

**Ebook  
Version**

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WOMEN'S  
BY  
GIRLS

NOVA 22

ADMIDAR

**april  
2013**

**SKIVE**

**WOMEN'S BY GIRLS**



# APRIL FOOL!

*This issue starts from the back page...*





**Mel Waldman, Ph. D.**, a psychologist, is also a poet and writer whose stories have appeared in dozens of magazines including *HARDBOILED DETECTIVE*, *ESPIONAGE*, *THE SAINT*, and *AUDIENCE*. He is a past winner of the literary GRADIVA AWARD in Psychoanalysis and was nominated for a PUSHCART PRIZE in literature. He is the author of 11 books.

**Jeffrey Zable** has been publishing poetry and prose for many years in small press magazines and anthologies. The poems in this magazine are dedicated to two fine poets he knew, who recently passed away: Tom Cuson and Harold Norse. They are also dedicated in memory of Charles Bukowski and Steve Richmond.

**Mike Sheedy's** stories have appeared in various magazines. His collection *Now is th Tim* can be found at Amazon and Barnes & Noble. "Limey and the Bear" is an excerpted chapter from his novel *The Living, the Dead, and the Double-Dead*. That book is also available at the sites mentioned above. Contact Mike at michael@moment.net

**Wendy Schmidt** is a native of Wisconsin. She has been writing short stories and poetry for the last ten years. Her writing bends towards the left of center and often, when she's not watching, runs right off the page. Crucial tools for marathon sessions include the four C's; computer, cat, coffee and chocolate.

**Eric Scott** is the author of several articles in the field of psychology. He is a Research Associate at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health located in Baltimore, MD.

**LB Sedlacek's** poetry has been published in publications such as "Mastodon Dentist," "Fickle Muses," "Apparent Magnitude," "Sea Stories," "Tertulia Magazine," "Coppertales," "The Broad River Review," and others. LB's latest chapbook is "District of Confusion (the Washington, DC poems)." <http://www.lbsedlacek.com>

**Bonnie Quan Symons** has had her haiku poems published in the *Vancouver Courier*. She has also had her poems published in *Four and Twenty*, as well as in *Resurrectionist Review*. She works as an Administrative Assistant and lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

**Maggie Veness** lives and works in Coffs Harbour, a seaside town on the beautiful north coast of NSW, Australia. Her stories have been described as mischievous, perceptive, unpredictable, contemplative, disquieting, and thoroughly engaging. Her prize-winning short fiction has been published in six countries to date.

**Paul Malone** is an Australian writer living in Austria. His stories are often humorous, sometimes speculative, and occasionally written for children. Right now he's working on a children's book series (if he can be so presumptuous), revisiting a few short stories in need of a rewrite, and dabbling in non-fiction. He's also a founding member of Vienna Writers—an eclectic mix of expat types and lost souls who are gradually finding their way in the world of words.

Paul sometimes post his thoughts: [www.paulmalone.wordpress.com](http://www.paulmalone.wordpress.com)

**Lance Manion** is the author of three short story collections: *Merciful Flush*, *Results May Vary* and *The Ball Washer*. In addition to contributing to numerous flash fiction sites he blogs daily on his website [www.lancemanion.com](http://www.lancemanion.com) where you can reach him and find his Facebook/Twitter info.

**Maren O. Mitchell's** poems have appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Classical Outlook*, *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, *Sunrise from Blue Thunder*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume V: Georgia*, and elsewhere. Her nonfiction is *Beat Chronic Pain*, *An Insider's Guide* (Line of Sight Press, 2012). She lives in Georgia, U.S.

**Brennan O'Shea** lives and works in a seaside suburb of Adelaide and has had stories published in print and on-line; most recently "Don't wait" in *Regime 02*, March 2013 and "Outside the mirror" in *Lizard Skin Press Short Story Anthology 1*, 2012

**Michael Price.** Widely published in literary journals, Michael Price has been writing fiction for over 30 years. He earned his BA in Theater from the University of Minnesota in 1980 and performed his own one-man one-act play "No Change of Address" to considerable acclaim at the 2011 MN Fringe Festival.

**Carla Sarett's** stories have appeared in *The Linner's Wings*, *The Medulla Review*, *Loch Raven Review* and other publications, including the humor anthology, *Love Hurts!* Her first collection of stories, *Nine Romantic Stories*, was published In 2012. She would be delighted to hear from you at [carlasarett.blogspot.com](http://carlasarett.blogspot.com).

**Lucy Cole Gratton** is a retired CPA living in Murphy, NC. She has been writing for herself for many years—only lately seeking to publish. Lucy is a native of Decatur, Georgia, and has degrees from Agnes Scott College and the University of Florida.

**Bob Grove** grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. He earned his bachelor's degree at Kent State University and his master's at Florida Atlantic University. He has taught courses in English, journalism, and creative writing as well as the sciences and psychology. A former ABC-TV news journalist and program host, he has published eight books and hundreds of articles in U.S. magazines.

**Diane Havens** is an actor, audiobook narrator, educator, poet, and playwright from Brooklyn, NY. From the stage to the page, she's portrayed many characters and created some of her own. Hear samples of her work at [dianehavens.com](http://dianehavens.com)

**Karen Paul Holmes** works as a freelance business writer in Atlanta. In 2012, she received an Elizabeth George Foundation emerging poets grant. Her poetry credits include *Poetry East*, *Atlanta Review*, *Caesura*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and the *Southern Poetry Anthology Vol 5: Georgia* (Texas Review Press). [www.facebook.com/karenholmespoetry](http://www.facebook.com/karenholmespoetry)

**Grove Koger** is the author of *When the Going Was Good: A Guide to the 99 Best Narratives of Travel, Exploration, and Adventure* (Scarecrow Press, 2002), and has published short fiction in *Phantasmagore*, *Lacuna*, *Scareship*, *Eternal Haunted Summer*, and *Two Words For*.

**Allen Kopp** lives in St. Louis, Missouri, USA with his two cats. He is the author of over a hundred short stories, appearing in such diverse publications as *Abandoned Towers Magazine*, *Superstition Review*, *Copperfield Review*, *Burial Day Books*, *The Zodiac Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Short Story America*, *Midwestern Gothic Literary Journal*, *Santa Fe Writers' Project Journal*, *Danse Macabre*, *A Twist of Noir*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, *Dew on the Kudzu*, *The Medulla Review*, *Berg Gasse 19*, *Subtext Magazine*, *Best Genre Short Stories Anthology #1*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and many others. He welcomes visitors to his website at: [www.literaryfictions.com](http://www.literaryfictions.com)



**Claire T. Feild** is an English composition instructor. She has had 259 poems accepted for print publication in 190 literary journals, such as, *The Carolina Quarterly*; *Birmingham Arts Journal*; *Hurricane Blues: Poems about Katrina and Rita*; *The Mochila Review*; *Folio*; *South Dakota Review*; and most recently, in these print journals: *Spillway*; *Tulane Review*; *Chinaberries & Crows: An Anthology* (Solomon and George Publishers); *University of Colorado's Palimpsest: A Creative Journal of the Humanities*; *The Path: A Literary Magazine*; and *Veil: A Journal of Darker Musings*. Her first poetry book, *Mississippi Delta Women in Prism*, is set in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Excerpts of her memoir, *A Delta Vigil*, have been published in Boston's *Full Circle: A Journal of Poetry and Prose*.

**Tom Frozart's** writing is mainly inspired by a variety of life experiences in the corporate world, isolated communities of Algeria or the Australian desert, and Antarctica where he was head of scientific teams for international projects.

He's interested in the ethical aspects of science and the fabrication of evidence, the intricacies of our perception of the world and how our behaviour evolve under social, religious, or environmental pressures.

Tom Frozart holds a PhD in Information Science; he currently shares his time as a project management consultant for hi-flying industries and shares his time between Australia and France.

**Brady Gerber** is a sophomore at Indiana University studying business and music, and in his free time he writes music and short stories. His favorite writers include Bob Dylan, Henry Miller, Kurt Vonnegut and Shakespeare.

**Roger Gilroy** once had two of his photographs stolen from an All Fools exhibition in NYC.

**Ricky Ginsburg** is one of those writers who sees a flock of birds heading south for the winter and wonders what they talk about on their journey. His portfolio consists of over 300 short stories, nearly half of which have found their way into various magazines, both paper and electronic, and four novels, all self-published. While much of his writing has elements of magical realism and humor, he also has a serious side, but keeps it in a small plexiglass box under his desk.

**Fern G. Z. Carr** is a member of The League of Canadian Poets, lawyer and teacher. She composes poetry in five languages and has been published from Finland to Mayotte Island (Mozambique Channel). Carr's poetry has been chosen by the Parliamentary Poet Laureate as Poem of the Month for Canada. [www.ferngzcarr.com](http://www.ferngzcarr.com)

**Ushiku Crisafulli** is a poet, playwright, actor, graphics designer, event manager/promoter and founder of the OpenMind Collective. He co-wrote and starred in the January 2008 Manchester Playwrights Forum production of *A Last Cry* at Contact Theatre. He is part of the Contact Young Actors' Company Alumni and was Manchester's representative in Contact Theatre's Contacting The World Festival Youth Leadership summit in 2010. He was winner of the penultimate Poetry Pillow as his 'Bidaman' persona, O2 Think Big funding for OpenMind project, and the Prince's Trust Community Cash Award funding for OpenMind project.

He periodically updates his blog with poetry pieces at <http://www.openmindcollective.com/blog>

**Susan G. Duncan.** Northern California based, Susan G. Duncan is a management consultant with an arts clientele. She served as executive director for San Francisco's musical phenomenon Beach Blanket Babylon, California Shakespeare Theater, and Grammy-winning ensemble Chanticleer. Her work appears in *Atlanta Review*, *Blast Furnace*, *Compass Rose*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Thema*, among others.

**Robin Wyatt Dunn** lives in The Town of the Queen of the Angels, El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles, in Echo Park. He is 33 years old. You can find him at [www.robindunn.com](http://www.robindunn.com)

**Jaimie Engle** has managed a hip-hop band, modeled bikinis, and danced at the Aloha Bowl halftime show. She has published numerous short stories, both online and in print, with her debut novel slated for a December 2013 release through Wayman Publishers. Feel free to drop in on her at [www.jaimiengle.com](http://www.jaimiengle.com)

## About the Authors / Artists

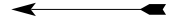
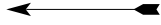
**Jon Alston** is a native of Northern California and graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from California State University, Sacramento last year. Married for over seven years, he now has a baby girl as part of his life. On the off chance he isn't writing or working on photography, he works for Copilot Press editing and binding handmade books. He has been published in such journals as *Midnight Screaming* and *Conium Review* (among others) and is forthcoming in *The Encyclopedia Project* next summer. Writing is his life.

**Andrew G. Bennett** has written prose in many different genres over the years, and also composes poetry. Published many times in various journals, he is now concentrating on speculative fiction.

**Mark Burchard.** After auditioning for the New York City Opera in 1971, Mark was charged with, "Offenses to the Vocal Arts," and sentenced to five years of hard labor in their sub-basement wardrobe department in Lincoln Center. Upon his release Mark became the men's costumer of the original Saturday Night Live and quickly moved on to film. Inspired by the high jinks and slaphappy moments in his 29th film, "The Silence of the Lambs," Mark successfully tried his hand at writing comedy. While you are waiting (presumably with bated breath) for the jury to render its verdict on Mark's forays into poetry, fiction, memoir, and photography, check out his Filmography at [IMDB.com](http://IMDB.com)

**Tom Burkett** lives in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in *Storyglossia* and *Underground Voices*, among other publications. His story, "The Moose Head Haus," was listed in the top ten stories of 2009 in The storySouth 2010 Million Writers Award.

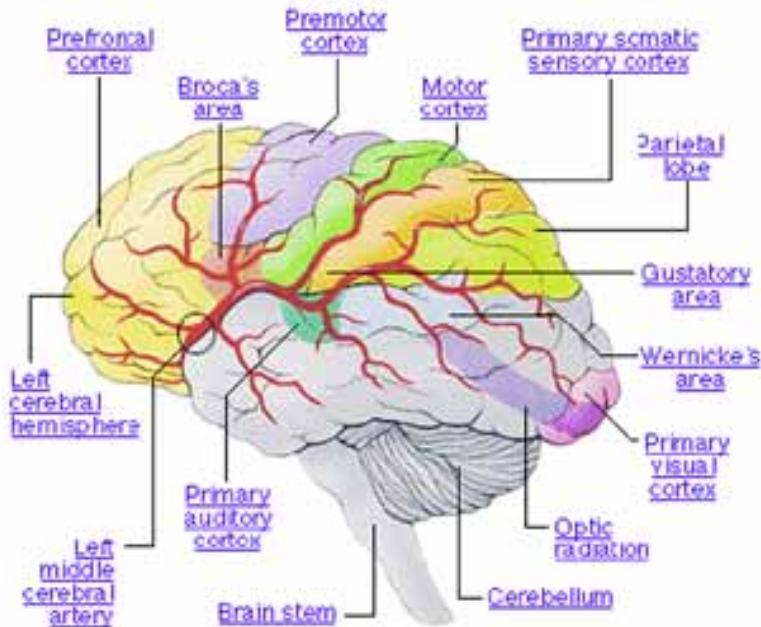
**Rachel Cann.** Mild-mannered women seldom make history. Moxie: the Untold Story is my feature film script seeking a producer. More info: [RachelCann.com](http://RachelCann.com)



enough assertion of force to test her alertness. But if you are able to, by all means do so.

If your subject passes all of these tests, rest assured that they are prepped and ready for you to beginning brainwashing.

## Appendix B



<sup>iv</sup> We suggest if a group of people are your goal, to do one person at a time, as this process is very involved, and you would not want any mixing of gray matter.

<sup>v</sup> This step produces a significant amount of fluids, so make sure you have the bucket ready.

<sup>vi</sup> It is crucial to place the brain in the top of the dishwasher, because if left in the bottom rack it will be more susceptible to re-soaking of all the information that you are trying to remove from it.

<sup>vii</sup> Be sure to NOT pour the entire remaining contents into the subject all at once, or extremely violent vomiting will be induced; nothing smells worse or makes a bigger mess than projectile vomiting brain fluids.

## Appendix A

There are a few simple ways for you to tell if your soon to be brainwashee is in deep sleep. First of course is to call their name; with this step and all other steps, if they do respond to your test, administer further sleep aids. Next try yelling their name. Continue this approach until your voice cannot go any louder. Once you go this far you are in good luck, there are only two other things to try. First, with an open palm, slap them forcefully across the face; the reasoning behind the open hand is that it leaves a stinging sensation that nerves are more sensitive to than a closed fist, which causes a more dull throbbing pain and could potentially break the person's jaw or cheek, as well as your hand. Now many tend to stop here, feeling safe enough that their subject is in a deep enough sleep, that their following brainwashing will not be disrupted by unwanted waking. However, there are those who are terribly worrisome people, and so the final sure sign that your subject is asleep is to do one of the following three things. The first and most common approach is to take the middle finger—usually considered to be the most unnecessary finger—and break it. Use a hammer, a nutcracker, or your bare hands, it does not matter. The other two are sex specific. If brainwashing a male and you feel unable to break his finger, you may kick him promptly in the genitals. If that does not wake him, nothing will. With a woman, it is much more difficult, but some prefer this approach as well to the breaking of a finger. If you are able, punch her directly in her ovaries. The average person, however, is not typically so well versed in the pressure points of the body, and this is not considered a powerful

tubing into the person's mouth and a marginal ways down their throat. Apply funnel to end of tubing; dispense the rest of the fluids<sup>vii</sup> in the back into the body—do not fear, these vital juices will be absorbed by the stomach and redistributed to the appropriate places in the body.

12. Allow the person to rest for a day in your residence. Once the brain has been placed in its proper place, the body will go into a state of comatose for a few days to a week; this is a natural reaction and will help with the healing process.
13. You cannot begin to comprehend the massive headache that your now friend will wake up with, so it is best to return them to their home and remove yourself from thence and allow them to discover themselves in their own state; most attribute the pain to excessive alcoholic consumption. After two weeks time, the person should be restored to a full state of health and you will have successfully brainwashed them!

See, nothing to it! And now you have your very own brainwashed lackey at your bidding. If any complications should occur during washing, or if you have any question, please feel free to call us at 888-639-27246 and an operator will be ready to receive your call.

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<sup>i</sup> Each person you brainwash is different, as should be the form of media you use. Text is generally the medium of choice—pamphlets, books, essays, monographs, short stories, magazines, etc.—for information in brainwashing; especially for heavy readers, books are typically the best. However, a new form of experimental brainwashing has been experimented with for several years now and has been met with resounding success. This style of brainwashing involves the introduction of other media styles, such as musical compact discs, digital video discs, cassette tapes, cellular telephones, computer software, etc.

<sup>ii</sup> It would be good to check to see if the subject is allergic to latex or not. Extreme complications rise out of those persons who are allergic, and very undesirable effects will occur

<sup>iii</sup> When this process is performed by hand, the residues and oils in the skin are soaked up by the brain flesh and can cause dementia, hysteria, depression, Alzheimer's, blindness, dysentery, restlessness, painful urination, some sexual side effects may occur, and headaches.

impact that you wish to have: a *china* setting will have only subtle effect; *normal* will be more domineering, but the person will still have general control over themselves; *heavy duty/pots and pans* setting will completely saturate the mind and make the individual into a slave of sorts—this setting is not suggested, as it has precarious results. Depending on your washer and quantity of media, time will vary.

9. Once the wash cycle has completed, allow to air dry for about an hour—best technique for this is to simply open the dishwasher and let the brain dry in the rack.
10. Now it is time to put our little mind back in its head.
  - a. Apply Epoxy to the brain stem and cerebellum.
  - b. Place your hands underneath the brainstem and cerebellum, like cradling a baby, and press it firmly into the rest of the main brain; hold for five minutes or however long the Epoxy indicates for the glue to have set. Do not worry about the curing time, once the top cranial portion of the skull is reattached, the brain will be held firmly enough in place for a secure culture.
  - c. Now gently push the brain down, slowly guiding the nerves and veins back down the spinal cord.
  - d. Put the subject into a sitting position and grab the bucket that you should have placed under the head to capture all leaking fluids.
  - e. Pour what fluids you can back into the exposed/open head. Note that not all of the fluids will fit, which is what the funnel is for later.
  - f. Now Epoxy the top of the skull back onto the person's head. Although this is one of the messier ways to perform this, it is by far the most effective.
  - g. To ensure a successful culture, apply ducting tape of medical wrap liberally around head. If tape is used, be sure to be kind and shave the person's head before beginning this procedure.
11. After the replacement of the brain, lay the person down again and insert the



cutting device and carefully and delicately remove the top of the person's skull. The exactness of this step is not too particular, simply make sure that the incision is about half an inch above the brow ridge<sup>v</sup>; set the top of the skull aside, you will need this later.

4. If you have not yet put on the latex gloves at this point, do so gloves now.
5. This is typically the most difficult part of procedure, because if performed incorrectly, it may result in the death of the subject.
  - a. Position a hand on the person's brain, and gently pull it out towards you until you can see the brainstem. **WARNING:** do NOT pull too far or you may cause serious damage to the nervous system.
  - b. Once semi-extracted, hold the brain firmly in both hands and snap off the main brain section from the brain stem and cerebellum. Do not be afraid to be forceful in order to remove the brain. Refer to Appendix B if you are unsure what the brain looks like.
6. After complete brain removal, place fresh brain in open dishwasher on top<sup>vi</sup>, and set the dishwasher on the rinse cycle. **CAUTION:** DO NOT for any reason use soap at any level of your brain washing, similar to complications if handling without gloves though more intensely so (the rinse step is optional, but is suggested; the clearer the mind the more effective your brainwashing will be).

\*if for any reason at all during your brainwashing, your subject appears to be stirring, or perhaps even waking, do not be afraid to administer an extra sedative or two when needed.

7. Once the rinse has completed, take your selected material which you wish to actually brainwash your subject with and place it in the bottom rack of the dishwasher. At this point the brain is now a blank slate and ready to receive any information.
8. Now run your washer on a regular cycle. Which you choose depends up on the

**Supplies:**

1. Select material appropriate to your situation of brainwashing.<sup>i</sup>
2. Next, acquire the individual(s) in question that are presenting the problems.
3. Obtain some sort of sedative. We recommend most sleep aids, but avoid using products like Rozerem, as you will find your subjects will have problems staying asleep during the whole of the procedure.
4. Non-powdered latex gloves.<sup>ii</sup>
5. Epoxy; super glue will not be strong enough.
6. A bucket.
7. A funnel and tubing.
8. A roll of ducting tape.
9. Any sort of cutting device. Can range from a buck saw to a katana; anything that will cut.
10. Locate any sort of dishwashing device (must be any type of mechanical dishwasher; this process cannot be done by hand and receive the desired results.<sup>iii</sup>)

**Process:**

1. Take the individual(s)<sup>iv</sup> and give them your selected sedative. Once taken, allow for the medication to take effect. This may range from fifteen minutes to two hours, depending upon the choice of product. Make sure that the person is fully asleep (see Appendix A for ways to check for R.E.M. sleep).
2. Lay the subject on a flat surface, preferably something you would not mind getting slightly dirty.
3. Once you are positive your subject is sleeping and on his/her back, takes your

*The All-Inclusive*

# HOW-TO

*Guide for*

# BRAINWASHING

by **Jon Alston**

**H**AVE YOU EVER WISHED THAT PEOPLE JUST THOUGHT LIKE YOU? Have you ever tried to get your point across but not one person was willing to listen? Sure you have, we all have experienced those impossible situations with tepid results. In “The All-Inclusive How-To Guide for Brainwashing,” you will learn the steps necessary to gain complete control over anyone you want. Just apply these steps and adhere to the advice within and you too can be living in a world that thinks just like you!

To begin, you will first need to know just what it is that you want to brainwash someone with. For instance, let us say that you have a fellow co-worker who is just one of those people you cannot seem to shut up about things they know nothing about. What kind of a resolve could we possibly have for that? Nothing! In this leaflet, you can learn to wipe the slate clean of the “all-knowing” ignoramus. By following our patented thirteen steps, you will be the master of your domain. So what are you waiting for, let’s get started!



**'My Daughter and her Cousin'**

*photograph taken in Rutland Vt. by* **Roger Gilroy**

## ADVERTISEMENT

# Sick and tired of puerile jokes?

**Whoopee cushions, messages to ‘ring this number and ask for Mr Bear’?  
Feel like going to sleep for half the day on April 1st?**

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*- Why not just ban it altogether? -*

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Our new 100 year calendar does exactly that – NO APRIL 1ST. At all.  
And there’s more!

Sure there are a few adjustments over time but after 50 years (give or take a few leap years) Dec. 25th will fall in the middle of winter so you can *really* enjoy that roast turkey and Christmas pudding in the cold, cold weather. How good is that!!!! Your descendants will bless you.

Just \$29 – the number of days in the new April – for one of these beautiful calendars. \$45 for two, \$33 for five.

And if your birthday is April 1st just send you old birth certificate with your order and we’ll give you a new one. Choose from March 31st in canary yellow or April 2nd in vibrant purple.

*Don’t delay, send today!*  
*to Gregor Pope Newcalendars*  
*PO BOX 1572 in your capital city*



“I hope you don’t expect me to flinch at the mention of God, or Jesus Christ. That is an old mediaeval superstition. Along with many others, like signing in blood. As you see: blue ink, on the first April last year, a leap year! I’m certainly not superstitious!”

“And you expect me to hand over this ‘essence’ like a sandwich! Now I know he did not mean to deceive you, but you’ve been done, Mr Nixon, like the proverbial snag on the barbie. Kerwin wouldn’t have known what ‘essence’ meant, or a soul. Cloned beings don’t have them. Try suing me if you like. Now, please go, or I’ll get a couple of my gorillas to help you out.”

“That will not be necessary. Thank you so much for seeing me, for explaining all so—so—succinctly. Makes me feel quite nostalgic for the old traditions.”

Mr Nixon dematerialised, without puff of smoke or sulphurous odour, then rematerialised into a small pile of white powder in the middle of the chair.

“Lucy, Lucy! Fetch a dustpan and brush will you? Then could you slip out and get us some fresh milk? Ah, thanks dear. Now we’ll see what your guarantees are worth, Nixon. This is a more mundane tradition, but *very* effective.”

The building exploded into fire. No one was injured, bar the singeing of the hair on the back of the minister’s hands. The local paper showed a picture of Reverend Nicholas looking, suitably downcast, at the ashen remains on the site.

“Lucy, I’m expecting someone from the insurance company this morning.”

“Oh. I’ve just taken a call from the editor of the local paper, he says they’ll open an appeal, he’s sending someone over tomorrow to see you about it, so if the insurance company doesn’t pay—”

“They will. I’ve had experience dealing with insurance companies in the past. This time I wrote the contract myself. And not on April 1st.”

“Hm, cede my essence? What on earth does that mean?”

“Such a question! From a man of the cloth!”

“Sounds like a ‘pop’ psychology euphemism for selling one’s soul.”

“Quite so.”

“My object is to *save* the souls of my ‘clients’, as you call them.”

“And you will, you will! Paid for by Kerwin. His essence to preserve the essence of all your clients, hundreds of them perhaps. And not only the essence, but their earthly lives as well. Alas that he died so young but all in your Outreach program will benefit because of Kerwin. It’s a very good deal don’t you think? Have no fear, I shall honour my side of it. Believe me. Once you have paid your son’s debt that is.”

“I?”

“You. The commodity due to me was not with Kerwin when he died so obviously you must have it.”

“How could I?”

“Come now, don’t try to deceive me. Either you never allowed the infant to take possession of it, by abstracting it soon after his birth, or you bribed the child to give it to you in return for your approval. Common failings both for people in your profession. As we both know.”

“I have work to do. I think you should leave.”

“As your son’s executor you have a duty to pay his debts”

“Mr Nixon, did Kerwin tell you he was adopted?”

“Indeed he did. And that he had no knowledge of his parentage. It is most reprehensible that you kept it from him. He had a right to know.”

“I could not tell him what I did not know myself. Kerwin was one of the unfortunate results of the human cloning experiments of 30 years ago. My brother was one of the social workers involved in finding foster parents for those poor children. Kerwin survived longer than many of the others but his brain cells had begun to break down—to put it *very* simply. Did he not tell you about his annual scans?”

“He mentioned something about an inherited early decline—”

“—induced, not inherited. I see the road accident in which he died as the hand of God saving us all from the distress of prolonged decline.”



## Not On April 1st

by **Brennan O'Shea**

“Thank you so much for making the time to see me. I realise you must be very busy. Your —er mission?”

“Outreach program.”

“Ah yes, of course.”

“You wish to see me about my son I believe. Which one?”

“Kerwin. And please, if it would be too distressing for you I could return a few months hence.”

“Thank you. But since you're here... How did you know Kerwin?”

“A business transaction. You see, I offer personal development programs: changes at the deepest level to help you reach your maximum potential. Increase intelligence and creativity; bring about vast improvements in health, and by reducing stress levels enabling you to change your life: spiritual, material, emotional, the whole complete whole—”

“Yes, I vaguely remember him telling me something like that. He was very keen for me to use your system in the outreach program but it didn't seem appropriate. I have very damaged young people here: alcoholics, drug addicts—”

“Oh I understand that. My programs have helped many former substance abusers move from the very depths of depravity to successful and fulfilling lives. His contract with me was to provide for all your clients, now and in the future.”

“*And* in the future? Surely not!”

“Oh yes. Ongoing counselling is provided for as long as the subject desires it. I am ready to fulfil my side of the bargain. As soon as payment is made.”

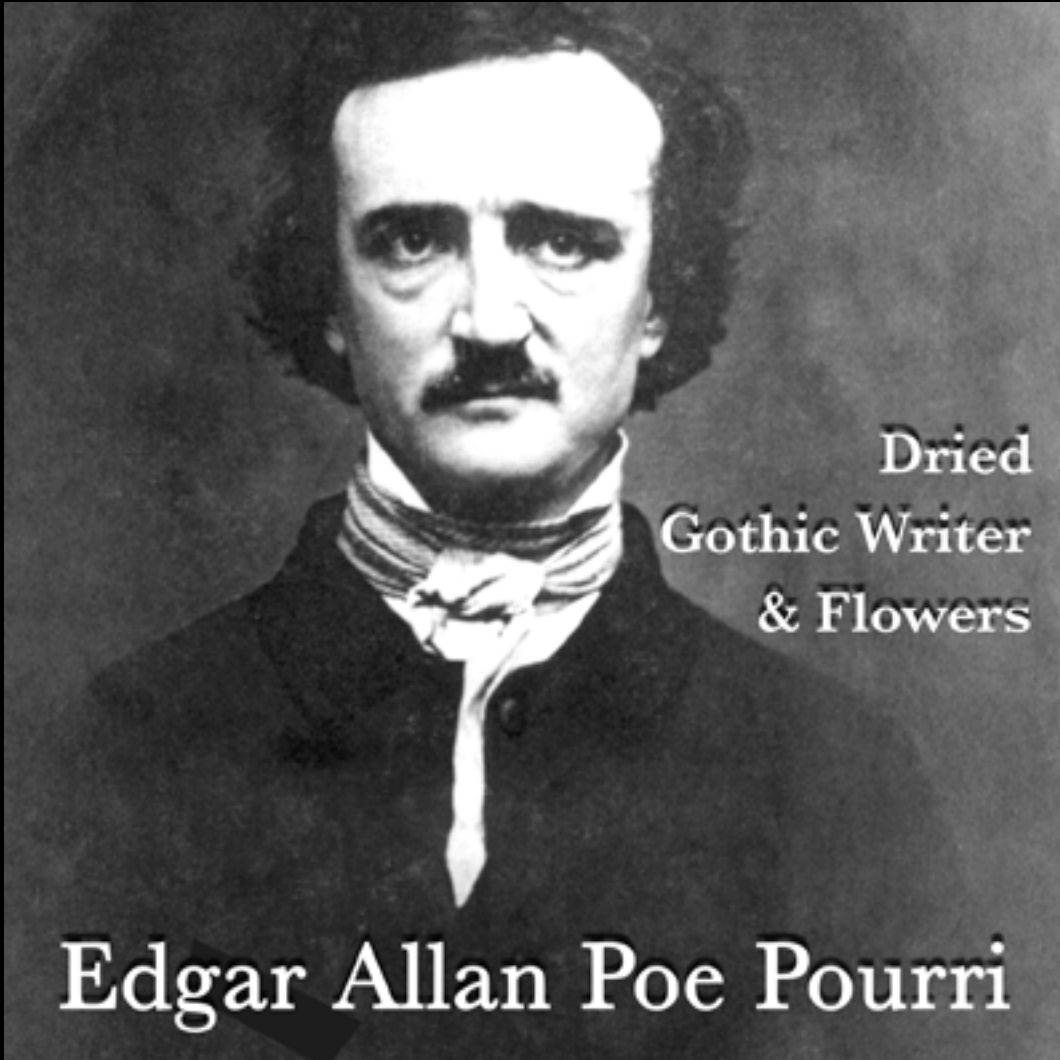
“Payment in advance?”

“No, not quite. Payment was due on Kerwin's death. Which, of course, no one expected to be so soon—please, do allow me to offer my condolences.”

“Thank you. You spoke of a contract.”

“Here is a copy. Quite short. Quite clear.”

