

# THE FINAL DRAFT



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# **The Final Draft**

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# Short Fiction

## Ted

JULIE HOOVER ROTHWELL

When I was in college a soon-to-be ex girlfriend chided me for my inability to commit. She didn't know that I had been previously in a seven year long relationship that had me seriously thinking about marriage, a house, children and the whole she-bang.

I met Christine Klem when we were both in kindergarten. She remembered it as being first grade, and due to the nature of our first meeting I never corrected her. We were waiting in line for the hurdles during the school wide end of the year field day. I pulled one of the patches off of her brownie uniform to see what would happen and she kicked me hard in the shins and left a mark. I was in love.

Of course, I never told her I was in love with her. I did what any rational elementary school boy would do and singled her out for tormenting. In first grade when we began our streak of being in the same class I did my best to prove my love for her. I smashed art projects and turned castles made of blocks into rubble. I was always secretly thrilled when I came in to start the day and noticed, while putting my lunchbox in my cubbie, that our paper plates had clothespins on the same center. Despite my joy I would always protest loudly that I hated Christine Klem.

Christine, far from being upset would say, "I don't want to play with Butt-Ted." That was her pet name for me. Christine was that perfect rare breed of tomboy. She was daintily dressed with a big sassy bow in her hair. She wore pressed dresses in shades of pastel with ruffled socks. Her coppery hair was always gleaming and arranged in a different style each day. I loved to watch her sleep at naptime, from a safe distance and to watch her work on the playground, sitting with the aforementioned dress bunched around her, flashing her Underoos while she dug in the dirt with a stick. She was my kind of girl.

The other joy of Christine, what made me truly love her, was that she could give it as well as she could take it. She tortured me mercilessly. Once we were paired together in a PTA square dancing exhibition because we were the same height. She smashed my hand and crunched the bones continuously for the entire 3 minutes and 17 seconds it took us to do our routine.

As we got older our love/hate relationship grew and changed with us into kind of a symbiotic friendship. When we played seven up she would always pick me, and we knew that, so we always won. When the girls who would later grow up to be the "popular" girls teased Christine for her success at kick ball I put extra effort into tagging them out. If I lost my lunch she would share her sandwich with me, but claim that my half had boogers in it. When we started the awkward sex ed talks in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and she kept asking for bathroom passes I would tell the teacher that she had gotten sick during art class.

We rode home on different busses but one year her bus would stop at a stoplight by the corner where I got off every day. If I waited around she would drop me notes folded in that complicated way that only girls can master. They were typically one line, often insulting, except for one notable day. My parents had just started fighting audibly at home and I had cried at school. It was embarrassing and possibly one of the worst memories I have from that period. That day, my note from Christine was, "I'm sorry you had a bad day." That's hardly poetry but it was moving enough for me to add it to the shoebox under my bed. I rewarded her kindness with a Valentine that bore the message, "You = Poop" with a little sketch of her and the poop under it.

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade I decided that the charade of hatred was a weight I could no longer bear. I confessed to everyone I could that if marriages for people our age were legal that I would pledge my heart to Christine forever. My epiphany was ill timed to coincide with my classmates' development of sarcasm. Not only did Christine not take me seriously, my declarations made her turn pink with rage. I decided to make her jealous by asking her best friend to be my girlfriend during a school wide camp out. It worked, but not in the way I bargained for. Instead of running to me with open arms and demanding that I kiss her (which is what I imagined would happen) she got revenge. She pushed her friend out of a canoe without even bothering to make it look accidental. I thought that I would get off Scot free until I reached into my sack lunch on our day long hike and it mysteriously contained my own dirty underwear instead of a peanut butter sandwich and a bag of chips.

By this time my parents had decided to get a divorce. My mom and I moved in with my grandparents during the summer and I mourned the loss of Christine. I didn't even get to say goodbye. I started junior high at an alien school and became quiet and withdrawn. My mom knew that I missed our hometown so she got a new job and moved us into an apartment by Christmas and I started school with my old classmates after the winter break.

On the first day of school I finally saw Christine during band practice after months of torture. She played the clarinet and I played the drums so I had the pleasure of sitting behind her, watching her curls bob up and down as we played the first five lines of "Eye of the Tiger" over and over. She ignored me throughout the entire class, or so it seemed, but on our way out she gave me a shy grin before she looked down and hurried off with her giggling co-clarinetists.

During lunch I tried to decide where I would sit. Coming to a new school in the middle of the year is a daunting task and the situation was exacerbated by the fact that all of a sudden there were lines drawn between the cool and the un-cool. I had no idea where I fell in that hierarchy. Luckily, one of the snotty girls from elementary school, Karen Brogden, had her eye on me. Before I knew it I was plopped down at the "popular girl" table with five pairs of batting eyes and five heavily glossed lips pointed my way. The conversation was gossipy and I wasn't too interested but my perch afforded me an excellent view of Christine who was eating lunch with a table that looked like it was a lot more fun.

I was disappointed to find out that there was a new man in her life, Jimmy Neubauer. Jimmy followed her around like a lost puppy and Christine told anyone

who would listen that she hated him. He put poems in her locker. I knew I couldn't compete with that so I didn't try but I did corner Jimmy in the boy's locker room and told him that if he "tried anything" I would kill him. I even slammed his locker for emphasis but all in all, he seemed like a good kid.

It looked as though Christine had forgotten about me. Besides those continuing shy smiles and the occasional wave we really didn't have any contact. One day Karen Brogden "asked me out" and I didn't turn her down because I couldn't see any benefit or drawback of the match. I didn't have to do anything or be anywhere, all I had to do was stand around with her in the hall while she talked to her lame friends. That went well for about two weeks until she told me that, "I wasn't her soul mate" and she dumped me in gym class. I figured it was pretty obvious that I wasn't her soul mate, because we were in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, so I wasn't too broken up about it until lunch. Apparently, my not being her betrothed meant that I needed a new lunch table.

Once again I was lost. This time I was brave and sat at Christine's table. I was cool now, right? Silence greeted me as the other girls at the table gawked at me. Christine cleared her throat and launched into a monologue. She spoke rapidly and softly. Her voice was just above a whisper and sounded forceful like the air being let out of a balloon. Each word was punctuated with her fork for emphasis.

"Look Ted, the way I see it you're one of the oldest friends that I have. We haven't always gotten along but we have sort of a brother and sister relationship. You know? You've looked out for me and you've always just kind of been there. Like, I know that you're popular now, or whatever, and that's ok with me but I want you to know that I'll always be your friend whenever you need it. You know, because we, like... we're old friends and we always will be. So it doesn't, you know, *matter.*"

She stopped talking suddenly and her friends exchanged surprised looks and then went back to staring at me. She picked up her lunch bag and began systematically shredding it to petite bits. After a few moments passed and I started to feel kind of awkward she looked up, grinned and said, "Karen Brogden is a stupid ho-bag anyway."

Everyone laughed and the ice was broken. After lunch Christine took me over to Jimmy Neubauer's table and introduced me to a bunch of guys with bowl cuts and soccer shorts that would end up being my frat brothers and groomsmen one day. They would be with me in high school when I dated most of the girls at that old lunch table and they would be in my life long after Christine left.

Because Christine did leave and it happened all too soon. I remember the day that she told me. Her coppery hair had been chopped off to her chin and it flapped up and down when she ran across the kickball field over to where I was standing. It was at the spring kickball tournament after our homerooms were disqualified and while we made designs in the red sand with the toes of our shoes she told me that she was moving to Kentucky with her family that summer. She was upset because her grown up brother was staying behind, sad because she had to leave all of her friends behind and angry that her parents hadn't told her sooner. We sat down in the grass and she picked at the clover while I squinted into the sun. We stayed there in companionable silence and listened to the laughter, yelling and the "thwunk" of

the kickball. She put her head on my shoulder and her hair smelled like fresh air and apples.

I never heard from Christine again, and I don't think that I ever will, but I still think of her from time to time. I met my red haired wife at a poolside wedding reception at a swanky country club. She was a bridesmaid and I was a groomsman and when we were introduced I was seized with an uncontrollable urge to push her into the pool. I did and she yanked me in with her. We came up laughing and spluttering and in the time it took to ruin a rented tuxedo I knew I was in love for the second and last time in my life.

# The Many Gifts of the Mylittleponyobile

JULIE HOOVER ROTHWELL

"It's a giant, pink van," Kelly said in amazement.

"I know. Well, it isn't really. Well, it is a van but it hasn't always been pink," stammered Luke with excitement. "I had it painted pink just for you. That shade of pink paint is hard to find for cars so the guy at the shop had to mix it just for you. It's not too Pepto is it?"

"No, it's just right. It's just that, well, I've never seen anything that color with wheels before."

"Isn't it great?"

"Sweetheart, I really like it, don't get me wrong, but what possessed you to buy me a pink van? I already have a car and we're still making payments on it."

"Well, I didn't actually buy it. This guy I know at work was going to take it to the dump and..."

"You rescued it?" she said with raised eyebrows and a small smile.

"Well, I thought we could use it this summer to drive cross country. It's out of date but it runs fine and I thought it would be fun for you and James."

Kelly and Luke spotted one another on their first day of teaching at Thomas Stegner Junior High School and immediately fell in gooey, ridiculous love. Their courtship was as nervous and intense as the kind of relationships pursued by their students. Although, Luke argues it was love at first sight and Kelly claims he wore her down, their students knew it was inevitable from the first day a jar crammed with Luke's genetics fruit flies shattered on the floor of Kelly's shop class. As the semester wore on Kelly would watch the new generations of *Drosophila melanogaster* as they flitted through the sawdust and became trapped in wet cement, always making sure to note the eye color to have an excuse to talk to the handsome biologist in the teachers lounge. "White eyes today?" she would say cheerily and Luke would lean in conspiratorially as they chatted about the trysts of the tiny matchmakers.

Luke was instantaneously charmed by her giggle and went to great lengths to coax it out of her, even going so far as to volunteer to be the sponsor of the school's drama club, a mismatch of garrulous kids who took themselves very seriously. Kelly attended every performance and enjoyed everything from the only humorous portrayal of Hamlet ever to grace the stage to an interpretation of West Side Story where the gender roles were reversed. Somewhere between "Mario's and Antonia's" secret meeting in the garage where Mario worked and all of the girl fights, Kelly realized that she was in love and volunteered to build the sets in order to get to know the hapless director.

A few years, many productions, and scores of 14 year olds later, Luke and Kelly were married and raising their own son, James. James was an inquisitive little boy, the ultimate genetics experiment, who inherited his mother's quickness to laughter, his father's love of the ridiculous and the friendly confidence of a much loved child. This summer he would be seven years old, and Kelly and Luke had determined that he was finally old enough for them to harness the free time of their long summer vacation and use it to drive across the country and explore little burgs and large metropolises.

James and Kelly had been fixtures at the neighborhood public library for months, pouring over pamphlets and atlas's and taking the time to plot all of the stops on a giant push pin coated map of the U.S. in the basement at home. It was a formidable logistics problem, both of them having soft spots for underdog towns, and neither of them being able to resist the siren song of festivals with fantastic names like, "The 65<sup>th</sup> Annual Pig in a Sailor Suit Festival" or bylines promising, "The Largest Tap Dancing Hamster You've Ever Seen" (a dubious claim with lots of leeway). As a result, the map was in danger of collapsing under the sheer weight of the pins and the wall behind it would probably need to be repapered.

Luke had spent a lot of his time trying to solve the problem of how they would tackle this cross country adventure with enough gear and rations to sustain them on their journey. Many an hour he would mull the problem over while his hormone crazed mini-biologists vigorously flaunted the boundaries of the scientific method. One day one of his pals from work asked him for a ride after he dropped off an old clunker at the scrap metal lot. When Luke saw that giant panel van, with its obvious potential to go from lemon to champagne, he knew that that it was the answer to all of his locomotive problems. He parked the van at his brothers house and lovingly transformed it from a barely functioning eye sore to a fine tuned, turbo charged, completely state of the art....eye sore.

After Kelly peeked in to admire the plush lavender interior and the Hello Kitty mud flaps she realized the extent of the gift. Here was a beast of a car that had been tailor made for her. It was the automotive equivalent of a My Little Pony and it was the perfect transportation for the two months of time on the road that she and her son had planned. There was even a kennel for Allenkey and Cinnabar, the family dogs! No detail was left out. From the glittery review mirror to the rhinestone coated cup holders it was like a dream come true. It was no longer just a panel van, it was a panel van that Barbie herself would drive with pride. She scratched the side of it, sniffed and expected it to smell like apricots.

Soon the smelly halls of T.S. Junior High were emptied, the van was packed with enough fruit roll ups and sunscreen to sustain John Wesley Powell on his voyage West and the trip was upon them.

The trip was a wild success. The adults took turns driving and singing Weird Al songs and James would hoot and honk the horn whenever they crossed state lines. The dogs enjoyed fast food French fries and marking their territory all over the continental U.S. and the Kodak moments inspired by animals in costumes and giant, roadside dinosaurs were all recorded for glossy, 5 x 8 posterity.

One day while Allenkey and Cinnabar were lolling in the sun, tongues out, bellies up, with James feeding them heavily processed fried chicken, a man approached the happy family with the pastel abomination of a van clutching a flier advertising a lost dog.

"I was wondering if you'd seen my dog," he said while scanning the area. Luke took the flier and admired the drooling grin of the obviously beloved canine ink jetted onto the page.

Kelly leaned on his shoulder and smiled at the page, "No. We'd remember someone so cute. We're sorry. Has he been gone long?"

The man sighed and shook his head, "It feels like days but it's only been since yesterday. We've been camping out here and he ran off to chase some raccoons the other

evening. He's normally very good about coming back once he realizes that he doesn't have a chance, but it was dusk in an unfamiliar place and I'm worried that he's lost. I'm having hard time finding him on foot."

James was stirred by the sad story and paused in the spoiling of his own animals to offer assistance, "We can help you! We have a big van and we're not in a hurry."

Luke smiled at his sons capacity for kindness and agreed "We'd love to help."

The man was so anxious about his dog that he didn't even comment on the bizarre, genie lamp style interior of the van, sank into his purple velvet captains chair with a sign and kept his eyes peeled out of the window. As they drove around the small mountain town the man introduced himself as Aaron Chambers. He was middle aged and looked too soft and refined to be a local mountain man. Once he relaxed he explained that his wife had left him for a literal traveling salesman and he had been so embarrassed by the cliché that he quit his job at the law firm, moved to the campground with his dog and sold his car to the first group of Deadheads that passed through. He'd been living off of his savings in a borrowed tent and eating beans out of cans. His dog, Scooter, was his primary source of conversation and his disappearance in the unpaved wilderness with its lack of manicured lawns and sympathetic suburban porches propelled Aaron into a frenzy of worry.

It was James who spotted the dog, mainly because of it's proximity to an ice cream stand. He was muddy but healthy and had an expression on his fluffy face like a weary traveler waiting for a layover in an airport. When Aaron leapt out of the pink monstrosity, Scooter was instantly transformed into a wriggling drool factory and was obviously overjoyed to be reunited with his master. Kelly laughed through tears and Luke rubbed her shoulders. James proposed that celebratory ice cream was in order.

The dogs became acquainted while their people slurped and scooped in the warm sun. Aaron, starved for human contact by his self imposed expulsion to the woods, admitted that he was ill equipped for the not-so-great outdoors and perhaps he'd been a bit rash to flush a promising law career down the tubes. Kelly volunteered to have him join them as they journeyed on. Luke promised to drop him off at the very next burg that struck his fancy, and after a nice firm handshake and some wet wipes they collected his meager Wal-Mart camping gear and loaded it into the Prettyponymobile.

They had some small towns on their itinerary before reaching the next city with multiple zip codes but Aaron warmed up to the spirit of the trip and after the, "Great Corny Corn Festival" had even lost his gloomy mood and was no longer pining for his treacherous wife with a penchant for tinkers.

One evening around the campfire, he told them about his days in law school and how envious he was of a couple that shared his routine. He would sit and eat his bologna sandwich and keep his most recent case file firmly shut in its folder. Every day he would sit at a picnic table in the park next to his makeshift office and watch the couple who would rendezvous on a bench outside of hearing, but not watching, distance. He admired the young man, all pressed suits and solid hair and envied the time he spent grinning at the lithe blonde who always accompanied him. He imagined the exciting conversations they must be having and ran continuous imaginary scripts of their chatter through his head while he ate. He confessed that, juvenile as it was, he was in love with the young blonde and was heartbroken when one day the pair suddenly stopped appearing.

"I switched to ham and Swiss after that," he concluded sadly and non-sensibly.

Kelly, always the romantic, said, "Well, now you have a second chance to find her." and Aaron had to chuckle at her optimism.

Luke winked good naturedly and added, "We found your dog after all."

A week or so after picking up Aaron and finding his dog some more passengers joined the cross country tour. One day while James was walking Allenkey, Scooter and Cinnabar around a campsite he stumbled upon a veritable tent palace in the eyes of a seven year old. It was a large plot with multiple tents linked together under tarps and a wide array of cast off lawn furniture, all compiled together. Surrounding this jumble was a lush vegetable garden and a flourishing plot of flowers. In the center of the tantalizing bedlam was a curly haired toddler sucking on his fist and pounding the dirt with a plastic shovel. James stooped to examine the busy little guy and the hounds took that opportunity to get loose. James struggled to catch them, darting around and weaving through the plastic and wrought iron obstacles. He was too out of breath to notice that a young woman had joined the chase until finally they had caught all of the mutts.

"Thanks, lady," James panted while he caught his breath.

"No problem," the girl said as she scooped up the little one.

"This place is really cool! Our tent isn't this nice at all. We only had one and we don't have any plants or anything. It's just a tent. We're lucky when we even have a fire. My mom says that we'd be the worst nomadic tribe ever!" James said when he quite obviously regained his wind.

The girl was charmed and laughed at his speech. "This is where we live all the time," she explained, "My husband and I moved here when we had Mickey."

James eyes were saucer wide as he exclaimed, "You get to live here all the time? Awesome!" Around this time Kelly and Luke strolled up. "Mom! Dad! Isn't this place cool? It's their real house!" James said while waving his non-dog hand and rocking back and forth on his heels.

The young woman embarrassed, moved forward with the baby on her hip and said, "Hi. I'm Laura. This is Mickey. We were helping your son catch this pack of wild dogs."

Kelly graciously thanked her and her warmth put helped to ease Laura's embarrassment about the discovery of the makeshift home. Luke offered up some potato salad as a reward and the group rejoined Aaron for a snack and chatted about the pink van, which was an ice breaker if there ever was one.

After a while a lanky young man with red baseball hat showed up and was introduced as Laura's husband, Jeff. Jeff was issued a paper plate carrying more food per square inch than the manufactures probably intended. As he and Laura ate they told of how they ended up living in a campground with a baby. Not surprisingly, it was a sad story involving angry parents, revoked trust funds, tracks that had wrong sides and concluded with a visit to the courthouse and a compact car filled with a lifetime of possessions. Luke and Kelly felt blessed that things had gone so smoothly for them and were very sympathetic with the young couple.

The next day they were departing early to catch the world's only panda bear salt and pepper shaker museum. James, a great lover of rotund bears of all persuasions, was so excited that he demanded that their new acquaintances be brought along. They were so enamored with the pink van and its quest that they were easily convinced to temporarily abandon their gypsy suburb for a week's vacation and sight seeing. The pink van,

cavemous as it was fluffy, easily accommodated the extra passengers and the trip was freshened by a new set of anecdotes, car game and silly songs.

The salt and pepper shaker museum was followed by an equally postcard worthy trip to the smallest horse ranch in America. A more detailed inspection revealed that the ranch itself covered a fair amount of geography and wasn't the smallest of anything. It was the horses on the ranch, tiny miniature paintbrush horses, that were the diminutive element advertised in the title. Kelly, enraptured with the pint size beasts but exhausted by the sheer ground that they covered, retired to the pink van to recline on the furry seats and wait for the troop to return. After a while she was lulled to sleep by the utter plushness of the vehicle and didn't even realize she had dozed until she was awoken by the sight of a sobbing woman in a wedding dress.

"What's that woman doing in a wedding dress on the hood of my pink van?" Kelly wondered in her sleepy daze. Then she realized that she was probably still dreaming and snuggled back down into the seat, only to be annoyed that the dream was so realistic that she couldn't fall back asleep.

Kelly sat up, aggravated and confused, and realized that she was awake and that the otherworldly appearance of the van was enough to make anyone think they were dreaming. Kelly pulled open the panel door, as gently as a giant metal door permits, and walked over to the front of the van in her sock feet.

"I can't believe it," sobbed the soggy bride by way of introduction. Her tear stained chubby face was caked with makeup and mascara. It moved through cracks like moist and shiny a ventriloquists dummy. A tiara and the remains of a veil were perched precariously on an heavily Aqua-netted snarl of brown curls. Kelly found herself wishing she had a box of wet wipes or a beach towel, possibly even some scissors. "I can not believe it," the bride clarified to the mystified Kelly.

"You can't believe what?" Kelly asked conversationally, hoping to make the situation less awkward by being a more active participant.

"I planned this wedding for years! Then he finally proposed and I slaved over each detail. I got a pedicure to match the God damn Jordan almonds," she drawled in heartrending but southern tones as she kicked off a white satin shoe revealing an unexpectedly turquoise toe. "I even paid some kids to come decorate the get away car and he didn't show up. I won't even get to keep the presents and I was only missing three pieces from my everyday entertaining silver tidbit set from Linens and Things," she paused long enough to wipe her nose with the hem of her dress. (Although it sounded more like, "Linenzandthings.") "I'm like, a really sad lady in a story. Miss Havisham meets *A Rose for Emily*."

Kelly, recognizing this as her chance for a word in edgewise added, "Meets Charlie's Angels?"

The bride giggled a little to herself, honked her nose on her satin skirt and then seemed to realize the ridiculousness of the situation and began to convulse with laughter. Kelly was infected by the insanity of the scene and joined in, and when the rest of the gang came back from tiny horse watching they found the two woman sprawled on the pavement in an unladylike fashion, laughing, drinking cold Coke's and gossiping like old sorority sisters. The bride, whose name was Chrissy, was a debutante from a respected family and an English teacher. Her fiancée didn't show up for their gala wedding and 1,397 guests, the entire adult population of her small town, bore witness to her nervous

breakdown after a two hour postponement of the ceremony. When her great uncle on her mamas side said, "The games on," and got up to leave it was the last straw for poor Chrissy and she pelted him with every orchid, lily and perfectly matched baby rose (special ordered from greenhouses in France) and started complete bedlam in the largest Baptist church in three counties.

Chrissy had run out of town, literally, and didn't stop until she ended up in a Shoney's parking lot where she was rescued by a tour bus of senior citizens on their way to see some bite sized horses. When you're in a wedding dress at a pony farm a pale pink van seems like as good of a place as any to sit down and plot how to find and kill a traveling salesman.

"Did you say traveling salesman?" interjected Aaron, "What a fantastic coincidence. My wife just ran off with a traveling salesman this week!"

It was just bizarre enough to set everyone off laughing hysterically. When they finally wiped the tears off of their eyes they had decided to get Chrissy a change of clothes and smush her into the back with the rest of the people. After all, the next stop was the "Smithfield Lake - Land of 2,000 Ice Creams" annual taste-off and what's a better cure for a broken heart than ice cream?

The jolly group hardly noticed the cramped quarters in the van and happily passed the drive to Smithfield. Each person invented ice cream flavors more fantastic and disgusting than the last and they had no inkling of what kind of ice cream would be necessary to get the count up to 2,000 unique flavors.

Chrissy, Kelly and Laura all hit it off and soon they couldn't imagine how they'd lived without each other for so long. One topic of discussion was the unusual way Aaron had taken to staring at Chrissy when she wasn't looking. She'd turn suddenly to find him, chin on fist, gazing at her with a confused expression. Chrissy, being Chrissy, would toss her brown curls and giggle at him. All of the girls suspected that he had a crush on her and thought it was a reaction to the odd circumstances that landed both of them in the pink van.

