

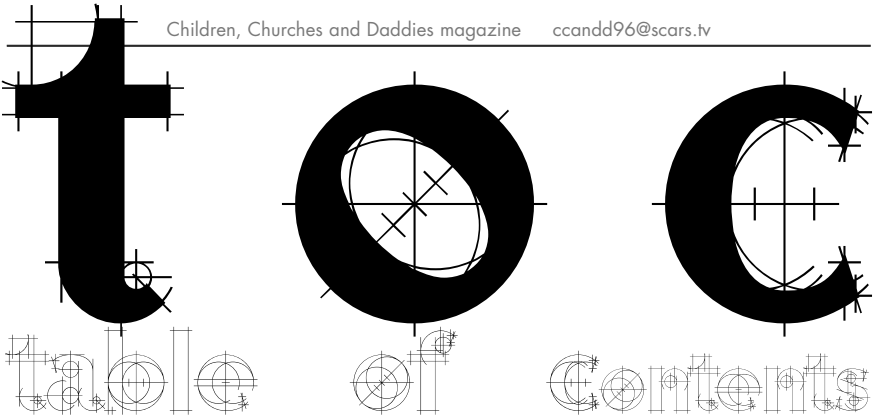


children
churches
& daddies

ISSN: 1068-5154

v139 • August 22, 2004

the unreligious, nonfamily-oriented literary and art rag



poetry

john vick	2
Kaitlyn M. Ulmer	2
tyneil Phillips	3
Kareene Martel	3
Milo Redwood	4
M. W. Hamil	5
JC Lee	5
Cliff Lynn	6
Erica Stux	7
Milo Redwood	8
Helena Wolfe	9
translation: Mackenzie Silver	10

art

Irene Ferraro	10
Stephen Mead	11
Matt Graham	11

prose

Bryan Orr	12
-----------	----

poetry

Gabriel Athens	36
Sydney Anderson	36

art

Dr. Deborah FerBer	37
Cheryl Townsend	38
Jave Jarvie	38
Edward Michael O'Durr8	38
Supranowicz	38
John Yotko	38
Mark Graham	39
Mike Hovancek	39
Rose E. Grier	39
Xanadu	39

poetry

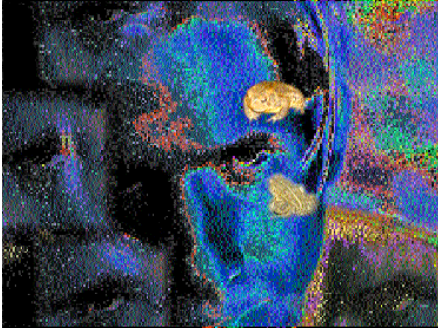
Janet Kuypers	40
---------------	----

art

Scar Publications	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 40
-------------------	-------------------

COVER PIC	Forest with stepping
-----------	----------------------

wazterfall in Bad Gastein, Austria, photographed May 2003.



998998989

John Vick

An Amazonian frog smaller
than my iris crawls up my cheek. The
picture makes my jaw bone twitchy
and I can not quit taking quick peeps
at your magazine subscriptions, all
saddle stapled IQ trivia
on semi-gloss bond, all purulence.
If I were in the dark forest
would I find an iris green as yours?



Plea for Anarchy

Kaitlyn M.

Ulmer

We stand dutifully erect,
Our heads bent in lazy servitude,
Our legs wobbling weak,
Our hands plastered to our breasts,
Saluting anarchy.
The banner leans, beaten
By youth assured by dissent,
Flogged against the blackboard,
Unraveled, unwrought, untold.
Red stripes of Bush's blushing,
His dictionary out of reach.
Red stripes of Clinton's agony,
Infidelity to impeach.
White stripes of empty promises
Falling from the skies.
White stripes of feigned purity
Sullied by tainted lies.
Blue sky of pollution,
Oil reeking into sin.
Blue sky of empty ozone,
Global warming scalding skin.
And fifty stars of incongruence,
Laws sanctioned by our idols,
False gods, innumerable flaws.
Anarchy, where are you?

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.



Empty

Kareene Martel

I pour my coffee in a bottomless cup
Look in the mirror and
I don't know who I see
There was someone's reflection
But I can't recognize her
I wonder if it could be me

if Christ were guillotined

Milo Redwood

heaven knows
why I get so much
pleasure ridiculing
idols and religious
symbols
like the cross

the cross is a perfectly
gruesome symbol and I get
heartily sick of seeing
it everywhere

okay let's say that his
Jesus person actually
existed and that he was
nice
even wise.
it's said that he lived
two thousand years ago--
which by all indications
means that he was surrounded
by moronic barbarians so
if he was even decent--
well let's just say it set
him apart but the book claims
that he was so much more than
decent
okay, fair enough.



Apparently being kind,
compassionate and wise
was a revolutionary thing
and revolutionary things
still get people killed

today I guess such a threat
to society would be either
shot, lethally injected
or gassed and his or her
followers
--so attached to a symbol--
would wear necklaces
and what not, displaying
a gun or syringe...

what would a tiny golden
gas chamber look like
dangling from your
beautiful neck?

GIANT BLACK BUGS EVERYWHERE

M.W. Hamel

I wonder
if that giant black bug
that was walking on
my black sheet
while I was
laying in bed
was an
illusion

to be honest
I'd had a few
but I heard
something
and looked down
and saw it for
the briefest moment
then smacked it away

the black bug
flew across the room
and careened off
the fan
and lay on its back
slightly twitching

cursing
I picked it up
in toilet paper
threw it in the toilet
pissed on it
as it came to
from the shock
of the collision

then flushed

the rest of the night
I kept listening
jumping up and
turning on the light
screaming
"I'll kill all you little fuckers"

but nothing was
there
just
an illusion

Priorities

JE LEE

I use a sly grin
to get a conversation
for a little while.

It is easier
sometimes to get laid than to
find conversation

Lena on the Bus

©lllll 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

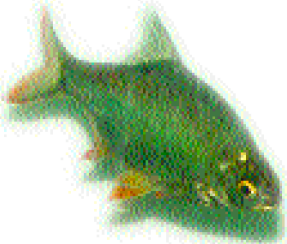
On the road to an aunt's house,
a well-earned reprieve
My Bosniak Girl
Sarajevo's my home,

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.



FUTILITY

Erica Stux



I scrub spills and scuff marks off the
kitchen floor, only to find more the next day.

A slippery seal, fur slicked by an oil spill.
was caught by humans and cleaned up, at a
cost of eighty thousand dollars.
Spectators cheered upon its pristine release.
Cheers turned to gasps, when a killer whale
surfaced and seized the hapless seal.

At the hotel

Milo Redwood

the rooms are
normally left
open
--on display for tourists--
but a door was
closed
and I knew
that the room
had not been rented
so I turn the knob,

just walk in.

There are two men,
arm wrestling.
First I'm embarrassed
and just turn around
to leave--
they're grunting and getting
red
but then I
notice that only
one is grunting
and red...

on closer scrutiny
I see that it's
Christ and Satan
and
you know which one is red.

The winner
gets earth for
the next thousand years

Christ is cool
and collected.

