

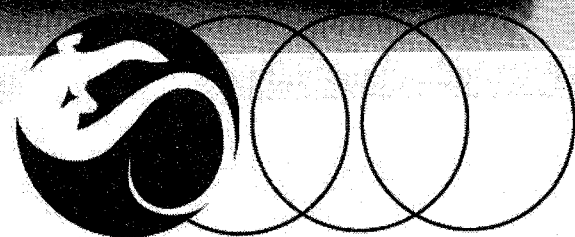
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words

LESS.

**SHORT STORY
ISSUE**

the monitor.



volume 10 >> issue 6

a campus collective.

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The Monitor is published every other Tuesday.
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346. Each writer is responsible for his or her
own work.

"Among people who have learned something
from the 18th century (say, Voltaire) it is a tru-
ism, 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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The Editors' Box

Welcome to our third semesterly short story issue. You are one lucky reader, because within this issue are almost thirty stories covering a wide variety of topics. We've got everything from suicide, to murder, to accidental deaths, to... well... Truman students must be childhood-hug deficient or something because killing, dying, death, and gratuitous violence dominated our short story contest this semester.

People killed (or soon to be killed) by serial killers, by robots, by funeral-goers, by Iraqi insurgents, by Ringo Starr, by cancer, by Neanderthals, by themselves, by autoerotic asphyxiation, by wandering into traffic, while running over a squirrel, while robbing Charlton Heston, while ejaculating - we've got them all. What do attractive young women, babies, and guys named Chris all have in common? If you said "cannibalized in the coming pages" you'd be correct.

Of course not everyone dies in these stories. Some characters merely cut their wrists, try to chop off their fingers, repetitively smash their hands into a bloody pulp, or are raped by inmates named Big Hank.

Along with the plethora of violence contained in this issue, there are still some non-violent tales to be told. So hopefully those of you seeking less gory fare will dig a little before writing off this semester's submissions. Hopefully all of our readers will find some truly satisfying fiction in the following pages. And hopefully many of the authors published here will find a good supply of Valium sometime soon.

Signed,

Frances Dusseault, Andrés Delgado
Jon Lawinger

Jon Lawinger
Andrés Delgado
Frances Dusseault

Process of selection..... The Monitor received 27 short story submissions. It was the pleasure of seven staff members to read these carefully and select from them five finalists. Among those finalists are *A Full Night* and *Flores Para los Muertos*, by Trevor Alexander, *Fall*, by Eric Scott, *The Groovy Orgasmic Poachers*, by Brad Brown, and *Thirty-Six*, by Michelle Carter. Each judge ranked their top three among these five finalists, giving three points to their favorite story, two points to their next choice, and one point to their third choice. In the end, the first and second place stories ran away with the vote, both outpacing the nearest competitor by double the points it received. A single point won the vote for *Flores Para los Muertos* over *Thirty-Six*.

First Place Flores para los muertos

fiction by >> Xander Kennedy

Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

I ate a flower today. It was beautiful, now it's in my stomach. I own it now. I possess it. I can command and control it, in a manner of speaking. It's not the first time I've eaten a flower, and it probably won't be the last.

"Can I help you?"
"Yes, I think I'd like to buy this flower."

"Ah, I compliment you on your choice, sir."

I was being the dutiful tourist, keeping to myself, when she selected me.

-setting-

An outdoor café in the heart of London. A very picturesque June afternoon, recalling images of countless cliché-ridden romantic flicks. The iron table and chairs were perhaps a bit rusty and a little uncomfortable, but wonderfully appropriate for the atmosphere. Across the street a sidewalk band was resting as their flautist was doing a few solo numbers in a constant effort to survive. They looked happy despite their gaunt features, a combination which seemed to only make me feel guiltier for having money. As one of the many streets leading away from Trafalgar Square, Craven St. had caught my attention, and that of my stomach, by the numerous awnings and the promise of food underneath them. I was presented with a tour of the world and its foods as I determined what sounded best, finally settling in Greece. A lukewarm glass of water kept me company as I waited for my gyro to arrive. Today's edition of The Guardian rested under my 50-pound Guide to London on the edge of the table, neither of which had yet satisfied their purchase for me. And as always a solitary flower rested in the center of the table...

'Isn't it odd that flowers are the reproductive organs of the plants they grow on?'
- Logan Pearsall Smith

...Today's was a flawless yellow Gerber daisy, easily comparable to the sun overhead. I had selected it early this morning without giving it too much thought, but in retrospect it seems as if my intuition must have kicked in because it could not have been more perfect. She approached.

"Is this seat taken?"
Grin, "Learn that one at school?"
"More likely the movies."
"Ah, the experts."
"You have potential."

-description of She-

I didn't notice her at first. I thought her an extension of the daisy. Her yellow dress and hair grew out of the center of the table for all I knew. But then the blurred color came into focus and she spoke. Her voice, a flute, the shade of the awning, atop Nelson's Column. A tall, thin block of marble stood in front of me. Master's hands chiseled her features; sanded them smooth; then touched them with life. Angular, wiry, fragile, tough, beautiful, breath-taking, life itself. I responded, I think. She sat, she somehow came to be sitting-complete casual grace. She had a flower.

"Potential?"
"Definitely, that's why I came over."

"Towards what?"
"You appear, at surface level at least, to be both handsome and intriguing. I don't allow myself to wonder 'what if?' I find out."

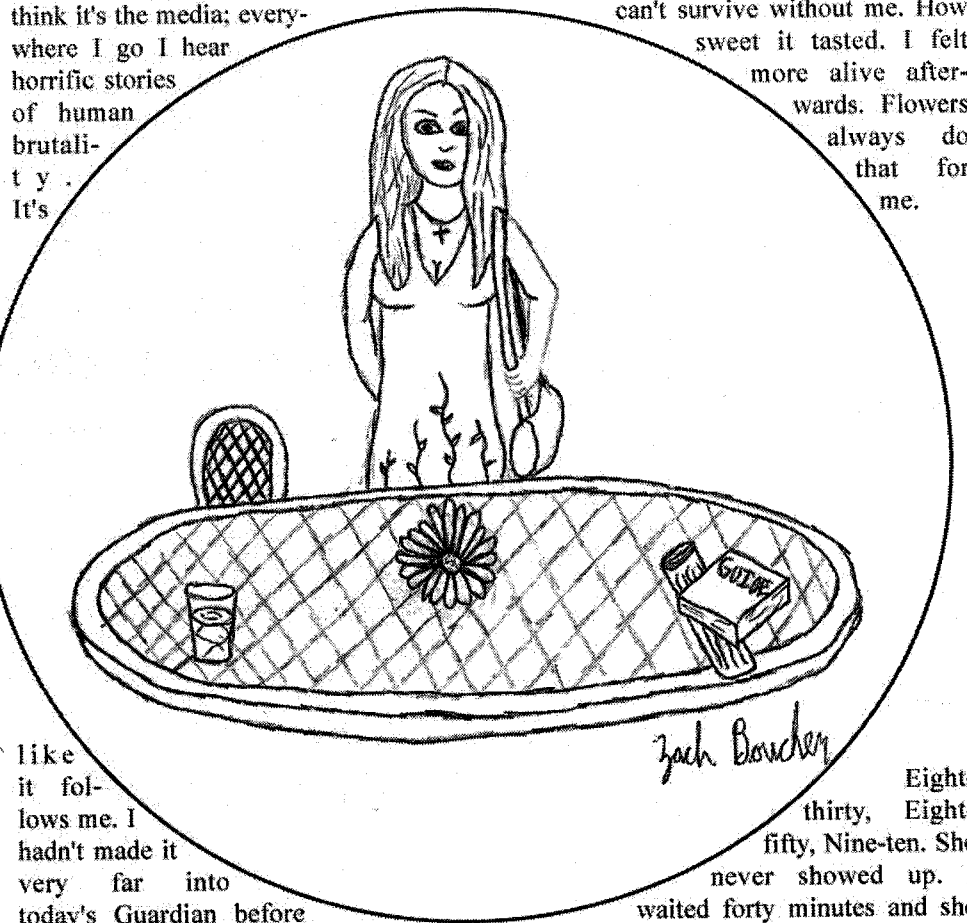
"What if?"
"I think you know."
Click, "Ah, me neither."
"So, are you deserving?"
"Perhaps too much so."
"Good, we'll rendezvous. Meet me outside the National Theatre at half-eight." She'll bring a flower.

-journey-

Flautist, eat my food. Then worry about the tab. Never completely nice. I grabbed my daisy and followed, but not too close. I've much practice at this-a sneaky bastard. Eleven blocks northwest, never very far from the river's dirty waters. At one point she engaged in a conversation with two older women. I took the opportunity to do some window-shopping; all crap, but English crap nonetheless. First time to Britain, it was supposed to be my new home, but I'm not sure how long I'll last here. I move around a lot. I think it's the media; everywhere I go I hear horrific stories of human brutality. It's

double-layered window, I watched as she finished glancing through her mail and unlocked the door to her apartment. So this is where passion resides.

On the way to the National Theatre. I finished eating my Gerber daisy-beauty can't survive without me. How sweet it tasted. I felt more alive afterwards. Flowers always do that for me.



like it follows me. I hadn't made it very far into today's Guardian before my current quest. At block seven of our journey I was almost deterred by the scent of possibility elsewhere, but another glance at Her pushed me on. Rounding the next corner I glanced down and noticed that my flower was missing a couple of its petals. At block eleven I had just bumped past a tall gentleman in a trench coat...

"Excuse me, sir."
"That's quite alright."
...when I saw her disappear into an apartment building. Hurrying ahead I hid by the doorframe until the doors of the elevator closed behind her. I pressed the button for the same elevator as I watched the numbers above it light up. It made it to the fourth floor, paused, then began to descend again. Quickly taking the stairs, I stopped seconds later at the entrance to floor number four. Peeking through the

Eight-thirty, Eight-fifty, Nine-ten. She never showed up. I waited forty minutes and she never came. Man, I feel like a sucker.

No matter though; I'm leaving the country anyway. The next morning the papers were full of the stories of the gruesome murder of a young woman in her apartment in downtown London. It seems as though the legs had been found severed from the body and there was evidence that she had been eaten from the waist down to where her legs would have attached. Poor girl.

"What can I get for you?"
"I'd like that deep red rose, please."
"Again, an excellent choice, sir."
"I know."

'A cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin.'
- H.L. Mencken

Second Place Thirty-six

fiction by >> Michelle Carter

The first one was no big deal. Blonde and young, I hastily kissed him on a dare, shrugging afterwards. I wasn't going to share that he was my very first. His accent made him sound even younger, and he had already kissed three girls. He wore pants that read "No" in the light, and glowed "Yes" in the dark. As we fell asleep, I couldn't help but stare at the fading affirmation.

John wasn't mine. He belonged to one of my girlfriends and smelled of her laundry detergent. His glasses dug into my cheek. Under the stairwell, we talked of having children and Cinderella fairytales. His father died later that year, I held his hand at the funeral and drank with him that night. In grief, he asked me to marry him.

Cameron proposed after I hadn't seen him for two years. He drove seven hours from Michigan to profess his love. Standing barefoot on the hot July pavement, I said no for the second time, hardly blinking, numb to the idea.

Studying anatomy hardly ever involves studying anymore. It's hard to tell when you're being asked to study and when you're being asked to fuck.

Randy had no qualms about asking me to fuck. Liberal views and feminism were taught at our university, which allowed him to assume most girls would be receptive. His hair was matted against his forehead with sweat when he leaned in. My bed looked strange and lumpy with him in it. He asked to shower before he left.

Later that week he told me I had ruined him. I mauled his innocence in a tangle of sheets. I threw the sheets out.

They all lie to get you in bed. Or they shower you with manners, with playing with your hair, with dreams of romance and dances under moonlight.

Slow dancing is awkward anyway. They place their hands on your waist and spend the rest of the song trying to get lower and lower. The scared ones grip too hard. The nice ones won't even dance.

Anthony wouldn't dance. After

They kiss all your hands; tell you they'll do anything you want. But when they have the power, you always get screwed in the end.

Eric impressed my mother. Then we fucked in the backseat of her car.

Love wasn't all I was looking for. In thirty-six different places, you find more than love.

You pull up your shirt looking straight ahead. Your face is blank, waiting to be overwhelmed with electricity

anyone kissed them.

His words were charged magnets, leaping on to moving stars. Constellations laughed at you later, telling the story of how he left you.

"We could never be together. That's ridiculous." They'd stare at you as if you were crazy.

"I was just having fun, babe." Shaking your shoulder a bit, or sometimes just, "You're fucked up."

Some days you had no desire to look at them. Yet, you'd fulfill what you were asked.

"It's your job, as a girl." That's how Kyle explained it, or "You're good, you should spread the wealth."

The wealth I had was lost. Somewhere around number nineteen, when he asked me if I felt like going for a drive. The trees looked darker, leering through the car windows. Sounds of summer nights drifted in, mixing with the protests in my head. It's only rape if you say it so he can hear it. He asks, "Is this okay?" You've got to say what you mean. You'll be able to smell his cologne for the rest of your life.

Hank never smelled of cologne, always sweat and grass. After most nights with Hank, so did I. On the playground, he'd lay me down, pushing my shoulders into the aching wood. The weekend before, he stole some car stereos. He told me the story, assuring me "those dumb-ass bastards" would never catch him. His face scared me, the look of defiance.

Then sooner or later, I realized they all scared me.

Noah pushed me up against the shower wall, "You can't bring me in here and then change your mind." I watched the trails of water on his face, swirling in Van Gogh patterns. I thanked them for hiding my tears.

When asked, I tell people that it was the most romantic night of my life.

