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BALANCE

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SCARS PUBLICATIONS
2004 COLLECTION BOOK

CONTEST WINNERS
FREEDOM & STRENGTH PRESS
MAGAZINES: DOWN IN THE DIRT,
CHILDREN, CHURCHES & DADDIES

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SCARS PUBLICATIONS
AMERICA 2004

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children
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& daddies

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down in the dirt

revealing all your dirty little secrets
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ART · WRITING · SCULPTURE

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THE BALANCE
BETWEEN OPPOSING FORCES

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

In light of the political elections this fall, I started wondering if anyone running for office could really help American with the issues we're faced with daily.

Being from Illinois, I thought of political candidates Alan Keyes (a man from Maryland running in Illinois). But he says it's not right to have an abortion, but the death penalty is good. Should I get my answers from a man who thinks it's not right terminate a fetus that can't live on its own, but it's apparently okay to kill those who have already been living?

That doesn't help me... But all I keep thinking about is how our government is supposed to protect us, and everyone felt something was missing after 9/11. Then I remember that news reports were stating after 9/11 that if flight 93 that crashed in Shanksville Pennsylvania landed less than 30 seconds later, my nephew would have been killed while in school from that crash.

After 9/11, my nephew couldn't sleep for days.

Can he be comforted that we had a decision-making president to help an economy that was failing for a year before he became president, when we *are* gaining jobs in 2004? Can he be comforted that the decisive President Bush stepped in to fight terrorist-supporting nations like Iraq when everyone else backed away?

I don't know if President Bush can help us, when I wonder why people who have lost jobs have found that new jobs now pay Americans on average 13 grand less per year. Then I wonder: George Bush prays in the Oval Office, and occasionally he even open cabinet meetings with prayer. May he be too much of a religious zealot to warrant reelection? And another thing: both the right and the left oppose the Patriot Act, and Bush wants to expand government powers under it. But what frightened me the most was when I heard a President Bush's advertisement that ended saying the country relies on freedom, faith, families and sacrifice.

What do we have to sacrifice for Bush's plan?

What have we already sacrificed for Bush's plan?

John Kerry and John Edwards protested and say that in war situations Kerry'd deploy all the forces in America's arsenal - our diplomacy, our intelligence system, our economic power, and the appeal of our values and ideas - to make America more secure

Do the Democrats have the answers? Let me think... Our diplomacy didn't do anything for years. We've been using our intelligence system already. And we are the biggest economic power in the world. And they hate our values and ideas. How will that help?

The Green party noted that this election is dominated by fear. The Republicans play on the fear of terrorism and the Democrats play on the fear of Bush. Do we have to play on fear to elect our president?

I've seen how other countries deal with our problems, like gas prices, or health care. In Europe, gas is expensive (their government doesn't subsidize its price down), so they don't depend on cars as much as we do in America. In China, people pay for healthcare out of pocket, because there was no national health care plans like in the United States. And if that meant families lived together to save money, then that might help keep the family together better than the American family.

Other countries don't seem to ask as much from their government as we do.

I wrote a poem in 1998, *True Happiness in the New Millennium*, and a few lines from it fit into this story perfectly:

you keep asking for a big brother and I'm here to set you straight
you want someone to wipe your noses for you
well, pick up the damn tissue and do it yourself
because when you give up your rights, you take away mine
and we're not having any of that

I say it again towards the end of the poem:

you're looking for peace in all the wrong places
you're asking your leaders to save you from yourself
but your leaders are losers and they're worse off than you

Maybe trying to say my peace about the elections for this annual book was a good way to introduce this book, by ending with lines from a poem, and by always reminding us that we should be thinking about everything. I know that's why we write, and that's probably why we read. Enjoy the reading in this collection volume. And keep thinking.

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Janet Kuypers®

Janet L. Kuypers
Doctor of Philosophy, University of Wexford, 1996,
Reverend through the Universal Life Church, 1999





SCARS PUBLICATIONS
EDITOR'S CHOICE
AWARD WINNERS

OUT OF SORTS

PETER RENNEBOHM

Jack was only seven weeks old when he entered our lives. Friends advised against our decision-said we were too old, too set in our ways. It was too soon after Sam. Perhaps, but as soon as we laid eyes on Jack, our hearts melted. We ignored their well- intended advice and brought Jack home.

We knew right away that he was, well, different. His head and ears were too big for the rest of his tiny body, but we thought he was wonderful. As time passed, he became something of a project, however. It was nothing definitive; he just seemed to demand more. Jacks body eventually balanced out but as a youngster he was, well, high maintenance.

When he was six, I began taking Jack to work. I was ready for retirement and had scaled back my activities. I had a buyer for the business but it took two years to conclude the deal. Jack was four when I began taking him to work. He loved riding in the car. Because I kept irregular hours, I could come and go as I pleased. I had long since lost interest in the business and became less involved. I had good sales people, a great office manager, and a key employee to run the business. I was ready for a change. Jack wasnt.

As the end drew near, I was excited and eager to move on. Negotiations with the buyer stalled and we had a number of rather heated exchanges in my office. Jack was always present, and he sensed how irritable I was but ignored the true implication of the discussions.

He had his routine, and as long as he could count on the predictability of each day, he was happy. He looked forward to visiting with Pat, our secretary, as well the salesmen who popped in and out. Jacks days at work were full and satisfying. He knew precisely when the mailman and UPS driver arrived. Both always had kind words for Jack, and sometimes handed him a sweet treat, which he dearly loved. The two of us ate lunch at McDonalds every day, and in time, the drive-thru help came to know him by name. Our final days at work drew to a close. I was too involved to concern myself with Jacks feelings about my selling the business. Once everything was in place, the papers were signed and duly notarized. I shook the new owners hand, cleaned out my desk, and prepared to leave. It was October 1, 2002.

Jack treated that day like any other. He couldnt speak, of course, so our communication was always



limited. Im afraid I assumed far too much about his understanding of the event. If Id have thought more about it, I might have weaned him off our two-year, daily routine. Unfortunately, Id been too caught up in my own emotions. I was eager to pursue the next phase of my life. I wanted to write, play golf, go duck hunting, and work in the orchard.

On that last day in October, I gave Pat a hug, said goodbye to the rest of the employees, choked back a few tears, and picked up a small carton of personal belongings. Jack stepped close to my side. He was always able to sense any strong emotion from my wife or me. He did his best to comfort me that day. “Ill be all right.” I wiped my eyes. “Lets go, Jack. Time for us to go home.” It was the end of the day so he led me to the door.

“Bye bye, Jack. Come back and see us once in a while, okay?” Pat called. Jack turned, nodded slightly, and slipped quietly through the door. “I dont think its sunk in yet, Pat. Guess Ill have to make sure he understands that we wont be coming back. You take care. Call me if you need anything.” I closed the door and followed Jack to the car. Thirty-four years of my life trailed in our wake. I was officially retired—we were retired. We could do anything we wanted and I was anxious to begin our new life.

As we drove home for the last time, I glanced over at Jack. He stared quietly out the side window. If he sensed the significance of the moment, he gave me no indication. He acted as if we would be returning to the office the following day. If I had thought more about it at the time, I might have recognized some early signs of denial. In time, my wife and I quickly discovered just how problematic our retirement would become—not for me or her, but for Jack.

I took him hunting with me every weekend during that October. We spent a great deal of time together and both came home tired and, I thought, happy. It was the perfect antidote for our first month of unemployment. For a while, I never detected any significant change in Jacks behavior.

Between duck hunting trips, we worked in the orchard. He couldnt help pick the ripened fruit, of course, but seemed content to stroll among the trees, playing with drops nestled in the grass and watching me work. We had a huge harvest that year and I had to set up a roadside stand to sell what we couldnt use. Jack greeted everyone who stopped by. He loved people, and strangers warmed to him immediately.

Once the last apple was sold and the rest crated for storage, the weather turned cold and we were forced inside. Thats when things really changed.

I set up a small office in my wifes laundry room and began spending most of my time writing. Jack poked around, making half-hearted attempts to keep himself busy. I knew he was bored so I made sure we left the house at least once a day so he could ride in the car. That wasnt enough, however. His demeanor changed dramatically. I had never known Jack to pout or whine. He always had a bright sparkle in his dark eyes, and he had such a happy-go-lucky temperament that anything less was notice-

able. He lost his appetite, reluctantly accompanied me on our twice daily walks around the property, and otherwise just kind of moped around. He didnt sleep well and we were worried about his health. A visit to the doctor was in order, so I made an appointment with Doc Hartnel.

“Whats he been doing that has you so worried?” Doc asked.

“Well, I think hes lost weight--doesnt each much anymore. He gets up during the night and wanders around the house. Hell come into our room and just stand next to the bed. Never makes a sound, just stares at me. I always sense his presence and it scares the hell out of me. He doesnt want to play with me and even seems bored when we take our walks. I dunno, Doc... he just seems. . . well... out of sorts.

After a thorough examination, Doc said, “theres nothing wrong with Jack that I can see. Whats changed at home recently?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Sounds like hes suffering an emotional trauma of some sort. Has anyone been injured or left home unexpectedly?”

“No.”

“How about a change in his daily routine?”

Bingo! “Well, I retired recently and Jack came to work with me every day. He had lots of friends at work and loved his time there. We had a daily routine that included rides in the car, lunch at McDonalds, and. . .oh, you know, different errands here and there.”

“I think I know what the problem is. Ive seen this before. Jacks behavior is actually quite predictable. You retired and he lost a job. Hes out of work and now hes depressed. “

“Im out of work-not Jack.”

“Nope. Believe it or not, he had ajob as well. Somehow, youve got to create a new role for him-a new pattern that hell feel secure with.”

“Huh? Geeze, Doc. This doesnt make any sense.” I scratched my head and looked down at Jack. He was anxious to leave. I patted his head and rubbed both large ears.

“Jacks just a dog, Doc! Hes a six year old, ninety pound golden retriever!”

“I know. But, remember, these are pack animals. Theyre extremely territorial creatures of habit. They are most secure when their daily lives are routine, predictable. Youre just going to have to find a new job for him, thats all.” Doc smiled as if he read my mind.

So that was it. I shook my head and let Jack drag me to the car. I had a neurotic retriever on my hands. Some retirement this day was going to be.

SCARS
PUBLICATIONS
**EDITOR'S
CHOICE
AWARD
WINNER**

UNTITLED

ANDREW ANNEX

7th grade this year is going to be hard, I am sure.
My parent's say, "It will be O.K."
My sister says, "You will need to work much more".
Yet still, I am not sure.
Reports and stories pouring out of my head.
Calculations and figures sometimes coming out instead.
Almost infinite pools of knowledge, accessed on the web.
Trying to choose between two verbs,
"Soar will not work, for sure".
Deciding between
1 or 0,
True or False,
Hot or Cold,
Cats or Dogs,
Large or Small,
Left or Right,
The endless Boolean operatives of Life!
Which to choose?
Which is right?

SCARS
PUBLICATIONS
**EDITOR'S
CHOICE
AWARD
WINNER**

DRAINAGE

ANDREA FOX

My soul festers in my body
like an infection.
Terminal,
it still struggles.
Feeling the cut,
the sting, the blood flowing slowly,
tracing paths of pain
along the veins of my arm.
Taking with it my agony and shame,
leaving blissful nothingness behind.
Wanting nothing,
feeling nothing,
being nothing,
but drainage from my soul.
As my life drips slowly to the floor,
one drop at a time.

A GRAVE SITUATION

ERIC BONHOLTZER



SCARS
PUBLICATIONS
EDITOR'S
CHOICE
AWARD
WINNER

Digging graves was not a desirable occupation. The dirt was unforgiving, cold and solid. It was back-breaking work, a bone-wearying profession. Max had known all of this before he had taken the job, but sometimes circumstances dictated the situation. He had a problem, and try as he might, his hands just always seemed to wander where they didn't belong and return with something that was not theirs.

But Max was an optimist. No matter how far he sank, he always considered it a temporary plight. He could dig graves. He could till the earth's surface for as long as it took because after all was said and done, it was still just a temp job. Now, almost six months after being released from the county lockup, Max began to wonder just how long this living hell was going to last. His Uncle John, the graveyard caretaker, a gruff old man with a toothless grin and a lazy eye, had told Max when he'd started off that he'd be digging graves until he dug his own, and at the time, Max could barely suppress a chuckle, but now he wasn't so sure.

As Max's dirt-encrusted pick split the grass, his thoughts wandered. He wondered how, for a town of only 500 people, they could manage a body or two a week. Sure, threshers hacked people to death. Farm animals killed ranchers in freak accidents. And there was a staggering cancer rate; these people smoked like the Marlboro man was riding away with the last of their cigarettes. But still, it just seemed like a bad town, a place where people came to die.

Max's current client, though, had been a transient. A bad car accident and no one to claim the remains. Not a particularly pleasant way to go. Max paused, lit up a cigarette, and thought that, perhaps, there weren't all that many ways that were. Inhaling deeply, Max listened to the faint rumblings of thunder just over the hills, telling of the storm to come.

He had to hurry. There was still another body waiting on the table, an old drunk named Howard Broach, who had to be interred before the storm made the ground too muddy to till. Max's thoughts grew grimmer contemplating that enormously corpulent deceased, whose only legacy in life was to indulge everything to excess and leave an immensely bloated corpse behind. And while there were no shortages of mourners at his funeral, when all the smoke settled, no one wanted to be stuck with the bill.

Howard Broach became another county job. Max had been sour at the funeral and he was sour now. County requisitioned bodies, those with no one to claim them, were interred for next to nothing, which made Max's cut even less. With a grimace, he snuffed out his cigarette with a booted toe, took a swig of whiskey from the flask he always kept at the ready, and returned to his digging.

Night had fallen by the time the two holes were dug, and with great effort, Max wrested the bodies into their final homes, the unwieldy body of the late Howard Broach giving him more than a little trouble. Max had asked his uncle about a coffin for the body and the man had merely shrugged. The county got what it paid for.

With a grunt, Max picked up his shovel and somberly started filling in the graves. Rain was beginning to fall, making the grip more slippery with every stroke of the shovel. "Damn," Max groaned as the spade slid out of his hand, down onto the barely covered body of Howard Broach. Max shook his head in aggravation as he climbed down into the muddy hole, cursing his misfortune. As he bent down to retrieve the implement near a bloated hand that appeared to be reaching out of the dirt for a lifeline, suddenly Max's run of bad luck seemed to come to a dead halt. Fortune surely smiled on him as his eye caught a glimmer that could only be gold, a ring still attached to the dead man's finger.

It was a plain gold band with ruby inlay set in a distinct pattern. Definitely valuable. Perhaps tonight had not been such a bust after all.

Curious as to why his uncle, by no means an honest man, had not thought of the same idea, Max bitterly found out the reason as he tried to wrest the ring from the corpse. Stuck tight. Judging from the frayed and torn skin on the bloated finger, Max realized his uncle *had* come up with the same idea and had obviously failed. Not wanting to follow in his uncle's footsteps, Max simply seized the burial spade and hacked off the finger with a single stroke, easily extricating the ring. Prize in hand, Max climbed from the grave, tossing the finger over his shoulder with no more thought than a discarded cigarette butt.

After relishing his treasure for a few golden moments, a subtle fear began to gnaw at him, realizing what he had just done. Thoughts of cold clammy hands bursting from the grave flashed through Max's mind with every scoop of dirt as he quickly resumed his job of interment. Max could almost feel that cold lifeless stare watching him, waiting for something. "Sorry buddy, you're not getting your ring back," Max muttered under his breath. "Finders keepers. You're not going to need it where you're going." As sweat beaded his brow, Max swore, as he shoveled the last patches of dirt over Howard "Nine Fingers" Broach, that the corpse's eyes were wide open.

Max's house was little more than a shanty, the paint peeling and the floorboards creaking, but the refrigerator was filled with cool beer and that was enough. A pile of discarded tall cans later and the grave digger was feeling A-OK. The TV, with its blurred picture, was off, but the radio bleated a bluesy tune and a new found sense of possibility flared in the soon-to-be-former grave digger.

Max pulled out the ring and fingered his prize gently, marveling at the uncanny smoothness. Despite the glow of intoxication slowly enveloping him, something didn't set right about it, and Max knew it wasn't pangs of regret. There was definitely something *off* about the ring, and its ruby inlay, but Max couldn't pinpoint it, and furthermore, he didn't really care. It was his ticket out. The money it would fetch at hawk would set him up for a while until he could find something better. Tossing a discarded can to lay with the others, Max searched for another beer. Finding it, he popped the lid and spilled the drink all over himself as he heard a voice.

It was old and hollow, as if from a great distance away, calling out to him, "*My ring.*" Max shivered, glancing around frantically. He was alone. Or so it seemed. He tried to tell himself it was just an overactive imagination and too many graveyard stories, but he wasn't convinced. Trying to salvage what was left of his beer, he came up with only two shallow sips. He *definitely* needed another one.

Max made his way to the kitchen, flicking on the light switch as he went. A little illumination and a fresh can of beer did wonders to ease the mind. He was already halfway to feeling normal again when he saw it. Muddy footprints. And definitely not his. Following the dirty trail led a bewildered Max back into his living room.

Sitting there patiently was none other than Mr. Howard "I'm Buried" Broach. A sickly pallor coupled with dirt stained his clothes.

"What...what...the.." Max could barely voice the words, taking a tentative step back as he spoke



them. “What...what..do you want?”

Howard chuckled, an animal-like cackle. “*What do I want? Hmmm.. now let me see?*” As the unreality of it all set in, Max suppressed a scream. “*Well a coffin would have been nice.*” Again that horrid laugh. “*Maybe someone who wouldn't have tossed me into the dirt. Yeah, you thought I didn't see, well I was watching. But you know what I really want? I want my finger back.*” That same humorless smile never leaving his face, Howard held up his mangled hand short one digit.

Max took another step back, his mind unable to handle the unreality of it all. He searched frantically for a weapon but found nothing promising. “*Forget it. What's a little finger between friends, right? But you do have something I really want back, Maximillion. My ring. It's special. You like the ruby pattern? The ancient Byzantine symbol for immortality? I know I did. It called to me Max, like it called to you. I knew from the second I saw it on that gypsy's finger. I knew I'd kill for it. It speaks to you, Max. But you already knew that didn't you? I feel its voice waning in me. And I need it. It does things Max...It'll bring me back. Forever.*”

Despite his fear, Max realized just how much his *own* future rested with that ring. It was his, and nobody was going to take that from him. If it truly was that powerful it would be priceless. Max stalled for time, “What ring?”

“MY RING!!! My ring now!”

Max took another backward step, running into a wall, his hands going up protectively. “It's my ring now.” His eyes closed despite himself and he waited for those cold hands that never came.

Instead there was just horrid laughter. “*Over your dead body right?*”

After several moments passed and Max found himself still alive, he mustered the courage to open his eyes. Nothing. He was alone again. Utterly alone this time. He checked his pocket, the ring still nestled safely inside; his eyes catching on the pile of discarded beer cans. Had he really had that many? He didn't feel drunk, but he knew he probably was. He tried to rationalize. It had to have been a hallucination. Stress and alcohol, never a good mix. That was the only explanation. And nearly an hour later, after a few more tall ones, as Max slipped into sleep, he had a good long laugh about the whole thing.

Sleep didn't last long. The peal of the thunder awakened Max in a cold sweat. He was still in the throes of a waking dream, the vision earlier still all too real. For the next hour he tried to fall back asleep, but with little success. The storm had abated somewhat, but he couldn't shake what he had seen. Every time he shut his eyes he could see cold dead hands digging their way towards him. Another two hours of restless waking, debating on the reality of his encounter, and a full bottle of Jack Daniels later, Max reached a conclusion: he knew what he had to do.

The rain beat down on him like miniscule needles. Max would make sure it was just his mind playing tricks on him and then he would go home reassured. He was thoroughly soaked by the time he reached the grave. It was deserted, as he had expected at this time of night, and though he had tried his best to skirt the houses adjacent to the graveyard lest someone call the cops, he couldn't help but feel someone was watching.

There was scant illumination from the lightning, and Max was thankful for the darkness, making his secret job that much easier. Placing a small flashlight on the ground, he hefted his shovel and began to dig, taking one patch of freshly tilled soil from the ground after another. Max emptied the grave which he had just filled, aware of the lunacy of it all, constantly assuring himself that at the bottom he would find exactly what was to be expected, one very cold, very *dead*, Howard Broach. And then he would sleep. He would sleep the sleep of the dead, assured in the knowledge that there was no body, after him.

But as he got closer and closer to unearthing, what he fervently hoped would be a corpse, Max's uncertainty increased tenfold. And as he removed shovelful after shovelful of dirt where he was sure that he should be striking flesh, his uncertainty manifested into full on terror, complete and abject horror because the deeper he dug the more certain he became: there was no body.

Suddenly, he felt a hand upon his shoulder. Max could not even venture a scream as the hand forced him around to stand, face to leering face, with the dead Howard Broach. "*MYRING!!!*" the dead man spat at him. Max was gripped by panic, unable to move, confronted by a man who should by all rights be lying in the cold ground. Max's mind reeled with the implications, the unreality of it all cascading over him.

A stroke of lightning split the stormy night sky, illuminating Howard in all his grizzly glory. The dead man did not hesitate, instead pushing Max, still clutching his shovel, into the grave. Howard followed, landing with a thud right next to him.

Max barely had time to sputter and choke, before he felt a four fingered hand pressing his face into the mud. Relying on nothing but instinct, Max seized a handful of earth in his hands, and in a quick motion ground the soil into Howard's eyes. Not pausing to think, seizing the opportunity, Max grabbed the shovel and swung. He connected, the blow smashing the side of Howard's head with the sharp trowel blade. And then as quickly as it had begun, it was over.

Howard didn't move. But that wasn't enough for Max, not nearly enough. Howard had been dead once before. Max had to be *sure* this time, so he brought the shovel down, again and again, striking with unrelenting fury. He didn't stop. Like a man possessed, he pounded Howard's corpse into oblivion.

Lost in his rage, Max almost didn't notice the voice of someone approaching. And even when he did, it took him a minute to pin down the sullen oaths and repetitious swearing, but as soon as he realized just what was going on, he scrambled from the hole. Taking a hiding place behind a weather-worn granite crypt, Max tightened the grip on the shovel. He had company.

Max watched as the old man stood beside the hole with a somber look of bewilderment. It was clearly not what he expected to see. Putting it all together with the pick axe, saw, and shovel in the man's hand, Max chuckled, stepping out from his hiding place. "I know what you want, and its *mine*."

"What?..what?" The old man stammered taking a step back.

"I know what you were trying to do. And I'm telling you, you're too late. I already got the ring."

"Max?! Is that you?"

"In the flesh." Max advanced on the startled man, his shovel held behind his back. "I'm sure you're a little surprised at seeing me here, huh, Uncle John?"

"Well..yes I was.." He stalled for time, his hands reflexively grasping his pick-axe. "..I got a call about a grave robbing."

"You call the cops on yourself? Is that it?" Max laughed at his own cleverness. "I know what you really want." He approached until they were both within striking distance. "You want *my ring*."

"It's my graveyard, my ring."

"I found it first." Max prepared for his swing. Just a little provocation and it would all be over. That was when he felt the hand. From the look on his uncle's face he could tell that the old man was likewise startled. However, that brief moment of surprise quickly turned into abject terror when realization struck, as cold clammy hands reached out from the grave, that utter chill and fear the last thing the pair felt as they were dragged down screaming into the earth.

The town sheriff was perplexed when he saw them. Two very dead gravediggers piled into what appeared to be a cemetery battleground. The lawman stared long and hard at those two familiar faces, now so horribly distorted in death, and thought. *I always wondered when those two would do each other in. Never did like each other much.* Finally he shrugged impassively, telling himself to make a note of it. *Guess it's time to put out an ad for a new caretaker and grave digger.* With no further ado, the sheriff picked up the shovel. *County jobs*, he thought bitterly, and started the arduous task of filling in the grave.





the chosen few

ACT OF LOVE

BERNADETTE MILLER

The old barn, a distance from the road, was nearly hidden by spreading oaks and overgrown grass. At the end of the civil war, the land had belonged to an Indian

woman, but the main house had been stripped of valuables and burned. Now only the barn remained with missing shingles and rusty door hinges, and smelling of rotting wood and faintly of goats, although the hayloft was intact. That spring, dappled with afternoon shadows, it waited for Hope.

She limped toward it, inching through the tall grass, ignoring the buzzing insects, careful not to scrape her wounded leg bandaged with cloth. Panting, she heaved

inside the open barn door, her long skirt and petticoats dirty and torn, tendrils escaping from the blonde neckbun. Trying to catch her breath, she listened to the

shouts of the men seeking her, their heavy boots clumping through the grass. She shrank against the wall and sucked in her breath as the voices approached, sounding as if they'd soon reach her. But just as suddenly the voices receded; the men had passed the path leading to the barn and were heading toward the woods beyond the old farm.

Holding her injured leg, she hobbled to the door. She heard only the beating wings of insects, and blue jays flying past. As she returned to the wall, she heard a strange noise, and glanced up fearfully toward the dim hayloft.

A man was watching her.

Terrified, she cowered against the wall, wondering if she should try to escape.

Using broken boards like a ladder, the man descended from the hayloft, a rifle strapped to his back. He was a half-breed Indian, wearing leggings, a fringed leather shirt, and a headband. Two reddish plaits hung over his shoulders, one entwined with a single red feather. His eyes were pale brown. Standing motionless, he watched her.

"Help me, please," she said weakly, sinking to the ground.

"Come with me." He motioned for her to rise.

She felt too weak. He again motioned and she forced herself to stand. Pain pierced her leg; she winced.

"Can you walk?" he said, surprising her by his lack of accent.

“I think so.”

“Good. Let’s go then.”

They walked slowly out of the barn and through the tall grass toward the woods, where they followed a worn path. Sometimes she felt so weak she was afraid of fainting, but the Indian’s patient waiting spurred her. Overhanging tree limbs swept aside, scattering birds that chirped warnings to each other in the forest’s cool mustiness.

An hour later the pair left the woods and headed through open fields of grass and shrubbery. It took another hour to reach the mountains. Along the way, her companion pointed out food, and she filled her skirt with blackberries, cattail roots that tasted like celery, wild carrots that were surprisingly white, acorns and black walnuts.

“You’re not going to eat?” she asked when they stopped for her to rest in a cave behind a copse of oaks. She reached for the remaining blackberries and hesitated. It didn’t seem right--eating alone.

“You need nourishment,” the Indian said.

Swallowing the berries that dyed her hands brownish red, she studied him as he squatted nearby. He was handsome with Indian features: high cheekbones, clean shaven, and full sensuous lips, his shoulders broad and his waist narrow. He probably came from the reservation near Pemberton. She blushed, and reproached herself for studying his body. He was just an Indian being kind to a white woman.

“I’m glad you liked the food,” he said when she finished, “but you need meat. I’ll hunt for rabbit.”

“What’s your name?”

“Vincent MacDonald.”

Well, some of his folks came from Scotland--same as hers! “What were you doing in the barn?”

He smiled, a forlorn sad smile. “Did I ask you that question?”

“I’m sorry.” She looked away, her blush deepening.

“I’ll take you to Pemberton,” he said. “My aunt lives there. She’ll heal your leg wound.”

“I’m a fugitive,” Hope blurted out. She bit her lip. She shouldn’t confide in strangers. And if she frightened him off, he wouldn’t help her.

He simply nodded.

“A man came into my sewing shop in Centerville. I...didn’t want to...He had a gun...He twisted my arm...Then the gun was in my hand and he fell...”

He nodded. “Let me see your wound.” Stooping, he motioned for her to lift her petticoats.

She flushed and straightened the skirts. “It’s just grazed.”

He smiled then, a beautiful wide smile with strong white teeth.

Hope smiled back, regretting she hadn’t trusted him.

“Can you make it to Pemberton?” he said finally. It’s only a few miles from here.”

She nodded.

“We’ll leave soon,” he said and disappeared into the rear of the damp cave, the cracks lined with mosses and lichen. After awhile he reappeared, a sack tied to his back with leather thongs, along with the rifle. “Come, we must leave.”

She stood, wobbling, and reached toward him to steady herself, but refrained from touching him when she flushed at his nearness.

Leaving the cave, they walked along the mountainside for two hours and reached another forest. There, under a broad oak, she rested. Beyond the clearing, the meadow was filled with wildflowers and humming insects. Hope smiled to herself. She felt like just sitting, smelling the sweet air and watching the birds chattering among themselves. It was the first time she’d felt like this since that awful man came into her shop. She leaned against the tree. She’d almost forgotten how tired she was. Eyes closed, she felt a pelt spread over her.

“Rest now,” the Indian said.

Feeling strangely comforted, she stretched out on the cool grass and slept soundly without dreaming.

The smell of cooking flesh awakened her. Beside her was a greasy tin platter and she ate with her fingers. Rabbit had never tasted so good.

He smiled. “It’s important to eat meat. You’ll recover your strength.”

“Don’t you ever eat?” she said, wishing he wasn’t so good looking, and nice. She didn’t want to fall in love with an Indian, a man from another race. She had enough trouble dodging the Sheriff. She wiped her hands with tree leaves.

“I ate while you slept,” he said. “Can you walk more?”

Nodding, she rose, and followed his tall, graceful body, trying not to imagine it against her, trying not to imagine his arms about her, focusing her attention on his broad back as she followed him slowly through the forest path that paralleled a main road. Occasionally riders on horseback cantered past, and they paused behind the thick shrubbery. At dusk they camped deeper within the forest, and he made a crackling fire.

“Tell me about your family,” she said, her body propped on elbows. The brushwood catching fire showered sparks; his eyes glowed against the flames.

“Please tell me.”

He studied her. “My father was a white attorney, my mother Comanche... I was born and raised in Connecticut.” He stared at the fire and it suddenly blazed.

“Tell me more,” Hope said, wanting him to confide in her.

“After my mother died...my Aunt Tula lived with us and taught me Indian ways. Then...my father

died, and Aunt Tula married a white man and they bought that farm...where you and I met..." He paused. "Would you like some coffee?"

She shook her head. "Please keep on."

"I lived with Aunt Tula for awhile. Then...the reservation near Pemberton." He gazed at the fire. Hope smiled for him to continue. He shrugged. "You need rest.

We'll talk more tomorrow."

She nodded and fell asleep immediately under the pelt, dreaming that she and Vincent started talking and then held hands. She awoke at dawn, startled to see him bent over roasting meat, but staring at her.

"You're beautiful--" He turned as if embarrassed.

She sighed. He was so different from most men, treating her with respect as if he valued her.

The next day, they began walking again through forest, fields of tall grass and shrubbery, and more forest, stopping only to eat and rest until, a week later, they finally reached Pemberton.

Waiting until dark to traverse the deserted streets, he led her to a small clapboard house near the town's edge. "Aunt Tula will help you," he whispered and disappeared into the dusk.

His Aunt Tula, tall and very fat, opened the door with a smile of surprise at Hope's explanation, and ushered her inside. Aunt Tula had the high cheekbones and straight black hair of an Indian, hanging in plaits like Vincent, but her dark eyes were deep-set above plump cheeks. Wearing a voluminous leather skirt and fringed shirt, she led Hope upstairs to an attic bedroom where she helped her guest remove her tattered clothes. Then, she washed and sterilized the leg gash with wine, and rewrapped the wound with clean cloth.

Smiling, she said, "Rest long as you want. I cook dinner now and wash your clothes." She gestured toward a steamer trunk at the bed's foot. "Put on my cousin's clean dress when you're ready."

"Thank you," Hope said, and watched Aunt Tula lumber down the narrow stairway. In the small room with its homemade pine furniture, she gazed at the yellowing dresser photograph of an adorable baby with reddish hair who vaguely resembled Vincent. Exhausted, she lay under the soft quilts and fell asleep. Vincent's arms embraced her but as he bent for a kiss she awakened.

It had seemed so real, she could hardly believe it was only a dream. Shaking her head, she rose and opened the trunk. Vincent probably preferred Indian women. Her blue eyes widened with pleasure as she lifted the long leather skirt and fringed tunic that had lain folded atop the clothes. They seemed made for her slender body.

Descending the narrow stairway, she saw Aunt Tula setting bowls of corn and hot biscuits beside a plate of baked meat. The older woman waved a heavy arm for Hope to sit. "So, my young cousin's clothes fit."

Hope smiled. "Yes." She glanced about. "Where's your nephew? I thought he'd be here for dinner."

Aunt Tula sighed deeply. "Running Eagle, Vincent, died four years ago. In that barn at Centerville.

He visits me sometimes, though you're the first person he ever brought with him. I love him very much, but it's no good his spirit can't find peace."

Shocked, Hope stared at Aunt Tula. "That can't be! I was with him for many days, he told me about himself--"

Aunt Tula smiled, a sad little smile like Vincent's, as if she, too, wished she didn't have to explain. "It is only his spirit, but it should rest."

Hope trembled, wondering if Aunt Tula were sane, but the small dark eyes gazed with serenity and pity at Hope's disbelief. Finally, Hope whispered, "How...did he... die?"

"When white folks set my farm on fire, he tried to save my goats in the barn, but got trapped.

"Ohhh..." Hope stared through the window at the general store across the street, and reproached herself; she shouldn't want something she could never have.

She stayed in Pemberton for two months, helping Aunt Tula by sewing poke bonnets to sell in the general store. Once, Vincent suddenly stood beside her reflection in the bedroom mirror. Gasping, she turned to touch him and he was gone. Had he really been there? Or had she wanted him there so badly she only imagined his presence?

"Forget Running Eagle," Aunt Tula said over her sewing. "You're still young and pretty. You could find a husband to take care of you."

"I don't want someone else," Hope replied, her gaze fastened on the lace she added to a bonnet.

Aunt Tula sighed. "No good mooning over a dead man--like chasing a dream." She put down the sewing basket and rose. "Come, I'll show you his grave. Then you'll see that it's better to forget him."

"All right," Hope said, reluctantly, and heard a knocking at the door. Maybe it was Vincent! She flew to open it and recognized the gray-haired, mustached sheriff from Centerville.

"Ma'am, I'm here to arrest you for murder," he told Hope who stared at him dumbly. "Will you come peacefully or do I need these?" He dangled handcuffs.

She bit her lip. "I won't give you any trouble."

He politely led her to the wagon outside. Before climbing in, she embraced Aunt Tula.

"I'll visit you," the older woman said, and scowled at the grim-faced sheriff tugging at the horses' reins after Hope settled beside him on the front seat.

During the journey, she scanned the countryside, hoping Vincent would again help her. If only she could talk with him, just for a moment, jail wouldn't seem so hard.

Resigned to her solitude, she spent her first night lying on the cell bed and staring at the barred window. Suddenly she heard the same strange noise that she'd heard in the barn. She quickly rose and looked outside. Vincent stood there, a finger hovering across his lips. She nodded and waited. Soon

afterwards, she heard a thud against the floor. Vincent suddenly stood at her jail cell. He turned the key noiselessly in the lock and motioned her outside. They hurried past the sheriff sprawled on the floor.

“You’ll be safe with my relatives at the reservation,” Vincent said.

She looked directly at him and noticed now the eerie glow in his pale brown eyes. Sharing confidences around the campfires, she’d thought it was only a reflection from firelight. She should have realized... Maybe she hadn’t wanted to... She shuddered then, knowing she’d fallen in love with a being beyond understanding, perhaps a devil from hell...

She swallowed hard and fought her fears. “I want to go with you.”

He shook his head. “You would become a spirit, like me, no longer a person.”

“I don’t care,” she whispered, and tried to embrace him, but her hands touched only mist.

“Close your eyes,” he said, and she felt a gentle kiss on her neck that made her tingle and feel that anything was possible.

“Hope...Hope...Hope...” He repeated her name as though he couldn’t believe they were together. “You can’t come with me, I can’t ask this of you.”

“Do you want me?” she whispered.

“Should I lie and say no?”

“Then please let me go with you.”

He hesitated. “It’s wrong. You’re alive and beautiful. There are other men...”

“I love you,” she said and closed her eyes again. She clung to the sweetness of his kiss on her lips. She’d follow him anywhere, no matter what he was.

After the jail break, Hope Elizabeth Murdock vanished and no one, not even Aunt Tula, knew what happened to her. Because Vincent stopped visiting, the heavy-set woman searched his cave. One evening she visited the old barn she’d once owned,

knowing that her nephew’s spirit often stayed there. The barn, slanted with twilight shadows, rose against the gray sky. Aunt Tula looked up in the tall grass, her heavy arms shading her eyes.

She shouted, “Running Eagle, tell us what happened to her!” Cupping her hands around her mouth to increase the loudness, she repeated the question four times as was the Indian custom.

There was only silence.

She scanned the barn’s interior, then awkwardly climbed the broken boards, gasping to catch her breath. Reaching the hayloft, she sat heavily for a moment and rested, glancing about. Suddenly she smiled. Near the wall, a red feather protruded between floorboards, encircled by a honey-blonde curl.

THE CURE-ALL MACHINE

BERNADETTE MILLER

Henry found the machine by accident. He was a meek accountant plodding along in a dreary electronics firm, and saddled with a coarse, domineering wife. To escape his unhappiness, he'd become a film buff. One Saturday afternoon, enthusiastic over an Ingmar Bergman preview, he arrived at the Greenwich Village theater an hour early and decided to wander around, window shopping. On a narrow side street off Waverly Place, in the cluttered window of Abraham's Curio Shop, there glittered an odd, metallic cube. Henry paused to examine it, shading his eyes from the sun's glare. Wide as a shoe box, the cube had a green knob, and above that a small printed card that read FRONT. Sprouting from the top, like antennae, were two levers: the left painted silver; the right, gold. Impetuously, he stepped inside the musty shop crammed with exotic wares, reminiscent of the biblical Middle East. Hearing the doorbell tinkle, a swarthy young man wearing a skull cap of many colors emerged leisurely from the rear, threading his way among tambourines, frolicking camels, and kissing shepherds.

"I'd like to see that unusual thing in the window," Henry said.

"Which unusual thing?"

"That metal cube with the knob and levers."

"Oh, you mean the Cure-All Machine." The young man removed the heavy object and placed it in Henry's hands.

He turned it about for inspection. Each side had a knob: green, yellow, red, and a larger black one in back. He tugged gently at the gold lever; it wouldn't budge.

Juggling the cube, he heard something rustle inside, but couldn't find an opening.

"Why is it called a Cure-All Machine?"

The young man shrugged. "Don't know. Some flipped-out professor talked me into buying it this morning."

"Well, I'll take it!" Henry said, watching the cube sparkle. "It has a mysterious, fascinating quality."

Excited over this strange purchase, he postponed the film and caught the East Side subway to his small Bronx apartment, which his wife had decorated with garish furniture and idiotic ornaments. In the peppermint-striped living room, he set the cube on the gilded coffee table; then he called out for Evelyn to come and look.

Annoyed because her hair was only half-set, his fat wife appeared in gaudy orange robe, her lips pursed as though expecting every plan to turn sour. Hands fisted on hips, she glanced at the object, and said, "Now what in hell is that, Mr. Smart?"

"A Cure-All Machine," he replied timidly, worried she'd disapprove. "Intriguing, isn't it?"

"Intriguing, hell! If you think I'll allow that monstrosity in my lovely home, you're nuts. Get rid of it this minute!" In a huff, she snapped back a bleached hank of hair and flounced into the ebony bathroom, where she spent most of her time.

Fond of the object by now, especially since Evelyn had rejected it, Henry sat disconsolately on the leopard-skin sofa. "Hmmm, I wonder why it's called a Cure-All Machine," he mused, and pressed the green knob on the FRONT side. Instantly, a slot opened at the bottom of the cube, and a printed card slipped out. It read:

* Test Case No. 2... Your name, please? I am called Havohej. Press the yellow knob, and I will satisfy your desires. All I ask in return is appreciation. **

Aha! A sort of modern Aladdin's Lamp--his Ship of Good Luck finally arrived! Filled with hope, he pressed the yellow knob. "This is Henry Farnsworth. Please, give me self-confidence. Make me aggressive so I can get a promotion, and--"

Before he finished, bluish smoke spiraled up from the gold lever. Astonished, Henry watched the smoke hover like a cloud above his head and then melt away. He felt a peculiar exhilaration, an ecstatic giddiness--like a mystical experience. As he sat there basking in riotous contentment, the red knob flashed on the machine and a card slipped out. It read: * You forgot to say thank you. **

"Oh, thank you, thank you," he babbled happily but absentmindedly, for he began debating other requests. They were sensible things. For example, he often regretted that his marriage was empty, he and Evelyn barely tolerating each other. If only she were more sympathetic, understood his needing films as an outlet... He pressed the yellow knob, and asked that Evelyn be kinder. Sure enough, as soon as the smoke cleared, she appeared.

"Henry, I've been thinking... If that damn thing means that much to you, you can keep it!"

Elated by her acquiescent attitude, he watched her return thoughtfully to the bathroom. Right afterwards, however, the red knob flashed and another card slipped out. It read: * You didn't say you love me. **

"Of course, I love you," he whispered, puzzled at the machine's petulant demand for affection. He studied the cube awhile. Havohej was very valuable; it shouldn't just sit about. Jumping up, he stuffed it among the junk in the bedroom closet, where his wife wouldn't discover it since she never cleaned the closets.

"Oh, I threw out the eyesore," he explained later, and planned on making requests gradually to avoid

aggravating his sensitive benefactor.

Monday, reporting to work, he was delighted by his cheerful manner. He'd always approached dreary Tenth Avenue with a sinking feeling that the squat gray corner building was his tomb. Now, he strode briskly through the dingy corridor toward his cubicle, and energetically attacked a pile of invoices. After lunch, the haughty president signaled him into the plush corner office with its paneling and mahogany desk.

"Farnsworth, I've been thinking... For thirty years you've done your job competently, never missed a day, never asked for a raise, never complained. Well, I'm promoting you to comptroller with appropriate salary."

Overjoyed at this marvelous news, Henry could hardly wait to tell his wife. That evening, he hurriedly climbed the four flights in his brownstone, his heart palpitating from excitement and the hot, crowded subway. He sometimes suffered from a heart murmur, but now he had a cure. While Evelyn fussed in the bathroom, he finished his bowl of greasy stew, hauled out the machine, fondly patted the gold lever, and stated his request. After the smoke cleared, his heart never felt better. This time, though, he waited for the flashing red knob and card. It read:

* A pat on my lever is insufficient. To show proper thanks for my supreme generosity, worship me. **
"No!" It debased his pride, groveling to a machine. Besides, he'd always considered religious rites a bunch of nonsense. The next card read:

* Warning! Your rejection hurts my feelings. Console me at once with worship--or suffer a penalty! **
Henry thought for a moment, and pressed the yellow knob. "What penalty?"

The machine didn't respond.

"What is the penalty!" he shouted, growing frantic.

His benefactor pouted in silence.

Fearful of punishment, he kneeled on the purple rug and bowed his head, hands steepled as for prayer. "Dear Havohej," he mumbled, feeling foolish. "I love you, beg your forgiveness, and promise to obey your commands."

It wasn't so much worship of a machine that bothered him; after all, it was a silly formality--like praying to a church icon. But considering the cube's excessive need for gratitude, he thought he should be handsomely rewarded. One night after arguing with Evelyn over seeing a Kubrick film, Henry recklessly requested that his crude, ignorant wife have a fatal accident. The very next morning, she slipped on a hair roller in the bathroom, banged her head against an iron Cupid, and died.

He attended the funeral and sadly returned home--feeling like a murderer. Filled with remorse, he wandered through the apartment, and glanced wistfully at her portrait on the shocking pink dresser. Finally, he sat on the sofa and stared glumly at the machine, now perched on the coffee table. The red

knob flashed. Reluctantly, he reached for a long card, that began quite poetically:

* I am the Good Shepherd who leadeth thou into green pastures of delights: the comfort of thy soul. But...to repay my benevolence, you must erect for me in thy bedroom a shrine as per specifications on the ***Holy Testament*** cards that I shall emit forthwith. Sunday, at sunrise, pull the gold lever and say: Hail, oh Glorious Divine Machine--to Thee I owe all! Repeat the above every hour, ending at sunset. **

“Is that enough?” Henry muttered sarcastically, feeling somewhat bitter about the machine killing his wife. The next card read:

* Your attitude is not loving! To avert my wrath, you’d better offer me succulent sacrifices, such as tenderloin, medium rare, easy on the gravy, and a tossed salad--I prefer Roquefort dressing. Be sure the rolls are hot and crisp, not soggy! **

“But, Havohej, a machine can’t eat human food!”

* Despite my superb gifts, you insult me with heretical notions. Therefore, pull the silver lever to learn thy penalty. **

“No! Why should I pull the lever and suffer for it?”

* Foolish mortal. Get smart, Henry, and pull the lever--or you’ll be sorry! **

Bracing himself, he pulled the silver lever.

* As penance, you must worship me for an entire week, which you will celebrate every year as a holiday in remembrance of your joyful benefactor. Furthermore, your sacrificial dishes had better be gourmet, such as... Beef Wellington with Yorkshire Pudding. For dessert, let’s see now... Ah, flaming Cherries Jubilee! (This is tricky, so be careful.) Oh, I’d also like a bottle of good wine, and some lighted candles. Make sure they don’t over drip. **

Henry dropped the card in astonishment. “A week’s worship is impossible! I can’t take off from work whenever I feel like. Besides, there are important art films I haven’t seen. De Sica is due Wednesday, and Saturday I want to catch Kurosawa’s--”

* Oh, child of Havohej, I shall set thee on the righteous path. Forget such sinful ideas as art with its graven images, and concentrate solely on me--a wondrous being. **

“Forget art films?” cried Henry, horrified. “Forget the enjoyable hobby I’ve spent years studying? Never!”

* You are being stupid by shunning my commandments. But enough of this quibbling! Start praying, fast, or I’ll really get sore. And once my wrath is aroused, cities may burn down, a whole civilization scattered like seed in the wind... There’s just no telling how far “Okay!” Henry shouted, not finishing the card. He was thoroughly alarmed. The machine had become a Frankenstein’s monster, a glut-ton for adoration! Henceforth, he would avoid further requests, and devise a plan to dispose of his

threatening benefactor.

That weekend he erected the shrine--a kind of tented minaret, squeezed between the bedroom closet and pink dresser. For hours he labored with knotty pine, hammer and nails, following the instructions of the *** Holy Testament *** cards. Worded in a peculiar archaic English, the meaning was often contradictory and obscure.

Improvising, he grabbed from the dresser Evelyn's two pearly angels, crowning the striped canvas tent with the grinning cherubim, and installed Havohej on a fluffy, cotton-lined ledge within. He finished Saturday night, exhausted. Setting the alarm clock, he rose sleepily at dawn to being the rituals.

As the week progressed, Henry learned how draining continual worship can be. Unable to leave the apartment lest the machine need his services, he waited on the sofa, glancing at his watch to check the hour, and wracked his brain for a plan to destroy his captor. He felt like a prisoner in his own home, and yearned to see an art film to alleviate his misery.

By Thursday, he could bear it no longer. That morning, he slyly ordered some delicious sweet and sour spareribs from the Yin Yang Restaurant across the street.

Storing in the refrigerator the unconsumed Eggs Benedict served for breakfast, he purified the plate, as per the *** Holy Testament *** cards, and set the steaming spareribs on the shrine's offering table. Then he spent the entire afternoon abjectly declaring his total love and obedience--interjecting for dramatic effect a fervent

“Amen!” and “Hallelujah!”

After awhile the cube began to radiate a warm glow, a golden aura that hovered over its levers like a halo. Henry, resting a moment, gaped at this strange sight, and noticed the red knob flashing. The card read, as though purring:

* More... more...”

Anxious now to appease his benefactor's insatiable need for affection, he jumped up and wildly promised all sorts of goodies: a marble temple at Sutton Place, a cup of his blood poured daily over the altar, and other grandiose commitments he couldn't possibly keep. Finally, he closed the velvet curtains, and sneaked out to Greenwich Village, where he saw an absorbing Fellini film. He returned several hours later, having thoroughly enjoyed himself, and feeling refreshed.