Satan is driven
and crazed
and wins,
however,
Christ is a good sport--

Christ is a graceful
loser

anyone good enough

Helena Wolfe

i used to think that i was no good
that i was worthless that i meant nothing

and then i got a good job
and then i got me a ton of money

and then i looked in the mirror
and i realized i was gorgeous

and people laughed at my jokes
and people thought i was talented and strong

and now i look around me
and i can't find anyone good enough

and i wonder if i expect too much
but i know for a fact that i deserve more



**Amber
Stream,**
by Irene
Ferraro

**I Want More
Than That**

A poem's
Kannada
translation,
Mackenzie
Silver

ಈ ಧಅನ್ನ ಂಬರೆ ಠನ ಠತ
ಈ ಅಮ ತಿರೆದ ಒ ಥೆ ಒನೆ ನಿವ್ವು
ಸ್ತನ್ನ ಈ ವನ್ನ ಸೂಮೆಧಿನ್ನ ಮೂರೆ ಯೂಲು
ಗವೆ ಮೆ ಥತ ಅನ್ನ ನೂವ ಈ ವನ್ನ
ಮೂರೆ ಥನ ಥತ ಧಹನವ್ವ ತ ಯೂಲು
ಗಿವೆ ಮೆ ಮೆಅನ್ನ ನೂಧಿನ್ನ ಈ ವನ್ನದ
ಮೂರೆ ಥನ ಬ್ಲನ್ನ ಸೆವ್ವ ಚನ ಯೂಲು
ಗಿವೆ ಮೆ ಥತ ವಸ ಈ ಬರಿನ್ನ ಉವ
ಥೆ ವ್ಹೊನ್ನ ತ್ತೆವ ಒಜೆಸೆ ವ್ಹೊ ಚನ
ದೂ ಥತರಮೆ ಈ ವಸಯೂವಿನ್ನ ಥತ
ಯೂಲು ಚೂಲುಳ ಬೆ ಥತ ಸೂಮೆಒನೆ

**...from
Heroines
Unlikely,**

art by
Stephen
Mead



Comfort, the mother stands for, strength in the mouse-brown,
Meek and myopic, so the child may be sure
Of the steady hold, the seeing gaze



**Clouds
for
Matthew,**

art by
Matt
Graham

Looking Into the Abyss

By Bryan F. Off

The screams were the worst.

Abner Deal had been doing the vigilante thing for over a year now and had gotten used to the blood and the gore, the pleas for mercy, but he didn't think he'd ever get used to the screams. The perv, as he and Attberton called the pedophiles, sat panting in the stainless steel chair, trying to catch his breath to do just that again. Scream.

Abner sighed, and ripped off a wide strip of Duct Tape. Wonderful stuff, Duct Tape. He slapped it over the perv's mouth and held a finger up to the gray tape. "Shhh," he whispered, looking deep into the man's wide-open eyes. Besides, he was getting tired of hearing the perv's cries of innocence, which only caused to piss Abner off even more. He considered it a weakness on his part though, that he couldn't abide the screams of the damned. The perv nodded vigorously, as if by cooperating he might still get out of this alive. Silly rabbit.

The perv sat naked on the chair, his thighs spread out and Duct Taped to its legs. His genitals and thin buttocks poked through the bottomless piece of cold, metal furniture; a pair of alligator clips were clamped onto his bleeding and swollen testicles, the wires leading to a hand cranked generator capable of producing 3,000 volts. His penis was withdrawn like a frightened turtle, as if it knew what still lay ahead of it. A seemingly never-ending stream of urine dribbled into the dark maw of a drain directly beneath the chair. It echoed dankly in the soundproofed concrete cellar.

Abner cranked the generator and watched the perv's body strain at his bonds. His body was covered in sweat, which just made the shock all the more efficient. Spittle bubbled at the edges of the tape and the perv's cheeks ballooned out comically. Abner laughed and selected a safety pin from his satchel. He showed the pin to the perv and opened it slowly for his benefit. The perv was looking almost bored now. He obviously thought nothing could be worse than what he'd already been through.

Abner shoved the business end of the pin into the perv's left eye. He felt the gelatinous eyeball pop under the pin and smiled satisfied that the

perv was once again appropriately terrified. The perv looked as if he was going to faint so Abner pulled the tape free from his mouth.

“If you scream, I’ll take the other eye too,” said Abner, as friendly as a man saying, *Good morning, to you on the street.*

The perv nodded and squeezed his eyelid over the ruined eye trying to stem the flow of ocular fluid and blood. *“Please don’t hurt me anymore. Please, I’ll do anything,”* he croaked though his severely strained vocal cords.

Abner smiled. *“Good. We’ll begin with “who” first of all.”*

“Who?” said the perv, blinking the sweat from his one good eye.

“Yes, who did you take? I specifically want to know of those young girls you abducted and who were never found by the authorities. And don’t skip anyone Kent Wether,” Abner said, using the man’s name for the first time. *“Because I have a good idea of “who” already.”*

To Abner’s delight, the perv tried to bluff him. *“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about. My name’s not Kent Wether, it’s John Tyler—*Abner calmly picked up his garden shears from the satchel and proceeded to prune Mr. Wether’s thumb from his right hand. It plopped onto the drain one second before the perv began screaming anew.

Abner shook his head sadly. *“Tsk, tsk, tsk Mr. Wether. What did I tell you about that screaming?”* he clucked, before shoving the dripping pin into the wildly gyrating eye of the perv. If anything, it only made the screams worse.

It took another finger before Kent Wether began confessing to every single abduction that Abner had him down for, but not without Abner’s help and prodding. Five more fingers followed the second, leaving Wether with only three remaining fingers; all on his left hand, as Abner had to remind the perv of each and every victim, as if he had forgotten all about them! Abner didn’t know what angered him more: the perv’s feigned ignorance or his callous disregard for the lives he’d discarded like so much trash. Abner wrote them all down though; the names of the victims, where he had taken them, what he did to them, and where he dumped the bodies. Six in total. Abner swallowed down the hate that was threatening to overtake his senses. It had happened before and the end result was always a quick death for the perv, which was the *last* thing Abner wanted.

He stared at the names of the dead; their bodies left to rot in a garbage dump, an abandoned building, lakes and rivers, and the Francis Marion Forest Preserve. He frowned at the varied dumpsites. It was unusual for a serial killer to be so haphazard. They were usually creatures of habit, often to the point of being predictable. It was almost as if

Wether was making it up just to get Abner to stop torturing him.

Abner shook the troubling thought from his head and made a mental note to notify the families that their daughters' killer had been dealt with, and that he had suffered greatly in the end for his sins. At least these families could properly bury their dead now and maybe receive some closure from the justice Abner was giving them this day. The perv, his eyes now useless, cried piteously in the cellar of Abner's home, begging for a forgiveness that only God could give him. He would get no absolution from Abner Deal, just resolution.

The end was always the same for the pervs'. Abner severed the man's genitals with a quick snip of his pruning shears and dropped the pale flesh dispassionately into an industrial blender he had set up earlier on a small stainless steel table beside his satchel. He then puréed them into a bloody soup, which unfortunately Mr. Wether was unable to witness. His screams even drowned out the high shriek of the blender. Abner pulled a hose and funnel from the satchel and threaded the hose down the perv's throat. He ignored the choking and the frantic head shaking as the blind piece of shit realized what was about to happen to him. This part was always better when the perv could see what was going on of course. Abner enjoyed the looks on their faces as he whipped their dicks and nuts into what would be their final meal. He had gotten a little carried away this time though, and ruined his fun by blinding Wether before the grand finale.

Abner picked up the blender and poured the vile mess into the attached funnel. It looked like Manhattan Clam Chowder running down the clear tube. Wether began convulsing and frothing at the mouth. Speed was of the essence now if the perv was to make it to the grand finale. Once it was all down, Abner tore the hose free and quickly Duct taped Wether's mouth shut again. This was the best part, watching the pervs' as they inevitably threw up their very "reasons for being in his cellar" into the closed confines of their mouths. They literally choked to death on their own genital soup. Sweet, sweet justice, that.

Abner watched impassively as the perv Kent Wether rock and rolled on the steel chair. He wasn't worried that the chair couldn't take the abuse. Like the sound proofed cellar and the van he and Attherton used to pick up the criminals, the chair had been constructed to endure extreme punishment. *Extreme Punishment*, Abner like the sound of that. That's what he doled out to the worst of the worst, extreme punishment for extreme crimes against humanity.

“Paybacks a bitch, Mr. Wether.”

A little genital soup leaked from a loose flap of the Duct tape, as Kent Wether shuddered one last time. His face was bluer than a blueberry and his sightless eyes bulged out obscenely as if in the end he saw what awaited him in hell. Abner liked to think so anyway. He got up from his own chair and stretched. It had been a rough eight hours; from the “acquisition” of the perv at the Photo Hut, to its arrival in the *Abyss*—as Abner referred to the cellar—and finally to the physically draining torture session that ended with the death of one Kent Wether.

