends came. The front porch then was made up invitingly, and it was here that Flannery usually saw friends. Regina would bring out refreshments, or a meal, greet the visitor and leave Flannery to her guest. The local Episcopal priest thought to get a weekly reading group together, and six to eight regulars met at Andalusia. The group lasted about three years. She visited people, including friends in Tennessee, where she would stay a while. She went to Lourdes at one time. She spoke at 60+ lectures. She rode in planes. Hardly the recluse, she.

Every morning she was at Andalusia, she and her mother would go to mass in town. They attended the Sacred Heart Church in Milledgeville. The church is still there. They would come home and have breakfast together. Then Flannery would go to her room to write. She regularly wrote from 9 am until noon, which resulted in an average of three pages a day.

On most days she and Regina would drive into town to get the mail and lunch at the Sanford House Tea Room, where one of Flannery's favorites was their

peppermint chiffon pie. She learned to drive a car. She liked to go for walks. She liked to drink Coca-Cola with coffee in it. She was bad at math and never was a great speller.

Authors started coming and by spring of 1958 Andalusia was known. Today people still use the phrase to "make the pilgrimage" when referring to visiting Andalusia. It's still much as it was when Flannery was there.

Andalusia is some four miles northwest of Milledgeville, on the west side of Highway 441. The address number 2628 is at the driveway. A sign above on a small hill is white and announces "Andalusia Farm" in red letters, with "Home of Flannery O'Connor" underneath it in black. You can't miss it.

Driving up the dirt road, you get your first glimpse of Flannery's Andalusia. There are some old wooden buildings, a pen structure for her beloved peacocks, an interesting small brick building, and the house. You ask yourself what a water tower is doing there.

The house is pretty and in good shape considering it was built around 1860. It is a Plantation style home. It's had a few additions to it. The front screened-in porch that today is graced by a row of white rocking chairs is indeed welcoming. In the late 1950's Uncle Louis Cline added a suite of rooms on the north corner of the house that would give him a place to stay when he came from Atlanta. Behind these rooms a shed was built, as well as another extension on the north corner.

There is no charge to visit Andalusia; however, donations are not only appreciated but needed. A sign tells you to enter through the front door. Just the right doors and windows are open with a strategically placed fan making the inside comfortable and cool.

You see her bedroom too quickly. Expect a large room with perhaps a kingsized canopy bed done in maybe peacock colors; a monstrous desk with an electric typewriter on it; and elegant Victorian drapes at the windows, of light material because of the warm months, and you will be surprised.

Flannery's room is small. It still looks very much as it did when she was there. It is dated from the 1950's. Today there is a light barrier across the threshold to keep it untouched. It can stun realizing this is it—the place where almost all of her award-winning works were created.

The bed where she slept and lay sick so many times is there. Smallish and simple. It has a wooden headboard and is made up with a bedspread of white squares with light blue vertical lines. The drapes look homemade and could have been, since Regina was a skilled seamstress. The material is light with dark blue squares and a thin white line going across every foot or so.

There are three windows, one behind the bed and two on one wall. Her black typewriter is set up on a small, simple table. It faces away from the windows, like the other ones did where she worked elsewhere. This typewriter is not proven to be Flannery's. Her original typewriter is in a Flannery O'Connor exhibit at the college in town and has a clear hard plastic case over it. The typewriter set up at Andalusia is one just like it. In any event, by the time Flannery was typing her last works in 1964, she had gotten an electric typewriter and was using that.

There are pieces of small furniture original to Andalusia, such as a table serving as a nightstand holding a kerosene lamp and a few chairs in the room. The floor is wood-planked. And not far from the typewriting chair is a pair of crutches. Flannery's crutches are also on exhibit at Georgia College, but the ones here look exactly like them, and the hosts at the house think they probably are a second pair.

It is interesting to know that Regina designed and made an attractive coat for Flannery to wear in the colder months. It is part cape and part coat, since freedom was needed for the arms. You can see it in some photos of her taken outdoors.

A sign near Flannery's room asks that no flash photography be used. You can walk through the kitchen and the dining room, which are set up much as they were when she and Regina lived there. The paint on the walls is badly peeling. One room that is set up to show movies or hold small talks has been painted a beautiful peach. The upstairs is closed to the public.

The gift shop is wonderful. It holds copies of many of Flannery's published works. Postcards, bookmarks, notecards, and t-shirts are also for sale. There are some good original paintings of this or that around the farm. There are DVDs of the movie, "Wise Blood;" the film made at Andalusia of her story, "The Displaced Person;" in addition to her 2015 biography, "Uncommon Grace: The Life of Flannery O'Connor." The option of shopping online directly from Andalusia is available by going to the farm's site at www.andalusiafarm.org (478) 454-4029.

A plus of living at Andalusia was that Flannery could have birds again. The first thing she got was a pair of peacocks (a peacock and a peahen) for \$65 out of a Florida Market Bulletin. At one time the farm had something like fifty. She had pheasants, quail, a one-eyed swan, two Polish crested bantams, mallard ducks, and three Japanese silkie bantams. Last year there were one peacock and one peahen there. Neither was of the lineage from O'Connor's time. Peacocks have a creepy call—more like a scream. One wonders if these calls gave Flannery inspiration.