The real reason for the lapse of focus on Aaron's part was far more coincidental and if the ladies had paid more attention they would have been able to see the gears turning in his head. Aaron had a suspicion that was more of a wish than a hypothesis based on fact. If he squinted at Chrissy just right, turned his head to the side, subtracted 20 pounds and plopped a blonde wig on the whole mess she looked like an identical twin of the woman he had been so enamored with in law school. In fact, the more he thought about it the more he became convinced that he had finally found his princess on a pedestal that he had lost to the passing of time. All the facts made sense. They were from the same town, the traveling salesman was the other guy and they were destined to be together!

Not daring to believe his good fortune (or shatter the illusion by flat out asking her if it was true) he began to try to woo her and simultaneously ask her questions that would feed his theory.

"Eating lunch near law schools is delightful, don't you think?" he posed as they sat in a movie theater.

Chrissy, confused but charmed by his nuttiness would reply, "Of course, Peanut." Aaron's heart would swell with warm feeling as he sank into his seat with a feeling of conviction only experienced previously by Don Quixote.

One day, at the "Potterstown Purple Pickle Party," as they strolled through the fairgrounds alone he caught a glimpse of sun shining on one of her chocolate ringlets and couldn't take the suspense any longer. He had to know if she was the girl from his past! He steered her to a picnic table, sat her down, and then sat at a neighboring table and called, "Does any of this seem familiar?"

Chrissy looked around at the hillbillies wearing violet cucumber suits, took a big gulp of vinegar scented air, shrugged and yelled back, "Sure!"

Aaron was the happiest man on the planet! He galloped back to her picnic bench, planted a desperate kiss on her cheek and confessed the entirety of his soul.

Chrissy was flattered by the whole thing and was very pleased with the results of his misguided chronicle and the conclusions he had leapt to. She wiped off her cheek and listened patiently, all the while thinking, "This guy is crazier than a hat made out of a live raccoon." until it dawned on her. He was right! It was her at the other bench. Sure, it wasn't her and Harold the traveling salesman but she did visit her brother Pete for lunch every day until she met Harold in the toilet paper aisle at the Food Dog. Chrissy started to giggle, and then she started to chuckle and before Aaron could understand what was happening she was slapping his thigh, her shoulders were heaving up and down and she was literally choking with glee.

"What's so funny?" said Aaron as his spiel ground to a halt.

"You're right!" squealed Chrissy, "I thought you'd lost your mind but you're right." The sting of that remark was quickly forgotten and Aaron grabbed her ample waist and pulled her into a big hug.

"You've made me the happiest man alive," he said into her hair.

"Let's not get carried away," smiled Chrissy.

When they made it back to the others, lying around the van, pickled from the inside out, they were all very pleased to hear the news and were even more amazed to hear that this was the end of the road for Aaron and Chrissy. They had discussed the uncanny intervention of fate and decided to set up shop in Potterstown. "If the improper food handling at this festival in any indication, this town could use a good lawyer!"

Addresses were exchanged, Scooter waggled his goodbyes and the crew headed off to the next stop, two persons fewer but filled with fond reminiscences. The seat in the van wasn't going to be empty for long.

While Luke was picking up donuts for the lethargic sleepy heads at the campground he started chatting with a very over dressed man at the bakery. The man was plopped down in a swivel chair, at 6am on a Saturday. That wouldn't be so unusual except that he was wearing a full suit with a napkin tucked into his bow tie to keep the powdered sugar and sprinkles from finding their way to his natty double breast. Luke decided to query the man about his atypical attire. He soon found himself captivated by the answer. The elderly gentleman was on a quest to meet a daughter he's never seen or imagined. He had come all the way from a town called Saxmundham in England to find her.

It had recently come to his attention, from a dramatic death bed epistle, that he had inadvertently impregnated an American girl on a class trip to London fifty three years ago. The girl had gone on to marry her high school boyfriend, who was believed to be the culprit despite his technical virginity, and they had lead a happy life. Only on her deathbed did she start to feel pangs of anxiety about the deception, not due to any guilt

but strictly because of all the troubling genetic problems she kept reading about in People Magazine. What if the father had a heart condition, narcolepsy, or worse, what if he had the Mad Cow? Her daughter deserved to know! She penned short letters, leaving out the sordid details, to her daughter and the birth father and died peacefully knowing that she wouldn't have to be involved in the resulting untidiness.

The old man, Mr. Hicksby, was very nervous and had put off the awkward reunion for almost a month. Every day he put on his best suit on the off chance that he developed the courage to cross the street to the flower shop and speak to his daughter who worked there. He'd watched her from his sugar coated vantage point for days. He admired her rose fluffing and carnation snipping skills. He recognized himself in the way she squinted at new shipments of lilies and skillfully tied ribbons into outrageously dexterous bows. He was filled with love for this alien offspring and wanted to make a good impression so she would be keen on him too.

When Mr. Hicksby concluded his dilemma, Luke sat in silence and searched his brain for the right way to help him. He decided to do what they'd been doing all trip and bring him to the pink van for the rest of the bunch of hooligans to decide the best course of action.

Kelly, always a problem solver, decided that the best way to approach this was to go in as soon as they could. They would all go together. A big, smiling mob, complete with cute children and animals, is hard to have a fit in front of. It would be like ripping off a bandaid with less hair loss and more flowers.

They approached the flower shop tentatively. Mr. Hicksby mopped his face with a handkerchief and swore under his breath. The rest of the group was silent with anticipation. The plan was to go into the shop, wander around and let Mr. Hicksby order some flowers from her and conversationally mention that he was her long lost dear old dad. It wasn't the finest scheme ever plotted but it wasn't exactly a matter of national security either.

As soon as they entered the shop pandemonium broke loose. The dogs took off after the startled resident tabby cat and James, who was holding the leash, was pulled into a pile of vases. As he fell Kelly and Laura tried to catch the back of his coat and bonked heads. Jeff tried to straighten out the mound of people and keep them from smashing anything else as they untangled themselves. Luke and Mr. Hicksby, left standing in the melee, looked sheepishly at the florist. Her mouth was gaping at the wreckage and she looked to be dangerously on the brink of a meltdown. Luke stuck offered his palm for a handshake and said, "How do you do? We've brought you your real dad."

The florist's face held a wide array of emotions, everything from panic to joy registered. Everyone was silent and held their breath as they watched what unfolded. The florist began to cry and the old man picked his way over to her and hugged her from across the counter. It was so simple and honest that the untidy group knew that the worst had passed and retreated back to the donut shop to give the new family their space.

As they sat in the bakery they were all too nervous to eat. James gave them updates from his surveillance, "She's waving her arms up and down," or "He looks happy!" After what seemed like a few hours the bell on the bakery door tinkled and the father and daughter reunion came through the door.

The old man explained that he wouldn't be returning to the pink van. He was going to stay in the small town with his daughter and spend the rest of his days getting to know her.

"The only problem with this plan," his daughter explained, "is his other house. We don't want to rent it, sell it or pack it up. It's all too much of hassle and we don't need the money."

Kelly casually suggested, "You should give it to Laura, Jeff and Baby Mickey."

As soon as she said it she regretted it but Luke came to her aid and found a way to explain it that made it seem like the displaced family would be doing Mr. Hicksby a huge favor. Mr. Hicksby was immediately sold on the idea. He wouldn't hear of them refusing. Before the end of the day the matter was settled, the terms drawn up and the whole thing was sealed in blood. (Or at least, strawberry jelly donut filling.)

The pink van suddenly seemed very empty on the trip to the next town. Kelly and Luke were quiet, lost in their own thoughts, in the front seat. James was staring out the window when he said, "Hey, you know what I wanna do tomorrow?"

"No sweetie, what do you want to do?" Kelly replied.

"I want to sit in my room and play with my Legos."

Kelly thought for a moment and said, "Yeah. You know what? I'd really love to plant some tomatoes."

Luke laughed out loud, "I think that's a good sign for our adventure to be over. Let's go home and sleep in our own beds for a while before school starts."

When they got home James made a beeline next door to get the mail from the neighbors. For the entire trip he'd been sending home postcards to himself for his scrapbook and he was eager to look over all of the places he'd been. In with the pictures of women with beehive hairdos and children with faces slicked with colored sugar as he sorted the mail was a wedding invitation, a housewarming invitation and a thank you note. James could hardly wait to get back to the house and skipped down the sidewalk with Allenkey and Cinnabar trotting behind.

# The Ways of the World

SIR FRANCIS DASHWOOD

I am a tree. I know the ways of the world. Once—the first of my memories—I was a sprig. I had two tiny branches each with two tiny leaves and the sun dappled down on me. I think that, before I was a sprig, I was even smaller—a seed carried on the breeze—and that I sprouted where the breeze placed me. Around me swayed the stems of the rustling grasses: above them towered the mighty trees, stately rulers of our glade. Sometimes animals would trample through the neighborhood—cows and horses that would tear up and champ the grasses, and other creatures, on two hooves, that would crush all indiscriminately and then move on. By good fortune, the animals left me uninjured, and my first year was happy. My roots probed into the damp rich earth of the soft forest carpet below; my branches stretched upward to reach for the distant blueness of the sky, my leaves tracking the sunbeams as they danced through my glade. My slender stem strengthened although each slight breath of wind shook me till I was dizzy—I clung to the earth, which gave me life.

That first winter was chilling and frightening. All the trees became black and bare; dead, yellowed leaves floated down to shroud me in darkness; the icy blasts shriveled and killed my own leaves. My sap withdrew to my heart. I shivered in misery. Even the dandelion, whose leaves has touched me in the summer, and whose yellow blossoms had looked like baby suns, grew chilled and mournful. Alone and fearful, I shuddered—waiting to die. But I did not know the ways of the world.

Winter is merely the time before spring—just as night precedes the dawn. My first spring found me weak but alive. As the days warmed and the nights became less cold, the sap crept slowly upwards and my leaves returned. I was growing taller, too, my stem changing into a miniature trunk. My branches divided; new leaves were born. The grasses around me sprang to life. Fuzzy bumble bees buzzed overhead and ants foraged across the forest floor. The friendly dandelion put forth her glossy leaves, then her yellow blooms and, as the summer evenings lengthened, her great fluffy balls of seeds. If the blossoms had looked like suns, these looked like moons. Gusts of wind would pluck the seeds gently and waft them away, sailing off to new glades, new forests, perhaps.

The years passed and I had become a sapling—thin and gawky, all length and skinny branches. But my roots were digging deeper, my leaves more numerous, my life more secure. I could see more now—past the edge of the glade, through the tangle of shrubs, to where brown fields with ploughed grooves were exposed to the elements. A pathway ran through the glade, towards the fields. In the other direction were squat, square shapes called buildings, made of sawed-up trees that had been roughly nailed together. At my foot, the friendly dandelion had gone now, but her family remained, yellow dots scattered over the glade. The offspring of the grasses I remembered from the twig-time bent and swayed in the breeze as their parents had done. Now I had no fear of the cows and horses for they could not eat me, but the two-hoofed creatures—which are called humans—once twisted

off one of my branches. They used it to beat the cows away from the glade and then tossed my branch into the grass. All that summer I watched it dry and become more brittle. Slowly the branch broke up into fragments at last so tiny that they became indistinguishable from the mold on the forest floor. My wounded trunk oozed sap to seal the injury but raindrops from a summer shower found their way inside my bark—a painful rotted scar was left where the branch had been.

That winter a great wind-storm came and many of the other saplings who were less sturdy than I were dashed to the ground. Only one clung to life. In the spring-time of the next year, with some roots still under the earth, the survivor was able to put forth leaves. It was a hopeless fight—a late frost destroyed the sapling. By that time, the scar I had suffered had deepened into a hole although the rising sap prevented further damage. A mighty larch, a giant under whose arms I had been sheltered, was felled one night, pitching over as it was stabbed by a flashing bolt of lightning. In the morning it lay, inert and humbled, a great gash blasted into its side, its branches shattered, and its roots naked in the light of dawn. It was dead, this great, permanent, living tower. It was eerie to sense the space which the larch had once occupied. And my leaves nodded, and I thought I knew the ways of the world.

Days spiraled by, like the wheels on the wagons of the humans who came to collect wood. One day they sliced up the larch because its carcass impeded their pathway through the glade. With axes they hacked away the branches and tossed them into the thick bushes nearby. With a noisy saw they detached the trunk from the roots, then cut the trunk into logs to be loaded into the wagon and carried away. The stump and roots were left where they lay.

That evening the glade stank with the sweet scent of violence. The grasses had been trampled, the delicate flowers crushed, and the air was laden with the stench of sap. Fragments of sawdust drifted through the beams of sunlight that filtered through the lush canopy as the shadows lengthened and deepened. The fieldmice, the voles and rabbits, and the other creatures were wary of returning and the blackbird would not sing. The only sounds to pierce the silence were the mournful calls of distant peewits that swooped over the ploughed fields. Perhaps they knew what had been done.

Seasons spiraled by, and my trunk thickened and I was strong and steady. Almost as tall as the great trees I had once looked up at as a twig. I relished the exuberance of the spring, with its burgeoning hum of life; reclined in the long drowsy days of summer, savoring the abundance; rustled to shed my leaves in the goldenness of autumn, preparing to sleep; and reposed patiently throughout the winter, awaiting that tingling surge that presaged the new spring.

Small humans, called children, often came into the glade. On one low horizontal branch of mine they tied a rope and swung to and fro, squealing with delight. I rocked in unison with them, enjoying their pleasure, thrumming with delight. One soft, warm evening, two other humans came with a knife and carved a design into my bark. It was, I suppose, gently meant, and the scar was slight. I was pleased to have been chosen. In the bole caused by the loss of my branch a pair of finches had chosen to dwell and soon their clutch of eggs became rowdy, squabbling chicks. I accepted all of this happily—when you are tall there is much

less companionship. A nuthatch built a nest in the creepers that twined irritatingly around my trunk. The nuthatch sought out the shiny black beetles and other insects that bored into me and so was welcomed, but the creepers I despised for they pretended to be plants growing tall, but clung to others for both nourishment and physical support. They were loathsome but immovable tenants. And I sighed with the August winds and learned a little more of the ways of the world.

Many years passed. The children grew and their neglected rope-swing grayed and rotted. New lovers cut their initials into the smooth and soft parts of my bark. The lane broadened as the grass thinned under the passing feet. Burrowing down into the safety that lay between my roots a rabbit made his home, wooed and won a mate and raised a family. A gust of wind sheered off one of my topmost branches—one of the thickest—and moisture decayed the wood and formed a cavity. It was there that a green woodpecker built his lofty home—attracted by the security and the insects that lived in the dank darkness under my bark—while a dusky, silent owl had excavated a residence further down in the bole where the branch had been. I enjoyed some of these guests and tolerated all. Far down below the owl might see the field mice and voles as they dashed tremulously from the sanctuary of one clump of coarse grass to the next. And he could see the tiny sprigs thrusting eagerly upward, seeking the light—the light denied to them by me, now myself one of the elect of the forest. A stately giant, with my highest twigs touching out to the sky, my highest leaves almost brushing the clouds. But I was barely aware of the rustle and activity of the mice, or the rabbit in his burrow, so remote had I grown from such lowly things. Even the cows looked small and no more horses came, only a belching, smoky creature with huge circular legs, which clattered along the lane on its way to the field, wearing ruts into the earth where stale brown water would lie. In the summer the bees would drone through my tiny flowers: in the autumn the breeze would lift away my seeds, carrying them down to the floor of the glade or beyond. In my elevation, I felt sure that I knew the ways of the world, but I was filled with a curious dread.

The bole that had formed at the place where the branch had been torn off sometimes trapped some rainwater that was driven in by the breeze. Just a few drops, but enough to persuade the owl to desert his haven. The straw and twigs he had carried to his nest stayed damp, and the cavity gradually enlarged. Down and down the water would seep, deeper into the heart of my trunk, hollowing out a great rotteness. Above, the branches flourished their verdure; below, the roots were strong and firm; but between, a numbing weakness was bleeding me of vigor. From the retreat of autumn to the wet, dark winter days; from the iciness of winter to the surging joy of spring. But this time there was no surge of joy, only a leaden weariness as I balanced myself between the earth and the air. On the ground across the glade the outline of the great fallen larch could still be discerned, terminating at its dried and stubby stump—a stump under which a wandering badger had, just this spring, scooped out a temporary shelter; inside which a small band of wasps were now industriously forming their paper nest; in the roots of which a pair of robins had fashioned a cradle of fibers and grasses for their five precious eggs; around which the tiny sprigs mingled and played with the dandelions. As the sad insistent hand of the breeze pushed me for the last time, as my trunk began to crack instead

of to bend, and as my roots gave way under the strain—as I toppled to meet the sprigs in the soft mold of the forest floor—I truly knew that I knew the ways of the world and was content.

# Broken Spirits

JANICE RAYE STUART

Sad notes drew Nissa from her bed to the open window. The early spring breeze blew her dark hair from her face. Her thoughts mingled with the tinkling windchimes that hung from the awnings. She leaned over the sill, letting her breasts rest on the cool wood. The moonlit trees, still bare from winter, wavered in the breeze, drawing eerie patterns of shadow on the brown grass.

A loud snore from her husband interrupted her contemplations, and she glanced in the direction of her husband. Her fist closed with each intake of air. He should be sleeping, she thought to herself. He had insisted on having sex so he could relax. The half-hearted act only served to build tension until her lower back and thighs began to ache. Once again, she found herself wishing for her cycle to begin.

Turning back to the window, she stared at the large oak that dominated the back yard. As she studied the scarred trunk, something moved. Nissa's heart skipped a beat as she made out the shape of a woman standing there.

Nissa crouched to avoid the eyes of the uninvited stranger and wondered why the dog hadn't barked; then she saw him asleep beneath the picnic table.

The dark shadow stood, unmoving, and a creeping sensation made its way up Nissa's back as she sensed the stranger staring in her window. She swallowed. For some reason this strange woman was intent on her bedroom!

Nissa leaned into the sill again and pressed her face against the screen. The woman was clad only in a nightgown that rippled in the breeze. Nissa tried to see the woman's face, but made out only one detail--two large, shining eyes. A lump rose in her throat as she whispered, "Go away!"

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Nissa dropped the garbage bag into the metal trash can and slammed the lid with relish. Let him find his own supper, she pouted. He didn't even bother to call to say he was working late. In the past months, Robert seemed more interested in his test tubes and pigs than her or the kids.

Picking up the tail of her nightgown, Nissa ran back into the house and slammed the door. She paused to listen for the children who were in bed. Hearing nothing, she slunk to the family room and plopped on the sofa. She clicked on the television and began to channel cruise with the remote. After two rounds of sixty channels, she settled on a couple writhing naked on silken sheets.

Nissa hugged her knees as the man thrust himself at the woman. His partner's hair was spread over the pillow and sheets like a great web. Nissa studied the woman's hungry look and wondered if she were a black widow in human form. A wicked smiled crooked Nissa's lips as she watched with more interest. Finally the man shuddered in ecstasy, and the woman let her hands fall along his back. Her head lolled to one side, and two great silver eyes stared into the camera. Mashing the power button, Nissa tried to turn the set off, but the television continued to play. When she rose to turn the power off at the source, she began to tingle as the two silver eyes followed her across the room.

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His hand reached under the covers to lie on her knee, then he began massaging her skin slowly. Robert's touch drew a tingling along her leg until it settled between her thighs. Her breathing quickened in response, snapping her awake. "Stop," she whispered. "I'm tired."

He bent close and kissed her on the throat. "I'm sorry about dinner."

"Hope it was worth it," she mumbled.

"The boss told me we had to have the results," he said, kissing her again. His hand moved along her thigh. She turned abruptly and glared at him. "What?" he asked like a child answering his teacher's scornful look.

"I said don't."

Robert blew out a breath and moved his hand away. "I'm just stressed. I need you. I need to know you care."

"I don't feel like it. All right?" Nissa rolled away and closed her eyes, hoping he'd get the message. He didn't move for a moment, then he turned over roughly, shaking the whole bed. In a few short moments, he began to snore. Nissa listened for a while, then sat up in anger. She put on her slippers and went to the bedroom door. Without saying anything, she grabbed her coat and left the room.

Nissa glanced in the rearview mirror as she pulled out of the driveway. Her day's mascara had left dark rings under her eyes, and her hair fell in messy curls about her shoulders. She turned the car down the street and rolled silently down the pavement, wondering why she was doing this again, driving the streets like a lost tourist. The image of Robert moving over her reminded her, so she revved the engine once and drove out of the neighborhood.

After circling the deserted downtown, Nissa directed the car south to a shopping center where a video store kept late hours. She parked sloppily and emerged from the car, still buttoning her London fog. Inside a few red-eyed insomniacs wandered through rows of video tapes, stopping to examine one or two along the way. The sight of a man wearing pajama bottoms made Nissa less self-conscious of her gown and slippers. She moved through the drama section until she found herself facing a row of horror flicks. Scanning covers filled with axes, blood and the slashed bodies of women, Nissa poked her lips out to blow a raspberry when a sudden movement down the aisle drew her attention. Looking up slowly, to avoid notice, Nissa took in the long flowing hair and lithe body of a woman dressed in a black leather coat. Bare, muddy feet jutted from the hem of her white skirts. As Nissa studied her more closely, the woman looked up and flashed silver, cat-like eyes.

A shiver ran up Nissa's back, as she turned away. The eyes of the actors on the boxes followed her as she fled to the back of the store. Nissa whirled about and saw no one behind her--the woman who had glanced up at her with silver eyes had vanished.

Nissa pressed the gas pedal into the floor, enjoying the rush of air into the car. It felt good--no wonderful--she smiled to herself. No man, no kids, no worries. She wondered how far she could go with the cash in her purse and her credit cards before she'd have to return home--if she did at all. She thought about the time she

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had spent at the beach along the Outer Banks. She had enjoyed walking the sand with the cold Atlantic washing over her bare feet. Taking a deep breath, Nissa imagined she could smell the ocean. Two hours, that was all it would take.

The road rolled under her, rushing towards the car in an endless blur. The countryside was gray in the moonlight, the silhouettes of houses and trees etched along the horizon. There were no other cars, no streetlights. She savored the isolation of the open road, but as the satisfaction began to fill her inside, her headlights flashed across a figure on the shoulder --a thin woman in long white skirts, walking backwards. Her eyes reflected silver in the light. Nissa pushed harder on the gas as she passed the recurring nightmare.

A few seconds later she glanced down at the speedometer, sixty and rising. Nissa looked up at the impending curve and eased off the gas. She moved the car into the wide sweep, enjoying the swaying movement as she cut the wheels. Her headlights flashed into the darkness until they lit up a white form ahead. Nissa's heart beat faster as she recognized the hitchhiker. Without thinking, she slammed on her brakes and slid past the figure. As she stopped, Nissa laid her head against the wheel, stifling the scream in her throat. She gripped the steering wheel until her fingers turned white.

The night voices of crickets and frogs arose, then went silent. "Are you all right?" a sweet voice asked.

With her head still against the wheel, Nissa nodded. "Yeah, fine," she whispered.

"Are you sure? You looked frightened back there."

Nissa lifted her head and turned to face the speaker. Two large eyes stared at her, wide with concern. The woman's features were fine like a Venetian statue. Her tiny lips trembled slightly as she studied Nissa.

Nissa felt the tension flow out of her. "I'm fine."

"Good." The woman straightened up as if to walk away.

"Wait!" Nissa felt compelled to call.

The woman stopped and turned. "Yes?"

"Do you need a ride or something?"

The stranger cocked her head slightly, her long hair falling over the shoulders of her leather jacket. "Yes, I need a ride."

Nissa took a deep breath. "Get in."

Nissa pulled away, glancing over at her rider. "Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Where's that?"

The woman lifted her pale hand and pointed towards the road. "Just a few miles further. I live off Harper Road."

"All right. I'm not in any rush." Nissa studied the yellow line rushing at them. Her passenger rode in silence staring out the window. Nissa glanced at her several times, wondering why the woman had been out after dark and why in the world she had picked her up. "It's rather late to be hitchhiking. There aren't many cars on the road."

"I knew someone would come," she answered softly. "Someone always does." She continued to stare out the window. "Why were you out? Doesn't your family worry about you?"