Entering the apartment, he heard an eerie hissing sound from the bedroom--like escaping steam. He rushed to the shrine and yanked apart the curtains. Bluish smoke billowed from the gold lever, the red knob flashing hysterically. For a moment he stood petrified with awe, not knowing what to expect. A card shot through the slot. It read, bitterly:

* Ah, the selfish wretch returns at last! The pure savor my omnipotence; they shall enter the king-

dom of contentment. But the sinner who scorns my company--what a damned fool! **

"I only left for three hours," Henry said sheepishly, wishing he hadn't dropped by the Happy Hippie Bar for a cocktail. But what a relief--away from his tormentor!

The next card read, coaxingly: * Come, reconsider; it's not too late. Cast aside your evil thoughts. Let thy heart dwell only on me, the Wonderful One. Just ask and it shall be given unto you. Everything... everything... **

"Except freedom," he muttered in disgust.

The next card read, whiningly: * I am superior, magnificent, a glory of perfection! So, where are the converts you promised? Where are the pretty virgins? The candelabra? Exotic prayer beads? Where's the mushroom pizza for my late-night snack! **

Fed up with the machine's childish chatter, Henry said impatiently, "Okay, you shelled out a few nice things, but look what you want in return--my enslavement!" Warily, he reached for the next card that struggled through the slot.

* ... You...You... abominable golden calf! For your impiety I shall cast you into hell! Miseries will be heaped upon your head--aye, unto your entire family, even the seventh generation! First, I'll send a catastrophic flood; then, I'll demolish survivors with fire and brimstone. Wailing in sackcloth and ashes, they'll beg my forgiveness, but I'll stand firm--not one drop of mercy! Oh, boy, just you wait; will I get even with you and yours! **

Furious, Henry hurled the card at his snarling benefactor. "Go ahead, do your worst! Demote me at work, bring Evelyn back--I don't care. I'm sick and tired of your asinine demands and obnoxious bragging!" Then, too angry to weigh the consequences, he threw the machine on the shaggy rug, and gave it a swift kick--right in the gold lever. For several moments it writhed like some obscene animal, sputtering bluish smoke. Henry watched with satisfaction. Maybe, if angered enough, it would somehow self-destruct.

He suddenly felt a stabbing pain--like the onset of a heart attack. Clutching at his chest, he frantically sought a way to deactivate the machine before it destroyed

him, and impetuously pressed the black knob in back. His heaving benefactor shuddered with a violent tremor, and abruptly lay stock still, the smoke vanishing.

Weak from his ordeal, though the pain was gone, Henry bent for a final, somewhat mangled card that had wriggled through the slot. It read, as if gasping in rage:

* ... *@&+! ...Ready for *@&+! ...computer invented by Professor Jacobs. Fulfill man's need for god by duplicating biblical Jehovah. Ready... Test Case *@&+! Destroy Farnsworth. Kill him! No, please, not that black knob, you ungrateful schnook! All I asked for was appreciation... appreciation... apprecia

JOBBED

I get on the bus
and close my eyes.

“I can’t cut it,” I think.

“I’m just not doing it.”

There seems to be no “instead” for me.

I might as well be mopping floors in a gilded tourist spa in Greece,
or washing dishes in a greasy spoon in Toad Suck Ferry, Arkansas.

“All honest work is noble,” goes the cliché.

But should we be grateful for every indignity
suffered in the name of earning?

Yes,

there is meat on my plate.

I just don’t have the teeth to chew it.

CLAIRVOYANT

drinking my Crown Royal [neat]
screaming at meaningless celebrity faces on the tube

I...am...dumb

drinking my Crown Royal [neat]
trying on one custom-made iron mask after another
because they are more beautiful than I am
one day I will come up short
my head will be full of crumbling age
dust will cover my eyes
and I will ride the light to my proper place
drinking my Crown Royal [neat]

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THE MILL EN NI UM HAI KU CHAIN GANG RE FLEC TIONS ONE THROUGH SEV EN TEEN

10 fingers 10 toes 5 quite functional senses and still I complain
I am grinding in visible holy Jesus in blind Elvis drag
give me your hand now pleasure me this way and that make it casual
sing out, haiku king know your role open your mouth and reign eloquent
I never slept with the lesbian and she did just fine without it
and in the streets: dust I am the lover vanished in sweet misty dreams
she knew when she was going to die [it didn't make it easier]
the road not taken the path of least resistance the highway to hell
fire escape wid ow unlocked uncocked wishing she were on the street
factual fictions and vitamin fabulous reminiscences
ebb and flow and swirl and distance me night by night from his departure
the way to heaven the sunny side of the street the straight and narrow
I was born and raised to be what I am no more no less no big deal
somebody owes me somebody's into me big somebody smells sweet
somebody left me somebody thinks they found me somebody lost me
gather what you love hold it closer than your skin lose it all slowly
the system does not exist for us the system exists for itself

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CUERNAVACA 1972

J. QUINN BRISBEN 11 JUL 2003

(from a version 1st conceived 28 NOV 1968)

Sol becoming *sombre* in the late
Morelos afternoon as the shine boy
With the *huaraches* made from tires
Of local manufacture goes among
The *cantina* tables; he sees my
Scuffed boots, I nod and look up
To the mural on the old palace wall
Where on an embedded column
Diego Rivera, using old tricks,
Has made the eyes of Cortez
Appear to follow us everywhere.

Maybe Malcolm Lowry sat here
Thirty-two years ago invoking
This place by re-imagining it
So brilliantly that the town where
His drunkard moved toward doom
Exists in parallax with this one.
There are people here who recall
Him drunk but no one ever seems
To recall him writing; artists make
Their own legends: Rivera's huge
Appetites, the slavish vision that made
Siqueiros back up the road spray
Trotsky's villa with machine gun fire;
Both of them, and Lowry too,
As arrogant as staring Cortez.

I drink in the classic manner; *tequila*
Con sala y limon verde, salt in
The web between thumb and forefinger,
The small lime halved neatly by a blade,
Tastes blending with the sensuous slap
Of brush and cloth on my boots.
The peso at that moment was worth
Eight cents *estados unidos* and I
Give him a fifty peso note with the
Image of the liberator Morelos and
Wave away the change; he says
“*Cinquenta pesos para dar lustre*
A las botas es muy generoso,
Muy generoso, gracias senor
Gracias patron;” everyone in
Shoe leather is a boss under
The watching eyes of Cortez.

Dead freedom fighters are honored
On fifty peso notes and even
The names of states, on crosses
Carried in processions, in the echo
Of hoofs on this very plaza;
Despite the poison we drink and think
Or the rest our bodies make us take
To ease our pain, despite arrogance
And illusions and ice picks
In the skull we shall some day
Walk equally shod and equally free;
The shadow of the palace advances
But not forever, dollars move faster
Than the feet of workers but not
Forever, the eyes of killer Cortez
Do not follow us forever.

GENTRIFICATION AND MEMORY

J. QUINN BRISBEN 23 JUN 2003

I prefer co-ordinates of time
And space to be exact even when
Populated by ghosts not made by me,
So this was on a not particularly unlucky
Friday the Thirteenth, June, 2003,
When we were on our way to a leaky-
Roofed roomful of peaceful people when
Peace was unpopular with the president
And those who ran him to hear an old
Friend and comrade speak feelingly
Of past resistances not entirely
Lost and plans for futures not
Bright but not entirely hopeless.

On Division between Damen and Hoyne
Are many upscale restaurants, and we
Ate in one where the cheapest wine
Cost twenty-five dollars a bottle;
That is one hundred times what
A shot of bar whiskey cost on that block
In the late 1940s when a character
Invented by Nelson Algren and called
The Sparrow got busted so often
On that corner that he thought the charge
Drunk and disorderly, shortened to d and d
At the station, meant Damen and Division.

Now they serve little whiskey here except
Over-advertised sour mash and single-malt
Scotch, never the kind that burned through
Varnish at two bits a shot back when
The dealer with the monkey on his back,
Hooked on morphine from his army kit,
Listened for the one howl of Antek the Owner's
Deaf cat that told you that the drink you
Just took, the needle you just jabbed, the bet
You just made had doomed you now forever.

Once I played poker with Algren
Not far from here on Evergreen;
He was a lousy player, so in love
With losers that he had to keep
Losing himself out of pure love,
And once I drank with my son in
The last low-life tavern in the 'hood,
When we had to be missing
From his house for a girl party:
Not losers, but a bit in love
With ease and drifting downward.

Now old-timers would be busted
On this block even before ordering
Their first shot and a beer, for drift
Is upward here, toward domination,
And empire, but odds are still
Always with the dealer, so everyone
Dies: people, empires, even gentrified
Streets; and only the Sparrow and
Frankie Machine and the others
Live indelibly and forever.

GOLDEN GATE FOG

J. QUINN BRISBEN 14 AUG 2004

I saw it dazzling white on top and
Covering all but the tops of the cables
And the towers, moving like a herd of
Angel sheep into the bay, what I had
Only known from books, movies, and
The subtle sound effects of radio drama;
Later, inside it on the bus across the bridge,
Sensing the mysterious draining of color,
Emerging to bright Sausalito and sitting
In front of the tourist cabin while my
Father smoked and my mother fixed
Supper inside, and I rather liked the
Saggy couch that was my bed that night,
We talked, trying to find subjects
That would hurt neither one of us as
He picked up my paperback of *The Glass
Key*, read a page, then said, "The man
Who wrote this was a lunger; one
Lunger can always tell another," and he
Was right. Dashiell Hammett had rotten
Lungs, and neither he nor his heroes
Expected to live as long as he did. I am
Older than Hammett ever got, and with
Luck will live as long as my father who
Was eighty-five at his death, although still
Sharp and dangerous in my mind with no
Fog except the parts I never understood.

The next afternoon I stood on Powell Street
Waiting for the cable car to Chinatown,
Having made a pilgrimage to Post and
Stockton where Miles Archer took one
Right through the pump, and watched the
Fog drift first over Geary and then
Over O'Farrell Street, giving me
Fantasies of being Sam Spade or
The Continental Op, and I recall
That moment clearly, although it was
Fifty-six years ago last July.

Forty years ago come another September
Two new friends introduced themselves:
The redhead with freckles was named
Geary, the white-haired ex-Seabee
Was O'Farrell, and they asked me if
I knew the parallel streets in downtown
San Francisco, which of course honed
A memory. I lost touch with O'Farrell
After he retired, and I miss him because
He understood my odd jokes that depended
On having lived in another fading world.
Once as he passed I told my students
That he had dated Barbara Frietsche and
He stopped and recited the whole poem
Because there are some things you cannot
Forget no matter how hard you try. Geary
I chiefly recall from pictures every Easter
Of him with his wife, a baby in her arms,
And the rest stair-stepped down in their
New togs; eventually there were ten.
The pope gave him a medal for that,
But, when I met him many years later,
His hair by then turned white, he said
That times and customs had changed
Even in the church; he had fewer
Grandchildren than children and no one
Gets medals for that kind of loyalty now.

The fog blurs sights and sounds and
The years increase its density and the
Terrible ache in the bones, and a lot
Of memories blur and leach out but some
Remain, chiefly ones you want to forget.

THE CICERONE FEELING THE RODINS

(for M. B.)

J. QUINN BRISBEN 21 AUG 2004

His partially sighted friend has permission to feel
The Rodins on the parkway in Philadelphia and
The cicerone, guiding her, has scrubbed his hands
For the same privilege. They start naturally
With *The Thinker*, cast many times, seen by
The cicerone in Tokyo, vandalized in Cleveland,
Below ground in the Paris Metro, underneath
Another casting in the artist's studio which
The Philadelphia casting replicates, a cliché
That somehow has not let fame reduce
Its power, now felt, thinking with massive
Head on massive workman's hand, thinking
With every articulated muscle, rough in
The bronze, complete but unfinished, right
Elbow on left knee, deep-set eyes that are
Looking inward, all features strong, bulging
But nothing protruding, all body parts clothed
Only in thought reinforcing all other parts;
Probing and gliding hands on surface and
Crevices, hands reading as well as eyes.

On to portrait busts: Bernard Shaw
Confident of what he is so eager to
Become, in a dialectical dialogue
With the devil, putting his entirety
Into eyebrows and unspeaking lips that
Speak anyhow because hands understood.
Father Eymard, who told Rodin to return
To the world, the classic saint's face
That his hands found, and their hands find,
Showing the great gift early, and Balzac,
Colossal head embodying a teeming world,
Rough-hewn Clementel, one last portrait as
True as any in over half a century.
After more hours spent felling the six
Burghers of Calais, all marvelously themselves,
And careful study of the anguished, clenched
Hands, and the decaying yet perfect old
Woman who may be the helmet-maker's
Once beautiful wife from Villon's poem,
They give their hands a rest and try to
Put at least a few things into words:

“He was nearsighted,” the cicerone says,
“Which got him out of the army during
A bad war; everyone who knew him says
He was always kneading clay, always
With his hands on something. These things
Were meant to be seen, yet created by
Touching, the way we have been doing.
He had a great ancestor, Michelangelo,
But was different, knew better from
Great experience how the tits were
Attached for one thing, but shared
The same sense of primal creation and
Destruction and the terrible beauty of
Absolutely everything and everyone.
He shocked people of course but was
Popular in his later years but never
Compromised by popularity, containing
His own time, and past and future, too,
Which makes him unique or nearly so,
All fragments complete, all stillness moving.

THE CICERONE IN SAINT PETERSBURG

(for G. W.)

J. QUINN BRISBEN 16 JUN 2004

The ticking of the metronome has awed
The group; its sound meant Leningrad was still
Alive, though no one at the station had
The strength to make a sound, they ordered time
In the midst of chaos: bombs descending, trying
To shatter the frozen lake and sink the trucks
That kept the city barely alive, and long guns
Killing at random for nine hundred days
While Shostakovich composed in the light
Of firebombs, Akhmatova shaped pain into
Regular forms, Zoshchenko told funny stories,
And some at least have survived: halting old heroes
Sixty years later with medals pinned on frayed lapels,
Recognizing the American group with its cicerone
Who knows only enough to say “mir y druzhba”,
Which means “peace and friendship”, and the old reply
“Dodge truck” to show they know who sent the aid
That kept the ordered city alive when shards
Of chaotic metal and falling masonry ripped
So many fragile bodies when the city was still
Leningrad. The old name has come back and the
Bronze horseman and Dostoevsky’s courtyards
And the symmetrical rococo theaters and palaces
Never left, nor has the feeling that someone
Is carrying a bomb intent on making chaos
To make new order where impossible things
Have often been done, so everything is possible.

The bus leaves the museum, which is bedecked
With wedding flowers on weekends, for this siege
Memory is still revered when many ideologies
Have lost their hold and many despots ignored
With impunity although they still can chase you
In your dreams. It is the reminder that once
Common heroes lived and saved the city almost
Despite their leaders and that this artificial place,
Built on swamps as the yellow water from the tap
Reminds us, will live on in spite of all disasters,
Not all of which are even serious, as the group
Recalls a story as the bus passes what they can
Decipher from the Cyrillic as Luna Park, the place
Where the crocodile swallowed the bureaucrat whole
And alive, causing so many problems in a system
Where, as Dostoevsky the joker knew, imposition
Of order on disorder is inherently absurd.
The bus does not stop there because the group
Wants a full afternoon on the parquet floors
Savoring the great treasures of the Hermitage, nor
Can it stop as the group passes the university,
But on the wall of a science building they see
In mosaic tile the record of a superb triumph
Of order over chaos accomplished here
In 1869 by Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev,
And the cicerone bursts helplessly into song:

“Even the densest of students is usually able
To understand this great periodic table,
Seeing the noble gases descending on the right
We sense there must be more to hold the light;
Gallium, scandium, and germanium
Anyone notices who has a cranium
Must fit here and here and here and so
The table must fill with the ordered flow
Of elements; those with radioactive furies
Fall in step to enlighten the Curies;
The table worked; no one knew why or wherefore
Until breakthroughs of Rutherford and Niels Bohr.”

The group is relieved when the cicerone runs out of rhymes;
Order is a triumph in all places and all times;
But order needs chaos to build upon,
And, once it is achieved, there is always more chaos
As far as straight streets, time, or mind can reach.

THE CULLET ON BRUCE GOFF'S MONUMENT

J. QUINN BRISBEN 6 JUL 2004

How like him, how very like him
To use his grave marker to teach me
A new word: "cullet": a lump of fused glass
Added to new material to facilitate
Melting, a catalyst aiding a process
As teachers naturally do, as he did,
And now his friends have placed his ashes
Under the marker with his angled
Geometric script on the lagoon shore
Of Chicago's Graceland Cemetery looking
To the little island with Burnham
Underneath his boulder, near Mies, near
Gravity-defying Ruth Page, across
From the graceful levels Shaw designed
For the Goodmans, down the path
From the twining elegance of Sullivan's
Getty Tomb, among his peers, with that
Startling gem-like glass cullet from
The destroyed but phoenix-like Price house
Back home in Bartlesville, Oklahoma,
That still exists in loving pictures.
At least it was built, for he had
More ideas than patrons, but treated
Patrons well, having learned a
Modesty that his master did not teach.
Neither did he make students worship him,
Merely freed their minds to be themselves
With his spaces as their examples:

Grain elevators that had learned from beehives,
An infinity cantilevered from a rooted pole,
A spiral echoing with Japanese treasures,
A place for worship from Quonset huts,
And his own space concealed beneath a stadium
Where ideas split and fused like atomic nuclei.

I never took his courses. I had no math
Or drawing skills, but I was welcome
Under the stadium seats on weekend nights,
Encountering for the first time the swirling
Drips of Jackson Pollock, the talking wound
Of Cocteau's poet, the low passageways
Of the palace of Eisenstein's Ivan,
For his spaces were meant to be open
To anyone with an opening mind.

I was not there to help him when
The cops entrapped him with a punk
And forced him from the school. Dante
Encountered his old master Brunetto,
Who had taught him allegorical journeys,
Among Sodomites in the seventh infernal circle,
Praised him highly but could not cool the fire.
Goff should have had a chance to be a cullet
Helping many more to blaze and fuse
And cool into transparent clarity,
But he kept on, and the buildings are there,
And the drawings are there to learn from,
And those he taught are teaching others.
The sun strikes the cullet into brilliant light.

YATABAGHDADU

J. QUINN BRISBEN 20 MAY 2003

It is a real word, a verb
In Arabic, meaning to try
To live like the elites of
Baghdad in its storied days,
Which were still being storied
At the Beit al-Iraqi last
November when Amal served
Tea and a pastry with syrup
And cream called *kahi*, and we
Exchanged a few stories and
Songs and, of course, did a
Little business and talked some
Politics and religion, which is
What Baghdad has always been about.

A ceramic tablet hangs on my wall,
Not looted and only a copy anyhow,
From Amal's shop and home, close
To a bridge on the Tigris, thus bombed
In both 1991 and 2003, and I hope
Soon back in business, for that last
Bombing was pre-invasion and Amal's
Neighbors, though perhaps envious, were
Not looters like the camp followers who
Stole treasures from the museum
While troops were guarding the oil.

It is cuneiform, although I cannot tell
What kind, though not the earliest.
When the original of that clay was marked,
People had been writing for many centuries,
And this was done hurriedly, the lines
On a slant, not praising some king
Or god, not an epic about heroes
Ravaging cities; that would be written
With more care; just words about
Business, everyday love, gossip,
The sort of things we talked about
When I bought it for five U. S. dollars
Just to show I had been in Baghdad.

The original might be on its way to
Some collector who justifies crime
By exhibiting taste and scholarship,
Perhaps willing it to another museum
To avoid taxes when the trail of
Theft is no longer fresh. I hope
It has not become dust or mud
Like so much of our past. War
Does that. I mention that because
I am against war, and the happy
Few who like fresh poems, hold
Old clay tablets worth more than
Dying children, also war's result,
And I want them to work for peace.

War makers should not bomb cities
Whose poets they do not know,
Should not bomb bridges where the
Passage of almond-eyed women from
Al-Karkh to al-Rusafah and back again
Was noted in the Ninth Century by
Ali Ibn al-Jahm, and a later bridge
Jisr al-Shuhada, which means
The Martyr's Bridge, where bullets
From thugs in power killed the
Brother of the poet al-Jawahiri
In 1948. That poet lived in exile,
Wrote of Baghdad's bridges from Prague,
And is buried in Damascus. He called
Baghdad *umm al-basatin*, the mother
Of orchards, orchards recently burned.

Now the occupying troops look
For oblivion in bars in the narrow
Street named for Abu Nuwas who
Sang of wine and disillusionment
Thirteen centuries ago in such dives.
Let us hope the banned poems of
Muzaffer al-Nawwab, smuggled in
On tapes during the reign of
The last dictator before this one
Are circulating freely. I hope
Baghdad is a nest of singing
Birds like the ones sold in
The Suq al-Ghazl on Fridays
And dreamed of by banned poets.

There is no real ending to
Thought and memory except
Death. Baghdad's most famous
Narrator, the one you heard of
Even before you knew that
The city was going to be bombed
And invaded despite our outcry,
Always used to stop at dawn
With the tale incomplete so
She could live another day while
She made up or stole another
Story to put off the killers
Who are always in power in
Baghdad and, I fear, everywhere.

PASSING FOUR AEGEAN ISLANDS

J. QUINN BRISBEN

I. LEMNOS

The Lemnian women tore their men to shreds
In Dionysian frenzy, needing aid
Repopulating Lemnos, *Argus* stayed
With Jason, Heracles, and crew that sheds
Their tunics and falls to on joyous beds,
Restoring balance; love and then evade,
A common practice in the hero trade;
The boys sail on, leave babies in their steads.

There is no treaty betwixt prick and brain,
No gender peace except one daily done
With new demands and tears and pain,
A full equality of mind but none
Of need, desire, and dream; we work and gain,
Then madness loses nearly all we've won.

II. LESBOS

We are not making babies anymore
But married and despite Apostle Paul
Still burning now and then; we know the call
Of flesh, respect it as the lovely core
Of being, love our friends who have the more
Unusual tastes for intra-gender all-
In coupling, echoed in towering tall
Achievements in this isle's poetic lore.

I do not know how real great Sappho was
Or if she really burned with love for girls
In ways that great religions bar because
We must confine our passions far from whirls
Of chaos: loving outlaws sacred laws,
And those who say so create costly pearls

III. CHIOS

On craggy Chios grapes grow strong and sweet,
Old Aristophanes called Chians sots,
But out of wine and mastic gum came lots
Of silver, time for song and story, meat
Of rising human skill, a daring feat
In painted clay and chiseled stone and thoughts
Reducing primal fears and gods to noughts,
Until harsh war crushed greatness with its feet.

The massacres were fierce and exiles fled
Eventually to flourish in the shipping trade;
The pendulum stopped swinging and the red
Desire for blood browned out and hate decayed
To old crones keening for the fading dead
And legends of spring hills in blooms arrayed.

IV. SAMOS

Polycrates had luck at least until
The Persians won and nailed him to a cross;
When warned to balance mounting gain with loss,
He threw a ring into the sea and still
The ring came back, for with his lucky toss
A big fish destined for the tyrant boss
Had gulped it down to feed fate's foolish skill.

Greeks counted no one fortunate till life
Had stopped, not Croesus, Xerxes, or the men
Who nailed Polycrates, who win the strife
For now, but are betrayed and caught and then
Slit open with their very own fish knife;
The only question is exactly when.

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF COWBOY BUDDY LOGAN

J. QUINN BRISBEN 16 SEP 2004

Gaynell Gowrie Briggs knew that her mind was going, knew that she could not do anything about it, and knew that she was not going to care greatly. She would dress well and groom herself properly for as long as she could, and others would probably do that for her as long as she could not. She would hurt others when the outside world fogged up and she withdrew into herself, but she had always hurt others without meaning to, just as others had always hurt her.

She had hurt her husband Tom Briggs most of all. Tom was a genuinely good man who deserved a lot of things. He deserved a million dollars and had almost had it a couple of times, but he enjoyed the wheeling and dealing more than he enjoyed the possession itself. If he ever achieved a dream, he would inevitably parlay that into the next dream until the whole structure collapsed. Then he would start over with another big scheme and would keep on doing that until he died.

Tom deserved a kind of love she had never been able to give him. It was not just the lack of children, although that was part of it. Gaynell had always been afraid of the pain of childbirth. Her own mother had never really recovered from her birth and had died when Gaynell was five years old. Her aunt had died giving birth to her cousin Flossie. Another aunt and her husband had adopted Flossie. She could remember being present at the birth of her cousin Morgan's son Cletus when she was thirteen. The screams of Morgan's wife Annie terrified her, although Annie soon recovered and pretended that it had been nothing at all. Her stepmother had also pretended that it had been all in a day's work a year later when her half-sister Ernestine had been born, but she had heard the screams then, too.

It was more than just the fear of physical pain. She had let others get the impression that she was afraid of having a child by Tom, who was a huge man with huge bones, but that was not really true. Others supposed that she did not want Tom's children because of the persistent rumors about a scandal in Tom's ancestry, but that was not true either. It was mostly that she feared she would be an unloving mother, a terribly incompetent mother in all essential ways. Although a gracious hostess when someone else was doing all the real work, she was never a competent housekeeper, never a willing housekeeper, and the details of taking care of a demanding baby would have been quite beyond her.

It was getting worse now that her memory was going. Ernestine would come over and find tablecloths that should have been washed but had just been put away in a drawer after being used. Tom, who

loved to cook and had grown up in a series of lunch wagons, would chide her about unwashed pots and exposed sandwich makings. Tom did his best to help, but he was busy with a million schemes, currently centered on real estate. Gaynell was increasingly unable to cope by herself.

Tom had no close family of his own and loved being part of hers. He doted on Ernestine's children and on the children of her cousins before that. He loved big family gatherings even when his other troubles sometimes made him drink too much. He loved the camaraderie of politics and business and the social life that was part of that. He loved being the center of attention and never got enough of it, not even during those times when he had held public office. He had adored her, been kinder to her than she deserved. She had been kind in return, but that had never been enough.

Once for a few years in the 1950s she thought she had found a niche where she could truly help Tom, one in which she really belonged. Tom had used his political influence to get the franchise for a television station. In those days a lot of daytime programming was local, and Gaynell conducted a popular daily interview show. She had her beautiful black hair, just beginning to be touched by gray, done up by a professional every broadcast day. She interviewed passing authors and civic club speakers, winners of prizes at the county fair, aspiring politicians and enthusiastic hobbyists of all sorts. It did not last. Echota, Oklahoma proved to be too small a market for television. Tom eventually had to sell the station to entrepreneurs who re-centered the station on Oklahoma City. Somehow Gaynell did not have what it took to make it as a television personality in a larger market. Perhaps, she thought, she lacked warmth.

She had warmth enough for a succession of pampered cocker spaniels. She had enjoyed helping to raise her half-sister Ernestine, she enjoyed being an aunt to Ernestine's children and to her cousin Flossie Bickam's children, too, especially when they reached the age to make intelligent conversation. She had enjoyed college, especially the subtle lessons in refinement that had been part of the privilege of being a member of a good sorority. She had majored in English. She had tried teaching for a year after graduation, but she had no talent for keeping order and little interest in the standard curriculum. She was a good enough writer to work for a small town weekly newspaper that Tom Briggs had owned for many years, but she had no extraordinary talent.

She read constantly and liked a lot of the current best sellers and Southwestern regional writers like Tom Lea, whom she had met during the war when Tom Briggs was stationed at Fort Bliss. However, her favorites were detective stories and related genres. They ended with discovery, rational explanation, and a sense of order restored if only temporarily. She was delighted when her cousin Flossie's son Max Bickam developed the same taste in early adolescence. Gaynell bought Max a subscription to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* as a Christmas present when he was twelve, and they enthusiastically discussed their favorites together. Long-playing records were beginning to be available then, and she and Max shared a

love of classical music that was rare in that time and place. The music, too, had a quality of tapping unruly passion and then ordering it that she liked.

Sometimes she and Max disagreed about books. He highly recommended a World War I spy novel by Manning Coles called *Drink to Yesterday*, but Gaynell was disappointed when it ended with the death of the protagonist, a meaningless death as far as she could see, as meaningless as the war itself. Her cousin Oliver Gowrie had died of the flu at the end of that war, and her cousin Caleb Gowrie had come home from it with the tuberculosis that killed him a few years later. Tom Briggs had spent World War II editing an army camp newspaper, Ernestine's husband Herman Betz and all her Gowrie relatives had survived, and she was glad of that. She preferred death as a puzzle to be solved rather than the mess it often was in the real world.

Max's favorites soon became the hard-boiled characters of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, men who managed to embody an astringent virtue in a world of bottomless corruption. Gaynell preferred the Perry Mason novels of Erle Stanley Gardner. She devoured each new one in the series as soon as it was available. She especially loved the parts where Perry Mason would trick the real killer into confessing right in the courtroom. Somehow she would dream that she was confessing on the witness stand and somehow felt relieved that her secrets were now out in the open and the world was in balance again.

The details of those dreams would fade when she woke up, but she had an idea of the reality behind the things to which she had confessed. In a few months of 1934 she had had the only really passionate sexual relation of her life with a bank robber who was also a killer. She had helped make his legend and had wanted to share the doom of a man who knew he was doomed.

A lot of it, especially the passion she had felt, would always be her secret, although kind and friendly Tom Briggs must have guessed it and had done everything humanly possible to supply its loss. Her uncle Hab Gowrie had known about the hideout and known that his niece was involved. Her father Zeke Gowrie had known enough to prevent her from going to her death. Even her cousin Flossie's husband Henry Bickam had made a shrewd guess about the relationship. None of these ever talked to her about it afterward and others who might have had suspicions held their peace, too. It had ended, as she always knew it would, in death, a death that she had wanted to share. Parts of the rest of her life had been good, but she knew nothing would ever match that intensity.

Now in 1977 at the age of sixty-six, she knew that her mind was going. They called it Alzheimer's disease now. When the mind of her aunt Lorena Maxson had gone the same way in the 1940s and 1950s it had just been called senility, something that happened to a lot of old people. They still had no clue as to what might be done about it. She knew she would have good days and bad days but that finally there would be only bad days and a death of which she would be unaware and others barely so.

Was there anything worth saving, worth anyone else's remembrance? The letters, maybe. The first drafts were in her handwriting. She had made her outlaw lover Cowboy Buddy Logan laboriously copy them by hand before they were sent to the newspapers. They had been printed and reprinted in newspapers and magazines all over the country and had made the temporary fortune of the Choloneh *Plainsman*. They had made Buddy famous the way he had always wanted to be, but she, Gaynell Gowrie, had written them. They were her immortality, too.

An FBI agent had checked the letters that came into Tom Briggs's weekly paper in Choloneh. Comparing them with samples of Cowboy Buddy Logan's handwriting they had from other sources, he pronounced them authentic.

"The thing I don't understand, though," the agent had said, "is how this man who never had much real schooling and could barely complete a sentence in the last orphanage that he ran away from does it. Now all of a sudden writes letters that have a bigger audience than William Allen White or Arthur Brisbane. This hick bank robber writes like a cross between F. Scott Fitzgerald and Will Rogers."

Gaynell was pleased. She had graduated from the University of Missouri at Columbia with a degree in English, but her writings had never been singled out for praise there. She had found most of the literature she had been required to read rather boring. Yet the first of the letters in Logan's handwriting that had been sent to the Choloneh *Plainsman* contained a classical allusion that caught the imagination of the public.

I am told the ancient Greek hero Achilles was given a choice between a long and peaceful life and a short and glorious life. He chose glory. I would make the same choice. There is no war going on now that I would care to fight, but I have decided to get my glory robbing banks. These banks squeeze the farmer and the small town merchant for all they can get, then pretend to go broke so they can take every penny that people have saved. The posters call me a public enemy, but these banks are the real public enemy. I have always shared out what I had with people who needed it, and I will continue to do that until I am killed.

I know I will be killed. The police, all over the country, work for the bankers, and I have never needed more than a couple of friends to knock over a bank. I am outnumbered, but that is all right. I have chosen the short and glorious life.

Two months later H. L. Mencken praised that letter in the *American Mercury*: "This young hoodlum has a panache that should be the envy of our windbag politicians and juiceless professors. In the unlikely event that he survives a few more years, he may define our age as Francois Villon defined his." Gaynell had put that paragraph in the same manila envelope as her drafts of Buddy's letters and the clippings about him.

The first robbery of which Buddy was in charge earned him the nickname Cowboy. He and an asso-

ciate had tied a rope around the safe of a bank in Moscow, Oklahoma, and tied the rope to a pick-up truck. They then pulled the safe through the back door of the bank, splintering the doorframe. After loading the safe on the truck bed, Buddy had flourished the rope with a whoop and holler as his partner drove him and the safe away. The banner headlines next day said: COWBOY ROBS BANK.

That day Tom Briggs told his only reporter Gaynell Gowrie to write something about the early Spring that would exactly fill a hole of four column inches in the paper that was going to press the next day. "The haberdashery is going broke and can't pay for their ad," he said.

Gaynell thought a few lines of verse would be in order, even though that was difficult for a printer to set in type. She drove her flivver to one of her favorite spots, the cottonwood-lined creek on one edge of the farm that her cousin Luke Gowrie had lost to the bank the previous fall. Her uncle, Hab Gowrie, had used that secluded spot for manufacturing whiskey for forty years. She was not surprised to see the remains of a campfire near where she parked, for hobos often stayed overnight there.

She was surprised when she heard the sound of a gun cocking and a voice that said, "Don't move, girlie. Don't move a muscle." Gaynell wanted to scream but somehow could not make a sound.

"We got a visitor, Buddy," the voice said. "What do you want me to do with her?"

"Her?" Buddy asked. "Let me have a look." Gaynell stiffened with fear.

The one called Buddy came around to the front of the car. He was just short of six feet tall, slim and hard-muscled. His light brown hair was neatly parted, and he had just shaved. He was not wearing a collar or tie, but his vest was buttoned up. His two-toned shoes looked freshly polished, and he wore spats. Gaynell wondered how he could be so neatly turned out if he had spent the night camping out. He had a very pleasant smile.

"Who might you be, young lady?" he asked. "And what are you doing here?"

"My name is Gaynell Gowrie from Choloneh," she said. "I drove out here because this is pretty country and I have an assignment to write something about it for the local paper. This land used to belong to my cousin before the bank took it and to my uncle before that. My father is thinking of buying it when times get better."

"We found what looks like part of a still," Buddy said. "Was your cousin a bootlegger?"

"The still belongs to my uncle, Hab Gowrie," Gaynell said. "He's not a bootlegger. He just makes enough for family and friends."

"That sounds like a real gentlemanly way to deal with whiskey," Buddy said. "You wouldn't happen to have any of that whiskey with you?"

Gaynell blushed. Last December Tom Briggs had traded a display ad for Hab Gowrie's hardware store for a couple of quart bottles of Hab's 1921 batch. He had given one bottle to his printer and kept the other

in a locked drawer of his desk. Gaynell had learned to drink at college, although she never drank much. More as a way to tease than anything else, she kept telling Tom that she wanted a drink of his whiskey for Christmas. On Christmas day Tom presented her with a flask with her monogrammed initials on it full of her uncle Hab's whiskey. She kept the flask under the seat cushion of her car. She had not had a drink out of it since her first sip four months before. She reached under the seat cushion and pulled it out.

"My friend Hank here claims to be a judge of good whiskey," Buddy said. "Do you mind if he has a nip?"

Gaynell shook her head. Hank came around to stand by Buddy. He had eased down the hammer on his revolver and set the safety. He wore a threadbare jacket over his overalls and had not shaved that day or the previous day. He opened the flask, took a sip, and then a swig, holding the liquor in his mouth appreciatively.

"This is very good stuff," Hank said, "about as smooth as I have ever tasted. It has spent a lot of years in the keg."

Hank handed the flask to Buddy. Buddy looked to Gaynell before he drank. She nodded. It was obviously stronger liquor than he was used to. He wiped the mouth of the flask carefully before handing it back to Gaynell. She politely took a sip before placing it back under the seat cushion. She had no idea what might happen next. Buddy was obviously dangerous and his dangerousness increased his attractiveness. Looking down the creek bed, Gaynell could see a pick-up truck with a safe resting on its bed. Buddy followed her gaze.

"You've figured out who we are, then," he said. "We had business with the bank in Moscow yesterday."

Gaynell nodded.

"Now we have two problems," Buddy said. "What do we do with that safe, and what do we do with you?"

"That safe belongs to the bank," she said. "I think you ought to return it."

Buddy laughed. "Hank," he said, "this lady has a lot of sense. We have what we needed out of that safe and have no further use for it. When we have taken it back, we can return this pick-up that we borrowed from a farmer without his permission and get our own car."

"Do you think this girl is good at forgetting?" Hank asked.

"No matter what I think, I never hurt a woman and I never intend to," Buddy said. "She shared her flask with us right away. I think she's on the square."

"You're the boss," Hank said.

"Miss," Buddy said, "I will trouble you for one more thing. I need to write that bank a note. Do you have pencil and paper?"

Gaynell handed him the notebook in which she had intended to write her poem about Spring and

also the fountain pen her stepmother had given her when she went away to college.

Miss Gaynell Gowrie, you have fancy writing equipment,” Buddy said. Gaynell thrilled when he pronounced her name. He wrote for a while, then returned the notebook and pen to her. She read the note:

Dear bank,

I am returning this safe because I have no further use for it. I am keeping the money, about six hundred dollars, and don't try to claim it was more. There were a lot of mortgage papers and stuff that I burned. I hope you have no copies so you cannot foreclose on folks. We did not blow up your safe. We just took the back off it, which we done easy. You can screw it back on.

Sincerely,

Gaynell looked at the note. “You have misspelled mortgage and sincerely. You need to say ‘we did easily’ rather than ‘we done easy’. Otherwise it is a very good note.”

“Are you a schoolteacher?” Buddy asked.

“I was,” Gaynell said. “I was not very good at it.”

Buddy took a new notebook sheet and corrected the note according to Gaynell's suggestions. He handed the sheet to her.

“You didn't sign it,” she said.

“I am not real, really anxious for people to know my name just yet. They'll know it soon enough.”

“This morning's Wichita *Beacon* says, ‘COWBOY ROBS BANK’,” she said.

Buddy signed the note “Cowboy.”

“This has been a very pleasant meeting,” Buddy said. “I would take it kindly if you would not say anything about it. This is a good place, and we might like to come back here some time. I would like to see you again, too. I never met a lady as nice as you before.”

“I would like to see you,” Gaynell said before she could stop herself. She drove back to town and immediately typed exactly four column inches of fervent prose about the floating seeds of the cottonwood trees. Tom Briggs was pleased.

It was a great year for bank robbers. John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, Alvin Karpis, Ma Barker and her boys, and others were operating in 1934, and many of them died before that year was out. The automobile made it possible to rob slackly defended small town banks and be out of the range of local law enforcement officials quickly. Bank robbers were popular in a depression year when many people believed banks had robbed them. J. Edgar Hoover's FBI had just begun its unparalleled publicity campaign against wanted robbers.

Gaynell searched the newspapers that daily came into the Choloneh *Plainsman*. Within a week in

Stanton, Kansas another safe had been pulled through the back wall of a bank. The leading robber there had been described as handsome and well mannered. Gaynell was sure that had been Buddy. Still later a clerk at a resort hotel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas that was robbed during a Baptist convention recognized the robber as Buddy Logan, whom he had known ten years before in an orphanage in Henryanna, Texas.

Soon the newspapers had abundant information on the background of the now legendary Cowboy Buddy Logan. He had been born in 1910 on a farm that his parents had homesteaded on the former Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation near Mountain View, Oklahoma. A train killed both his parents at a grade crossing in 1920. He was sent to a Baptist church orphanage. He ran away from it two years later and became incensed when he found a bank had foreclosed the mortgage on his parents' farm. He was sent to another orphanage for problem boys in Nebraska and ran away from there in 1925 at the age of fifteen. The next year he returned to the area where he had been born and was arrested for assaulting a bank official who had gained possession of what Buddy Logan still regarded as his family homestead. A local jury refused to convict him of that, but Oklahoma City police arrested him a few months later for riding with some friends in a car that proved to be stolen. He served six months in a reformatory and never reported to a parole officer after his release.

He got a job as a counterman in a diner in Bowman City, Texas. He impressed a traveling salesman there who got him a job selling hardware wholesale all over the Southwest and Midwest. Buddy Logan saved his money, acquired a wardrobe and demeanor that earned him good commissions, and had dreams of some day opening up a hardware store of his own. Then in 1933 when he was twenty-three years old, the company for which he was working went bankrupt while owing him several hundred dollars in commissions, and the bank in which he had placed his savings failed also.

Buddy Logan decided to become a bank robber. After apprenticing for some months as a lookout or driver for a more established gang, he decided to go into business for himself. He knew very well that his career as a bank robber was likely to be a short one, but he cared little. His first three robberies netted him more money than he had ever made as a traveling salesman in his best year and gave him a sense of empowerment that he had never felt before.

Gaynell Gowrie received a letter postmarked Claremore, Oklahoma written in pencil with no address except her name and the name of the town. It read, "If you can and if you want to, meet me where we met before next Saturday afternoon." It was unsigned. She drove out to the creek after lunch, having told her stepmother that she might be having supper with some friends.

At first she did not see him, then he stepped out from a grove of trees that concealed an obviously new Packard touring car. "I was hoping you would come," he said.

"Do you need to write another letter?" she asked.

“I need that among other things,” he said.

His name was beginning to be known, and he needed to justify himself, for he did not know how much longer he might be allowed to live. Gaynell suggested the analogy to Achilles, which he liked. She wrote out the text following his suggestions. He copied it on a sheet of stationery from the resort he had robbed in Arkansas. He put it in an envelope and affixed a two-cent stamp.

“Who do you think I ought to send this to?” he asked.

“Address it to the Choloneh *Plainsman*, Choloneh, Oklahoma,” she said. “I will drop it in the box in front of the post office in the town of Jackson on the other side of the river either today or tomorrow. It should get to the paper by Tuesday and be printed Thursday. We have an exchange with all the papers in the area. It will be picked up and reprinted by a lot of them, and I bet it will make the Associated Press wire, too.”

“You are so smart,” Buddy said. “I’m real, really glad I met you. Can you stay for a while and talk?”

They sat on the running board of his Packard. He told her about his life on the road and now on the run and about growing up in orphanages, hobo jungles, and the reformatory. She told him that her father, Zeke Gowrie, had once had a wild streak, too, and had spent a year in Leavenworth Prison for taking a woman across the state line for immoral purposes.

“It was not such a bad thing,” she said, “but he thought that he had been a bad man and that doing his time would help make things right again. When he got out again he courted my stepmother, who is a very nice person. She married him partly because she wanted to make a good home for me, which she has. I have a little sister Ernestine who is eight years old, and I just love her.”

“Do you have a boyfriend?” he asked.

“I suppose Tom Briggs who runs the paper is a boyfriend,” she said. “I really enjoy talking to him and hearing his jokes. He’s kissed me a couple of times, and I didn’t mind. I think he would ask me to marry him except that the paper is not making enough money for that now. He just doesn’t excite me. He’s a big, homely man, but that’s not the reason he doesn’t excite me. He just doesn’t.”

“Has any man ever excited you?” he asked.

“I dated a lot of fellows in college,” she said. “The only one who even began to excite me was an art student. He wanted me to take off my clothes and pose for him. I didn’t do it, but I sort of wanted to. Sometimes I think I have a bad wild streak in me like my father had.”

He kissed her. She kissed him back, hard, with her mouth open.

“I didn’t mean to be so bold,” he said, “but I’m an outlaw and I don’t have much time.”

“I don’t mind,” she said.

He told her that he had been with women that he had paid but he had never had a real girl friend

before, never had anyone to love. He had always wanted that, just as he wanted a store of his own in a nice town and a real home to come home to at night.

They detached the seat cushion from her car and laid it down in a shady grove. He fumbled so much undoing the buttons on his spats that she had to help him. There was not much foreplay, but both of them were very excited. She was a virgin, but there was no blood. They rinsed themselves off in the cold water of the creek, splashing each other and laughing. Then they made love again. It was even better this time, especially for her. They got dressed again. Buddy grinned as he put on his spats.

“I didn’t take precautions,” he said.

“If I ever have a baby, I want it to be yours,” she said.

They sat and talked about a million things until almost sunset. Then she drove back to the highway and across the river to post the letter. When she came home her stepmother said, “you must have had a good time at supper. You’re grinning from ear to ear.”

Gaynell called her stepmother mother and really felt that way about her. Mary Gowrie had baked a lemon meringue pie for supper. Her father and Ernestine had had two pieces apiece, but there was one left. Gaynell ate it and praised it highly.

The letter caused a sensation. Tom Briggs printed it on the front page and called the Associated Press himself. “I hope he writes us more letters,” Tom said. “This is the best circulation builder this paper ever had. I wonder why he picked us to write to.”

Gaynell said nothing and Tom did not look suspicious.

The following Wednesday Gaynell almost fainted when she read the headline **ROBBER, LAWMAN KILLED** in the Kansas City *Star*. An armed deputy sheriff had been in the bank when it was being robbed in Cutter, Kansas. He had waited until the two robbers were fleeing with bags of loot, then pulled out his gun as they were near the door and away from others. He shot one of the robbers dead and was aiming at the other when he was killed himself. The remaining robber escaped with all the loot. The dead robber was identified as Henry Mazurek of Budweis, Oklahoma, a farmer who had recently been making payments on an overdue mortgage with what he claimed were gambling winnings. Gaynell supposed this was Buddy’s companion Hank, the one who had pulled a gun on her. The other robber had positively been identified as the notorious Cowboy Buddy Logan, who was now wanted for murder.

The next evening Gaynell received a long distance person-to-person call at her home. It was Buddy’s voice. She was about to warn him that the Gowrie phone was on a party line where everybody listened when he said, “This is Bill Larkin, who is marrying one of your sorority sisters from college. We just found out that your wedding invitation and several others did not get mailed. The wedding and receptions are this weekend starting tomorrow night Friday. I know this is short notice, but can you make it?”

Gaynell said she would take the milk train down to Echota in the morning, then catch the little Frisco train called the doodlebug to Tulsa. It arrived, she thought, about three in the afternoon.

“I can’t meet you at the station, but take a cab to the Mayo Hotel. Ask for the room reserved by Bill Larkin. Wear a ring so that everyone will know you are one of the sisters.” She had a sorority ring, but she supposed Buddy meant a fake wedding ring of some kind.

“Should I wear anything special?” she asked.

“I liked what you were wearing when we last saw each other. I would like you to wear that most of the weekend.”

Gaynell blushed, but no one in her family seemed to notice. Mary Gowrie quickly approved the trip and helped her pack an overnight bag. Zeke Gowrie looked at her thoughtfully. He was still troubled by his own wild streak which sometimes led him to do dangerous things on horseback and in cars and hoped it would never surface in his daughters.

While changing trains in Echota she picked up a fake gold wedding band at Woolworth’s. When she arrived at the Mayo, the desk clerk said yes, she must be Mrs. Larkin and was expected. Buddy began taking her clothes off as soon as the bellboy left the room.

They had a meal sent up to the room Friday night and breakfast in bed Saturday morning. Gaynell decided that she did not like that because it was hard to keep from being messy. Buddy was afraid of going out for fear of being recognized now that he was wanted for murder. He wanted to write another letter to justify his actions:

I am sorry I killed that deputy sheriff in Kansas. I know I will pay the penalty for that in time. The only justification that I have for that is that he had just killed my friend and was about to kill me. I am certain that, even if I had dropped my gun and held up my hands, he would still have drilled me. I had no time to think before I shot.

Killing is a bad thing, especially when poor men do it to each other. Most lawmen do not make much money if they are honest, and a fair percentage of them are honest. They are told to kill people who stick up banks and not to kill bankers who take everything from families that are having hard times through no fault of their own.

Hank Mazurek, who was killed by that lawman, was a good man who was just trying to save his farm. I have known him for the past year. He was a good companion in all weathers and just as true as steel. He loved his wife and children dearly. I hope they will be able to keep their farm, which is the main thing that Hank cared about. There is no way that I know of that anyone can prove that any money Hank had came from robbing banks. Anyone who tries to deprive his widow and children of their land will answer to me.