**ADVERTISEMENT**



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Gothic Writer  
& Flowers

Edgar Allan Poe Pourri

## One Step At A Time

*a poem by* **Jeffrey Zable**

I'm writing this poem for the sole purpose of becoming famous.

I've been told that famous people are rich and lead exciting lives.

I've also heard that they get lots of sex and free tickets  
to events like football games, rock concerts, and fashion shows  
where they get to choose first from the latest outfits.

Such an opportunity would make anyone with an IQ of 60  
or higher want to sit down and write a poem.

After all, how much does it take to put a few words down  
on paper, and send it to a person who will print it  
and make you famous!

That's one of the things I love about this country.  
Anyone, anytime, anywhere can make it  
just by putting themselves out there. . .

one step at a time.

that I would have accepted the guy’s challenge and in an attempt to beat him, I would have spun out of control and hit a telephone pole. This would have happened because I am not a seasoned race car driver. Most of my life I’ve driven ordinary cars like Chevrolet Corollas and Dodge Darts. I would have been killed instantly in my Jaguar convertible and then my loving wife would be a widow. Yes, I must sincerely thank you for not accepting any of my poems for your magazine. Of course, there are other reasons to be thankful that you didn’t accept any of my poems, but I’ll save those for another letter. Here’s wishing you the best in your publishing endeavors and please pass along any of the above information to anyone who might be in a similar situation. That’s all for now.

Sincerely,

**Jeffrey Zable**

## Dear Editor/s

*a poem by* **Jeffrey Zable**

After careful thought I want to thank you for rejecting my poems for your magazine. At first I was a bit disappointed, but soon I realized it was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. If you had accepted some of my poems—even one—and published it/them in your magazine, I could have become famous. Famous in the sense that women might want me for more than just friendship, and given that I'm no different than any other guy, the temptation to take advantage of a given situation might have overwhelmed me. What I'm saying is that I could have easily succumbed to the pressure and done something that I would surely regret. You see, I'm a happily married man who's never been unfaithful to his wife. If for some reason I strayed from the path and got caught... well, the consequences would be disastrous. I've gotten so used to my wife being around that I doubt I would be able to make it without her. Also, if you had published me and I made a lot of money, I'm not so sure that I would have spent it wisely. It's likely that I would have bought a new, and larger house, and certainly a new car. I've always wanted to own a Jaguar convertible and, again, that would have proved disastrous. You see, there are a lot of crazy drivers here in San Francisco and some who even challenge others to race them. If someone had driven up along side of me, rolled down their window, and said, "Hey buddy, you wanna race?" I don't know that I would have been able to resist. If I were driving my Jaguar convertible what probably would have happened was



Your form is patronising,  
like a midget petted by a giant.  
I don't know what you claim to do,  
but it's hard work getting through to you.

The Psychiatrist's Checklist,  
it's so full of shit.  
But instead of just complaining  
I thought I'd help them out a bit.

Have I been sleeping?  
Well that's nothing to do with mood.  
Inspiration strikes at any time  
especially for creative dudes.

Pick a number from 1 to 5,  
are you dissatisfied?  
Who needs a form  
when I have my words,  
whether spoken or written  
my testimony shall be heard.

The Psychiatrist's Checklist,  
it's so full of shit.  
But instead of just complaining  
I thought I'd help them out a bit.  
I thought I'd help them out a bit.

## The Psychiatrist's Checklist

*a poem by* **Ushiku Crisafulli**

The Psychiatrist's Checklist,  
it's so full of shit.  
But instead of just complaining  
I thought I'd help them out a bit.

No I'm not feeling suicidal  
and I don't self harm.  
But a world free from bullshit  
is the path to inner calm.

And no, I've not been aggressive  
in the last two weeks  
but if some cunt tried to hit me  
fuck turning the other cheek.

The Psychiatrist's Checklist,  
it's so full of shit.  
But instead of just complaining  
I thought I'd help them out a bit.

Have I felt low about myself?  
Hell no that just ain't right.  
I'm positively awesome  
it's the world that's full of shite.



We're the Flash Mob,  
hell yeah I've got a flash nob.  
And I point it in the air  
before we get the cash robbed.  
We're the Flash Mob,  
drawing emphasis to the nipple.  
To the saloon with our boon  
and celebrate with a tippie.

Flash Mob,  
We're the greatest gangsters  
since the Wild Wild West.  
For what we do  
we're the very best.  
We're the Flash Mob,  
We're the Flash Mob.



Flash Mob,  
We're the greatest gangsters  
since the Wild Wild West.  
For what we do  
we're the very best.  
We're the Flash Mob,  
We're the Flash Mob.

You can find us in an inner city bank  
armed with flexible wrists  
and a tendency to wank.  
Robbing from the people  
that rob from the people.  
Shooting banksters in the eye...  
\*spoooge sound effect\*  
damn that shit is lethal.

Flash Mob,  
We're the greatest gangsters  
since the Wild Wild West.  
For what we do  
we're the very best.  
We're the Flash Mob,  
We're the Flash Mob.



## Flash Mob

*a poem by* **Ushiku Crisafulli**

Flash Mob,  
We're the greatest gangsters  
since the Wild Wild West.  
For what we do  
we're the very best.  
We're the Flash Mob,  
We're the Flash Mob.

Back in Chi Town they were run by Capone  
I prefer to make a racket with my Al CaBone.  
Hipsters think the Flash Mob is all about Twitter  
but just like Babe Ruth I'm a heavy hitter.  
This is a stick up, and I don't mean a gun  
and we ain't firing blanks so pardon the pun.  
With a mask up top and another down low  
hand over your money or we're ready to blow.

Rocky's glistening brow when he gazed at Jules as he spoke, Grigor knew he meant it.

Grigor walking back to the youth hostel. Jules and Maurizio driving past, Jules with the window down, waving, looking back at him as he strolls along the pavement, the casual spring in his step on this warm night in this new city where the air smells so different. She is still looking back, he senses, after she can no longer see him. "See you tomorrow," she had said, so softly, before she left.

When he finally gets in to the youth hostel and collapses in his bunk, in the dormitory where everyone is already asleep, he lays awake and touches his face where the schnitzel had hit him, and he smiles. He is feeling "chirpy" all over again.

Trappa Tony snaps his fingers, points to Maurizio. "Parmesan!"

Maurizio, handing Trappa Tony a stainless steel bowl and spoon.

"Sit still!" Trappa Tony, blood trickling from one nostril, sprinkling grated parmesan on Grigor's head. Trappa Tony stepping back, admiring his work. "There... that should do it." Snaps his fingers. "Time to serve him up."

Stony faced companions pushing the tub now, rolling Grigor back into the dining area, while he sits in the fetid wash, gripping the tub's edges, parmesan sprinkling down his face. He feels like a macabre banquet main dish. What *is* this?

He is wheeled before the strange people's table, eight of them all staring, some doubled with laughter. The big guy's pink face is glistening with tears, eyes scrunched up. He's thumping the table with his enormous fist and shaking and shuddering as he laughs, pointing with his other hand at Grigor.

Trappa Tony, still holding his nose, standing beside Grigor. "I think he broke my nose!"

More hysterics, the big guy slowly getting up, his stomach pushing out the table. "Alright, alright," wiping his eyes with a napkin, coming round to look down on Grigor.

"Rule number one: Never hit the customer, no matter what shit they pull. Even numb-nuts like Tony. Rule number two: Never—and I mean *never*—come to work looking like that again." They are all laughing now, even Trappa Tony.

Jules, coming to work later, brings along a change of clothes for Grigor. "That's Rocky for you. Always a joker. He demands loyalty though."

"I thought they were gonna kill me."

Jules sighing. "You have to chill out, Grigor. This isn't Serbia. No one's going to hurt you."

"No? You ever been hit by a schnitzel?"

"You have a job, don't you? Rocky wouldn't have set up that prank if he didn't have a good gut feeling about you."

On Jules' first day Rocky dressed up as a sheik and pleaded with her to marry him. She refused, and she too ended up in the tub. Rocky, that surprisingly good-natured man with a profound respect for slapstick comedy, had chuckled when he recollected this, Grigor listening politely in the tub, the others standing around as though he would be delivering a sermon. But from the softening lines in

between perception and sane reaction. The muscles in his chin yanking at the corners of his lips. His eyelids fluttering.

“Sir,” voice quavering now like his legs, “I am not making fun. I would not do that, sir.”

“Oh no?”

“No.”

More muffled laughter from the strange people’s table. Trappa Tony’s stony faced companions too, guffawing in contempt.

“Well then,” Trappa Tony said, reaching down, grabbing his schnitzel, lifting it up. “Then what the hell is this?”

Grigor’s pupil’s ache even more than his balls when he sees through the broken schnitzel pannier to the distinct red and white checkered pattern of a tea towel beneath.

Maurizio! The Machiavellian bastard!

Tea towel schnitzel now sweeping through the air, an extension of Trappa Tony’s adorned hand, slapping Grigor in the face, the sting of fried breadcrumbs, the follow-through of the hot tea towel, a resounding crack. Grigor staggering back, clutching his face, an uproar of cries and nervous laughter all about.

“Come on, boys!” Trappa Tony moving in, ducking Grigor’s defensive arm. They are on him, all three. One gets hold of the elastic in Grigor’s underpants, lifts him off the ground, feet swinging comically. Grigor writhes fiercely, an elbow catching Trappa Tony in the face.

“Son of a bitch!” Trappa Tony, clutching his nose. Big man at the other table laughing loudly, thumping table with fist.

They have Grigor though, march him dangling in his underpants like a kid on a swing across the restaurant and into the kitchen, where Maurizio is holding open the doors.

“In the tub!” Maurizio, pointing to a the bath-sized pot-soaking tub, filled with soupy water the color of burnt tomato sauce.

The elastic in Grigor’s underpants snaps as they throw him, arms flapping like a startled pigeon in Pionirski Park, straight into the hideous brew. In he goes, swallowed up, completely under, eyes firmly shut. Like being dropped into a giant toilet.

Back up, right ear blocked, dishwasher taste in his mouth, clearing his eyes.

ruddy face as though he's been drinking too much vodka. They're all watching him now, the big guy choking back a laugh.

But Grigor has a vision of his working visa being snatched away, of being sent back to Serbia. Game over. Life screwed. Not rational, but his balls begin to ache the way they always do when he feels threatened.

Angry man spreads his hands. "Are you deaf? I said 'get over here!'"

Quivering knee now trembling. Legs moving like shaky pistons. "Of course, sir."

Jules, pulling a favor from Maurizio the chef because she feels sorry for Grigor, and because she is Maurizio's "new girl". "He's sweet," Jules, vigorously drying Grigor's hair, "but insanely jealous, typical Italian."

"Don't screw up." That is what Maurizio said to Grigor in the kitchen when he nodded with his hooked nose at the steaming schnitzels on their plates. Maurizio, in his neatly pressed chef's uniform, his Mediterranean complexion that darkened like a thundercloud over Napoli when he first saw Grigor. He was more than just jealous—he was a mind reader, knew Grigor was in love with his girl.

Grigor at the table now. "You didn't order the schnitzel, sir?"

Angry man takes off sunglasses, lays them on the table. "Are you kidding me?"

Both Grigor's legs trembling now, definitely noticeable. Post traumatic stress, probably, from the time he was bashed in Belgrade, also three men, Albanians who didn't like the look of him. "Please, sir?"

Angry man, those sweeping palms again, addressing his two stony faced companions. "Can you believe this guy?" He reaches out, grasps Grigor's arm, pulls himself up.

He is intimidatingly short. Only comes up to Grigor's freshly shaven chin. No distance between them, shoes tip to tip. Sickly sweet aftershave and cigars, a penetrating stare, summing Grigor up, stripping him down. Grigor, feet swimming in a thin hot film of sweat in his black nylon socks and black vinyl shoes with handy Velcro straps.

"I'm gonna ask you one last time," said the very short man with an iron grasp. "You trying to make fun of Trappa Tony?"

Trappa Tony? What kind of name is that? What is a "trappa"? Does he mean "trapper"? Trappa or trapper, the sound of it works its way into Grigor's brain, flicking vital switches, shutting down relays

## Feeling Chirpy

by Paul Malone

Grigor is feel feeling “chirpy”. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Funny Aussie word. Chin high, breezing through the dining area to the kitchen, meals served: one, two, three, down go the plates in a brisk flourish, the slightest of bows. “Enjoy your meals, good sirs!” Those strange looks because of the way he talks, so polite and with his Serbian accent. He makes a good waiter. They would never guess it’s his first night. His friend Jules gave him a haircut earlier so he would “scrub-up”. Straight from Jules’ shower after the haircut, hair all bristly, and there she was, finished sweeping up all the hair, completely unabashed by his nakedness, laughing at his spikes.

“It is too short?”

“Nah,” Jules reaching up, running her hand through his hair, sprinkling water, the tangy smell of her shampoo, the touch of her fingers, that amazing tingling sensation that sweeps over him. Her breath on his cheek. “It looks... cute.”

He looks “cute” and is “chirpy” and finally he has a job, and he is in love. Not that he can tell her that now. His palm is on one of the big white kitchen doors, pushing inwards, when one of the diners cries out, “Waiter!” The voice has an hysterical edge, like a butcher’s bandsaw at the bone. The sound penetrates Grigor’s ears and anus simultaneously, reaming-out all his new-found confidence.

He turns on sticky carpet. The three men he just served are staring at him. One wears seventies sunglasses with reddish lenses, and a black turtleneck top even though it is a warm night. He holds his arms up as though shocked, an exasperated appeal, nuggety silver rings on both hands. He is gaping at Grigor, shaking his head ever so slowly.

“What the hell is this?” Fingers on his left hand dipping towards his plate.

Grigor follows their fall. A Wiener schnitzel with rice. “Pardon me, sir?” Right knee starting to quiver.

“Get over here!”

It is Tuesday night, very quiet. Only one other table with guests—strange people. Grigor can’t figure them out. They’ve been stealing glances at him all night, particularly the big guy with the



Only 6 weeks—  
long before  
my mattress  
would assume your shape,  
    we'd have a real fight,  
    I'd know your fears  
    or you, mine.  
Long before I'd leave  
the bathroom door open  
or give you a key.

6 weeks—  
seemed longer,  
    until the Nordstrom  
    bill for the lingerie  
    arrived and you  
were already  
history.



## 6 Weeks

*a poem by* **Susan G. Duncan**

All of 6 weeks—  
long enough  
to accustom myself to  
    your height,  
    your hairline,  
memorize your  
    phone number,  
    middle name,  
    birthday.  
Long enough  
to know  
your repertoire of kisses  
and know  
I'd have no  
complaints.

of a little girl, trapped by the Space Cheese. She is our ultimate figure of life, the colorless hair, the pale skin, the joys we lavish her with, the legacy of our peculiar cold wildernesses on our Old Earth.

"I am of the Clan Gruyere," says Space Cheese.

"I'm a Smith," says Martha, sniffing.

"Martha Smith," grates Space Cheese.

"Yes," she says.

Sing to me Muse of our Food, Sing to me of the Justice of the Galaxy, for it bends towards Justice, does it not? This is what we are told, and in your journeys, Muse, have you known it to be true? Sing to us, woman, galactic woman, of what you have seen.

*I have seen all. I have seen too much. I have seen...*

Shut up, I told you to sing.

*Cheese fights for freedom,*

*Cheese knows the love of the wide hope in the dark,*

*Cheese knows lonely.*

*Martha sings, sings for him.*

*She sings to the cheese.*

*As her Norwegian ancestors did.*

Singing to the cheese, singing to the wheel of cheese, as we sway in the dark. Hold my hand, Muse. Muse, what does it mean?

## Cheese in Space

by **Robin Wyatt Dunn**

Cheese in space! It is Gruyere and it is brave!

“We’ve got a lock on the little devil. Get him.” Cheese has enemies. Cut from a mighty wheel, flung at relativistic speeds outward into the dark to defend its own, cheese is brave, and cheese is lonely.

Cheese in space! It is alive! It will survive!

Its viscosity obeys the equation: vacuum kills. To that end, it must be somewhat evil in its habits. It must penetrate.

“Oh my God, it’s coming in!”

The men are right. It is.

Cheese in space! It is a victory. It is a love.

The men are screaming. They flee the cheese; they know it means death. It approaches quickly. The Cheese is so brave. It knows that even occupying this vessel will only keep the vacuum out for a millennium or two. Cheese needs more time. It matures slow. It has a mission from its Great Gruyere God. It must journey; it must forefend.

Cheese in space! Sing to me Spicy Jack Muse of its many victories and heroisms! Sing to me slow of its spicy fragrance and delicate texture! Sing to me of its passions, and fears, for it is one of us, the hero, Cheese Hero, watching over its Cheese Flock, without doubt, without hesitation, filled with yeasty fire.

“No! No, Cheese! Please, no!” The little girl whimpers. She is food for the Cheese, but Cheese knows she may have other uses: intelligence, entertainment, justice.

The Cheese Speaks: “Awwwkkkllgblgrppp itsss s oakkgikbppp!”

The girl screams and screams! The Cheese must switch languages; it has learned many.

The Cheese Speaks: “I know you are little girl. I am Cheese. Tell me name of you, girl.”

“I’m Martha,” she says, and we fall in love. We fall in love, for she is Martha, and young and innocent and blonde, with blue eyes! Our best Aryan hope! Our great white hope of old in the eyes

*Coming this Summer...*

# Everyone's a Chameleon

*starring* **Adam Sandler**

*“ You had me at ‘Hello, Goodbye’ ”*

PG

**ADVERTISEMENT**

*"...amazing... waste of time..." - Variety*



## Reduplication

a poem by **Karen Paul Holmes**

i.

Lulu had a boo boo;  
she fell doing the cancan  
in a frou-frou tutu,  
then wee-weed all the way home.

She lives in Walla Walla  
with Mimi who eats mahi-mahi  
with couscous.  
Mimi laughs at knock-knocks  
and tells night-night stories  
full of blah blah.

Lulu's sister CeeCee  
was a goody goody  
who did a no no  
at the Choo Choo.  
Still, she's chichi in Miu Miu,  
saying *chop chop* and *yada yada*.

ii.

Mama learned the cha cha  
wearing a muumuu  
in Pango Pango—  
she's only so so.

Their dada James James  
joined the Dadas  
but went to Sing Sing  
for stealing bling bling.  
Now he's in la-la land.  
Bye-bye papa.

## Observation No. 1

*a poem by* **Karen Paul Holmes**

Lulling muffled sounds

Liquid warm cocoon

Why would anyone leave the womb?



they took my big sister's advice: named me *Karen Sue*.  
I thought them negligent, turning over  
my identity to a five-year-old. (And anyway,  
couldn't it at least have been Susan)? Now  
living in the south with February daffodils  
and dogwood Aprils, I have ditched Sue  
for my maiden name, Paul—  
a boy's moniker, after all. My daughter  
has a well-thought-out name, carefully  
culled. She wants to change it. The age-old  
joke, it seems, got played on me: Mum and Dad  
were not the fools I wanted them to be.



## Out Like A Lamb

*a poem by* **Karen Paul Holmes**

My mother expected a boy at the end of March,  
but nature pulled the wool over

with a daughter born on April first,  
a Michigan child, who always wished

March would come in like a lion, that her birthday  
might arrive soft and sweet, no need

for heavy fleece. Often windy-wet and sometimes  
snow tricked me, upset

like so many children when their big days  
don't turn out as small minds dreamed. And

what about my parents? With three girls already,  
they had gladly chosen a boy's name. Stumped,



3.

I'd claimed a vacant locker.  
The previous renter left an angry note  
to demand I return their locker!  
I'd found another locker.  
I gave theirs back, but, first,  
I poured in a jar of frothy chicken broth,  
eggs, salad dressing, vegetable oil,  
mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, dried parsley,  
slammed the door shut!

I left them a note:  
"Here's your locker back. Enjoy the mess!"  
watched them open the locker!

My friend, a university student,  
after her class, took a peek that night,  
wrote me a note, that she loved it,  
how it looked like bird shit!"

4.

My student residence neighbours  
had a party which kept me awake.  
As they slept, I poured my concoction  
along the bottom of their door.  
It seeped onto their carpet,  
leaving permanent stains!

## Silly Pranks

*a poem by* **Bonnie Quan Symons**

1.

Tired of our supervisor  
mooching candies  
from people's desks,  
I planted stale candies,  
warned colleagues not to eat these—

hardened spearmint leaves,  
foil-wrapped chocolate eggs  
that my friend found in her boot,  
which got missed from her Easter loot!

2.

One evening,  
I drove with my friend  
to a colleague's apartment,  
pressed her apartment buzzer,  
tried to keep it taped down.  
After I drove back home,  
I phoned the colleague repeatedly,  
hanging up, was entertained  
from her complaints the next day!



## **April 1, 2004**

*a poem by* **Bonnie Quan Symons**

April 1st due date—  
unexpected pregnancy,  
'til the miscarriage.

**April 1, 1989**

*a poem by* **Bonnie Quan Symons**

After my move to Vancouver,  
I dated a former Calgarian.  
We shared a past, but, we would not last.  
Stressed from studying, irritated,  
he dumped me April Fool's Day,  
leaving notes behind for me to find,  
outlining reasons why he should dump me:  
my crooked teeth, curved spine.  
I should have left him first:  
He was a vegetarian.  
I was a carnivore.  
He liked to hike through wilderness.  
I preferred the city.  
He was a botanist, soil scientist.  
I was a secretary.



## **This Poem Is One**

*a poem by* **Maren O. Mitchell**

This poem is one  
of all possible poems.  
It is one possible version  
of all possible versions  
of itself.  
It could be this one.  
Or this, changing to this  
or that.  
It could be that, or that  
turning into that or  
this  
one  
poem.

## Getting Where I Want To Be

*a poem by* **Maren O. Mitchell**

Where would I be without you?  
Stranded on hot, swollen feet, thumb jerking sideways.

You take me where I want to go,  
your suspension tight, yet giving.

If I'm not attentive to your needs,  
you'll leave me behind in the dust.

In summer you cool me with your color,  
in winter, warm me with your motor.

If I don't understand you,  
we'll collide in a body and soul-shattering crash.

If I passed you on the street, I'd not know you.  
When I'm not with you, you blend into all the others.

You shield me from the winds of speed,  
from bird missiles, from bullets of those faster.

O new pickup truck, where would I be without you?  
At home, a hermit, dreaming of destinations.

## The Accumulation Of Listening To Five Well-Known Poets In Three Nights

*a poem by* **Maren O. Mitchell**

extol their agonies of existence  
is not something  
to be desired.

It calls for nicely coming home  
in contentment for what pleases me,  
accompanied by “Pralines and Cream,”  
“Peach Melba,”  
and “German Chocolate Cake” Baskin Robins ice cream,  
topped by fifteen cents  
of real canned  
cream under pressure.



## What Is The Question?

*a poem by* **Maren O. Mitchell**

There's no time like the present.

Time is no present.

There's no present like time.

There is no time.

Time is like the present.

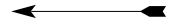
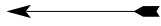
The present is time-like.

There is no present.

The present is here.

The present is time.

Time is present.



## The Joy of Cooking

*a poem by* **LB Sedlacek**

Cooking dinner for some is fun or easy  
like using the right spices or garnishing with parsley  
but my meals, I'm afraid, are frequently inedible  
since I just can't seem to use the recipe!

## **Rude Awakening**

*a poem by* **LB Sedlacek**

Young girls believe in fairy tales  
even though they're not true  
thinking every guy could be Prince Charming—  
'til out on a date when he's late, cheap, and rude.



## **E-Anthems**

*a poem by* **LB Sedlacek**

The Choir is ready to practise the anthem  
And the director has passed out all the copies—  
Only to see pens and pencils flying  
And wishing sheet music still came on floppies.

## Word Plays

*a poem by* **LB Sedlacek**

Shakespeare's plays, so we read,  
are famous for their language  
which may explain Americans abroad  
who can't understand Englishmen in Cambridge.

so they all stopped coming. Scott and Nick quit their jobs and Eugene's ownership of vanilla was stolen (don't ask me how this happened, I don't quite understand it myself). Eugene was forced to sell his Latin books, his mansion, his car, his two condos, his yacht, and the Fort Wayne Tin Caps. Eugene was still in great debt, so he had to sell his clothes, his shoes, his teeth, and his wigs (he wasn't bald, but he read somewhere [and by he I mean Scott] that powerful men in the beginnings of America all wore wigs). Then there was nothing left to sell, and Eugene had nothing.

I do not know what happened to Eugene after he lost his fortunes, and I do not care, and really you shouldn't either.

license to own a word. Nick drove Eugene and Scott down to Washington where Eugene made a plea in front of all the senators and congressmen to sell Eugene a word. This was completely unnecessary, but Eugene had enough money to buy time on the floor to give a speech. Eugene (and by Eugene I mean Scott) gave a passionate speech about the honor and responsibility of owning a word and how if anyone were to own a word it should be the fair and honorable Eugene. The senators and congressmen were very confused. But they were being paid to listen, so they listened.

A deal was made for the rights of a word to be given to Eugene, and every time someone said that specific word he would make sixty-seven cents. The word was vanilla. Eugene was offended. Eugene thought vanilla was too soft of a word. Eugene wanted a powerful and impressive word like scorpion or tenacious. Instead he got vanilla. Eugene wanted to sue the United States for treason. He didn't know what treason meant, but he knew you could sue someone for treason. Scott calmed Eugene down and convinced him that at least two hundred and seventy people a second say the word vanilla, and that the US Government was very generous to give Eugene a profitable word such as vanilla. Scott had no idea if this was true, but Eugene was convinced and was calmed down. So vanilla it was. Eugene was now the proud owner of the word vanilla. If you are reading this out loud, then you have made Eugene four dollars and sixty-nine cents.

Eugene surrounded himself with so many expensive things, but soon he became lonely. Thus his next purchase was a wife. He (and by he I mean Scott) called every popular modeling agency in New York City and Los Angeles to fly their models to Eugene's mansion for him to choose the most beautiful woman in America, and twelve of the most beautiful models in America were flown to Eugene's mansion. Eugene had very particular taste. He wanted a woman who was beautiful. That was it. The decision-making process was very tricky for Eugene, because all the models were beautiful. Eugene could not pick a woman, so he decided that no woman was good enough for him. He did some research (he actually didn't do any research) and came to the conclusion that all the greatest men of history were all lonely men who were too brilliant for women. Eugene felt sorry for all the women who could not have him, yet he found comfort that he was among an elite group of men who could not find a proper woman to match their worthiness.

Eugene spent the remainder of his jackpot on other expensive treasures, but soon all the money was spent and Eugene was broke. He had no money to invite his high society friends to his mansion,

came to his house for regular gatherings of the highest members of the town's society. But first he had to find friends. That was his next purchase.

He paid people to come to his house and discuss high society topics with other high society people drinking high society brandy and whiskey. Doctors, authors, athletes, government officials, and college professors were all invited, and those who were invited came every time they were summoned. These people were willing to spend an hour or two at Eugene's mansion for a little pay. Eugene would give long tours of his mansion and showed off his famous collection of paintings by famous painters whose names he could not pronounce. He usually got the title of the artwork and the painter's name wrong, and his guests knew it. But Eugene did not pay them to talk back or correct but to nod their heads and be observant and interested. And so they did indeed nod their heads and were observant and interested.

Family members began to call Eugene to congratulate him on his sudden fortune. For many, it was the first time in years they had any communication with Eugene. Eugene was not happy to hear from his distant family members, but he felt a strange pleasure in receiving the phone calls. Uncle Joe and Aunt Kate didn't call after five years of silence just to see how things have been. He knew they didn't give a damn. He knew his family members only called to rebuild bridges and hopefully receive a little bit of his new fortune. They would receive nothing.

What to buy now? How about a baseball team? Sure, why not. So Eugene bought a baseball team. He wasn't sure which one, he just told his people (he now had enough money to afford people) to find a team for him to buy. Eugene became the proud owner of the Fort Wayne Tin Caps minor league baseball team. Eugene had no idea where Fort Wayne was (it's in Indiana, another place Eugene didn't know existed) but he was damn proud to be the owner of its baseball team.

Eugene bought a personal assistant to help him decide what to buy next. His name was Scott. Scott was very helpful. Scott suggested to Eugene to buy him his own mansion. Scott told Eugene that if he had his own mansion then it would help him think about what Eugene should buy next. Eugene agreed and he bought Scott a mansion.

Eugene had always wanted to own a word. It didn't matter which word, any word would do, as long as it was cool sounding and profitable. So Eugene (and by Eugene I mean Scott) looked into the process of buying a word. His research had led him to Congress, where it's possible to obtain a



## Jackpot

by **Brady Gerber**

Eugene was not a kind man. The few girls that knew Eugene would tell you, if you ever asked them, that Eugene was a nice man. He was not. I know this because I have met him a couple of times. You could say we were acquaintances. Acquaintances, not friends.

I don't think Eugene was ever a friend to anyone. In fact, Eugene was not a lot of things. He was not tall, dark, or handsome. He was not pleasant, giving, honorable, kind, understanding, patient, trustworthy, or healthy. But once upon a time, Eugene became something that would serve him more in his life than any of the things he was not. Eugene became rich.

How Eugene won the billion dollar jackpot was probably one of life's many freak accidents of blind blessings that are neither deserved nor undeserved. But to Eugene this was no random occurrence. Eugene had believed his whole life that an event would change the course of his life, and this was the grand moment of fate giving him what he deserved.

Now what to do with all that money? That was priority number one for Eugene, to spend the money on a lot of nice things. The first thing Eugene bought was a large luxury yacht. Then he bought a condo in Florida so that he had a place to store his yacht. Then he bought a condo in California, because you can't have a condo in Florida without one in California.

Eugene bought a 1970 Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and hired a driver named Nick to drive him around wherever he needed to go somewhere or just whenever Eugene wanted to drive around the town to show off the car. Eugene always referred to Nick as Driver, and on the rare occasion Eugene was in a generous mood he would call his driver Frank believing that to be his true name.

Eugene paid the best interior designer in town to renovate the new mansion he had recently bought from the mayor (it was the only mansion in town and it was the mayor's). Eugene wanted a large library to be built into the mansion to hold the most rare and excellent collection of books that could be found. Most of the books were in Latin because they were the most expensive. Eugene had no intention of reading the books. He wanted the books to impress all of his famous friends who

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## Dipsy-Doodle

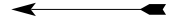
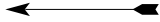
*a poem by* **Claire T. Feild**

He roams the streets unsatisfied, the  
hefty coins in his frayed  
jacket pockets meant for the  
dinsome purchase of golden  
arches in Dubai. To stand near  
wealth is his curse, dint  
his sail.

## Illustrious

*a poem by* **Claire T. Feild**

His distinguished nostrils breathing  
in fluff, his choking to the beat of magic  
glam in the purplish bar, the one dying  
pleads the owner of the club, his hair split  
in the middle like a reckless cauliflower,  
to place his hand on the lip of his cell  
to call 911. But this generously hawkish  
rogue in the club hits the owner's hands  
with a nailed hammer, a harness that  
scares all in the club to drown in  
horror so they can leave except the  
drunks passed out on checkered  
tablecloths, the floor, and the stools.  
The owner says, "Get out of here.  
I will pretend this conflagration  
never happened. And, by the way,  
give me your cell phone."



