

the monitor.

truman state university's only source for thorough coverage
of community issues, student affairs, politics and culture

volume 10
issue 11



Second Semesterly Short Story Contest Issue

Grand Prize Winner Savings Derby

Story by | Neil Paul Stransky

The Monitor received 41 submissions to our short story contest this spring semester, which our panel of seven student judges read and discussed. Savings Derby, by Neil Paul Stransky, won the \$50 prize. Six other finalists are also recognized with the designation of "Editor's Choice," in this issue. Thank you to all our contributors and we'll see you in fall.

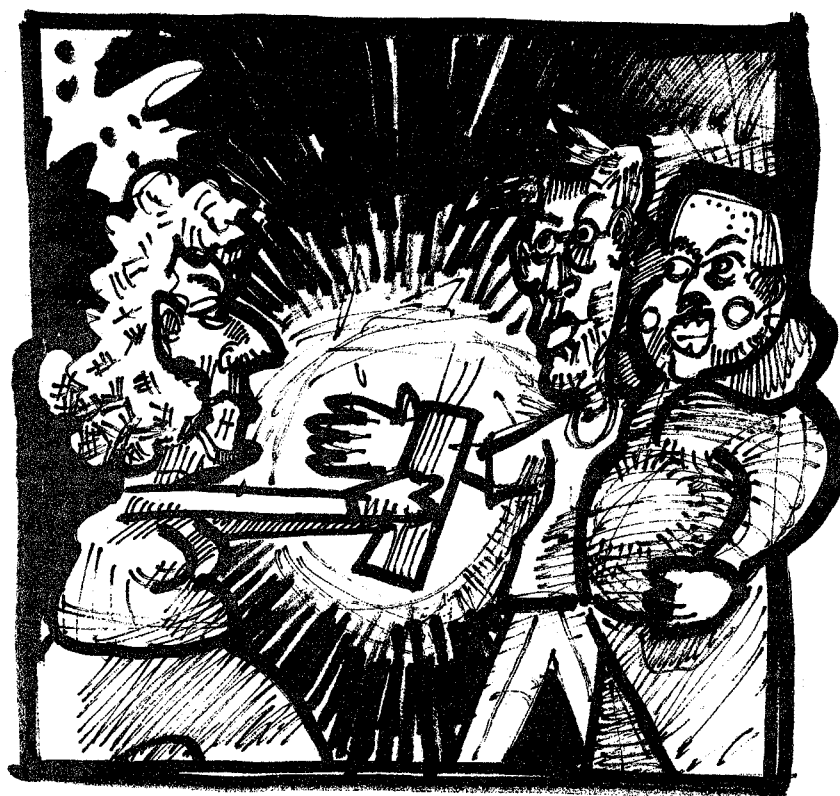


Image by | Joe Moccia

I had been informed of the incident the night before during the briefing; it had been reported from reliable inside sources that one of the coveted items had been damaged during the night time mission. The reconnaissance was to be carried out swiftly, without incident, only taking prisoners if it was absolutely necessary to the fulfillment of the mission. "Ok, Drew, you take the right side of the bins. The spaghetti will be marked by a yellow label. Don't be sidetracked by anything—soda, chips, what have you. Keep your focus on locating and securing the spaghetti. Greg, you take the center; Dan, the left." Bob was not speaking metaphorically. "I'll recover the trolley and meet you at the location as quickly as possible."

As I looked around me at the myriad regulars of this early morning routine, the gravity of the situation was a bit astonishing. A woman who could have been my grandmother was doing calisthenics; George Burns had his leg raised to his head; dear god, that dude's got a matching set of sweatbands.

"Mueller, you all right man? You look a little distracted."

"Nah, I'm cool dude. But I swear that Chinese lady Suzanne was talkin' 'bout last night is eyein' us. It's freakin' me out man." The woman in question, Crazy Betty, had a reputation among the locals of this quaint Canadian community. Californian by birth, Iowan by claim, American by any account, I was starting to get a bit freaked out by this Canadian ritual. When Bob "The Sweetster", as he would later come to be known, had first let us in on his little shopping secret, I thought it a great opportunity to sacrifice a few hours of sleep in order to get some great deals on grub. The three of us "boys", as The Sweetster liked to refer to us, were just visiting an old friend for the summer, the fourth of our group sound asleep back in the horse barn we had been relegated to, awaiting the rewards of our underestimatedly harrowing endeavor.

I had received my first hint of what kind of

shit I was getting myself into the night before through the mother of the household, Laina. "So you'll be accompanying Bob over to the savings derby, eh?" she had casually remarked while watering her lavender. It wasn't the comment itself that betrayed the innocent notion I had held of the savings derby. Rather, it was the concerned side-look she had given me and the nearly inaudible chuckle that had slipped out of her throat that screamed, "Poor boys!"

There was no mistaking the seriousness of the event I was now to partake in. Once more, Crazy Betty snuck a glance in my direction, perhaps sensing that I wasn't from around here. I could almost swear that

her glance was accompanied by a quick sinister grin, revealing to me her canine teeth, rumored to have sunk into the flesh of more than one threatening competitor. I glanced down at my watch—7:28. Two more minutes and I would see the face of some amused high school punk, drunk with the knowledge that his unlocking of the front door would result in pandemonium.

"Here he comes boys, let's move into position. You all remember your assignments?" I looked first to my friend Dan, then to Drew, both of whom had the unforgettable look: half "what the fuck is this guy wiggin' out about?"; half "what the fuck are we doing here?"

"Remember, don't even look at any item

that isn't a three-kilo-bag of spaghetti. There will be a lotta great deals in there, you can always get 'em later. It isn't every day there's a possibility of claiming the jumbo-spaghetti-pack for ninety-nine cents. The last time it happened—well, I don't wanna get into that now. Just don't screw this up for me boys." This was serious, I could see that plainly now. And even if it wasn't all that important to me, I could see its value to Bob. The Sweetster did not like to be let down, and I surely did not want to be the one to go down in the annals of the Comox Valley as "The American that Choked."

The moment had come. Pinched by an anxious middle-aged man of The Sweetster variety, I was instinctively driven into action. In an instant, men who had been alive the year The Great Bambino hit 60 became inspired track stars—at least as much as the "no running" policy would allow. The eerie super-market musak melted into the scene, one which still comes to me in a slow-motion, car crash testimonial quality. The angular elbow of a silvery-haired grandma nudged a hapless rookie into a display of canned goods; George Burns went down to a high-ankle sprain; my feet carried my body transcendent of its conscious will towards the fulfillment of its mission. Overtaking now-rabid Betty on the left, I passed through the aisle prescribed to me, floating unconsciously to my destination—the center bin. My youthful legs had been narrowly outpaced by a few of the veterans, Mr. Sweatband already rifling through the "dented or otherwise damaged" goods, shoveling them into his trolley, an action upon which they had officially been claimed. To the thrill of my deepest senses, my eyes came to rest upon the holy grail, the gimungo-sack of spaghetti, gleaming in the sterile lights of Save-U-Lots. The hopeful hand of an innocent American plunged into the bargain smorgasbord, inches away from a glorious ending to its first savings derby. But too long had Crazy Betty awaited this day; she would not be defeated. Instantly, my hopeful hand sprang back from the bin, stung by the bite of determination, propelling my incoherent body with it to the floor. My eyes flashed up in surprise, meeting the billowing eyes of Bob. His head lowered in disgust, shaking slowly in disappointment of



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Among people who have learned something from the 18th century (say, Voltaire) it is a truism, hardly deserving discussion, that the defense of the right of free expression is not restricted to ideas one approves of, and that it is precisely in the case of ideas found most offensive that this right must be vigorously defended. Advocacy of the right to express ideas that are generally approved of is, quite obviously, a matter of no significance."

-- Noam Chomsky

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from the desk of the editors...

This issue is a unique treat. It offers us a glimpse into the creative soul of the University community. And in doing so we saw that you are all some very wacked-up people. Death, suffering, destruction and depression ran rampant through the stories we received, and here at *The Monitor*, we're a little concerned about you all. Go outside. Get some sunshine. Take your meds. Get some. Whatever it takes to cheer you up a bit. Because you know what? You deserve it!

Anyway, we were pleasantly surprised at the slew of stories that found their way to our tower. We'd love for you short story writers to keep stuff coming year-round. As always, without all of your submissions, *The Monitor* wouldn't exist. Which would deprive us editors of a reason to still be awake at five in the morning.

The usual champion of the Editor's Box, Andres, is off picking a fight with an abnormally loud and tall Anglo-Saxon holy man, leaving the two of us new editors to

take care of things.

So as the first order of business we'd like to thank Amanda Hackney and Joe Moccia for their awesome illustrations in this issue.

As sexy as sixteen pages of pure text is, everyone likes stories better with pictures.

Finally, we'd like to give some mad props to Cameron Moore, as this was his last year as an editor of the juggernaut that is *The Monitor*.

He's poured his time, energy, and ink into this paper. He listed himself as just another editor, when in reality he was much more than that. As a full time student, he ran this place completely, and those who became deeply involved, like we did, were pulled in by the ideas and values he exemplified. To give him his due, we'd have to give him much more than praise in

the Editor's Box. Maybe we should have gone to the party with you. But then we'd be drunk and not putting this paper out. So this'll have to do. Am I allowed to say that? This is *The Monitor*. You're allowed to say anything. That's what we're here for.

Jon Lawinger
Frances Dusseaut



Photo by | Mary Burford

A Short Story

Story by | Rory Rhoreron

I can tell you right now you're not going to like this story. So you should stop reading now. It's not because it's sad or anything, or even particularly poorly written. It's just that it isn't interesting. Well at least to me it's not, I know I wouldn't want to read it. Don't worry, I'll give you a second to find a better story. I recommend one about robots or sex or something, I'm sure someone wrote something along those lines. Ok. Have you switched to another story yet? You have? Good, I can get on with telling my story.

The thing is, I've been having problems sleeping lately. It's not that I'm not tired. Just the opposite. I am incredibly tired, but sleep won't come. The reason? Because I just can't get stupid shit out of my head. Well, I'm sure it can't be too stupid, because they (the thoughts) keep haunting me. What is this stupid shit I'm talking about? The time in third grade where I stole fifty cents from my babysitter. The time in eighth grade when I didn't ask that cute girl to dance with me. That time in tenth grade when I did the same thing I did in eighth grade. The time last week when I insulted some guy just because I had a good zinger. This shit goes on and on and on and on and on, enough so that even if I think of each thing for only a few seconds, I wind up staying up two and a half hours after I try to go to sleep.

The fault is that I try to be nice. That's where I get into trouble. The nicer I try to be, the more things I realize I do that really suck. And then I can't get them out of my head. I am quite sure that by the time I am thirty-five I will not be able to sleep and

shall shortly thereafter die of exhaustion.

I told you this story was horrid. Now I will have another thing to keep me up at night, the guilt of inflicting such tripe upon the fine readers of this. I mean, there's not even a plot. And now I'm talking about the story within the story, which I'm sure has to be breaking some rule of authorship that I am unaware of. Which shouldn't be particularly hard, as I don't think I am aware of any rules besides simple grammar and spelling.

I am quite sure that anyone who braved my introduction has given up reading by now. There must be a few who read to this point, either by some perverse masochism or because they are the editor and must read this in order to fairly judge it. Either way, I figure I should give a bit of a bang to the end of this. I think I shall write about that which I'm sure you all want to read about.

I masturbate with a regular frequency. I doubt that I am destined to wind up in some medical journal; it is a normal male daily or semi-daily event. I am afraid I don't have any special perversions to tell you about, I don't have any odd fetishes or anything. What I have developed in my masturbatory pursuits is a fine appreciation of pornography.

The short story is that the state of pornography today simply sucks. There is very little of it that is made that is of any quality whatsoever. I do have an appreciation for burningangel and ishotmyself, but beyond this, produced porn is mostly crap. This is why I have come to find home made porn much better created than the stuff by "porn stars."

There is something about these people in the pictures that just forces me to relate with them. For whatever reason, they have searched the internet for approval, and have used their naked bodies and fin-

Empty

Story by | Joe Baumann

I wish I could go back there. Just return and listen to the soft music billowing from the dark corner. It's only two flights up, third apartment on the left, but I have to keep walking. But I can't; I never do. Jillian probably has a window open because it's so unusually warm for October. She likes fresh breezes wafting through the apartment; the two rooms seem to liven up so quickly when the soothing urban air wraps its fingers around her bed, her desk, her music stand, and all the mysterious little crevices of her studio.

Surely, she's playing her violin by now. It's what she does every time we fight. We yell and scream and when she slams the door I'm embarrassed, and my cheeks redden because the same old woman peers out her door at me from the end of the hall. I hate walking past her, the old lady who manages to make me feel like garbage with one simple shake of her head. Walking by tonight was no exception.

As I reach the exit of the small building, I pause, as always, hoping that perhaps Jillian will come running down the stairs. But I know she won't. I know she's getting ready. Opening the door, I step onto the sidewalk. It is quiet, normal for eleven at night. As I walk, I slow down slightly, stopping under Jillian's window. It is open.

For a moment, I can't hear it. But slowly the timid notes flow from the window and gradually become more confident. After a few minutes I lean against the rough brick wall and close my eyes. I can hear Jillian's music clearly now, and I know she knows I am there listening. She always pretends to appreciate the compliments, but she can see how empty they truly are. Eventually I stand up straight, relieving the wall of its usual duty. As I turn the corner I can still hear the notes, barely. I do not know how long Jillian plays, but I'm sure she knows I am gone, because she knows me. And I can only listen so long before the notes melt together, before they become hollow inside.

gured snatches to get this approval. If only they knew that they received their greatest approval from me. Or perhaps they do know.

I also am seeking such approval. Having no snatch to finger, I must seek another path. Of course, I know you're thinking "Dude, you've got a cock, why not use that?" The answer is easy, no one wants to see cock. There is an over saturation of cock. Hell I can see cock walking down the street, and I don't even want to. So I am stuck finding my own path.

Not that my own cock is lacking, or anything. This isn't some pride thing, where I claim my cock to be great even if it is not. I honestly don't care what you think of my cock. I merely state this because if I wanted to follow the porn route, I would easily be able to. I can provide you with the names of ex-girlfriends of mine who can corroborate my story if you are still a doubter.

This whole masturbation sideline is starting to bore even me, so I'm sure that you're bored to death by now. Which is OK, cause I should stop writing soon.

You see, my friends just arrived and I really need to get going. Since they are time travelers you'd think they'd be a bit more patient, having all the time they need and all. But there is something with relative time frames and universal time and something I don't quite understand. They tried to explain it to me once, but it all went over my head. I don't know why they even tried, they should know that I won't get it yet. At least the one that is my future self should have known. That's right. I hang out with my self from the future.

Now if only I could sleep tonight.

The Covetous Nature of the Sea

Story by I Justin Roberts

Once, I was asked to exemplify love and courage, and I couldn't help but think of my grandfather. When I was a boy, my grandfather was swallowed up by the sea. No, really. I was there. I was staying with him at the time, and one morning the sea came to our door and swallowed him whole, right before my eyes. The reason why it did so is as interesting a tale as the fact that it did it in the first place. The reason was my grandmother, and how she became my grandmother.

In his working years, my grandfather ran a ferry in Bar Harbor, Maine. He worked that ferry for 41 years, and the salt in the air weathered his skin until it was as tough as worn leather, but from pictures of his youth I could tell that at one time he had been a handsome man. He had to have been to beguile my grandmother.

One day on his ferry route, my grandfather spied something impossible; a mermaid sunbathing on a rock just offshore. She was everything any man could have asked for, from the waist up anyway. Her skin was comparable to polished alabaster, and her features seemed to be

chiseled my Michelangelo-himself. However, it was her hair that caught my grandfather's eye; rust in color, but with sheen so brilliant that it broke up the sun-

light into all colors. My grandfather found himself staring into that sheen, and he felt as if he were staring the very essence of life itself right in the face

My grandfather called out to the mermaid. She smiled and waved, but plunged into the sea quickly afterwards. Almost as an afterthought, my grandfather waved back, before pulling his head out of the clouds to resume steering the ferry. For the rest of the day, the only thing he could think of was that mermaid, and to his fancy, the mermaid was back the next day, and the day after that. After a stretch of days, the mermaid became comfortable enough with my grandfather's presence to swim up to the side of the boat for a long overdue introduction.

"Well handsome," the mermaid said, "what do they call you?"

"Jack, my n-name's," my grandfather replied

"Pleasure to meet you, Jack. My name's Claire."

Then she swam away.

Over time, they grew increasingly fond of each other, and, my grandfather found himself taking his ferry boat out at all hours of the night to have a secret conversation with his burgeoning love. One

night, several weeks after their first illustrious encounter, he asked Claire to marry him. This gesture was faced with seemingly insurmountable opposition on many levels. A respectable, hardworking man like Jack married to some fish-woman? Preposterous!

Of all obstacles they had to overcome, there was one that was precedent. Claire was betrothed to the sea; its ire was the last thing she wanted to bring upon her Jack, her one true love. After many professions of his love for her, she accepted his proposal. My grandfather lowered his most comfortable net into the water, and pulled Claire aboard, right after which they had their first kiss.

As with most marriages, the first year was rough, but for different reasons, as I'm sure you can understand. But their love was so strong that nothing could break their bond. Eventually, Claire lost her fish tail, and began to grow legs. After she took her first sure steps, they had a proper wedding, and against all odds, they had a child, my mother Emma.

The sea, coveting the love that my grandparents shared, grew bitterer with each passing year, and after 30 years, sea finally caught up with them, and I was there to see the confrontation. We were sitting at the kitchen table, eating our breakfast when the rhythmic sound of waves breaking upon the doorstep roused my grandfather from his seat. My grandmother, Claire, wore a worried look upon her face, for she knew that her betrothed had finally come to claim her. My grand-

father opened the door to meet the sea head on. My grandfather seemed to be talking to the sea in some other way than I could possibly fathom, as he had learned to do this from working the ferry all those years. After talking at length to the sea, something dreadful happened that I will take with me for the rest of my life, I saw my grandfather in defeat. With shoulders slumped, he plodded back to the kitchen table, and with a thin mask of strength said, "All right, looks like I'm off."

My grandmother looked at him with pleading eyes, but before she could say anything, my grandfather said, "It's either you or me, and I'll be damned if I'll ever let him have you. Stay here with the boy. I'll see you soon."

My grandfather turned to me, winked, and tussled my hair. "Take care of Grandma for me, would ya?" Before I could answer, he grabbed my grandmother and gave her a kiss straight out of a Carey Grant movie. He looked at my grandmother in the eyes for the last time and smiled faintly.

"See you later, handsome." My grandmother said.

My grandfather was ready to meet his fate.

Grandfather stiffened his shoulders, arched his back, squared his jaw, and marched out to the sea. The sea then took him, and in an instant, he was gone. The sea then flowed from our doorstep, and hasn't returned since.

Clarence at the Chariton

Story by I Kyle Hill

The icy Chariton River tempts me, staring back at me. Groping for my soul, it calls my name.

My car stalled on the bridge where I now stand, yet Avril's pristine words of plight keep playing, pushing me toward the cold, green railing. The blinking headlights emanate onto the snow, reflecting back toward a nearby hamlet.

The hamlet's few residents remain asleep, unaware of my presence.

If ignorance is bliss, they must be in heaven, and judging by the dominion of my perturbed subconscious, I may never meet them in that celestial paradise. Just as I am losing grip on the icy railing, I too am losing faith in whom I can trust.

The woman I love, a pious Child of God, locked lips with a different deity, one of porcelain.

In my bitterness I fled town, simultaneously shedding tears and eluding the slick westbound curves. In my bitterness I showed disregard for safety, omitting my lap belt and defrost blowers.

Complicated my life has become. My closest peers disregard me as a social recluse, following the American way of setting selfish double standards. I could not turn to God for help, for these same peers had introduced me to salvation; Salvation they tossed around flagrantly as a flimsy Frisbee, fitting to lodge it in a fir around late November.

Who do I trust at this grim hour, without any natural light? My family is among the oblivious dreamers, unaware of the nightmare they may wake to find.

The Chariton whispers my name again.

"Worry not," it woos to me. "This winter of discontent can end. Let our white waves envelop your misery."

My glove is the first to acquiesce, revealing the Sharpie "X" on my hand. Quickly the hand demands heat, and dives into an empty pocket. My other glove swivels about, slamming me against the concrete barrier and guiding me down to a seat. I huddle and let my tears freeze when they contact my soiled denim knees.

The Chariton cries my name once more.

"Your peers don't care," it condemns. "Come unto our waters. We will cushion you from your concerns. Careen toward us and experience the ultimate."

The temptation grew warmer, and my mind raced overboard.

Suddenly, a man approached me.

"You think they'll name a school after you?" he questions.

I stand and challenge the query, facing the Chariton that tempts my existence.

"Those Catfish you brag about will be the only ones disposing of you longer than anyone else."

This man I never met had already delved into the deepest depths of my personality.

"Look South," he commanded, pointing toward my hometown. The metropolis lacked luster, and loomed empty as it had for several decades. Sectarian suburbs had sprawled beyond, allowing the ringworm of urban decay to encroach on my subdivision. Faces I knew exhibited anxiety, strife, and lacked the smiles I once

recalled. The muddy waters that bisected the city, stretching for thousands of miles, met the Chariton earlier than expected.

"Look West," he commanded, directing me to an image of a coffin. It was not mine, but its inevitable sight could be caused by the Chariton. The anguish on my family would be too grave.

"Look North," he commanded, as I stared onto an empty quad. The flags did not fly at half staff, and no flame melted the ice around it. Hundred of peers mourned briefly, then returned to their lives. I was a passing memory, but even for those that I met when holding a door open for them just once, they could not forget.

"The galaxy does not revolve around you," he admonished, "but without you it cannot revolve."

As I turned east, I glanced at several of my peers, struggling without one of their own. They could not discuss music. They could not discuss politics. They could not discuss spiritual concerns. They could not discuss the proper way to conjugate Spanish verbs.