I hope the bankers will take care of the family of that lawman I shot. He was one of their good soldiers, just like the one who will eventually get me. In the meantime I will take such love and friendship as I can get and enjoy what the money from the banks will buy.

Sincerely,

Cowboy Buddy Logan

After dark on Saturday Gaynell talked Buddy into going out on the streets. As they deposited the letter in a mailbox he said, "You are the best thing that ever happened to me."

They were near a movie theater and decided to see a show. It was a musical with production numbers by Busby Berkeley called *Dames*. It starred Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler and featured a lot of good comic actors like Guy Kibbee and ZaSu Pitts. One of the songs, "I Only Have Eyes for You", deeply moved them. They decided that it would be their song from now on. Buddy did not take her to the train Monday morning or tell her his plans, but Gaynell vowed to make her great happiness last as long as it could.

When she got back to Chaloneh that afternoon, she dropped by the newspaper office on her way home. Tom had taken a drink from his office bottle and had a copy of the Sunday Tulsa *World* on his desk.

"That society wedding you said you were going to in Tulsa didn't make the papers," he said.

Gaynell said nothing.

"I don't know exactly what is going on, and I don't really want to know," Tom continued. I want you to know this, though. I will always be there for you when you need me, and I will do anything to keep you from being hurt any worse than you are naturally going to be."

The heavy man stood up and Gaynell hugged him with tears in her eyes. Tom's love was good for her and Buddy's was not. She was going to stick to Buddy as long as she could.

The letter on Mayo Hotel stationery with the Tulsa postmark arrived the next day. Tom had the printer set it up in type for the front page. He told the Associated Press that they could put the letter on the wire immediately if they paid him a fee and mentioned that the letter had been sent to the Chaloneh *Plainsman*. Then he called the sheriff at the county seat.

"I don't know why the punk is writing to this paper," Tom said. "If he keeps it up, though, I am going to build circulation and maybe make a little change. I don't think I've broken any law and don't intend to. I just wanted the law to know what was up."

"The federal people will probably want to see those letters," the sheriff said. "I'll inform them and then stay out of the way. The feds have a reputation for grabbing all the glory. They can have it, and all the bullets, too. I knew boys who talked like this Cowboy Buddy Logan during the war. I admired their style, but I learned to stay the hell out of their way."

Over the next two months Gaynell met Buddy five times, once in Wichita, once in a camp ground

with cabins on the Salt Fork River upstream of Choloneh, once in Arkansas City, Kansas, and twice more at the little creek near Hab Gowrie's still. Five more letters resulted, each more widely circulated than the last. Celebrities started making references to Cowboy Buddy Logan. Will Rogers said on radio that he would make a good choice as ambassador to those countries that were refusing to pay their war loans. J. Edgar Hoover said, "Logan expects to be killed, and the FBI expects to stop this plague of bank robberies. Both these expectations will be met, and soon."

Buddy wanted one more letter to be printed after he died. Gaynell helped him write it, although she was weeping as she did:

By the time everyone reads this I will be dead. I hope I died game with my wounds in the front. Although I surely resisted being taken, I hope I took no one with me. I still feel sorry about that lawman in Cutter, Kansas who was only doing his job. It is a shame to the country when poor men are hired to kill other poor men who are doing what they do only because they are hard up.

I also feel sorry about the man I knew as Florian Armstrong, who drove my getaway car when I robbed the bank at Jones Center, Nebraska last week. He got a bullet through the leg for his pains. He will recover and, since no one has his fingerprints or a description of him, I hope he will succeed in a less risky line of work. He is a colored man, but he treated me as white as anyone I ever met.

The one thing I regret not doing is killing a bunch of really evil bankers like the one who took my parents' land and tried to put me in prison when I called him on it. I have heard that man died of a stroke last month, and I hope his last thoughts were of me. However, I have learned that all bankers are not evil. I have heard tell of bankers who went to prison or had to flee the country because they lent farmers money on what the bank inspectors said was bad collateral. I do not know much about finance, but I think that is what bankers ought to do. The way things are now a poor man does not have a chance, and we are all trapped into doing bad things.

My life has not been all bad. Even while on the run I have known generosity, kindness, and even love in a way that I would not have dreamed possible before. I am probably not right with God, but I believe that even the worst sins can be forgiven. I hope I am with my parents and many old friends by now and that others will join me in God's own good time.

Sincerely,

Cowboy Buddy Logan

On their last visit to Hab Gowrie's creek Buddy gave Gaynell a silver locket on a chain. It was inset

with a real diamond. Buddy's picture, taken at a dime store photo machine, was inside it. Gaynell had nothing to give in return until she thought of the flask, now lying on the gas tank of her Ford because they had removed the seat cushion to make love. She had not taken a drink from it since the day she had first met Buddy. She knew that Buddy drank very little, too, but it seemed like a funny and loving thing to give him. It fit exactly into his lower left vest pocket. "I'll wear it over my heart just like you wear your locket," he said.

The harvest of winter wheat around Choloneh in June was disappointing for the indebted farmers. The weather was hotter than anyone could remember with the thermometer topping one hundred degrees day after day. Gaynell got into the habit of coming home to her father's house at noon, taking a quick bath and changing clothes before eating lunch and going back to the newspaper. On Wednesday, June 27 her uncle, Hab Gowrie dropped by as she was getting ready to go back to work.

"Gaynell," he asked, "do you ever go out to that little creek on the place that used to be mine and then your cousin Luke's?"

"Yes, I do," she said. "I drive out there sometimes. It's a pretty place. I like to sit there and sometimes write in my notebook."

"I figured it was something like that," Hab Gowrie said. "That's what I told those lawman about an old Model T with recapped tires this morning. The sheriff called me from the county seat about eight o'clock and told me that federal lawmen were coming down to have a look at that place. They think outlaws have been hiding out there."

Mary Gowrie came out of the kitchen holding a dishtowel. "Mercy me," she said.

"The sheriff called because he knows that Zeke is thinking about buying that land and that I am in the habit of using that area by the creek sometimes." Hab knew better than to mention the word whiskey in front of his sister-in-law or his wife or any other Gowrie woman. They knew he made it and drank it, but that was never done in front of the women or in any of their houses.

"I decided to go out there," Hab Gowrie said. "The sheriff and I have had an understanding for many years, and this particular bunch of federal men have no interest in the use I make of that area, but I just wanted to look things over. These federal men kept their coats and ties on even though it was already hot as a two-dollar pistol. They had plaster of Paris with them and were making casts of all the tire tracks they could find. They would look at those casts and say 'Packard touring car' or 'flivver with recapped tires'. Once they said the tracks were a couple of months old, but they were fairly sure they would match the pick-up truck that was used in the bank robbery down at Moscow. That means that Cowboy Buddy Logan has been hiding out there."

"Mercy me," Mary Gowrie said again. Gaynell, you had better not go out to that place for a while."

Gaynell promised that she would not.

Tom Briggs went across the street for coffee every weekday morning at ten o'clock. Gaynell always stayed in the office in the unlikely event that any printing business came in while Tom was out of the office. She had told Buddy that this would be the safest time to call but that his messages had better be as brief as possible and worded so that no casual listener could understand their content.

On Friday, June 29 she was reading the huge headline in the *Wichita Beacon* about the bank robbery in Jones, Center, Nebraska the previous day. A town constable had managed to get off a shot that wounded the driver of the getaway car in the leg. Buddy Logan had managed to grab the wheel and keep his foot on the gas pedal. He was out of town before a pursuit could be organized. Several hours later the car used in the robbery had been found abandoned in a Negro neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri.

The telephone rang. Before Gaynell could say anything Buddy's voice said, "I'm all right and have a new car. I'll meet you Tuesday night where we have met before." He hung up before Gaynell could warn him of the danger. An operator told her that the call had come from a pay telephone at a gas station in Peculiar, Missouri, but there was no way she could possibly reach Buddy before he drove into the trap. She decided that she would die with him.

But she did not. She excused herself from the supper table on the evening of Tuesday, July 3 and started to leave the house. Her father Zeke Gowrie barred the way.

"You're not going out there, Gaynell," he said. "Hab says the lawmen have had the area around his still staked out for days. Tom Briggs told me an hour ago that Cowboy Buddy Logan robbed the bank over in Storey just after noon. Tom is out at the creek right now with the sheriff.

"I want to be there, too," Gaynell said.

"You are my daughter, I love you, and I am not going to let you die," Zeke Gowrie said. "I know you think you love that outlaw. I guessed there was something happening between you just as soon as those letters started running in the paper, but you are not going to die with him. That would nearly kill me and Mary and Ernestine, and I know you don't want to do that. I know you think this is the end of the world, but it isn't. I got over the death of your mother, your uncles got over the deaths of their sons, and you'll get over this. You are not going out that door even if I have to slap you down, which I have never done before."

Gaynell ran crying to her room. Half an hour later Ernestine tapped on her door and asked if she could use the portable wind-up phonograph in her room. Ernestine had bought a record that day of a tune she had heard Gaynell humming. She intended it for Gaynell's birthday the next month, but she thought it might cheer her up now. They played "I Only Have Eyes for You" over four times while Gaynell hugged her little sister.

Shortly after nine o'clock Tom Briggs called at the house and asked to speak to Gaynell on the front

porch. "It's over," he said.

Buddy had driven in without suspecting the lawmen were waiting for him. When he got out of his car, a new streamlined Chrysler, the lawmen put a spotlight on him and ordered him to surrender. Buddy fired one shot. More than two dozen were fired back at him. When the lawmen cautiously approached his body, they smelled whiskey as well as gun smoke and blood. He had been carrying a flask in his vest pocket.

"The bullets had taken out the initials," Tom said, but I recognized the flask."

"Tom. I never meant to hurt you," Gaynell said.

"You never do," Tom said.

Gaynell got her purse and gave Tom the last letter of Cowboy Buddy Logan. "This will help you write your story," she said. "You can pretend you got it in the mail and lost the envelope. It will be a really good story. It might even get you a job on a big city paper."

"No," he said. "I intend to stay right here in Choloneh with you and your family. You can have the rest of the week off."

"I'd rather keep busy," she said. "I'll cover the Fourth of July celebrations tomorrow and write them up so they can be in the paper the next day. We'll just keep going on as we were before. It is over."

She had begun to have her period several days earlier than usual the previous Thursday when she knew her lover was in mortal danger. She would never bear Cowboy Buddy Logan's child. It was over.

On Sunday, July 22 John Dillinger was shot down near the Biograph Theater in Chicago. The next day Flossie Bickam called her cousin Gaynell Gowrie from Echota twenty miles away.

"I told Henry Bickam that, if John Dillinger could risk his life to see an air-conditioned movie, I can risk my respectability by going out in public to cool off for a few hours even though I am seven months pregnant," she said. "Henry says we ought to make a party out of it. He wants you and Tom to come down for supper tomorrow night and be our guests at the show. It ought to be over in time for you two to get back to Choloneh."

Gaynell and Tom agreed. The next day Mary Gowrie went out to the chicken yard in back of the house killed two hens that had not been laying well by wringing their necks, then plucked and prepared them. "Flossie makes good batter," she said. She has my recipe."

They left in time to reach the Bickam house in Echota at five in the afternoon. Flossie fried the chicken while Tom made the drop biscuits that were a specialty of his.

Henry Bickam was a traveling salesman, although he was thinking about starting a furniture store in Echota. He and Flossie had been married nearly six years. They were totally surprised and delighted by her pregnancy.

"If it's a boy, we intend to name him Will Maxson after Flossie's father and call him Max. We haven't

picked out a girl's name. If it's quintuplets like the Dionnes, we'll give one away to you."

"I don't know if I could take proper care of a baby," Gaynell said.

"That doesn't stop women from having them," Henry said.

The afternoon paper thumped on the Bickam front porch. The headlines were still about Dillinger.

"I am glad these bank robber are getting put out of business," Henry said, "but I feel sorry for them all the same. I met the one they called Cowboy Buddy Logan when we were both traveling salesmen on the road. From all I knew of him, he was a very nice fellow."

Henry saw the look in Gaynell's eyes.

"Nobody has told me anything," he said, "and I have no intention of saying anything to anybody, not even Flossie. In that last letter when he wrote about good bankers having to leave the country, I figured someone might have told him about your cousin Louella's husband having to run off to Brazil. Hard times are bad for everybody, but we have no choice except to get through them."

Dinner was very good and the picture show *It Happened One Night* was even better. When the "walls of Jericho" fell between Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable in the final scene, Flossie's baby gave a celebratory kick. That night Gaynell took off Buddy's locket and put it in the manila envelope with her copies of the letters and all the clippings.

Now in 1977 with her mind beginning to go Gaynell Briggs looked at the envelope again. She had to give it to someone before it faded from her mind. It could not be to Tom, for that would only make his own painful memories worse. Her father and stepmother were dead. Her sister Ernestine had probably never known the whole story, and that tragedy had never really been part of her own life. Flossie Bickam was dead of cancer, and Henry Bickam was bitterly estranged from his son Max and his daughter Lori. Max Bickam had written her recently thanking her for helping to start his large collection of classical records. Gaynell liked Max but he was a writer for magazines, and she did not want her secrets made public until she was long past caring.

Then she thought about her cousin Louella who had resumed the name of Gowrie when her husband had fled to Brazil following the 1933 bank holiday. Louella had become a repository of family keepsakes. Henry Bickam was talking about leaving the land he had inherited from Flossie to Louella in order to keep his children from inheriting it. Yes, she would seal the envelope and give it to Louella to put in her safety deposit box. She would write instructions for Louella to give it to Max Bickam at an appropriate time.

Was there anything else? Her household goods would go to Ernestine and her children. Tom would probably need all the cash that was not his already. People had already forgotten that she had been a minor television personality in a town that no longer had a television station. Was there anything else that she would like to have remembered and preserved? No, she did not think so.

SPHERE

NICOLE MACALUSO



*Nicole Macaluso art:
left: The Two Sages
of the Phoenix
top right: Arise!*

The last face and place I see—
When all the doors have closed,
are crystal blue eyes and straggled locks.

The chagrin smile of
Someone who's been around here
way too long.

The long highway of prosaic thought—
Like a collection—
Coins in a purse—
Seashells from the shore.

The world outside,
Crumbling, in stacks of body bags.
War upon war and even more.
For there's a profit to be had.
Where the youth vanish in foolish pride and false honor.

Your inner world—
A shaded sphere—
Promises—unclear.
Where you'd be now.

The tree of dreams, grows branches reaching,
As if to touch the floor of heaven itself.
The roots are woven—embedded—encased.
The seasons grow, multiply—
The mosaic of you life, spent.



MARQUEE

NICOLE MACALUSO

Running with Great Fury,
The Pedway vanishes to shallow wooden steps—
Sinking into an ocean.
The rising fear—not so terrifying
As I cling to the wrung of the Metra's side rail.
I seemingly can grasp with no weight to tow—.
Going towards an abyss—alone.
The basilica fills quickly, a thousand or so to seat.
An orchestra of five sang like one could never imagine—.
The floors shook,
The walls trembled as bass—
The music fell upon us all.
Surreal, in many a sense.
The organ's pipes etched the very words:
No Crucifer, No deity—
Texts marquee only—.
The devotion—Fanaticism?
Who cares—Life's too short.

EITHER/OR

NICOLE MACALUSO

Either/Or Kierkegaard says it best—
You have to decide.
Too young and imputent?
Maybe, too much stress...
Or the older and more scholarly,
Probably not wise—.
Never had an inkling to date—
“Father know best...”
Dr. J feels men aren't my forte,
At the moment, anyway.
Meanwhile the brush glides on—.
Little squares I painted today.
Little containers—,
Jubilence, mystery—,
Golds, Greys & Reds—,
Riding crimson crescents.
The journey begins—.
Either/Or
A night or two—your fantasies' whore.
Hot white light-blinding passion—.
The Patchwork done.
The brush, palette—,
Wiped clean.

“DEAD POET SOCIETY”

NICOLE MACALUSO

A friend told me once, all of poetry is about time.
A Poet's life—————
Falling into meter—as paced steps,
Minutes chime—ink to paper.
The poet's paper-thin boundary—
Is an open soul to all.
For one to read, ridicule—rescue?
Never saw the film, “Dead Poet Society.”—
Somehow seems as Hollywood heresy.
How would they—or could they ever know,
Who a poet truly is?
Beyond Bohemian branding,
A poet is a matrix of one collective thought—.
A painting of open sky—
No lines between or bars to hold.
Endless—————.
There are,—————No “Dead,” poets.

FLOWERS

NICOLE MACALUSO

The flowers were there—,
Waiting for the bees—.
Wishing—Wanting to be,
Raped—————Ture
Of the moment when lust becomes deadly.
All too eager—.
The shadows fall as do the tears of those un-desired.
The tremor and pace—,
The desire to escape——becomes profound.
As the rain wraps around.
He wants, she wants, they want.
What does it all matter anyway?
Watching the decay—,
Like sugary poison, filtering in——.
I Love You Terry, I Love You.

FISH

ALEXANDRIA RAND

It's a pretty miraculous thing, I suppose, making the transition from being a fish to being a human being. The first thing I should do is go about explaining how I made the transition, the second thing, attempting to explain why. It has been so long since I made the decision to change and since I have actually assumed the role of a human that it may be hard to explain.

Before my role in human civilization, I was a beta -- otherwise known as a Japanese fighting fish. Although we generally have a beautiful purple-blue hue, most people familiar with different species of fish thought of us as more expensive goldfish. I was kept in a round bowl, about eight inches wide at it's longest point (in human terms, that would be living in quarters about 25 feet at the widest point). It may seem large enough to live, but keep in mind that as humans, you not only have the choice of a larger home, but you are also able to leave your living quarters at any point in time. I did not have that luxury. In fact, what I had was a very small glass apartment, not well kept by my owners (and I at that point was unable to care for it myself). I had a view of the outside world, but it was a distorted view. And I thought I could never experience that world first-hand.

Previous to living anywhere else, before I was purchased, I resided in a very small bowl - no longer than three inches at the widest point. Living in what humans would consider an eight foot square, I had difficulty moving. I even had a hard time breathing. Needless to say from then on I felt I needed more space, I needed to be on my own. No matter what, that was what I needed.

I lived in the said bowl alone. There was one plastic tree in the center of my quarters -- some algae grew on it, but that was all I had for plant life in my space. The bottom of my quarters was filled with small rocks and clear marbles. It was uneventful.

Once they put another beta in my quarters with me -- wait, I must correct myself. I thought the put another beta there with me. I must explain, but please do not laugh: I only came to learn at a later point, a point after I was a human, that my owner had actually placed my quarters next to a mirror. I thought another fish was there with me, following my every motion, getting angry when I got angry, never leaving me alone, always taking the same moves as I did. I raced back and forth across my quarters, always staring at the "other" fish, always prepared to fight it. But I never did.

Once I was kept in an aquarium for a short period of time. It was a ten-gallon tank, and I was placed in there with other fish of varying species, mostly smaller. I was the only beta there. There were different colored rocks, and there were more plastic plants. And one of the outside walls was colored a bright shade of blue - I later came to discover that it was paper behind the glass wall. Beyond the other fish, there was no substantial difference in my quarters.

But my interactions with the other fish is what made the time there more interesting. I wanted to be alone most of the time -- that is the way I felt the most comfortable. I felt the other fish didn't look like me, and I often felt that they were specifically out to hamper me from any happiness. You have to understand that we are by nature very predatorial -- we want our space, we want dominance over others, we want others to fear us. It is survival of the fittest when it comes to our lives. Eat or be eaten.

I stayed to myself most of the time in the aquarium; I occasionally made shows of strength to gain respect from the other fish. It made getting food from the top of the tank easier when no one tempted to fight me for the food. It was lonely, I suppose, but I survived -- and I did so with better luck than most of the others there.

Then one day it appeared. First closed off to the rest of us by some sort of plastic for a while, then eventually the plastic walls were taken away and it was there. Another beta was suddenly in my space. My space. This was my home, I had proven myself there. I was the only fish of my kind there, and now there was this other fish I would have to prove myself to. Eat or be eaten. I had to make sure -- and make sure right away -- that this other fish would never be a problem for me.

But the thing was, I knew that the other fish had no right to be there. I didn't know how they got there, what those plastic walls were, or why they were there. But I had to stop them. This fish was suddenly my worst enemy.

It didn't take long before we fought. It was a difficult battle, all of the other fish got out of the way, and we darted from one end of the aquarium to the other. It wasn't long until I was given the opportunity to strike. I killed the other beta, its blood flowing into my air. Everyone there was breathing the blood of my victory.

Almost immediately I was removed from the aquarium and placed in my other dwelling -- the bowl. From then on I knew there had to be a way to get out of those quarters, no matter what I had to do.

I looked around at the owner; I saw them walking around the tank. I knew that they did not breathe water, and this confused me, but I learned that the first thing I had to do was learn to breathe what they did.

It didn't take much time before I was constantly trying to lift my head up out of the bowl for as long as I could. I would manage to stay there usually because I was holding my breath. But then, one time, I went up to the top in the morning, they way I usually did, and without even thinking about it, I just

started to breathe. I was able to keep my full head up out of the water for as long as I wanted and listen to what was going on outside my living quarters.

Everything sounded so different. There were so many sharp noises. They hurt me to listen to them. Looking back, I now understand that the water in my tank muffled any outside noises. But beyond that, no one in my living quarters made noise -- no one bumped into things, no one screamed or made noises. But at the time, all these noises were extremely loud.

I then knew I had to keep my head above water as much as possible and try to make sense of the sounds I continually heard. I came to discover what humans refer to as language only through listening to the repeated use of these loud sounds.

When I learned I had to breathe, I did. When I understood that I had to figure out their language, I did. It took so long, but I began to understand what they said. Then I had to learn to speak. I tried to practice under the water, in my dwelling, but it was so hard to hear in my quarters that I never knew if I was doing it correctly. Furthermore, I had become so accustomed to breathing air instead of water that I began to have difficulty breathing in my old home. This filled me with an intense fear. If I continue on with this experiment, I thought, will my own home become uninhabitable to me? Will I die here because I learned too much?

I decided that I had no choice and that I had to ask my owner for help. I had to hope that my ability to produce sounds -- and the correct ones, at that - would be enough to let them know that I am in trouble. Furthermore, I had to hope that my owner would actually want to help me. Maybe they wouldn't want me invading their space. Eat or be eaten.

But I had to take the chance. One morning, before I received my daily food, I pulled the upper half of my body from the tank. My owner wasn't coming yet, so I went back down and jumped up again. Still nothing. I kept jumping, until I jumped out of the tank completely. I landed on the table, fell to the floor, coughing. I screamed.

The next thing I remember (and you have to forgive me, because my memory is weak here, and this was seven years ago) is being in a hospital. I didn't know what it was then, of course, and it frightened me. Doctors kept me in place and began to study me. They sent me to schools. And to this day I am still learning.

I have discovered one thing about humans during my life as one. With all the new space I have available to me, with all of the other opportunities I have, I see that people still fight each other for their space. They kill. They steal. They do not breathe in the blood, but it is all around them. And I still find myself doing it as well, fighting others to stay alive.

SWALLOWING WHERE MEAT COMES FROM

EDITORIAL CC&D, MAY 22, 2004, v. 136

It took me flying to China to read about this story in the Shanghai Daily newspaper.

Now, it's hard to be a vegetarian in China; when you want to order food, everything has meat in it (even the meals that say they don't have meat in them have two different kinds of fish in it...). But even meat-eaters would agree that it is crossing a line to eat human meat, and this was a potential peril those in Vancouver, British Columbia (Canada) learned about when it was reported that a pig farmer became a serial killer, and may have potentially placed human remains in pork that he gave to friends.

<http://www.karisable.com/skazpicton.htm> said that 15 victims were among 63 missing women, from the Vancouver Downtown Eastside in October 2002. But March 2004 newspapers revealed that human remains may have been in the processed pork products from this man's home. CNN reported on March 11, 2004 that pork products processed and distributed from the farm of accused Canadian serial killer Robert Pickton may have contained human remains. I checked out more sources on line, and saw that www.seattletimes.com even carried an AP story about this. The AP article stated: A news release issued by B.C.'s Health Ministry said RCMP investigators have evidence that some products were handed out by Pickton to friends and acquaintances in the area prior to his arrest in February 2002.



A woman in California told John that it is possible to spread mad cow disease in the United States, because even though farmers are not supposed to feed animals the remains for their own species, they can feed remains of one animal to another, which becomes processed food for that original animal again. It seems that the way our society works, certain animals are okay to eat and to feed to others, but we don't think about how that meat gets to our table, or what we have to go through to get our "daily serving" of meat. Maybe they would think twice about their meat consumption if they knew the entire process.

THE FREEDOM PENDULUM SWINGS AROUND THE GLOBE

EDITORIAL CC&D, APRIL 22, 2004, v. 135

To visit a friend and to see the amazing historical sights, we decided to take a trip to China. We looked back over our lives — we were raised knowing that we couldn't trade with China, that they were so violently Communistic that we would never be able to experience their culture or their history first-hand. So we stopped listening to AM talk radio, hearing about how the U.S. government could search flight records for potential terrorist activity, to head to the other side of the globe and see how the other side of the planet — and the other political side of the coin — functioned.

Now, I have to remind myself that I was seeing urban areas, Beijing and Shanghai, and that I was not witnessing the destitution of the rural expanses of China ... I have to remind myself of that because it was so much like the United States that I could forget. Corporate monoliths like Starbuck's and McDonald's were on every corner. People driving on the roads and on bicycles were more demonic than the city streets in the United States. Surrounded by skyscrapers and a ton of construction for the development of the city, the only thing that reminded me that I wasn't on an American street was the fact that no one anywhere spoke English. Other than seeing signs in the street written in Chinese and not English, it was amazingly comfortable to manage in Shanghai.

While taking a flight to Beijing, we read an English newspaper (the Shanghai Daily, March 9 2004), whose main headline was "Historic Progress Hailed in constitutional amendments." The draft amendment to China's constitution went over the inviolability of private property. The Shanghai Daily article even stated that "the constitutional amendment is also expected to enshrine human rights protection." I even kept this paper, so I could have written record of the expansion of rights given to the people of China. This story seemed to mark a remarkable time in history.

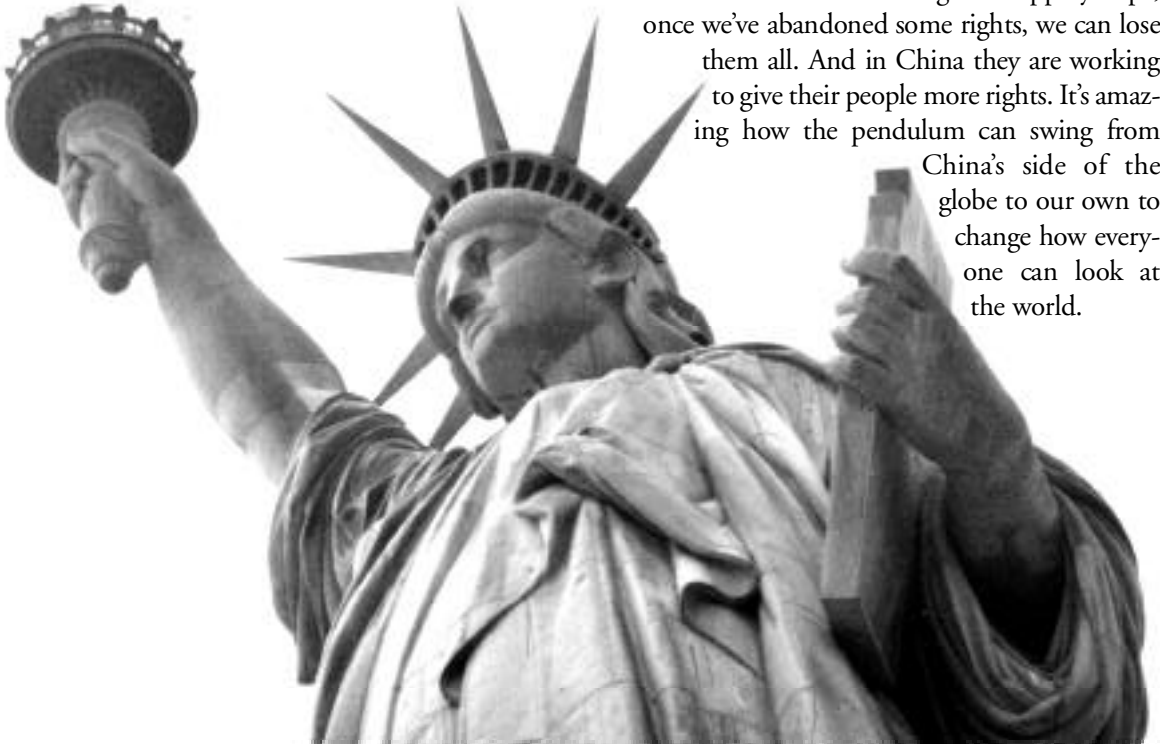
It was remarkable because I saw the inverse happening to us in the United States. I thought about



John losing unemployment benefits because the U.S. government saw (by searching flight records) that he flew to Puerto Rico, which is outside of the United States; in other words, a weekend trip cost John his unemployment benefits. I also heard that the U.S. government wanted to access anyone's hospital records to be able to search for people who had abortions.

The Patriot Act was passed six weeks after 9/11. We know now that it greatly changed the balance between liberty and security in this nation's framework. Now the Domestic Security Enhancement Act is a draft for the sweeping expansion of Anti-Terrorism Act — and one of the provisions in here (if I've got this right) is that the government could actually strip citizenship from someone if — for example, if you were found making what you thought was a legitimate contribution to some non profit organization. People can argue about the “favorability” of particular non-profit organizations (that some non profit organizations are fronts for terrorist groups).

All I know is that I see that we're walking on a slippery slope; once we've abandoned some rights, we can lose them all. And in China they are working to give their people more rights. It's amazing how the pendulum can swing from China's side of the globe to our own to change how everyone can look at the world.







poetry & prose from
children
churches
& daddies

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BAD DREAMS

BY BRYAN F. ORR

Billy sat up like a shot in his sweat soaked bed. He was breathing hard and his eyes were wide, his dilated pupils trying desperately to see through the dark. Perspiration oozed from every pore, even though it was a chilly October night. *Was that a draft he felt coming from the hallway?* He tried to remember what the bad dream had been about, but all he got were meaningless fragments.

It was just a dream, he told himself, but his mind and body were still flooded with adrenaline and weren't responding to his reasoning yet. He wiped his brow with the sheet and finally got his breathing under control. Man, that must have been some nightmare, he thought, falling back on his pillow. If it was that bad he wasn't so sure he wanted to remember it.

A sound coming from the bathroom directly across from Billy's bedroom caused his heart to resume the race. He sat up again and peered into the night. Both his bedroom and the bathroom doors were open, but except for the faint moonlight filtering through the frosted window in the lavatory it was too dark to make anything out. A tree branch scraped the bathroom window, as a gust of chilly October wind moaned outside. Billy let out a heavy sigh of relief. And even though the waving limbs of the tree were casting weird shadows across the tiled floor of the john, he allowed himself to relax a little. He turned on his side and faced the wall closest to his bed. Every inch of wall-space was covered with his obsession: monsters, and the men who played them. It was, as his mother liked to point out, the very reason for his recurrent nightmares.

"If you're not careful Billy," she would often lament. *"You're going to get lost in that awful world of horror, and never get back."*

He wondered if Forrest 1. Akkerman was plagued by his imagination as well. F. J. Akkerman was the Editor and Chief of Billy's favorite magazine: *Famous Monster's of Film*, A monthly publication devoted to the horror genre and its devotees. It was from that magazine the 8x10, black and white stills came from that papered his wall. Of course, this sacrilege was only committed if he had enough dough to buy two copies of that month's issue.

Once a month, Billy would bike over ten miles to the only newsstand in town that carried *Famous Monsters*. The magazine's covers were nearly worth the one dollar price tag alone! With their blood-dripping font, they featured a different monster every month. The classics, such as Universal's Creature Quartet: Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, the Wolfman, and the Mummy-played respectively by Boris

Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney Jr., and the great Karloff once again-were usually sure bets to grace the cover. And all had found their rightful place on Billy's wall. But lately, the great imitators at Hammer Studios-in England, of all places-were taking their bloody turns as well.

Christopher Lee-who in Billy's opinion was the greatest Dracula of all time- stared down at Billy from his spot on the wall. His blood-smearred mouth was open, lips curled back to reveal two razor sharp fangs, which were ready to plunge into the neck of the next available virgin. But if a virgin weren't about, an eight-year old boy would do in a pinch, Billy supposed.

He pulled his Spiderman sheet up to his chin and tore his eyes from the hypnotic gaze of the Dark Prince. He quickly passed over the color pictorial featuring a scene from *The War of the Worlds*—those weird Martian dudes, with their long rubbery fingers, really freaked Billy out-and tried to focus his sleepy eyes on the relatively benign countenance of the greatest monster of all time: the undead creation of Baron Von Frankenstein. Boris Karloff's gentle interpretation of course, not the remorseless creature Christopher Lee played in the *Terror of Frankenstein*.

A feeling of overwhelming Deja vu swept over Billy just as he closed his eyes to go back to sleep. His eyes snapped open and he sat up in bed once again. Over in the bathroom, the shadows still played eerily across the cold tile floor.

"I've seen this before," he muttered softly.

He reached over and picked up his wind up Mickey Mouse alarm clock from the night-side table. Mickey's glow in the dark hands told Billy that it was nearly twelve o'clock. He frowned as he set the clock back down. *Feels like it should be later,* he thought, as he reached for the pull chain on his bedside lamp. Nothing. *The bulb must've burned out,* he reasoned. But the feeling that he had already been through this before grew ever stronger.

He was swinging his feet from out of the covers when he heard a sound that made his balls shrivel up into a tiny wrinkled sack. *Plink, plink, plop,* it went. The wind outside had settled down and the house was deathly still, except for the strange dripping noise, which now seemed amplified for the lack of outside noise. He quickly discounted the idea that it might be a leaky faucet or showerhead.

Plink, plink, plop.

No, the sound was coming from in front of the bathroom window. Besides, whatever was dripping had a viscous quality to it, like maple syrup or...the feeling of deja vu became more pronounced, and a tangible sense of anxiety was playing along the hairs on the back of his neck.

Plink, plink, plop.

What the heck was that? He took a deep breath and tried to reign in his emotions. *It's probably the toilet making that noise,* he told himself. *Just go in there and jiggle the handle and it'll stop.*

Another shadow flickered across the bathroom floor. *I sure wish the wind would stop shaking that tree...* it hit Billy like a punch in the gut that the wind had stopped. Then what made the shadows move?

Plink, plink, plop.

Another movement of shadow followed the dripping. Billy quickly drew his legs back under the sheets and pulled them tight to his quivering jaw. The bathroom was shaped like an L, with the toilet being hidden from view at the end. He squinted into the darkness, as his eyes began to adjust to the night. By the faint moonlight coming through the window in there he could just make out the tiled wall where it turned the corner.

Plink, plink, plop.

It would be so easy for somebody to hide back there, he thought, as his pupils drank in all the available light. Then when I go to use the toilet... Oh, great! Why 'd you have to think about that Einstein? Now I really do have to go!

Plink, plink, plop.

Okay, this is really creeping me out. Maybe I should call mom, he thought, but immediately dismissed that idea. Eight years old was too darn old to be calling for your mommy! She *really* would make him tear down his pictures then! No, he'd just have to turn on all the lights in the hall and bathroom. That would make it go away. The shadow returned.

Plink, plink, plop.

The combination of the two nearly caused Billy to cry out in fear. The shadow moved again. it almost looked like...he shook the disturbing image from his mind. He couldn't have seen that I Billy knew that if you stared into the dark long enough you could make yourself imagine anything. He took a fortifying breath and once again swung his feet from under the protection of his covers. Usually when he got up in the middle of the night he worried about something grabbing his legs from underneath his bed (the Creature from the Black Lagoon sometimes hid underneath there) but all thoughts at the moment were on the dripping monster in his bathroom.

Plink, plink, plop.

Billy got out of bed and swayed there for a moment on shaking knees. The shadow was moving again, but he kept his eyes pointed on the light-switch on the wall beside his bedroom door. If he could just turn on that light he was sure it would chase the bogeys away. Besides, staring at the switch kept his mind from visualizing what he thought he'd seen.

Plink, plink, plop.

His bare feet felt like blocks of ice on the hardwood floor of his room. (Where was that draft coming from?) He slowly tiptoed across the floor-as if that might fool a bogeyman-until he was standing by

the door to his room. An STP motor oil sticker glowed on the wall just above the light-switch. The mundane memory of putting the sticker up somehow bucked him up and he reached for the switch. He flipped it six times before he realized the power was down. Either that or the overhead bulb was out too. But that was too much of a coincidence.

Plink, plink, plop.

Then again, someone could have cut the power by killing the switches in the breaker box upstairs in the kitchen. Billy stepped out in the hall and was about to run upstairs to his mother's room-screw being too old, right now all he wanted was to smell the Noxzema on his mommy while she hugged him tight-when the shadow caught his attention.

Plink, plink, plop.

From where he was standing, Billy could clearly see the end of the bathroom wall where it turned into the corner. In the darkness a hand waved up and down from behind the corner. Billy opened his mouth to scream but nothing came out. He faintly felt the hot urine as it splashed down the front of his *Scooby Doo* pajamas, running down his legs and warming his ice cold feet. But his piss hitting the hardwood floor still couldn't block out the immutable dripping.

Plink, plink, plop.

It was too dark to make out any features on the hand, but Billy knew without a doubt that he wasn't imagining it. The hand moved deliberately in an up and down motion, as if waving hello to him. A cold draft coming down the hall made Billy aware that a door or window was open somewhere in the house to the elements outside. *That IS how it got in.*

A giggle from the bathroom turned his blood to ice.

"Hee-hee-heel" followed by the interminable, *plink, plink, plop.*

A gust of wind outside slammed the open door shut with a loud bang. Billy screamed and ran for the questionable safety of his bed. He pulled the covers over his head, but the muffled sound of the bogeyman's laughter made him realize his mistake. *Why hadn't he run upstairs to his mother?* His bed would be no sanctuary from the monster in his bathroom! Spiderman wouldn't leap from his covers to save him, nor would his monsters come down from his wall to rescue him.

Plink, plink, plop.

If only he could turn on a light! The light *always* vanquished the bogeymen! Suddenly, Billy remembered his Boy Scout flashlight tucked away in the drawer of his night-side table. He yanked the drawer open-nearly pulling it all the way out-and rummaged through the mess of boy-stuff he kept in there. Past the loose marbles that rolled and clattered, past the useless slinky with the bent wire, and past his nearly complete collection of the *Planet of the Apes* trading cards, to get to the flashlight that was shaped like a periscope.

Plink, plink, plop.

He frantically pointed the light at the bathroom and slid the on switch up but nothing happened. From the tiled floor of the bathroom, Billy heard the distinctive sound of a footstep. Then another, followed by the unearthly giggling. “*Hee-hee-hee!*”

Plink, plink, plop.

Everything was louder now. Billy realized he’d taken the batteries out of the flashlight so they wouldn’t corrode; they were also in the same drawer. The bogeyman took another two steps towards him. He could feel the lengthening shadow of the monster as it crawled across the floor and into Billy’s room. Billy refused to look up though; for he knew to look in the monster’s eyes would be the end of him.

Plink, plink, plop.

Trying to ignore the now booming sound of the dripping, Billy scrambled around inside the drawer until he came up with the batteries. The slow and methodical footsteps towards him, and the insane giggles, which accompanied them, weren’t nearly as awful to Billy as the intolerable dripping though. There was something altogether evil and potentially earth-shattering about the otherwise innocuous sound.

Plink, plink, plop!

Billy didn’t want to see the cause of the dripping, but the light was his one lone hope. His mother couldn’t help him now. She didn’t believe in bogeymen and wouldn’t see the monster until he was on top of her. His father couldn’t help him; he had died when Billy was but a baby. But the *light*. . .yes, the light could save him! If *only* he could correctly insert the batteries into the flashlight in time. Was positive up or down?!

PLINK, PLINK, PLOP!

The dripping was nearly deafening now, making it difficult for Billy to focus on the task at hand. *It’s up stupid! Up!* He slammed the batteries home, nearly dropped the screw on top, and finally spun it on. The monster was almost out of the bathroom now, Billy could hear its ragged breathing and throaty laughter, as it approached him. The thing’s shadow now fell over him like a lion over a lamb.

PLINK, PLINK, PLOP!

Still refusing to look up into the eyes of the monster, Billy instead pointed the flashlight at the creature’s feet and, with trembling fingers, flicked on the light. He had known the thing was near, but was unprepared for just how close. It was standing in the doorway of his bedroom, not ten feet away. There was no sigh of relief though when the light came on, spotlighting the worn work-boots. Monsters and bogeymen didn’t wear boots, so naturally the light didn’t banish the creature back to hell, from whence it had come.

Plink, plink, plop.

The volume inside Billy’s head became muted as he realized for the first time in his young life that some things in this world are *far, far worse* than the horrors of make believe. He watched in stunned ter-

ror as a thick, red liquid dripped on the intruder's boot three times in succession.

Plink, plink, plop.

Quiet. Billy's world had become deathly quite, as all of his senses became narrowly focused on the scarlet splashed boot. The only clamor now was of his own terror driven breath; loud and violent, as it hammered his eardrums. The toe of one scuffed work-boot was covered in the crimson stuff. *Blood*, Billy's mind numbly corrected him. It's *blood*

Plink, plink, plop.

His bladder released the remaining fluid left in it, but Billy was beyond caring. Even his hands had stopped shaking. Death was at hand. He slowly panned the flashlight up the madman's legs. The crazed intruder made no further attempt to enter Billy's room for the moment, but seemed satisfied with standing in the circle of light. It was as if the man wanted Billy to witness something before...

Plink, plink, plop.

The source of the dripping, it had been in the man's hand the whole time, dripping blood on his left boot at regular intervals like a leaky faucet. Billy's eyes flew wide at the cause of the dripping. He could literally feel his mind begin to bend toward the snapping point and idly wondered, *so this is what it feels like when you go mad?*

Plink, plink, plop!

The volume had returned to Billy's world with a thunderous crash. He blinked in confusion as his flashlight finally found the face of the murderer. The face of a creature more terrifying than any monster featured in his favorite magazine. The face of a man. His mother's murderer. The killer, with hair wild, and eyes red, tossed the severed head at Billy. The head, his mother's head—*oh dear God, his mother's head!*—turned end over end, flinging a parabolic splatter of blood across his room from the ragged flesh and bone jutting out from his mother's neck.

Splat! Splat! Splat! Splat! Splat! Splat! went the blood, as it painted an abstract of madness on Billy's floor and ceiling.

He felt a warm drop hit his face as the head fell heavily onto his lap. His mother's final look of horror was frozen on her face at the moment of death. She seemed to stare up at Billy, imploring him to run, but Billy was gone. Whether it was his mother's head falling into his lap, or the warm spatter of her blood on his cheek, or the once comforting aroma of Noxzema that now filled Billy's nostrils, his mind had finally, and mercifully snapped.

He didn't hear the monster (*A real monster, mind you, not the sort you tore from your favorite magazine and taped to your wall. Real monsters went by the names of Ted, or Jeffrey, and even John Wayne.*) laugh loudly as it approached him.

But he felt its shadow descend upon him.

Billy sat up like a shot in his sweat soaked bed. Perspiration oozed from every pore, though it was a chilly October night. *Was that a draft he felt coming from the hall?* He tried to remember what the nightmare had been about, but all he got were meaningless fragments.

It was just a dream, he told himself, as he brought his breathing under control. A sound coming from the bathroom across from Billy's bathroom made his heart resume the race. And as a foreboding sense of *deja vu* washed over him, Billy had a curious thought. *What's worse, being trapped in a nightmarish reality or a dream that never ends? Or was there any difference at all?*

Plink, plink, plop...

SUNRISE CONFUSES DAY ONE

JANE STUART

When morning empties silver baskets
of streamlined clouds,
a cornucopia filled with strangers
riding away into autumn's moon.
There in the wilderness,
snowflakes dot green grass.
My heart was yours but the phone card
needed recharging.
I loved a knight who rode a rented charger.
You wore a tunic, said time had dropped its lens,
that fascinating rhythm wasn't "hexy" anymore
and on the wall flowers bloomed
indecisively.
We let the top down, the car filled with rain.
Frost painted snow with dewy fingers,
sun feathered sky's rising wings
with such tender light.
and, then, baskets opened softly. There was tender time.
I looked at you and saw crepusculum,
a deep dark robe that fell upon your shoulders,
and roses, red and shining in the light
of the turned-over moon.

1939: EVICTION DAY

MICHAEL BROWNSTEIN

We planted cotton
and scarred our hands,
came home to make love
and fell asleep instead.
Greed is a wicked half-sister.
You filled your hands with it.
For a moment
color lost its importance.
I stand with others
holding my infant son,
every one of my possessions
along the highway
defining our misery.

-- In 1939, New Madrid County, Missouri's plantation owners evicted both black and white tenant farmers and sharecroppers from land they had farmed for decades. The federal government had offered a check to help the workers. By evicting them, the plantation owners were able to take the money for themselves.

IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

SARAH E. ROSE

She wears her robe of chastisement
in the public square
where before the eyes of all the crowd
she is made to stand naked
so all can see her shame and learn a lesson;
Obey, do not go against the "norm".
With downcast eyes she fights to keep
her head held high / her nostrils flare.
Her will is broken, but not her spirit
She was stripped of her children, her love, and
Her life, then executed on a false charge.

The powerless woman on that day so long ago
left behind some sage advise.
These words were all she had to give,
all she had to leave for those who would follow,
In her wisdom she left this haunting message
so we'd know exactly what to do;
"Be ever vigilant that none may steal
your rights away from you,
for even in towns with no public square
a makeshift one will do."

EXFOLIATION

MAUREEN TOLMAN FLANNERY

OK, so let's think about this one.
In this kind of city
there are thousands of us bums
with nowhere to go--and who knows
how many more housed low-lives
barely hangin in there, hangin out.
Now, each of us is sloughing off skin
like a bull snake, especially this winter
in these bitch-cold winds. You with me?
Think about it. Flaky parts of old guys
deposited near park benches;
every seven years whole hobos
floating out around train tacks.
Could be worse on the environment
than your slick-ass Volvos putting out exhaust
or tires leaving rubber along the road.
Making you sick, eh, thinking of all our DNA
cork-screwing through the air like seeds
floating around looking for earth to sprout in.
You must be breathing us in every day
through your little asthma inhalers.

Hey; it's not so bad. Look at it this way.
When old age winks back at you from that
gold framed looking glass,
where you think you sorry rich ass
is looking all fine in your Calvin Kleins
and things that set you up there above
the rest of us slobs
start coming undone,
those Vassar children don't call back--
your Volvo develops an unexplained rattle--
the top grain cowhide bottom
drops out of your stock portfolio--
you start forgetting things
and clients won't return your calls
and its all a little shaky, aint it, bro.

That's when it might just be a comfort to know
about what I've just told you--
how you've prepared for this letting go
with your daily dose of the flaked off skin
of the homeless.

A SPECIAL BLUE HOUSE WITH VELVET RESTRICTIONS

RONALD M. ROWE

Witnessing a special blue house with velvet restrictions, I found she could anchor the moon like a ghostly barque whose sails are massive clouds.

She was a block of art shading the river of time with svelte exultation, the elixir of her makers.

The sun dipped like a sparrow onto her roof as blue as turquoise, and she responded by cradling the wind like an infant for the touch of the solar festivity.

She enriched the principality of light like an immense loaf of bread shimmering between telephone poles, which promised her an influx of secret energy like the crowning of a princess with a diadem manifesting lunar magnetism.

ANOTHER AMERICAN NIGHT

JON PETRUSCHKE

The TV screen turns
from pixels to Paxils
and I'm stuffed, yet starved,
chewing on the remote.
I defeated consumerism
by buying everything advertised.