There is no doubt that Andalusia did. Her stories are so much a part of the farm, you can walk around the grounds, point at something and name one of her stories—but certainly not without getting something of a chill.

There are several old pieces of farm equipment. None caused as much trepidation as seeing that old red tractor that looked just like the one that smashed one of the displaced persons to death. At Andalusia, Flannery's stories almost turn into non-fiction.

Back further is a big wooden barn, showing its age, with a ladder propped against it. How many people won't go in because of the connection made between it and "Good Country People?" The small red brick building turned out to be the "milk-processing shed." Pasteurization was done offsite. This shed was used for keeping the milk cold until it could be transported for pasteurizing. This building was in the film, "The Displaced Person." It also figured in to the story, "The Enduring Chill."

It took Flannery six years to finish "Wise Blood." It was published in 1952. At first her relatives in the area disliked it and thought it too racy. But as the book grew in copies and sales and started getting positive attention, her family mostly

changed their minds about it.

"The Life You Save May be Your Own" nabbed her a \$2,000 Kenyon Review fellowship, publication, and won second prize in the 1954 O. Henry Awards. In 1957 Schlitz Playhouse showed a teleplay of "The Life You Save May be Your Own." It starred Agnes Moorehead as the farm widow and Gene Kelly as the stranger. When Flannery heard of it, she said that "a tap dancer" was going to play the lead. She did watch, and along with many others, was disappointed that the ending was changed, probably to please the censors. People who didn't like her violence and near-sexual scenes in her stories, saw the show and thought she had written this positive tv-ending. She later wrote to a friend, "Children now point to me on the street. The city fathers think that I have arrived finally." 10

In 1961 Regina was working on turning the dairy farm into a cattle farm. She was also expanding her timber sales. Flannery wrote no new stories in 1962. She gave readings and public talks. She went to Texas, Chicago, North Carolina, Louisiana, among other places. In 1963 she continued to travel to accept awards and to speak, but wrote little.

The fall of 1963 found her ill with fatigue. She was diagnosed with severe anemia and had to be treated with iron. She was treated at the doctor's office, which meant plenty of hours spent in his waiting room at the Baldwin County Hospital. Her writer's block was broken when she began to see the possibility of a story in that waiting room. The story she ended up writing was "Revelation." It was the only short story she wrote quickly (eight weeks), other than "Good Country People." Louise Abbott recalled, "I felt 'Revelation' marked a turning point in Flannery's thinking, feeling, writing, everything. And that she had started in another direction."

In late November she was feeling too weak to be at the typewriter. She watched the JFK funeral coverage in bed. Before Christmas she fainted and ended up in bed for ten more days. A lower blood count was shown by tests. Whether she knew it or not, she was starting to die.

In January, 1964, she proposed the idea of a second short story collection to her editor, Robert Giroux. She thought seven stories with "Revelation" ending the book. Her completed manuscript was requested by May.

Regina and Flannery were sent a record player by friends. Someone gave them a lot of records. Flannery enjoyed classical ones. She was also watching a lot more television than she had been. She often used it as she had used the newspaper—material for her writing and to keep up with the current trends.

The fainting spell was found to be caused by an enlarged fibroid tumor, which also caused her a bad case of anemia. In February, though her doctor did not want an operation to give her lupus a flare-up, she had the surgery done at the Baldwin County Hospital on February 24. It seemed to have been a success, but she was back in bed within two weeks. She did a lot of reading, and she sensed that something was seriously wrong. She was put back on antibiotics and steroids, which raced her mind, and she hated that.

April 1964 found her back in the hospital again when the antibiotics that were being used for her kidney infection were not doing much to halt her progressing

disease. She broke out in a full-blown Lupus rash and did not know how long she would have to be in the hospital.

Originally she had planned to polish and rewrite the first seven stories in the second short story collection. Her doctor told her no typing except for short business letters. So she decided to have the stories sent to her publisher just as they were printed. She thought she could make any changes in the proofs.

Flannery composed stories in her mind. She went to the doctor once a week for a blood transfusion. It gave her energy, and on those good days she worked for an hour.

She took one of her stories, "The Partridge Festival," out from the short story collection. She didn't like it. She would rewrite her first published story, "The Geranium," as "Judgement Day," desiring to go back to her beginnings as a writer to show how far she had come. She would then come full circle.

She had to be hospitalized at Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta in May. She signed the contract for her second book collection, "All That Rises Must Converge," before she went in.

Despite Regina's guarding of Flannery's hospital room door, visitors got in to see her. She kept a notebook for writing underneath her pillow. She did get work done in the hospital. She finished most of the rewriting of "Judgement Day." She worked on "Parker's Back." She had been creating the pieces of "Parker's Back" since about 1960.