He slipped on a pair of elbow length rubber gloves and turned on the high powered hose he kept neatly rolled up beside the hot water faucet with a bleach dispenser connected to it. The floor of the *Abyss* sloped gently to a drain in the center of the room. Steam rose from the jet of hot water as Abner hosed down the dead perv. He then washed away the steaming pile of feces still leaking from Kent Wether’s protruding buttocks. It was, as usual, the final act of the dying animal. The strong scent of hot bleach won out though, as it not only cleaned all the surfaces, but neutralized the foul smelling air as well. Finally, Abner was left with the scalded remains of the perv, ready for disposal. Then after cleaning the tools of his trade, and putting them neatly back into the satchel, Abner took one last look around the room.

He decided to leave the rest for tomorrow. Maybe he could even get that baby Attherton to give him a hand! He blew a kiss to the clean and dripping corpse before shutting off the lights.

“Sleep tight scumbag.”

He keyed the freight elevator, which was the only way to access the cellar, and stepped inside. There were three floors to choose from. The first floor of the *Deal Funeral Home* was for the mourners; with its dark and somber interiors and its tasteful, unpretentious furnishings, it was meant to be the first stop in the grieving process. This floor also held a Chapel room, complete with a crematorium for those who preferred the fire to the earth.

The second floor held Abner’s living quarters.

The cellar, which was split into two rooms, was where Abner really made his living; changing the mask of death—if but briefly—into a peaceful repose of final rest. Down here in this windowless room of death, Abner tended to the dead in more ways than one. He kept the business of the funeral home separated from the ugly business of retribution though, refusing to even use the same space for his acts of vengeance. It wouldn’t be right,

he reasoned, to taint someone's dearly departed with the presence of the depraved individuals he disposed of in the adjoining room.

The Deal Funeral Home had once held a staff of three, not including Abner and his dead wife, Sheila, who had once seen to the mourner's needs. Now it was just Abner. He had reluctantly fired his three long time employees after his wife's death, knowing that he couldn't take the chance of them finding out about his future extra-curricular activities.

As Abner spent more and more time seeking out the perv's that had eluded the blind eye of the law, his funeral business became more neglected. The once beautifully manicured lawn, which fronted the old Georgian home, was now overgrown with weeds and grass that came up to a tall man's knees. It was no longer a place that soothed one's senses. Now, only the very poor sought out his services, which was exactly how Abner Deal wanted it. He wasn't in dire need of funds at this point anyway.

He punched the second floor button and felt the old elevator lurch upwards, the overhead lamp sputtering like a dying flashlight. It was his constant fear that one day the decrepit service elevator would break down between floors, trapping him inside with one of the dead. The elevator door wheezed open on the first floor and Abner breathed yet another sigh of relief. He walked through the dimly lit hallway and down the center aisle of the Crematorium Chapel.

He flicked on the gas and ignited the jets inside the cylindrical chamber to make sure it was still in working condition. Abner felt the familiar sting of heat as the oven doors opened up. The glow of the fire flickered across Abner's gaunt face, giving him a hellish aspect.

He was exhausted by now but his night was not yet at an end. Unlike the cellar, he couldn't afford to leave the van in its present condition. In his line of work Abner could never be too careful or too thorough. Usually Jim Attherton took care of the van but lately Jim had become distracted. Abner thought that his friend might have lost his stomach for what they were doing. Last night, Jim had taken off after helping Abner bring the perv into the Abyss, without so much as a goodbye.

Abner went outside into the chilly October night and went over the van with another hose and bleach combination. The van had no carpets, and the bucket seats were covered in plastic, which they of course replaced and disposed of after each "acquisition." Then he wiped down every surface with bleach—which covered up traces of blood and bodily fluids efficiently, as well as cheaply—and vacuumed the whole thing

twice to catch any stray hairs. Jim had taught him well of that old forensic adage, 'a killer always takes something away from every crime scene, and leaves something of himself as well.' He then took the rags and the bag from the vacuum cleaner to burn in the cremo-oven.

"Damn," he said aloud. "*Forgot Wether's clothes!*" He'd left them in a corner of the Abyss. "*Well, I'm not going back down there tonight. I'll see to it with the body in the morning.*"

After turning off the oven and disposing of the ashes in the septic tank in the backyard, Abner trudged upstairs to his bathroom. He always felt filthy after dealing with a perv. Their sins were so vile that just by being near them he felt as if he'd just taken a dip in the septic tank. He scrubbed his skin until it was pink and raw, washed his short cropped hair twice and blew out his nose into the steam of the shower, as if the mucous in his nostrils was now radioactive and must be expelled, lest it infect him.

He stepped out of the shower and dipped his hands into a mixture of bleach and water he'd prepared in the bathroom sink. His hands were the worst for it too. They were dry and would often bleed at the ever-widening cracks on his knuckles. It reminded him of how his mind sometimes felt. Bloody and cracked. He rinsed them under the cold tap afterwards and rubbed some aloe-Vera crème over them. It was odd how his skin drank in the oily lotion, like a dry and cracked riverbed soaking in a thunderstorm and not leaving a trace of it behind.

His room, which had once been the guestroom, held no furniture other than a twin size mattress shoved against one wall. Abner flicked on the light and walked naked over to the closet where he kept all his clothes. His underwear and socks were all on the top shelf; he took a pair down and slipped them on, leaving his feet bare. Abner liked the chill, he slept better in a cool room. Yawning, he turned the light-switch off and stumbled across the dark room and into bed.

As tired as he was he couldn't seem to fall asleep. They had gotten their man after nearly six months of legwork, but he wasn't happy with the end results. Kent Wether had been a very bad man and had deserved a harder death than Abner had given him. He had also been hoping that the death of this seriously deranged individual would finally give him some closure. But like all the others, it hadn't. His anger and hate still burned bright. He would have to continue it seemed. If only he could lay his hands on the man who had taken Dewey from him, then this nightmare might finally end. That particular monster, however, had escaped

Abner's wrath forever by taking his own miserable life.

Abner rolled over and stared at the wall in the darkness. It had been a long road that had led him up to this point. He wasn't the same man as when he started. When he looked in a mirror these days he saw a stranger. He knew that if his wife or son were still alive that they wouldn't recognize him either, might even be frightened of him in fact.

The thought of his family brought shame to him. Sheila wouldn't have approved of his violent deeds. And little Dewey...well, Dew was too pure of soul to even think about in the same context as these men. But it was because of Dewey and Sheila that Abner was doing these horrible things in the first place. And for Abner Deal, that was the cruelest irony of all.

Once upon a time, the Deal family had been an American anomaly: a *truly* happy family. Abner had never known anything else in his life. So, for him, happiness was a given. The only child of Clarence and Agnes Deal, his childhood had been nearly idyllic. Some might say that growing up in a funeral home, with dead people laying about downstairs, wouldn't be a healthy environment for an especially sensitive boy like Abner—*he would often cry for those dearly departed that he didn't even know*—but it taught Abner that nothing in life is as natural as the inevitability of death.

He learned the trade of preparing the dead for the afterlife from his wise father, and preparing the living in their grieving process from his caring mother. He was an only child, born late in the lives of two very gentle souls. Abner never dreamed of any other life than the one he'd been born into. He was in his last year of high school when his elderly parents died three days apart. His mother went first in her sleep. Abner awoke to the screams of his father in the middle of the night, when he'd discovered his wife's cold dead hand resting on his cheek. Clarence Deal never recovered. Three nights later Abner found the old man dead in bed as well, his open eyes fixed on his wife's bare pillow. He'd died of a broken heart.

Abner was heart-broken too but his mother and father had taught him well. He had his father's assistant prepare his mother for burial. Not because Abner wasn't strong enough for the task, but because he'd understood his mother would have wanted it that way. But when it came time to prepare his father, Abner saw to the unpleasant job him-self.

He finished high school because he knew that's what his mom and dad would have wanted, but there was no need to attend college. His own

father had certified him as an undertaker the year before. The family business fell to Abner and he didn't miss a beat. The Funeral business is a recession proof line of work and by the time Abner was twenty-three he had already earned his first million.