Nissa swallowed. "No, they're asleep."

"And your husband?"

Taking a deep breath, Nissa tightened her grip on the cold wheel. Her wedding ring felt icy with the question. "He's asleep too."

"Ah," the woman breathed.

"What's your name?" Nissa blurted.

"Celaeno," the woman said with a trace of an Italian accent.

"I'm Nissa."

"Nissa, that is a Greek name."

"Celaeno is unusual. Is it Italian?"

"Yes, an ancient name where I come from." She pointed at the road sign up ahead. "There's my road."

Nissa slowed the car and took a left turn onto the road. A yellow warning sign marked the dirt road. They bumped along the pot-holed road, that seemed to go nowhere. There were no houses to be seen, just a grove of trees at the end of a wide-open field. "Where's your house?" Nissa asked in a trembling voice.

"Ahead, just a bit further."

"I can't see it."

"It's there, just on the right."

Nissa turned at a break in the tall grass. The driveway was worse than the road, lined with five-foot-high grass on either side. After a half mile or so, Nissa stopped at the edge of a dark cul-de-sac. "Here you go."

"Thank you, Nissa. Would you like to come in for some tea?" She caught Nissa's eyes and held them.

"I..." Nissa hesitated, thinking about the offer. It would give her a chance to get to know Celaeno, who had become a spectre in her mind. "All right."

Turning off the car, Nissa got out to follow Celaeno to the porch of a house that had seemed to appear out of the darkness.

The structure was old, a single-story white frame with peeling paint. The porch floor creaked as they walked to the door. As Celaeno reached for the knob, the door swung open, and an older woman stood at the threshold.

"You've brought company," she greeted Celaeno.

"This is Nissa," Celaeno announced.

"Nissa. I am Aello." She stepped away from the door and let them pass.

The room was dimly lit with kerosene lamps, the walls covered in yellowing flowered wallpaper. A fire burned in the hearth, and Nissa was offered a seat on the oversized sofa in front of it. Nissa pushed aside a cat and a pile of newspapers to make a place. Aello dumped some tea leaves into a tea ball and set it inside a cup she had taken from the mantle. The old woman, whose hair was wrapped in a loose bun, bent slowly over an iron pot that set next to the flames. Her long dress was dirty around the edges. Her wrinkled hands lifted the pot and poured hot water into the cup. When she turned, her large eyes shone in the dim lights, much like Celaeno's.

"Thank you," Nissa said as she took the cup.

Aello took a second cup and dumped out a slick liquid before pouring some water into the dark ceramic. "You have taken up Cela's habit of late-night prowling. Are you not worried about your family or they about you?"

Nissa sipped at the bitter tea, then shook her head. "They're fine. I don't think they ever know when I'm gone."

"Surely," the old woman grunted.

"I guess it's hard to understand, but I'm always looking for time alone. It's hard to find when you have small children."

"How young are they?"

"Three and five."

"Boys?"

"A boy and girl." Nissa took a long drink of the tea, relishing the warmth that flowed down her throat. She couldn't remember having enjoyed tea like this before. "Are you Celaeno's mother?"

The old woman cracked a loud laugh. "No, we are sisters."

"Oh," Nissa said. She stared at the grounds in the bottom of the cup. They seemed to shine against the white porcelain. "Have you lived here long?"

"For a few years," Celaeno answered. "We've lived in many towns, several countries over the years."

Nissa studied Celaeno's young face. "You don't look that old."

"I'm a lot older than you think," Celaeno smiled. "Where were you going tonight?"

"Nowhere." Nissa shrugged. "Anywhere."

"Running away from your family?"

"No. No." Nissa whispered. "Just some air. I need space now and then."

"Your husband grants you no freedom?" Aello asked.

"I can do what I want."

"Then why do you flee? Is his love not satisfying?" Celaeno continued.

Nissa shifted uncomfortably on the torn cushion. The tone was accusatory, but she felt no need to justify. It was her life, and none of their damned business. "I need to go," she announced as she pushed herself up. The sudden motion started her head swimming, forcing her to sit again. She closed her eyes against the spinning room. Her stomach threatened to heave. She put her hand to her mouth and felt herself falling away.

Something cold and clammy ran over her forehead. Nissa slapped at it. "Stop," she managed in a croaking voice. She cracked her eyes to see who was adding the sick feeling that crept through her. The room was nearly dark save for a thin line of light that fought its way through a shuttered window.

"It is all right, sister," Aello's voice barked.

"What happened?" Nissa asked, trying to push herself up on the bed. The effort made her grimace.

"Lie still. You need rest."

"I need to go home," Nissa coughed. Her voice sounded like it had grown old, several octaves lower than it should be.

“Not now. Besides the sun’s up.”

“I can see that,” Nissa snapped. Her shoulder blades itched, and she reached back to scratch herself. She had been stripped of her clothes, so she imagined it must have been the rough blanket that irritated her. As she touched her bare shoulder, she winced as her nails scraped painfully against her skin. Nissa moaned once and pulled her hand away. Staring at the long jagged nails she nearly choked. “What’s going on?” She persisted, forcing herself to sit up. The effort was taxing, but she managed, though her legs protested. “Aello, I need my clothes. I’m going.”

“You cannot. Not until dark.” Aello answered from the shadows.

Nissa strained to see the old woman. “Why, pray tell?”

The floor creaked as Aello moved closer to the bed. Nissa gasped at what she saw. The old woman was naked, her torso wrinkled with flat breasts. But it was the dark, leathery wings that spread behind her and the bird-like legs and three-toed feet that were the most shocking. Aello’s silver eyes shone brightly in the darkness. “We cannot go into the light. Would you face the world of humans as you are?”

“Humans?” Nissa echoed. “I...” she stopped and began to scratch her back again. This time her fingers struck something hard on her shoulder blades. Slowly Nissa fingered the protrusion. A sob caught in her throat. She pulled the covers from her waist and stared through tears at the scaly legs of a bird.

The cold night air blew through her long curls and thin nightgown, but she stood watching the house from the backyard, clinging to the trunk of the oak for protection. Someone sat at the window, taking in the breeze and studying the greening yard and trees. A crack of thunder announced a coming storm, the threat of lightning and of being seen. Nissa moved behind the tree.

A second figure bent over the first and whispered. A light giggle rose from the sitting form, the laugh of a woman. Nissa swallowed hard as Robert kissed the woman. “Come to bed, Cela. I need you.”

“In a minute, love,” she answered softly. He stepped away and she turned back to the window. Her eyes pierced the night and came to rest on Nissa. “Are you waiting?”

“Yes, Cela. I need you now,” Robert called from the bed.

“Coming,” she smiled.

Nissa leaned against the tree as a flood of tears flowed from her large, silver eyes. He would never need her again. No man would. She turned her head and listened for other women who waited in the late night hours. Perhaps she would find another broken spirit, then she could be human again. Lifting her arms, she unfolded hidden wings and rose to the sky.

# An Eclipse of the Moon

JANICE RAYE STUART

"NAME?" the computer asked.

"Neci O'Sullivan," she whispered deliberately.

"YOU ARE EXPECTED." A camera scanned the length of her body. "REMOVE TASER AND PLACE IN SAFETY BOX." The electronic voice commanded as a drawer extended from the panel next to the door. The well-shaped muscular woman reluctantly pulled her weapon from her belt and set it slowly into the metal container. Neci watched the camera survey her action. Some security systems could stun if cooperation wasn't given. She just hoped it didn't register any bio-enhanced weapons. As she straightened up, she smoothed her short, but loose, red hair.

"ACCESS GRANTED," the wall announced as the door slid open.

A three meter Tauno met Neci at the entry, nodding his head in a solemn greeting. She followed him down the hallway, a long, rounded tube with paintings set into the pink clay wall. She rubbed her nose with the increasing antiseptic smell. As they walked, Neci stared at his scarred head. The Tauno were well-known for their freckled bald heads. Though humanoid, they lived for at least two millennia, the number of freckles an indicator of their age. This one was covered in the spots, but the scars had taken some of the markings out.

They approached a dragon-shaped, orange Odissan female cleaning a large painting in the hall. The alien stopped moving as they walked by, her large white eyes catching Neci's as they passed. The pain Neci read made her wonder how long ago the alien had lost its tail.

Neci pushed up the tight sleeves of her bodysuit as an uneasy knot formed in her stomach. This wasn't the streets of Detroit, where she'd grown up, but it was already fraying her nerves as much as the violent gangs that roamed that ancient city. At the end of the hall, the Tauno pushed the door aside and indicated she enter. Slipping in sideways, Neci stepped onto a plush, but old, tapestry rug that ran the length of the spherical-shaped room until it met the gated, oval desk on the other side. A window had been set into the wall running from floor to ceiling then over the top of the room. The blue-green sky of the icy planet shone brightly into the pink room. Neci wondered just how much this man really had to own a glass window able to withstand Clannard's abrupt changes of season. A single s-shaped chair was set in front of the desk and a dark hand pointed at it.

"Have a seat, Mistress O'Sullivan."

Neci walked with a brisk gait to the chair and sat down. She crossed her legs and fingered her thigh-high boots. "No one's called me Mistress in ten years."

"Oh?" the man asked as he swivelled around to face her.

Neci stared. The humanoid man's face was ashen gray. His hair appeared as if it had been dyed black too many times, leaving it stiff and wiry. His bulbous nose was a mismatch for his tiny, thin lips. His forehead was covered with Tauno freckles. She caught his pink eyes and glared. "What makes you call me mistress, Herr Schweger?"

“Old world courtesy,” he said, rolling his ‘r’ with a German accent. “I have read your qualifications disk. It seems impossible for such a young woman to have done so much.”

“I’m nearly thirty. I started young.”

Schweger looked at the screen embedded in the quartz-topped desk. “The information’s a bit dated. When were you recertified as a licensed starpilot?”

“Inservice training on a starliner.”

The old man tapped a few keys embedded in his desk. “Have you received your license as a first contact ambassador?”

“No,” Neci whispered quietly.

“Can you tell me why you disappeared from Old Earth more than twelve years ago?”

“Is there a point?” Neci asked. She glanced over at the quiet alien waiting for further orders. “Or are you just interested in dark secrets?”

“I’m reviewing your stats for strength.”

“What about yours?” Neci leaned back. “Why would a multi-billionaire, in galaxy gold trade be a silent co-owner of two mining colonies? As a founder of Medicorp what would interest you in mining? None of the ten colonies Medicorp established have done anything but bio-research.

“Your research is excellent. Few know my mining interests.”

“Should they?” Neci smiled. “So what’s the job you have in mind?”

“I need a courier.”

“I’m not an errand girl.”

Schweger smirked. “Granted, but this is a special pick up.”

“I don’t deal in alien kidnapping.” Neci snapped her leg down as if to rise.

“I don’t need a criminal.” Schweger slid a data cube across his desk. “I need someone willing to carry the bio-research.”

Neci picked up the thumb-sized cube up and studied. “Smuggling on- planet?”

“Not on. *Off*.” He studied her eyes. “That cube is the information on the bio-techwear you’ll be handling in order to take DNA samples.”

“Techwear for whom?”

“I’m only hiring you, so the tech will be fitted to your body.”

Neci took a deep breath. “Most of the tech I’ve seen is risky. Failure can drain the wearer, dump the cargo or even contaminate a ship. I don’t like any of those scenarios.”

“This is a DNA sampling not a virus or organism.”

“Who’ll be packing the sample in the gear?”

“You’ll meet your contact once you’ve landed. You’ll have to stay for one lunar cycle in order to get an accurate sample.”

“I’ve never heard of satellite orbits affecting DNA.”

“It’s just the launch window. The planet’s atmosphere is thick and radiant.”

Neci twisted her lips as she fingered the cube. “I don’t know. I’ll need some time to calculate risk versus payoff.”

“I’m sure you’ll find the pay very profitable.” He typed in a figure on the embedded pad on the desk. A number floated into a hologram above the top. Neci studied the large number. As calm as she was externally, she wondered if Schweger could read her heightened heartbeat from some sensor she could not see. She glanced through the

hologram toward her employer and tried to see the hidden truth. His pink eyes were tinged with the green of a Aldebaron sea-wolf, the oldest known ocean-spawned life. For a split second, she thought she could see the shadow of an Odissan tail quiver behind Schweger's chair. That would explain the tail-less female she had glimpsed in the doorway along the corridor.

Had he found some new way to cheat death? She leaned forward and set the cube on his desk. "I'll need a data disk that will play on my ship's computer. I don't have jack capability."

"I'll have the information transmitted immediately. You'll need to report to the med-techs in my personal hospital at 0500 hours."

"What about my contact?"

"The contact will meet you onworld once you've landed."

"What world?"

Schweger turned in his chair and spoke towards the window. "Lupinos in delta sector."

Neci flicked the cube across the desk. "Bloody great."

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Wind howled outside the geo-dome complex, and the dimly lit bar was aswirl with dust and smoke. The colony had been on the planet for two centuries, but it was obvious no one was interested in building anything sturdier than the original settlement of domes. Neci traced her name in the dust on the aluminum table and stared at the bit of dust in her corn whiskey, brewed by the colonists. She slugged down the shot and coughed with its bitterness.

The room whistled as someone opened the outer airlock. The inner door slid open and a tall figure wearing a concealing cloak strode in. She watched the booted, cloaked humanoid walk across the floor directly to the bar and spoke to the keep. The dusty-covered hood was flicked off and the man underneath turned toward Neci's table and moved with resolution. Neci stared without hesitation at the weathered face and blonde mane that appeared to flow about his face as he walked. His eyes were dark pits with a bare amount of white showing around the edges.

He stopped at her table and nodded once before sitting on the vacant chair. "I am Darrek. I am your contact here." His voice was deep, almost growling with his words.

"Neci O'Sullivan," she replied softly.

The barkeep carried a large mug of beer to the table and set it front of Darrek, who only cast a sidelong glance to dismiss him. "Have you gotten your quarters yet?"

"I rented a room in the community building."

"Do you have the keys?"

Neci stared. "Yes."

"Give one to me," He held out his hand.

"Why?"

"If you wish to leave, I must have the key."

Neci blew out a long breath and reached inside her jacket and pulled out one of the large card keys. She noticed Darrek's stare as she passed card across the table. Her long sleeve had slipped above her wrist, exposing the techwear around her wrist. "Med-technology. I carry the samples in the gear."

"I wasn't told," he said, bringing the mug to his lips. He took several long draughts then set the mug down loudly.

"Is it important?"

Darrek licked his lower lip, then shook his head. "I don't know. There aren't many who've gone off planet after staying during the last moonrise."

"What does that mean?"

Darrek smiled. "You'll see."

"When's moonrise?"

"Five days." He held up his hand and slowly curled down one finger at a time.

Neci studied the sharp nails as they buried themselves in his thick palm. He stood up and walked away leaving her alone with the dust-covered table.

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The domes had been sparse of people in the public areas, then on the morning of the fifth day, the commons came alive with people meeting, moving about, and trading sundry goods. Neci stepped into the sunlit dome and stretched. After two days of boredom, she had given herself a large sedative and slept for two days. Despite the long nap, she felt tired, especially after several unending nightmares in which Darrek chased her through rocky forest. The last time he had caught her, and she woke tangled in silken sheets, very much aroused.

Neci strolled through the commons aware of staring eyes. The looks were short-lived with the colonists quickly returning to their business. Most were buying and selling meats, fresh-killed by the looks of the carcasses. Neci shuddered a bit, having been a vegetarian most of her adult life. There were too many sentient lifeforms in the galaxy to take a chance on eating anything that was animal. Once the trading was done, the colonists left the area quickly, toting the meat slung over his or her shoulder.

Neci moved past the impromptu marketplace until she found a green area nearby. A group of children were playing happily amidst the flowers and shrubbery. It appeared to be a game of chase and tag, but the losers were not only tagged but thrown to the ground and set upon by the others. The victors would howl in joy, slapping their fallen prey. Then all the fallen would rise and gallop about hunting in turn.

Neci watched until a small toddler tugged on her jacket and held up a small a small furry pet. She stared into the dark wide eyes of the child as he showed her the rodent and shuddered at the hunter look that studied her. Then she gasped as she noticed the blood that ran from the pet's nose and ears. Backing away, she turned and made her way back to her locked room.

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The room felt like a cage, and Neci paced nervously back and forth glancing at the clock in the wall that counted down to moonrise. Her heart began to beat fast as the time clicked to an hour.

After a few more minutes, she picked up her jacket and went to the door. As she touched the lock and pulled it open, she stepped into the tall thick form of Lupinos. "Damn it, Darrek!" she shouted as she backed away.

"Where are you going?" he asked as moved inside.

"Out. I need a change of space."

"Not this close to moonrise. Everyone's inside." Darrek closed the door and slid the card into the lock. He held out his hand. "Give me your card."

“Why?” Neci clenched her card between her thumb and index finger.

“You will not need it.”

“I’d rather hang on to it.”

“Give it to me,” Darrek spoke slowly.

Neci glanced at her card then at him. After a moment, she held the card out.

Darrek snatched it from her fingers and snapped the two cards in half then half again, dropping the pieces on the floor.

“Why the hell did you do that?” Neci asked.

“All the doors open in the morning.”

“All right. So you’re spending the night?”

“Yes.” Darrek peeled off his cloak and laid it on the bed. “It’s a very special night to share with a newcomer.”

“How so?”

“There’s a change to come. One you’ll never imagine having lived without.”

“You’re talking in riddles. Explain what you mean.”

Darrek reached out and grasped Neci’s arm. He pulled the sleeve up and touched the flickering techwear on her arm. “Schweger didn’t tell you what this is for, did he?”

“I’m to receive a DNA sample.”

Darrek shook his head. “Not quite true. The tech will record the DNA in your system.”

“If that’s what he wanted, he could have gotten that on Clannard.” “You know better than that. Our world is one of change. The colonists learned that too late after the very first moonrise. We didn’t realize it was a life sentence we received when we came here.”

“What do you mean? You talk as if *you* were one of the original colonists.”

“I am.”

“Except for the few immigrants, everyone who survived the first moonrise have continued here.”

“Two hundred years?”

“Two hundred and fifteen.” Darrek whispered as he stepped closer to her. Neci remained in place as he reached out and slipped his hands around her waist. He pulled her to him and bent down to kiss her.

“What’s going to happen?” she asked as he brushed her lips.

“Something exciting,” he smiled.

Neci clenched his silken sleeves as his canines seem to lengthen. “What happened to you?”

Darrek shook his head, flicking his long hair about his shoulders. Then he eyed her for a split second before sliding his tongue along the side of her face. “The one hidden part of me was freed.” He straightened up and let Neci stand on her own.

“Well, I don’t need anything freed,” Neci snapped as she straightened her bodysuit. She tugged on her sleeve and discovered several long gashes. Without any reaction, she glanced at Darrek’s hands, at the long dark claws he had suddenly grown. “Am I to be your prey?”

“No. For whatever reason, there has been no hunting among our own kind.”

“Our kind?”

Darrek smiled monstrosly. “There is no turning back once moonrise has begun.”

Neci looked at the clock. "How do you know it's begun?"

Reaching to the nearest control panel, Darrek hit a switch. The room trembled slightly as the ceiling began to unfurl. Neci stared up at the top of a second moon rose above a full view of the first. "An eclipse of the first draws us out."

Boldly Neci stared up at the spectacle. She began to back toward the closet behind her. As she wrapped her fingers around the taser, Darrek raised his arms and howled.

Neci pulled her taser free and aimed it at the shifting form of Darrek. "I'm afraid it's not something I feel the need to do."

Darrek's lips drew back to show a mouthful of sharp fangs. "You will."

"Not likely," she said as she pulled the trigger. As the huge creature fell into the floor, Neci blew out a long breath. It was good the legends weren't true. She stooped down next to the lupine figure and unclipped the techwear on her wrist. After a few adjustments she fastened the device around Darrek's hairy wrist.

She sat back against the wall and waited for the device to record his DNA. For a long while she stared at the reemerging moon and wondered how an entire planet gone mad could survive. She took a deep breathe and inhaled the scent of dead man in front of her. It wasn't anything human.

She closed her eyes and prayed morning would come quickly.

The shuttered ceiling slid closed loudly, jarring Neci awake. She studied the now human form in front of her. The techwear registered its job as complete, so she removed the device and clamped around her own wrist for safe keeping.

Picking up her bag she took once last look at Darrek before she stepped into the hallway. Neci slid the door closed and walked quickly toward the exit.

Outside she nearly tripped on the sheep's carcass someone had left the night before. Her stomach lurched, but Neci continued to walk calmly toward the landing pads nearby. She felt more comfortable as she saw her small ship waiting for her. Its automatic systems were already warming up for the take off. Using her exit visa, she carded the auto-release and climbed on board as the launch pad disengaged its locks.

As she settled inside the small cockpit, she turned on her comlinks to monitor any suspicious calls. Everything was quiet, as if the entire world slept off a bad night of drinking. She did a final check and strapped herself in.

She sent the prerecorded message to disembark and waited for permission. The thirty-second gap seemed to go on forever, when a face appeared on the screen. Neci stared, trying to control her emotions.

Darrek brushed back his disheveled hair. "Good morning, Neci. How are you feeling?"

"Strange question for a dead man."

Darrek shook his head. "Didn't do your homework. We're allergic to silver."

"No shit." She reached for the com-end when Darrek cleared his throat.

"Have a good trip. We'll see you in two cycles."

Neci hesitated. "What do you mean?"

"You'll have to come back. There's one drawback to living forever. Lupinos makes it impossible to stay away. Your body's going to need to come back for the next eclipse."

"Why the hell would I?" She held her wrist up. "I recorded your DNA."

Darrek smiled. "It doesn't work that way. It takes two full cycles before you'll feel the change. The mutation is a slow process."

“You’re crazy. I haven’t felt anything.”

“Scan your DNA. You’ll see what I mean.” Darrek touched his forehead in a gesture of farewell. “I’ll see you in a few weeks. Maybe we could have a litter.” He smiled, a hint of canines still showing.

“Fat chance.”

“Take care.” Darrek signed off.

Neci held up her arm and stared at the techwear. It was in there, but it wasn’t hers.

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The Tauno seemed slower and older as he led her down the long hall. The Odissan female ducked behind a tapestry that led to some unknown door. Neci felt the hair on her arms bristle with nervousness. It was not a feeling she was used to. Perhaps it was the two months she’d spent limping through space from Lupinos. She’d slept most of the time, so planetfall had her system out of sync. Neci rubbed her sweaty palms on her bodysuit.

Schweger’s office seemed darker than before, but she could make out all the details including the look on his face. He looked older, more than he had months before. Neci avoided the chair and stood in front of the desk.

“Do you have the gear?”

Neci held the techwear out. “I gathered the data directly from one of the locals.”

Schweger’s eyebrows rose. “How did you manage that?”

“It doesn’t matter.” She set the piece on the desk and slid it gently across. “Why didn’t you tell me about the effects of the planet?”

Fingering the device, Schweger shook his head. “Why? You’re a clone. Clones don’t react to DNA alterations.”

Neci winced. “How do you know I’m the clone? No one’s kept up with my sister or me for years. Hell, half, the time, I don’t know who’s the original.”

Schweger stared at her. “Are you?”

Neci winced again and slammed her fist on the desk. “There is no difference.” She looked up at the glass window and the twin moons rising beyond the mountains. “There’s an eclipse tonight.”

Her employer glanced at the window. “I guess so.” He reached over and grasped the techwear. Gingerly he took the device and snapped it on his wrist. Neci could hear it activate, and from the pained look on Schweger’s face, it was making some kind of effect on him.

“Shit,” Neci blurted as she reached for her undetected taser. Schweger’s face began to shift and sprout hair, much like Darrek’s had. Suddenly the old man looked very powerful. Neci stepped back, keeping her taser aimed at the monster’s head.

Schweger stood up and stretched his transformed arms out. They were covered in thick hair and ended with massive claws. His pleasure showed in the mouth filled with fangs. “How do you like my new DNA?” he growled.