Her hospital stay lasted a month. She lost twenty pounds and had four blood transfusions. She had to follow a low-protein diet because her kidneys couldn't handle the toxins from eggs, cheese or meat. The doctor there decided he could not help her anymore, so home she went to Andalusia in late June.

Regina set up her table and typewriter by her bed. Flannery would work an hour and rest an hour. She felt a little better at times, and she was re-thinking whether or not to include "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead," wanted to do some rewriting in "The Enduring Chill," and she requested this second collection not be published until the spring of 1965.

The nitrogen level in her blood had risen, so her prednisone was cut in half, which meant she did not have the energy the steroids were designed to give her. The doctor gave her more frequent but smaller doses of prednisone so she could have at least some energy. The priest visited and gave her Communion and, by Flannery's request, the Sacrament of the Sick.

For three weeks, Flannery went to the typewriter and spent about two hours each morning. She received a letter notifying her that her story, "Revelation" came in first for the O. Henry prize.

In late July she had to go to the doctor's office and the hospital several times. Her kidney infection returned. Her cortisone was discontinued and antibiotics doubled. She had another blood transfusion.

Just about the end of July, Flannery was rushed to the hospital. On August 2 calls went out letting friends know she could die at any time. On Sunday, August 2, Flannery received Communion. Her kidneys failed and she was given the Last Rites.

Just before midnight, she went into a coma and was pronounced dead at 12:40 am, August 3rd, 1964.

Naturally we wish she had lived longer to give us more stories. But writing in spite of pain, working as hard as possible, gave her the energy to keep writing to the finish. I believe she gave us all she had.

Regina went back to live in the Cline mansion after her daughter's death. Regina died in 1995 at the age of 99.

Flannery, her mother, and her father, are buried at the Memory Hill Cemetery at 300 W. Franklin Street in Milledgeville. There is a self-guided walking tour available at the cemetery. Some hotels hand them out. The cemetery is open seven days a week.

Andalusia has activities on its grounds. October 28, 2017 is "Andalusia's 12th Annual Bluegrass Special." Please email (wiseblood@andalusiafarm.org) or phone (478) 454-4029 for complete list and up-to-date information.

"The River" was filmed some time ago and is available for free viewing on YouTube. It's too bad more of Flannery's short stories weren't made into films.

In 1976, PBS filmed the short story, "The Displaced Person." About 40 people from New York and Atlanta came to Andalusia to work on the film, and several locals were used. John Houseman starred with Irene Worth. A few temporary changes had to be made to some of the outbuildings to make them look more like they were in the 1940's, which is when the story takes place. When Flannery lived at Andalusia, Regina did employ a family of "displaced persons."

In 1978 her novel, "Wise Blood" was made into a movie. John Huston directed, and it was produced by Michael and Kathy Fitzgerald. DVDs are available at Andalusia's gift shop. It is sometimes shown on Turner Classic Movies.

There are some lovely readings on YouTube of Flannery's stories. Estelle Parsons reads "Everything that Rises Must Converge." Flannery did a reading of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" in 1959. Andalusia's gift shop also contains her short stories on audio.

End Notes:

- 1. O'Connor, Flanner. The Complete Stories. NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971, back cover
- ² Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home historical sign.
- ^{3.} Gooch, Brad. Flannery, A Life of Flannery O'Connor. NY:Little, Brown and Company, 2009.4.
- ⁴ Private photo, Flannery O'Connor's childhood home.
- ^{5.} Gooch, 107.
- 6. Ibid. 121.
- ⁷ Ibid. 197.
- 8. Ibid. 215.
- ⁹ Ibid. 7.
- 10. Ibid. 288.
- 11. Ibid. 356-357.

UNCONTROLLED FURY

"The disease had sharpened my senses.... Above all was the sense of hearing acute." --Edgar A. Poe

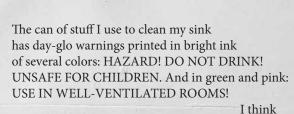
I heard the heart beat! Do you mark me well? This is the point; I heard it steadily Night after night, and it vexed me like hell, Until at length I had stood readily Determined to seek surcease from this sound!

Oh, the dissimulation that ensued would even make a madman come unbound. But 'twas the eye that made me come unglued. I would have left that place but for that orb. It had aroused an uncontrolled fury In me; too much for my mind to absorb!

I was alone, the sole judge and jury. You think me mad? The old man's hour had come! The beating stopped; Silence. My mind was numb.

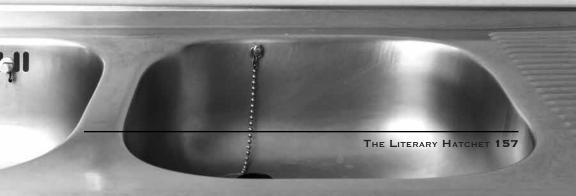
-michael c. seeger

CLEANSER



When skeptics scour, the few who note may blink; But others never even smell the stink.

