

HOWL

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Volume XII

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Students of Copper Mountain College

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Faculty Advisor Letter

Dear Readers,

This twelfth edition of **HOWL** is once again evidence of the brilliant pool of talent that we have at our college and throughout our surrounding community. As is always true, the vast majority of our submissions is from CMC students, past and present. Some of our stories and poems are from friends who have been members of our Creative Writing & Literary Society since its inception twelve years ago. Other submissions are from faculty and the staff of **HOWL**. As you see, after a dozen years of putting together this little magazine, a sort of community has formed to help it find its way to you, our audience.

As always, I want to acknowledge **HOWL's** staff, all volunteers who have given so generously of their time and energies. Also, thank you to the Copper Mountain College Foundation for funding the printing of our magazine and offering it each year as a gift to our community.

The work involved in publishing **HOWL** has become an annual labor at our college, not unlike seeding a field, caring for it, and bringing it to harvest in the spring. Enjoy!

Sincerely,



Greg Gilbert

HOWL'S

2007 Writing Challenge Winners

HOWL had planned to reprint last year's Writing Challenge winners in the present edition, but what with the number of new submissions received this year and limitations concerning the size of our magazine, we have decided to devote the limited space that we have to new works rather than formerly published submissions, regardless of their excellent quality. And thank you to the generosity of the CMC Foundation for funding the awards.

Winners of the 2007 HOWL Writing Challenge:

- David Falossi
- Jyoti Jennings
- Joanna Montano
- Cyndera Quackenbush
- James Darin Rich
- Tracey Smart
- Lauren Yanofchick

Congratulations to you all!

Opening Credits

by Shannon Bryce Rumsey

She, in her usual stance of frayed confidence,
stated that I am an emotional miser,
picking feelings like dandelions to put in a box
until they wither lifeless.

Again I struggle with the impending swing
of the pendulum of moods, locked in familiar course
as in pointless debate. I see the end as easily as
this beginning and all in between, like scenes
from “Casablanca,” well watched, always the same.

It would seem that one of us tires of the film
and the other clings to the script like a crib blanket,
or confuses subtle changes in dialog for new footage.
She is as much a master of illusion-making in random
accusation as I in denial, so fantasy will substitute
quite nicely
for real issues. And reality...? All of it that I can
perceive is that our bodies are compassionate friends,
our egos, mortal enemies.

She stood crisply in a red dress, so much like Nancy
Reagan
that I knew she had dressed for me, appealing to
my devout political loyalties. She posed as an icon,
calculates, that this image would
stay with me forever. She was pressing flowers.
I responded as planned, inside and out, stirred,
aroused on all levels, and read proudly.

In the subsequent minutes of free-fall she promised me
everything she knew I wanted,
affection, support, fidelity, children,
nonverbal and noncommittal, something for nothing,
the first of many illusions.

She throbs on my brain like an emotional hangover,
braying intimate curses and overt derogatories.
I am self-serving. I am distant. I am unfulfilling.
If she could see it from my eyes she would
recognize her understatement, and perhaps the movie
would stop showing. But she cannot. I must burn

the wretched cellulose before I am burned to smoky ash.
And the projector grinds to a premature halt, and she cries,
hastily putting together a final,
painful image to do lasting work, and she fails. No tearful
recall of a falling curtain remains, but the Republican red
of the opening credits.



Dreamers

by Carolyn Eads

One by one we watch the horizon
with an eye on tomorrow
ever anxious to savor a dream
embrace a new idea
listen to the world's songs
race with a shooting star.

Many times we stand alone
with our ideals, must
rely on inner strength to
pioneer the lands, seas, skies
a blank canvas, a simple sheet of paper.

We cannot deny
yesterday is our teacher
today is our passion
tomorrow is our legacy.

Simply seeing another night turn into day
we journey on, willing to make our next step a
leap of faith.



Chemical Supply

by Nathan McClain

A cracked beaker holds everything you pour for the briefest of moments, like a broken heart or an ear

carved of ice, like glass I tend to spend decades blowing into some shape I hope will

either carry or contain—the act of forming memory, letting each

go slowly, one drop at a time. Like hydrogen to my oxygen, without you

I'm ground into powder, into dust. I hear junior high boys singing songs about re-

kindling old flames (*I want to be your Bunsen burner, love, your test-tube, baby*), about growing

men from atoms, as though culturing us from scratch might nullify the impulse sleeping in the human heart. If

only you were a telescope, I'd look through and pull my future up close, my Milky Way, my swirling

quasars. My professor has a desert rock collection, a constellation of distant parts forming a

sum, a whole, a story—like stars against the backdrop of silence and space, a few

understated shots in the dark, like your voice, calling from one end of our history

(which is all we have anymore). You're the x to every chemical equation that equals me,

you're the inventory list of my heart, the zinc to my ammonium, the lab welded shut.



Forming Attachments

by Savya Lee

After you died, my daughter,
We cleaned out your shed,
A rented space for storage--
And found only yarn.
Bags and boxes of it
All waiting to be crocheted,
Knit together to form
An attachment.
Though they sit in bags
Touching each other
They are not attached.
They are waiting for your hand
To make the connections.

I remember being angry because
You would never use it all, yet
You always collected more.
"Why?" I would ask
And you didn't know.

Now, still wondering
I think of the string theory.
In the new physics they say
We are all connected by strings--
Everything that exists--
We to each other, to universes--
Stars and planets, plants and
Animals, stones and the kitchen sink.

Isn't yarn a form of string?
Was that a subconscious
Desire of yours, to be attached?
A longing for the puppetry of strings?
Not robots but puppets, not

Separated but connected.
Being pulled toward, then away,
Up, down, to places unknown.
Then who is manipulating the strings?
Who is making the connections?

In the string theory
The strings are unseen
But you, my daughter,
Made them manifest
Hoping to unite us all--
And we did not understand.



Sevenling ("You Prophesy the Arrival" ...)

by Nathan McClain

You prophesy the arrival of Spring
listening for the hummingbird's hum.
A sunflower opens for the butterfly inside

your right breast, beating its wings—
the flutter you confused with your heart.
At night, you listen at the window

for the solitary whistle of a train slowing.



“Peaches”

by Lauren Yanofchick

Shane Miles checks the address again. Most of the time he can't read his own writing. His brother's house comes into view. The gate is hanging open, rusted on its hinges. He slows his car at the mail box to admire its gluttonous explosion of letters and flyers. Pulling forward, the stone driveway bracing underneath the tires, he can see letters and parcels stuck to the chain link fence.

The house was his brother's design. A plastic sign sticking up from a weed patch by the porch says in writing reminiscent of lasso rope says, “A Rain Miles Creation.” No one but the family and visitors can even see the sign; it belongs by the road where people can see it. But that was Rain, modest as could be.

The house was only something Shane had seen in a Polaroid photo with a label on the back that said: *A work in progress*. Four stories with a little room on top that is all windows, like a wedding cake topper that glitters in sunlight.

Shane pulls a set of silver keys on a brass ring from the planter on the cherry-wood porch. One for the deadbolt, one for the bottom lock, one for who knows what. Rain is not there to ask. Rain is dead at thirty five years old.

Shane remembers.

The call could not have come at a better time. Chloe was stuffing clothes and books into a suitcase, staunch on leaving him right then. She answered the phone, thinking it was her friend who was going to pick her up, but instead it was Emma.

Emma was very calm. “He died.” She said this to Chloe, not Shane, and Chloe had to unpack her bags and put the kettle on, her reasons for leaving set aside. When Chloe really did leave three weeks later, taking *the kid* with her, Shane called Emma.

“You just caught me, Shane,” said Emma. “I'm leaving the house. I can't stay here.” She gave a heavy pause and then dutifully asked how he was coping. Her husband, *his* brother, was dead after all.

“Can I stay there?”

“I'm not paying for utilities. I had them turned off. If you want to camp out then go ahead.”

“I can't stay in my apartment,” he admitted. “Chloe left me and I feel like dying.”

“I know the feeling.” Before hanging up she told him directions and where to find the keys.

There is only one dry log waiting for him to burn in the fireplace. There is a newspaper, three weeks old, that he sets a kitchen match to. A black and white image of words and political leaders is set ablaze.

To get back in the car and find food somewhere would be defeating the point of solitude.

Everything is custom built. Everything in the house came from Rain’s imagination, came from his sweat and will to create. But if Rain were giving the tour, he would never say how long it took him. He would never talk about his aching hands, splintered, all the times he hit his thumb with a hammer, or how hard it is to find good help these days. He would never bring out the *Architectural Digest* clipping and point to his fame.

Taking canned beef stew from the maple wood pantry is like taking canned beef stew from a pantry in Rain’s genius head.

Walking up the spiral stair case with a lit candle is like walking up Rain’s bright idea. Maybe the spiraling staircase came to Rain in a dream or out of nowhere while playing poker with friends. Maybe it had been something he had seen when they were kids that he had harbored in his sketches and daydreams.

Rain and Shane, one’s a freak and one’s a brain.

Seeing a photo of Rain with Emma and Page is like seeing himself with two strangers.

Shane remembers. “You should go.” This coming from Shane’s fiancé, Chloe, the now ex-fiance, in regards to Rain’s wedding to Emma. “You should go because he’s your brother.” What marvelous reasoning skills she possesses. “You should go.” This is in regards to the christening of Rain and Emma’s daughter, Page. “You should go because she’s your blood.” What cryptic language she can utter.

Shane remembers. “You should come.” This from Emma, the sister-in-law he’s never bothered to meet. She has tried everything to get Shane to visit them. “We’ll *pay* you to take pictures. How much do you charge?”

The night is dark and cold. He has remembered the prescription sleeping pills in his toiletry bag and takes one with bottled water he finds in a cupboard.

The night takes on strange whisperings. If he were superstitious he would think that he could hear Rain's thoughts. But he isn't that and so he does not.

He falls asleep on a daybed near the kitchen. In the morning he wakes on an unfamiliar Greek revival couch with a lyre arm design in the study room. This kind of thing just happens. In the medical world this is called *somnambulating*.

After taking three photos with his manual Nikon from varying angles of the Greek revival couch, something startles him. This something is a knock followed by a lady's "yoo-hoo!" coming from the front door. The lady is portly with broken blood vessels in her cheeks. The lady is holding a brown sack that looks heavy. The lady knows him.

"You're Shane aren't you?" This she says with a motion that would lead to an embrace. Shane let's her squeeze his arms like tubes of toothpaste. "You look just like your brother, the auburn hair and blue eyes. You're both so tall." The lady wants to cry. She says she lives just a quarter mile away and she's come to feed--

"Can I help you?" Shane isn't one for small talk right now. He wants her to cry somewhere else.

"Oh, yes," she says. "I mean no. No, I just wanted to say welcome and that the phone company has been looking for Emma. I guess she forgot to turn off the service."

Shane asks to take a photo of her in the doorway. She obliges and then asks what will happen to the house. She asks if he had come to the funeral, she did not see him there. She begins to ask something else, something about peaches. *Nosey hick*, he thinks.

He turns his back and leaves her on the porch and eventually she goes away. He picks up the receiver on the phone in the kitchen and dials.

"Hello?" Chloe sounds like she was sleeping.

"It's me."

"Shane?"

"Yeah...do you know where I am?"

"No. I don't care." Shane feels this is true.

"How are you?"

“I’m fine. I’m great. I need money though.” Chloe dropped out of modeling school. When his brother was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer and Shane became depressed, she dropped out of love too. She would argue that though that it was his lack of success, motivation, and ability to communicate that sent her packing.

“How much?” Chloe took out a loan for modeling school that she can’t repay.

“Where are you then?” She is smoking in bed, exhaling through her nostrils.

“I thought you didn’t care.”

“I don’t.” This is their game.

“Are you sleeping?”

“Are *you*?” They used to lie awake at night asking that same question.

“What have you told him?”

“Nothing.”

“I’m at Rain and Emma’s house.”

“Dropping out of society for awhile? You owe me the money for your supplies.”

“Okay, come get it then.” He thought of the roll of twenties in a film container in his toiletry bag. He thought about calling his agent, begging for a new start.

“Never mind. Forget it.” Chloe, the ex-fiance, the single mother of *the kid*, has hung up her phone.

There is a wooden crate full of bottled booze in the back of the pantry behind stacks of sealed party cups. Into a red cup he pours Grey Goose. A new experience: room temperature top shelf vodka without promise of ice.

If it is still early for Chloe (assuming she had not slept in) then it is probably close to noon for him. Normally noon is not standard happy hour. Normally.

But why is he feeling watched?

After attaching his flash, he takes two photos of the near empty pantry, and his brother’s stash of high quality liquor.

And then something startles him again. That something is a voice, androgynous, ageless, coming from above. The ceiling in the living area is photo worthy in itself, vertical dark wooden beams, patterns made from red tiles, the highest point no less than thirty five feet. And now it has words.

“Uh-oh.” This is what the ceiling says. “Uh-oh. Oh, no.”
Shane’s cup trembles. He is drunk. He should eat something.

“Uh-oh.”

And then Shane sees it. A bird. A huge light colored bird is on a vertical beam, a shinning eye staring down at him, with one wing raised. Shane begins to climb the staircase, until he hears the bird hiss.

“This is very surprising,” Shane says, voice slurred. What else can one say? The bird, which Shane recognizes to be a cockatoo of sorts, stomps it’s left foot on the beam and fluffs its crest.

Shane takes another few steps upwards, trying to get a better view, and again the bird hisses. What Shane had not seen in the shadows of the previous evening was that the banister of the staircase has bite marks and that there are white droppings here and there.

“Hello,” Shane hears himself say. It was worth a try. The bird, which he can now see is a brilliant array of cream and peach, keeps one eye on him and stands on one foot and then the other. He tries again. “Hello bird.”

“*Pretty* bird.” Classic!

“*Pretty* bird,” Shane mimics. They each repeat this a few more times, and then Shane breaks the pattern. “What’s your name?”

“What’s your name?” the bird throws back at him.

“Shane.” The bird considers this. It faces him directly. Its eyes, which are actually chocolate brown like those of a loyal dog, seem to relax.

“Rain,” the creature squawks.

“No--- *Shane*.” The bird seems to consider this also. Shane considers that he might still be sleeping. That calling Chloe was a dream too. He wants more proof. “Rain and Shane are brothers.”

The cockatoo fluffs and raises its crest. The wing lowers gently down.

“Rain and Shane, one’s a dunce and one’s a brain.” Shane sings it like the kids used to do back in school. The cockatoo seems to enjoy this. It bobs his head a few times. Shane is only about fifteen feet from the bird and he can see it is missing feathers. “Rain and Shine, little ones.” This he says like his mother used to when she would wake them up for school.

“Emma,” says the bird. “Emma went to market.” Shane drops his head. It is suddenly all too damn sad to bear. His brother dies, his sister-in-law abandons the house and family pet. And where has he been? Living a grueling city life, absorbed in his own petty problems.

He sits down hard on the top step, out of view of the bird. His shoulders come up like he is about to cry. But nothing comes. He finishes his cup. The bird has said something else but Shane couldn’t make it out.

“Peek-a-boo,” it repeats. When Shane says nothing, the bird lets go a high pitched whine followed by what sounds like weeping. Shane goes to the closest bed he can find on the second floor and takes the two sleeping pills he’s stashed in his pocket. He wakes at sunset in the footed bathtub on the third floor. This kind of thing just happens.

The sound of talons on tile is heard. Shane is having trouble staying awake. The cockatoo is perching itself on a bare towel rack.

“Bath time,” it says quietly. “Bath time for Shane,” it says in a definite whisper. Shane’s eyes are heavy. The bird is vigilant. It begins to sing in a soothing voice a song that Shane recognizes even while half his brain is stuck in sleep.

“Mares eat oats and goats eat oats,” the bird coos. “Mares eat oats and goats eat oats.” This was Shane and Rain’s childhood bedtime song. Rain must have passed it on.

Shane falls asleep again and wakes in darkness. He is still in the bathtub, moonlight shining through the little round window, two eyes reflective in the blackness. “Wake up!” the voice demands.

The voice is like espresso to Shane’s pulse and he is up feeling for a light switch. But of course there is no electricity.

His head is throbbing. His limbs are gelatin. He takes the steps like a toddler and the voice says calmly, “Careful, careful, careful.” When Shane misses the last step and comes falling forward onto his hands and knees into the hard wood, the voice says, “Uh-oh. Shane needs a tickle.”

And Shane finds himself talking back. “I’m okay, bird.”

“*Pretty* bird,” the voice corrects, with a hint of umbrage.

Shane finds himself sharing a can of vegetable stew and saltines with his new roommate, the cockatoo, by candlelight. When Shane pets the bird a talc-like powder comes from the feathers. There are a few bald spots where the bird pulled out feathers.

Months later, Shane will read that birds do this when they are grieving. He will learn that when they lose a loved one, they are capable of going insane.

Shane asks again what the bird's name is.

"Peaches," says Peaches. Okay then, Shane thinks. Peaches is a lady bird with a little crush. Rain had never mentioned this pet before. But why would he?

The next morning Shane let's Peaches follow him everywhere. What other choice does he have? He uses up all of his film on Peaches. Peaches eating crackers. Peaches with his crest puffed up. Peaches dancing. When he finds a large cage under a blanket in the cobwebbed shed outside, he brings it in to the living room. Peaches eyes it hatefully.

He can't shut Peaches out of the dark bathroom when he develops the film. He tries telling Peaches to wait downstairs but this makes Peaches cry. A goddamn bird crying. He would have never imagined.

On what Shane guesses is his fourth day in the abandoned Miles mansion, he finds a yellow harness on a leash which he can only deduce is intended for Peaches. A little drunk, Shane manages to get the very complacent Peaches into the yellow harness and then drive five miles to a market. Peaches sits in the baby seat of the cart while he shops for all the things a bird would like.

"Do you eat this?" Shane holds up a head of lettuce and Peaches taps her beak loudly on the metal of the cart. No one seems to care about his strange pet. He figures Rain and Emma used to do the same thing. *Rain and Emma*. Shane holds up grapes and Peaches bobs her head, taps her beak, and does a dance.

He remembers the wedding notice from Rain. On the back Rain wrote, "I'll pay you to take pictures if you come. How much do you charge?"

Chloe and *the kid* have driven close to three hundred miles. Chloe is chain smoking with the windows down and it's just over forty degrees outside. Last time Shane saw her she had blonde hair and black roots. Last time she saw him, he was making a promise to give back the money he borrowed for supplies. *This next show*, he had said, *is gonna do it. This next show and I can pay you back and more.* She wants to be paid back. She is counting all the reasons she has not to like him. The drive is agony without a working radio.

The kid is pretending to be asleep. She asks him, “Do you want me to quit smoking? Does your teacher say smokers are bad?” He knows that if he says yes and yes, that she will cry. He pretends to sleep.

“We’re gonna see daddy, okay? Do you miss him? Are you mad at me?” The kid has practiced this. He gives a fake little snore.

Shane falls asleep in an enclosed canopy bed on the third floor with Peaches by his head. He wakes up on the floor of the living room with Peaches by his feet. He finds an antique sugar chest painted to look like curly maple in the closet of a spare bedroom. Inside are photographs of all the things he missed: the foundation of the house being poured, the wedding, the pregnancy, the christening. Peaches likes the pictures of her and Rain so much she dances when she sees them. At the bottom is a photo Shane had sent Rain nearly three years ago. It is a photo of his pretend little family: the fiancé, *the kid*, and him. He holds it up and says, “Family.”

Peaches understands. She sits on his shoulder, preening his long eyelashes and shaggy hair.

“Family,” she coos. “Family.” It is unbearable. He wants to cry. He can’t. Peaches makes her weeping sound and he swallows three sleeping pills without water. He has a few minutes before they kick in. He finds the wooden ladder that leads to the fifth floor room, the little glass cake topper.

His head just about touches the ceiling of the little room. He is about two inches taller than Rain. He can tell this was Rain’s hideaway. There is a telescope, a book called *The Cure for All Cancers*, and a paisley floor pillow.

“Time to play,” says Peaches. He tells her no and she squawks so loudly his ears ring. “Time for a treat,” she persists. The pills should have taken affect by now.

The window facing east has no screen and is more of a sliding glass door than a window. It strikes him as an irresponsible thing to have with a four year old in the house.

Like *he* would understand parenting.

Why wasn’t he feeling sleepy yet? In the medical world they call this *developing a drug tolerance*.

“Shane *needs* a tickle,” says Peaches. He is amazed at how empathetic she is.

“Shane is bad,” he hears himself say. “Shane is a bad father, a bad man.”

“Shane *needs* a tickle,” she reasons again.

“Chloe and I lied to her son. We told him I was his dad when he was just a baby.” He felt hot tears. “I thought I would be, you know? We were going to get married and I was going to be his dad. But she left. And I know she’ll tell him the truth.”