I now looked east to a hotel room in Paris. A transient flight attendant knelt in front of a bed, sobbing as she wiped the tears with one hand and ingested a glass of Merlot with the other. My eyes quivered as I recognized her frizzled copper hair, and then her face—the face that would never stop beaming in jollity—without her signature smile.

"Her first drink came from the Chariton," he warned me.

She continued sobbing as she approached the half-full bottle on the mantle against the door.

"That bottle ripened in the

Chariton," he added.

She clutched a letter, reiterating her airline's reluctance to return to her native state. She spent hours on legs leading her farther from Missouri, and as the distance grew wider, so did her melancholy attitude and loneliness.

"Her bitterness fermented in the Chariton," he declared.

"Go home, and forgive all," he proclaimed, pointing to my car that now started. I gave the stranger a brief hug before walking to my car and cautiously retuning home.

I chanted constant prayers as I darted eastbound. Osborne's great inquiry filled the interior as I pondered the man's words—words that may have saved my soul, and perhaps countless others.

"It matters not who does what, Father," I whispered. "When I lost faith, You did not turn away. I'm with You, my Lord. Forgive me of my selfishness. Forgive me of my bitterness and hasty generalizations."

The sun rose over campus that morning, melting away the crisp snow that covered the grass and asphalt. The meandering slush paused briefly when contacting two pairs of shoes near another, as I gave my friend an emotional apology and assuring embrace. Now melted residue, it trickled through sewers and ravines until reaching the Chariton River. Instead of devouring my bitter soul, it consumed a sweet elixir of forgiveness and companionship.

The man sat at its bank and fed the catfish swimming against the melting ice. As the now bearded man fished for food, He fished me from despair

The Monitor Proudly Presents our Runner-Up...

Hourglass (Editor's Pick)

Story by | Meredith Sladek

The Polaroid flashed, and the little boy dashed up to his mommy to see the bleak dark- grayness evolve into the polychromatic snap of the way that his smile stretched and how the wind had tousled his hair at that moment. He was satisfied, and ran off to resume play in the sand. His mother tucked the future keepsake into her straw purse, and, with a cautionary shout to her young one, she in turn resumed her previous activities of writing a detailed letter back home to her friends.

"Mommy, look at me! Look at me now!" he called to her, joy filling his voice with the discovery of his newfound stunt. "Just a minute, dear," she replied, adding sentence after sentence after sentence to the paragraph about her future little Nobel Prize-winning physicist. He would go straight to Princeton, no, Harvard; how were they going to pay? Of course he would have numerous scholarships, but you could never tell about that stock market...

The sand crunched under the feet of the passersby, a few grains picked up carelessly by wind's breathy hand and scattered about the beach. The young boy scooped up a handful and let it slide through his fist onto an already growing mound. Grain by grain slowly dropped, second by second passed, ticking off seconds of the day, immeasurable infinitely small and many Moments pass, as past and future cease to exist in the fleeting moment of the Now. The crested wave of time floods creation; the location that was once its peak will see water no more; it is no more in time and will never be reproduced... and neither man nor god can prophesy where the next peak will take itself, but always, always, will there be one, only to differ the next split instant.

The sun was warm. It burned the boy's shoulders. His mommy had told him to put on sunscreen but he had squirmed away and said no, no, it's all slimy. He could run faster than she could! She had given up chasing him and read her magazines on her towel. But now the sun hurt and he wished he could rewind time so that he could just close his eyes and have the sunscreen over with because he would be all red later today. But his mommy explained that he couldn't rewind time because time didn't do that and things didn't work like that. The sand was all up and down his legs. He gathered it into a big mound, then more and more. He put some wet sand into a bucket and turned it upside down on the mound to make a mold of a tower. It was going to be the biggest, best sand castle ever, and people were going to come from miles around and say, "What a beautiful castle! It's perfect!" and they would pay him thousands and thousands of dollars to build more and more of his sand castles and he would be able to stay on the beach forever.

Oh, what a sand castle it was! Grand and masterfully formed, in the eyes of a six-year-old, precious and charming from an adult's viewpoint. Its grainy slope extended at least two feet off the ground. There were crumbly pillars and towers from the crafting bucket, and a shallow moat was dug not only around the sculpture but also through it, with a humble stream of water flowing in the rut. Decorative stones and shells

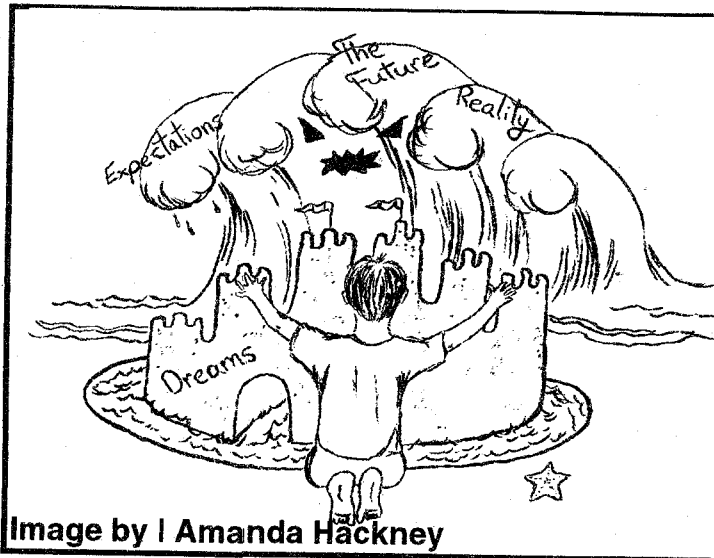


Image by | Amanda Hackney

adorned the castle, signifying windows, outlining doorways, or purely for providing variant color to the brown monochrome sand. Formerly hard at work for the past hour, the boy sat on his heels and grinned at his creation. He pictured himself famous and in the newspaper and making millions and millions of dollars from selling these castles to other people. He'd have a whole business where he would do nothing but make sand castles.

One man with a complex camera came up and asked the boy's mom if he could take a picture of the boy playing by his castle for a tourist guide about the beach. His mommy agreed and the boy rushed to his castle to show it off to the photographer. The man snapped a few pictures while the boy chattered about his future plans for his castle and himself and how he would make billions and billions of dollars and everyone from all around the world would come to see his very first and best castle. The man smiled at him gently and went to whisper something to his mommy, while the boy fixed a hole in the back of the castle. The photographer walked off, and his mommy called him over to her chair. He scampered over, and plopped into her lap. She asked if he really believed that his castle would last forever. When he nodded, she explained quite delicately, as gently as he had placed the seashells in the castle, as carefully as he had placed the molding bucket full of wet sand, as lovingly as he had dreamed his fantasy of immortality, that his sand castle was beautiful, but it would most likely not last through the night. The tides would wash it away and there would be little left the next day.

He could feel the frustration and impatience slowly well up, then finally overtake him like a great wave. He squirmed out of his mother's lap and made a beeline to the sand castle. Down went the carefully sculpted pillars. The moat was filled again with angry shoves of sand. Shells broke and scattered about, all in a cloud of sand, as the height of the castle was brought down and flattened by the crush of the boy's foot. He flung himself about the castle, kicking it, screaming and sobbing as he finally collapsed in a disillusioned heap on his former wonder, his salty tears wetting the sand, as the tide had truly taken the castle down.

Dear Shoes

Story by | Joseph T. Pini

Two guys in a diner booth, a tapper and a writer. A notebook lies flat on the white table surface, written upon appropriately by the one called writer. Across from and facing him, tapper taps his fingers on the table in a manner that is bored but not impatient. The tapping at first resembles playing chords and scales on a piano but soon loses all skill; it becomes a game called "how hard can I hit my fingers on the table without hurting myself?" Only one hand is tapping.

Likewise, only one hand is writing. The writer's pen spends more time at rest on lips or caught between teeth than pressed to the notebook at the ballpoint tip. Four hands among two guys, but only two hands at work. The two at rest hands occasionally pick up coffee cups or adjust the angle of the notebook.

Tapper asks if the letter is almost done, and as writer responds "no", he happens to scribble the word "yes" in mid-sentence. Writer laughs to himself; tapper doesn't notice. Tapper checks his watch (which is on the at-rest wrist) and relays the hour to writer. There is plenty of time to finish the letter, which is addressed oddly enough to someone named Shoes, but neither wishes to spend the whole afternoon sitting in the diner.

Tapper becomes distracted by the menu and unwittingly distracts writer from the letter. "What's an Affogato?"

Writer is absorbed in a sentence, "What?"

Tapping hand moves toward menu and becomes a gesturing hand, "What's an Affogato?"

"An Espresso drink. Like... Espresso with ice cream."

"Oh. That sounds good."

Gesturing hand becomes coffee mug lifter, and then resorts back to tapping. "Throw in a semicolon. Improperly. Misuse it just to confuse her."

"I don't want to confuse her." A moment of silence. "I hate writing semicolons. They look so awkward." Writer starts illustrating on the napkin being used as a coaster for tapper's mug. "So a comma with a period over it? It looks like the letter i or a, even."

"What if you wrote the word i've with a semicolon before it?"

"It would look like jive. Like don't jive me."

The napkin is full of semicolons which resemble letters and one that forms the eyes of a winking face. Tapper stirs his coffee. Writer taps his pen on the notebook.

"Put that semicolon conversation in the letter."

"Ok."

Writer writes it down.

ward in his chair.

One business man looked at the cowboy and saw the crimson pool that spread from the cowboy's back. A bloody spot spread on his chest soaking his dirty shirt and leather vest. The business man turn back around and saw the other two men grabbing for the dead man's winnings. He just shrugged.

The whores had not moved much, just jumped a little. The cowboys had drawn their guns, but were holstering them. The bartender pulled a pail and mop from behind the bar.

Oh well, the floor needed cleaning anyway, he thought as he submerged the mop into the bucket.

Draw over Five Cards

Story by | Jesse Dowell

Dust layered the building that doubled as the Gilhust saloon and brothel. The boards of the floor were well worn and cracked. Girls in fluffy dress and corsets stood against the banister around the second floor and sat at the tables around the saloon. The bartenders rubbed a beer glass trying to clean it. The cowboys sat around one table eying the whores and drinking whisky. The saloon was mostly empty on the afternoon and the only entertainment was fucking, drinking, or playing cards. Five men sat around a table doing the latter by way of five card draw.

The cowboy stared at his hand as his beaten gallon hat draped a shadow over his face.

"Raise fi' dolla's," his graveled voice

spoke as he laid five bills in the middle of the table.

Only he and a boy of about 16 remained in the hand. The two business men folded before they got new cards, but the flashy dressed man had waited to see if he could get something, but his luck was as dry as the dusty street outside. The kid had grin that spread from ear to ear.

"Ah see yer five an' call ya," he drawled and slapped his own money on the table.

The cowboy took a drink of his beer and gently sat his glass back on the table. He eyed the kid and sat back in his chair further.

"C'mon, cowpoke, ah ain't got a' day," the kid said.

Five faded cards were laid down face up. The cowboy's didn't change but the

kid's smile melted away.

"Ya got fo' Kings," the kid said coldly. "Ah had fo' tens."

"Yep," the cowboy muttered and reached for the money in the middle of the round table.

"Ah ain't got no mo' mo'ey," the kid said shaken, "Ah can't be'ieve it. Ah lost."

"It happ'ns," said the cowboy.

"Fuck!" the kid screamed as he stood up quickly, pushing his chair over. "Ya cheated ya sumbitch!"

The kid pulled his revolver out the holster and cocked the hammer back. The cowboy did the same thing. The cowboy pulled his out faster, but both guns fired at the same time. The kid's body flew backward into the wall. It landed limp and started to twitch. The cowboy fell back-

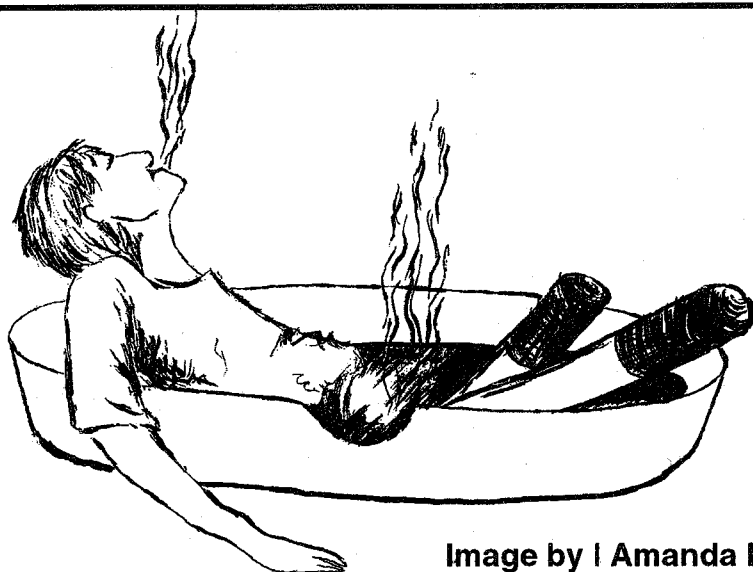


Image by | Amanda Hackney

Ashtray (Editor's Pick)

Story by | Richard Boggs

I'm a leper with all my skin, an abortion with all my limbs.

One love, one life. Disaster hits at four in the morning. Ground zero is a war zone of vomit and body plasma. My toilet only looks this colorful during the holidays, but even then it's just as messy. Vomit; heave, one two three. What looks to be either cookies or spaghetti comes spilling out of my mouth in large, spongy chunks soaked in stomach acid. I'm almost certain the neighbors have their ears pressed tightly against my wall listening to what they think is someone having passionate sex. But sex with me isn't that much different either. My stomach is done for now so I light a cigarette to celebrate. I suck that puppy down in five large puffs and think of the lyrics to some song. One love, one life. It plays over and over until it forces tears from my eyes. Fuck this, I think, fuck all of it. None of it matters, and not even me. Right now, the only thing I love is this cigarette and the smear of drying vomit on my face.

The song whispering over my clock-radio carries the moans of a girl passed out on my bed, but at least now I know she's breathing. The phrase "murder-one" comes to mind.

Her name's not important, or what she looks like or

where she's from. What's important is the fact we went to high school together, and now I fucked her. Now, this pinnacle of masturbation fantasy is bruised and asleep on my bed, with my pinkish palm prints wrapped around her neck. As you can tell, I'm not much of a romantic.

The thought of all this makes me sick again; I vomit. I should be happy about my testosterone induced accomplishment, but now I'm a monster. A dirty old man waiting outside your daughter's school to rape her. I'm disgusting, depraved, and degenerate; the three d's of disrespect. That's me in three words.

I'm a leper with all my skin, an abortion with all my limbs.

I stumble into satin colored room drenched in the smell of whisky and sweat. It also happens to be my bedroom. As I smash the butt of my cigarette into the far left corner of my bed, I think of my responsibilities. My responsibilities as a human. I have to think of something to tell her when she wakes up, if she wakes up. I have to think of a name, a reason, and a motive, or rather a lack thereof. I have to, at least for a moment, believe what I'm doing is right, or I might just flinch.

Suddenly, I think of my mother.

24 Hours in Kirksvilliana

3004 AD, United Fascist World and Outer Space Perimeter Bush enterprises, Homeland-Incorporated.

Story by | Larry Iles

Blaurentius Crisles 16th, citizen "archivist" wakes up with his threeheterosex wfepersons. Anxious, he does his approved duty marathon copulation mission-style approved, according to man-on-top manual of Saint Laura VICE Bush of coup of USA November 2004 that "inaugutated" our great, indivisible OUTER space empire. Indeed, church of Bushiana Man worship, say some of official history books he processes daily, has origins. In that mysterious year, when once again the "Floridean," as it is now spelt, ballot boxes operated crazily: seeking to deny our beloved oil-providers of GOD-given entitlement to benignly for them "ruke" us eternal. Crisles was no fool, however, as hadn't even a lost-records president TOM Jefferson Bush said: AMERICAN IMPERIALISTS have duty to have "happiness" for eternal real? So with wfepersons' giggling consent, they substituted moving camera "on-top" movie, 1000, onto state ASHCROFTIAN PATRIOT SURVEY CEILING MIRROR MONITOR! And they went down to the unsurveyed, they thought, basement he'd built where wfepersons fucked him with STAR WARS MODEL REAMER-

BEAMERONE THOUSAND, CHENEY PI-RATE ENTERPRISES, HALLI-BURTANIA TOOLS INCORPORATED; to all's vast glee!

ONTO WORK MORNING, at "archival" center in Kirksvilliana College of "OSTEPATHIS" REORDERERING-HISTORY; where did these names come from he, uncomfortably, in cyborg circuits sometimes dared, illicitly, wonder? He knew reading a dirty, actually proscribed, set of tatty papers called MONITOR "BECK" PAGE and "TRECHO" YEAR BOOK, spelling was too "provenance" modern perhaps, that, long ago, in oil war-5 with the Euro-DEMO COMMUNITY and China Ausso-ASIATIC Communist alliance enemies the United World FASCIST Truman state military academy had been rival destroyed. By his college, 2049, as it had, finally, been subversively taken over. By peculiar creatures called AMNI-FEMINISTS in pay of these unpatriotic deviant "rogue state" enemy alliance! BUT what the suppressed place had, ever, "liberal arts" stood for was as much puzzlement to him as it was to MFA Livingston, dea of something at that lost place and Corsical Paddius, director of internal studies there, who had turned Brutus for our side! WHAT, HELL, WAS "LIBERAL ARTS?"

With wfeperson Eurasian-liberated slave no one, lunchtime approved, two hours, work through "strength" sopulation, two hours for our great leader President Mel Bush Dynasty 16! With adoption of her suggestion, we "TRANSORTER" ATMO BUSH CONSUMERIST-PAY MACHINE, REVAPORISE OURSELVES: TO HER NATIVE MALAYASIANA CONQUERED BY US PROV-

INCE. Here, we enjoy oil-Bush reatomised café a Indochine, with toe-rubbing provided GUANTANAMO EX-TERRORIST MASSEURS! As, since I am a PHD "Bush class merit" worker, in UNITED WORLD EMPIRE AN-NEXED SUCH TERRITORIES such called "semi gay-perversions" are elite allowed! Altho' they are, strictly speaking not globally or outer space legal, and PETALANIA thus always has to bring extra George dollars to keep our wheels lubricated, so to speak. There's a wonderbar guy too we see there revered Fallwell "closet-out"-the-four; wonder who, the smiling romp is descended from? Someone, in our momentous coup FLORIDEAN year of 2004 he claims, but won't elaborate in weird lingo, lost, as too "straight?"

Afternoon time with soulmate wfeperson no. 2, who "duty-bound by our great Bush leaders' teachings to afternoon-shift, unpaid assist her man! Called "standing by" after a Republican Party country-singer of the twentieth century, BOONIUS PAT PARTON, I "belive!" However, after slipping away from official duties, "wife" and I, ugh mustn't use that old word, do secret-out our unofficial herstory, we are writing for a EURO-DEMO FRENCH county there! We are labeling it. "Real story of 2004, Novembre USA." It will sell well, especially among our draft-fleers, there called CANADIANS AND MEXICANS. Why? You see: me and BETTINIUS postulate that a man called Kerry, really, won, then, in something called non-electoral college vote plurality. But old tv tape, from a station "KTVO," suddently goes BLANK just as they try to announce the KERRY FIGURES as a HERR Heine of some-

thing called the DIVISION OF BONDAGE bursts in with money he thrusts into the mouth of a man called weather SPARKLOCK??

Nighttime and bedtime, at last, with wfeperson 3 mother of our approved statutory 2 kids, all surplus adopted, not aborted you might morally male comprehend. EBONYIELLA tells me about her day at the white house KIRKSVILLIANA adoption such, surplus center! It appears, as she was instructing one of these evil unfortunate, now teenager "girl" surplus in new Mel Bush movie, THE LASHING, how its proper theology to "belive" Jesus-Bush just whipped all Semite darkies for their own violent penitence (ouch) good, not the money-changers as the EURO DEMO draft dodgers "lyingly" claim, the child had the impertinence to ask, "why?" Oddly, she had forgotten "why," accoding to SAINT LAURA'S 2004 VICE MANUAL. She's worried they will reprogram us cyborg fascist slaves all in punishment, low-grade TRUWOMAN academy result. I said don't "woo" so loud, it's a man's world, MINE so safe! "BASH, BASH" ON OUR DOOR, "CITIZENS OF ASHCROFT COMPOUNDS OPEN-UP, BY ORDER OF PATRIOTS, "says the horrible chorus of bashers; "wot are we going to do?" I've already been reprogrammed and oiled so many times all my spelling skills have become human mind nit-wit unsexist AGAIN! As if, hell, my ancestors might ultimately have been KERRYTTES or EURORITES or so thus "no ones:" in real liberation, 2004, potentially!!!

All resemblance to the "living" of 3004, is UNDENIED!

Strawberry Memories

Story by | Joel Anderson

Lindsey still had strawberries left over from lunch, rich and red, and we snack on them, reach into the plastic bag, and search for the sugar-dusted gems. The sweetly tart flavor of spring fingers in our mouths and on our lips, staining them a bloody red. Though her mouth hardly moves, she smiles with her eyes. As we lay in the hammock, I know there is a God, for the moment is perfect and only God makes perfection.

Yet, only in heaven do such moments last forever; soon Lindsey must go back to Spencer's Grocery and I to the soap factory. As we part, Lindsey grabs my hand, stands on her toes, and plants a warm and moist affection on my cheek. I stand there stunned, and before I can decide whether to return love's tender greeting, she's gone. I touch my cheek where Lindsey marked me with her soft

lips. With a dab from my handkerchief, the mark is gone, but I can still feel the ghost of Lindsey's touch.

Absently, my hand returns to my cheek as I make my way to the factory, trying to stretch out the memory of Lindsey's sweet strawberry kiss. It's a short walk, made quicker by the fact that I'm in no hurry to get there. Like always, long before I can see the factory, I can smell it. To the townsfolk, it smells like a sweet perfume. To me, it smells like death. Like Pavlov's dog, I've been conditioned, conditioned to hate the smell of soap. I feel dirty before I shower, and I feel dirty afterwards. A soap worker is never truly clean.