—james b. nicola



JUST ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

After: Cask of Amontillado by Poe

After: "Just another Brick in the Wall" by Pink Floyd

watched from towering heights omnipresent vertical uprights slice sep -arating those barricaded above ground

bricked-in Fortunato's, though unchained, shrivel between row after row of pummeled and packed red clay mortally separated

lifeless husks tease within window slots some with shades drawn, others reflecting outward, still other bedecked in uncolored glass

a tasteless palate of black & white grovels with the blues of humanity leaving off the spoked wheel with its confined cycle

oh for the dawn of day rouged in pink and peach, we plead within our niches as the trowel layers mortar between splayed fingers

—deborah guzzi

ill met by moonlight

When Congress passed the bill for the witching ban, the news spread to every coven and clan, their members mounted brooms and took to the sky—there were squadrons of witches, I do not lie. The session ran late under a moon grown full as the witches descended upon the Capitol, hurling fierce oaths and sundry spells, they subjected the politicians to unimagined hells, ill met and having hard-learned their lesson, Congress reversed the bill in an emergency session.

-allan rozinski

memory tonic

He takes a tea-spoonful of reddish tonic. Dried stubbles sprout within his old skull.

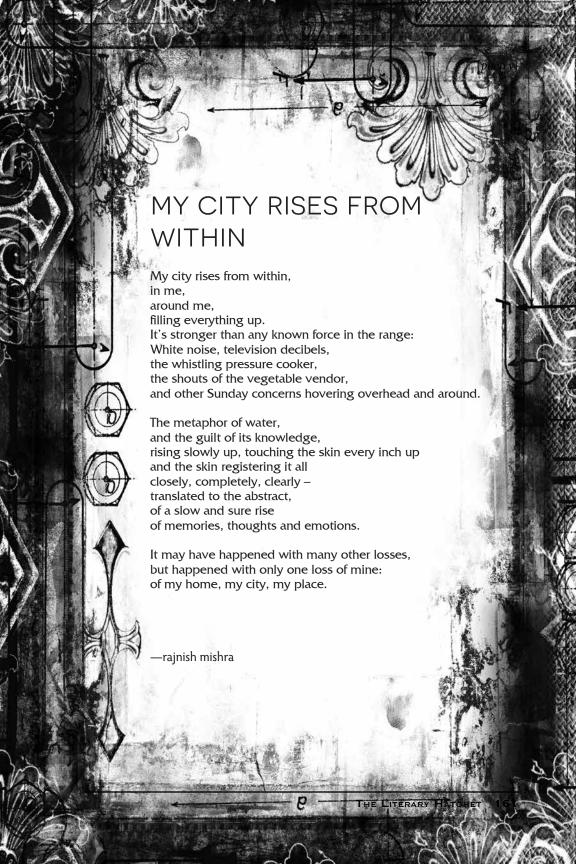
Memories froth in the vast past... His mom applies bitter neem paste on her nipples like the inaugural ceremony of denial on the earth.

Silhouette of a secret sorrow grows against a wall. Tear oozes out of the past.

Memories froth... A baby sucking within the frozen arms, fumes of mystery from smoldering frankincense near grandma's stiff body, remnants of a rape, infiltrating fingers of a homosexual, distilled pain from privation...

He loses his sleep. Even the sweetest memory lands on loss. Peace is in the oblivion.

—fabiyas mv

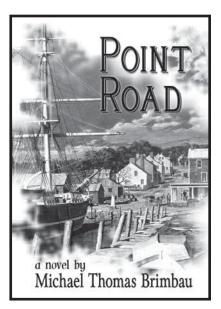


Point Road

by Michael Thomas Brimbau

\$16.95

Emily White lives with her grandmother, Charlotte, in a somnolent whaling village at the end of Point Road in Westport, Massachusetts where nothing much ever happens. The year is 1861. Civil War has broken out between North and South and



some in town have heeded the call for service to their country. Yet, life at Point Village continues with a quiet routine.

Emily loves living in Point Village and finds her adventures in books. She is a dedicated member of the Drift River Readers Club, which has recently taken up a book about the suicide death and hanging of Sarah Cornell in Tiverton, Rhode Island—an incident which occurred many years previous. Emily believes that the Club should investigate the thirty-year-old hanging. In her virtuous endeavor to solve the Cornell mystery, the mission at hand becomes derailed when a servant girl is found hanged on a nearby island and her passing regarded as a suicide.

Death has become a tormenting companion for Emily and she is determined to solve this crime. As circumstances unfold, the Drift River Readers Club is assigned a puzzle they cannot ignore when one of their members becomes the prey, and the war in the south moves north, complicating things and drawing Emily into the conflict.

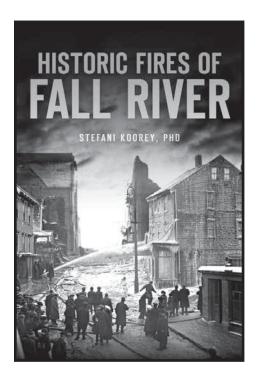
Follow Emily and Samuel Cory as they set out to sea on the grand schooner *Sphinx* to unravel a murder and rescue a friend from being the next possible victim.