“Just lovely,” Neci said as she pulled her trigger. Schweger appeared surprised as his chest exploded from the silver-charged particle beam. He fell over his desk with an unceremonious thud.

The door slid open and the large Tauno stepped inside with a laser rifle. He brushed past Neci and checked his dead master. He turned toward her and pointed at the door with his weapon. “Gooo,” he growled.

Neci backed out and began to walk swiftly down the hallway. At the door panel, she slid her palm over the sensor plate. The computer whistled and the door slid open. As she stepped into the partial moonlight, Neci winced, and her taser slipped from her clawed fingers. "Great," she growled at she staggered along the pathway.

# Darkly Bright World

JANICE RAYE STUART

The afternoon light was gray with the cloudy sky. A fine mist hung in the air as if trying to wrap every tree, every house, every living thing that moved outside. Maggie walked quickly along the sidewalk, pulling on the tattered sweater she had thrown over herself before going out. Now it didn't seem important to keep the creeping cold off. It was just important to get home, to get out of the overwhelming gray that folded itself over the neighborhood. The clouds were moving quickly, threatening to clear the sky before sunset.

The familiar blast of a klaxon signaled the end of the exercise period at the prison that was situated behind the row of old narrow houses. The smell of mildew rose sharply from the moss that grew in the tiny spaces in between the wood-frame structures. The front yards were filled with dead leaves that blew freely from one house to the next, pressing themselves finally against the short rock wall that lined the sidewalk in front.

Maggie pulled her sweater more tightly and moved at a faster pace down the broken sidewalk. She glanced around nervously at the houses, trying to see if any of neighbors were out—or worse if any of the local vagrants were wandering about. The neighborhood lay between the prison and the state mental hospital, but now the odd street person would cross through the neighborhood from the railroad track bridge where he slept and the downtown soup kitchen. Sometimes they would lose their way or get too drunk en route, so they would end up seeking haven in between the old houses. But it was the place she lived, even though she'd had little choice in the matter.

Finally she saw the familiar pale green of her own house. His chest lightened in anticipation as she neared the walkway to her porch. Just as she reached the break in the wall, one of her neighbors came out of the mist and greeted her at the edge of her yard.

She didn't really know Rodney, even though he would stop and talk to her every time she came home. He was just a recognizable face, one that said home was only a few steps away. Maggie slowed her pace as he smiled, his round face drawing to a lighter brown with his white-toothed grin.

"Not a great day to be out," he sounded as she continued to walk. His eyes widened, making his large brown pupils appear to bulge. His dreadlocks were damp with falling mist.

Maggie smiled weakly and moved a bit faster as she reached the end of his part of the wall and the beginning of hers. She stepped over the low wall and crunched through the leaves toward her porch. The steps creaked as she walked up. She sidestepped the one floorboard that gave when trod upon. Pulling her key out, she fumbled with the lock a moment before pushing the door open.

Once inside she shoved the door closed and leaned against it, breathing deeply. The house smelled of smoke and fresh herbs she had put out before leaving. The hallway was dark, but it was comforting. She felt the cold wood through her sweater and shivered as it pierced her skin.

As her eyes adjusted she could make out the long corridor that stretched to the back of the house. The empty foyer was big enough to be a room itself, save for the uneven

stairway that rose into a narrow opening for the second floor. A bit of light struck the top step, a ray of hope.

She listened for any sound, but heard nothing. There was no wind outside, and no one lived in the huge house with her. She began to move toward the steps, but stopped as a breeze stirred the hair at the back of her neck. She rubbed at the edge of her short hair. Her back itched as goosebumps rose along her spine. Grasping the railing of the staircase, she turned on one heel and steeled herself to face the source.

"I called your name, but you didn't answer," the man spoke softly from the shadows. The door had not opened. Maggie realized that he must have been standing there all along.

"I didn't hear you," she whispered.

"I told you I would come for you."

"But it's been two years. I waited, but you never came."

"You didn't seem to be in any hurry to answer my calls."

Maggie looked down at the floor. "I haven't felt well. This house makes you feel old and sickly."

"You look wonderful for someone who's been shut in for so long."

The pale woman touched her face with her right hand. "I get out sometimes."

"When?" he sounded surprised.

"In the afternoons. When it's cool outside."

"Like today?"

Maggie nodded. She wrapped her arms around herself. "I like to walk and look at the neighborhood."

"Do you see your neighbors often?"

Swallowing, she answered softly, "Sometimes."

"Haven't you been lonely?" He took a step towards her.

"No, I like my house."

"But you're all alone." He took another step.

"I like being alone."

"So you haven't missed my touch."

Maggie wrapped her fingers around the side of her throat. "Your kisses."

His hand slipped out of the shadows tempting her to take it. She stared at it a moment. She remembered its smoothness, the tingling it brought with its touch.

"I don't think it can ever be the same," she said. Her words calmed the feeling that rose with his offer. "I've changed."

"I told you the change would happen."

"It's not the change you said would happen." She put her foot on the lowest step. "I waited, but you didn't come."

"I couldn't."

"Couldn't?" She asked with doubt. Maggie shook her head and took another step upward. "I thought you could do anything. You said you could. You said I would be able to do anything when I changed."

"And you can." His fingers stretched out as if to grasp her.

Instinctively she pulled her skirts against her. "I got tired of waiting. I had to stop hoping you would come."

"I'm here now." His voice rose a bit. "Just come with me."

Maggie backed up, three, four, five steps. She glanced back. Five more and she would be at the top. There was her hope despite what he offered. "You don't need me. I know that now. And I don't need you."

"Didn't I make you feel special? Loved?"

Was it love? She took another step. He had left his seed inside of her. Made every fiber of her being tingle with life. But he had taken her life as well. He had been made alive through her sacrifice. Now she was empty. Another step. She wavered as her foot reached up again.

"Wait, Maggie. I offer my life to you. This time you will be able to share in my life."

"Life?"

His hand disappeared into the shadow, and reemerged with a rivulet of red running down his wrist. "I offer my life."

Her eyes fixed on his lifeblood. It had always tasted sweet, but he had taken it away and left her for more than two years. "It's too late now." She eased back another step. Two more.

"I love you, Maggie."

"Do you?" she whispered.

"You can sense it. You know I'm telling the truth."

Maggie wrapped her arms around herself. "I know." She took another step, and this time he gasped loudly. The warmth was at her back from the light that flooded the upper floor. It had been a long time since she had visited the top of the stairs. "Are you afraid for me?" she asked.

"Yes. Please come with me now." He took a step forward, and she could see his pale, beautiful skin. His coal black eyes had tiny sparks in them. She could nearly see her soul swimming frantically in them.

"I can't go with you. I waited too long. I've taken too much blood to take any more." She turned to stare into the bright hallway above. She smelled the sweet decay of the homeless she had invited in. The light hurt her eyes, but she could make out the shape of the thin woman whose throat she had torn out the night before. She smiled as she remembered the bitter taste. This woman had already been dying. The virus had tainted the sweetness of her life.

"Maggie!" he called from below.

She remembered his touches. The kisses that set her veins on fire. She remembered the ecstasy that rose with the rhythm of their lovemaking. Maggie turned back to her lover. This time she held out her hand. "Come with me."

He took a step backwards. "I...I...can't." he finally managed.

"The light is so beautiful." She smiled.

"Please, don't." he spoke more loudly.

"I have to," she said as she took the last step. She tingled nearly as much as she had when he touched her. Her veins burned, and she watched her lifeblood fill her eyes. All the world was bright. All the world was red.

# Connubial Rites

JANICE RAYE STUART

Adele closed the book with a loud slam and laid back on the sofa. The upside down clock above her reminded her how late it was. Once again Nick was lost in some reverie about the latest artifacts they had brought in from an English ruin. Sometimes she wished she had never consented to their year-long sabbatical to Wales. Now, after returning, he seemed more lost than he had been when they left. Every week, more of his finds would arrive by belated shipping, then he would spend hours cataloguing, studying and pondering the pieces. Occasionally some adoring graduate student would find him working over the artifacts and beg off some long lecture from him.

Her frustrated sigh seemed to come too loudly in the quiet living room. Finally Adele stretched and stood up to turn off the lights. She scuffed her slippered feet across the carpet in the dark until she stood at the dining room table where Nick had laid more of his precious trinkets.

Carefully she ran her fingers across the metal and stone pieces he had selected. Some were supposed to be Druid, but Nick had suspected they were older, much older than that. Adele touched the amulet clasped snugly around her upper arm. The bronze piece, in the form of an aspis, was a gesture of love on his part, but it didn't ease any of the loneliness she felt all those months he spent crossing the English countryside as he looked for more remnants of the Celts' history. He had come home happily one afternoon, after six months of useless tramping, bearing the amulet as his first treasure. It was their fifth anniversary, and he had promised to be home early so they could celebrate. She had been so angry she had flung the meal, dishes and all, across the room at him. The fight had overshadowed his victory, and both of them were hurt for days afterward. Then, as he was wont to do, Nick had come home bearing flowers and the polished amulet, begging forgiveness to the point he wept. The following days were filled with love-making and special time of closeness, but then he left for another archaeological hunt.

The memory angered Adele this night as she stood over the table of historical artifacts. With a single movement of her arm she swept the things off the table, then she sat on the floor and cried in the ruins.

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"Adele? Hon, are you all right?" Nick whispered as he touched her arm.

Adele jerked awake, having forgotten where she lay. "What time is it?"

Nick cleared his throat as he helped her sit up. "It's nearly dawn."

"Dawn? You've been out all night?" she squeaked groggily. "I can't believe you were studying." As she stood, Adele pulled away from Nick.

Her husband just stared at her, then he looked down at the artifacts on the carpet. "What the hell happened here?" He squatted down and started picking up the pieces, carefully brushing each off as he did.

Adele shook her head slowly. "I don't believe it. You're more concerned about those bits of trash than you are me. I asked you a question, and you start worrying about things that are only part of a dead past!"

Nick slipped a couple of items on the table without looking up. He continued to pick up more of the articles. "This is important, Addie. We don't need to argue about it."

"I just happen to think our marriage is a bit more important." Adele bent a little, trying to get him to look up at her. "At least you could do is look at me." She realized it was a nag, but she needed the attention, any attention, at the moment.

"Why? All you're going to do is gripe at me, and right now I'm too tired and too distracted to listen or participate." He dusted off another piece before setting it on the table.

"I'm not one of your damned lectures! You can't schedule or unschedule me at your whim." As Adele watched him, she wrapped her arms around herself and fingered the armband, trying to work out some of the anger. She wondered what she'd have to destroy to get his attention. Finally she squatted down in front of him. As he lifted another object, Adele put a hand over it. He looked up and stared, this time a bit of anger crossing his features. "You know you're a real..." she hesitated, wondering whether he would even react. Then she smiled and narrowed her eyes. Her words came out slowly and deliberately. "Bastard. You're a real bastard!" She stood up and backed against the doorjamb to the hallway. As she balled her hand into a fist, she felt the armband tighten around her arm.

Nick straightened up and faced her. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means," she stopped as her lips trembled, "That if you were to try and win my heart now, I wouldn't even look at you. Not if you were the last man on earth. Because you're not a man." Her voice rose. "You're an unfeeling ogre!" She squeezed fist and felt the armband cut into her skin. "I'm sick of it. Sick of it all!" As tears threatened to escape, she looked past her husband toward the bay window where the first light had begun to streak through. "Damn you," she whispered. Adele closed her eyes as a trickle of blood ran down her arm...

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"Milady!" An unfamiliar voice called urgently. "You've cut yourself."

Instinctively Adele let go of the thing tearing into her palm. She looked down at the blood trickling down her hand. A few drops had spilled down the front of her long white skirts. For a moment she stared, unsure of what she saw, then she lifted her hand and looked back at her long gown. "I...I..." she stammered. Something was wrong. She had been...pleading...no praying... Adele reached up and rubbed the side of her head, confused.

A small woman waddled closer, holding out a piece of cloth. "Let me help you." She took Adele's hand and began to wrap it.

"What happened?" Adele managed, glancing around the gray room lit only by candles.

"You've cut yourself on your armband. You've must have been too diligent in your prayers to our god." The older woman tore the final edge and wrapped it counterclockwise to tie down the swathing. "It'll heal soon enough."

"Thank you," Adele spoke flatly, still trying to make out her surroundings. "Uh," she looked at the helpful woman whose eyes were filled with concern.

"Marda," she filled in.

“Marda,” Adele repeated with a thin smile. “I’m a little confused. Why did I come here?” She cleared her throat. “I mean, how did I get here?”

“Milady?” Marda sounded confused.

“Did you come here with me?” Adele asked softly.

“No, Milady. You were already here for sunrise devotion. I just finished milking the goats when the master told me to attend you.”

“Master?” Adele’s eyebrows rose.

“Lord Shanahan,” Marda supplied with a smile. “The master of this castle. Our liege in both land and spirit.” Her eyes beamed with devotion, her words being a ritual.

“Is Lord Shanahan about?”

“Of course, Milady. He’ll be joining you for mid-morning devotion in a short while.” Marda brushed her hands over her dirty apron that covered her long skirts.

“Pardon me, Milady. I have some duties to tend to in the main hall.”

“Sure,” Adele answered without thinking.

“Good mom,” Marda called as she left the room.

Adele took a deep breath, closed her eyes and counted to ten slowly. When she opened her eyes, she was in the same room where she had arrived earlier. She squeezed her bandaged hand. The pain reminded her that what she was seeing was real. “What’s going on?” she whispered to herself. Adele turned until she faced a stone altar of some sort. Running her fingers along the gray stone, she tried to remember the devotion Marda was so certain she had been engaged in a short time ago. A pentagram was etched in the center of the top.

A single narrow window was set in the wall behind the altar with two large bowls at either side. Adele walked around the altar to the first bowl which she found filled with water. She leaned over the clear pool and stared at herself. The image was hers, though her hair seemed longer and redder. Her blue eyes glistened back despite the lack of light, and her oval face bore the bright color of a younger time. The face made her smile, letting her high cheekbones draw out their pink color.

“You’re a lovely young woman,” a deep voice spoke from behind her. “I’m privileged to have you at my court.”

Adele turned to the man and smiled slightly. She took in the large man, dressed in furs and silks. His shoulder-length hair was nearly white, his face square with broad cheekbones and thick nose. He was not unhandsome, but obviously bore some age. His eyes were starkly green, piercing her with his stare. Not able to place why she knew, Adele became sure she was protected by this man, thus her feeling of uneasiness faded. “I’m not quite sure what I’m doing here,” she hesitated, “Milord.”

“Wasn’t it your wish to be here?” Lord Shanahan turned his head slightly as if confirming his statement. Abruptly he bowed his head. “I have come to greet you, Lady Adeline, priestess to this holy place.”

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Nick rolled over and wondered why he had let himself fall asleep at a dig, especially in wet grass. He opened his eyes without sitting up and looked at where he had chosen to sleep. His bed wasn’t grass but very damp straw which he now realized smelled badly of mildew and some animal he couldn’t identify. The bed was situated in a shallow cave which was wide open to a wood beyond.

He reached up to scratch his suddenly itchy face and gasped as he nearly clawed himself. Slowly he pulled his hand away to examine it and found himself looking at a massive paw that came away. It was human, more or less, but very large with lengthy black nails. "Sheesh!" he grunted aloud. His voice was husky and whistled slightly through his teeth. Nick reached carefully towards his mouth to feel two big tusks protruding from his lower jaw and overlapping his upper lip. His fingers continued to explore his face which he discovered was both pock marked and bulbous in places. He felt the side of his face and ear which he discovered was elongated and pointed. His coarse hair laid thick and long over his head.

Next he stretched out his arm and looked at the muscular build it had acquired, much broader and thicker than it was before. Finally Nick pushed up and looked over the rest of himself. His torso and legs were all disproportionately larger than normal. The skin was mottled with alternating pock indentations and warty growths. He wore a tight leather jerkin and pants that were too tight for his groin. After a long scientific look at himself, Nick shuddered and groaned loudly. "What's happened?" he asked in a guttural voice.

"A curse, my friend," a high-pitched voice answered him.

Nick turned to see a small, lithe man standing a few feet away. He was dressed in green garb and sported blond hair. The most peculiar feature about him was his narrow, pointed ears. "Are you a faerie?" Nick asked weakly.

"Tis my natural state." He eyed Nick for a moment. "Unlike your ogtrish form."

Nick sagged back in the straw. "I don't understand. One minute I was arguing with my wife, the next I'm an oversized toad."

"She cursed you." He stepped closer and nudged Nick with his staff. "Though it's not the first time a husband was so damned."

"But why?" Nick moaned.

"Only you know that. Unless she was a real bitch, you must have provoked her."

Nick shook his great head from side to side. "I can't think..." he hesitated as the faerie leaned closer as if to take in his answer intimately. "What do you know about all this?"

"All I know is that a new priestess has taken residence at Lord Shanahan's castle. A call to worship has been sent out and every kind of creature has been drawn to the castle to participate in the Connubial Rites ceremony."

"What happens at the Connubial Rites ceremony?"

The faerie smiled wickedly. "The priestess picks a receptacle for the god's power."

"So?" Nick watched him closely.

"Of course, the receptacle cannot live very long after receiving the power. But," he moved as if to whisper the rest, "the last hours are paradise as the priestess gives herself wholly to the holder of power." His eyebrows rose and his eyes widened. "Wholly."

Nick studied the look on the faerie's face. It smacked of lust. "Is she that beautiful?"

"More than you could imagine. And," his leer broadened, "she's a virgin."

Nick blew out a long breath, making the faerie back away. "I'm still unclear here. What does that have to do with my curse?"

The faerie shrugged. "You're an ogre now. It's your duty to try and win the priestess' favor. The curse cannot be broken unless you succeed."

A crooked smile spread across Nick's face. "Of course it'll end if I'm dead. Though I don't think that's what I really want."

"Priestess Adeline will not be pleased if you don't present yourself."

Nick's eyes widened. "Adeline?"

"You know the woman." The faerie spoke surely. "Then you know how great the prize is."

"I might." Nick said. He reached up and rubbed his face roughly, to make certain he was awake. The rough skin and large tusks reaffirmed his fear. "What's your name anyway?"

"Simon," he smiled. "And yours, my friend?"

Nick opened his mouth, but realized he was not sure of his name. "Nykos," he finally mumbled.

"Nykos," Simon repeated. "Sounds foreign."

"No kidding." Nick quipped. "I think it's American."

"Is that near London?"

"I don't think so," Nick spoke softly.

"Well, Nykos, we've got a treasure to find and a journey to complete."

Nick's eyes widened. "Treasure?"

"Each candidate must bring a prize for the priestess as part of his offering."

"And where do we find this treasure?" Nick asked eagerly.

Simon shrugged and leaned against his staff. "It's wherever you choose to look. The treasure is special to each giver. You will have to find that gift yourself."

"Are we competing then?" Nick grunted, staring at the small man whose eyes seem to sparkle and draw him in.

"No, my friend. I'm here to see you get to the castle." The faerie stamped his staff on the straw, a glimmer of light brightened at the top of the rough wood. "Are you ready to go now, Nykos? We only have two days until the ceremony, and it's a day's walk to the temple."

"I'm in your hands," Nick sighed.

"No, my friend. You're in the hands of our god."

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Adele knelt on the floor in front of the altar and repeated the words she remembered. Finally she touched her forehead to the stone floor. Lord Shanahan knelt beside her and repeated the same ritual, then he rose and offered his hand to her. She let him help her up and lead her out of the small temple. Outside she took a deep breath of the cool morning air and looked around. They stood at the threshold of a small stone building made of large granite stone blocks. The roof was covered with slate shingles. It did not appear to be holy, but she could feel a sense of reverence rise inside herself as she studied it. The feeling seemed to emanate from some knowledge that the place was her lifeline, the key to her existence. She tried to shrug off the emotion but found it only intensified.

Shanahan watched her from one side. "What are you thinking, Milady?"

"Have I always been the priestess here?"

"No, Milady. You've traveled a long difficult path to reach this place. You have been chosen by our god to participate in the Connubial Rites."

“Connubial Rites?” She repeated the words. They sounded odd but felt familiar somehow.

“Yes, you will wed with the power of our god.”

“How is that done?”

“You’ve spent too much time in devotions, Milady. You know the forms and the rituals you must undergo.”

Adele wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. “Actually I don’t feel like remembering anything.” She stared past Shanahan towards the large garden that lined the inner wall of the castle. “It’s like a dream I can’t wake up from.”

“It will come back to you.” He laid a gentle hand on her shoulder, making her shiver slightly. She looked up into his warm, green eyes. “I’ll send Marda to tend to you. Perhaps a long warm bath will relax you.”

Adele nodded. That sounded wonderful. As they walked toward the door to the main hall she glanced up at her host. He wasn’t beautiful, but he exuded power and grace. She wasn’t afraid of him, though something told her she should be. Then she wondered if a priestess ever took a noble spouse.

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With a look of disgust, Simon watched Nick eat the half-cooked, half-skinned rabbit. “Are you full yet?” He asked as Nick began gnawing on the bones.

Nick stopped chewing and glanced down at the greasy, bloody mess on his hands. He dropped the remains on the ground and kicked them away. “I guess. But I have the strangest craving.”

“Manflesh no doubt,” Simon interjected quickly. “Except in times of worship, it’s not unknown for you buggers to eat a few unfortunate creatures like myself.”

Nick eyed him closely. “You’re kidding.”

“Just think about it. You’ll have no difficulty in seeing me on a spit, skewered straight through.”

Nick grunted loudly in a near laugh. “So how do I go about finding my offering?”

Simon smiled and leaned against his staff. “You have a whole world to choose from. Just take some time and look around. You never know what’ll strike you.”

Nick rolled his eyes about surveying the trees for something that could be a gift. For the most part it looked like an ordinary wood, not unlike... Nick stopped and scratched his head. The thought was incomplete as if someone had yanked that bit of memory away. An irritation brought his attention to his thigh where, with a couple quick scratches, he found a large fly buzzing. Without thinking, he snatched the insect and stuck it in his mouth. Not bad. He swallowed and then wondered what possessed him. He was human, wasn’t he? Hadn’t he been? The idea swam around for a few seconds before Nick stood up and started examining the trees around the stone circle where Simon had chosen for them to stop and rest.

The large stones were moss-covered, but they had been put there by someone, arranged in a definite order. The thought was clear and strong, as if he instinctively understood the arrangement. He walked the circle, slightly hunched and arms swinging, following it until something caught his eye, glinting in the sunlight at the edge of a large rectangular stone. Nick squatted and dug his fingers into the grass sprouting around the stone. His nails scraped something metallic, so he stopped and finished uncovering it.

Carefully he lifted the item out and stared at it. It was a armlet, shaped like a serpent, just like the one he had given to Adele. Adele! The name struck a cord. He had given it to her because he loved her. He had never really meant to hurt her. It was just so hard not to get lost in the work he did, the treasure hunting, the hoarding... He stopped thinking and continued to stare at the armlet. It would be a perfect offering for the priestess. Then she would choose him, and he would be a god! Nick tucked the treasure inside the leather jerkin he wore and looked about for Simon. Wait 'til the little guy saw what he found!

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Adele sank down in the water and watched Marda pour the last of the steaming water in the wooden tub. The old servant bent over and began scrubbing Adele. "I have you always waited on the new priestess, Marda?"

"No, Milady." She stopped and looked away. "There was a time when I was chosen to serve the god."

"What happened?" Adele asked softly.

Marda shook her head slightly and started washing again. "I was not pleasing to him. The power was given to the wrong man."

"How do you know which one is right?"

The servant shrugged. "You just do. A feeling begins to warm you all over, then you make the right choice."

"But obviously the choice is not always correct."

"True Milady, but my feelings were gone cold a long time before I was given a choice to make." She finished and stood up to retrieve a towel. Adele rose from the water studying her rounded breasts and thin waist. As smooth and beautiful as her body looked, it did not feel entirely her own.

"It is not your own," Shanahan spoke up from behind her.

Adele turned around, nervously trying to cover herself. "My lord," she bowed her head, both in reverence and in an attempt to avoid eye-contact.