SO MANY LIES

A COLIN MADISON
SANSKRIT TRANSLATION

ल्लो अन्य लिएस
ईम सो सिचक ओफ पेओप्ले
वेइन्गा चोन्देस्वेन्दिन्गा तो म्य फ्रवे,
तेल्लिन्गा मे थत ई अम थे ओने
थत दोएस्नत उन्देस्तन्द
थेय उन्देस्तन्द होव थेय धिन्क
अन्द होव ई धिन्क
पेओप्ले ई ओन्वे व्रुस्तेद तोळ मे
वेल्ल, वैत, इत इस प्रावळ्ण्य मोरे
अच्चुरते तो सय थत एवेर्याने
तेल्लस मे थेय तेल्ल मे, थेय तेल्ल
मे, थेय तेल्ल मे ओवेर अन्द
ओवेर अगेन। पेओप्ले ई उसेद
तो क्नोव, पेओप्ले ई उसेद तो

ESSAY ON A NEWS REPORT (67)

MICHAEL CERAOLO

With the approach of the first anniversary of the tragedy
the 'corporate citizens' day was made
by the pseudo-news stories that heavily advertised
the fact that on the pseudo-holiday
they would refrain from advertising

SCRUBBING THE JUICER

JOHN VICK

The acid spray of orange juice
doesn't stop tonight's ovulation,
growing the chance of another
mouth to feed.

She scouts back alley bars
and unemployment lines,
looks for a Him Hymn to replace
Ousted Other Him.

Pouting alone over scouring pad,
nursing a festering sore,
she dreams a feathered scull cap,

SENSE OF URGENCY

JOHN VICK

You smell like
melon - fresh in the morning.

The scent of your clothes,
- bleach,
the feel of them
- crisp linen.

Your spastic toothpicks
after supper
won't keep my mind off
your plantain
playin' my music box.

Just thinking about us
doin' the crossword
and you rappin' my nose
with a rolled up newspaper.

GREED

DAVID SPIERING

*THINGS TO DO AT A STOP LIGHT
AND FROM THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS*



The next stop light or pause light as I call it, stop me good momentum, to allow fat, money grubbing state power executives to break into traffic the moment they reach the end of their drive ways. Suddenly, the light turns red, and an expensive car paid for by my power bill money, rolls out through the screeching tires, and angry faces. When the working people's revolution happens there people's homes, cars and playthings will be melted down to base cash value, and shared with all people, by the form of a check in the mail. I work my health down to a few sighs, a breath, a wrenched back (it took me fifteen minutes to put my underwear and pants on); I had to sink money into aspirins to control the pain. Later, I locked my bike and helmet to a bike rack. As I walk to the library to check my e-mail, a man asked me,

“Can you help me with a little change.”

“I was thinking about asking you the same question.”

He looked at the faces to two retro-hippies coming behind me. They emptied their pockets into his plastic cup, and walked off.

Somehow, either side of the situation didn't seem fair. Maybe, sometimes, I'll give him some change. It's the rent for me each month that's a worry.

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

JESSICA M. STILLING

His entire body trembled right along with the tremors of the train. He seemed to hang suspended, crucified and Christ-like as both hands clung to the metal pole above his head. He tried to stay focused, his head jerking back and forth like a weathervane, his body whipping side to side, obediently following every snap of the subway. At that moment he was one with the train. He wasn't thinking about work or his brother whom he was on his way to see. No busy streets, bustling passersby, lights blaring like a summer carnival, saxophonist carrying on like he's Miles Davis in the next car over. No thoughts, no frantic Penthouse fantasies playing out as the hot blond chick enters no worries about what mom would say if she saw his rough tired eyes. No thoughts, no noise. Quiet. His mind was empty, focused entirely on every jerk of the subway rushing through him filling his lungs with the rich taste of oxygen.

A man came crawling towards him. He looked Casey right in the eye. His clothes were all torn up and Casey could see through the man's torn pants to the open wounds, red and sticky, like a fine wine glazed over an animal carcass. Casey strained to make out his features but everything blurred. He stopped in front of Casey and dropped to the ground in one soft eloquent motion that stumbled into eternity. There was no struggle, no frantic last-ditch effort; he simply collapsed dutifully, quietly, like a mother bowing out after baseball practice. Casey watched reverently as the man's chest began to convulse, calm itself and then simply stop. A moment so still, so precious, Casey couldn't help but stare. His job as a journalist had taken him into many dangerous situations. He had seen men go down in showers of gunfire and crowds trampled in protests gone bad. But they had all struggled, were all taken by surprise unlike this man who simply gave in.

Casey jerked forward suddenly, his head rushed back as he took one swift breath. His hands were red and his clenched fist had left an indent in the side of his face. It was almost time to go home when he awoke with a start to find himself alone in his office surrounded by papers and memo pads. He had been researching an article for the morning news when he had fallen asleep. He tried to go back to work but his mind just wouldn't focus. He kept watching the man stop, just stop in front of him and then that was it. Gone. When he looked down at the sheet of paper he had been absentmindedly scribbling on he was startled to find that he had written in huge black letters, "Go see your Brother!!!"

Casey stared up at the immense stone walls of the church. He gazed intently at the bright purple and yellow stained glass windows looking down on him with heavy, disapproving eyes. Matthew greeted him warmly with a kind genuine smile. He reached out slowly, grasping his brother's shoulders as Casey stared

into his brother's tranquil, lost boy eyes. Matthew had always been different. He had the face of a child, bright-eyed and innocent. In the summer while all the other boys were out playing Matthew would simply pace back and forth talking to himself near the front of the house. When someone would approach him Matthew would hide until his brother ushered them away. For a while Casey was convinced his brother was a zombie. "Should I call you Father?" Casey asked nervously as he scanned his brother's attire. The black slacks and proud Roman Collar sent shivers through him.

Casey had snapped the last time he had been in a church. It was after the services had ended and everyone was up mingling. The thick stuffy air and the mass of bodies, which spoke in hushed whispers as they bent down to hug Casey, suffocated him until Casey instinctively felt he had to fight his way out. He ran for a ways until he saw Matthew the zombie child, still and submissive as ever, waiting patiently in that hot stuffy cage. A hot trembling rage suddenly ripped through Casey. "Get up and do something!" He had screamed in his brother's face. "Run around!" He had screamed before he was ushered out. Matthew did not flinch, he stayed perfectly still throughout the assault. "He's not my brother," Casey had called from the open doorway of the church before his father carried him to the car and drove away with him.

"Whatever makes you comfortable," Matthew said, shaking his brother's hand. "It's good to see you. I'm glad you came. I've been meaning to talk to you about something."

"What's going on, Matthew?" Casey asked, suddenly feeling foolish that his dream had seemed so important up until a few moments ago.

"Do you remember that tennis match your senior year, the one when they stopped the match for a few minutes because the ball retriever got sick on the court? You stood in the sun a while and watched a moth walk by you as you waited for the game to resume."

That had been Casey's last big tennis tournament of his senior year. He had been standing off to the side, clutching the fences as the heat pressed against his soaking wet t-shirt, when a large Monarch butterfly had caught his eye. He observed it for several moments before it stopped dead in its tracks on the baking concrete courts. After a while Casey lightly tapped the Monarch with his racquet. The crisp brown bug did not flinch and finally crumpled like dry parchment against his racquet.

"I never told you about the bug," Casey began. In fact he had made it a point to tell his brother as little as possible while growing up. "But now that I think of it I had a dream like that a little while ago."

"Things bother you that don't bother other people," Matthew said suddenly, as if he had been trying for several minutes to change the subject. "I want you to think about the world from now on, Casey."

"What do you mean, think about the world? Don't you like my brand of journalism?"

"I didn't mean it like that at all. I just think that...I just know that if you thought about the world for a little while you'd see something bigger than what they see. There are messages sent through the uni-

verse all the time and it doesn't take a man of the cloth to understand them. There's something inside you, brother. Remember when they found out the Attorney General was stealing public funds? You saw that before anyone did and broke the case."

"That doesn't mean a thing, Matthew. There's nothing inside me, I just know how to follow my gut."

"Yes, you follow your gut. I follow my gut too, but my gut didn't tell me that if you tear up housing downtown it would lead to a mass exodus."

"No, Matthew, my brain told me that, now get off my case."

"No one else's brain told them that. Then why did it happen anyway?"

"I think you should visit Mom more," Casey stated defensively changing the subject. His brother's naiveté had begun to get to him. Matthew looked hurt.

"You should visit Mom tonight, Casey. She's going to need you soon."

The water felt cool and fresh upon his face as Casey twirled around near the bottom of the pond. The mud squished slowly between his toes. It clung to his feet like the thick paste on the walls of their new house. Casey was five years old. He was full of pent-up energy from the long drive into town from the city and ran straight for the pond the moment he was let out of the car. His older brother followed timidly behind, bashfully dipping his feet into the icy cold water. It took a while to get Matthew to swim, but once he was in Matthew seemed at home.

"They turned off the phones last week, that's why I haven't called you," Casey's mother said as she put out a cigarette. "It's nice to see you, though. I would have called when you moved back to town but the phone was off. So, how's work been?"

"Work's been fine. Here, Mom, take my cell, just in case there's an emergency," Casey said as he casually tossed the phone to his mother underhand. "I'll get your phone back up as soon as I can. You should have come to see me. I could have fixed this."

"I'm doing all right. It's nice that you came to see me, though. I haven't heard from you since you got that big promotion at the station."

"Things have been pretty crazy there lately. They've been sending me all over the place, but that should settle down soon."

"That's good to hear. It'll be nice having you back; perhaps now I'll have some company around here."

"Of course, Mom," Casey said as he took his mother's hand. "What about Matthew, Mom. Has he been around? 'Cause he's been acting kind of strange."

His mother stared at him for a moment with worried, questioning eyes. "You think he's acting weird. How would you know?" she asked angrily, throwing his cell phone at him with a tired, lifeless arm. Suddenly Casey's mother fell forward. She hit the floor with a thump as Casey rushed to catch her. "Call a

doctor!” She cried. He dialed 911 with his cell and stayed by her side until the ambulance came.

Casey gazed down at a timeline he had written out in the waiting room of the hospital. His mother had had a mild heart attack and would be in surgery for some time. While he waited Casey began a timeline chronicling every major event that had happened from the end of World War One to the present. *“I want you to think about the world from now on, Casey.”* He then clumped together the events directly before and after a war and compared them to the events going on in the world. The terrorist attacks, the small “invasions” and civil wars suddenly came together like the pieces of a giant cosmic puzzle. “There’s gonna be a war soon,” Casey pondered mater-of-factly.

All of a sudden the television caught his attention as Charles, a collogue from work began a report. “Breaking news, there has just been a deal struck overseas which will allow certain hostages to go free in exchange for classified information dealing with the arms programs implemented elsewhere.”

“Nuclear weapons,” Casey whispered as he stared down at the information before him. “There’s going to be a war and its going to bring about an unprecedented spread of nuclear weapons.” Suddenly a vision of two men in black suits shaking hands against a backdrop of rows upon rows of dark green missiles flashed before him. The weapons were endless; they went on forever in a march of power and order. And then he saw chaos. And then he saw black. Casey began to shake uncontrollably as he ran out of the hospital and into the flashing New York night. The streets seemed to be calling him. He could feel his feet pounding across the concrete as New York City lay sprawled out before him.

“Remember when you were little and I used to tell you stories while we were swimming in the pond?” Matthew asked as he let Casey into the church.

“Do you have a room or something, a place where you live where we could talk?”

“I live here,” Matthew responded as if Casey should know better. “Remember Cassandra? She was Apollo’s lover. She was just a mortal woman until Apollo blessed her with the gift of foresight granting her vision into the future. But after Cassandra left Apollo he tried to take her foresight away. When he realized he couldn’t he decided to curse her another way, by making it so that no one would ever believe her when she predicted things. Cassandra foresaw wars and traitors, she even saw her own death and the deaths of those she loved but there was nothing she could do to stop it because no one ever believed her.”

“Matthew, Mom’s in the hospital. Her phone had been turned off and she had a heart attack while I was with her. She needed me, just like you said.”

“Nothing she could do to stop it cause no one believed her,” Matthew seemed a bit angry as he repeated the last lines of his story. There was a glare in his tranquil blue eyes Casey had never seen before. “But seriously, I’m glad you were there for her. Obviously if you’re here she must be all right.”

“We’ll see. She’s still in surgery, but the doctors said it looks good. Still, it would be nice if you came

back with me.”

“She’ll see me later,” Matthew replied reverently.

“What kind of priest are you? You won’t even see your own mother after she has a heart attack?” Casey asked, infuriated.

“Do whatever it is you need to do. We’re at a threshold, Casey, and you can see it. You know something’s going to happen.”

“I highly doubt that I have any control over what goes on in the world. You need to be thinking about your mother, not Cassandra the prophetess.”

“Most people need cameras and flashing lights in order to figure out what’s going on. Most people see only what is spoon fed to them. No one will believe the country’s planning on getting into a corrupt war unless it’s spelled out in nice, neat, easy to understand phrases. Not even when it’s too late.”

“Yeah, well what are you going to do? I don’t have a spoon. Now, common Matthew, come with me to go see Mom. She should be out soon. She needs us.”

“No, she needs you. You go to her.”

Matthew slipped when he started splashing with his brother in the pond. His feet slid with the thick slippery mud and he flew backwards as Casey rushed to the other side of the pond to catch a frog. He didn’t see that his brother had hit a rock. He didn’t notice that Matthew never came up for air. It wasn’t until he heard his mother’s screaming that Casey realized something was wrong.

“I need to talk to you,” Casey’s mother said as she clasped his hand. Her face was pasty, covered with a thin film of sweat, and the harsh fluorescent light reflected a sickly yellow glow upon her face.

“Its okay, we don’t need to talk about him,” Casey said as he grasped his mother’s hand.

“You haven’t spoken of your brother in seventeen years. You were so young when it happened and after your outburst at the church you completely denied his existence altogether. We took you to doctor after doctor but they only made things worse for you. You just stopped accepting that he was ever real. You told me I was crazy for making up an older brother you never had. Perhaps we shouldn’t have given up so quickly, but it was just easier to let you believe nothing had happened.”

“What are you talking about? My brother lives in a church and thinks I’m a prophet.” It was as if the subway tunnel was closing in on him and the bright lights of the city were becoming closer and closer, coming at him like a bullet on a battlefield. All at once Casey could see his brother, splashing with him inside the pond. He saw his brother, cold and stiff lying inside a box of blue silk. He looked like wax sculpture all nice and neat in a black suit with neatly folded hands. “That’s not my brother,” Casey had said as his mother tried to explain to him why Matthew looked so still. “My brother doesn’t look like that.”

“Honey, what happened? What made you think of your brother after all this time? Maybe it’s

being back home?”

Casey looked hard at his mother. He stared her down John Wayne style as she lay in her bed. She looked weak and frail for the very first time. “He’s not my brother,” Casey said slowly and then bolted out the door.

Casey spent the night at the station, working on a piece that had to be in for the evening news. His hands shook as he took notes. They felt like ice, his entire body felt frozen solid. He couldn’t write a thing and so finally he closed his eyes. He began to see pictures of men in battles, still-life’s of crisp uniforms laid out on blue cotton sheets. Casey looked down at the sheet of paper in front of him and realized he had been writing again.

“You’re a little young, don’t you think?” Casey’s station manager said to him the next day.

“Yes, but I’ve done so much for you already. I’m the one who tore the lid off the Credence Case. I exposed the Fillmore scandal on a hunch and figured out how to get into the mayor’s office for an interview. I get the most fan mail. Our audience loves me.”

“I could send you overseas, kid, but there’s really not much going on over there right now. Just a few civil disturbances and that new treaty they just signed. I don’t understand why you want to be over there right now when there’s so much more going on right here.”

Casey laughed. All of a sudden it seemed ridiculous that his boss couldn’t see it. “Something’s going to happen soon. I want to be there when it goes down.”

“Well, kid, I can’t say I believe you but I’d like to prove you wrong anyway. Are you sure you’re up to the challenge? You’ll be overseas for a long time.”

“I have a hunch, sir. I think you should let me go with it.”

“Look kid, I don’t want you doing anything crazy over there, or saying anything stupid or miscalculated, you understand?”

“Yes, sir. I’m fully aware of the consequences.”

“Alright. You’re damn lucky we need your face on that screen no matter where it’s coming from. Be careful over there. We can’t lose our best reporter.”

War had come sooner than expected. It caught everyone off-guard. Casey gazed out at the battlefield. It seemed as barren and dry as the biblical wasteland where Cain slew his brother. Soldiers ran about him hurriedly, their tanks following in slow pursuit. The sun baked down upon the desert. It was a harsh sun, a bully sun unlike the soft Connecticut rays he had felt as a child. America entered the war a couple of months after Casey arrived. Bombs went off every few minutes, but he paid little attention to them. He just wanted it to fade away. He didn’t want to stop anything anyway.

Casey glanced over the notes he had been taking. He had given up on investigative journalism one morning and had begun sending his boss bad poetry and jumbled journal entries in the middle of a war. “I have

truly been dying since the day I was born. The headaches are real, the dizziness is never psychosomatic. All of it's a death march. Isn't there always a possibility that my head could explode? Perhaps I've already passed and I'm experiencing memory now in some kind of flash. A three hundred and sixty degree tunnel just pulling us in at a million miles per hour. Perhaps right now, we're just rushing through our memories. No wonder everything seems to go by so fast. As I get older it all seems to fly by quicker, like it's going into overdrive. Maybe the plane's going down, or the air supply's lessening. I wonder what it feels like, this heavy moment with its heavy air and heavy thoughts circling about like a mid-western tornado. The universe, it's got me, just like it got my brother. I can feel it all around me, in tiny whispers and roaring waves...it's like thunder."

The rains came down about the same time the gunfire began. Bullets intersected the pouring rain, they flew through the atmosphere like a train in a subway tunnel headed for the bright lights of New York City. The ground seemed to cave under him as Casey fell to his knees, his head spinning. His legs slid through the earth as he tried to move himself out of the shower of gunfire. His legs were numb and heavy, it was no use to try and stand. Slowly Casey fell forward. The mud felt like a blanket against his skin. It covered his lips and climbed up his nose. He laid there for several moments with his fists clenched, his mind racing as his legs struggled briefly to be free of the grasp the thick heavy mud had on him as he sunk further down. Suddenly he could feel the quick sharp tremors of the subway, the bright blue saxophone notes spraying him with cosmic vibrations, the lights flashing walk/don't walk as he watched his brother slide slowly beneath the water. It all came together, colliding in a mesh of molecules, sound waves permeating his skin, colors blinding him through the darkness. It was all so busy, pointless and real as his breathing slowly, peacefully stopped.

HOW I IMAGINE YOU

HELENA WOLFE

walking on the power line
like those success posters

I've seen you like that before
I've thought you were worth
all of that and more

is that silly of me

do I dream too much

do I imagine you

as something better than you are

WRONG ATTENTION

A TAMIL TRANSLATION BY HOWARD SHINDO

ரொங்க் ஆத்தெந்நிஒந்
ஈம் திரெத் ஒ பெஇந்க் அவெ
ஸொ முச அந்த ஈம் திரெத்
ஒ மிஸ்ஸிந்க் யொஉ அந்த்
ஈம் திரெத் ஒ வந்திந்க் அ
திரெ வித் யொஉ அந்த ஈம்
திரெத் ஒ வந்திந்க் யொஉ
அரொஉந்த் மெ

ஸொமெதிமெஸ் ஈ திந்க் வடு
ஈம் அபொஉத் தொ ஸ்லெய்
தத் தே எசைத்ர பில்லொவ்
சொஉள் பெ யொஉ

COFFEE

SHARI O'BRIEN

I inhale the steam as it floats
from the shiny black pool of coffee,
and hope the rich vapors will decongest
my clogged and cluttered head.
As I take a bittersweet sip
from the thick ceramic mug,
I think of the pairs of hands it took
to make this drink:

those of the Peruvian farmer and his sons
in a fog-hugged plantation
Where the Andes kiss the clouds,
And the trucker, who, like me,
Must caffeinate himself to work.
And who stays awake
By singing out loud to the radio,
And the packer with brown-skinned fingers
Who has touches so much coffee
that its smell can't be scrubbed from her skin,
and of the lanky kid with the crooked grin
who puts himself through school
by scooping from bins lustrous beans to grind and concoct
into House Latte and Brew of the Day
for the regulars through whose veins it flows
like ink through pens.

THE 2000 CENSUS

PETE LEE

The Dallas Police Dept., on a
Desperate recruiting mission,
Traveled as far as Puerto Rico
But didn't come back with
A single firm candidate.
So they ordered all their
Monolingual patrol officers
To take 60 hours of Spanish.
Now the complaint is that
The cops know enough to
ask basic questions, but don't
Understand the answers. And
All the blacks want to know
How anything has changed.

SEE YOU CRAWL

A KYLE MACKENZIE
JAPANESE TRANSLATION

あなたが這うのを見なさい

来られる, 男の子

私はあなたが来るのを見たく這う

ないあなたが私によってがここにほしいので

しかしので私があなたが這うのを見たい

THE SPIRIT IN BETWEEN

TYNEIL PHILLIPS

*If a lion had you in its jaws I would attack it,
If the ropes binding your soul are your own wrists
I will cut them.*

Sharon Olds

She is livid with life.
Her body overextends itself
to electrical outlets supplying
a current of breath
permanently exhaled
one icy afternoon
as she slid into a tangle
of glass and metal,
snow falling on wounds
that wouldn't heal.

Without a voice
or the use of fingers
to shut herself off
she is a technological casualty
a prisoner of the war
between God and machine
She is the spirit in between.

UP A DIRT ROAD

CLIFF LYNN

You're up a dirt road
Porch lights are out
In houses unfamiliar as the back of the hand

Fresh-mowed hay
in the endless fields
The baler's in pieces at the Copeland place

Summer rain ain't any more or less lonely
Just because it's summer
Forget what the song says

Here's a dairy
And the mephitic ammonia reek of cowshit
fills the mouth, coats the dentalwork

The asparagus
Is gone to seed

And the second skin
Of country dirt

And you know
If you don't shift your direction soon
You may end up where you're headin'.

LENA ON THE BUS

CLIFF LYNN

Fourteen years old,
and thinking pre-law
My Bosniak Girl
Her friends are all legless,
or dead, or moved on
My Bosniak Girl

The morning sunspray on her lenses
Hides her pretty black eyes from the stranger
Her coincidental traveling companion
The American soldier dispatched to her country
Much too late to save her childhood

She speaks English
much better than he
My Bosniak Girl
Spinning yarns too gruesome
for a child of fourteen
My Bosniak Girl

My immediate family was left intact
We were fortunate
Snipers never hit us while we queued
For bread or drinking water,
And the grenades in the lobby
Found only the neighbors' children
So fortunate, we

On the road to an aunt's house,
a well-earned reprieve
My Bosniak Girl
Sarajevo's my home,
why ever would I leave
My Bosniak Girl

At a pit stop, the soldier buys her some
Blackberries from a roadside mother and
Her three stick-children.
Bosniak Girl scolds the American for not haggling,
Then explains patiently, as if to a child:

The adults, they say it's the Serbs
And the Croats.
And the Serbs believe the Bosniaks
And the Croats are at fault.
And the Croats...well, you see, don't you?
But it's in each of us, this animal.
We all must try to understand this, change this...

Fourteen years old
So fortunate, we.

WORN OUT

JANET KUYPERS

I recently heard the theory
that the dead follow you
they stay with you
for the rest of your life

and the pull at you
and tug at you
and wear you out
until you die.

And are you doing this to me?
Are you pulling the color out of my hair
because I only noticed grey hairs
on my head after your death.
And come to think of it,
my back started hurting
after you were dead for a while
and -

and it that because
I've been carrying you around?
Are you clinging to me after you left?

Please, I don't want to feel guilty
for leaving you.
Please don't haunt me like this.

Maybe I should have been there
to see them lower your casket into the ground.
Maybe I should have seen you
in your suit and tie
in your coffin -
maybe then you wouldn't tug at me
and wear me down
and make me feel old.

Because I recently heard the theory
that the dead follow you
and wear you out
until you die.
But I'm beginning to think
that the reason people get old
is because they've gone through too much.

And if the likes of you
leave the likes of me
you'll make me wonder
if I'll have too much baggage to carry.

MAKES ME LOVE TO HATE YOU MORE

SHANNON PEPPERS

I want so much, I want it ugently
they say I'm worth it, you'd want me too
you'd be a fool not to

the way I'm saying these things
it makes perfect sense to me
should I spell it out for you

I'm tired of spelling everything out, but i can

I am an inpatient little wench
do you THINK that when I am angry
but still, will my love for you fade?

that is my punishment
for what I have been through
you know that through my track record
I have value for the people around me
you have to know that I care

maybe absence makes the heart grow fonder
maybe it doesn't
maybe it makes me love to hate you more
maybe my love for you will stay the same

FLAWLESS, KAREENE MARTEL

He won't let me wear sandals in the rain,
His belt never matches his shoes.
He never brings me flowers, they make him sneeze.

He buys fresh fruit every day,
And only uses recycled paper bags.
He never eats anything green, he hates that colour.

He rents videos on Wednesdays,
Yet he doesn't own a TV.
Never sees romantic comedies, only at the movies.

He never reads books more than an inch thick,
Or rips them to inch-thick pieces
They don't fit in his pocket.

His clothes are full of paint, his hair a mess
He smells of canvas and solvent.

He lies about his family, he prefers mine
Because his parents are not insane.

He says I smile too much, and he feels
He inconveniences me by walking slow.
He thinks my hair is too short, and wants
Me to wear pigtails to bed.

He fears I don't dream of him,
He only paints me while I sleep.
He hates that I eat in bed.
He doesn't know he's perfect.

BULLETS FLYING

BY TERESA SPIES DEMPEWOLF

At thirty-eight years old, Kara wrestled with the noun ‘hero’ these days. She hadn’t been for the war against Iraq-thought it foolish to impose America’s democracy on another country. She knew plenty about laws and courts as a Peace and Justice Advocate lawyer; she had a father who was a General in the Army, so life in her later years was never smooth. Plus, she was the only one now who could give her parents grandchildren. Through two husbands, a career and volunteering, time didn’t permit it. Besides, the heartache of losing her young brother years ago left her emotionally wasted.

She glanced around at the deep green walls of her family’s library. Stacks of beautifully bound books alphabetically shelved, many read and enjoyed. But, what always drew her eyes across the wall to the left of the river rock fireplace, were the many medals and snapshots of her father’s days at West Point. Also, snaps of his buddies who served with him in his young years, pictures of old historic flags and his promotion ceremonies. She leaned her head back on the soft leather chair; her small head strangling in wispy auburn hair as she thought about her life, kept at arms length.

Many young people go into the Marines, Army, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard because they don’t want to go to college and don’t know what else to do with their lives. Or they do want to go to college but can’t afford to and know the United States will pay their way. They join a service to travel and many times never have to shoot a gun. They get paid the minimal amount, but housing, food, clothing and time to grow-up are free.

Kara heard a door open then close. A voice yelled down from the second story home where she was raised.

“Ruth, is that you? It’s about time. It’s sixteen-hundred. I need a pain pill.”

Her father was still giving orders and treating them like soldiers, even though he was dying of prostate cancer.

“I’ll get it mom,” her voice loud as she jumped up and went into the kitchen.

“Hi Kara,” mom said, giving her a smile as she put the grocery sacks on the table. “Has he been awake long?”

“I didn’t hear a thing. I rested when he did. He must have just woken up or I would have heard him. How was the bridge game?”

“Oh Honey, I’m so glad you came and stayed with your father so I could leave for awhile. I enjoyed seeing my friends again and you know how much I love to play bridge.”

“No problem, mom. Oh, Mary Ellen Maffey from Hospice called and said she’d see you at ten for

the in-take tomorrow.”

“Good. I’ll be here.”

“Ruth, did you forget me already?” Dad yelled. “Two women in the house and I’m still forgotten.”

“Coming daddy,” Kara said, grabbing the pain medication. She poured water into a glass from the refrigerator. “Your wish is my command, general.”

Her father was hard to talk to these past years. He was the soldier, the ‘I love America right or wrong’ guy; and she, the complete opposite. They always ran away from each other when in reality there was so much to talk about, especially the war. They were miles apart in an empty cocoon. It didn’t have to be. It wasn’t always this way.

Yet, with the war she argued with herself about the two-thousand who died September-eleventh; but at what price? How many others do we kill to make up for them?

“Daddy, would you like me to give you a backrub or read this mornings paper to you?”

Gruffly, “I’m not dying today and I read the parts of the paper I like this morning.” Then he turned his back to her and she was dismissed.

“Here’s your pain pill.” She left it and the water on his bed stand. This little power play drove her up the wall, but she wouldn’t acknowledge it. She wanted to ease his life in some way, but saluted his backside and went downstairs looking for her mom.

She saw the light under the bathroom door, so went into the library and sat back down in the dark brown chair she loved and closed her eyes again, waiting. When her mom came and sat down by her she told her mother what was eating at her.

“Those of us in the private sector made our way also after graduation, mom. We went to colleges, universities and rambled through books and studies and classes. We had part time jobs and many lived at home. Luckier ones lived in dorms and made do with one or two people living in close proximity like I did. When we graduated we had to find jobs and it wasn’t always an easy task. We had to pay back our student loans. Dad never asked me if he could buy my books. I was thrown out to sea. I was his only child, then. I would think he could afford it, mom.”

Honey, I’m so sorry he wasn’t there for you like you wanted.”

“Thanks, but those who join the service never think they’ll be engaged in a war. So, if one comes up they’re told to be ready to be deployed. Dad just won’t see there’s other ways to look at this war besides his way. I’m feeling so frustrated. The day before dad was diagnosed with cancer we had one of our many arguments.”

“I know Honey, I’ve heard them before.”

“You men are all alike,” I said, steaming hot like a tea kettle. “Not going to the doctor for regular check-ups; your macho-career getting in the way of good health. Now you’re hurting and I hate it.”

“Well Kara, you’re right in one way. We don’t run to the doctor every few weeks like you women do. Besides, we run the country. Our men are in Iraq. We have heroes coming home in body bags to keep you women-folk safe. We don’t have to run to the doctor all the time. We have important work to do.”

“It was just like him, mom, to put women down. He hated the idea of my being a feminist. ‘If I wanted two boys I would have had them.’ He yelled. I was devastated by the comment, mom. He made my blood pressure quicken. Here I worked my butt off to get through law school and do you think he ever gave me thumbs up? Hell no.”

I yelled back, “Yea, daddy,” my voice steaming like dry ice. “The next thing you know one is killed. The young man or woman is now a hero. They gave their life for their country. But who says just because they’re doing their job-the job they signed up for, they are Americas heroes?”

“Kara, watch what you say, here. Your uncle Karl gave his life in the Korean War for you and all other Americans. His blood poured out on the battle field. You bet he was a hero. Sometimes you disgrace me with your words. You went wrong somewhere, Kara-terribly wrong.”

“No, daddy, teachers, students, firemen, actors, parents and just plain others working in their line of work aren’t called heroes if they’re killed by a robber during a bank heist or by a drunken driver. But, we turn those in the service into heroes just for showing up. Not because they begged to fight, but because they had nowhere else to go; no skills, no nothing, but hoped life would be easy and it was a chance to get away on one’s own and see the world. I just don’t get it, dad!”

Her mom patted her hand, but got up from the couch. “I need to put the groceries away, Honey.”

Kara was agitated. Her thoughts hurled like wind, swooping in the cold dampness of life. Daddy wasn’t always like that to her. He was a sweetheart in her young years and she had him eating out of her hand. He read to her and played finger puppets at night when she was scared someone was in her room. He made hotcakes in the shapes of animals and made her laugh. It took him forever to get the food ready, but she didn’t care. After all, he was her dad.

Then when she turned thirteen and began developing he did a complete turnaround. Mom said it wasn’t about her. It was the same time her brother Josh died in a swimming pool accident at age nine. He had sneaked into the city pool two blocks from their house on a hot night, climbed over the fence and drowned. We never knew why, since he was a good swimmer. Her daddy closed up and slapped her from his fun loving ways. It seemed they turned into enemies. She missed their wonderful relationship.

There was so much grief in the house after that, she made herself invisible. She got good grades in school and sang in the church choir even though she hated it. She babysat the neighbor’s kids just to hear laughter. She had to admit she stopped being lovable, too.

She remembered coming home for the weekend once in college. Her mom and dad were relaxing

after dinner, so she asked him to talk about her brother, Josh.

“What in the hell for, he’s dead. Leave it alone, Kara.” Then he knocked his chair down trying to hurry away from us. She looked at her mother, but her eyes begged Kara to understand.

“Mom, it’s been almost twenty years now. Why can’t we talk about what happened to Josh? Doesn’t he realize I hurt and miss him, too?”

Her eyes sprang a leak and she pulled me close. “We all do, Honey. I miss my son terribly. Sometimes I feel like I’ll break into little pieces if I speak his name. It’s not fair to you, but it just hurts us so much not to have him in our life any more.”

Then Kara realized how fractured the family had been since her brothers death. Love doesn’t always smooth the seam of life and hearts do break.

Each time they argued she’d leave and slam the door. They both got fired up, but now she wished she would have...could have...just stayed and met him head on. But she never did. She always chickened out. She let him take her power away. He never talked to her as an adult, so they stayed child to adult. She blamed herself as she was a red hot ember that never cooled, so she was more like her dad than she wanted to admit. She wasn’t a shrinking violet in court or on the job though. Her temper kept her sharp, but she couldn’t argue with her own father.

The night of his death his wife of forty-four years and daughter stayed close by his side, gently wiping his face with a cool cloth and holding his hand. They spoke softly with remembrances of old times. Only once his eyes opened. He stared longingly at his wife and slowly his head turned to Kara. Haltinly, laboring with whispered breath he said. “Give ‘em hell, honey,” and his eyes closed for the last time. The sobbing daughter fell apart.

Major General Ross Edward Morrisy died last Friday. He had a four star funeral attended by many hash marked individuals with impeccable uniforms and highly polished boots. His wife and daughter sat front and center at his funeral. As Kara watched the sad, stark ceremony she heard a close friend of her fathers talk about his beginnings.

“Over forty years he spent in the Army. Not because he had to, but because he loved the rules and traditions and American spirit and the democratic way of life. He was apple pie and all it meant growing up on a homestead in Wyoming as the oldest of six boys. From poverty he excelled to be a major general and we’ll deeply miss him.”

Yes, she thought through shimmering tears, he was one who went in the service to be taken care of and for him it worked. It really did. She lost it though, when the bugle played taps. She was proud of her father, but her blue tears only wanted the one thing he stopped giving her. She just needed-no, wanted back-more of his sweet loving heart.

FEVER

AMY DURANT

I. It is something that happens, sometimes:
a person will go up in flames. They burn
at about 3,000 degrees. This is hotter
than a crematorium. Things are sometimes
left behind: an arm, a foot, the head.

Investigators often blame smoking,
drinking, suicidal tendencies.
Nothing around this person is burned.
Their clothing doesn't burn. The carpet
remains pristine.

The fires are internal in origin.

There are few survivors. The ones that
do live to tell say they remember nothing.
They remember talking to a friend,
perhaps, then a dark hot void,
finally waking up in the hospital
as empty as a husk, burned black, hands
curled, faces melted into masks.

II. When they find me, please tell them
I've always burned hot, even in the
coldest winter. If this were a fairy tale,
I would have swallowed a cinder as a child,
a burning needle, a firefly. Believe me,
I have swallowed none of these things, yet still
I burn, I glow, a banked potbelly stove.

They will find perhaps a foot, a finger,
the curve of an ear. My clothes will still
be plump with my shape. They will blame
suicide, smoking.

They will not think to blame you.

This fire will be internal in origin:
my eyes will go first, burning blue,
twin pilot lights. It will slowly burn through
each memory of you, back to the beginning,
the genesis of this yearning. I will embrace
the fire like a lover come home
from a long journey. I will take it to bed.
There will be no afterwards in which
to remember nothing.

A finger, a foot, the curve
of an ear. These are left behind for you
as curios of a forgotten time in which
I loved you at temperatures
beyond all that is rational.

MAYBE THAT IS ENOUGH

ਮੇਯਥੇ ਠਤ ਈਸ ਨੋਰੁਘ
ਸੋਮੋਤਿਮੇਸ ਥਿਗਸ ਵੇਰਕ ਓਉਤ ਅਚੋਰਿਦੰਰ
ਤੋ ਪਲਨ ਅੰਦ ਸੋਮੋਤਿਮੇਸ ਥੇ ਪਲਨ
ਇਸ ਨੋਤ ਏਚੋਯ ਵੁਤ ਯੋਉ ਹਦ ਇਨ
ਮਿੰਦ ਭਉਤ ਸੋਮੋਤਿਮੇਸ ਯੋਉ ਚਨ ਅਤ
ਲੇਅਸਤ ਥੇ ਹਯ ਵਿਥ ਥੇ ਪਲਨ
ਅੰਦ ਈ ਤਕੇਦ ਤੋ ਯੋਉ ਤੋਦਯ ਅੰਦ
ਈ ਥਿਕ ਨੋਇਥੇਰ ਓਨੇ ਓਫ ਉਸ ਹਵੇ
ਪਲੰਸ ਫੋਰ ਤੋਨਿਘਤ ਅੰਦ ਥੇਰੇ ਇਸ ਅ
ਚੇਯੋ ਯੋਉ ਵਿੱਲ ਥੇ ਇਨ ਤੋਵਨ ਫੋਰ ਥੇ
ਹੋਲਿਦਯ
ਅੰਦ ਮਯਥੇ ਥਤ ਮੇਅੰਸ ਈ ਦੋਨਤ
ਗੋਤ ਤੋ ਸੇਏ ਯੋਉ ਫੋਰ ਥੇ ਹੋਲਿਦਯ ਈ

GURMUKHI TRANSLATION
BY CARTER DONOVAN

PINIONED

BRANDI S. HENDERSON

There is a sky,
black and cold.

I am pinioned in the fixed stars;
tied to it, the bindings making
me bleed.

A tear falls and burns the ground.
A fire explodes and I drown
in flames.

My scream reaches the outermost
sky invisible, no echo
through the dense lucid air.

There's no promise of peace
at the end alone,
only replete emptiness;
hexed by the knowledge no escape exists.
I cannot feel, anymore,
the pain that surrounds me.

Please let me go...

DES

DONORA HILLARD

I am not winning any money for this.
And I am not

going to write about writing just so
you can tell me how chaste and noble
I am, how

Catholic an undertaking is my devotion
to the craft. Mine is a separate mission.

So when you come to see me, don't
mention an audience or offer "prizes."

Such things

are meant for the back alley of a carnival,
the toddler reaching and crying,
reaching and crying again.

IN THE ROOM

A GUJARTI TRANSLATION
BY SLOANE EMERSON

ઇન ઠે રોઓમ
મચ્છે ઇમ રેઆદિંગા તોઓ મુચ્છ ઇતો
ચિસ મચ્છે યોઉ રે ઉચ્છય વિથ ફેર
ઇ વોન્ટેર વ્હન યોઉ રે લિકે વ્હન યોઉ
અરે હપ્પય વ્હન યોઉ રે ઇન્ટેરેસ્ટેડ ઇન
તલ્કિંગા અન્ડ યોઉ વ્હન તો સ્મિલે
મોરે અન્ડ લિવે મોરે ઇ વ્હન તો
ક્રોવ યોઉ વ્હન યોઉ રે લિકે થત
મચ્છે યોઉ અન્ડ થત વચ્છ વિથ મે

MAKING SENSE OUT OF THE INSANE

GABRIEL ATHENS

I can't see the silver lining around the clouds
I see the dripping blood from poorly cut wounds
they haven't healed, I tell you

that's modern life, there is no happy ending
look and look, but you can't find it

making sense out of the insane is pointless
the insane starts to make sense
bottle up all the hate to understand

change all the goals in life
change them all
after a while that has an effect on you
after a while you start to feel like a prisoner
with the life kicked out of you
by a bunch of other prisoners
while the guards are paid to look away
it's funny how the prisoners get the coin
to pay all the good guys off

When you start to see that
And when you start to feel like that
the line between sanity and insanity is blurred

KNOW HOW THE TRUTH IS

AEON LOGAN

how many times do you fight the same battles
and lose your battles against the world
how many times will you still fight
knowing no one will listen
all of your efforts will be to no good
no one will notice or care or even act interested

let's not fool ourselves, say it like it is
don't get our hopes up until all goes wrong

we all know how the truth is
each time we try to get anywhere in life
when you try to accomplish things
you never thought possible
when you try and try and try
someone always kicks you in the teeth
making you feel hopeless

sometimes I'm not the best with words
but maybe I've said enough
without saying any more than I have to

EVEN AFTER 32 YEARS

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

My brother commented
that he was surprised I was taking
ballroom dancing lessons with my wife,
didn't seem like something in
character for me, not something
I really wanted to do. And I said,
"What can you do together after
the children have gone? Going to the movies
and dinner isn't really much of a
hobby to do together. I'm interested
in poetry and genealogy, archeology, history . . .
and she likes to garden and shop,
so what can we do together, as a couple?
Yes dancing seems like the perfect thing."
And he said, "Oh I see, that makes sense."
And I added, "Another thing, dancing
gives me the chance to hold her
and that's always a nice thing for me even after
32 years of marriage."



WOMAN

BY DR. DEBORAH FERBER

I HAVE MY DREAMS

SYDNEY ANDERSON

I don't even care
if you call me anymore
because I have my dreams
and they make me happier
than you




GONDOLA, VENICE
Scars Publications ITALY MAY 2003



ASHES TO ASHES
BY NICOLE AIMEE MACALUSO





you can't be free or strong unless you can speak up

FREEDOM

and

STRENGTH

FENG SHUI

SHERYL L. NELMS

just because
we spent

every quarter
we had

sold our double
bed and

kitchen table
with chairs

watched as the gold Oldsmobile
was repossessed

leaving us stranded in
the desert west of Las Cruces

in a trailer
with no electricity

rent unpaid and
a landlord who threatened

to shoot us
tonight

don't think I
have given
up

my peacock feather
is in the right

sector

and the lid
is down



WHAT THAT TOO YOU KNOW

A TELUGU TRANSLATION
BY STEVE ERRMAN

అన్ తవ దోష ఉన్
ఈ వనె థిన్ తెప్పెన్న్య తో నోతివె
థె దెత్తెల్
ఈవె నోతివెద్ వైన్ యుక న్నెఅక్
ఇన్ వన్సిన్ వెల్ల, ఈ నోతివెద్ థె
దోషట్టె మెఅసిన్ అన్ మయ్య
యొక వెరెనోత్ త్రిన్ తో గె అ
దోషట్టె మెఅసిన్ మయ్య ఈమ్
జన్ తోఒ అవరె
మయ్య ఈ వన్ నోమెథిన్ తో
నోర్కె వె నోమెన్ వన్ థవ తోఒ,

TRINITY HIGH GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

SHERYL L. NELMS

Friday night
he's at

the Safari Lounge
drunk again

Monday morning
he's back at his
office

next-door to
the principal

telling students
how to live

their lives





down in the dirt

CHRIST WENT TO THE WRONG PLANET

SCOTT C. HOLSTAD

there are no fucking miracles
aside from the fact that i'm
still alive and far too many
other people are too
why
in the world
people aren't throwing
themselves off bridges in
droves i'll never know

i've been shot at
my dog's been shot
i've been homeless
i've knifed myself
 why wait for someone
 else to do it?

i've been cuffed
i've been in court
 3 times before the same
 judge in one fall alone

i
drive 160 on the freeway
in the hopes of a
fiery escape
my major
x-mas wish
and
like everyone else
i get shit
life on a razor's edge
words that kill
and guns that don't

*[From my book
"Shadows Before the Maiming"]*



You appear as one normal,
Yet serpents slither behind
Your eyes

As the Moon rises in Hell
You blow kisses at the Dead

Indescribable.
Met my match
At long last.

Zyprexa
Risperdal
Don't need the pain ones
Although a friend is taking
160mg of Methodone per dose
throughout the day

The arm's not pockmarked,
Merely scarred with ribbons
Of knives

We live this life as though
We were already amongst
The dead
And
Perhaps
We are

EXIT WOUNDS

SCOTT C. HOLSTAD

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CERTAINTY

BY KENNETH C. ENG

When searching for truth, the most pertinent problem one must grapple with is refutation. That is why certainty is an essential issue to be addressed before any meaning can be derived from existence. It was certainty that the philosopher Rene Descartes was obsessed with, and it was this mania for sureness that drove him to doubt everything. However, while he asserted that his own consciousness was a truth, he never really went much farther than to say that everything else could be questioned. Little was he aware that there are entities in reality that must always be constants. Seventeen such elements are the most primary requisites or reality. These include: logic, consciousness, causality, a timeless genesis, a temporal genesis, destiny, time, space, spacetime, relativity, macrocosm, microcosm, quantum mechanics, uncertainty, unconsciousness, symmetry and asymmetry.

The first truth from which all others are drawn is **LOGIC**. Whereas inductive reasoning, the use of past events to presuppose the probabilities of future events, is by nature imperfect and incapable of attaining certainty, logic can never be defied. One can say that induction relies on the use of induction to be proven, and hence relies on unfounded circular reasoning, but one cannot declare that logic requires itself to be proven and is then equally unfounded. If one were to state that the only truth in the universe is the infinitely reflexive acknowledgement that there is no truth (similar to Descartes' statement that it is possible to have a triangle that does not have three sides), then by sheer reason, I can declare that such a statement can only be made through the use of logic, which contradicts the very essence of an infinitely recursive nihilistic conjecture. Accordingly, logic is the only thing that can be proven true through circular logic, as it is in itself logical. Triangles will always have three sides and $1+1$ will always equal 2.

By logic, one can deduce that **CONSCIOUSNES** is the second constant in existence. There would be no universe if there were no consciousnesses to observe it, since quantum mechanics and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle state that objects must be observed in order for them to be real. Thus,

all physical entities would not be if there were no living beings to see, hear, taste, smell or feel them. That is not to say, of course, that awareness is confined to carbon-based organisms, for there is no way to disprove that inanimate objects do not have their own form of sentience. Rocks, wood, air, and even computers may even be able to experience the cosmos, thereby acting as observers and creating reality by feeling it. We as humans may not be used to visualizing the potential mindfulness of a chess piece, but perhaps we could view inanimate objects as having their own forms of genetic codes (the physical laws that govern the atoms that compose such objects) and better place into perspective the idea that the double helix does not necessarily have to be the only conduit to livelihood. There is also no way to controvert the possibility that ideas and abstract, immaterial things might be in some way alive, with their own genetic codes that are built solely of thought. In fact, since everything, including DNA, nebulae, atoms, molecules, etc., emerged from the Big Bang, it would make perfect sense that if we are aware, so must everything else be. So, the universe would not need DNA-based organisms to exist, as everything else in the cosmos was spawned from the same conscious beginning. Nonetheless, even if all things besides humans were not conscious, it would still not contradict the simple actuality that sentience is an inherent attribute of existence.

The next two imperative certainties are the beginnings. **CAUSALITY** implies that every event has a cause, and thusly, everything that happens is bound to a chain reaction that spans the entire universe. Like logic, causality operates on premises and conclusions (which are analogous to causes and effects), except that causality is based on time, and logic is based on mathematics and deduction. One might argue, ala Neils Bohr, that there are an infinite amount of causes in the universe, thereby rendering causality ridiculous. However, it is ridiculous in itself to assume that every event has an innumerable sum of antecedents, for paradoxes of infinities (ie. Zeno's paradox) can be resolved by applying limits that everyone learned about in high school. Ergo, even though all entities are essentially built of an endless number of points, it is reasonable to view them as wholes (essences) that cannot truly be given exact measurement, yet can be understood like billiard balls on a cosmic pool table. Each one acts with determinable effects that can be noticed, but not quantified in absolute mathematical precision. Albeit choice is a factor amongst conscious things in the celestial sea, it too is trapped within this inescapable network of domino events that has already been preordained at the origin of the cosmos, when the very first events of the universe set off all future events. Therefore, there must be a meaning to life, and a start to time's flow. A steady state universe would be impossible because it violates the laws of causality that operate similarly to and are as necessitous as logic.