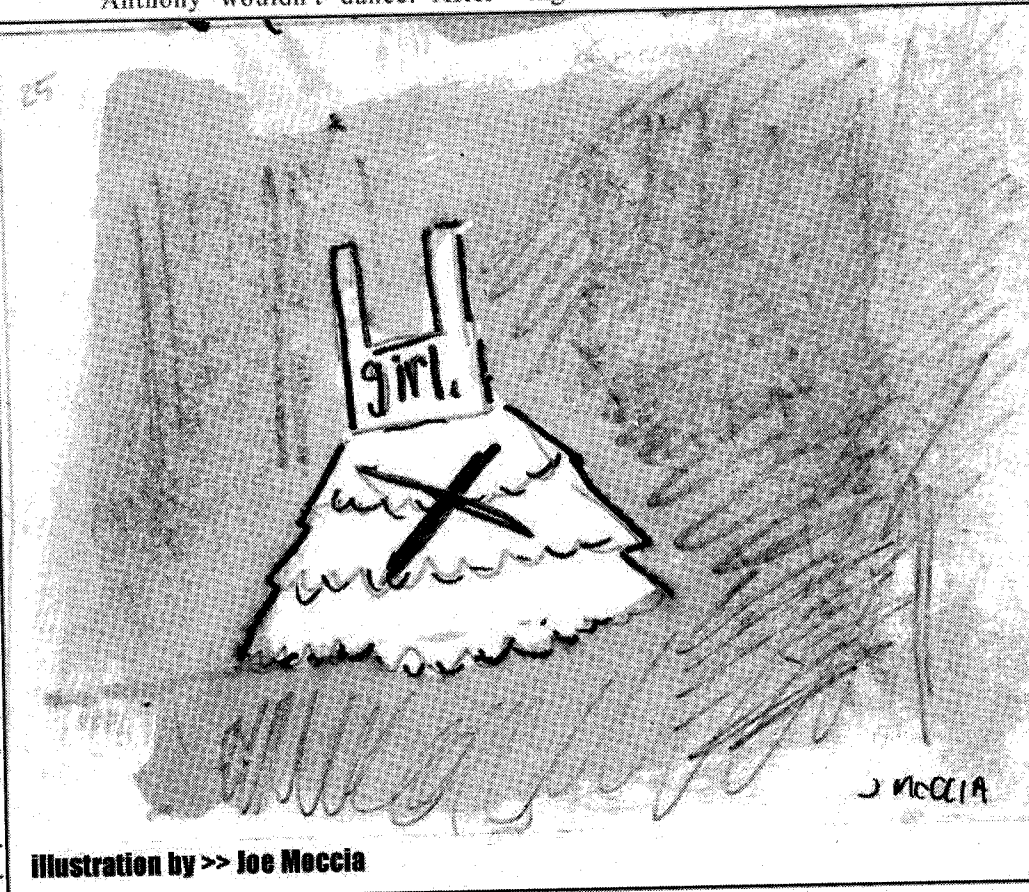


Illustration by >> Joe Noccia

seven dates, I was sick of playing hard to get and sick of him playing Mr. Nice Guy. Under the blanket, on his basement couch, I touched his hand. He used that hand to change the channel.

If you got crazy, Jack would hold your face so you couldn't move, telling you to stop being so stupid.

Some guys court like politicians.

that he promised. Instead, you're mechanical and stiff. Closing your eyes, you fall deep inside a mask, suffocating on plaster and loneliness.

The phone rang. It was never Brian. I'd wait, curled up on my bedroom floor, staring at the gray morning through the window. My body tired and worn, my cheeks would taste salty if

worry about. But she knew what she had done. No one needed to know that she tried to cut off her finger. Just for the hell of it. But she chickened out half way into it. Now a piece of her index finger dangled haphazardly off of her hand.

Blood was everywhere. She ran to the bathroom and managed to paint the walls, sink, and mirrors that wonderful crimson color. Her hands were covered in blood, and then, as if it was a sudden realization, she realized that she was bleeding a lot and that it was her blood soaked flesh hanging from her mangled

finger. This was real. Panic. The bleeding won't stop. Oh God...

Bellabalu was in the kitchen. This time she was chopping carrots for lunch. The sunlight from the kitchen window warmed her back. She closed her eyes and smiled.

When she opened her eyes again, she was staring at the cracked ceiling of the bathroom. Splashes of blood speckled the walls. There was confusion...then she remembered. Her head throbbed and a trickle of blood ran down her neck. The black clip holding

her hair together lay shattered across the floor. Its teeth lay spread, mingling in shallow puddles of blood. She got up, went to the sink, placed the cut digit back in place, and bandaged her finger back together. As she walked back to her room, her roommate came out. "You look like Hell." I'm not feeling well—that's all.

Bellabalu sat quietly in her chair and stared at her bandaged finger. Next time...

Retrospect

fiction by >> Billy Chong

"You suffered a mild concussion," repeated in her head. Nothing else. She hears words coming from mouths. But all she can hear are those words being repeated over and over. The bright spongy purple Band-Aid on her left index finger reminded her of what she did. "What did you do to your finger?" people asked. Just a cut. Nothing to

The groovy orgasmic poacher

fiction by >> Brad Brown

To Ben for being an awesome roommate and coming up with this crap.

As I lie here on the tiny prison cot, Big Hank's supple man flesh pressed against me, I have time to stop and reflect on how I got to this place. I think it is important to look at all the roads you have taken in life, to see where you have come from. It lets you know who you are. That, and it takes your mind off 'little hank' slithering its way into your pants.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen. I used to be half of the greatest criminal team in the country. We called ourselves the Groovy Orgasmic Poachers. My partner Leonard and I were feared across the nation, and you never knew where we would strike next.

We lived like kings-fat, filthy, thief-kings-all by stealing Tupperware.

I know. Stealing Tupperware sounds stupid to me too. I remember when Leonard came up with it.

"Tupperware?" I asked. "What the deuce have you been smoking?"

"Look, every great criminal has a trademark. The Riddler leaves riddles. Two-Face does things in twos. Elvis Presley had that sneer."

I blinked "None of those people are real!"

"So? Being imaginary never stopped Santa from delivering toys."

"Leonard, you're Jewish. You never celebrated Christmas, let alone believed in Santa!"

But I let him have his way, and we went with it. And we were actually successful. You'd be surprised how much Bon Jovi's leftovers will fetch on the black market. We stole Tupperware from all sorts, though mostly famous people: Bruce Springsteen, Harrison Ford, Dan Quayle (apple slices left-over from his snack time), Al Pacino, Mitch Pileggi, Courtney Love (a bowl of vodka, vomit, and more vodka), and those guys who wrote "The Macarena." No, I don't remember

their names either...

Leonard and I were on top of the world, ahead of our game, and we slept naked on huge piles of money every night, the luscious green bills sticking to our glistening bodies as we rolled around giggling like schoolgirls.

But we never did that together. Contrary to what you may have read in The Sun, we were not into that.

Then one night, we broke into the mansion of NRA guru, the one and only Charlton Heston. Breaking in, it was all gravy-it was too easy. The gate and house were only guarded by guns. And when I say 'guarded by guns,' I mean rifles were propped up against the gate, smaller rifles slung around their 'shoulders.' They even had little hats that read 'Security.'

Nobody ever accused Charlton of being not crazy...

We made our way to the kitchen, after taking a moment to dry heave over the nude portrait of Charlton mounting Zira, and then we threw open the refrigerator door.

There, inside the fridge, was a solid wall of Tupperware.

"Holy Toledo," Leonard muttered. "It's Mecca."

"Leonard...you're Jewish..."

"Oh. Uh-I mean, um, mazel tov!"

We started opening bowls, and the first twenty or so were just full of bullets. Cold bullets, but bullets. Then we reached one with a strange red goo. A single bullet floated in the goo. The container was labeled 'Michael Moore.'

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

Leonard shrugged. He swished his finger around the bowl, and stuck it into his mouth. "Tastes like Big Mac and bacon-wrapped sausages."

There were several similar bowls: Amelia Earhart, JonBenet Ramsey, Kevin Mitnik, Dr. Zaius, and Rosie O'Donnell. Then we reached one labeled "Mac." Leonard opened it, and he started to orgasm.

It is only three o'clock; they left the dorms just hours ago.

She hardly even knows me.

He adjusts his hands on the wheel and checks the rearview mirror.

I shouldn't force conversation though.

He taps the break to disengage the cruise control.

Is this what it means to lay down your life?

He switches lanes to avoid congestion. I hope she has a great time tonight.

He increases his speed, then relaxes again.

"Holy macaroni...it's macaroni! And CHEESE!" He started cradling it, holding it like his Precious.

I muttered, "Just grab everything, and let's go." I was getting creeped out, and he was cuddling the cheese.

"Cheese!" he squealed like Squee.

Just then, we heard a cold mechanical voice. "Halt."

We looked up to see two giant robots, cannons mounted to their wrists, rolling towards us. "Put down the cheese," one of them said. "You have thirty seconds to comply." Its voice was the cadence of a death squad.

It wasn't until the trial that I found out

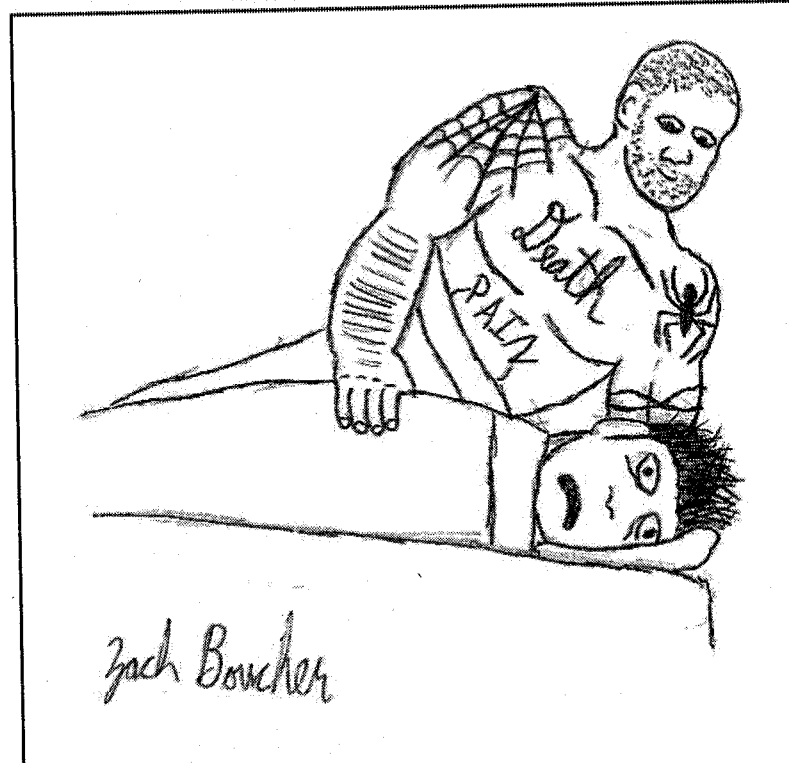
Leonard like a squirrel being hit with a lawnmower.

I screamed. I watched Leonard die right in front of me. Leonard was the best friend I ever had, so I did what any good buddy would do. I ran like heck, like a poodle on fire, little slivers of Leonard clinging to me and sticking to my hair. I ran as hard as I could, dodging bullets, and leaping over the Moses shaped dildo in the den. Finally, I was at the gate, and I fell over the top, a bullet grazing my Leonard covered shoe.

Unfortunately, I landed right in the arms of a cop propositioning a hooker. The hooker startled, and she ran away. So the cop, realizing he wasn't getting any delicious five

cent poontang that night, decided to take out his sexual frustrations on me. It wasn't until he was working over my kidneys that I became aware of the warm, comforting sensation that you only get when you have pooped your pants.

Needless to say, the cop took me in. He said Heston had roughed me up. Heston pressed charges. I was wanted in



Heston was also president of the National Robot Association. Apparently giant autonomous death machines are every American's right and make us safer too.

"Never!" Leonard shouted. "You can never have my cheese! You'll have to pry it from my cold dead hands!"

The robots thought about it for a second. "Agreed." They opened fire, shredding

eighteen states and Guam, so the trial wrapped up pretty quickly. So now, here I am, in the loving but sweaty embrace of Big Hank, tears on my face, lamenting for friends lost, glory long sense past, and anal virginity taken against its will.

I'm not so groovy now.

But Big Hank says I'm still orgasmic. Sigh.

She's so beautiful, though. He brakes quickly and swerves to avoid a collision.

His cheeks become plump, his lips thin, and a slight chuckle draws her youthful gaze to him. He turns his head to meet it and finds her smiling as well. They shake their heads in unison.

"That was pretty close," she says.

"Relax," he replies confidently, "I'm pretty good at keeping things under control."

"You had better be. Otherwise, I might have to take the wheel."

She knows, however, that she would never take the wheel.

They are both very aware of the dan-

gers of travel. At any given moment at sixty miles per hour, hundreds of pounds of steel may swerve, smash, and spin into traffic: then people bleed.

Interesting.

"No matter who is driving, there is always a chance for an accident."

"I know," she says, "just be careful."

Either drive and risk a helpless death, or never travel at all.

Perhaps it is worth it to see a good concert. Perhaps it is worth it to share the world with somebody beautiful. Perhaps they will die on cold hard pavement.

She's definitely worth it.

The dangers of travel

fiction by >> Bradley Smith

The bass drum kicks; a warm heart beats.

Still hours away, the two young explorers sit two feet apart watching tree-tips and road signs rush past their windows. Track three fades and the sound of rubber on pavement is tossed by tire tread through the thin metal floorboard, resonating a song of smooth silence that softens the mood. Track four begins and he smiles.

I wonder what she thinks of all of this.

Fall

fiction by >> Eric Scott

The heat advisory was on its sixth day; the heat index was supposedly above one hundred and five degrees, with expectations that tomorrow and the day after would only get worse. Men in business suits struggled across the park, trying to make it to the subway station before sweat made the idea of "formal dress" impossible to uphold. Nobody was swimming in the municipal pool or jogging along one of the park's paths today. It was just too hot.

Sam, however, stood near the duck pond, wearing a long brown trench coat, leather gloves on his hands and thick woolen socks on his feet. He was perfectly bald, with ice blue eyes and a rigid chin. He looked into the duck pond and saw his reflection staring back at him, his vapid expression, the glare of the sun against his pale skin. He had never felt so cold and alone in his life.

His mouth fumbled with the words he was trying to let out. He could barely remember his Master's name, much less what had made him have to leave. He knew he had woken up like this, standing near a bench in the park, and had made his way over to this pond. He did not know how long he had been there. The concept of finite time was something new to him.

Ripples in the water spread, making his reflection waver. Sam did not know why at first, but then he noticed that his cheek was wet, and that drops of water were falling from his face to the pond. This, too, was a new sensation, and for a moment he was consumed with curiosity. Then it came to him that it must have a connection with his sorrow, and the drops began to fall again.

He felt a sharp pain somewhere around his left shoulder blade and jerked

away. Then he felt someone's hand rest on his shoulder, steady and comforting.