“Shane needs *time out*.” Shane hears this from her but he is sobbing loudly, in awe of his own tears.

After awhile, he leaves the little glass room and has another drink. He has another pill. Tomorrow he will go home. He will go home and start over again. Six days is long enough.

Three hours later Shane falls into a blackened sleep on the daybed near the kitchen.

“Uh, oh.” Peaches is vigilant. “Uh-oh. Oh-no. Careful, careful, careful.”

Shane wakes up in the fifth story glass room. The sliding glass door is open. It is freezing. It’s the coldness that wakes him. But he is stuck between states of consciousness, sitting with his legs dangling out into the air. Peaches is on his shoulder. His eyes open; he sees her there, one wing raised, a sign he learned means that she’s afraid. Part of him knows *why* she is afraid. When his eyes close and his torso heaves forward she steps off of him but keeps close. “Wake up!” she screams. A bird screaming, he would have never imagined. His torso falls back into the room again.

“Shane and Rain brothers,” she says. Shane opens his eyes to see trees and ground below him. It is so cold. He considers that he’s dreaming.

“You’ve been like a sister to me bird,” he hears himself say this and then he smiles, laughing at how stupid it all is.

“Shane and Peaches,” she says. He considers that he’s dreaming.

Rain and Shine, little ones.

When Chloe and her son arrive the first thing she does is go through the stack of eight by eleven photos resting on the daybed near the kitchen.

“A bird,” she says with distaste. “All of these are of a goddamn bird. I can’t believe it. He’ll never be able to sell these.”

She lights a cigarette. “Shane?” She calls out but receives no reply. “He’s probably asleep. God, this house is huge.” Her son has a plastic sippy cup in one hand and a banana in the other. He is glad to be out of the car. He sees something that makes him shriek.

Chloe spins on her heels. “What?!”

“A bird mommy! I see a bird in a cage.”

“Well don’t touch it.”

“It’s sad.”

“Fine, just don’t touch it. Go outside okay?” She starts up the staircase calling out for Shane. *Maybe he knew I was coming and he left*, she thinks to herself. She thinks to herself, *cheap bastard*, and takes the stairs two at a time.

The kid has followed the porch around to the east side. He sees a shiny rock and sticks it in the pocket of his corduroy overalls with his banana. He chews nervously on the plastic lip of his cup. He looks up. And then he sees.

His cup falls to the ground and rolls off the porch into the dirt.

Shane is on the second floor roof, face down, one arm dangling off, the other is underneath his cheek.

Chloe is yelling down from the fifth story glass room, and *the kid* is yelling up from the porch. Shane’s eyes open and he sees *the kid* waving his arms far below him.

He considers he’s dreaming. This kind of thing just happens.



Footprints in the Desert

by Savya Lee

Dawn before sun-up.
Spring!
Cool, grey sky shadows
Touch the semi-darkness.
There is a subtle movement
Toward light but
Not yet --
I open my door, deliciously
Breathe the nectar of
Early morning
Take that first step
Outside
Into the cocoon of solitary
Like the first human
To walk upon the earth.
Like that first morning
Of creation.
There is no sound.
I sniff the air
Feel its coolness
On my skin,
Feel my feet touching ground.
And then--in half-light
I see the footprints.
Huge silent symbols
Of a parallel world,
Unknown animal tracks
In a land of shadows
Just outside my house. . .
I pause, step back
Over the threshold and
Quietly close the door.



Petals of Sound

by Savya Lee

At this hour
Far beyond time
I hear the distant music
Of the dreamer.
I am touching the
Outer edge of sound.
In the night
Desert winds whisper
A song of stone and star--
Of universes underfoot
Hidden beneath lizard tracks.
I hear petals of sound
Falling into sand,
Creating constellations
Of dancing atoms.
I breathe earth and dream
Wake to the cry of coyotes
Stepping over everything.



Lunch Stop in Jerome, Arizona

(Ghost town once known for its copper mine)

1955

by Richard Lee

Dressed in old pharmacies
wind in her skirts,
words in her bones,

she waddles on this
mountain, is a fistful
of outhouses and

grocery stores in
gray and white. Her hands
move in clouds, are

menus of windows
where open diners
speak but are

dead. Cars walk down
her alleys, nudge her
eyes awake. Fences faint

with the weather, break
down her hills. What
shall I have to eat?

Shutters rasping among
the uplifting pines?
And where is that

waiter? I raise a
hand, catch his miners
smile. Words explode

backwards into the look
on my face. You're next
he is saying.

I'm next, this wind
is saying.
You are, youre

next, it is whistling
with drippings, with
candle drippings,

with houses that fall,
with eyes and service
of wine and with paint.

You're next with
cows and dung
and the weather.



Basic Beat

by Carolyn Eads

Like a great symphony
nature surrounds us
pushing,
pulling,
pulsing,
eternally setting the tempo
no matter the arrangement
always adhering to, always returning to
one basic beat.

Man blindly marches to a different drummer
building on earthquake faults --- creating artificial hearts,
settling on shifting sands --- smashing atoms
daring hurricane paths --- hurtling through space
blocking river runs --- unlocking arteries
reshaping shores --- destroying the ozone
felling trees --- artificial insemination
shackling land in asphalt and cement
polluting and killing the seas.

But, mind the basic beat
pay heed to Mother Nature, the ultimate conductor
for we are all unschooled musicians
playing off-key, most unwilling to learn
some unable to read the score.

Watch her baton,
even the unfinished symphony has an end . . .



Animal Crackers

by Carolyn Eads

As I dig through my box of animal crackers I
stack the ones that are alike: three camels, two seals
then a lonely tiger appears, next a fat hippopotamus

Now two bison join the group, searching I find another piece
a broken lion, then half a bear. Numerous crumbs
are on my finger-tips, pieces I cannot identify.

Shortly, I eat the elephant, play with the kangaroo
leave the gorilla until the last and think a fleeting thought,
there was no giraffe.

Looking in my empty box my mind leaps through time and space
to mountains, jungle, savannas and plains.

Crinkling up waxy paper, my heart is heavy.



The Future is Now

by Trent Taylor

ABL - Advanced Baseball League

F1 = Fan 1

NK = New Kid

F2 = Fan 2

F1 - Hey new kid, which team does your father play for?

NK - The Hi-Desert Rangers.

F1 - Who?

NK - The Hi-Desert Rangers in the MLB?

F2 - The MLB?

NK - Major League Baseball.

F2 - That league is for losers. The most home runs per year has
only been 70 or 80 and that record will stand for the next hundred

years.

F1 + F2 - HA! HA!

F1 - Yea, it's the girls' league. The field is so tiny and the pitcher is so close to the batter they're practically kissing!

F1 + F2 - HA! HA!

NK - No way! It is the original league and its true to its founders of baseball's ideals.

F2 - Yea. Boredom.

F1 - Slow.

F2 - And predictable.

NK - Is not!

F1 - Look dude. Get with the 21st Century. You are living in the past. Humans must advance and improve to remain competitive. Innovation and competition is what sets us apart from all other species.

NK - Yea, but not with performance enhancing drugs in sports.

F2 - Dude, why not? They have been a part of human existence for generations - in all walks of life.

F1 - Yea, my great grandfather is a 148 and still plays tennis 6 days a week. And he has only had two bypasses. Both my grand mothers bowl with a average in the 190s and they still flirt with the guys on the other teams. Enhancing drugs help people stay active, fit, healthy and they live longer - with their full memories. These drugs are eliminating old age.

F2 - Everybody uses them. I bet you took some last night while studying and more this morning for the exam.

NK - Only stimulants.

F2 - Right. Read the label. All stimulants have enhancements to target specific parts of the brain and body. You can't just use them once either.

F1 - The food you have been eating all your life has been genetically altered, fortified - enhanced. Even what your father eats every day. There has not been unmodified food for thousands of years. Once we began harnessing food into crops we have been altering what grows. Cattle, pigs, fowl and fish, too.

F2 - You can't honestly believe your dad has not taken performance enhancing drugs.

NK - He hasn't.

F2 - What if he gets a head or stomach ache before a game or has an injury? I bet he takes some product to mask the pain.

NK - Yea, but it is legal in the MLB.

F2 - Ha. It is still a performance enhancing drug. One person says it's legal one place another says it isn't. He still plays better using it than not. It is a crutch, to improve performance.

NK - But it is not created to make him stronger or faster or change his genes. Or to make him into a super athlete or super soldier.

F1 - Yea and his career won't be as long as a player in the ABL by 15 or 20 years. When he retires, he will probably start using enhancing drugs because of his reoccurring pain and difficulties due to his injuries. So why not use them now and contribute to the incredible records the players are making in sports now.

F2 - The Olympics have allowed enhancing drugs for decades now. Men are getting closer to running the mile in a minute.

NK - Baseball games are more exciting knowing the players are not on drugs.

F1 - What? Who watches the MLB any more? I don't even know how many teams are left in the league. Ha. Most cities switched over to the ABL.

F2 - The sports news doesn't even mention your league.

F1 - The World Series hasn't been on TV for over 20 years. And it wasn't even a 'world series'. There were only American teams. The ABL is truly an international league with its regular season and playoff games. There are 15 countries represented in the league.

NK - So.

F2 - Dude, we are no longer run by computer corporations. Its the pharmacy corporations who run the world now.

F1 - And the ABL pitchers are closing in on throwing the ball at 175 mph. Your daddy would piss his pants at the plate.

NK - No he wouldn't.

F2 - O, ya right. His un-enhanced eyes would miss seeing the ball.

F1 - Strike Three!

F1 + F2 - You're out! Dude!



My Love

by Karen Hyde

The best and most beautiful things
 in the world
 cannot be seen—or even touched.
They must be felt
 with the heart.
When you need someone
 I am there.
If you need a shoulder to cry on
 I am there.
You won't be shedding tears alone.
When in time of need take my hand,
 I'll be there.
I am here to stay by your side.
I have no words to ease your worries.
I see a strong individual inside you.
You can make it,
 if you are able to believe in yourself
 the way I do.
Love is the emblem of eternity.
Love cures people
 both the ones who give it
 and the ones who receive it.



Five Definitions of One Term

by Harriet Murphy

How many words does the average English speaking person utter a day? One thousand? One hundred thousand? Maybe four hundred thousand? You don't know? Well, neither do I; nor does the World Wide Web. What I do know is that we use a variety of different phrases in our vocabulary every day. Do you often wonder what they mean or where they come from? Today I am going to examine one of those phrases. I am going to define, to you, the term "dead ringer". I am also going to tell you where it comes from.

(1) My brother Rick, from Salem Massachusetts and an engineer at General Electric sent me this scenario:

The young man swaggered into the bar and spotted the crowd of young ladies. He put on his best James Dean attitude. The cigarette dangled from his mouth while he made his way toward the crowd with a look of indifference and confidence on his face. After all he did consider himself a "dead ringer" for the rebel icon.

So what does the term dead ringer mean? Read on and I will tell you.

(2) Webster's College Dictionary defines dead ringer as "A person or thing that closely resembles another." The IdiomSite on line defines dead ringer as "something that is exactly duplicated."

A ringer is a horse that is taken through the country and trotted under a false name and pedigree. Ringer has since been adopted into the English Language to mean any very close duplicate. Now let us talk about the word dead. As we all know the word dead means, cease to exist, or the sense of lifelessness. We all tend to focus on these meanings, and we tend to forget the other meanings of dead. The meanings that are relevant here are precise or exact. This is demonstrated in many phrases; "dead- shot," "dead- centre," "dead- heat," ECT. (Levin para 9).

So, dead ringer is literally the same as exact duplicate.

(3) Dead ringer is also a slang term for "Having a very strong resemblance" (Idiomsite para 1). A dead ringer is a clone for someone or something else, such as an identical twin, or a painting

that has been reproduced. Many famous artists, such as Rembrandt and Picasso, have had reproductions of their painting done by an increasing number of beginner and mature painters throughout the years. Some of these painting are called dead ringers because they are hard to tell if they are the originals. A dead ringer may look like the object that has been duplicated, but in the case of an identical twin, for example, the personality of each individual may differ. My former classmate and friend Marianne, who is from Singapore, says “In her culture dead ringer is someone who not only looks like another person but has the same behavior, mannerisms, and way of talking; in other words a spitting image of someone else.”

(4) There are games in which the term dead ringer is used. The IdiomSite on line states,

“In the nineteenth century, the term dead could sometimes be used to mean “absolute” or “complete.” A “dead ringer” is achieved when a goal is achieved perfectly, as in the game of horseshoes. When playing a game of horseshoes, a perfect throw resulting in a horseshoe encircling the scoring stake is called a “dead ringer”” (IdiomSite).

I was interviewing my dad and he told me of another game he used to play when he was a child. He said “I would shoot pennies up against a wall and the one whose penny bounced back, heads up, closes to the shooter would be the winner. Some of the players would have two headed pennies, which they called “dead ringers”.”

(5) I remember someone telling me a while back, whose name and face eludes me at the moment that the term originated in England. The phrase dead ringer refers to people who were prematurely buried and who pulled on bell ropes that were attached to their coffins in order to attract attention. The person hearing the bell would then dig up the grave releasing the poor soul who was buried. These people who came to the close call of being buried alive were called “dead ringers”. I was skeptical; I could not believe this was actually true. Reporter Beth Levin does mention it briefly in the January issue of the “Stanford Linguistics Newsletter” (Levin para 7). So I did some more research, and found it mentioned again on the [IdiomSite](#) (IdiomSite para 2). I guess there must be some truth to this folktale; although, the term did not originate here, which I am sure of.

(6) In an E-mail interview with my former tutor James Burkes, I asked him for a cognitive definition of the term dead ringer and here are his remarks. “1) Irretrievable, without possibility of error, At one time the signal to lower the curtain of a theatre was actually a small bell rung backstage. “Ring down the curtain.” 2) Also very, very close to imposter or fake. “He was a dead-ringer for someone so-and-so, but wasn’t them;” False representation.”

(7) These things are all well and good to know but where did the term come from? According to the January issue of the “Stanford Linguistics Newsletter,” “the term dead ringer originated in the US horse-racing fraternity at the end of the 19th century when a horse was substituted for another with a similar appearance in order to defraud the bookies.” (Levin para 9). I myself have always thought the term’s origin was from the game of horseshoes, as did many of the people I have talked with. It surprised me to know that it was not.

In this essay, I have defined the term “dead ringer” a number of times. The denotative meaning that I have chosen is exact duplicate, which is broken down and explained in paragraph three. The connotative meanings I find very interesting. To an artist, dead ringer is a reproduction of a famous painting, and to an identical twin, his or her, brother or sister. The phrase “dead ringer” has also been used in play. An example of this is the game of horseshoes, which my dad will tell you, is widely known mostly to a generation gone by. It is amazing how many times we will speak words and as they spill out of our mouths, we really don’t know the definitions or where they originated from. Remember, the next time you call someone a dead ringer be careful, for that person may have been buried alive at one time, thus demonstrating that a term or phrase can have multiple definitions.

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Pilgrimage to the Promised Land

by Elmer Castillo

My everlasting solo pilgrimage continues on,
A quest for a place where my people aren't afraid to rise

I yearn for a land bountiful in beauty
Where sunshine stretches beyond vanilla skies

I want to go where angels gather to sleep on clouds
Where this friendly fire known as greed is no more

Off to a place where armies and fleets are useless
With nowhere to fight, because there is no war

I lose myself there, admiring the oceans so golden
Where we become one with imagination

No more fixation on minor pre-occupations
Only strength and unity throughout the population

Perhaps this land is right here and now
Its coordinates reading in between you and me

Suppose we already inhabit this peaceful soil,
It could exist right here and now, if you wanted it to be...



Campo's Dilemma

by Donald C. Sachs

Cicero, Illinois in the 1920's was a unique town. In a geographical sense, Cicero was a suburb of Chicago; but, no two places could have been more dissimilar. Cicero was a small sleepy town that was not much more than a wide place in a road that went nowhere, while Chicago was a large, busy metropolis expanding out from the shores of Lake Michigan. In Chicago one could find a first class symphony orchestra, a famous art institute, numerous "speak easies," and many high and low class brothels.

It was well known that Cicero was the so-called headquarters of the infamous Al Capone's underworld organization. Mr. Capone owned a huge house surrounded by many acres of woodlands on the edge of town. Also, several of Capone's henchmen had homes in the area. However, the Capone gang maintained a very low profile in Cicero; the townspeople were unaware of their presence, except for an occasional limousine seen passing through town. Although Capone controlled virtually all of the illegal activities in and around Chicago, he did not allow even a hint of such activities in Cicero. In fact, if the citizens of Cicero desired an alcoholic beverage or the company of a prostitute, they had to go elsewhere. So, it was not by choice that Cicero was an island of respectability in a sea of corruption. Probably about the most exciting events for the people of Cicero were the hotly contested football and basketball games at the local high school. The town would forever bask in the memory of the year that the basketball team made it to the state semi-finals—only to lose by one point to a team from Peoria. Five years later they still talk about that game. And, the place where they do most of their talking is Joe's Diner.

When people talked about Emily Warren, a waitress at Joe's Diner, the words often used were "different", "peculiar", or "unusual". It was not anything regarding her appearance that was unusual. She was not unattractive, but her facial features were quite ordinary. Her complexion was ruddy and clear. She wore little makeup; usually only lip gloss. Her dark brown hair was pulled back

and gathered in a small bun. Emily's shapely figure was well-displayed in her waitress uniform; she didn't flaunt it, but she knew that men noticed her firm breasts and small waist. What was most unusual about Emily was that she was a "loner"; she had no close men or women friends. Emily lived with her mother and brother, Eddie. Emily's younger brother, Eddie, had always been a problem. His mother and sister tried their best to help him, but it seemed that trouble followed him everywhere. He was a poor student—Emily was three years ahead of him in school and she helped him all she could. Fortunately, he was blessed with an athlete's body and a talent to excel at football and basketball. When Eddie was offered an athletic scholarship by Iowa State University, Emily and his mother thought that he would get a fine education. But, their hopes were dashed when he flunked out after his first year. Back in Cicero, he had been working as a plumber's helper at a low wage, and he had been secretly betting on various sporting events with a bookie in Chicago.

There was no question, Emily was the best waitress at the diner. Whereas Joe's other waitresses stayed only a few months, Emily had been working at the diner almost three years. She was always very fast and efficient; there was no wasted motion. She had her "regular" customers and she gave them her special attention. The other waitresses were careful not to encroach on her territory—unless Emily got too busy and gave them the high sign. Joe Armando, Emily's boss, did not interfere with her work. As long as the diner ran smoothly, he was happy. Since Emily started work there, everything had been great! During most weeks, Campo ate at Joe's five or six times—he was one of Emily's regulars.

If you were ever in a street fight, you would want Campo on your side. The scars on his face and neck gave stark evidence of many violent encounters. He was not a big man, but his medium build belied his strength and gave no hint of his quickness and his proven ability to inflict pain and serious injury. His black hair, graying at the temples, was combed straight back. His eyes, inconsistent with his thin lips and firm jaw, were kindly eyes—they were hazel and deep set. He walked with a purposeful, steady gait, primarily on the balls of his feet, his body bent forward as if he were late for an important appointment. This man, known in Cicero only by the name Campo, was not a killer, but he was feared as much as a

killer might be. He was an “enforcer”—that is, he was paid to “encourage” people to do things that they did not want to do.

Since Campo’s reputation always preceded him, he often only had to confront his adversary to achieve the desired result. If the person he was dealing with showed no intention of complying with Campo’s request, then he had to resort to physical force. His methods of persuasion could take several different forms, depending on the size, age, and estimated physical abilities of his opponent. At times, a cut lip or bloody nose was sufficient—on other occasions, a broken arm or leg was required to emphasize his resolve. Campo always departed with the promise that should another visit be required, the consequences would be more severe. Had he ever lost a battle? Well, one violent encounter ended in a draw—both combatants were carted off to the hospital with multiple fractures, a concussion, and a punctured lung. However, Campo’s worthy opponent decided to pay his debt rather than repeat the experience.

If we had been able to crawl into Campo’s mind, what would we find? We would find that he believed in a set of uncompromising principles. First, everyone is responsible for his own actions. Second, everyone will be treated equally—no matter what their skin color, station in life, manner of dress, or reputation. Third, if a person made a bad choice, tried to cheat someone, steal something, or welsh on a debt—that person must make it right. Finally, what Campo does, as an enforcer, is not done with any personal animosity toward the mark—it is based upon the principle that the wrongdoing must be corrected.