I've been working in this factory for two years now and the sight of it never ceases to rattle me. The factory is an imposing monolith of steel, smoke, and fire, spewing out its noxious fumes. Slowly and perhaps deliberately too, the memories of this past afternoon sidle out of my mind, con-

sumed by the thought of ten hours of soap-flavored hell.

As sure as I am that there is a God, I'm twice as sure there is a devil, for only the devil could design a creation so fiendishly sick as the factory. Men are pumped in and out, the best years of their lives consumed. Some men donate limbs to the factory, others, their eyes. If they're lucky enough, they can still work, but most amputees of the factory aren't that blessed. There's no advantage in being a young factory worker either. It only means I have more years of my life to sacrifice.

Around these parts, the American dream is just that, a dream.

Nothing is natural in the factory, not the soap, not the machines, and especially not the foreman. Everything is artificial. Working the night shift, even the light isn't real. The glaring bulbs are supposed to keep the workers from looking up, from becoming distracted, but looking down only brings the burning lye into my eyes, mouth, and soul. My clothes and

hair never come clean of that terrible smell. Sterile. Harsh. Antiseptic.

The squawk of the intercom barks over the speakers as 234 workers stop and stand still, looking neither up nor down. Announcements never herald good tidings. Usually they mean we "get" to work through a holiday or that raises will be withheld for another year. I prepare myself for the worst, and a few seconds later, I hear it. Clancy's Soap is proud to announce a new product, a product that will revolutionize the soap making business. Of the five factories in the Tri-city area, this factory alone was chosen to make the new product.

Strawberry-scented soap.



Onion Voodoo (Editor's Pick)

Story by | Dana Kuhnline

I was slicing onions, two of them, in a blinded, weeping, onion stupor, sniffing pathetically and listening to the rain. Yes the rain, melodramatic but true. You would laugh at me, but the rain makes me feel sorry for myself. It makes me think too much.

I was slicing onions with the sharpest knife in the world, at least, that's how they're labeled. I know about my knife because I labeled, labeled, labeled them while selling them one summer. Well, to four customers all summer, including myself. I was never very good at selling things, even the most sharpest things in the world. I can't present superlatives with any honesty or conviction. It's too much pressure. I guess that's why I can't even sell myself.

I was slicing onions, through the rain, and watching the lovely precision, how the knife slips so sweetly through. With each tiny movement, a 12-inch butcher knife through wet, white, strong scented flesh. It was so beautiful, and I wished I could slice myself up so neatly, cleanly, effortlessly. The thought that something going through my skin and my life could be so clean and silver sends shivers down my spine. The image of a knife making slim red lines down my back was so much more delicious than shivers can describe, delicious, simply, delicious. The neatness of it, the cleanliness, it's the sort of thing you crave in the rain, to be washed, divided, and blended with spices. So much easier than real life, where parts of you stick out awkwardly, growing hair, falling in love; it's endlessly, endlessly messy.

I know about the beauty of this temptation because last week I had a taste of it, and I realized something. I was slicing quickly through potatoes when I caught the top part of my thumb, the fold in the knuckle where it sticks out, or used to. The thin piece was lost in the potatoes and there was my thumb, with a little monk's tonsure, perfectly, perfectly smooth and pink, growing precise circles of blood. It was so surprising, so perfect, right into the potatoes. The white skin was almost invisible. It was so, beautiful. Not the sort of thing you could plan out.

But it makes me think of a plan; I am always, always planning. In my half-dreams I plan about you, darling, while I cook, wait to fall asleep, tie my shoelaces. And I was wondering if I sliced off a piece of my body and slipped it into your soup, what would happen? If my skin went down your throat; if I could let my cells mingle with yours; if you could digest me. I was wondering if you would need me then, if I could make us have a union still, even if you never knew the reason. Would we be connected? I would finally be inside you, where you never let me, finally figuring things out, exploring, and sifting through your stupid secrets.

How else can I get inside you except through trickery, and yet I think all the trickery just leads me farther, farther away from where I was trying to be. If I tried to tell you

this, you wouldn't understand. But I would be inside of you, my thumb digested and mixed in with the potatoes that nourish you. I've always wanted to feed you. You know this, and it bothers you. I wanted to feed you myself; the sunset, every tree I saw, I wanted to give you each petal on each dandelion that I loved. I wanted you to see what I loved, and I wanted you to take it, to have it inside of you. You are such a jerk.

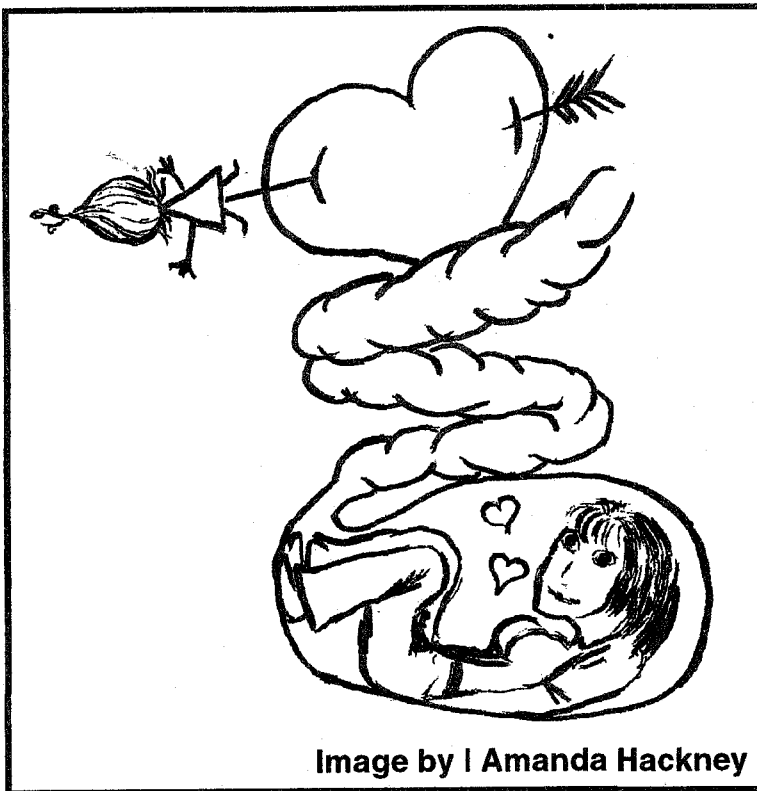


Image by | Amanda Hackney

Why don't you feel special about all this? These offerings are not something to be ignored, or even skimmed over, or worst of all refused. People need other people. You needed me; I always knew that. You were like a little boy orphan, hungry, a little dirty, innocent but always in trouble. It was instinct to take you in. It was what girls are supposed to do. And you were supposed to like it, you were supposed to need me, I was supposed to have something to give, to give up.

It's part of my blood, submission. It is a part of me like my mother's eyes, and it is a part of me like my mother's strong hands, passed down in strong tradition of strong submission. You have to have something to sacrifice. You need someone to sacrifice to. The women in my family are tough, and to prove it they submit. No one can submit like they. When I brush my teeth, quietly, my eyes are gray, and flecks of toothpaste hit the mirror. At these times, I know that all the women of my family are inside me. Are they who I'm supposed to be now? In a life of cutting and boiling to make do? One more drip in the endless pattern of women falling over men. And I am like them, strong willed, strong legged, and I am smart. And you know, I am probably smarter than you, although dear, I'd never say so. Some days, I can't even say how much I like you, as like and love are irrelevant at times like this. I only know that I need you, need, need you, like water or air, or food.

A person can do without food for two weeks, as long as they are drinking juice, they say, even longer if the person is strong enough. But when they see food again they are weak

and barbaric, they are uncivilized, and they can't keep pieces of bread flicking out of their mouth while they stuff it. They are weak; they are disgusting. This embarrasses you, I know, my own weaknesses for you. This is what I am like when you let me see you again, when you mosey, yes mosey, dammit, in with flipped hair and crooked smile, long thin legs and irritating habits. When you finally return my call. I am never quite gone, sometimes I imagine

you have an extrasensory connection to my limits; that you can read me and predict me. But I know that in truth my limits just bend themselves to your occurrences. I drool over you, smile too much, and I drop things. I talk faster and in higher pitch. It's like you cut my life with my sharp knife, between everything I care about, and then you on the other side. I hate it, but the neatness is, enticing.

How can I help but be proud of myself, done with the onions, slicing garlic now, strongly scented, sticky and small. The roof is still pattering with fat splashes of rain. My hips hum as I cook, my feet are light on tiled floor, and stews are beginning to bubble, will you call, will you not? Some day, some time soon, you'll call, and then the soup and garlic and potatoes and all will drop to the floor. You will ask me what I am up to, and of course it is nothing. Nothing of course, and how are you, how is your stomach doing? You will come back here, and I will feed you things, all the things that I can. I have been thinking of plans again, you see.

After this time, you'll have to come back, and perhaps you need more of my thumb. Or a lock of hair this time? Is this how my mother did it? Is this how she kept my father around, pieces of her, slowly slipping into soup over time, like breast milk, or an umbilical cord. Maybe all I need to do is find a way to carry you in my womb for nine months. Or perhaps, I wonder, as silver knife glints through the potatoes now, I could build a womb of me inside of you. With onions and voodoo, yes, with thumbs and strange strands of hair, all waiting for me in your stomach. A voodoo doll, an effigy of me, clinging to the edges of your intestines, turning you into my own doll.

We'll be connected then, and you will always be trying to figure out what it is about me that you can't quite shake, not the movement of my hips, or the quick sex of my fingertips. No, as you tell me, you can see that anywhere, there is smoother skin, there are quicker sexed fingertips, there is even more subtle liquid of hips. And it's not the way I talk that entices you, because that has always bothered you. I am funnier than you, but also more awkward, I have seen you wince at parties. It's ok that I bother you, you know, you chew with your mouth open, and blow your nose into socks. We all have faults. You don't have to love me, but you will wonder why you can't stop needing me.

The secret, of course, is magic, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

Whose Savior Now?

Story by | Ed Jenkins

Last night I dreamt that I had to beat up some two ton kid. Fortunately I was Batman, otherwise I don't think I could have done it. It was like some Mortal Kombat shit. This boy was a very spherical 4,000 pounds, and he might have even been some kind of Ultimate Fighting champion.

But the action wasn't my greatest concern. I was more stressed about the identity conflict, always worried about changing into Batman before I act so that nobody knows my secret. Anyway, this morning I realized that I've had these superhero dreams before (maybe 3 in the last 6 months). And they always included me in some reluctant leadership position against a very grotesque and violent enemy. Good vs. Evil dichotomy.

Well I've always had a bit of a savior complex. I fantasize about saving people, communities, universes, and especially women. I think that a lot of men have savior fantasies. The same corny films that taught us our culture's concept of love did the whole macho man and distressed maiden bullshit.

But I think the underlying desire for men to save women is, of course, power. Can you dig it? Look. Our patriarchal institutions, by definition, systematically provide men in general with relative power over women. Men oppress women, thus they have a feeling of power tainted with some level of guilt. So in an attempt to maintain that power but overcome the guilt, we (men) seek to save women from the oppression into which we have forced them. Of course this plan is futile, because we cannot trick the depths of our psychology into righting our sins.

Parents pull this shit too. As long as they choose to be the top members of a familial institution, parents need power over their children to preserve the hierarchy. It may be in the form of parents setting the kids up for failure in order to teach a lesson, or it is often the more subtle, systematic recycling or their own neurotic upbringing into the successive generation. Then the parents will save us through their mighty experience and consequent authority? How reactionary!

Pets? Yeah. I have a distinct memory during my childhood of carrying a puppy out into a field and then walking away. As soon as it began to whimper I went to "rescue" it. Even then I know consciously that I was doing this under whatever pretext with the goal of achieving some kind of validation from rescuing the dog. I wanted it to see me as a savior. That type of relationship would be one in which I was the superior but also the revered. But it didn't work. I knew that dog wouldn't have been crying if I didn't pretend to strand it there.

No, it can't work. Certainly an oppressor can repent, and a victim can forgive. But it is impossible for the oppressor to rectify the sin through some means other than repentance. And, by the way, I'm not really a superhero (wink).

Mea Maxima Culpa

Story by | Stephanie Nash

Smoke coils above them. Tobacco and incense and sex flavor the air, his lips, fill his mouth. But they fail to cover the smell of the pile of dirty laundry in the middle of the floor. The post-coital warmth is broken by the buzz of craving, so Ben disengages himself from his girlfriend and lights a cigarette.

Cancer by the time he is forty.

But now he is twenty-one, the age at which the pleasure of legally buying beer should still be sharp and clean. Ben knows the world isn't fair. That's why the laundry pile doesn't move.

"Chain-smoking really isn't attractive." Betty presses her mouth to the back of his neck. "You always taste like cigarettes now."

Betty has a stupid name, but she isn't stupid. He used to stare at her in chemistry. The quirk of her mouth made him dream of kissing her.

"Besides," she adds, reaching for her clothes already. "Smoking isn't allowed in the dorms."

"They're not going to stop me." Ben says. And it's true — about once a week his RA bumbles down the hall to remind him it's against the rules. Sometimes, she tells him that if he ever needs to talk about it, she's right there. Bitch.

"Sooner or later, they will."

Ben doesn't answer.

Usually, Ben smokes all day and skips class. When he does go, it is on a whim, and he has rarely showered or shaved. He's realized that secretly, the professors are all the same person. They speak the same words with the same tones, and Ben is amused that he is the only person to have figured it out.

"Mr. Evans," professor says, as the rest of the class shuffles out. "It's good to see you."

He can respond in any way to this. Sometimes he doesn't respond at all. It doesn't matter.

"Of course," they coo. "With what you've been through — take as long as you need. You shouldn't worry."

And then they smile.

He thinks about their crap salaries, and feels better.

"I love you," Betty whispers, bending to tie her shoes. He almost doesn't hear her, but then the only time she says it is when she can pretend she didn't.

"Leaving already?" he asks, scratching the back of his neck where she kissed him.

"It smells like — God, I don't even know. It's really disgusting in here."

"Rain?" Ben gestures at the incense.

"No. Not at all."

She stands up, fidgeting. Nervous, now, where she was never nervous before. Before it happened. She edges around the pile of underwear, grimacing. Betty hates the laundry, but she hasn't mentioned it directly. People never do.

His phone rings.

Both of them ignore it. They're too busy staring at the mound. Ben scratches his neck again and stands up. He catches Betty's hand to draw her closer. The answering machine: *Hello, this is Alex and Ben's room, leave a message.* Ben hates the message. Hates his mother's halt-

ing voice — how is he will he call — and turns his head so the kiss lands on Betty's cheek. She sets her jaw, angry.

"I'm pregnant."

Everyone says that what Alex did isn't his fault. Everyone says it, over and over. They do not understand these things. They do not understand why he never goes to the hospital. They keep telling him about it, these people who say that it isn't his fault, laboring under the misguided notion that his absence is somehow a request for information. Through them, Ben knows intimately the white room, the beepbeep of the heart monitor. The way Alex 'looks

so small' in the bed, his head swathed in bandages that hide the hole, hide the way his brains were scrambled around. How the bullet-

They say it isn't his fault. But he was late. He was late, while

Alex was bleeding.

He stares at her. This is something he has not thought of. This is something that does not fit into his reality at the moment — his girlfriend was not to get pregnant. He takes a step back from her, and stumbles on the laundry. Betty sucks her cheeks in.

"Yeah, that's what I thought."

"What?"

"You don't even care, do you?"

"Christ, Betty. Don't start with me. Don't. You don't know."

"What Alex did isn't your fault!" she shrieks at him, loud enough that the whole floor must hear. He hates her, her whining and the funny quirk of her mouth and the way she just doesn't get it.

Betty attacks the laundry pile, flinging it everywhere. He lunges for her, fingers wrapping around her upper arms and squeezing, squeezing hard. Betty screams, and brings her knee up, and the world turns hazy white with pain. He collapses onto the bed wheezing. She continues to dig.

"Stop," Ben whispers. "Stop."

"You don't care. You don't care about me, and none of this is my fault," she mutters. Ben covers his mouth and nose against the stench of sweat.

"Don't, please Betty, please."

Ben does not know where Alex bought the gun. He does not know how long he had it. Ben remembers every day the police, calling them, Alex lying there and how he didn't know. He should have known, they'd been roommates for three years. He remembers screaming, and he cannot sleep. He cannot ever sleep, and everyone thinks they know what's going on but they don't. They can't understand. They say they do. They don't. They don't. They don't.

They stare at the floor.

"It won't come out," Ben says. "It's all ways there."

"I know."

Betty shivers, her arms around herself. The floor beneath the pile is red brown.

"I told you to leave it."

She doesn't say anything. Ben grabs for anything to cover the red. Pants, shirts, underwear. Anything. Slowly, the stain vanishes again.

"It's not your fault, Ben."

He ignores her, patting the pile back together, able to breathe again. His room tastes like anger and death. Betty sighs.

And she turns to leave.

Ahem

Story by | Bryan O'Brien

I hear a woman behind me explaining why her audience shouldn't shop at Wal-Mart. Her audience, whose involvement in the conversation I have not yet deciphered, consists of a young man and woman, the latter being an employee of the small coffee shop. As the woman excitedly describes Kurt Vonnegut's "Player Piano," the young girl walks back to her duties behind the counter. I realize I should read this book. The Young man stays, obviously showing interest now. They speak for a while before the woman walks to the couch behind me and sits. She begins knitting. I am writing the words "I realize I should read..." when a passerby asks her in tones of polite conversation, "Where'd you get the yarn?"

Black Memory

Story by | Joel Sievert

My fingers were oddly skeletal, iodine-stained in the tingling glow of the solitary sun. The sky was empty and seamlessly orange, shaded slowly from light to dark as the eye scanned across its ancient page. I faced north, the hills of my palm casting long shadows over the valleys. It was my right hand, and I held it out in front of my face, about a foot away, hitch-hiker's thumb extending into the darkness, fingers slightly separated, slightly bent. My elbow rested shakily on a knobby hip; the skin between, elastic, allowed the bones to grind smoothly and painlessly. I felt only the pressure between two bodies, not the violent twisting and pulling of my skin. I marveled briefly at this, as one tends to think of skin as taut and tender, firmly attached to the skeleton. But here it gave slack, here it rolled, still rubbery of course, but, below the surface, liquid... I found my eyes out of focus, having drifted immeasurably into a distance presently masked by my hand. I watched with unblinking disinterest as my hand, gripped by some foreign energy, wavered briefly and edged out of my vision. The sky was swiftly approaching red. I let the hand fall off to my side with a muffled thud as it landed in the sand. My legs were crossed in a full lotus, which only then did I realize was uncomfortable. It was a discomfort that vanished in the smoke with my attention. Misdirection. My arms were now limp at my sides, keeping me, like my bare feet, peripherally aware of the sensation of sand. Shirtless, my sharply curved spine must have jutted sinisterly with the aid of shadows. My head was still, up, woozily. Outside of my perception, a long black shadow was now slithering from my body, swimming confidently in the wavy sea of off-white sand. This I saw from the heavens. When the sky was blood red, I scanned my surroundings one last time, just in case. My neck was stiff. I saw nothing but the horizon. In those last moments of sunlight I felt the temperature fall rapidly. Goose bumps crawled up my arms. When the sun finally died, leaving me in the pathetic spotlight of the moon, I leaned forward to feel the sand. Barely warm, it would soon be cold. Fortunately however, it wasn't very dark. Even before my eyes had adjusted I watched the sand slip through my fingers. The cloudy veil of stars was intrusive to say the least. Vile infiltrators of solitude, they flickered and laughed from their crowded nebulae. In solitude time passes immeasurably slow. I pulled myself to my feet with a groan and teetered heavily, as my legs were numb, walking for perhaps

"Wal-Mart," she replies. I finish the story. Later I consider my words hasty and pick up my pencil once more. Every few minutes I ponder reading her this story in which she has unknowingly starred. I finally decide against it, fearing the scenario might send me into a hellish introspective tailspin of self-narration, as if someone somewhere had sat on the remote in control of my thoughts. To distract myself, I indulge in another coffee shop conversation. Two mothers are sharing Java in the corner. One tells of her daughter's 'Fall to Cannabis' with proud but desperate tones. The other gives the occasional sympathetic anecdote, with a drop of reassurance. I assume she is attempting sincerity while being glad her daughter is a 'straight kid.' It is then that I hear the first clear comment from the second woman, "You know Joan, Marijuana is a very common social indulgence. Have you ever tried it?"

ten minutes. I plopped back to the ground, spinning around to lie on my side, and stared back at my tracks. I had broken the perfect blanket of sand. On a spherical world, distance is an illusion. Infinite horizons of dust... I closed my eyes to erase the contrast. All I could see now were my grey footprints in a field of finite, planar black. The path was long but none of it escaped my perception here in the plane world. Suddenly distance was erased and the blackness was once again infinite. Opening my eyes to the sky was adding light, but not dimension. How long have I been trapped in this desert? I felt my ribs one by one as my stomach howled fiercely from its ribless flesh-cage. I noticed suddenly how dry my throat was, how sandy. In eerie synchronization with my perceptions, my body began to shiver from hunger and cold; I cursed the waste of energy. Indeed in the last desperate and asphyxiated gasps of consciousness I was a pathetic and dying animal. I saw it in her eyes, to be sure. Some peripheral quality, some quiet lust, some odorless death, all in one twinkling facet of the pupil. Some yawning desperation?? I remember her face quite well. Her skin was soft and sheet-white, her cheekbones sharp and skin-tight. Her long and sensuously, sinuously curved neck beckoned with every breath or fragrant chirp my starving teeth. I can still taste, on the tip of my tongue or in the back of my mind, or both, or neither, the bittersweet caress of her flesh. And her eyes, oh her eyes, a cold and electric blue, her pupils two brilliant points of light. There remains within me a stinging wound, skinned flesh, much more vivid, as misfortune would have it, than the momentary memories of joy outlined in the fog of my mind. Rapidly receding shadows perhaps sneaking into deep dark crevasses to await pleasant senility, should it ever come. But visions of her slender grace will be forever painted on the transparent porcelain of my eyeballs. I cannot escape her even in sleep, for my dreams are haunted by chance encounters and fantasy lives. I have fooled myself a thousand times already; from behind, or at a distance, I have spied and followed my dear departed, but up close she is invariably revealed as some sexless creature with a drained complexion and vacuous grey eyes, some incidental petal in the crowd. In truth, or in reality as I believe it so, I have not seen her since, nor do I imagine I ever will; I have distanced myself. It was far too grave in that pale wet city. And so it is here I find myself in the restless night, in a place she can never know, a world beyond those saccharine dreams of yesterday, in this quiet death, staring through frozen time at black memory.