"Sorry, friend. I forgot that you might still be a little tender there."

Sam turned around to see a tall black man, his head bereft of hair, his features appearing as though they had been

Sam didn't say anything, though his eyebrow twitched as he searched his mind for some kind of response. The other man took his hand away and turned himself halfway around, facing away from Sam. He pointed to his own shoulder blades, near where he had touched Sam's back.



illustration by >> Shaun Gaynor

chiseled out of marble. Over all, he was exceedingly handsome, though his dark skin contrasted disturbingly with his eyes. They were ice blue, just the same as Sam's. He was also perfectly bald.

Sam blinked in confusion, trying to place the other man's face. "I'm sorry, but I... I don't think I know you. Do I?"

The other man shook his head. "No, probably not... Not directly, anyway. But I saw you across the way here and I could see that we might have something in common."

Sam opened his eyes in understanding and nodded.

"You can call me Mike," said the man. "You seem confused. Did you just arrive?"

"I don't know. I just know that I found myself over by that tree," Sam said with a gesture, "and then I came over to this pond and I don't honestly know how long I've been standing there."

"Mmm. Yes, I did that too, for a while. You'll grow out of it eventually. You have to, or else you'll go insane..." He

glanced at the pond himself, though he didn't pay it too much attention, the way Sam did. Mike continued. "I've seen one or two of them, too... Terrible, to see one of us in that condition. Doesn't seem right at all."

Mike looked up, directly into the sun, and he did not wince. "Not that, I suppose, it's too much better for us..."

Sam smiled, hesitantly. "So, uh... What did you do? To be put here, I mean."

"Does it matter? Said the wrong thing, held the wrong opinion, veered left when the boss man wanted you to jerk right. It's all the same in the end, isn't it? We all try to do the right thing, the thing that's expected of us. Then, next thing you know..." He looked around the park, the faint waves of heat distorting the distance across the pond. "We're here, and half the time, we don't even know why."

"Does... The emptiness. Does that go away, eventually?"

Mike closed his eyes and smiled. "I used to be a big proponent of hope. Not much for it, these days. Nah, that feeling doesn't really go away, kid. Just something you get used to." He opened his eyes. "I hate it up here. I probably always will."

"Anyway. Like I said, name's Mike. I'll be around, if you ever need a hand."

"S-sure."

Mike turned and walked away, his tall form obscured by the black leather coat. It flowed behind him like cape of a decadent king. Sam furrowed his brow as the realization came to his lips.

"Wait... You said 'up here,' Mike."

Mike turned around. "Yeah?"

"Just which side were you on?"

Mike turned back around and kept walking.

"Does it matter?"

Untitled

fiction by >> Jonathan Stutte

The morning awakes to rain and he awakes to blame the rain on the morning. Of course all the morning can do is apologize since it had not the means to explain the situation at hand nor the night before. And this all might mean something to him if the morning had the means with which to apologize. On these mornings he gives into his bizarre superstitions and eats creamy peanut butter on bread to appease the gods of those who eat such things in hope of preventing any mishap in the rain.

But it was this morning that he had no want for food. His mouth was sour and he ran

to the sink.

Six-thirty seven his clock decides to wake him. The clock's awry sense of alarm and time seems to be his karma payment for stealing it some time ago from high school. Set the alarm for 7:00 a.m. to have the alarm arrive in the vicinity of anywhere. It guesses. Often. Every day. And he can't understand why.

Why the blood? He had nearly washed the sink out.

The last decent meal was when his clock chose to release its noise at 5:23. That morning was a cornucopia of flavor in a bowl of milk. He remembered that as being 'pretty darn good stuff', like the box said it was. Nine different vitamins and minerals. No other breakfast like it. Colors in a bowl.

They swirled through his head, from his dreams, less understandable than the blood. Now his dreams had become the culprit of the blood. They were so intense as to tighten his jaws. He saw again himself ignoring the form with blood down its back dragging towards him with an unheard and unvoiced plea.

After making coffee he walks out of his kitchen to his window in the living room and looks sadly at the streaks dribbling up his window. Rain. The reason he is dower. Money. The reason he is drinking twice baked coffee. The neighbor's window beneath him. The reason the raindrops start moseying their way upwards on his window. They have the audacity to preserve their window view and suffer the exterior of their wall to an ill fitting win-

dow unit.

And he had the audacity to ignore the man and suffer someone else? His dreams weren't clear, but they were remembered. He had let the man pass. Not a glance. In the dream he hadn't known he was there. He had smelled the flesh of the lamb, but paid no attention to it. It had rested on his shoulders. Instead he signed papers to another man at a desk... in a field. It was then a hunter ran past with newly shot game on his back and his dream turned.

Now he must ready himself for work and exit the apartment by eight. Waking up this early to stare out of the window could prove dangerous to that thought and he might just need to grab stronger coffee the next time

continued on next page

A full night

story by >> Trevor Alexander

A full night's sleep is hard to come by these days for Fred. Along with the drooping of his skin and his constant heartburn, it seems his bladder is shrinking in his moderately old age, waking him well before morning. At least the ache in his left knee is mild this morning. Red lights across the room read 4:07. *It's almost like clock-work*, he thinks. Yesterday those lights read 4:06. He supposes the old man's body he now inhabits, after 71 years really is like a complex clock; things always happen on time and according to the well-established pattern, that has become his day to day living. Everything he does feels like the steady moving of a second hand. His life is comfortable, predictable. Tick.

He turns to look at his wife, the quilted lump sleeping soundly next to him. He still sees the blush of embarrassment spread across her cheeks from the first day they met, after she had knocked that stack of papers from his hands. Her brown hair flashed as she turned to help, and her mouth offered a weak smile as she looked away from his gaze. She was the secretary for a man down the hall and had just started working at the large accountancy firm. *I wish I had a secretary like that*, he remembers thinking. He and Mary worked less than a hundred feet from each other for seven months—the most terrible months of his life—but said

fewer than ten words to each other the entire time. Although he was a handsome young accountant, he'd never really even been on a date. He had thought it best to admire Mary from afar. As far as he could get, at least.

Taking his coffee break early was probably the best decision of his life. Faint voices coming from the small gray

knocked that bastard over into the counter, spilling hot coffee on the man's face and chest. *No clock ever landed a blow like that*, he proudly reasons as he leans down to plant a dry kiss on his wife's cheek. Tick.

His feet automatically drop into his slippers as they do every morning when he has to pee. He runs his hands through the grizzled, gray remains of his hair and rubs the spot on his chest under his plaid cotton pajamas where his heartburn is acting up. He heads for the bathroom downstairs, not for the exercise, but because if he flushes the toilet in what he still thinks of as his wife's bathroom, he would wake her. Stepping lightly on the dark wooden stairs so that they don't creak too loudly, he almost trips over a partially broken stair. Looking down, he smiles. They should have fixed that step years ago. Fred trips over it almost every morning. Tick.

He is overcome with memories of his son's tumble on that stair. Craig had not been slowly lumbering down the stairs; he was running in that acceptable childhood half-nakedness towards the Christmas tree and the presents spread beneath it when he fell.

Fred snickers aloud. *I almost didn't buy the bicycle he was running towards because Mary was convinced Craig would break his arm*. Which, of course he did, when he fell down the steps that day. While Fred immediately recognized the irony of this

and laughed the whole way to the hospital, his wife wasn't able to stop her maternal hysterics and break out laughing until they reached the safety of the waiting room. *At least he didn't rebreak the arm after he started riding the bike*, Fred thinks, smiling, shaking his head slowly as he shuffles down the dark, wood-floored hallway to the bathroom. Tick.

Sitting on the stool, he looks at the old porcelain bathtub sitting on little iron feet, and he sees his daughter splashing in the water. He was giving her a bath. *She asked me where babies come from, and I was mortified, he thinks, in a good way, if that's possible*. Fred looked down at Beth, his daughter with her hair standing up, sudsy with shampoo, and he told her "A place like a bath, warm and wet. You'll learn when you're older." She giggled, and was satisfied. *I still picture her with that innocent trusting look in her eyes*, he realizes as he stands. He turns to flush and looks down. He frowns, as though he sees something unusual. He shuts off the light and leaves. Tick.

Fred sits on the couch for almost exactly an hour instead of returning immediately to bed. He stands, moving more slowly now, his joints stiff from sitting, and rounds the corner into the kitchen. A phone rings softly in his ear three times. *I hope that I am not a clock, because I think I am running down and there is no one to wind me*.

"Hello," he says with a start, "I'd like to make an appointment. I had an issue with my stool this morning. It might be important."

The receptionist asks what the issue was.

He says, after more than a moment's hesitation, "There might be symptoms of...that is I think I should be tested for...well...I think it might be cancer."

Tick. The second hand freezes as the comfortable, predictable clock stops.

continued from page 6

this happens. The sun, waking up just a few minutes before him and appropriately stretching itself within the rains only aperture, prevents him from taking any enjoyment in the window's view thus forcing him to move on into his day's preparations.

The same light had shone out of an unseen aperture. This light cured his vision, though. The diffusing rays brought together the chords of his vision and seared into one another; memory and reality without what had been his morality. And again he bit his tongue; this time, though, the pain leaped like a bolt to the conscious, reminding him of what he couldn't envision.

He is out of the apartment by eight

and hardly carrying on down the sidewalk, spitting into the gutter, becoming slightly nauseated. The rain subsides for the moment but the cars still slide lazily avoiding any puddle for fear of pothole. People on the curbs are shaking out their umbrellas and their jackets to prevent dampening what is already damp. The trees carry their jewels loosely allowing them to fall and break every so often with no concern in the world; they have had their fill. The sun has its place in the clouds taking a quick look at the behavior of humanity before the clouds took it up again.

And it was that glance at humanity that had bolted him. It was that same eye that had seen him through the aperture, one so easily avoided in the dream, so easily ignored in the field. It had watched from the sky and the

shepherd simultaneously, his back to it. The moment it slipped from the clouds the day before he had felt a relief, in the dream it had left a haunting coldness and a guiltily perception of what? And in the past seconds it had left him separated from the innocence abundant in the people surrounding. This colored them white and left him sinking towards a blank shutter in the road, this one without a light, certainly the same in the dream and one that was quickly becoming the apparent as the whole of the night before. The landscape became outlined and color became contrasts and hews of drawings.

He listed further into the street sinking closer to shutter, a blank hole which the sun had made apparent before as if to warn. When he reeled upon, the visions of the pedestrians

fell upon him, searing white though they'd no knowledge; he then heard a familiar haze of noise within himself, signaling the departure of the siren. And before he could save himself it dawned upon him that his torrid night had brought this guilt upon himself, something for which he dared not redeem himself in fear of rejection where rejection was already too late. And before he could save himself, before he could save himself it dawned upon him that he denied the shepherd the opportunity to do just that. And before he could save himself he the lights dawned upon him closing the shutters and blurring the fine lines around him leaving him no effort to discern now what was to be the end of himself, lying in the street, the focus of every person who saw him walk blindly into the street.

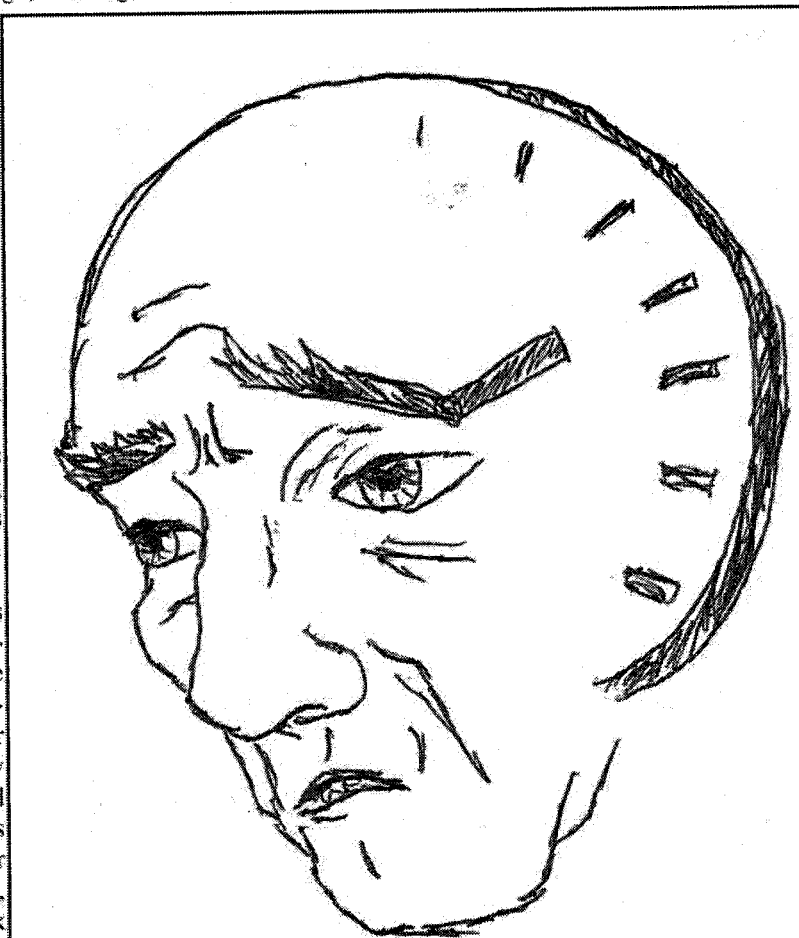


Illustration by >> Shaun Gaynor

Surely you jest

fiction by >> Zhian Kamvar

There was no possible way that Shirley could believe what Jared was saying. After all, he was drunk and half of his words came out in spittle. After five minutes, there was a puddle in his lap and the front of his thin Metallica shirt was wet. He was trying to explain to her the laws of his so called "Fundamental Physics" so that he could impress her and, thus get into her pants. It was too bad for him, because she was clearly wearing a skirt.

Her watch suddenly beeped twice. She looked down at it and without looking up, she said, "Well Jared, I've got to go to class, so you just go play on the playground or something." And, with one motion, she stood up and sent the drooling seven year old wobbling off towards the swing set. She knew that she wasn't going to have a good day. Already it was 4 o'clock and she had fallen out of her loft when the alarm rang, suffered agonizing pain caused by a stray eyelash in her contact lens and was hit on by a seven year old at her job at the daycare center. This was her first and only class of the day, underwater basket weaving.