Work became his life and life was good. And then it got even better. Sheila Farnsworth walked into the Deal Funeral Home one cold and wet January morning looking for work. She was attending Francis Marion College in nearby Florence, and needed a job to help pay for her tuition and books. Abner didn't need any help. The funeral home still employed the same three employees from when his father was still alive. But there was something about the fresh-faced girl that he couldn't say, no, to. She was a mess, dripping in the foyer, with her dark hair plastered to her head. Her makeup, which she'd taken such care in applying before going out to look for work, was running down her face in dark rivulets.

Abner had never seen anyone lovelier.

He hired her on the spot as a "Customer Liaison," inventing the title right then and there. If the dark haired beauty ever caught wise, she never let on. Abner's employees knew right away, of course, but said nothing at all. They were all quite fond of Abner, all of whom had known the boy his whole life, and they all wanted to see him fall in love before life passed him by.

He paid the struggling sophomore a ridiculously high salary, which enabled her to finish school on her own terms. Like Abner, Sheila's parents had died and she too was all alone in the world. She fell in love with Abner almost as quickly as he did her. But Abner didn't have much experience in matters of the heart, much less the female of the species. Two years went by without him making a move. By this time Sheila was aware of his feelings; he stuttered and blushed furiously whenever she looked him in the eye, and heaven forbid if she should touch him, poor Abner would nearly faint!

She finally took the bull by the horns and kissed him one afternoon while the two of them were alone in his office. He was bending over her shoulder as she worked at his desk. They were going over the books and it suddenly hit her that if she didn't do something right then and there, then she probably never would. She turned her head and the two of them locked eyes. She grabbed Abner by his face and kissed him feather soft on the lips.

When she opened her eyes she was sure she'd made a terrible mistake. Abner was looking at her thunderstruck, as if he might be sick. But the slow moving boy kissed her back instead. That afternoon in the office the

two of them made up for lost time. One month later, to the *day*, they were married. If there was a time after that that could be pointed to as an unhappy period, it was the two miscarriages that followed. Both of them wanted to start a family, but what neither of them ever knew was that they both wanted it more for the other, rather than for themselves. And though the lost babies made them sad, they still had each other and quite frankly it was more than enough.

Then came Dewey.

After the third pregnancy was confirmed, Abner and Sheila held their collective breath until the child was born deep in the night of September 19th, 1989. To say that Dewey Farnsworth Deal was born without incident, though, wouldn't be at all accurate; for September 19th, 1989, was also the date Hurricane Helga made landfall on the coast of South Carolina. It tore through the state, leaving death and destruction in its wake; Marion was directly in its path.

Sheila went into labor just as the power went off at two a.m.. Abner tried several times to load his wife into the family van, but downed trees and power lines, not to mention the howling wind and driving rain, kept the harried couple trapped in the darkened funeral home. Abner called for an ambulance but was told that due to all the storm casualties it would be at least two hours before they could get there. Three hours later he picked up the phone to find the line had gone dead. They were on their own.

Abner looked over at his wife, who was sitting up in bed with her legs spread wide. She was doing her breathing exercises she'd learned in Lamaze. Abner had brought up every candle in the house and the room was ablaze with flickering light. A fine sheen of sweat lined Sheila's upper lip and her hair was a fright. To Abner, though, she was a vision of beauty. When he told her the news she was all smiles.

"Look at it this way Abbie," she said, calling him by the pet name he detested. *"At least this way we won't have a hospital bill."*

Abner returned her confident smile and excused himself to get everything ready for the delivery. He threw up in the downstairs john and splashed his face with cold water. He wanted to get his nerves under control before going back into that room. His flashlight illuminated his pale face in the mirror eerily. He looked like an escaped lunatic from a Mental Ward. He closed his eyes and for the first time since his mother's death, he said a prayer.

“Dear Lord, please guide my hand this night. Please don’t take away all that I love. Please.”

One hour later, Dewey Farnsworth Deal was screaming lustily to the joy and relief of his mother and father. Outside, it seemed the end of the world had arrived. Several tornadoes, spawned by the high winds, were responsible for the most damage; destroying over sixty homes in Marion, including two of the Deal’s neighbors. Every tree on their property had blown down, including one old oak that had stood for over two hundred years and had withstood the winds of countless other storms. But the home and its occupants came through without a scratch.

After the loss of his family later on, Abner would often wonder if maybe his earnest prayer that night had but forestalled the tragedy that was meant to befall Sheila and his unborn son during the storm. It was a torturous thought that plagued him, especially in the darkest part of the night. For that death would have been far more merciful than the one that awaited them down the road.

Dewey was the cherry that topped off Abner and Sheila’s lives so perfectly. Now, most parents think that their children are special, and I suppose that they are; each in his or her own way. But Dewey *really* was special. Not in some progeny way, Dewey didn’t excel at the piano or math. His clumsy artwork was only appreciated by his parents. He wasn’t an overachiever on the field of play or in the classroom. What set Dewey apart from the rest of the pack was his humanity.

At the age of two Dewey had made it his business to hug the bereaved during the “viewings.” He seemed to understand the concept of death at a remarkably young age, and could often be found praying in the Chapel for those strangers whose last stop on earth was at his home. Sheila worried that a funeral parlor was an unhealthy environment for their overly sensitive son but Abner argued that he had grown up there, and he had turned out just fine.

And Dewey was fine. At times he got too close to the pain of others, but that was just his nature. The first time he saw the movie *The Yearling*, he mourned for a week. After that, such movies were avoided at great pains in the Deal home. But his son’s caring heart just made those close to him love him more. It was like living with a young Jesus or Buddha.

Sheila would often say, “He’s here to teach us, not the other way around.”

It was this raw empathy though that made Abner aware his son was-

n't meant to take over the Deal Funeral Home someday. You couldn't survive this business if you were unable to disassociate yourself from the grief of others. Dewey wasn't meant for any line of work where the pain of his fellow man was so evident.

At the age of five Dewey began to express an interest in the afterlife. He wasn't a religious kid, though Abner and Sheila were casual Christians and took him to church regularly, but he was very spiritual. He believed the Christian teachings but was one of those rare Christians who did so without the baggage of intolerance and self-righteousness. He and his father would have long talks about the meaning of life, especially the *why*, and what his purpose in life was. This, at the age of five.

Abner never knew what to tell his son when he said such things. He felt like a child discussing Quantum Physics with Albert Einstein. Completely out of his element. It was clear to he and Sheila that their son *was* meant for great, great things. Surely God wouldn't create such a human being without having great plans for him?

And then came the days of darkness.

A day before Dewey's sixth birthday he was abducted. His mother had stopped at the *Car Bright Car Wash* on the spur of the moment. They had been on their way home from the bakery, where Dewey had chosen a specially decorated cake for his birthday party, which was to be held the very next day. Sheila, seeing how dusty the family van was, thought it would be a good idea to give the car a good wash. What happened next was a cruel lesson to Abner; that life had no rhyme or reason. It was odd, though, that someone like Abner, who had been raised in the midst of death, didn't already know this by then.

Abner couldn't stop torturing himself with all the "Ifs." If Sheila had just waited till she'd gotten home to use the restroom or had at least insisted that Dewey stay with her, if only she'd bypassed the carwash that day, if only *he'd* cleaned the damn car himself, like Sheila had asked him earlier, if only it had been *some other kid* that day. *If*, was a bastard of a word.

Usually they would drive the van through the car wash; Dewey loved to watch the suds and the whirling blue brushes, but Sheila needed to use the restroom this day. So while she was in the bathroom, Dewey went out back to watch the van going through. The security camera caught what happened next.

Abner awoke with a start and looked around the darkened bedroom

in confusion. “Dewey?” he called out inexplicably, as he always did when waking up. A faint breeze puffed out the curtains on the room’s lone window over his bed. Abner fell back on his pillow and stared up at the remaining stars twinkling overhead. He was grateful that the moment was unconnected with his past. He couldn’t recall ever sharing a late-night moment like this with his wife or son. That was one of the worst things about losing a loved one. Everything in life—holidays, music, movies, people, places, and events—was just another painful reminder that the one you shared those times with was gone.