One evening while she was at work at the diner, Emily received a telephone call from her mother. Emily was angry; she had told her mother many times not to call her at work, unless it was an emergency. Her mother said this was an emergency; she was somewhat incoherent at first—after Emily calmed her down, she learned that Eddie was in serious trouble. Eddie had been gambling heavily and owed a loan shark more than \$10,000. It seems that he had borrowed \$5,000 to bet on some football games, lost the bets, and the high interest had ballooned the debt to more than twice the original loan. Emily’s mother said that the loan shark had been to their house looking for Eddie. While Emily was on the telephone talking to her mother, Campo was eating his dinner at the diner. Campo heard Emily’s side of the conversation and he saw that she

was very upset. When Emily came by to give Campo his check, Campo looked up and said,

“Emily, I can see that the telephone call you received has upset you—I couldn’t help hearing your part of the conversation. Is there anything I can do to help?”

Emily was surprised by Campo’s offer to help. It was the first time Campo had ever said anything to her of a personal nature. Usually, their conversation had been confined to remarks about the food or the weather. But, when Emily looked into Campo’s eyes, she was sure that he was sincere, and, she also felt that he would probably be familiar with her brother’s problem. She answered quickly,

“Thank you for your concern. We cannot talk here. I’ll be off work in an hour—would you meet me in front of the public library at 9:15?”

“I’ll be there,” replied Campo.

Emily and Campo met at the library and while they walked toward Emily’s house, she told Campo the sad story about her “stupid brother”. Campo had heard similar stories many times—a frustrated athlete is certain he knows which team will definitely win a game, sees a chance for easy money, borrows from a loan shark, losses the bet, and cannot pay the debt. They arrived at Emily’s house. Emily invites Campo in for a cup of coffee; but, he declines noting the late hour. Then Campo asks,

“Say, Emily, I don’t even know your last name.”

“Oh, I’m sorry—it’s Warren, Emily Warren.”

Campo was stunned—but, he didn’t change his expression. He immediately realized that he, Campo, had been assigned the job of collecting the debt from Eddie Warren for the loan shark. He quickly said,

“Emily, when you talk to your brother, you tell him to check into the Hotel Avalon in Chicago—it’s on Clark Street near Madison—tell him to use the name Sam Jones and stay out of sight as much as possible. I’ll see what I can do and I’ll get back to you. Goodnight.”

Emily was startled by Campo’s abrupt manner, but she was grateful that he offered to help her brother. She bid him goodnight, turned and went up the walkway to her front door. Campo waited until Emily was inside her house, then he started to walk back towards town. This was the first time that the personal element had

intruded upon his work; to this time, all his cases had involved people he did not know or want to know. Now, he was confronting a first-class dilemma. When Campo arrived at his apartment, he knew what he must do.

Two days later, on a Sunday, Emily and her mother had just returned from church when they received a telephone call from the Cook County Hospital in Chicago. The hospital person told Emily that an Eddie Warren had been brought in that morning with extensive injuries. He was now out of the operating room and in recovery. Emily said they would come as soon as they could. Since Emily did not own a car, she called Joe Armando and he offered to drive Emily and her mother to the hospital. When they arrived at the hospital, they would allow only one person at a time in to see Eddie—so Emily went into his room. Emily was shaken to see Eddie buried under bandages, tubes everywhere, and one leg elevated, held up by cables and pulleys. She sat down beside the bed and took hold of Eddie's hand—he stirred and opened his eyes.

"Hi, sis," he muttered through swollen lips.

"Oh, Eddie, I'm so sorry you are hurt. Are you in a lot of pain?"

"Not much—but they probably have me all doped up—I'll sure feel it later."

"You just rest now—don't try to talk."

"No, sis—I want to tell you what happened. Well, this guy came to my room at the hotel this morning just after I got up. He told me he knew about the debt and the loan shark—and he wanted me to come with him. So we walked down the block a ways and then he pulled me into an alley. He told me that the debt had been paid, but that I was never to bet with a bookie again. Then he started to beat me up—I tried to fight back, but he was too fast and too strong for me. I guess I'm more out of shape than I thought. The next thing I remember I was at the hospital emergency entrance. Before this guy left, he told me that if I ever got in debt again, I'd get worse. I tell you, sis, I'm sworn off all betting!"

Later, at the diner, Joe remarked to Emily that he hadn't seen Campo in a while. Emily looked at him with tear-filled eyes and said, "You're right, Joe, and my guess is that we won't see Campo again."



"Human Rights"

by Angelica Stoddard

There is never a day without torture;
There is never a day without rape.

There is never an hour, a half-hour,
a minute or a second when the earth is not
too full of our screaming.

There is no moment small enough
to hide within.

Yet there is no Dark Continent, either.
There is no Mordor in the land.
Wherever you go, parents
sing their children to sleep.
People say "I love you" and mean it
as much as they can.

The patient is terminal; the patient
has many good years left.

There are no countries, cities, towns
or villages where we do not say kind words.
There's no corner of the earth
where we have not embraced.

Yet there are spaces small enough, gaps
where the light is gone. They can be
as large as a family, a relationship,
or a single person.

They can be as small
as an instant of cruelty
in an unremarkable life.

We are all terminal.

What will we do with our time left?



A Long February Day

by Harriet J. Murphy

In the month of February in the year 2006, Robert Matthias Jr. noticed a persistent pain in his chest; it started off as an annoyance, something he was sure was indigestion. As he reached for the Tums, once again, on that snowy winter day of February 8th, he made a decision to call the doctor the following morning. Turning the bottle upside down so the Tums would fall out into his hand, he noticed that his hands were sweating. The house was warm with the wood stove going, but Robert was not the type of guy who sweated during the winter months just because the house was warm. Not giving it a second thought, he decided that what he needed was a nap. Making his way to the bedroom he was stricken with a sharp pain in his chest, a pain that brought him to his knees. Alarmed now, he called for his wife, Rosemary, and she dialed 911.

While the ambulance was pulling into North Shore Medical Centre (NSMC) in Salem Massachusetts Robert asked the driver, “Is it ok to pass out?” and then he did. The snow was falling heavily, and the ground was slick. The paramedics moved quickly, but carefully, rushing Robert through the emergency room doors, with his wife following closely behind him. “Heart attack!” yelled the paramedic. This revelation brought panic into Rosemary’s eyes. Heart attack, how can that be? Her husband was only fifty-five years old! When the doctor saw Robert he immediately ran some tests. Robert’s blood pressure was low; in fact, he had essentially no blood pressure at all. He was not breathing on his own and had to be resuscitated. Things were happening all too quickly for Rosemary, who was still trying to register the words the paramedic said as they echoed in her head. “Heart attack,” she said to herself again, in disbelief.

The doctor was speaking to Rosemary; she heard something about a blockage. “A blockage?” asked Rosemary. The doctor told Robert’s wife that Robert had a blockage in his right coronary artery. Rosemary was numb; she wanted to call the kids, but refused to leave Robert’s side. The doctor performed an angioplasty to open up the blood vessels and to reestablish blood flow. Mr. Matthias, however, was still unresponsive, and soon was on his way to the operating

room to replace a mitral valve with a new mechanical one. As Rosemary waited to hear some sort of news, she was informed by a staff member, that NSMC had one of the best emergency and cardiac on-site medical teams in the state, and that Dr. David Roberts, who was performing the surgery, was the best cardiologist they had on staff.

Several hours later, Robert was in the intensive care unit with Rosemary by his side once again. That night the northeastern coast had one of the biggest snow storms of the season. Rosemary was staring out the window, near Robert's bed side, talking with the nurse who reassured her that Robert was going to be alright, when Robert started to stir. "You're going to be alright." Rosemary told her husband. "What happened?" Robert asked in a faint whisper. "You had a heart attack." answered Rosemary, "They did surgery, and you're going to be just fine." After waking up from the most terrifying experience of his life, and finding out he had a heart attack, disbelief ran through his mind. He had always thought he was healthy and would never have one. Turning to his wife he said "I could have died; I have been given a second chance, Rosemary. If it were not for the doctors and nurses here, I would not be alive today."

This story has special meaning to me because this man is my older brother Bobby. I call him Bobby because I have always known him by that name. I heard about his experience, by telephone, days after the actual event. I was in shock. My brother is only two years older than I am, so we are very close. My brother lives three thousand miles away. We both make an effort to keep in contact by telephone every weekend now. During one of our telephone conversations my brother told me that his life has changed drastically. He explained to me, that his life has become very precious to him. He started to make more time for his family, and he had to learn how to enjoy each day that God has given him. "I pay attention to what is going on around me more." he said. "I stopped working so hard, and I try to keep my body and brain active. I have even quit smoking, Harriet. I still get a craving for a cigarette once in a while, but Rosemary would kill me if I had one," he said with a soft chuckle.

My brother is an active person, and recovering from his heart attack was not easy for him. He was out of work for two months; this by itself drove him crazy. He had to stop working so

hard, so he went from two jobs to one. Once he got his strength back he started to work out once a week on a treadmill, rowing machine, and with weights. The realization that his life could have been gone entirely in one day has made him enjoy what he has with a great deal of gratitude. It is going on two years now since my brother has had his heart attack. His life has changed quite a bit, all for the better. He and his wife are also proud grandparents. Apart from Alia, their granddaughter, Robert and Rosemary are also now grandparents of two new additions to their family, Rose and Remy. February 8th is a day that will be remembered by my whole family, and someday Robert and Rosemary may be telling their great grand children this story too.



life waits

by elise kost

the tail twitches so slightly,
like a woman's eyes, smiling shyly.
...like a shadow, giving permission.

life
waits
for the perfect moment.



Two Seasoned World

by Mike Green

“The narrative line has become a mare’s nest. You must look for your identity not in the march of time, but in the flow of clouds; in the images and symbols of your soul.”

Yaldus Ordney

1412

I

october
your eyes
 barely budded
sky becomes grass
now the light mingles
 with the rain
weren’t we all only memory
 scoop of vanilla
 popcorn stars that’s how it seemed
how thin I was
what I
 would that be
what makes a self
 memory plus ----
regret---you said

 the drive back from Montreal
 in the white out blizzard of ‘54
 I was 8 Daddy 32 Grandpa 50
 he said---you must forsake all others for one
 from the front seat
 watch the road
 the washed sky’s bleak sublimity
 I saw

stars fall from everywhere
 then stop stop stop
suspended
 light and loneliness

snow six feet deep
 on his grave
 it's all wasted Mom said
 like sugar on shit

 it's like your heart
 had another secret valve
 for dead love
 not blood red
 but coal black & cold

II

autumn season of mild misgivings
 for trees turning
 corn yellowgreen shouting
 the apple's milky bubbling
 your smile widening
 like blood spilled on wet pavement

a sky so blue it's in your face
 a dance

 of dust

 on the world's floor

each day a passing cloud shadow
 season of slow Sundays
 memory in an apple sack

season heading north
 soft cool path through meadow weeds
 the dreaming road goes on
 of itself

full ripe sun
 because words mean
 are you finally vindicated
 shut up

there's always meaning left over
 like cold soup or
 sucked bones

where is the formal reality in each fleck of sunlight
 there was once a blue bowl of cherries
 a leafless tree

a car crash
I can't love you any more

III

how your body colored the water
swimming
a day so pale it seemed tattered
by evening's edge
in pieces at dark

time is sky is lost memory

we die quietly as grass is
as damp was once wet pavement
or cool like a cup of coffee
left in a room emptied of nurses
no more than dust than ash than
pollen
is there resignation in the

drip
drip
drip

of the IV
regret in the
golden stubble beneath the snow
remorse in the
trees like licked bones

asleep a frozen river
vein of ice in the earth's arm
there are limits to each harvest
too much cold straw
one can't eat the
beckoning wood
stripped of its smile

IV

swimming in the sea
of a dead self

the fleshy green leaf
 necklace of flies

what is left
 the light on her arm
 it's just flecks and flakes

the sky uncoiling on the highway
 hats coats ashes
 these we inherit
 tied with blood
 and yellow light at evening
 fading as a lost photo
 sinking

V

slate of the sea shake
 it's april now
 the ice nets its undone

 keep both hands on the wheel
 time comes in nibbles
 knees opening like a sluice gate
 crumb cake or was it
 hoe handle in the face
 infant death and mother's rest
 the dying relation to a star

I will miss you so much when I am dead my Nancy
 All that is me ends at the shore of skin
 Contriving with the sea's green to dissolve
 Indifferent as another's dream

 Light falls
 And fails
 Not mouthful
 From a milky nipple



(This story is fiction based on real events.)

Not Again

by Donald Wyatt

He was just sitting there behind the steering wheel, his brain on autopilot. He was driving east on highway 54, a two-lane cattle trail between Tucumcari, New Mexico and the south side of Topeka Kansas. The modern day cattle trail with trucks hauling the cows. The desert of New Mexico gradually turns into grassy hill country with a few trees in Oklahoma and Kansas. The thick fog he was driving in kept any view of the terrain to just a few feet beside the road. Even in this thick fog, driving was as natural as breathing. An occasional glance in the rear view mirror to verify the heavy trailer was still attached, though he knew by the way the van rode and the load on the engine it was still there, was his only distraction. Highway signs appeared out of the fog, “Work Zone Ahead,” “Reduced Speed Ahead,” and disappeared just as fast. There was no indication of work being done. Not at 2 o’clock in the morning anyway. Just construction signs.

Semis appeared out of the fog and disappeared, going in the opposite direction, on their way to who knows where. The occasional passing truck made the thick fog swirl for a moment, giving a ghostly look to anything visible.

The sudden ‘beep, beep’ of the radar detector jolted him back to reality. He had been thinking of the last time his grand daughters had come to visit. How they had left fingerprints on the patio windows. And that after 6 months he still had not cleaned the prints from the glass. It wasn’t because he was lonely, he wasn’t. The handprints were a daily reminder of the girls and how much he missed having them around.

The patrol car appeared out of the fog and pulled to a stop on the side of the road. He checked the speedometer. 52 mph. He wasn’t speeding. He had seen this procedure before. His mind flashed back to the previous summer when he had been mistaken for a bank robber and dragged from his van by the police in Sandusky Ohio. Mistaken identity they said later. That was a nightmare he didn’t want to see repeated again any time soon.

Soon the patrol car was behind him, lights flashing. Again he thought of last summer. He found a safe place to pull the van and trailer to a stop. Again, just like last summer, he was suddenly

surrounded by police officers. His heart pounded with fear. It was hard to swallow and swallowing was the only way to keep it down. They swarmed out of the fog like alien space ships. Where had they all been hiding? Certainly there was no bank out here in the cattle country of western Oklahoma.

He remembered how last summer he had almost been shot for trying to roll down the window. He made no such attempt this time. He checked the driver's side rear view mirror and saw officers checking the trailer and rear of the van. One had a dog sniffing the trailer. This was certainly different than last summer. What was the dog for? An officer cautiously made his way to the driver and instructed him to open the window. The driver did as he was told. "What's the problem officer?"

"You were speeding," came the reply.

"The speed limit is 55 and I know I wasn't going that fast."

"You are in a construction zone and the speed limit here is 35 not 55," the officer said. The officer had stuck his head in the window to get a good smell of the inside of the van.

The driver quickly realized the cops were checking for drugs. Apparently they didn't have one of the new sniffer flashlights the big city cops use now days. Not to worry, he didn't have any drugs.

The police dog was now making the rounds of the van. The driver thought, *"I hope he doesn't pee on my wheels."*

The officer said, "I'm not going to give you a ticket. Just keep the speed down." The driver thanked the officer and asked, "why so many cops and why the dog?"

The officer thought for a moment, "This two lane road is the pipeline for drugs coming from California to the mid west. Places like Kansas City, Des Moines, Omaha, and even Chicago. I probably shouldn't tell you this but the construction signs are just our way of having an excuse to stop people who are suspicious. You have California plates."

This stop had certainly been different than last summer's experience.



Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Hand" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

by Lisa Murphy

It is widely acknowledged that Robert Frost is a master poet, but what provides a basis for comparison of these two poems is the level of mastery shown by the poet in two diverse forms: The first is traditional rhyming verse, and the second is dramatic dialog. In each of these forms Frost takes us close with his unassuming style and then reveals to us a rich experience with carefully crafted language that we can appreciate more with each additional reading.

This was particularly true with "The Death of the Hired Hand." I found myself quite moved by the simple words and sentence structure which conveyed intimacy between the husband and wife. It was easy to see that Frost was familiar with the subtleties of the region, particularly in local idiom and means of expression. As I read again, I began to notice the careful punctuation which guides the reader even closer in the subjects' private conversation. I felt as if I had become a witness to what was happening. The story itself is remarkable in the depth of feeling it conveys along with a real sense of the decency and compassion these people have for their unexpected guest. That Silas is just the hired hand is acknowledged, but they are willing to allow him to maintain his dignity, and even to provide for his comfort and well being. They know that it is unlikely he will be able to return to work; even so they will not tell him this out of respect for his feelings.

Throughout Frost's dramatic dialog is an underlying musicality, although there is no obvious use of any poetic device. The lines are not all equal in length, but nearly so; and the words are mostly one or two syllables. It is the pure simplicity and lack of artifice that make it so appealing to the reader. We are given a sense of place and time without actually being told, and the most dramatic moments at the end are provided by pauses in the conversation where the subjects (as well as the reader) are left alone to contemplate existence with nature as a backdrop: "I'll see if that small sailing cloud will hit or miss the moon."

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little sailing cloud, and she.

Warren returned, to soon it seemed to her-
 Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.
 “Warren?” she questioned.
 “Dead,” was all he answered.

Robert Frost is also famous for his ability to distill complex thought and universal truths without making them sound trite. His turns of phrase have actually become almost immortal. In “The Road Not Taken,” the metaphor about the choices we make in life being like two roads diverging in a wood is universally accepted. “The Death of the Hired Hand” has one very similar in terms of creating a metaphor for the family and what it means to belong: “Home is the place that where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” How true! Yet it impresses us with its originality, and deeper meaning as well. Isn’t the concept about God and forgiveness the same? Salvation can’t be earned and certainly isn’t deserved. It can only be accepted, like the charity shown to Silas by Harold and Mary in the poem.

In attempting to research this poem, I found there wasn’t much that had been written about it. First published in 1915 and included in the collection of poems titled “North of Boston,” the book was Frost’s first real commercial success, and was well received in literary circles. Jay Parini in his biography of Frost notes that the poet “...could enter a women’s consciousness with uncanny ease, intuit her needs and sympathies, find and exploit her vocal range” (172). Another biographer, David Bradley speaks of the sounds of voices in the poem: “The sense was in the sounds of the voices more than in the words, mere fragments of meaning. The technical things people liked to talk about- iamb, anapest, elision, or irony, sarcasm, pathos- were only labels for what the voice instinctively knew” (55). I found the poem to be compelling in that it manages to make the reader privy to a rich and evocative scene between two people who are experiencing and dealing with one of life’s great mysteries. Upon a second or third read, the realism is even more startling and apparent.

In Stopping By Woods on A Snowy Evening Frost takes us for an unexpected adventure with a poem which seems to be simple and straightforward, but then upon closer analysis we discover subtle turns of phrase and a complex rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme, a-a-b-a, b-b-c-b, c-c-d-c calls for four rhymes instead of two, and a link between one stanza and the next. This complexity would seem to

force the poet into language which would seem contrived and artificial. Instead, the words seem to come effortlessly. The lyrical qualities of the poem are evident throughout. In the line “Of easy wind and downy flake” vowels and consonants modulate each other. We are transported with Frost into the snowy woods, and we feel a certain lightness of being absorbed in such elegantly crafted verse. Quoting Bradley again in his book A Tribute to the Source, he speaks of this poem as “pure sorcery.” “Form and energy become one within the poem, as elemental as the mystery of an atom” (106). This poem comes from the poet at about midpoint in his career and he is quoted as saying it “contained everything I knew” (Parini 212).

This poem also seems to save its most interesting aspect for the end. What are the promises the writer has to keep? When the line “I have miles to go before I sleep” is repeated twice it represents more than a simple statement that the traveler has a long road ahead of him that night. It seems to suggest another of Frost’s universal declarations about existence, and it stops us with a momentous realization. We all have miles to go before we sleep. “Life is a journey, not a destination,” seems to be one interpretation, and again Frost has framed it in a whole new way. What I find so appealing about a Frost truism is that he doesn’t make you conform to his vision for it. He suggests something, but leaves it up to the individual reader to respond to it or not. The fact that the poet takes great pains so that his work does not appear intellectually pretentious speaks volumes. Even at a point in his career where he is finally being acclaimed for his great talent, he is restrained and self-effacing. There is an almost total absence of ego in his work, which is quite refreshing.

These two poems seem representative of Frost’s best work. They show the poet in top form as a serious artist. The craftsmanship in each is self evident. They tell stories that are easily understood, yet are far from simplistic or one dimensional. The complexities are understated and the reader is not put under any pressure to discover them at once. The purpose is to inform and provide enjoyment to the reader, but not in any crass or commercial way. There is nothing gratuitous or sensational in either of them.