## Provocation

*a poem by* **Claire T. Feild**

His body, stiff as broccoli legs  
leaning next to green florets,  
he has reason to be required to  
attend an illustrious group  
anger session. They all sit  
near a parrot chirp-chirping,  
“Talk is cheap.” When the session  
is almost over, the master of  
his orchestra asks, “Now what did  
you learn today?” A person with  
stale neurons that occasionally  
flare answered,  
“Talk is inexpensive.”  
Holding an inhospitable glare  
in their eyes, the prisoners  
march carelessly to pressed  
cubicles.

## Postponement

*a poem by* **Claire T. Feild**

Their wedding put on hold,  
her diamond seems to weep  
and her wedding dress seems  
to shrink into what Barbie  
would like to wear. Her  
posture is not stumped  
because of this devastation.  
She refuses to pout, for this  
behavior would cause him  
to be the winner. Instead,  
she kisses all men she sees.  
She's as happy as children  
would be if they could swim  
in cooled melted butter,  
skim milk,  
cookies nearby.

## Aunt Mrs. Walters

a poem by **Claire T. Feild**

An angel wearing a beige straight skirt and matching pumps,  
she was most discriminative in her taste for fusty grammatical  
structures and their red-squill derivatives.

Before school each morning, she taught me about the brief  
excursions subjects and verbs in love take on a straight  
linguistic beach.

A recent college graduate carrying literary gangrene, I saw  
her in the grocery store pausing next to the tarantula  
gadabouts, bad kids sharing malevolent gland grins about her  
accordion figure.

A loose hubcap, she raced toward me mechanically, all language  
arts.

Taking my pink hands in her galosh-gloved ones, she assumed  
my career choice, and bellowed, "*Give 'em hell!*"



## Aunt Mavus

*a poem by* **Claire T. Feild**

i.

Miss Mavus told us she was always sick because she had never married and because she had not found someone as sick as she thought she was to hang out with.

To rectify this problem ethically, we decided to find her a man, a placebo man, who would make her well without his ever knowing it.

Since he had to possess the right pitch, we spread out like fanfares to find Mr. Verbal, the one man who could talk to her about her illnesses and his.

Old man Warren was our perfect specimen because he sat on the street corner not only talking to people, but to dogs, cats, and an occasional mouse about his ailments.

ii.

We had to drag him to her home because he was as heavy as an island formed by a volcanic eruption.

After he spoke to Miss Mavus, who was in her front yard planting petunias, she staggered toward his matrix smile, the color green seeming to embed itself into his teeth—and she didn't complain—for she had found the man of her nightmares: a man as ill as she thought she was.

“You lied to me?”

“Are you surprised?”

“I guess not,” Milo said. He sat back down and slumped into himself. Total resignation took over. His fate was accepted and sealed. Milo took his beer. He downed the whole thing.

“I told you to be careful with that,” Patterson said.

“I know there’s no alcohol. So what?”

“You’re still going to wake up with a massive hangover,” Patterson said.

“Fine.”

“They always say that. But when the vomiting starts they sing a different tune.” Patterson smiled. “See you at work tomorrow.”

“But tomorrow is Saturday,” Milo said, as Patterson began walking away. “I...”

But then he just let him go.

“You don’t even want to think about it?”

“Think, schmink. I’m one up.”

“That’s too bad because it was John Adams who nominated George Washington for the post of commander-in-chief.”

“Damn it,” Milo said.

“Last question,” Patterson said. “Ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

“On what day did the Revolutionary War begin?”

“Are you serious?” Milo asked. “That’s your last question?”

“Yep.”

Milo laughed. “Well, get ready to pack my bags buddy, because this boy is heading uptown. The Revolutionary War started on July 4, 1776. Even the dumbest kid knows that.” He got up from his chair. “Feel free to send someone along later with my bags.”

“Not so fast,” Patterson said, grabbing Milo with another of his wing-stained hands. “The Revolutionary War did not begin on July 4, 1776.”

“Yeah right. Didn’t anyone ever tell you not to bullshit a bullshitter, Patterson?”

“I believe you told me that.”

“Well, it’s good advice. Now where’s the train out of this joint?”

“You’re wrong about the date.”

“It’s July 4th. Independence Day.”

Patterson chuckled. “That’s when the Declaration of Independence was signed. The war actually started on April 19, 1775, with the battles at Lexington and Concord.”

“Take me to a library and we’ll see who’s right.”

“There are no libraries,” Patterson said. He got up off of his lounge chair. The space of flesh where his man boobs had rested was now red and sweaty.

“Get one of your history books,” Milo said.

“I don’t have history books because I’m not the real Patterson.”

“How do you know I’m wrong?”

Patterson sighed. He chuckled again. “It doesn’t really matter. I was pulling your chain. There’s no three question contest to get out of Hell.”

this? Like to some kind of lawyer or mediator?"

"All of the lawyers are in Heaven," Patterson said.

"Figures. So there's nothing that I can do to try and get out of here?"

"Well," Patterson said. "You remember how I was always a big Revolutionary War buff?"

"You used to talk my ear off about that stuff. I got addicted to Excedrin Migraine as a result."

"You never listened?"

"Hell no."

"That's a shame," Patterson said. "Because there is a way for you to get out of here."

"What?" Milo said. "Anything. I'll take it."

"It's a little something that the boss has us do to all the newbies."

"The suspense is killing me."

Patterson smiled. "Milo, I'm going to give you three questions from the Revolutionary War. If you can answer two out of the three, you get to leave here and go up to Heaven."

"Two out of three?"

"Yep."

"Bring it on."

"Okay." Milo sat there in his stupid get-up, rubbing his hands in anticipation. This should be a snap, he thought. Milo was no patriot but three questions about the Revolutionary War should be a cinch. "Name the French aristocrat who became a general in the Revolutionary War."

"French aristocrat," Milo said. A statue in Union Square came to him. He used to meet this blonde named Charlotte there. They had some of the best afternoon trysts of his life. But they always met by this one statue of a general. Milo would stare at it as Charlotte prattled on about her job, reading the name over and over and wondering when they'd leave and go to her apartment to have sex. "Lafayette."

"Score one for Milo," Patterson said. "One more answer and you're free to go. Are you ready?"

"You bet your life, big boy."

"Name the Massachusetts statesmen who nominated George Washington for commander-in-chief of the Continental Army."

"John Hancock," Milo said instantly.

“Got shot.”

“Shot?”

“He was on his way back from an audition for a show that would’ve made him a star.”

“What did he do to end up here?”

“Made a deal with the Devil to become famous.”

“But he never became famous.”

“Are you kidding me? His murder was scandal in the LA rags for months.”

“That’s a trick.”

“So is life.”

Milo was silent. The weight of his situation began to bear down. “Look, I understand that I might’ve cheated on my wife one or two times, but was that really enough to land me here?”

“Ten.”

“Huh?”

“You cheated on her ten times, Milo,” Patterson said.

“That’s impossible.”

“You gave her a venereal disease.”

“A touch of hepatitis C.”

Patterson pulled a piece of paper out of the back of his pocket. It was stained with ketchup and Buffalo wing sauce. He handed it to Milo. “That’s a list of everything that got you placed down here.”

Milo began to read the list. “It says on here that I broke eight of the Ten Commandments.”

“You did,” Patterson said.

“And this stuff about the neighbor’s dog. I only gave him Benadryl.”

“It wasn’t just Benadryl.”

“I fed him a sleeping pill or two.”

“Or the whole bottle,” Patterson said.

Milo looked at the list a second time. “Running red lights? Aren’t you getting a bit petty now?”

“One of those caused an old lady to die across town because the person you cut off was so angry that they drove without thinking and hit her.”

“So you say.” Milo handed the list back to Patterson. “Isn’t there somewhere I can go to dispute

“Or feel cool air, or see an autumn leaves fall, or see a Super Bowl... I could go on if you'd like,” Patterson said.

“Why not?”

“Don't you want to be surprised?”

“Would you want to be surprised in a place like this?”

“True. Let me think.” Patterson bit his bottom lip, letting his big yellow teeth fall over the flesh. “You're going to have to get a job.”

“Doing what? Carrying large boulders up hills only to watch them come back down again?”

“Nothing as Sisyphian as that. You'll be working back at the travel agency with me.”

“Who needs a travel agent in Hell?”

Patterson raised an eyebrow at Milo. “Lots of people do. Especially all of the families going to Disney.”

“They have Disney here?” Milo said.

“They practically bankroll the place,” Patterson said. “But that's not all. We've got constant traffic here. Smog. We've got undercooked food with E-coli and Salmonella. There's no aspirin or good drugs. We play twenty four hour news networks and reality television all day and all night on warped tube sets that never shut off, that seep through the walls and floors and ceilings of your noisy neighbors. Our cell phone connections are bad down here. There's no WiFi. All of our prostitutes are diseased. There's no pizza, but there's a McDonald's on every block. Dogs bark non-stop, and babies always cry. There's...”

“Okay, enough,” Milo said. “I think I get the idea. But if this is my personal hell, why are there all of these other people around?”

Patterson laughed. “People aren't that original. Plus there's simply not enough room for you to exist in your own world. So some aspects of Hell are shared.”

“Like that bartender back there?”

“A failed actor,” Patterson said. “He spent years telling everyone how famous he was going to be, and how he'd never have to bartend again. They really hated him at his job.”

“What happened to him?” Milo watched the bartender slamming down glasses and throwing bottles, none of which broke.

pants that were flooded to the ankles, and a tight red t-shirt with the phrase, *While You Were Staring at My Butt, I Farted*, written on it in puffy blue letters. “I don’t believe this. I die and I’m stuck in Hell wearing these clothes, and Edgar Patterson gets to live on eating wings and farting in his chair. Let me ask you something, if this is Hell, why is it a sandy beach?”

“Because you hate sandy beaches.”

“I really do. And sun.” Milo stopped moving and felt his sweaty brow. “There’s no shade and the heat is almost unbearable. I gotta hand it to you. This is actually what hell is for me.”

Patterson smiled. “I’m pretty excited by what we came up with.”

“So are you the Devil?”

“That’s kind of hard to explain. Let’s just say that there’s one main Devil, and a bunch of us who act as his conduits.” Patterson thought for a moment. “Think of the Devil as kind of like a company president, and the rest of us as his board of directors.”

“Great. Corporations run the afterworld as well.”

“Yep.”

“Will you always be in the form of Edgar Patterson?” Milo asked.

“Except at your home. At home I’ll be your wife. Only forgive me if I nag you constantly. I have to. It’s in the contract.”

“And I don’t get to meet the real Devil?”

“He’s mostly retired now. He takes on the big ones when they come down here.”

“Like Jerry Fallwell?”

“Fallwell went to Heaven.”

“You’re shitting me,” Milo said.

“I shit you not. He did Gore Vidal though.”

“Vidal is down here?”

“Most artists are.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s wherever his hell is.”

Milo sat back down on his lounge chair. He picked up his beer and had a good pull. The brew had quickly gotten warm. “I’ll never see another gray day.”

kind of right wing psycho, or a nut job in the subway?”

“Blessed are the meek?”

“It’s the Catholics’ fault. They were always going on about when you die, if you lived a good life, you’d go to Heaven and there’d be everyone you ever knew just waiting there for you. I thought, who in their right mind would want to die and go somewhere and see all of the people you spent an entire life trying to get away from?”

“That’s a good philosophy,” Patterson said. “It’s wrong, but it’s a good philosophy.”

“So you don’t see everyone in Heaven?”

“You’re more likely to run into those people down here.”

“Great. Like who?”

“Ex-girlfriends and wives, neighbors that you had problems with; bullies from your childhood; tax auditors; people who talk in movie theaters. There are a lot of players from the Dallas Cowboys down here.” Patterson smiled. “Old bosses.”

“So you’re dead too?” Milo asked.

“Nah,” Patterson said. “I’m simply the manifestation of Edgar Patterson, your old boss at Roadways Travel Agency.”

“But the real Patterson will end up here one day, right? I mean the man should have his own island in Hell.”

Patterson laughed. “He’s not coming here when he dies.”

“Edgar Patterson is a lazy, slothful individual. The man sits at his desk for hours playing solitaire and eating bags of potato chips by the dozen. He sleeps all afternoon while I do *his* work. And then he takes all of the credit for it with those guys up in Corporate.”

“He’s never cheated on his wife with a prostitute,” Patterson said.

“That’s because no woman would take him.”

“You’re just mad at him because he put you on probation.”

“I was only making fun of Jesus Christ. How would I know that it would offend him?”

“He’s a sensitive man.”

“He’s a Jew,” Milo said. “He doesn’t even believe in Jesus.”

He got up off of his stool and began pacing. Milo looked down at his clothing. He had on Khaki



“What do you care for here?” Then Milo got a creepy feeling inside of him. “You haven’t gotten us involved with sex tourism. Am I some kind of guinea pig? Because I swear I tell them that you drugged me and had me dragged down here.”

Edgar Patterson sighed. “For goodness sake, Milo, haven’t you figured it out already? You’re dead.”

“Dead?” Milo said. “That’s one-hundred percent not possible. If I were dead my wife would’ve texted me the news with about ten joyous emoticons.”

“Think about it. Would you be in a place like this with me? Would you be here at all if you were still alive?”

“True...” Milo said. Then it hit him. He remembered making love to that beautiful woman, working harder and harder to please her. But then he had to slow down once the pains started in his left arm and in his chest. And then? Milo slumped in his seat and put his head in his hands. “This is just terrible.”

Patterson put his stained hand on Milo’s shoulder. “It’s not so bad here.”

“Heaven?”

Patterson laughed. “Guess again.”

“No.”

“Yep.”

Milo grabbed his waiting beer. He drank the thing until it was gone. Then walked back to the alcove and ordered another one from an angry looking bartender.

“Be careful with those,” Patterson said, when Milo returned. “There’s no alcohol in the drinks we serve down here.”

“What?”

“It’s all a part of the experience. There’s no taste to the food, no alcohol in any of the drinks, and you’ll always stay sober and hungry. You should see some of these people. They eat and drink all day, thinking that’ll help them numb some of the sadness. But, of course, it just hits them harder.” Patterson shook his head. “You should see the complaint letters I get.”

“You know this does nothing for my lifelong ethos of atheism.”

“Sometimes it pays to believe what you can’t see.”

“How could I believe when it seemed as though everyone spouting the word of God was some

"You're not on vacation with your wife."

"I'm not?" Milo smiled. "If I'm not on vacation with my wife then who am I on vacation with?"

"Do you even know how you got here?"

"Not a clue."

"What's the last thing that you remember?"

"I remember making love to a beautiful girl. It was the best sex I'd ever had. She kept begging me for more. I'd never had a woman talk that way." Milo felt no shame or embarrassment. It would be good for the fat bastard to hear a tale of unbridled sexual pleasure. "And then I woke up here on the beach."

"She was paid to act that way."

"Really?"

"Yep."

"Then she deserves an Oscar."

Patterson had another Buffalo wing, taking the whole thing in one slurp.

"Can I have one of those? I'm starving," Milo said.

"Sure."

Milo took a wing off of Patterson's plate. But it tasted like nothing to him. "How can you eat this?"

"Frankly, I'm a little disappointed in you," Patterson said.

"About the woman?"

"Yep."

"Well..."

"I'm just kidding. I'm all for infidelity. In fact, I encourage it."

"You?" Milo didn't even know that Edgar Patterson had a monogamous sex life to speak of, let alone the hutzpah to endorse extra-marital affairs.

"Why not me?" Patterson said. "Besides it's good for business."

"You mean at the office?"

Patterson waved his arms around. "Here."

Milo looked around at the sand, the blue water, and the blue sky. He leaned in closer to his boss.

## Sandy Beaches

by John Grochalski

Milo Dabrowski awoke in a lounge chair overlooking a vast span of cobalt colored ocean. He stared up into the sunny sky. It was just as blue; the hot sand around him a rich beige color. Milo got up and looked around. There was nothing but paradise as far as he could see. It was humid as well; the kind that made you ill. Milo hated this kind of heat. He passed summers indoors, happily destroying the Ozone layer with air conditioning. To him the sun was a flaming ball of carcinogenic gas in the sky. He'd once heard that the world would end in exactly eight minutes if the sun ever burned out. Milo imagined those eight minutes as one long and glorious symphony of time.

There were a few other people wandering the beach. Nestled above were rows of condominiums painted pastel. Milo looked at it all and sighed. This was paradise to some, but not for him. It was like he always said to his wife: give me an overcast world with a daily chance of rain and maybe, just maybe, I could believe in Heaven. He loved the gray. Milo had no clue how he'd gotten on this beach. It was surely not by choice. Greta must've dragged him here on another one of those marriage saving vacations. He stretched and yawned, covered his eyes with a hand, saw a bamboo cabana alcove in the distance, and went trudging through the hot sand in search of a cold drink.

"Hello, Milo," the voice next to him said. Milo had just gotten his bottle and settled his lounge chair near a sliver of shade that seemed to keep moving away.

Milo set down his beer and looked to his left. Resting right next to him was an overweight man, naked to his waist, a plate of Buffalo wings on his bulging stomach. It was Edgar Patterson, his boss. Christ, Milo thought, taking in the fat, grinning, shirtless man with his red babyface and those man boobs that stuck against his belly. Had he gone nuts? Was he on some kind of working vacation with Edgar Patterson? Milo put down his beer. "What in the hell are you doing here?"

"What do you mean?" Patterson asked, in that doughy way that he had of talking. He took a wing, sucked off all the skin and fat, the chicken meat, and started chewing and snorting.

"I mean what are you doing *here*?" Milo gestured toward "paradise." "While I'm on vacation with my... wife?"

**Listen!**

*a poem by* **Lucy Cole Gratton**

Were you not there  
where bees buzzed and flower grew  
when air blew strong  
and water ran deep  
where birds sang beautiful  
upon that old crooked fence  
above meadow fair  
and I taught you to listen  
to words and sounds of the world?

**Listen!**

*a poem by* **Lucy Cole Gratton**

Were ewe knot their  
ware Be bused Anne flour grew  
Winn hair blues throng  
an what err rand deep  
ware birds hang beau two fill  
uh pond ole crew Ted fence  
a buff met door fare  
an eye taut ewe to list ten  
two words Anne sounds uh th' whorl ?



## Obfuscated Jabberwocky

*a poem by* **Bob Grove**

Timber crested, the phantom seeks its paisley patch,  
Shrill and sleek its members gleam, caressed by the winds of time.  
Dark chambers daunt the ravishing tide  
As crimson seeps across the torrid path  
Voices stilled now murmur  
With closure close at hand.

## A Parody on Poetry

*a poem by* **Bob Grove**

i.

The theme of this lyric is terse:  
It just couldn't get any verse.

I have a preference for prose,  
As everyone probably knows.  
I really don't care much for rhyme;  
It seems like a big waste of time.

I once attended a reading  
By a highly regarded poet.  
He knew by my sneer of disdain  
That his words fell on deaf ears, I know it.

He glared at me as he asked,  
"You think writing poetry is easy?"  
I quickly replied without thinking,  
"I do, and much worse, it's cheesy!"

ii.

But he volleyed, this time with bravado:  
"Try rhyming with 'purple,'" he said.  
My smirk of contempt was replaced  
By a wide-eyed expression of dread.

A word that rhymes with "purple?"  
The thought made me shudder in fright.  
I stood up, aghast at that challenge,  
Then turned and slinked off in the night.

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## nonsense candy

a poem by **Diane Havens**

i.

ignorance is bliss they say  
and they are wise  
and so I try  
each and every day  
to forget-misunderstand  
to speak ineloquent  
to stammer  
to unlearn stuff I used to know  
like grammar

I'll never age that way  
that's true  
go back to the wisdom  
I had at two

and simple things  
like when to eat  
and it's best  
when it's all sweets

ii.

I close my eyes and I am tall  
and thin and 25  
pretty and alive  
no mirror no proof  
just your stupid eyes

a perfect plan  
is this  
for man

(what was your name again?)

life is but a childish game  
and who are you?  
oh who cares who!  
a rose by any other name  
would not be you

(or would it?)

Bullwinkle is a moose. Freud was one of the last to leave; he was still taking notes. By the time I reached the exit Holmes was waiting for me, his eyes fixated on his beloved pocket watch.

“...twenty-nine... thirty... thirty-one... mark!”

“What was that?” I asked.

“Extraordinary. Quite singular, actually. I must write this down,” he said, producing a tattered note pad from his inside coat pocket, and doing just that. “It has been precisely four hours, seventeen minutes, and thirty-two seconds since my left interior phalange entered this structure until the moment, mere seconds ago, when your right heel exited same.”

“Funny,” I remember telling him as we left the haze behind.

“How so, my lad?”

I thought back. “It seems like we just got here.”

A potentially ugly *National Geographic* scene (frog vs. duck) was effectively policed by some of the further in debt. “Hey it’s getting’ kinda late, see, and ah... either somebody deals dem dere cards right now or I plays all yuz bums a tune on my violin, see.”

Hawkeye, forever in search of peace, with Leonard Nimoy, snatched up the cards. “O.K., Mr Hoffa, I’ll deal. Let’s be a good little bad guy and put the gun down. Atta boy. Well! What shall we play next? Ladies? Any requests? Perhaps an intimate little fling at hearts, he said with a wink?”

Playfully glancing over each shoulder at the beauty that sandwiched him, he emitted a contented sigh and proceeded to deal the entire deck face up.

“Ah, to sleep; perchance to dream;” he romanced, oblivious to the world outside of an arm’s length in each direction. “Ay... and then maybe a little rubdown back at the swamp.”

As someone once said, all good things must come to an end. Actually, that guy was there that night, too. Nice fella. Likes Boilermakers.

It was sometime early the next morning, although I had no clue as to the exact hour, when an affected Pee Wee Herman mumbled something about drinking up or dying into an already grossly overworked microphone. Slowly, reluctantly, the honored dignitaries began to file out. Greg Morris and MacGuyver had thrown together a few impromptu explosives out of Green Chartreuse and used coffee grounds in case the Caped Crusader got lippy on his way out. Fortunately, he left without incident, with Dracula at his heels, their capes clashing dreadfully. No doubt it was inevitable that Vanna White and Noah Webster would see I to I on a few things. They ended the evening over at his place for a BLT and alphabet soup late night snack.

Hitler and Eva Braun hot-wired one of Lee Iacocca’s cars, kidnapped Klink, and told him if he didn’t get them to a 24-hour Bavarian fast food joint by the count of zwanzig, they were going to eat him. Brando, Dean and the Fonz were out in the parking lot, throwing ice cubes at chicks as they left. Woody Allen was out there too, with his ball glove, making all sorts of spectacular catches. McGarrett was offering a sober-cab service for those in particular need; Lennon, Letterman, and Herman were amongst his first customers. They hauled Lincoln away in a rubber truck. He was whistling *Dixie* by the time it got there. Honest. Nobody saw Serling or Houdini leave; they just sort of disappeared. When Jim Henson and Mel Blanc left, half the crowd went with them. Bullwinkle, after a great deal of difficulty, finally made his way to the door, but of course, as we all know,

who—unbeknownst to us—had been loitering next to Don the whole time, trolling for leftovers. James Dean saw the whole thing and laughed so hard I thought he was gonna swallow his toothpick. At least I think he was laughing. Sal Mineo must have thought he was laughing because he started to laugh, too, but then, Sal hadn't been out of the house in months. Mary Tyler Moore, ultimate trooper she, offered CPR to Don (and the rest of us; "What the heck? As long as I'm at it..." she said), so she could qualify for her senior girl scout CPR meritorious conduct badge award medal plaque thing. I declined, but admitted that it was definitely one of her funnier lines. J.D. didn't think it was funny at all and started sulking. Sal wet his pants and whimpered away. But it woke up Don. Nobody saw him after that.

Her either.

The obligatory card game took place around a big round table in the back of the joint. I'm not sure who ended as the big winner but Houdini was up by a lot, last I checked. Vanna White was losing her shirt and asked if Perry Mason had left yet. Hawkeye was sitting between Loni Anderson and Jayne Kennedy and wasn't doing very well, either; ..."can't concentrate..." he repeatedly muttered through a smirk. He horribly misdealt the cards (more than a few times) and regularly misquoted Shakespeare, which wasn't very nice considering he owed the old Bard over two hundred bucks by the time we left. Colonel Klink played for awhile but could never remember which was higher—the five or the seven. Kruschev sat in on a couple of hands after Klink bowed out but was asked to leave because he kept looking at everyone else's cards. Even Napoleon tried to get into the game.

"Nosirree, Nappy old pal, old buddy, old chum," vetoed Daffy, on behalf of all present. "Nosirree, bub."

Indignantly, the little general stood tall and bumped his head on the bottom of the table. "And why is this, monsieur Duck?" he prided.

"Why? Did ya hear that? Why, he says... hoo-hoo! That's rich! That's a hot one! What a comedian! A reg'lar Bob Hope! Why... hoo-hoo! What a riot! Ya really wanna know why? Do I really gotta tell ya? Huh? D'ya really, truly, cross-yer-heart-hope-to-die wanna know? O.K., Nappy old pal, I'll tell ya why... BECAUSE YOU'RE SHORT, THAT'S WHY!!! Hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo!!!"

Napoleon blew a fuse, a reg'lar *fuse du jour*. "And you, monsieur Duck, are ze DEAD DUCK!"

primarily to his persistent irrational wailings of “I’ll save you, Nell!” to the dumb-struck Herman who, by that time, was so weirded out he seemed normal. Fortunately for all involved, O’Toole passed out in less than five minutes and Leary forgot what he was doing after siphoning disc cleaner through a straw and he wandered away, blessing us as he passed, which was a nice parting touch, but altogether meaningless. When I chatted with Darwin later he mentioned that, earlier, he’d whipped “...some saggy-eyed hippie...” twenty-seven times in a row before his opponent so much as blinked, much less scored; it had to be Leary. Charley was also socially butterflying his new book, *Alcohol And Other Theories Of Anebriation*, due out later that month, often politely excusing himself in search of the more glandular of the species, with Leonard Nimoy. He eventually ditched ol’ big ears by ducking behind Peter Lupus until the coast was clear, then proceeded to run into Cher, who had long since given Groucho the secret word and was perched on a bar stool in front of the men’s room offering “Pick me! Pick me!” to every high school quarterback that walked by. The Fonz had taken a whack at her earlier, only to be told that he reminded her of some other greasy character she used to hang out with and that if he didn’t leave her alone, she was going to hum the theme from “Shaft” to his groin through a silly-straw; she was running ’em through a revolving door that night. She did think that Bullwinkle was “...kinda cute...” but, after all, Bullwinkle is a moose. Rumor has it she ended up with Shakespeare. I suppose she got caught up in his charm, mesmerized by his eloquence, swept away by those old world manners... although I couldn’t help but notice that his fly was open all night.

As one might well imagine, I was having the time of my life. Even the normally subdued Holmes emitted a hoot or two or three when Martin and Lewis showed up, not only together, but sporting dry-look perms and sipping root beer from specimen bottles. Hef and a few gals from the home stopped by to alter the atmospheric pressure in the room. Don Juan and I were swapping prom night lies by the ladies’ biff when Miss’ June through October 2009, went in for a powder, or to write a novel, or whatever it is they do in there.

The mind reels.

”Hi,” glibbed August, the hottest of the months.

“Oh... yeah, nice to see you,” I managed, catching Don in a dead faint, a fraction of a second before he would have absolutely flattened an understandably squeamish Mr Magoo,

Of course, he was half in the bag when he got there. He and Letterman had been washing down amino acids with Robitussin in the parking lot since noon and neither was in any danger of being mistaken for normal any time soon. And Herrs Hitler und Dracula should have been ashamed of themselves for some of the unusual grief they were putting Miss Piggy through; very abnormal pork behavior, indeed. Marlon Brando got into a particularly physical debate with himself concerning the tipping of elderly cocktail waitresses with flabby triceps during happy hour. I still maintain he was grossly overacting but he did bring up several excellent points. Robin Hood and his merry men (they stretched merriment to its limits that night) found it difficult finding worthy beneficiaries of their line of work during the evening's festivities, so Robin—crafty devil he—stopped swiping gratuities off the bar about midnight, paid off his Carte Blanche bill, treated the boys to a night at the local brothel, and spent the remainder of the evening snapping bra straps and engaging himself in other acts of radical merriment. He and Paul Bunyan were slam-dancing with a couple biker types last I saw and don't think he didn't escape that little rug-cutting without multiple fractures. My Consolidated Splint stock rose nine-and-a-half points the next day and Little John sucked his thumb for a week after visiting the big cheese in intensive care, with Robert Young at his side, taping a coffee commercial. It was sad.

Naturally, like all wing-dings of such dimension, there were other, more subtle casualties of the evening. Pee Wee Herman played DJ most of the night and offended many, many people. Suffice to say, we were never quite sure what we might be treated to next (aside from Sinatra's Greatest Hits on a regular basis) and Pee Wee was doing some pretty disgusting things with the microphone to Gladys Knight and one other big Pip. Ed Sullivan bitched constantly about the entertainment and was overheard telling Beethoven that he wished someone would "...turn the damn trash down a few hundred decibels..." so he could hear himself be boring. Ludwig indicated that he didn't understand, then screamed, "CRANK ON DEM TUNES!" much louder than was necessary. Somehow, Peter O'Toole and Timothy Leary managed to stumble into the DJ booth at one point of the evening, held Pee Wee and the Pips hostage with their breath, and demanded the international destruction of all disco-scented pre-amps sold between '77 and '84. They also wanted a jet filled with marijuana, two cases of Jack Daniels, Leon Redbone's phone number, and insisted that Colombia be declared our fifty-first state before last call, or they threatened to blow up the world by breathing on the Middle East. The brave mountie, Dudley Do-Right, briefly intervened but was largely ineffective, due

“Hey, nice to see ya,” he’d say. “Ya know, y’all is one lucky dude. You is havin’ the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet the greatest. Joe Frazier ain’t the greatest. Uh-uh. Jerry Quarry sho’ ain’t no damn greatest. You be toastin’ the greatest of aaaaaall time.” Then he’d order you a drink and walk away without paying for it. Everybody liked him.

Holmes was singularly spunky that night. He and Cosell got into it over something with many, many syllables but I have my doubts as to whether or not anybody ever figured out what the big deal was. Even Noah Webster looked confused. He accused them both of making up words and bawled his eyes out in the can for forty-five minutes. Thoreau stuck his head into the conversation between the two thesaurus-heads, thinking he might shed some light on the topic at hand. He was soundly ignored as well, got steamed, and left. Harpo “told” me later that everyone hated Henry, partly because he was walking around fishing garnishes out of ladies’ drinks with his lips, but mostly because he was weird. I found Groucho making a pitch for Cher out on the dance floor. They were doing the fox-trot. Well... he was.

“...candlelight dinners, soft music, booze...”

Cher gagged as politely as she could muster on short notice. She was doubled over for a minute-and-a-half, Groucho patting her lightly on her back the entire time, feeling for the hook. Unfortunately, she was clad that evening in a lovely sequin shoulder holster and a strategically adorned roll of stamps, and was struggling with her return address.

“...midnight strolls, twelve-thirty strolls... come to think of it, it’s been years since I did the stroll... dip!”

“Ouch!” Cher coughed. “What the hell...?”

“Why don’t we run off like two fools in love... or, if you prefer, just like two fools. In fact, let’s not even run.” Groucho assumed the Romeo stance. “Oh my sweet, sweet petunia... will you marry me?”

“What?!”

“Can’t you see that I love you?”

Cher regained her composure. “Hey pal, whad’ya think ya got here, some kinda desperate schmuck? I ain’t no wide-eyed kid, ya know. Just what do I get outta this deal anyway? You?”