"You are quite beautiful. More than I am even used to seeing." He stepped closer and touched her chin. As he lifted it, his eyes caught hers in a holding stare. "More than any mortal here deserves," Shanahan smiled.

"I'm not so sure of my worthiness."

"You must be. If you do not have self-worth, then no man will value your love."

Adele swallowed the lump that rose with his words. "And what if no man would love me?"

"That is impossible," Shanahan reassured softly. "In fact, we must be sure that no man touches you before the time of choosing." He stepped back and waved his hand.

Something cold settled around Adele's hips. She looked down at herself then choked slightly as she touched the solid metal belt that locked around her abdomen and wrapped between her legs. Nervously she followed the band from her crotch until she discovered it thinned to a wire that rode up between her buttocks to join the backside of the belt. Adele slipped her fingers between the larger piece and her lower abdomen and found it lined with leather, which was beginning to warm against her skin. Adele looked up to question Shanahan but found only Marda waiting with her towel.

"Marda," she hesitated, "what is this?"

Marda looked at her with no surprise. "Your chastity belt, Milady."

“Chastity belt?”

“Each priestess wears one until she is given to the one who wields the god’s power.”

Adele ran her fingers over the intricate design set in the metal. She twisted slightly and checked the back of the belt. “There’s no lock for this. How does it come off?”

“It doesn’t, until the power wielder sets his magic to it.”

“But why am I wearing it?” Adele asked, her lips trembling.

“To guarantee your virginity. Our god will not accept a soiled offering.”

Adele shook her head. It wasn’t the nightmare she had hoped. The belt was frightfully real, solidifying the strange world around her. As she fingered the cold metal, she wondered why she had to wear such a thing, especially since she was sure she was *not* a virgin.

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Nick stared incredulously at the assortment of candidates that stood just outside the gates to Shanahan’s castle. He recognized dwarves, several faerie, a satyr, a winged centaur, a human topped with the head of a long-eared jackass, and a pair of unicorns. There were others he didn’t recognize, all just as peculiar and none of them truly human. He blew out a loud breath and wondered if they all suffered the same curse or whether he had just read too much of Bulfinch’s mythology. Another chord was struck, but he lost the thought more quickly this time. Nick scratched his left ear and wondered what they would get to eat. As he considered the meal, he realized the satyr was beginning to look very tasty.

“Praise be to the god! Give praise to his name!” Someone called out in a sing-song voice as the gates opened and the crowd of male creatures began to move through. Several were incanting in some unknown tongue as Nick walked with the crowd. Simon hummed quietly next to him.

As the last of the candidates came inside, the gates closed with a reverberating clunk. An inner set of iron bars slid down to effectively block the gates. Nick wondered why anyone had to be locked in with their god. Yet, just to see the priestess would be worth dying for. He believed that now. Every hour they had gotten closer to the castle, Nick found his memory of Adele fading and his anticipation of the virgin priestess growing. He felt certain she would choose him. He had found the perfect offering, and he was larger and stronger than any of those around him. He would be the ideal receptacle for the god’s power.

The large mass slowed now as a tall, very dignified-looking human male walked through the ranks, nodding and speaking to some candidates individually. When he reached Nick he stopped and scanned him from head to toe. “And do you think you are worthy of our god’s power?”

Nick smacked his lips nervously then nodded slowly. “The priestess will find me worthy.”

“Is it the trinket you bear? Your great size and strength?” Shanahan hesitated and stared into his dark eyes. “Or some undying love you believe she has for you, Nick?”

Nick swallowed and stared back with sudden understanding. “What have you done to Adele? What’s happening to us?” he whispered angrily.

“Nothing more than has happened to men and women since the beginning of time.” Shanahan smiled knowingly and moved past Nick.

Nick started to follow, but his anger faded and he stood quietly watching the nobleman walk to the front of the throng. The candidates turned and followed Shanahan to the steps of the temple where he climbed to the top and held his hands up. "Praise be to our god!"

The candidates answered his call with, "We will praise him for his power."

"Now," Shanahan hesitated and glanced over the group. "you will praise him with your most inward self until she has chosen his receptacle." He clapped his hands together once, and the crowd seemed to sway with the noise.

Nick's throat tightened, and he coughed to loosen the muscles. As he did, no sound came out. He looked down at Simon, who appeared very calm, and tried to ask what was going on. No sound came with his words.

A panic began to grip Nick. How could he tell Adele he was here? How would she know to choose him? It was as if his chances had been torn away with his voice. Simon's declaration about his curse suddenly became too clear, too real. If Adele didn't choose him, he would stay an ogre forever and never have the chance to tell her... The candidates began to bunch closer as the first row moved into the sanctuary. Nick soon found himself squeezing into the back of a large gray room where only a few candles lit the inside. Like a bad nightmare, he was crammed in with a multitude of monsters and no way to scream out for rescue.

"Praise be to our god to whom we have been called to worship!" a woman's voice called from the front of the sanctuary. Nick looked up and gasped silently as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen stood in front of a stone altar. She was scantily dressed, emphasizing her full breasts and wide hips. Her face was smooth and ivory-colored, but the blue eyes were sharp and strong. She lifted a staff of gold high and waved it over the first row of worshippers. The entire group obediently knelt with her motion, Nick following suit.

Adele walked along the first row of penitent idolaters and studied each one in turn. "My god says only one of you is worthy of his gift." She stopped and looked over the assemblage. "How do you show your worthiness?"

Candidates began to raise their palms or legs upward on which laid their treasures. Nick reached inside for his gift and stopped as the glint of the priestess' armlet caught his eye. She wore the aspis already! He felt for the treasure he had found and soon realized he still carried it safely. As his fingers closed over the piece, he wondered why she would even consider his paltry trinket. He pulled it out and stared at the crusted-over metal shape, dirty from time and lack of care. Junk, he sighed to himself. He had brought her nothing but junk. He wavered a bit on his knees as Simon elbowed him in the side. Nick glanced over at the faerie who indicated that he should look up. As he did, Nick's heart sank. Adele was considering a large bauble balanced delicately on the end of a unicorn's pearl horn. The candidate was watching her eagerly as she considered his gift. After a long moment, she dropped her hand and began to walk through the crowd towards the back where Nick waited.

She stopped again, this time considering a sword held up by a dwarf. Carefully she traced her fingers along the blade. A thin smile showed her pleasure. Nick's hand curled into a large fist, digging his long nails into his palm. He could feel blood trickling down the hand as he relaxed his grip.

Adele finished admiring the sword and continued to make her way towards the back. Nick watched anxiously as she stopped again and again. Was she ignoring him? Deliberately teasing him? He dropped his head and understood she could do neither for he no longer existed. He was nothing. Nothing but an ogre, too repulsive and stupid to even consider. As he stared at the stone floor he began to smell something sweet, nearly intoxicating. "And what do you have to offer, my ogre?"

Nick looked up slowly, his eyes blurred from tears. He lifted his bare hands in gesture of nothing. Adele started to glance away, but stopped as he touched her hand. Gently he pulled her hand towards him until it rested on his chest. After a few seconds he released her hand, leaving her free to continue with her search. Yet, instead of pulling away, she let her hand rest, feeling the beat of his under-sized heart.

Adele stared with amazement. How could such a huge creature have such a tiny heart? How could he touch her with monstrous claws and be so gentle? She closed her eyes and shuddered. He had always touched her. Always cared so much for her. So why couldn't he have shown her before they had come to this? Maybe she had grown cold... She pulled her hand away and opened her eyes. "And what would you sacrifice to join me in these rites?" she asked softly, as if not to let anyone else hear.

Nick moved his jaw slightly and prayed for a voice. "My heart. My life."

Adele took in his eyes and smiled a tiny smile. "I accept your offering." Her knees weakened, and she could feel herself falling.

---

"The power is given to you, don't let it pass away." A voice spoke softly, but commandingly to her. Adele could not see him but she could feel him all around her in the warm darkness. It was Shanahan's voice, the god who ruled over lovers lost in a midsummer's dream.

"And will he love me?"

"He has given you his heart, his life, my priestess. Any lover who does not, loses his soul to my world, to join those who could not give their hearts. Nick now understands that he cannot love his treasures without letting his heart turn to stone. Be wise in your love him, and you will be granted the strength to hold him forever."

"Thank you, my Lord Shanahan," she called to the darkness as she slipped earthward to join her lover in connubial rites.

# Poetry & Song Lyrics

## My Father

PHYLLIS EDWARDS

As I walk in this world many trials I must face, but I have a father who looks upon me and doesn't think of my life as a waste. He is the same today, tomorrow, and yesterday, and I know he'll make a way.

Chorus: My father watches over me wherever I may lay. He is God almighty, and I will live with him finally one sweet day.

My Father loves me, when no one else cares. He can always comfort me and wash away my tears. He owns everything to erase away my fears. He is the same today, tomorrow, and yesterday and I know he'll make a way.

When I was born he was there and as I live he is here. When I die he will care. He is the same today, tomorrow, and yesterday and I know he'll make a way.

## A Sinner's Prayer

PHYLLIS EDWARDS

I try. I try to get everything right. I try. I try with all my might, and yet still I can't seem to win this fight.

I try. I try with no end in sight. I try. I try, but things don't look so bright. Oh, how I wish this burden could be light.

I surrender. I surrender. God forgive me. I am a sinner. This day to you my soul I render.

# Night

PHYLLIS EDWARDS

Version #1

Night comes at last.

Ink covers the sky.

Glow of light comes from the moon.

Hides in darkness.

Til the morning comes.

Version #2

Night comes at last.

Ink covers the sky.

Glow of light comes from the moon.

Hides in darkness.

Tells someone's story.

# Beauty in Chaos

KRISTIN COULON

freezing blue flames  
scorch smooth as snow  
razor sharp rivers run  
frivolous in their flow

raging red clouds  
release better black rain  
brilliant bright thunder blasts  
sky screams in pain

heavy weighted words  
make meaningless vents  
sad strings of song  
so seldom make sense

towering trees trample  
down dark deserted paths  
bone biting wind whistles  
battering in blind wrath

mighty mountains move  
kicking up a cold chill  
awesome ocean waves tease  
pleading time to stand still

when the world finally quiets  
night blares its silent call  
you see then that chaos is  
beautiful after all

# Forgot to Remember

KRISTIN COULON

the sun shines  
surely I know this can change day to day  
but somehow when my gaze slides your way  
I forget

forever and always  
deep down I know that these are just dreams  
but somehow looking into your eyes it seems  
I forget

everything is perfect  
of course I know that can't ever be true  
but somehow whenever I'm looking at you  
I forget

I need you  
the sun is fast fading, darkness sets in  
I'm fighting to find you when suddenly then  
I remember

you left me  
our "forever" was too short, your "always" was a lie  
pain clears my mind and suddenly I know why  
I remember

I miss you  
we were lost in emotion, blinded by "somehows"  
perfect can't happen and suddenly now  
I remember

# For Tiff

KRISTIN COULON

when you're sad  
smile for me  
and then remember back when  
we never had to cry

when you're running late  
smile for me  
and then remember back when  
time wasn't important

when you're angry  
smile for me  
and then remember back when  
we laughed 'till it hurt

when you feel hopeless  
smile for me  
and then remember back when  
we had endless opportunities

when you want to give up  
smile for me  
and then remember back when  
we never stopped trying

so whenever you need me  
just smile  
and then remember back when  
everything was perfect

# Smokescreen

KRISTIN COULON

whispered arguments  
hushed angry words  
worried glances, shh  
who heard them fighting?  
relief, no one was listening  
fake smiles return  
they still look like  
the perfect couple

long sleeves in summer  
excuses, must have fallen  
ran into the door  
does the doctor believe her?  
sigh, the questions stop  
the bruises fade and  
he still looks like  
the perfect husband

baggy clothes hid a  
big belly, absence explained  
she's visiting grandma  
has the boy told anyone?  
good, no problem there

she comes back alone  
she still looks like  
the perfect daughter

bottles hidden everywhere  
blacked out on the porch  
hurry, get her inside  
did the neighbors notice?  
lucky, no one is outside  
sleeps it off and  
she still looks like  
the perfect mother

big lavish parties  
pretty dresses, expensive  
suits, everyone's there  
how do they manage it?  
looking so happy  
they're so good at it  
they still look like  
the perfect family

# In Memory of Coretta Scott King

ERNEST L. FREEMAN

## Part I

Another day has come and gone  
Another night soon to pass us by  
But we sit and listen  
As another hero said goodbye

For God has called another angel home  
To his place on high  
For she brought love among us  
For we must not give up  
For she sweetly said goodbye

Let's remember the things she has done  
The battle she has been through  
And let us always say  
*Coretta, we love you*

So another day has come and gone  
Another night soon to pass us by  
But we just sit and listen  
As another hero has said goodbye

Let's remember her  
For the things she helped do  
And let us say in our own words  
*Coretta, we love you*

## Her Hero (Part II)

Many things have come to pass  
The struggle we have gone through  
For many heroes have fallen  
Some greater than me and you

Many things have changed  
Since they came along  
For we learned the meaning of love  
We learned to be strong

We have stumbled along the way  
But we did not fall  
For we kept our heads up  
Kept our backs against the wall

Many tears have fallen  
Many pains we bear  
But no matter what the struggle  
In our hearts his words were there

Without his wisdom and strength  
His knowledge and beliefs  
We would not have come this far  
We would not have made it

For now we must understand  
The things he went through  
Because through it all  
She was there to help make  
His *dream* come true

So through many struggles  
We have gone  
The battle is really not over  
But the victory has been won

So let's not forget the struggle  
Let's not forget the heroes  
Because when we look back  
We can always say  
That no matter what  
We had a hero  
And she helped him pave the way

# My Lost Child

CONNIE ESTES

Memories shadow my yesterday  
As I reminisce the times we'd play  
He had no care in the world  
Mind occupied by some little girl

All the talks we had  
And the playful kidding around  
There was no better teen  
That could ever be found

You see, I'm his mother  
And I just know these things  
I see him each and every day  
I know him and his mood swings

Oh, I know I'm kidding myself  
As I surely overlooked the signs  
The obsession and depression  
He was lost and in a bind

Troubled and confused  
His mind had been abused  
My God, I hadn't been discerning  
That he was still in mourning

His father had been taken by death  
A man of stature and a picture of health  
The father he looked up to  
Was gone and he didn't know what to do

Why didn't he talk to me  
We could have talked seriously  
His motives were planned instead  
When he took a gunshot to the head

I wish I had them back  
What I'd give to back track  
So many words unsaid  
Nothing comforts the tears I shed

His loving father has been gone  
For many years, I've been alone  
Now my son is gone too  
My lost child, I'm lost without you

# Spring Breezes

CONNIE ESTES

Warm frisky winds  
Holding the scent of a spring day  
Dance with the petals  
Of fragrant flowers

Whirling through blossoming trees  
Floating butterflies to their new destinations  
As they bounce off the effervescent waters  
Of ponds that lay so quietly still

Delicately yet gently  
They thread through the flowing hair  
Of a child who paces briskly  
Through the soft slender grasses  
Of a farm's green terrain

Prancing relentlessly through  
Golden hues of sun rays  
Continuously blowing their elements  
Of new beginnings

Spring breezes  
Softly twirling and swirling  
Atop the whitest of velvety clouds  
Yielding down to Herat  
Whispering spring is here again

# Blossoming Beauty

CONNIE ESTES

Jagged and rough were her edges  
Bound in an aura of doubt and indecision  
Unable to fathom her ability to be  
The graceful beauty that she is  
Faltering thoughts gave way to  
Clouded judgments of her authenticity

Created in the essence of radiance  
The inevitability of her emerging splendor  
Holds immense grace and supremacy  
Which germinate and build her character  
Her jagged, rough edges soften subtly as  
Each day pledges truth in her beauty

# Thoughts of Love

CONNIE ESTES

Thoughts of you consume my mind  
As the clock bears endless time  
My mind becomes yours as our thoughts entwine  
What you think, I've already thought  
What you feel, I feel right now  
What I see in you, you've seen in me

Your laughter is my smile  
Your eyes are my vision  
The beat of your heart is the throb of mine  
My words pour out to you expressing the pain I feel  
Your heart embraced my pain and showed me compassion

There's no explanation how love touched us by surprise  
This love is real, as we both have realized  
What we feel is not our imagination  
But a true love creation that can not be denied

You've awakened everything that was asleep in my soul  
You've planted memories that I will forever hold  
I'll always have my dreams to keep you alive in my heart  
Thus the time is now here that we know we must part  
But before anything else that I say or do  
I must say these words: I love you

# What To Do (when you don't know what to do)

KATHYE PERRY

Your mouth is open yet you don't know what to say,

All the hurt and suffering seems to stand in the way.

You remember what your grandma use to say, hold your head up high, look to the sky, a way will be made, just hold up your head.

Hold on, be strong, it won't be long and all the pain and suffering will be gone.

Words will come, flow free and full. You're not forgotten, life's not that cruel.

Your prayers will be answered, hope restored.

Life will be fulfilling, you won't be bored.

Rise, shine receive your blessings, then

you will know it was worth all the testing!

## Lost

KATHYE PERRY

Don't know which way to go

I've never been this path before

Need some direction to help me through

While I'm beginning my life anew

Will I ever feel sure of loving again

Hopefully someday I'll meet a new friend

## It Is Done

KATHYE PERRY

A race was run,

Some of it was fun I really can say.

Until the dark that filled a heart, took all the fun away.

Was it lack of respect, oh what the heck, I may never know why.

I won't tell a lie cause it

doesn't matter why, what's done...

is done.

# Beautiful Earth (what a marvelous thing)

KATHYE PERRY

What a wonderful joy it is to see, the  
beauty of nature and its majesty.

Everything blends, entwines and embraces,  
spaced precisely in their designated  
places.

What a marvel to see, I wish I were a bee,  
flying free smelling life's roses, no  
particular place to be.

How can it be, such a marvel to see, when  
its possessed by such as you and me?  
Ours to have, cherish and protect, not  
to pollute, take for granted and neglect.  
Enjoy the earth, treat it kind, after  
all it's ours...yours and mine.

# Empirical Irruption

BRAD WARD

Isostatic adjustment dire.

The earth bulges tumescent here

Do you see the dying trees?

They are drowning in the overflow

and we are spent of helium—now only the dead weight of atmospheric equilibrium

Bor-ing!—

Paramecium infants of pink taffy flesh blink at an Alaskan sun set—

they are of a melting pot race eliminates answers when one is surrounded by mirrors:

“What a looker *I* am! A real *killer!*” He took a manual drill to his crown by standing on his head till his feet were cold and the icy epidemic metastasized, kissing the drill bit soon thereafter and he collapsed in a pink blob that echoed once in a small elastic bounce silent and calm like kissing lips grazing a cold grey brow...

...A crescent moon spirals into the foreground from a cosmic tunnel assuming its most famous pose among the scintillating stars. A wolf howls at a beautiful woman masturbating at the edge of a cliff her fingertips polishing delicately her clitoris. When she comes, a mighty gust blasts her into the sky and she squirts apart in the directions of the five extensions form her torso, her entire body liquefying in sopping orgasm as if she were splatting against the astrological ceiling. The stars absorb her and for a brief moment in times eternity she is mythically immortalized...

Some once called orgasm “death,” the act of dying, for death is spontaneity of dropping the burden of worldly worries. It is vaporizing into the spirit realm for a momentary enrapture of eternity.

Life is nothing but a pink paramecium examined by vicing pentagon of mirrors

# I and I

BRAD WARD

I've decided that from here on out,  
Rhymes should be coincidental so as to mimic reality,  
which means that they should not follow cadence,  
which cancels out happenstance with intention.  
In fact,  
If one does not look for them,  
They will seem non-existent  
To a point  
Where they will no longer seem non-existent—  
They'll just blend in like  
Agreeable oxygen in stagnant atmosphere.

## Citizen Janis

Doppelgangers try to save face—  
Lift from existence,  
Drift from the regular dosage of  
prescribed persistence  
I lay low  
And  
Corrode in the hanger  
Netherworldly prefabricated meme strangler,  
Helicopter my limbs in hopes  
To evoke danger,  
Gyrating torrents of whirlwinds  
To stir the film  
Forming atop the soup of  
your primordial ethics: level-heading the scoop.

You're but a melting pot  
Automatic dogmatic skeptics,  
Methods hectic save when  
Septic seas slosh expected.  
Beneath the foamy surf:  
Your drowning empire erected:  
I work to reverse your gurgling mirth,  
Burst or bend (in hopes to burst) your bubbles...

Pantalgia pandemic like steel baton  
Striking stone  
Loosens your grip  
Rapturous vibrato

Foams the marrow of your bone.

And as that stone

I

Stand alone, holms

And as that stone

I stand atop to throw myself up-on your glass dome,

Shatter that glass straight

Back to sand,

Watch it wash into the ocean

To one day build another land

And...

# Awakening

CORINSA SMITH-WILLIAMS

The Cries the screams the wails and whys  
Let's come together—it's do or DIE

Oh Now all of a sudden we are one race  
Brought together by God's Love and His Grace

But what about nine/ ten? That's the day I want us all to remember  
The day before that frightful day in September

Where was all this love way back when?  
Who gave a damn about me and mine then?

What about when my cousin was shot dead in the streets?  
Who comforted his mother when she found him on the cold concrete?

Or what about my community engulfed with social problems and crime  
My ghetto mothers are still committed to this 24 hour grind

We are not the only ones to feel this pain  
For anyone who didn't know—the problem still remains

We are at all time high in the unemployment rate  
So now that brothas is robbin', stealin' and hustlin' you think it's self-hate

He still must provide for his wife and his kids  
In between catchin' a case and doing his bids

But now, he can't vote because he's now known as a rebel  
But who judges BUSH while he dances with the devil?

The smoke screen is real, but I can see straight through it  
And the "weapons of mass destruction" he still didn't prove it

So ask yourself... does he care about any of us?  
Should he lead the one nation under God that we should trust?

I say let's get rid of the commander-in-chief  
He has caused me and mine more than enough grief!

What's the last kiss to seal these words I just spoke?  
November is coming fast make it your business to vote!

# The Last to Wake

TERRA SCARLETTE KENAKIN

In chances of bleak autumn past,  
To those impure of integrity,  
I do dream in the ideal, so steadfast,  
To wistful feats of idolatry.  
Putting asunder these seeming reveries,  
Does audacity stand silently beside me?  
The awaits avid tendencies,  
Yet putting resonance so tenderly.  
Halt compromise, stand not near,  
Let resistance fill thy gap.  
And come this oblivion, so sincere,  
Come closely in thy lap.  
And for all those who are the last to wake,  
May peace lie softly for Pity's sake.

# Silhouette of a Man Once Parted

TERRA SCARLETTE KENAKIN

My heart still wanes,  
Disconsolate I mourn.  
Dare I dream a reverie  
With levity torn?  
How divine is a rose,  
That Opportunity seeks to bloom.  
For the eternity not seen,  
Dreams wilt all too soon.  
What of a broken window,  
That reflects broken sunlight?  
Shall it reflect broken dreams,  
Or disheartened moonlight?  
The final hymn of a songbird,  
Mournfully into the dusk, sings.  
A sparrow bellows its last cry,  
Goodbye sweet melody ring.  
My story in one particular,  
Through endless dreams do I wander...

# Ode to a Weeping Willow

TERRA SCARLETTE KENAKIN

The rustle of leaves,  
Like a mournful cry.  
With ev'ry leaf that falls,  
Another tear is shed.  
Why do you droop so?  
Why not stand proud, valiant, and be a beauteous sight?  
Your branches are hung,  
You're depression and despair.  
Need I say to what end you're overlooked?  
I shall hear you crying,  
As the wind sweeps by.  
Out my window I glance,  
And there you sigh.  
Weep not willow, for I will comfort those cries.  
I will take notice and wonder...  
Why you weep, your story untold,  
As the rustle of leaves,  
Shake the winter so cold.