The class would be quite calming if it weren't for the professor who was an aging hippie that would never cease to amaze himself with his wisdom. Normally the class was 50 minutes of lecture on the history and application of underwater basket weaving and 20 minutes of actual underwater basket weaving.

It was quite simple, actually. It was easier than normal basket weaving in the sense that the water prevented the wicker from becoming brittle. The hard part was the air. The proper way to do it was to do it as a team. Since the basket would naturally float as a cause of the wood not being as dense as the water around it, it has to be constantly held down, so one

This particular day, the professor was lecturing about how a certain mushroom allows one to hold his or her breath for hours on end (or make it seem like that). Shirley woke up with a start due to a strange pain in her right pinkie. It was not a hurting pain, but more of a pain that would make someone say, "That's strange." Out of confusion, of course. It

professor asked, seeming to be quite annoyed that she interrupted his magnificent lecture.

Shirley stared up into his wrinkled old eyes and said, "What do you mean?" while her hand was being slowly mutilated by the repetitive force.

"What do I mean?! My god, you're thrashing your hand on the desk as if you were trying to overkill an innocent insect!" The professor paused to smile at his clever alliteration. Shirley looked down at her hand and screamed. It was bouncing up and down on the desk at the rate of twice a second. By that time, her hand ceased to be a hand, but was more of a purple and black ball that was bouncing in a puddle of blood. All Shirley could think of was the fact that she left her keys in the Daycare center.

Before any more words were spoken, she ran out of the room, hand still beating the empty air in front of it as if she were cheering on a sports team. She ran as fast as she could, past her car, past the day care center, past the gas station with the known pedophile working the counter, to the nearest place she could possibly get some help. She ran straight into a police officer, and accidentally beat his face beyond recognition while she, herself, was going hysterical with every orifice on her head leaking some sort of fluid. Her eyes were leaking saline solution, her nose was leaking mucous, her ears were leaking wax, and her mouth was leaking salivary enzymes and blood, because she had accidentally bit her tongue when she ran into the police vehicle.

It was not a pleasant sight. Here was a girl who was in her early twenties, with dark brown, curly hair. She was athletic, well to do, and was beating an officer of the law in the middle of a busy intersection during rush hour. The officer couldn't do anything, he was pinned between her and his vehicle, his arms were flailing and he was screaming from the top of his lungs, because his mouth had ceased to exist. He desperately grabbed for his shiny, new baton, which was hanging on his belt, just begging to be used.

His hand grabbed a firm hold of it and he raised it up above his head and brought it down on his own skull several times until his legs finally collapsed underneath him and he stopped screaming. Shirley was still screaming and she was now beating the roof of his vehicle with her purple, swollen, and disfigured fist. She knew she should have stayed in bed that day.

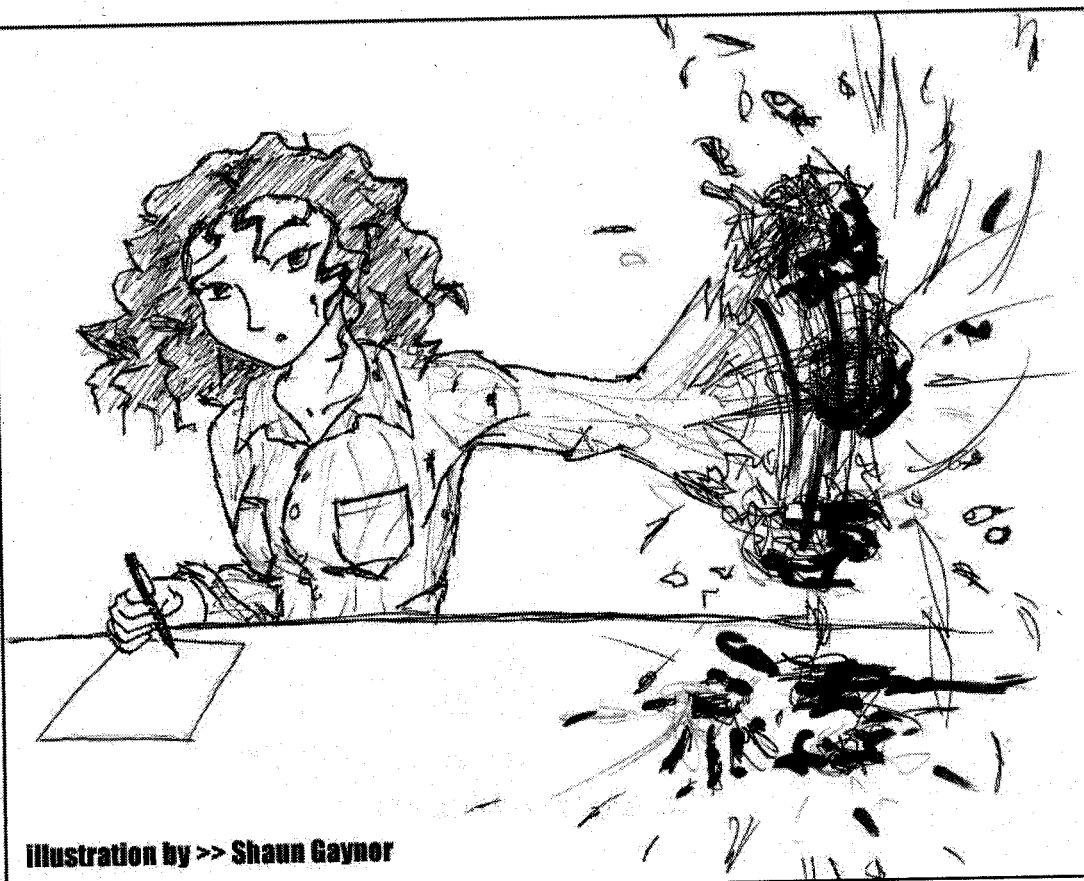


Illustration by >> Shaun Gaynor

person would be underwater, weaving while the other is desperately trying to get air, they switch places every 30 seconds at the beginning of the semester, and eventually go up to 3 minutes.

was a constant pain all throughout her pinkie. She started to hit it on the desk as hard as she could. She didn't know why she was doing this.

"Is there something wrong?" The

thing, but I just hurt all of the time now. It's like a terrible feeling has just taken up residence right above my stomach and right below my ribs, and it never, ever goes away.

I'm scared, but I'm not sure what of.

I know you're not going to abandon me, even though my mind automatically replaces the word know with hope. But don't you ever want to? Don't you ever think about how much better your life would be without me to poison the days you wake up happy?

You don't need to answer that.

I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for my faults. I'm sorry for every time in the past four years that I've hurt you. I'm especially sorry for this past week.

I've talked long enough. I'm having as much trouble ending this as I had starting it. I guess all I can really say is I'm sorry. And I love you.

same ways, and I can't seem to stop. It's not like a book where you can find your mistakes and edit them out.

You know, I dreaded going to work today? That's what my short story was about. And it wasn't really because of you. It's because I'm afraid of what I'll do. I don't trust myself anymore, and I don't have anyone else to blame. Just a stupid little girl who's so afraid of getting hurt that she doesn't realize that the only person hurting her is herself.

I'm always going to love you. I don't know why I've been so horrible lately. I'd like to blame it on something: work, stress, any other issue that may be bothering me at this point in time, but, in the end, it always comes back to the same thing: me being me, and I hate me.

All I can really do is try. And I am trying; I'm continuously trying.

But I think I'm getting worse.

I think I need... God, I need some-

Phonecall

fiction by >> Michelle Alford

Hey. It's me again.

I don't know how to start saying what I want to say, so, instead, I'm stalling for time by explaining why this sounds so awkward.

I don't want to start with an apology. I already told you I'm sorry, and I think you'd know it even without the oral statement.

I don't want to say my grievances at all, let alone start with them. This is an apology, not an excuse. Besides, I'm sure you already know them. I've said them so many times that I'm starting to get redundant. And you know how I hate repetition.

I'm very repetitious though, aren't I? I keep hurting the same people in the

Cadmus and Harmonia

fiction by >> Bradley Smith

The bridge had come to an end. They found themselves in each other's arms leaning against the side of a quiet gazebo from which they could see the city lit up over the serenity of the water.

She placed her fingers firmly around the upper portion of his arms and admired his triceps. They were abnormally large for a man of his stature, wrapping around the girth of his bones before expanding outward as a convoluted mass of strength and resilience. She thought about the times he had asked her to rub them to work out their soreness. He would wince from the pain, then tell her to continue saying that she was the only one who could help relieve him of his infirmities. Though she never believed him, she was glad to be the one whom he turned to, no matter how daunting the task always seemed. Despite all of their strength and mysterious appeal, his triceps were not for her.

He said:

I know you are fond of my triceps, but I must apologize: I have saved them for others. Instead, I will give you much more: my biceps.

Then he gently took her wrists, turned them, and placed her palms on his much smoother, much less enticing biceps brachii. They were thin, although firm, and far undersized from lack of experience. She could feel through a vein running down toward his hand the beating of his young heart.

Startled by a burning beneath her soft flesh, she pushed him away and stared at him from a distance.

She saw wisdom. His cheekbones were chiseled divinely of stone. In his eyes she saw courage, noble ambition, passion for passion, and eternal allegiance to those whom he loved. His thighs were firm and anchored in truth. His chest was a refuge; his arms hung as walls; and his hands melted like candles around her insecurities giving warmth in the times that she needed it most. She carved in his collarbone a spot for her chin so their union, like two halves of a puzzle, could be completed.

After minutes of silence, wonder, and prayer; she asked him a question.

Boy...

Yes?

Will you promise me that no matter what happens between you and me, you will be at my wedding?

I can't promise you that.

Well then promise me this: no matter what happens between you and me, my children will meet you someday.

I can't promise you that.

Her face became dim and she looked toward her feet. She was silent.

He gathered himself. He took a deep breath. He told her the truth.

Darling, this is all I can promise you: no matter what happens between you and me, I will be at your funeral, or you'll be at mine; this is all that we have.

He extended his arms, pulled her in close, and gave a kiss to the bridge of her forehead.

She smiled contently and her eyes became wet. She then laid her hands upon his small biceps, for she now understood.



illustration by >> Joe Moccia

Life lesson #43

fiction by >> Kristopher Magers

I'm going to tell you a story. And this story is completely, utterly, and entirely true. No, really, it totally is.

I'm serious here, this story is like a delicious chocolate candy with a surprise truth-filling in the center.

That's how true it is.

You see, here was the plan. How things were supposed to go down. My crew and I had decided to knock over one of the forgotten gold mines of America: the Carpet Barn.

Think about it, folks. What do you have in your house? Carpet. What's in your neighbor's house? Carpet. What's in your best friend's house? Carpet. Do you see where I'm going with this? What might you even be standing on right now? Carpet. Wake up and smell the carpet, people. I don't care if you're King of Poland, you're going to have carpet somewhere. The stuff is everywhere.

So there we were, my posse and me. There was Harvey Brubaker, AKA the "Baby Hopper," manning the getaway car. Trust me when I say you don't want to know how he earned his nickname.

We also had Eddie Rucka or, as we liked to call him, the "Ham Slapper." He was the only one of us who looked good enough in a wig to pass as a woman. Sure, a really ugly woman, but a woman nonetheless. It would be his job to distract the cashier with his feminine . . . ugliness. I mean, JEEZ! You have no idea how bad he looked in that wig.

Next was Paul Alan David, the man

with three first names. None of us were really sure which name to use, so we just called him the "PAD." He was going in with me to loot the place, but little did I realize at the time just how vulnerable he actually was to bullets. I wish he would have mentioned something like that to me before we went into this. It's just common courtesy . . . wait, I think I'm being all foreshadow-y now.

And, finally, there was me. The others in my posse just called me "Susie." I don't

the process of this . . . dammit! I just ruined the ending! Uh, just forget reading those last few sentences. It's easier than me restructuring this paragraph.

So, that was the plan. What's that? Did you miss the specifics of anything even closely resembling a plan in any of that? Obviously, you weren't paying close enough attention.

Okay, sure, so I'll be the first to admit that maybe, just maybe, it wasn't the most thought-out plan in the world. Maybe the proverbial wall was missing some bricks. The book was missing some chapters. Some jerk had stolen the metaphorical door-knob from right off the door. So to speak.

And maybe, just maybe, I shouldn't have gotten water guns in place of real ones. The really big kind of water guns in lots of bright, neon colors with fancy names, like, "The H-2-O-inator of Doom 3000" written across the sides of them. I think people may have been able to tell the difference between the real

thing.

And, sure, maybe I shouldn't have recruited my "posse" from the old folks' home. And then forgotten to bring their pills. And, sure, we didn't even get through the front door of the Carpet Barn before I realized that blunder. But oh well. You live and learn and all that. And they did let me ride in the ambulance after the store manager was nice enough to make the call about my posse.

Heck, I even got some really nice carpet samples out of the whole thing.

. . . or maybe that's not how it happened.



Illustration by >> Joe Nocella

really know why. I think it was because they were jealous of my long, flowing, natural hair. With blonde curls and everything. I felt like a real life Little Goldilocks! Tee-hee.

But, for whatever reason they had to call me that, it didn't matter. We had a job to pull. One that would have us set for the rest of our days. Set in moolah and bling-bling up to our wazoo, I tell you! It's just too bad I was working with three people I absolutely couldn't stand. Oh, how I hated them so. It's a good thing that most of them died in

the two large arteries, then crisscrossed in evenly divided diamonds.

The marks are already gone. All it took was a little water.

If I had actually killed myself, cutting deep enough to bleed, perhaps they would have blamed the book I had just finished reading, one that admittedly spends a lot of time on the subject of suicide.

As one of the characters says, "It would be as simple as checking into a hotel room."

No one would have known 'til morn-

ing. My parents probably wouldn't have noticed the closed bathroom door or the empty bedroom as they ate breakfast and prepared for work. I don't know who would have worried first, my boss, who knows I'm occasionally late but never more than five minutes, or my best friend, there for her first day on the job. Whichever called, I wouldn't have answered.

It's a ridiculous thing to consider, though, as I keep looking back at my wrist, searching for signs of what I did, not finding any but the possibility of a red mark,

High class tonight

fiction by >> Trevor Alexander

The lightning that sometimes flashed through the windows was the only light in the room, other than the small red dot of a lit cigarette in Charlie's mouth. He never even took it out to breathe real air, just exhaled around the unfiltered end. The shadow on the wall that lasted only a couple seconds at a time looked like an old man sitting in a wheelchair. Charlie was sitting, slightly hunched over, and while only thirty three, he felt like an old man tonight. Not because the rain made his knees hurt, which it had started to do, but because he had lost her.