Available **NOW** through createspace.com/6941280

FOR WHOLESALE INQUIRIES, PLEASE WRITE TO: PearTree Press, P.O. Box 9585 Fall River, MA 02720 peartreepress@mac.com

Historic Fires of Fall River

by Stefani Koorey, PhD



Fall River's textile boom in the nineteenth century brought with it a series of fiery disasters. The Big Fire of 1843 left more than one thousand people homeless and destroyed two hundred buildings, as well as twenty-some acres of land. After the Steiger Store Fire of 1916, mill owners pushed the city to replace horse-drawn brigades with fire engines. The intense heat from the Kerr Mill Thread Fire of 1987 melted hoses as first responders battled the blaze. Author Stefani Koorey chronicles the historic infernos of the Spindle City and celebrates the community's resilience in the face of adversity.

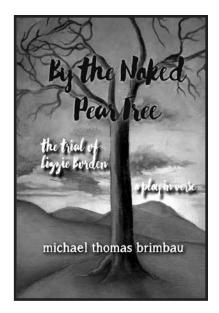
Available **NOW** through amazon.com / \$18.96

[advertisement]

By the Naked Pear Tree

The trial of Lizzie Borden in verse

by Michael Thomas Brimbau \$12.00



By the Naked Pear Tree, a play in verse, was written in the spirit of Steve Allen's unconventional television program, Meeting of the Minds.

Our satirical performance begins outside a New Bedford, Massachusetts, court house. The year is 1893 and the trial of Lizzie Borden is about to begin. Dispatching his oration, the tragedian, Euripides, stands in the street preaching the merits of womanhood and relating the concerns he has for the outcome of the trial, and how it may corrupt the honor of the fabled heroines he has written about. Not long after we are introduced to Clarence Darrow—progressive attorney and respected member of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Hired by Euripides to allusively defend Lizzie Borden, Darrow invites his colleague and adversary, William Jennings Bryan, to a challenge, giving the dubious Bryan a chance to play prosecutor—to change the course of history, and help convict Lizzie Borden of the murder of her parents. In doing so, the two men agree to a friendly game of poker. Winner of the ensuing card game gets to decide the fate of the accused. But the outcome is not what one would expect, and those who tamper with history are left to reap the consequences.

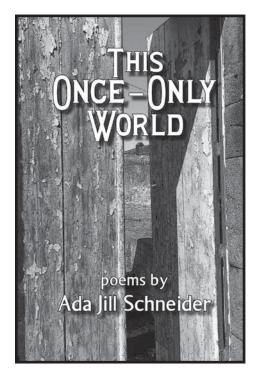
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This Once-Only World

poems by Ada Jill Schneider



This Once-Only World is a collection of personal, yet universal, poems that dance on every page with gratitude and poignancy: poems that celebrate long love and reflect on family; poems that appreciate the world and plead for justice; poems that know what lies ahead for someone turning eighty but who insists, like Edna St. Vincent Millay, "I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned."

Available **NOW** through createspace.com/45404853 \$10.00

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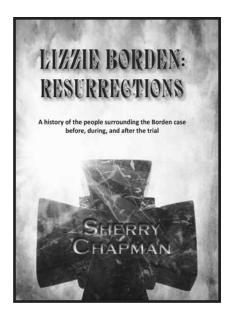
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Lizzie Borden: Resurrections

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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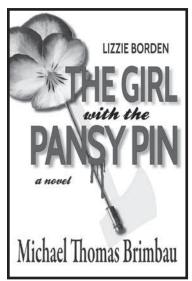
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Lizzie Borden: The Girl with the Pansy Pin

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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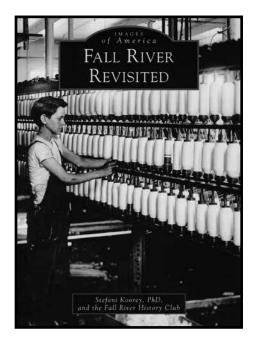
Get the latest news at girlwiththepansypin.com

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.

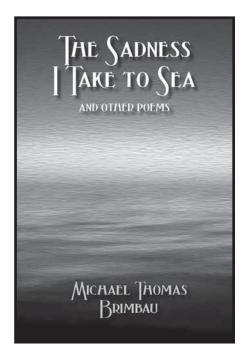
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The Sadness I Take to Sea and Other Poems

by Michael Thomas Brimbau

Putting pen to paper and allowing its ball tip to bleed and spill out is a good thing, and helps with the venting as well as needed healing. After all is said and done, following all the missteps and failings, to move on and search for lost love all over again is not only essential but the absolute specimen of a yearning and healthy soul—and the fundamental spirit conveyed in *The Sadness I Take to Sea.*

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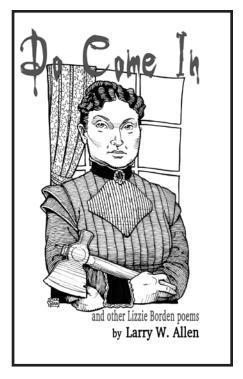
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Do Come Inand Other Lizzie Borden Poems

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.