# And the Muse Did Turn Her Cheek

TERRA SCARLETTE KENAKIN

The parchment encumbers,  
The reverent rose entwined.  
With endless thoughts of wonder,  
And elegance refined.  
I sit with worthless dreams,  
Of a mournful reverie.  
How chance my bud does seem  
Of melancholic remedy?  
And the rose began to wilt,  
To lament its providence.  
The Muse shall turn and tilt,  
Upon sweet consequence.  
And at long last the bloom-  
Imposing creativity.  
And the heart shall wane and swoon,  
Of ominous capability.  
And the Muse did turn her cheek,  
For in script, vivacity to seek.

## funeral

THERESA FINE-PAWSEY

in a January haze  
Native singers,  
old leather singers,  
warble a song I have sung,  
in a language I haven't heard.

\*\*\*

when they sprinkled the ashes  
over bare trees and mountainside,  
they fell to the ground  
like feathers.  
reminders of the fallen,  
memories of a boy.

## Good Morning

THERESA FINE-PAWSEY

Good morning.  
You are not what I thought  
you were  
when I opened the door.  
Are you what you want  
to be?

The sun shines in between  
the cracks and  
the sand slips in between  
your toes,  
and you don't know yet  
that I will drown in you  
and,  
good morning.

# Parade

**THERESA FINE-PAWSEY**

you marched past  
in a long line of sparkle and brass,  
while i watched from the stand,  
holding my mommy's hand  
and waving my flag.

i knew you had to love me when  
you turned and winked and waved,  
but the smug policeman's smile  
won't let me march  
in your parade.

# Secret Treasures

**SHERRY DIANNE KIRKLAND, RN**

I carried you within me, gave birth to you,  
cradled you in my arms, met your needs,  
and some of your wants.

Kept watch to keep you safe and warm. I  
kissed your face and hands, wept with you,  
laughed at your silly pranks, and scolded your  
not so good behavior. You stood in my shadow.  
We danced in the grass, and held secrets in our  
hands.

Through all the years I cared for you, I did not  
consider the day would come that I would stand  
in your shadow, and you would care for me.

I look at you, and see that little baby that was  
placed in my arms, the one I kissed and promised  
to love. You kiss me now, and say that you love.  
Say that you will be back soon, and will bring the  
items on the list; while I remember the dances in  
the grass. Tucking the secrets once held in our  
hands away in my heart.

# The Ism

STEPHANIE HODGES

It's hard to admit to myself that I still love her  
I still feel her in my soul  
I question the reason I say that I need her  
I must admit that there are things that I love about her  
And vice versa  
And what she doesn't love  
Is my new hardcore bad girl attitude  
What she hates is my confusion  
Or as she calls it  
My denial or refusal to be "real" with myself  
My denial is the only thing that stands between her and me  
I've got a serious phobia for the ism  
And for religious reasons  
I reject that part of me  
I drown out the voices in my head that tell me that I could have been happy  
I try not to dwell on the fact that she seemed like my soul mate  
I Try  
I try not to think about the ism  
Until on lonely nights it is she that I dream about  
Fantasies over take me and I snap back to reality and realize it was she that I  
fantasized  
About  
I think about my lover  
But it is she that I desire  
She makes me question my sexuality  
Asking myself whether I am refusing to make a choice  
Although I once made the choice not to be with her and broke her heart  
I question whether I am afraid of the truth  
Afraid to find the truth  
Afraid to find myself caught up in the ism  
We question me  
She urges me to take a second look  
So I do  
But all I can find is my phobia for the ism  
Not the ism in general  
But my phobia for my own ism

# Prepare for the Second Coming

STEPHANIE HODGES

Wake up wake up  
My spirit tells me  
Constant thunder rolls  
boom. clap  
24 thousand hands clapping  
the sky sounds like it's opening up  
some of it's falling  
prepare for the second coming  
with every horrible sound my heart no longer beats  
it races  
fear is ever present  
short of God's graces  
In the distance a car alarm sounds  
It is the sound of seven trumpets blazing  
my heart with every thwack and thump  
my heart spins counter-clockwise with the room  
A great white light shines through the darkness of the room  
It barely bothers me  
I'm still half asleep  
But i'm awake enough to scream  
I'm not ready for this  
I say to myself  
I listen for sounds of my parents' existence  
I hear nothing  
I ponder  
Rapture  
I expect to find them gone in the morning  
Too afraid to move  
too afraid to look and see if the sky is falling  
revealing seven stars  
nine planets  
for a second I ponder Neptune  
the possibility of its beautiful torquoise visible  
Dizzy drowning in sweat  
I seem to fall asleep  
the sounds seem to dim in its infiniteness  
thought it would never end  
silence falls like the blanket of night  
In the dullness of dawn I awake  
my parents are gone  
but so is the car, so i.e. they've gone to work  
the car is gone

God doesn't rapture cars  
sounds of the previous night rush back in to my mind like blood  
It was a fleet of helicopters or airplanes  
It's one of those things you look back on and laugh  
I haven't yet  
It isn't funny to me  
the message was heard loud and clear  
prepare for the second coming

## **Yin and Yang**

**STEPHANIE HODGES**

We've become too different  
mind body and soul  
my thoughts are no longer your thoughts  
my ways can't even match yours  
Unbalanced  
unequally yoked  
the pendulum swings between us  
time ticks on  
the sand runs down to the bottom  
I don't know how much more I can Take  
We've become too different

# Words of Life Imitated

STEPHANIE HODGES

You know I thought about you today  
I tried to paint you  
No matter what colors I used  
They always came out in faded shades of blue and gray  
So I sat down today and painted over it using my words  
I painted the words "I love you"  
You know  
In red like you're supposed to  
The words came out in the lightest shade of blue  
So I dipped my brush back onto my palette and started to paint again  
Spelled out the words "I-still-love- you"  
You know  
Like I was supposed to  
Again  
But the words came out the darkest shade of black  
I thought I'd beat the system and paint the next words in black  
"I'll always love you"  
But those words turned snow white  
It was if the words were little white lies  
I even tried to paint the words "You're the apple of my eye" out of desperation in  
the lightest shade of gray  
The colors wouldn't even show up on the page  
That's when I got scared and backed away from the canvas and just stared at the  
canvas  
Those words did not exist for me  
So confused I closed my eyes and looked again  
And it all seemed like a Monet  
Only dots, colors of splotches like images of the first year's snow  
And in that painting I realized I had painted an image in my mind of peace

# Rainbow of War

AMANDA DINCHER

Red rivers of blood flowing together  
Orange clouds of dust hovering over dead bodies  
Yellow sun rising over the battlefield  
Green grass turned black from debris and ash  
Blue skies open to the warrior's souls  
Violet flowers cover the ground marking the graves of those loved and lost.

# A Place

AMANDA DINCHER

I need a place  
Where I can hide  
And not be found,  
Where I can think  
And not be disturbed,  
Where my dreams come true  
And my fears go away.

I need a place  
Where my wants and wishes come true  
But I have no possessions to worry about.  
Where I can wonder  
And have all my questions answered.  
Where I can be alone  
Yet not be lonely.

I need a place  
Where I can love  
And not lose.  
Where I can speak  
And my voice be heard.  
Where everyone can be happy  
And not have a care in the world.

# Together

AMANDA DINCHER

Masked be ignorance,  
We hide our love.  
Only doing what's been done before  
With gentle touches  
And delicate kisses.  
Time passes in silence  
Afraid to speak  
For what might be said  
Not trading it for the world.  
Nothing could be better  
Than time spent together  
Just us-alone-forever.  
Warmth from our bodies  
Can calm the soul  
But make the heart beat faster  
As imagination takes control.  
We close our eyes  
Soaking in the feeling  
Never experienced before.  
The space between our hearts  
Disappears into oblivion.  
As the moment comes  
When we must part  
And the embrace becomes more  
Over powering the senses  
While tiring the body  
Slipping into unconsciousness  
Waiting for tomorrow to come  
So all of this can start over.

# Untitled

AUGUSTUS DISMUKES, JR.

Dedicated to Ms. Veronica L. Ware

I am envious

I am envious of the sunlight  
That brushes your face  
Of the mirror that sees you  
Each morning.

I am envious

Of the pillow upon which  
You rest your head.  
Of the cup that touches  
Your lips.  
Of the table that feels  
Your finger tips.

I am envious

Of those that are privileged  
To hear you speak  
That hear your laughter daily.

And at the end of day

When you're all alone  
Would that I were in your thoughts  
As you are in mine.

Yes, I am envious

And yet I am comforted in knowing  
That none of those things  
Can appreciate your  
Beauty, warmth and smile  
As I who can conquer them all  
With a simple  
...Hello!

# A Tactful Death

SUMMER HEALEY

The tact that I owe thee,  
Would only aid in preventing the comprehension of self,  
Therefore tact is your demise and the blunt blow of truth is your salvation,  
Your bed of roses requires thorns,  
For roses would die without defense,  
Thorns as well as blooms serve a purpose.  
Your death comes slowly,  
In the form of beauty,  
For even death needs attributes.  
Look closely for the decay of perfection,  
Beauty masks all,  
Depth is occasionally a grave affair,  
Step with purpose,  
Be not afraid,  
Prudence is often wise,  
For chasing white rabbits could swiftly become white elephants.

# Good Morning

AMANDA DOUGHERTY

**What** a great gal to give without thought

**What** a wonderful woman who loves wholeheartedly

**She** lives her life so large yet so little

**She** has a high hanging halo above her head

**Her** motto is "To love is to give, and to give is to love"

**Her** best feature is forgiving the unforgettable.

**When** I need to be comforted, I can call upon her calming voice

**When** I am a victim of unfortunate events she is my virtue, and my vision when all is virtually lost

**How** effortlessly she has embraced my every eminence

**How** she has had hardships and heartache yet she still holds dear her higher power

**She** is like the wings of an angel

**She** is the north star of my life

**She** is the greatest wonder of a little girl's dreams

**She** is the greatest maker of happiness

**You** all must be wondering why I am telling you the littlest things about the most

Wonderful person in my world, and not the grandest things. As I thought about what I would say about such a woman, so many feelings and emotions came to heart, no words could ever describe what this woman has done for me and how much she has loved me. If I were to start to tell you even her littlest qualities, we would be here for hours! I could never fully show her how much she means to me, but I will try my whole life to show her that she is my shining star, my guiding light, and my biggest love. And while she has been upset with some choices and mistakes that I have made, she has stood by me 100% and loved me for who I am. She loves me unconditionally and I love her the same. Every day I hope and I pray that my daughter will get to know and love this woman as much as I have. Everyday I hope and I pray that my daughter will be able to enjoy the effortless loves of this woman. Every day I hope and I pray that I can show her how much she means to me and how much I love her, respect her, cherish her and how thankful, how very thankful I am everyday for having her in my life. Everyday I get down on my knees, and thank the good Lord above for sending one of his angels to watch over me. Everyday I get down on my knees and thank the good Lord above for giving me such a blessing in my life. That angel, and that blessing is Pricilla Smolucha, my shining star, my guiding light, my ever so glorious love, my Grandma.

# Dead As a Nation

KENTON EBERSOHL

Silent are rivers of waters in rage  
Stuck to our path as though locked in a cage  
Cursed to silence when freedom withheld  
Controlled by the very evil we felled

Broken spirit is the only result  
When we pour on the wound masses of salt  
Apathy strikes when nothing we do  
Laziness comes and washes anew

Conformity we fight as though the greatest of beasts  
And all in turn do we fight it the least  
Restricted we are by the ones we elect  
Damned by the education we neglect

Our souls would boil if we only knew  
What actions our masters really do  
Change we do not for fear of the work  
For power comes with that sort of quirk

Silent are rivers of water in rage  
Stuck to our path as though locked in a cage  
Cursed to silence when freedom withheld  
Controlled by the very evil we felled.

# War on Terror

KENTON EBERSOHL

The scars upon the victor's hand  
Remind him of the glories past.  
What hero was made of this man  
And the valor he knew could never last.

His thoughts at night were laced with pain.  
The mangled bodies of dead and lame.  
The innocent children let out their screams,  
That haunted this hero throughout his dreams.

A noble fight for country and king.  
The feel of the arrows' cruel stings.  
The stories would tell as the truth was untold,  
And hearts would break if it would ever unfold

"Defend our land," the king said with a cry,  
And he sent thousands of people off to die.  
What would be told of chivalry and stamina,  
But what's left out is the business propaganda.

# Willing to Pay?

KENTON EBERSOHL

They speak at great lengths  
When nothing they say  
We abandon our strengths  
And our morals decay

Heroes we shun  
And souls we pay  
We do what is fun  
Always stopping to play

When our time is up  
What will we say?  
That our lives were cupped  
Inside meaningless days?

When fault lies within  
And we lose our way  
Futility begins  
Are you willing to pay?

# Our Disagreeable Point of View

CHRISTOPHER GAMBLE

Maybe because I know  
Maybe because I knew  
That's what I knew  
To see more  
To hope for more  
To catch a few  
Maybe because I knew  
Maybe because I know  
To reach my point of view  
Yes, I know  
Yes, I knew  
Yes, that shoe  
Hoping for a few  
Maybe I can wear it  
Maybe I can fit it  
Or if I'm on my way to  
A friend's house, when I get there  
We'll see right through  
Our disagreeable point of view

# No Hay Nada Mas Hermoso

MARIANELA MAÑANA

No hay nada más hermoso,  
Que un nacimiento.  
El de un nuevo ser,  
El de un nuevo amor,  
El de un nuevo día.  
¡Qué exacta y sabia es la naturaleza!

No hay nada más hermoso,  
Que saberte en mi camino.  
Temeroso, quizás herido,  
Para que saberlo.

No hay nada más hermoso,  
Que el momento del encuentro.  
Entre tu alma y la mía,  
Con tantos secretos.

No hay nada más hermoso,  
Que el calor que emana tu cuerpo,  
Junto al mío, que exquisito.

No hay nada más hermoso,  
Que saberte solo mío...  
Aunque sea un momento.

# There Is Nothing More Beautiful

MARIANELA MAÑANA

There is nothing more beautiful  
Than a birth.  
Than a new being,  
Than a new love,  
Than a new day.  
How exact and wise is Nature.

There is nothing more beautiful,  
Than to know you in my pathway of life  
Although the process may bring  
Fears and wounds.

There is nothing more beautiful,  
Than the moment of encounter.  
Between your soul and mine  
With so many enriching secrets.

There is nothing more beautiful,  
Than the warmth that emanates from your body,  
Near to mine, how exquisite.

There is nothing more beautiful,  
Than knowing you are mine alone  
Although it be for a short time.

(Translation by S. Thompson –Chapel Hill writer)

# Mozzarella Moon

SERENA SUNDERLAND

What if the moon was made, not of green cheese, cheddar cheese, or parmesan cheese, but mozzarella cheese? This poem assumes that it is.

Oh, my Mozzarella Moon  
A bittersweet boon.  
I think of you at noon,  
You just can't come too soon.

Sitting in the sky,  
Shining from on high,  
Like a cheesy pizza pie,  
So tasty, yes, oh my!

How I wish that you were here  
So that I could hold you dear,  
And smell that cheese so near,  
And yet you won't I fear.

Oh my moon that's made of cheese,  
To me you're such a tease.  
So I guess I'll get my keys,  
And just go buy a pizza please.

# if i lie sleeping

ZEINA NASSAR

if i lie sleeping  
cradle me  
in your gentle arms  
and sing a quiet melody

and if i wake  
before the sun  
return me to the dreams  
that in my slumber come

or if i die  
before i wake  
take me to the valley  
and free me in the summer lake

# Aging

MARTHA J. FITZGERALD

at 22, i was on.  
i was alive and snapping  
with the fire of genius.  
in 10 short years  
i've absorbed the slow stagnant death of lethargy.  
i no longer breathe to escape.  
i settle into sleep.  
all i have for you  
is the lazy smoke of a snuffed-out doer.

# Writer's Block

MARTHA J. FITZGERALD

and i always begin with "and"  
like what came before had less importance  
but, from here, it's all downhill  
cutting me off like the mistaken flow of sewage  
cutting me off at the pass.  
and you get there before me  
spear pointing backwards  
but i fall mouth first  
and i'll never speak again  
not like the warm wet mother i was  
nor the cold hard knife i feel like.  
but quiet  
with electric fence anger  
and S.S. charm  
i cut out secrets like paper dolls  
and pose them in the dresses  
i made myself  
like stories  
i drop hints like dishes  
but you weren't watching  
this dance i do every time  
where i fall back into line  
on the end  
into the corner  
and i think like a child  
like a soap opera  
that suicide even counts  
for points in the game

# Essays & Film Reviews

## Becoming an Axolotl

JEFF METTE

*Ambystoma mexicanum* reached Paris in 1864, when thirty-three specimens were imported from lake Xochimilco, Mexico, to the Jardin des Plantes. There, the axolotls resided as biological curiosities from the Americas, exiles, and the progenitors of modern laboratory and zoological stocks (Majchrzak).

The Argentine writer Julio Cortázar also emigrated to Paris to escape the regime of Juan Perón. In Paris, he encountered the axolotl and wrote the short work that helped introduce them to the world. In Cortázar's *Axolotl*, the narrator first develops an obsession with the axolotls on display in the public aquarium at the Jardin des Plantes and later is transformed into one of the helpless, captive animals. By obscuring the differences between his character and the axolotl, Cortázar creates an unintentional metaphor on human development.

Axolotls follow a somewhat unique developmental path known as neoteny, the retention of juvenile features in adults of the species. Although they will occasionally undergo the metamorphic change typical of amphibians, the process is not a mandatory developmental step for the axolotl, and mature, reproductive adults are essentially the same as their aquatic larvae, only larger.

Humans are another vertebrate species often described as having neotenic features, although the idea does not enjoy scientific consensus. Humans retain into adulthood the large head and youthful, flattened face of juvenile primates. Neotenic development could explain many of mankind's strange traits, including our lifelong capacity to learn and our singular longevity.

Class Mammalia includes species of a great range of sizes, from mice to whales. Across this range a striking consistency exists, each mammal breathing once for every four heartbeats, and both metabolic rate and lifespan corresponding to size. The heart of any individual mammal beats about 800 million times in its life, and so larger mammals, whose hearts beat more slowly, live longer. Humans, on the other hand, fall far from the

curve of mouse to whale life expectancy, living three times as long as other mammals of equal size. Provided that humans do exhibit neoteny, this could be a result of its influence (Gould).

In reading Cortázar's *Axolotl*, it is not unreasonable to imagine the narrator is a child. Cortázar's character anthropomorphizes the features of the axolotl as a child would, and their relationship appears to be the extent of the narrator's worldly concerns. Humans, after a long childhood, transform into childlike adults. Literally, Cortázar's narrator becomes a neotenic adult of the species *A. mexicanum*, but arguably, the character simply becomes a neotenic adult human, and his despair over a life trapped in an aquarium is really a metaphoric complaint about the many inferiorities of adult life. Formerly obsessed with adulthood (literally, the mysterious childlike adulthood of the axolotl), the narrator discovers too late the irreversible disconnect between childhood and adult life. He becomes his obsession, and in growing up, the unique perspective of children is lost. In this way, becoming an axolotl is a universally human experience.

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# Llegar a Ser Ajolote

JEFF METTE

*Ambystoma mexicanum* llegó a Paris en el año de 1846, cuando treinta y tres especímenes fue traído del lago Xochimilco en México al Jardin des Plantes. Acá los ajolotes residieron como curiosidades biológicas de las Américas, destierros, y los ancestros de los ajolotes modernos de laboratorios y parques zoológicos (Majchrzak).

El escritor argentino Julio Cortázar también emigró a Paris para evitar el régimen de Juan Perón. En Paris él encontró los ajolotes y escribió la obra corta que les presentó al mundo. En *Axolotl*, el narrador primeramente obsesiona con los ajolotes en el acuario público del Jardin des Plantes y después él es transformado a uno de los irremediables cautivos. Por la oscuridad entre su carácter y el ajolote, Cortázar crea un metáfora accidental sobre el desarrollo de los humanos (Wiki).

Los ajolotes desarrollan por un ciclo vital poco común. El desarrollo neoténico es la retención de aspectos infantiles en los adultos del especie. A veces ellos sufren el cambio metamórfico típico de los anfibios pero no es un parte obligatorio de su desarrollo y ajolotes de madurez sexual en casi todas la veces aparecen como renacuajos grandes.

Los humanos son otro especie de vertebrado que tiene formas neoténicas, sin embargo la idea falta el consenso completo de la comunidad científica. Los humanos retienen durante su madurez la cabeza grande y la cara aplanada y juvenil de los primates jóvenes. El desarrollo neoténico posiblemente explica algunos de los rasgos únicos de los humanos, por ejemplo nuestra capacidad de aprender por toda la vida y nuestra longevidad rara.

La Clase Mammalia incluye especies de una gran variedad de tamaño de cuerpo, desde los cetáceos a los ratones. A través de todo esta variedad existe una consistencia sorprendente. Cada mamífero respira una vez por cada cuatro latidos del corazón, y la tasa metabólica y la longevidad corresponden al tamaño del cuerpo. El corazón de cualquier mamífero late aproximadamente ochocientos millones veces durante su vida. Entonces, los corazones de los mamíferos grandes

laten más despacio y ellos duran por más tiempo. Los humanos, por otro lado, están lejos de la curva de longevidad entre ratones y cetáceos. Nosotros vivimos por tres veces más que otras especies de mamífero de tamaño igual. Si los humanos desarrollan neotenicamente, posiblemente este es la influencia (Gould).

El lector sería racional imaginar que el narrador del cuento *Axolotl* es un niño. El carácter entiende los ajolotes solamente en un nivel antropomórfico, igual que los niños. También la relación entre el narrador y los ajolotes es el total de su interés y actividad. Los humanos maduran en la forma de adultos juveniles después de una infancia larga. Literalmente el narrador llega a ser adulto neoténico del especie *A. mexicanum*, pero es posible que él solamente llega a ser adulto neoténico humano, y su desesperación es debido a la vida atrapada en el acuario es una queja metafórica sobre las inferioridades de la vida adulta. Antes de su metamorfosis, él está obsesionado con la vida adulta (literalmente los misteriosos y juveniles adultos del ajolote). Demasiado tarde, él descubre lo que es abandonada irreversible durante la maduración. Él llega a ser su obsesión, y en su desarrollo pierde la única perspectiva de los niños. De ese manera, el llegar a ser ajolote es una experiencia compartida por todos los humanos.

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# Tourists Lost Under the Sea

JEFF METTE

Last year for Christmas, I was in Mexico. It was a family vacation and, unfortunately, I had to share a hotel room with my dad. Every day, he would get up first thing and start complaining. His chief frustration was that nobody wanted to explore our exotic surroundings, so one fateful morning, he told me I was going to enjoy an underwater adventure. He had already paid for the Scuba lessons.

In the pool, the other victims of fatherly generosity and I practiced using the equipment. Finally, we were to submerge ourselves in the Caribbean Sea and join the clams, shrimp, edible fish, and the rest of the condemned.

We rode our ugly, graceless barge across the lagoon. The water was like a mirror but still everyone got seasick and barfed copiously. Underwater, we happily encountered a reef full of fish. With sweeping waves of his arms, the guide would indicate one or another aspect of marine biology while we swam along behind him. I stopped for a moment to examine a fish. When I looked up, the group had disappeared.

Imagine, for just a moment, your author lost on the bottom of the Caribbean. Calmly, I checked the tank levels and confirmed that I had ten more minutes. Shortly thereafter, I found another group of divers and I surfaced in the nick of time. In the distance, I could see my boat squatting. I swam to her.

During our short reunion on the deck, the guide expressed to me his deep concerns about my disappearance.

"Where were you?" he asked distractedly. He was busy with a huge pile of scuba gear.

"I got lost...joined another group...over there," I replied breathlessly. I pointed to the other boat in the distance.

"I thought we were under head count," he told me, completely without interest.

Just then, the boat lurched forward. I sat and watched the mangroves pass and thought about what it would be like to run out of air underwater or come up

without the guide and get decompression sickness. I thought about smothering my dad with a pillow. Maybe I can just sign him up for skydiving or something and let fate take care of it.