The table he sat at was a round, yellow Formica dining table in a dirty little house. On the wall that was sometimes lit by lighting are crushed tulips and shards of ceramic. Remains of the vase she threw at him when she left with his kid.

The cigarette finally moved in the darkness like a dot from a laser sighted gun, and Charlie took a drink of the Jim Beam Black Label on the table. High class tonight. Not on the rocks, or in a glass, but straight from the bottle. The cigarette was awkward in his other hand while he drank slowly and deeply. He set the bottle back on the table and took his hand off the neck; the cap remained unscrewed on the counter in the kitchen. The bottle barely made a sound on the table, it was nearly empty and light. Lightning flashed and a tree branch at the house next door snapped and fell. Charlie heard this, but didn't react in any way.

His son would have reacted. At seven years old, all kids react to lightning flashes, and to the loud, jelly-jar drinking glass rattling thunder that followed. Charlie could picture little Ben with his arms wrapped around his father's legs, begging to be comforted. His wife decided that giving comfort wasn't his place any longer when she took Ben away in his own beat up Mustang. The car she had said he would have to sell because of the kids.

He stood up, and decided that he would take the last thing he still had before she could take that from him too. The .45 in his right hand struck his temple gently. The coldness of it almost made him take it off the skin, but he held it tightly against his head. Lighting flashed, followed by a loud rip of thunder. Several seconds later, the lighting showed blood and little pieces of skull on the wall next to the crushed flowers.

which might be a trick of the light, and the barely lingering pain. I wouldn't have actually gone that far. I love life too much.

I used to love it a lot more though. What happened?

This isn't anything as final as a suicide note. Nothing as self centered as a plea. Nothing as dire as a warning. It's more of a commentary. An almost objective step back and slow statement of what happened.

I cut my wrist today. Then, I stared for a long time, wondering why I did it.

Commentary

fiction by >> Michelle Alford

I cut my wrist today.

Not deep. It didn't even bleed. I simply left parallel white lines, marked by nail scissors I had searched for over a period of weeks and, having found them the day before, left conveniently placed on the bathroom sink for me to use to leave parallel lines straight down my wrist, between

from the top of this train

fiction by >> Bradley Smith

From the top of this train one could for years into the deepest corridors of nostalgia: life, love, and loss; the tunnels reaching toward and from abounding visions. Perched on a rail car, his eyes named the track as he tried to discern truest condition, longing to find the point from which it all stemmed.

It was late February and the gradual melting of the most recent snow had freed the grass-covered Earth into a sea of fresh clay. His shoes were still dry, (blame his walk from the car) but was too deeply absorbed in his reverie to notice. So he stood: hands in pockets, knees barely bent, as the song of the train played on.

Just down the track through a canopy of trees, he swore he saw an apparition: a spirit, an angel, a woman, him? A ghost-white mnemonic rose from his mouth and abducted his vision so that he could no longer see before him: instead he was taken back three years of a lifetime ago...

* * *

The streetlight stuttered as he slipped from the van. Knee deep in pavement, he stalled for a moment. It was the lowering cross that made him think twice at the brisk September gale that pushed him toward the door. He wrapped his arms tighter and took a deep breath.

Upon opening the door, a balmy middle-spawned current ran over his face. It entered his nose, then left through his mouth, and his eyes became wet. The small pasty room was crowded with people of differing ages. Nobody noticed his entrance for the music was much too loud to hear the closing of a door. Instead, their gazes were fixed on projected song lyrics.

He chose a spot away from the door: close to the back and far left. After removing his jacket he seated himself, only to discover that he was the only one

sitting: the people around him were all at their feet. Most were singing, some

clapping and dancing, and still others just sang as they smiled. He felt very uncomfortable, but continued to sit by himself.

It wasn't in question that his life was a mess. He had avoided this night for too many weeks and was tired of being asked to attend. "One night won't kill me," he had said to himself, "and even if it does: would that be so bad?"

Now seated in a church full of strangers, (except for the friend that invited him) he regretted his decision to attend. However, he decided that while he was there, he might as well listen to the music: it wasn't bad after all.

I cannot be saved by the hand of another,

From the pain of this world or myself.

He was tired of searching. It had been years since he felt like he knew who he was. He was tired of pretending, for he had a few friends but none understood him at all. He was tired of fighting: his family was a wreck and so was his head.

The world is ever fleeting and I am just a bud in season.

The breath of your perfection blows against my skin,

And I'm home again.

As the song played on, he began to feel as though it had been written just for him. He was never an advocate of cheesy moments, yet he couldn't help but feel moved. He tried to fight off his emotions, (it had been so long since he had cried) but he just couldn't help himself.

It started as a swelling in the bottom of his throat; it then gathered in his eyelids; and before he knew it a warm, damp, tear tumbled down his cheek. Then it was two, and then three. He wiped at them quickly, hoping nobody would notice, but through his glossed over vision, he saw that nobody was watching him. He had never felt so exposed and yet so intimately known in all of his life.

He had spent years searching, and at that illuminating moment, he realized that he, in fact, was the one being sought. So he sat and he wept, then decided to live.

HE! RUMSFELD SQUARE-JAW AMERICANA MAN, OLD EUROPE, SUSSEX ONE MILLION MOVIE YEARS BC! As told, by his slayer, to LARRY ILES

fiction by >> Larry Iles

D. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, in the Bush II US Old Fossil Party 2004 lame-duck administration got on the phone today to Born Aha Again Ashcroft, to lament the fact that Al Quaida has been interfering with his dream waves, nocturnally! "Damn, Mr. Attorney General, I am sure it's those Kirksville Anarchists in league with Bin, as I tell ya for sure, I'm convinced! They had someone plant some Saddam WMD scanner into mah heart up in emissions to mah brain, when I was last undergoing heart resuscitation electric shock for our great Cheney, I mean junior's, administration."

Anyhow, not uncoincidentally, a British "subversive" in the aforementioned rural paradise of (sic!) excitement, also, got dream visitations. A beautiful, androgynous figure of piercing-foot claiming to be Cromagnon huntress woman, with semitised lock of hair and voluptuousness of ebony mammary breast, appeared; tell him, all is well! I slew the Rumsfeld man's ancestral Neanderthal in "Old Europe" across your Wealden Sussex Downs just one million years ago! "How, fair one, did you accomplish, tgh, gasp, this beneficial, good rid-dance of new world Americana man when Bin couldn't get tha mean critta! Even with Pentagon-aimed imprecision on 9/11, the day the Saudi Moslem world at least said "enuff is enuff" to the US Empire of gas-guzzler stealers! Replied LI: totally bewitched, as ever, by Utopian scenarios!

"Simple," answered Bettaglorbid, for do thou not, oh professed herstorian, have remembrance of the Achilles legend in Troy's sad tale? Well, Neanderthal Rumsfeld DNS (oops I didn't mean Starch but ALL AMERICANA") is as you know obsessed, with ANY "chemical warfare" components! His future descendant, as Dow Chemicals, sold them to 1980s Saddam and claimed they were "everywhere," unbeknownst to the UN, in invaded Iraq, in his 2003 invasion by New World Americana. So what, my

siren shadow did, was form the shape of a well-known belly dancer, "Chemical Sally" in the former Chicago Nixon Congressman's home-city!

She went on. "with WMD and the big dollar oil-sign, tantalizingly, carved all over my Ashcroft wrapped up Christian tee-shirt front, I sailed in front of "DR." As he was munching, in your real home town valley, on a feminastra dinosaur thigh-bone, manufactured by New World Halliburton search-and-destroy company. "Wanna party, Yank, with your Bardot Old-World Betta?!" I wagled my slender, fishy tail to this chalk pit USA-slime! Sure enough, that was it! And while we were in Versailles palace site, to be across land-filled, then La Manche, I slipped chemical poison in the fuckers evil Halliburtania! (A derriere!)

Oh, marvelous slayer, went a grateful waking "LI," but how come his descendant is still very much with us until at least January? And why did so many of these so-called New Worlder "Ammo" amigos vote for Boss Cheney in November, despite all we in the fine Old World, Europe, have tried to tell them? "That," she replied, over-rational old 50-year-old, "is one of the riddles of real afterlife time you might be permitted to know when you, too, join Neanderthal Rumsfeld in the new-nuked over-gassed US-caused Ice Age melt-down, to take place in Earth-3000 AD. "Oh yeah, in no life and no pursuit of all but unhappiness," re-slept her dialogue - LI poser! As back, in holy Ashcroft inner sanctum, dishonest John, planned yet more Kirksville anarchists' arrests with 12 agents per ex-student this time! To placate the nightmare-ridden real Rumsfeld, off to yet another Baghdad USA thugs "pep talk" in false boasting!

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Continued from previous page

front door, the bedroom door opens. Bright-eyed and red-cheeked, Kristen bears more than a passing resemblance to an Algonquian in her thick and fluffy coat.

"You got a small package in the mail, Alexi," she says as she tosses a thin cardboard envelope at me.

"Alexi?" I say, examining the envelope. The return address is in Warrensburg.

"Yeah, I was wondering the same thing," she says, dropping her backpack and coat on the perimeter of a well-established pile of clothes in the corner of the room. With the absence of her coat, Kristen just looks small and a little bit child-like. We actually met as she was busy fooling a bunch of theatre-goers into thinking she was a dancing, eight-year-old girl. She does youthful well.

As I search the package for some way to open it, I remember that my brother had just started calling me Alexi over Christmas break. "He could have at

least given me stamps."

"He?" Kristen hands me a pair of scissors as my efforts to peel off the tape are unsuccessful.

"Clayton. He was thrilled at the idea of giving me another unusual nickname." Still having done nothing more than sit up and catch an envelope today, I yawn as I finally break through the advertised, Manco Mailing Tape. I squeeze open the package and out slides a CD case and a letter, handwritten on blue construction paper. Kristen glances over the track list as I read aloud the letter.

Uh oh-love! love! and growth...and freedom...lessons, love, people, yes, people, and the challenge! Children! Students! and essays and stories and microwaves and music, of courage, music at the very core permeating out, influencing all and low and high and Spirited Away! But then some keep their spirits right here, thank you, intertwined and churning and sticking their hand in the beehive over and over oh! Love! Yeah, that's really it..

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Weeds in eyes

fiction by >> Nathan Moore

It's marred at first, a little disrupted, but I can still see the outline of the moment when I become cognizant of the crazy and I think, "I see you; this is less intelligent than I am." This is irreconcilable. I * reckon * I'll * see * some * bile. The fog rises, and I see it's an unmovable hard-lined jet-black metal statue of crazy. She springs out bouncing and senseless, painted up and rubber faced and says, "Look at me, I'm crazy as hell. I'm already gone. Do you like me enough to deal with this? I deserve it, don't I? Look what I've done for you and tell me I don't deserve it. You can't leave now, this is bigger than anything you can ever escape from."

Don't think me overcritical. It's what my past has earned. The marvelous people have

Fuck you too

fiction by >> Jon Lawinger

"Fuck you too." He mumbled under his breath as he turned to walk off the porch step.

"When you're lonely again, you'll know where to find me." She said 5 seconds earlier.

The new coat of wax on his Corvette gleamed under the streetlight directly overhead. He punched in the driver's side window of the rusted Honda Civic parked behind him as he walked past, opened his car's unlocked door and slid behind the wheel. She heard the tires squeal and the trash can hit the tree.

His teeth grit harder with each multiple of ten the speedometer's needle slid past. While his fingers went numb from clinching the wheel his vision sharpened and at the top of a distant hill he spotted a squirrel at the edge of the empty road. His mind slowly cleared and focused while his muscles relaxed and the squirrel hopped off the right-hand curb into the street. The speedometer neared triple digits as it scurried part way across. His breathing slowed and a calm settled over him as the distance narrowed to a block. The squirrel made one final bound to within a few feet of the left curb. His vision faded from his awareness as he crept into nirvana, yet his car drifted into perfect alignment with the squirrel. A moment later, as the two merged, he found peace.

The windshield didn't even slow him down. His body landed on the fifth of the seven cars parked alongside the street.



Illustration by >> Sherman Djushivili

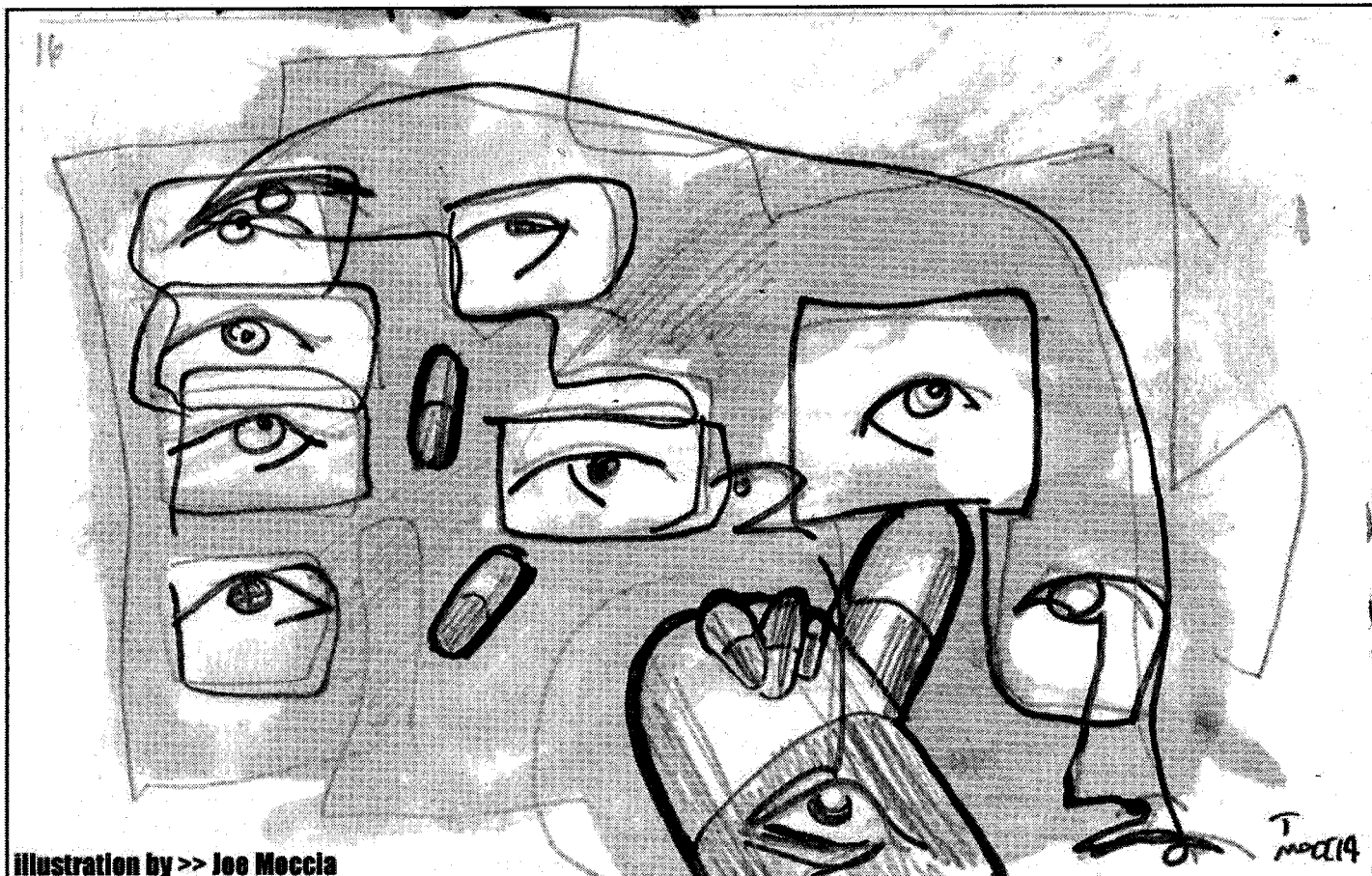


Illustration by >> Joe Mocella

been lost through no fault of their own. I make gruesome massacres of us. At the end of it I could sometimes piece together an image of the tragedy I had engineered. It is a disaster that looks depressing and dead yet aesthetically pleasing, like brilliant crimson blood rolling down perfectly contrived docile little wrists of some misshapen maiden, camera rising, overdone effectively.