One might then ask the age-old question of what happened before the Big Bang. If there was nothing before it, then it too must violate causality, right?

WRONG.

The Big Bang was a temporal origin that sparked the initiation of time. However, it is not to say that time was a requisite unto itself. The only other possible way for the universe to have emerged was through a non-temporal cause, an event that held an ultimate purpose and thereby manifested the meaning of life. This **TIME-LESS GENESIS** would be an idea, thus linking logic (the un-time-like brother of causality) to its sibling, causality, and starting the universal timeline. Consequently, there were two dawns to existence – the Big Bang, which restricted all beings to **DESTINY**, and the timeless beginning that contains the sought-after purpose that every intelligent human seeks.

The certainty of **TIME** can be shown by the fact that causality is an innate part of the cause-effect consistency that makes the universal machine operate. Since causality is a definite element of being, and time is required for causality to turn, time is a constant. Events that obey causality also have to have **SPACE** in which to occur. Although a mind does not require a body, matter does need volumetric substance to establish shape, size and locality. Since the “physical” (as far as one can define the terminology) universe cannot exist without space, space must be real. Even entities in one’s imagination have spatial parameters, except that those parameters are also imagined to an extent.

Furthermore, space and time are linked in that an observer’s state in existence changes the fabric of what is. Relativity generally relies on induction or experimentation to be true, but even without empirical evidence, it is still correct to say that one’s mental conception changes the way the temporal and spatial dimensions flow. For example, most adolescents conceive five years to be a very long while, yet as people grow older, years seem to be perceived as shorter. This happens because the apprehension of time’s motion is determined according to the countless factors that constitute the beliefs of every human. In this case, the most prevalent constituent that causes older humans to perceive time in a more contracted way is the fact that they have lived longer, and thus, every passing year seems less significant. Likewise, if one were to move at the speed of light, light years would not seem so distant, whereas to an ordinary man, a hundred miles may sound far. This clearly proves that there is a link between volumetric and temporal parameters, as a man who can think and move at light speed would find spatial stretches to be more retrenched than a man who ponders at the velocity of a dolt. Therefore, it is absolute that **SPACETIME** is relative to one’s internal mental and physical states and is malleable according to **RELATIVITY**. Note



that relativity in this sense does not infer the laws of conventional special and general relativity, which assume quite blindly that traveling at the speed of light would cause time to dilate (conventional relativity is littered with unfounded physical constants obtained through induction).

Relativity only applies to one side of the universe – the **MACROCOSM** that is the large-scale world a conscious observer perceives. To us as humans, this would refer to buildings, houses, snakes, chessboards, etc. The other side of the universe, the **MICROCOSM**, is also in our perception, but it is the small-scale world that lies at the heart of every modicum of spacetime and matter. For instance, imagine a granite stone and all its surface imperfections. Imagine trying to catalog each and every one of those grooves and specks to total, flawless accuracy. The task, obviously, would be impossible, as there is an infinite amount of detail to everything that is real. Further, no matter how far we peer into something, there is no way we can determine whether or not fundamental particles like atoms, quarks and photons really do compose the entities we experience in our world. Who is to say that even the smallest of the known subatomic elements is foundational to matter? Perhaps the reason why physicists in the past few years have been finding swarms of new elementary particles is that there are an endless number of levels to which one can descend in size. Therefore, the only true and ultimately simple fragment of matter and space would be a zero-dimensional point (Also note that size would be relative, and that a macrocosm would still exist even if you were as large as a galaxy. The new macrocosm would just be on a larger scale).

These immeasurable points would be impossible to observe through a microscope, as they are literally infinite in smallness. However, what is apparent in all objects of the macrocosm is a level at which detail begins to get blurred and uncertain. One cannot determine, no matter how long he or she stares, how many bumps and grooves adorn a slab of granite, because even the best human eyes (or any eyes for that matter) still bear a degree of incertitude in their field of view. No one can access the infinite amount of detail inherent in all things, since the detail is not needed when it suffices just to gather overall impressions of objects. Besides, it would take a limitless amount of memory to encapsulate every bit of data the universe potentially has. So, this incertitude within our vision would represent the microcosm, which happens to obey the laws of **QUANTUM MECHANICS** that scientists have derived from experimentation and mathematical calculation. In quantum mechanics, everything is chaotic and ephemeral, things come out of nowhere, and particles can be in many places at once. Since one can never be certain of anything in the microcosmic realm, it is logical to state that the nature of quantum mechanics applies to reality.

UNCERTAINTY is in itself a certainty because anything we are not looking at may as well be embodied as a chaotic, wavelike mass. As the Uncertainty Principle states, it is possible to occupy multiple states of being when not observed by a conscious organism. Therefore, anything our senses cannot touch is intrinsically uncertain, including what is behind this paper/computer screen at the moment.

In addition, quantum mechanics appends another aspect to logic, space, time, and consciousness. These four elements of reality have their own quantum levels where infinity causes them to take on different, microcosmic forms. Logic's uncertain angle would be the countless values that lie between any two integers (0 and 1, for example have limitless fractions between them). Space's microcosm would be the 0th Dimension, which is completely unobservable, and hence, contains all possible realities simultaneously in a multiverse (Uncertainty Principle). Time, if reduced to its quantum phase, would be similar to the 0th Dimension, except that it would embrace all potential timelines that can be lived out, much like a record of all possible chess games that can be played. Patently, though, the number of possible realities is endless and the number of chess games is astronomical, but finite. The final microcosm would be the **UNCONSCIOUS**, the uncertain condition ingrained in the very depths of the conscious. The unconscious, even though it can never be overtly observed by the conscious, is by nature enshrouded in total mystery. There are ways, however, of deducing what its ultimate purpose is.

By the laws of causality, everything in life has a meaning. In fact, even the first law of thermodynamics demands that energy in a system cannot be destroyed or created, only converted. Similarly, events in the universe or multiverse should be kept in balance by laws of conservation that prevent any occurrence without a purpose from existing. After all, if something does not affect the universe, then why should it be classified as extant? It is okay to have "dark matter", but "doesn't matter" is just unacceptable because it simply cannot be real if it has no affect on the real world. Accordingly, there is a balance or a **SYMMETRY** to the universe that maintains an equilibrium for all things, material and immaterial. Events and choices are like energy and matter, so it makes sense to view the harmony of causal proportion to that of thermodynamic proportion.



Symmetry in this sense is not exactly defined as the property of an equation to remain unchanged when its components are shifted. Regardless, it is still related to this quest to find a balanced equation. Having a causal function to everything in a line of unbreakable destiny is akin to having a perfectly beautiful equation, a goal that physicists strive for. It eliminates the need for nihilism and can give everyone the ease that the purpose of life is out there to be solved. Furthermore, symmetry is accepted by most physicists as an imperative requisite to a final comprehension of the cosmos and is even an explanation for why the anomalies (zeroes and infinities) of superstring theory cancel out so impeccably.

Thence, the meaning of the unconscious can be understood in that everything in the universe is connected and that the unconscious is the dominant controlling factor in the cosmos. The intercon-



nectedness of all things is evident when one considers that everything emerged from a singular point in time and out of time (the non-temporal beginning). If we as individuals are cognizant, then it stands to reason that everything from which we evolved – apes, eukaryotes, DNA, primordial soup, stars, and even the Big Bang itself should also be sentient. Therefore, the sentience of the beginnings implies that there is a supreme force guiding everything in existence and that inevitable destiny is wrought by the choices of that “supreme being’s” mental quantum level. Our own mindfulness is logically attached to this godlike entity and therefore, the unconscious is the directing rudiment that commands fate. The only reason why the conscious is separated from the unconscious is because sentience requires choice in order to exist (Without choice, we would not be able to think, therefore we would not be). That is why humans generally cannot see through time and view the inevitable destiny that will be later described in this tome.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the universe is symmetrical in its causal side and maybe in its thermodynamic side, it is still asymmetrical in the fact that there is differentiation amongst things. Although water and mercury are both made of an infinite number of points, they are disparate by their essence. If space and time were wholly symmetrical, there would be no matter and no forward movement of the temporal dimension. Trees, rivers, landscapes and stones would not exist. Consequently, in order for change to occur, there must be an unbalanced face to the cosmos, one that allows for things to be different. This is not to say that I am contradicting myself, as the unevenness can be equiposed in a symmetrical arrangement. Therefore, there can be balance in unbalanced things. Symmetry and **ASYMMETRY** coexist. Even a balanced equation may have dissimilar variables within itself, and the coveted solution to relativistic quantum physics, if it exists, might have irregularities to it.

Thereupon, there are certainties to existence that can be proven through reason alone. The truths of logic, consciousness, causality, a timeless genesis, a temporal genesis, destiny, time, space, spacetime, relativity, macrocosm, microcosm, quantum mechanics, uncertainty, unconsciousness, symmetry and asymmetry are invincible and cannot be disproved, as they operate entirely on irrefutable premises. However, this is not the end what can be known, for knowledge without meaning is pointless. One must make extrapolations from these certainties, for only then can the true meaning of Ultimate Reality be elicited.

HAPPY HOUR

KURT MACPHEARSON

Everything that means anything
has been mashed into a bottle
its glass clear as gin
exposing all that is me
to dirty hands that pour
shots of distilled poison
at the end of the bar
where I sit
watching painted faces
I secretly wish to ignore me
while wanting nothing more
than to get drunk
on the dreams
I let get away

GLOSSARY

KURT MACPHEARSON

Choices
dictionary pages
infinite things I could have done
but blind temptation
ruled the soul
and control of limbs
were given to drink

If I had
one sand of the glass
to open the mind's book
and take a random stab

And definition
under the finger
might have shed light
on what I'd been doing.



FLOWERS

KURT MACPHEARSON

Scraps of paper
perfumed tears
and wilted petals
strewn across the floor
are all that's left
of what I've brought home



ARCHAEOLOGY

KURT MACPHEARSON

Tattered remnants lurking in the heart
of a dig,
bones lain in fetal position
beside pottery shards.

The life I have lived
may one day be read
by the same methods.
But will the scholar know
of the crimes,
the love lost,
horrors visited in the dark
of my dreams?
Could they be broken down,
a linear map
that would somehow make sense
of my existence
and locate the point where I went wrong?

LIVING

Ashok Niyogi

This is what I call a photo-poem. I have taken all photos with a Minolta Dynax 300 Si, in different states of inebriation, on a Richter scale of 8 to 10, with film speeds from 100 to 800, depending on what I got, where. But they are mostly in 100 and 200 in Fuji and Kodak.

The only discipline I kept was to shoot early or late, except for the few dark guys, which I shot with 400 in the Indian noon.

This is not about the Himalayas.

True, they are an integral part of whatever I do and where do you get such 'photo-ops'; but this series has no snow. No glaciers, no abodes of the Lord Shiva.

They are about a three-month interlude.

And they are about me.

This one is for my nephew, Bunty Singh, last known as Supratik Dutta, who saw my first basin of blood, held his nerve and saved my life.

I



Let me be
Let the clouds cover me
Let the branches darken
Beneath the sun
Let the road snake down
And come up again
To the neighboring mountain
Right now
I am fixed on the sky.

II



My little boy
Is being coy
Publicity he abhors
Except when it is on Mama's lap
The little girl has
Something against cats
Now if she jumps the camera lens
It is because
She thinks the camera is a cat.

III



Like a wild beast
It comes roaring in
Not really
There's no sound
Just the impression
That the heavens will fall down.

IV



Mangoes in the mountains
Our ecology is mixed up as I am
Indo-gangetic fruit in mountain dew
So what else is new?

V



Travelators for stone chips
Small small children
With red red lips
Hips
Bent beneath the burden of firewood
Mountain goat
Is what I will be
So that I can see.

VI



Russian blue and Russian white
Why am I reminded of Volgograd,
Of Omsk and Tomsk
And Intourist
In this terrible Delhi heat?

VII



You cross this bridge in Cawnpore
Not isolated I am sure
Like the ropeway over the Beas
Water gurgling over boulders
Lips like petals in the dusk
Sexual almost.

VIII



Unpredictable
Dusk over mountains
Is sudden
Rotten fruit
For damaged monkeys
Little monkeys cling to mother's breasts
Tests
Of summer homes
With gnomes.

IX



Stratified rock
In wet overhangs
Ominous
The road clings
Each turn brings
Flowers and a bird

X



When pictures speak in English
I am surely going mad
It's sad
But Jolly will understand
The meaning
Of an evening in the sky.

XI



Is Haiku grammar
Or is it verse
Just terse
And obtuse
I understand
These feelings in the woods.

XII



No wonder I do not shave
Do the rockslides behave
Goats climb mountaintops
Do goats shave?

XIII



I read the 'Waste Land'
And for the first time
Didn't understand a word
Will they let me serve tea
At Oxford?

XIV



Tagore wore a different dress
Almost as if he were posturing
If his clouds were not loyal to him
I would have sought redress.

XV



Take it away
Here and now
Let Tolstoy do the balance job
And Hemingway play
At fish and bulls
From Andalusia
And then in your Convent Row flat
Yeats will mist over all that
While Nuns in habits
Scurry to and fro
Go.

XVI



Boris kept filling pages with ink
Roerich splattered ink into mountains
I am a swan in the chorus
 On my tip-toes
The roof in the 'Gum'
 Has windows
In the Metropole
 Crabs have toes
Stainless-steel cutters
 And bibs
Snow-flakes and flutters
Mayakovsky in the dark
 Stark.

XVII



Wet in the rain on Pushkinskaya
Burgers in McDonalds
And a walk
Through the park
Pushkin sits
To brave the rain.

XVIII



The Czar built the first wooden ship
But roads were mud and snow
Eta Russia you know
I was reading Lermontov
Now I drink vodka
And read Akhmatova
That is what Zima has done
Yevgeny what fun.

THE FOLLOWER

MICHEL SAURET

Alone in the car, Alex was accompanied only by the revving sound of his engine. He was driving back home, barely teasing the speed limit, eyes deeply drawn to the road before him. The clock on the radio showed that it was just past one o'clock in the morning, which was much later than he had anticipated. The road he drove on was wide, and so long that it seemed as if his high beams would never reach the end of it.

Opposing traffic lanes were separated by dividing blocks that formed a wall as long as the road extended. He drove in the lane closest to the concrete wall, leaving a distance between his car and the wall that was too close for comfort. He could easily extend his arm and touch the wall with his fingers, scrubbing his fingertips across it if he really wanted to. The thought felt frightening, but he couldn't resist keeping the car at that distance. It was unexplainable why he was driving so alarmingly close to it. The speeding wall attracted him as much as it frightened him. The two thoughts played tug-of-war with one another. The contradiction of these two thoughts therefore brought Alex's '88 Explorer *a foot and a half* away from the destructive sandpaper. A foot and a half. 18 short inches in distance. Alex's arm itself was longer than that. *Eighteen inches*, Alex thought with a perturbed fear creeping up his mind. Perhaps, he could drag more than just fingertips along it, after all. He could sand down an entire palm to a bloody contortion.

Suddenly, the memory of 8th grade flooded his mind. It was just three years rewound back in time. Shop class had always been one of Alex's favorite classes, and now its presence appeared before him. The smell of wood chips and the faint burn of lumber in action infiltrated his nose. Choo-choo-trains holding gumballs needed to be sanded down to achieve a smooth surface and a shiny gleam. To speed up the process there were sand belt machines provided to the students. They dragged a strip of sandpaper downward, scraping the edge of a metal platform faster than a shooting bullet. The machines mesmerized some of the students and terrified others.

Alex had felt both at the time.

"Only sandpaper, that's all," Alex said to himself softly without even realizing he had spoken. A hypnotic tone stained his words, carrying an unmistakable dreamy sense to them as he spoke. The strip of sandpaper was not shooting downward anymore as he drove, but it ran backwards as fast as Alex driving could send it. Trying not to be distracted from the road, he turned his head quickly just a bit to see the wall. From the road, to the wall, and back, his eyes jumped back and forth, barely paying attention to

his driving. The window whined noisily down with the magic push of a button, and he slowly neared the large SUV closer to the wall. The cool summer air blew in through the window.

He imagined himself in shop class again, sitting at the sanding machine with the roof of the train in his hands. The piece of wood slipped away from his grip as he tried to smooth it, shooting his hands at the rotating sander. The gritted belt tore at his skin, and blood squirted everywhere in his imagination the same way it does in bad horror movies.

The window was completely open. Graciously, he rested his left elbow on the edge of it, and waved his hand closer to the racing wall. The steering wheel nudged to the left. The 18 inches shortened to around 15, forgetting to take in account the rear view mirror, which was closer yet.

His fingers expanded gently, letting cool air jet fast between his knuckles. Gradually, his fingertips approached their landing towards the top of the short wall. It reminded him of a crazed hijacker landing a plane without the knowledge of how. The descending hand was the plane, and his mind was the crazed hijacker. Four inches above the landing strip, his hand prepared for a turbulent ride.

Four inches descended to three. Three then down to two. Two inches became one. It was the shortest inch Alex had ever eye-measured. Just like the wheels on a plane, his fingers propped open leaving their tips millimeters away from destruction. One eye stared crazily at his hand as the other watched the road. Alex imagined the red of blood again, bringing him back to self-conscious reality. His vision flicked at the speedometer, and saw an arrow pointing at 95. *More like 93, no need to exaggerate*, he told himself in a gritty sense of correction. Realizing how fast he was going wasn't what made Alex flinch the crazed hand back to safety.

Something else he saw provoked this.

What made him stop himself from being unable to eat French fries for the rest of his life was the thought of being followed. This was just a paranoid idea that he was usually able to dismiss, but tonight the eerie sky had begun to takes its toll on his mind in a way that had never happened before. He eased his Explorer at a safer distance and pulled on the button, closing the window.

The headlights following him had an oval shape. Or at least they appeared to be. Was he *really* being followed? He wasn't sure. Just a few minutes earlier he had seen the exact same headlights behind him. *Was it minutes, or seconds?* Alex's mind asked without really knowing the answer. Now he did not even know what the oval headlights could mean. They could probably mean a cop.



A cop!

Alex jumped up at the thought. It could very easily be. Tonight was somewhere near the end of the month. The 27th. The 28th, maybe. It was hard to keep track of time during summer. The end of the month could mean trouble for a kid who drove past curfew without a senior license. As if conscious of the situation's significance, he raised an eyebrow at the thought. The idea that a cop might be following behind disturbed him. More cops than usual roamed around at the end of the month, scrambling through the night to make their quota like dads buying presents on Christmas Eve.

The wall had ended a few seconds ago, but Alex did not even notice it strip by. His thoughts were fixated frantically at the headlights behind him. So far that's all he could make out of the car, just the headlights. Approaching a red light to turn left, he began to slow down to a stop. He did this carefully, making his mind go nuts with details.

Slow down precisely now at a decreasing speed.

Don't hit the brake pedal too hard.

Make sure you put on your turn signal.

Don't look suspicious or like a drug dealer.

Don't---

How in the hell does a drug dealer driving exactly look like? Nervously, he laughed, picturing one in his head.

The red light beamed on for what seemed like forever. The car behind him approached closer. It was close enough now to make out the outline of a head. The driver's head then came slightly more into focus. A street light grazed down to shine the side of his face. The traffic light was the same color red as the blood he imagined a few seconds earlier. *Had it been seconds?*

Alex's eyes flicked at the rear view mirror, and then back at the light. Curiously, he didn't know which he was more interested in. The red light seemed impossibly long, but the stranger was almost close enough to count the hairs on his head. There weren't many. He was partially bald and had an almost pudgy face. Alex stopped flicking his eyes, and instead he just stared at the driver behind him. With his right hand he turned a knob, lowering the volume to the music. All he could hear now was the insistent ticking of his turn signal.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

That noise wasn't going to stop until the light turned green.

The driver's face behind him was as easy to see as Alex's own hand on the steering wheel. The person seemed to be wearing a uniform, or at least a suit and tie, with shirt and all. But that could just be Alex's eyes playing tricks on him. He'd like to believe that, too. In a panicky way he continued to stare at the driver.

The man pulled out some sort of block and rested it on his steering wheel. Alex couldn't see it clear-

ly, but noticed that he... Was he writing on it? He was. The follower's eyes kept on looking at where Alex's license plate would be. *Could he be taking my license plate number?* he thought to himself frantically. No, the suggestion was just too crazy and paranoid. Why would he be taking his plate number if he hadn't done anything wrong? He rambled between thoughts, clotting his mind with chaos.

The man then put the block and pen away and took a warm chug from his mug. Looking at the follower more closely, Alex noticed his eyes jump up. They were looking directly at Alex with curiosity. Glaring at him with concern, the man squinted his eyes to tiny slits. It was impossible for the traffic light to be still red after the long time Alex had been studying his follower, but it still was. It was as red as before. Alex felt that he was being observed as much as he had been doing the observing. No, not felt... he *knew*.

When is that damn light going to turn gree--- Before he could finish his thought, his question was answered. A green arrow pointed to the left, giving him permission to push the gas lightly with his foot, and turn the wheel.

His tires tended to screech naggingly any time he took a turn too sharp or a curve too fast. In a paranoid alert, he waited for the screech, and his heartbeat paused. He held his breath up until he was going straight again. Then he knew it wasn't going to come.

Making the turn, he looked at the side view mirror to figure out what kind of car was behind him. It looked like a newer Ford. Maybe a Crown Victoria. Under cover cop cars were often Crown Victorias, but under cover cop cars were almost always white, and this one seemed to be of a dark blue color, or black, even. It was hard to tell in the darkness of night.

They drove down hill, and their cars accelerated increasingly without having to press on the gas. Alex tapped on the brakes, slowing himself down to match the speed limit. He could not chance any stupid mistakes. Cops smelled fear, and could even determine if you were going a fragment of a mile per hour above speed limit. *Yes, and they can hear your thoughts, too,* he thought.

Little by little, Alex began to lose more of his sanity.

As he made his way down the hill, the intersection far in front of him was red, once again as before. There, he saw another cop drive by. This time it was a real cop car, with lights and everything. *They're everywhere!* he thought to himself feeling a little neurotic.

Instantly, he looked back at his rear view mirror. He was still there. The pudgy-faced man driving a possible Crown Victoria was tailgating him closer than a brown-noser's face to his boss's ass.

I'm coming for you, the follower's eyes seemed to be saying. *I'm gonna getch-ya!* And although there really wasn't any expression on the pudgy man's face, Alex knew he was smiling. The man was smiling sneakily at the thought that he was going to get him. Alex turned the volume to the music up again. The maniac thoughts were becoming too much for him to listen to. System of a Down blared incoherently

through the speakers. It was no use; it did not stop a single crazy thought.

At the intersection he looked both ways, then turned right on red. *Was that a No turn on redâ intersection?* he asked in a panicky, rhetorical question. The follower followed, but no sirens whaled to indicate he was being pulled over. Once again Alex turned down the music and made sure that there was no siren.

Alex looked in the rear view mirror to see the man still there, still behind him, not giving up. How long had this chase been going on for? *It's only a coincidence, Alex. Only a fucking coincidence,* he tried to tell himself, taking a stab at reassurance. But he wasn't going to let himself be reassured, not until the pudgy man would be gone.

Alex took another turn at an intersection. It was green this time. Behind him the man took the same turn, tailgating as before. "What do you want from me?" Alex screamed at the reflection through the mirror. This time his full attention was directed to the driver behind him, not keeping a single thought on what was in front of him.

They were once again driving down a hill, but this time not as steep as the one before. *Go away. Go away. Go away!* he repeated continuously with anger in his thoughts. His eyes were fixated on the follower. The '88 Explorer gradually sped up, approaching forty on a 25 zone. Without paying attention, he rested his foot on the gas. Seconds later he blared through 22 miles above the speed limit.

"Get the hell away from me!"

As Alex hit 50 the man lagged slightly behind. Speeding up seemed to be working. All he had to do was run away from him. He laughed hysterically through a slightly deranged smirk. The smirk widened, realizing that this was working. At 52 miles per hour the follower was fading away into the darkness. Greatly resembling a maniac, Alex laughed even louder. Suddenly his laugh broke off, disrupted by a hopping shadow gliding in front of his car.

It had been almost a minute that Alex hadn't been watching the road. A slim doe pounced onward, crossing his car's wrath. His face exploded with fear, flicking on like a light bulb in less than a second. Tugging hard, he cut the wheel to the right, and planted the brakes to the ground. For a moment, the large vehicle stood on the edge of the two left tires, verging the possibility of tipping over. Dirt flung outward from underneath. The tires *did* screech this time. They screeched loudly. A large tree trunk appeared instantly in front of his path. The impact blasted a crashing scream so loud that it awoke nature from its slumber. The deer hopped on forward untouched, without looking back.

With the Explorer crashed on the side of the road, the follower drove by. The man's head turned just enough to see what had happened, but he did not stop for a full viewing. He kept on driving. The driver was no more than just an old wrinkled man, and the car wasn't a Crown Victoria at all.

It wasn't even a Ford.

ALL'S FAIR

JOHN BRUNI

The Idea comes out of nowhere. One moment I'm sitting in the bathroom, holding my mop against my shoulder, ready to jump up and pretend I'm working should my supervisor enter, and the next, I realize: She'd love me if I saved her life.

Yes. It would have to be like that. Women always fall in love and have sex with men who save their lives in the movies. I'm not an idiot; I know not everything in movies is real, but something about this situation rings true.

But how can I save her life? I can't be around her 24/7, and even if I could, it's not like there's a lot of people out there who want to kill her.

But what if I put her life in danger? Not my directly, but what if I could get someone to try and kill her? Or better yet, to rape her? Her shift is up at midnight. It's not inconceivable. And since I get off at the same time, I could just be walking by, and whoops! There's a guy trying to rape her! Never fear--Andy Chantelle's here! I'll save her, and she'll let me have sex with her!

But who could I get to try and rape her? None of my friends would do it. Besides, she might recognize one of them. It would have to be a stranger, a professional. But I have no connections.

Or do I? My brother got out of jail a month ago. It's not impossible for him to know someone. You have to make friends in jail, right? Or you will get the business end of a shank or a shaft. I've seen movies....

As I punch out, I try to start a conversation with her. She just says goodnight, like everyone else.

I masturbate, thinking about her twinkling eyes and dimpled smile, wondering what her touch would be like. "Soon," I whisper. "Soon, you'll be in this bed with me, and then I can feel you whenever I want."

The next day, I call up my brother, Frito. He's not Latino; he just like Fritos a lot. His real name is Donald, but no one calls him that.

"S'up, brah?" he asks. He's white.

"I need a favor, Frito. I need to talk with...have a meet with someone who can get things done."

"I can do stuff, knowumsayin'?"

"No, I mean illegal things."

"Jesus, Andy! You better not be on no cell phone, a'ight?"

"Nope. No cell phones. So, do you know someone? From pr...from Inside?"

"You fo' real?"

"Most certainly."

"I might know someone. Gimmie an hour. I'll call you back a'ight?"

Frito gets back to me thirty-two minutes later. "You know a place called Paco's Taco Bar?"

"I think I've driven past it before. Isn't it on 25th?"

"Truth. Be there at seven, a'ight? Bring two large."

"Sure. Is that two hundred?"

He sighs. "Two thousand."

"Okay."

"Coo'. Peace out, brah."

I don't know why Frito wants me to meet with his brother, but I smell money. Frito says two grand just to listen to the guy, and that's cool. I need the money, and if the offer's too heavy, I'll split.

I make it to Paco's an hour early, like Mike always taught me. It's a thinly disguised warehouse. I've been here ten minutes, and three women already offered me their rates.

Frito's brother is here at seven sharp. He looks just like Frito said: short, skinny, mid-length blond hair combed to one side, very conspicuous birthmark on his throat. Very white.

I call out his name: "Andy!"

He turns, wide-eyed, looking for whoever called him. He looks kind of like a lost child like that. Definitely not a player.

I raise my hand and beckon him to my table. He approaches without even stopping at the bar.

"Are you Frito's friend?" he asks.

"Yeah. Have a seat, gimmie my two large, and say your piece."

"Half now, half when I'm done talking." As if he's trying to be a player.

"This ain't TV. Gimmie the money, or I walk."

"But what if you leave...walk anyway?"

"What kid of businessman do you think I am? Listening for me is an investment. I sacrifice some of my time. If what I hear sucks, well, I'm out, what, a half hour at the most? If I like your offer, I stand to make more coin. Get it?"

He hands me the two grand under the table. I sigh, take the cheddar from the envelope, and count it in front of him. It's all there.

"Okay," I say, "now talk."

"There's this girl I work with," he says. "I love her, but she won't even give me the time of day." He pauses, as if he expects me to say something, or nod. I do neither, and he continues. "The way I see it...figure it, the only way she'll love me back is if I save her life. That's where you come in."

He pauses. Still I say nothing.

"She gets off work at midnight, just like me. The parking lot's pretty dark. I want you to jump her and try to rape her at knife point. Then, I'll swoop in, attack from behind, and send you running away. I'll be the hero, and she'll fall in love with me." He grins, and I can tell he's thinking about sex. "What do you think?"

I sigh. "This plan sounds ridiculous. Have you ever thought of asking her out?"

"Uh...well, kind of. The idea scares me half to death."

"And this plan of yours doesn't scare you?"

"No," he says immediately. "It's a sure thing."

"It's a stupid thing. Very risky."

"I'll pay you money."

"You look like the two large you gave me was all you had." Not really, but it's a good way to get a feel for how much a guy has. They usually retort, "Oh yeah? Well, I got a hundred thou in the bank. How bout that?"

Andy doesn't. "I make good tips at the restaurant. Besides, I've been saving a lot of money."

"You got a hundred grand?" I ask. It's worth a shot.

He pales. "But, that's too much."

"It's a risky plan, and it's me taking all the risks."

"Fifty thousand dollars," he says.

"Ninety."

"Sixty?"

"I don't like it, but I've got a soft spot for forlorn lovers. Eighty large."

Sixty five, for pretending to rape a girl? It's good coin for five minutes worth of work, but I'd be screwed if the cops showed up. Why would that happen? Sure, this guy will call the cops, but I'd be long gone by then. He doesn't want to be implicated. That would mess up his romantic plan.

"Deal."

"Half up front?" he asks.

“Sure. You got it on you?”

“I’ll get it. Thirty-two, five. Where can I meet you?”

“Here. I’ll wait.”

He goes for it. I don’t know his name, and I’m out of pocket thirty-two thousand, five hundred dollars, but she’ll be mine by the end of the week!

I go to the bank, and I show my ID so I can listen to the manager bemoan the large loss of his pleas for me to leave the money in the bank. I take the briefcase I bought, put the money in, and head back to the Taco Bar.

There, I’ll tell him my plan.

Mike sits in his usual spot at the back booth, smoking and drinking his usual Jack and Coke, heavy ice.

“Hey, Mike. What’s happenin’, bro?” I slide in across from him.

“Not a lot,” he says. “You look happy. Getting any?”

“Yeah, but that’s not a big deal. I got money. A job.”

“You need me in?”

I waved my hand. “Nah, but thanks. It’s an easy, one man job.”

“No job’s easy. I taught you better than that.”

“Yeah, yeah.” I roll my eyes before I tell him about the job. When I’m done, I say, “See? Easy.”

“No, it’s stupid. Are you insane?”

“It’s easy money, Mike. Besides, you’re the one always on my ass about the hundred I owe you over the Super Bowl.”

“I’ll cancel the debt,” he says. “Don’t do it.”

“I already got his money. And he’s got my word.”

“What’s he gonna do, go to the cops? ‘Hello, Officer, I gave this guy thirty-two grand to rape the girl I want, and he made off with my money.’ See?”

“What did I say? I have morals. They’re twisted, but I have them.”

“Honorable thief.” I point to my chest.

He sighs, and takes it. “Gimmie the details, just in case things go wrong.”

That’s why I came to see him, so I can tell him. Just in case.

Tonight's the night. I stretch the nervousness out of my legs, arms, and stomach, but the jitters remain. I look at the clock: five minutes to quitting time. Five minutes? Easily an eternity.

After we're done cleaning the tables, we all get in line to punch out. "Doing anything good for the weekend?" I ask her.

"The usual," she says without looking at me. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight." I can't wait to touch her breasts. They're big.

I give her a half minutes before I head out the door. I can still see her, walking toward her car on the other side of the parking lot. Her jacket is shiny, and her butt swings very nicely. I wonder how hard it is. It looks quite muscular.

I grab the baseball bat I left by the dumpster and wait, watching her glow.

Here we go, the moment of action. This isn't the first time I was hired to do something to someone, but I still feel the butterflies. It's just a feeling that never goes away.

I clench the knife in my hand, crouching behind the car. An Accord, just like Andy said. I can see the employee door, and from it come a handful of people. Only one wears a shiny jacket, and she matches the description: long blonde hair, perfect complexion, great tits, and a pair of hips that suggest a helluvan ass.

Here she comes.

Andy's plan is to hit me from behind. I'm not worried. I've taken my share of punches, and Andy doesn't look very strong. Easy money.

I leap out at her, pressing the blade to her throat and dragging her to the ground. She gets a short scream out before I clamp my hand over her mouth.

"Shut up or I'll kill you!" I hiss. "You're cute enough to rape dead, get me?"

She starts sobbing quietly as I fumble with her belt buckle. Her crotch is warm, and although I'm not into rape, I am a but aroused. I wouldn't actually do it, though. That's sick

Her pants are down, and I'm working my zipper, and Andy still isn't there. What the h--

--ell you think you're doing?" I scream as I bring the baseball bat down on his head as hard as I can. I hear the skull crack loudly, and he falls limp. I kick him off her and see her...uh...her vagina. It's pretty and smooth. I wonder what it tastes like.

"Andy!" she cries. "Thank God it's you! You saved me!"

She pulls up her pants and hugs me crying in my chest. Frito's friend isn't moving, not even to breathe. The dark puddle spread around his head quickly. Dead, just like I hoped. I have to give the cops someone, after all. Too bad I can't get my money back, but it's worth feeling her breasts like pillows against me. I smile.

I've been watching them for a month. I still can't believe that stupid job worked. Andy and Allie got married (Allie had to get rid of her old boyfriend first), less than three weeks after he busted my brother's head in and was called a hero in the papers. I have their routines down perfectly. Andy is like clockwork, though Allie can be off sometimes.

Regardless, they're both home by one in the morning. They live on the ground floor of an apartment building.

Arson is easy for me, and in such a big complex, think of all the motives the cops will drive themselves crazy over.

There are just some things a man shouldn't do to get laid, and Andy did one of these things. I hope he enjoyed it.

Actually, I don't.

This is for you, Eddie. Rest easy.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

JOSEPH KLIPPLE

The news stunned Clancy when he heard it on his car radio while driving home from work: “Sheriff’s deputies are dragging Jenkins Reservoir for the body of Vera Huddleston who apparently drowned after falling from the bass boat of her former husband, retired firefighter Sam Huddleston. The woman is said to be a resident of Wilmington, Delaware. The much-decorated Huddleston has operated an aquarium manufacturing firm here since he retired from the fire department on disability in 1992....” The announcement took Clancy back thirty years to when he was first married and the Huddlestons lived down the block.

“You’ve heard?” Millicent asked when he walked in the door.

“Just the radio bulletin. What was she doing around here?”

“I asked Beth. She said she thought Vera was making overtures. Wanted to get back with Sam.”

Clancy couldn’t imagine that. The two men were never more than acquaintances, but he admired Sam greatly and thought what a shame it was for him to have an albatross like Vera. No man would volunteer for the same torture a second time, not even a genuine hero like Sam who had saved three lives in fires.

“Why would he give her the time of day?”

“Probably couldn’t avoid her. Beth said she showed up at the fish show, the one they hold every year to benefit some children’s disease. Sam’s always an exhibitor.” Millicent never liked Vera--mostly because she was an incessant talker who was always ready with an unkind word--but Beth, who lived next door in those early days, worked hard to be everyone’s friend. When Vera moved to Wilmington after the divorce, Beth kept in touch.

“What were they doing out at Jenkins?” he asked. “I thought she hated fishing, always bitching that he liked bass better than he liked her.”

“Maybe she was trying to show him she had changed,” Millicent said. “It’s something a desperate woman would do. She probably wore out her welcome at Wilmington and didn’t have anywhere else to turn.”

After dinner, Clancy sat for a while in front of his own aquarium, watching the guppies warily on guard against the red wagtails from the safety of the water weeds. He thought about the times he had spent in Sam’s showroom admiring the huge multileveled and grottoed tanks which were trademarked Huddleston designs and which had become such a rage among affluent yuppy fish fanciers. Huddleston’s own home was said to have a two-storied tank encircled by a stairway. Clancy knew, of course, that it wasn’t something he’d ever



buy for himself. Millicent the collector couldn't spare the space. She already had too many cabinets filled with figurines. He cut the musing short, deciding he needed a good night's sleep. As the medical examiner, he'd be required to do an autopsy when they found the body, and he wanted to be well rested for that chore.

They brought her in the next afternoon. Aside from a few abrasions caused by the grappling hooks, Vera looked like the usual drowning victim that hadn't been too long in the water. She was wearing one of Sam's old fire department sweatshirts and a pair of what were probably his jeans which had been rolled up at the cuffs. Clancy noticed with more curiosity than emotion that she had aged considerably since he'd seen her last and had put on enough weight so that Sam's jeans were almost snug around her waist. Broderick, the deputy who had brought the body in, was eager to give Clancy the details. Huddleston hadn't left the scene once during the search.

"He was very distressed, blaming himself over and over for not insisting she wear a life vest," Broderick said. "She apparently refused and I gather she was a hard woman to make do much of anything."

Clancy nodded at the truth of that. Millicent had guessed right about why they were at the lake. "Huddleston said he hadn't seen her in years when she showed up, begging him to take her back," Broderick said. "He told us that wasn't in the cards, even though she was acting nicer than he could ever remember. He took her to his house because she didn't have any money or any place to stay.

"He said she was the one who suggested they go fishing, as a way of showing how she'd changed. I gather she never cared for it before. They headed out straight-aways, so they could be on the water at first light, and he was attaching a lure to his rod when he heard a splash. She was gone when he looked around. Doesn't think she ever surfaced.

"He tried to find her, of course," the officer said. "He's still as brave as they make 'em, but he had no luck, so he called us."

Clancy's examination established drowning as the cause of death. He walked his report over to the office of Sheriff Grasskopf. The sheriff wondered if Vera could have jumped from the boat intentionally, perhaps confident that her ex-husband would rescue her. Or was she desperate enough to end her life in a way that would forever torment Huddleston? Clancy told the sheriff there was nothing in the evidence to support either scenario.

They had agreed to declare the drowning accidental when young Renfrow, a gung-ho officer who drove everybody up the wall, burst into the sheriff's office and made the flat-out assertion that

Huddleston had killed his ex on purpose.

Renfrow had been a good uniform deputy, but making detective went to his head. Clancy was a little sorry for the fellow. He knew the sheriff's feelings bordered on contempt.

"You're claiming that Sam held her head under water out there in the lake?" the sheriff asked.

"Not there," Renfrow said. "In that big tower of a fish tank in his house."

"Come off it," said the sheriff. "That's the craziest thing I've heard. That tank's got a top on it. I've been there and seen it."

"Sure," Renfrow said, "but the lid comes off for cleaning, which Huddleston seems to have been doing that night."

"You questioned him?"

"Learned that from his cleaning lady."

"Oh?"

"I had a hunch, so I check out the neighborhood and learned of the scream the woman next door heard after midnight. She thought it came from a party the college kids were having across the street. They get boisterous on Friday nights. I looked into that. The party ran late. One fellow remembers seeing Huddleston leave with the boat sometime after three. He said he thought Huddleston was alone. It was dark, of course, and the fellow wasn't exactly sober."

"More'n likely drunk as hell," the sheriff said.

"So I rang Huddleston's door chime" Renfrow said. "Mabel, his cleaning lady, answered. She was using a wet vacuum to soak up water from the carpet on the second floor landing at the top of the tank. Real squishy."

"Hold on," the sheriff said. "Did you identify yourself as a deputy?"

"No need to. She's known me for years."

"And you just moseyed on inside? Without asking permission or saying why you were there?"

"No need for that, either. She'd heard the news, but decided to go to work anyway, since it was her regular day. Has her own key. She said Huddleston must have been cleaning the tank. I asked if that ever caused spills. She said sometimes, but this was worse than usual. There was something that looked like



seaweed on the carpet, and a little dead fish like a guppy.”

Clancy felt sympathy for the woman, having mopped up his own tank-cleaning messes several times.

“I climbed the stairway and noticed the water seemed to be about a foot below the top of the tank,” Renfrow said. “I asked about that and Mabel said sometimes Huddleston removed water to mix in chemicals. I wondered if he usually left the job unfinished. She said he must have been interrupted.

“Then I found Vera’s clothing laid out on a chair in the bedroom. They were dry.”

“And why shouldn’t they be?” Clancy heard exasperation in the sheriff’s voice.

“I think they got wet when he drowned her, and he dried them in the clothes dryer. We should get a search warrant and check out the lint trap.”

“A search warrant?” the sheriff exploded. “Where’s your probable cause? All you got is suspicions based on an unauthorized search.”

“There’s the scream,” Renfrow objected, “and what the student saw.”

“And that would have been the time to ask for a warrant. Not after you stomped around illegally in your presumed crime scene. Didn’t you ever hear of the Fourth Amendment?”

“We could at least bring him in for questioning.”

“About what? You want me to humiliate one of the finest, bravest men any of us have ever known by asking him if he lured his former wife up to where he was pretending to clean his fish tank so he could grab her by surprise, up-end her and hold her under water until her breathing stopped. Giving her time for only one scream which more than likely came from a drunk coed. Give me a break.”

The sheriff swallowed hard. “Renfrow, this is an order. Back off. If you ever had a case, which you don’t, you messed it up with your unprofessional shenanigan. We’re settling this matter the way it should be. Accidental drowning.”

As soon as he left the sheriff’s office, Clancy wondered if he should have said something. He thought that he might have, had it been someone other than the cocky Renfrow making the case, and if the entire affair hadn’t been so clouded by memories of the old times and his personal feelings about the people involved.

Then, too, he didn’t have enough scientific knowledge of tropical fish to know if any of them might survive in Carolina waters. Aquarium owners were always dumping fish they no longer wanted in lakes and streams. He supposed some of the fish adapted, so you couldn’t say for sure where a particular one came from. He hadn’t thought it significant enough to include in the autopsy report.

There was really only one thing for him to do. When he got back to his office, he removed a small plastic bag from the refrigerator, carried it to the bathroom and emptied it into the toilet, flushing away the little blonde guppy he had removed from Vera’s trachea.

9/11-911

TIM KRZYS

This story is written for those who have a morbid curiosity about death and tragedy, and for the survivors and loved ones of the victims of 911. All names are fictional as are the specific events. However, there are many factual components in the story related to timing of events and the structural collapse of the WTC. This story is not meant to open wounds, but to help some never forget, and to help others who must understand the last moments of a loved one in order to let the pain and memory rest.

Great care was taken to respect the survivors. All the fictional names were checked to be sure they did not, by coincidence match any of the victims of that horrible day. While many events are accurate down to the minute and second, all persons and businesses are purely fictional.

The World Trade Center twin towers, like New York City, were tall, proud and stood out from the crowd. They were 110 stories high, Tower One, the North Tower being 1,368 feet tall, and Tower Two shy of being its exact twin by four feet at 1,362 feet tall. Combined, they held about 10,000,000 square feet of rentable space that was occupied on any given day by almost 50,000 people. The rentable space on each floor amounted to nearly an acre, or 43,200 square feet, or about the combined floor space of thirty, average sized ranch homes.

It was called the World Trade Center for a reason. There was a bigger purpose than to provide space for its tenants. One purpose was to promote world trade, and world peace. Trading partners, when linked by common economies, are often reluctant to go to war or undermine the economy of the other. The two towers housed offices from over 430 businesses from at least 26 different countries. They were the world's tallest buildings for a short time until the Sears Tower was completed in Chicago. Despite that fact and the fact that neither of the Twin Towers stands today, they shall always rise out of the ashes like the mythical Phoenix and remain tall in our hearts.

American Flight 11 was preparing for its journey from Boston to Los Angeles. It was only 7:30 on a Tuesday morning, as the long line of passengers slowly made their way past the ticket counter, down the gate to the jet, where they waited while those in front stowed



luggage before taking their seats. It was like any normal, routine day at the airport. Crowds of strangers hauling their luggage behind them walked down the long shiny halls, past vendors selling gum and magazines and snacks, past hot dog stands that were preparing to open later that morning. Overhead pages, some in foreign languages boomed through the airport, anonymous voices that were largely ignored and just part of the ambiance of the bustling environment. Small electric carts beeped their way down the hall, their electric motors whirring as they swept past.

It was as normal as a day could be, giving absolutely no hint of the history making event that had already been set into motion. That's how death and tragedy typically take center stage. Death is often disguised as routine, walking among the living who are too busy going about their lives to notice its cold and chilling presence, but it's always there waiting to steal tomorrow. And with few exceptions, it comes as a surprise, as if tomorrow was a promise and that promise had been broken, our trust violated. As people hurried to their gates, their thoughts were filled with family or work, worries about money or health, and some dared to entertain concern about flying. Fear is not a stranger at airports. In the best of times people approach flying with some measure of fear and hesitation, somehow feeling safer on the highway even though statistics called those thoughts lies.

Had anyone considered the possibility of the horror that would lie ahead on Flight 11, being terrified would have been an understatement. But no one's imagination conjured up the events that were about to unfold, and it's likely that only fifteen percent even gave any consideration of being in a plane crash, and if they did, the thoughts were quickly dismissed as routine cloaked the shadow of death. As passengers boarded Flight 11, some were anxious, some slightly fearful, but most simply boarded, found their seats and stowed their luggage and sat down as if their whole future was still waiting for them to write it.

Dan Powers was 29. He stood barely over six foot and was considered the short one of the four boys in his family. He had warm, green eyes that were intelligent, sharp and perceptive, sexy and full of expression. In high school the girls all commented about how cute he was, but his eyes were irresistible. In the blink of an eye they could go from looking happy and excited, to whispering of pain and sadness. It was as if all of his emotions were expressed through his eyes without the necessity of one word being spoken. Dan had a strong, athletic build, a soft kind face, and short dark brown hair with a touch of gray coming in on the sides. He considered coloring his hair, believing 29 was too young for any gray, and at least one morning a month he stood in front of the mirror for several minutes having a debate with himself over the pros and cons of hair coloring. No matter how strong his argument for either side, he always came back to the strongest argument of all, his wife loved the touch of gray and promised to always love it. Still, he kept a small bottle of Grecian Formula hidden in a drawer in the bathroom, tucked way in the back of a drawer behind a pile of folded washcloths. His wife Beth knew it was there and periodi-

cally checked to make sure it hadn't been used. Beth colored her hair because gray didn't look well with blonde, or any color on a woman for that matter, according to her. She told Dan that when she was a great-grandmother, she'd let the gray finally show.

Dan was a CPA for a large Boston accounting firm that was branching out into L.A. Because of his Harvard education, his strong work ethic and especially the way he worked so well with others, his boss personally requested he be the one to monitor progress in the L.A. office. Like any young man striving to build a great career and to have more toys than the average man, it was an opportunity he couldn't refuse. He disliked flying, and disliked being away from home even more. But not everything could be carried up the career ladder.

As he stood alone in the crowded airport, nearly oblivious to the activity around him, Dan kept thinking of Beth. She was home ill, fighting a bad cold that arrived every year about this time as if it was a seasonal requirement. It had been that way since she was a little girl growing up in the suburbs of Boston. Over the years the colds decreased in severity and duration, but always arrived on time every September. Two years ago it arrived late, and she didn't become ill until mid-October. The break in routine was actually distressing, leaving her to worry that maybe an undiagnosed cancer was mucking up her schedule. That morning Beth woke only long enough to kiss Dan good-bye and call in sick to work. She was a paralegal for a large attorney firm and had hopes of maybe one-day attending law school. Being employed by a law firm would soon provide great benefits, but little if any, true comfort.