But Abner didn’t want to forget. He held onto the pain like a life preserver in a tossed and tempest sea. Still, there were times like these when he welcomed a moment that was his alone. He closed his eyes and tried to go back to sleep but the images from that surveillance video kept playing on the back of his eyelids.

When Sheila came out of the restroom she went outside to where Dewey had said he would be. He wasn’t there, nor was he out front. Sheila felt the first fingers of dread begin to caress her heart at that moment, but it wasn’t anything any parent hasn’t felt at some moment with a wayward child. Children were always wandering off on their own, much to their parent’s distress, and Dewey wasn’t any different in this respect. If something of interest caught his eye, Dewey would wander off with the best of them.

Sheila checked inside the carwash first, asking the cashier and attendants, who were by now finishing up the inside detailing of her van, but none had noticed what had become of the little boy. After checking the men’s room and finding it empty, Sheila’s fear became more pronounced. With the help of the cashier, the two women quickly checked the neighboring shops on Main Street, but once again no one had seen the little boy. That’s when Sheila made two phone calls: one to Abner, and one to the police.

Two hours later, and after a much thorough canvassing of the neighborhood, an *Amber Alert* was sent out. Neither Abner nor Sheila believed their Dewey had been abducted, but the police were definitely leaning that way. It was Abner who noticed the security camera panning the back of the car wash.

“Excuse me,” he said to the cashier comforting his wife. Abner found himself unwilling and unable to do so. *If only* Sheila had

watched Dewey better...

He pointed to the camera. "*Is that thing recording here or somewhere else?*"

CNN and Fox News replayed the grainy black and white video for the masses nearly as often as they'd played the terrorist attacks on the twin towers in New York City. It was every parent's worst nightmare caught on tape, and it both horrified and titillated the nation like no other case before it. The talking heads of the cable giants used the tragedy to garner higher ratings for their networks by playing to the fears of those parents glued to their TV's. "Experts" were interviewed to speculate what might have happened to Dewey Deal after the abduction, and how parents could avoid the same tragedy simply by "being more aware". Implying, without coming right out and saying so, that this whole tragedy could have been averted had Sheila Deal been a better parent.

The infamous "Car Wash" video was less than six seconds from Dewey coming into frame, as he peered into the car wash with his hands in the pockets of his Wrangler blue jeans, to the moment when the door of a black pickup parked behind Dewey opened and a large white male with a crew cut jumped out. Dewey's back was to the man and he never even had a chance to fight back. The man, dressed in a mechanic's style overalls with a name patch over his left breast, picked Dewey up and threw him violently into the truck. The man quickly jumped in behind him, slammed his door shut, and was gone.

Just like that. In the matter of 5.9 seconds three lives irretrievably shattered. The whole thing happened so fast that the first time Abner saw it he wasn't sure it had actually happened. But Sheila had no such illusions. Unlike Abner and the rest of the world, Sheila Deal only saw the video the one time. Her scream could be heard two blocks down from the *Car Bright Car Wash*.

Abner flashed back on the video again. Dewey was wearing a striped T-shirt that day, which was one size too small and his belly could be seen poking above his jeans, reminding most viewers of little Opie Taylor from the *Andy Griffith show*. That this had occurred in a small southern town just gave the connection more credence, and pretty soon journalists stopped referring to it as the Car Wash Abduction, and were now calling it the Opie Abduction.

Police across the state—hell, across the country—were on the look-

out for a black Nissan pick up truck with a white male driver at the wheel. And though thousands of trucks fitting that description were pulled over, the right one had managed to slip through the dragnet. Days passed, then weeks, and eventually the networks found another tragedy to exploit and the world moved on.

In the time that had passed though, the FBI had broken down the video, frame by frame, pixel by pixel, and some startling new facts had been brought to life. The first big break was the name patch on the abductor's overalls. After enlarging the pictures and focusing on the patch the name *Joe* could be seen. Once this information was imparted to the detectives investigating the case, they were hot to follow up on the lead. Now here was something they could use! Before, all they'd had was a white male—who might possibly have been a mechanic—who drove a black pick up truck. This placed their possible suspects in the *hundreds of thousands*. Now they had a name, which significantly narrowed down their search.

But not so fast! Said the FBI, enjoying their moment of triumph, in what had been an era of very public failures and scandals. Their analysis of the video had also caught an interesting reflection on the windshield of a Ford Escort parked right behind the pickup. It was the truck's license plate: APD 666, Florida tags. And carrying a kidnap victim across state lines made it a federal case. The FBI, led by special agent James Atherton, was now in charge; and they had the name of the perp, one Joseph Smith, along with his rap sheet and last known address.

Once again Dewey Farnsworth Deal was back in the news. Every TV station in the country was glued to the drama playing out in the small town of Platteville, Florida. Sheila and Abner were two of them. They watched from opposite sides of the couch as a news camera panned on the residence of the auto mechanic, Joseph Smith. Their marriage had been dealt a devastating blow by their son's disappearance. Abner had long since realized it wasn't his wife's fault. After all, he had left his son alone numerous times in grocery stores, parks, and even their neighborhood. This could just have easily have happened under his watch.

He tried to express this to Sheila, but since viewing the tape she had withdrawn from life. Their family physician explained it to Abner this way, "It doesn't matter that you don't blame her Abner. She blames herself." It was also made clear to Abner that he should have Sheila committed to a mental health care facility for her own safety. Abner balked at such a drastic step. He still believed that his son would be found and

that Dew's return would heal his broken family.

"But what if you're son isn't found Abner? Or God forbid, he's found—

Abner shook off the doc's protests. *"You don't understand. My son is special. He's meant for great things and God would never let him come to harm. You'll see,"* he'd said, with no apology.

The doctor shook his head and patted Abner on the shoulder. *"Alright, but Abner please keep this in mind. If it looks like...like, this whole thing is going to turn out badly, have Sheila committed before she finds out. Don't wait till it's too late son. Call me, you hear?"*

Abner watched the news that day in a state of bewilderment. He had always imagined that the lair of this beast would be a broken down shack or tenement slum. But the TV screen showed a manicured lawn and well tended home. A white picket fence lined the yard and an orange holiday banner flapped in the breeze, letting Joe Smith's neighbors know that he was ready for Halloween. The only clue that something was amiss was the yellow crime scene tape encircling the brick home. The black truck was parked underneath an open carport next to the house and two crime scene investigators were going over it with their little black bags.

My son was in that truck, Abner thought in idle horror. What terrors did he endure in that vehicle and this peaceful looking home?

But what he found most difficult to understand was that this monster had children of his own; two daughters; one three, and one Dewey's age, according to an excited reporter at the scene who had managed to beat his peers to the scoop. How could a man with children of his own do such things? To Abner, who rarely watched TV and read the newspaper even less, it just didn't make any sense.

Sheila made a mewling noise on the other end of the sofa as the news anchor replayed the car wash video for those viewers who'd been living in a cave the last two months. She averted her eyes and cried soundlessly, as the anchor relayed the events leading up to this moment, but she didn't leave the couch. Tentatively, Abner reached out to her but he just couldn't get his hand to touch her. He withdrew back into his own shell of grief.

Suddenly there was a commotion in the house as every available lawman on the scene began converging on a shed in the chain-link fenced in back yard. The anchor mercifully shut up as the reporter on the scene ducked under the yellow tape along with his cameraman. They stopped at the fence and focused on the door of the shed, which was blocked from view by some ten investigators peering inside. A uniformed officer, who

had discovered the inner sanctum of the torture shed—as it would later be dubbed, pushed his way out of the hut and threw up beside a child’s swing set for the whole nation to see. Abner faintly heard his wife moan beside him, but his attention was glued to the only portion of the shed entrance he could see; the top half.