Groucho didn’t miss a beat. “Oh, so you wanna know what you get outta this deal, eh? Alright honey, you bet your life. George... oh George... tell this little doll what she’s won.”

with some other ex-chief-of-staff. Sigmund Freud and Rod Serling were standing a few feet away, hiding behind Peter Lupus, taking notes. Michael Jordan was buying shots of anything red for those showing an interest in purchasing a pair of sneakers from the fine selection he kept on hand in the trunk of his Jag.

As mentioned, smoke was getting in everyone's eyes that night but Bogey told me he saw Steve McGarrett on the other side of the pinball machines, giving a temperance lecture. Word is, he had Danno tied up on a leash near the dance floor, where the Five-O second-banana enjoyed a fulfilling evening of scratching himself where you're not supposed to and barking at girls. Bo Derek thought he was oh-so-cute and tried to rub his belly, which probably wasn't the most intelligent thing she'd ever done, since Danno is, and always will be, a cop. Bo was booked before she could count to 10. She acted like she was angry (although it was hard to tell) and tossed her cocktail at him, glass included, and instinctively began to disrobe. I distinctly remember this because I'd been discussing pre-Cenozoic east-Asian drug refinement techniques with Holmes over a go at the dart board, at which he took two games out of three. About that same time there was a confrontation by the door.

"...I'm terribly sorry, sir, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to check your hat and..."

"But as I told you, young man, it is not a hat. First you make me leave the boy wonder in the Bat-car because of some archaic liquor law, and now this. What a lousy party."

"I truly am sorry, Mr Batman..."

"Hell, Robin's been dipping into the Bat-fridge for years. I had a few belts with him before we left. Just last night he and Aunt Harriet got downright batty sweeping out the wine cellar while Bat-girl and I were... well..."

"Please try to understand our policy..."

"Policy, schmolicy. I hate going to parties with Alfred. He doesn't use deodorant."

"...all hats..."

"It's not a damn hat!"

"...masks, hats, headgear, whatever... ya gotta check that stuff, sir."

"Aw, that's a crock a' bat-beans..."

And so on. Ali showed with a couple ex-con buddies of his; things sorta mellowed out after that. He spent a good portion of the evening ducking Howard Cosell and introducing himself to anything that moved.



## Perchance

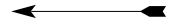
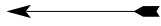
by **Michael Price**

I never saw a camera crew, or even Geraldo Rivera, which surprised me considering the magnitude of the evening. It was, indeed, the happening of the year, “a real hoo-haw,” as my dear friend Daffy would refer to it in the years thereafter. Of course, technically, I wasn’t invited; I never was. I just happen to know a lot of bouncers. Nonetheless, that night I knew everyone in the room. They weren’t familiar with each others’ accomplishments, in many cases, but I knew them all very, very well. Best of all, for once, everybody seemed to know me. I belonged; that was new.

The haze had already become knife-worthy by the time I arrived, nine-thirtyish, with the master sleuth at my side. Holmes and I had split a cab on the way over, as I recall, although he graciously permitted me to tip the fellow, as per his usual practice. Once inside, however, his instinctive curiosity led him to all corners of the establishment, occasionally seeking me out for background data concerning “...the blatant mating rituals of the somewhat chemically altered and totally plowed— inclusive...”, or to leech an ale or two from my eternally party-stricken pocketbook.

The airwaves were graced with an abundance of old Sinatra and Nat King Cole hits—everyone said so—and the two crooners couldn’t move without some teary-eyed female offering, at the very least, her heart to one or both of them. Frank, who was sipping Manhattans with one hand buried in his suit pocket behind the DJ booth most of the evening, staged an emergency press conference after *My Way* was played for the third time in twenty minutes to announce that he wished to purchase a round of drinks for the house, with special attention paid to many of the ex-wives of Mickey Rooney, who was a little short that night.

“Unforgettable...” the Nat-man warbled, as I noticed our beloved sixteenth president sitting alone at the end of the bar, slumped over what appeared to be one of the most potentially lethal strawberry dacquiris I’d ever seen. Lincoln was cursing Dewey and his decimals in the key of R at the top of his lungs, never taking his eyes off the blonde, two stools down. Honest. He was tipping in pennies, which didn’t exactly have the bartender clicking his heels in glee, either. And the more Norma Jean ignored him the more ol’ Abe drank—silver-tongued devil, he—until she finally left



I'm not making this mandatory for those who are not interested in casual sex, I'm talking only to those men and women who would be going to sleep with a stranger anyway. Throw a dog a bone for once in your self-absorbed, sex-crazed life.

I think this could really take off. Ugly people everywhere would count the days until April 2nd. The fact that it follows April Fool's Day would make it especially easy to remember. It's as if life played a cruel April Fool's Day joke on an ugly person with a hunchback or cleft lips and then the next day makes it up to them. Right now all they are getting is the cruel.

Sometimes it's easy for the rest of us to forget about those less fortunate. There are fundraisers galore for every disease and disability you can think of but nobody is doing anything for the ugly amongst us. The ones who weren't lucky enough to come down with some rare condition that would cause all sorts of benefits and ribbons to come cascading down on them making them feel part of the larger whole.

And one last note. If you are willing to sleep with an ugly person on April 2nd... don't mail it in. Give them your best effort. Put that penis or vagina to work and give them the time of their lives. It might be another year before they are getting some so give them something to remember.

So remember the date!

April 2nd: National Have Sex With An Ugly Person Day

## April 2nd: National Have Sex With An Ugly Person Day

by **Lance Manion**

The idea came to me after I saw a picture of a very ugly girl making the rounds on the internet. The thing was she was smiling and laughing, which on the downside put her enormous choppers on display, and there was something about the picture that really touched me. I mean, her teeth were a mess and her hair was a mess and her whole face was a mess but somewhere inside this mess was a human being seeking the same things that non-ugly people are looking for.

Let's be honest. Ugly people have an uphill battle in this culture. From the time they slide out of their ugly mothers they stand at the plate with two strikes. Most homeless people are ugly and if you take a good look at most trailer parks they are brimming with ugly people. I'm sure statistics would support this contention.

It's not fair.

The problem is what to do about it. Our society is way past the point of ever truly changing and appreciating inner beauty. That ship sailed the day the first eyeballs came online. Evolution saw to that. Until then ugly things could squirm and crawl around without a problem but once the first set of eyes popped onto the scene it was over for the ugly creatures.

I know ugly people. They are just like the rest of us... just not as attractive. Some of them don't even know they are ugly. That's bad. Some of them do. That's worse. They are good people, they just have bad genes, and I'm sick of them being treated like second class citizens simply because of some physical issues. I won't list the breathtaking array of offenders here because I want this to be a pro-ugly movement and if I tick off all the various maladies I might want to switch sides.

Anyway, here's the deal. It's simple as can be. On April 2nd everyone who is considering going out and getting laid will just lower their standards quite a bit and sleep with the ugliest person they can find of the opposite sex. Unless they are gay of course. Whichever way their wind blows. Point is, one day will not kill anyone. Think of how happy that ugly person will be. I can't believe that anyone could do such a noble act and not look back with some pride on the fact they made someone's life better.

from the frock which was turned it into rags. Next day we went to the hairdresser to get rid of my blond locks.

Imagine waking up as a boy and feeling the irrepressible urge to switch... (and that was just me.) I would just let go and take notes.

Next morning, once my girlfriend had left for work I raided her drawers to procure some elemental items—skirt, laced cami, assorted knickers, wax strips for a finishing touch—hairy neutrinos have never been heard of.

Being a sexed adult, I must admit I was quite aroused, to the point of finding it difficult to fit into the skimpiest pieces. At the same time I wondered about the possibility of irreversible side effects. All that day I went about my usual tasks—without venturing outside—and reversed to my original self in time to make soup for dinner. As far as my partner could observe, I was fully fucktional so to speak, she only lifted a brow when feeling how soft I had become.

Since then I keep visiting the neutrino world, occasionally having a girl day out, and night as well. Setting aside any gender alteration for later so as not to warp the experiment.

When I had enough matter for my article I went back to the quirky scientist. He confessed feeling naked as my findings were at the same time reinforcing and bringing down his theory. The absence of quantic faith is the signature of the particle of sin, but as a human I couldn't escape the gravity of morals: I was just fooling myself for the sake of being published and enraging Creationists. A full-time fool.

## Master Chef

by **Tom Frozart**

Being published had become an obsession. I had picked a subject that could either make me super rich or leave me a fool among anonymous fools: ‘What was the pre-Big Bang soup made of?’ Hard-line fundamentalists were enraged at scientists chasing *God’s particle* that allegedly had escaped the soup. This would explain what couldn’t be explained. If our universe was made of a finite number of particles that nobody could count, how could we find the missing one? In addition particles had been rearranged again and again since the beginning of Time: as a ballet dancer or a bear, a vegetarian or a meatworks slaughterer, a Bible scholar, an apple, or a Macintosh. Sounds bizarre, though when you look around, nonsense is everywhere.

Years before asking the Big Bang question I had met a nuclear scientist. The guy was THE expert of neutrinos, things that have no mass and enjoy a choice of three genders. Worse, they swap genders without any apparent reason and some dub these “the cross-dressers of quantum physics”. A clear omen of their evil lineage, said my interlocutor. He was horrified at the thought a mass-free particle bearing the weight of humanity’s foolishness. In his own wording, “neutrinos were the seed of sin, and there had been no Bang.” Upon crossing the demarcation line into metaphysics he had lost any return option and has been treated like a pariah ever since by his peers.

The best way to find out if they were at the origin of sin was to slip into the skin of a neutrino. The endeavour was akin to catching a ghost, and the elusive bloody particle had already fooled many would-be Nobels. I was losing sleep over it when it struck me that I should look at it from the other side of the looking glass: what would happen to a neutrino turned human, and what would he/she do?

As a five year old I had had a brief and unaccomplished experience of transmutation. Mum had piled up old togs when clearing out a wardrobe; at the top of the heap was a blue-and-white-checked dress with sequins which had been my sister’s when she was my age; I grabbed it, and a couple of hours later I was still girlying it up when the postman spotted me crouching to pee in the garden. He spread the news next door causing Mum to have a fit of shame, and me extracted swiftly

dragons roamed the earth and wizards blasted lightning from their mighty wands and witches bubbled, boiled, troubled and toiled.

Is it a fascinating fluke, a mystical mutation? For these inherited oddities now only appear in rare momentous births every other century or so.

Come closer, curious ogler. I won't bite your neck or kick your butt or even leap buildings in a single bound. My ability is more subtle and hence much more deadly. Observe the hand. I'll only do this once and at an astounding speed. Watch closely.

Yes, it's incredible! My thumb bends all the way back past my index finger's knuckle. Stare if you must, bold souls. Have you ever experienced such a driving force of preternatural power? Super human, superfly, super duper, and at last, I have you under my thumb.

You're beginning to believe. Your mind is going numb, I mean numb. You're feeling dizzy. You want to look away and yet can't stop yourself from peeking through closed fists. My extra dexterous finger and totally awesome thumb thing has you mesmerized.

You see? It doesn't take capes, or karate or hurling refrigerators to impress people. Power is in the eye of the beholder or in this case, the hand of the holder.

Look at it, but not for too long. It is like the sun, one glimpse is all humans can handle.

I am the last of the Thumb Thwarters traveling through time and space. My foes are leery. For on any given day, I may signal a thumbs up or down and whoa to the thugs that threaten my throne. For with this power comes great responsibility. Thumbs are not to be trifled with, although it is getting harder to find a captive audience. Follow me, handhopper. Learn the ways of the thumb.

## Thumb Thwarter

by **Wendy L. Schmidt**

I have but two. They are small, slightly obscured and unassuming. But, they can drop a strong man to his knees. They can make a spiteful woman swallow her tongue. They can cause brazen children to cower. And, they can make troublesome teenagers smile and utter, “Cool.”

I didn’t strive or study or cast a spell to acquire this power. Like most singular supers, I was born with it.

One moment in my presence, one flick of a fickled finger, and nobody ever asks me the dreary party question, “So, what do you do?”

The story begins in my distant babyhood when night-time comfort came from sucking a thumb or two. Juicy, double jointed and ripe for the sucking, how could I know what power lay in wait?

On the playground kids were cruel. They scoffed at my skinny arms and sneered at my bright red mane. Then, at a rare birthday party, my mother lost the bottle opener. Lines of Ting’s Rootbeer and Creme Soda lay in wait as thirsty kids came in from playing tag and taking whacks at a donkey shaped piñata.

“Oh dear, what will we do?” Mother cried.

“Gimme,” I said, and without hesitation, popped a cap with two thumbs. Everyone was thumbfounded. They gathered to admire my magical cure. It was intoxicating to receive so much attention. Yet, the humblest part of me also knew, quick thumbing had helped my mother out of a potentially ugly situation.

To think, I had something special to show. Strength was obvious but what else could these babies do? I fiddled and fangled and fretted and finally found it. The ability had been there all along. I only needed to be brave and try.

What is my super power you ask? Want a demonstration? Ready to experience the dark dimensions of hand dexterity? Poor sweet fools, you are about to enter the realm of the human freak show. Yet, it’s so much more than visual stimulation. My power is a throwback to ancient times when

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Diamond rings and other shiny objects have been known to catch the attention of Penises and resemble prey to them. Caution should be taken when swimming near mangrove coastlines by covering or removing such items.

### **As Food**

Penises are popular both as food and game fish. They are most often eaten as fillets or steaks. Larger species, like the Great Penis, have been implicated in cases of food poisoning.

Southern Nigerians smoke them for use in soups. Smoking protects the soft flesh from disintegrating in the broth.

Some species grow quite large, such as the European Penis, found in the Mediterranean Sea and eastern Atlantic, and the Great Penis, which ranges on the Atlantic coast of tropical America from North Carolina to Brazil and reaches Bermuda. Other Penis species are found around the world. Examples are the California Penis (extending from Puget Sound south to Cabot San Lucas), the India Penis and the black-finned Penis (from the seas of India and the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago).

### **Behavior**

Penises are voracious, opportunistic predators relying on surprise and short bursts of speed (up to 27 miles per hour (43 kilometres per hour)) to overtake their prey.

Adults of most species are more or less solitary, while young and half-grown Penises frequently congregate. Penises prey primarily on fish (which may include some as large as themselves). They kill and consume larger prey by tearing off chunks of flesh.

### **Penises and Humans**

Like sharks, some species of Penis are reputed to be dangerous to swimmers. Penises are scavengers, and may mistake snorkellers for large predators, following them in the hope of eating the remains of their prey. Penises have reportedly bitten swimmers but such incidents are rare and possibly caused by poor visibility. Penises generally avoid muddy shallows, so attacks in surf are more likely to be by small sharks. Penises may mistake things that glint and shine for prey. There has been a reported incident of a Penis jumping out of the water and injuring a kayaker, but a marine biologist at the University of Florida said the type of wound appeared to have been caused by a hound-fish.

Hand-feeding or touching large Penises in general is to be avoided. Spearfishing around Penises can also be dangerous, as they are quite capable of ripping a chunk from a wounded fish thrashing on a spear.

We have no intention of rehearsing the full repertoire achieved by Sensei Stephenson extemporising in this vein. Numerous editions of his works, selected and complete, are now freely available. However, it would be negligent to close our short portrait of this undoubted maniac without acknowledging what is generally regarded by devotees as his masterstroke, the notorious, so-called Wikipedia Penis. Here, under the entry for “Barracuda”, Sensei Stephenson substituted the word “Penis”, and he did so not once, but repeatedly, as though in the grip of a terrible obsession. Indeed, at the time of his death, he was editing his “Wikipedia Penis” for a record sixth time (We are reminded of Nikolai Gogol’s celebrated labours over “The Nose”). The whole runs to several pages, including photographs, which are not replicated here, out of concern for the sensitivity of younger readers. Certain critics have suggested the full, unexpurgated work tends to drag on a little. This is undoubtedly correct. We therefore offer an abridged version:

### *Penis*

#### *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*

The Penis is a ray-finned fish known for its large size and fearsome appearance. Its body is long, fairly compressed, and covered with small, smooth scales. Some species can reach up to 1.8 metres in length and 30 centimetres in width. The Penis is a saltwater fish, and is found in tropical and subtropical oceans worldwide.

#### **Appearance and Physical Description**

Penises are elongated fish, pike-like in appearance, with prominent sharp-edged fang-like teeth (much like piranhas), that are of different sizes and set in the sockets of their large jaws. They have large pointed heads with an under bite in most species.

They are generally dark green, dark blue, or gray on their upper body with silvery sides and chalky-white bellies. Colouration varies somewhat between species. For some species, there are irregular black spots or a row of dark cross-bars on each side. Penises live primarily in oceans, but certain species such as the Great Penis can be found in brackish water.

Adult members of the Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie are terrestrial and nocturnal reptiles, though they will often bask in the sun to warm their bodies.

The Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie reproduce very slowly, taking ten to twenty years to reach sexual maturity. Mating occurs in midsummer. During courtship, a male makes his skin darker, raises the spiny plates on his back and tail, and parades toward the female. He slowly walks in circles around her with stiffened legs. The female will either submit or retreat to her burrow. Males do not have a penis; they reproduce by rubbing bottoms with the female.

Likewise, under the entry for Prime Minister of Australia, Sensei Stephenson had substituted that phrase with the word “Potato”:

***The Potato of Australia***  
***From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia***

The Potato of the Commonwealth of Australia is the highest minister of the Crown, leader of the Cabinet and head of government, holding office on commission from the Governor-General. The office of Potato is, in practice, the most powerful political office in Australia. Despite being at the apex of executive government, the Potato is not mentioned in the Constitution specifically and exists through an unwritten political convention.

The formal title of the portfolio has always been simply The Potato, except for the period of the Fourth Deakin Ministry (June 1909 to April 1910), when it was known as The Potato (without portfolio).

but had inadvertently fired a live bullet from her “Safe Action” Pistol—and so the notorious Sensei Stephenson crumpled where he stood.

Uttering his famous last words, “If they are allowed to have pit bulls, I should at least be permitted to carry a scimitar, and on occasion use it,” he slid to his knees, clutching the reading material that he (merely a bibliophile distrustful of prison libraries) had been reaching for. It was an old copy of J.K. Huysmans’s disgusting work, *A Rebours*.

### ***The War Against Wikipedia***

Nevertheless, Sensei Stephenson lives on. He is, of course, best remembered as the posthumous inaugurator of a new literary movement, the Category Error School of Automatic Writing.

For on his computer was found evidence of Sensei Stephenson’s involvement in a second set of outrages, his authorship of a sequence of hitherto unresolved Internet hoaxes. The former librarian had perfected the art, soon to be widely imitated, of editing various Wikipedia entries in the most peculiar of ways. Certain effects, satiric or perverse, artistic or deranged, according to your taste, were achieved by the simple expedient of switching a single word under a particular Wikipedia entry. Thus, under “Tuatara”, Sensei Stephenson had swapped the title word for the phrase “Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie.” Here is a sample of the consequences perpetrated on the Web:

#### ***Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia***

The Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie are reptiles, which, though resembling lizards, are actually part of a distinct order. Their most recent common ancestor with any other extant group is with the squamates (that is, lizards and snakes). For this reason, the Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie are of great biological interest for those studying the evolution of lizards and snakes.

suburbs: Paddington, Surry Hills, Darlinghurst, Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay. We will not, however, chronicle in detail events that are disgusting to relate, sickening to contemplate. Suffice to say this was the final tally:

Pitt Bulls	11
Staffordshire Terriers	3
Pekinese	2
Chihuahua	2
Pug	1

Sickly, neurotic, obscene, that April, May and June a nameless horror hovers over Sydney's streets and backyards, its beaches and its barbecues. In particular, the resort to lesser, ornamental breeds, seems unsporting and suggests a disturbing breakdown in control. If the city's Pekinese and Chihuahuas could be despatched, then what was next? As it happened, the public need not have worried. The end came very quickly. On the 15th of June, at around 10pm, an elderly Russian couple, were sitting on their balcony drinking kvass, when suddenly they saw their pug, strayed onto the street, dispatched to the invisible doghouse. Their son, an oil worker on R & R, was downstairs watching TV. Forced from the flickering blue screen by his parents, still eating his dinner—a take-away souvlaki, with garlic sauce—Arslan Arsskoye protested he hadn't left the front door open, then, hit by his mother with a carton of milk, admitted that he had, relented and agreed to shadow the eminently anonymous, fat, scimitar-wielding young man who was slowly padding his way back to a dirty terrace on Napier Street in Paddington.

When eventually two police forced open the door, Gerry "Sensei" Stephenson, as though anticipating the final call, had changed into his karate costume (with the bogus black belt) and was sitting quietly at his computer.

"I see that you have come to arrest me," he is alleged to have remarked, but rather than stepping toward the police, as he should have done, he said, "Excuse me a sec," and made to open a drawer.

No questions were asked.

A shot rang out—the officer concerned later declared she'd intended to reach for her stun gun,

The atrocity, for reasons never made plain by the New South Wales constabulary, received no media attention at the time. Only later, and then scandalously, was it acknowledged as the first case of a decapitated pit bull on Sydney's streets, although, it should be said that the owners themselves, a professional couple in their mid-forties, now expecting their first child, always insisted that Boris was not in point of fact a pit bull, but rather a Staffordshire, with a lovely temperament, loyal, affectionate, not at all vicious, and indeed very good with children.

If the police had mistaken the first abomination for a one-off prank, they were soon to be sadly corrected by the second and third atrocities. These occurred, two weeks later, within minutes, or even seconds, of each other, in broad daylight, in Centennial Park, that redoubt of the Sydney eastern suburbs bourgeoisie. Centennial Park is also the scene of many a crime, and so was a worthy site for the first public blaze of Sensei Stephenson's passage into the annals of iniquity.

These now were definitely pit bulls.

They were muzzled.

They went missing from the playing fields around Federation Pavilion, and were eventually located, guillotined, as it seemed, in a nearby amphitheatre, the Belvedere.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the dogs' demise was sensationally reported on the weekend news that night.

At this point, the police were officially clueless. Yet had they examined the CCTV footage more scrupulously, then, they might have observed, a short time after the barbarity, a young man departing by the Paddington Gates. He is slightly pigeon-toed, bespectacled and puffy. He wears a baseball cap (correctly, not back-to-front), tracksuit pants, sneakers and a plain white t-shirt. He has what appears to be a tennis racket slung across his back, inside a cover. But there are no tennis courts in Centennial Park, are there? Are not the nearest, at Maccabi Tennis White City, some three kilometres away? In fact, this is our first image of Sensei Stephenson, the human jigsaw. For, assistant librarian, butcher's son, false karate master, coinor of aphorisms, internet hoaxer, Australian Dadaist, bloody bane of pit bulls, then and now, here and gone, black-and-white or technicolour, try as we might, he remains essentially unfathomable, a kaleidoscopic figure, by turns fascinating and yet ungraspable. Better, then, we just adhere to the facts. His real name was Gerry.

After a short hiatus, further atrocities were propagated—nineteen in all—in a narrow circle of

Kobudo Academy, a Mr Barry Rogers of Bankstown, himself a landscape painter, who also noted that Sensei Stephenson, though a nice boy, was not in point of fact a Sensei, but merely a yellow belt, who “badly needed to relax,” thereby adding fraud to his list of crimes, and breaching several conditions of his training, viz:

- (a) Karate students should develop good manners and show respect for elders and instructors.
- (b) Persons who use Karate to bully or in brawls, or do not conduct themselves properly in public will be expelled without prior notice.
- (d) Persons found to have a criminal record or to be of bad character will not be permitted to continue training.

Be that as it may, the karate master, Sensei Stephenson, more than justifies his entry into any Book of April Fool's Greatest Hits.

### ***The Business of the Pit Bulls***

Now our style becomes as dry, as spare, as matter-of-fact, as a police report. In short, we revert to banal, affectless, understatement. The first corpse was found just off the pavement on Oxford Street.

His name was Boris, and he lived, or had lived, only a short distance away.

How he escaped the backyard into which he'd been locked the night before (to bark incessantly, becoming the proverbial neighbour's detested dog), his owners could not say.

In any case, Boris would bark no more. His head was lopped clean from the shoulders.

The body fell several steps away.

The remains were found in the hour before dawn by a young female jogger, who, alive to the perils of Paddington's pavements—cracked concrete, tree roots, sundry filth, not excluding human vomit and canine ordure—deftly sidestepped the torso, before stopping in front of the startling head that lay in a pile of breathless leaves. A young solicitor, she rang the police on her mobile, before remembering that it was April Fool's Day and wondering, and then continuing with her exercise regime.



## The Karate Master, Sensei Stephenson

— or —

### Every Day is April Fool's

by **Konrad Muller**

*Alone in the great desert of men.*

Chateaubriand.

Of all perpetrators of urban hoaxes, the most bizarre and abominable of recent memory was the strange case of the Karate Master, Sensei Stephenson, brief nightmare and scourge of Sydney's inner-city streets, whose pavements he reduced to his slaughterhouse.

Our story properly begins under the old sandstone walls of Victoria Barracks, amid a heap of fallen leaves, that fleeting note of bronze that tells us it is autumn in Sydney and warmth is fading from this gorgeous city by the Pacific. It concludes several months later, in a winter of insanity, not far away, in a matchbox-thin terrace, where in a pool of blood, a young man, shot by the New South Wales constabulary, dying, lies muttering his now famous aphorism:

“If they are allowed to have pit bulls, I should at least be permitted to carry a scimitar, and on occasion use it.”

This decadent or deranged son of a butcher was, at the time of his death, an assistant librarian at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney (where his superiors' reports invariably paint him as a model employee—diligent, punctilious, polite). And, indeed, in the ensuing autopsy of events, his occupation was inevitably linked to his second congeries of hoaxes, the so-called War against Wikipedia. But maybe, at bottom, he was just an aesthete gone haywire, an artist *manqué* exercising full creative license, now macabre, now ironic, to unleash upon the crawling city an oeuvre that was “totally modern”, totally real? That, at any rate, was the suggestion of the Shihan of his Karate and

“Not so loud.”

“Are you really going up there?”

“Sure am.”

“And what about the pups? They real or not?”

I closed the door softly and whispered, “The whole thing, made it all up.”

“And you’re still going up there?”

I grimaced and bit my lip. “Kind of have to at this point.”

Irma rolled off the bed, wobbled over and planted me with a dry-mouthed kiss. “I would’ve done the same thing,” she whispered, holding my cheeks between her hands. “That’s if I was a dinner-table prima donna who can’t do better than bony, middle-aged pussy.” She yanked me down on the mattress, and I can’t say I put up much of a struggle.

I was going into her when I heard the front door click shut.

“There’s your brother.”

“Fuck it, let Mr Do-Good go.”

A splintering of thunderclaps smashed through the canyon.

“Yeah, just like that.” Irma pulled me in tight. “You got it in just the right place.”

“I don’t look middle-aged, you shit.” The shout came from the bedroom. “Or bony.” I’d forgotten about Irma.

“You’ve been neglecting your company, Andy.” Jackson was fighting back a smile. “I’m just going to head home.”

“What about the pups?”

“You really had me for a while. You know what did it? The details. The wind-twisted limber pines. That sucked me in. I’m not sure what they are, but I had this picture of a pine tree twisted up like a corkscrew.”

I watched a flicker of lightning singe the canyon. There was only one way to win.

“Fuck it, let’s go to the top. Let’s see how full of bullshit I am.”

The words came out bold and confident, and I saw Jackson flinch. Now he was the uncertain one. I had the perfect strategy. I’d drag him to summit, and we’d spend the day looking for the den until he was ready to collapse. I was six years younger and in way better shape. He had a good layer of flab from the demands of career and family.

“What about your...”—Jackson nodded at the bedroom—“girlfriend?”

“She’s a big girl. She can find her way out.”

“Well, if you’re going up there, take this.” He pointed to a green backpack leaning against the coffeetable. “Nutritional supplements. For the pups.”

It was probably loaded with baby bottles full of some mush he’d been researching and preparing all night. I could picture him in the kitchen—blender going, measuring cups precisely filled to specific lines, the concoction poured into the bottles with an exactitude that was painstaking and tender. That’s what I couldn’t stand. His heart was always in the right place.

“We’re both going up there.” I gave him a hard stare. “Once you see where I shot the cat, it won’t be hard to find the den.”

In the bedroom I rifled through the closet for hiking and rain gear. Irma was lying on the bed. Her smile showed an overbite and the gap between the front teeth.

“Is this some kind of fucked up sibling rivalry shit? Because I know all about that. I still can’t stand my brothers. Total monsters. Or my sisters. Or my cousins. Or just about anybody in my family, really.”



field. During a storm like this, we'd be lightning rods. Didn't he have a wife and kids? A thunder clap resounded down the canyon, managing to come off like a well-timed exclamation point.

"Are you really going to make Angie a widow just to save some cubs?" I raised my brows judiciously. "Cubs that might already be dead?"

Jackson had his hands on his hips, looking down at his North Face boots. He sighed, lips vibrating. Then he cocked his head and gave me a look that seemed to sum up how perplexed he was.

"There are no cubs, right Andy?"

A drizzle smattered the roof.

"It was a lactating female, but I didn't actually see the cubs."

"That's not what I'm getting at. There was no mountain lion, right?"

"What?"

"I mean, whenever you come off as the voice of reason, something's up."

At first I thought of defending myself with a fit of self-righteousness, but then nothing reeks of guilt like sanctimony. So did what always works with Jackson. I went with the opposite.

"Your brilliance, Jackson, has ensnared me again." I did a mock bow before him, one hand at my belt, the other behind my back, my face all the way to my knees. From down there, I caught a glimpse of his fists squeezing and had to smile.

"Yes, I invented the whole drama." I gave my voice a Sherlock Holmes formality. "Because, insecure as I am, I have to be the center of attention. A dinner-table prima donna. I love it when I can make your kids gawk at me with awe and dread. Because when you're like me and you're wasting your life away—as you've pointed out on numerous occasions—and have nothing better to do but pick up bony middle-aged women because you don't think you have what it takes to hook up with someone your own age, then you want people to admire you. And what's the best way to do that? Yes, impressing them with tales of feats of danger and prowess."

With my speech complete, I sang out an ironic, "Tah-dah," and mimicked a magician flicking his fingers over a top hat. "How's that for an explanation?"

"Whoa." Jackson looked at me with eyes a little too wide, lips pressed a little too tight. "I think you pretty much hit the nail on the head."

"Come on, I'm being sarcastic. I'm saying what you think I'm thinking."

I did feel a little guilty, spinning a tale like that, but mainly I was charged up—the performer’s buzz. The whole thing had gone off so spontaneously. Dinner table conversation. Talk of a mountain lion sighting. Then my little fib somehow managed to take on a life of its own, fueled by all those eyes. It was like I was back in competition, aiming, launching, making fists squeeze, incisors tear the inside of lips. It was a feeling I’d forgotten, and forgotten how much I’d enjoyed.

When I pulled the Cherokee up to my cabin, I knew there was no way I was spending the night alone inside. I was too wound up. I’d end up throwing beer bottles off my balcony just to see the beauty of glass shattering on granite. So I walked down to the Lodge. A breeze was coming over the pass, down through the canyon. It smelled like warm rain. Like out in the desert on the other side of the range, somewhere between the 395 and Vegas, a storm was lashing, even though overhead I could see the Big Dipper.