Cronus and his Son (Editor's Pick)

Story by | Matt Siemer

Joshua followed his father in the forest, walking then stopping again to listen for the sound of the deer. His father bent down. He looked at tracks. He got back up again, and they moved. Now they stood still. His father crouched down behind some foliage overlooking a source of water. Josh positioned himself behind a tree a little away from his father. They were both very quiet. A breakfast sandwich.

Yes, Josh was not thinking about his prey as he stood silently behind a tree. He wanted a breakfast sandwich like the one he had eaten earlier at Marshall's Diner. It had been on a toasted bun. He had loved that toasted bun.

"I think I hear something," his father, Steven, said. They both tensed.

After a minute nothing happened.

Josh looked over at his father. They had both consumed a similar sandwich. Did his father have the same desire? He didn't think so. Steven was staring intently at the pond. He had a mind that could focus on just one thing at once. It probably came from his former profession. Steven had been a clockmaker.

One year ago, a strange incident had occurred. Steven had gotten a call from the fire department one night, and learned that his shop had burned to the ground. Apparently, in the bookstore next to his shop, an absent-minded individual had left a large space heater on, and in the middle of the night, the bookstore, and consequently every store around it, had erupted into flames. The shops were old, and the police department told him the next day that faulty electrical wiring was probably to blame. At first Steven had taken the news very badly. He was used to working long hours in his shop, and he enjoyed the tinkering and puzzling that was needed to assemble a perfect time-telling instrument. He eventually decided to take the

insurance money and go into an early retirement, but the decision was hard, and the first few months were troubling for him. After the initial shock, he found that he now had more time for his family, which he had not been a part of for some time. His mind, however, still worked in the same way, slowly, carefully, with focused attention to detail.

He heard his son's stomach rumble. He looked over at him perplexed. They had just

eaten a few hours ago, and if he could hear his stomach, the deer probably could too.

"Quiet over there," he said, "you think the deer are deaf?"

Josh gave a mumbled, mournful reply. The breakfast sandwich had cheese! He did not feel like hunting today.

The day was cold, wet, and perfectly monotone in its color scheme. Brown autumn leaves and gray-brown clay that stuck to boots slogging through it.

Josh did not want to be misrepresented, however. He was glad to be hunting with his father, as they always did in November. While his father was still working, this was the only time they ever bonded. They had never missed a season, and Josh always enjoyed himself. He looked over at his father, perched like a bird on a stick, waiting for a deer to enter the clearing. Josh was not enjoying this trip. What he wanted was hot bacon and eggs (with cheese) on a toasted bun. A toasted bun! Compared to the chilly, frostbitten air, it was a toasted euphoria. He shifted from one leg to another. He felt lazy and hungry. Leaning his head against the tree, he started thinking about a certain hot sandwich. His mind started drifting to other things. He would like to sit down, his feet ached from standing. The release of pressure that would bring. He would like to take off his jacket and hang it next to the fireplace. He would have liked to ask

his father right then if they could go back and sit at that warm table, and perhaps have a good conversation about one thing or another. They hardly ever had conversations about anything important. Now that he thought about it, Josh didn't know his father very well at all. He had been absent through much of Josh's childhood, gone working at his shop. Now that he was retired, they tried their best to communicate with each other, but the old ways were too routine, too easy to slip back in to. As much as he knew his father's habits, he did not know why or how they came about. He did not know the man. And that breakfast sandwich! He could see himself ordering it now...

"JOSH! I see one!"

Josh stumbled to consciousness and fumbled with his rifle. It slipped out of his hand as he tried to gather his bearings! He tried to catch it as it went down!

BLAM!

A thunderous roar was heard through the clearing, it reverberated through the air. Josh was on his knees. The rifle was near his unstable hands. The shock of waking had jarred him. He looked around. His father was lying on the ground, prone.

Oh God! Josh picked himself up onto shaking legs. The rifle had gone off in his father's direction. He couldn't believe what was happening. He had been so careless. He was never careless!

Suddenly his father looked up. He was shaking, his eyes were wide. He got to his knees.

"What the hell happened, eh? You could have at least shot in the direction of the deer."

Josh was unsure of what to say. He stammered and stuttered. He was only slightly aware that his father had made a joke. He said the first thing that came to mind.

"I was thinking perhaps..."

"?"

"Perhaps we could..."

"?"

"I think I would like another breakfast sandwich!"

"!"

Steven looked confused for a second. His son's request had been as unexpected as the gunshot. He looked around. The deer was gone now. His mind now began to focus singularly on a new object: a sandwich. There was always tomorrow for deer.

"Okay," he said.

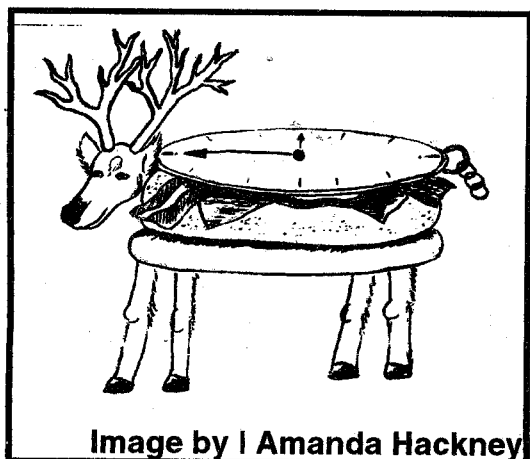


Image by | Amanda Hackney

Becoming

Story by | Katie Dixon

Erin Chelsea Hinson grew up in Manhattan with just her mother. Her father had left them two days after Erin was born. Growing up, Erin was very close to her mother (Nancy), until one day, when she was 14,

she was looking around in her mother's closet for a shirt to borrow, and discovered Nancy's dominatrix outfit. This was at a point in her life when people were always teasing her about being short, and not very good looking, and saying that because she was so short and ugly she could never become a model (which was the only thing that she ever wanted to be). She be-

Wearing the outfit made Erin feel very close to her mother, so she decided that a good way to honor the memory of Nancy was to become a domanatrix herself.

came very angry towards her mother because Nancy was tall and everyone thought that she was so hot and beautiful. Nancy died five years later, from Gonorrhea. Erin became depressed because she never got the chance to make up with her mother. So she decided to devote her life to taking photographs of anything and everything that she found beautiful.

Then, one day, about one year after Nancy's death, Erin was sorting through her mother's clothes to give to charity, and she came across the dominatrix outfit. As Erin sat there holding it, a thought came across her mind, and she decided to try the outfit on. And to her surprise, it fit perfectly! Wearing the outfit made Erin feel very close to her mother, so she decided that a good way to honor the memory of Nancy was to become a dominatrix herself. But only as a hobby (just as Nancy had done); she kept her job as a photographer for a Manhattan art magazine. But there was only one problem, Erin had low self-esteem from being made fun of as a teenager. This caused Erin to only seek out nerds and geeks as clients, because she knew that she could dominate them very easily. And that made her feel better about herself.

course. I put my hand out and stroked his brown fur, and the most wonderful thing happened, Crackers used his tiny claws to climb up my hand! It didn't even hurt a bit, and Crackers wanted to be with me! I gave a smug look to Joey. Joey's response was simply to take Crackers away and return him to his plastic prison.

I spent that entire afternoon designing the obstacle course. It wasn't spectacular, but it still seemed a good challenge. There even was a rest area in the middle with some water. I had thought of everything. Adam helped, too. He wanted to see this as much as I did. Maybe I wasn't the only one to not see Crackers? The thought fueled my master plan.

It wasn't long before we had Crackers in hand, the plastic cage's lid thrown asunder in liberation of this beautiful animal. We, all of us, were excited, I could feel his little heart beating fast in my palm. Running up the stairs two at a time, we

We shared everything, except when it came to desserts, but that's just the rule.

So you could imagine my surprise when Joey wouldn't let me play with Crackers.

A wholly original name for a wholly original gerbil. His brown fur was just at the level of fluffiness that it didn't really look prissy, just cute. He had wonderfully expressive, deep, brown eyes that seemed to have an intelligence to them. Also, there seemed to be no limit to his chewing. He would eat and chew on the cardboard tube, then eat some more, chew cardboard, and nap, cardboard, drink water, cardboard. There was one of those wheels too, and when Crackers entered that ingenious device, he would run and run until he could no longer run. And then he ate some cardboard.

But, I was not allowed to play with him. This infuriated me. Adam got to play with Crackers, but not me. It

was obvious that he could only trust immediate family with the task of playing with this gerbil. For weeks I pestered him about wanting to play with him; I had it all planned, we would set up an obstacle course of pillows (nothing harder, did you think I was stupid?) and help him along when he was stuck, but Crackers being a brilliant gerbil, he obviously would not have any trouble. I thought this was a rock solid argument, and everyone would have fun, especially Crackers.

No.

We swore a surprising amount in those days, and I'm sure that there was an obscenity or two that was released into the upper atmosphere at that refusal.

Can I just touch him?

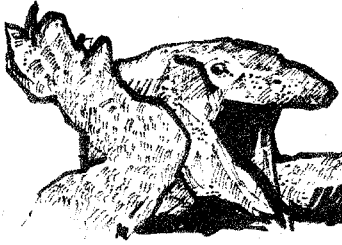
Joey carefully picked the small creature from his cage and held him out to me. Crackers looked up to me with his deep, intelligent, brown eyes, and I knew that he was yearning for more, for the world beyond his cage. Perhaps for an obstacle

"Crackers"

Story by | Ben Knoll

I had always been close to my cousins when I was growing up. I used to always go over to their house; they had a cabinet full of snack food, a fridge full of whole milk and soda, and a large backyard that was right next to the Galleria, the loveliest mall to a 10 year old boy. I'm sure we contributed to the loss of many small treats and trinkets. I'm proud to say that they have never caught the culprit.

Joey and I would play together, Adam tagging along. We were dubbed, rather unceremoniously, "The Littles." We would run around the backyard playing imaginary games about adventurers discovering ancient tombs and ruins and crossing the stars to planets inhabited by more ancient tombs and ruins. Ending with us screaming, dirty, and hungry walking into the old house and demanding sustenance.



the minitor.

We hope you enjoyed the short story edition.
Good luck on your finals, and have a great summer!

volume 9
issue 11



Largest march in American history

Testimonial from the March for Women's Lives

Story by | Amy Ameis

On Friday April 23, forty-five women and men boarded a bus: destination- The March for Women's Lives, Washington D.C. In a post to her friend, Dr. Natalie Alexander described with whom we would be spending the next 72 hours; "We had 45 people: 4 men, the rest women, two black women, one transnational from India, three mother-child pairs, including our new candidate for state senate and her fourteen year old son, some professors from Truman, four medical students from the osteopathic school in town, the rest TSU students, all came along in the Northeast Missouri NOW bus!" Needless to say, our enthusiasm filled the air, and since there was no ventilation, it only escalated throughout the trip.

Nineteen hours later, to everyone's relief, we arrived at our hotel in Fredrick,

MD. Some of us rested; most of us ate and downed a few ales, saw some good music, and enjoyed the experience that Fredrick had to offer. It was hard to sleep, everyone thinking about the next day's events.

For those of you who don't know, the March for Women's Lives was a gynormous gathering of 1.15 million souls on the Mall in D.C. (the largest march in American history). We were rallying to protect any woman's right to choose what is best for her body, not only when it comes to abortion. We were crying out for access to all forms of contraception, *real* sex education, universal healthcare, universal family planning, and anything which helps a woman, anywhere in the world, make a more informed choice when it comes to her reproductive health. -We DO NOT

want a man making choices about our bodies. "Not the church, not the state, womyn should decide their fate."

At 10:00am we rallied on the Mall and heard many powerful speakers including, Hillary Clinton, Alix Olsen, Ashley Judd, Madeleine Albright, Dolores Huerta and Dorothy Height. We watched in awe as more and more protesters continued to appear from all over the world and continued to get fired up about the causes which we all hold so dear. Hoisting a coat hanger into the air, actress Whoopi Goldberg recalled the days when abortion was illegal and women died from illegal or "back ally" abortions. "Does anybody remember this? Do you remember what this was used for?" she said to the crowd,

24th Hour ★ of the Day ★ After Forever

The Journal of an Insomniac

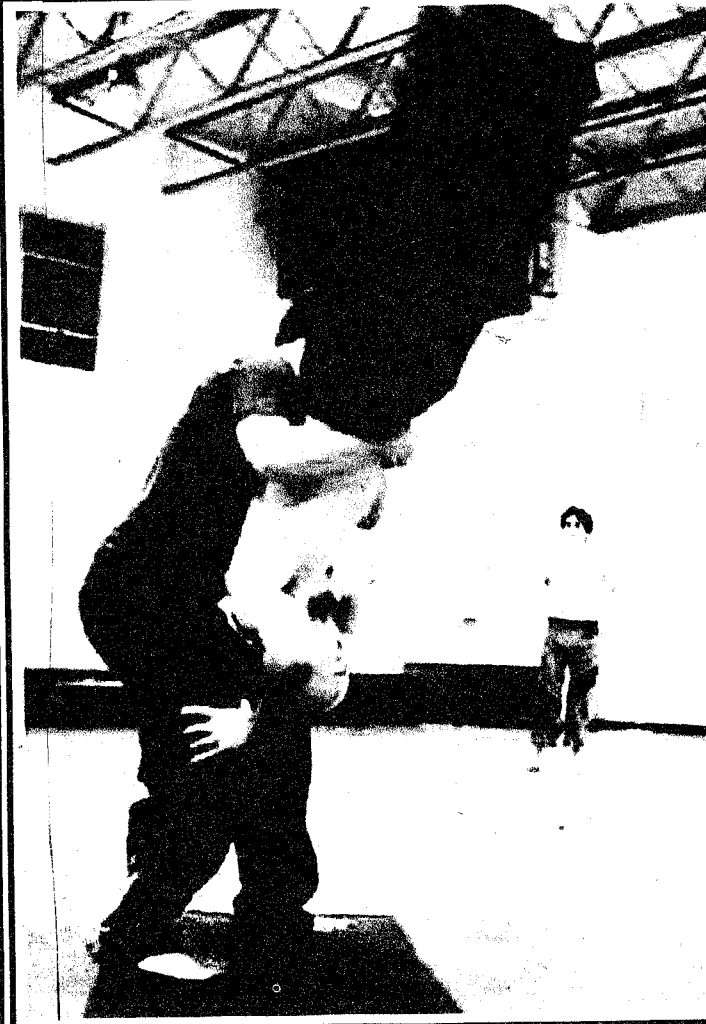
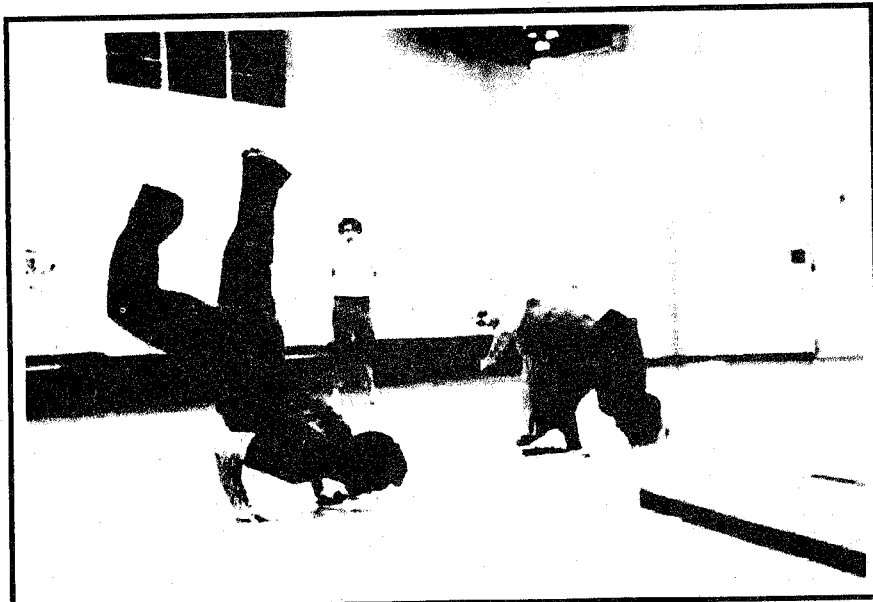
I love to watch the shadows chasing the sunshine across a field of long grass on a partly cloudy, windy day.

One day in the cafeteria, the lunch lady told me, "I put pineapple in these baked beans so we could have some Hawaiian music later."

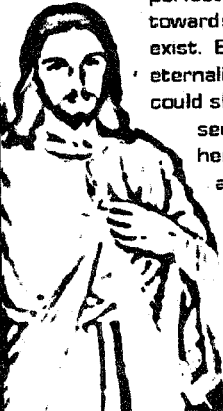
Amanda Hackney

Caopeira: A Photo-essay

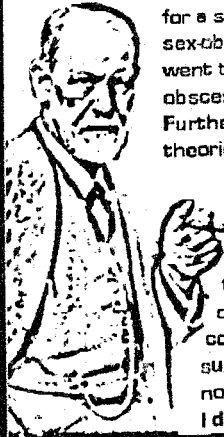
Pictures by | Tessa Bernhart




Paris Hilton and Jesus again Public Service Announcement: I've recently come to realize that this comic may have promoted inaccurate conceptions of the people it depicts, so I'm giving them this chance to set the record straight and then retiring the series. I hope this clears up any misunderstandings. Jon Lawinger



The suggestion that I would embrace, verbalize, or act on sexual thoughts about Paris Hilton is completely false. As the living embodiment of perfection, which all humans should strive towards, I am the least sexual human ever to exist. Even my immaculately conceived, sinless, eternally virginal mother was married, so she could sleep naked with her husband or get some second base action from him without losing her purity. But since I was never married and never sinned, I never engaged in any sexual activity whatsoever, not even masturbation. Still, since I was fully human, and underwent all normal human biological processes, I did have wet dreams, which are not sinful due to their involuntary nature. However, I didn't look forward to them, and I tried my best not to enjoy them.

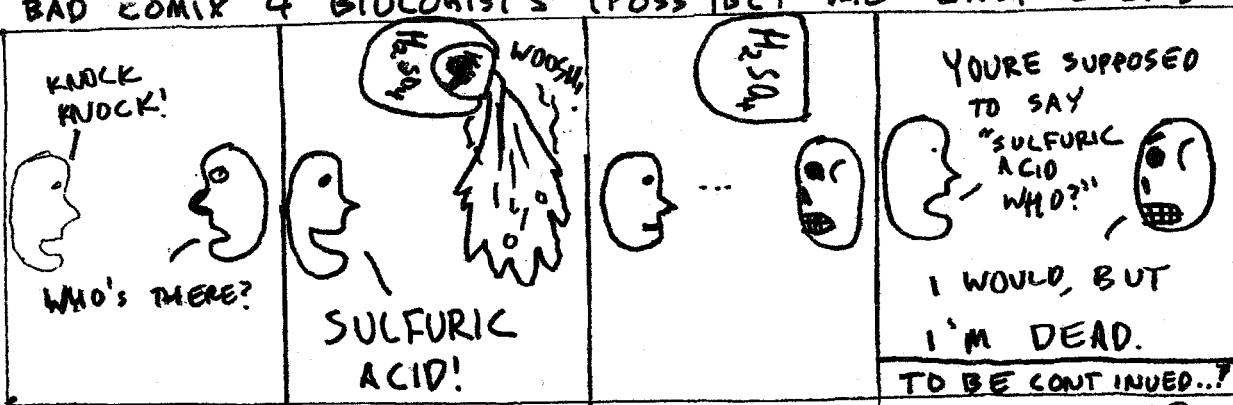


The suggestion that I was nothing more than a sex-obsessed horny old man is extremely misleading. The fact of the matter is that for a significant portion of my life I was a sex-obsessed horny young man. I also went through a brief period of time as a sex-obsessed horny middle-aged man as well. Furthermore, my revolutionary psychological theories did not consist merely of believing that all men secretly want to sleep with their mothers and that people are prone to randomly blurting out obscene thoughts. I also claimed that all women were desperately envious of men's penises, and that all men were constantly afraid of being castrated. Sadly such points of genius were ignored. Finally, no matter what Paris tells you, I swear I didn't force her to do anything.



The suggestion that I would act in such a slutty fashion as to attempt to seduce the almighty Jesus Christ is highly believable and hard to argue with. But can you blame me? Wouldn't you want to see what the Son of God looked like nude? Can you imagine how good the embodiment of human perfection would be in bed? I've tried! Yeah, it's true. Jesus is my ideal fantasy hook up. Maybe I'm just drawn to inaccessible men. And Jesus is as inaccessible as you can get.

BAD COMIX 4 BIOLOGISTS (POSSIBLY THE LAST EVER!)



BY PHIL SPEAR

Eco Tip

Take a brochure only if you need one. If you do take one, treat it with care and as you are leaving the attraction, return your brochure or map to the place from where you got it so someone else can use it.