Available *NOW* through createspace.com/3354462. \$14.00

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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.

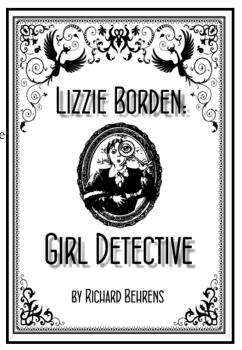
Many years before her infamous arrest and trial for the murders of her father and stepmother, Lizzie Borden pursued a career as a private consulting detective and wrestled unflinchingly with a crooked spiritualist, a corrupt and murderous textile tycoon, a secret society of anarchist assassins, rowdy 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!

Available *NOW* through createspace.com/3441135. \$14.95

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Get the latest news at LizzieBordenGirlDetective.com

Contributors

Kristyl Gravina is from the island of Malta and her work has appeared in several publications including *Haiku Journal*, *Third Wednesday*, *Three Line Poetry*, *Hindered Souls* and *Down in the Dirt* among others.

Mindy Watson is a Washington, DC-based writer/poet. Her essays have appeared in Adelaide Magazine, Ars Medica, Corvus Review, Sinkhole Magazine, and Thread Literary Journal. Her poems have appeared/will appear in Autumn Sky Poetry, Clementine Unbound, Eastern Structures, Ekphrastic Review, Literary Hatchet, Midnight Lane Boutique, Palettes & Quills, Quarterday Review, Snakeskin, and Think Journal.

Sherry Chapman writes humor & historical articles. She was the resident humorist for *The Lizzie Borden Quarterly* and *The Hatchet*. She is the author of *Lizzie Borden:Resurrections* c. 2014, published by PearTree Press. Sherry is also the consulting editor for *The Literary Hatchet*.

Shawn Chang is a seventeenyear-old writer whose works have appeared in *Under the Bed, The Literary Hatchet, Shot Glass Journal,* and *The Australia Times Poetry Magazine.*

Stephanie Smith's poetry and fiction has appeared in such publications as PIF MAGAZINE, ILLUMEN, BETE NOIRE, THE HORROR ZINE, and DARK MOON DIGEST.

Gary Priest writes short fiction and poetry. He has over twenty publications online and in print. Recent or upcoming publications can be found in Daily Science Fiction, The Eunoia Review and Literary Orphans. He lives in the UK at the end of a dead-end road, which may explain everything.

Allan Rozinski is a writer of poetry and fiction with a soft spot for horror. He has had poetry and stories published or accepted by The Literary Hatchet, Devolution Z: The Horror Magazine, Bete Noire, Eye to the Telescope, and the anthology Muffled Screams I: Corner of the Eye. He can be found on Twitter and Facebook. He is still waiting for Cthulhu to call.

Mike Murphy is primarily an author of audio plays, with over 150 produced in the U.S. and overseas, many for Audible. In 2016, he won a Moondance International Film Festival award for his TV pilot script "The Bullying Squad" and a semi-finalist award for his audio play "The Forever Pill." His prose work has appeared in DIME SHOW REVIEW, GATHERING STORM MAGAZINE, ZEROFLASH, INWOOD INDIANA PRESS, and THE FLASH FICTION PRESS, among others.

Jeff Haas is a professionally published poet and short story writer who also teaches creative writing at Emory University.

David F. Shultz writes from Toronto, ON, where he also works as a teacher. His work has appeared in the SNAFU: Hunters anthology. the Singular Irregularity anthology, Three Line Poetry Magazine, the Haiku Journal, and the Lovecraft eZine, and is forthcoming in Polar Borealis Magazine, the 49th Parallels anthology, and *Dreams* and Nightmares magazine.

Deborah Guzzi is a healing facilitator using energetic touch and the written word to assist in fostering wellbeing. She has written three books. The Hurricane, 2015, is available through Prolific Press, Amazon, and other venues. Her poetry appears in University Journals & Literary Reviews in the UK, France, Spain, Canada, Australia, China, Singapore, New Zealand, Greece, India, and the USA.

Vivian Belenky is a Storvverse author at Fiction Vortex.

Joan McNerney's poetry has been included in numerous literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse. Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze. Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Three Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Review Journals. and numerous Kind of A Hurricane Press Publications have accepted her work. Her latest title is Having Lunch with the Sky and she has four Best of the Net nominations.

McKinley Henson is a twenty-yearold with too many thoughts and inspirations. "I admire poetry for its limitless styles and formatting. I'm best described as an indecisive paradox. No. Perhaps 'a ghost' would be a more fitting term. Just like any amateur poet, I hope I can create many beautiful works in the future."

Michael Lee Johnson, was nominated for two Pushcart Prize awards for poetry in 2015, and nominated Best of the Net in 2016. He lived ten vears in Canada during the Vietnam era. He is a poet, freelance writer, editor, publisher, and photographer who experiments with poetography (blending poetry with photography), who has been published in more than 935 small press magazines in 33 countries. He edits eleven poetry sites. He is also the Editor-in-chief/publisher of poetry anthology, Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze: amazon.com/ dp/1530456762. He is also Editor-inchief of a 2nd anthology, Dandelion in a Vase of Roses released April, 2017: amazon.com/dp/1545352089

Shelley Fleming is an attorney working in Cleveland, Ohio.