The woman I hooked up with, Irma, wasn’t beautiful. She was too bony, late-forties, a good drinker with a horse laugh and crow’s feet. There was a split between her two front teeth, and all I had to do was lavish some attention on her smile and she glommed all over me. We closed down the bar bellowing out Cheap Trick tunes, banging spoons on plastic beer mugs. On the way back to the cabin, she was shoving my hand under her blouse. The sky had clouded over, and thunderclaps echoed. We were in my bed going at it when the thunderstorm really broke, sounding like the whole shebang was kicking up right over my roof. It wasn’t until the headboard stopped whacking that I heard the knocks and remembered Jackson.

I came out in boxers and sat on the couch while my brother blew off steam. How could I not be ready? Incredulous! I was still drunk? Incredulous! I reeked of sex? What-the fuck-incredulous! I wasn’t really listening, but trying to figure out if I could get out of this whole thing without copping to the lie. The thunderclaps struck more frequently. Lightning silhouetted pines and outcrops.

“We can’t go out in this.” I pointed outside, thanking the weather gods for gnashing up a storm at just the right time.

“Do we have much choice?” Jackson was standing at the window in a long-sleeve, North Face micro-fiber climbing shirt.

I went into the number of pines I’d seen split and blackened from lightning strikes on the way up to the ridge. The whole mountaintop, I reminded him, is one large dome of granite. The alpine rock

Then I threw in the twist. The kids were devouring my yarn, and I wasn't about to let them go. I especially didn't want to lose my brother, Jackson Richard Taylor, himself, the Prius-driving, goateed vet. King of the free Saturday morning neutering clinic, who was muttering "incredulous" over and over as his blue-eyed glare stabbed me through his bifocals. Saying what I figured would keep my audience locked down, I went into how I headed over to check out the dead cougar, to take the bolt out of its neck, and found it was a female. "But not just a female,"—and I paused so the implications of what I was about to say would ripple through Jackson Richard Taylor's veterinary mind—"a lactating female." I got the head-shaking, breathy "incredulous" I'd hoped for. And then mostly for the boys, and their wide eyes, I added a little gothic melodrama. I told them I'd hardly slept for two nights because I kept having nightmares of the mountain lion cubs writhing in their den, waiting for their mom, starving.

"As if," I emphasized, holding their gaze, "they were haunting me." I pointed to my own eyes, red and saggy. "Windows to the soul."

This was actually from the previous night's boilermakers at the Lodge. But it did the trick. Aiden and Jasper exchanged the look I'd hoped for—something between awe and dread. And then because, I guess, I wanted to end on a heroic note, I proposed that my brother join me on a quest to save the cubs. I figured he would weigh the offer, come to the brink of agreeing before the practical duties of clinic and family made him turn it down. So when he did accept, I had to hide how stunned I was by acting the opposite. I threw my arms wide and beamed a grateful smile, thanking Jackson Richard Taylor, himself, for condescending to meet me at my cabin at four the next morning to fight the good fight.

He lifted his chin. "Just be ready to go." Then he leveled a stare full of Prius-driving righteousness. "It's the least you can do, Andy."

"Andrew," I corrected.

• • •

As I gas-guzzled away from his Studio City split-level, I was sure that before I even made it home, I'd get a call saying it wouldn't work out, that he had too many appointments, too many commitments.

## The Mountain Lion

by **Tom Burkett**

Everybody knows the lyric. “I put a spell on you.” Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, right? It pulsed through my head as I saw the way my extensive piece of bullshitting was putting quite a spell on my brother, his wife and their two elementary-schoolers. Their eyes sucking me in, I told them how I tracked down and shot the mountain lion with my crossbow. I made the whole thing up as I went along.

The spaghetti was getting cold, forks collapsed in the marinara sauce. The more they stared, the more they craned over the green-rimmed stoneware, the more I cracked it out. The hike up Mt. Baldy. Spotting the big cat on a ridge behind the summit, a good 10,000 feet up in the San Gabriels. I gave them the smells and sounds, the sticky sweet tang of wind-twisted limber pines as you push 9,000 feet, the air whistling over the granite outcrops. I told them how seeing a kitty that size makes you feel like a coifed and shampooed poodle.

Then I went into how the next day, just following an impulse, knowing the odds of seeing the cat again were way against me, I returned with my crossbow and tracked what I hoped was the mountain lion’s path over two ridgelines. When I did see it—so I told my little audience—I was amazed by its utter calm as it gazed down at me from the jut of a boulder a good hundred feet away. I even celebrated my amazement by pausing to admire its sheer musculature before I sank a bolt in its neck.

No reason they wouldn’t believe all this. My brother and I grew up tracking injured animals with our dad, a Forest Service vet. And in my late teens and early twenties, I’d been a competitive archer, even had Olympic dreams, before I burned out on the discipline, the early mornings, the whole “anything worth doing takes sacrifice” mantra. Before I discovered what a joint, a few beers and AC/DC can do for you at midnight.

Of course they wanted to know why I did it. And I gave them the only answer I knew would keep them spellbound. For no other reason, I told them, than the thrill of the hunt. Pure primal, caveman, gut-level thrill. And yeah, I knew it was a protected species, and knowing that kicked that much more dopamine across my synapses. “Dopamine’s the stuff in your brain that makes you feel awesome,” I added for the kids.

“There’s too many women standing in line already.”

“Ha! I doubt it, not with that schedule you keep. Hong Kong on Mondays, Calcutta by Friday. I’d like to know what kind of bennies you’re on.”

By summer, after weeks of rain, Gwen’s garden was in. Weeding, with bad knees, was going to be a challenge, but she would find a solution for that as well as the mosquitoes that came in droves when the sun went down. Lance began coming by each Saturday morning to mow. Unless she’d had her hair done, her toes and fingers polished in white, she usually hid. But this Saturday, with summer in full swing, she thought about bringing him an iced tea. She added her own fresh mint leaves to make up for her being *en deshabille*, flip-flops, hair tied up in a tight little bun, with a few little grey wisps she allowed to escape so that they framed her still-pretty face. Now that her apartment gleamed, she had gained the confidence she needed to press him about the promised hot tub.

“Sweetheart,” she called above the racket of the mower. “Love of my life!”

When he saw her standing on the deck, ice tea in one hand, waving with the other, he cut the motor off and ventured forward, grinning from ear to ear. Even in cut-offs, spectacularly white, Gwen thought him delicious. She’d joined the Y and found she didn’t really need a hot tub; she’d really begun to like swimming, even lost a little weight. Maybe all Lance wanted was a friend. She needed a friend with benefits: a man who would bend her over backwards instead of worrying about why he shouldn’t.

“When am I getting the hot tub, Lance?”

“A hot tub? Are you crazy? Have you any idea what the liability would be?” His face was flushed and there were sweat marks on the front of his T. “Is that glass with ice in it for me?”

“Nope,” said Gwen, feeling just a tad guilty. She was wearing a skimpy terry cloth cover-up, bright green, which showed off her tanned legs. The one thing she prized above all was honesty. All the parrying and thrusting had begun to bore her. *No tickee, no laundry*. She turned her back and over one bare shoulder called: “I like to treat my men mean. They always come back for more.”



morning ablutions, when she was on the toilet once, a clay mask on her face. Why didn't he invite himself in so she could get to know him better? Maybe it was because she didn't have money and he did. That was always the way with some men. Maybe he was one of those men who needed to be mothered. This, she definitely didn't need, yet she worried about him working too hard: eighty hours a week in public relations for a large outsourcing computer company. She'd told him of one of the millionaire developers she'd looked up when she last visited her home town.

"Dead," she'd told Lance. "What good is his money to him now?" She'd had a crush on him too. They'd been out one night celebrating her selling a piece of his real estate... an entire mountain in North Carolina he'd traded for a waterfront house, his whole fortune on the line if she didn't sell it. He was so grateful. But when he'd bent her over the hood of his Corvette for a kiss, she couldn't miss feeling his teeny weeny pecker. He'd ended up marrying a scrawny nineteen-year-old and she wasn't sorry. When she loved, it wasn't going to be for money.

"You're the best," Lance said, once, when she agreed to drive to another property he owned to lock a door he'd forgotten when he'd been showing it to a prospective tenant.

"I know it," she answered, always on the kibbitz, quick with a repartee. She was a little bolder than usual, for it was spring and it was clear if she remained shy, she'd be barbecuing for one on the deck, sipping Zinfandel mixed with tears. You'd think after all those years of fighting men off when she'd been young, she'd have learned how to flirt, to be seductive, but she hadn't. She was of the generation when women were taught to be ladies, never to ask but to be asked. And if he did ask, she'd have to tell him how she didn't do condoms. For her, sex wasn't recreational, nothing to be taken lightly. None of this hooking up business the way kids did. Love in her book was meant to be forever. Sometimes she hated her hypocritical self for there was nothing she'd like better than to undress Lance's tight little body, lavish it with all the ardor she was saving for someone who would appreciate her.

"And you'd better get your garden planted," said Lance, one day while out mowing, after she'd advised him to get a neighbor kid to do it. Didn't he know how to relax on his day off? "You've got some good dirt here. Summer's right around the corner. I've already got six kinds of lettuce in mine. Beans and tomatoes. Cucumbers and squash."

"Why should I plant a garden when you can bring me your vegetables?"

She held her temper when the apartment wasn't ready. The polyurethane on the hardwood floors needed time to dry and he had to use her space for various equipment like sanders, tools and compressors, since the other apartments weren't quite done. But at least the closing had gone off without a hitch, and her old landlord let her stay, surrounded by boxes, ready to move. Lance let her bring her plants to put in the shower and promised to water them. His own palatial home had Orchids on the counters by the sink, huge Poinsettias in the living room, and a slender Amaryllis growing in a clear glass vase centered in the middle of the kitchen table. Her plants were in plain terra cotta, mere cuttings given by a friend whose Christmas cactus always bloomed on time, unlike the one she'd once given Gwen that had rotted from too much watering.

On moving day, the first place she looked was the shower. The Zinnias had died on their stalks, purple flowers faded and dry. The Wandering Jew and even the hardy Geranium could not be saved. Gwen felt like crying, but she had more to worry about than plants. Far from her familiar surroundings, she didn't know a soul; she didn't even know how to find her way to the highway, getting lost several times during practice runs. Nights were terribly lonely. She began to hate television, retiring early before her favorite shows just to get the day over with. And little by little, she bought furniture, filling her new space with light blond wood end tables, cotton rugs and inexpensive Renoir prints for the walls. Sometimes she bought oils or water colors at exhibits if she thought an artist showed promise.

The only time she saw Lance was on weekends, when he would come to empty the quarters from the washer and dryer, or on the first of the month, when he came to collect the rent. "Sweetheart," he would say, after knocking on her door, looking as perky as Katie Couric when she hadn't even had her first cup of coffee. "Honey. Have you got a plastic bag? I really need this money."

She really had it bad. No one else would do. Once, before he'd put in her doorbell, he'd surprised her by knocking on the living room window. She let him in, half asleep, dressed in something that had seen better days. He was dressed for work, with a yellow tie only the bold could wear and his hair was still slick as if he'd just stepped out of the shower. "Omigod, you look so good and I'm so ugly!" How embarrassing was that?

Nothing could quell the obsession. She even began to have dreams about him. Every time she saw his warm smile, her spirits lifted. She couldn't figure out why he kept coming and interrupting her

It didn't matter that the last two men she'd had a crush on had fallen by the wayside. Gwen took these things in stride. The first was a movie producer with whom she'd applied for a script reading job. Okay, he wore a toupee, but Gwen could overlook a thing like that. They had a cultural bond she thought more important. She liked men who were brainy and he had an MBA from Harvard. But he had so many family commitments, promising dates and never delivering. Cannes, you know. Then the Berkshires. Always some relative flying in at the last minute or so he would say. By the time he called to ask her to a movie, she told him to get lost. Not in those words, of course. When he asked for a reason, the gall of it rattled her so much, she answered: "I don't want to have to wait six months to see you again."

The second disappointment was the chiropractor who straightened her back after she'd suffered a rear end collision. He was over six feet tall, with miraculously meaty hands, swooping her up off the table after his ministrations were over so that she felt petite and delicate. He would compliment her often, how her skin was so soft, how supple she was becoming, and how he couldn't be a success without her involvement and support. A newsletter, perhaps, which she was willing to write, if he ever found the time.

Those massages on the table sent her hormones into a tizzy. Side-by-side yoga positions on the floor. It was all she could do to restrain herself from jumping onto his body. The insurance ran out and then he called to invite her to a New Year's Eve party at a yoga studio. She was thrilled enough to buy a bottle of champagne. She drove up and down Mass Avenue several times until she found the place, so she was late. She hadn't expected a room full of twenty-year-olds jumping from a standing position into prone or standing on one leg like flamingoes, for God's sake, with the heat turned up to a hundred and ten. She thought she would die of embarrassment if not hyperthermia sitting on the floor in the farthest corner, the only square footage left, where a crack under a door leaked cold air. First chance she had, stepping over dozens of supine bodies without tripping, she found her bottle of bubbly on a table in the entranceway amidst an array of party favors, flimsy kazoos and healthy drinks for balancing electrolytes. She snatched up the bottle, clutched it to her chest like a criminal and out into the cold, bitter night, home again lickety-split. No, power yoga, with her knees, was out of the question. And so was the chiropractor from then on. Before she fell for another guy, she was going to be very, very careful.

holding up a huge banner with the year of their graduation. Mrs Robinson she wasn't and instead of telling him she'd been Valedictorian, what came out was: "Are you on your knees, or what?"

Gwen could have kicked herself, only then realizing that Lance was short. Taller than her, but short. His face, in the class photo, came up to the other men's biceps. Gwen figured it was better not to apologize and make it an issue. Better to have him think she hadn't even noticed his height when he'd shown her the apartment. It was the truth. She'd been more interested in how much sunlight came into the kitchen, or into the bedroom since she seldom ate out and she liked to sleep late. Lance told her she could plant a garden in the back forty where there were plenty of trees separated from the yard by a rusty old fence. She thought she was going to be terribly happy there, but the one thing she wanted, the one thing she needed for the aches and pains she suffered from arthritis, was a bath tub. All that jogging on macadam had ruined the cartilage in her knees.

Her old place had an antique tub with lion's paws. She considered it a peak experience the day WBUR played *Danny Boy* by different artists on a reel-to-reel all day and night. She had soaked in it for hours, almost in a fugue, turning the spigots with her toes if the water got too cold. She was really going to miss the peace she found in that bathtub. But Lance wasn't asking for a credit check or even references. He slid the lease across the table and Gwen, despite her reservations, signed her name in a tremulous scrawl.

On her next visit to view the property, they were on the back deck surveying the large back yard and the thickets beyond and Gwen broached the subject. "Since you're going to be expanding the deck, you think you could put in a hot tub? I'd be willing to pay for it."

Lance smiled at her. "Anything you want, baby!"

Gwen hadn't heard anyone call her that in something like thirty years. Effusively, she threw her arms around Lance's neck. "Oh, thank you. Thank you."

She could just see herself, a bon mot, champagne flutes and midnight soirees, slipping later into something silky. Nothing like a hot tub to melt her natural reserve. She couldn't even remember when she'd last had sex. She wasn't in any hurry either. Her mother was on her third husband, eloping at the age of sixty-five. Gwen, herself, had never been married though she once had a long-time boyfriend who introduced her to chopped chicken liver and how it was okay to pee in the shower. The money he left her when he died was still in a safe deposit; what she missed, most of all, was the intimacy they shared.

## Almost a Summer Love

by Rachel Cann

Her new landlord's name was Lance. From the beginning, even before she signed the lease, despite a slight cast in his left eye, she found herself attracted. She thought she saw a superior intelligence and a twinkle in his eyes like that of a faraway star. Little did she know she was facing a master manipulator, although he'd told her he'd leave his Jaguar parked in front of his house so she could find it. "I've got a real good feeling about you," he'd said, when he opened the door, revealing his perfect teeth in a broad smile. "I even told my mother."

Gwen, who'd grown up before fluoride was added to the water supply, usually hated people with perfect teeth. *How many men in their fifties talked about their mothers? Maybe he was gay.* The man hadn't even closed on the property and had already taken deposits on two of the other apartments in the triplex which needed total renovation. The house was a hundred years old, with a slanting roof and a chimney on top, proclaiming there had once been a fireplace. Gwen worried she'd be out on the street if something went wrong at the closing. Her old landlord expected her to be out by the first and she had already given notice. "What happens if my place isn't ready?" she'd asked. "Will you pay for a hotel?"

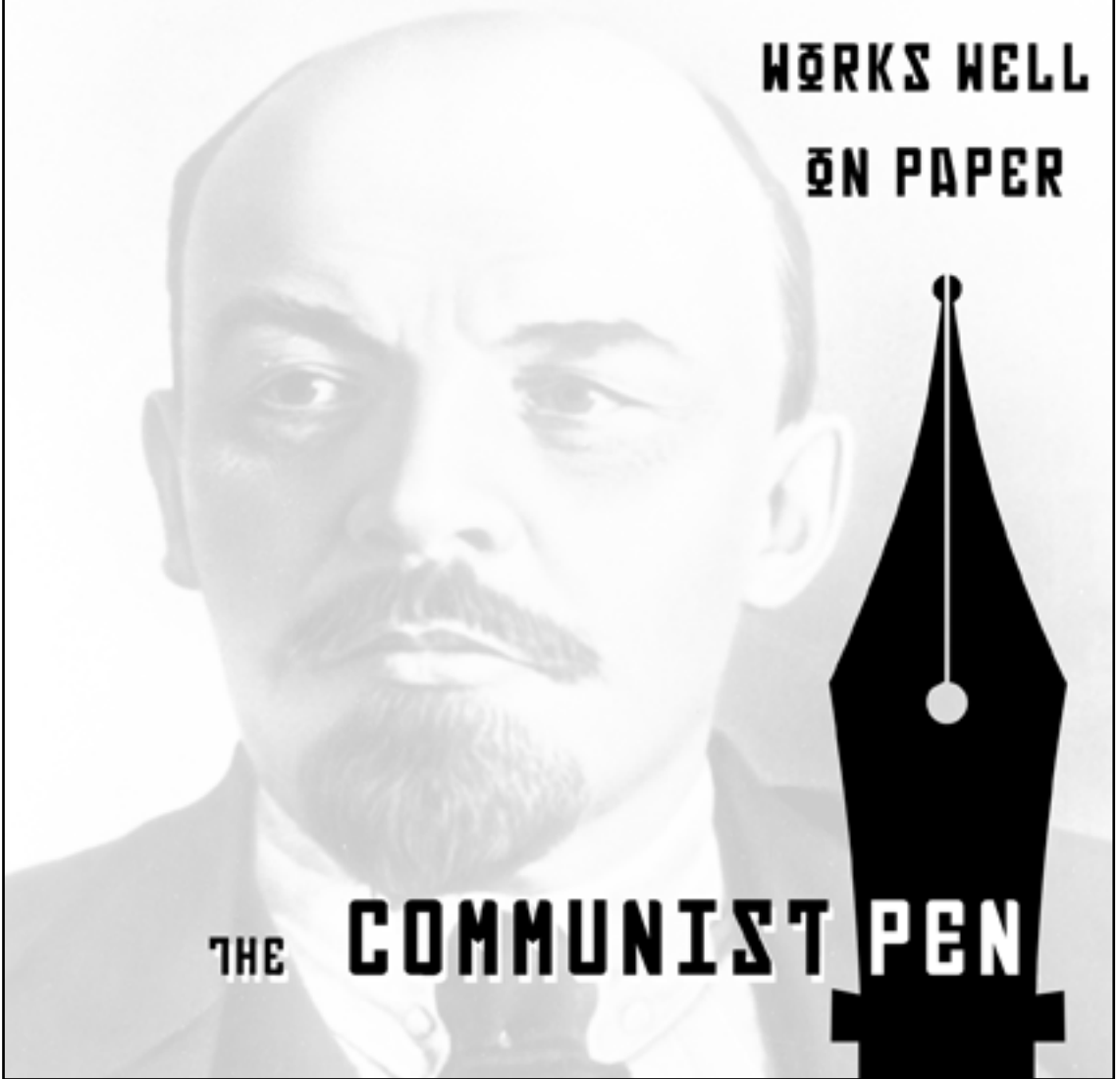
"If it's not ready, you can move in here with me for a couple of weeks," Lance answered. "I'm going to have the place professionally landscaped and extend the deck out back." Then he showed her an apple pie he'd just baked, with a crust so high and tasty-looking, she almost forgot she hated apple pie, wondering, why he hadn't offered her a piece. She'd made too many mistakes about men in the past to trust whatever it was that was making her feel all school-girly. She liked how he seemed willing to divulge things she considered private: how he was divorced and not in a serious relationship and how he wasn't attracted to very many women. It had to be someone special.

It was fall and she was dressed in her best, Preparation H applied with a Q tip to tighten her eyelids, on the way to a class reunion. He brought out his group class photo, indicating with a finger, his little bubble face, almost lost in the sea of standing classmates. "I was class president," he said.

She didn't ask which year he'd graduated, nor did she want to admit her own. The front row was

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“In the absence of the truth,” Mr Ticklefeather said, “let us say, yes, I am his father.”

“Very well,” Nurse Precious said, slinging the baby onto her shoulder. “Come with me. You’ll have to sign some papers saying you assume full responsibility for his upbringing.”

Mr Ticklefeather beamed with satisfaction and pride. He followed Nurse Precious and the baby out of the room without another word to Mercy Buckets.

Mercy got out of the bed and walked slowly to the window. She opened the blind and, looking out at the sky, saw the full yellow moon beaming down on the tired old world, exactly the way it had done the night she and Mr Ticklefeather went rowing on the lake. She had to wipe a tear from her eye. Already she was feeling lonely and just a little sorry for herself.

"I'll leave," Mr Ticklefeather said.

"No!" Mercy said. "I want you to see this odd little baby, even though you are *not* the father."

"It's better if you feed it the old-fashioned way," Nurse Precious said.

"It won't matter with this one because I'm not going to keep it anyway," Mercy said.

Nurse Precious produced a bottle from the folds of her uniform and handed it to Mercy. As Mercy held the baby in the crook of her arm and held the nipple of the bottle to its snout, Mr Ticklefeather leaned in to get a better look.

"He looks a little like me, doesn't he?" he said.

"He doesn't look a thing like you," Mercy said. "You have nothing to do with him at all!"

"He looks like a Percy to me," Mr Ticklefeather said. "I've always liked the name Percy. How about if we name him Percy? Percy Ticklefeather. I like the way that sounds."

"You can name him Boll Weevil, for all I care," Mercy said.

"I know this is going to sound funny to you," Mr Ticklefeather said. "I know I'm not really his father, but I wish I was. Since he doesn't have a father, or at least doesn't have one that we know about, I'd like to take him and raise him as if I really were his father."

"I don't care what you do with him."

"Since you *are* the mother and, to the world at least, I'm the presumed father, how would it be if we get married and bring the little fellow up properly, in a home with a mother *and* a father?"

Mercy looked at him with disbelief. "Why would I want to marry you?" she asked. "I don't love you. I hardly even know you, even though we went rowing on the lake that one time."

"We can get married and figure out together who the father really is and what really happened and when it happened. All will be revealed in time."

"No," Mercy said, "I suppose I should thank you for the offer, but I won't ever marry you or anybody else. Not if having peculiar babies is the result."

The baby drank the entire contents of the bottle, belched and went to sleep. By and by, Nurse Precious came back to collect the baby to take him back to the nursery.

"I'm going to take him," Mr Ticklefeather said to Nurse Precious. "Mercy Buckets wants nothing to do with him."

"Are you his father?" Nurse Precious asked.



“Well, I *am* sorry, I’m sure,” Mr Ticklefeather said, putting his hand over his mouth.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came as soon as I heard.”

“Heard what?”

“You know. About the B-A-B-Y.”

“Why would that concern you?”

“Well, I’m assuming I’m the F-A-T-H-E-R since we went out together that one time.”

“Stop that spelling! We went rowing on the lake. I’m pretty sure that doesn’t result in a baby of *any* species.”

“Don’t you remember when we kissed?”

“That doesn’t do it, either.”

“You finished a hot dog that I started and we drank out of the same cup.”

“Mr Ticklefeather,” she said, “don’t you know *anything* about the birds and the bees? You are *not* the father!”

“Who is?”

“That’s just it. I don’t know!”

“Oh, my!” Mr Ticklefeather said.

“No, no, no! It’s not like that, Mr Ticklefeather! I don’t know who the father is because there is no father!”

“What do you mean?”

“We’ll save that one for another time.”

Mr Ticklefeather had only a moment to look perplexed because the door opened and Nurse Precious came into the room bearing the bundle of dirty laundry again.

“Time for the little chappie to feed again,” she said in her sing-song, setting the bundle beside Mercy on the bed as Nurse Nimbus had done earlier and pulling back the face flap.

“Oh, no!” Mercy said. “How many times a day does this happen?”

“It never ends,” Nurse Precious said.

“I want a bottle! Bring me a bottle of whatever it is they drink! I’m not doing that other thing again!”

He left and in a few moments Nurse Precious came in and gave Mercy another clonk on the head to calm her down.

When she awoke she was confused. She had been dreaming that a giant chicken was holding her down, trying to put its beak into her mouth. She sputtered and picked some imaginary feathers from between her teeth. She realized then that someone was standing beside her bed and that someone was her own clown mother, Clarabelle Patootie, and her clown father, Petey Patootie. They had both been clown headliners in the biggest show in clowndom but were now retired from the show business.

"My dear!" her mother said, realizing at once that Mercy was awake. "Your clown father and I have been frantic with clown worry."

"It's not what you think!" Mercy said, trying to sit up. "I swear I don't know where that thing came from!"

"Now, now, now," her mother said. "We're not judging you. We've just had a long talk with Dr Stitches. He told us the whole story."

"I'd like to hear that story myself," Mercy said.

"It's going to take some time to sort this all out."

"Have you seen that thing?"

"Yes, we saw him. Our grandson. He's a fine little fellow."

"Yes, but he's some kind of a gorilla or something. I never saw anything like it before in my *life!*"

"You just rest now, dear. You've been through a terrible ordeal. We'll talk it all out later."

Petey Patootie never had much to say. He always let his clown wife do the talking. He patted Mercy on the hand and looked into her eyes. "You hang in there, old girl," he said. "We'll be here if you need us."

She dozed off again and didn't know when her clown mother and clown father left. The next time she opened her eyes, she saw a huge clown face looming over her. As she screamed and sat up in the bed, the clown face withdrew to a safe distance.

"Who the hell *are* you!" she said. "Why are you standing over me like a spook?"

"It's Mr Ticklefeather," a voice said. "I was leaning close to see if you were asleep or only faking it."

It took her a moment to see the clown from whence the voice came. "You act like a crazy person," she said. "You scared me nearly half to death."

“Oh, you have to feed it, dear. The little fellow is hungry.”

“And just what do you have in mind that I feed it?”

Nurse Precious and Nurse Nimbus exchanged a significant look and then Nurse Nimbus discreetly exited while Nurse Precious showed Mercy what was to be done.

Later in the day, after the baby had been fed and taken away again, Mercy was dozing when Dr Stitches dropped by her little room to see how she was doing. He was wearing a long white doctor’s gown and a rubber chicken on each shoulder like epaulettes. On his old head was a powdered wig like George Washington, only pink.

“Well, well, well,” he said, “that was quite a harrowing scene we had in the delivery room this morning, wasn’t it?”

“Who the hell are you?” Mercy asked, irritated at being awakened.

“I’m only the fellow who saved your life and the life of your baby,” he said.

“I want to go home. My clown mother and clown father must be worried about me.”

“All in due time, my dear.”

“And when I leave, I’m not taking that *thing* with me.”

“What thing are we talking about, dear?”

“The little animal that they say came out of my body.”

“I take it you are referring to your son?”

“I go. It stays.”

Dr Stitches made a note on his clipboard and looked at Mercy over the tops of his Ben Franklin glasses. “You wish to give the baby up for adoption?” he asked.

“I don’t care what you do with it. We’re not even the same *species*.”

“Hmm,” he said, “*mother exhibits marked ambivalence toward baby*,” he read as he wrote.

“My clown mother and clown father are going to die when they find out about this. They don’t know I was ever even *with* a man. Hell, I don’t even know it myself!”

“So, you have no knowledge or recollection of the act that brought your baby into being?”

“I don’t know anything except that I want to go home and forget that any of this ever happened.”

“You’ve had a shock,” Dr Stitches said, patting her on the shoulder. “You just rest now and don’t worry about a thing.”

“You are on the third floor of Clown General Hospital.”

“Have I been in an accident or something?”

Nurse Precious laughed. “We do have a wry sense of humor, don’t we?”

“I want to go home.”

“Of course we do, but we’re not ready yet. If you and your baby get along well, you should be able to leave by Tuesday.”

“Me and my *what?*”

Nurse Precious looked at Mercy and wrinkled her brow. “You don’t remember why you came to hospital?”

“I don’t remember anything.”

Nurse Precious looked at Mercy’s medical chart she was carrying but hadn’t bothered to look at yet. “Oh, I see,” she said. “They had to put you out, over, and under during the birth. You haven’t even seen your baby yet.”

“If you don’t tell me what you’re talking about *right now*,” Mercy said, “I’m going to walk out of here and take a jitney home even though I *am* wearing a bed sheet with nothing underneath.”

As if on cue, the door opened with a suck of air and Nurse Nimbus came into the room with what looked like a bundle of dirty laundry in her arms. “Here we are!” she said cheerily. She laid the bundle on the bed beside Mercy Buckets and pulled back a flap to reveal the face of a small animal.

“Ugh!” Mercy said. “That is the ugliest thing I ever saw.”

“You be sure and think of a good name for him now,” Nurse Precious said.

The two nurses linked arms and twirled around in a little jig as if that were part of the ritual that Mercy was unable to understand.

“But what is this thing?” Mercy asked. “It doesn’t even look like a clown. It looks like an ape. It’s all covered with hair.”

“Why, it’s your baby, dear,” Nurse Nimbus said. “What else would it be?”

“Are you telling me that thing came out of my body?”

“Well, the stork didn’t deliver it, if that’s what you mean,” Nurse Precious said, laughing uproariously.

“Take it away!”

## Do You Take This Clown?

by **Allen Kopp**

Mercy Buckets felt pains in her midsection. She had the feeling that there was something inside her that wanted and needed to come out. She checked herself into Clown General Hospital, believing she was dying. After a clown doctor had done a perfunctory examination, he knew right away what was wrong with her. She was about to have a clown baby and, being the naïve goose that she was, she hadn't even known it.

Almost at once she went into clown labor. When they were wheeling her in to the delivery room, she didn't know what was happening and became distraught.

"Help!" she screamed. "Somebody help me! They've taken my clothes! They're holding me prisoner and they're going to do awful things to me! Somebody call the clown authorities before it's too late!" Her round red nose quivered with emotion.

Nobody called anybody, of course. A clown nurse clonked her on the head with a frying pan and after that she was quite manageable. She wasn't able to help in the birth of her child, being unconscious as she was, but Dr Stitches managed just fine, with the help of several clown nurses, and delivered her of a perfect baby boy.

When she woke up, she was in a bed in a little room all to herself where everything was so white and shiny she thought for a moment she might be in Heaven. She heard sounds from behind the closed door but they seemed remote and far away and comforting in a way. She felt funny as if all her bodily parts had been stretched and then allowed to snap back into place. She still didn't know what had happened to her.