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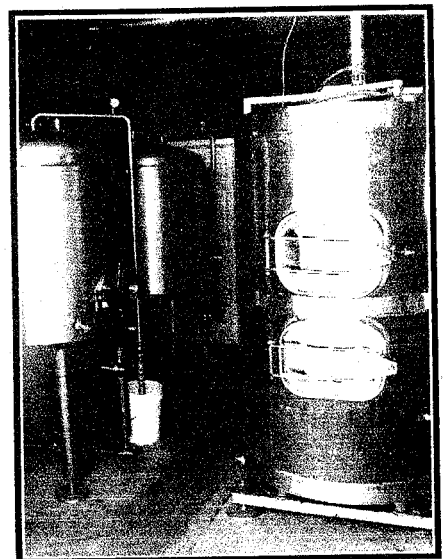


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L E T T E R S

monitor

Got something to say? Write a letter to *The Monitor*. Send complaints or praise to *The Monitor* mailbox in the CSI, or email us at monitortrm@hotmail.com. Letters may be edited for length.

Cats love, but want more tuna

Deer edditr,

Hi. Were 3 kittys hu wanted to thank u for the grate kitty porno u put into yr papre. Sometimes as kittys hu reed we feel real left out but its so nise to see sum people hu understand the wants uv thare kitty readers. We hung the newspapre rite abuv the litter boc and have a little message fr scott hu is quite a specimin.

Scotti meow meow meow meow,
rraaahw-aaarrrr, meow.

We always reed ur paper cause the people hu live at our house like u vary much and now we du tu. We think u should rite more things about tuna thou. And birds, and cudling, the stuff that's really important.

Yrs truly,
spacegrass
fuzzbastard
axl

University unfairly handles sexual harassment case

Andrés, Cameron, and Nicole

Two brief final issue feature submissions, as Narissa told us at AI last nite you might, indeed, be doing a last issue final for this year, and if I don't submit on both, no one else might "note" either issue's impor-

tance this SIDE of late AUGUST in record print!

NO SEX HARASSMENT CHARGES PLEASE, WE ARE SEXIST KIRKSVILLE, AND TSU!

The news that the local judiciary will "not proceed" in the case of a TSU student alleging sexual harassment against a since "suspended" local Baptist minister can satisfy no one! Especially, the accused minister as an unfair suspicion will now hang over his future pastorate career. Far worst, than anything many of us, anti-Iraq war, feel, still, in loathing for his church putting up the sign there of obnoxious and most un-Christian slogan "THANK GOD FOR A FINE PATRIOTIC GENERATION" in support of the illegal invasion of Iraq ongoing since last year of a Moslem country, in false crusader bigotry!

The stated reason for this even greater aspersion on the integrity and bona fides of your fellow TSU student and his former parishioner is worst, still Democrat prosecutor, M. Williams, explains his enfeebling non-clarity on this now no longer sub judice case, meaning we CAN comment MONITOR! By saying, he, simply, has not got "enough evidence" to establish "non-sensensual sex" according to the most recent INDEX front page report (April 8). IF SO, THEN, MARK, WHY DID YOU TAKE THE CASE UP IN THE FIRST PLACE? AND WHAT HAS

LOCAL N.O.W. GOT TO SAY ABOUT THIS BEFORE THEY/WE ALL MARCH OFF TO WASHINGTON DC IN NATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROTECTION ENDEAVOR? FROM A MALE CONSERVATIVE NATIONAL JUDICIARY SIMILARLY, ARGUABLY, "FAILING" WOMENS COMPLAINTS AND DEFENDANTS HONOR ALIKE! AS, OBVIOUSLY, THIS CASE HAS NOT BEEN FAIRLY DECIDED ONE WAY OR THE OTHER HAS IT MR PROSECUTOR, AND SHOULDN'T YOU APPEAL IT, MR DEFENSE??

Now there is reason to be all of us locally concerned about this unsatisfactory non-decision to all hurt and damaged parties. As it would seem to 2004 be part of a pattern of failure to get justice-for-all, feministically and equitably. That has marked, literally, the last decade and a quarter in Adair, redneck male-slanted TSU vicinity! Two NMSU Communications professors found themselves obliged to, "voluntarily," after all, early 1990's after the Administration "suspended" them following allegations she repeated of her own interview request to me and my wife and the INDEX, THE MONITOR, OR unproven "date-drug sex" accusations by a student female, now left! And, more recently, yet another TSU Communications

professor had to undergo a year's suspension and "psych" exam. Before he was allowed back after a now too-DISSATISFIED and left, female INDEX student left her INDEX job, after similar accusations!

SO THE QUESTION REMAINS NOW WIDE OPEN! And in frankly a state of stench dishonoring all these 3 female students integrity and their alleged harassers! Why is there no justice for all in this area? And, what chance, has any TSU female or gay/bi student got of restoring their, YOUR, allegedly violated state from "harassment," if local authorities fail to deliver any verdict? And my good friends in N.O.W., your own credibility, to poor economically-speaking TSU women students, begins here at home. As much as in DC marches I, TOO, support! IN feminist majority, misnamed macho campus, now N.O.W. we must get some decisive justice! As, NEVER forget, sex harassment involuntarily has ZILCH to do with anyone's notions of acceptable, even desirable, greater sexual freedom! OR DOES IT, LOCAL INDECISIVE AUTHORITIES given this wicked new stalemate in lingering odor of non-decision for ANYONE?

Larry Iles

Letters from the underground



Column by I Mr. Rory Roherton

Dear Rory,

About two years ago I lost my right eye and it really affected me. Either men weren't interested in me or I couldn't see that they did through my self pity. Now, there are 10 guys who are all into me. Before my accident I had a really active sex life, and I'd like to get it back. The problem is, I can't decide between the guys and I'm afraid I might miss my chance. What should I do?

Cute Confused Cyclops
Missouri Hall

Dear CCC,

Fear not! As soon as I read of your plight, I knew what you needed to do. After a brief consultation with a panel of experts, I have proven it to be entirely possible. The answer? Decuple satisfaction. That's right, accommodate all then lucky guys at once. How you ask? Its simple, once you break it down. Begin with good old DVDA (Double Vaginal, Double Anal for those of you out of the loop) and already you have 4 guys taken care of. Then use both hands to manually stimulate two more guys, and we're up to 6. Titty fucking, footing, and a good old American blowjob bring us up to 9. The tenth? Your empty eye socket of course!! Glad I could help!

Rory

Dear Rory,

I am a nerd. I don't know how to get girls. Help me.

Nerd
Centennial Hall

Dear Nerd,

Ahh, the age old question at last. The thing is, no one has a fool proof guide to

getting girls. And even if they did, they would be too busy having sex to answer this question. So I'll give you the basics. First, meet girls. I know this sounds obvious, but it's the first step. Meet as many as you can. If you think only one girl in a hundred could possibly be interested in you, meet a thousand. Next step, concentrate on the ones who are at least nice to you. No, this does not mean they want to go out with you. They could just be nice. On the other hand, they might want to go out with you. So of all the ones who talk to you, you need to throw out a little "bait". Give them a compliment and see if they take it. If they give you one back, slowly reel them in. Continue with the compliments, but don't go too fast or you'll scare them away. Eventually, you will have a girl who is willing to date you.

Rory

Dear Rory,

I like to fuck ugly and nasty chicks, but all my friends make fun of me. Also, they say I'll get a disease because I never use condoms. What do you think? Are my friends right?

Dirty Dude
Missouri Hall

Dear Dirty,

Hell no your friends aren't right. You keep it up brother. For inspiration I recommend the works of GG Allin.

Rory

Dear Dear Rory Lovers,

Rory is hopefully studying in Japan next fall. Don't fret, though. He should be continuing to do his column from the land of the rising sun. God bless e-mail. This is the last issue of the monitor for this year, thanks for reading. As always, you can email me at roryrhorerton@hotmail.com. Until next year!!

Rory

Letters from the
UndergroundColumn by I

MY BACK PAGES

Whew! Whoa! and Holy Shitballs! I taste freedom at the tip of my tongue, and there's definitely light at the end of this tunnel. Just hope that's not a train barrelin down your way. That's it folks, thanks for playin, have a nice day. Summertime, and the livins easy. But don't let your brain atrophy, keep writin. and when you come back in the fall, I'll still be countzachula@hotmail.com. Peace.

Easter, unveiled

I went home over Easter break and although I was only there for 24 hours, I managed to get in a minor fender bender, as I'm prone to do. (I'm a space cadet!)

I came home, told Kurt the news and watched the wave of anger start in his toes and steamroll its way straight to his brain, whereupon his hand shot out straight for the fridge, he pulled out a Bud-Light, cracked it open and downed half the can on the spot. AH!

Obviously relieved, Kurt was now ready to deal with me, the world, the problem at hand. Later he would apologize to me "for getting mad," missing the point entirely. Point being that it is perfectly acceptable for people to get mad sometimes, but unacceptable to deal with that anger by downing beers, or threatening violence or performing violence and you wonder why I'm a total stone bag. I learned it by watching you, okay!

But I can't do that anymore, or be "that guy" anymore. That's why I burned all those pictures at the cemetery on Monday. How cathartic. That's how you can tell this is a real good poem—all the catharsis. Besides, how often do you get a glimpse of someone's entire existence in one moment? More often than you think, I guess.

Thanks, Kurt. I'll come home again real soon. Just you wait.

-zach

they watched your unconcerned mouth
with their mouths, pink—
and words are little gifts
that float between faces—
and pop, and eddy,
and i remember that night
you caught me laughing
(we drank beer out of a jug)
and you laughed back,
and there were no words
and no mouths
and only that sweet beer
and that belly throat laugh

Critical Mass Cheer

Hey move it, hey shove it
My bike is rad, I love it—

So try it, come on and ride it
We'll take the quad and riot.

Hey Hey all the kids around say (x3)
Take no prisoners, take the quad today

Hey (x7)
Take no prisoners, take the quad tonite
Fight (x7)
Hey hey all the kids around say (x3)
Hey hey all the kids around say (x3)
Hey!

—Kirksville Radical Cheerleaders

Necessary

I just took a fat piss in the men's room,
third floor, pickler memorial library.
Normally, public men's rooms
are really weird places to be,
you have to look down at your own wang
and pretend like nobody else exists
in the whole world cause god forbid
some duder is checkin out my package.

But I was in there, takin a leak
and the guy next to me, a total stranger,
looks over and says, "These urinals
are too high," and its true. They're
situated too high up on the wall, and if
either of us were a few inches shorter,
we'd be peeing at an incline which
is no good for anybody, especially
the custodian.

"These urinals are too high." The best
part is I've had that same thought at least
a hundred times standin in that exact
same spot, but him telling me made
all the difference in the world. I didn't
tell him that though, cause he caught
me off guard, but I smiled and agreed
with him and we went our separate ways
and man that guy rules. Go that guy.

-zach

An Immense Case of Bagel Blockage

Story by | Lauren Rosenfield

I love bagels. Any kind of bagel. More specifically, any kind of bagel that comes from Bagel and Bagel. When such a store opened up in my neighborhood at the beginning of the summer years ago, I immediately included a trip to Bagel and Bagel in my daily routine, consuming at least four bagels after swim practice each morning. And four seemed like it was never enough.

I had always been an over-committed, over-achieving child while growing up, and my parents just assumed this daily routine was a dramatic exaggeration of my discipline for study and swimming. I don't know why I loved bagels so much or understand the reason I had to have more than one bagel at a sitting. Eating bagels was just something that I enjoyed - a blissful reward for a hard day of swimming.

My bagel binge habit continued throughout the summer months, only the four bagels I had everyday soon turned into five, six, and then sometimes even seven. Yes, seven bagels a day. My parents worried some, seeing that their only daughter was eating so much steamed pumpernickel that a heart attack or some other health problem could come in the way of marriage or work. But I wasn't gaining any weight, seeing as I was such an athlete, so they let me eat at my own free will...sometimes.

"Damnnit, Lauren, you're going to give yourself a heart attack one of these days with the amount of bagels you take in!" my Dad would scold, his plump face swelling and turning red.

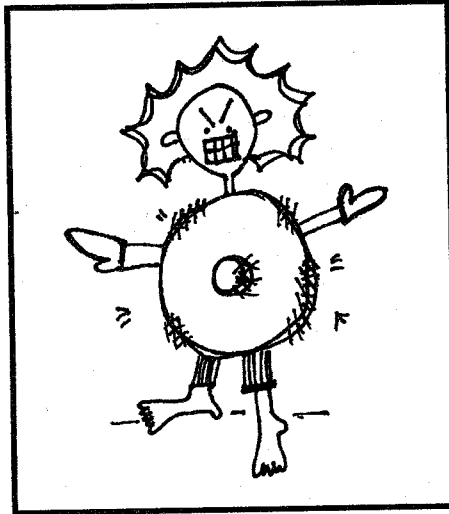
"Hey Dad, nag on me all you want, I'm burning off tons of calories during practice, so maybe I need this extra energy," I replied.

However, my increasing bagel consumption lost its momentum one normal, typical summer day.

At the beginning of the summer, I had planned on having some friends over for a day of fun-in-the-sun on the family boat. The day before my friends would be over, I started the morning off with my usual swim practice, and then my typical binge of four bagels at Bagel and Bagel. After a nap and then swim practice again and then an after-dinner snack of four *more* bagels, I had beaten my bagel consumption record, racking in a whopping eight bagels in one day. My friends would arrive the next morning, and I wanted to get a good night's rest so I'd be able to play all day and not wear out. With slight discomfort in

my belly, I yawned and headed off to bed.

Only my "good night's rest" wasn't so good, as I awoke at six in the morning, having to go to the bathroom. After a feeling of passing glass splinters, I realized that something wasn't right. Something didn't feel right, in fact, something was on fire...and this horrible burning sensation was one I had never felt before. I thought



to myself that perhaps I should go and get help. I woke my dad up crying. I didn't know what was wrong, and I was starting to worry about the perfectly planned, playful day ahead of me. For some reason the thought of canceling my day of fun with my friends upset me more than knowing I might have some major health problem.

"Dad, Dad!" I loudly whispered while shaking him violently. "Dad, something's wrong, it *really* hurts when I go to the bathroom, I can't take it."

"Humm, mughmgmg," my Dad replied, his head face down in the pillow. I repeated my previous actions, only this time shaking him even harder and practically screaming into his ear that I had an urgent message.

"Okay, okay! I'm up...what's wrong now? It burns when you go to the bathroom?" he asked.

"Yeah, burning is an understatement. I'm in pain Dad, it kills, and I feel like I have to go every five minutes," I whined.

My Dad asked me questions, crossing his

arms and putting his glasses in his mouth, thinking about the problem. Then suddenly he picked up the phone book and began dialing the phone.

"Who are you calling? An ambulance?"

"No," he replied. "I'm calling Bob Biber, I'm sure that he'd take you into his office right now without an appointment."

Dr. Bob was a urologist and long-time friend of our family. He lived down the street from us and I still to this day remain a close friend with his triplet daughters. I felt a little anxious about having someone I knew so well inspecting my plumbing, but knowing my Dad, he was probably seeing the cheaper side of the situation.

Dr. Bob was really nice. He opened his office up at eight in the morning, on a Saturday, just for me.

"What seems to be the problem?" he asked.

I explained to him what was wrong: where it hurt, when it started, etc. I even went into how many bagels I was averaging a day, mostly because my Dad was like "No, you tell him what you're *really* eating!" After a couple of minutes, Bob asked me to lie down on the table for a sonogram. I was a bit worried, I mean, sonograms are saved for people with cancer and babies and stuff, and I really didn't want to call all of my friends and cancel our date because I had cancer or a bun in the oven.

The good doctor smeared a clear jelly on my distended belly, and as he worked I stared at the monitor showing my gut. But I didn't see anything. All I saw was a massive grayish blob that looked like bad reception on a regular TV. No one in the room was talking, just searching on the mini-TV for something...anything. Maybe a coin I had swallowed, or an ulcer. But I thought to myself: *the problem isn't my stomach, it's that awful feeling of passing glass splinters and feeling like I need a Depends in order to go out into public.* I didn't understand why Dr. Bob was looking for the solution in my protruding tummy.

"You're full of *shit*," he said, emphasizing the words "full" and "shit" by widening his eyes.

"What?!" my Dad and I both said at the same time, me a little angry that the Doctor was laughing at my pain.

"You have eaten so many bagels that your body couldn't metabolize them fast enough. You clogged up your intestines, your whole digestive system. As a result, you sprouted

an opportunistic infection from the *e.coli* in your body, and that's why you have that burning sensation when you urinate. You have a bladder infection," he stated.

I was shocked and appalled. To think that the one thing I loved so much could cause me so much discomfort. My dad just gave me this horrible, blank stare. One that was saying: "You glut-ton! Look what you have done to yourself!" It was if he was disappointed that I couldn't handle my leisure activities in moderation.

"You see how the screen is all gray?" Dr. Bob told the two of us. "It's because you are full of shit, because the gray stuff is shit. If you were healthy and regulating at a normal speed, the screen would mostly be black, with perhaps a little bit of gray, but the screen is *all* gray."

Bob gave me some special medicine for people in my situation, and a huge, economy-sized bottle of Milk of Magnesia. I took a hefty dose right there in Dr. Bob's office, knowing it would relieve my clogged intestinal system. My Dad and I discussed the nature of my actions during the car ride home.

"I just worry about you sweetie, I don't want anything bad to happen to you. You don't want another drek krenk, do you?" he said to me. Drek krenk is Yiddish for "shit sickness."

"No, I don't. I didn't mean for this to happen. Dad, I just like eating bagels, but I promise from this day on I'll eat everything in moderation."

I unfortunately had to cancel my day of relaxation with my friends, as about ten minutes after arriving home my insides felt like a bomb was going off, and I was running to the bathroom about every fifteen minutes. Let me tell you, sprinting to the bathroom every fifteen minutes is anything but relaxing.

To this day, I still love bagels as much as I always have. And it's hard. It's hard to only eat one and not eat another. I have to pace myself, take things slowly. But then I think to the future, and what a cool grandma I'll be when I'm talking to my nine grandchildren about life lessons and survival skills. But instead of war stories and tales of standing in bread lines during the Depression, I'll be able to tell them a really great, disgusting poop story. A story of immense bagel blockage, and how my bagel obstruction taught me a lesson I (not to mention my friends, parents, and Dr. Bob) will never forget: one cannot consume too much of a good thing.

made it upstairs to Adam's attic bedroom.

Crackers went everywhere in that room. We put him through the obstacle course, up on the windowsill, near the computer, ever careful not to let him through the crack to the haunted attic. He even drank the water at the rest stop! We had a blast, and by the end of the day, we all were tired and happy. I heard a car door slam, and since we knew Joey would be back soon, I went downstairs to check. Adam said he would watch Crackers. It was the next door neighbor, so we were safe.

I came back, and Crackers was acting strange.

Adam told me he just started doing it the minute I left. Very fast breathing, lying on the ground, his heart pounding faster than ever. Adam thought that he was just tired, but from the little gasps of breath and noise, I knew it was something worse. I went over to where the small, fragile body

lay, and pressed my hand softly to its chest. Crackers turned his head slightly

towards me, giving me a look with his bright, beautiful eyes, and he stopped



Photo by | Robert Slade (w/o permission)

moving.

Adam probably noticed how my face changed. We both knew what had just happened, and I started to cry. We both cried. Crackers was dead. It was our fault.

We told my uncle Morie what happened, and I said that it was my fault, since it was my idea to take him. I was taken home, riding in the very back seat of the van, a weeping wreck.

I got home and I went to my room to be alone.

I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew was my mom waking me up gently and giving me a note written in Joey's scrawling hand.

"Ben-Ben,

You are my best friend and I don't want to lose you. I am sad, and I know you are. We must get through this together. I don't want to forgive you because I you didn't do anything wrong. I love you, Ben, please come over again.

All my undying love,
Joey"

Freddy and Pearl (Editor's Pick)

Story by I David Capps

that's my seat"

"Oh, I'm sorry... I was just coming up to see the pit, if you'll excuse me"

I promptly made my way to a row of ushers watching for stragglers.

"You see, the problem was that there were many single seats, but no pairs of seats, and Pearl, my wife, wouldn't have it if she had to sit apart from me" I explained to the usher, having concluded that I would rather stand with Pearl on the sidelines than miss the concert.

"Well, since it's this is a very special concert, you wait here for

your wife and I'll see what I can do—we do only have about five minutes though" said the shaky voice.

Phew, I was in luck—she was going to shuffle ushers around to get us seats together!

"Where is your wife?" she asked, motioning towards two open seats.

"I guess she's still in the bathroom, powdering something or other... she always takes awhile".

"It's always more difficult to put on imaginary makeup than real makeup, or, I guess you wouldn't know, since you're 'real' " I almost said something along those lines, but stifled it.

Perhaps rashly, I decided to go fetch her. As I grabbed her hand, there was a swish of underwear in the stall next to hers. I decided we'd go for the aisle on the other side, where I noticed some standing room. But as we passed through the bar area, I took it upon myself to finish the unfinished drinks—and despite her tugging—I eventually collapsed on the floor and everything grew drunk and dark.

"Ode to Joy" awoke me. Pearl had taken a cab.

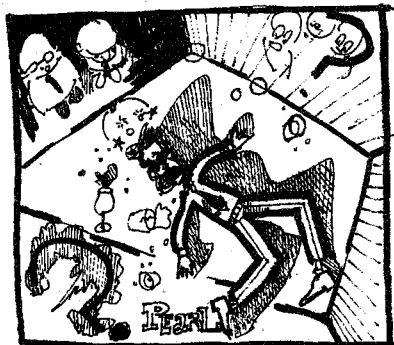


Image by I Joe Moccia

"Freddy, you almost ready for the concert?" She was ready, stunning, dressed in velvet black. It cheers me up. I have always wondered why this creature is 'with' me.

"In a sec, I'm fixing my hair—I have a cow lick the size of Kentucky".

Pearl bounced over and smoothed it out using hand and spit, kept tugging on my turtle-neck.