# Turistas Perdidos Debajo del Mar

JEFF METTE

La Navidad del año antepasado, yo estaba en México. Era un viaje familiar y desgraciadamente yo tenía compartir el dormitorio con mi padre. Cada día él se despertaba a principios de la mañana y empezaba a quejarse. El primero de sus lamentos era que nadie quería explorar el país exótico. Entonces, una mañana destinada y crítica él me dijo que yo iba a disfrutar de una aventura debajo del mar. Ya él había pagado por la clase de nado submarino.

En la piscina las otras víctimas de la generosidad de sus propios padres y yo practicábamos usar el equipo de Scuba. Al fin estábamos listos para hundirnos en el mar Caribe y juntarnos con las almejas, camarones, peces alimenticios, y el resto de los condenados.

Por barcaza fea y rechoncha nosotros cruzamos la laguna. El agua era como un espejo pero muchos pasajeros estaban mareados y vomitaban copiosamente. Debajo del mar, encontramos felizmente un arrecife poblado de peces numerosos. Con ademanes amplios el guía indicaba uno u otro aspecto de la biología marina mientras nadaron al lado de él. Yo paré por poco rata y examiné un pez. Cuando yo di una mirada alrededor del arrecife el grupo se había desvanecido.

Favor de imaginar brevemente al autor perdido en el fondo del mar Caribe. Tranquilamente yo verifiqué el nivel de aire y confirmé que yo tenía al menos diez minutos más. Poco después, yo encontré otro grupo de turistas subacuáticos y me subí en el momento preciso. A los lejos yo vi la rechoncha. Nadé a ella.

Durante nuestra reunión corta en el puente del barco, el guía me expresó sus inquietudes profundas a mí.

«¿Dónde estabas tú?» me preguntó distraídamente. Él estaba ocupado con un montón del equipo de nado submarino.

«Estaba perdido...me junté al otro grupo...por acá.» contesté jadeando. Yo indiqué el barco en lontananza.

«Pensé que alguien quizá estaba extraviado.» me dijo él completamente sin interés.

En este momento el barco despegó bruscamente. Yo lo sentí y miré el manglar y pensé en la experiencia de acabarme el aire debajo del mar. O subir sin el guía y contraer la enfermedad de decompression. Pensé en asfixiar a mi padre con una almohada. Quizá puedo matricularlo en clases de paracaidismo o algo similar y esperar que el destino ocurra.

# The Girl Who Saw the Civil War

MARGARET WEST

When I was young, around eight or nine, I wanted a bike more than anything in the world. The bike I had my eye on wasn't like the other bikes. Oh, no. This bike was pink and purple, and it had a banana seat. As well, it had a little white basket in the front, covered with flowers. I loved that bike. She was all I thought about.

Well, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that my parents bought me that bike, and everything was perfect. But, alas, that's not what happened. Instead of my dream bicycle, my parents gave me something else, something horrible. I can still remember how I felt when I opened that present and saw what was hidden under the wrapping paper.

It was huge, over half my size (granted, I wasn't so large myself, but still!). It had string hair all tangled up. Its button eyes were mocking me. Its body was nothing but cloth and stuffing, and, boy, was it filthy. It looked as if it had been shoved in a box in an attic for a long time.

This was more than my young heart could handle, and I began to cry. My mother, in her defense, told me, "One day, you will love this doll." I did not believe her.

But I was a child, and my mother was right. The doll, whose name is Jasmine, was made by my great, great, great grandmother for her daughter, my great, great grandmother during the Civil War. Now, when I look at her, I don't see the same disappointing pile of junk that was where my bike should have been. I see a doll made with love and filled with mysteries and history. And I am proud to have this emblem of my past.

# La Chica Que Vió la Guerra Civil

MARGARET WEST

Cuando era joven, tenía ocho o nueve años, yo quería una bicicleta más que nada. La bicicleta que quería no era como otras bicicletas. Esta bicicleta era rosada y morada, y tenía una silla en forma de bananas. También tenía una canasta con flores enfrente. Me encantaba esta bicicleta. Pensaba en eso todo el tiempo.

Pues, yo sé qué piensa usted. Cree usted que mis padres me dieron esta bicicleta. Pero que lástima para mí, porque nunca la recibí. En lugar de la bicicleta, me dieron algo diferente, ¡algo horrible! Todavía recuerdo lo que pensé cuando abrí el paquete y vi lo que estuvo adentro.

Era grande, la mitad de mi estatura. Tenía pelo de hilo que estaba enredado. Sus ojos de botones me burlaron. Su cuerpo era de tela y pelusa. Estaba muy sucia, como había estado en un ático hace mucho tiempo. Empecé a llorar, y mi madre me dijo, “Un día, te gustará esa muñeca”. No le creí.

Pero era joven y mi madre tenía razón. La muñeca, que se llama Jasmine, era de mi tatarabuela, y su madre la hizo durante la Guerra Civil. Ahora, cuando la veo, no veo la misma muñeca que vi cuando era joven. Veo una muñeca de amor, misterios e historia. Y tengo orgullo que tengo el regalo mejor del mundo.

# A Taste of California

MARGARET WEST

One day in June of 1991, my brother Joseph and I were playing baseball in the front yard. It was wonderfully sunny, without a cloud to be seen. Joseph was up to bat, and I was pitching. My brother hit the ball over the trees and into the street. I started to run after it, but I just couldn't catch it. I saw it roll down the hill and under a car. This struck me as odd because I wasn't accustomed to seeing cars parked on our street. I stopped short and took in the car and its surroundings.

There were four men in the car, and one outside in front, looking at the engine. He seemed confused, and the others were yelling things at him like, "Man, you said you knew what you was doing!" and "We gonna be late!"

At first, they were so concerned about the car they didn't notice me, but then one of the men in the backseat saw me.

"Hello," he said. They all turned to look who their friend had just addressed.

"Hi," I responded, a little nervous.

"You live 'round here?" another one asked me.

"Yeah, I live over there, in the house behind the trees, with my parents and my brother."

"Oh, man, that's sweet."

"Now, ain't that some luck," they said.

"And your parents, they up there now?" one of them asked me.

"Yeah, they are," I said.

Well, after some more discussion where they explained to me, with the occasional squabble, exactly what had happened, and I asked my share of questions, because I just couldn't understand why they hadn't bought more gas when they'd last passed a station, I grabbed my ball, and they grabbed their bags and followed me home.

It was the first time I had seen all the men together and out of the car. And what a group they were! They were all African-American, with very short, dark hair. Two of them were short and chubby, and the other three were tall and skinny.

They all seemed happy and relaxed despite the fact that their car had just run out of gas.

As we arrived back in front of the house, my brother started to yell, "Where have you been, Marg...," but as soon as he saw the five men behind me, he froze.

"Hey, boy," they said, but that was too much for Joseph, and he ran inside crying. He wasn't a big fan of strangers.

"Follow me," I told the men. "My little brother is stupid."

I went in the house and yelled, "Mom! Dad! I have five men with me!" which, of course, got their attention. So after many more questions and just as many explanations, my parents decided they could use the phone to call AAA.

As you can imagine, my brother and I had grown bored of all the grownup talk and had started snooping. The men had put their bags down in the front hall when they'd come in, and everyone was now in the living room.

My brother called me over to the one he was looking in.

"Look," he whispered as he held out some very odd large, brown costume looking things he'd found.

"What are they?" I asked.

"You don't know?" he responded. "They're huge raisins! They're the California Raisins!"

# Un Sabor de California

MARGARET WEST

Un día en junio del año 1991, mi hermano, Joseph, y yo estábamos jugando en el patio frente de nuestra casa. Hacía mucho sol sin una nube en el cielo. Jugábamos béisbol. Joseph estaba bateando, y yo lancé. Mi hermano bateó la pelota arriba de los árboles y hasta la calle. Empecé a correr, pero no pude coger la pelota. La pelota rodó abajo de la colina y abajo un coche. Eso era raro, porque nunca aparcaban en la calle. Entonces, paré de correr, y miré al coche.

Había cuatro hombres en el coche, y uno afuera enfrente, mirando a la cubierta. El parecía confundido, y los otros gritaban cosas como, «Dijiste que sabías hacerlo,» y «¡vamos a ir tarde!» Ellos no me notaron y el grito siguió, hasta el hombre que estuvo detrás de la silla en el medio me vio.

«Hola,» él me dijo. Los otros me miraron con ojos felices, como si yo fuera su salvador.

«Hola,» respondí, con un poco de temor.

«¿Vives aquí?,» el otro me preguntó.

«Sí, vivo por allá, en la casa detras los árboles, con mis padres y mi hermano.»

«Oh, qué bueno, qué suerte,» dijeron.

«Y, ¿tus padres, están allá?» uno me preguntó.

«Claro,» dije, porque empecé a darme cuenta que pasó.

Pues, había mucha discusión cuando me explicaron exactamente que pasó y hice más preguntas (porque no pude entender por qué no habían comprar más gasolina cuando vieron la estación). Después de reobré la pelota, me siguieron a mi casa.

Era la primera vez que veía a todos los hombres juntos y afuera del coche. Ellos eran negros americanos y tenían pelo muy corto y negro. Dos eran bajos y gorditos. Tres eran altos y flacos. Todos parecían felices y relajados a pesar de que el coche estaba sin gasolina, como tenían trabajos divertidos e interesantes.

Cuando llegamos, Joseph empezó a gritarme cuando me vio. «¿Dónde has estado, Marg...?» pero el paró cuando vio a los hombres que estaban detrás de mí.

«Hola, niño,» le dijeron. Mi hermano empezó a llorar. No le gustaban los extraños.

«Sígueme,» les dije. «Mi hermano es tonto.»

Entré a la casa y grité «¡Mamá! ¡Papá! Tengo cinco hombres conmigo.»

Como puedes imaginar, mis padres tenían muchas preguntas. Pero, después de toda la confusión, mis padres decidieron que los hombres podían usar el teléfono para llamar a la asociación de automoviles de America.

Mientras tanto, mi hermano había entrado y empezó a buscar algo interesante en las maletas de los hombres (antes, los hombres decidieron que no debieron dejar sus cosas en el coche.) Mientras ellos llamaban, mi hermano me llamó para ver las maletas.

«Mira,» susurró. Había encontrado disfraces grandes y marrones.

«¿Qué son?» le pregunté.

«¿No sabes?» respondí. «Son pasas grandes. ¡Son las pasas de California!»

# Are We Muslims or Terrorists?

ZAHEDA KHANAM

When a Danish press published a cartoon of Muhammad with a bomb-shaped turban, they implied that Islam is inherently a violent religion. This is both ironic and offensive to those who uphold the true ideals of the religion. The irony is in the fact that the word “Islam” means “peace,” and the offense comes from the fact that it is against the rules of Islam to depict the image of Muhammad, in part, to discourage idolatry.

However, what a cartoonist drew is just one man’s expression of a point of view. We can’t hold a person guilty just because an opinion was expressed. Yes, the cartoon offended many people all over the world, but a cartoonist still has the right to do that. In this century, we’ve reached a point where a person should not be afraid to express his or her opinion. Freedom of speech comes as a priority for any civilized society. That is how we all can invite each other’s opinions and intellectual ideas. Still, the issue here is the unfortunate portrayal of this religion. Muslims greet people by saying, “As-salamu-’alykum-wa-rahmatullaahi-wa-barakatuh,” which means, “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” This idea expresses the truer essence of the religion, the one that the vast majority of Muslims follow. However, because of the hypocritical and ignorant actions of some violent extremists, the non-Muslim world receives a distorted view of the religion. Unfortunately, it is this distorted view that gets spread through the media, and the cartoon is just another example of the continuation of such negative stereotypes. Certainly, there is a big difference between a peaceful protestor and one who decides to protest through violence. They can both claim to be Muslims, but, in reality, only the peaceful one is legitimately practicing the beliefs of Islam that are clearly written in the Qur’an. As a comparison, if a Christian man decides to bomb an abortion clinic, the peaceful majority of Christians will clearly understand that this person is not following the Biblical teachings of Jesus. They would understand how ridiculous it would be to draw a cartoon of Jesus bombing an abortion clinic because they are culturally familiar with Christianity. However,

because people in the Western world are not as familiar with the tenets of Islam, they might not be so quick to understand the misleading depiction of a cartoon criticizing Islam. This broad cultural misunderstanding, I believe, is the greatest danger created by such stereotypical cartoons.

Thus, in answer to the question posed by the headline, in some people's mind, there is not much of a distinction between Islam and terrorism. However, this is a mistaken association that needs to be clarified through more dialogue, and perhaps that is the greatest good that can come out of this Danish cartoon controversy.

# ON MEDIA: HUM 160 Students Explain How “The Medium Is the Message”

DR. ELIZABETH PENTON

[Editor’s Note: This essay is intended as an introduction to the following three film analysis essays.]

Cinema is sometimes referred to as a means of propagandizing. Subject matter is important but, as Marshall McLuhan stated in his iconic quotation, elements of technique and delivery have just as much impact on meaning. One of the major objectives of an undergraduate education is to educate students to be discerning consumers of media. The course HUM 160, Introduction to Film, specifically strives to have its students understand and critique the techniques of film-making. The following student papers examine the work of three prominent film directors whose editing styles have underscored a broader message in their oeuvre.

After seeing her first John Ford film, *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939), Summer Healey remarked that she felt like she was watching *Bonanza*, a TV series which ran from 1959 to 1973, well before she was even born. Ford’s directing set down the classic template not just for Westerns, but in American film and television for decades. Ford’s classical cutting and lyrical style have defined American identity, with landscapes that embody the great American frontier, colors reflecting gender roles and ethnic distinctions, and actions characterized by emotion, humor and heroism. Often, Ford’s plots involve the struggles of a man against and within a variety of forces swirling around him. *Drums Along the Mohawk* showcases the experience of one newlywed couple on the hostile frontier during the American Revolution. Krista Rosendahl’s paper examines the mechanics and photography of the pivotal chase scene during which the protagonist runs for the life of his family, his community, and their dream of a place in the new world.

The infamous Stanley Kubrick is known for having “more imagination with dialogue and a camera than Hollywood has seen since the obstreperous Orson Welles went riding out of town” (Phillips 551). Kubrick’s films run a creative

gamut. *Dr. Strangelove, Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, is a masterful example of his directing genius at work, allowing the accidents of filming, the magic of editing, and the spontaneity of the actors to work together to produce a work wholly unanticipated by even Kubrick, himself. As a comment on the ironic relationship of fallible man to his fallible machines and the paradox of political reasoning and morality, this film is an aesthetic tour de force of editing and tone. Summer Healey's paper closely examines a single, quickly passing shot that screams "satire" in its two seconds of glory. Given the release date of 1964, this film was prescient in its dark view of military and technological prowess and, like *2001, A Space Odyssey*, in its editing techniques.

Sergei Eisenstein was called on by Stalin to produce a film that would set forth a message of Russian pride and identity in the face of a possible invasion from the West on the eve of World War II. The story would be that of the historical figure, Alexandre Nevsky, who led an unlikely victory against the advancing Teutonic (Germanic) Knights in an asymmetrical "battle on the ice" of Lake Peipus in 1242. This victory marked the firm establishment of the Russian Empire on the eastern boundary of Europe. Nevsky was also adept at negotiating peace with the Mongol nation who were simultaneously on the move toward the north (Russia) and west (Middle East and Europe) during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Eisenstein is noted for the development of a film editing style called Soviet Montage, a technique clearly designed to create meaning and solicit specific feelings from raw imagery. Though no less manipulating, the film *Alexandre Nevsky* (1938) does not use montage. Rather, the director employs extreme horizontal sweeps and very low angle shots to conjure a powerful sense of the land and sky: the body and soul of Russia. Nick Holdekom's paper illustrates how the director creates a cinematic battle for the camera frame.

#### Works Cited

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# Before the Battle on the Ice

NICK HOLDZKOM

Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 landmark film *Alexander Nevsky* is a remarkable document of Soviet formalist filmmaking. Editing was an almost mystical experience for Eisenstein, and his advanced skill and care are evident throughout the film. One of the most amazing examples of his editing is the twenty-minute battle on the ice, with its myriad of techniques, involving varied and numerous camera angles, forward and reverse motion, camera proxemics, and even some early jump cuts, all colliding to create a pulsing and dramatic battle with the intention of putting the viewer right in the heat of it and sometimes as a witness to the dread and profound bravery the Russian folk army demonstrates. The battle on the ice can be seen as a battle for frame dominance and Eisenstein's editing is heavily responsible for this effect of proximity.

The lengthy battle scene owes much of its impact and drama to the extended scenes of preparation and expectation that precede the first engagement of battle. The scene opens with the date "April 5, 1242" on the screen which fades into a desolate and overcast sky brightening as the day of battle draws near. The Russian army has positioned themselves and stand, waiting and surveying the frozen lake.

The sky dominates these opening establishing shots. Setting up the battle that is soon to come, Eisenstein uses this extreme long shot of the frozen lake at the bottom of the frame with the sky dominating the rest of the frame, frequently as a multivalent symbol. The open sky could be seen as a blatant display of what can never be owned, it could show the vastness and desolation of both the landscape and the emotions of the Russian people or it could allude to the heavens watching on in anticipation.

There is a repetition of the open expanse of earth and sky as the scene progresses; the land slowly takes over more and more of the frame. This droning horizontal effect is finally broken by the first shots of the Russian army. In a low angle shot, a general is standing bravely in profile, on a large rock in deep focus on the left edge of the frame, with his cape flowing in the wind. Behind him stands a

soldier, in quarter turn, holding a spear in the air, adding to the newly established verticality. There is a feeling of man-made verticality, defiant to the natural horizontal landscape. This and many other highly stylized character positionings are used as a key to understanding the emotions behind the Russian people. The editing is slow and deliberate, allowing the viewer to read into the emotional impact of the setting and posing of the characters. This makes for a purposeful and highly effective suspension of time; there is no clue as to the duration of this scene, five seconds or five hours.

The editing speeds up with several long sequence shots showing many different reactions and choreographical placement of the Russian army looking toward the horizon. Like a painter slowly filling up and developing his or her canvas, Eisenstein begins to incorporate different parts of the frame to show the Russian army as they begin to invade the open space that he continues to cut to and reestablish throughout the scene. Tight-framed close-ups of soldiers' faces clash with shots of the backs of other soldiers staring at the horizon in a long shot. There are no normal, eye-level shots. The camera is often positioned from low angles or moderately high angles and sometimes at oblique angles, revealing the bravery and significance of the characters and always incorporating some portion of the setting into the frame.

A final way in which Eisenstein thought of to utilize the frame and proxemic patterns is in the advancement of the German army. They appear in the extreme long, establishing shot of the frozen lake enveloped by the sky as they advance towards the camera. This horizontal shot with the German army moving towards the camera is incorporated with a juxtaposing shot of a dramatically vertical, bird's-eye view, shot in a tighter, long shot of the German army moving downhill, from the top of the frame to the bottom, like running water. A third shot is then brought in to show the distance traveled by cutting to another horizontal shot of the German army running across screen from right to left. These three shots quicken the pacing of the scene as the emotion and setting have been established and the battle is imminent. The length of the cuts shortens, heightening the

suspense and building to a final vertical shot, this time a crane-shot, as the two armies finally descend upon each other.

Eisenstein chose cuts that juxtapose ideas and concepts rather than create a linear timeline. Similar subjects shot from different positions, with a constant reestablishing shot, reinforce the tension of the ensuing battle on the ice.

Somewhat criticized for its heavy-handed symbolic nature and subjective view of reality, Eisenstein's filmmaking is very direct and sincere. His innovative camera angles, proxemics, and editing practices create possibly the most elegant and profound audio and visual cooperation in cinema history.

# Peace Is Our Profession

SUMMER HEALEY

Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* is a brilliant work of happy accidents. Kubrick's incidental approach inserted satire into what would have otherwise been a serious political commentary on the Cold War. These "accidents" occur by mixing satire with startling realism. One such scene contains a powerful contrast that occurs during a troop's attempt to storm the barricaded base containing General Jack D. Ripper and Captain Mandrake, who are connected through the dominant—a massive white billboard containing the jarringly simple slogan "Peace Is Our Profession" that towers over the soldiers who are in the midst of death and violence.

The mise en scene of the shot sets the billboard slightly off-center in the mid-ground, but as the camera slowly focuses during a brief pause, the audience is able to clearly see the words "Peace is our Profession" placed below "843 Air Bomb Unit"—focusing our attention, utilizing a closed form technique, on not just the ironic mission statement but on those who are carrying out this mission for our protection. The use of the closed form technique allows the viewer to peer at the chaos through a chain-linked fence, which obstructs the view of the fighting occurring within its perimeter illustrating the obstruction of the objective of peace that is driving the violence, as well as entrapping the soldiers in a brutal fight which contradicts the clear message. This entrapment extends to the ignorant soldiers who are, of course, the men in the 843rd Air Bomb Unit who are not flying to our salvation but to the destruction of humanity—they are trapped not just by their mission but by their bravado attitudes that allow them to destroy without thought of the ramifications.

A dead soldier lies below the billboard, his gun by his side, helpless, as his arm outstretches towards his weapon, only inches, it appears, from his fingers, and, like the president's hope for stopping the mission that will destroy everything, it is just out of reach. In this loosely framed shot, the audience is soon aware of the scope of the battle currently raging as men move quickly in and out of the picture, darting

around the dead soldier with gun fire as the sole background music—running from their fellow soldier’s fate. The stark landscape is interrupted by the smoke that abruptly appears on the screen and objects that swirl around the billboard and the dead man, creating quick paced movements allowing the audience to finally feel the full tension that is surrounding the men.

Low key lighting creates a dreary outlook with little contrast except a lit area where Kubrick further directs the audience’s attention to the dominants of the shot. The scene, apparently shot with a long lens, blurs the soldiers, creating nameless faces, allowing the audience to identify the troop members as any one of our boys. As one watches, the scene gives the sense of a news reel from WWII through the grainy cinematography and the use of hand-held cameras, creating a realistic shot that conveys an atmosphere of anxiety and tension in the situation, which appear to conflict with the rest of the film in which the leaders’ childish reactions are often the dominants of the scene. The swirling and blurred images in this news-like format contradict the dominants of the shot, which are life-less and completely still in the midst of action and turmoil. The effect illustrates the difference between the words and the action of the mission at hand as actions speak louder than words. Peace is their profession, but to attain their goal, the troops are sent to their deaths by violence through incompetence, ironically falling victim to their slogan, and making a mockery of the evocation of free will. This shot epitomizes the entire film’s statement on the hypocrisy of power—no peace can be forced. Kubrick, in his other scenes, shows his different characters using reasoning, compromise, and politics as the main methods of mediating, all non-violent forms of mediating towards the main goal of peace. This contradiction between peaceful mediation and the forceful rigidity of the military boasting that “peace is [their] profession” allows Kubrick to demonstrate visually that the military force is incompatible with peace since the military will always be combating another, negating peace. This is seen in the final moments of the war room as the general begins to shout frantically at the men in the war room that there can be no “mine gap” giving the audience an unsettling feeling as to who exactly is “calling the shots” displayed so vividly before us.

# Review of *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939)

KRISTA K. ROSENDAHL

Whoop...the arrow hits the tree just inches from Gilbert's face as we hear a drum beat! Mr. Ford chooses an *eye-level, medium shot* to capture the emotion of the scene. Danger is imminent which prompts Gilbert to take action. He leaves the Fort in a sprint to the next Fort along the frontier to obtain help while leaving behind his beloved wife, Lana, along with all his friends. The Indians have just created an explosion outside the Fort with the help of the British. It looks as though the Indians will take the Fort shortly. Can Gilbert get help in time?

In this "classical style" film, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, John Ford shows exemplary techniques in the portrayal of speed and distance through lighting, landscape views, and camera angles. The music adds drama, apprehension, anxiety, and tension to the audience. Gilbert has just been lowered through the window of the chapel fort wall and is running through an enemy-infested area and towards the woods. The high angle shot gives a general overview of the ground and river bed area, suggesting a tedious and dangerous journey and also conveying a lack of speed on the part of Gilbert. The background music is of war drums, high octave Indian cries, and a violin playing rapidly, all creating an atmosphere of tension. This high angle shot is the establishing shot for what is to come. As Gilbert is about to enter the thick, green forest enhanced through color and lighting, a deep-focus shot is used. Concurrently, an explosion occurs at the fort. Gilbert whips his body and face around in response, emphasizing the urgency of his mission. Mr. Ford spotlights Gilbert's face to capture urgency, purity and goodness. The deep-focus shot reveals the thickness and darkness of the forest. Whoop...the arrow hits the tree serving as a wake up call to get moving and is shown by a close-up shot of the arrow and an audible boom from a drum emphasizing the power of the arrow. It remains as a focal point using a fade-out shot. The chase is on and the action is established through visual shots and music.