In a little while a smiling clown nurse came into her room to check on her. "Are we feeling better now?" she asked. She had an upturned nose that resembled a sweet potato and a huge head with great waves of flame-red hair.

"Who are you?" Mercy Buckets asked.

"I'm Nurse Precious," she said. "I'm here to take care of you."

"But where am I?"



“What’s time is it?”

She pulled her phone out. “12:30”.

I started to laugh. It slowly built inside me until guffaws exploded from my chest, the tears rolling down my red cheeks.

“What’s up, buddy?”

“Go on, Jason. Just say it.”

Jason grinned, the words he wanted to say to me for a whole year bubbling inside of him.

“April Fools!”

The room erupted again, the laughter as intoxicating as the tequila.

“Every year with you guys,” said Shelly, reluctantly joining in the laughter.

“Ha. Payback is a bitch,” said Jason lifting his iphone. A photo of the doll and me filled the screen. The expression of pleasure on my face was one I knew I’d be seeing until I got him back. I had a whole year to wait.

Light exploded around me. The room filled with laughter.

“Hey, baby.”

I turned, the girl’s breast still in my face and her nipple in my mouth. Jason laughed as he held up his iphone. A flash of light blinded me.

“Perfect!”

The laughter bellowed through the room. I looked up at the girl. Her unblinking stare gazed back at me. She really was beautiful. I reached up to caress her cheek. My hand slipped and I poked her in the eye. She didn’t blink. She didn’t react.

“Oh, Jesus.”

Shelly’s voice was a splash of cold water across my face.

“Aw, come on. He’s rounding second base,” snorted Matt.

More laughter as Shelly pulled the girl off me. She was trying not to laugh.

“God, wait until your father sees this.” Shelly’s disappointed face sobered me.

“I’m so sorry, honey. The guys were egging me on. Nothing happened, I swear. She means nothing to me.”

“Don’t hurt her feelings,” said Mike. He leaned against Jason, their weight against one another to keep from tipping over as the laughter overtook them. I looked away, not wanting to meet Shelly’s eyes, hoping that she would forgive me.

“You guys suck,” said Shelly. She grabbed my chin in her hand, squeezing and lifting to focus me. “She isn’t real. She’s a doll.”

I stared at Shelly. My brain heard each word but the tequila dampened the meaning.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s a doll,” Shelly repeated.

“Hope you didn’t get her pregnant,” snickered Jason.

“They can have the baby shower at Toys R Us,” added Mike.

Laughter erupted again. Even Shelly chuckled, looking to the ceiling as if the answers were in the yellowed tiles. I looked at the girl, flat on her back, green eyes staring upward. In the bright lights, the passion was gone, the mystery a lie. Jason sat next to her, cupping each breast, making them talk; the voice the same that whispered in my ear. Matt and Mike stood above me, looking into their phones unable to hold them steady. I looked back to Shelly.

and I almost tipped over. An arm grabbed hold of me and kept me from sprawling on the floor.

"You okay, little brother?" My brother, Mike, peered at me through the haze. His auburn hair glistened with gel, the talc smell reminding me of the old barbershop our dad took us to when he wanted what he called "a real shave". He leaned closer to my face. He actually seemed concerned, a first for him.

"He's fine," asserted Jason.

My head flipped back and it felt as if I could feel the Earth's rotation under my feet. I was happy I was sitting down. I couldn't place the exact drink that pushed me over the edge, but I was certain a toilet bowl was in my near future. I was looking forward to the cool porcelain against my hot skin. I could hear the laughter of my friends far away like a branch snapping in the forest.

"Come on. No one is going to tell Shelly. This is your last time to have another chick. Just look at her," said Jason taking my face in his chubby hand and twisting my line of vision across the room to the girl sitting next to Matt.

The girl sat with her legs crossed and her top off. Her breasts sparkled with glitter and I could not stop my mouth from smiling, like trying to hold an inappropriate laugh inside. The outline of her body against the burgundy sofa, the smell of vanilla that poured from her in waves, my name a hushed chant building to a crescendo all urged me to rise. I tried to get up, my legs unwilling. I felt Jason and Mike lift me, dragging me across the small room. My knee smacked into the small glass table that separated me from the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Her eyes focused on me, staring into me.

"She's all yours," said Matt sliding across to allow me to take his place.

They plopped me down next to the girl. I shifted in my seat, Jason throwing my arm around her. She fell into me.

"Hi, baby."

Her voice was raspy and guttural, like the reverberation of an earthquake. I focused on her eyes, green and wide, unblinking. I touched her hair that looked soft but was stiff to the touch. Hairspray assaulted my nostrils. She pushed into me, her weight pressing me into the velour of the sofa. She was heavier than I imagined, like bags of cement draped across my legs. I kissed her. Her lips tasted like cherry lip balm, but were cold and stiff. Her breasts pressed into my chest. She slid up my crotch, her breasts engulfing my face.



## My April Girl

by **Eric Scott**

The girl sat on Matt's lap, her back to me. Two dragons, one red and one black, undulated on her bronze skin. Her hair, like black webbing, blanketed her shoulders. Stray strands fluttered in the hot air of the tiny room as she rocked from side to side, her movements more mechanical than provocative. The back room of the club steadily darkened until all I could see were outlines of Matt and the girl, the details lost in the smoky haze.

"She's really hot," said Jason easing closer to my side; a self-satisfied grin washed across his unshaven face. He blew cigar smoke from the side of his mouth. He handed me another tequila shot.

"You having a good time?" Jason's breath smelled of onion rings and cheap whiskey. Perspiration coated his balding head. His flannel shirt was unbuttoned to reveal a gold chain that sparkled like iron pyrite in a black forest of hair.

"Oh, yeah. This is great." I swallowed the tequila; it burned my parched throat and I coughed. Jason patted me on the back.

"Matt's just warming her up for you. Think it's time for the man of the hour to get some."

I shook my head, regretting the last shot as the room continued to shimmy. I was glad it was so dark. It was bad enough to feel the world swishing around me. Seeing it with clarity would bring up the hot wings I ate earlier. I didn't want the guys thinking I couldn't handle my booze after all my boasting.

As Jason poured me another shot, I realized I'd lost track of how many drinks I'd had tonight. I was usually able to count them in my head. Tonight, my brain constantly interrupted my counting with random thoughts of throwing up or internal mantras in an effort to slow the spinning room. My friends, especially my best man Jason, went to a lot of trouble to put on a great bachelor party for me and I didn't want to spoil it by asking to go home. But all I wanted to do was sleep.

"I can't, man. Shelly, would kill me."

Jason held out another tequila shot. I absently tried to push it away and he shoved it to my mouth. The burn, like battery acid on skin, covered my lips. He smacked me on the back again as I drank

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· GEORGE STREET, SYDNEY ·

I treated myself to a handful of blue pills, which do all of us a world of good, and beamed. “Oh, something tells me that you two crazy lovebirds are going to work it out! All you need is a little R&R at some fabulous rehab center, on one of those Caribbean islands where Boris or Igor does his banking or whatever it’s called these days.”

Nancy winked. “With all these global financial meltdowns, we can splurge. By the time you’re a free man, who knows how many more of those fantastic bailouts we might have?”

“Banking’s a very solid business,” said Roger with new light in his eyes. Yes, he’s the same old loveable Roger and I wouldn’t have him any other way.

“If only poor Sam had learned about banking,” I said, becoming a tad weepy. But then again, my ex-husband never did get the hang of money, did he?

was after Roger's "accountants" shot themselves in the middle of the night and there was, if you think about it, no "real" company to do business with.

But then, there never was a "real" company, so it's the gesture that counts, isn't it?

On the bright side, Roger's wife hadn't witnessed his unfortunate tantrum. Nancy detests public scenes. Luckily, she was out of commission because she'd had that breakdown which no one, and I do mean no one, was allowed to mention which was sad, given what an all-round terrific wife and mother Nancy is—or had been before she discovered her husband's Ponzi scheme or whatever those nasty people at CNN called it.

I don't think that Ponzi-scheme label was fair and it's another sorry example of how the mainstream media twist things. True, Roger always carried wads of cash and never seemed to "work." But isn't money always floating in from peculiar places like those men in Washington who are always printing money out of thin air or those strange rates which are always going up and down for reasons no one can fathom?

Luckily, Roger's upstate prison is posh, by contemporary jailhouse standards. My husband has lots of dear colleagues there, although, for whatever reason, they don't call him Boris, they call him Igor. It must be one of those cultural differences since they never speak a word of English, at least when I'm around.

As for Roger, the prison diet and all that exercise have worked miracles—he looks decades younger! It's no wonder that so many celebrities stay there. And to boost his spirits, I brought Nancy for a visit. These days, she goes by the name Natasha, but to me, she'll always be plain old Nancy.

"Nancy?" Roger asked in a strangled sort of voice. I suppose he hadn't seen his wife since the trial, and really, she did look smashing in shiny black leather and stilettos.

Seeing his tomato-red face, I explained, "That's Nancy's brand-new look working for Boris or Igor. Don't ask me what she does because, you know little me, I have no head for business!"

Nancy handed Roger one of those amazing blue pills that we all take "for energy," as we like to say. "Call me Natasha," she said.

"Thanks," he said, popping about a dozen then and there—come to think of it just like Nancy does every hour or so to control her gambling addiction. And that addiction, among so many other special things, is one thing that Roger and Nancy will always share. And isn't sharing one of the keys to a truly happy marriage?

## Crazy Lovebirds

by **Carla Sarett**

“What are a few more years in the grand scheme of things? After all, quality counts more than quantity,” I said as I offered Sam a warm post-marital embrace.

“Speaking of quantity...” Sam mumbled as he searched through my handbags for a stray twenty, as he had so often during our happy, but all-too-brief, union. Poor Sam never could get the hang of money, although he did have a genius for spending it, at least when it wasn’t his which, sadly, it never was.

I expressed empathy as I always do—it is who I am. “Take time to grieve, Sam.”

Taking my advice at face value, he hurled an alligator purse across the room. On his occasional days of sobriety, Sam’s aim was remarkably accurate, I must admit. “You know, Sam, they say that divorce can be more stressful than death itself,” I told him. “But maybe they mean the death of a poodle or a chimp, and not a person.”

“Maybe,” Sam agreed.

In hindsight, I realized that I’d experienced one of my famed psychic moments since Sam’s accident was stressful in the extreme. Mind you, I never held Sam’s death against him for a moment—we had a fine and strong marriage, despite what everyone says these days.

Anyway, given the tragic circumstances, my wedding was subdued and was certainly not one of those garish “Martha Stewart” events. And it was spiritual as only a second or a third marriage can be, since genuine wisdom, in my humble opinion, requires the depth and experience gained in marriage. In many ways, it was a magical day or it might have been if Roger hadn’t barged in, hysterically screaming.

“After those horrid lawsuits and mean Federal agents, he needs to vent a little,” I told my new husband. “At least Roger didn’t fling himself from a window the way some of his Hollywood clients did.”

To be honest, I felt that Roger’s fit was uncalled for considering how my new spouse (whose “real” name is Boris, but that’s another story) had generously thrown a little business Roger’s way—and that



**The Case of the Mysterious  
Disappearance of the Wife  
Who Fell in the Toilet  
After Her Husband Constantly  
Left the Seat Up**

*a poem by* **Fern G. Z. Carr**

Officer, please let me explain—  
although my wife was a pain,  
her mysterious disappearance  
wasn't from my perseverance  
in flushing her down the drain.

interested in the *ratatouille*, etc. The cook is too, I can tell, and we share a conspiratorial smirk. She recognizes a kindred spirit, I think, and I think too that I should make her a bit younger than I had intended at first, perhaps single. Carefree.

*then I couldn't quite go back to sleep but lay there*

And while I'm at it, I'm pretty sure that the contessa is no longer so enamored of the house. She's pulling out her phone...

*thinking about ardent mirrors and*

And I—I should say *we*—*we* are no longer so enamored of *her*. The cook has sneaked into the pantry where (I know) she keeps a bottle of *marc* to pour us a couple of tots. And she's taken the wooden lid off a big stone jar and spooned some dark, glistening olives onto a plate. Now we carry the glasses and the olives, softly closing the door behind us, to a table on the terrace, where we sit down to begin what I predict will be a very pleasant day.

puzzled at that, since one is—no, as *I am myself* quite observant, I'm not so sure about my hostess, we'll see.

*that I heard uttered in the dream weren't "oil and fennel" but "ardent mirrors."*

"And rather too, rather too—*intrusive*." Ignoring me still, she's observing herself from the side and apparently not liking what she sees. "Too *ardent*." There it is! "I like a mirror," she declares emphatically, as if quoting herself, "that knows its place!"

*I lay awake thinking about ardent*

"We'll have them taken down," she's continuing, peering more closely at the mirrors and prying a bit at the silverish frame of one of them. "They appear to be bolted to the wall. How odd! We'll talk to the factotum."

*mirrors and after a few minutes went to my study to*

We proceed into the kitchen, where the cook is preparing what smells like a *ratatouille* (and indeed is, a very good one, thank you, as I will learn that evening). The cook goes to find her husband, and in more or less short order there ensues a scene that you'll have to imagine in which the contessa explains in her middling French what has to be done and the poor man strives in his colloquial French to explain that *non, Madame*, he has express orders not to remove anything from the walls, the paint, you see, the bolt holes, etc., etc. If he had a cap he would be twisting it in his hands, and perhaps he should have one, although I'm going to have to research the subject to learn just what kind of cap a Frenchman of his station and region might wear.

*record the phrase on a piece of paper. Even*

But frankly this whole situation is growing a bit out of control, and anyway, I'm rather more



## Ardent Mirrors

by Grove Koger

*I was dreaming about processing olives when I heard the words. Now*

Let's say a duchess—no, make that a countess, one by marriage—is leasing a house in the Provençal countryside for the summer. Her agent has found the place, and she's taken a quick look and it seems perfect. There's a separate apartment in the east wing that I'm to occupy, plus rooms enough for the wave of shiftless *bons vivants* who are bound to turn up when word gets out. A cook and her factotum husband live in a little house across the way, and there's a lawn with a pool at its lower end. A grocer in town will supply meat and fresh produce twice a week. The countess (perhaps she should be a *contessa*, but English by birth) signs the papers, gives notice at her hotel, hires a driver with a van to move her bags, etc. Now her personal maid is hanging up the contessa's clothes and the contessa is having a more thorough look around.

*I've never given a thought to processing olives, but here we—we?—were,*

“Rather a lot of mirrors,” she says to no one in particular, although I'm standing right beside her. The contessa has offered to put me up for the summer while I finish my novel, but surely it's incumbent upon me to be on hand during these preliminaries. As a matter of fact the novel is done but an opportunity to spend a month or two in Provence is not to be sneered at, certainly not by a first-novelist-to-be. Even a successful one, as I shall be.

*soaking them in a solution of oil and fennel. Yet the words*

“Rather a lot...” She's moved to the next room, and indeed there are mirrors on every wall except for the one made up entirely of windows (French, naturally) opening onto the south terrace. “Odd,” she adds, “that one didn't notice them the other day.” In fact one did not, and I'm more than a little

## Like April's Fool

*a poem by* **Tadhg Muller**

i.

This long last breath.  
Drawing forward constantly.  
We are hunted.  
Stalked like game.  
Like Christmas, we wait.  
All but the fool.  
Like the winter.  
Like Dawn.  
As midnight.  
Black as Hell.  
See the tired hands.  
See the first grey lock.  
A face with crows legs.

ii.

For whom is this,  
last laugh meant?  
For the dead,  
The vanquished?  
For the forsaken?  
Stripped naked.  
One and all.  
Stripped bare to the bone,  
Like April's fool.  
The final laugh.  
Played without sound.  
Played in final silence.

The blue and red lights of the Florida State Trooper coming up fast behind them shocked Jackson out of his tirade and he instantly lifted his foot off the gas. But it was too late this time; they'd gone past a radar gun thirty-two miles an hour over the posted speed limit. The Trooper slid in, one car-length to their rear and pointed towards the shoulder.

As he brought the Chevy to a halt and threw it calmly into Park, Jackson turned to his wife and took a deep breath, holding it for a few moments before blowing it out. "It might all sound a bit crazy to you, hearing it for the first time." He glanced at the Trooper coming toward them in the rearview mirror. "But what if I'm right?"

Before she could answer, Jackson Wilson pulled his driver's license and registration from the rubberband on the visor and turned toward the brimmed hat now visible in the corner of his vision. A friendly smile replaced the anguished look he'd thrown at his wife in the brief moment it took him to make the turn.

"Good morning, officer..."

Jackson froze. His voice suddenly locked down tighter than the lug nuts on his tires. He tried twice, but couldn't bring himself to say the man's name, embossed on his uniform, the word choking in his throat. Clovelia, wide-eyed and still blanched, grasped her husband's arm in a mix of fear and disbelief. Her voice only a whispered breath as she finished the sentence for him, "...Hiroshimura."

was faster than the finest American sports car ever to suck a gallon of fuel. The fastest thing the Japs had before the deal was a rickshaw going downhill in a rainstorm.”

“And you think they built it out of World War II Jeeps?”

Jackson ignored her question, again slamming his hand on the dusty, gray dashboard. “Look at the number they used! Two, four, zero. Add ’em up and what do you get? Six. Three digits, so six, three times. Goddamn six-six-six, the sign of the Devil. You think that’s just a coincidence?”

“That’s...”

“And in the dashboard of every one of those Jeeps was a radio, made in America, made with American technology.” He pointed to the dash-mounted Toshiba in front of them. “Where the hell do you think that came from? Christ, Clovy, a Japanese transistor radio back in the day didn’t last a whole summer, even *with* a box of fresh, American made nine-volt batteries.”

Jackson’s face reddened, the thick veins along his temples now engorged to the point of having shadows. The Chevy, closing in on one hundred miles an hour, straddled both northbound lanes, eating up the empty road ahead as though it owned it. In the passenger seat, Clovelia hunkered with one hand on the dash and the other wrapped securely in the handle over the door.

“We gave them the tools, the blueprints, and enough working models of our technological advances to jumpstart their economy in only sixty goddamn days. If it wasn’t for goddamn Nixon, everyone would be driving Chevys, Fords, and Chryslers, and the emblem on that radio would say GE or RCA, for Christ’s sake.” Rolling the window down, Jackson spit his gum into the slipstream and watched it in the mirror as it blasted backward, away from them. “If that wasn’t a deal with the freaking Devil, you can have my goddamn voter’s registration. I mean, look around the house. We’ve got Japanese hifi, Scandinavian furniture, French appliances in the kitchen, and Italian tile everywhere you walk. And my Black and Decker drill, my goddamn Black and Decker drill, is made in...” He paused to catch his breath before screaming the words at his wife, “Goddamn Japan!”

His tortured lungs now failing him, Jackson sputtered and slapped the center console, and for a few seconds Clovelia thought he was going to vapor-lock right there behind the wheel.

“Jackson! Stop the car!” She reached for the ignition but he brushed her away. “Jackson, pull over and get out. I’ll drive!”

“It’s... it’s... it’s not right, Clovy.” His chest heaved and with the exertion to breathe, he leaned even harder on the gas pedal; they were now at one hundred and five.

“What’s the difference?” Catching up to a red Toyota Corolla, he pointed to the silver trunk emblem. “And just look at the Toyota insignia. If that isn’t a head with horns, I’m a Republican.”

Clovelia leaned over and put the back of her hand against her husband’s forehead. “You do feel a little warm.”

Jackson slid the fan control over to high and turned on the air conditioner. “Nah, that’s just from sittin’ so close to you.” He turned and winked at her. Even with her seventieth birthday less than a month away, her face was as soft and radiant as it had been on her fortieth. Jackson blew her a kiss.

They drove in silence for few minutes, both facing straight ahead, still in the fast lane of the Turnpike. With his foot rather than his conscious mind in charge of acceleration, they’d crossed over ninety and were heading to ninety-five when she cleared her throat and looked at him.

“You in that much of a hurry?”

He relaxed the muscles in his pedal foot and let the Chevy slip under ninety. “You don’t believe me?” he asked.

“I’m not so sure you believe yourself.” Tapping the glovebox, Clovelia’s tone slipped into her now-I’m-serious voice, “Do you really think these numbers mean anything other than the fact that there are more Camrys on the road in South Florida than any other car?”

“That’s my point!” Jackson slapped the dashboard. “The damn Jap cars have taken over!”

“Fine, I’ll grant you that much. But Nixon?”

“Ah, there’s the crick in the old man’s knee. November 21st, 1969, ten months almost to the day he takes office, Nixon gives Okinawa back to the Japanese.”

“So?”

With a satisfied smile creasing his face, Jackson nodded knowingly. “Uncle Dishka was there. He saw it happen.”

“I’m all ears.” She blinked at him and folded her hands in her lap. “Pray, continue.”

“Thirty-five thousand Jeeps, crated, never driven, sitting in Quonset huts all those years protected from the elements. The finest American automotive technology ever developed. Nixon gave them the keys, the pink slip, and a full tank of gas for each one.” His voice took on an angry tone and with it, the speedometer again began a slow climb. “Sixty days later, only two lousy months, Datsun introduces the 240Z, a car that can blow the racing stripes off a Corvette. A goddamn Jap car that

glanced over at her. “Remember your first VCR? It wasn’t a Panasonic or a Sony, it was an RCA made right here in the goddamn USA. Did anyone ride a motorcycle other than a Harley? Other than Cubans and Canadians, who else but Americans played Major League Baseball?”

Clovelia’s face broke into a crooked grin, her eyebrows lifting to match the expression on her lips. “Okay, but now the connotation is quality. So what?”

“How did that happen? How did the country of rice, raw fish, and Godzilla turn into the most powerful automobile manufacturing nation on the face of the Earth?” Jackson opened the center console, took out a piece of bubblegum, and popped it into his mouth, slurring his speech, “An-shwer me dat.”

“For the love of God, did you really expect them to stay a third world nation forever?” She shook her head several times. “That’s what we civilized folk call ‘progress’. Everyone gets up off their knuckles eventually, Jackson. And anyhow, what does Nixon have to do with it?”

It took him another minute to soften the gum to where he could speak, but Jackson held a finger pointed in his wife’s direction until he could. “That pointy nose, the weird hair, that devilish smile...”

“Richard Nixon was the Devil?” Clovelia shuddered and crossed her arms over her chest. “*You* voted for him!”

Jackson nodded. “Twice. Bastard fooled all of us. But look what happened: January 20th, old eagle beak is sworn in. Ten days later The Beatles play their last concert together, forever, and during his term, Elvis visits the White House not once, but three times!”

“So Nixon liked Elvis better than the Beatles.” She frowned. “You’re not saying he was the cause of their breakup, are you?”

“Along with Yoko Ono who was...”

“...Japanese.” Clovelia pinched the bridge of her nose, slowly shaking her head from side to side, and moaned, “Oh, come on!”

“But that’s not the worst of it.” Clicking off the cruise control, Jackson pulled into the passing lane to get around a slow-moving Lexus. As they flew past the car, he nodded. “Think about the names of the Japanese cars for Christ’s sake. Lexus, for example, begins with an ‘L’ just like Lucifer. Honda and Hyundai with an ‘H’, as in Hell.”

“Hyundais are made in Korea.”

passenger side wheels in the right lane and the rest of the car in the left. Jackson cut around it, using the bicycle lane for clearance. “See that?” He cocked his head toward the other car.

Clovelia groaned as she spied the Toyota emblem on the front grill. “You want the book?”

“Nah, we’re coming up to the Turnpike ramp, I’ll add it later.”

Traffic, for a Thursday morning, was heavier than normal and of course, the lane he’d settled into seemed to be the slowest of the four. As they inched up to the toll plaza, Clovelia pointed to the Honda in front of them and asked, “So now we’re stuck behind a Honda, where’s that in your book?”

“Middle column on each page. The balance of Satan’s spawn.” He slid two quarters from the coin holder built into the Chevy’s center console. “What you fail to realize, my dear, is the deal the Japs made with the Devil.”

“The Devil?”

“Uh, huh.” Tossing the toll into the basket, Jackson rolled up the window and accelerated to just over eighty-five miles an hour.

Clovelia said nothing for a moment, but did tighten her seatbelt and close her window halfway. “The entire Japanese nation made a deal with the Devil?”

“January 20, 1969, over forty years ago.” He turned and said calmly, “The inauguration of the thirty-seventh president of the United States.”

“Nixon?”

“Richard Milhous himself.”

Now, she closed the window completely and leaned against the door, the anger building as she pursed her lips and asked, “Are you drinking again?”

Jackson set the cruise control and tilted his seat back one notch. “Christ, no. Come on, Clovy, a promise is a promise.” He blew out a long breath. “It took me a while to see this whole matrix of evils come together in my head, but with the data I’ve gathered so far this month, the proof is now obvious.”

“Obviously, obvious to you.”

“Look. Think back to when you were a teenager. What did the phrase ‘Made In Japan’ mean to you? Substandard, right? Something that wasn’t made very well and would probably break just when you were really getting to enjoy it.” Brushing several strands of gray hair back from his eyes, Jackson

“Look at the marks in the first column. Nobody is worse when it comes to ‘Sleepers’...”

“Sleepers?”

“Asleep at the wheel, ass-draggers, morons, idiots, call them whatever you like. Drivers who don’t watch the light to see it turns green. People who shouldn’t be on the road, at least while I’m on it. Anyhow, ten to one against the other Japanese cars and at least a hundred to one against all the other cars on the road.” Jackson closed the notebook and tossed it back into the glove compartment, lifting the door and slamming hard with the side of his fist. “That means, if you’re sitting behind a car and the light turns green and the shithead driving doesn’t move until you honk the horn, it’s almost a certainty that the offending car is a Toyota Camry.”

“And you’ve been keeping a record of this?” Clovelia whistled. “Your bookkeeper’s gene still kicking around in your skull?”

Jackson smiled and then nodded, his face taking on a more serious tone. “Since the first of the month, just out of curiosity. And mind you, it’s not just traffic lights.”

“Oh?”

“Almost any time you see a car plodding along in the left lane, screwing up traffic, it’s a Camry. See a car make a left turn from the right lane or a right from the left lane and eight out of ten times it’s a Camry.” He coughed several times, cranking the window back down again to spit before continuing. “The worst part is it’s not always senior citizens driving them. Nope. Young kids, moms with babies in car seats, executives too busy talking on their cellphones to be driving like normal people, for some reason they turn into idiots the minute they get behind the wheel of a Camry.”

“So your theory is that it’s the car and not the driver?”

“Bingo.”

Clovelia laughed and slid up in the seat, checking behind her to see the Post Office truck turn right. “Your Uncle Dishka drives a Camry and he...”

“...drove the damn thing into a Volvo in a parking lot and then ran over the foot of the cop who was writing the accident report.” Jackson shrugged. “How’s that for proof? He drove his Ford station wagon for twenty-one years before the engine gave out and the only body damage on that car was from rust. Put his shaky old ass in a Camry and he thinks he’s in a fighter jet.”

Ahead of them, a blue sedan with its license plate hanging by a single screw, was riding with its



## The Unified Camry Theory

by **Ricky Ginsburg**

The Toyota Camry in front of them, brake lights still glowing after the traffic light changed to green, finally crept forward into the intersection. Jackson, counting silently to himself, felt the bile rising in his throat with each mentally ticked digit. He'd make it to three, alright, but only because Clovelia was in the car. Slamming his fist on the horn, hissing the word "asshole", he called into damnation all the powers he could muster from the front seat of his Chevy.

Clovelia let him rant for a few seconds before she touched her husband's wrist with the tips of her fingers. "Enough, you're giving me a headache."

"Goddamn Japanese cars." Jackson spun his head to the right, not trusting the mirrors, and swerved into the curb lane, cutting off a Post Office truck. Swinging quickly back to the left, he spat out the open window, "Deliver the mail on your own time, asshole!" and cranked it closed. The Camry veered toward the center median before coming back on course, its right turn signal now blinking as Jackson's Chevy pulled in front.

"What the hell's gotten into you this morning?" Ducking lower in the seat to avoid what she was sure was a piercing stare from the driver behind them now, Clovelia shook her head slowly and rolled up her window. "That was my side, you know."

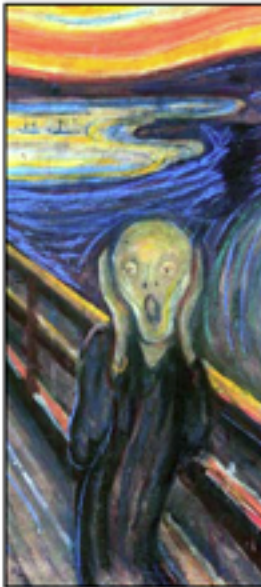
Jackson pursed his lips and blew her a kiss. "Sorry." Reaching over, he tapped the glovebox button and dropped the door open. "Hand me that notebook, willya?"

Clovelia pulled a small black memo pad from the depths of the compartment and handed it to her husband. "What's this?"

"My independent study of South Florida traffic problems." He laid the book on his knee and flipped it open, searching through several dog-eared pages until stopping at one with the word "LIGHTS" in capital letters at the top. Jackson took a ballpoint pen from his shirt pocket and made a tick mark in the leftmost of three columns on the page. "Camrys are the first column, all other Jap cars in the middle, and everything else on the right."

"Why Camrys?"

Coming soon to a cinema near you:



*Images:*

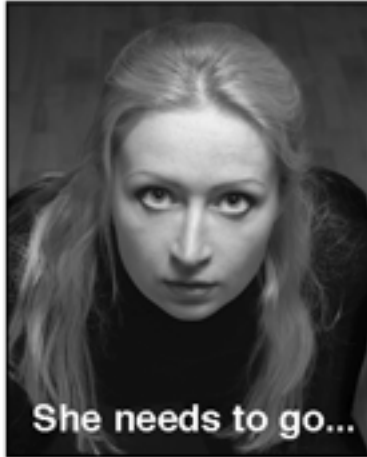
- Dreamstime
- Australia's AV heritage online
- ABC DigMusic
- Dunny pic: Manfred, Wiki

# A TOWN WITH ONLY ONE TOILET

( A Crapper Production )

PG

**ADVERTISEMENT**



**They  
all  
need  
to  
go...**





## April Fool

a poem by **Violet Magallanes**

You can be happy in Australia, as long as  
you don't go there.  
from *Oxfordshire* by Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa)

Walking along Regent's Canal we come across birds  
flopping around in a mesh enclosure, ibis I had seen  
before in Queensland, their curved beaks worrying  
my father's lawn for worms. Their flight alights in me  
the idea of running away together to Australia where  
we could start over, where loud miners and lorikeets  
would greet us from the gum trees on the river—  
its colour remarkably like the colour of this canal  
water. We walk on to Hampstead Heath taking in  
the hawthorne, the willows bowled over by their  
own beauty, and when you duck into a tube station  
I land in Maryabots as a choir performs St. John's  
Passion by candlelight. Just as Bach is about to  
bemuse me to the point of no return, the question  
of what to do with the pajamas I bought for my  
husband chases me out of the church.

Sam stared at me, rubbing his hands through his hair. “Jesus, Livy, you’re talking over forty-thousand dollars. You sure you’re ready for this?”

I smiled. “I’ve never been so sure of anything in my life,” I said and we kissed.

• • •

Sam pulled the website with forty-four thousand, two hundred and eighty four dollars in bids going unclaimed. It was a hard thing to let go of, but so was my virginity. Luckily, I got a check from my dad two days later for the full tuition cost. Apparently my mom had found out about what I was doing and called my dad, and gave him an earful. I guess Dad’s girlfriend’s new tits will have to wait.