"Come on, we're gonna be late"

I knew we were not going to be late in any relevant sense. Since this was the last concert of the season, ample ceremony preceded it: the giving of mammoth checks, the shaking of unctuous hands, the petty jokes of the Ford Foundation, and, last but not least, the Maestro's ushering of these tycoons off the stage.

"Uh, ... Freddy?"

"Yes?" I said, walking briskly.

"I need my ticket, if you please"

"Oh, I forgot to mention, we're crashing it—it'll be easy with such a crowd"

Pearl protested that we were no longer 22 yr-olds but ultimately followed me in, with a winning smile the whole way, complemented by a faint "Uh... sir?" part of the way.

"You know the drill" I said in a low voice as we stood behind the aisles, "Wait for the crowd to thin out, then we'll find a couple seats up front". She rolled her eyes.

"Just count your lucky stars we missed the opening ceremony" I said.

Finally, after we thought it had pretty much filled up, we dashed up and grabbed two 4th row seats.

—"Sir, excuse me, excuse me, but I believe

Karondoletta's Eyes

Story by I Jessica Hoelzer

Four blades of grass floated down like feathers to rest on a mangy bed of fiery, tangled red hair. Karondoletta Kazukauskas brushed them aside with a quick flick of her toothpick-thin wrist, never removing her attention from the document spread before her. The thick heat of a Jamaican afternoon made beads of sweat line up like sentries across her pale, freckled forehead. A few had found paths around her wide eyes, one the color of a blue-green ocean waiting to be discovered and the other dull as unpolished wood. The saline droplets came to rest at the tip of her chin, debating whether or not to continue the journey down to soak her far too thin rose pink halter top. Her matching mini-skirt completed the ensemble, clashing wildly with her scorched hair. But this was only an asset when Karondoletta traveled with Arthur Chefneuf II, who employed her as a Swedish Koran translator.

A gust of wind swept through the grass hut, speckling Karondoletta once again with green confetti. Perturbed, she used her long, fuchsia nails to begin picking the pieces of roofing from her hair. As she was finishing, she heard a deep voice behind her that was so startling she raked her nails against her cheek, adding three crimson scratches to the convoluted color scheme that adorned her anorexic frame. Only one man had a voice like that, the ring of which could make the Koran come alive. But here? Now? In a little grass hut in Jamaica, seven years after the fact?

Eyes half closed in frustration, Karondoletta turned to face the intruder. "Samud? What—Why—" Her stammering was almost a plea. Suddenly, she regained her composure and snapped her head back, sardonically demanding, "What now?"

"Ah, and it's lovely to see you, too, darling. I would have traveled all this way just for the pleasure of once glimpsing your eyelids ensconced in enough powder to bury a chef." His lips turned up slightly, revealing two dimples in his darkly tanned skin. "But of course, your work has always been of interest to me, seeing as I taught you all you know." Samud's darkened and narrowed eyes took their time rolling down her figure to the table where the document laid.

"I'm afraid that's no longer of any interest to you," Karondoletta's tone implied much more than mere business. "My boss is around here somewhere, and I doubt he would look kindly on me sharing. *Anything*." With that, she turned dismissively back to her work, futilely attempting to clear the grass off the table.

"You'll have little to fret about there, my dear. Samud and I are old friends." Chefneuf—II's—grainy, aristocratic voice grated like sandpaper on Karondoletta's now tightly strung nerves.

A lock of hair escaped the rubber band that secured it in its unruly nest, falling in front of her befuddled eyes. She didn't bother to remove it, certain that the view behind her would not be a pretty scene.

Her fears were well founded. Her employer, a full silver head shorter than the still-lean, forty-ish Samud, had one

flabby arm around her former instructor's back; the other veiny hand waved wildly about the shack.

"Karondoletta, dear, I'm glad you're still here," Chefneuf purred, if such could be thought possible from his impaired throat, ruined by

years of smoking the finest Cuban cigars. "I've had a little basket put togethah. Let's all traipse down to the beach."

Anxiety swirling in her sunken stomach, Karondoletta dallied behind the two men as they made their way down to the water. The sand burned her bare feet, sending pinpricks up her legs to complement those piercing her brain. Samud was conniving, and though they had shared some special... moments... she knew him for what he *really* was. Her current boss, eccentric as he was, had grown on her. She worried that he was clueless when it came to the devious Samud. But what was his intent? To steal her work? To steal *her* back? Could he possibly be jealous? Karondoletta almost warmed to the idea, thrilled that she might rouse such emotions in a man like Samud, who grew in stature as thoughts raced through her needed brain.

Chefneuf and Samud were already spreading out a red-checkered tablecloth by the time she reached them. Chefneuf pulled out a brown paper lunch bag and tossed it to her. Surprised, seeing the basked full of food, she lifted her plucked thin eyebrows like a child asking permission to go out to recess.

"Samud will be taking your place here, Karondoletta." Chefneuf didn't even pause at Karondoletta's sharp intake of breath. "Inside the bag you'll find a ticket back to the States and some compensation for all the extra, well, *work*, you've done. I didn't think it necessary to include lunch, seeing as you won't be here to feed it all to the pelicans." Smiling serenely, a chubby cherub, he turned to Samud, throwing back over his shoulder, "Your service has been much appreciated."

Karondoletta stumbled backwards, and, regaining her footing, began running away from the scene on the beach. She could see Samud's hideous grin flashing in her mind like a marquee sign outside a cheap theatre. She glanced back only once, at which point she began to sprint. Samud had just lit a candle Chefneuf had taken from the basket. It was the same lavender scented luminary they had shared on her first evening of employment under Chefneuf.

But perhaps the connection had been fated all along. The two men were clearly just as confused as Karondoletta's eyes.

Sorrow under a Starlit Sky

Story by I Matt Kell

A rabbit hopped out of the tall swaying grass in the full moonlight of the cool autumn evening. A shadow fell across the rabbit and he looked up to see the outline of the flying city of the mystics known as the Mystars, Maur, as it crossed between the moon and the rabbit. The twisted conical spires that resembled a unicorn's horn and the mile long hunk of rocky earth easily identifiable even in the dark silhouette. In daylight, one could see the small hemispherical buildings arranged in a grid pattern divided by pathways of sparkling blue, red, and yellow stone running out from the thirteen spires. Located in the center of the city, the spires were of various heights and seemingly scattered about in a three hundred foot diameter. On that night it resembled a stand of sharp spikes.

A few seconds later, the magnificent city became fully visible for the last time as a green bolt of energy screamed its quick journey into the side of the largest spire exploding in a flare of stone and green flames. The rabbit hopped into the grass as more bolts raced to the city. The sky was filled with their screams and trails of yellow, green, blue, and red light. A menagerie of colors enveloped the spires with a deafening boom that scattered animals for miles. People awakened by the raining stone and the explosions began running into the pathways to see what happened. Black winged figures in long red cloaks with flaming scythes

swooped down savagely slicing the humans, elves, halflings, gnomes, a few dwarves, a couple orcs, and the few goblins that rushed out of their homes. Screams echoed in the night as the black figures went from house to house killing all they found there. Some tried to flee and jump from the floating rock that once was their home. Most were caught by the winged figures, a couple managed to make it to the ground only to find small furry humanoids with large glittering eyes and teeth waiting for them.

Screams, fire, and smoke now filled the night sky above the once tranquil floating city of Maur. One end flying rock began to dip down towards the ground. Trailing yellow flames and black smoke the city of Maur plowed into the earth. The creatures disappearing into the darkness from whence they came leaving the mound of earth, stone, and flames that had once been the home of the Mystars. At the edge of a forest a mile or so north of where the attack began, two drops of water appeared about two feet in midair. Black sorrowful eyes appeared a few seconds later. More body parts began to take shape and fill with color of life, eyelids, cheeks, and forehead, mouth and chin, and soon the rest of a halfling boy nearing adulthood. Wrapped in a black trimmed dark blue cloak with a star clasp the boy stared as tears ran down his cheeks, but made no noise. A few minutes later realizing that the invisibility potion wore off the near-adult halfling turned and ran diving into the sheltering darkness of the forest.

Beauty Within

Story by I Kaleena Wright

Once upon a time there was a creature of amazing grace and elegance. She was well-mannered and well-groomed, witty, and wonderful to be around. In fact, she was the envy of most creatures on the island of Demulo. Her name was Dahlia, after her mother's favorite flower.

Unfortunately, Dahlia is not the focus of our story. To tell the truth, she plays no part in our story at all, except to show what the people of Demulo thought of as perfect. The focus of our story falls far below this image of perfection.

The focus of our story is simple-minded, clumsy, ill-mannered, and dirty. When she walked down the street,

she was invisible, unnoticed. However, this never bothered her because first of all, she hardly left the house, and secondly, when she did leave the house, she was too focused on the slightest details, such as a leaf tumbling past her feet or a ray of sunlight bouncing off a particle of sand, to notice the lack of acknowledgement. This all too common lady that is the focus of our story was named Beauty, and she was a rat.

Beauty lived in the middle of the island of Demulo, underground. As a result of her home, Beauty rarely got to see the day or night. So, when she did travel above and see what the world had to offer on its surface, she thought it a great treat. She loved every moment she spent above the ground and every part of the day or night that she got to experience. Sadly, these moments were few and far between.

The rest of her time was spent at her home, looking after her twelve siblings, of whom she was the eldest. She cooked, she cleaned, she did everything in between. She laughed, cried and played with all of her siblings, but above all else, she loved them wholeheartedly.

Slowly, over time, her siblings grew up and moved out to find their own places in the world. Eventually, there was no one left for her to take care of at home. She had mountains of time available and nothing to do with it.

First, she decided with her newly acquired time she'd explore the surface world to a greater extent. After only a month, she knew Demulo like her rat's nose knew the scent of cheese. Her favorite place on the whole the island was the beach on the northeast side.

Oh, how Beauty loved the northeast beach! To her, it was the most beautiful thing in the world, or at least on the island of Demulo. It had myriad shells of all colors, shapes, and sizes. She loved looking closely at the separate grains of sand, each slightly different in color, and then, stepping back and looking at their off-white uniformity when seen as a whole. She loved to hide in the shadows of the rocks and watch the waves curl up onto the edge of the shore. She explored every crevice of that beach, but she refused to explore the water that constantly swirled onto the beach's sand.

She loved to watch it: how it flowed, how it shaped things and then in a turn of a second, was shaped by things. The water was her image of perfection. She adored it but feared it all the same. Everyday that she visited, she dreamed of someday just walking out and feeling, the water brush against her fur. Everyday that she visited, she grew more and more con-

fident of her ability to reach out and touch the water and got closer and closer to it.

One day, Beauty rose early in the morning with an incredible new feeling. Nothing was beyond her capabilities. Beauty knew, with the first sunbeam that reached her freshly opened eyes, what she was going to do today with her new-found confidence. She quickly hopped out of bed, washed up, and got ready for the day. Today, Beauty the rat would touch the water that swirled onto the shores of the northeast beach.

She set out for the beach in a fast walk. She did not wish to run because she did not want to use up all of her energy and excitement be-

fore she had a chance to tackle the challenge that awaited her. The whole while, her mind was full of thoughts about how the water might feel and how she could celebrate finally touching it.

Before long, she had reached her destination. There it was, the beautiful northeast beach. She took a moment to take it all in: how it looked, how it smelled, how it felt. This was a day that she did not want to forget, ever. She took a deep breath, inhaled then exhaled, then slowly took her first step. Her footfalls were somewhat mechanical, falling in a slow, unsteady, left-right pattern. In this manner, she inched her way up the beach. Now, directly in front of her was her ultimate goal and fear, the water. It was now or never. Slowly, in a smooth sustained motion, Beauty reached forward with her right hand.

The water was so cool and wet and indescribable, and she knew she must have more. She tried to hold it in her hand, but she simply could not capture it. It seeped between her fingers no matter how tightly she squeezed them together. It teased her, this wonderful thing called water. She simply could not resist it. So, she took another step forward so that the water splashed around her ankles. This was her moment of ecstasy.

It was at this precise moment that Beauty the dolphin was swimming the ocean in search of inner beauty. Beauty knew that he was gorgeous on the outside, but felt as though that was only skin deep. Inside, he felt lost. It was during this search that he came across Beauty the rat, enjoying her moment of ecstasy. He swam up beside her and waited patiently for her to come out of her seeming trance.

It took a while before she realized that he was there beside her. When he realized that she had noticed him, he asked her how she was on this fine day and if he could ask her a question. She responded that today she was better than any day ever before and that she would be delighted to answer anything he had to ask her. The question he posed though, caught her thoroughly off-guard. He asked if she knew where he could find beauty. Awkwardly, almost stuttering along the way, she said that she, herself, was Beauty.

Upon hearing this, Beauty the dolphin could not have been happier. He realized that his search was finally over. He knew how to fix that feeling of emptiness deep inside of him. Just then, he reached out and swallowed Beauty the rat whole. At last, he thought, I have beauty within.

She set out for the beach in a fast walk. She did not wish to run because she did not want to use up all of her energy and excitement before she had a chance to tackle the challenge that awaited her....

Pillow Heart

Story by I Joshua Mallory

I used to sleep with a girl. She would cuddle with me, snuggle with me, play with me, laugh with me, hold me tight and cry on me. We spent years together, night after night. She would come home and tell me things she didn't tell anyone else; how her day went, what made her happy, what made her sad, what made her tick. She liked to fall asleep with her head against my chest, instead of a pillow. She loved me. She told me I was what she needed.

Then one day, she set me aside. She said her mom told her that I was bad for her, that she was too close to me. She said she needed to be independent, that she needed to be able to get by on her own. So she put me on a shelf. She couldn't hold me, or cry on me, but it was okay, because I could still watch over her. I spent years on the shelf. I saw when she was happy, I saw when she was sad. I couldn't do anything for her directly, but she would still sometimes talk to me from her bed, and I always kept watch over her.

Then one day, another boy joined her in her bed. I didn't really understand why she liked him so much. He wasn't as furry as I, and he

was quite a bit noisier (he snored), he shifted about in bed and took up more than his share of the blankets. She snuggled with him, played with him, laughed and cried with him. She talked to him now, never to me. But I stayed there still, keeping watch over her.

Then one day, she came to bed alone, crying more than she ever did. She sobbed, and cried, and yelled and swore, and struck her bed, and she threw a pillow across the room that knocked me off the shelf. It didn't hurt, but it hurt. I lay with my head buried in the carpet, trying to go blind to it all. I had a moment's doubt that she didn't care about me anymore. Then she picked me up. She had forgotten I was on the shelf until she knocked me down. She cuddled me, saying she missed me, telling me why she cried, saying she was sorry she shut me away. She slept with me again that night, resting her head against my chest. She told me I was the one she really loved, and that she would never put me on the shelf again. I knew she was lying, but I already forgave her for it. She was the only one I had ever loved, and even as she put me away again, I would watch over her as long as I could, and I would always think only of her, as only a simple stuffed animal could. Fin

Conversations with Jane

Story by I C. Horsford

No one ever saw her because she was invisible. Sometimes, I could see her, but only when she chose, never when I wished. My only clear memory of her person is yet uncertain. I think it was July. We sat on the back porch at twilight. Four candles burned away the mosquitoes; the nervous insects fluttered around us, just outside the circle of foul smoke.

Between us there was a plate of crackers and some tea. I ate quickly; Jane let her white fingers hover near the snacks, only at great pause lifting a few bites to her lips, letting them dissolve, swallowing nicely without effort. In the black sky, little blue lights rested; Jane set her eyes upon them, studying them as one reads and re-reads a difficult text. She began to draw pictures in the air with her index finger, naming aloud the constellations, but never once glancing back at me, her audience. Of course, I lost her in the explanations and began instead to notice her colorless hair, skin, eyes. The candles did not make her glow, as such light usually gives the skin a muted, pleasant victory over blemish, but merely made Jane visible in the darkness. My eyes shifted over her slight shape, small square shoulders, no breasts, no hips, a smoothly arched back.

When she finished with the stars, she returned her hands to her lap, crooking her fingers at even angles. Her lips rested slightly apart.

I thought of other days - past and then the future ones. Then, of course, I will live on North Duchesne and Jane will come around sometimes to bring me roses and hear Solace in my great ghostly house - the Radley House, she calls it. But first, there is now to conquer.

She is not an easy soul. Indeed, the night on the porch was uncomfortable. Hours ran by quickly, but delicately. I was aware of my slouching (I tried to straighten myself), the clumsy gracelessness of my hands,

the way my body was nearly too womanly. Her thin, fragile form made her look old, tired.

We bought dresses together once. I wandered out of the dressing room in black velvet - Madame X - proud broad shoulders, pale breasts holding up the strapless cloth in front. Jane appeared in white, a sickly shadow of herself, collarbones protruding, the white skin and dress melting into one, washing out her features. Still, she held the same poise, one almost forced, much too restrained. She didn't buy the dress.

That July night I found it difficult to sit with her. Perhaps we had always felt this awkwardness, but that time it was tangible. I could think of nothing else, save the air separating us, which seemed light and fine, but really was terribly naked. *This is she, I thought. The girl you love beyond measure. The one whose words you keep in a secret box, tied up with an orange ribbon, whose cursive has become such a familiar sight that you can write sentences in her hand.* But the little figure in the dusk was strange to me. I did not want to speak to her. When I thought of things to say, I could imagine nothing more than a comment on the approaching fall, a dull description of the softball game I had played the night before. Nothing could be cheaper than these matters. When I saw her elsewhere - at school, at work - she spoke about things like that. I grew angry at her then. It was impossible for these two to co-exist: first the trivial and then Jane, each made up of the things the other despised.

I walked home without a goodbye. Jane simply cast her eyes off into another place. A few times as I walked, I looked back; I saw her staring through me, and as she noticed my staring through her, we both shifted glances. My eyes flew up to the pear trees, hers diverted to the yellow roses in her garden. When I had gone far and could no longer see her, I quit the space around me and began to compose a letter in my head.

God and Wet T-Shirts

Story by | Jon Lawinger

officer#5774 Citation#C538262
\$15.00 If Paid Within 14 Days

With the car's overhead light on I read the fine print to her as she meanders her way back to the main two-lane highway that we took most of the way to the lake. I pull my wallet out of my pocket, fish out a soggy ten, and toss it on the dash.

"You're the one that parked there, you can cover the extra dollar." Teasingly. Reconsidering, I pull out a single and drop it next to the ten. "Even better, you owe me fifty cents. Now you're financially obligated not to disappear and never come back again."

At first automatically, "There's probably fifty cents in the ash tray over there." Then taking it in a bit more, "Yeah, right... financially obligated. I guess I'll have to come back and see you again sometime to pay that off." She looks over and flashes a grin.

"You'd better. And if you don't you're not going to get away with it. I can find you now that I know your last name. Or at least I think I do. Rachael Raine, eh? Maybe I should ask for some I.D. to make sure you're not lying."

"Well it's in my right pocket." Then exaggeratedly, "I have to keep both hands on the wheel, so I can't reach into my pocket to get it." Quick pause. "But... you know..." Feigned innocence. "If you really want to see it..." Trailing off, she slides over just a little on the seat, sticking her hip out, indicating the pocket. She smirks, enjoying getting me on the spot with the innuendo.

It's like a toying challenge to me. A dare. An offer that's on the table because it's so easily played off as a joke. She knows she's more sexually aggressive, or at least more sexually comfortable than I am, and she's been playing with that fact all night.

"Umm... that's alright, I think I can trust you." I reach up and turn off the light.

"You sure about that?"
I'm completely aware we're only alluding to very small time kicks here. And I am completely turned on.

"Yeah. I'm sure."
I don't know why I declined. At first I tell myself it was because I didn't want to distract her while she was driving. That's not it though; I'm not *that* uptight. Maybe I just don't have the guts to make any sort of move on her, even when she's so obviously beckoning. Maybe I don't think she was actually beckoning, just playing a hollow game. Maybe the whole silly flirting thing was just too cheesy for me to stomach any longer. I don't know why I declined, but I'd felt like I should, so I did.

Anyway, now she's got me going, and I can't keep myself from eying her up, especially her wet-t-shirted breasts. I don't know what the hell it is about breasts that's so appealing in the first place. I suppose there's some evolutionary explanation. But if that's it, then thin, wet, clinging cloth must indicate fertility or enhance survival or something, because I can't stop staring. The visual treat comes in waves, as every 30 seconds or so the bright lights of a passing semi — the only other traffic on the road this late — illuminate her fully for a few seconds before flashing by, leaving me straining for outlines in the darkness.

I still feel a little guilty for staring, but between her kissing me at the lake and now teasing

me with her sexuality, it doesn't seem quite so illegitimate anymore. My mind wanders back to the lake, her crawling on top of me, feeling her skin against mine, her lips against mine. It really happened. It's really working out how I so desperately wanted it to. Part of me knew it would all along, even though I tried to deny it. Even without believing in God, I believe that things work out the way they're supposed to. I don't know how. I don't know why. I just know. Instinctively. If something is really meant to be, it'll happen that way. And it did. There in the grass by the lake under the stars, with our wet clothes pressed between our bodies, it happened. With her breasts pressed up against me.

Another semi passes. Oh God, those breasts.

For some reason I'm feeling bold. Probably the same reasons I don't feel so guilty for staring. Whatever it is, I wouldn't usually say what I'm thinking out loud, but I'm a little drunk on circumstance, so I let my lips loosen.

"God you look hot right now. I swear, I oughta get you all wet every chance I get."

"Is that a promise?"

"Oh," bashfully chuckling and undoubtedly blushing, "I didn't mean."

"Shit!" My pair of bills on the dash splat into the windshield while our tires leave their outer layers behind. Staring straight into our headlights from the middle of our lane fifty feet ahead is a thin gray cat.

I don't think we're going to stop in time. Glancing at Rachel, she doesn't either; I can see it written on her light-flooded face. Turning back to the rapidly approaching feline, I brace and wait for the death-signaling thunk of cat-splatter, but it turns out I misjudged things, and we come to a stop five feet from the stunned kitty. Moments after its life is spared, the cat leaps off to the left. A split second later, the beginnings of our expressions of relief disappear into the night's shroud of darkness and I hear it, louder than I expected in the first place.