Crazy is a far different species of disaster; it thrives on the inaction it demands. It hatches spores in the dark, a tree fungus that knows where the weakness lies. The Fungus has evolved a cognizance of the tree's need to be uprooted periodically. (Its leaves must receive sunlight in different angles and wavelengths in order for its shape to expand to the stature it is capable of, and for the roots to ascertain the hardness and strength needed to succeed in its final move to a harsher landscape). It is an ever-changing pest that adapts in whatever way necessary in order to survive in its environment. It biologically realizes what it must do to keep both itself and host alive. It does it by sucking life softly and slowly, rendering its hosts weak enough so that it is unable to fight while keeping it strong enough so that it can limply uproot for a brief time after longer and longer intervals. I live with lies. Everyone does.

"I don't think you have any idea what you've done to me."

She was still attractive to me after everything. Sitting next to her with my elbow on her knee made me want to jump on her, feel something now. But there's always something attached to the now, lingering safely out of sight until it yanks you back. It's like flying your kite into a tree, your blind fun entangling

hopelessly with a tree someone else planted in the wrong spot.

"The day after you broke up with me I ate a bunch of pills. I had to stay in a home for a while. That's where I've been the last three months. I've just come back to try and find some closure on us."

But just because there's trees out there doesn't mean you should never fly your kite. She does look damn good. That body, all tall and no lanky, good things amply represented. She could move, too. Dance a hip jive that rides you to your knees, begging for her to let up. It's her power: centering five feet and ten inches of body on a dance that twirls your head, leaves you sweaty and needing another ride. In control, making you a baby, just pawing and moaning for what you need. She's always ready to dance, letting me try to keep up with her moves every night.

"Listen, I know I probably went a little overboard when I threatened your mom. She wanted to take all of you from me, calling you all the damn time. I got scared you were being taken, and she didn't like me anyway. Sometimes I lost sight of what we could have been. We were meant to be together. It's why we keep coming together, we have to be together...but there's something I should tell you."

I remember our first time together. I came in from the rain, drenching wet. She had her hip leaning on the doorway to her apartment. I kept my head down and started to walk by. She called me back and took me dancing. Dried me off and made me wet all over again. Her only downfall was her breath, metallic and cigarettes. I had to do everything I could to keep her mouth shut when she was close. Turning my head to the side when she leaned

in. It never made sense to me that such an angel breathed fire, but it sure never kept me from trying to grab her close. When she finally left I forgot all about that breath, until she started talking to me tonight.

"I was pretty upset that night we broke up, and I slept with some guy. I found out I was pregnant a month later and I had an abortion. I'm sorry if this freaks you out, but it's all because of what you did and a part of what happened to us...say something. Say something nice to me."

"You're still very beautiful to me."

She had me so wrapped in her dance I couldn't talk, I could only respond. She could have told me she killed puppy dogs with ice picks for fun and I would have responded the same way. These details were messy though, blaming me for her shit. Had me pinned up behind her side of the facts, dangling meat in front of the fence. Giving me reasons not to like something I have to have. I only broke up with her because my mom feared for her life. I sort of had to. She's better now, had some time for the crazy house to help her sweep the cobwebs of compulsion. She's good for one more flight above the trees.

She done did it and left me buzzing.

"Make sure you have your phone on you tomorrow so I can call you at lunch. You can take me to get something to eat. Are you going to have your phone on so I can get a hold on you?"

We can dance again? Memories are miniscule, shadowed and lost at the first touch. They are weak and dying in the past; trees that somebody else planted getting in the way of my flight.

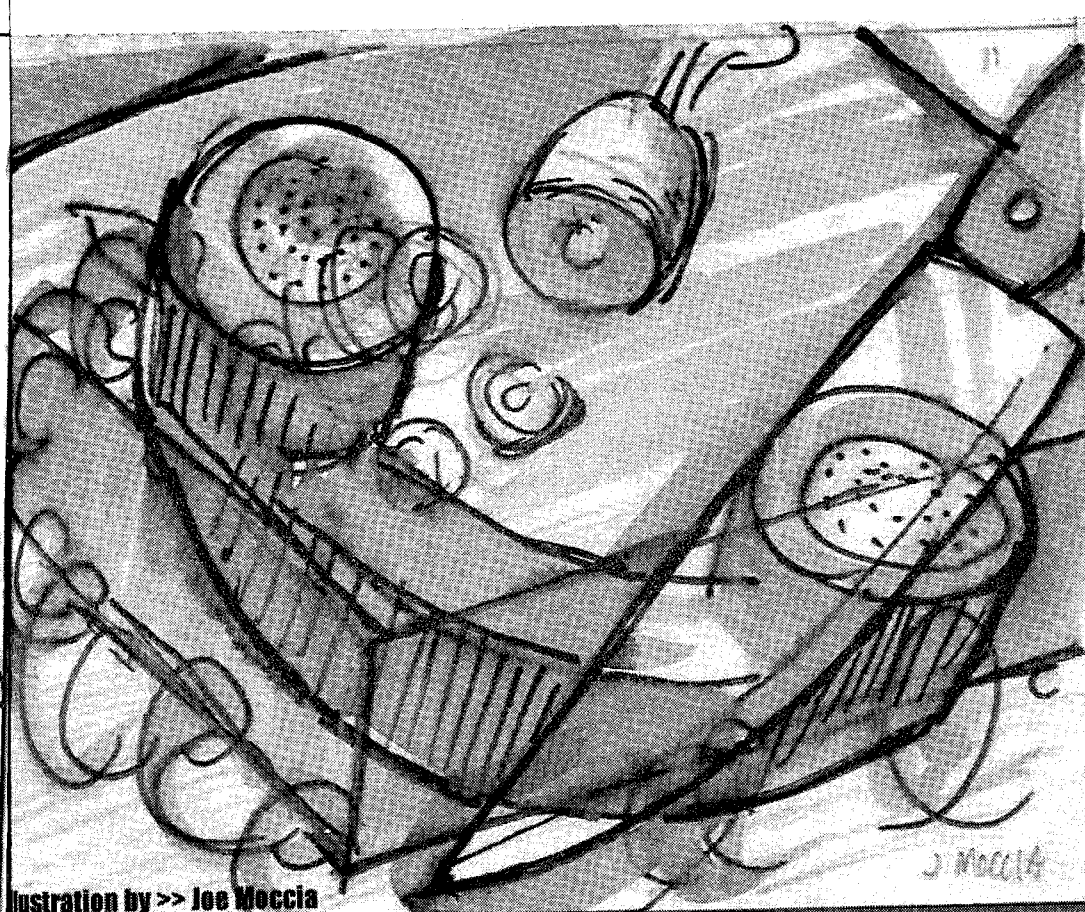


Illustration by >> Joe Moecia

A better place

Fiction by >> Eran Feintuch

I hadn't spoken to Uncle Bill in years. So when I picked up the phone and heard a strange, gruff voice introduce itself as my uncle, I was a little bit scared. Uncle? What kind of uncle was this? Some evil twin of my father's who had gone unmentioned in all of Dad's family history lectures?

But then I remembered who he was. He was a giant. When I was four, my father-eager to see his brother-flew us down to Orlando under the guise of a trip to Disney World. I'd never actually met him before, and when he stood towering over me with an entrance ticket and a mug of coffee as big around as my head, I frantically tried to twist out of my father's unbreakable handhold and run away. It was no use, but my father came to the rescue, pulling him aside and talking to him the entire day-far away from me. From that day forth, my father was a hero in my eyes.

"Oh, yes, of course I remember you, Uncle Bill!" I reassured the voice on the phone. How could I not? The man drank coffee from barrels!

"Listen, Sarah. I know we haven't seen each other in a very long time; I'm not a part of your life and I accept that. I just wanted to talk to you, well . . ."

"About Dad?" Glancing over my fingernails to make sure the paint job was coming along all right, I guessed the con-

versation topic as easily as I would guess the color of an orange. It was only Phone Call #49 about my father in the last month, mostly from the obscurest of relatives who had somehow procured my phone number, even after I had it removed from the phone book.

"Well, yes," Uncle Bill replied. "I know you two were very close. We haven't ever kept in touch, but I just wanted you to know . . ."

"How you understand what I'm going through?" I held out my hands to examine my handiwork. My fingernails now shone an opulent ruby red. "Thanks, Uncle Bill, but I think I'm recovering. It's hard, that's true, but . . ."

"Sarah, I know it must be terrible for you. Your father . . . moves on to a better place, and you have to go on living in an empty house."

"Yes, it's always hard when someone you love . . . moves on. Thanks for calling. I really appreciate how much people like you care. Your call demonstrates an exceptionally caring spirit and a selfless human empathy. It touches me, truly it does."

I glanced at my watch. We'd been talking for three minutes, and I had a kettle of water on the stove. I could hear it hissing like a deformed, metallic alley cat. Time to wrap this up.

"Well, Uncle Bill, I've got to go. I'm sorry. I can't . . . it's difficult to talk about these things." Damn. Uncle Bill was making me depressed again. Something bad happens, and you're just starting to get over it when someone brings it up all over

again, raking buried grief to the top of your emotional compost heap. Why couldn't these people just leave me alone? It was so inconsiderate of them.

"Well, OK," Uncle Bill mumbled, dejected at my refusal to pour out the deep, dark torment he assumed possessed my heart. "I guess I'll just let you mourn your loss in peace," he continued. "But if you ever just can't stand the silence of your empty house, give me a call. I mean it, Sarah. Just don't call on Sundays between one and five-that's my NASCAR time, you know."

The water was coming to a boil. "OK, Uncle Bill, will do," I hastily replied, slamming down the receiver. Got it. Will do. Just not during NASCAR hours. Why are relatives so annoying? Maybe it's because they're such bad

liars-why would someone I'd only seen once in my whole life suddenly care about me?

Skipping into the kitchen, the kettle whistling wildly, I tripped over my father's muddy shoe-one of the old brown ones he got for fifty cents at a garage sale. He always wore those shoes when he was out in the garden. Walking to the stove, I turned the burner off and pushed the kettle aside. Seizing a knife from the counter, I began therapeutically slicing vegetables. Now I really was crying. A lonely tear slowly streaked down my mournful visage in a beautifully heart-wrenching poetic cliché. It wasn't so much that he was gone-he'd gone to a better place, after all. It was the sheer emptiness of the house without his delightfully inebriated chuckle after dinner. Brandishing the knife in desperate sorrow, I recalled my dear father, holding my hand in line for the carousel, reading me a bedtime story, faithfully snapping cheap Polaroid shots of my elementary school play.

That was it. I couldn't stand it anymore. I needed to get out of that depressing house. Hurling open the front door, I leaped outside and stomped over to my next-door neighbor's place. Anything was better than the dusty silence of my lifeless abode.

I rang the doorbell, and I heard familiar footsteps shuffling toward the door. It opened, and my father stood there, filthy from going through all the U-Haul boxes. "Well, hi, Sarah!" he greeted me. He grinned, wiping his dirty hands on his

dirtier sweatpants. "How're ya doin'?"

"Just fine, Dad, just fine. So, you think this really is a better place?"

"Absolutely, Dear. It cost ten grand less than the old house just 'cause it needed a little painting inside. Couldn't pass up the deal. And it has a two-car garage. Besides, isn't it nice having your own place?"

I dread going to work today.

It has nothing to do with work itself. I like my job, for the most part, and today is one of those special days that I would usually look forward to.

My dread has everything to do with one certain person that I know I'll see almost as soon as I get there.

Why did I suggest you talk to my boss? Why did I ever think it would be a good idea for you to work there?

I guess I thought it would be fun.

Dread

Fiction by >> Michelle Alford

Isn't it kind of funny that I dread seeing you more often than I anticipate it anymore?

And that the reason I dread seeing you is because I still love you?

I talk like we've already ended it. Well, maybe we should. I think I hate you more often than I love you anymore. I mean . . . I never say I hate you out loud.

But my mind rarely says I love you.

I know that I do. I know that part of me always will, but the hurt overwhelms the love and the hate spawns from the hurt.

I know nobody wants to hear the old phrase, "It's not you; it's me." I certainly never believed those words spoken to me in my last break-up.

But it's not you. It's me.

I'm too selfish. I'm too possessive. I'm too paranoid. In the end, it's me who hurts me, not you.

And, in the long run, I end up hurting you too. The part of me that loves you is tired of hurting you.

And the part of me that hates you is tired of being hurt.