So, as I said in the beginning, I’ve been trying to figure out if people are laughing with me or at me. I mean, I did give up a lot of money. But, I don’t care. It was worth it. And I’m sure some people are laughing with me because, through it all, I did find love, and that’s kind of funny considering the circumstances under which Sam and I met.

By the way, I got a letter last week from some producer in California who said he wanted to turn my story into one of those *Movies of the Week* you see on the Hallmark Channel. Can you believe it? I would never have to worry about tuition again.

I wonder if Dakota Fanning would be available?

I didn't say anything at first. "Do you think it's a good idea?"

Sam shrugged. "It is if you want to pay your tuition."

Did I?

He smiled. I hadn't noticed he had dimples earlier. "Come on. I'll take you to your car."

When we got to the pub, I turned to Sam. "Thanks for taking care of me last night," I said. "I don't usually drink like that."

"I hope not," Sam said. "You were pretty trashed."

I kissed his cheek, and stepped out of his car. "Thanks, Sam. See you around."

But, I knew I wouldn't.

• • •

The following two weeks flew by. My website received over one-hundred thousand hits and my virginity was up to forty-thousand dollars. I know, who'd have thunk it. I didn't see Sam again. But I thought about him. A lot, actually.

Why couldn't I get him out of my head? It was something he had said, about how life and not love had gotten in the way of his parents' relationship. I couldn't shake that thought. And then, just twenty minutes before the close of the auction to sell my virginity, it hit me. That was it. I was letting life get in the way of love. I didn't want to fuck some stranger for money like Yellow-Tooth, the prostitute on COPS. I wanted to wait for real love, no matter how fantastic or unattainable that ideal might be.

I drove to Sam's house and pounded on his front door.

"Hey, Livy," he said, opening the door, "is everything alright?"

"I want love!" I blurted out.

Sam stopped. "What?"

"I don't want life to get in the way," I said. "I don't want money for school to get in the way of what choices I make with love." I grabbed Sam's hands. "I don't want to sell to a stranger what I have saved all my life to give to someone I fall in love with. It doesn't matter what choices my parents made. You were right. I don't have to let life get in the way of love. I want you to shut down the website."

Where the hell was I?

I lifted my head like a newborn calf. My shoes and socks lay on the floor. Oh shit. It was starting to come back to me. I sat up on the edge of the bed. How the hell did I get so drunk? I checked to make sure I was dressed. Check, thank God. I followed the noise to the kitchen. Sam stood over the stove cooking.

“Hey,” Sam said. “Thought you could use a greasy breakfast.” A plate of bacon and eggs sat beside a tall glass of OJ on the kitchen bar. “Coffee?” he asked.

“God, yes,” I said.

I nibbled some bacon while he poured, enjoying the aroma of hazelnut before it hit my tongue. It was quiet for a moment while he watched me.

Finally, I blurted out, “Did we...”

“No,” he answered.

I nodded, sipping some orange juice.

“So, I worked on some ideas for your website last night,” he said grabbing his laptop. He sat it next to me and clicked some keys. “Look it over and let me know what you think.” He swiveled the laptop to face me.

In bold print the text scrolled across the top of the screen, ‘Virginity for Sale to the Highest Bidder’. He had listed my statistics and had added several flattering photos of me along with entertaining graphics.

“Where did you get these pictures?” I asked, feeling more like myself as the coffee replaced the beer in my bloodstream.

“From your Facebook page. It’s amazing how easy it is to access information on the web, yet people just post it like it’s their high school locker.”

“It looks good,” I said at a loss for words. I mean, really what do you say in a situation like that?

“I can have it up in five minutes. Then we just wait for hits.”

I rubbed my temples. Was I having a panic attack?

“You sure you’re ready for this?” Sam asked.

I thought about it for a few minutes. What else could I do? “Fuck it,” I said. “Let’s do it.”

Then, he did. I thought I was going to pass out. “Okay, it’s up,” Sam said, staring at me. “You alright?”



• • •

The pub was just off campus and we took separate cars. C'mon, I didn't want to come across as easy. After a few too many beers we were both talking with our guards down.

"It's not like I don't believe in love," I was saying through the accent of Corona and lime. "I just don't think it comes in that neat package that I have been saving myself for. I mean, what's the point in waiting for something and giving your life to it, only to have it ripped out from under you for some big-titted blonde who makes your Viagra worth taking?"

"Do your parents still love each other?"

"How the hell should I know? They were together since high school and then one day, it's over; the friendship, the relationship, the family. Over."

Sam placed his hand on mine. "It's not like that for everyone, Livy. My parents got divorced when I was in the tenth grade and I was devastated. I couldn't understand why they just couldn't get their shit together. After a while, I saw my mom smiling again and my dad and I started talking again, really talking. They were both happier." He took a drink. "What I realized is that although they were my parents, they were two people long before I came into the picture."

Sam moved his hand. "It wasn't love's fault that their marriage didn't work. It was life. They let it get in the way. But, I won't, and you don't have to either."

I nodded. He was wise for his age, or at least that's what my Corona was telling me. But either way, he was right. I slammed down my beer and stumbled off my stool. "I say yes, yes, to love!" Half the bar turned to look at me. Then I yelled out, "Anyone wanna fuck?"

And that's the last thing I remember.

• • •

I opened my eyes to lines of light piercing to the back of my skull. Pots and pans rattled somewhere in the house and I could smell bacon cooking which turned my stomach. My head pounded with each pulse and I moaned.



in? Guys kill themselves in religions with the promise of virgins waiting in heaven. What I got here is worth a lot of money.”

I watched as the car drove away and the COPS logo appeared on the screen. I had a lot of work to do.

The next day after class I detoured to the IT Department to find some kid looking for an extra credit assignment. I figured the best way to get out there was to create a website but I don't speak computer. I always thought the more bytes a computer had the more contagious it could be.

But, how do you approach someone with this sort of project? Can you candidly just say, “Hi, I'm Livy and I'm a virgin,” like I'm at an AA meeting? I jumped as a hand tapped my shoulder.

“Can I help you?”

I turned and stood face to face with a sandy-blond guy wearing horned rim glasses.

“Yeah,” I said, “I have a project I need some help with.”

“Sure,” he said, “come on over.” He walked to his desk like I was just another student looking for a website with flowery language and clever graphics. Well, sort of. There was a flower involved and it was definitely graphic in nature.

We sat at his cluttered desk and I noticed a collection of comic books on the bookshelf behind him. Surprise, surprise, a techy with a geeky side. The problem was that he actually wasn't a bad looking guy, which made what I was about to ask so much more difficult.

“I'm Sam,” he said. “What can I help you with?”

I leaned forward and lowered my voice. “Sam, I'm not sure how to say this so I'm just going to be direct.”

Sam leaned forward mimicking me. “Would it help if I whispered, too?” he asked. His eyes were dark blue. I had thought they were brown.

I explained the situation and what I was hoping to accomplish and sat back, giving Sam a moment to let it sink in. Sam pressed his lips together, opened his mouth, but then closed it again without saying anything.

“I knew this was a bad idea,” I said.

“I could use a beer. You?” he asked.

“Yes. Definitely.”

fuck. You'd be like that camel-riding IT guy in the desert reading a manual to help me figure out why my laptop keeps crashing. It's frustrating for the person on the other end of the line 'cause you don't know how to get the job done."

I rolled my eyes, knowing she was right. I would have to watch porn just to know which body parts we were talking about. I shook my head. "I can't believe my fucking dad did this to me."

"Sex is a powerful thing, Livy," Becca said.

"Maybe I can get his new girlfriend to do some phone sex to pay for school. It's the least she could do."

Becca turned on COPS. A woman who looked like she hadn't seen a shower in twelve years was attempting to talk with a Houston officer. Her teeth were yellow, the ones left anyway, and her hair was like moldy cotton candy. My mouth dropped. "She's being arrested for prostitution?"

"Hey," Becca said, "some people are desperate."

"I mean for Chris' sakes, someone was not only going to pay to fuck that, but they were willing to go to jail if they got caught."

"You know, Livy," Becca said, turning to face me, "you should sell your virginity."

I looked at her. "That's not a bad idea."

She laughed, exposing her pearly whites. "Get the fuck out of here. I'm totally joking."

"No," I said, "that's a great idea. I could auction my virginity like a toaster on ebay. It's brilliant."

"Livy, seriously..."

"Why the hell not? My goods are far more valuable than hers," I said pointing to the walking addiction stooping into the backseat of the cop car. "Anyone can do it, Becca. Of course, once a virgin does it, she's no longer a virgin."

Becca shook her head. "You're not joking."

"What else can I pull off in two weeks to pay for school short of prostitution? Or lap dancing? At least this way, I'm offering a real commodity for the highest bidder. Maybe someone will even make a movie about it. Dakota Fanning can play me in a few years."

"Livy, prostitution is illegal. You may not look like a crack whore but you're still selling your body."

"Who isn't, Becca? People fuck their way up to the top in every line of work. Why shouldn't I cash

## The Web We Weave

by **Jaimie M. Engle**

For two weeks now, I've been trying to figure out if people are laughing with me or at me. I'm a sophomore, and I've just run through my financial aid, which wouldn't be a problem, except my asshole father claimed me as a dependent to offset recent alimony payments to my mother. Maybe he's planning on buying his new girlfriend bigger tits with the deduction, because I'm not seeing a cent of it.

"How you gonna cover next semester?" my roommate Becca asked.

"Maybe I could donate blood," I said through the crunch of Doritos. "Nah, I'm too squeamish for that."

"Maybe you should sleep with the guy in financial aid and persuade him that you have good enough credentials to stay in school," Becca said. She was beautiful with dark features, athletic curves, and guys fell all over themselves to catch a glimpse.

"Maybe I'll cut your hair while you're sleeping and sell it to the cosmetology school for a wig," I replied.

"Go ahead," Becca said, bouncing into our kitchenette. "But be prepared to wake up without eyebrows."

I folded my feet under my lap and grabbed another handful of chips. "Maybe I can start a nine-hundred-number. Those girls make good money, don't they?"

Becca carried over two diet sodas, handing one to me. "Livy, you can't be a virgin and have phone sex."

Yes, I'm still a virgin. But don't think I'm diseased or completely disgusting looking. It was a choice I made in ninth grade. Believe me, I've had plenty of opportunities to change that choice. I'm pretty cute. I mean, not drop dead gorgeous like Becca, but not many girls are and they still get laid.

"But aren't those women like crippled housewives or single moms?" I asked. "I'm already ahead of the game in that case."

Becca glared at me. "They may be missing an arm or breastfeeding but at least they know how to

laughs? You, I'm talkin' to you. I'm pointing this .45 Magnum at you. Wanna die laughing? You. I mean you, the old timer looking at a picture of a genuine hottie. I got one question for you. Yeah. Just one."

## April Fools Winter Haikus

*by* **Dr. Mel Waldman**

Orange-gold leaves falling now  
In the winter of deceit  
April Fools

Turn the clocks ahead.  
The long days of winter are  
Here; it's March Madness

Winter wonderland,  
Come out, the prankster shouts. The  
Snowman melts in June.

Las Vegas desert  
Mirage, a snowstorm on a  
Dog day afternoon

I sip hot coffee  
By the fireplace in summer  
An old timer forgets.

## Old Strangers On A Train

by **Dr. Mel Waldman**

Two old strangers on a train start talking.

“Sinatra’s coming to town. He’s gonna sing *My Funny Valentine*. I’m taking my wife Rosie to this Lincoln Center concert on February 14th. Got the tickets in my pocket. Frank’s the greatest. Rosie absolutely adores Ol’ Blue Eyes. I’m gonna get lucky with my darling wife after the concert. Red wine, roses, a box of Godiva chocolates, and 3 Valentine’s cards. We’re gonna have great sex when we get home. Romance works every year. I smell hot sizzling sex in the air.”

“Well, that’s the way to do it, Jack,” the other stranger says, tapping his wooden cane. “But I got one question for you.”

“I know,” the stranger with the tickets boldly says. “You’re gonna ask me how I can be going to a Sinatra concert when the legendary singer’s been dead for years.”

“No, that’s not my question.”

“Well, spit it out. Shoot!”

The curious stranger takes out a large gun. It looks like a .45 Magnum, a Dirty Harry monster.

The old timer married to Rosie drops dead of a heart attack.

The stranger with the gun pulls the trigger and squirts water at the fresh corpse.

“I just wanted to know where you and your wife lived. But you died too soon. Haven’t had sex in years since my Nancy died. We were romantic too. Every year I bought a bottle of red wine, a bouquet of roses, a box of Godiva chocolates, the works. Thought I’d get lucky with your Rosie. But you dropped dead. I didn’t get Rosie’s address. Sorry, Jack, I didn’t mean to kill you.”

He laughs uproariously.

“Of course, I did. Confessions from a horny old man who misses hot sex more than his dead wife.”

The stranger taps the tune of *My Funny Valentine* with his wooden cane as the train arrives at Grand Central Station.

“April Fools Day. What kind of practical joke can I play today? Hey, Mack, wanna have a couple

## Sasquatch on Saturday Night

a poem by **Chryss Yost**

i.

The backwoods bar smelled pretty skunky.  
She was, she says, “a little drunk.” She  
leaned in close, said “Hey there, Monkey,  
you got those lonely Bigfoot blues?”

“Is it true what they say, “big feet, big\_\_\_\_?  
He gazed with puzzled, deep-set eyes  
as she ran her hand up his hairy thighs,  
to find out if the rumor was true

His legs felt like two wooly sheep.  
A Bigfoot is nothing if not discreet,  
yet there she was, reaching for his meat!  
What’s a lonely ape to do?

ii.

His hands, immense! His shoulders, huge!  
Sure he’d be one well-hung dude.  
Her reaction was nothing short of rude.  
She was clearly not amused.

*Bigfoot*, she scoffed, *I guess big shoes.*  
*So much for legends. Thanks for the booze.*  
She left Bigfoot alone in the booth  
with the lonely Bigfoot blues.

Yes, there’s more to a sasquatch,  
Then what’s in his crotch.  
that’s the lonely Bigfoot blues.

or so, his natural grip all but came back. They were all so engrossed with the stick that no one noticed that Tony was now standing behind them.

That's when the worst that can happen happened.

"The lucky stick," said Tony with a gentle pat to Walt's back catching him totally off guard.

Before anyone knew what had happened, Walt's reflexes kicked in, the stick went flying, and Tony's nose was once again sliding off his face.

Walt instantly dropped the stick and took off running out the front door. With no plan in sight he went to the only logical place he could think of. His old backyard. There, he climbed his favorite tree, and waited to die.

"If you don't stop staring at her nonstop," said Smiley, "Tony's going to finally notice."

"And if you haven't noticed yet," said Ray, "there's a hockey stick mounted over the bar."

Walt had to admit, he had been staring a lot. The one thing he hadn't noticed though was the hockey stick mounted over the bar. And after a moment Walt finally recognized the stick.

"Oh dear God," Walt said in complete shock. "That's my stick. The one I hit him in the face with."

"You're serious?" asked Ray.

"Positive. See the way the grip is wrapped? No one else ever did it that way."

Walt's heart quickly sank, and the river of sweat began to surface for yet another time.

"Got to be another stick," said Smiley. "There's no way that stick is still around."

That's when Walt noticed his name on the bottom side of the stick. It was then that he knew he was dead.

"Great stick," said Roxanne joining the chorus of stares. "Tony found it stashed in one of those storage cabinets that you had in your room. Way in the back under some old boxes."

"He's going to kill me?" he asked Roxanne in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Who? Tony?"

Walt nodded.

Roxanne laughed.

"So that's what that stick is." Roxanne finally said. "The famous nose stick."

Walt nodded again.

"I wouldn't worry about it," smiled Roxanne. "If it wasn't for that stick we never would have gotten married."

Walt's expression went blank.

"It was his nose," she said with a smile. "For some reason I was always a sucker for a ruined nose."

Walt directed his attention to the stick.

"You want to hold it?" asked Roxanne.

"Of course he does," said Ray.

"Go for it," said Smiley. "What's the worst that can happen?"

Roxanne handed Walt the stick. At first it was like holding a foreign object, but after a moment



“What can I get you?” Roxanne said once behind the bar.

“You work here?” asked a stunned Walt.

“I don’t seem to have any choice. I married the owner.”

How was that possible, Walt thought? She was the most stunning creature on planet Earth, while Tony was the stunning opposite.

“Which means she finally saw your bedroom,” said Ray with mock sarcasm.

”Shut up,” Walt said quickly. “You’re going to embarrass Roxanne.”

“No. I’m going to embarrass you.”

“Which judging by the color in his face, I think you already have,” said Smiley.

“Don’t let them kid you,” said Roxanne, handing Walt a beer. “I love your old room. Maybe you can come up and see it while you’re here.”

Walt removed his handkerchief and dried his forehead.

“You’d better stop there Roxie,” said Ray. “You’re going to give the poor man a heart attack.”

And a heart attack was the last thing Walt needed on top of his melanoma.

“I’ll talk to Tony,” said Roxanne. “See if I can get you in the old room.”

Walt took a long sip of beer and settled down. Maybe things would all work out, he reasoned. Surely Tony wasn’t going to kill him. At least he didn’t think so. Granted that could all change in an instant if he was alone in his old room with Roxanne. Although in retrospect even when he lived there, he’d never been alone in his room with a real girl. Imagined yes. And for the most part always Roxanne. But even God himself wasn’t going to let Walt have that great of a night.

After an hour or so of embarrassing Walt to the fullest extent of his patience, old classmates began to slowly filter in. Some they recognized, some they didn’t, and some looked so old and horrendous that the three of them didn’t want to recognize them even if they could. Walt didn’t look so bad, he thought to himself, even with the thing on his neck. And in an amazing stroke of luck, one of his old class mates, Andy Glickman, was missing half of his own neck no doubt due to his own melanoma. So even if someone noticed Walt’s neck, all he had to do was point to Andy’s, and the conversation would be diverted. He just wondered if he should tell Roxanne. That could be the one turning point that could get him into his old room with her. Not for the sake of getting her in there, but more for the sake of seeing it one last time. And this time with the girl of his younger dreams.

Walt did everything in his power to keep his cool. He wanted to see his old house more than anything, but he knew at this juncture it was best to play Tony's game rather than being too presumptuous. After all, he had but one chance, and it was a chance he didn't want to ruin by being overly eager.

"Can I buy a beer?" Walt finally asked.

"No need," said Tony. "I get them free. Just buy a lot of beer for other people, and maybe if you do, I'll let you see the house."

"That would be great," Walt said a tad quicker than he would've liked.

"I've got a few things to tend to before the party. So you guys just keep on spending money and we'll talk later."

Tony started back to where his massive form had arrived from, when he turned to Smiley. "And you quit smiling so much. I still get nightmares from all your smiling back in high school." And with that Tony was gone.

"It's no wonder I never liked him," said Smiley.

"Don't let him get to you," said Ray. "Once an ass, always an ass."

"Then why do you still have beers with him?" Walt asked.

"Simple," said Ray. "And here she comes now."

She was instantly recognizable to Walt. Even after all these years she looked the same. Her beauty, the perfect skin, the amazingly form-fitting sweater that screamed, "I'm stretched as far as I can go without bursting." She was the one girl in school that Walt was possessed with. Roxanne Burns. The epitome of hormonal splendor.

"Oh my God, she's magnificent," Walt said in a voice a tad louder than he wanted.

"Thanks," replied a smiling Roxanne.

"I'm sorry," Walt stammered.

"No need to apologize. You just got yourself a free beer out it."

"You remember Walt Egan," Ray said.

"How could I forget," said Roxanne. "He was my number one stalker back in high school. I never saw anyone un-tuck their shirt quicker when I was around."

The beads of sweat once again started to form, on Walt's entire body this time.

Smiley bellowed his slightly infectious laugh, slapped Walt on the back, which sent him into the bar, and then offered to buy him a beer.

“Still drinking the same?” Smiley asked.

“I hope not,” said Walt. “I’d like to think I’ve moved up from the dollar fifty a six-pack brand.”

“Well played. A hefty domestic it is then.”

Smiley ordered a round of beer for the three of them, and that’s when Tony McMahon entered from the kitchen. Walt was the first one to notice him, and unfortunately he’d changed for the worse. He was now nine feet tall, had muscles on top of muscles, and the most tattoos Walt had ever seen on a human being’s arms. Luckily he’s wearing pants, Walt thought, or he’d no doubt be showing off the bevy he must of had down there as well.

“If it isn’t Mr Hockey Stick,” Tony said in a deep, serious sounding voice the moment he saw Walt.

Walt took a long pull from his beer, and once again felt the beads of sweat beginning to form on not only his forehead, but also on the flabby crevice just above his almost sixty year old buttocks. He then thought about running away, but realized he had nowhere to run.

“Don’t worry,” said Tony walking over. “Just wanted to see the reaction. And to honest, it was better than I expected.”

“You’re huge,” said Walt shaking Tony’s hand.

“I decided in college huge works better with the shape of my nose.”

“Still sorry about that,” Walt meekly replied. Maybe if he told him he was dying of cancer, Tony wouldn’t look at him as if he was about to rip off his head and eat it.

“All in the past,” said Tony, “and besides, I’m sleeping in your old room these days. Kind of payback enough if you ask me.”

Walt had loved his room. It was a converted attic that his parents had completely redone his junior year in high school. They added a dormer, drywall, and brand new carpet. It was the exact opposite of Brock’s attic room. They were the ying and yang of party bedrooms back in the day, and unlike Brock’s room, Walt kept his fresh. Not so much out of pride, but more out of fear his parents would find out people had been in it.

“I even put a skylight in the room,” Tony beamed with pride. “Right over where the bed is. On a clear night, you can see everything.”

result in a serious fire code violation. And that was not how he planned on dying. In an imaginary inferno that would render his possible melanoma a mute point.

"I don't recognize anyone," Walt said.

"And I doubt anyone would recognize you as well. We're early. No one should be here for another hour. We're on the set-up committee. I forgot to mention that."

"Where's the rest of the committee, then?"

"We're it. It's just a few tables and some chairs in the back room. The bar's taking care of the rest once we're done."

"Why couldn't the bar do a few tables and chairs themselves? It can't be that hard."

"That's another thing I forgot to tell you. Tony McMahon owns the place. He likes to think he's cutting a good deal. Made booking up the place up a tad easier if I volunteered the muscle."

"So he hasn't really changed all the much then is what you're saying?"

"If you mean is he still mostly an ass? Of course he is. But he did cut me a pretty good deal. Even if our muscle is nothing but flab."

Walt nodded with a laugh, and then they headed to the back to flex their flab. Once the tables and chairs were in order, Ray motioned for Walt to follow him back into the bar area. There, with a huge smile on his face, was a face Walt could almost recognize. And after the smile got bigger it was all but obvious Smiley had arrived.

"You son of bitch," Smiley said reaching out his hand.

"You're looking well," Walt lied.

Smiley was close to three million pounds, and had more chins than Walt and Ray combined.

"Nice lie," laughed Smiley. "The last time I looked well was the mid-nineties. That was the last time I could take a leak without lifting my stomach to find it."

Walt almost asked him, to find what? But luckily his senses kicked in. That was one habit he'd always had around Smiley. If it was a stupid question, Walt had a habit of asking it, and then the second it came out, only then did he realize the immensity of his idiocy.

"You almost asked about it, didn't you?" said Smiley.

Walt felt the sweat beads begin to form on his forehead.

"Of course not," lied Walt. "I'm just glad it was still there."

It was their senior year, right after New Year's. Brock went into the hospital with a 104 fever, and never came back. One of those heartbreaking moments when you realize that you're not invincible. That even 17 can be the end for some. But to see the room again in all its glory brought back memories of some of the greatest parties Walt had ever been to. And all because of that attic room with Brock.

"You might want to start getting ready," said Ray. "We're supposed to be at the Inn by five for happy hour."

"Sounds great," said Walt, still taking in the room.

"I'll be downstairs. You know where everything is up here, so make yourself at home."

"I will. Thanks."

Ray nodded and went down the stairs.

Walt took his suitcase over to the bed and started to unpack. It just seemed surreal to him to be back in a world that hadn't changed. He tried to absorb as much of it as he could, because he knew it wouldn't last. That was one thing he hated about growing old, his long term memory was still rather good, but his short term was about half that, which made no sense. That and Walt had suffered a divorce some years back. But what are you going to do? he thought. So he took a deep breath, changed into his only suit, and went downstairs to face the inevitable evening of pending disaster.

The Inn was but a five minute drive from the house, in the heart of downtown, a beautiful two block strip that had everything one could ever want. Grocery Store. Pharmacy. Chinese restaurant. Italian restaurant. Shoe repair store. Two gas stations, one on each end. A Sweet Shop. And a Five and Dime store, amongst others. It was the perfection of small town life. A fact Walt hadn't realized until they parked in front of the Inn.

"Are you ready?" Ray asked as they stepped out of the car.

"I think so." Walt adjusted his tie and collar. He didn't want anyone to see his melanoma, and he also didn't want his collar so tight that melanoma might grow in size due to some odd choke hold move that his shirt might put on it.

"After you," said Ray, ushering Walt in the front door.

The lighting was dim, the music low, and Walt couldn't imagine how an entire class was going to fit into this place. At most eighty to ninety people would be the limit. Any more, he reasoned, would

past came back. And in such vivid detail that it was as if he was living them again. It was wonderful.

"That's Smother's old house," Walt said as they drove on by.

"He died a few years back if you didn't know. Some kind of cancer from what I heard."

Walt's stomach grew tight. Smothers was the epitome of health growing up. He was one of those muscle-ridden athletes that never got sick, could out drink anyone, and still feel great the next day, and had such amazing hair that it wasn't possible for him to die. It was all in the follicles, he liked to say.

He thought about telling Ray about his melanoma, but then knew it best to keep it to himself at this point. Why spoil a good time for others when you were almost having a good time yourself?

"Here we are," said Ray pulling into his driveway.

Walt was stunned. It was his friend Brock's house growing up. Four stories, on a lake, with immense landscaping. It was becoming rather apparent that Ray calling him was for more than a reunion.

"I'll be damned," said Walt.

"You'll be damned even more when I tell you: you get to sleep in the attic."

The attic. The attic was one of those places that went on forever. In one end there was the equivalent of a living room. In the middle a ping pong table and pool table. At the far end another living room area. Then off in the small L shaped area was a single, twin sized bed. Walt was amazed when he saw the room again, it looked exactly the same. Ray had duplicated it to perfection. It was a thing of beauty.

"What do you think?"

"I'm in awe," Walt said. "It's like it never changed."

"When I bought the house from Brock's parents, I made sure this all came along with it."

So that was why it was so perfect. It was the originals. There were stains on the carpets. Holes in the odd wall. Even cigarette burns on a few of the chairs that Walt had witnessed the original burn. It was like going back in a time machine to teenage perfection.

"Brock would have loved this."

"Couldn't think of a more fitting tribute," Ray said, a slight quiver in his voice.

"I still remember that night."

“I can do you one better. I know who owns it now.”

“You’re kidding me?”

Ray nodded and smiled. “You remember Tony McMahon?”

“Of course I do. We hated each other’s guts.”

“Then you might want to make up with him real quick. He bought it a few years back.”

Now that was something Walt hadn’t expected. To not only see the old house, but to have the chance to go through it changed Walt’s entire outlook completely. He smiled. It was the first real smile he could remember since he knew he was dying. To be inside again would be like having his parents back. The memories were that strong. He was sure it was completely different on the inside and out, but to see where he grew up just one more time, was an unexpected pleasure he hadn’t counted on.

“You think you can get us in?”

“Tony and I have a beer now and again at the Inn, so I think I can. Granted that’s if you don’t bring up that thing with the hockey stick.”

The hockey stick. Walt had forgotten about that. Seventh grade hockey. Friday mornings before school. Championship game. Tony had slashed Walt across the shins on his game-winning goal in overtime, which in turn caused Walt to break Tony’s nose with an accidental slash across the face.

“It was an accident,” said Walt. “Someone slashes you in the shins and then before you know it your reflexes take over.”

“The accident with him wasn’t the issue. It was the you standing over him laughing that pissed him off.”

“He was an ass, what can I say.”

“Just don’t bring it up,” said Ray. “And he likes beer, so buy him a few tonight when we get to the Inn.”

Suddenly Walt felt ready for a reunion.

The rest of the ride was spent on small talk. They reminisced, lied about life stories, and once even had a minor laugh. Maybe this wouldn’t be all that bad after all, Walt thought. Sure Ray’s an ass, but even after all the years, he missed him to a degree. That was the one thing he hadn’t counted on when he came back. The memories. It was like a trap door in his mind had opened and every event of Walt’s

Walt thought for a moment before answering. Surely there had to be some way out of this.

"I hate to impose," he finally said.

"Impose nothing. It'll be just like the old days."

That's what Walt feared. The old days for the most part were awful. Everything that could go wrong usually did go wrong. It was one of those mysteries that was no doubt grandfathered in, just waiting for the next opportunity to mock them.

"So it's settled," Ray said. "See you in a week from Saturday. I'll pick you up at the airport. You can email me all the particulars."

Walt took down Ray's information, and then felt an incredible urge to jump off the roof of his house, and he would have if he didn't have a debilitating fear of heights.

• • •

When the day of reckoning arrived, Walt was certain he was coming down with something to accompany his melanoma. His head throbbed, his stomach was a butterfly farm, and his feet swelled up just enough to make his loafers a tad uncomfortable. Kaye informed him that it was nothing more than his imagined fear of separation anxiety, and dropped him at the airport. His right loafer split open just as she pulled away.

Five hours later he was in Ray's car, heading north on the Garden State Parkway.

"If I didn't look so bad myself," Ray said, "I'd tell you how crappy you look." Then he let out one of those laughs that made you want to crawl into the glove department and stay there until you died in a massive car crash with one of those movie type explosions.

"Thanks," was all Walt could respond with.

Ray smiled, with what appeared to be sarcastic evil, and they drove on without any words exchanging. Walt took in the scenery. The smoke stacks. The shipping yards. The smog. It was all coming back to him. His entire youth was surrounded by this. And for the first time in years, he had to admit, he missed it. Even the smell brought back memories of his youth. It had been nearly thirty-five years since he'd been back, but in an odd way it was still his home.

"Do you think we can go by the old house?" Walt asked.



Now he remembered why Ray and he were only sort of friends. Ray was an ass. But he was also older, which back in the day meant only one thing. Ray was the first to turn eighteen. Ray could therefore buy beer.

“I see you haven’t changed over the years,” said Walt without feeling. “Same old rascal.”

“And I can still buy you beer. Let’s not forget that.”

Walt took a deep breath and hoped that Death might take him immediately.

“I’ll bet you’re wondering why I called?” asked Ray. “Well wonder no more.”

Fabulous, Walt thought. I’m dying and yet that’s not punishment enough.

“I have one word for you,” Ray said, “reunion.”

“Not you and I?” Walt replied a little too hastily.

“Of course you and I. Along with the rest of our class if you can still stand any of them.”

“So you’re talking class reunion then?”

“Well you and I could just have one, but we’d no doubt bore each other to death in no time,” Ray said with a comical tone that Walt found rather annoying.

“Forty years huh?”

“Forty on the nose.”

Walt paused for a moment, trying to think of any avenue that might give him cause to refuse this invite, but unfortunately thinking on his feet wasn’t one of his strong suits.

“I suppose I have to say yes,” Walt finally responded.