William R. Soldan is from the rust belt city of Youngstown, Ohio, where he lives with his wife and two children. He received his BA in English Literature and is a graduate of the Northeast Ohio MFA program. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and appears or is forthcoming in publications such as New World Writing, Jellyfish Review, Kentucky Review. Elm Leaves Journal, Mystery Tribune, The Best American Mystery Stories (2017), and many others.

Marshall Pipkin was born and raised in a small raisin-producing town in California's Central Valley. There he watched countless horror movies in black and white and inhaled horror stories borrowed from the local library. He is married, has three daughters, and earned a BA in English and an MA in Literature from CSU Fresno.

Darrell Lindsey is the author of *Edge of the Pond* (Popcorn Press, 2012), and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize (2007) and a Rhysling Award (2014). His work has appeared in more than 65 journals and anthologies. He lives in Nacogdoches, the oldest town in Texas.

Michael C. Seeger is an educator residing in the Coachella Valley near Palm Springs, California. Prior to his life as a middle school English instructor, he worked as a technical writer for a baseball card company and served as a Marine infantry officer during Desert Storm. Michael says he considers poetry a passion and writing generally a way of life.

John Grey is an Australian poet and US resident. Recently published in Homestead Review, Cape Rock and Columbia Review with work upcoming in Louisiana Review, Poem and Spoon River Poetry Review.

Haris Čolić was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He started by publishing short stories and poems in school magazines. He writes for web portal AKOS and publishes his short stories and poems in magazines and anthologies. He is currently working on his first book.

Rick McQuiston is a forty-eight year old father of two who loves anything horror related. He has had nearly 400 publications so far, and is currently working on his sixth novel.

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 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 and can be contacted at wvscheer@aol.com.

James B. Nicola's poems have appeared in the Literary Hatchet, The Antioch, Southwest and Atlanta Reviews, Rattle, Tar River, and Poetry East. His nonfiction book Playing the Audience won a Choice award. His first full-length poetry collection is Manhattan Plaza (2014); his second, Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater (June 2016). A Yale graduate, James has been giving both theater and poetry workshops at libraries, literary festivals, schools, and community centers all over the country.

Ken Allan Dronsfield is a published poet from New Hampshire, now residing in Oklahoma. His published work can be found in reviews. journals, magazines and anthologies throughout the web and in print venues. Ken's new book. The Cellaring, a collection of 80 haunting/paranormal/ weird and wonderful poems, has been released and is available through Amazon. His poetry has been nominated for two Pushcart Prize Awards and the Best of the Net for 2016.

Ann Christine Tabaka was born and lives in Delaware. She is a published poet, an artist, a chemist, and a personal trainer. She loves gardening, the ocean, and her cats. Her poems have been published in poetry journals, reviews, and anthologies.

Hannah Marier has been published in *The Literary* Hatchet and been accepted by the Pen 2 Paper competition, which brings awareness to those with physical disabilities. She grew up in Georgia, and has a huge passion for writing. literature, and social justice.

Josh Abbott lives in Pleasant Hill, Oregon with his lovely wife Lily. When he's not hiding from the sun he enjoys gardening, swimming, and and camping in the deep dark woods.

Bruce Boston is the author of more than fifty books and chapbooks. His writing has received the Bram Stoker Award, the Asimov's Readers Award, a Pushcart Prize and the Rhysling and Grandmaster Awards of the SFPA. His latest collection, Visions of the Mutant Rain Forest, a collaboration with fellow SFPA Grandmaster Robert Frazier, is available from Amazon. bruceboston.com

RazZae DeGeest was born in Oskaloosa, lowa, and found entertainment in observing the lives of people around her; their behaviors, their triumphs, their struggles, their flaws. Currently an unpublished student at William Penn University. RazZae hopes to grow as a writer and gain priceless knowledge on the literary craft of writing.

John Reinhart lives on a farmlette in Colorado with his wife and children. He is a frequent contributor at the Songs of Eretz, editor at Poetry Nook, member of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and was awarded the 2016 Horror Writers Association Dark Poetry Scholarship, and is a Rhysling and Dwarf Stars Award nominee. He has penned two chapbooks and two full length collections. More of his work is available at patreon.com/ iohnreinhart and facebook.com/ JohnReinhartPoet.

Niko Spanos currently lives in East Java, Indonesia. He has lived in more cities than his age and is not sure how he feels about that

E. F. Schraeder's work has appeared in Four Chambers, Dark Moon Digest, Glitterwolf, Slink Chunk Press, the HWA Poetry Showcase Vol. 3. Lavender Review, and other journals and anthologies. The author of a poetry chapbook, Schraeder lives and works in the rustbelt and serves as contributing editor to an animal advocacy webcomic and blog.