The dissimilar styles of the two poems give the reader much to reflect on. The point of view is very different. In one we are spoken to directly, and in the other we are an observer. In one the poet speaks to us in his own voice, in the other he uses the voice of

someone else. One asks us to consider the mystery of death, and the other life's long journey. Neither of them tells us what to think, or has any implied objective. We are asked to consider, and that is all.

To see how others responded to his work I found a collection of critical essays to help me in the process of writing this paper. I was surprised at how much controversy his poems had generated and the strong opinions expressed by some of his critics. One went so far as to question whether the poet had any talent at all, completely dismissing the form of dramatic dialog entirely. "I see no reason why poetry should imitate conversation...Conversation is the most careless and formless of human utterance; it is spontaneous and unrevised" (Winters 59). Others had nothing but praise for the poet, and his old friend Ezra Pound credits him with changing the face of poetry and giving voice to rural New England, to the dismay of some literary elites. Some are not critical of his work, per se, but are critical of his process. Too spontaneous, doesn't adhere to form, fails some sort of social litmus test, and so on. One critic suggests that Frost's best response to all of these should be to just write more poetry.

I found that Robert Frost was indeed a serious poet and deserving of his reputation. He had devoted his entire life to his craft, even though he was forced to work as a farmer to support his family for many years. He was a lifelong scholar who never graduated from college, and therefore did not have the highest regard for the educational establishment. Nevertheless, he earned the respect of many of these institutions and was awarded numerous distinctions. As one critic noted "Poetry is the most difficult form of human utterance: we revise poems carefully to make them more nearly perfect" (Winters 59). It seems fitting to acknowledge this is what makes good poetry so easy to recognize. It is very nearly perfect! Though not all of Frost's poems may be considered great, most are very good. He added new forms and broadened the appeal of poetry to many people.

I discovered my own ability to appreciate poetry through the study of Robert Frost. His unique style became quite recognizable for me as I continued to read, and I began to see how a poem is made to work on different levels. It was gratifying for me to learn that poetry is something we can all enjoy, and not just for those with advanced degrees. Again, from what I learned from reading about Robert Frost, I feel this was his intention. He had little patience for

snobbery and wanted his work to be free from any tone of superiority. Fiercely independent, he refused to be influenced by the intellectual establishment. He maintained his own sense of integrity which is reflected in many of his poems, yet he is never pious or preachy. It is hard to discern from his work if he practiced any religion.

The most important thing for Robert Frost was the poetry itself. In “The Death of the Hired Hand” it was poetry in a new form, now accepted. It was new and strange at the time of publication, but we now know that dramatic dialog is very effective in conveying a sense of reality, and has its own distinct appeal in an artistic sense. In “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” we see the poet as a master of the traditional form with his effortless command of language, meter and rhyme together. Without the slightest hint of pretense this lovely poem takes us along for a ride through snowy woods on a magical night. Both poems leave us with thoughts and questions unanswered, yet this is all for the best. It is up to us to find the meaning in these poems, as in life. This is the essence of poetry.

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earth and man

by elise kost

once...

there was no separation of
earth and man

...harmony was necessary...

then came the storm of
church and state

...systemized judgments of actions, thoughts, emotions
...everything organized into
love..., or hate.

...people stopped tasting their food
numbness grew

...like a plague.

awareness became commerce, politics, “waste management”
...every moment planned.

...then, people began
trading freedom for fear.

...trading endangered lion, wolf, elk, bear territory
for cattle ranching.

...trading
red mountain blood for strip mining
forests of oxygen for clear cutting
Mother ocean for oil drilling...

...trading conscience – consciousness for what
“people” think
for what “they” say....
...allowing “them” to discern
...where to end...where to begin.....

...trading just enough for everyone
for more and more and more
for some....

hmm..., now,
when i feel a “law” clawing in
i feel the need to
block it, break it, taste it -
climb up the highest mountain
and shout from my soul, stomach, wounds :

“there are no walls to hide behind
no definitions
no rules
no giving up
no weakness

WE ARE FREE !

we are whom we choose to be...

...there is no wrong along the path
of harmony.”



Holes

by Senaida Sanchez

Through holes we are conceived in
Through holes that we are born.
Through holes it is we see through
Through holes it is we hear
Through holes it is we breathe through
Through holes it is we eat.
Through holes it is we relieve ourselves
Through holes it is we speak.
Through holes it is we're thrown in
The day we cease to breath.



oil and water don't mix

by elise kost

the sun sets at 4:30 in Lost Hills
'cuz Daddy works for the oil wells,
and it's either that or McDonald's in this tiny little town.

the sun sets at 4:30 in this bitter water valley
where green lawns are mandatory
where the oil rig mosquito
feeds like a vampire
from the blood of our Mother,
making Nature live eternally in death.
...Daddy takes deep breaths of the black smoke poison,
after all, he took the job 'cuz he got worker's compensation.

the sun sets at 4:30
down the 46-99-58,
beside the train,
under the pesticide plane,
bringing bitter showers
to the field of flowers
under telescope towers of the state prison -
the only buildings in my vision.

the sun sets at 4:30
over deserted farmlands and dead horses,
over the gun club ranch and the golf courses.

the sun sets at 4:30
for the wildlife refuge down the road,
Daddy was told it'd be sold someday anyway....

the sun sets at 4:30
'cuz the smog pours from the floor up,
and it settles thick,
like the ashes of my illness -
'cuz Daddy don't know
that oil and water
don't mix.



How You Make Me Laugh

by Lynda Herrington

The way you touch me,
How you make me laugh,
Keeps me feeling free,
I want to keep on this path,

I like you being around,
The things done in the room,
It's nice to hear your voices' sound,
I never even felt it was too soon.

I enjoy your company,
I want you to know how I feel,
Oh, how it makes me uneasy,
These emotions seen unreal.

Can I tell you this?
Will it push you away?
I want your kiss,
With you I want to lay,
Why else would I ask that you stay? !!



Eden

by Jeremy Ritter

Crowded city highways,
Buildings as far as the eyes can see
Chemical sunsets
And crowded apartment complexes
This is not for me
Lush green forests, bordered by a rocky blue sea
Constant rain, filling up rivers and streams
Lush green apples, falling off trees
This is the way life was meant to be



Of Breezes and Uneven Surfaces

by Greg Gilbert

Walking about within my house, alone
 The rooms appear purposeless
 Spaces among spaces
 To contain the stuff that takes up space
 Each item held fast by the spinning of the universe
 The ticking of the clock
 The energy of inertia

The overcast afternoon light
 Hints of mysterious realms
 Of breezes and uneven surfaces

A friend once told me that the universe
 Is micro-waved Jell-O
 The same stuff everywhere
 Cooked unevenly
 And that every moment that ever was
 Remains an illuminated instant living within
 The warp and weave of space
 Lost loves, the family of my childhood, the small
 Triumphs that bear repeating, ALL
 Recoverable through some wormhole folding
 Of the fabric of the universe to
 A place where, cursor-like, the heart flashes
 Its little pointed mantra
 Pulsing here and here and here
 Here is where a voice may be recovered
 A touch retouched, a moment relived
 As if by a magical compass
 A back azimuth that triangulates
 The present moment with loss and longing

But such visits
 To the temple of the temporal

Were they within our scope
The infinite co-mingling
Of rarity and plentitude would debauch
The gift and blanch the light
From each miraculous moment
The knowing intensity of
“This too must pass”
Would pass
And our gain would become
Our loss

The moments themselves
When her hands worried napkins
Folding herself away
The time when we ran like children
Into each other’s arms
Her gift of the magi scent
The curve of her back
Our lips, hands, and breathlessness
A broad sunlit sail billowing with life
Now, only now behind the curve of space

To once more sit with my father
To hang an arm over his shoulder and tell him
It’s okay, everything is alright
To see my grandfather’s old fingers
Working the magnifier above
The *Information Please Almanac*
His watery eyes searching, searching . . .
To answer my grandmother’s sweet
Tennessean voice and tell her
How everything turned out
To bask in my mother’s smile
And sleep within the murmur of their voices
If only for a moment
A little moment

But we cannot reach that mystical distant point
Where all lines converge
On a final emancipation

The *now* and *not-now*

The *now* is nevermore

Now of life *now*

Lives bound at the heart

Now of our children and their children

Now of the rooms that fill our days

Momentary glances like the soul's calligraphy

The pool of the sky, the hills behind our home

Her warm body dreaming next to mine

Beneath this universe of dark matter

With its vast spinning wheels of nuclear light

Folded within the origami of our blue/green world

Is a realm where moments pop like sudsy froth

A sizzling fizzy flux

On the edge of Neverland

Particle and pulse, on and off

Limitless and nowhere to be found

In the palm of one hand

Shimmers a pond of dreams

Memories in the image of their maker

But the other hand knows well

The hard surfaces of loss

And the vividness of a waking dream

The algebraic religiosity

Of factoring for the unknown

And glimpsing behind the curtain

The fullness of the ever present

And infinitely brief *now*



Flame

by Tracey Smart

Your quivering tongue
Is but a tremor holding arrows
You stand luminous
Giving out light from a distant star
A zealot consuming ardent love

With lucid intellect
You stand with armistice in the air
The object of admiration
I am an unobstructed crucifixion
For I can slay your resplendent wrath

Your face overtly transparent
But I am in a state of combustion
A rational truce I seek
Between outrageous ruin and diligence
My polished sanity distinctly brilliant

Solve the obvious reason for resentment
A little anger gleaming in your eyes
No burden is clearly perceived
For the fanatically earnest feelings are understood
Undergo a state of innocence

As only you could



The Iron Lung

by Adam Petke

Nothing ever louder, a Friday highway intersection.

Louder than a lung.

Breathing, wheezing, and buzzing, a whistle and click – here and there.

Heart, Pulse and pump, thud and hiss.

Congestion can cause the occasional arterial accident.

Broken glass, some skid marks, spilled fluids running green from a cracked radiator.

A stop?

No...

A clot stops all.

Scrapes across the skull, power-off.

power stop spinning and gears seize. Shouts and hollers, horns and clicks and cracks of asphalt steps in heeled feet.

Dazed. A hand on a bruised stagger...

Blindside slide an unseen change in dinner plans.

left Heel only

left in

swinging

Left

headlight.

Green melts in red tie-die and flaming black gravel
and the Friday night party lights come out to play.



Solitude Hill

by Les Rogers

Jake Sanders' cabin sat on a rise overlooking the Yukon, a few miles upstream from the village of Rampart. There was an open view to the north where the river completed a serpentine passage through hills, and you could see where the last bend circled the flats of Chicago Lakes and aimed south toward the cabin. It deflected off the base of Rampart Hills and crossed to the foothills of the Ray Mountains on the far side of the valley. There, it settled on a southwesterly flow for seventy-five miles to the mouth of the Tanana.

On a bright August day in 1970, Jake sat at his table on the porch, ending his lunch with his favorite dessert, a bowl of rice pudding. Hanna made it every year on the first day of her visit, and she was in the cabin now, stirring a pot to leave with him. The pudding finished, he pushed back, groaning as he stood. Tall and lean, his body tilted forward and to the side by arthritis, he limped across the deck to his rocking chair. He raked his fingers through thick silver hair, now cut short, enjoying the freshness of cool air on his scalp.

Hanna stood in the doorway, watching him. "Jake, I think I gave you a better haircut this year."

"Feels good. It was gettin' too heavy. Like to tip me over."

"If you'd come to Fairbanks and live with me, I'd keep you looking young and sharp."

"Talked that out last year." Jake looked away, studied the horizon.

"We need to talk again." She crossed the deck to the bench along the outer edge of the porch and sat facing him, smiling at the stern set of his chin.

Hanna had her mother's dark eyes and long, black hair, but she was tall and slender like her father. The curves of her body were hidden beneath an open windbreaker, one of Jake's, which hung from her shoulders over a cotton flannel shirt. In work jeans and hiking boots, she moved with natural grace, as if she'd never worn anything else.

"At least a visit," she said. "Let my friends meet my legendary father. Let me take care of you."

"Don't need no takin' care of," his voice calm, eyes scanning

hills behind her.

"You need a doctor, and I fixed a room for you." She watched the stubborn lines around his mouth, hoping they might soften.

"Not goin' to live in no damn town."

"You need help. That cough will kill you."

Jake shook his head. "Not goin' to die in no damn town."

Her eyes teared and she tried to blink them clear. Last year, the first after her mother's death, she'd accepted defeat, remembering from childhood that discussion ended when he shook his head. Now his health was worse. She needed to stay calm and persistent. "You have to come to Fairbanks with me, at least for the winter."

He heard a catch in her voice and saw moist eyes and the face of her mother, and he remembered the first time his eyes had found Mattie's. Was that the moment he gave up solitary life?

"Jake, I don't want to worry about your collapsing in the snow and freezing."

"Ain't lookin' to die this winter, Hanna."

"You always speak about death like you can plan it. As if it will happen at your convenience."

"Well, it ain't convenient now. I got sacks of oats and flour. Sugar and salt. Coffee. And all that damn firewood. I'm gonna eat it and burn it, unless a tree falls on me or some damn thing. I'll stick here and watch the Yukon freeze and the break-up, come spring." He looked at the river, and nodded. "Think winter will be early this year."

"There's something I haven't told you." She waited until he met her eyes again. "You'll be a grandfather in March, and I need you with me. One winter in town won't hurt you. Mattie would have come."

"Mattie and me raised you independent, not to need us or nobody."

Hanna held back the rush of her anger. "I am independent. That's not the point."

She studied her father's aging features—eyes that looked beyond you, a long nose and a wide mouth that could change his face with a smile. He looked more Indian than Mattie. In that face she sensed images of times and places before the Yukon. Tragedy and rebellion. Pain endured and locked away. He did not talk about the years before Solitude Hill.

Hanna stood and moved to the cabin door, then turned and spoke to his back.

"I love you Jake. You're my family, all I have."

"You're not gettin' married?"

"No. I'm not ready for that, and he's not a keeper."

Jake pushed up from the table. "I love you Hanna," he said, "but it's time for you to leave me and the river behind." He went down the steps and started around the side of the cabin.

Her anger escaped. "I suppose you planned it that way when you sent me to school in town."

"Didn't plan it, just knew what had to be."

She turned to the river. Jake could stare endlessly into that current. Flowing waters eased his troubled spirit, Mattie once said. Hanna didn't understand it then, but later she became his silent companion, and he hers. Even in Fairbanks, from the banks of the Chena, she felt him next to her. He was love and protection, and she could not reconcile what now felt like dismissal.

Her anger waned. She walked to the back of the cabin and found him splitting firewood. He was tapping a steel wedge into the end of a two-foot log with a hand sledge.

"I should have told you about your grandchild earlier," she said. "I think it will be a boy, and I've chosen his name."

Jake grasped a sledgehammer. He raised it overhead and swung it down, not the wide arc and power of his younger days, but still the precise strike of an experienced woodsman. The ring of steel on steel blended with the sharp crack of dry wood as the two pieces flew apart. The sound shot out over the river and came back.

"I'll call him Jake Sanders."

Jake picked up the wedge and tapped it into one of the halved logs. He looked at Hanna.

"What if he's a girl?"

"Mattie."

Jake's cabin, built from logs he harvested and dressed with his ax in 1932, stood at the point where the ground began to slope, ever more steeply, down to the river. The outer limit of the porch was almost an overhang. Mattie's grave was one hundred feet away, to the right if you stood on the porch facing the river. To the left and well back from the river a three-sided outhouse opened to distant views. Between the cabin and Mattie's grave, the wood poles of a fish

drying rack sagged from summers of hanging salmon. Behind the house, a log cache perched atop poles ten feet above the earth, and six cords of spruce spread along the ground like a barrier wall. Below the cabin, there was a summer dock at the edge of the river, but you couldn't see it unless you walked down the trail a ways.

Hanna leaned against a spruce post that supported the porch. A light wind came from upriver carrying the first scent of fall, the fragrance of wildflowers in their final bloom and the subtle aroma of decaying leaves.

She watched the river and its moving highlights where sun glinted on ripples. The annual visit to her birthplace was over. She had waited until the last day to convince her father to move into town, or at least come for a visit. Her strategy had been a week of relaxation, fixing meals together, recalling the years of childhood and memories of Mattie. She would establish the bond of family and persuade him. But he was still the iconic independent who had come to Alaska in territorial days, fifty years ago.

Three gulls circled and skimmed the water below. They soared upward and flew downriver toward Rampart, as if answering a call. Her eyes followed them, and at the point they disappeared, she saw a small boat coming upstream.

The sound of an outboard motor reached the cabin minutes later and became louder as the craft approached. A large man sat in the stern of a typical flat-bottomed riverboat, hunched forward against the wind. Anyone on the river would recognize him. Hanna called out to her father, who was inside the cabin.

"Jake! Better get out your checkerboard. It looks like Big Henry is coming a day early. Lots of gear in the boat. Looks like a dog, too."

"Loves dogs more than people. He's probably bringin' the tent and tarps. Told him I'd fix the holes and tears. We're goin' to scout where the moose are grazin' after you leave. Be ready for the fall hunt."

She smiled. "Are you two still sharing a moose every year?"

"Yep." Jake grinned. "It's me and Henry and a big buck. Told him this is my last year. Back won't take it and my legs are gone. Anyway, it's not as much fun as when Mattie went with us."

"Before I left for school, you'd take me with you. My best memories."

"You were always ready to go. Those were good times. We

usually knew where a couple bulls might be, and we'd find one. Hard work, but Henry packed most of the meat out. Can damn near pick up two quarters and run with 'em. And Mattie could shoot. Best damn shot in the country."

"You'll be hunting for a few more years. Big Henry won't let you quit." She stepped to the end of the porch. "I'm going down to the dock and help him bring things up."

Jake limped from the cabin and watched his daughter start down the trail.

"So damn beautiful," he sighed. "Pregnant . . . that's the difference in her eyes."

Mattie was born at Rampart in 1918, the year her father moved the family there, seeking work. When she was five, her parents decided to return to Stevens Village, their family home, about ninety miles upstream. She first saw Jake in the early summer of 1943 when the steamer *Nenana* stopped at the village. He was a member of the deckhand crew that lived aboard the ship. They loaded firewood for the steamer's hungry boiler, cords of wood cut and stacked by villagers at locations long the riverbank during the long winter. They loaded and off-loaded cargo, working long hours seven days a week for \$100 a month.

The sternwheeler made six or eight round trips each summer, from *Nenana* down to Marshall and back, and Mattie looked for him each time it stopped at her village. On the last trip that summer, Jake saw a smooth, round face, long black hair and dark eyes that watched him. On the first trip the following year, he looked for her in vain, but on the second run she was there. When he saw her on the third run, he managed a few minutes freedom from the ship, but he could not find words.

"What's your name?" she said.

"Jake Sanders."

"Mattie John."

After that he talked to the skipper and spent ten minutes ashore on each trip. In mid-September, after the steamer's season had ended, he mounted the outboard on his boat and went to her. He stayed a month. They walked the country, joined her family's fall hunt and secluded themselves in a cabin for a week. Snow was flying and winter settling on the Yukon when he left.

The next spring he was on the *Nenana* when it stopped at

Stevens Village. A passenger this time, after ten summers on the crew. She was waiting. "Come with me," he said, and they went downriver on the steamer to Rampart and his cabin at Solitude Hill. Hanna was born that summer.

Jake and Mattie spent their days together. They hunted, fished and trapped. They set out a vegetable garden each spring. Their cabin was warm in the winter, and they were never hungry, but as years passed Jake became conscious of his declining strength. He could not live as long as Mattie.

"When my time comes I want to be buried right here," he told her.

"I will stay and be buried beside you," she said, but one morning in the fall of her fiftieth year, she collapsed.

"We best get down to the hospital in Tanana," he said.

"No."

He saw acceptance in her eyes. "I don't want to be left behind," he said.

"I'll wait for you," she told him and died that night.

Her relatives said she should be placed in their village graveyard with other family members, but Jake buried her by his cabin.

"Jake," Hanna shouted. "Surprise, you have a present." She ran up to the porch, leading a medium size dog on a leash. "I don't know what he is, but he's a charmer. Look at those floppy ears. And smooth white hair."

The dog circled Jake's legs, sniffing at his pants and boots, cautious at first, then quivering, captivated by new scents.

"Don't need no dog to feed." He watched Big Henry approach with a roll of canvas on each shoulder.

"Hello, Jake." Big Henry's missing-tooth smile could lighten a funeral. Mattie used to say that feelings might be softer in the village if he used that big grin more often. She knew some people didn't like him because of his size and abrupt ways.

Jake eased his body into the porch rocking chair and pointed to the bench. "Henry, drop that stuff by the door and park yourself awhile."

"Can't stay long."

Hanna passed the dog leash to her father. "I'll heat up the coffee and bring us some bread. Still warm out of the oven."

"I can tell," Big Henry said. "Think I smelt it half mile downriver. Bring some of that honey with the comb in it."