I don't think I'm ready to be alone though. In fact, I know that I'm not. I still need you too much.

I still see us as forever, and I'm not ready to let go of that.

So, I'll try to change. I know I've been trying unsuccessfully for months, but I'll keep trying. I will fight for this until we both stop hurting.

Or until we hurt too much to try anymore.

Repeated for emphasis

fiction by >> Zhian Kamvar

Patrick was sitting in the park with his friends; it was the late afternoon, early evening on a warm summer's day. They had been gallivanting around the town all day, not particularly in search of some specific recreational activity, just to frolic gaily so as to pass the hours of the long day. Already they had seen a picture show, ate three lunches, explored an underground creek, and now they were sitting in the middle of the field at Memorial Park watching the orange sun melt into the horizon. The light was piercing Pearce's eyes, but he couldn't get out of the gaze of the slowly melting sun. He was blinking and winking in a manner that of mental patients, because the ultraviolet hurt his retinas so. "God...I can't stand the light, you guys. Can we move somewhere else?" Pearce said and stood up.

James looked at Pearce and said, "No. I'm comfortable."

"Since when did everything revolve around your comfort?" Pearce asked.

"I should ask you the same question." James shot back, "It appears as if you are the only one that is not satisfied with our choice of location. If you don't like it, you can move."

"No I can't," Pearce protested.

"Why? Because you won't be sitting next to Beth?" James taunted. Pearce looked constipated. Everyone was looking at him. Awkward silence flowed from him like a river. He was trying to think of a way he could get out of this situation. The hamster of his brain was trying to run the mile in 2 minutes. The thought of stating that there wasn't any room anywhere else popped up and then was burst because

of the fact that they were lying in a field. After about ten seconds of the constipated silence, Pearce gave up and said, "Goddamn you James.", Sat down, and endured the day's leftover, stale sun. Beth leaned away from Pearce. Everyone laughed except for Pearce.

"So, anyways, it turned out that the guy had been in his house for weeks before I found him. It was pretty cool, heh, I went up to him and was all, like, to my

brother, 'I'm gonna poke him with this stick.' And I took a stick from out-

side, and poked him in the face." Patrick continued while everyone was listening intently, horrified and amused at the same time. "It was like, when you take a donut with custard and squeeze out the filling with your hands, except it was yellow, red, and purple...And the donut was in the shape of half of a guy's face."

"What happened to the other half?" Pearce asked.

"I dunno, he shot it off, I guess." Patrick said. "Anyways, we were just going to leave him there, but someone saw us come out of the house, I guess the guy was chasing his cat outside or something,

just ignored it.

"You know, I heard something really weird about someone who died here." Said Jesus, "I mean, this was really fuckin' weird. It was so weird, that if you heard it, it would make you piss!"

"Well are you gonna just sit there and tell us that it's weird, or are you going to tell the fucking story?" Beth chimed in. Everyone looked at her and then looked back at Jesus. Not wanting to lose his audience, as if he could, Jesus started to tell what he heard.

"Do you guys remember Albert who lived behind 7-11?" Everyone nodded. Jesus continued, "Well, he's not important, hahahahaha." Cold stares were emitting their powerful rays against Jesus.

"What you guys don't get jokes?" Said Jesus, and seeing the same locked expression in everyone's eyes, he began to tell the real story,

"Ok, do you guys remember the time when we were in high school and that one guy hung himself from the tree near the railroad tracks? That guy was the grandfather of the kid I'm talking about. This kid was about our age, and he decided one day that trying to jack off with a rope around his neck was a good idea. He'd done it many times over the course of a few weeks apparently. Until he slipped up one day."

"How'd he do that?" asked Pearce, who was listening very closely.

"He slipped off of the chair that was supposed to catch him if he fell." Said Jesus.

"Wait, what is the point of trying to hang yourself while whacking it?" asked Pearce.

"I've read somewhere that it cuts off the oxygen to your brain, making your nerves go bugfuck and it gives you a gigantic orgasm." Said Jesus.

"Ewwwww." Said every-

one.

"That's why we don't do it," Jesus started, "Any ways, before I was rudely interrupted, I was saying that he slipped up one day. That isn't the weird part. The weird part is afterwards. Of course his parents walked into his room to find him naked, hanging from his coathook with tissues and skin mags on the floor around him. I heard that his body wasn't found until about three days after it happened. I

guess his parents were away or sumthin figure that his face was looking all purple and purple by then. So, of course, they aren't happy about it, and they try to arrange for a quick burial. They took him to the mortuary down on McLellan road and they were about to bury him the next day when he sat up in the coffin. Someone panicked and threw a letter opener in his eye and he fell back into the coffin."

"Wait, how come I never heard this?" Patrick asked.

"Because no one would believe it. Come on, man, you've got to admit, this is pretty far out there." Said Jesus.

"Yeah," Rachel said, "Who carries a letter opener to a funeral anyways?" Jesus sighed. "That's not the point. The point is that they closed the lid of his coffin and buried him anyway without telling anyone."

"How'd you hear about it?" asked Pearce.

"My friend's dad is the mortician," replied Jesus.

After that, it was dark, and they didn't want to be sitting in the park any more. Everyone went to their houses or apartments to either watch TV, read a book, smoke a pot, or...in Pearce's case, hang out. When Pearce heard Jesus talk about Autoerotic Asphyxiation, he wanted to find out how to do it. I will spare you the details, but Pearce looked up on the Internet: "Jack Off Rope Neck" and a site for Autoerotic Asphyxiation popped up. He read how to do it, and, in the end, he was lying naked, on his back with a plastic shopping bag tied around his head and semen all over the bedspread. I can tell you his last thought was of Beth...as he was ejaculating.

His parents did the same thing that the parents in Jesus' story did. They actually took him to the same mortician. When the priest said "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.", Pearce heard it and opened his eyes to see darkness and he pushed open the lid of the coffin and was blinded by the light. He heard screaming and he said, Mom?

A shovel wielded by his father hit him in the back of his head, and they took him out of the coffin, stripped his suit off of him and nailed him up to the nearest tree by his wrists and his ankles. He was hanging in terrible pain as the mob made up of the small funeral party of his close family took turns kicking him and hitting him with the shovel. As a final insult, they took some barbed wire and wrapped it around his head. They left him hanging on that tree until he died. They then went into the church, had some tea, washed up, chatted for a while, and called the police about a brutal beating in the church graveyard.



Illustration by >> Shaun Gaynor

but he was all like, 'hey! What are you kids doing over there?' and I tried to act all innocent and said, 'We were passing by, and there was this smell coming from the house, and there's a dead man in there' The guy ran in his house and called the cops. Next thing I know, I'm in handcuffs and being asked questions." Patrick smiled, but it was real big, as if he was trying to hide something he just did. The only one who seemed to notice it was Pearce, but he

An unforgettable idea

fiction by >> Anonymous

Surrounded by the dust-filled light of the basement, he leaned back in the chair like a scorpion poised to strike. He began to write.

Dear Readers,

If I tell you my story, I gotta die. I should change my mind and stop writing this or lie about it, so that I can keep on livin' or at least wait until I've finished my cigarette.

I wish I would've gotten me an angel or somethin'. Nobody needs an angel more than a lost angel. See, I'm a lost angel.

It's the weirdest thing - I really feel people's pain. There ain't no angels that feel pain, you know? Who the hell cares, right, we ain't even supposed to exist... anyhow, the pain has never left. It's like the whole damn world's crying on my head. Today I felt this woman, and she was hurtin' so bad, you know, 'cause they were raping her with wine bottles, breakin' the glass right up against her body, and there was this little kid, and he didn't deserve nothin' but they were still killing him anyway. How can a person kill a kid, man? That's some fucked up shit! And to feel them crying, begging like animals for their lover's life or their dead dog - why? I can't help everyone. It sucks, dude, bein' helpless.

One day some people saw me, before I got real good at hiding, they actually saw me, and of course they were kinda curious, but it was like they didn't quite care either. It was like my halo was a dissecting light, you know? I was on a frickin' operating table and all their hands were grabbing at me, holdin' me down, tryin' to see if I was real or not. They didn't care about me, I guess, or whatever, I don't fuckin' care anymore...

He paused as a drop of water fell onto the paper. Was it a tear, or a drip from the leaky roof above his head, who can say? The flow of pain became his blood. Their screams became his voice. Their horrified eyes became his gaze. He had mourned, cried, vomited on the streets just like them. But he had been just a silhouette on the shades of their minds, not quite believable, and perhaps divine. To them, he was "evil", unknown, a thing to destroy, an idea to manipulate. He was just a toy.

...Ha, they thought they could fuckin' play with me, but they had to die

sometime, 'cause everybody's gotta. And when their souls came out to get to heaven, or hell or whatever they thought they'd be gettin', all they got was me standin' there in their way. But honest, I only stopped them, the bastards who cut me up. Didn't know there would be more. Souls came every day after that, drifting all around like smoke, the air so thick with souls sometimes I thought I'd get high or somethin'.

They had nice white glows at first. Real special in a way. But they always found something wrong with... I mean, they'd bring each other down, like what's it called - sibling rivalry. We were kinda like family, until they got all hateful and shit. Then it was like, get the hell outta the way because everyone was angry, ripping each other up. Their white glows had gaps in 'em, so only a little glowish stuff shone through, sorta like they were covered in the night sky, with star spots of light showing through the black. Got fed up after awhile with their shit. I hated all of them too, everyone but that girl.

Fear caused him to scratch out certain words. Any words that might betray him, reveal weakness or humanity. He wasn't human, so he shouldn't feel like one, right?

...She was real cute, that girl. She died in a car accident, so she wasn't movie star material or anything, but you could tell she was cute. They ganged up on her but she was like, "Fuck off!" only she said it nicer.

She looked at me with this look, those eyes just stared right at me like nobody else existed. She started walking up to me, but I looked in her eyes and she froze. I bet she saw the awful stuff I see, it was like she understood, but didn't get pissed off about it like I did. She radiated something, I dunno what it was but it felt "good". Then she cried for me, like she cared... cried for all of them, even while they yelled at her.

The souls started to glow and became real pretty again, light just exploded all over the place like pow! There's the sun right up in my face! I knew they felt that weird "good" thing I had felt...

He remembered the explosion of light, the happiness had been thick and drinkable like a milkshake. He could never form a smile, nor create one on someone else's face. If he felt love for her, he would never realize it.

...Then, it was just us two. She

A Peace from Violence



fiction by >> Anonymous

8:00- It was oh eight hundred hours and we had already begun to move into the city. The stench of blood filled my nostrils as we crept through the torn streets of this wasteland known as Fallujah. I was the squad leader of twelve weathered soldiers. Our mission was to take out one of the top religious leaders in Fallujah. What we did not know was that they were waiting for us.

8:15- We had reached our destination. The area seemed clear of enemies. As we moved in, I could feel my rifle quivering in my hands. This felt wrong. The skeletons of the wreckage loomed around us as if they knew that we would soon join them as lifeless remnants of a time of peace. Then suddenly private Johnson fell to the ground. We all just looked at him. His face was gone, replaced by a gaping hole. "Sniper!" one of the other men yelled. "Take cover..." But before he could finish, he collapsed to the ground. Everyone panicked. Half of the men began to fire rapidly at the

shadows. The other half ran for cover or for dear life.

8:30- I was left alone. I had tried to take cover behind a wrecked van when the shadows began to move. Around a hundred shadows came out of the darkness. The faces of these demons contorted until they resembled men. I could kind of make out what they were saying. They began to move in on my position. I froze. I did not know what to do. Then one of them came up to me. Without saying a word, he pulled out his pistol and hit me across the face. Everything went black.

18:30- I woke up. My hands and feet were bound, and I did not know where I was or what happened. There was a crowd of men standing around me. One of them began to speak in English. "Read the cards or we will torture you until you die." The realization of what happened hit me. I had been taken captive. I knew that they would kill me. Then a thought crossed through my head, "Was this worth fighting and dying for?"

asked how come all the souls was so pissed off, and I had to answer her.

~~It was my fault~~, dammit, I could have been in heaven but I wasn't perfect, I wanted power, so I was thrown down. The name's Lucifer, I said. How come you made 'um feel good but I can't make 'um all feel good?

You know what she said? "Because I can love, and you can't," she said and she disappeared. She's right. I can't love anybody, ha, because I don't fuckin' exist!

You think you know everything about me, you think you can fuck with me, don't you!

So, Readers, you know what I am, although it meant my demise as an entity. Even if I don't exist, I remain as a never-ending idea of the mind. M.M.R. mind. I'm the everlasting idea in your head that you cannot forget.

Now to finish my cigarette...

The ballad of the Army of Undead Fetuses

fiction by >> Jonny Dangerous
and Kyle DUDWell

"Hey Kyle, remember when the Beatles fought Michel Jackson?"

"The chief ammunition is meatballs and pasta sauce in the epic battle between The Beatles and Michael Jackson. The army of children versus the army of sex-crazed-hornidity-ridden-angst-filled-teenage-women."

"What does 'angst' mean?"

"Umm.. Drama, or Tramua. Also, hornidity isn't really a word"

"At 11:53 (when its still dark outside) Michael Jackson brooded over a warm cup of hot chocolate, filled with moist, mushy, marshmallows devising an evil plot to commandeer the sex-crazed-hornidity-ridden angst-filled-teenage-women that worshiped the Beatles."

"Or did he? In Liverpool, in 1893, it was prophesized that four men, of ill-reputation, would signal the beginning of the end of western civilization. Michael knew this and knew that the only way to save the world was to sacrifice one of the sex-crazed hornity-ridden-angst-filled-teenage-women to the gods of pasta. The primitive pasta gods of old."

"Preparing to throw this pre-sex-crazed-hornidity-ridden-angst-filled-teenage-women baby over the window ledge, out of nowhere a pasta covered steamy meatball whistled through the thick, foggy morning air and stuck his formerly-black, furrowed brow.

"SPLAT.

"The strike of the meatball against his plastic nose frightened Micheal Jackson and he dropped the baby unintentionally."

"But hadn't he planned to drop the baby?"

"Well, yeah. But not yet. He wasn't quite ready to drop the baby yet. Anyways, at that exact moment the Beatles were crossing the street under his window, and the baby fell safely into Ringo's arms."

"But as soon as he caught it, he realized he had yet to eat. So, forgoing his regular, overly-English, tea and crumpets, he decided to eat the baby. The other Beatles not only stood by, but cheered, and wrote a song about it too. It was called "Peppy, Dramatadore" and it converted an entire generation to rock-n-roll, angering the slightly conservative primitive pasta gods."