Emma-Johanna Henriksson is a Swedish poetess who prefers plants and literature over people. Her recent poetry has appeared in *Flyg fula fågel* and *The Bones of Nirvana*, published by Svensk Apache.

Kate Garrett is a writer, editor, mother, history buff, and amateur folklorist. She is the founding editor of Three Drops Press and Picaroon Poetry, and her own poetry has most recently appeared in Up the Staircase Quarterly, Prole, The Black Light Engine Room, and Rust + Moth. Her pamphlet The Density of Salt (Indigo Dreams Publishing, 2016) was longlisted for best pamphlet in the 2016 Saboteur Awards, and her next. You've never seen a doomsdav like it. will also be published by Indigo Dreams later in 2017. She lives in Sheffield, UK.

Mark Farley has been shortlisted and highly commended for the Bridport Prize. Find him on Twitter (@mumbletoes) or via his blog mumbletoes.blogspot.com/

John Thomas Allen is a 34-vear-old poet from New York. His poetry has recently been published in Spectral Realms and The Adirondack Review. and in 2014 Ravenna Press published a surrealist anthology entitled Nouveau's Midnight Sun: Transcriptions From Golgonooza and Beyond, based on the 2012-2014 surrealist movement ("The New Surrealist Institute") led by David Lehman, David Shapiro, and the author himself. He is working on his own collection, Poking The Third Eye Out.

John Rodzvilla teaches in the Publishing and Writing programs at Emerson College in Boston. His work has appeared in Harvard Review, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, gorse, DecomP, Verbatim and Bad Robot Poetry.

Rainish Mishra is a poet, writer, translator, and blogger born and brought up in Varanasi, India. He loves his city and knows how much it has affected him as a human being and poet. He is the editor of *PPP Ezine*. a poetry ezine and has his blog on poetry, poetics and aesthetic: pleasure: poetrypoeticspleasure. wordpress.com. His poems have been published in several print and online publications, including The Blue Nib, stanzaicstylings, micropoetry, indianreview, Criterion the Journal etc.

Samson Stormcrow Hayes

is the author of the critically acclaimed graphic novel Afterlife (YALSA quick picks selection), screenwriter of The Deal, a ghost writer on a Steven Seagal film. and author of numerous stories and poetry. Hayes has written for Nigel Lythgoe (producer of American Idol), The Weekly World News, and his epitaph. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, he now resides in Los Angeles where he expects the smog to slowly kill him. He can be found in old parking lots, abandoned malls, or at Stormcrowhaves.com.

Christina M. Carrell is a non-fiction author and a previously unpublished writer of fiction and poetry.

Brooke Revnolds is from Charlotte, North Carolina. Her story "Dr. Google" won 2nd place in the 2016 Short Story Contest for Channillo. Her stories have appeared at The Scarlet Leaf Review and The Story Shack. She has upcoming stories that will appear in Massacre Magazine at the end of June and Fantasia Divinity in Julv.

Mary Donaldson-Evans is a retired academic and is indulging her life-long fantasy of writing fiction and personal memoir. Her creative work has been published in The New York Times' "Metropolitan Diary," the Stir@Café Mom, The Lowestoft Chronicle. Diverse Voices Quarterly, and Boomer Lit Magazine, among others.

Dirk James lives in San Leandro, California.

Denny E. Marshall has had art, poetry, and fiction published. One recent credit is cover for Bards And Sages July 2016. See more at dennymarshall.com Madison Garey is a student at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is a member of the Jimenez-Porter Writers' House. She has been published in Stylus and won 3rd prize for the Jimenez-Porter Literary Prize for poetry.

Ashley Dioses has been previously published by Hippocampus Press. Centipede Press, Wildside Press, Martian Migraine Press, Burial Day Books, and a few amateur ezines. She will have her debut poetry collection published by Hippocampus Press next year. She has appeared on Ellen Datlow's full recommended list for Year's Best Horror Vol. 7 for her poem "Carathis." She is an Active Member of the HWA and a member of the SFPA.

Bill Thomas and his brother are the founder of Thomastoons, which has produced cartoons for most publications including Reader's Digest and Saturday Evening Post. He loves to learn about new things and is very passionate about cartooning.

Fabiyas MV is a writer from Orumanayur village in Kerala, India. He is the author of 'Kanoli Kaleidoscope', published by Punkswritepoemspress, USA, 'Eternal Fragments,' published by erbacce press, UK and 'Moonlight And Solitude,' published by Raspberry Books, India. His fiction and poetry have appeared in several anthologies, magazines and journals. His publishers include Western Australian University, British Council, Rosemont College, US, Forward Poetry, Off the Coast, Silver Blade, Pear Tree Press, Zimbell House Publishing LLC, Shooter, Nous, Structo, Encircle Publications, and Anima Poetry. He won many international accolades including Merseyside at War Poetry Award from Liverpool University, UK, Poetry Soup International Award, USA and Animal Poetry Prize 2012 from RSPCA (Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelties against Animals, U K). He was the finalist for Global Poetry Prize 2015 by the United Poets Laureate International (UPLI), Vienna. His poems have been broadcast on the All India Radio.

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