"I knew you'd want that. I'll be back in a few minutes." She looked back at them from the door and smiled.

Big Henry tilted his head toward Jake. "Great girl," he said. Jake nodded. They looked over the river, an old man in his rocking chair, a younger one on the bench, the dog between them.

"This is the pup I told you about, Jake. My sled dogs would eat him. Better you take him. Good dog. He'll tell you a bear's around or someone's on the river. We call him Rooster. Won't let you sleep come morning."

Jake grunted. "Swell."

"Mattie always got you up before sunrise. Rooster's job now."

Jake reached out and the dog sniffed his hand. He stroked its smooth fur between the eyes with a thumb until it laid its head on his knee. He slipped one hand under its chin, the other over a long nose and lifted its upper lips to see the teeth. He looked in each ear.

"Sit," he commanded. The dog sat. "Well, a real house pet in sled dog country."

"Yep. He was lookin' lost and hungry, so after couple days I took him in."

"I'll give it a try. Can always shoot him, come worst."

Big Henry looked toward the cabin door. Hanna was still inside. He leaned toward his old friend and lowered his voice.

"Jake, you'd be smart to come along tomorrow when I take Hanna down for the plane. Winter in Fairbanks and some doctoring might boost your get-up."

"You know I ain't goin' anywhere."

Big Henry nodded. "Just sayin' you'd be smart."

"Time to make my cut, Henry. The river country's changed. I belong to the past. You're young. You'll grow with it."

"And Hanna?"

"Nothin' for her here. Sky's her future. Stewardess now, commercial pilot in a few years. Nothin' can stop her."

Big Henry smiled. "You're right. She's Mattie with an education."

"She'll remember life with Mattie and me. But that time is gone."

Jake began a coarse, vibrating cough that flushed his face

and sapped his energy. He crossed his arms over his chest and sagged forward, resting on his knees.

Big Henry waited for him to recover. He looked toward the cabin door again before he spoke. "Down on the dock she was worryin' on something you said about death. How you won't die till you're ready."

"Sure as hell don't intend to go before then."

"She's worried, Jake. Told me she might come back here to live next summer."

Jake grunted. "She knows better than that."

"How you goin' convince her to leave and you stay here?"

Jake didn't answer. His own journey to Solitude Hill and to Mattie and Hanna had started in France. Life almost ended at eighteen, the youngest soldier in his platoon, one of the last men shot before the Armistice. He had never known parents or family, so after recovery he fled the hero scene to Anchorage and a job building a railroad to Fairbanks, a small mining town. When the job ended, he settled there and worked for the Road Commission. Winters he trapped. His last three years in town, he worked summers aboard a gold dredge. In 1930 the town felt too civilized. He moved to Rampart, and two years later built the cabin on Solitude Hill.

Hanna came out with a coffee pot, cups and a can of condensed milk. She set them on the table, went back inside and returned with bread and honey. Big Henry reached for a slice and shoved half of it in his mouth. Hanna poured three cups of coffee.

"Your bread tastes just like Mattie's," Big Henry said.

Hanna laughed. "Jake baked the bread."

Big Henry grinned. "Damn . . . I knew it was little off the mark." He looked at Hanna and spoke softly. "I miss your ma's cookin'. Best trail cook I ever saw. But my wife's a good baker."

"I remember Bertha's pies," Hanna said. "I told her I'm still waiting for her visit. Do you think you'll come into town sometime?"

Big Henry shook his head slowly. "Not likely. Worked hard and saved so I could move out to the river. Only been here fifteen years. Now, if I was here as long as Jake . . ."

Jake laughed. "Henry thinks he's retired now. Started gettin' Social Security checks this year, some new early retirement deal. And Bertha's runnin' a roadhouse."

"That's why I gotta go," Big Henry said. "Gotta get the new stove workin' so she can bake tonight." He spread honey on another

slice of bread and stepped off the porch. "I'll be back in the mornin'."

Rooster whined and tried to follow him, but Jake tied the leash to the bench. "You got a new home, dog."

The animal looked confused, and Hanna took her coffee and sat next to it. She stroked the smooth hair of its neck. "Jake," she said, "I like seeing you with a dog again. Nugget used to follow you everywhere. Your favorite lead dog."

Jake shook his head. "Don't need sled dogs n'more. It's just me now, and Henry comes by couple times a week. Sometimes spends the day."

"Is that why you don't have your boat in the water this year?"

"Every year I think about makin' life simpler. Most important thing I learned these years on the river is I don't need much."

"Well, you need food." She moved toward the door. "I'm going inside to pack. Then I'll bring out the beans and more bread. A piece of dried salmon for Rooster."

They relaxed on the porch after dinner, listening to the only sound in a quiet evening, the voice of the Yukon. The current abrading the bank below them, a piece of earth falling into the water, swirls and sudden rushes. That soft sound of power in a great waterway.

"I'll never forget the steamer *Nenana*," Hanna said. She looked at the river, barely visible in the fading light. She pictured the massive boat chugging slowly upstream, the turn of the paddle wheel and deep waves rolling across the river, heaving their energy against the bank. When it passed below the cabin, the captain waved from the pilot house and pulled the cord on the steam whistle. The sound shook the house and vibrated in her chest.

"When they retired the boat, everybody was sad," she said. "1956. I was eleven."

Jake struck a match and lit a kerosene lantern. "When you was a tyke, you'd pester me every day. Always wantin' to know what day the *'nana* was comin' by. And nights you wanted stories about the summers I crewed on her. Sometimes I took you and Mattie down to Rampart when the boat landed. Most important day in the village."

"I loved watching the boat come in, men on deck shouting and throwing lines ashore, villagers catching the ropes and running

them to the tie-ups, the ramp coming down and people getting off, and I still remember how excited I was when I was four and you carried me aboard. We went to Stevens Village to visit Aunt Lucy. Everybody waving, Lucy with a bag of cookies. It was the last year of passenger service."

"Damn sure changed lives when the steamer quit. Changed the country."

"My life changed the fall you sent me to Fairbanks for high school."

Jake studied her face, looked into her moist eyes. "Mattie hated for you to leave. Me too, but we knew you had to go. We were proud how well you did and looked for your comin' home summers."

"She cried at my graduation." Hanna crossed her arms and leaned forward. "And I cried because you didn't come."

An aurora played across the heavens in front of them, and Jake turned off the lamp. He leaned back, and she sensed his retreat. He was with Mattie now. Vertical rays of white light speared the night, moving across the sky in waves, silent music of an unseen conductor. Tinges of pale green flowed through the moving pattern, and a soft rose visited and left.

Hanna's parents had felt an emotional intimacy with the northern lights, almost a reverence. As a child she had learned to anticipate and respect a period of family quiet time on the porch during evenings when lights were strong. Jake always had a passion for silence, and now, in the two years since Mattie's death, he could pass days without words.

They watched in quiet for half an hour, until the lights began to fade. Jake relit the lamp and Hanna started to pick up the plates, but she set them back on the table and looked at Jake. There were tears in her eyes, a drawn face. "I think I'm still crying from my graduation, and because you still won't visit me."

Jake shook his head. "I'm sorry, Kitten. I found my life on this river. Married your ma when you was growin' inside. I'm diggin' my grave this year, next to hers. Start diggin' early winter, when the ground's thawed deepest."

"How will I know if you are dead or dying? Or where you are." She was angry now. "What if Big Henry is sick or off fighting a forest fire. Who will bury you? Who will tell me?"

Jake looked across the Yukon. "It's a simpler thing than that,

dying. Don't need to complicate it."

Hanna stood and looked down at the moving water. She turned toward him. "I can't leave you like this."

"You're only twenty-five. You have to live your life, and you can't live it here."

"Every summer, when I came back, the river seemed a little more normal without the steamship. But now, I miss it again. And I miss Mattie and the life you two made. It makes me want to stay and find it again."

"That life is gone." You'll find yours in another time and place.

Hanna pushed a chair next to his and sat down. He put his arm around her, and she leaned into him. "I love it here," she said.

"Your roots are here. Come back for a week every year."

"You promise to be here?"

"Everything changes. Even Rampart's gold rush heyday lasted only a few years. Not much left of it now. Country's got more snow machines than dog teams, and the sky's full of airplanes. Solitude Hill will be here. Mattie and me out there in the ground."

The next morning, Hanna arose as early daylight crept over the country. Her father would sleep for another hour. She poked the embers in the stove and added fresh kindling. She looked through the shelves of canned and dry goods, making mental notes of what she might send him from Fairbanks. Canned butter, for sure. He loved it on his bread.

Rooster's eyes followed her, and he sprang to his feet when she went out on the porch. They watched the sun come up in a clear sky. She inhaled deeply, cherishing the crisp air of daybreak. She sat on the bench, and the dog jumped up beside her.

When the sun flooded the cabin with light, she and the dog went inside. She dipped water from a bucket into the coffee pot, set it on the cook stove and lit the burner. Jake was awake now, and she bent and kissed him.

He stretched in his bunk. "Henry'll be here in a couple hours."

"I'm going to mix the batter, and when he gets here we'll have a pancake breakfast."

"Never go wrong feedin' me and Henry pancakes, unless you don't make enough."

"I know. Mattie told me he ate fifteen one morning when you were hunting."

Rooster scrambled to his feet and looked around, sniffing the air. He charged out the door as if in pursuit of a rabbit. Then he dashed back, barking in excitement, prancing about the cabin and swishing his tail.

"What the hell's got him," Jake said.

"I think I hear an outboard." Hanna walked out on the porch, saw a boat approaching the dock. She rushed back in.

"Big Henry's here, and I haven't started the batter yet."

Jake stretched and groaned. "Henry's early more than late. Can't wait to get goin'. Out huntin', he gets me up while the moose still sleep. Dependable as hell."

Rooster barked a greeting and Big Henry stomped into the cabin. He laughed, a quiet laugh for a large man. "Good morning! Figured I'd catch Jake in the sack."

"I'll make some breakfast," Hanna said.

"Don't have time. Got a pot of coffee in the boat. Brought a loaf of fresh bread and a jar of jam."

"First class service this morning."

"Sorry to hurry you," said Big Henry. "I gotta run down to Tanana soon's I drop you off. Bertha's pinochle partner went to see Doctor Brown at the hospital. I'm supposed to pick her up before noon."

"It's okay, I'm all packed. Just need to stuff a couple things in the bag and grab my jacket."

She went to her bunk, picked up her night clothes and folded them. She eased them into the top of her duffel bag and zipped it tight.

"You're ready?" Big Henry said. She nodded and he picked up the bag. "Come down to the dock with me."

They walked out on the porch.

"Jake," Big Henry said. "We'll wait for you at the dock."

Jake sat on the edge of his bunk, coughing. "No, think I'll say goodbye up here. Can't rightly move this mornin'." He limped out on the porch and reached for Hanna. She stepped toward him and he gathered her in his arms. They clung together.

"I love you, Jake."

"I love you, Hanna."

"You know I'll always come back."

"I know." He kissed her on the lips and forehead.

Big Henry stepped off the porch. "Jake, take it easy. I'll see you tomorrow."

Hanna followed Big Henry down to the landing. He tossed her bag into the bow of the boat and studied her face. "Your dad needs to see a doctor, but I knew he wouldn't leave. Stubborn man. Like me."

"I feel like he's dropped me out of his life."

"No! He wants you to go on, but it's hard for him. He don't say much 'bout his feelings, but he livens up when you're comin'. Shaved the day before you got here, then put his razor away for a year. Won't let nobody touch his hair. Waited for you to cut it like Mattie used to."

"I felt the closest to him the first day, cutting his hair," she said.

Big Henry wrapped an arm around her. "That was his best day, too. Then he had to turn down his feelings. Make you go free. Expect he won't talk for a week after you leave." He stepped into his boat and bent over the outboard. "Don't worry, girl. I'll keep track of him."

Hanna remembered the year this large man arrived at Rampart. She was ten, and Jake had taken Mattie and her to Rampart on her birthday. They saw a riverboat ease into the shore and tie up, no paddle wheel and many times smaller than the *Nenana*. It looked like a barge with a high pilot house at one end. They were standing near the gangplank when Big Henry walked down with Bertha. He asked Jake a question, and half an hour later the two men were friends.

"I know you'll check on him," she said.

Big Henry leaned over and raised the outboard engine on its pivot, and the propeller drive swung down into the water.

"He speaks about death as if he has control over it," she said. "As if he can decide when his time should end. I remember him and Mattie talking like that. It worries me."

"If you're thinkin' about that old Yukoner, Johnson, that killed hisself, don't worry. Jake don't interfere with nature. Lets it happen. Just thinks he's got a say on it."

"Doctors might have a bigger say." She looked up toward the cabin.

"Jake reminds me of my grandfather," Big Henry said.

"Knew the day of his death months before. Said some of the old people heard voices of earth spirits. They knew maybe a year ahead and picked their time to go. My dad always wanted to understand it, but he was kilt in a truck accident."

"What do you think?"

"Hell, I was raised in town. Went to high school. Got educated. What do I know."

Big Henry started the engine and reached for Hanna's hand as she stepped on board. "Your dad says he'll be okay this winter, and I trust what he says. Might be thinkin' about going into town come spring. I know that face. He's thinkin' somethin'."

Big Henry revved up the engine and Hanna looked up. From the dock only the top of the porch roof was visible, but at a short distance from shore, she could see the entire cabin. Her father stood on the deck, an image as slender and still as the posts supporting the roof. Rooster sat next to him. She waved.

On the porch, Jake watched the boat move out into the current and turn downstream, a white wake trailing behind, Big Henry's solid figure in the stern. He saw Hanna wave. He watched until they disappeared. Then he watched the river.



Coiled

by Tracey Smart

The monotony
I call my life
Rings the bells of sadness
Loud and clear.
I am interspersed
With a few tears
Of happiness.
A strange figure I am
Who stands still in the quiet distance.
A contingency
Of if and maybe,
I am breathless.
A lullaby I sing
But my eyes will not close
For I am filled with apprehension
And sleep hides from me.
I stand against all,
My body bent,
My thoughts coiled...
Around a glimmer of hope.
I am told
I am the wrongdoer
But I yearn
To outweigh the colors I see.
I shall become whole soon
If I shall face the missing pieces



Mark

by Tracy Smart

Inspiration is an act of breathing...
A supernatural fix with divine truth
That inhales the target and enlivens the shield,
Which is animated within the two faces you carry.
You have the strength to stimulate or ridicule our character,
A notable token of the soul.
The goal accomplished to bind the races,
When a peculiar distinction is recognized
As important qualities with consequences
Become visible signs manifested through words, ideas, and pictures.
These words and ideas and pictures can be labeled to indicate
fruition.
Symbols designated by signatures
Dealt by our own hands
A stain in agreement with my own guidance
As I watch falling leaves
That are scarred by the Healing Tree
It bleeds intimate knowledge through lines
Threads that wound more than flesh
Division by color, creed, and kindness
The moral boundaries of art and life.



Engine Idling

by Carol Sanders

Damn, it's good to get away, thought Walter on his drive to the desert house. The Ford 250 engine dependable; Walter's favorite, Willie Nelson, singing about the road--Hell, this was heaven. He had earned some alone time, leaving the wife minding the grandsons, two hours away.

He got to choose the TV morning show, coffee and cereal with that cutie Diane Sawyer; then he worked in the yard and later fooled with his building projects. The pile of dry tree limbs reminded him: he needed to make a dump run. He bunged the trash cans into the back of the pick-up, locked the house and drove to the dump. The sun slanted low as he cleared the dump entrance before closing time. He unloaded the barrels, remembering his tricky back. Where had the day gone?

Home again, he stopped at the front gate, got out, closed the truck door, leaving the engine idling. He swung the gate open, went to climb in the truck.

The door wouldn't open. Locked. He walked around to the passenger side, tried that door. Locked. The truck idled, doors locked. Through the closed window he saw his keys dangling in the ignition. His house key, the truck key, all his keys—locked in the truck.

Damn, what a screw up.

He fished his cell phone from his pocket, dialed 411 and got the number for Auto Club. He waited ten minutes to talk to an operator, telling the humiliating tale to a sympathetic professional. It would be a while, she said, but help was coming.

Then he dialed the wife.

"Oh, no," she said. "The truck is running now?" He knew she could see flaming five dollar bills pouring from the exhaust as the engine chugged on in its determined Ford way.

"Sure is." He chuckled, hoping to lighten her mood.

"Oh, Walter," she moaned. "What a damn shame." She hung up.

It was fifty-eight minutes by his watch before he spotted the tow truck lumbering toward him through the long shadows on the desert road. The driver waved, pulled in behind the Ford, got out of the truck.

It was a she, a hefty gal, dirty-blondish hair escaping from under a Chevron cap.

“Hi,” she said. “Guess you got a problem.”

“Yeah, keys locked inside.” He looked at her, grinned.

“Pretty stupid, huh?”

“I’ve seen worse,” she said.

She grabbed a Slim Jim, made a few moves, and the door popped open.

He climbed in the truck, shifted into drive, pulled into the garage, got out, closed the garage door. Carefully, he placed the keys in his pocket.

He was surprised to see the day disappearing.

“Paper work.” The driver held up a clipboard.

“Getting dark; let’s go in.” He held the back door open for her.

He read and signed where she pointed, shoved his copies into a drawer.

“How about a beer?” he said, opening the fridge. “God knows, I need one.”

“You’re my last job today, so hey, sure,” she said. She set her Chevron cap on the kitchen table, twisted the top off the Fosters he offered. She declined a glass, tipped her head back and emptied half the bottle.

Two beers and some sports talk later, they slouched on the sofa. He saw her face beside him, no make-up, wide blue eyes, wrinkles, hell, she was forty-five, fifty. A young thing. The beer made him daring enough to lean into her face, seeking her lips. The kiss was casual. They drew apart, then she tilted her head and kissed him more seriously.

“I wouldn’t mind a tour of the house,” she said.

“Sure,” he said. Damn, he thought, if she means what I think, this old man might get lucky.

He stood, taking his time to get to the bedroom. Can’t stumble, got to maintain. And it’s only polite to give her a chance to change her mind.

Midway down the hall, he turned to see her leave her Fosters on the little table, smile, follow him. On the edge of the bed in the dusky light, she pulled off one boot then the other. He

followed her lead. They matched button for button, shrugged off their clothes and slipped into bed.

He remembered her saying something about his slim jim being up to the job, some pleasant movements, taking it slow and getting it done. Relaxed, he fell asleep.

Then he was awake. He switched on the bedside lamp, watched her pull on her Levis, her boots, shove her arms into her long-sleeved khaki shirt.

“Call again if you have trouble,” she said, fastening the last button.

“Sure will.” He sat up, felt dizzy, put his head back on the pillow, closed his eyes.

He heard the back door slam, her truck engine rumble down the dirt road.

Damn, he thought, hot mama damn. Imagine an old man getting into that. What luck.

“Yes, the engine’s off,” he told the wife when she phoned later. “The Auto club guy took less than a minute to open the truck.”

“That’s good,” the wife said.

“Very good,” Walter said.

The wife sighed. “Well, it’s bedtime. Love you. See you tomorrow.”

“Good night. Love you.”

Walter had trouble getting to sleep. But when he did, his dreams echoed with the sound of an engine idling.



The Hunted Became the Hunter

by Mandilyn McGowen

"Ok Ms. Newton, can you start from the beginning."

"Not a problem. Where would you like me to begin?"

"From the beginning would be nice."

Well for a long time it was just me and my mom. My dad left my mom when I was 3; he said he couldn't handle the "family" life style, you know how it goes. Guy knocks girl up and when things get hard, he bails. So that left just me and my mom living in a little town on the outskirts of Chicago. She was all I had and I was all she had. We were the best of friends. My mom was the typical single mom; she worked long hard hours in the E.R. at the local hospital as a nurse to make ends meet. But she always found time for me. We had this little routine when I was younger, every Friday night we would go out for pizza and then take a walk for ice cream. Those were the best days of my life. My mom had the occasional dates, but nothing was ever serious. Well, that was until she met Richard Garrison. Rich was this gorgeous ambulance driver who was frequently coming through the hospital dropping off victims of horrific car accidents and stuff like that. And he always liked to flirt with my mom, and ask her out on dates. Of course my mom turned him down, but after a while he grew on her and she finally agreed to go out on a date, but just one. Well one turned into two, and two turned into three. And before we knew it Rich was a part of our everyday lives. At first I didn't know what to think, I was eleven and I had seen guys come and go in my mom's life, but Rich seemed to be the real deal, the complete package. He really loved my mom, and he seemed to really like me too. He was the first to ever let me go on dates with them. And I think that's what stole her heart. A year later Rich moved in with us and they started talking about marriage and in the spring of '82 they got married, and I got to go on the honeymoon with them. For a while we lived like a normal American family, we were happy. That didn't last long. Shortly after their marriage I started to notice little changes in Rich. He stopped helping mom around the house, and he started drinking heavily. The drinking was originally just a beer here and there, no big deal, before long he was going through a 24 pack in a night.