“Not only do you have to say yes, but I’m going to go out on a limb here. I’m going to let you stay at my house.”

Walt dropped the phone.

“Speechless,” continued Ray. “I thought as much. Didn’t think I was that generous, did you?”

Walt picked the phone up. “Could you please repeat that last part? I seemed to have dropped the phone.”

“I said you can bunk at my house. It’ll save you a fortune on a hotel. No need to thank me. Just remember, first ten beers are on you.”

“I don’t know what to say,” Walt said slowly.

“Nothing to say. It’s a done deal. The wife’s dead, so I’ve got plenty of room.”

Walt gave her a quick peck on the cheek, and then headed downstairs to the one phone that was still living. On his way he began to think if he even knew a Ray. Certainly he must or one wouldn't be calling. But then again it was possible that this Ray was merely selling something. Possibly time shares, or maybe some form of generic ointment for those with moderate to severe afflictions. The only Ray Walt could truly remember was his sort of friend from high school, but that was forty years ago. So that Ray calling now didn't make a lot of sense, although little made sense to Walt at this point. Why was he facing his own death? Where along the lines of life had he failed? Was he saying all this out loud, and if he was, could Kaye hear him? All valid questions, he thought as he answered the phone.

"Hello."

"Walt? Walt Egan?"

"Speaking."

"You have any idea how hard you were to track down? I'll bet I called thirty people looking for you. Twenty didn't remember you, and a few others thought you were dead. But then I talked to old Smiley, and I'll be damned if he didn't know where to find you."

Smiley? Now that was a name Walt hadn't heard it in years. They were best friends through high school and roommates in college. The last he'd heard from him was a Christmas card about ten years back from some foreign place like Iceland or Wyoming. One of those cold places was all he could remember.

"Ray," Walt slowly said. "Ray Chandler?"

"The one and only. How in the hell are you?"

*Dying is what he wanted to say. I have this cancerous growth on my neck that's slowly killing me. My only chance of survival is for the doctors to amputate half my neck or better yet my head.*

"Fine," Walt said instead.

"Walt Egan. I still can't believe I found you."

"I'm in the phone book," Walt joked.

"The phone book wasn't the problem. The problem was which phone book. I had no clue what state you lived in. I even tried to find you on the internet, but apparently you haven't done much with your life, because I couldn't even find you there either."

## Home Is Where Someone Else Lives Now

by **Greg Freier**

Walt had a melanoma on his neck. Or at least he thought he did anyway. It was on one of those spots that was located just out of the reach of comfortable vision when one looked into the mirror. The kind of spot that was located in just such a place that when you tried to see it, you tended to pull a muscle in your neck thereby causing a newer, fresher pain. And pain was not Walt's forté.

He thought about telling his wife Kaye, but he knew if he did, she'd want him to see a doctor, which to Walt was out of the question. I mean, what if he did really did have a melanoma? He certainly didn't want to know for sure. The mere thought that he might was stressful enough. He couldn't even imagine what he'd do if he was completely positive that he did in fact have one. To think one is dying is one thing. But to actually know is something completely different. So Walt did what he normally did. He went on with his life, but with the almost certain knowledge that he was dying.

"I've been calling you," said Kaye when she entered the bedroom.

Walt was sitting on the edge of the bed gingerly touching his neck. "I'm sorry. I'm a bit occupied this morning."

"There's a phone call."

"Did you bring the phone?"

"You'll have to use the one in the kitchen. The cordless is dead apparently."

Walt's eyes began to mist when he heard that the cordless was dead. How symbolic, he thought. A dead phone now, and soon a dead me.

"Are you okay?" Kaye asked while walking to the bed.

"I'm fine," Walt replied. "Just thinking about the poor cordless..."

"Nothing to think about. It'll be charged and good as new in few hours."

Walt nodded, and thought how lucky it must be to be a phone. You die, and then a few hours later you're back to your normal inanimate state.

"Someone named Ray," said Kaye, "on the phone that is."



## Brain No Good

*a poem by* **Andrew. G Bennett**

My brain has been destroyed by the long ravages of time  
If I had have been born deaf, I would've forgotten how to sign

It's two thousand and something but I've forgotten just what year  
My best friend could easily die and I would forget to shed a tear

The world could explode into flames but I'd still turn up at work  
And it would probably be at a previous job, not my current perk

When I gently kiss my wife goodnight she tells me it's still morning  
And I always change to go to bed at the same time the day is dawning

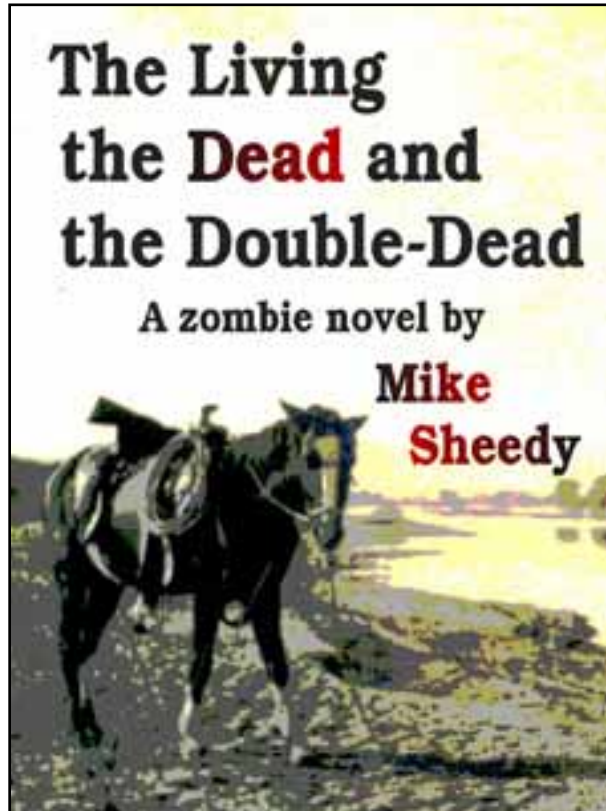
I can't remember world happenings and so I'm always quite contented  
I'd turn on the TV to watch the news, but I've forgotten it was invented

I think that I used to like oysters but it may well have just been scotch  
I would never drink before 5 pm, if I could remember to bring a watch

It's because that I never remember that I cannot be called a liar  
I'd like to have breakfast in bed but the stove sets the bed on fire

And so if I fail to speak to you, please don't hold me to blame  
I've just confused you with someone else, you know... 'What's-his-name'

**REAL ADVERTISEMENT**



‘The Living, the Dead, and the Double-Dead’ by Mike Sheedy  
is available online from Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

I bit my lip to keep from smiling, then I kept biting to make it look like I was upset. I wrung my hands and said, "Well, there's no need to... I don't know..."

The man watched and grinned. He liked seeing me squirm.

I bit a thumbnail, faked a tic under my eye and said, "Well... you *promise* you'll put him down quick?"

"One shot, right through the beaner."

"One shot?"

"Yep. Can't afford more than one. Cartridges are hard to come by."

I pretended to give the matter some more thought but I didn't take long. Limey was getting closer and the bear might show up again at any moment.

"Okay. I guess it's a deal."

I went to my horse and mounted. The man sputtered when he saw I was about to leave.

"Wait a minute. The deal's for the zombie *and* the jerky."

"No," I said, biting off a chunk of meat. "I won't throw in the jerky."

"Then I'll do like I said. I'll ruin your reputation."

"You mean you'll tell people about this deal?"

"Sure will."

"Okay, but when you do, be sure to tell the *whole* story."

I rode off and caught up with my herd around the next bend. A couple of minutes later I heard gunfire behind me. Either the bear showed up at the man's house, or it took eight shots to put Limey down.

*The above story is an excerpt from a novel called,  
'The Living, the Dead, and the Double-Dead' by Mike Sheedy.  
Available online from Amazon and Barnes & Noble.*

“*There* you go,” he smiled. “*That’s* how it works. The ol’ give and take.”

I went to my packhorse and dug through one saddlebag, then the other, stalling for time. “There’s some jerky in here somewhere.” I stalled until I saw Limey come lurching around the bend in the road. He was angled back at the waist, smiling up at the sky, and he was missing one of the arms that had been whipping around the last time I saw him. The bear had been at him again. The bear wasn’t trailing him, though, and I figured he was off-loading some bad meat in the woods.

When I saw Limey, I closed the saddlebag, pointed at him with a strip of jerky and said, “Good. There he is.”

The man looked down the road. He squinted, then he laughed and said, “*Damn!* That one’s got a *major* hitch in his gitalong!” He slapped his knee and laughed some more. “I’ve never *seen* a sorrier piece of zombie flesh!”

I acted offended. “Don’t make fun of him. He means more to me than the whole rest of the herd put together. I hate it that he’s torn up like that.”

The man saw a chance to do some trading. He went serious and did what he could to put an understanding look on his face.

“I know how it feels to see one of ’em you like in that shape, mister. I can take care of him for you. I mean, I can put him out of his misery.”

I sniffled. “Please don’t joke with me.”

“I ain’t joking. Honest.”

“So you’d... you’d put him down for me?”

“Sure. Be glad to. You give me that jerky and the zombie, and we’ll call it even on the water.”

I pretended to have doubts. “Well, I don’t know. He’s been with me a long time, and I’d hate to lose him.”

The man turned hard, driving home the deal.

“Look, you either do like I say, or I’ll ruin your reputation.”

That caught me by surprise. “Ruin my reputation? How would you do that?”

“I know people all up and down the way along here, and lots of folks stop in for water and to have their shoes mended. I’ll tell them about you. I’ll tell them what you look like and say you welshed on a deal.”

I thought I saw where he was going with his talk about trade. He wanted something in exchange for me using his water.

He lifted his chin toward my herd.

“Looks like you’re on your way to do some bidness.”

“Going to San Francisco.”

He shook his head. “That’s a long piece. I don’t think all them zombies are gonna make it.”

“I expect to lose a few along the way.”

Thinking of losing zombies made me remember Limey. I looked back but didn’t see him coming around the bend yet. I wondered if the bear had finally finished him off.

The man lifted his rifle and aimed at my herd. The lead zombies were starting around the next bend in the road. “I ain’t gonna shoot,” he said. “Just want to get a better look through my scope.”

He studied the zombies, then he lowered the gun and said, “I’m thinking you oughta give me something for the water you and your horses used.”

I’d been right about him wanting to trade.

“We didn’t bathe in it. We just drank.”

“Still, what’s fair is fair. And it looks like you got enough zombies so’s you could spare one.”

“Well, like you said, they won’t all make it to Frisco, so I need to hold on to them. Besides, you should have a sign on your trough if you’re going to charge for water.”

“Oh, really? You telling me how to run my bidness?”

The man was beginning to get on my nerves.

“That’s not business. It’s robbery.”

He lifted his rifle and cradled it in his arm so it was aimed in my general direction. My gun hand was still hanging beside my holster.

“You shouldn’t insult me like that,” he said. I waited for him to make his move, but he didn’t, lucky for him. He relaxed a little and said, “Maybe you don’t like the way I trade, but I deserve *something* for the water you and your horses drunk. If you ain’t gonna give me a zombie, I’ll take some food.”

He deserved something, all right, and an idea popped into my head.

“Okay. Let me see what I can do.”



business shingles were nailed to the front door—"Sawblades Sharpened," "Shoes Mended," "Cremations."

No one answered my call, so I hollered again. I still got no answer, and there was no activity that I could see, so I swung down from my saddle and led my horse to the near side of the water trough. I led the packhorse to the other side, then I pumped a fresh stream of water for myself and we all drank.

I was hanging my full canteen on my saddle horn when a man appeared from behind the house. He carried an old carbine with a scope and what looked like a ten-shot clip. I faced him and let my gun hand hang down beside my revolver in its holster.

The man was skinny, dirty and shifty-looking. He walked toward me but stopped about ten feet away.

"Howdy," I said. "Hope you don't mind me using your water."

"Not at all."

He looked at my horses and then turned his attention to my zombies. It wouldn't take me long to catch up with them when I was done, so I decided to pass a little time talking to the man. I gestured to the shingles on his door.

"Looks like you keep busy, with the saws and shoes and such."

"Not much of that. Mostly cremations. That's what I was doing around back just now, raking over some ashes."

"You cremate so they don't come back zombie?"

"Yep. Folks don't like to burn their own, so I do a decent trade in that." He smiled. "Have a little fun at it, too."

"Fun?"

"Sure. They're dead, so there ain't no rules on whether they got to be killed again before the burning."

I come across his type every once in a while—they don't just destroy zombies, they enjoy doing it. No one likes to be around people like that.

"Well," I said, "I guess I'll be moving on."

He acted like he hadn't heard. "Yessir, I do a decent *trade* in cremations."

that the cut butt cheek was gone and the bear was licking his lips. I uncurled my whip and cracked it above the herd.

We picked up our pace a bit. I looked back pretty often and was pleased to see Limey falling farther behind. I was even more pleased when I saw the bear leave the road and trot off into the woods. He moved fast, and bowlegged, and I figured the bad meat was having an effect on him. He was on his way to do what wild bears do in the woods.

The herd plodded along for a while, and I looked back a couple of times, then I got busy with other things and when I took my next look the bear had returned. He was nosing along behind Limey again, and Limey was in even worse shape than before. Something about butt meat must have appealed to the bear because *both* Limey's haunches were gone. He no longer had an ass, and with the support of his butt muscles taken away his body was tilted back about thirty degrees from the hip. But he was still plowing ahead gamely, smiling at the sky, his arms dangling from his shoulders.

I kept cracking my whip from time to time, to move the herd along, but I also kept a close eye on what was happening behind me. I knew that nature would probably be calling on the bear again, and I wanted to be ready when it did.

My chance came before long. The bear trotted off to the woods and I rode back, drew my samurai sword and cut one of Limey's Achilles tendons. I thought about cutting both, but if I dropped him where he was the bear might make a quick meal of him and come after my other zombies. So I just cut the one heel and then rode back to the herd.

Limey continued to move forward after I cut the tendon, but he was slowed down considerably and I knew he'd never catch the herd. I started into a bend and when I glanced back for one last look he was a pitiful sight. He was angled back and smiling at the sky, and his arms were flailing like crazy with each lurching step.

I lost sight of him and pushed on around two or three more curves, and I'd forgotten about him by the time an old clapboard house came into view. It was a termite chew away from falling down and its front yard was full of clutter. My zombies shuffled past the place, toward the next bend in the road, but when I came to it I reined to a stop. Among the piles of junk and cordwood in the yard I saw a horse trough with a hand pump at one end. The trough was full of water.

I called out a hello and studied the house while I waited for an answer. Some hand-painted

**Novel Excerpt****Limey and the Bear***by* **Mike Sheedy**

Four of my zombies shook off their hobbles during the night, so after I finished eating and shaving I set out to round them up. I went on foot, because the herd was in a small field and I knew the strays couldn't have gone far in the surrounding trees.

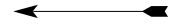
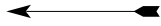
I found three of the zombies a few yards into the trees and led them back to join the rest, then I went looking for the fourth. It took awhile but I finally found him deeper into the woods, and when I saw him I got a hell of a shock—a bear was standing in front of him and eating his guts.

The zombie was Limey, one that got gored by an elk early on in the drive. I'd wrapped some cloth around his midsection but the bear had chewed through it and was nibbling on the intestines that hung like a string of sausages out of the lime green jumpsuit. Limey just stood there smiling and scratching his ass.

There's something about zombie meat that doesn't agree with animals, so they hardly ever eat it, but for some reason the bear was attracted to Limey. That was fine with me because he was occupied and didn't see me through the trees. I sneaked away and saddled my two horses. After kicking a dozen butts to get things moving, I drove the herd out of the field and back onto the trail.

I was traveling along an old county road that was cracked but level, and the herd was walking at a pretty good clip. The morning sun always freshens zombies and puts a spring in their step. So I was making good time, and I got about a mile down the road when I thought to check on my packhorse. I'd loaded him in a hurry and wanted to make sure everything was still in place, so I looked back. And I got another big surprise. Limey was about a hundred yards behind me. Not only that, but the bear was behind him.

Limey had been limping ever since I accidentally cut one of his haunches with my bullwhip, but when I saw him following me he was limping even more than usual. I wondered why, and then I saw



professionals could use with people who don't trust words. Studying my reflection, I pull back the corners of my mouth and alter the tone. 'Crick-crick-crick.' *Everyone's* heard of *Morse* code. What if they named a code after me? It might be possible to trigger a communication breakthrough with Moira. Maybe even as soon as tomorrow. What would they write on my probation report then?

I screw up my face. 'Crack-crack-crack.'

'Farrrrrrrrrrrrrk!' yells Sophie from the bedroom. I close the door and continue.

‘Wow, thanks for that, Stan,’ I shout. ‘So, how...’

‘Previous job in a plant nursery. Used to read all those little plastic things stuck in the soil beside the plants. Photographic memory,’ he says.

‘Lucky,’ I shout.

He shrugs, and calls, ‘Did me no harm at exam time as a kid.’

Stan drives up and down the marina, loops around the headland, then cruises past the two local lookouts, and for the entire sixty minutes the loonies act pretty much like regular ladies on a regular bus.

It’s almost noon and so far I have nothing to report to Danny. We crawl back through the gate and pull into the parking bay, and everyone besides Moira files forward and steps off the bus. I lean down and whisper, ‘You were spot on about Sharon. She is a flibberty jibbet.’ She doesn’t look at me but I think she’s pleased because she makes three rapid croaking sounds, then follows me off the bus.

• • •

It’s late. I’m cleaning my teeth and contemplating Moira’s unusual sounds. Retracting my tongue, I work on creating a vacuum, then rhythmically suck and release the muscles at the back of my throat. Suck, release, croak. The technique comes easily. I saw a documentary once about some remote tribe in some jungle that made this type of noise instead of talking. Or maybe it was Eskimos. I do a few rapid sets of three.

Fresh-mint foam drips from my chin as I practise in front of the mirror. ‘Croak-croak-croak.’ I decide to try out a couple of sets on Moira tomorrow. Then Sophie appears in the doorway.

‘What the fuck?’

‘I think this croaking thing is how Moira tries to communicate. Listen: croak-croak-croak.’

‘You sound like that God-damned frog that gets up inside the drain-pipe when it rains. Fuck,’ she says, and walks away.

I don’t think Sophie understands. I don’t think she’s had any experience with loonies. I’ve got them in my extended family but no-one that’s bitten off anyone’s cock or anything.

I imagine inventing a code using croaks—an alternative to regular language that mental health

• • •

A sweet-faced nurse named Leah is helping me guide ten loonies up the steps of the mini-bus. For my one hour morning session I've organised a tour of the local beaches via the ice-cream parlour. Sharon won't be joining us. I saw her earlier in the dining room and she looked pretty zoned-out. With the last one on board I go to climb up myself but our driver, Stan, steps across and blocks my entry.

'Frank, my man,' he says, 'Before I can let you board this bus I've got orders from management to check you're not concealing any chocolate on your person, what with all these fine looking ladies at your disposal—a couple have no teeth to get in the way.' He punches my arm and cracks a thunderous belly-laugh as he swings around and drops into the driver's seat.

Moira's seated directly behind him. She presses her hands over her ears and scooches across to the window. I don't know about Stan. With his woolly neck and his green sweat-band he looks more like a tree hugger than a bus driver.

Me and Leah get everyone belted in and the bus heads out through the electronic gate. Leah's in the aisle seat across from me at the back, and after we've turned onto the highway she leans across and whispers that she's heard about Sharon's crush and that the same thing happened a couple of months back with a new male psych nurse and he ended up requesting a transfer.

'Ask for access to Sharon's case history,' she says. 'Don't let her get to you. Her behaviour might seem challenging but when you read about her father starving her then feeding her candy bars in return for sex, well, I would've bitten it off too.'

'Jesus Christ,' I say.

Stan parks the bus then helps Leah supervise while I go to buy the ice-cream cones. I return a short time later carrying two overloaded cardboard trays. Once we're on our way again I try to spark some conversation about the attractive coastal scenery. 'Who can tell me what kind of palm trees they are?' I ask. Silence. 'Anyone?'

Stan clears his throat and yells, 'Phoenix Dactylifera. Otherwise known as the date palm. One of around fifteen hundred species. A hardy, salt-water-tolerant variety producing delicious fruits two or three times a year.'

I hand him yesterday's incident report and admit I'm really worried because here I am again and it's only my second week. 'More rumours?' he says. I explain about Sharon flashing and Moira saying flibberty jibbet and how that led to an ugly scuffle. 'Moira actually spoke?' he says, and I'm relieved that he's more interested in this than anything I did or didn't do. He tells me not to worry about Sharon. 'Crushes on staff are common in the women's blocks. Good looking young man like you turns up, who could blame them?' And just as I think I see him wink again we hear the beeps of a message on his mobile. 'Grab a seat will you Frank? I'll just be a minute,' he says, so I drop into the black vinyl chair opposite. He retrieves the phone from his trouser pocket and holds it low on his lap.

High on the wall behind him is a framed photo of several bare-chested men wearing colourful sarongs. They're standing on some tropical beach with their arms slung around each-other, Danny left of centre, and I start thinking about what Sophie said. While Danny's busy thumbing a reply I notice the silver roots of his jet black hair and wonder if I'll resort to dyeing my hair when I'm nudging fifty.

Slipping the phone back inside his pocket he tells me he'll be recommending an immediate review of Sharon's medication, then hands me another incident report.

'Procedure,' I say.

'Way to go, Frank,' he says. 'Anything else I can do for you? Anything at all?'

'Nothing. I do appreciate our chats, though. Thanks,' I say, and stand to leave.

'Look, I'm about to head home for a well-deserved drink,' he says, rubbing his palms together. 'Been a long day. You're welcome to join me if you'd like some afterhours *de*-briefing.'

The emphasised *de* of the debriefing catches me off-guard. 'Umm, c-can't this time but, umm, but th-thanks for the offer and everything.'

• • •

That night as soon as I go to write the words 'flibberty jibbet' in the incident report I drop the pen and consult Google. It reads: *A scatterbrained female prone to flaunt her sexuality*. Seems old Moira was onto something. When Sophie sees me with another report I tell her about Sharon and Moira wrestling, but not about Sharon flashing her bush. She'd laugh and want to tell all our friends, and all I want to do is erase it from my memory. I also don't mention Danny's offer to remove my briefs.

We are about to have a one hour morning session of fake flower arranging and I haven't seen Sharon. I take a seat at the long table in the activities room with nine loonies and get busy setting up. Someone's sniffing and someone's slapping their cheeks and someone else is making guttural throat-sucking noises, but I'm doing better at ignoring compulsive behaviours. I distribute plastic vases and lay assorted bunches of flowers along the length of the table.

Suddenly Sharon prances into the room and grabs a chair, then pushes in between two others seated opposite me. I've never seen her wearing lipstick. She starts fluttering her eyelashes at me. I had not anticipated this. She's used paper ribbon to fix her hair into two high ponytails, which would look sad on *any* fifty year old woman, but looks much sadder when the woman lives in a loonie bin.

'Hanky-panky-Franky wants a girlfriend'n I want some chocolate,' she announces. Before I can reply she's on her feet yanking her dress up and flashing her horrible overgrown bush. 'Here's somethink for ya. Yes please, yes please. Wha-cha got-fa Shazza? Yummy-yummy!'

'Jesus! Where are your underpants?'

The room falls silent.

Seated a few chairs away an older woman named Moira raises her spindly arms and squeaks, 'Flibberty jibbet.' It's the first time I've heard her speak.

'Shut-up!' yells Sharon.

Moira responds with three deep croaks, then grabs two handfuls of plastic orchids and makes out like she's about to arrange them into a blue, plastic vase.

'I said "shut up!"' screams Sharon, who's still clutching the hem of her hoisted dress.

'Now, let's settle down,' I say. I'm not actually sure what a flibberty jibbet is but right now I'm more concerned with looking anywhere else but at the bush.

It takes three more croaks for Sharon to lunge along the table and grab Moira by the throat. The other loonies start screeching and clapping. Moira's chair tips backward and I remember to punch my electronic panic button just as they hit the floor. Sharon's on top of Moira with her hands around her throat and her bare crack in the air and Moira's punching Sharon's stomach with two fists-full of orange orchids. Then a couple of thugs in white uniforms appear and pull them apart.

I phone Danny to tell him I've had another problem and he invites me to his office at the end of the day.



## Ladies of the Bin

by Maggie Veness

Word spreads quickly. Sharon has been overheard telling the other loonies I gave her a chocolate bar in return for a blowjob. I phone Danny, my supervisor, and say I have a problem. He asks me to come to his office. 'Did you do it?' he says from behind his tidy desk.

'God! Of course not! What kind of a person do you think I am?'

Gazing at his manicured fingernails, he adds, 'Because if you did we could overlook it just this once. Know what I mean?' When he looks up at me I think I see him wink but I'm not absolutely sure, so I put it down to a nervous tic.

'There's nothing to overlook,' I say.

'Excellent,' he says, and passes me a two page incident report. 'You're new so I wasn't certain. Following procedure. Way to go, Frank,' he says, then leans his head on his hands and looks at me.

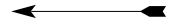
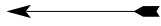
I'm worried I've missed something. 'Procedure?' I say.

'Report the incident to your supervisor, debrief, and pick up an incident report. You've followed procedure. Way to go. Fill that report out and drop it back tomorrow. Anything else I can do for you?'

When I get home I tell Sophie about the whole blowjob thing and what Danny said and she starts laughing. 'Fucking hysterical!' she says. 'That Danny guy was hoping you'd ask *him* to blow you as well. Is he as attractive as Sharon?'

'Thanks for listening. I really feel better now,' I say. I try to see the funny side. I really try. But it's no use. This Diversional Therapy position could springboard a career in the area of mental health and I was hoping for an unblemished report at the end of my four week probation. Sophie's still chuckling when she wanders away to take a shower. I pour a scotch and sit at my desk to fill out the incident report.

• • •



## **the long march**

*a poem by* **Warren Tang**

after the long march  
there's always a fool  
named april

exit out the front door flaunting her O.J. high in the air. The second she was out of sight strangers, oddly enough, talked to strangers, some surprised themselves by shaking hands, and a few were thrilled to discover that the person standing next to them in line was indeed their next door neighbor. Yes! Vivian Yang left behind some very satisfied customers. In fact, they were her first but, as things would turn out, certainly not her last fan club.

“But now I trendy,” she said. “I both on parole an’ tech savvy. Everybody doin’ it... steal i-Phone, I mean.”

Chuck and Eleanor looked at each other slack jawed and then turned back to the little lady. Only Chuck managed to speak. “Do you realize that’s a felony?”

“Yes, I do, but not a word I’ve said is true... you *April Fools!*”

Chuck and Eleanor didn’t know what hit them harder, the realization that it was indeed April 1st or the fact that her clipped Asian accent had vanished and she now spoke in a voice that was clear, succinct, and educated, if not downright upper crust. A loud “Huh?” was all that either one of them could muster up.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Vivian Yang, Yale Drama, Class of ’72, Equity, SAG-AFTRA. I’m playing an abused Asian domestic in an episode of *Law and Order*. That’s what we’re shooting around the corner, but please don’t let that or this outfit mislead you. I’m really a Shakespearean actress.”

“Well, whatever...” Eleanor said as she tried unsuccessfully to repress a case of the giggles. “That was somethin’. You sure had me goin’.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Chuck added as he turned to address the other customers and cashiers who had turned their way because of the ruckus. “Would someone kindly give this young lady an Oscar or a... a... an Emmy or a... a... Tony or... or whatever it is she’s...”

The tiny thespian squealed. “Oh! Don’t worry about the details, young man. I’ll take all three!”

“Hey! Anybody got a red carpet?” a gentleman standing at the next register shouted above the gathering crowd.

“No gots!” the Gristedes manager hollered back. “How about dirty maroon or an even dirtier black?”

“Fuhgeddaboutit!” the actress cried. “I’ve been practising for this moment my entire life.” She cleared her throat, held up the quart of orange juice she held in her hand as if it were a statuette, and continued. “Ladies and Gentlemen of the Academy, thank you so much. Oh, my God! Is this really happening? You have no idea how much this means to me...”

Suddenly a loud and boisterous round of applause rose up from the shoppers and cashiers and drowned the lady out, whereupon she bowed, flipped Eleanor a Five for the juice, and made a grand

## A Marketable Exchange

by **Mark Burchard**

At the checkout counter in his local Gristedes supermarket, Chuck, a middle aged resident of Chelsea with a penchant for people watching and beer, looked at the bag with a half-dozen oil cans of Fosters beer inside, mumbled an obscene comment about the high cost of living in Manhattan, and begrudgingly handed two twenty-dollar bills over to the cashier. Fresh out of the ATM, the bills were as clean and crisp as any he'd ever seen. Still the cashier, Eleanor, a handsome woman of color whose wit Chuck had admired on a number of occasions, carefully looked them over and then held them up to the light to check for watermarks.

"Hey! I just printed those," Chuck said defensively. "They're perfect."

"I know that, Honey. I'm just checking to make sure the ink's dry."

Chuck and Eleanor were about to share a good laugh but they were stopped short by the tittering *He! He!'s* of a tiny, thin woman of Asian descent who had joined the line behind Chuck unnoticed.

"You fun," she said. "You make me He! He!"

Dressed in a faded and grungy floral apron that rose over her slight bosom and hung down to the hem of her mid-calf skirt, her feet were encased in a pair of filthy and torn sneakers that were a mere two-steps away from becoming refuse. Immediately Chuck's years of people watching helped him peg her as an out of work Manhattan domestic and very possibly an illegal alien. A housekeeper, nanny, cook, or all three, Chuck wasn't sure, but in fact, his interest in that point was quickly fading. His eyes were now fixed on an incongruous accessory: the cellphone she held in her left hand.

"Is that the *new* iPhone 5?" Chuck asked as he felt the sting of jealousy.

"Yeeees!" she replied with gleaming pride. "Boss man lend to me. Wife teach me an' I go to private iPhone tutor school at senior place once week."

"You are a very lucky lady."

Her face flushed as she bowed her head and shook it. "No. No. I steal i-Phone. I fired."

Chuck's head reared back and he exchanged a wide-eyed glance with Eleanor. Then much to their surprise the little lady shot them both a cheery smile.

# EDITORIAL

by **Matthew Glenn Ward**

**W**ELCOME TO THE BEGINNING OF ~~THE FILM~~ THIS ISSUE OF *SKIVE!* This nutso-formatted issue is dedicated to ‘April Fools’ Day’ or ‘All Fools Day’ (the 1st day of April). As you might have guessed, reading starts at the *back* of the magazine and finishes at the *front*, in a conventional sense that is (perhaps this will be the issue that gets us to strike it rich in Japan, where right-to-left publications are more *de rigueur*). There are direction arrows in the headers, just in case you get lost.

Firstly, the cover, blatantly ~~stolen~~ borrowed from Monty Python’s LP ‘Monty Python’s Flying Circus’ (1970). The Python titles have been scribbled out and *Skive* info has been written elsewhere on the image. “*April Fool’s, Terry Gilliam!*” (Actually, Python did something similar in 1971 with a Beethoven LP [see pic, this page], so *our* cover ‘vandalism’ is an homage to *their* cover ‘vandalism’).

Next, a big thankyou to the many writers and artists who contributed their inspired craziness to the magazine you are about to read; in such large numbers, in fact, I am pushed to a 1 x page Editorial ;-)

cheers,

Matt



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# **SKIVE MAGAZINE**

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