It was as dark as a killer’s heart in that shed, lit irregularly by the flash of a camera . Something awful had happened in there. Several of the technicians began to wander off now, some were even crying. Another one looked like she too might be sick but was able to get herself under control. But the urgency that these people had exhibited upon arriving at the scene was now gone, replaced by a sense of dejection and failure.

“*Wh-What’s going on Abner?*” cried Sheila, speaking to him for the first time since the day of the abduction. “*Where’s Dew?*”

Abner was about to tell her that, ‘everything will be all right,’ when the men remaining at the shed’s door parted like a curtain. Two tech’s dressed in white overalls from their covered feet to their heads walked out a similarly covered stretcher between them. Abner felt something grab his heart painfully and he hoped that it was the beginning of a massive coronary. But it was just the cruel fingers of reality making sure that he was paying attention. He would not be spared this grief. He looked over to Sheila but she was gone. He hadn’t even heard her leave.

“*Maybe it’s not him,*” he said aloud, as bitter tears coursed down his cheeks. “*Maybe that’s the man underneath the sheet,*” he added hopefully, but the stretcher was too small for a full-grown man. “*It could be some other kid!*”

He felt no shame at making this hopeful declaration. Right then he couldn’t have cared less for the sorrow of another parent. He just wanted his Dew back. The camera followed the stretcher as the reporter spoke in a hushed and falsely respectful tone. Abner paid the cretin no attention, but stared intently at the stretcher instead, willing it to give him some answers. Then, just as the bearers were loading the dead body into an ambulance parked behind the black pick-up, the white sheet slipped from Dewey’s face long enough for the eager news crew and its viewing audience to plainly see him.

For the next several hours more reporters descended on the home of Joseph Smith, as reports slowly filtered out to them from the investigators inside. Abner later wouldn’t recall watching the reports, as he lay curled up on the couch in a fetal ball. Nor would he remember hearing the incessant ringing of his telephone, followed by the hammering at their

front door. A merciful state of shock had fallen over him as he watched a team of investigators come out of the residence long enough to have a quick news conference on what they had learned thus far.

It seemed that Joseph Smith had a police scanner in his truck and had probably heard the transmissions as officers and the crime lab descended on him and his home. He then sent his wife and children out of the house in a panic saying, 'they're on their way to kill me.' Then after watching his family drive off he went into the back room and wrote a suicide note, taking full blame for what he had done and where the authorities could find the bodies.

The reporters on hand, who up till then had been quietly listening or scribbling away in their notebooks, suddenly erupted in a chorus of questions. And it all came down to the last word in the note. Bodies, *not* body? The lead agent, who Abner recognized as James Attherton, held up his hands for calm.

"Let me finish! As of now we have just two bodies; 38 year old Joseph Smith and...here the agent looked into the camera and seemingly right into Abner's pleading eyes. "And six year old Dewey Farnsworth Deal. But the shed in back of the house has, shall we say, extensive evidence of other foul play."

"Did Smith kill the boy when he found out the law was coming?" shouted out a reporter in the back, looking to place blame with the FBI.

Attherton shook his head emphatically. *"We don't know the exact time of death right now, but due to the significant decomposition we're certain that death occurred several days prior..."*

The constant ringing of the telephone underlined the rest of the news conference but Abner hadn't answered it in weeks. It was usually the press anyway looking for a heart wrenching sound bite from the grieving parents. Damn vultures. He barely heard the rest. His son was dead. So what did it matter? Dewey was dead. Abner closed his eyes against the pain, the constant ringing and the loud knocking at the front door.

The blast of a shotgun coming from upstairs sent his eyelids flying open. **"SHEILA! NO!"**

The rest of Abner's life from that point on came to him in fragments and broken pieces that made no sense. It was like trying to piece together a puzzle one piece at a time without the benefit of an overall picture or having the other pieces to choose from at his disposal.

The memory of a rain-drenched funeral might come to him. Black

umbrellas glistening wetly, as the rain thumped sadly against them. Spanish moss hanging down from the tall oaks surrounding the yawning empty graves. Mud puddles forming in the bottom of those awful, awful holes. Was he really going to let them bury his family in those desolate pits? Flowers being tossed onto the best mahogany caskets Abner had to offer. Polaroid's pinned haphazardly along the cork covered walls of the shed. Pictures of naked little boys in various forced poses, their wide open eyes shiny with fear. Blood spatter marred several of the photographs like the art of an insane Jackson Pollard inspired artist. Implements of torture and sexual sadism littered across a workbench. Tiny wrinkled genitals floating in Mason Jars filled with formaldehyde. The jars neatly stacked against one wall, as if they held mother's finest preserves. A lonely and barren cot stained crimson; handcuffs locked at its head and foot. Six graves in an ordinary looking backyard. A smoking shotgun lying beside Sheila's lifeless hand. The fat face of Ed Neil, the first of the pervs' Abner had tracked down, as the light of sanity fled his eyes at the sight of his genitals being dropped into the blender. The others flashing by in a series of screams and gore. Kent Wether declaring his innocence.

Abner awoke with a start. Sunlight was streaming through the bedroom window and birds were greeting the new day with cheerful song. But the delights of the beautiful fall morning were lost on him. He rolled out of bed and stumbled bleary eyed into the bathroom. He winced at the reflection looking back at him. Three days of stubble and the red rimmed eyes of a damned man looked back at him. Surely that wasn't him in the mirror! He ran a hand over his scratchy jaw to confirm his senses.

The jarring sound of the telephone ringing made him cry out in alarm. He let out a heavy sigh and grinned sheepishly into the mirror. *"You need a break from the madness, my friend."*

Abner went out into the hall and picked up the old fashioned black telephone that sat atop a small oak table with a matching chair beside it. Once upon a time it had been the only phone in the home; it went back all the way to his grandfather. *"Hello?"* he said, sitting down in the creaking chair.

"Abner, it's me," said the familiar voice of Jim Attherton. Attherton, once an FBI agent, was now Abner's partner in crime. Jim's voice was strained this morning.

"You shoulda been here last night Jim," said Abner, yawning into the

phone. *"I made that perv really sing at the end. Got all the dumpsites too. I'll start contacting the families to—*

"So he's already dead?" Jim asked, his voice full of despair.

"Course he is," said Abner. *"What the hell's gotten into you Jim? The son of a bitch deserved to—*

"Listen to me for a second Abner! Haven't you seen the news?"
"I just got up Jim. Why? Did another kid get snatched?"

"No Ab," Jim sighed. *"Just turn it to channel 3, then get back to me later. We need to talk,"* he said in a resigned tone, then hung up.

Abner frowned at the receiver in his hand before racking it. What was that all about? He had sensed for some time that Jim was growing weary of the enterprise they had started after Dewey and Sheila's deaths. Abner shook his head as he pushed himself up from the chair. This probably meant that his friend was going to tell him it was quits for him.

James Attherton had a special talent for finding that rare but most terrible breed of serial criminal, the kid killer. Over the years Attherton had made quite the name for himself at the Federal Bureau, as the pedophile phenomenon became more of a public concern, fueled by the nearly weekly child abductions making headline news. But despite the many successes in his field (he had safely returned twice as many children as opposed to those cases where the kids were either still missing or had been found dead) the failures haunted him. Bearing witness to man's inhumanity is hard enough on one's psyche, but when that inhumanity is perpetrated on a child...well, a man can only take so much of that.

Dewey had been that straw for Jim Attherton. He had taken Dewey's murder very personally. Two weeks after they uncovered Joe Smith's torture shed, Attherton resigned from his post and joined Abner in making people like Smith pay for their crimes in a way the Government would never approve of. Over the years he had witnessed the terrible rise of the pedophile. What had once been a freak of nature, a joke in a raincoat, was now as common as a speeder on I-95. The Internet fueled their criminal lusts for only a nominal fee. Child pornography was illegal to send through the mail but the animals that peddled the smut had found a haven in the computer age.