The yelling soon started and he would scream at Mom calling her horrible names. Telling her that she was worthless and she would have nothing if it wasn't for him. The fights would usually start in the middle of the night when mom would come home from the hospital and she'd find him passed out, drunk in his chair in front of the T.V. And it always escalated into him kicking us out, and Mom would have me pack a bag and we would go to the local hotel. She always went to the same one, the one that was five blocks from the hospital off of 5th and Maine, and he always called when he sobered up, telling her that he was oh so sorry, promising it would never happen again. Things would be good for a little while and then he would start all over again. It was a vicious, never ending cycle. The majority of the time his anger would only be expressed through shouting towards mom. Over time things started progressing and it finally reared its ugly head. He began knocking my mom around; he always did it when I wasn't home. I think he knew that I would try and stop it if I was there. And I would have, I wanted to kill him. Yet, she would constantly make excuses for his behavior and cover the bruises to the best of her ability.

I remember the night it got really bad, I was seventeen and I had just got in from the movies. When I came in they were screaming and yelling at each other, as usual, so I just headed straight for my room. I never could understand why she stayed with him. I mean, yeah, he was a great husband and father and all that when he was sober. But he never was sober. As I lay in my bed I pondered that thought and I started drifting off to sleep.

That's when I heard a crash. Two seconds later I heard glass shatter and a scream. The scream came from my mom. I flew from my bed and went running down the stairs and that's when I saw him hitting my mom. He had her by the collar of her shirt and he was screaming how she needed to respect him, and he kept slapping her. I was filled with rage, I started charging towards him. I didn't know what had come over me. All I saw were flashes of red. I jumped on his back pulling him away from my mom. He dropped her to the ground and tossed me to the wall. I slid down the wall and fell to the ground. When I looked up he was towering over me, he bent down and pulled my head up by my hair,

"This aint between me and you bitch, it's between me and your white trash mom." He whispered.

Releasing my hair from his fist my head fell back to the ground. As I lay on the floor I looked over at my mom, Rich was kicking her. I knew if he continued he would kill her. She was covered in blood and her poor body looked torn and broken. With the tears in my eyes I made my way over to my mom's china hutch. This hutch was beautiful, made of solid oak, and it had belonged to my grandma. On the bottom shelf of the hutch sat a sterling silver serving tray that had made it through two world wars and a depression. It was so thick and heavy. As quietly as I could I opened the hutch and pulled the serving tray out. I knew I had to act fast, before he could turn around and see me. I knew I'd be in for it if he caught me. I was small, 5'4 and weighed 100 lbs. and Rich was 6'2 and weighed 190. The facts were simple, plain as day, if he caught me trying to stop him from "teaching my mom a lesson" I'd get just as bad, if not worse than what she was getting. So I slid up the wall slowly and with all my strength I took that serving tray and ran towards him and whacked him on the head with one swift bang. Rich fell faster than a sack of potatoes, he was out cold. Once his body hit the floor I rushed to my mom's side. She was barely breathing. I ran and grabbed my car keys and I dragged my mom's limp and bloody body to the car and placed her in the backseat. I drove so fast to the hospital and pulled up right next to the doors honking the horn. The moment I pulled my mom out of the car three nurses came running out to help.

My mom suffered 5 broken ribs, a broken collar bone, a punctured lung, a major concussion, and had 34 stitches total in her head and her arms. As she laid there in that hospital bed all I could think about was how badly I wanted to kill him. I wanted to make him suffer the same pain he put my mom through.

The police went to our house that night and arrested Rich for assault and battery. However, the police released him two days after my mom was released from the hospital saying it was a "*minor domestic dispute*." That's where the police made the mistake, they released a monster back on to the streets, and the only thing that separated him from us was a little yellow paper stating he wasn't allowed to come within 500 yards of us. That wasn't going to do us a damn bit of good. He found out where we had been staying and he begged my mom to come home. He said he couldn't live without her, and if she didn't come home he would go insane and kill himself. But my mom stood her ground, she had put up with his shit

for too long and she said no. He didn't like that answer. He started hitting my mom. He said he would kill her before he let her leave him. I tried to stop him and he slapped me across the face,
“You're next you little bitch”

I reached for the phone and dialed 911. Ten minutes later the police arrived and arrested Rich. Later that month he went on trial and the D.A. had me testify against him. Mom refused to testify, she was scared of what would happen if she did, and I think a part of her still loved him. I testified, and he was found guilty on assault and battery, attempted murder, and violating the restraining order. He was sentenced to four years in prison.

“Ms. Newton, does this have anything to do with the situation at hand?”

“I'm giving you the whole story, so you know why I did what I did, so just sit tight detective; you'll hear the reason why you are here in just a minute. Now where was I? Oh yeah”

My mom and I found a little apartment two towns away. Nothing fancy, just a small one bedroom that we got for cheap so we could save money. I changed jobs and became a receptionist at the hospital, that way mom and I could have the same work schedules. We didn't go anywhere alone. It wasn't for long, just long enough for us to save money up so we could leave the state and go somewhere else. My mom wanted to go somewhere sunny. And we did. We moved out to California in '83 and found this awesome 2 bedroom apartment in Orange County. My mom got a job at Martin Luther Hospital as the resident nurse in the E.R. and I started cosmetology school that summer. We finally had it together and we weren't scared anymore. We had control of our lives again and we were living the life we always wanted. I soon graduated from school and got my own place, a cute 2 bedroom apartment with my friend Becky and it was only ten minutes away from moms. Rich became a distant figure of our past; he was gone and almost forgotten. Mom had even talked about possibly dating again. In '87 Rich was released from prison and he began his hunt, for me. For the next year he searched high and low through the United States and in early '88 he found us. My mom was first. He tracked her down to working at Martin Luther Hospital and he began following her. I remember my mom telling me 3 days before her death that she felt like someone was watching her. I just told her that she was freaking herself out. Now I wish I had listened and believed

her. It was March 23, 1988 and Rich snuck into my mom's house while she was at work. On Wednesdays mom got off work at 11:30pm, which put her home close to midnight. I had talked to my mom just before she left work, the last thing she said was ***"I love you Jenni-Sue and I'll see you and your scissors tomorrow"***

I was supposed to do her hair. I finally talked her into cutting it all off and highlighting it. We were both excited.

But Rich had other plans. I walked in the next morning to a horrific sight. I found my mother's lifeless body; face down in a pool of her own blood. I dropped everything and ran to her side, but I was too late, she was dead. I ran to the kitchen and called 911. I sat in the kitchen floor waiting for the police. The investigators came and started surveying the scene. That's when they found the note. Rich left a note on the living room wall:

"I'LL BE BACK FOR YOU!!!! I WILL FIND YOU JENNI!!!!"

Written in my mom's blood. Right away I knew that Rich was my mom's killer. I told the police everything I knew, but they never did find him. They searched for days, but no trace of him was found. I tried to wrap my mind around how someone could just disappear, as if they had never existed. I no longer felt safe in Orange County. I had to leave. And I did. My roommate and I packed up our stuff, and moved to New York. I got a job working at this small salon in Manhattan and I started taking self defense classes. I even went and bought a gun from a pawn shop in Brooklyn. I no longer feared anything or anyone. This time I would be ready for him. For a while things seemed fine, and I thought that I was successful on losing Rich. Boy was I wrong. About a week ago I was walking out of a store in Soho, when I saw him. I was stunned. I felt like my feet were cemented to the sidewalk. I couldn't move. I quickly turned around and hid behind a wall. At first I thought my mind was playing tricks on me, but the second look confirmed. It was definitely Rich. That's when I put my sunglasses on and pulled the hood of my sweatshirt over my head and tucked my hair in. I'm not sure why I did it, but I started to follow him, I followed him right to his apartment. He lived above a little Japanese restaurant there in Soho. I sat by the gate and waited for him to leave. Three hours later he finally did. Once he was gone I went up the stairs and picked the lock to his apartment door. As the door slowly pushed open I started getting nervous, I didn't know what I was going to find in there. I

took a deep breath and walked in, I was terrified. Covering his walls were pictures of me; me at work, at dinner, at clubs with friends, even on dates. There were times of when I went to the gym, to work, my new name, new social, EVERYTHING. He found me and he was planning his revenge. I left as fast as I could and hurried home. Once again that fear overwhelmed me; as I walked through the door of my apartment, my roommate Becky was sitting on the couch. I hurried over and told her what I saw and what I had done. We sat there talking that night and we created a plan, a plan to give Rich his opportunity to find me and make his move. I was tired of running. I had to take a stand. Later that week I went to Soho, and walked through his neighborhood. I did this walk three nights in a row so he could catch on to the pattern. On the third night I had a weird feeling. A few blocks after I passed where he lived I got the feeling that someone was following me. So I stopped and pulled out a mirror and lip gloss to “*touch up*” I looked in my mirror and it was him squatting down, acting like he was tying his shoes. That’s when I knew, tonight was the night.

He followed me the whole way home. I went up to my apartment; Becky and I climbed up in my bed and sat there waiting for him. At around 1am I heard my front door quietly close, and Becky heard it too. It was him. I laid there in my bed pretending to be asleep, and Becky hid in the closet with the gun. Listening to his footsteps quietly creep across the floors, I knew he was close. My heart was pounding, and I felt him near me, I could feel his breath in my ear. He slowly whispered:

“Wake up sunshine”

I opened my eyes and there he was before me. I flew back and that’s when he grabbed my hair and threw me from my bed. All those classes I had taken learning to defend myself seemed useless. Rich was so fast, strong and powerful, I couldn’t remember the moves. He grabbed my shirt and dragged me across the room, through the door and into the living room. I struggled and kicked, I even screamed, all I could think about was Becky in the closet. But she stood there, so quietly, just waiting for the moment. But not too soon, I needed to hear for myself how he killed her. I wanted to know everything, the thoughts going through his head why he felt the need to do it. And I knew all those same feelings he held when killing my mother would come back as he prepared for my murder.

Rich started kicking me, I couldn't get up. He stood over me, hitting me. I could feel warmth running down my face, trickling across my lips. It was blood, my blood. The pain was gone. I was putting it out of my mind to make it through this. I couldn't let myself get lost in the pain, it would consume me and he would win. My head laid on the floor; it felt like it weighed 50lbs, I couldn't lift it. He stopped kicking me and he stopped hitting me. He stood up, stepped away and disappeared, I tried to pull myself up; I knew one more blow to the head would knock me out cold. He reappeared holding a knife and he bent down and pulled my head up off the floor.

"You know, this was the same position your mom was in before she died. I watched her, day and night. I knew her schedule, so that night she worked late I snuck in to her house. I removed the light bulbs from the fixtures and sat, waiting for her. Like a cat waiting for a mouse. It was dark and she tried to run but I had her trapped. When she turned around I hit her so hard it knocked her out, she had no idea what had happened. But you, you little Jenni are going to feel everything. You know exactly what's coming to you."

He hunted her. He was a coward. I tried to move but couldn't. He placed that cold metal blade on my skin I heard a loud pop and Rich fell to his left. Becky had shot him; she shot him right in the left shoulder. Rich soon gained control and charged towards Becky. She took off running into the room, throwing anything and everything in his path, trying to slow him down. She came running towards me and she slid the gun across the floor. I knew I had one chance to get it. I scrambled about, slipping in my own blood and I reached for the gun. As I grasped it tightly within my hands I turned towards Rich and fired. 1,2,3,4; all in his chest. I couldn't stop. Then I heard the

Click... Click.... Click.... Of the gun.

I had cleared every round into Rich. As his lifeless body laid there in the hallway I felt a sort of relief escape me. I looked at Becky:

"What took you so long?"

"Well I knew you wanted answers. You told me to wait until you got your answers. Then everything got so quiet and still. I panicked. I thought I had missed it. So I came sneaking out and that's when I saw him over you whispering in your ear. Did you get your answers?"

As I looked down at his lifeless body I replied,

“I did.”

We sat there trying to figure out our next move. We didn’t believe that we would ever make it this far. So I told her to leave. I told her to go to our spot and stay there for two days, and if I didn’t make it there within two days then she is to leave. With tears in her eyes Becky headed for the door.

“Thank you for everything... I couldn’t have done this alone”

“What are friends for?” she replied

She left and that’s when I called you. You see. I had to. I had no choice. He was going to kill me. He killed my mom and now he was after me. He wouldn’t stop till he had me dead, till he shed my blood and held my lifeless body in his hands. I couldn’t continue my life running. He deserved everything he got.

“And where is Becky? Jenni we are going to need to speak with her.”

“That’s the thing. Her name isn’t Becky and she doesn’t live with me. She saved my life and now I’m saving hers.”

Just then two sergeants walked in to my room.

“So what’s the deal detective? Do we arrest her?”

“No”

“But sir, she killed someone. Shouldn’t we at least take her downtown to the station for questioning?”

“NO SERGANT! Now leave us. I still need to speak with her.”

The detective turned towards me with a very strange look in his eyes. Almost like a lost child looking for his mother.

“Look Jenni, I know what you are going through. About five years ago my wife was murdered by a man I had placed in prison ten years prior. I wish I had the opportunity to hunt him down and take care of him. He preyed on your mom and he was preying on you. I commend your strength Jenni. Most people never get to see this day. You truly are one of the lucky ones.”

The Detective walked out of my bedroom and into the living room.

“Sergeant Michaels, can you come in here?”

“Yes detective.”

“Well she’s still pretty shook up, let’s get a crew in here to make sure she’s ok. This intruder got her pretty bad.”

“Intruder sir?”

“Yes sergeant, intruder. Her mother’s ex husband was released from prison a few years back and when he was released he

stalked and killed the mom and has been hunting the daughter down ever since. He broke into her apartment planning to kill her tonight. He pulled her from her bed and dragged her to the living room beating her until she was barely conscious. He walked away to the kitchen to get the knife you see there, that's when she slowly crawled to the couch and grabbed that small hand gun there from under the couch and fired. The hunted became the hunter. She is one of the lucky ones Sergeant Michaels. This here is a classic case of self-defense and nothing more. I just wish they all had this ending.”

“So do I detective. So do I.”



The Sport of Hunting

In which Man Requires the Advantage

by Cassandra Bebb

I found myself in the presence of
 An intolerable cruelty;
 For that which had but one defense,
 Was incapable of its utility.

The immoral beast lay waiting,
 Behind a tree, in camouflage
 His bow was at the ready, and then;
 The soft treading of paws.

The beast twitched in excitement,
 His eyes surveyed the land,
 The forest knew this poor beast,
 For this poor beast was man.

The wind... a foreboding silence,
 The man then stalked his prey,
 It lumbered in the distance,
 Delighting in the autumn day.

Curiosity struck the great one,
This new creature seemed so strange,
He just wanted to get closer,
Not knowing he was now in range.

A meeting of eyes, DANGER!
To Flee? Or to fight and to die?
The man let loose his mighty bow,
The moose took it in his side.

Pain and fear compelled him,
He charged with all his might,
But the man just narrowly escapes him,
The moose has lost the fight.

His home was his true captor,
The trees blocked his escape.
Antlers which should have defended,
Man used to seal his fate.

His horns will be a trophy,
They'll hang above the hearth,
For years to come they'll talk of him,
While men wallow in their mirth.

The moose was stripped of all defenses,
Forced to cut his life short,
And the shooting of this poor dumb creature,
In this I find no sport.



Winter

by Cassandra E. Bebb

Silence... The wind echoes the emptiness of the world, gently casting the dead and dying leaves from their branches. Noiselessly they flit and flutter until they find their way to the frosting grass, grazing the nose of a newborn fawn huddling in the warmth of his mother. Startled by the leaf he jolts awake, glaring at the brazen orange and yellow corpses around him, crushing them with his foot for disturbing his slumber. The wind embraces him with chilling adoration, welcoming with the perfume of autumn, and warning of the coming winter. Blinking he stares into the darkness below his hill. Looking up he notices a train of ants running up and down the face of the large barren tree; beyond the branches of the tree the stars seem dim and distant. Shaking off the fear and chill he wobbles to his feet and moves aimlessly to the edge of the hilltop, looking at the world around him. The air is damp as the scent of life fills his velveteen nose, relishing the scent of mushrooms growing nearby he realizes he is hungry and yearns for his mother. Turning in her direction he catches a strange odor, his stomach turns, loosing his appetite he averts his gaze from the train of ants on the tree, and her...

The endless fields of grass beckon him into the darkness, whispering of tasty treasures hidden among the small rocks, of games to be played, holes to be investigated, and springs to be splashed in. The wind rustles through the thicket as an owl silently snatches its prey from the safety of the grass. The young deer rears in contempt for the scheming predator as it carries a field mouse into the darkness. Covering in the grass he shivers. He is not alone and the field offers little protection. The scent of fear and uncertainty linger, the odor from the tree growing more pungent as he hides on the hilltop overlooking the thicket. In silence he tries to focus past the stretches of the field, searching for the safety of the forest beyond, but there is nothing. The wind whips through the endless scores of waving grass and into the swallowing dark, and then nothing. Terrified, he stumbles back to the safety of his mother. Falling down in the frosted grass he nudges to be nursed, but she does not move. He tries to push her leg out of the way, but she is stiff and heavy. Losing his strength he breaks the silence, bleating quietly for warm milk, nudging her thigh once again. Still she does not move.

Flinching in revulsion as the odor wafts around him, he notices the train of ants marching across his mother's back, and shivers in disgust, the hairs bristling on his neck. The wind now moans through the thicket, a haunting sonnet of the departed and soon to be departing. The stars shine solemnly in the heavens as the fawn begins to understand why his mother will not feed him. Bleating at the trail of ants for being so cruel he nestles against his mother's body and waits with her for morning.

The cold autumn sun rises, its harsh rays striking the twisted branches as the last of the leaves drift to the ground. The crow perched on the highest bough stretches his wings to embrace the dawn, gazing down on the fawn and his mother as the ants relentlessly march to and fro. Preening for his morning flight he ponders the events that had passed under the barren tree, of the mother that had not survived her young, and the fawn that had not lasted the night. The winter brings their mourning to the forest, yet through their passing, new life will emerge in the coming spring, and the thicket will rejoice in their remembrance. The crow leaps from his perch as the first flakes of snow begin to take the thicket.



Untitled

by Graham Cooley

Brothers fighting, children dying, mothers crying
Greedy political figures lying
We kill each other, but to what end?
All these problems, we create
Only love can conquer hate
The future's in our hands, our fate is what we make.



Zombie

by Senaida Sanchez

You who walk without direction
Striving for perfection
You who talk without thinking
With the worst quotation
You who taste without tasting
Swallowing what's given
You who see without looking
Past your own reflection
You who touch without feeling
Frozen cold and solid
You who live without living
Fighting for existence.

Stop! Stop and listen!
Stop and walk with a purpose
Stop and talk with meaning
Stop and taste with complex flavors
Stop and look beyond the obvious
Stop and touch the textures in life
Stop and live. Breathe!
Listen to the world around you chirping
Partake in it! Absorb it!
Take a look around you past the façade and into you.



The Truth

by Graham Cooley

For her to tell me,
what some monster did.
He took my angel,
and clipped her wings.
I had no way of knowing,

I had no clue.
I am worried,
that it has done more than she thinks.
She says she's fine,
but I know better.
I have known her for too long,
I know her too well.
Yet she didn't tell me.
Not until now.
I know she's not ok.
I can hear it in her voice.
It stabs with every new word.
I see the tears she hides,
that she shields from the world.
The memory is ripe,
vengeance not paid
You can deal with this monster,
Because I can not.
She says she's ok,
but I can't believe her.
The girl of my dreams
has confessed to me.
A dark truth.
That happened to her,
which I could not prevent.
My heart beats
but its beats are mute
My hands are cold,
but remain numb.
Enraged by a villain,
who I now wish to harm
I don't know him
But I know my princess.
He tried to kill our fairy tale.
I'm in a state of disbelief.
God, please don't let this
Stop our happily ever after.



Alone in a Dream

by Graham Cooley

Don't let me get in your way.
 I don't want to interrupt you.
 I just stand at the wall,
 dreaming away.
 Just go around me,
 as if I am not here.
 Continue on your way,
 nothing to see here
 Can't you see
 I am trying to dream.
 Don't talk to me.
 Don't look at me.
 I'm hiding in a dream,
 because it is the only place
 where it's safe to be me.