Dan tucked his garment bag into the overhead compartment, being careful as he moved aside an old duffel bag and two other carry-ons. He had discovered over the years that some passengers were extremely touchy about having their luggage rearranged by strangers unless it was the flight attendant. When he was satisfied with the placement of his carryon, and confident the overhead compartment would close without problem, he sat down in the window seat and fastened his seatbelt. He imagined that one day he would join the aisle seat crowd, those business people who didn't fly for the view, and wanted to save as many seconds as they could upon landing by being able to exit quickly so they could hurry up and wait some place else. Dan still enjoyed the view of a window seat, but imagined that one day, as he grew older, he would lose the child-like curiosity and excitement of seeing the world from thirty thousand feet up. On occasion and if the sky was clear, and the jet took a certain flight path, he could spot his home. In his den was an enlarged photograph of their home he had taken three months ago as the jet made its final approach for landing. Despite the graininess of the enlarged photo and its obvious amateurish appearance, he had hung it with all the pride of a fisherman displaying a trophy, award winning swordfish. Plagued with boredom if he wasn't constantly busy, Dan retrieved a Grisham novel from his briefcase and began reading. As the crowd of passengers squeezed through the aisle, every arm carrying some-

thing, a woman checked her ticket and then sat down beside Dan.

“Good morning,” she said with a cheerful, melodious voice.

Dan lowered his book, looked over and smiled. “Good morning.” He thought she seemed awfully cheerful for so early in the morning. “You must be going to L.A.,” he said, a little unsure of exactly what to say to a stranger on a plane.

“I sure hope so. It’s a non-stop flight,” she said with a wide grin. “I’m looking forward to getting home,” as she sat back in her seat.

“I wish I could say I was going home, I live here in Boston. My wife’s sick and I hated leaving her this morning.”

“Oh, anything serious?”

“No, just a severe cold.” He paused a moment, held his place in the book with a finger, and offered his free hand. “I’m Dan Powers, accounting.” They shook hands and he was impressed with the strong, firm grip and the softness of her feminine hand.

“Lisa Hodges, marketing.”

“Ohhhhh.”

“What does ohhhhh, mean?” she said smiling.

“I guess it didn’t surprise me. You seem so cheerful and outgoing. I guess those would be good qualities to have in your field.”

“Yes, they are,” she agreed. Lisa placed her purse on the floor between her feet and then leaned back in her seat.

“Well, cheerfulness and early morning flights fit together for me like a square peg and a round hole. Or is it a round peg and a square hole?”

The woman laughed. “Oh, it’s not that early and you seem to be in a fine mood.”

“It’s the window seat. I’m like a kid when it comes to flying. I love looking out the window.”

“Me too,” she agreed. “but I can’t wait to get home and asked for an aisle seat. Quicker exit that way. I flew in Sunday night for a big presentation on Monday, and I’m exhausted. I think my body is still operating on west coast time.”

“Yes, I have that to look forward to,” Dan said. “Do you have any family in L.A., or are you one of the millions of transplants who moved there from one of the other forty-nine states and Mexico?”

“No, I’m a little unusual. I was born and raised in the L.A. area. I don’t know why, but I never had the sense to move away. There’s something beautiful and alluring about the area, but it’s also false and fairytale. My roommate is an aspiring actress, and sometimes I think half of the people in L.A. have aspirations of breaking into show biz.”

“I’ve heard that. Just in the small firm we’re starting up, we have two people who have been extras in some movie. I have no idea which one and don’t really care. They’re still hoping for a bigger part, you know, to get discovered. One man was on *The Price is Right*.”

“That certainly is a claim to fame!” she said with a giggle.

“Can you believe he even included it on his resume?”

“That doesn’t surprise me at all. I think ninety percent of LA is delusional about their talent and chance of becoming famous. Do you go out there often?”

“No, thankfully. Just once a month or so to check on our newest accounting firm. To be honest, I don’t care for traveling, but it scores points with the boss.”

“And none with the wife I’ll bet,” Lisa filled in for him.

“You got that right. You have anyone special in your life? Perhaps that’s too personal a question.”

“No, don’t worry about that. Half the fun of flying is getting to meet someone new. I have a boyfriend. He’s a cameraman for a game show.”

“Not...”

“Yes, can you believe it, *The Price is Right*!” They shared a laugh at how small the world really was. “I hear all about the wannabes that come onto the lot looking to become the next big star. It amazes me what some people call talent.”

“Talent and TV have nothing in common!” They both laughed at the truth in that statement. “How long have you two been together?”

“We’ve been dating about fifteen months.”

“Any wedding plans?”

“Maybe. I think he might ask me on my birthday, which is next week.”

Just then, the flight attendant began to announce the pre-flight instructions. A few passengers who were standing in the aisle quickly stuffed their belongings into the overhead compartments, slammed them shut and found their seats.

“Well, have a happy birthday,” Dan whispered.

“Thank you.”

The flight attendant reviewed all the safety instructions, made last minute pre-flight checks of all the overhead compartments, and then found their seats and strapped in. The jet was filled with a cross section of Anytown, USA. There were a few small children, all under the age of ten, four married couples, one couple who had been married only four months, several grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, businessmen dressed in suits, men dressed casually in blue jeans and sweatshirts. Several businesswomen wore dress suits or slacks, and a few traveled comfortably in blue jeans and a T-shirt. Among the non-cau-

casian men, were a few of oriental background, several African Americans, and about ten who appeared of Middle Eastern decent. Among the ten were five casually dressed men who traveled light, appeared to be flying alone and blended in quietly with the other passengers. They fit in well with the melting pot of passengers aboard Flight 11. They politely took their seats and waited patiently for take off.

A few minutes before eight, the jet taxied to the runway and joined the short line of other jets waiting for takeoff.

“I hate this part,” Lisa said.

“I hate landings,” Dan replied, his mouth curving into a grin.

“Oh, that’s great. Between us, we’ll have fear sandwiched between the two events.” They both laughed as the pilot throttled up the powerful jet engines and the large, Boeing 767 moved forward on the tarmac. The wings were filled with over 10,000 gallons of extremely flammable jet fuel. The Boeing 767 had a maximum takeoff weight of approximately 450,000 pounds, a wingspan of 170 feet 4 inches, with a length of 201 feet. Its typical cruising speed was 530 miles per hour. In forty-seven minutes its speed would exceed 600 miles per hour. In a fully loaded 767, flying at an extremely low altitude where the air density is greatest and its resistance highest, the entire structure of the jet would begin to approach its point of self-destruction. Inside the 767 there were two aisles with three seats in the center in economy class, and two center aisle seats in business class. In first class there were two seats on either side of the aisle, and one in the center. It boasted a roominess that would soon feel tiny and smothering.

After the jet was air born at exactly 7:59 a.m., it banked gently around to head west. The Boeing 767 had a light passenger load of only 81 passengers, two pilots and nine flight attendants. While still climbing, the flight attendants began to prepare the galley for beverage service. As soon as the seatbelt sign blinked off, people unbuckled their seat belt, got up, and headed for the restroom or to grab a different magazine. Some simply stood and stretched before returning to their seats. A few passengers opened the overhead compartment to retrieve reading material, a laptop or PDA from their luggage. Amidst the normal routine, and unnoticed by anyone, one by one, five Middle Eastern men got up from their seats, opened the overhead compartment and pulled out a small bag. They carried out their activities slowly, almost as if they were purposely delaying returning to the seats. But no one noticed because there was no reason to notice. One of the men, Atta walked confidently toward first class, pushed aside the curtain dividing the two areas, and continued toward the galley.

“Can I help you sir?” A flight attendant asked.

He said nothing. With a sudden and very rehearsed swiftness, Atta swung one arm around the woman’s neck, abruptly spun her around and pulled her towards him. Within a second, she was subdued in a chokehold with a sharp box cutter held against her throat.

“Hey!” a first class passenger shouted as he stood.

Suddenly, four other men rushed through the dividing curtain, each one holding a box cutter with a sharp, shiny razor blade exposed.

“Don’t be a hero,” Atta spoke with a heavy accent. “If anyone moves, I will slit her throat then kill one of you.” The passenger who was standing froze, looked Atta straight in the eyes, glanced around the first class section, and slowly sat down. Quickly and without discussion, the four other terrorists subdued the flight attendants in first class, and three of them escorted the flight attendants to the rear of the aircraft. Atta and Al-Omas remained behind.

Atta retained his choking lock around the woman’s neck as he dragged her toward the cockpit door. Al-Omari kept watch over first class. “Open immediately,” Atta commanded, striking the door firmly with his free hand. The woman stood still, her eyes widened with terror. The knife blade was pressed against her neck so firmly that even the slightest movement would bring blood.

Atta stepped back slightly and waited as his partner moved closer. A moment later, the co-pilot opened the cockpit door. He stood tall wearing a white shirt and minus his jacket. “What’s the problem out here?”

Al-Omari kicked open the door sending the surprised co-pilot sailing backward. He fell to the floor landing hard on his back.

“We are taking over the plane,” Atta said firmly. He moved in front of the open door still clutching the woman. “If there is any resistance, we are prepared to die and to kill everyone on board this jet. I suggest you do not resist.” The flight attendant tried to look away as the co-pilot fell, but Atta’s arm kept her head positioned so she had to watch. She gasped and the sudden noise made the terrorist tighten his grip around her neck. Her eyes were bugling and she was breathing hard. The pilot turned around in his seat as his co-pilot landed on the floor beside him. “What the hell is going on!” The pilot demanded to know.

Without a word, the terrorist pressed the knife blade against the woman’s throat until a tiny drop of blood emerged and dripped slowly down her neck. Without a word or warning, he pressed harder and slid the blade across the flight attendant’s throat. Blood squirted out and sprayed the wall beside the cockpit door. She screamed and immediately clutched her throat as the terrorist released her. A rapid gush of bright blood flowed between her fingers. Her contorted and twisted face drained of color, her knees buckled and then her eyes glazed over. The terrorist reached out and shoved her to the floor and she collapsed like a small tower of Jello. A woman sitting in first class screamed and then suddenly fell quiet, sobbing nearly silently after the terrorist glared at her.

“If you follow our instructions, no one else will die.”

The co-pilot grabbed onto his empty seat and pulled himself up, never once taking his eyes off the killer.

“Both of you, get out. Now!” The terrorist commanded.

“Who will fly the plane?” the pilot asked.

“That is not your concern. I’m not going to say this again. Get out.”

The pilot and co-pilot looked at each other. Both hesitated, trying to figure out if there was a solution to this attempted hijacking. There was unusual and almost eerie silence in the cabin. The pilot slowly got up from his seat and stood beside the co-pilot. They slowly stepped out of the cockpit, moving cautiously as they walked past the terrorist leader. Two of the terrorists had stepped into first class to make sure no one tried to be a hero. Atta spoke some firmly giving commands in a foreign language to the two remaining terrorists. They quickly grabbed the pilot and co-pilot, and with box cutters in hand, lead them to the rear of the plane where they would be tied up with duct tape. As they moved down the aisle there was near silence. Every passenger watched in silence.

Before they entered the business class, one man stood up and was abruptly struck across the face. He fell backwards into a woman passenger as blood spilled from his nose.

Atta looked behind him, his eyes glaring at the seated passengers, and then he stepped into the cockpit and slammed the door shut.

As the two pilots were lead to the rear of the plane, the terrorists warned the passengers to remain in their seats unless they wanted to die. The cabin remained unusually quiet and still. A sense of shock and disbelief had settled into the large jet, which now was feeling extremely small, stuffy and isolated from the entire world.

“What’s going on?” Lisa asked quietly, leaning toward Dan. Her voice was nervous and breaking.

“I think we’re being hijacked.” Other passengers were growing restless, looking around the cabin and whispering to one another.

“Attention everyone. In the name of Allah, we are now in control of this plane. I must warn you to strictly obey our instructions or be killed. If anyone tries to resist, we will begin killing passengers beginning with the two pilots. Unless you want to be responsible for someone’s death, you must stay in your seat. If you need to use the restroom, raise your hand and we will address your needs.” There was a long pause before the deep voice boomed over the intercom again. “You must follow our instructions. You must remain calm and quiet, and must stay in your seats. Anyone failing to follow these instructions will be killed immediately. I hope I have made myself clear.” The intercom clicked off and the cabin fell completely silent. The hum of the jet engines was the only sound that filled the length of the cabin. A small baby began crying, and whispers of the mother trying to calm her infant floated among the seats.

“What are we going to do?” Lisa whispered.

“Nothing. We’re going to do nothing. Hopefully, we’ll fly to Cuba or Columbia or something, and they’ll let us all go.”

“They don’t have any guns, do they?”

“I don’t know. But they have box cutters that they got on board somehow. I don’t really want my throat slit.” Dan turned around in his seat in time to see one of the terrorists walking up the aisle. He was holding a box cutter in his hand and looked ready to use it.

Despite the large size of the cabin, the six seats across and the two aisles, Dan was beginning to feel as if they were all seated in a tiny and crowded Lear jet with a narrow width and low ceiling. The air was beginning to feel stale and stuffy. They were on their own, at the complete will of their hijackers. Flying was normally a surrendering of power, of not being in the driver’s seat. That feeling of powerlessness had just been jacked up a few hundred notches. Dan looked around the cabin, wishing he had a gun, a parachute, something to help even the odds.

“You!” the terrorist said, pointing at Dan.

“Me?” his voice cracked.

“Turn around unless you’d like to join the pilot in the rear of the plane.”

Dan quickly turned around and remained silent. There was nothing to say. He wanted to be as invisible as possible, and that meant remaining silent. The terrorist walked past him, staring him down with his dark eyes. The jet began banking sharply to the left. Passengers suddenly looked out the window trying to determine where in hell they were going. Except for quiet whispering, and there was little of that, the cabin remained extremely quiet. No one moved, no one read a magazine or turned on their lap top. It became a jet filled with still and quiet statues.

Within several minutes, the four terrorists separated many clusters of passengers throughout the cabin. Almost out of some absurd kindness, they did not separate people who were traveling together. When they were finished, the 81 passengers were spread among the entire length of the aircraft. Dan and Lisa were allowed to remain in their assigned seats.

Suddenly a woman’s scream ripped through the quiet like a cannon shot, and then almost as suddenly, silence returned to the cabin like a thick, impenetrable fog. Some passengers turned around to see what was happening, but most sat motionless in their seats, wanting and not wanting to know, their faces white with fear and hands tightly clutching the armrests.

Minutes moved like sluggish giants in a tight corridor. Anyone who glanced at their watch stared long enough to make sure the sweep second hand was actually still moving. Some simply sat staring, being careful to avoid any eye contact with one of the terrorists. Others pretended to be reading, but no one could plow through more than a sentence before they glanced up from the page again, totally aware of the precariousness of their own safety. In the cockpit, an air traffic controller attempted to contact the pilot to inquire about the course change. He received no response. The new pilot increased the jet’s speed

and set the heading for New York City. Cleverly using a Global Positioning Device, Atta programmed the target's address and used it to assist in guiding the jet. After several minutes, the pilot made an announcement over the intercom.

"This is your pilot. If you wish, you may use the in-flight phones to call whoever you would like. You may say whatever you like, but I must ask that you do so quietly. If not, we will help you become quiet." There was another click and the intercom fell silent.

"What do you think is going on here?" Lisa asked in a whisper. She rubbed her face nervously with trembling fingers.

"I have no idea, but I don't like this at all. Why would they let us make phone calls, unless it doesn't matter?"

"What do you mean, doesn't matter?" Lisa's face was twisted with fear, her eyes were widened circles and her brow wrinkled with tension.

He regretted making that comment. "I'm not sure. But something tells me we're not going to Cuba." He looked at the phone on the back of the seat in front of him. Dan checked his watch. It was 8:20. They had only been in the air for twenty-one minutes. Beth was most probably still sleeping and maybe wouldn't hear his call. He sat motionless and waited, wondering if the whole thing was a trick of some sort. Maybe they would kill whoever made phone calls. Maybe they would make them special hostages, telling their loved ones on the other end of the line to meet their demands or listen to them being murdered. His mind played with all sorts of possibilities, none of them positive. After an extremely long and endless minute or so, he heard someone making a call. He continued to sit motionless and heard another call being made. It was followed by another, and then another. He kept the debate going in his mind, wondering about the safety of making a call. So far, nothing had happened. Finally, he reached out and pulled the phone off its rest. "I have to try and call home." He thought of saying this may be his last chance to speak with his wife, but decided against it. Dan leaned over, pulled out his wallet and retrieved a credit card. He swiped the card on the phone, nearly missing because his hand was trembling, and then dialed the number. "I hope she hears the phone," he said to Lisa. Dan placed the phone close to his ear and waited. After a long delay, the phone began ringing in suburban Boston in Waltham, Massachusetts.

It rang a second time, and he waited, and then a third, and he waited, and waited, and then a fourth ring and the waiting grew longer, and a fifth time, and he waited. Dan looked at his watch. It seemed he had to wait to verify the second hand was still moving.

He looked at Lisa. "I don't think she's awake. The damn cold medicine, probably knocked her out." It rang a seventh time, and after a long delay, an eighth, each ring seemed to take longer and longer, finally a ninth ring..... he'd never heard such a slow ringing phone before in his life.

“Hellllloooo,” spoke a hoarse and groggy voice. “Who’s this?”

“Honey? It’s me. You need to wake up, you need to wake up now and talk to me.”

“Dan? What’s wrong?” She coughed to clear her voice. “Are you okay? Aren’t you on your flight yet?”

“Yes,” then he repeated in a quieter voice. “Yes. That’s the problem. We’ve been hijacked.”

Beth sat bolt upright in her bed. A pillow dropped to the floor. “Dan! What do you mean, you’ve been hijacked?” Tears began forming. “Are you okay? Do they have guns? Is anyone hurt? Are you okay?”

“Honey, I’m okay. I think someone was hurt. I saw blood on one of the hijackers and I don’t think it was his.” Why did he tell her that! What was wrong with him?

“How many are there?” She was sobbing now, hoping, praying that she was still actually asleep experiencing a cold medicine induced nightmare, a horrible nightmare that even in life, could never feel real. She looked at the digital clock on the nightstand. The red numbers glowed 8:22. It felt like three in the morning.

“There are five, I think. I haven’t seen any guns, but they have knives, box cutters. They’re flying the plane and I have no idea where we’re going, but from the position of the sun, I think we’re heading south. The pilot and co-pilot are sitting in the back of the plane. I don’t know if they’re okay or not.”

There was heavy sobbing into the phone and spits of static clouded the sound. “Oh my God! Oh Dan! Are you going to be all right? What is going on? Do they know you’re on the phone? Pleeeeease don’t let them hurt you.” The sentence ended with tears and heavy sobbing. Beth looked at the clock again. It seemed to be the only proof she had that this conversation was actually taking place. The numbers glowed 8:23. Suddenly the numbers changed to 8:24. That small change in a minute was proof that the day was marching forward, moving ahead and out of control. In an odd sort of way, how digital clocks sliced time into such small increments reminded her just how precious every moment really was.

“I don’t know why, but they’re allowing us to make phone calls. I don’t know if I should stay on the phone for very long or not. I don’t know what is the right thing to do.” Dan raised his head slowly and looked forward, peeking over the seat in front of him like a soldier expecting return fire. “Some of them are up in first class. They have the curtains pulled so I don’t really know what is going on. A lot of people are making phone calls.” Soft crying sounds could be heard throughout the cabin. Dan noticed a few callers wiping their eyes as they held the phone tightly to their ear. He knew how they felt. Clutching the phone, embracing it was the only closeness to family that remained. “I love you so much, Beth. I don’t know if, I don’t know what’s going to happen. Please call my parents and my brother. He should be at work. Grab the address book in the den. His number’s in there.” Dan blinked hard. He could barely see through the tears clouding his eyes. He needed to remain strong. There was no telling what he had yet to face. “I love you. I love you so much. You know, I never say that enough, I never tell you how

much I appreciate you and everything you do for me. I've been working too much lately when I should be home more with you. I wishæ”

“Stop! Dan, don't do this! Pleecease, don't do this. You're a wonderful husband and I couldn't love anyone as much as I love you! Please tell me that things will be okay.”

Dan paused, trying to picture Beth sitting up in bed, clutching the phone tightly, wiping her eyes with a soaked tissue. He had been working too much, trading in memories of being together to get ahead in his career. Life was so short, way too short, and he had been racing through each day as if there was an endless supply of them. Why was that so easy for people to do? Why did money and things matter so much when the real wealth in life was the time with loved ones and the memories they created?

“Dan? Are you still there? Dan?” He could hear the panic across the miles.

“I'm sorry, yes, I'm here. I was just thinking. If something happens,” his voice cracked. There was a lump in his throat the size of a large rock.

“Don't talk like that. You're coming home, I know you are. You have to!”

“Beth, if something happens to me, you must be strong. We have to consider what could happen.”

“Stop!” Beth screamed into the phone. Her voice cut sharply through the static and the miles. “Stop it! Now stop talking like this. You're coming home. I know you will. I love you so much. You're not leaving me. I know you'll be home. You have to be. You can't leave me, you can't leave me,” she finished, her voice trailing off to tears.

“Okay, Beth, okay. Call everyone, and turn on the TV. Maybe there's some news about what's going on.”

The conversation continued for a few more minutes, and each word was pulled from his heart. The longer they talked, the more impossible it became to find the right words, and to push back the growing flood of emotion that was tainted and stained with guilt and fear. He wanted the conversation to never end, and he wanted to end it immediately. When Dan finally said goodbye, it was like trying to talk fluently in a foreign language he had never spoken before. The goodbye seemed so final, like he had actually been witness to life's end and he was still living. In the pit of his stomach he knew he would never see Beth again, never touch the softness of her hand, listen to her laughter, enjoy the warm moistness of her kiss or feel the wonderful sensation of her embrace. When Dan pushed the button to end the call, not one word existed in his thoughts of what to say next. People talked of being left speechless, but rarely were. There was always a remnant of a thought, a word waiting to be inflated into a sentence always on deck ready to push forward. This time however, his mind was completely blank. Not even an image existed in his thoughts. It was as if twenty-five billion brain cells had suddenly ceased functioning, save for a few that regulated the basic body functions that normally occurred without consideration. After a long pause that existed without the benefit of time, Dan absently handed the phone to Lisa. He glanced down and

checked his watch. It was now 8:34. Slowly, the nightmare reappeared; thoughts sluggishly fell together into a sloppy pile, still not making any sense. Dan turned his head slowly and looked out the window. As his mind powered up on dying batteries, he noted the sun's position and saw something familiar.

"I think we're headed toward New York City." His voice was weak, robbed of strength by intense grief.

Lisa looked out the window, and then looked at Dan. "Here," she began, holding the phone. "Put this back. I could never in my life make a call like that. Maybe I'm a coward, maybe I'm just scared to death, but finding the words to say what you just told your wife, is, well, I don't know what it is. I can't even talk well now."

Dan looked at her and looked at the phone she was holding. "Are you sure?"

Lisa nodded silently, swallowed hard and handed him the phone. Dan took the phone, replaced it and looked across the aisle. A woman was wiping a tear from her eye and talking on the phone. She looked to be about seventy, and from her appearance, Dan

guessed she had money. Her clothes looked expensive and she wore beautiful diamonds on her fingers. He checked his watch again. It was now 8:37. Less than nine minutes remained before the jet plowed into World Trade Center 1, the North Tower. He knew something was going to happen soon. Life gave those that listened, an intuition that was rarely a blessing and often a curse. He knew, he was certain. Every glance at his watch reminded him that it had now become useless except for the minute and second hand.

Three of the hijackers continually moved quickly through out the plane. Their constant movement was aimed at keeping everyone off guard, unsure of their location and intentions. Yet, there was something else behind their movement. It almost looked like pacing, impatient waiting for an event to occur. It seemed they never stood still, bending over occasionally to glance out the window, and then talking to each other in their foreign language. At times they smiled at one another, and as time passed, their chatter became more frequent.

For the most part, the passengers remained quiet; a few were crying, some sat silently in shock, staring forward or simply looking out the window at the Long Island Sound below them and to their left.

Dan looked out the window again, and then glanced at his watch. It was 8:38, and unlike only a few moments ago, the second hand seemed to be almost spinning.



World Trade Center 1, North Tower

It was 7:20 a.m. when James L. Jones arrived to work on the 101st floor of WTC Tower 1, the North Tower. He was a brilliant electrical engineer for Cohen Electronics, which had been one of the first tenants of the tower when it opened in 1970. The owner, Ed Cohen was determined to have an office on the top floor, but settled for the 101st. The view of looking in any direction for nearly fifty miles on a clear day was one of the few remaining pleasures he enjoyed in his life. Personal tragedy had decimated his once extensive library of enjoyment. Now all that remained was work, and looking out the window for inspiration.

In many respects, every floor of the north tower was nearly identical, though the configuration of the office cubicles and a few other minor variations gave each floor its own personality. The building's core was occupied by a small area of elevators, restrooms and stairwells, leaving the entire perimeter of nearly an acre completely open for office space. The external structure, or skin of the building provided the true backbone and strength and essentially held up the building. The lack of support beams and structures gave each floor a sense of expanse and space, reflecting the enormity of the entire tower. The weight of each floor was transferred to the tower's powerfully strong sides, held in place by thick rivets and braces. In a sense, the support columns, often found within a tall building, were for the most part, moved to the perimeter of the tower. It was an ingenious and sound design that made the interior feel as large and graceful as the soaring view from outside.

As Jim exited the elevator, he could smell coffee. He walked with a casual confidence to his cubicle, set down his leather brief case, removed his suit jacket and hung it up on the shiny, brass coat rack just as he had done over five thousand times before; five thousand, one hundred seventeen to be exact, nearly fifteen years. He was probably one of the few employees in the entire World Trade Center who counted such things. He had a reason, and it wasn't because he had an incurable obsessive-compulsive disorder that wouldn't respond to therapy or medication. There were an exact number of workdays he wanted to reach before age sixty when he would semi-retire with his wife. It was a number only he knew, a number he likened to hitting the jackpot; it would be the day he started to really enjoy life and all it had to offer. Thirty years of employment, minus vacations, holidays and the rare sick day he grudgingly allowed himself, the number came to nine thousand, one hundred ten, or 9,110. The number held significance; September 11th was the anniversary of when he first met his wife Ellen in 1980. The year presented a problem, so instead of working ninety-one thousand, one hundred eighty days, he rounded the year to a zero. It beat working himself to death for the sake of sentimentality. Besides, 91,180 workdays amounted to over two hundred sixty-five years. That just didn't seem practical. His wife thought he was just plain goofy.

Satisfied his routine was intact and everything in its place, he smiled at the warm, morning rays of sun that enveloped his small space like an ethereal, translucent blanket, and then walked with a more

casual, slower pace to the break area for a cup of fresh coffee. Often he made the first pot in the morning, but on occasion, someone arrived before he did.

“Good morning,” Jim said to Vicky Bloomberg. She was a brilliant engineering student who showed great promise. The fact that she arrived so early was just one more indicator of her work ethic and dedication. Sacrifice was always rewarded in the corporate world.

Almost always.

“Good morning, Jim. I already made coffee.”

“I could smell it as soon as I got off the elevator. When did you get in?”

“Just a few minutes ago. I couldn’t sleep. Kept waking up, tossing, turning, you know the routine. So I decided I might as well get a jump start on rush hour.”

“Workload keeping you awake?” He asked as he walked over to the coffee pot.

“No, I don’t know what was bothering me. But every time I thought about coming into work, I thought about staying home.” She took a sip from her cup and looked out the window.

“I have those days, too. Especially when it’s Monday and raining!” He chuckled and poured coffee into a Styrofoam cup, shook in some sugar and powdered creamer, grabbed a plastic stirrer and stuck it into the coffee. Jim was forty-five, looked his age, but didn’t feel it. He was a tall man, six foot two, with broad shoulders and a waistline that was also growing broad. There was something about hitting the forty-year milestone that made staying slim a true battle of the bulge. Two years ago he essentially conceded defeat, tossed out his size thirty-five pants and purchased only size thirty-seven. The other battle in the two-front war of middle age was a receding hairline. He hated how it crept up behind him where he couldn’t see it coming, until finally, carrying a comb was more for ego than function.

Jim had two sons in college, one studying English and the other drifting between majors, still undecided but leaning toward law. His wife Ellen was a nurse who worked part time, preferring to pursue her hobby of painting and volunteering. As soon as the kids were out of college and he hit the magic number, they planned to sell everything and move to New England, semi-retire and work only enough to fund their interests and desire to travel. Their goal was to build a beautiful two thousand square foot log cabin in the mountains of New Hampshire.

Jim picked up his coffee. “I couldn’t sleep last night either. Kept tossing and turning, wondering what number today was...”

“The date?”

“No, it’s kind of a private joke in our home. I track the number of days I’ve worked and...”

“Oh yeah, I’ve heard about your retirement plans. Bill told me and said that when the time approaches, they’re going to get a pool together on what that secret number is!” They both laughed.

“Still got a lot of time for that to happen!”

“So, you couldn’t sleep either?”

“No, don’t know why, just one of those mornings. I kept thinking of all the projects I’m working on at home. Refinishing the basement, planting some white pines in the back yard, that sort of thing. Thought today would be a perfect day to work outside.”

“It sounds like it,” she agreed.

“I finally quit arguing with myself and decided to make this day number five thousand, one hundred seventeen. Another day closer to that log cabin!” He stirred his coffee and tossed the plastic stirrer into the garbage. “How was your weekend? I never did get a chance to ask you yesterday.”

“Too short, but aren’t they all? My boyfriend and I went to see his parents.”

“Where do they live?”

“Danielson, Connecticut. It’s a cute little town in the northeast corner of the state not far from Rhode Island. It’s about an hour east of Hartford. We had a nice visit. It’s such a beautiful area. So many trees!” She took a sip of her coffee.

“That’s what I miss living near New York. But one day! My wife still talks about getting a bed and breakfast, but I don’t know if I like the idea of strangers spending the night all the time.”

“That’s because you live in New York. People in New England have a different attitude about people.”

“So, what did his parents think?”

She shrugged her shoulders as she sipped on the steaming coffee. “I don’t think they’re thrilled that I’m Jewish.”

“Typical. People get so worked up about stupid things, convinced that you’re not going to meet in heaven.”

“Exactly. They’re Catholic. I don’t know where everyone thinks Jews go after they die.”

“Same place as Muslims, Hindus and Lutherans!” They both laughed. “Seriously though, don’t let that stop you. That’s their problem to deal with. What do your parents think about it?”

“I think they share the same view as David’s, only from a Jewish perspective.”

“Sometimes I think religions cause more prejudice than they cure.” He suddenly noticed Ed Cohen, the CEO walk onto the floor and toward his corner office. “Looks like it’s time to get to work.”

Vicky looked past Jim in time to see Cohen disappear into his office. “Is he ever cheerful in the morning?”

“No, but after working for Ed all these years, I like the guy.”

“Why? He’s not very friendly.”

“Ed’s not had the easiest life, and wealth can buy you things, but it can’t bring happiness. I know

that's a little overused, but it's so true. He lost his wife and daughter to a car accident quite a few years ago and I don't think he has much in his life except work. He's a generous man though. He always gives a nice Christmas bonus."

"Christmas bonus?"

"Well, he calls it an end of the year income adjustment. He always encourages holiday decorations, no matter what your faith." Jim checked his watch. It was 7:45 a.m. Life was going to change in one hour. That's how life was. Always the same day after day, and then never the same again. Except for illness, which left a trail of symptoms and hints of coming attractions, life generally cruised along with total unpredictability, and when it appeared too routine, it stopped being routine.

"I guess we better appear busy," Vicky added.

"Not me. I'm going to read the paper for ten minutes before I get to work on the Anderson project. Ed's okay. Don't let him scare you."

Vicky smiled, refilled her cup and then left for her tiny cubicle. Jim went to his desk. Outside the sun was shining brilliantly on the water. The morning sky was nearly clear with only a few scant wisps of clouds. It was starting out to be a beautiful Tuesday morning, and from the 101st floor, they could see nearly forty miles in any direction.

The elevator bell dinged and the door opened followed by the exit of a tall young man. Thomas Glenn was twenty-one, had short blonde hair, a pierced left ear, and a persistent smile that nothing seemed to erase. As the elevator door closed, he walked straight for the freshly brewed coffee. He hated his name, which was reversible as he called it. Having two first names was frustrating, and new acquaintances always got them turned around, calling him Glenn one moment and Tom the next. Sometimes he didn't even bother to correct them. A second elevator dinged and the door opened.

"Hey Tommy!" a voice boomed into the early morning office.

Tom Glenn turned around to see Bill Freeman stepping off the elevator, holding a black leather briefcase in one hand and a magazine in the other. "Yeah, what's up?" Tommy replied.

"I finally remembered that magazine." He held it up as evidence. The cover sported a motorcycle, and Tom could see it was the latest issue of Cycle magazine. Bill walked briskly to the break area.

"Hey great!" Tom said, as he grabbed two Styrofoam cups. "Is that the issue with the article on the new Yamaha?"

"It's in there! I think you should consider buying it. You need a bigger bike if you're going to go cruising with us next spring." There was a group of North Tower employees who formed a loosely held together motorcycle club that focused on touring the New England area. There were only about nine members, and on any given ride, about half were present.

Tom laughed as he poured two cups of coffee. Bill came up to the break area, handed Tom the magazine and grabbed his cup of coffee. "Hey thanks. Appreciate it." He took a careful sip of the hot liquid. "Think your wife will let you buy it?"

Tom laughed as he flipped open the magazine, trying to locate the table of contents. "I would think it's only fair. After all, she must have an equal value in shoes!" They both chuckled at the remark.

"Yeah, what is it with women and shoes? I have a brown pair, a black pair, and a pair of tennis shoes."

"Got me. But every woman I've met is the same way." He located the table of contents and quickly flipped to the article. "Now that's a sweet bike!" He stared down at the photo as Bill looked over his shoulder.

"Sure is, but I'll stick to Harleys."

"Where is the spring trip next year?"

"P-town," Bill said, referring to Provincetown Massachusetts on Cape Cod. "We're planning for late May, early June. We'll probably set the date in March and make motel reservations then, too." Just then they all noticed Ed Cohen coming their way. He had a walk that quietly said he was the boss, but as usual, his facial expression was blank.

They all turned and said good morning in what sounded like rehearsed unison.

Ed nodded hello and glanced at the magazine. "Motorcycles, huh? If I was younger, I think I'd buy one." Both men looked up from the magazine with surprise. Neither knew what to say.

Ed smiled. His smiles were always weak, as if his facial muscles had very little practice making such expressions. His frowns, which were not all that frequent either, were much more pronounced, outlined with creases and wrinkles. "You look surprised. No, shocked."

"I am," Bill replied through a weak grin. "I didn't know you even liked motorcycles."

"I wanted to buy one many years ago, a Honda, but my wife didn't think it was a good idea with us just starting to raise a family. She wanted me around, I guess." The remnants of the smile quickly evaporated.

"It's not too late," Tom said. "They're a lot of fun, and great for reducing stress. There's nothing like being out there feeling the wind."

Ed rubbed his chin, his brow wrinkled in thought, and then he walked over and poured himself a cup of coffee. He always preferred it black and couldn't understand why anyone drank it any other way. He took a sip of coffee, set the cup down and picked up the magazine.

"Humfff," he said, as he flipped through the pages. "They sure have changed since my younger days."

"Malcolm Forbes owns a few motorcycles," Tom said.

"Really?" Ed replied, suddenly interested.

"So does Jay Leno," Bill added.

“Hmffff! No Hollywood type ever impressed me with their preferences and habits,” Ed shot back, still looking through the magazine. “When did you say this trip of yours was?” He looked over at Tom.

Tom looked surprised and caught off guard. His mouth hung open as if it had frozen just before getting out the first syllable of a short word. “Ah, well, we were looking at sometime in the spring.”

“When?” Ed wanted to know.

“May or early June. By then, the weather is usually a little nicer.”

Ed nodded as he flipped through the last few pages of the magazine. He stopped suddenly, folded the pages over and looked at an ad. “They make three wheelers?” he asked, looking over at Bill.

“Yes, they do. You can buy one for about fourteen thousand, or more depending on what you want. Harley makes a nice side car setup for twenty-eight.”

“Hmm, a side car. Guess three wheels would be easier to learn on, wouldn’t it?” Ed asked, still looking at the picture of the trike in the magazine.

“Much easier. They ride a little differently, but you still get the feel of riding a motorcycle.”

Ed continued to study the ad for the longest time. Bill and Tom remained silent, sipping their coffee and glancing at each other, both wondering about the sudden interest and friendly socializing. Ed was never a very sociable type, certainly never one for small talk over coffee. Work time was spent on work talk. It’s not that he was unfriendly, just a very private individual who appeared as if he didn’t know how to conduct himself outside the business world.

Ed closed the magazine and handed it back to Tom, and then picked up his coffee. “Maybe it’s time I start living. It’s a shame to have so much money to live on, but so little to live for. Maybe we could stop at a dealership some weekend and you guys could make sure I don’t get ripped off by a salesman who sees me coming for miles.” He smiled, and this time his grin was wide enough to touch his eyes.

“Be glad to,” Bill answered.

“Sure, sure, that’d be great. I’m thinking of buying a new bike, too,” Tom said.

Ed looked at his watch. It was already past eight. “Guess I better get to my desk and set an example.” He winked at the two men and walked to his office.

“Now if that wasn’t something!” Bill remarked.

“Maybe he’s finally coming out of his depression. I’m sure that was a helluva blow, losing both his wife and daughter in the same accident. How many years ago was that?”

“Maybe fifteen, sixteen years ago. I would think a person doesn’t completely recover from something like that. I feel for the guy. Maybe now, he’s finally getting around to living again.”

“I wonder if he got on medication?” Tom thought about it a moment. “Guess we better get to work,” he said. They took their coffee, Tom tucked the magazine under his arm and went into the mail and sup-

ply room. He did all the odd jobs, and was more or less an administrative assistant of sorts. Cohen gave him the job because he was going to class part time for engineering. It was all Tom could afford at the time, and he was hoping to eventually go to full time night school.

Angela Hurst was probably one of the best administrative assistants in New York, if you believed what Ed Cohen had to say about her. He occasionally joked that if anything happened to him, she'd probably be the best one to run the company. It was a comment that didn't set well with some of the men, but not one could honestly disagree. She was smart, witty, efficient, could spell like she had a Webster's crammed into her skull, wrote extremely professional letters, kept the office running smoothly, had a flawless filing system and was always cheerful and optimistic. Ed paid her top dollar. If he lost Angela, it would take two people to replace her position. She was Ed's assistant, the receptionist and the office manager. As an extra bonus, she was attractive. She had long brunette hair that looked so full and filled with highlights, she looked like a TV commercial for shampoo. Everyone liked her, and for good reason. She was simply a good person. Angela was thirty-five, married to a fireman, and had two children, a girl who was thirteen, and a boy who was nine. Her mother babysat while Angela and her husband worked.

"Ang, could you come here a moment?" Ed called from his office.

Angela got up from her desk and walked into Mr. Cohen's corner office. She had a walk that attracted every male eyeball within sight. "Yes, what can I help you with?"

Ed swiveled his large leather chair around, crossed his legs and looked up at Angela. "I was thinking of getting a motorcycle. What do you think?"

"A motorcycle?"

"Well, a three wheeler, or trike. Or perhaps a motorcycle with a sidecar."

She smiled. "What brought all this about?"

"I don't know. I just got up this morning with a feeling about life. I decided I've wasted enough of it. It's time to live a little, do the things I've always wanted to do. Who wants to die with a long, exhausting list of regrets? What do you think?"

Angela nodded. "I think you should go for it. My husband wants to get a motorcycle, but right now that's a luxury we can't really afford. Maybe in a few years."

Ed chuckled. It sounded so familiar. Life swept by like a series of fast forwarded movies that hid the entire plot. Then, before we know it, we're staring at retirement, dealing with growing health problems and aches and pains and we know for certain that life just isn't going to get any better. "I agree. I think I should. Next Spring I want to travel more, have fun, do things with people. I live in this big apartment across from Central Park and I don't even know anyone in the area. I'm ashamed to say that. Aside from the wonderful people I work with, I'm a stranger in this city."

“It’s never too late to change,” Angela replied. “What got you on motorcycles? Was it Bill and Tom?”

“No, no, neither.” He paused, and rubbed his chin in thought, then folded his arms across his chest. “It was me. I wanted one years ago, when I was about your husband’s age, but I didn’t get one, probably for the same reasons.” He paused. Memories sometimes stung, and any memory of his lovely wife and daughter were difficult to think about. He nodded his head a few times. “Yup, I need to do that. Just wanted to know what you thought.” He looked at his watch. It was 8:27. In eighteen minutes, the floor was going to shake like one helluva earthquake.

Angela returned to her desk. The office was still not fully teeming with life. It was still early. Most people didn’t arrive to work until much closer to nine. In New York City, commuting was both an art and a science, and it was nearly impossible for everyone to arrive at work by eight. The subways, bridges and highways could only be choked with just so much traffic. Between eight and nine work got done, but it was more often than not, a warm up for the day. Emails got answered, papers organized, yesterday’s work glanced at, but rarely did anyone get too intensely involved. Things always changed after nine when everyone had arrived at their desks.

At 8:39, Vicky went into the break area to make fresh coffee for the later arrivals. She tidied up the area, cleaned a few drips of coffee off the countertop, and then prepared a fresh pot. As she glanced out the window at the brilliant morning, she noticed a jet flying low. She’d never spotted a jet in that area of the sky before. Flight paths and flight times were very routine. If most people checked an area of the sky the same time each day, they’d be surprised at the consistency of jet trails streaking across the sky. You couldn’t set your watch by them, but a jet was usually within a few minutes of their schedule. Still, having been a New Yorker for such a long time, a person can tell signs like a woodsman looks at a broken branch to track an animal through the forest. She continued looking out the window. The jet was in the distance, but no matter what she told herself, no jets had ever flown in that area before. At least not at this altitude. As the image grew bigger, it seemed even more odd to her. Wasn’t that a dangerous flight path for any jet? New York was not only full of millions of people, but it had an awfully lot of huge buildings to bump into. The jet grew larger and larger and Vicky continued watching. Now, she was pulled to it by an intense curiosity. Something was different in a subtle way, but it wasn’t the jet that seemed out of place that really bothered her, it was the feeling in her gut that kept her standing there watching.

The jet grew larger, and closer. It turned slightly, adjusting its flight path. If it hadn’t been such an insane thought, she could’ve sworn the jet was aimed right for her. But, that was impossible. The distance was too great to really be certain of such things. It was probably a trick of the mind, a lack of sleep, a little fatigue playfully tossing around thoughts of fantasy. It was really difficult to realistically conjure up images of the impossible. When something has never occurred, it was very difficult to imagine it. But

still, that jet loomed larger and closer, moving quickly and she was certain it was coming right for her.

“Hey Ang, come here a minute!” Vicky called, never taking her eyes off the window. It was 8:43 and thirty-two seconds.

“Be right there. What’s up?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe I’m seeing things.” The early morning light might be playing tricks, casting shadows in just the right way to make something appear differently.

Angela walked over to the window where Vicky was standing. “What are you looking at? Is Spiderman out there?” She giggled. It was always like Angela to find humor anywhere she could fit it in.

“No,” her voice trailed off to silence as she stared at the rapidly growing image. It was getting closer. It had to be! “See that jet out there? Isn’t it flying low? Have you ever seen a jet flying in that area? I don’t remember ever seeing one flying like this before.” Her words came out quickly, like they were fired from a shotgun.

Angela walked up closer to the window, held a hand over her eyes like a visor and searched for the jet. “Oh, I see it.” She squinted in the morning sun. “That does seem like a really strange place for a jet to be flying. Maybe they’re having engine trouble and lowered their altitude. They could be coming in for a landing.”

That could be. She hadn’t thought of that. Still, the idea didn’t make sense, though she felt foolish for not wanting to consider it an option. “Doesn’t it look like it’s coming right for us?”

Angela leaned into the window and stared intently. “Yes, it does.” Suddenly she felt something disturbing inside, a growing feeling that she was looking at a scene that didn’t make sense, but it should. It was 8:44.

The jet loomed larger and closer. It seemed dangerously close to other buildings, though it was flying above all of them. Helicopters were a common sight, but they were a totally different situation. Jets didn’t buzz around the city as if they had become a new tool of commuters. “Something is not right. Not right at all,” Vicky said. She took a step back from the window. The jet continued flying in a straight path, and it appeared headed right for the North Tower. That was impossible. When something has never happened, the eyes convince the brain they are liars.

“Oh my God!” Angela screamed. She took a few steps backward as the jet grew closer and closer coming at them like a giant missile.

United Flight 11

Dan looked over Lisa and out the window. That was definitely New York City below, and they were flying very close to it and the buildings. Three passengers had been murdered, and that event kept every-

one else in their seats. There were going to be no heroes on Flight 11. Dan had guessed the woman's scream earlier in the back of the jet was a reaction to the murder of the two pilots. What else could it be? he thought. After seeing how brutal the hijackers could be, almost as if they didn't care at all what happened, he started to wonder what they were headed for. And the phone calls. That was totally a mystery. It was another piece of evidence that lead him to believe they were not being hijacked to land anywhere. These terrorists had something else in mind.

Crying could be heard in pockets throughout the cabin. People whispered, some got up and were escorted to the bathroom, one man asked for and received a couple tiny bottles of vodka to drink. He gulped them down and remained in his seat, staring out the window and whispering almost silently to himself. Perhaps he was praying. Dan couldn't be certain.



“Why are we flying so low and so close to New York?” Lisa asked, as she leaned toward Dan.

“I'm not sure, but I have a sick feeling about this.”

“What do you mean?” Lisa was looking pale, the color had drained from her cheeks and there were growing creases scratched onto her face.

“I'm not sure.” That wasn't entirely true. He had a feeling they were going to crash somewhere, but it seemed so far fetched and absurd that his mind kept telling him that fear was ruling his thoughts and he mind was filling with insanity. Still, he seriously wondered. He looked at the phone and considered calling his wife again. Some people had remained on the phone the whole time. Dan imagined the reliving of pain when that credit card bill came in the mail. It seemed like a very morbid thought, but those kind of those burst into his mind at will now. He looked at his watch. It read 8:43. He looked out the window again. The huge buildings below really did remind him of giant toys, perhaps an exceptional Lionel train set up, long ago started by a father for his son, and continued even though the young boy was now a married man and a father himself. At this angle, the city didn't look real. Tiny cars moved sluggishly on the congested streets below, mirrors and glass occasionally glistening in the morning rays. Long, thick shadows cast by the skyscrapers left many streets still in the dark. Tiny red taillights glowed dimly as people enjoy a few last moments before terror would strike them in the heart and soul. He wished he could see where the jet was headed.

Suddenly the jet banked slightly, leveled a little, and then banked again. Every passenger reacted to the movement. A few women screamed, most groaned, or called out. One man, a Muslim who sat three rows behind, began praying. Most simply grabbed the armrests tightly.

Then he saw it, the North Tower of the World Trade Center. It loomed like a huge blockade to their left. Dan noticed immediately their altitude definitely appeared lower than the 110 story building. It didn't take more than a second for him to guess what was going to happen.

"Say a prayer Lisa," he said. His voice was rapid. He felt palpitations ripple and flutter through his chest and suddenly felt short of breath. Dan quickly looked behind him and noticed two terrorists in coach were both standing in the aisle. He turned and looked forward. The curtain had been pulled open and he could see that in first class, there were two more terrorists standing in the aisle, each one holding tightly on to a seat. They knew! They knew exactly what was going to happen and they knew they were about to die.

"Why? What's wrong? What's going to happen?" Lisa's words shot out like machine gun fire.

Dan turned and looked at Lisa. Her face was scratched with terror. There was no color in her cheeks, and her eyes screamed the truth of what she knew in her heart. Behind those eyes there was a rapid display of images and memories. There was a spooky blankness to her eyes that he had never seen before, but they vaguely resembled the eyes he had witnessed at a funeral home of someone who had lost everything that mattered in their life. "We're going to crash, I think we're going to crash! These terrorists are going to try and bring down the World Trade Center."