Untitled

fiction by >> David Victor Gehrke

"Look at that pipe conglomeration. Don't tell me someone built that." Chris walks to it.

"It's a gas pipe." Lots of pipes all knobby and crooked.

"Light a match and kill yourself," I tell Chris. "Why is it there?"

"I don't know," I tell Chris.

The pipes, thick from paint, all rise from one stalk of five straight pipes; the whole thing looks like rhubarb or a bush. Chris touches a vent on a lower pipe. It is cut diagonally.

"There's nothing out here. Where do these pipes lead?" I point.

"Maybe back to those houses?" Chris frowns at me from under his olive hood. His face is sad, but he is not. To our east is the road. Some houses are beyond the hill, but I cannot see them from

here; only night. To our west is a mown lawn, larger than a field, no trees. It is cold tonight. I know why the pipes are there. I keep these things.

We stand under a street light. It glows amber-orange, flickers. We stand on a jut of road, but it looks more like a paving accident. Chris looks up at the lamp. It is too bright for my eyes.

"I see some moths and mautermillers," I say.

"What are mautermillers?" Chris asks.

"Those white moths. They're powdery."

Chris never sees them unless they are in the light.

"Why is this light here?" he asks.

A metal sign dangles, nailed to the wooden post. It reads, TR-4950. The lower edge is rusty. Earlier today it rained. The haze lingers; it makes the lamp's glow larger

"Peppy Dramatadore"

(lyrics sung to the tune of 'Hey Jude')

Peppy, Dramatadore.

Eat that Baby, Cause its delicious.

Remember, as you finish its little toes.

That you were hungry for an overly-English tea.

Baby! Yummy! Baby! Yummy! YEAH!

Na-na-na-Na-nanan-Na

Yummy Baby. Baby.

"Just imagine that furry little meatball head, those little noodly baby limbs, that macaroni body. As Ringo bites in, marinara dribbles down his chin."

"MJ was upset that Ringo ate his sacrifice, so he pulled the pasta-covered meatball from his head, unfortunately also peeling back years of constructive surgery,

than it should be.

"I mean, I don't mean like this is a waste of electricity, I mean, it has nothing to do with the ecology. Why is this here? What did someone put this lamp here for? There's no one here to enjoy it, there's no purpose."

"The earth grew it," I say. "It came out of the ground and no one saw it rise out and everyone assumed someone else built it."

Chris lights up. "Wouldn't that be wild? If it was just . . . here? Just for us, now?"

"Yeah."

Over there, on the road, is a series of telephone poles. Their lines, waves, droop because of the rain. There are no birds. The pole that lights Chris has a nest of wires at the top. Two twisted wires reach many meters over to the line of telephone poles. There is no ground wire. No birds have ever sat on these lines. Just two wires latching onto the telephone electricity.

Chris notices this.

I notice Chris noticing this.

"What is this like?" he asks. "This is like something. This is like veins of the earth or something. What is this?"

I smile at him from under my red hood.

A building squats behind us, a Self-Serve Car Wash with Magic Wands. A quarter gives you 180 seconds. We are behind the building. There are no garbage bags or dumpsters.

"No car needs to be back here, why is there a light?" Chris asks. "The pay phone is on the other side of that garage."

I know why the light is here. I keep these things. The garage doors facing us are closed. The Self-Serve Car Wash is open, but no cars visit it tonight. Inside, the lights are on, but only the spills around the cracks of the door reach us.

We climb a billboard. It is Chris's idea. The platform is not that high off the ground; we do not need a ladder. Chris pulls

revealing his true self, Macho Man Randy Savage.

"Snap into a Slim Jim!," ejaculated the wrestling star. (I used the word 'ejaculated')."

"At this point, my memory gets a little hazy, but I do remember that the greatest rock band of all time, The Legion of The Undead Fetuses arrived to subdue the forces of the Beatles and Macho Man Randy Savage.

"Balance must be brought!"

"And so it was."

Peace ruled the land for many days to come. The land was safe from tyrants, and children danced and played on sunshine and gumdrops and happy.

Rainbows of love filled the sky as the Beatles and Macho Man Randy Savage

himself up easily because his arms are strong. I wade through the wheat.

"I hope there aren't any skunks. Are there any skunks?" I ask Chris. He laughs, leap and grip the edge of the platform. My arms are weak. When I try to pull up, my red jacket catches on

the platform's metal lip. I hold myself so I do not fall on my back. I am about to fall. Chris walks over and pulls my arm while unhooking my jacket from the platform. I drag myself onto the

platform. It is not worth it, the view is terrible and the billboard is political. A few cars breathe past, not seeing us.

"You should have brought your camera," Chris says. He leaps off the platform into the field and slogs back to the road.

I leap off the platform and try to run through the meadow. The wheat hides a pit and I trip. Now I am wet.

"Ha ha ha ha," I laugh.

"That was the most nervous laugh ever," Chris says. He chuckles and takes off his hood. He sniffs the cold air and glances at me.

I am going to break that rule. They won't be happy.

We are back under the light pole.

Chris points at the wires. They are gone. The pole looks aged. Now it leans, and the light is out. It is not planted in the same place.

Chris notices this.

I notice Chris noticing this.

All the mautermillers and moths are dead.

Chris will never know.

"Is this the same pole?" Chris asks.

Then he looks at me.

I smile at him from under my red hood.

Chris thinks, then understands. Veins of the earth.

Veins of the earth. Chris understands so now I have no choice.

I devour him.

walked....strolled....skipped through the peaceful shiny, happy fields...

"But the peace did not last long..."

"One day, on a shiny, happy skin through the elementary functions of doom with swirling vortexes of happy, the slightly dull Starr was feeling hungry again. He felt Macho Man Randy Savage's firm hand in his, and began to think.

"Is this not a baby? Am I not hungry?"

"Gazing longingly at Macho Man Randy Savage, Ringo's eyes deceived him, he saw not a full-grown hunk of man whose love he would never, could never have, but saw a chubby, delicious, glistening baby.

"A lone tuba player could be heard in the distance."

Exuent.

bombings in Nepal

story by >> **Andrés Delgado**

Reuters reports several bomb blasts in Nepal, last week. Tension between Maoist rebels and the government has been exacerbated by the rescheduling of general elections which were earlier delayed by violence. None of the explosions induced casualties.

Rebels claimed responsibility for the blasts on Nov. 29, outside Lumbini, a town on Nepal's border with India and the reputed birthplace of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. But the three-day global conference of Buddhist monks and other scholars began

as scheduled on Nov. 30.

Two days later bombs exploded in the capital, Katmandu, in two separate blasts. One attack targeted a suburb's Election Commission office, destroying windows and doors. The other explosion occurred outside the home of former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's daughter; again, the damage was structural and minimal. Maoists rebels have denied responsibility for the Katmandu attacks.

A week before the Katmandu blasts, Nepal's government, a constitutional monarchy, issued a Jan. 13 deadline for the rebels to meet for peace talks, which the Maoists rejected. If the Maoists refuse to meet for talks, the government says it will proceed with elections.

Ukraine stirred to Orange revolution

story by >> **Sansanee Waratana**

Thousands of Ukrainians have set up camp in Kiev's main square since late last month, protesting the Nov. 25 presidential election results that gave the current Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich 52.46 percent of the vote. The opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko, has said he can prove that at least 3 million votes were false. "In one region, he said, turnout increased by a half-million voters after polls closed."



This is an AP photo of the Orange Revolution currently underway in Ukraine. It is the people's response to what they believe is a fraudulent election.

In response to the call for civic reform, the Ukrainian parliament suspended the results and declared that a second election will be held this December 25. The parliament has also approved changes in the constitution that would guard against future electoral and ballot fraud. The changes also reduce the

president's power by transferring some responsibilities to the parliament.

Despite the tense situation, both police and protestors have not resorted to violence. The optimistic protestors standing in the frigid snow have blocked off the government and parliamentary buildings.

A recent email from my uncle now living in the Ukraine describes the scene in Kiev:

"My friends from Ukraine took me every night to the center and protested for Yushchenko to win. It was awesome to see millions of people in the center and fighting for their rights.... People are sleeping in that cold weather. There are thousands of tents and government building are closed and blocked. Police are so nice and kind to the people.... Even TV stations are not working because they want to hear the truth. They are sick and tired of telling lies. One TV station is on 24 hours and telling the truth of (Yushchenko).... When I went to the center I felt like I was in a huge family. People feed you and gave you tea. It is really cold in Ukraine and people are

still standing and protesting for the justice.... They came long ways for this. Some people came from other regions of Ukraine. People even took one day on the train to come and protest. They are desperate for what they want. They will stay there until the government changes."



Prepare to defend diversity

opinion by >> **Anonymous**

I know people will hate me because of the shape of my face, the texture of my hair, and that I speak a different language. I know this and it's taken me an entire childhood to accept it. I can get over the hate. That's not what I'm complaining about. What I'm concerned with is whether I'll have to get over it again.

In recent events, the white supremacist, Alex Linder, received attention for advertising his beliefs. There's gossip floating around that he plans on starting a group on campus. Now THIS concerns me.

He has an agenda to spread hateful ideas starting with our campus. We are a liberal arts institute equipped with people from all different backgrounds. What is he trying to accomplish? He cannot possibly kill everyone that's not white, but he can cause people to hate each other. As humans, it's ridiculous to reject someone based on differences. Likewise, in the body, it would be detrimental for the liver to reject the heart because of differences. We rely on people ESPECIALLY because of our differences.

ences.

Why is it that when people have the audacity and motivation to start something they believe in nowadays, it has to be digressive? I think Truman students are extremely intelligent, both critically and compassionately. We are so smart that we focus too much of our energy on our studies to gain even more knowledge instead of looking at the present for enlightenment. In this way, Truman students represent the current young generation of America-being too smart to care.

Motivational speakers always tell us to start with little accomplishments. This is our chance! I truly believe that the majority of Truman students think that everyone is equal. We have so much power as a body of students with a common goal. Let's be aware that this man may try to start a hate group on campus. If this is true, I'm pleading with you to be concerned and be ready to take action to defeat his influence.

I wish I had more space to elaborate on these ideas. It would be beneficial to our understanding of the complex nature of our world. However, I hope you examine these thoughts with deep consideration.

Gunshots disrupt state visit to Haiti

story by >> **Emily Randall**

During Sec. of State Colin Powell's Dec. 1 visit to Haiti, gunshots went off near the presidential palace where Powell was meeting with Prime Minister Gerard Latortue and President Boniface Alexandre. The meeting was to show the importance of Haiti to the U.S. following the latter's pullout of forces earlier this year. It is unknown whether the shooting was related to Powell's visit.

It has been a rocky year for Haiti. On this 200th anniversary of their independence from France, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced out of office in a U.S.-supported rebellion. Violence has erupted in Haiti since Aristide's departure. Over 200 people have been killed in gang and political violence over the past three months.

The State Department has said that supporters of Aristide were behind the gunfire,

which was returned by UN troops guarding the palace. The current interim government has been accused of arbitrarily jailing such supporters.

The shooting originated in Bel-Air, a slum two blocks away from the palace. Carlos Chagas, an assistant to the commander of the UN peace-keeping mission in Haiti said that the shooting and the meeting were unrelated and that the UN troops were responding to gunfire that was restricted to Bel-Air.

However, Haitian Justice Minister Bernard Gousse said the UN troops were responding to shots fired from a car outside the palace.

Witnesses reported UN troops moved into Bel-Air in armored vehicles soon after the shooting began. Two people were killed, one during the police raid. Three students in Bel-Air school were injured.

My Back Pages...

Well chilluns, this concludes anohter tempestuous semester of the monitor... hey you did great. Now go home, relax but don't let your brain atrophy and definitely don't get defenestrated because we need you here, come january so you can send your submissions to me, countzachula@hotmail.com

Now go on home and get some rest, you big lug. Peace.

Atomic Café

Almost another 2:30
the fourth atomic bomb exploded
by 4000 rats
working in conjunction
with all the ships in all the oceans
carrying atomic playboys.

Scene 26, take 2
of these experiments on Bikini
that cannot be anything but good
because God is on our side.

Gone is the spirit of wartime unity
torn asunder
but the chief of police
was hauled off to jail
in the evil communist Soviet Union.

The time is not yet,
for America is based on
free parking for all of the cars
that we capitalists acquire.
besides, we've got nothing to worry
about-
we've got the bomb.

This is a time for
my lord to come.

-Ms. Julie Ferdman

Leaf on the Breeze

How I fly,
Through the sky,
 Drifting around, oh so high.
Fluttering, wafting, without a care
 How I love it up in the air.
 Feeling so free, there's nothing I wont dare.
 But as I flutter, I drift ever closer to the ground,
I can see my brothers and sisters, waiting to be found.
By a rake, or child, or silly hound.
 But NO! I want to fly!
 Struggling upwards, I reach for the sky,
But I know I must eventually rest, and so I give in with a sigh.

-Jordan Kimbrell

A Love Poem

Your beautiful blonde hair
Makes me want to stare
Your lovely face
Leaves no trace
Of the things you do so wrong
You don't know where you belong
I don't know what to do
I think that I like you
It has only been a week
But I am much too meek
Too quick I fall in love
And then I feel the push and shove
I don't try to act the way that I do
I just try to impress you
I find it hard to talk to girls that I like
It's not as simple as riding a bike
Girls are friendly and kind
They make me want to lose my mind
I can not tell you what I feel inside
I've always wanted a girl by my side
One that would be there for me
And then maybe I could see
That beauty lies within
Because that is when
You have found your true love
Which is as pure as a dove
The thought of you is always on my mind
But then how could I be so blind
You never really wanted me
It just wasn't something that was meant to be

-Brian Easley

I try to invest in this page
and take up its space in
replacement of my own
real need for real space.

The ace card is though
there's no real dough
and no real knead
for real dough
because

reality has been replaced
with placards and placemats
and all things tidy for signifying.

I ask why too much
and get caught up
in the lack of answers .

Amsterdam's a damn nice
place to go
too touristy though.

A new scene, at least
but please! It's all under
one sky and this one lie
is all I have left to live.

I'll give it to you gladly,
when its time.

Benign and acting fine
is too whiny for me even.

I'll call you when I'm sleeping.

-Jerry Bruckheimer