**"Never, Never"**

by Kristin Goldsborough

Setting down his newly finished graphic novel, Deren smiled at his collection. The grins of super heroes throughout the eighties and nineties glinted back at him. He pushed his glasses to the bridge of his nose and heaved a sigh. His mother would be up shortly, bringing with her a grilled cheese and the hopefulness of teenage normalcy. Not willing to oblige, Deren decided that today he would simply ignore her knocks. Sure enough, moments after his deliberations, he heard the familiar sounds of his mother's ever-present sensible heeled shoes clicking up their wooden staircase. Then, that knock-knock, and a sigh almost identical to Deren's when he didn't respond. Most days, she would just quit trying and leave.

Today though, she had more than a hopeful conversation in mind. Today, was an intervention.

“Deren, sweetie,” she said. Her maternal voice floating through the locked door. “Don’t you want to go to school?”

“No,” he responded. He didn’t want to go to school. He never wanted to go to school.

“Sweetie, school is important. Come on. I’ll excuse your tardy and everything will be fine.”

“Mom. I really don’t want to go today. I’ll go tomorrow, okay?” Deren said. Trying to relieve himself of the conversation.

“Okay, honey. But I really think you should go today...” His mother said. Her voice trailing as she left the still closed door. Deren thought about going to school. Just sucking it up and going. He quickly banished the idea with the thought of Kiel. Kiel his arch-nemesis was the reason behind not going to school. It wasn’t that Kiel was bigger than Deren. He wasn’t. Standing at an awkward 6’3, not many of the kids at school were bigger than Deren. Kiel was just more charismatic. Manipulation was his middle name. And he had successfully turned the entire junior class against Deren. The entire junior class except Rosie. Deren’s Lois Lane. She was the only person who knew the true identity of Deren. When he removed his glasses, and slicked his hair back. He wasn’t the same old Deren. Unsuccessful attempts to name his alter-ego continued to plague him. But he knew, one day he would find the perfect name. Something that suited him just right. Until that day. He was just Deren, with no glasses and slicked back hair. He knew though, that Rosie felt it.

For as long as he can remember, she was part of his life. Her beautiful hair always glowing bright gold in the sun. Her blue eyes always screaming for him to kiss them shut. Unfortunately, he was too nervous. Since they hit puberty Deren had become increasingly more and more aware of Rosie’s glowing hair, and plump pink lips, and blue eyes underneath light lashes. It was a problem. Every time she was around his palms got sweaty and he muttered and stuttered. Her giggling always made him even more scared too. He knew she wasn’t giggling at him. She would never laugh at him. He knew this because when Kiel would push Deren and start calling him “super geek” or something equally unintelligent, Rosie would take Deren’s hand, tell Kiel he was a creep, spit on him then drag Deren away. This was a daily routine. Something brought on no doubt by Kiel’s

ineptitude. Sometimes, Kiel's brother Roger would get involved, but Deren knew that Rosie had it handled. Roger didn't need to step in front of Deren. Deren always wished he could stand up for himself, but Rosie was so good at it. And if she continued to stand up for him, it meant she would continue holding his hand everyday. Maybe someday, her hand would travel to his hip. Then to his lower back. Then to pull him in closer. Then her other hand would touch his chest. And her gaze would meet his. With his slicked back hair and glassesless face, he would wrap his fingers around her chin and bring her lips into his.

Dragging himself away from his daydreams, Deren looked at the clock. It was four. Rosie would be getting out of drama club soon and expecting Deren to meet her outside the auditorium. He had to get there before Roger did. It was *their* personal ritual. *They* met everyday after school. Not Rosie and Roger. Whether Deren and Rosie hung out or not was up to their nightly plans, but they never forgot to meet each other. Never, never. He grabbed a book he was going to take to her and threw on his striped sweater. He had been trying to get her involved in comic books. He knew she would love the stories and the colors. She had always been very entertained by stories with colorful descriptions and thick plot but Rosie had never been immersed in comic books. So, Deren was doing everything he could to help her along, and this book had every super hero and super villain written into comics inside its pages. He had told Rosie that morning on the phone he would bring it to her this afternoon. After taking the gigantic book into his arms, hugging it closely so he wouldn't drop it, he ran down the stairs, skipping every other step.

"Where you going sweetheart?" his mother asked, standing at the stove, stirring a pot of what smelled like soup.

"To meet Rosie, Mom."

"Aw. Okay honey. Have a good time. Keep in touch."

Deren walked excitedly down the street to his high school. This was always the best part of his day. All he had to do was bypass Kiel and his gang of assholes. Simple enough. Just run across main street. Kiel and his friends stood by the big tree in front of the school, so Deren would cross the busy road, go around the girls' bathroom and find himself standing behind the auditorium. Placed safely on the other side of the campus from Kiel.

Standing on the edge of the road he looked across it at the school. It was unusually busy, but Deren didn't think anything of it.

His palms were already sweaty just from dreaming about Rosie. Looking both ways three times like his mother had always taught him he stepped into the road. Then, hours later woke up in a hospital bed. A bandage secured tightly around his chest.

“Oh my god. Oh my god. Valerie, he’s awake. He woke up!” Rosie yelled into the hallway.

What happened? She’s so beautiful, he thought. Not realizing where he was until his mother ran in the door.

“Oh my goodness. My baby. Are you okay sweetie? Oh my god. I’m so happy.” Deren felt his chest began to ache as he noticed the tears rolling down both his mother and Rosie’s cheeks.

“We didn’t think you were going to come to this quickly.” Rosie said, intertwining Deren’s fingers in her small hand. “We’re so relieved. The doctor said an accident like that should have killed you. But you made it out unscathed. My super hero.” Rosie said this as she laid her head gently on Deren’s chest. He hoped she couldn’t hear his heart beating a million miles a minute.

Rosie and Deren’s mother stayed by his side the entire night. Helping him to relive the accident. All he could remember was stepping into the street. Then blackness. Apparently, he had stepped in the way of a motorcycle. Which hit him, then spiraled Deren’s striped sweater in the spokes of the tire, caught him just right and ran over his chest. If he hadn’t had the book clutched so tightly all of his insides would have been squashed like an ants at the park. He came out without a scratch even. Just a small bruise on his ribs where the book pressed into him.

For weeks after the accident Deren went to school. After something like that, the kids had to be nice to him. Even Kiel didn’t say anything to him. *Being ignored is a lovely feeling,* Deren thought, one day while he was waiting for Rosie to get out of class. Rosie and he had become even closer since the incident and she had begun taking him around her other friends. One night they went to the movies. Then to the mall. And another night out to a concert. He really enjoyed all of the outings, except that Roger was always with them. What he was really trying to do though, by going everywhere with them and putting up with Roger, was bide his time until he had the opportunity to talk to Rosie. About the truth. His true feelings. Since the accident he had decided life was too short for him not to make sure she understood. He had stopped sweating profusely when she was around, and instead of wearing his glasses he had invested in

contacts. Not exactly Superman, but still close. At least closer than before. Before he wasn't even a Clark Kent prototype.

This day waiting for Rosie he started to notice something odd. One of the power lines outside of the school was kind of sparking. Strange but he felt no need to get involved until he noticed a small girl riding her bike in the area of the power line. Biting his lip and gauging the inevitability of getting involved, Deren tackled the little girl right before the power line snapped. Her bike was instantly melted by the high voltage. An amazing coincidence.

After that incident there continued to be incidences. Ones where Deren found himself in the right place at the right time. Deren saved a little boy from drowning at the local park. He saved a paperboy from getting hit by a bus. He saved a kitten from a tree. It seemed like he was the perfect super hero. What he lacked in aesthetics, he made up for in perfect timing. He became his own hero. Instead of having to read stories about heroes he was one. He laid his comic books to rest. And asked his mother to make him a cape. Not any old cape, a cape fit for SafetyBoy. The name made him excited. It explained what he did, without being overly dramatic. SafetyBoy.

The cape his mother made him was red. Because real super heroes had red in their suits. And the wording on it was gold. It was just as perfect as his name. His mother was so happy to make her son something. It had been so long since he had needed her help. Always finding solace in his comic books, her passion to help was overwhelming. She thought it a bit strange for seventeen year old to want a super hero cape, but she understood her son's fantasies. As long as he was young, she felt she should indulge. It wasn't a crime to humor your children.

Everyday Deren wore the cape under clothes. The saving lives had taken a hiatus. But it gave him time to focus on Rosie. Which he did. Every moment of everyday. Once he lost the glasses, and started to gain some confidence, she began to notice how handsome he truly was, until she realized that every single minute of her life was wrapped up in him. She hadn't spent much time with her friends, because she was always with Deren. His unexplained clinginess was starting to get the best of her. So she began to stray. Deren didn't realize she was wandering to the dark side, until it was too late. He saw her in the lunch room, kissing Roger. On the mouth. The way Deren had for so many years fantasized their kiss.

So, he made a plan to prove to Rosie, that he was a real hero. Because if she believed he was a real hero, why wouldn't she want to be with him?

Leaving a note for Rosie in her locker Deren took off to finalize his plans. On his way to take care of business, he ran into Kiel. Without the aid of Rosie or even Roger, who he would have been happy to see at this point to, the unfortunate happened. His striped sweater got caught on the branch of a tree. Pulling his cape from being hidden neatly inside his clothes. And the laughter began. And the taunting. Pushing Deren to finalize his plans in a matter of minutes.

Running as fast as she could to the top of the highest building in town, Rosie threw the door open. There was Deren. Grinning, with a daffodil swaying lightly in his fingers.

"They're you're favorite, aren't they?" He said to Rosie as she ran to him.

"Deren, don't do this. Please don't do this." She said sobbing like a small child.

"Real heroes fly, Rosie. Don't worry." Kissing her the way Roger had earlier in the lunch room, he took off towards the edge. All he heard was Rosie scream as the wind caught his cape. His magical super hero's cape. And he was flying. Soaring through the sky. He could see the faces of the people below him begin getting closer and closer, and he realized he had made his first super hero swan dive. Then, he realized something very different, and much, much scarier.

The people are getting so close, so quickly, I can't pull up. Oh god. But I'm flying, he thought as the pressure from the atmosphere pushed him closer and closer to the cement.

But I'm a hero. Heroes don't die when they jump off buildings. Heroes never die. Never, never.



Coffee Couplet II

by Lauren Henley Yanofchick

Coffee cans perched on a fence;
they are shot by my father.

Wingless rusted birds;
I am four and coached by my father.

“They are bad guys,” he says
“and you are home alone.”

No, I think,
those are coffee cans.

“The one in the middle,” he says
“that one is The Boogiemán.”

Imagination turning coffee cans
to wingless birds

to a faceless bad guy
to someone I know---

The Boogiemán.
I *know* his ugly face.

The pistol is small.
The pistol will jerk.

I am distracted by a crystal
in the dirt.

My first crystal.
Someday I will lose a tooth.

“Steady,” he says.
“Now shoot.”



The Men Who Suffered

by Sean Blau

There once lived a man who had no access to food or clean water. In another part of the village, there lived a man who ate well and drank clean water but had no wife. Both men suffered greatly. One day, the men ran into each other.

“You look so miserable,” the hungry man said. “You must be starving!”

“I am,” the well-fed man said, “but not in the way you think.”

“I don’t understand,” the hungry man said.

“I have no woman to love. No woman to cook and clean. No woman to be my mate for all eternity.”

“But you are not hungry for food? For clean water?”

“No. Of those I have plenty.”

“You fool! You have everything!”

“No. I have nothing.”

“But I have a wife! I would rather have food and clean water than be with her! What good is a wife when you are starving?”

“I would rather have a wife than have food and clear water! What good are those without a lover?”

“If you feel so, I will gladly trade my wife for your food and clean water! She is beautiful and of age.”

“If you are true to your word, I shall accept this offer!”

“And if you are true to your word, I shall stay true to mine!”

And the men grasped each other’s arms in agreement. The well-fed man moved into the hungry man’s shack, married the wife, and began to starve. They produced three children. The hungry man moved into the well-fed man’s house, engorged himself with food and clean water, and became lonely and anxious for a woman. He grew large and fat.

After several years, both men grew tired of their new possessions. The fat man yearned for his wife and the married man yearned for food and clean water.

Finally, the fat man marched to the married man’s shack and demanded he share his wife with him.

“I cannot allow this!” the married man said. “But, now that you are here, I demand you share your food and water with us! I need food and clean water to sustain myself and my family!”

“I cannot afford to give you any food or clean water, but, again, I demand that you share your wife with me! A man cannot live without a woman!”

So furious was the married man that he began to fight with the fat man. The fat man defended himself and struck back with solid blows. The married man, being malnourished, was easily defeated. He died by the fat man’s fists.

The wife, the children, and the fat man all cried.

“I didn’t mean to kill him,” the fat man said.

And the fat man had the woman.

The new couple made a large feast out of the malnourished man’s head so that they might acquire his wisdom.

“At least his seed will last beyond my years,” the fat man said as he looked at the dead man’s children.

“It is a fitting punishment,” the wife said to herself, for she had become infertile after the third child.

And the fat man lived the rest of his days suffering. The man, despite having a wife and food and clean water, would never have children of his own. And he cried every night until his death.



My Old Friend

by Shannon Bryce Rumsey

A gust of wind
Stirs the leaves at our feet
As we sit in the park,
Aching silence strung around us.
I glance quickly at you
And see you tossing popcorn
At squirrels.
My old friend,
How long has it been?
The park bench is cold
Like the fortress between us.
What is friendship?
I call you friend,
But it's been so long.
And you've changed,
As have I.
Only for loyalty and respect
For a friendship that was
Keeps us here, together.
Time weakens the strongest of loyalty
And I don't know you
Anymore.
Memories of you
Sting in my mind.
How much you've changed...
I wish we hadn't changed...
My old friend.



Tell Me Of This God

by Shannon Bryce Rumsey

Dearest One, sitting so distant,
defying my psychic plea for approach,
tell me of your God.
Far away friend to be, make Him known.
Tell me of this Being, who, in holiest council,
argues a cold and lonesome case;
who, for unknown retribution, abominates me to this
you-less anguish, deaf to *my* cries.
Speak of He who bids you pass me by,
ignoring the one who was to be yours.
Yes, pray tell,
make Him known who keeps you for Himself,
locked away in a fortress of faith;
who keeps me bellowing for entry,
for but a word of welcome, yet keeps you still;
who shuns me with your hard visage,
and tempts me with tender eyes.
Tell me of this God,
or, Only One,
let Him tell you
of me.



The Stray

by Gloria White

He was just a stray dog but someone felt sorry for him and took him home. That someone was my daughter. She was always a sucker for any animal down on its luck. It was August on the desert - the hottest time of the year. She knew her own dog, an Akita, would not tolerate any competition so she kept the stray in her garage with a fan blowing over a block of ice to keep him cool. In the meanwhile, she put an ad in the paper and contacted everyone she knew who might want to take him. She even took him to a veterinarian for shots. That's when she learned he was an Alaskan Malamute, was deaf and had cataracts. The veterinarian guessed his age to be about seven years.

I was a bit frightened of him the first time I saw him in the back yard looking through the glass patio doors. His eyes were a very pale blue, almost white, surrounded by red. His black and brown coat was dirty and crusted with dried blood. We thought a car might have hit him as he had large scabs on his rump. He howled instead of barking. Perhaps he never learned to bark because he was deaf.

My daughter discovered early on that he was not house broken when he territorialized every last wall and object in her garage with urine. At least the solid stuff was done in the yard.

Days turned into weeks and no one wanted to take the poor thing. It was a chore for my daughter to keep the Akita and the stray apart. Only one of them could be in the backyard at the same time because the stray was a male and the Akita a female and neither dog was neutered. In addition the Akita could attack the stray as she did with any dog in her path. My daughter was having second thoughts about her decision to befriend the stray.

For some time I had been thinking about getting a dog. One that was not too big who would warn me with barks if anyone approached my house - a friendly, clean, house broken dog that was playful and good company - nothing at all like the stray. When my daughter was considering taking the stray to a dog shelter, I broke down and offered to take him.

So now I had a dirty, skinny dog that was deaf, didn't see well, howled, and whenever I approached him, turned on his back in submission. He must have once belonged to someone because he

had a dingy collar around his neck when my daughter found him. I wondered if he had been physically abused by his former owner.

It was very hot outdoors but I could not possibly allow him in my house. So I opened the two doors in my garage, one to a front courtyard and another to the back yard, to create a breeze. Then I arranged an old foam mattress and several old blankets and pillows along a wall where he could sleep, created a eating place on a small stand off the ground where I would place his meals and placed two large pots of water, one inside the garage and another in the yard. I hoped that my efforts would give him a sense of security and safety.

The stray was very thin and possibly malnourished. There would be no canned dog food for my dog. Every time round steak and chuck steak were on sale, I bought several pounds, which I baked, cut into small pieces and froze. The meat was supplemented with mashed vegetables and cottage cheese. I discovered that he especially liked sweet potatoes whipped with butter. For a bedtime snack I wrapped cold cuts around strips of cheese.

It took a number of weeks before the stray adapted to being my dog. He began approaching me when I went outside if I was close enough for him to know it was me. I could touch him, but only for a short time. It took a little longer before he learned that he should sleep on the bed I made for him. In the beginning I would lie down on the bed and lure him to me, gently push him down, and stay with him for a while. He finally caught on.

Since the stray could not hear, there was no point in naming him. I only referred to him as my dog when I talked about him. My friend George from Long Beach who visited me for a few days each year called him Howler. He did howl a lot, and I never knew why, but he usually stopped if I showed up. One morning I overslept. A neighbor rang my doorbell who was concerned that something had happened to me because the stray had been howling for hours.

When the weather became more pleasant I decided to take the stray for a walk. I attached a leash to his collar and off we went. He was instantly addicted. From then on we walked every day, even in the rain. I just had to pick up the leash, and he would get so excited I could hardly get it attached. It gave me great pleasure to see him so happy.

One Day when we were returning from our walk, a woman with three dogs running loose approached us. One of her dogs pounced on the stray. My poor dog was no match for this vicious

animal. I got on top of the stray while screaming at the woman to pull her dog off. “Let them fight it out,” she said.

I was furious, “My dog can’t fight back. He doesn’t hear or see well. Pull your dog away,” I shouted. She finally did but not before the stray and I both had bleeding wounds. When we got home I told my friend George, who was visiting me at that time, what happened. He gave it no importance at all, saying, “Don’t be so upset. It’s just a few scratches.”

“What do you mean it’s just a few scratches? My dog was attacked, and I have a right to be upset!” I was ready to send him back to Long Beach. George never appreciated how much my dog meant to me.

By May of the next year I had the stray for nine months. He had gained weight and had become a sweet and gentle dog who never gave me any problems. Whenever a stranger came by and approached him he no longer rolled on his back in a submissive stance. One early morning I noticed he was lying in a hole he had dug and didn’t get up to greet me when I went outdoors. He was obviously ill. By afternoon his condition worsened. I called my daughter and together we took him to the veterinarian. She had to carry him because he was unable to walk. The veterinarian examined him. He couldn’t tell what was wrong with him until he took x-rays and did other tests. Then he said something that surprised me. “I don’t know if you want to spend money for these tests because this dog is about thirteen years old, and he may not recover.” He was the same veterinarian who guessed him to be about seven years old nine months earlier. He didn’t say it, but I understood him to mean that it would be better to euthanize him. It was not an easy decision, but I had to make it. We buried him in my back yard that same afternoon.



The Island of Gentle Touches

by Rebecca Martin

Before I left, I called a friend of a friend. Oh yes, this person said, Africa had changed her forever. When I asked how, she told me she'd been in Kenya only a week. But once a woman had touched her gently on the shoulder.

I was sitting on my terrace, the bay pearling in the dusk. In my first two weeks, I'd shot pictures of the animals just like all the other tourists, but for the last month of my trip I wanted to find that village of gentle touches. After landing on the island that morning (and looking at a few trekker-like hostels in Lamu Town), I walked for forty minutes along the sea wall to Shela, the smaller village on the beach.

At the village café, I asked if anyone knew of a room in a private house. Hamid, a merry, elfin-like man, leapt up, brought me to his unoccupied guesthouse. (It was June, the tail end of the monsoon season, he explained.)

But after he showed me the top floor, the room I wanted, he asked, "Do you know Peugeot?" Sure, nice car, I said. He pointed at the elaborately-tiered villa facing his simple guesthouse. But Madame Peugeot came only for the month of August, he claimed, and most fascinatingly, she could not bear to eat alone. Hamid imitated her, flitting about, fluting in a high, squeaky voice: "Will you dine with me? Please do." Then Hamid told me that the Monacos owned six villas and some barons and dukes other properties in the village.

"But it's not so much work," he said, "paddling out every morning to the jungle island to milk my cow."

This didn't seem like the village I'd wanted. But maybe I should touch other people first, who would in turn touch other people, who would touch more people and soon the world would be touching each other's shoulders, gently.

Someone was banging on the guesthouse door below.

After I unlocked it, a man wearing a squashed cap marched upstairs, right up to my terrace, explaining all the while that Hamid's wife was his sister and this afternoon his own wife had just made a fresh batch of fish samosas.