Dawn emerges representing the passage of time through use of a fade-in shot. A whole night of running and being chased has been captured by this technique.

Time and distance are further established through the use of cutting to continuity. Ford uses both pine and birch forests with pan shots of the open plains in between them to indicate the great distance that has been run. He also uses filters and fill lights to show the changes in the sky that normally occur throughout the day and night. The shooting script calls for wide-angles, low-angles, upper-angles, and pan shots with colors representing different skies capturing the distance and vastness of the chase. This technique is often used to break monotony and create a sense of distance and time. A long shot is used with backlighting to show motion. Gilbert passes the camera; there is a three-shot of the Indians pursuing him. Ford then uses a wide-angle lens capturing all four characters running. The change of hues in the sky from sunrise to a darker sky creates passage of time, i.e., a full day. Slow stock and high key lighting appear to be used to show full daylight which produces a crisp, clean image. Ford uses linear, open forms in vast horizontal shots to express the immensity of landscape running off the screen past the limitation of the frame. The open land shots were setup with a wide-angle lens. The characters run toward the camera, and even the clouds slant upward and off the upper part of the frame in a triangular form, representing an expansiveness of the plains and clouds going off into infinity in these loosely framed shots. This was again seen in the final shot of the chase scene when the Indians are giving up. The camera shot all four characters from the back using a low-angle shot. Once again a different type of forest was used. The trees on the left and the right side of the center shot, gave the illusion of coming out of the forest into an open space. It was a carefully planned shot conveying many subtle ideas. The sides of the frame show a fading, thinning forest of pines, which also represented height and altitude. The terrain is slanting upward. The camera tilts upward emphasizing an up hill motion and illustrating the character's struggle. In the upper center of the frame there is open space, representing freedom or room to breathe thus giving the viewer a feeling of going from the confinement of the forest to the top of a plateau or mesa, through great effort. In summation of this well planned shot, a sense of depth and expansion beyond the forest was brilliantly achieved through the sky appearing as if floating over the mountains, with clouds thinning and appearing to move in

forward streaks. The trees were much skinnier like those in higher elevations. Gilbert is out running the Indians. Ford's visual style masterfully illustrates Gilbert's escape from the claustrophobia of the forest. The audience experiences Gilbert's ordeal, his courage and stamina, as he finally breaks free from the imminent danger.

# **The Patriot Act – National Security vs. Civil Liberty**

**JASON A. EARHART**

There is a serious problem that is being overlooked today by a majority of Americans. Unfortunately, most Americans are turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the problem while our freedoms, the founding principles of our country, are slowly being eroded away under the banners of safety and national security. Shortly after the terrorist attacks upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the United States government enacted into law the Provide Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (Patriot) Act. This law was designed to improve the communication between various law enforcement agencies of the United States in an effort to better track and further prevent terrorist attacks from occurring. The only problem is that while this is happening, there are parts of the act that circumvent some of the rights and privileges granted to each American citizen under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In order to prevent such an injustice from occurring, citizens should urge their senators and representatives to enact into law various bills, such as the Security and Freedom Enhancement (SAFE) Act, that prevent such an erosion from occurring.

The Constitution and Bill of Rights are the two laws that the founders of our country enacted in order to protect the rights and freedoms that every citizen is given by God. These laws also limit the amount of power that the government can have, and they give each branch of our government the ability to check the other so that one branch does not become more powerful than the other. The problem with the Patriot Act, according to some, is that not only is the language vague and hard to understand, but there are sections that could possibly be used not to fight terrorism, like it was designed, but to simply get around those safeguards granted by our nation's forefathers. The provisions that have caused the most uproar since their inception are Sections 213, 215, and 216. Section 213 contains a provision commonly referred to as the "Sneak and Peek" provision that allows the police to search the home and business of a suspected terrorist without informing the suspect and without any reason other than the suspicion of terrorist activities.

Section 215 says that libraries, banks, internet service providers, and other record keeping professions have to divulge the personal records of a suspected terrorist to authorities without the consent or knowledge of the individual and without reasonable evidence. Section 216 allows various agencies to trace, track, and monitor the e-mails, phone conversations, and other personal correspondence of a suspected terrorist. Supporters of the Patriot Act state that these sections, along with others like them, are a necessity for our country to successfully fight terrorism; however, Nat Hentoff in his weekly column of the Washington Times, says that “The Justice Department recently conceded that 88 percent of section 213 search warrants have been executed in non-terrorism cases” (A21).

Following the attacks of 9/11, the American people were frightened. Everyone kept asking how these attacks could have happened on American soil and what we can do to prevent these attacks from occurring again. To quickly reassure Americans of our safety, Congress passed, with an overwhelming bipartisan majority, the Patriot Act, which President Bush signed into law on October 26, 2001 (Ball 49). The Patriot Act, however, was not the first law put into effect that called into question the right of national security over civil liberty. In 1917, after the United States entered World War I, against strong opposition from minority groups, President Wilson established The Espionage Acts which lessened the rights of citizens who were of German origins. In 1918, the government passed the Sedition Acts of 1918, which allowed the government to imprison anyone who spoke out against the government or acted in a way that was considered disloyal or subversive. Then again during World War II, approximately 139,000 immigrants as well as lawful citizens of Japanese, German, or Italian origin were detained in work camps without trial on suspicion of espionage (Ball 6). These are only a few examples of how our government has suppressed the rights of lawful citizens under the banner of National Security.

There are many critics as well as supporters of the Patriot Act; therefore, there are many solutions to the problem and debate over national security versus civil liberties. One such solution is to simply do nothing because there is no problem; the government should simply be allowed to do whatever is necessary in order to

protect the United States from any threats whether local or world wide. The advantage to this idea is that since there would be no controls on the government, it would be pretty easy to catch terrorists and therefore protect our country. The main disadvantage is according to Congressman Roscoe Bartlett, a Republican from Maryland: "With this permanent expansion of government powers, we will no longer have areas, such as our homes, that deserve greater privacy protections" (Hentoff A21). Also, where would the line be drawn? Bartlett further says, "The government] could investigate us in secret based upon unproven complaints against us. That puts all of us as individuals at risk and at the mercy of any disgruntled neighbor or coworker who alleges we are involved in terrorist activity. It could be me today, or a neighbor or member of a labor union or church group tomorrow" (Hentoff A21). The resulting police state that would occur is not what so many men and women have died defending. The liberties and freedoms that this country represents would be a thing of memory.

Another solution to this growing problem is to simply abolish the Patriot Act all together. This is a good idea in theory because the threat to civil liberties would be gone; however, the act itself has some good points in it. Title VII of the Patriot Act expands the regional information-sharing system to allow federal, state, and local law enforcement quicker response times in the event of suspected threat of attack. Title IX expands the duties and responsibilities of the director of the CIA in order to assist the Attorney General in the generation and dissemination of intelligence as it pertains to terrorism. This section of the Patriot Act also created the Foreign Asset Tracking Center and the National Virtual Translation Center in an effort to improve the training of government officials regarding the identification and use of foreign intelligence. Title VIII of the Patriot Act updated the laws concerning domestic and cyberterrorism. In a speech to the Ohio State Highway Patrol, President Bush said, "Before the Patriot Act, Internet providers who notified federal authorities about threatening emails ran the risk of getting sued. The Patriot Act modernized the law to protect Internet companies who voluntarily disclose information that saves lives." Most importantly, the Patriot Act added amendments to the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 by establishing

compensation guidelines and to provide assistance to the victims of terrorist attacks and their families.

A third solution is to pressure our elected officials to create laws that amend the Patriot Act so that the rights and freedoms of Americans are not lessened so that we can feel safe. In the years since the creation of the Patriot Act, many organizations have filed law suit after law suit which challenge the legality of the Patriot Act. In response to these lawsuits, various congressional representatives have introduced bills that will amend not only the language of the Patriot Act but some of the sections themselves. Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wis) has introduced three bills that he says protect the liberties and freedoms that were taken away by the Patriot Act. First, he introduced the Library, Bookseller, and Personal Records Privacy Act which is designed to protect the privacy of citizens who have no connection to terrorism by re-defining the ability of the government to obtain library, bookstore, medical, and financial records under Section 215 of the Patriot Act while still allowing the FBI to follow up on legitimate terrorist leads. Next, the Reasonable Notice and Search Act revises Section 214 of the Patriot Act to delay notice of the execution of search warrants and requires the Attorney General of the United States to submit to Congress a report concerning all the requests of delayed notices. Finally, the Computer Trespass Clarification Act limits the amount of warrantless surveillance of authorized computer users allowed under Section 216 of the Patriot Act (Martins and Martins 54). Also, on April 5, 2005, Senator Feingold joined others including Senators Larry Craig (R-Idaho), Dick Durbin (D-Ill), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), and John Sununu (R-N.H.) in introducing the Security and Freedom Ensured (SAFE) Act which calls for the amendment of some of the heavily criticized sections of the Patriot Act including Sections 213, 215, and 216 (Martins and Martins 54).

The solution to this problem is for citizens of this country to stand up and urge their senators and representatives to enact into laws bills such as the SAFE Act. Section II of the SAFE Act would eliminate the "John Doe" wiretap. This type of wiretap does not need to identify the person or the phone being tapped; therefore, protecting Americans from unneeded surveillance. Section IV of the Safe

Act amends Section 215 of the Patriot Act by requiring law enforcement officials to provide reasonable evidence and justification that the required information required is necessary to prove the suspect is a spy or terrorist. Also, the SAFE Act allows the suspect to challenge the government's claim in a court of law. This law and others like it allow for due process and for a continued system of checks and balances to occur within our government so that the right and privileges of American citizens will remain intact.

On September 11, 2001, the citizens of this country were awakened to the harsh reality of global terrorism. Everyone was and still is scared that those acts could one day be repeated. The Patriot Act was created with the intention of preventing such acts from occurring again. Unfortunately, the law was rushed into creation without properly thinking through the consequences to the American public. If we are to truly defeat the terrorists who committed those acts, we cannot allow the slow erosion of the freedoms on which this country was founded simply for the false hope of security. If we do, we allow the perpetrators of the acts to win. This country relaxed for a moment and the results were devastating. When I was in the Navy, my Commanding Officer used to always tell us to keep our heads on a swivel and to constantly stay alert and aware of our surroundings. We should not only pressure our elected officials to create laws that amend the Patriot Act so it does not strip away the rights of American citizens but we should maintain a constant level of awareness. The defense and national security of this nation are not simply just the responsibility of a person in uniform but of every citizen of the United States.

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# The Loss of and Search for Heritage

KULPANA AKPAN

Martín Espada wrote “Coca-Cola and Coco-Frío” in 1993. It is in the collection of poems titled *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators: Poems*. Espada has many collections of poetry. He was born in 1957 in New York, but his heritage lies partly in Puerto Rico. Espada’s experiences in Puerto Rico led him to write about the cultural transition he encountered. In this poem, he uses two components—symbolism and imagery—to help explain his point. Symbolism is when something represents something else and has a deeper meaning to it. Imagery describes the surroundings or sounds in a poem; it gives the reader an image of what is happening in the poem. In Espada’s poem “Coca-Cola and Coco-Frío,” the symbolism and imagery convey the people of Puerto Rico moving away from their culture.

Espada tells of how many of the people in Puerto Rico are Americanizing. The “fat boy” (3) goes to the country of his roots: Puerto Rico. He expects to find new things, but he finds the same and is “bored” (12). Finally, the boy discovers what he is looking for, after all his searching and coming up with dead ends. He discovers “coco frío” (15): “...a coconut / chilled, then scalped by a machete” (15-16). Through drinking the coconut milk, he gets a taste of the true Puerto Rico, rather than the “familiar” (12) American “Coca-Cola” (8). Many of the people in the poem are Americanizing and are leaving behind their culture. Espada shows that it is sad because they are replacing their culture with this new foreign one. To illustrate this, Espada uses symbolism to portray these people disconnecting from their origin.

Espada uses symbols to show how the people are no longer bonded with their culture. He writes, “...some great aunt / would steer him... / to a glass of Coca-Cola” (6-8). The boy’s relatives offer him Coke, but he does not want it. Espada writes, “he was bored with this potion, familiar / from soda fountains in Brooklyn” (12-13). The boy already drinks Coke in his hometown Brooklyn. The Coke symbolizes Brooklyn as the “familiar” (12), but the boy is looking for something new. Espada writes, “Then, at a roadside stand off the beach, the fat boy / opened his mouth to coco frío...” (14-15).

When the boy finds the *coco frío*, which symbolizes Puerto Rico's "family folklore" (2) or history, this is telling how he finds a part of Puerto Rico. On the other hand, the people are drinking Coke. They are not drinking their native beverage *coco frío*, but a drink from a culture which is not their own. Espada reveals this to the readers by writing, "...the boy marveled at an island / where the people drank Coca-Cola" (22-23). By them drinking Coke and not *coco frío*, it symbolizes how the people are assimilating the American culture into their own. Furthermore, Espada applies imagery to portray these points.

The imagery in the poem gives the reader a visualization of the boy searching and the people drifting from their heritage. Espada writes, "the fat boy wandered / from table to table / with his mouth open" (3-5). The author uses this visual to convey to the reader that the boy is searching. He is on the "island of his family folklore" (2), and he wants to find a piece of Puerto Rico. His relatives are not helping him because they keep giving him "a glass of Coca-Cola" (8). The boy "drank [the Coke] obediently" (11), but he is still hunting for something. At last, he finds the real Puerto Rico in the drink *coco frío*. Espada writes, "The boy tilted the green shell overhead/ and drooled the coconut milk down his chin" (18-19). This is displaying the boy finding a piece of Puerto Rico that is not overwhelmed by America. The boy drinks the *coco frío*, and it goes down his chin portraying that he is immersing himself in Puerto Rico, the country of his roots, and has found what he was looking for. Espada expresses that the people are Americanizing by writing, "...the people drank Coca-Cola / and sang jingles from World War II / in a language they did not speak" (23-25). These people are singing in English and not in Spanish. The boy wanted something of Puerto Rico, but they offered him something American, which is what these people are drinking. Puerto Rico is no longer unique; it is becoming like another country: America.

Symbolism and imagery are being used to tell the story of these people leaving their culture behind. Espada explains how Puerto Rico is becoming like a little America. The boy in the poem is trying to find his culture but is disappointed by his relatives; they are leaning toward what the boy is already familiar with. Espada uses symbolism, through Coca-Cola representing America's heritage and *coco-frío* representing Puerto Rico's heritage, to let the readers know in what ways the people are losing their grasp on their

Puerto Rican culture. Also, Espada uses imagery to help describe this act of Americanization that is happening with these people. Espada writes “Coca-Cola and Coco-Frío” to illustrate how Puerto Rico has become Americanized since World War II, yet some of its heritage has not been lost.

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# We Are Interchangeable

ERICKA NATZIC

When Tom tells his mother in Tennessee Williams's play The Glass Menagerie, "There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to you" (654), one cannot help but wonder if his sister Laura is the very definition of his heart. When E.E. Cummings says, "i do not know what it is about you that closes/ and opens; only something in me understands" (17-18) in his poem "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond," one, again, cannot help but wonder if this could be Tom speaking about the very same Laura. Through these two works, the reader is introduced to characters who seem to be echoing each other, and not only do they echo each other, but they also seem to be mirroring the relationships involved in both the play and the poem. Williams and Cummings craft two different pieces of writing, but there is a startling comparison to be made regarding the relationships between Tom and Laura, and the speaker and the muse.

In both relationships, their form of communication is less about words and more about an unspoken language the characters seem to share. Williams offers valuable insight into Tom and Laura's connection when reading through something as simple as his set directions: "*TOM utters another groan. LAURA glances at him with a faint, apologetic smile*" (645), or "[*She pulls on a shapeless felt hat with a nervous, jerky movement, pleadingly glancing at Tom...*]" (653). When Laura's glass collection gets knocked over in Scene III, Williams describes the following, "[Tom] *drops awkwardly on his knee to collect the fallen glass, glancing at LAURA as if he would speak but couldn't*" (651). There is an undercurrent of communication in which words are not necessary when Laura and Tom are together. Cummings's poem shares this same undercurrent. In reading over the dramatist's descriptions, one could almost insert Cummings's own lines of "your most frail gesture are things which enclose me" (3), or "your slightest look will uncloset me" (5). It was in the unsaid things that make these relationships even more compelling and fascinating.

Laura is made up of the same fragility as the muse in the poem, and this fragility captivates Tom as it does the speaker of the poem. Williams states in the

character analysis at the beginning of the play that Laura is “like a piece of her own glass, too exquisitely fragile to remove from the shelf” (641). He is reflecting Cummings’s person of “intense fragility” (14) of the poem. When Tom leaves home at the end of the play, the reader sees the symbolism of Laura as the glass following him in his travels:

Perhaps it was only a piece of glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city [and] I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be. (681)

“[So] in Tom’s case glass is both fragile and everlasting, [but] his physical escape brings no real liberation” (Durham 63). Laura’s memory has held onto him. The reader does not sense any real freedom in Cummings’s poem either. This is seen in the speaker’s words for his muse “nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals/ the power of your intense fragility” (13-14). Both Laura and the muse are made up of the same entrapping, a power that does not free Tom or the speaker. It controls instead. Laura’s “intense fragility” dictates Tom’s thoughts and actions as much as the muse dictates the speaker’s thoughts and actions.

Tom and Laura act according to each other as does the speaker and the muse, and neither really operate outside of this. R.B. Parker wrote, “[Williams] in an interview with the *New York Times* in 1975...said he believed there was no person living who ‘doesn’t contain both sexes. Mine could have been either one. Truly, I have both sides to my nature’”(131). Williams’s own belief fueled this representation found in Tom and Laura. And just as Tom realized he never really left Laura behind (he couldn’t, they were too much of the same person) is the same way the speaker describes his muse:

you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens  
(touching skillfully, mysteriously) her first rose  
or if your wish be to close me, i and

my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly ( 7-10)

The muse's response is the speaker's response. Laura's response is Tom's response. This proves that when one is such a part of something, one can never fully separate from it. Laura is like the rose. Tom dances in and out of being the one who waters her, while also believing he is made up of the same vine, the same petal, and the same flower.

There is a tension of ambiguity that occurs as an audience member in reading through both relationships of the play and the poem. When Tom says, "The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental..." (643), the reader could well extend those adjectives over to the Cummings poem. When reading the play, the reader begins to react to the story being created and starts to believe in it, and yet the reader needs to heed Tom's words. The reader experiences this same tension in the poetry of Cummings when the speaker refers to "things which I cannot touch because they are too near" (4), or the dimly lit uncertainty mentioned in "I do not know what it is about you that closes/ and opens" (16-17). There is a suspension created in lines like these. The reader is opened. The reader becomes closed. And then the reader is held, as the characters are held, in a place of ambiguity.

With both Tom and the speaker, their words are more reflective of themselves, rather than Laura or the muse. In most love letters or love poetry, while there is the sweet admiration of the Loved, there is a mirrored effect of just what the Loved does *for* the Loved One. In Cummings's poem, the reader is introduced to a fragile muse. Now while the reader is aware of her, the reader is more apt to learn about what the speaker does in response to the muse than learn about the muse herself. The silent eyes of the muse in Cummings poem can move the speaker to action or inaction. There is praise of the muse, and yet the poem is still more telling of the speaker, what he is able to do and feel, rather than about the muse for whom the poem is written to. This also occurs in The Glass Menagerie. Some critics may lean towards the play being more about Amanda or Laura, but Thomas L. King believes that "the play is Tom's" (86). King goes on further to quote one of the first reviewers of the play, Stark Young, noting, "Tom is the only character

in the play, for we see not the characters but Tom's memory of them" (qtd. in 86). Tom and Laura's relationship is intertwined, but whom the reader hears from throughout the play is from Tom about Tom. The muse inspires the speaker, but we hear from the speaker about the speaker. Here again is another way to see these two pieces of work combining.

When Williams chose the last line of Cummings's poem to be at the heading of his play The Glass Menagerie, this was no coincidence. Williams has Tom tell the audience at the beginning of the play that this "is not realistic" (643), but he, in fact, is not telling the audience completely the truth. Williams weaves his own life story in and out of the play, and this is particularly true when it comes to Laura and Tom's relationship. Williams's own relationship with his sister Rose was much like the relationship between Tom and Laura. R.B. Parker says that "Rose was the only person in the world that accepted [Tennessee] without reservation... who loved him deeply, and whom he could love with all the emotional intensity of a deeply sensitive and beleaguered child" (132). We have seen this same intense emotional bond in Tom's feelings for Laura. Williams intimately knew this poem that Cummings wrote in 1931. Williams seemingly interspersed Cummings's poem throughout his play because not only is it fitting for who Tom and Laura are to each other, but also it speaks volumes to the reality of Williams's own heart for his sister. Both Tennessee and "Tom" could be replaced with the "I" of "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond." Rose and "Laura" could be in place of the "you" in the poem. When Cummings writes, "nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands" (20), he may not have been thinking about the character of Laura, but Williams is. Williams writes a play, Cummings writes a poem, and in doing so, they both have created a bit of a community where the four people involved have been intimately living all along in each other's likeness.

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**Kulpana Akpan** is a Durham Tech student.

**Kristin Coulon** says, "I am 20 years old and in my third semester of the Business Administration program at DTCC. I was born in New Orleans, LA but am currently living in Pittsboro, NC. I have enjoyed writing poetry and short stories since a very young age but this is the first time I've submitted something to be considered for publication."

**Sir Francis Dashwood** is a peripatetic purveyor of periphrastic political prognostications and an enthusiastic evaluator of economic exigencies. He inhabits a humble hovel in Hillsborough with numerous animals, some of whom are relatives.

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**Martha J. Fitzgerald** is a pseudonym reflecting what the author's grandmother had wanted to name her. Now that Grandma's gone, the author does not want anyone to forget her weird hang-up about names. (Grandma had her own middle name erased from public record in the '30s because she didn't like it. To this day, only her daughter-in-law, the author's mother, knows Grandma's real middle name.)

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**Serena Sunderland** is 19 and says, "I'm a genius! If you're reading this inside "The Final Draft," then you know that it must be true! Either that or I'm extremely lucky in life."

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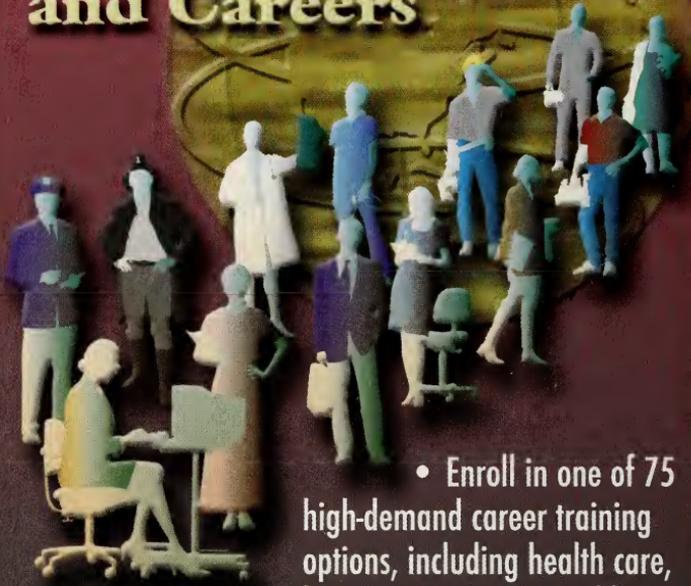
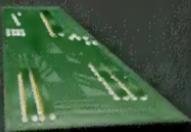
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