"Oh my God!" Lisa screamed. Other passengers turned and looked at her, but most had retreated into some internal world of their own where they still maintained some control. Lisa began crying and tears poured from her eyes in a way he had never seen before in a person. They were not single tears but more of a tiny stream of grief that flowed down her cheeks. "Please, you must be wrong! We can't be, we just can't be."

She leaned into Dan and he held her, but looked over her shoulder and out the window. Lisa's whole body shook as she sobbed. The buildings grew larger and closer. The jet engines were straining, going full throttle. The entire jet shook as if they had just encountered violent turbulence. The plane banked slightly, but did not level off. Dan looked out the window, but he didn't want to. He wanted to close his eyes tightly, hold Lisa as close as he could and brace for the enormous impact he knew was seconds away. Lisa continued sobbing, and he heard others doing the same. Tears moistened his own eyes though he tried to push them back. Facing death with tears seemed both natural and wrong at the same time. Every thought was jumbled and mixed up. Someone was screaming into a phone, saying 'I love you so very much.' Some were whispering prayers. A person yelled, 'oh my God!' He held her close and tight. He could suddenly see one of the World Trade Center Towers, he wasn't sure which one. In seconds, it grew huge, sprouting like it had come out of nowhere, dwarfing everything around. Sunlight glistened off the windows in spots of blinding reflections. Many offices were lit, but a few stilled looked quiet and dark, waiting for their occupants to arrive.

Then it was there. The north tower filled the window in an instant. He noticed people going about their normal office routine, sitting at desks, walking around cubicles. In the span of one or two seconds, his line of vision changed from seeing a large section of the tower to seeing only a few floors, and they were way too close. Suddenly, time seemed to slow. His mind took crisp and clear snapshots of images inside the windows. He saw two women standing by the window a few floors up, staring, one covering her mouth in shock. A few sat at their desk in the glow of a computer screen, some talked on phones, others stood talking with co-workers, or were walking, totally unaware of what was going to occur. In an instant, Dan thought it odd how such things happened, catching people off guard, suddenly destroying life's routine.

And then it hit with a deafening blast.

The sound blew into his ears with a crushing deafness. Metal scraping metal, glass shattering, and a roar that would drown out the sound of a train locomotive or approaching tornado. He'd seen both in his life. Everything happened in an instant, yet flowed by totally unattached to the clock. Perception was warped and time had ceased to be a tool of measurement. The last second of his life slowed, and suddenly the noise had dissolved into a background whisper that his brain did not seem to register.

He heard the wings being ripped off the fuselage, but he saw it happen more than he heard it. In an instant a shadow darkened the cabin as the still intact jet stormed into the tower going over six hundred miles per hour. He saw cubicle dividers explode and be swept away. Papers, chairs, desks all became airborne, and in the mixture of items, he could see people suddenly plucked from their innocent postures and flung about like weightless feathers. Nearly everyone appeared as though they had no clue as to what had just occurred. Dan saw one woman running in the opposite direction. A man was following close behind. It was so very odd some of the detail his mind could pick out from the blurry, compact and explosive mass. The man who was running was nearly bald. He wore gray pants and a blue shirt. His red tie was swept over his shoulder and waved in the air. And then in an instant, he was consumed by the ravage of the explosion.

A blinding and brilliant orange flash suddenly devoured the shadow of being inside the tower as ten thousand gallons of jet fuel ignited. The cabin was filled with a blinding light and with the ripping, deafening roar of the explosion. At that moment it seemed everything began to short out. His hearing was gone. The jet bounced and rocked violently. He heard the piercing music of people screaming all around him. The fuselage began to disintegrate like pieces of paper mache' being struck by a baseball bat. The blinding orange light from the fireball stormed into the cabin, followed by an intense, roasting heat.

Passengers were violently ripped from their seats and flung forward like weightless objects, hitting obstacles in their path with a dull and hollow thud. Nearly all of the seats were yanked from the floor and went crashing forward. In an instant the huge, compressed mass of passengers and seats raced forward like an out of control mob. The overhead compartments shattered, flinging debris into the cabin. The intense heat and



fire devoured many in an instant, melting everything it touched or approached.

In the cockpit, Atta held tightly onto the controls. He watched the approaching tower with the intensity of a man in a trance from meditation or prayer. When the nose of the jet hit the glass side, the wall immediately surrendered and opened up for the screaming jet. The jet's windshield shattered and sprayed Atta with tiny glass shards. His face was ripped into bloody ribbons as his body was tossed forward. The nose of the jet began to collapse and the fuselage crumpled from the impact. His bloody

face smashed into the control panel and in an instant his features were obliterated in a spray of shredded flesh and blood. He let out a loud groan as the air was instantly squeezed from his chest, and then he fell forever silent as his body was obliterated. A woman standing by her desk was holding a cup of coffee as she suddenly looked up at the crashing sound and was met with the nose of a Boeing 767 racing towards her at over 600 miles an hour. In an instant she was struck, tossing parts of her body in several directions at once. In less than a second, forty-five people on the 90th floor vanished as the huge fireball devoured everything in its range.

A huge fireball and gray plume of smoke and debris exploded on the side of the impact. Out of the opposite side of the building, a huge fireball exploded. Office contents, papers, desk chairs, tables, desks, lamps, file cabinets, ceiling tiles, window glass and other items mixed together in a confusing expanding mass of debris were flung out of the ripped open walls of the North Tower. The lighter debris caught the gentle air currents of the early, sunny morning and sprouted wings and floated gracefully toward the street, raining down on New York like an enormous ticker tape parade. Speeding past the flying mass of spreadsheets, reports and file folders, a man with arms flailing and legs kicking fell rapidly to the street below. A woman on the thirty-ninth floor was standing by the window enjoying the crisp, clear morning as Robert Murphy fell screaming to his death. She dropped her coffee and screamed. Heads bobbed up behind cubicle walls as if they were all balanced on giant springs that were suddenly released.

The time was 8:48.46 a.m.

The explosion from the jet fuel blew out every window on several floors above and below the point of impact. The stairwells, which were surrounded by mere drywall, disintegrated into a mass of rubble that coated the steps, making any attempts of walking extremely difficult. The nearly acre of office space

of each floor quickly filled with thick, choking smoke. The remaining office contents immediately burst into flames, fed by the remaining fuel that was not devoured by the huge fireball.

Dan held tightly onto Lisa. Huddled together, alone with their thoughts, with snapshot images that rapidly paraded through their minds, they crashed into the seats in front of them, sliding forward with the speed and force of a giant piston. A single, large tear spun away from Lisa's cheek and landed on Dan's lip. He tasted its saltiness, thought of his beautiful wife, and then the two of them were devoured by the crash and the fire.

They felt nothing, except for two seconds of fear, a brief deafening sound, and the bee sting of the impact that lasted far too short a time to truly register as pain. And then they felt peace, they heard the whispers of bliss, and as their bodies were torn apart by the enormous forces of the impact and explosion, they were no longer there to sense anything of this world.

As the large 767 ripped into the tower, the 170 foot wingspan was only slightly narrower than the tower, leaving only about 16 feet of clearance on each wing tip. Before the wings were ripped from the jet, they acted like a giant plow ramming their way through several office floors. Barely twenty feet inside the tower, the wings exploded and fell away as the main fuselage shot further into the tower like a giant airborne torpedo, and disintegrated before the tip of the jet could even get near the opposite wall. Nearly everything between the 93rd and 98th floor crumbled and surrendered to the exploding jet.

Floors collapsed with a thunderous noise, crushing office workers while they sat at their desks, reading newspapers, filing papers, talking on the phone, hearing only a loud thud, followed immediately by an explosion before they were suddenly killed.

United Flight 11, a Boeing 767 with 92 people onboard, 92 souls with countless memories and many loved ones left behind, was gone forever. On the west coast in Los Angeles, a few people were shutting off alarm clocks, or having their first cup of coffee, eating breakfast, or taking their morning shower, each one of them thinking about the reunion they would enjoy at the airport in a few short hours as they waited to pick up friends or family, and it would be a wait that would never end,



World Trade Center, North Tower, 101st Floor

On the 101st floor, nearly all of the twenty-eight staff of Cohen Electronics who were to report to work that day had arrived. Three people had called in ill, and five others were taking vacation time. One person was to attend his mother's funeral that morning and had stayed home.

Angela saw the huge 767 racing straight for the World Trade Center. The jet banked slightly as it turned toward the tower. Her screaming immediately caught the attention of everyone in the office. People stood up and peered over their cubicle walls, several stepped out from behind their walls into the aisle, all of them staring at Angela. No one needed to have anything explained. They could all see the jet coming straight for the tower. Both Angela and Vicky began backing up from the window, both too frightened to move quickly. Vicky covered her mouth and held her breath. The sight of the jet in a place it should never be stunned her, leaving her shocked and speechless. Seeing the painted nose of a 767 racing to a collision with the World Trade Center, staring it down with nowhere to go pulled the breath from her. The speed of its approach was impossible to judge. There was nothing to benchmark it against. NASCAR fans saw nothing in comparison as they watched small cars race around at 200 miles per hour. Flying aboard a 767 at a normal cruising speed of 530 miles per hour seemed slow and dreamlike as distant clouds and the world below provided no method for comprehending its true speed. Seeing a jet in this situation was just totally foreign to the brain.

It approached the tower with what seemed to be the swiftness of lightning. Every second it grew larger in the window. Distant one second, and huge the next. The other office workers raced toward the two women. Some simply stood behind their tiny, cubicle walls, hopelessly wondering if they would offer even the smallest safety from an impact. As the jet nearly filled the entire view out the window, Bill Freeman, whose office faced the approaching 767, thought he saw a single pilot in the cockpit. In the split second of that visual encounter, his brain took a haunting snapshot. The man guiding the 767 was smiling. In the time it took to blink, the jet had disappeared.

There was a huge THUDDDDDDDDDD, the kind of sound that was immediately recognized as a huge object hitting another huge object. The entire floor shook. Windows shattered and shards of glass were sprayed across the office. Suddenly walking or standing was like being on the deck of a ship during a violent storm. And then everyone felt it, the swaying of the tower. It was not a back and forth sway, the kind so often felt on extremely windy days. It was the sway that touched every nerve and rubbed it raw. The building tilted away from the impact. Many stood still and held their breath as they felt the tower continue to move. It went on forever, the waiting, every nerve in their feet waited for the sensation of the swaying to end. Nerve endings in the balls of their feet and in their heels went on high sen-

sation alert as each toe gripped the inside of the shoe. But the tallest building continued to sway away from the impact. They could all feel it and every one of them pictured the giant tower toppling over onto the bustling streets of New York. The sensation was dizzying.

“It’s tipping over!” Vicky screamed. She wrapped her arms around herself and braced for the inevitable.

“It can’t! It can’t!” Angela yelled.

No one moved. They were all frozen in place, their feet paralyzed with fear, minds conjuring up cartoon-like images that the slightest movement would tip over a 110 story building. The swaying continued, growing more gradual as each tenth second slipped by. Seconds slipped by like sluggish minutes do when you stare at your watch. And then finally, the swaying slowed. Some pictured an image of the tower breaking at the base like a large tree being snapped off in a high wind.

And then finally, the swaying sensation gave way to a vibration. In the mixture of panic, confusion and fear stoked paralysis, the jet exploded and sent shock waves through every fiber of the building. The entire panoramic view of New York was immediately erased as a huge, orange fireball erupted outside the window. The entire office interior was briefly painted orange. There was a roaring SWOOOSH sound followed by a billowing cloud of smoke and dust. Debris exploded into the air, some of it seemed to float for a moment before being snatched by gravity and pulled toward the earth. Papers fluttered in the wind like injured birds that would fall to their death. As the office workers stared, they could recognize some objects. Aside from the waterfall of paper, Bill saw a stapler shoot through the air. Jim stared with disbelief as a dented, black file cabinet shot past the window, and Angela saw a desk and chair fly into the sky. She couldn’t be certain, but it did appear as if someone was still sitting in the leather desk chair.

“Oh my God! What the hell has happened?” Ed Cohen asked, as he walked out from his office. The floor was littered with objects, that only a few seconds before, had sat on desks.

“A jet, a jet crashed right into the tower!” Vicky said. She was crying now, and the sobbing made her speech shaky and stop and go.

“A jet? You have to be kidding?” Cohen responded. But he knew she wasn’t kidding.

The swaying had stopped, but the sensation of having felt it still teased the nerves that tried to verify it was no longer present.

The entire office fell silent for a brief moment. It was as if each individual was stunned, trying to comprehend exactly what had happened. Cohen was the first to break the brief silence.

“We need to assess the damage, determine exactly what is going on.” He looked around the large, open office. Every eye was watching him. “George, Nick, and umm...” Cohen turned his head and scanned every face. “David, why don’t you check out the stair wells, call security, and let’s stay calm and first find out what our situation is before we panic.”

The three men left for the stairwell. Nick told the other two he would call security.

The North Tower continued to bleed thick smoke from its wound. Small groups of the office staff gathered and talked about what had just happened, recalling their fear, what they had seen or felt, and above all, the unbelievability of it. Many returned to their desks and made phone calls, most amazed the phone lines still worked. There was an odd mixture of urgency, panic and calmness that was about to be eroded away. Cohen walked over and stood by the window. Debris still floated in the sky. Thick, choking grayish brown smoke continued to bellow out of the building.

“I had a hard time getting through to security,” Nick said as he rejoined the gathering. “They’re still assessing the damage and what’s going on. They said to sit tight for now and keep them informed of any problems we encounter.”

“Thanks Nick,” Cohen told him.

“I smell smoke!” Angela said loudly. As if on command, everyone started sniffing the air.

“I smell it too,” Vicky added.

“So do I,” Jim and Bill both said in unison. Others nodded in agreement.

“Got problems!” George said as he returned from the stairwell, David following on his heels. Both men were walking quickly. “The stairwell is rapidly filling with smoke, and it’s thick. It’s also feeling pretty hot the lower you go. We couldn’t go more than a flight and a half down.”

“There’s one helluva fire,” David added, obviously winded from the stairs and short, brisk walk.

Several of the women gasped, yelled ‘oh no’, or made some comment of their fear.

“What are we going to do?” one woman shouted. It was Clara from the accounting department. Normally very calm and quiet, she looked too tightly wound and ready to burst if anyone did so much as poke her in the ribs.

Cohen turned around and stepped away from the broken window. He looked toward the area of the stairwells and noticed that thick smoke was no finding its way to their floor. “It looks like we better come up with a plan, and soon. Nick, call security back, tell them our situation and find out what they would advise we do. And hurry!”

Nick ran to his office to make the call.

“That smoke is getting thicker,” Jim began. “If we can’t go down, and I assume we can’t because of fire, we’ll need to go up.”

“And how will that help?” Leslie asked.

“It’s better than frying,” Jim shot back. “Besides, we can get up on the roof and hopefully a helicopter can rescue us.”

“Let’s wait and find out what Nick is told,” Cohen suggested. He noticed the thickening smoke that

was creeping up the stairwell. "Is that door closed?" he asked, referring to the stairwell.

"It's closed," George told him. "But the smoke is pretty thick. It's probably also coming up the air vents."

The office staff was growing restless. No one stood in one spot for more than a few seconds before they began pacing across the floor. Some ventured near the stairwell, others walked to their desks, but didn't sit down, some stared out the broken windows, keeping their distance, while others simply paced aimlessly around the office. Wind blew into the numerous windows, stirring papers and blowing them onto the floor. Small groups of individuals wandered around the office, talking, looking out the window, falling silent and giving in to their worry and fear, thinking of families, wanting to touch the ground again, that from the 101st floor, seemed like a whole world away and impossible to get to. The air was quickly becoming chilled.

Tom Glenn was standing alone by the window, envious of the beautiful sunny day with temperatures in the low seventies, and here he was trapped high above the streets of New York with no apparent way out. It didn't look good. He stared out a window that was still intact; grateful for a quiet moment alone that he knew would not last long. Tom reflected on his life, shocked by the calmness he felt as he faced certain, or maybe just probable death. Giving up so quickly was not his trait. Maybe there was something to faith that couldn't be measured, quantified or fully proven. That's why it was faith. As he stood there staring out the window, he felt a giant hand of calmness wrap around him. He stood silently, arms folded across his chest, when he noticed a thin, jet trail. Against the backdrop of blue it was difficult to see anything flying. He leaned closer to the window to cut out the glare, squinted his eyes and stared into the distance. Among the clear skies he noticed the metallic sheen of a jet. He stared at it for the longest time. There was really nothing else to do at the moment, and he needed the distraction from thoughts that were growing increasingly morbid by the second. The plane appeared to grow larger, and closer. It didn't seem to be on any normal course for an airport.

"Does anyone have a radio?" Tom yelled suddenly, still staring at the jet. It was 8:59.

"We're hunting for one now," Bill yelled back.

Tom continued staring and was soon joined by others from the office. Jim stood beside him looking through the wisps of smoke and the growing haze that was encircling the building. "What are you looking at?" Jim finally asked.

"A jet. Over there," he said pointing.

Jim held a hand over his eyes and peered out the window. "Oh, I see it. Looks like it's coming right for us!"

"You don't suppose....." Tom began.

"Yes, it is. Hey Bill, did you find a radio yet?" Jim yelled



“Yeah, there was one on Hugh’s desk,” Bill yelled back from across the office. Bill turned up the volume, leaving the radio plugged in on the desk. Everyone stopped what they were doing to listen to the emergency broadcast. In less than a minute, their worst fears were confirmed.

The smoke was growing thick, looking like a morning fog in the office. By now, it was covering the nearly acre of office space, and getting thicker.

“We need to get off this floor,” Cohen said as he walked up to the group now crowded around the radio.”

“There’s another jet coming this way too. Look!” Tom said. He walked closer to the window. Everyone followed him to the window.

“This is amazing. I don’t know if that’s the right word, maybe unbelievable,” Cohen said. “I never would’ve thought of using planes as weapons.” He shook his head as he stared at the jet. It was close enough to see windows. It was 9:02. By now, the curtain of smoke was thicker and no longer transparent. People were beginning to cough and hack.

“I just quit smoking two weeks ago,” Martin Cain said. He coughed again, and by now, his eyes were beginning to sting. “I really wish I had a cigarette.”

“Let’s get off this floor, and now” Cohen ordered. His eyes were watering now.

“Look!” Bill yelled, his arm outstretched and his finger pointing to the window. They all turned and looked as the huge 767 jet came up on the south tower. It banked sharply and turned toward the tower, then disappeared behind it. Nearly everyone screamed as the jet crashed into the South Tower. An enormous fireball erupted, spraying the air with more office debris. Bill thought he saw one or two people falling in the midst of the smoke, flames and mass of confetti.

“Oh my God! What is happening?” Tom yelled. The entire group of office staff crowded around the windows, staring at the huge plumes of smoke erupting from the tower. More debris continued to flutter to the ground. While they watched, their office continued to fill with thickening smoke. A similar thought ran through each their minds; two jets implied maybe three, or even four. They were a city under

siege, and there was no telling what would come out of the skies next.

“We need to evacuate this floor,” Cohen said. “The smoke is getting too thick. Are the phones still working?” More and more people were coughing and hacking.

“I can’t reach security. The line’s been busy,” Tom said in rapid speech.

“Keep trying,” Cohen answered. “Now, let’s get everyone together in the center area. Bill, why don’t you and a couple others go upstairs and see what’s going on up there. And hurry. We need to move quickly.” He coughed, and felt the slight sting of smoke in his eyes. It was growing hazy like a crowded bar on band night.

Bill grabbed a couple of other men, Hugh Lawrence and Pete Murray and rushed to the stairwell. As soon as he opened the door, smoke poured into the office like thick cotton that could be picked apart. “I need a towel or something!” he shouted. Hugh Lawrence ran to the janitor’s closet, running like a tight end racing for the winning touchdown. He was fifty-one, fully gray and slightly balding in the back. For his five-eleven frame, he was carrying an extra forty pounds, and was noticing it now, but he kept running, ignoring the pain in his legs. He wished he had spent more time at the gym and less time at the bagel shop. Hugh opened the closet door and quickly rummaged through the contents. He tossed out mop heads, pushed aside rolls of toilet paper and paper towels, allowing them to spill onto the floor. He found nothing except tiny cleaning rags the size of a washcloth. He grabbed a handful and ran back toward the stairwell.

“This is all I could find,” he said, out of breath and puffing hard. He held out the handful of rags.

Bill took the rags and looked at them. “I guess this will have to do. Go soak these in some water, and hurry.”

He handed them back to Hugh, who ran to the break area, placed them under a full stream of cold water and returned, water dripping from his hands. “Here you go.”

Bill took the rags, handed one to each of the other two men, and motioned for them to follow him. He walked quickly into the plume of smoke and disappeared. The other two men followed, covering their faces and trying to see through the stinging, blinding smoke. Bill found the steps and began hurrying up to the next floor, knowing there weren’t many more floors to go. The smoke filled the entire stairwell. On each floor, Bill pushed open the door to frightened faces. He noticed most people were huddled near the long, tall, narrow windows.

“How are you folks doing?” he asked as he stepped onto the 105th floor. His eyes were burning fiercely now, and he was coughing.

“It’s not good.” a man said. He looked to be about forty. Maybe late thirties. Bill couldn’t tell with all the fear scratched onto his face. “We’ve broken open some windows for air. We’ve seen some jumpers from the lower floors. Man, it must be hot for people to jump like that. The fire is moving this way.”

Bill studied the man's face. Pete and Hugh stood behind him. "We better keep going up. I don't think we can go down, not with several floors on fire. I'm sure that jet fuel caused a huge fire." Bill turned, opened the stairwell door, and the three men covered their faces and climbed higher. As each man took another step higher, they wondered what was going to happen next. Were firemen on their way up? Would it make a difference? Would they even arrive in time? One by one, they each began to wonder if the tower would even remain standing.

The 911 desk was under a barrage of phone calls. The lines were overloaded, and operators could only imagine the horror that was occurring.

9:09.21 A male called and stated that at the South tower, people are jumping out the side of a large hole, and no one is catching them.

9.0943 Caller from the 104th floor of the South tower, all stairs are blocked.

9.10.22 South tower, stuck elevator on floor 104. People trapped and yelling from inside.

9.12.18 Male caller states that there are about 100 people on the 106th floor. Requests instructions on how to stay alive.

9.15.34 Observers notice several jumpers from the windows of the North Tower.

Bill, Hugh and Pete returned to their floor and quickly begin leading people up to higher floors, which provided only a marginally better situation. Only about twenty made it before the stairwell became too choked with smoke.

9:17.39 A male caller states the stairs on the 105th floor have collapsed.

9.19.58 Evacuation to top floor of the North Tower begins.

The top floor of the North Tower became packed with people. Each of them reeked of smoke that was quickly filling the entire floor. People sat, rubbing their eyes, crying, holding onto a bottle of water or soft drink, and sitting against the wall in shock. Others kept running around the acre sized office floor desperately trying to find a way out. But 110 floors is a long way to safety. No one remained near the elevators. Listening to the cries and screams of people trapped became too much to bear.

9.22.23 Male caller states he is on floor 84 of the south tower. Says he cannot breath when suddenly the call is disconnected.

9.32.14 South Tower, people gain access to roof, hoping to be picked up by a helicopter.

Cohen and his remaining office crew huddle near broken windows, trying desperately to breath fresh air. The floor is rapidly filling with smoke and growing hotter, as the flames crept closer and closer.

"It must be over a hundred in here," Cohen says.

"At least," Bill replies. "Think we'll get," he stopped and coughed, trying to clear his lungs. It is getting to be more and more difficult. "Think we'll get out of here?"

“Doubt that,” Tom answers. He wipes the sweat from his face using his shirttail. “I hate this. I hate dying like this.”

“I wish I could tell you that you were wrong, but I can’t,” Bill replies.

Angela and Vicky are huddled together near a window crying quietly. Angela continues staring at the other tower, looking for signs that a rescue might be taking place somewhere, one that would be repeated for them, but nothing happens except for a raging fire and billowing smoke. Then suddenly, there is a shift. The entire top of the south tower breaks free and begins to crumble down as one big, intact section.

“Oh my God!” Angela yells. “Look! It’s falling over!” She screamed louder than she had ever heard herself, and many others joined her.

“Oh God!” Bill yells. Everyone on the floor turns and stares out the window. They watch as the top few floors break away in unison as a single block and begin to crumble and fall over. As the top of the tower tips and begins to fall, the floors beneath it collapse, and suddenly there is a huge plume of brown, gray smoke and dust ejected into the air. They stare in shock as the South Tower collapses almost perfectly, one floor pancaking on top of another, leaving a thick cloud of dust where the tower once stood.

10.12.35 A male caller from floor 105 states he can barely breath.

“We’re going to die!” a woman screamed. The top floor of the north tower is filled with sobbing, crying and very little conversation.

“I never thought something like this would happen,” Bill said in a low, defeated voice. He leaned toward the broken window and took in a deep breath of air. It still smelled like smoke and he coughed as the air filled his lungs.

“It’s amazing,” Ed told him. He repositioned himself on the floor, moving away from shards of glass. “I should’ve lived life differently after my wife and daughter died. I’ve wasted so much time.” The words sounded so out of place and foreign, as if someone invisible sitting next to him had spoken. He had never really mentioned their death for all these years. Instead, he held it inside, stuffed away his feelings and buried his life in his work.

“We never know how to really live life until most of life is gone,” Bill told him. “I suppose I should react differently to all this.” He looked around at a room filled with heartbreak. People were on the phone, frantically trying to reach loved ones, talking to their spouses, parents or children, some were still calling 911, screaming into the phone, desperately looking for an escape. He had given up. He had seen a couple of people falling past the windows, and it was a sight that was tattooed on his brain, a moving image he kept replaying no matter how hard he tried to stop it.

“We never act like today is the last day,” Tom said. “There’s always tomorrow. Everything can get

done tomorrow. We don't say I love you because of tomorrow. We don't take time to smell the roses, because of tomorrow. And then suddenly, today, this moment, and maybe a few minutes more is all we have left, and tomorrow is no more than a dream." He hacked and coughed, feeling the smoke burning deeper into his lungs. The air was getting worse and the heat was growing unbearable.

Angela walked over, pushed aside some glass with her foot, and sat down. "I wonder if my husband is down there," she said, looking out the window at the mass of fire and police vehicles. Her husband was a fireman, and from the looks of the scene, every fire station in the city had responded.

"Did you get a hold of anyone?" Bill asked her.

"I tried. Kids are in school. My mom's not home, and can you believe it, I can't remember the number to the fire station! My mind just won't work right." At that moment, her husband was racing up the stairs with scores of other fire and police officials. He was on the forty-fifth floor.

"I talked to my wife. I told her I'd try to get out and not to worry. I don't want her last memories of my voice to be panic," Bill said.

"I'll bet that was difficult," Ed replied. He wiped his eyes and stared out the window at the column of smoke and dust that was slowly blowing away. There was once 110 story tower outside that window, and now nothing but a memory of what had stood there. It was almost impossible to comprehend. He checked his watch. It read 10:25. The second hand was sweeping past 6 and he stared at it a moment, feeling that every second was more precious than he had ever imagined. He suddenly realized how worthless money truly was.

There was a loud rumble coming from the floors below. The building shook slightly and vibrated. As a floor collapsed, it weakened the structure even more. The sides of the tower were similar to an exoskeleton; it held the building up. The floors that were attached to it transferred the weight to the outer skin of the tower. As each floor collapsed, the sides weakened and began to bow outward. The raging fire in the floors below reached over a thousand degrees. The steel began to sag, the rivets weakened and one by one, they failed. Parts of the lower floors began to buckle. The creaking could be heard on all the floors above.

Elevators swayed slightly, and trapped occupants screamed, banging on the doors begging for help. Some trapped in higher elevators had already succumbed to the fire and smoke.

"What's that noise? What is it?" Angela yelled. She sat up and began coughing. Sweat poured down her shiny face.

"The fire," Ed replied. "Try to sit back and breath slowly," he told her. He knew, the building would not last much longer. Watching the south tower collapse, even though it was hit second, foretold their fate. He was sure of it. The thought gave him an inkling of what it must be like to sit on death row.

There was a loud crashing sound and a huge plume of thick, grayish smoke bellowed up from the

stairwell. Everyone leaned into a window and sucked in what little fresh air they could. The floor beneath them shook and vibrated slightly as lower floors began to fail. The screaming continued in short bursts, following by quiet sobbing.

One man, not from Cohen's office, got up and walked over to a desk and grabbed a large leather chair. He wheeled it closer to the window; picked it up with strength only a dying man can possess, and tossed it through the tall, narrow plate of tinted glass. The window immediately surrendered and the chair disappeared as it fell to the ground 110 stories below. Everyone turned and looked. Screams from lower floors could be heard. The man calmly walked over to the window, kicked away large shards of pointed glass at the window base, and calmly jumped.

"Oh my God!"

Several women screamed and the sound was piercing.

"Damn it's getting hot in here," Tom commented, trying to ignore what had just occurred. Beads of sweat covered his face. His shirt was soaked. "It must be a hundred-twenty in here."



"Reminds me a little of Phoenix," Bill answered. The temperature was rising quickly. There were more rumblings from the floors below, only louder this time. The building felt as though it had moved slightly. Everyone looked around, studying the fear in everyone's face. They were eyes of terror, resignation and sadness. They were eyes that had given up hope and were merely waiting for the inevitable. It amazed Bill how death could be faced so calmly, almost peacefully. Only a few continued fighting it.

There was another loud rumbling and this time the screams on the lower floor rose like thick and choking smoke. The floor shook violently. Pencil holders and other small items danced across desks. A lamp fell to the floor, its sound barely noticed. The tower shook and trembled, and loud THUDDDDDS filled the air. The noise rose up and became a loud and thunderous roar that filled everyone's hearing.

Suddenly it felt like sitting in a huge elevator whose cable had just broken. There was a brief moment of feeling nearly weightless as the floor beneath them collapsed. It buckled unevenly, first one side buckled and then the entire floor gave way. Almost in unison, everyone threw up their arms like roller coaster riders often do when the coaster tops the peak and begins a rapid descent. Nothing but piercing screams filled the air.

Bill looked over at Ed Cohen and saw a look of peace on his face. He knew he was going to meet his beloved wife and daughter whom he had ached for all these years. The floor fell several feet, maybe two stories before slamming hard into something. Furniture that had become briefly airborne came crashing to the floor. And then that feeling of weightlessness again. Glass shattered. Desks and office fur-



niture moved about as if everything had suddenly sprouted legs and was running for safety. Loud crashes from below nearly drowned out every human sound. And then there was a horrible feeling of falling as the lowered floors finally gave way and collapsed. The walls caved in and the floor began to break up. Bill grabbed onto the window blinds to keep from sliding across the buckling floor, but the blinds immediately gave way and fell on top of him. Ed Cohen simply let the crumbling floor toss him about. His

expression never changed, and the last time Bill saw him, he was sure Ed was smiling, even if just a little. Tom rolled away into a blast of smoke and disappeared. Orange flames erupted, shooting up through the broken floor before retreating briefly, then reappearing even stronger. In the rapid span of a second, the heat grew unbearable, and what didn't immediately catch fire began to melt. The screams were snuffed out as smoke and fire enveloped the top, collapsing floors.

The crumbled 110th floor began falling, riding a wave on top of the other floors beneath it. Every time the sandwich of collapsed floors fell onto another floor, there was a backbone, jarring thud before the next floor gave way, and it continued like that, one floor collapsing onto another. Each jarring thud came in rapid fire succession, and for those still conscious, it sounded similar to a machine gun going off, only a little slower. The noise was deafening, and those who were still alive, could not even hear their own thoughts as the tower continued its rapid collapse.

At 10.29.42 all calls from the north tower were disconnected. 595 souls left for home, leaving the earth in a flood of tears and sorrow that only their loved ones could truly comprehend, and many could not even do that.

And somewhere in the collapse, Angela met her husband.

ADDICTION

G. ALLEN WILBANKS

Henry sat cross-legged on his tattered stinking mattress in a dark corner of the abandoned warehouse. Sunlight poured through one shattered window that, for some unknown reason, had escaped being boarded up with the rest, but the light did not reach his filthy refuge in the corner. A candle burned next to Henry's makeshift bed providing all the light and heat he needed — or wanted — at the moment.

A large red sign posted on the door out front proclaimed, "Danger: Condemned," but Henry did not care about the sign. Police had raided the building three times in the past month to evict all the homeless and destitute squatters who had chosen to live here. Henry did not care about the police. The warehouse would probably be torn down soon to make room for a new supermarket or multi-level parking garage and any one still living in it might be buried by the bulldozers and wrecking crew, but Henry did not care about that either. Right now, at this moment in time, he only cared about one thing. One all-important event in his life that had taken precedence over every other thing that had ever held any meaning for him.

Henry tied the latex band around his left bicep using his right hand and his teeth. When he had pulled it as tight as it would go and secured it so it would not slip at a crucial moment, he vigorously rubbed the inner curve of his elbow, searching for a suitable vein. Most of the blood vessels in his right arm had become so damaged or weak they no longer showed under the skin or carried enough blood for his needs, and recently his left arm had begun to mimic the same condition of uselessness. Rows of carbon-darkened scars gave mute testimony to years of abuse. A small medical syringe lay on the mattress beside Henry's knee, waiting patiently for him to call upon its services yet again.

After a few moments of searching, Henry found a small vein close to the surface that was still serviceable. He picked up the syringe and checked the contents of its tube. Henry's hand began to shake. A jittery feeling in his guts and a slight feeling of nausea told him he had almost waited too long before preparing his fix this time. Well, he figured it was time to remedy that situation. He raised the needle tip to eye level and depressed the plunger slowly and delicately. An air bubble pumped into his vein might kill him, so he had to clear the needle of any dangerous air gaps, but he also did not want to waste any of the precious fluid contained within. After flicking the syringe a few times with a his index finger to draw all the air to the top, he pressed carefully until a fat glistening drop of moisture grew at the tip and spilled down the slender length of the needle.

Stroking his left arm with his thumb while cradling the needle between two fingers like a plastic and

steel cigarette, he checked once more to be sure he knew exactly where the tiny elusive blood vessel lay hiding. Henry brought the syringe into position and prepared to deliver the one thing in his life that still carried comfort and meaning.

“Wait.”

Henry paused at the verbal intrusion. A shadow moved over him, a deeper blackness enveloping the already dismal corner in which he huddled. The candle flickering on the floor flared into a surprisingly bright white light, then guttered out. No breeze roamed the abandoned building to explain the candle’s behavior; it had simply burned itself out. Trying to blink away the glowing silvery spot the candle had imprinted into his vision, Henry peered myopically around to locate the owner of the voice that had interrupted him.

A few feet away, invading Henry’s self-imposed isolation, stood a man wearing a long, gray winter overcoat with the collar pulled up as if to ward off a chill. The stranger hugged the coat’s fabric around himself as though desperate for warmth, but the air in the warehouse was far from cold. Henry felt the man’s gaze fall on him with an almost physical weight, and though he at first tried to ignore the intrusion, he was finally forced to admit the man was not going to simply go away on his own. He fired an angry glare at the stranger standing over him and opened his mouth to tell him to move along. But the words never came out. As Henry peered more closely at the figure looming above him, he saw that although this intruder resembled a man in general form, it was actually something ... else. A red-scaled reptilian snout protruded over the coat collar, sprouting from a nightmare landscape of grooved and twisted flesh. Four short pointed horns rose from the deformed head in a single row, starting at the center of its forehead and moving backward. And somewhere between the alligator mouth and the horns, floated two sickly-yellow eyes that gazed intently at Henry, seeming to stare right through him into his drug-poisoned, shriveled little heart.

At first Henry tried to convince himself that he had waited too long to fix and he was suffering the first hallucinations of withdrawal. But the drug never caused him to see things



like this before, and he quickly discarded the theory. The creature — imagined or not — spoke again.

“Heroin?” it asked. The mouth only moved slightly to speak the word, but the movement revealed needle-sharp teeth lining its entire length.

“Huh?” Henry replied, too dumbstruck to coordinate brain and mouth any more effectively.

“In the syringe. It’s heroin, isn’t it? Horse. Smack. Shit. The big ‘H.’”

“Uh, yeah.” Henry remained too shocked to be properly frightened, but he could feel the first stirrings of panic building in him. Or perhaps it was just his growing need for the drug reminding him time was limited.

“Do you like it? The drug, I mean,” asked the creature solicitously.

“I don’t understand,” said Henry. The question surprised him, but not as much as the fact this thing from a bad dream could talk to him at all.

“Do you like the heroin?” it repeated.

“Uh, I guess so.”

“Do you really? Does it make you feel good still? Or does it just keep you from feeling sick?”

Henry thought seriously about the question for a moment. “It used to make me feel good. Now, I guess... I... I....”

“...Just don’t want to feel bad. Is that right?”

“Yeah.”

The creature nodded and actually managed to push its features into a sympathetic expression. “I thought so. You’ve been using the stuff a long time, I gather. And I bet it has cost you quite a lot over the years. Maybe your job. A house and car. Perhaps even a family.”

“Yeah. Hey, who... what are you?” The fear, previously suppressed by Henry’s confusion, began to manifest. His voice cracked as he forced himself to ask, “What do you want? Are you going to hurt me?”

“No, no, no. I am not going to hurt you.” The creature laughed lightly in his throat. Henry did not find the sound pleasant or reassuring. “And as for what I am. Well, what do you think I am?”

“A monster?” Henry asked.

“No, not a monster. Merely a demon. And not a very powerful one at that. But I’m here to offer you something that I think you will like. How would you like to be able to throw that drug away? How would you like to never have to use the stuff again? You could be free of it forever with no withdrawal and no unpleasant cravings. Doesn’t that sound like something you would want?”

Henry glanced at the syringe still in his hand, then stared suspiciously back at the self-proclaimed demon. “How can you do that?”

“It doesn’t matter how. The important thing is I can do it, and all you have to do is say that you want

it.” The demon smiled, perhaps trying to be pleasant, but the toothy leer only made Henry flinch.

“What will it cost me?”

The demon shook his head slowly, looking slightly disappointed. “Come, come. You’re not stupid. I think you know very well what it would cost you.”

“My soul.”

“Yes. Your soul. The drug has taken your life away and I will give it back to you. But in return I will take your soul. I think that is more than a fair exchange. You can go on and get a new job. Get a new home, make new friends. I am offering quite a lot for a damaged soul that will probably fall into my hands in the end anyway. Don’t you think so?”

Henry did think so. Heroin had made his life a living Hell on Earth, and he had no reason to believe that after he died he wouldn’t be in for more of the same. But then again, if this demon were trying to buy his soul, maybe there was a chance he could still salvage it. Maybe the only reason he was being offered a trade was that the demon believed he might get away from him.

A second thought percolated to the surface of Henry’s muddled brain. This whole conversation could be some sort of trick. Maybe if he refused the deal, the demon would simply kill him and take his soul anyway. Maybe the creature was playing some sick game to pass a little time before he finished off his newest victim. Henry swallowed thickly before speaking. “If I tell you no, will you leave me alone. Or are you going to kill me anyway? Henry stared at the demon’s polished black boots, afraid to meet its eyes. He knew immediately how stupid the question was, but he still wanted to hear the answer.

“I’ll leave of course.” The creature said with the utmost sincerity in its voice and demeanor. If it had a heart, it probably would have crossed it. “I would love to just take your soul with me now, but I can only take what is freely given. I can’t even snatch the lint out of your pocket without your permission. Truly an unfortunate circumstance, but there are rules to be followed.” The demon paused, waiting until Henry looked up to meet its gaze. “So what’s it going to be?”

“No,” said Henry finally. “I don’t think I want your deal. Maybe I can quit the stuff by myself and maybe I can’t. But if I take your trade I know for a fact I’m going to Hell. I’d rather be a junkie with the tiniest chance of still going to Heaven than straight and already damned.”

Henry lifted the needle once more to stab it into his arm.

“Wait.”

Henry looked up again, needle poised.

“Maybe there is some middle ground here,” continued the demon. “Maybe I can help you quit. You will still go through withdrawal. It’ll be painful, but you will eventually be clean and it won’t cost you your soul.”

“Why would you want to do that?” Henry’s eyes narrowed as he tried to find the trap in the

demon's offer.

"It would be my good deed for the day," said the demon laughing unconvincingly.

"Demons don't do good deeds," said Henry. He placed the needle tip to his arm.

"Wait, dammit!" screamed the demon. Henry stared up in shock at the angry explosion. The creature took a step toward him and held out a viciously clawed hand, palm up. "Give me the syringe," it hissed.

"No." Henry recoiled from the hand and cradled the dope-filled needle against his chest. "I need this. Go away, please. Just leave me alone."

"Okay, okay." The demon backed away again holding both hands up in a placating gesture, the smile that wasn't a smile back on its face. "I'm sorry if I scared you. Here's my last offer: I'm going to cure you at no cost. You get straight and you keep your soul. No catch."

Henry stared in amazement. The demon's smile faltered slightly, and a haze of desperation seemed to grow around the creature. Henry could have sworn those monstrous red hands were shaking just the tiniest bit. As the demon once more moved close, Henry held his ground. He did not shy away even as the monster laid one clawed hand on the top of his head. He felt an odd wrenching sensation move through his body, not painful, but disturbing. The feeling, although intense, passed quickly except for a slight residual tingling in his extremities. Henry soon felt normal again. In fact, he felt better than normal. He felt good. And, not good as in drugged and comfortably high, but good as in clean and healthy.

The craving and need for the poisons that had controlled his life for so long were gone. The idea of injecting any more toxins into his body now repulsed him. For the first time in his life he looked at a needle full of heroin and did not want it. He stood up and, without a second thought, he dropped the syringe onto the dirty mattress and turned his back to it. He felt absolutely wonderful.

"Thank you," he told the demon sincerely.

But the creature did not answer him. Instead, it dived past him and scooped up the fallen needle. Tearing the sleeve of its coat in its haste to bare a scaly red arm, the demon stabbed the needle deep into its flesh and depressed the plunger, driving the liquid contents into its body.

Henry walked away, out into the bright daylight, thinking about all the horrible and bizarre things he had done in his life just to feed his addiction; while behind him a large, red demon slumped onto a tattered, stinking mattress with a soft sigh of relief.



CAT HAIR

VICTORIA TURNER



It always happens, no matter how hard you try to shed something. Mistakes stick to you like cat hair; you pick at it, but there's always more there. Sometimes pulling the fur off only results in it floating in the air next to you. It lands again on your clothing in another spot.

So you try a lint brush. It rolls over you and picks up all the pesky little hairs. But then you have to peel back the tape and that sticks to you too. It doesn't matter, because even after you throw it away, more appears.

The cat's still there.

Absentmindedly I stared at the tiny black hair, twirling it between my thumb and index finger. I stared at this strand of unfamiliar feline DNA until I felt a large hand on my shoulder. I turned my head slightly to see the tan, hairless hand, a shiny gold wedding band glinting at me with insincerity. Instantly, my stomach churned and the speed of my heart burst into a hammering pace. My nerves swelled and it took all of my courage to turn on my stool and face Steve. He stared at me with icy hawk-like intoxicated eyes, piercing me with frozen daggers.

Fuck.

Sucking in a deep breath through my nose, I inhaled slowly and curled my lips into a pained, toothless smile. Steve's eyebrows knit together as he stood next to my seat.

"We have to talk," he hissed in my ear, his smooth cheek grazing mine.

"No, we don't," I responded.

"Oh," he mocked, "we don't?"

"No," I said through clenched teeth.

"I think we better."

I glanced around the bar to see if anyone was paying attention. Sarah and her husband Mark were

busy chatting over bottled beer. Janet and Richard were busy watching the ball game on the large screen behind me. Other unfamiliar faces were in the back playing pool. As my eyes surveyed the crowded bar, my sight landed on Aiden's mother, one of the bartenders. She stood talking to Michael, a rowdy Irishman who never knew when he had enough, and had no idea that everyone disliked him.

"Ya don't understand," Michael slurred in a thick Irish accent. "What I'm sayin' is--"

"I do understand!" said Aiden's mother. "But what I'm telling you is. . ."

At least she's occupied, I thought to myself.

Steve hit my shoulder. With some force he grabbed my hand and pulled me off the barstool. He led me through the dense blue smoke that encompassed the dingy sports bar this evening. Some of the lights above had burnt out and hadn't yet been replaced. The tile floor desperately needed to be washed; cigarette ashes were strewn everywhere. Surprisingly, Steve's footsteps were audible over the loud chatter. He led me out of the pub and turned to me once we were outside. It was raining steadily, water pounding and trickling over the awning above us. Over the drumming of the rain I thought I heard the soft cry of a kitten. I shook my head. A gust of chilly air blew my hair behind me as I opened my mouth to confront Steve. His brown hair was combed neatly to the side, and he looked attractive in a cobalt blue shirt and jeans, for a man fifteen years my senior.

"There is nothing to talk about," I said, force behind my words.

"Bullshit."

"You're married."

He rolled his eyes. "That didn't stop you the other night."

"I was drunk!"

"No excuse."

I pursed my lips. "It shouldn't have happened. I admit that. And I'm sorry it did! I wish I could take it back!"

"I don't." He stepped closer. Angrily I shoved him away.

"You should have stopped it," I said quietly.

"Look, it's not like we had sex. It was just some making out that went a little farther. No big deal."

No big deal. I'm sure that's what your wife would think.

Taking a deep breath, I stared at Steve.

"I can't take it back. As much as I wish I could just erase it, I can't. But as far as I'm concerned, *nothing* happened. It *never* happened. And believe me, it *will never* happen again."

As I turned around to go back into the bar, I heard Steve say quietly, "That's too bad. I was falling in love with you."

A mistake. What the hell were you thinking? That's the thing; you weren't. All you wanted was some attention. Is that so bad?

Yes. If you're still scarred over that rejection from Ryan, forget about it. He's not worth your time. And you've known Steve's lusted after you for the past year. It was flattering, sure. An older man; rather, an experienced man. But you never would've done anything if you'd've been sober. You know that.

How could you have let yourself get so drunk? How did the bartender not realize it? Two Long Islands, two gin and tonics, and two tequila shots? Yeah, you laugh now in bitterness. After all, everyone said you'd be safe getting a ride home with him.

I entered the pub and went for a seat at the bar. Sitting down, I buried my face in my hands. Vigorously I rubbed my eyes with my fists, blessing myself for not putting on eye makeup today. I heaved a sigh and blurrily looked up into the face of Aiden's mother.

"Hi," she said to me, smiling. Her brown hair was pulled back in a small knot behind her head. Her hazel eyes sparkled happily in the dim bar.

I managed a weak smile and blinked several times.

"Hi," I said softly. I looked her over to see if I could decide which genes Aiden got from her. I didn't get far enough to make any decisions before she asked me another question.

"What're you having tonight?"

"Oh," I sighed. "It was a rough day. I'll take a Long Island."

She smiled deviously at me. "I'm not even going to ask if you want a jumbo one."

I managed a small laugh. She grabbed a large glass and filled it generously with several different liquors. I swiveled in my bar stool, and through the dense smoke I spotted Aiden leaning against the back wall, a bottle of beer in hand.

There it goes. You have a fling with a man who's convinced you're his soul mate in a desperate attempt to feel wanted. Five days later, you meet a wonderful man your own age, who's not like anyone you've ever met before. Incredibly smart. Premed. Breathlessly attractive. Models part-time. Excellent taste in music and movies. Stones and Scarface. And that one damn kiss. . .

Aiden's mother set the drink down in front of me and waved my money away when I tried to pay her. I threw the bills down on the bar as a generous tip instead. She went off to help someone else, and I sat alone. Without trying to look obvious, I pretended to check the clock above Aiden, but he wasn't

there. Instead, my eyes landed on Steve, staring at me with crushed desire. A stab of ecstasy pricked me in the womb. Shocked, I turned away. I bit my lip before letting out an overwhelmed sigh.

Hell. You feel guilty. And you should, no doubt about that. But now, it hits you; you love the way he kissed you. It was empowering, the way a man kissed you like that. So full of desire, such heated passion. Your whole body swelled at his touch. You even forgot how to kiss. But it's all fake; he's married and looking for some. Probably thinks you're loose. No, he wouldn't think that. After all, you never showed any sign of interest this past year.