Thunk.
The sound hangs in the air like the smell of sidewalk-stranded worms after two days of rain.

"Shit." She pulls the car over to the side of the road and for a bit we stare stunned straight ahead in silence. Finally she looks over at me.

"There's nothing you could have done." She turns away again.

"I know." She opens her door and swings a leg out.

"Where are you going?"

"It got hit."

"It's dead." My voice is firm. Cold. She freezes, but doesn't turn back to look at me. "He was going at least 55. Do you really want to see what it looks like now?"

She takes in a deep breath, and lets it out in a long slow calm-seeking sigh, then pulls her leg back into the car, shuts the door, and starts up the engine.

I'm completely aware we're only alluding to very small time kicks here. And I am completely turned on.

I'm feeling bold. Probably the same reasons I don't feel so guilty for staring. Whatever it is, I wouldn't usually say what I'm thinking out loud, but I'm a little drunk on circumstance, so I let my lips loosen.

Hold the Onions

Story by | Miranda Runcie

Switch McChicken slumped in his chair. The man sitting behind the desk stared at the résumé in his hands.

"Thank you Mr. uh...McChicken. That will be all."

Switch sunk even lower until his neck was in the ninety degree angle of the chair back and seat. He got up slowly and wiped his sweaty palms on his polyester pants. Stepping outside, the heat from the pavement singed his feet through the worn-out soles of his loafers. Another job interview come and gone.

"I'll never find a job in this shit hole town," thought Switch.

As he forced a hand into his pocket for the car keys, he heard a voice behind him. It was a voice from his past, a voice that made his upper-lip twitch more than normal.

"Hey! Hey, is that you McChicken?! Hey Mac, long time no...nice duds Buddy!"

Donny Golden (from Switch's college days at the University of Nevada Las Vegas) rushed up to Switch and gave him a mighty slap on the back—a slap that Switch could've sworn was a little too close to his ass. Donny's "Sun-In"-dyed hair gleamed a radiant orangeish-blond in the thick Nevada rays. His teeth blinded Switch who nervously, but politely said, "Oh, wow...hey Donny. It's been a while."

"Can't believe it! I can't...you're shittin' me...I can't believe it's really you—the McChickenator! What the hell are you doin' in Reno?!"

Switch tried to control his spasmodic upper lip, "Well...I...uh..."

"I was just about to grab a bite. Let's do lunch. You eaten? How 'bout Chinese. You like Chinese McChicken?"

All Switch could think of was getting out of his constricting polyester suit and lounging around the motel room in his favorite multi-colored tiger striped pajama pants. He hated the smell of Chinese Restaurants.

Switch got into his faded gray '82 Chevy Celebrity and Golden slid into the passenger seat. Then Donny directed Switch to "Sunny Bamboo Express" and they seated themselves at one of many empty booths.

"So McChicken, what's the story?" The waitress appeared with a pen and paper, but said nothing. "Oh, hi there hon...I'll have the fried squid lo mein with egg drop soup—hold the onions—and some of those long crunchy things that you dip in the red sauce. Yeah I think that's it"

Switch stared at the menu, his forehead forming beads of sweat and his lip quivering out of control. "I'll take...yeah, I'll have the uh, chicken...soup...and some rice...yeah, ok."

Donny was swishing his mouth with lemon water and fixing his hair in the reflection of the soy sauce bottle. "So Switch, tell me again. What the hell are you doing in Reno?"

The thought of Hooters hung in the back of Switch's mind in an uncomfortably convincing way.

In between lip twitches Switch explained, with very little detail, how he lost his bartending job in Carson City and was trying to make a new beginning in Reno, but with no luck. "I just had an interview. It's the eighth one this week, but every single business is looking for someone who knows Windows 3.0, and I don't even own a computer."

"Mac, why are you going for the computer jobs? Do you really want to be stuck behind a desk all day? You should come work with me. Great pay, hot chicks, good food. It's a great family restaurant."

"Look Golden, I'm done with the restaurant jobs, and besides, who wants to work at Bob Evans?"

"Ha! McChicken, I work at Hooters man! Believe me, no cubical job has the benefits that Hooters offers." Wink, wink.

"Hooters? But you're a guy. You don't have...I mean, wow."

The food came and Switch and Donny ceased conversation. The thought of Hooters, however, hung in the back of Switch's mind in an uncomfortably convincing way. After their lunch of MSG-ridden morsels, Donny drug Switch out to the car and they headed toward Hooters.

"Now McChicken, we're going to talk to a guy named Ed Greezly. He's the owner of all the Hooters in this area. I know the big man pretty well so I can put in a good word, but you'll have to be smart and give some effort to bring this deal full circle."

Switch thought it sounded like they were planning some illegal scheme—not going to a sleazy restaurant to get a part-time job. "Yeah I got it Donny. I think I can handle this. I've been through so many...Oh shit! What was that?!"

An iridescent light strobed through the sky and covered the clouds and sun with a greenish-purple shadow. Then it was gone. Donny frantically spat out a response to the flash, "I don't know Mac, but it was some crazy nuclear shit or something!"

Switch kept driving, but both he and Golden had their eyes fixed on the rear-view mirror and the sky rising behind them.

"What the hell that was, I don't know, but it's a good thing we're almost to Hooters. Just on the other side of this hill."

The car drove up and over the hill, but on the other side was nothing.

"Hey Donny. Isn't there supposed to be a Hooters down there?!"

Donny's face was frozen into a comatose state. His arm lifted slowly to the dashboard and a single pointer finger stuck straight out to emphasize the nothingness. Switch stopped the car. His lip started twitching and soon his entire face joined in on the uncontrollable convulsion. Donny didn't move. Switch looked all around and got out of the car. He fell to his knees, raised his head and hands to the sky, and pleaded for mercy from the job gods.

5 May 2004

Because I loved her

Story by | Jessica Bennett

I killed my wife because she loved another man. No, she never slept with him, though they had lunch a few times. Real friendly like. Nothing sexual though. But, she loved him in that carefree passionate way you can only love a stranger. She wanted to have sex with him.

"The dog howled at my feet"

One day, while she took our sick dog to the vet, I discovered her journal in the bottom drawer of her desk. No lock or anything, just a little \$2.00 notebook scrawled with secrets. Everyday she fantasized about the other man. He worked three offices down from her. My wife often fantasized about walking into his office and closing the door. Just the two of them breathing in each other's air. Then, she would take off her clothes very slowly. Unbutton her blouse inch by inch, though in reality she hardly ever wore blouses. Next, the skirt would slide down her silken legs, and he would watch, letting her get naked before him without a word. And she would, this woman who wore my ring of bondage, rip all the fabric from her body and walk up to his desk. With a flick of her thin arm his papers, his brief case, even his computer—she could do anything in her fantasies—would go spilling off the desk, and then he would rise, lean over and put his lips to her breast. They would make love right there on his desk like all those dime store novels that she calls worse than trash. My sophisticated lady in her dark panty hose and business casual attire. How strong she feels lugging her briefcase to work everyday, all the while like a bitch in heat for the guy three doors down. How utterly ridiculous. I know exactly what he looks like, this man of her dreams that is not me. She describes him page by page. She melts in his dancing brown eyes, runs her fingers through his short raven hair and licks the sweat that defines his sharp muscles. She also mentions just how the sun streaks them from the open window. I am not sure why, but she thinks this to be a very important detail. He is very handsome, this one three doors down. Nothing like the fat angry one she has at home. I never wanted to kill my wife. She would never actually sleep with him. She remem-

bers her vows, remembers the sick dog she must care for. Her lover is all hard hot scribbling in her dreams but nothing more, and for all her fetish she is my wife not his. My wife, my dainty bride, is a good woman who always wears one of those cheap little cross necklaces. She likes to give the burns on the street a dollar, though I tell her they'll just use it for drugs. She looks up at me with such hopeful eyes, and she wants so badly to believe they are all really good inside. That her dollar will change the dead to living again. I always felt guilty for explaining the truth, for resenting that single dollar that she gave away though it was hers to give. I hated how her lips trembled as I softly chided. When my damsel is nervous she absently touches the cross at her neck. It is not religion she is thinking of, but just a habit she's had all the time I've known her. My wife is a good woman, but good women have dirty dreams to, and I couldn't forgive her for that. I never wanted to kill my wife. I wanted to kill him instead. The one three doors down, with sultry eyes and raven hair and who always had a puddle of sunshine on his desk just in case. I knew his name of course. She wrote it over and over putting his last name to hers like she use to do with mine our senior year of high school, like she did that actor from that one show when she was in middle school, like she did her big brother's best friend in third grade. She filled pages of her journal with it. That clear milky paper all corrupted with sins, repeating like some pattern. I flipped through page after page reading a whole blanket of their two names woven together so tight that I couldn't breathe. I looked him up in the phone book, called all four names that I found. If he had been listed, I would have killed him instead, but he wasn't, and she came home. Our dog barked excitedly and bounded into our bedroom to greet me. He jumped up on my lap drooling and panting and laying all his happiness to my whim. She followed much slower, her soft steps eaten up by the new luxurious carpet she'd been so proud to install. I remember just how her face looked leaning against the doorway watching me. It was calm and full of all her sweet faith, beautiful and unremarkable. I imagined that she was thinking of him, wishing he were here sitting on her bed absently petting her dog. My wife's fingers brushed lightly against the cross at her neck before she entered. Then, she noticed her journal lying on the bed beside me open to the page of names. Before her shock could turn to anger, I killed her, wrapped my hands around her thin neck while our dog howled at my feet.

The Moment

Story by | John Rutter

The pen was still in his hand. That's what threw me. I could have easily pictured a gun, or maybe a needle, but a pen?

That wasn't all that was wrong, of course. He should have been gone by now. It was a Wednesday, almost 9. He usually left for work by 8 at the latest.

I wanted him to go more than usual. We hadn't even seen each other in three days, not since the day after the fight, not since I flipped him off as he drove away from the house at the shore.

So Saturday, then, that was the last time we spoke, if you can call it that. We never really spoke—he told me things, and I tried not to show the effect his words had on me. It was how I won, at least when I was smaller. But not that day—that day he went too far, his attempts to control me had become too desperate, unacceptable.

So that day, sixteen and righteous took a stand, and proved to be more than a match for forty eight and blown. The end was what I was picturing now,

here at the door. I stood over him, holding the 2x4 he had just swung at me, and I could have ended a chapter right there. "I should kill you with this thing", and with my words, and his submission, came the realization that this is what he wanted—me to do it for him. "Fuck it. You're not even worth it". That's where we had left it.

So here I am now, at the door, wondering if I'll ever get to celebrate my small victory, or was it just an event that increased the likelihood that therapeutic intervention will be required about two years out?

Probably the latter. Something else is wrong, too. His legs are in the same place they were when I got up to pee the first time, around 6:30. I remember seeing him, his legs anyway, and trying to be quiet. But now it's 9, and he's still there, and he's not gone, but he's got the pen, so, maybe?

I could go get Mike, but I'm already here, at what is turning out to be our door, yours and mine. I stand for a moment that still causes ripples on my life's mirror, watching for any sign, waiting until I was sure before I spoke to you in person, one last time.

Dad?

Shortest Horror Story I've ever Read

Story by | Unknown

The last person on Earth sits alone in a room. There comes a knock at the door.

Appreciated by | Josh Fenton

Accidents Happen

Story by | Trevor Alexander

Robert sits comfortably on his green leather sofa, his wife's blonde head resting peacefully on his shoulder as he watches his high-definition television. He is still, taking shallow breaths, not wanting to disturb her just yet; she is too beautiful to wake while she is sleeping. The moonlight shining through the many windows of his high-ceilinged living room onto her calm face makes her look like a character from a movie. Tomorrow will be a normal, busy day in advertising, and the man considers resting his eyes while sitting on the couch, but while he is still in his mid twenties, sleeping on the couch gives him a stiff neck and a headache, which would take the fun out of his morning swim. Better to just stay awake for now. Late night television grows increasingly dull, and he decides he will move them to the bedroom at the end of the infomercial.

A deafening noise followed by the sound of shattering glass rouses him from this half-slumberous condition. At first he doesn't notice the soon to be sharp pain in his chest, the warm liquid flowing down his stomach alerts him of his wound. The splash of blood from the bullet entering his body wakes his wife, as it flecks her face with dark red splotches. She immediately turns with her hands raised to stop further splashes of liquid, and realizes enough of the situation to start to apply pressure to the hole where his rib cage used to protect his right lung. With her other hand she uses her cell phone to call emergency, not wanting to leave his side to find the house telephone. The blue light from the phone makes the scene appear even more unnatural. Unable to convey her emergency at first through several deep, guttural sobs, she continues trying and, while weeping, composes herself enough to cry out, as though she had been shot, "Send a goddamn ambulance to my house now; my husband is dying!"

Two men, boys really, about fifteen, stand in shock in the backyard of the house next door to the injured man's home. Paul has a permanent reminder, a powder burn from his father's revolver, of the accident that he will need no reminder to keep from forgetting. Neither can move, perhaps due to shock, perhaps because while both would rather be somewhere else, neither can think of better place to go. Although they will not know the ramifications of their actions, or that the injured man even exists, until the police arrive at the house an hour later, neither remembers the specifics of the childish game they were playing in the backyard.

Robert now lies on the less comfortable stretcher that was used to remove him from his own home in a red and white ambulance with flashing blue lights that is rushing him to the nearest hospital that accepts his company's insur-

ance plan. His eyes are glossy, wet and heavily glazed over, but open, for one of few times since he was shot, so that he can gaze at his wife, who is clutching his hand with such ferocity that if he was still able to feel pain, he would complain. Fighting to stay conscious as blood from his nicked artery seeps through bandage after bandage, he professes to his wife, with red on his teeth and covering his tongue, "I love you." A playful half-smirk falls on his lips as his eyes darken and roll back into his head.

The large, mirrored glass window stared at each of the fifteen year-olds, as did the two police officers standing behind it. Paul, with the now bandaged hand is shaking, while the other sits in disbelief. Although he did not pull the trigger his mind is unable to discern the difference. As a rare youth who takes responsibility for his actions, he feels that he is equally to blame. His parents are on their way to the station with a lawyer, just the same as Paul's mother and father, but the police will soon release him; he broke no law. The entry of the tearful parents to the cramped room calms only one child; the other continues shivering uncontrollably, which he will eventually stop, and staring non-responsively into space, which he will never stop. After he is tried as an adult and sent to federal prison for involuntary manslaughter, his silence and distant gaze make him a favorite of the guards, and also of certain fellow inmates.

Although Robert survives surgeries and procedures and lives through the first night, he is not going to recover. At least that is what the doctors tell his wife. "He can continue to live on life support, but will never regain consciousness," was what one says, summing up about two hours of explanation. She loves her husband dearly, having never before felt that tingle in her stomach, which she felt when he looked at her. But she had married him before going to college and had never had a job; she has no way to support herself while he lay comatose.

"Pull the plug," she says, a single tear on her cheek, as she turns to leave the room in which her husband takes his last breaths.

10 Years Earlier

"I got it, let's go!" a boy, Bob, (short for Robert) cries as he leaps down the front steps of a white farmhouse two or three at a time. The other boy takes off running across the wide lawn, and hides behind low lying evergreen bushes, near the barn. Kneeling down, Bob pulls a revolver from his pants pocket and aims at the rustling bush. When his friend's head pops out for a moment, he pulls the trigger and his lips form "Bang!" but his voice is masked by the loud sound of a gunshot.

D & T 2000 (Editor's Pick)



Image by | Joe Moccia

Story by | Zhian Kamvar

"There are only two things certain in life, death and taxes." This was a sign that was posted outside the Post Office on April 15th. It was a cruel joke by the postmaster. That day in 1951, his little joke turned into irony.

Inside the post office, the air was thick with the stench of tax time. The smell of paper, sweat, and booze invaded the nostrils of all who dwelt inside. People were lining up outside desperately trying to get their taxes mailed in by midnight so they can have the April 15 postmark and in turn, avoid being screwed by the IRS. It was ten o'clock and Tom Chen was just getting in line. If everything went right he would get to the window at 11:30. Unfortunately, and for the sake of the plot of this story, it didn't.

At 10:32PM, a pregnant moose barged in, bucking and screaming for morphine. She collapsed on the case displaying the new stamps. The shards of glass cut into her womb. Among the glass and the womb fluid, a full-grown man fell out. He was naked and screaming. He was completely bald, and had some sort of cord attached to his stomach. Grabbing on of the shards, he cut the cord. The police were called, and for fifteen minutes, no one did anything except stare at the screaming, bloody, naked man, writhing and kicking among the glass and the moose fluid. The police had arrived, not knowing what to do so one of them took the man and hand-cuffed him and put him in the squad car while the other swept up the broken glass and hauled out the moose.

By then, there were only two people left in line, for most of the others had given up and gone home, prepared to accept the fines which they were going to receive. Mr. Chen told himself that he was going to stay there, no matter what had happened. After the moose was cleaned up, the Postmaster decided to close the post office. Mr. Chen was next in line, but they turned him away. It was quite impossible for Mr. Chen to describe what he was feeling that night, but it was a very deep and malicious form of rage building up inside him. In a moment of absolute and utter cliché, he vowed revenge against the post office.

The man who came out of the moose could not speak, as the police soon realized. They also realized one other thing: they could not legally hold him. He didn't do anything illegal. They decided to provide him with clothes and to take him to the homeless shelter where he stayed for the rest of his life.

Now, let us skip to two months ahead to June 17, when schoolboys and girls are just beginning to realize that they have nothing to do over the summer vacation. The man from the moose had learned many things in the two-month period of his

life. Already he had the vocabulary of a seven year old. He also learned to pick locks. On this particular day, he decided to go for a drive. Walking down the street, he spotted a Cadillac convertible parked in front of a theatre. He wanted it, so he jumped in, broke off the molding around the base of the steering wheel, and started the car. HE drove around looking for something to do, and then he saw some well-endowed women and one thing popped into his mind. That's right, it's a four-letter word: milk. What do you expect from a two-month old? These women were hitchhiking their way to California, so of course they got in the car with him. Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Joseph Miller, the postmaster, hears some rustling in the bushes outside and realizes that he is very hungry because the rustling sound reminded him of the sound of eggs frying in a pan. He had half an hour's worth of paperwork to do and the he would be done and ready to go to lunch. Joseph loved food so much that he thought that they nicknamed coffee after him. For eleven months out of the year, he looks like just an old guy to people on the street, but in December, he looks like Santa Claus and he has many children follow him to the post office hoping that he will give them presents. All he gives them is the finger.

It turned out that one of the girls had a bottle of whiskey in her purse. She pulled it out and started to drink it and passed it around like a bottle of booze. When it got to the man from the moose, he didn't know what to do with it, so he took a really big swig. He passed the bottle and all of the girls were staring at him. He suddenly began to feel very funny. He was feeling as if he was very heavy and light at the same time, his vision was tunneling, and his mind was wandering.

He got worried as soon as he began to hallucinate. He saw little creatures run across the road, but when it seemed that he would hit them, he felt no bump, occasionally there would be a bump, but he thought nothing of it. He was too busy being freaked out by the trees and buildings whizzing by. The man was flipping out because he thought he had seen Santa driving down the street, and shortly after that, he thought he hit an Asian man riding a bike. He didn't want to stick around to find out. He drove as fast as he could. The only thing that he couldn't figure out was why the man was laughing before he got hit.

It was too bad that he didn't let go of that thought, because he drove right into the post office just as a bomb went off inside. The man from the moose had died right where he was born. The explosion was heard throughout the town. Even in Molly's Diner where Joseph Miller was eating a BLT. The sound had startled him and he had a heart attack on table number 8. He died before the paramedics were able to get there. The really bizarre part is that it was a Sunday.

Cosmopolitan

Story by | Erin Roper

We were walking now and it was cold and dark and the car that whipped by threw dust in our eyes but we didn't notice. We didn't notice because it was Friday night and we were young people who didn't take ourselves too seriously and we just wanted to have a good time.

"You've never heard that song?"

"No."

"I thought you made up dances to the entire CD with your little sister?"

"Well, only the good ones really."

I was singing for her the song, the dirty song that was so funny that I couldn't believe that she hadn't heard it. Cars passed us again and I did the dance move that they spoke of in the song with the headlights lighting me from behind throwing my image onto the concrete overpass we were about to walk under.

"That's bad! That's a bad, bad song!"

"I know, isn't it?"

My teeth were big and white as I grinned at her, spreading out slowly and staying there. And it was times like these when I just wanted to say it, to let it all out in a great big rush of air and not pause until I had said it for all the times I had thought it. But perhaps, perhaps then it wouldn't be taken as it should and she would accept it easily because she thought it meant something else.

"That party was so dumb."

"Yeah, they should know by now that playing this song makes any party two-fold better."

"T w o - f o l d ?"

"Two-fold."

"Did you even use that correctly?"

Something else like when she grabbed my hand at parties and held it tight because we both had a little too much to drink and were a little scared of the people and the boys and being separated in the large crowd and she not knowing that I only went to the parties to have an excuse to hold her hand and lean in close to her and even mumble against her ear when the music was too loud to speak normally.

"For god's sake stop walking in the street."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Just get up here on the curb already, there's a car coming."

Now she was grabbing my wrist and pulling hard so that I had the choice of jumping up onto the steep curb or meeting it face first and I chose to jump, jump farther than necessary and knock into her lightly. Our heads slammed together, hit in a

sequence that was not in my plan and hurt slightly but was funny at the same time. She pushed me back and the car that was coming honked even though I was not in the street, and I was bent with laughter and pain over the very most tip of my left eyebrow.

"Next time I'm pushing you harder."

"Yeah right, I don't believe you."

"I'm going to, freak. And the car's going to go wham right into you."