It was an epidemic that was, Attherton knew, just beginning. But because it involved Free Speech the American public was unable to see the obvious solution to the problem. Some Americans would see their own children murdered before agreeing to any form of censorship. He had

grown disgusted with the legal system that refused to see that these pedophiles were beyond rehabilitation. On more than one occasion he had re-arrested some sick fuck mere days from their release from prison. Hell, these guys just spent their jail time working out new fantasies while jerking off to some porno rag. By the time they were released they had so much sexual tension built up that it was inevitable that they would end up hurting another innocent.

These animals cruised the streets of America in alarming numbers too. And parents blithely let their children roam their neighborhoods unsupervised. Would they let their child out the front door if a predator, such as a lion or tiger, were on the loose? He didn't think so. But at least a wild animal wouldn't kill if it had already fed, nor would it torment the child beyond endurance.

One parent had put it to him this way after he'd given a speech on the matter; "I can't let my child live in fear of what *might* happen." A sentiment that even now Jim could understand. But just ask one parent, whose child had been taken from them, if they would do anything differently knowing what they knew now, and you'd get another answer altogether.

These were the reasons Jim had given him anyway for quitting the Bureau.

Abner turned on the shower. Steam began to fill the bathroom and he wiped the mirror clear to shave the thick growth from his face. Abner thought back to his first meeting with Attherton just days after he'd buried his wife and son. He arrived unannounced at the FBI compound in Quantico, Virginia. The idea to seek out the pervs and to remove them from the face of the earth had been Abner's idea, but he knew full well that while he had the resources he didn't have the know how to pull such a thing off. Attherton did.

Over Attherton's desk a plaque stated in old English script, "*...if you gaze into the Abyss, the Abyss gazes also into you.*" Nietzsche.

A bulletin board, sitting catty-corner between two walls, held the photos taken from the torture shed of Joe Smith. It took all of Abner's willpower not to look at them. Somewhere on there was a picture of his son. Jim Attherton was leaning back in his chair with his hands behind his head. He was in his forties but the job had aged him prematurely. His hair was gray and his shoulders stooped from the weight of the personal tragedy he'd witnessed. He listened to Abner's proposal without blinking.

Abner had taken quite a gamble suggesting such an illegal venture to

a man that had sworn to uphold the law. But Jim had already made his feelings of dissatisfaction known, so Abner thought the worst that could happen would be a rebuke, followed by, “for your sake Abner, this discussion never took place.”

To his relief, though, James thought the idea had some merit. Attherton already knew of several such sickos that had escaped justice by either being too smart, or through mere technicalities. The next day Attherton put in his resignation. A week after that, their first perv paid a visit to the Abyss. Abner had gotten the name from the plaque on Jim’s wall, much to Attherton’s discomfiture. “Abner, the Abyss is a real place where even the innocent can get lost,” he lectured his friend, but by then Abner no longer believed in a Heaven or Hell.

Abner rinsed the sink after shaving. It was nearly black from all the stubble. He brushed his teeth then stepped into the hot shower.

Surprisingly, his friend had had little stomach for Abner’s torture sessions in the cellar. A few arguments ensued after the third perv went insane after watching his privates become consumed in the blender. Jim just couldn’t understand the concept of retribution. After all, it wasn’t his child who’d endured pain, degradation, and death at the hands of another. Abner believed in the “eye for an eye” concept, though, and was committed to making the pervs pay in the most horrible ways imaginable.

“*But Abner, you’re beginning to enjoy it,*” Jim had protested on more than one occasion. (“*My God Abner! That man’s hair turned to white in an instant!*”)

Abner stepped out of the shower and got dressed in the spare room. He hadn’t set foot in the room he’d shared with his wife, or Dewey’s room, since the day he’d buried them. On that day he’d allowed himself the luxury of properly grieving for them, reminiscing over photos, revered toys, and treasured mementos, crying for the family he’d lost. Then Abner left the rooms, locked the doors, and hadn’t shed a tear since. It was as if he’d locked his emotions with Dewey and Sheila behind those doors.

He went downstairs and straight into the kitchen. He was dreading the task of cleaning up the cellar, the body would be in rigor by now, but he knew he’d never be able to enjoy the day with it hanging over his head. *After breakfast*, he thought, as he turned on the little black and white TV on the kitchen counter. He smiled after realizing he’d been whistling while buttering his toast, something he couldn’t recall doing in an age.

“*I’m glad that it’s finally over with,*” he said aloud, while pouring himself a tall glass of O.J.

The thought surprised him a little. For a time he thought he'd never destroy enough pervs to bring him closure. And maybe he was right, but what the hell was closure anyway? Some catch word that a well-meaning head shrink had invented to give the bereaved something to live and hope for. But when someone you'd loved with all your soul was taken from you...there was no such thing as closure. Knowing this actually brought relief to Abner's heart. It was time to let go of the hate. And if he couldn't do that, time to move on anyway. Because without Attherton's expert assistance, Abner wouldn't be able to continue the hunt.

He'd always wanted to live in the mountains, maybe he'd sell this place and...the local news on channel 3 was showing a familiar face on the screen. Abner turned up the volume and took a seat on a stool by the counter. Something about a missing man.

Two minutes later and he was frantically dialing Jim Attherton.

"Jim, please tell me this is all a mistake! I-I can't believe this!"

There was a moment of silence, except for a deep and profound sigh coming from Jim's line. *"No Abner. It's no mistake. That man we picked up wasn't Kent Wether. His name was—"*

"I know his damn name Jim! For God's sake he must have told me six times before I-I..." Abner couldn't make himself say it. *"Oh dear Lord, I killed an innocent man,"* he cried. He slid off the stool and unto the floor.

"We killed and innocent man Abner. Not you. We. I'm the one who pointed him out. I'm the one who set him up."

"How did this happen Jim?" Abner asked with no malice. He wasn't blaming his friend; he just wanted to know what had gone wrong.

"Kent Wether, who looks remarkably like John Tyler, was fired the day before we picked Mr. Tyler up at the Photo Booth. Tyler was hired to replace Wether. When we picked him up after he'd gotten off, he'd just finished his first day on the job."

"Dear God."

"Kent Wether was picked up for indecent exposure the same day. He's being held—"

But Abner wasn't listening. He found that he couldn't care less about the fate of Kent Wether anymore. Abner had killed in the name of retribution. Of justice served. And for peace of mind. But what of John Tyler's loved ones? Didn't they now deserve those same things?

"Jim, I-I gotta go. Listen, I'm sorry for dragging you into this mess. But—"

"It's over. I know Abner; I feel the same way. I won't call the law on us,"

old friend, but you do realize that we have to answer for this.” It was a statement, not a question.

Abner nodded, not thinking that Jim couldn’t see him.

“Abner?”

“I know Jim. What will you do?”

Another pause followed; the silence spoke volumes though. Jim was going to pay for his part in the murder with a bullet from his service piece.

“Jim, why don’t you come over and we’ll talk about it?”

“For all the good we did we ended up no better than those we killed. Goodbye Abner.”

“Jim...”

There was a click on the other line leaving Abner Deal alone on his kitchen floor. *We have to answer for this...killed an innocent man...John Tyler...have to answer...*

Later, Abner found himself in the cellar standing over the pathetic remains of John Tyler, father, husband, son. An innocent man. How much time had passed, Abner had no idea. His mind felt as if it had sprung loose. Unhinged.

Tyler’s eyes had sunken into his skull; the ocular fluid had stained his cheeks. Dead man’s tears. But the lifeless orbs stared up at Abner nevertheless. Abner could hear the man’s cries of innocence resonating in the concrete chamber. He reached over with trembling fingers and pushed the eyelids closed. To his relief they stayed that way.

“I’m so sorry. So very, very sorry,” he said to the dead man, but his voice came back to him empty and unheard. The dead didn’t give a damn about apologies. Abner went over to the pile of clothes in the corner, where he’d thrown them after cutting them from the frightened man’s trembling body the night before.

“Why are you doing this to me? Why?”

He fumbled around in the pockets of the khaki pants and came up with a brown leather billfold. Why hadn’t they checked his ID last night? In the past they had always checked the ID! A South Carolina driver’s license issued to a John Waverly Tyler stared up at him from the see through divider. A folder of photos held pictures of his family. Three boys, one about the same age as Dewey, (*what would his mother tell him when he asked about his daddy?*) and a lovely wife who was sitting at home right now wondering where her husband was.