"Barracuda," he said, plopping his basket on the table. He yanked out a clear plastic bag—at the bottom of which sloshed several inches of yellow oil and a clump of fried samosas.

His opened shirt and frayed cut-offs dangled ominously around his gangling frame; his pencil moustache looked vaguely criminal. “But my wife and children are hungry,” he said.

I dug out a fifty shilling note. He wrapped three samosas in a half-sheet of newspaper.

“I am Mahmoud,” he said. “Everyone knows me.”

“Okay, Mahmoud—” I started.

“*Hakuma matata.*” He cut me off. He knew I didn’t want them.

He swiveled to one end of the terrace, then another. But there wasn’t anyone else up here. He bent down to my ear. “I can get you lager,” he said. He leaned in further. “Or spirits,” he whispered.

I thought I’d have to forget about getting a cold beer on Islamic Lamu Island, but it seemed Mahmoud had his no doubt illegal supplier. Again, he whispered that lager cost only three dollars a bottle, which was a little pricey, but on the other hand, everything had to be manhandled in on the little sputtering ferry.

I handed him six dollars’ worth of shillings for two beers. He examined each bill, then barked, “Pilsner or Tusker?”

Tusker was fine. But why was he talking like some kind of a tough guy now? He wasn’t that bad-looking with his wide cheeks and polished tan face; still he appeared nervous, something running behind his eyeballs.

“How many children do you have?” I asked. And how much could his profit be, fifty cents, I wanted to ask.

He didn’t answer. He pocketed the money, clattered down the stairs.

I laid the grease-stained packet of samosas on the table. Gently.

*

The next morning, a scream woke me. I rushed out to the terrace.

I never knew a donkey could squeal so loud. In fact, a whole train of donkeys stood along Madame Peugeot’s wall, saddled with baskets stacked with stone blocks. Men unloaded the blocks. Other men started to shovel at mounds of sand and gravel. More men arrived to saw and hammer. Soon, twenty men were pounding and sawing and shouting, and I’d moved in on a Sunday, I thought grimly.

A woman's voice shrieked. In a courtyard hung with laundry lines, a kerchiefed woman with a pointy chin was screaming at someone hidden from view. A voice shouted back, like the voice of an old man, hollering as if he were deaf. The yells and screams and even the normal conversations from the alley below were hollowing out my skull.

*

When I reached Lamu Town, a lone haranguing voice echoed through the narrow Kasbah-like passageways. In the town square stood a bony man in a tattered robe with matted ashy hair. He punched as he shouted in Swahili at the fifty or so idly-chatting men. But for all the notice he attracted, he seemed a fixture, like the TV that's always on.

A bare-chested beach boy wearing purple-mirrored sunglasses approached me. He asked if I wanted a dhow ride, then if I wanted to buy khat. In his mirrored glasses, I could only see my own mauve, fish-eye reflection, glaring back at myself.

I decided to ask the beach boy about the shouting man.

“Shaggy?” he said, and laughed. Apparently, Shaggy had “lost it” a few years ago after his wife ran away with another man. Now Shaggy devoted himself fulltime to advising the men of the town to respect the teachings of Allah, and especially not to touch other men's wives.

But what was the beach boy's name? King, he said. I asked King if I might gaze at his eyes. He removed his glasses, but kept his lids squeezed shut. I was struck by how delicate the skins of eyelids are.

But King didn't open his eyes, so I started to leave. A thumping sound reverberated through the square. An old man, with a shaved stubble of white hair and elephantiasis feet swollen under his knee-length sarong, was banging a stick of lumber on the stone wall of the old fort. He dropped the stick, turned to the circle of young men surrounding him, pleaded mutely for a hand-out with his sad clown face. The young men punched at him.

I turned away in disgust, only to see Shaggy running wildly in my direction. I froze for a moment, then ducked behind a donkey. Shaggy shot past, narrowly missing me. Then the pillbox-hatted man chasing Shaggy slowed to a walk and shrugged at the riveted crowd, who burst into laughter.

It seemed Shaggy and the beggar were the entertainment, the butt of jokes.

*

I left the square, stopping at various shops, open for the tourists that had not yet come. But after an hour or so of looking at tie-dyed caftans, I definitely felt like I was making a pest of myself. This didn't seem the place either, where anyone gave gentle touches.

On my way out of town, I passed through the square where Shaggy was still shouting and King still sat on his plastic drinks carton.

"How is the day?" King shouted.

I told him I felt a little crazy for wandering up and down the alley so many times because I was the only *mzungu*, and therefore conspicuous.

"Don't worry about it," King said. "Everyone goes up and down the main street at least ten times a day."

*

When I reached my not-so-quiet little village, a woman lumbered out of her door. She started, then seemed to recognize me. "Eh!" she said. "*Habari*."

"*Nzuri*," I lied. Fine.

She was Fatma, Hamid's wife, she told me. A teenaged girl popped up behind her. Their *bui-buis*, their long black robes, rustled around them. "And this is Hafsa, my cousin," she said.

Their opened door cast the only light into their dim room, made gloomier still by the dented pots, piles of laundry, and mattresses with half-ripped covers strewn about. A ginger-colored tom cat emerged, carrying a fish bone in his mouth.

"We are happy to have you," Fatma said.

"*Asante sana*," I said. Then remembering Mahmoud, I asked if they had seen him.

They looked warily at each other. I somewhat embarrassedly mentioned the Tuskers.

"Awk," Fatma spat. "That man is a liar. He is my brother, but you cannot trust him."

Hafsa rolled her eyes. "He *used* to be okay."

"*Used* to be?"

Hafsa looked irritated. Apparently, when Mahmoud was still a young man, he had worked hard (fishing), saved enough money to

buy a house, get married, have his kids. Then he started hanging out with the beach boys, smoking grass and chewing khat.

Fatma shook a finger at Hafsa. “No, he was never right in the head, always laughing to himself. When he was a boy, he would sing in the sea all day, from seven in the morning until ten at night.”

Fatma waved her hand to dismiss the thought of him. “He’s crazy.”

“Don’t worry,” Hafsa said, with a determined gleam. “We will tell Hamid what Mahmoud has done. Then Hamid will kick him.”

*

Late that afternoon, with the ceiling fan over my bed whirring on high, I was still seeing the glint in the women’s eyes, the mental image of Hamid kicking Mahmoud.

I heard rapping. Mahmoud was circling below, flagging out the sides of his white t-shirt as if to cool himself. I went down, opened the door.

He leaned against the frame, moaned. A drop of sweat traced a wet path from his temple to his cheek to his chin.

“What did you tell my sister?” he said.

“Only that I hadn’t seen you,” I lied.

He glared, then pointed at a black bag on the stoop. I picked it up; the two bottles felt freezing through the plastic.

“I have a little boy and a little girl,” he said.

I handed him another three hundred shillings for two more beers. He muttered something indistinguishable, but took the money.

Upstairs, I cracked open the first Tusker. Dusk now, the fairy lights in Madame Peugeot’s garden blinked on. In the bay, the atolls disappeared in the silver tide. A lone fisherman stood in his dhow. Then the boy singer at the mosque sang the 6:30 call to prayer, stretching out one syllable over twenty notes at least.

But after he sang the last *Allahu akbar*, I sensed a broken promise in the yawning silence, inky and endless, except for the fronds crackling in the breeze. I peered into the darkness as if I could find someone, anyone, to sit beside me.

I opened the second beer. A drop of sweat traced a wet path down the side of the bottle.

*

The next morning, I bagged up the empty bottles. I didn't care about my beer; Mahmoud could keep my money. I set out to look for him.

Hamid leapt up from a table of beach boys at the village café, took me aside. "You better hold on to your shillings," he said. "But I just made my second order last night."

Hamid tapped a forefinger on his temple, laughed. "And to think that I married his sister. Sometimes I wonder about her."

Dark clouds started rolling in. I felt a few drops, ran to the shelter that the beach boys had built, a little cave under low-arching doun palm branches. One of the two hammocks was occupied by a beach boy I hadn't seen before. I said, hello. He replied, "*Jambo*."

But he appeared lost in thought. Relieved I wouldn't have to make conversation, I lay in the other hammock, admiring the decorations the beach boys had stuck onto driftwood poles—glass bottles, scraps of plastic cartons, discarded rubber flip-flops separated from their partners—whatever junk had washed up on shore. Then I only watched the waves, wondering if this palm cave would be enough to live in, if this was all I needed to be happy.

But I shouldn't be lying here; I had just ratted on Mahmoud again. I pictured Hamid kicking him and Mahmoud wandering around, shouting at no one, getting chased, swinging a stick of lumber at a jeering crowd. I didn't know why his head would be shaved, but I saw that, too.

*

By morning, the drizzle had lifted. On my way into town, Fatma strolled toward me along the sea wall, her black *bui-bui* fluttering, smiling as if she were day-dreaming.

I called out, but she didn't hear. "Fatma?" I repeated.

She started back. "Oh . . . *nzuri*," she said. "You can forget about your Tuskers," she added. Last night, Mahmoud had broken the beer man's door and all the windows, too. The beer man wouldn't sell him anything unless he brought back the empty bottles from my first order. Either that, or he needed a deposit.

I recalled I had thrown the bottles out. "But where is Mahmoud now?" I asked.

"In the jail," Fatma crowed.

*

In Lamu Town, the district commissioner's black sedan gleamed officiously on the pier outside his office. After I knocked, a

fat man in a white shirt and grey trousers filled the doorway. Yes, he was the DC, he assured me. “And how do you find our little island?” he asked.

“*Nzuri sana*,” I lied. “Actually, I came to ask about a friend of mine.”

His grin froze. He led me into a back room, surprisingly bare for a district office, I thought. Separated by his empty desk, he tipped back in his chair.

“Yes, Mahmoud told me you were helping him,” he said. “You know purchasing beer here is illegal, young lady.”

I hadn’t been sure about that, I mumbled. “But what will happen? Where is the jail?”

He tsk-ed. “No visitors except for family.” His chair thumped forward. “But,” he said, “if you are truly concerned about your *friend* . . .”

*

In the square early the next morning, “How is the day?” King shouted.

“*Nzuri*,” I lied. After I had paid Mahmoud’s fine, the cost of a new door and windows (and an added amount to the beer man for his monthly payoff to the DC), I was broke. I tried to say goodbye to King, but all I could manage was, “See you next year,” though I doubted I would ever return. I had only made things worse for Mahmoud.

King looked disappointed. “Well, next summer we’ll take that dhow ride, my friend,” he said.

I confirmed the noon ferry departure, started back to my room to finish packing. Walking towards me on the sea wall, Mahmoud appeared.

“Mahmoud!” My shout surprised both of us.

He grinned, took off his squashed cap. The police had shaved his head, but left his little moustache. “I was in prison!” he said smiling, twirling.

He seemed proud, as though he had a role to play, an identity to uphold, that of crazy Mahmoud. Then I thought of Shaggy and the lonely beggar.

Mahmoud turned serious. “I have jumbo shrimp,” he said. He held out his palm, pointing with the other hand to above his wrist—clearly, a nine-inch long shrimp.

But there wouldn't be time. I was about to go on my way, but Mahmoud said, "Come. Meet my little boy and girl."

I followed him down a twisting alley, past anemic chickens pecking at goat dung, past children in tattered clothes who stopped their playing at the sight of me, past a stream of sewage. We came to a mud hut. Mahmoud pulled aside a burlap rag. We entered a narrow dirt-floored room filled with smoke. Mahmoud introduced me to several women, many children—it happened so fast, I couldn't keep track of which woman was his wife, who was his little boy, his daughter. Everyone ducked back so quickly, so shyly into the smoky corners.

The oldest woman yelled at a small boy who disappeared, returned a few moments later with a plastic bucket of twigs for the fire under the cauldron. Samosas bubbling in oil. The old woman squatted and stirred. She smiled. She offered.

Our hands touched gently, very gently. And I imagined all the other islands where everyone could touch.



Oddity Nemesis, Issue One, We've Got Issues

by Pi D-vo

It was nine in the evening on a Saturday night when everything wanted to keep on rockin', especially the convertible, which seemed to have a problem driving straight down the dark, winding roads of social misery, and the benefit of the doubt. The driver lowered the plastic dome over the top and took off into the air like some kind of a rocket ship made by Chrysler, causing the buxomly girl riding shotgun to hit her head into the dashboard. This had to be the strangest car Sally had ever been in in her life.

“. . . So finally I decided that my boyfriend wasn't in debt enough. I mean, he'd been dating me for like, six weeks, and it was only \$5,000. He obviously didn't appreciate me for me. So I took his car and sold it, and then I met you at the dealership, and you're obviously wonderful and have just the right number of credit cards,” the giggling blond chirruped, stretching her arms across the back seat

of this very strange car. It was blue, and had a lot of things that lit up across the dashboard, and also rocket boosters coming out the back which propelled it into the air, something which this girl oddly didn't find alarming at all.

"That's very nice," Rikkit said, turning the steering wheel. "So where do you want to go tonight?"

"Hmm . . . I don't know . . . I can't decide . . . What would you recommend?"

"I have an idea, what about Lune?"

"I haven't heard of Lune!" the girl exclaimed. "Let's go there."

And so they arrived at a quarter past six at a restaurant professing itself to be the simple and elegant Lune, where the floors were made to look like a cratered moonscape, and the only windows were placed in the ceiling to allow for a picturesque view of the Milky Way. On the outside it rather looked like a rocket ship about to take off, but Rikkit assured her that this was for show, and thus perfectly safe.

They were seated in a round, low table, and it was not six seconds later before Sally's glass of ice-tea began shaking and wandering to the edge of the table as did every other glassware in the restaurant. Sally continued stirring her ice tea and tried to make small talk as glass plummeted to the floor and shattered. Sally looked alarmed. "Where did you say you were from again?" she asked curiously.

Rikkit coughed. "Moldova," the yellow, antennaed, small little man said, squinting his red ruby eyes. He wasn't sure what he had told her before, but it most certainly wasn't Moldova. Sally was approximately twenty-five percent plastic, and that was most certainly a good portion of her brain as well, so she didn't bat an eye, but only her lashes. She would have retained some value as a recyclable product in most states.

Presently the shaking stopped. "Oh look, here comes the waiter!" she smiled. A robot with a large, glowing eyeball rolled towards them, a fake mustache on his upper lip and a white towel swung over his metallic arm.

"Bonjour, and what can I get for you this evening?" he asked, in the most outrageous accent possible.

"Hello, Robber! How's it---I mean, I do not know you, you are a person I do not know," Rikkit said nervously. Robber made a strange face, as if to say, 'You almost blew it, dipstick,' then grinned

excitedly as he poured wine everywhere but into the glasses. He then stole all the silverware, sparked, cackled, and rolled away on his little wheels.

“What a strange waiter.”

“Well, you know the French. Always so inventive.” Sally looked around, and saw people of varying colors and heights, some with several limbs, some who were gelatinous blobs, some who were made of metal and others with many eyes, and said,

“There must be a lot of foreigners here tonight.” She smiled vacuously.

“. . . Yes, sweetcakes,” Rikkit said. “I just wanted to say, that I’m having a wonderful time, and, may I kiss you?” he asked shyly, with the shadow of a smile on his faint lips.

“Oh, okay, I guess,” the girl sighed, and let him kiss her, which was a rather wet process involving lots of struggling, and required the use of two napkins when done.

“Waiter! Bring me a martini!” Sally gasped. “Can we go shoe shopping now?”

“Your dinner, monsieur,” the robot exaggerated, and presented a purple squid on a platter, with huge eyeballs at the end of each tentacle. The robot pocketed two of the eyes when no one was looking.

“Oh, excellent! Eggplant parmesan!” Rikkit laughed nervously, and pulled the robot aside, where he whispered feverishly into its audio receptors, “Why couldn’t you get any human food?!”

“Because I thought cannibalism might turn her off!” it mechanized.

“I meant food humans eat, not humans as food!”

“Well you should have been more specific!”

“You are stupid!”

“I’m not talking to you.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

“Oh God, what is that?!” Sally began screaming as the waiter flounced off the dish cover, and revealed a large amoeba underneath, still alive.

“Sushi?” Rikkit asked nervously. Sally got up at once from her chair and strode around, looking at all the patrons, looking at what they were eating.

“Oh my God! They’re all aliens!” she screamed, and horror music began playing fervently from nowhere, augmented by lightning strikes. The camera zoomed into her screaming face, her hands pressed firmly against her cheeks like some kind of a Munch portrait. At once she ran to the door, only to find that when she left Lune, she was on Lune still, for outside was the real lunar surface. She screamed, and fainted, then got up, screamed, and fainted, and she continued to do this while the patrons gathered about and watched with curiosity.

“I will get you back for this! I will never buy another Elvis album again!”

“My dear, it doesn’t matter if you buy another Elvis album or not,” Rikkit said, his eyes on fire like the eyes of Bela Lugosi, “because kissing is how my species mates, and you are pregnant with my child!” Thrilling music flailed the camera back and forth in dramatic discord.

“No, it can’t be,” she screamed, “because I’m . . . a man!” Suddenly the girl pulled a strangely human-looking plastic mask from her head and revealed that she was, in fact, a small, unattractive man in his late forties.

“Eew!” Robber shouted. “That’s just nasty!” Rikkit ran away to be sick.

“Yes well, I’ve got what I wanted. Photos for the Enquirer! Photos for the Enquirer! You can’t stop me, and you’ll never catch me! Ha ha ha ha!” And he ran off into the night, unaware that he was still on the moon, and had no way to get back to the Enquirer anyways. Robber rolled his eyes. Idiot.

And they all lived for several years after that, in emotional numbness.

The end.



CMC Foundation—Building the Future NOW

The mission of the Copper Mountain College Foundation (previously the Friends of Copper Mountain College) is to maximize educational opportunities in the Morongo Basin by supporting the college's activities, programs and facilities.

The Foundation provides the crucial link between community donations and the educational needs of the college. By supporting the Foundation's mission, you can help the college provide educational excellence for all its students, now and in the future.

For more information please visit the Foundation at www.thecmcf.org, or call 760-366-3791 x 4200.

Alumni Association

The CMC Foundation oversees the college's Alumni Association, composed of graduates, former and current students, faculty, and friends. Alumni donations and membership dues are used to fund student scholarships and other campus programs and activities. The Association's major fundraising event is its annual Art Auction, held in the early spring at the Helen Gray Center in Joshua Tree.

Membership dues are \$25 per year, payable to the Copper Mountain College Foundation with the memo: *Alumni Association*. Dues are charitable gifts for income tax purposes. Contact the Foundation for more information on the Alumni Association and gift-giving options.

HOWL'S Writing CHALLENGE

HOWL is funded through the generosity of the CMC Foundation, including cash awards for *Short Stories*, *Poetry*, and *Academic Papers and Essays*. Winners will receive prizes of **\$300.00**, **\$200.00**, and **\$100.00** respectively for first, second, and third place in each category. Eligibility requirements: While **ANYONE may submit work to HOWL**, Writing Challenge contestants must either be currently enrolled at CMC or have been enrolled at CMC within the past two years and not have attained any degree above that of

the Associate degree. If it is determined that there are not enough eligible submissions in each category, awards will be limited to those submissions judged as fully deserving of such recognition.

HOWL 2009 Submission Form

Contributor _____

Address _____

Phone (_____) _____ Email _____

Writing Challenge Entries

CMC Enrollment: Currently Enrolled Within Past 2 Years

Earned Degrees: None AA/AS BA/BS MA/PhD

HOWL, a literary magazine of Copper Mountain College, is accepting poetry, short stories, essays, scholarly papers, and reviews for its 2009 edition. The deadline for accepting submissions is **February 15, 2009**.

Guidelines: All submissions must be typed, double-spaced on 8 ½ by 11-inch paper. Poetry must be single-spaced. In addition to printed copies, all entries must be submitted on a CD, diskette, or by email to <ggilbert@cmccd.edu> with the word “**HOWL**” in the subject line. CD or diskette labels must include the title of the work/s and the name of the author. Entries may also be pated into emails. Because Howl is published on a volunteer basis, submitted work will not be returned, nor will results be announced in advance of publication.

Editorial Policy: Because **HOWL** is a product of Copper Mountain College and intended to represent the campus and community, and due to space limitations, publication of all submissions cannot be guaranteed. The staff reserves the right to edit all pieces.

Address: CMC’s mailing address is: PO Box 1398, Joshua Tree, CA 92252, Attention: Professor Greg Gilbert.

Agreement: I, the undersigned, confirm that my submission is my exclusive property. I grant permission to the staff of **HOWL** to publish my work without giving up copyright benefits. I also understand that publication, including editing, of my submission will be at the discretion of the editorial staff. Again, **ANYONE** may contribute to **HOWL**. Restrictions apply on to Writing Challenge Submissions.

Contributor’s signature _____ Date _____

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