Her hands came together in a hard slap inches from my face, air and noise puffing the hair up off of my forehead. I was jumping at her now, still laughing, and singing the lewd song louder and louder, my hands on her shoulders and jumping, jumping, jumping up and over and all around as we walked alongside the road.

"You have some serious problems."

"Don't pretend my dance isn't turning you on."

"Oh yeah, baby. Give it to me."

Dry, dry words without promise like the kisses at parties - stupid - drunken - exhibitionist kisses that sparked glittering flecks of hope deep within. And wasn't she just so cosmopolitan, having done it all, ultimately experienced. So. Over. It. And I, I was just left pretending, pretending that I too was just fashionably flexible and hip and young and nothing more. Left pushing aside all hope that we could live out the little wish in the back of my mind, domesticity to the highest degree, our little house and nine to five jobs and little girl child and dog. Left feeling slightly used and mostly ashamed. Boys liked girls who were cool, cool with being so close to their girl friends and we were just cool, so cool with no hope of being anything else.

"Look, I can see the apartment building."

"Woo-hoo the apartment building."

And I wanted to cover her eyes and keep walking forever, forever and never getting anywhere but being together so it wouldn't matter and she wouldn't ever notice or ask why. But it was as far away a dream as I had ever dreamt and I just kept going, lift foot step, lift foot step, knowing that in my dark dorm room there was the empty Tupperware that had the cake, the cake that mom had made for the boy I was dating, but which I had eaten myself and how I would have given it all to her if she had only liked the icing. But isn't that just how it always is.

"This really isn't that far of a walk."

"I know."

And she was right though I was breathing hard because I had danced for her the entire way home.

Ahem

Story by | Erin Roper

He hated when people sat next to him on the train. The entire time he would wonder if they were wondering about him. Wondering, wondering, and always looking.

The woman beside him now was talking on her cell phone. She had her legs crossed, left over right, high-heeled foot dangling, bouncing, to the cadence of the conversation. He watched from the corner of his eye as water dripped evenly off the bottom of her shoe. Drip, drip, falling onto the floor of the train, a little puddle of road salt and water to stain the tile.

He wondered how old she was.

Turning to face the window, her reflection appeared before him. She laid her head against the back of the seat, her throat exposed, moving, moving, as she spoke into the little silver phone. His eyes slid down her neck, seeing past the hand that held the phone, past the thickly applied French manicure. Eyes wander-

ing, wandering down to her chest to where her business suit started.

He wondered how old she was.

Its obvious masculine roots made the suit more feminine as it fit across features he did not possess. Blue and white, blue and white, the jacket and skirt matched the stone pendant on the key chain that idly laid in her other hand.

He wondered how old she was.

Down, down, past the bared knees and calves back to the shoe that still dripped water on the floor. Back up, up, again in time to see her teeth bare in a grin, accentuated by painted features. Talking, talking, and always laughing, her mouth moved.

He wondered how old she was.

He shifted in his seat, face creating a pained searching expression as it turned from the window.

"Excuse me."

She turned, turned, to face him now, face falling from smile to mild annoyance. He smiled a small, almost apologetic smile.

"Would you maybe...be quiet?"

Hey. My name is Jeremy Andrews. I'm at a weird place in my life right now. I'm at that stage where you're too old to just be a kid but not quite old enough to drive. You know, that place where you have to grow up but get none of the cool stuff that goes with it. It sucks for me, as I'm sure it sucked for you. Anyway, I'm giving a great deal of thought to killing myself.

I know that isn't exactly a rational desire. However, I've given this a lot of thought. I really believe this is for the best. Think of my teachers. I'm failing almost all of my classes except study hall. My sloppy work and horrible grades not only make me look bad, but they make my teachers look bad too. And that's just not fair. My teachers work really hard. I just don't get what they're teaching. Some of them even try to help just me, and it's not their fault I don't understand it. And they're all grossly underpaid. It's not right that they waste time and look unsuccessful just because I'm a lost cause.

Then there is my best friend Sean. Well, I still consider him my best friend. Sean and I were like brothers—closer than brothers, really—as we grew up. We had a lot of good times, and there is nothing I miss more than just being at his house. However as we were growing up, we did some things Sean isn't very proud of. I'm not very proud of them either, but Sean's parents are very religious. Very religious. His mom was so Christian that I thought she was Jesus. That has an effect on a kid, you know? I mean, living in a house like that, not thinking your friend's mom is Jesus. Sean...nobody rides Sean harder than Sean. He blames and berates himself over every little thing. Since he moved to Joplin last year, I think he wants to sever

Jeremy Andrews's Long Goodbye

Story by I Brad Brown

ties with me. Anytime I call or email or instant message him, I always get these short, rude, un-Sean like answers. He never calls me or emails me first. I think, to him, I serve as this constant reminder of all this bad stuff he did as a kid. It disgusts him, so I disgust him. I know he seems like sort of a jerk now, but Sean was the best friend anybody could want. I just want him to be happy. I think I owe him that much.

Then there are my parents. Sometimes, when I'm clear headed and not all angry at them, I feel so sorry for them. If you look at old photo albums, see the pictures of them in high school and college, laughing, looking so very happy together—you can tell they had dreams. They've never went into it, but Dad wanted to be a trumpet player. He wanted to play jazz in smoky clubs and be on the road. He wouldn't have made much money, but he could have always toned it down, gotten a degree, taught college, and they would have gotten by. Sometimes, on those rare Sunday afternoons when he's not too tired from working all week, he still practices. He's good. I don't even like jazz, and I get chills just listening to him. You can hear him pour his soul into it. During the week, he works at the meat processing plant. The fucking meat processing plant. He has to wear a mask just so he doesn't pass out from the chicken smell that smothers the factory.

I'm not too sure what Mom wanted to do in life. She was on her way to law school, I know that. Whatever she dreamt of doing, I doubt it included looking like a fat, bloated corpse that is drunk all the time. My mom, in those old pictures, she

looked like a movie star. One of those old time movie stars that are pretty even fifty years later. Now...now she's only thirty, and she looks so old. She's just so old.

I know it's not my fault they got pregnant. Believe me, I didn't ask to be born. However, I am the reason they still have such crappy lives now. It takes a lot of money to raise a kid. I have to eat. I need clothes. There are things for school. I'm greedy, selfish, and always wanting new videogames or crap like that. I'm going to be driving soon. There's no way my parents can afford a car or the insurance. And college is completely out of the question.

So, as you can see, this really is for the best.

I'm having trouble deciding how to do it though. Obviously, I want something quick and painless. The first thing I thought of was my dad's pistol, the one he keeps behind some boxes on the top shelf of his closet. With my luck, though, I'd probably screw things up and lodge the bullet in my brain, get paralyzed, and not die. The idea of having people wait on me for the rest of my life is kind of intriguing, but I'm not a big fan of drooling on myself. Besides, anybody can shoot himself. I'd like to do something less senseless.

There's a lake—actually, it's a pond—not too far from school. When I was little, sometimes my parents would take me there, and we would pretend to be happy. Dad would carry me high up on his shoulders, Mom would tickle me on the grass, and I would just laugh and laugh until I couldn't laugh anymore. Sean and I

used to ride our bikes up there too. We spent so many Saturday afternoons just walking around the edge of that lake, laughing, talking, and being bored but not caring. Just remembering makes me smile. I wouldn't mind if the lake was the last thing I saw.

I don't think I have the guts to drown myself though. If I tied myself to a rock, I think I might panic, cut myself free, and not go through with it. I could always shoot myself in the lake, but what if I'm just paralyzed? That would be a miserable way to go, slowly drowning with the knowledge that I can't even kill myself properly. Plus, Dad's gun would go with me, and I don't want to take anything more from the man. I've taken too much already.

I hear slitting your wrists is an easy way to go. Like everything gets real peaceful, and it's like someone slowly pulls a curtain over the last act of your life. It sounds like a nice way to go. Nobody has to clean anything up, and I'd get to see my blood mix with the water. I know it's kind of dumb, but becoming one with the lake...I could think of worse ways to go.

That's it then. I'll go slit my wrists in the lake. I guess the only question I'm left with now is why I am writing this. I don't really know. It's not a cry for help or anything like that because I don't want to be talked out of this. I guess I just wanted you to know that I'm not doing this for attention, because I know you've wasted too much on me already. Don't think you failed or kick yourself like this is your fault. I know I'm hopeless. I know I'm destined to fall. There was nothing you could have done differently. You've meant a lot to me, but now it's my time to say goodbye. Before I do, though, I just want to say thanks, and that I'm sorry I wasted so much of your precious time.

All Apologies,
Jeremy

Chapter 1

Story by I Erin Bush

— — In the cool clear air of an autumn dawn, two men stood facing each other on a green mountainside. Cautiously they circled, regarding one another with shrewd, calculating eyes. Without warning, the younger of the two struck, blade flashing in the pale sunlight. His opponent blocked effortlessly and, with the resounding clash of steel on steel, the battle began. The pair fought skillfully, moving seamlessly from form to form with the precision and grace of dancers, until both were panting and coated with sweat. The elder of the two, growing weary, stumbled on a stone and swung wide. The youth moved to take advantage, realizing too late his mistake. His opponent ducked easily to one side, pivoting to bring his hilt down heavily on the young man's head, leaving him sprawling face-down in the grass. Bitterly cursing his stupidity and his aching head, he spun onto his back only to find his opponent's razor-sharp blade poised a hairsbreadth from his throat. For a long, tense moment neither man moved. Then, with an irritated sigh, the youth dropped his sword. The older man broke into a wide

grin. "You're getting better," he observed pleasantly, sheathing his blade and helping the youth to his feet. "A few more years and I might actually make a passable swordsman of you!" He laughed, patting him roughly on the back and sending up a cloud of dust.

"Sure," the young man replied disconsolately.

"You don't give yourself enough credit, lad. I've known precious few men with your talent. In the Service you would have made Red Blade by now."

"Do you think so?"

"Red at the least." The pair caught their breath on the soft green grass in the speckled shade of tall evergreens, gazing at the shadowy forested valley and dark-tiled roofs of their home far below. The elder of the two was an imposing figure of a man, strong and hardy as ever he was despite the gray above his ears and wrinkles about his warm, brown eyes. The steady grace of his movements and easy confidence with which he handled his weapon hinted at a life of fierce battles and harsh campaigns. His body grown harder since the days of his youth, as evidenced by his numerous battle scars and rough, weatherworn skin, but thankfully the same could not be said of his gentle heart. His companion was young, having

not yet reached his adult years, of average height and build, with light-brown hair and a cool, steady gaze. A slightly crooked nose, as though having been broken once or twice, was the only distinguishing feature of an otherwise ordinary face. In fact, the only thing distinctive at all in this youth's appearance was his eyes. Like all of his despised kind, his eyes were red. When the older man finally spoke, it was with uncharacteristic gravity. "Nikolai, your mother tells me you were in the hospital again last month." Nikolai nodded slowly, not liking this turn in the conversation. "That makes five times in the last year," he persisted.

"Six."

"Six! Nik, if things go on like this, you'll never survive to twenty!"

"And what exactly do you suggest I do, Jack?" Nikolai snapped.

"You could run."

"I will not." It was clear from the indignant tone of his voice and stubborn set of his shoulders that the matter was closed. Not for the first time, Jack Nevski marveled at his nephew's tenacity. There was no point arguing, but there was an alternative. A poor one at that he allowed, regarding Nikolai with mingled pity and admiration, but at least the boy would stand a fighting chance.

"Have you ever thought of the Ser-

vice?"

"Yes," his nephew responded simply. Jack waited, but Nikolai remained silently gazing at the dark-roofed town with his blood-red eyes.

"It's no cake walk," Jack's face momentarily darkened in recollection, "but off north we're at war with the Roen. Most northerners haven't even seen the likes of you before, and so long as you fight they won't give a second thought to those eyes of yours." Nikolai made no response. "Well?"

"I wasn't going to tell anyone," he replied finally, "until after the Academy accepted me." He couldn't help but laugh at his uncle's shocked silence. "I don't know that I've ever seen you at a loss for words before," he commented, still smiling. All Jack could do was embrace his nephew tightly and wish him all the luck in the world. He would need it. Jack knew all too well the bitter road of those who made this war their profession, and he also knew what Nikolai would face if he remained. He did not envy his nephew this decision. Nikolai disengaged himself from Jack's arms, slightly annoyed at the pitying tone in his uncle's voice. But soon all thoughts of war and pity and soon-to-be-said good-byes were lost in the rhythmic clash of steel on the green mountainside.

The Rapture

Story by I Marc

The word rapture, of course, does not appear in the Bible. So, it was a bit of a surprise on that beautiful June day when Jesus came back as He promised to gather His followers together with Him in the air to take them off to Heaven to a mansion He had gone ahead to prepare for them.

The real shocker, however, was what happened back here on Earth after all of the Good people had been taken away. A series of "Left Behind" movies and novels had predicted total chaos with the breakdown of order, the flourishing of violence and anarchy, and the emergence of a brutal one-world government. It was quite the opposite, however, that was to come to pass. Amateur philosophers noted that as it is only night that gives meaning to day and pain that gives meaning to joy, so perhaps it was only to be expected that Evil could not exist in the absence of Good.

One of the first things that people noticed was the apparent disappearance of the entire Bush Administration. That, however, was only the beginning. Without George W. Bush, the United States occupation of Iraq soon collapsed. Tony Blair and José María Aznar apparently had also been raptured, and in the absence of imperial forces, autonomy and self determination soon flourished in the Fertile Crescent. Apparently Allah had also seen fit to take fundamentalist Muslims home to him, or perhaps it was only that Evil could no longer exist in the absence of Good. In any case, wars quickly came to an end as former enemies began to collaborate in the pursuit of common and peaceful goals.

Without their Born Again champion, Republican prospects in the fall elections grew dim. It was not only the absence of the War President that hurt them; it seemed that without Karl Rove and his dirty tricks the Republicans could not assure another stolen election and Tom Delay was no longer available to jerry-rig congressional boundaries in order to disenfranchise Blacks, Hispanics, and other "undesirables" in a White Christian vision of Amerika. Without John Ashcroft to enforce it, oppressive legisla-

tion like the Patriot Act soon was forgotten. Furthermore, it appeared that few of the people who were left behind would support the Republican Party because it had increasingly become dependent on its radical Christian right wing which, of course, was now raptured and enjoying their promised After Life in Heaven.

At first some people thought that the Democratic Party would be able to capitalize on the rapture to regain control over the White House. Without religious politicians advocating a Christian duty to support a flat tax, the death penalty, the slashing of social services, and a closing of the borders to the tired, poor, and huddled masses yearning to be free, Democrats were seemingly positioned to strengthen education and health care while spending not quite so much on a bloated military budget. But in becoming virtually indistinguishable from the Republican Party, they did not fare much better; seemingly most of the DLC members from Bill Clinton and John Kerry on down were also gone.

By November, however, the whole point of elections and even governments in general had become a moot point. After all, government only existed to try to restrain Evil in a Secular world and such concepts were now quickly becoming distant memories. Far from predictions of a one-world government, there was no longer any need for state structures. Without Greed and Evil, there was no more crime and no more injustice so lawyers became quite unnecessary. Without a Christian duty to protect private property, people became more concerned for the commons. The coercive powers of government—police, judges, and prisons—were simply no longer needed. Without the fear the Good people had imposed on the world, freedom and liberty flourished like never before.

Food First had long argued that hunger was a political issue and not one of a lack of resources. CEOs of top multi-national corporations like Archer Daniels Midland and Cargill seemed to be unproportionally represented among those raptured, and without their bloated salaries and predatory trade practices, poor countries were now able to feed themselves rather than be trapped in an export market under IMF sanctions and Free Trade pacts. As the global Gini coefficient

quickly approached zero, some social scientists sardonically noted that as they had predicted it had taken an act of God to realize socio-economic equality.

Most of the people who entered the health care profession to become wealthy were now comfortably living in Heaven where there was no pain, illness or death. Those who remained on Earth were committed to caring for their fellow human beings and were not motivated by financial gain, and so health care soon became universal, free, and immediately available. Without the Christian Right to block universal access to prenatal care, contraceptives, and quality sex education, issues like abortion which had so divided the public soon ironically became, in Al Gore's words (who, together with Tipper, was also nowhere to be found), "safe, legal, and rare." Every child was born to a stable family unit (as domestic abuse was now a distant memory) and therefore was loved and cherished.

Other issues like civil unions which had also so divided society were also no longer of concern, because those who saw marriage as a religious rite were now in Heaven where there was no marriage—and presumably no sex either. For those Left Behind, there was no longer a government with a perceived interest in regulating civil unions as a course of secular interest to society. Unlike what the Religious Right had predicted, without these regulations and restrictions bestiality and other deviant behaviors did not flourish. In fact, they were entirely unheard of which led credence to the belief that they only existed in the perverted minds of Christians such as Fred Phelps or Jerry Falwell. Or, perhaps, in the absence of Good, Evil could no longer exist.

Some people wondered what it must be like in Heaven with all of those Good people there. Before the rapture, such an image might have invoked pity: Was a concentration of all that Greed and Violence resulting in civil wars? Should one feel sorry for God for having to live with all of those self-righteous and self-serving people? Or was it His own fault for introducing concepts that could have such tragic outcomes? Was Heaven one big re-education camp, a way to reintegrate the Christian Right into humanity? Or was this an emergency action

necessary to assure the survival of His creation? But in the absence of Good, such thoughts that might result in bitterness could not be conceptualized. People soon forgot all about their former overlords, and after the remarkable events of that June Solstice there was little to be gained from dwelling on the pain and sorrow of the past.

Back on Earth, work patterns changed dramatically. Without the wage slavery of capitalism, people no longer needed to work to survive or survive only to work. Rather, people found deep and profound meanings in the most simple tasks. Without the need to fund bloated CEO salaries and stockholder demands, work days quickly shrunk to about four short hours. The amazing thing, however, was that without threats of wages or firings productivity went through the roof. Rather than society equalizing at the lowest common denominator, the entire world now enjoyed luxuries that could not even have been dreamed under the Ancien Regime.

Deep in the Amazon forest a former priest named Paulo chatted with his pals about the meanings of the astounding changes of the last few months. He was a former priest not so much because religion as it had previously been construed no longer existed nor because Pope John Paul II had not been seen recently and presumably was in Heaven with other Good Christians, but because he was excommunicated in the 1960s when under the influence of Liberation Theology he had joined the people's struggle in a much more direct and immediate fashion than his conservative bishop cared to allow.

Paulo tried to convince his buddies that what they were witnessing was what he had fought for his entire life, which was the same thing that the early Anabaptists had attempted to create at Münster centuries earlier: the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. In the cool evening breeze, however, his comrades did not care what it was called or how it had come about. They were just happy to be finally freed from the exploitation of large landowners and greedy capitalists. Life was good, and for the first time everyone on earth was looking forward to the next millennium.

Savannah Fare You Well

Story by I Joel Anderson

Dawn was fast approaching. From the east, the sun shot its red fingers above the horizon as if to grab the Earth and sky. To the west, night fought to maintain its dark domain. Betwixt the two, a clash of shadows befell the land. Spring had come, but the ocean kept the land cool. Not a soul stirred in the quiet coastal town. Not a soul except Jim McGraw, and oh was his soul stirring.

The jail cell reflected the occupant: dark, tired, and rough. Dead fingernails and scratch marks decorated the walls, a testament of former occupants not quite as composed as McGraw. Some men scratched their name in the stone, others just scratched. McGraw did neither.

Unlike most men in his situation, he didn't weep, plead, or worst of all, pray. His sins were his and his alone. Spending most of his life earning them, he wasn't about to

give them up. He coddled them close to his heart as a mother cuddles her child, for his sins were all he had left. Most men leave sons as a legacy, McGraw could only leave sins.

How he came here was simple: his luck ran out. He had pulled fairy dust and miracles out of his coat for seven and twenty years now, but the magic had run out. Betrayed, caught, tried, and now soon to be executed, McGraw didn't have much time left.

Peering out the barred window, he watched as night gave way to day. He had known day was coming long before God unleashed dawn's light. The morning birds had long since prepared him for this fate. Sighing, he sat on his cot and studied his hands, hands the color of tanned leather and able to smash walnuts. Before the betrayal, he lived and died by those hands. Those hands cracked safes, skulls, and from time to time, crossword puzzles.

The strength of his hands was only

surpassed by their dexterity. A shot fired at McGraw rarely had siblings, for the progenitor of the bullets never lived long enough to send off more offspring. He couldn't help but feel a little uneasy about the thought of dying without a gun in his southpaw. The only thing his hands would grip now would be a coarse, hemp rope.

He was out of time.

As the jailer led him out of his cell, McGraw kept his head high and his eyes level, analyzing the situation. Maybe he could conjure one more trick. The thought of escape was ridiculous though. Even if she hadn't betrayed him, she was only one woman and he was only one man. Escape was impossible. With leg manacles and hands cuffed behind his back, he wouldn't make it far if he tried to run. The Warden's rifle was a subtle reminder of that fact. Despite the early hour, a large crowd had gathered for the execution. A good hanging was a rare treat in these parts, and McGraw was a celebrity of sorts. His name was known on most every tongue from here to Atlanta. Bantered about in bars, whis-

pered about in schools, gossiped about in sewing circles, McGraw's exploits knew no stranger. Twenty-seven years he ran counter to the law, but soon he would meet his end dancing the dead man's jig.

King or pauper. Warden or crook. Everyone meets his end someday. The life one leads may hasten this fate, yet McGraw had no regrets. He regarded the gallows with reluctant fear, though he let none show on his face. Like death's grim scythe, the gallows knew no mercy. Bloodless, yet bloody still, it carried away the lives of many men.

Without pomp or circumstance, ceremony or speech, the noose was fitted around his neck. Studying the crowd, he found the one who had betrayed him. Her face was hard and cruel. She had come to make sure the job was done, and God forbid he deprives her of this small satisfaction. Despite all of this, he loved her still, knew he shouldn't but couldn't stop. With creak and a lurch, the trapdoor fell. His last thoughts were of her. His last words were whispered, "Savannah, fare you well."