Abner closed the wallet with a snap. He thrust it back into the dead

man's pants and picked up the rest from the floor. He laid the clothes on Tyler's ruined lap and tenderly cut him free of the chair. Tears flowed down Abner's face and his mind felt as light as a leaf on a wind blown day, as if at any second it would blow straight from his head.

Abner strained to hold onto his senses. He still had a job to do. He couldn't let the Tyler sons see their father this way. He wheeled in a gurney from the embalming room and lifted the naked and ravaged body of John Tyler on top of it. The next several hours were spent in preparing Mr. Tyler for his family.

Abner wheeled the gurney out of the embalming room and keyed the elevator open. He pushed the gurney in and punched the second floor button. The old doors closed and the lift lurched upwards. Now that he'd prepared Mr. Tyler, it was time to call the police. He had but briefly entertained the idea of going out the same way as his Sheila, his friend Jim, and even Joe Smith, but after all that had happened Abner still believed in retribution. He wouldn't cheat the Tyler's from their justice the way Joseph Smith had cheated him.

The elevator staggered to a sudden and gear grinding halt causing the sheet on the body to fall to the floor.

Abner felt his mind finally wrench free. He giggled as Mr. Tyler's eyes popped open. The eyelids made a sound not unlike that of Velcro ripping as the glue holding them shut over the glass marbles gave way. The corpse sat up on the table just as the lights flickered out.

"Paybacks a bitch Mr. Tyler," said Abner Deal in the dark.

can't answer that one

Sydney
Anderson

Carpet

Gabriel Athens

The apartment needs to be dusted. I can see some cat hair, and the carpet doesn't soak it all in, even though it does a better job than those damn hardwood floors that I'm so used to. Everyone seems to want hardwood floors in their home, but why? They are loud and look dirty quickly. And dust doesn't settle on them, so the air always has things floating in it. But carpet, carpet muffles the loud noises, it keeps your feet warm when you step out of bed on a cold winter morning, it makes things more pleasant. You have to vacuum it, true, but you don't need a mop. You have to be more careful that you don't spill things. But you shouldn't be spilling things in the first place, right? Well, anyway, I have to remember to dust this apartment. It should be perfect. You can't see the dust here, the carpet doesn't let all the dust get into the air but you have to make sure that you clean it more often. Is it worth the effort? I think it is.

i have a better job than you
i have more talent than you
i've made more money than you

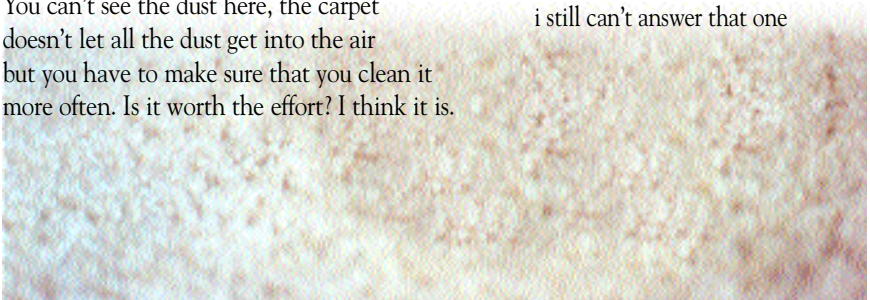
i'm attractive
i'm funny
i'm kind

i'm strong
i'm intelligent
i'm beautiful

and i look at what we had
and i wonder why i ever tried
and why i ever bothered

why did i ever put up with you
why did i think i needed you
why did i let you make me unhappy

with all my talent, with all my
brains
i still can't answer that one





woman art by Dr. Deborah Ferber



2sunflowers
art by cheryl townsend



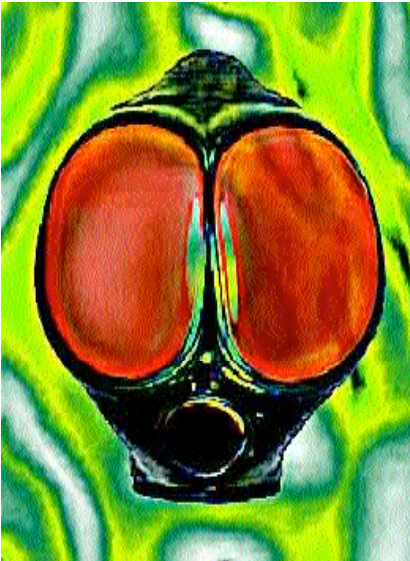
art by dave jarvie



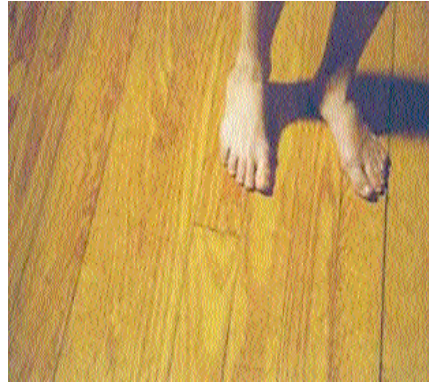
goblet, art by
edward michael o'connor supramonewicz



art by john yetko



brazilian bughead, art by
mark graham



feet on wood
art by mike hevancek



victor borge
art by rose e. grier



art by xanadu

precinct fourteen

Janet Kuypers

it was a long night for us, starting out
at your apartment with your roommate's
coworkers coming over and making

margaritas until two in the morning,
but of course we then decided that the
best thing to do would be to go out

and so off to the blue note we went,
found some interesting people to talk
to, closed the bar, i think that was the

first time i ever did that, closed a late-
night bar, i mean, and at four-thirty you
drove me home down milwaukee ave

and i know it angles, and you can see
the traffic light for oncoming traffic
as easily as you can see your own light,

but i'm sure the light was green, and not
red like the cops said, when they pulled
you over. you could have been in big

trouble that night, no insurance, no city
registration sticker, a michigan driver's
license when you'd lived in illinois for



over a year now, a cracked windshield,
running a red light, probably intoxicated.
so they brought us to the station at five a.m.,

and all they did was write you a ticket,
and they gave me a business card, said if we
had any problems to give them a call.

you drove me home, and the cops met
us there, too, hitting on me again, and
although we both agreed that the night

was a lot of fun, even with the involvement
of the fourteenth precinct, i still believe
that damn light wasn't even red.



ISSN#1068-5154

children
churches
& daddies

children
churches
& daddies

children
churches
& daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine

Produced By

Scars Publications and Design

Editorial Offices

Children, Churches and Daddies; Scars Publications and Design
829 Brian Court
Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA

Internet

ccandd96@scars.tv
<http://scars.tv>

Publishers/Designers Of

Children, Churches and Daddies magazine; cc+d Ezines; The Burning mini poem books; God Eyes mini poem books; The Poetry Wall Calendar; The Poetry Box; The Poetry Sampler; Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters Reverberate Music Magazine; Down In The Dirt magazine; Freedom and Strength Press forum; assorted chapbooks and books; music, poetry compact discs; live performances of songs and readings

Sponsors Of

past editions; Poetry Chapbook Contest, Poetry Book Contest; Prose Chapbook Contest, Prose Book Contest Poetry Calendar Contest; Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites); Collection Volumes

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, England, India, Italy, Malta, Norway and Turkey. Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues (via news and philosophy) as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. **Children, Churches and Daddies** is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published quarterly by **Scars Publications and Design**, 829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA; attn: Janet Kuypers. Contact us via snail-mail or e-mail (ccandd96@scars.tv) for subscription rates or prices for annual collection books.

• To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; if mailed, include SASE & bio. Work sent on disks or through e-mail preferred. Previously published work accepted. Authors always retain rights to their own work. All magazine rights reserved. Reproduction of **cc&d** without publisher permission is forbidden. Copyright © 1993-2004 **Scars Publications and Design, Children, Churches and Daddies**, Janet Kuypers. All rights of pieces remain with their authors.