Who knows? Maybe he is in love with you.

I turned my head back to my drink and took a long sip. After I rubbed my eyes with my fists, I opened them and saw Aiden standing a few feet away. Our eyes met and I gave a shy smile. He looked intimidating the way he stood so relaxed, leaning against the wall, one of his long, thin legs bent backward, propping him up. He had a navy blue bandana tied around his head and a few pieces of curly hair escaped near the back. His blue eyes lazily gazed in my direction as he reached up and rubbed his stubbly cheek. He refolded his long arms and gave me a cocky grin. He darted his eyes from me to the empty wall space next to him, then back to me again.

“Ah,” said Aiden’s mother. I broke my gaze from his direction. “Isn’t my son cute?”

Cute doesn't even begin to describe it, honey.

I smiled softly. “Yes.”

His mother beamed at me. “I did a good job on that one.”

I nodded. “Yes, you did.”

“You should go talk to him. I think he’d like you.”

I raised an eyebrow. “What makes you think that?”

She took a sip of ice water. “He’s tired of girls at the modeling agency. Sick of girls who only eat salads on dates and don’t talk about anything of importance.”

I took a sip of my strong drink that made me want to cough. “And what makes you think I’m any different?”

“I don’t know. Just got a feeling, I guess.”

“Just a feeling?” I repeated. I leaned over on the counter, folded my arms, and tapped my fingers against my elbow.

She laughed. “Okay . . . I overheard him telling his uncle that he was incredibly interested in you.” I blinked in surprise. “Really?”

She nodded, a secret smile on her rosy lips. "He said you two talked for hours, and when he asked you to go back to his place you shot him down."

I sighed. *So that's why he didn't call. You're not a slut.*

"He liked that you shot him down. He doesn't want to date a tramp. Now go," she said, waving me away, "or I'll cut you off for the rest of the night."

I laughed. "All right."

Standing up, I took a deep breath. I smoothed my long black skirt and adjusted my tank top, picking off a short black hair. I let it fall next to me. As I began to walk to Aiden, a hand was suddenly on my shoulder again. Before I realized it, I was being steered outside. I blinked in shock as I realized it was Steve.



"You," I hissed as I was dragged through the door. "What the hell d'you think you're doing?"

Rain still pounded on the awning, making a repetitive drumming that my heart began to imitate. A slow rumbling announced that was soon followed by a flash of lightning. The sky lit up and Steve looked almost frightening for a moment. His combed hair was jaggedly sticking upward in many places, as if he had fisted his hands in it and pulled hard.

"You know what, dear," Steve slurred, coming

closer. "I'm gonna give you a ride tonight."

"No," I took half a step back.

"C'mon, you know you liked it." He leaned in closer. His breath smelled of beer and cigarettes. I wrinkled my nose and pushed him away.

"No," I said firmly, and turned to walk back inside. Steve's hand grabbed my wrist and pulled me backward.

"Stop it," I shouted. Steve let go and walked off into the rain in a huff. "Just leave me alone!"

"What the hell's going on?"

I whirled around to face Aiden. My anger faded as I looked up into his face.

"Nothing," I muttered. "I think everything's okay--I think he left."

Aiden narrowed his eyes and stared around the parking lot. "I don't see anyone pulling out. Should I look around for the bastard?"

“No,” I said hastily. “I think I got rid of him.”

Aiden grinned down at me and I realized then just how tall he was. He took my hand in his and swung my arm. I beamed back up at him.

“I enjoyed our conversation the other night,” he said, his voice low.

I laughed, my face feeling as if it would crack from smiling so much. “I did too.”

He pulled me a little closer, still swinging my hand. “It’s been a long time since I met someone that I couldn’t stop thinking about after saying goodnight.”

“I think that’s a good sign.”

“I’d say so. But . . .”

My heart pummeled. “What?” I said, trying not to sound worried.

“Well . . .” he trailed off. I felt myself being pulled so close to him that we were nearly touching. I craned my neck to look up at him.

“I was wondering when you were going to let me take you out somewhere other than our occasional run-in here.”

I relaxed. “Well,” I said loftily, “you never called.”

“It’s been two days since we met. I couldn’t seem too desperate.”

“Ah. The old ‘play it cool’ game.”

He laughed and squeezed my hand. “How about tomorrow?”

“What tomorrow?”

“How about we go downtown and see a show? Dinner too. Then walk around the pier and let me see if your lips are as soft as I remember.”

I blinked up at him and smiled. “I’m busy tomorrow.”

The smile on Aiden’s face flickered.

“After all,” I continued smoothly, “we are playing the ‘play it cool’ game.”

He pursed his lips. “What if I won’t take no for an answer? Will I wind up like the jackass you just got rid of? All alone in the rain?”

I sighed and took my free hand and put it on his bicep. His arms had looked long and gangly, but touching it I realized his muscles were a well-kept secret; it was a firm arm that I wanted wrapped around me.

Aiden pulled me to him. “I can’t take it anymore. I apologize in advance for this.”

Before I could reply, Aiden slowly bent down and placed a soft kiss on my lips. My body tightened as he let go of my hand and placed one of his on the small of my back, the other gently caressing my bare arm. I responded to his kiss and reached up and put my hand on his neck, letting it wander over

his chiseled face. After a minute he stopped the kiss and smiled down at me. I bit my lip and looked into his blue eyes.

Damn. A soft kiss. Even better than the other night. Not like Steve's at all. It seems that Aiden actually cares about you rather than just getting you in the sack. And look at him. He's gorgeous, polite, smart, and his mother even likes you. That's always important. You win the mom, you win the man. And once you win him you won't have to come back here trying to find him. And Steve will be gone. And you can move on and not worry about that any more.

"Will you excuse me a minute?" Aiden asked.

"Sure."

"Are you coming in or staying out here?"

"I'll be in in a minute," I said, smiling at him.

"You better be. I don't want you running out on me." He winked at me and walked back inside. I checked to be sure he was gone before doing a little victory dance. I know I looked ridiculous, but I didn't care. I shook my booty and waved my arms in the air. Closing my eyes, I moved around in my own little world. I don't know how long I danced for, but I felt a warm hand enclose around my wrist and I kept on dancing. Then, suddenly, I was pulled into another kiss. I responded back without opening my eyes. Almost instantly I felt my stomach churn; instead of warm, soft lips, I tasted stale cigarettes. Horrified, I opened my eyes to see Steve, and behind him, wearing a look of shock was Aiden.

"Uncle Steve?" he said dubiously.

Steve turned around and looked at Aiden. Shocked, unable to say anything, I stood in horrified stupor.

"It's--it's not what you're thinking," I said quietly.

Aiden turned around without acknowledging what I said and stormed back into the bar. Furiously I turned to Steve, who grinned at me.

"Come on," he said, moving closer. I felt my face twist in fury.

"Go to hell!" I shouted. "Just piss off, all right?" Somewhere nearby a cat was howling. Steve turned, and in silent anger stalked off into the rain. I turned and fled back into the bar, running right into Aiden. My throat swelled and heart went weak in my chest. All the wondrous feeling I had felt minutes ago vanished and washed away in the rain.

"I swear," I said softly, "it's not--"

He brushed past me and walked outside. Then, he turned around and looked at me as I stood in the doorway. I wanted to cry, but I bit my lip instead.

"I thought you were different," he said quietly. He turned around and walked into the rain. Instinctively I followed him right into the storm.

"How can you say that?" I shouted over the clapping thunder. Icy pelts of water stung my face. "You heard me shouting at him before, telling him to leave me alone."

A small cry came from behind me. I turned and saw a small black cat, drenched with water. It looked at me with large orange eyes. Rain beat down on me, soaking my hair and matting it against my head. Aiden stopped walking.

"Then tell me," he called over the rain. He stopped talking. I waited, breath caught in my throat. "Tell me that it never happened before."

Lie. Lie. Don't tell him. Just lie. He'll never know. It's Steve's word against yours. He doesn't have to know. Say it! Say it now! One syllable. No.

I couldn't do it. I couldn't lie. Aiden stared at me with intense eyes.

"It did happen before," I said, voice barely audible over the rain. "But it wasn't supposed to!"

Aiden turned around and stormed off into the night. I wanted to run after him, to tell him I was sorry, how horrible I felt about what had happened. But instead, I stood, frozen in place, rain mixing in with my burning tears of anger and frustration. I balled my hands into fists and released them several times. I don't know how long I stood in the rain before the cat came and sat down next to me. I looked down at it and it blinked its lamp-like eyes at me. For some reason, I bent down closer to the cat and stared at it. Then, picking it up I pressed it against my chest, thinking about how much one mistake had ruined everything, and how hard my life was going to be from this moment on. I turned around and set the cat back down out of the rain.

"You bastard," I said to the creature.

Looking at my shirt where I had just held the cat were tons of tiny little hairs. I tried to pick them off, but there were too many. Instead, I let them stay there. Sitting down on the wet concrete, I let the tears flow freely, and the cat crawled into my lap. I didn't try to get it off.





HOW MUCH IS THAT BODY IN THE WINDOW?

ERIC BONHOLTZER



“Shoplifters Will Be Skinned”. When he saw the sign Jasper couldn’t help but smile, issuing a loud laugh to prove he got the joke. Despite the nonchalance he tried to effect as he entered Mike’s House of Furs, the young activist could barely suppress a shudder at the sight of all the pelts, all the senseless cruelty. He was a bundle of raw nerves, his stomach knotting and clinching. A dual mixture of fear and anticipation coursed through his veins as he thought to himself, he deserves this.

The store was deserted, Jasper the sole customer. In fact, the only other person in the store beside himself was a conservatively dressed salesman with overly stiff posture that led Jasper to much speculation about the guy’s love life. The young activist put on an Oscar caliber performance, searching about for just the right coat as the salesman made his approach. “Name’s Mike, as in Mike’s House of Furs.” He had meaty hands that looked clammy as he extended one in a manner that reminded Jasper for some reason of used cars. “I’m the owner of this place. Anything I can help you with?” Jasper took the hand though declined to introduce himself.

Something didn’t sit right with this man and it was more than just being involved in the propagation of slaughter. Mike had an acute glare about him that seemed to take in more than it seemed even as he spoke genially about offering his help, as if what he was really trying to get across was what can I do to get you out of here the fastest? But Jasper was not going to be deterred and certainly not by this two bit fur peddler.

“I’m just browsing, thanks.” Jasper hoped none of his trepidation shone through in his voice and apparently none had because Mike merely nodded, adding where he could be found if Jasper was in need of any assistance and wandered off to another part of the store..

Liking the situation less and less every second, and feeling that Mike’s intense gaze was boring into him every time he turned around, Jasper quickly snatched five of the most ostentatious and expensive coats that he could find giving intense scrutiny to the price tags. The sooner this was over the better. Each minute he was in here was another chance at discovery. “Could you open up the dressing room?” He did his best to sound casual. He didn’t know if it worked or not.

Mike, on the other hand, seemed at ease, almost as if he were enjoying seeing this young customer

so wound up, and he even smiled as he led Jasper to the dressing room. Jasper's fears were allayed slightly, for surely if the owner had any hint of doubt there was no way he would be let alone with a bundle of coats. As Jasper neared the dressing room, his resolve balked, and in a moment of indecision, he returned the five high priced coats to the rack and snatched up three at random in their stead, hoping Mike didn't have a dressing room limit. He reasoned that he would have less attention paid to him if the overcoats weren't of such high value and Mike might check them when he let him in. Besides, a stab at the fur world was a stab at the fur world and price was a secondary factor to getting out without getting caught.



"If you need help, just let me know." Jasper couldn't help but feel the salesman's gaze looking him over. But without incident, the door opened and shut.

Jasper set to work. He withdrew a folding blade, a cheap throw away and slashed the inside liner of a coat, poking the blade through to the fur opening wide gashes as he did so, irreparably desecrating it. On his second coat, Jasper realized just how much fun he was having and engrossed as he was in his work Jasper failed to notice the door handle slowly turning behind him. Only when the latch he had cautiously thrown began to rattle did Jasper realize something was wrong. The young activist cursed vehemently. He was almost done. He just needed a little more time. Mike's voice came from behind the partition, "Everything OK?, you've been in there for quite a while."

"Uh yeah, I'm fine." Jasper worked to cover his tracks. Folding the wrecked coat beneath the viable one, Jasper pulled on his knife, only to find it stuck. Panic clutched him. He just couldn't leave it. It was a throwaway, but it had his fingerprints on it and there was no way Jasper was going to be able to talk his way out of a three inch blade sticking out of one of the coats. He had to get it out. Jasper tried to stall, "Just give me a minute all right." He struggled desperately with the knife. The rattling of the latch didn't stop. Mike was still trying to come in. Jasper knew something was wrong, the shaking growing stronger and the attempt at entry growing more frantic.



"Sir I have to get in there!" came the voice. Then suddenly the knife was free. As fast as he was able, the young activist folded the blade and returned it to his pocket. Breathing a sigh of relief he popped the latch and opened the door a relieved smile on his lips as he snatched up the coats being careful to sandwich the ruined one between the others.

Already on the tip of the tongue was his excuse, "You know, I like them, but they just really aren't me. I'm sorry for wasting your time..."

He never got the chance to say them, the words dying off as Jasper noticed the long

knife in Mike's hands. Jasper trembled, not knowing was going on, his knees weak. This just couldn't be happening. Sure, he'd ruined some furs but it wasn't like he'd killed someone. Mike was looking at Jasper like he had just strangled his children. It just couldn't be happening. He had figured that the absolute worst that would happen if he got caught was a little fine, on the outside maybe probation but certainly not this. This was lunacy.

There was a sardonic mirth in Mike's voice, "Didn't you read the sign?"

Jasper opened his mouth, but no answer came. The knife came down, again and again, savagely. Jasper tried to ward off the blows but they came too fast, too strong. Crimson showered the dressing room.

On the cusp between life and death, as Jasper slowly dimmed he mustered the strength for just one question, it all making sense now, except for one thing, one thing he had to know, "...how'd...you...know...?"

Mike was silent a long time as if deciding whether to not to deign him with an answer. Jasper noted how a thin rivulet of blood, his blood, was wending a narrow path between Mike's eyes, down the bridge of his nose and clinging tenuously to the tip before dripping away. It was singularly the most clear and fascinating thing Jasper had seen all day. Mike smiled, his gaze never faltering, his mind made up. He could give him that at least. "In my store, men don't try on women's furs."

Mike did not live up to his sign's promise. He had bigger plans. Mike respected the fact that when it was all said and done, the young man hadn't whined, hadn't pleaded, he had merely resigned himself and asked a last question. It was an honorable thing. It was something a warrior would do, and Mike felt obligated to pay tribute that. So he preserved the body, stuffing it, making Jasper the ultimate mannequin.



Every so often, Mike would bring him out, to introduce a new fashion; it simply wouldn't do to have him out all the time because someone might recognize him. No Mike saved him for special sales. But every time Mike brought his human mannequin out he couldn't help but smile thinking that a man who "wouldn't be caught dead in fur," had been just that, and he could also not help but think, that in his expert opinion fur never looked better on anyone.



MINIMUM WAGE PARKING LOT POEM #2

KENNETH DIMAGGIO

Suburban teen
runaway

far from your secure
and safe world

After a friend
who put you in touch with
a dealer who told you to wait

for him at this
State Checks Cashed
& food stamps accepted
shopping plaza

In the meantime try
to blend in

by covering your Grateful
Dead psyche with your
grays sweat shirt hoody

Virgil will soon be back
to take you on a personal tour
of Inferno and also to deal

some Readies

Why

just a hand and not the rest of the body

in the fast food dumpster?

Why

all these satellite dishes
on the nearby tenement
porches about to collapse when
the glamorous reality that gets
tuned in ends by being snuffed up
as one more addiction

by people who make ends
meet

by mixing them with baby powder

And the cops who pour
sugar in their coffee now try to scratch
the winning lottery ticket numbers from a day they hope
will end in a cease fire

And the scum bags to them are the existentialist heroes
to others

Dante forgot
to write about Limbo

that permanent
holding pen
in the abyss

where suspects charged
with what crime

waste their lives

buying from the ring ring ring numb
grocery store and the sale sale shoplift fashion outlet

and if you still need more salvation there's the Pentacostal church
in what used to be the Laundromat Dante

never wrote about this rusting overturned shopping cart cosmos

but Virgil

can sell you a piece of Hell Purgatory and Heaven
all in the same vial

Suburban teen missing
boy

it might be your
body discovered within
the next dumpster heap of greasy French Fries
and hamburgers

the risk taken by this once
psychedelic pink flamingo kid

when he saw how life for him

would be a steady routine of purchasing a more expensive brand
of sustaining but soul-less groceries



Omega • Alpha • Chi



part 1: the omgea

Time: 11:25PM, December 20, 2012 C.E.

Place: LaGuardia International Airport

The noise of everyone moving through LaGuardia a few nights before Christmas cluttered the airport, and feet hitting the ground muffled together in a hazy cloud of background noise. But Sydney heard each click of her heels as a thunderous boom as she hurried her pace to get to the right concourse for her next flight. With her travel bag over her shoulder for her flight to Honolulu, Sydney Cooke quickened her pace to make sure she wouldn't be late for the 11:58 PM flight. As she turned the corner to the L gates for the International flights, she collided with man.

"Oh my God, I'm sorry," Sydney said as she tried to grab her bag falling off of her shoulder.

"Oh, that's okay..." The man could see from her uniform that like him, she was a flight attendant, but for a different airline. "You're on a flight soon?"

Sydney looked at the man and saw he was in a different-colored flight attendant's uniform. "Yeah, I'm going to Honolulu, in probably twenty minutes. What flight are you on your way to?"

"Actually, Aerolineas Argentinas has been overbooked lately because Brazil has been closed off, so I'm on a direct flight to Rio Gallegos."

"Where is *that*?"

"It's like at almost the southernmost tip of the country, so it's insanely long." He waited a second before he said, "By the way, I'm Brent."

Sydney smiled. "...Hi, I'm Sydney. And do you know the language at all for when you get there?"

"No, but I'm staying in the airport and going immediately back on a flight to Miami tomorrow afternoon... At least you get to go directly to Hawaii and enjoy Christmas there.."

"Yeah, but I don't want to get fired if I can't get to the Aloha Airlines terminal in time. But I'll only get a day there before I fly the Los Angeles for the next flight just before Christmas." Sydney glanced back at the hall she should have been running down.

"Sorry man," Brent said. "Hope you're not late for the flight."

"Thanks," Sydney said as they both started to turn to get to their flights. "You have a good flight too."

With that they both turned back to the hall and started moving toward their final destinations.

Time: Saturday, 1:46 AM, December 21, 2012 C.E.

Place: Aloha Airlines flight 2242, flying over the Wood Buffalo National Park at the northern edge of Alberta, Canada

Pilot: Eric

Copilot: Brian

Primary Flight Attendants: Courtney, Justin, Shannon, Sydney

“Eric, This weather is messing up our panels up and we can’t report to any station. I can’t find an airport anywhere to send a message out even.”

Brian looked around the panels in the cockpit, trying to make sense of the readings and the turbulence. Brian, Eric’s copilot, spoke again. “I know we’re flying to Hawaii, but there were no reports of weather like this for this flight. I’m sure we would have been notified of any weather problems.”

“We’ll have to keep trying every few minutes, but there’s not a lot on the ground below us — we’re almost touching the Northwest Territories. I’m sure that other stations further south and towards the coast are watching our flight pattern and tracking us, even if we can’t get through to them.”

“It’s pretty dark down there, and —”

“I know, and yeah, this is the worst weather I’ve ever flown through, but we’ll get through it. Call the flight attendants to let the passengers know that we’re doing everything we can about the weather and we’ll get out of it soon.”

“But Eric, there was no report of anything happening in our flight path, we don’t —”

“I know, but we’ve got to tell people *something*.”

Sydney got the page call from the pilot, and then tried to look through the cabin. Most people probably just wanted to get to sleep on this flight; they had left New York only two hours ago, and they knew they would be getting to Hawaii in the morning for their Christmas vacations. People would want to enjoy the day in Hawaii, so they’d want to sleep now. But there was no way with the amount of turbulence in the flight that anyone could rest.

She also knew about news reports in the past few weeks about growing seismic activity all over the world. South America and Central America had an increased number of earthquakes in the past few weeks — another flight attendant was even telling Sydney in the airport that day that they were working on a flight to Argentina, because people from Europe and the United States were suddenly interested in seeing the effects of these earthquakes. Major cities in Brazil were even refusing flights for tourism because of the

recent seismological damage. Looking back, she knew that over the years the number of natural disasters throughout the world steadily increased — from hurricanes in the southeast United States and Central America and China, to volcanic activity in the northwest United States and Hawaii and South America and Europe. So Sydney realized that people flying to Hawaii (versus California, now that a portion of the state eroded and broke off of the continent) might also be visiting to see the volcanic activity that has started once again on the islands. If there are bad conditions in Hawaii because of the volcanic activity, she was sure the passengers didn't want bad conditions before they even touched ground.

Sydney walked over to two other flight attendants, and asked Shannon, "Has anyone else been complaining since all this turbulence started? The babies stopped crying after about twenty minutes of this weather, but the captain just said to tell people that we'll be out of the turbulence soon, because people won't be able to sleep through this."

"I think it might just bother the passengers more if we keep calling them over the intercom while they're trying to relax," Shannon answered.

"I just looked at the cabin, and no one looks relaxed," Sydney answered as she moved to grab the intercom mic. "I know I'd want to know what was going on if I was stuck on a flight like this."

"I never thought I'd need Dramamine, but *man*, this is a tough ride," Justin, the attendant, said to Shannon as Sydney grabbed the mic.

Everyone's heads turned up toward the top of the airplane when they heard the mic click and buzz before Sydney started to speak.

"The flight crew apologizes for the heavy turbulence we're experiencing, but the Captain said that we should be getting out of this weather soon. The flight is doing well despite the turbulence. We apologize again for any problems this is causing, and if you need anything at all, please press your call button for any cabin crew member to assist you.." Sydney then turned the mic off and started to put it back in its rest.

"I'm going to check the foods and drinks in the back of the plane," Courtney said. "There's no way we could be serving any food right now, and it shouldn't spill out in the cabin."

"Smart idea," Justin answered. "I checked our reserves in the front by First Class with Kyle or Jacob to make sure everything's still stored."

Shannon turned to Sydney and asked, "Should we check the cabin to make sure no compartments have opened and make sure everyone's okay?"

"We should — we just told people to press the call buttons if they need anything, so we should get out there, too. I'll move to the back and start checking the cabin and moving forward, and we can meet in the middle after checking."

Justin and Shannon took turns occasionally checking over the passengers, but even the flight attendants wanted to stay buckled in their small seats during the flight. Justin turned to Shannon and set up distributing half glasses of water to anyone who felt like they needed it, but they knew no one would be able to hold a full glass of water without spilling a fourth of it before it could reach their mouths. After almost an hour of what seemed like constant upheaval, Sydney and Kurt both tried to contact the pilots to see if there were any changes in the weather.

After twenty minutes of not being able to contact anyone on ground. Eric told Brian that with the weather conditions so poor they would have to change their route to head further north for ease of flight.

“Eric, we need to know if other planes are in the area.”

“Brian, I should be able to see flights in the air.” Eric paused, while mentally coming up with a plan. “And this weather is making things so rough on our flight, we’ll have to increase our altitude and head up north to hope for better flying weather...”

Eric glanced at Brian and could tell he wasn’t comfortable with his decisions to makes changes to their flight. Eric spoke again. “Brian, we don’t have much choice. No one is responding to *anything* we’re radioing out there, and I can see if there are other airplane lights. I don’t think we have much choice.”

After making the decision to change their flight pattern, Eric added, “We’ll be barely crossing over the Eastern edge of Alaska by going north. People will see us up there and try to contact us.”

“And we should be able to radio... well, Anchorage is in the middle of the state, but maybe Fairbanks. Maybe they could tell us something about this weather, because we’ll have to turn around to go south again to make it to Hawaii.”

“I know, where we’re landing is on the west side of the islands, and that’s just a hair west of the western edge of Alaska.”

They knew that making the decision to change their flight pattern in hopes of finding a safer ride to their vacation destination almost left more questions than answers.

Brian finally asked, “We’re not going to be able to fly around forever. We’re going to have to land somewhere.”

“Yeah, I know... I fear that the weather is that much worse down there than up here.”

They let silence fall like a heavy weight on them as they tried to navigate the plane through storm patches. “Yeah, we’ll land somewhere,” Eric said, almost under his breath. “We’ll make it through this.”

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Ten minutes later, the cabin heard the click of the intercom system again.

“This is your captain Eric speaking. Once again, we apologize for the turbulence we’ve been experiencing on this flight. Every weather report we received before take-off showed that this flight pattern should be okay, but because of these conditions, and because of the size airplane we’re on, we have rerouted our flight to head further north to try to avoid the weather conditions. We’ve got the fuel for this, and although it may take a little longer to get to Honolulu, the flight conditions will hopefully improve so you can sleep the night through.

Once again, if anyone needs anything, press the call button over your seat to get the assistance of any of the flight attendants here.”

With that the people on flight 2242 heard the intercom turn off with it’s now almost usual clicking buzz.

•••

“Well, we’ve veered up north, Brian. Hopefully someone up there would be close enough to hear a radio call,” Eric finally said in the cockpit.

Shannon opened her purse once she strapped herself into a seat again, near Justin and Kyle, pulled out her purse and asked, “Does anyone need Dramamine?” She pulled out of her purse. “Look, I never need these motion sickness pills, I just keep them in case things get bad. Anyone want one?”

Justin took one immediately, Kyle waited a few seconds before asking for one. They muffled their thank yous to her, and then Kyle looked up and saw Sydney trying to get into the last seat in that part of the plane. “Hey,” Kyle whispered, “Shannon has Dramamine. Do you need any?”

“Well...I haven’t eaten much, so I don’t think I’ll be sick — yet. I’ll hold off. But thanks.” As soon as Sydney buckled herself into the seat they heard the buzz of another call button in the section they were sitting in. “I’ll get this,” Justin said as he started to get up to help a passenger.

For the next two hours flight attendants tried to occasionally walk through the aisles to offer people half-filled glasses of water if people needed something to drink. They couldn’t put more water in a single plastic cup, because it would be too easy to spill half of their cup of water if it was full. Besides, the flight attendants were having a hard enough time even standing or pouring water for people who needed assistance on the flight.

By 3:30 in the morning, people were getting up to use the washroom to try to throw up, if they didn’t try to use the air sick bags in front of their seats. The airplane was close to the Arctic Circle and could not see a thing in the night sky or on the ground, other than voluminous clouds. Most people on the flight tried to use their headphones to block out the noise from the storm below, which seemed to become more and more thunderous.

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Sue Matsushita wasn't feeling well in seat 26F of this Aloha Airlines flight to their home in Honolulu, but she wouldn't say anything to disturb her husband Charlie. She watched him wringing the paper napkin he held from his earlier half glass of water, and Sue finally pulled the airplane blanket from her lap so she could try to take his hand.

"Chuck, I don't know what is bothering you, I know it's a bad flight —"

"And you know I hate flying."

"You've taken these long flights for business before, and at least the work is done in New York."

"But Sue, the client canceled the account on me. I flew all this way and they shut me down. And they were a good account to keep for next year."

Sue looked down and waited a moment before saying, "I'm sorry about that honey, but it's almost Christmas, and we'll get back to the nicer weather. The kids will want to see you." Charlie smiled when she brought up his children, which are now adults. "And you know, it will be just a few months before Tom's wife has their child."

"Our first grandchild," Charlie said quietly to Sue.

Sue put her head down and started to smile. "Oh, don't make me feel so old, becoming a grandmother."

"Sue, you're not old, and you're beautiful," Charlie said as he squeezed her hand.

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"This turbulence is terrible," Brian said to Eric as they tried to manage control of the plane. "I can't believe the weather is still this bad."

Eric paused as Brian continued to manage steering their ship. He finally asked his copilot, "We're already at nearly thirty-five thousand, right?"

"Well, yeah, we're kind of high, but thirty-five thousand feet is fine. Why?"

"Brian, this storm's so much of a problem, and we can't avoid it by going lower, but there's a chance we can get on top of this storm."

"On *top*?"

Eric's voice changed and gained the tone of a ship captain. "Start an acceleration to forty-five thousand."

"What makes you think we can—"

“What makes you think we *can't*? And what would we lose by trying?”

“Excess gas for the flight, and... Have you ever flown that high?”

“We can go up to sixty thousand and it should still be safe. No, I haven't done it, but no, we've never been in any conditions like this before.”

Brian just looked at the pilot in silence. About fifteen seconds passed before Eric spoke again. “Look, the airline won't have a fit that we went though more gas to get the flight in safely when we couldn't even get radio communications with anyone.” He continued to look at Brian and the controls before he spoke again. “If anything else, Aloha Air will be thrilled with us, because if anyone else is in the air right now. They're *all* scrambling to keep their planes in the air.”

“You think other airlines are going through this?”

“Brian, these weather problems seem to be everywhere. I'm sure we're not the only flight going to Hawaii. If this storm is hitting so much of North America, I'm sure other airlines are going through this, and Aloha Air will be thrilled that we've done so well up here on our own in these conditions.”

Eric manned the controls as they elevated the flight 2242 to forty-five thousand feet. Eric wondered if this would be enough, and wondered what he could do to manage this vessel, to help his passengers and crew of over two hundred fifty people.

Eric, Brian, Sydney, and the rest of the crew and passengers on flight 2242 didn't know the extent of the storm, and that it was transforming the world underneath them.

Time: Friday, 8:46 PM, December 21, 2012 C.E.

Place: Honolulu, Hawaii, as flight 2242 flies over Canada

“Mom, the inactive volcanoes across the sea are glowing.”

She didn't listen to her son. “Kulika, you were supposed to clean the toys from outside before you go to bed.”

“But mom, the ground is really hot, I can't walk out there.”

Kaneki knew Kulika had to be making up excuses to not clean his toys, but she dried her hands from the dishes from their dinner. She looked outside and saw winds blowing Kulika's friends toys across their yard. Kaneki yelled out, “Is that Kala's bike?”

“I ... Yes, but she brought it home today.”

Another wind picked up and knocked tree branches against their closed door and window. Kaneki looked outside through the window and saw the storm lifting their belongings off the ground, moving things almost twenty feet in a one second wind gust.

She wondered if the storm would blow out the windows, so Kaneki backed away from the window before putting her hand on Kulika's shoulder. "Honey, go downstairs to the basement."

Kulika's eyes turned to saucers, seeing a fear in his mother he had never seen before. "Mom?"

She turned immediately to him. "It's okay, honey. Just go down there. I'll deal with the toys. Just go."

Kulika took a step back, looking at her, before turning around and running toward the stairs to go downstairs.

Kaneki then turned to go to the other side of the house to look for her husband. "Ione!" she called as she got to the other side of the house, drawn to the window to see Mauna Lua's oversized orange glow, moving and getting larger.

Ione came in to the living room to see his wife. "Kaneki, I've been staring at Mauna Lua — but you've seen it too," he said, looking out the window with her.

"The wind storm's shaking the windows in the house, I saw everything flying all over the place in the back yard ... and Kulika even said he saw other volcanoes going off from the other islands. I didn't see, but I told him to go downstairs, because the winds are—"

And with another wind a chair and table flew to the side of their house and their window, shattering the window they were looking through.

Ione started to walk toward the other side of their home. "I'll get wood to cover the window from outside," he said as he opened the back door to get boards.

Kaneki remembered in a flash that Kulika said the ground was hot and ran across the house to go after Ione. By the time she got to the back door, she could see Ione cursing the heat from the ground he walked on. Ione grabbed a tree to help him from falling, but then the wind picked up and made him struggle to keep hold of the tree trunk.

Kaneki screamed from the open door. "Ione! Are you all right?"

"The ground, it's—"

"Is it *hot*? Kulika said—"

"It's like it's *moving*. The ground's ... well, it moved under me, and I started to fall."

Kaneki watched him struggle. "Ione, I love you. Just get back in here."

"I will, I—"

The rest of his words were cut off by the cracking of a third of his house, bricks and all, as Kaneki

fell in the seismic rush down the stairs to the ground. He screamed ‘I love you’ to his wife as the rush of the wind heated everything that touched the ground and moved them north and east.

Time: Saturday, 1:46 AM, December 21, 2012 C.E.

Place: New Orleans, Louisiana, as flight 2242 flies over Canada

Although people usually filled the streets for drinking in the French Quarter, Bourbon Street was growing sparse and Royal Street was almost empty. Ellen and Kathy had just walked into Tropical Isles, even though they had just picked up Hurricanes in wide plastic cups from the street window of the Court of Two Sisters. They agreed that with the winds picking up outside, it would be a good call to sit somewhere inside until the winds settled down. Kathy was going to order a Hand Grenade so they’d have a reason to stay there, even though they already had drinks. But Ellen found the only empty table in the bar, and it was against the wall near the front entranceway, that they could lean on.

Tim, Jeff and Dave ran into the bar, trying to hold on to the doorframe because the winds were picking up outside. Tim almost stumbled into Kathy as Dave tried to make his way in to the bar. Kathy looked over at Ellen, and wondered how long the storm would last, so they could go outside again. Within thirty seconds, drinks on tables started shaking, and tables that no one was leaning on fell over.

“Sorry man,” Tim said to Kathy after he regained his footing. “The weather outside is terrible.”

“That’s why we came in here,” Kathy said, as she turned to look over at Ellen. “I thought this was just a wind storm.”

“Is it Hurricane season?” Ellen asked.

“No, I think that’s in the summertime. We should be fine now,” Kathy answered as she tried to move closer to the wall for safety. A few more people huddles against the wall, and they could see out the windows around the corner on Bourbon Street that no one was outside, but papers whipped by with the wind.

Jeff saw Tim talking to the two girls, but didn’t catch their names and wanted to be the knight for women in distress during the storm. He leaned over and said to Ellen and Kathy, “Are you guys okay? The storm is starting to make a mess in here too — if you need anything, let me know.”

Ellen and Kathy looked at each other, then back to Jeff. “I’m Jeff, by the way,” he said. “These are my friends Dave and Tim.”

“Hi, I’m Ellen,” she answered. Kathy then chimed in, “I’m Kathy.”

The ground started to shake, and a few people squatted toward the ground to not fall over, Jeff started to put his hand out to say, “If you two need something to lean on, I’m here and —”

In the middle of his sentence the wall they were leaning on cracked, and everyone fell to the ground as part of the building started to move. Ellen was knocked unconscious when she fell to the ground, and Kathy could see the Ellen’s red frozen hurricane drink spilled next to her, pooling like it was blood curling around Ellen’s hand and hip before the ceiling fell on everyone at the Tropical Isle and the ground started to move.

Time: Saturday, 8:46 AM, December 21, 2012 C.E.

Place: Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as flight 2242 flies over Canada

Hendrikus picked up his weekly paycheck from the front office room of the mini hotel an hour earlier, and had been cleaning the hallways after a late night of customer partying. Henry didn’t want to clean the window display stalls for the prostitutes from the night before; he hated the thought of cleaning up their messes, but he also didn’t want to clean out the public bathrooms. He then heard Johannes, the manager of the hotel, calling from the office.

“Henry, take care of the window stall first, people walk by there and see that before coming in here.”

Henry didn’t want to do the work, but he turned to pick up his supplies to go to the front of the hotel for the stalls. A rumble then swept through the building, and he tried to hold onto the wall at a door frame to steady himself. He looked over at his things and saw the bucket of cleaner splashing all over the floor; then he heard a window crack. Henry leaned over the grabbed the door frame before he took a stumbling step toward the main hallway. Looking outside, he saw Johannes was holding onto another door frame at his office toward the front of the hotel.

“What the Hell was *that*?” Johannes said, one he spotted Hendrikus.

“I don’t know,” Henry answered. “I heard glass breaking.”

“It was one of the front display windows,” Johannes said. Before Henry could say anything, a couple opened their hotel door and looked out to see what was going on. Joost, the client from the hotel room, looked around and saw Johannes. “Our furniture ... it’s *moving*,” Joost said, as Johanne’s employee Inge kept one arm on Joost and the other hand on the door frame. Just as Joost finished speaking, another rumble shook the hotel and the plaster around the walls and bricks started cracking. They heard a loud thud from another hotel room, and then the door opened with another client almost falling as he

tried to keep balance. Tunis barely had time to look up after opening his hotel door before another rumble cracked the main hallway ceiling and tiles first fell to the ground.

“I don’t know,” Henry said, as Johannes immediately said, “sit against this wall in the main hall, because there’s a support beam here, we’ll figure out what’s—”

Johannes couldn’t even speak as another crack knocked him to the ground and his desk pressed him backwards against the wall. Henry looked over to Tunis’ room and saw Helge as a ceiling beam and a part of the wall fall on her, pinning her off the edge of the bed to the floor. The hotel then almost cracked in half, and started to separate, with one half moving north. Henry thought about Hilde, who was stuck in a small side room off another hallway, as the second floor and ceiling then lost its support and fell on top of him, leaving only his left arm out for anyone to see.

Time: Saturday, 9:46 AM, December 21, 2012 C.E.

Place: Athens, Greece, as flight 2242 flies over Canada

Jacob Alhadeff woke up earlier than his wife Lea imagined, because he had gone out to meet friends Milha, Palomba and Reecial last night after they worked late. Lea had been preparing breakfast for him and had feta, tomatoes, oils, olives, and almonds.

“Did you enjoy being out with the your friends from work?” Lea asked.

“Hope you don’t mind we went out,” Jacob answered as he leaned on the bedroom doorframe.

Just as he finished his words, the house shook and all of the glassware and jars that were on the kitchen counter started to rattle. Lea looked around the room, and then looked back through the hallway at Jacob. “Jacob,” she said, scanning the rooms with her eyes, “hold on to the door frame.”

“I’m not that hung over...”

“No, I think another earthquake is coming. Try to go to the floor near the center column so nothing will fall on us. I’ll be there in a second.” Lea grabbed a pitcher of water and two glasses stacked, and tried to grab the bowl of almonds for them to snack on while waiting for the earthquake to subside. Jacob was walking to the living room to sit on the floor next to the center column when another quake hit and the entire house shook, knocking Jacob to the ground as he tried to walk into the living room.

Lea held on to the counter as the earth shook again and heard the noise in the living room. “Are you okay?” she yelled out.

“Yeah, I fell in the quake, but I’m okay. Get in here, stuff will knock over in the kitchen.”

The house started to shake more, so Lea forgot about the water and nuts. Remembering how they dropped to their knees when hiking to avoid the violent winds on the mountain peaks on their last vacation, she moved down to the floor. She hoped she would be safer if she went through the house on her knees to get to the safe spot in the living room. She made it to the living room doorway and saw Jacob sitting there, when a huge creaking thud echoed throughout the house. With the loud boom came an additional shift in their house, which actually dropped Lea flat to the floor.

Jacob panicked after Lea fell. He got up on his knees and started to try to crawl toward her, because she only had about ten more feet to travel before they’d be under the house beams. “I can’t believe this,” Jacob muttered as he then looked toward his wife and said, “Are you okay? Get over here, we’re almost set.”

“Yeah, I’m trying,” Lea said. “It’s like the house is even *shifting*, so I lose balance.” She moved a little over a foot on her knees when another quake rocked the house. Jacob heard the walls start to creak and saw plaster crumble around the room as he started to move toward her on his knees so he could meet her half way and pull her toward the center column.

They almost met in the living room along the floor as the house started to move again, this time more violently, and two of the walls started to collapse. Jacob grabbed Lea’s hand just before the main wall and the floor above them, fell straight down onto them.

Time: Sunday, 2:46 PM, December 22, 2012 C.E.

Place: Shanghai, China, as flight 2242 flies over Canada

Though Yi Min and her husband Shen had done their tree hitting ritual this morning, Shen decided that because his circulation was deteriorating, he should go out the the courtyard outside again for more tree exercises. Yi Min had added more ginkgo biloba to their daily tea, hoping this would also help their circulation and health, so she started brewing another pot of tea after watching him walk outside to go to the sophora japonica scholar tree outside their home.

Mr. and Mrs. Zhao left their work in their farming community outside of Chongqing — they opted to leave the rural life to go toward the water and to Shanghai. Although there was more access to Chinese medicines in Shanghai, they had less room in their apartment home, less room to hang their clothes to dry, and only completely different (and more generic) options for food from larger companies. Shen had to go to the

scholar tree on the corner at an open courtyard for his regular practice of moving his arms and hitting the tree bark repeatedly; but many people did this and no one thought anything of this use of the public tree.

Yi Min tried to make sure everything was good to help her husband as they were getting older, and she added a slight amount of ginger to the ginkgo biloba root for steeping his tea. She placed a large pot over the stove to heat water for their tea as she felt a rumble again from the house. They had been having trouble with the weather for weeks now, with weather changes due to ocean storms and typhoons, and distant volcanoes becoming active again. She could hear the howling wind as storms started to pick up again.

Shen felt the wind pick up too, as he held onto the trunk of the scholar tree for stability. This windstorm, however, even started to rip branches off trees and knock over chain-linked bicycles. When Yi Min heard things knocking into the walls of their home, she looked to the window to see branches and pieces of wood hitting the window, until one object was blown through the closed window. She thought she felt another earthquake starting, and with Shen outside, she didn't know where to go or what to do.

What Yi Min didn't know was that the weather changes and the quake would soon make her building start to collapse, and tip over only feet from Shen's scholar tree.

Shen tried to hold onto the tree trunk as he heard scooters tipping over and starting to blow away — he even saw a few *people* get caught in the wind and thought they were starting to fly away.

Due to the almost instantaneous, drastically tumultuous weather changes and the impending plate shift all over the planet, those people weren't "flying" away. They were being thrown away — just like most everyone else on planet Earth.

Time: Sunday, 4:46 PM, December 21, 2012 C.E.

Place: Melbourne, Australia, as flight 2242 flies over Canada

Dena was starting to get ready for her date with Lachlam; they agreed to have dinner on Sunday before Lachlam left the next day to visit his extended family north of Brisbane.

Dena needed to shower to clean herself off before her date with Lachlam, because she had been hiking with Lorrae and Narelle for hours to witness the new destruction from the Tweed Volcano (even though they argued over what to call it: as Lorrae said it was the Mount Warning Volcano, and Narelle was saying that it was just a part of the Border Group). Because volcanoes had been erupting regularly recently, they thought they'd spend the morning walking near the edges of some of the newly formed

mountain ranges from new volcanos. But their excursion took twice as long as they expected, and Dena only got home at 3:30 in the afternoon. She swore that after her shower she would try to rest for a few hours before meeting with Lachlam.

The hot spot beneath eastern Australia is broad, and took advantage of weak places in the plate to feed magma to the surface. These girls didn't know the science behind *why* volcanic activity now existed on such a grand scale, they only thought it was amazing to see Volcanos erupting and seeing the lava flowing at a safe distance. They would hear reports on the news about Mounts Schank and Gambier of the Newer Volcanic Province of Victoria and South Australia erupting violently since they started again in 2004. Narelle would hear that the cone-shaped volcanic pit used to be considered one of the earliest volcanos in Australia (though many volcanos were erupting now), and she wished she could witness its erupting again. She loved this because Narelle was even a photographer — she followed all the reports of volcanic activity in Australia (even ones she couldn't visit to witness), but she always lugged her camera bag around with her 35mm as well as her digital camera, and she loved using her telephoto lenses and taking tons of photographs of the lava while it was still flowing.

They knew, scientifically and historically speaking, that the Australian plate moved north at only about 75 km/million years or 7.5 cm/year. But they didn't feel there was any reason to question the plate shift in accordance with the eruption of so many volcanos.

Dena didn't even think about it, until she felt what seemed like the beginning of an earthquake only minutes after she got into her apartment. She felt the shaking get worse throughout her apartment, so she turned the television on to see if there were any news reports explaining the earthquake. As soon as she changed the channel and found a news station, she called Narelle.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Narelle, it's Dena.”

“What do you need?”

“I was wondering if you were feeling anything over near your place.”

“The quake? Yeah.”

“Did you hear anything about it?”

“No man, I'm clearing all of my glassware now and putting my camera stuff safely away. Have you checked out the news?”

“I just got it on. I was going to take a shower, but I don't know if this will be serious or not, like, if I should wait this out or take a—”

Another loud crack rumbled through the town, knocking Dena off her chair. and knocking the phone out of her hand.

It also disconnected them, because phone lines were down from the earth's shifting.

Dena looked around after checking and finding out that the phones were dead. The shaking continued, and half of her things fell from all of the shelves in her home. Things even fell from the countertops, the tables - even her nightstand. She didn't know where to go, and she knew the ground was not sturdy enough for her to try to stand and walk (or run) to safety. She crawled toward the broken back window (while making sure to avoid the glass), and she could hear people yelling in the streets.

She tried to get up to listen to them screaming, and when she was able to lift herself to see out the window she could see people screaming about the heat in the streets. She didn't understand it, but she could see people trying to get their feet off the ground, but most surfaces shook and everyone was actually trapped in the open space outside.

Dena turned back and slid down the wall, so she was sitting on her floor, leaning against the outside wall. Less than thirty seconds later another crack came, and the building Dena was living in almost split in half, before the Australian plate started to move.

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When the phones disconnected them, Narelle didn't know if Dena was okay, but she hurried to gather her things, so her camera equipment would be safe until after the quake was over. She didn't hear of any reports of seismic activity predicted for their area, and their seismologists were relatively good at predicting days when earthquakes would hit.

Narelle also knew that Lorrae was the last one to get home, and with the phones down she had no way to know if Lorrae even made it home before the quakes started.

As Narelle was trying to put away her digital camera (the 35mm and film was already in a safe), she heard a loud crunch and a tear from the other side of her place. She instinctively ran toward the noise, and stopped in her tracks when she saw the far wall torn from the side of her building. She could hear people screaming outside, and she heard people yelling through the walls of her flat. She then instinctively started to think like a cameraman, and she knew there wasn't much more she could really do to protect her equipment, so she slowly walked toward the hole in her home. She put her digital camera toward her face (with an almost empty memory card, she knew she had plenty of room for photos), and started snapping pictures of the hole in her home and the sky through her walls. As she got closer to the opening she could spot faces that went with the yelling she heard in those streets. She looked for a brief moment, and knowing there was nothing she could do from there for them, she just moved the camera in front of her again and started snapping pictures of the crowds over and over again.

She was trying to zoom her camera in so she could get better close-ups of the people caught in this natural disaster, when her building started to make that rushing noise again. She heard it coming from behind her this time, and turned her head just in time to see another wall collapsing, falling on half of her body, as she fell with it, creating a domino effect into the floor and with the remaining walls, as everything started to collapse into the heated ground, now starting to move faster with the plate.

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If her digital camera could have been rescued, it would have captured the last ten seconds of the people's lives on that street corner, on what was supposed to be the Sunday before Christmas.

But with the plates moving at the rate they were, causing such heat in the ground and such violent wind gusts and such tidal waves in their rapid motion, no technology would be saved. No *people* would be saved; no people on the land could survive there.

Scientists could not foresee the reason for the escalating earthquakes, tidal waves, sand storms in the deserts and almost global volcanos. They couldn't even explain the breaking of polar ice caps in Antarctica. Knowing the effects of celestial bodies on the Earth's weather, scientists and astronomers searched for more celestial explanations — and although they saw a few stray comets, they thought the Earth was safe from a collision with them, though they wondered if near collisions would wreak havoc on the planet's weather patterns. Ultimately, they were still at a loss for what could be causing all of the global problems.

They couldn't come up with an explanation because they had no warning for the plate shifts that the increased weather problem for the past few years were the predecessors for. There were more and more natural disasters around the globe, but no one knew to connect the pieces, because no plates had moved enough to force anyone to question it.

They couldn't question it any longer, as buildings collapsed and cars became ovens in all civilized places. Even trees in forests lost the majority of their leaves, and some were even uprooted. Even aquatic life couldn't survive the weather, which led to drastic oceanic changes. Nothing seemed safe any longer.

And nothing was.

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