

children
churches
& daddies

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the **UN**religious, **NON**family-oriented literary & art mag

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"Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. I think we're being
run by maniacs for maniacal ends and I think I'm liable to be put away as
insane for expressing that. That's what's insane about it." — John Lennon

the boss lady's editorial

Shoving our "good life" down the enemy's throats & what makes us think they want to be like us?

I was thinking about the cartoon show *South Park* last night, thinking about how they try to talk about middle-eastern interests (granted, they only refer to Saddam Hussein as being killed and being Satan's lover and they only refer to Bin Laden once in an Afghanistan episode), but one episode of *South Park* made me think more about our "war" in Iraq than any other show... In one episode the boys went to Colorado's version of "Cirque du Cheville" (a parody for the French circus "Cirque Du Soleil") and saw contorting Romanian quintuplets who later escaped and stayed at Stan Marsh's house. The boys wanted to show the little Romanian girls why America was so great, by taking them to places like the mall, or fast food restaurants. I'll even quote Eric Cartman: "You see, in America we have log rides! Bacon double-cheeseburgers! Sheep-shearing contests! And shopping malls!" But the quintuplets decided they wanted to go back to Romania, because it was *their* home, and it was their way that they understood and loved. The third quintuplet even said, "You know nothing about Romania, and yet you assume America is *so much* better! Maybe Romania isn't as nice as America, but it is *our home*! We are Romanian!"

Now why do I think this has anything to do with our "war" in Iraq? Because these young Romanian quintuplets in *South Park* were saying what many Iraqis are probably saying now... That although the citizens may not have liked living in fear under Saddam Hussein, that *doesn't* mean they want to to exchange their middle-eastern Islamic life for an American, Christian network-show and fast-food-meal mentality. The kids at *South Park* tried to show the Romanian quintuplets all of the decadence of America (in the same way the boys took the Ethernopian — I mean, Ethiopian boy Starvin' Marvin to the all-you-can-eat buffet, where Eric Cartman said "See, Starvin' Marvin, these are appetizers...that's what we call food that makes you hungrier"). *South Park* manages to exemplify the the over-abundance and decadence that Americans are associated with.

I mean, think about it — we now have TIVO for television sets, because videocassettes are too time-consuming and we can now eliminate

any commercials (because we don't have the time for *commercials*). We have "Merry Maids," so we can pay people to clean our homes for us, when we already pay for dry cleaners to wash our clothes and we pay for restaurants because we don't feel like cooking. We now have the Internet (and yes, *South Park* even had Chinese men in the Dodge Ball World Olympics make fun of how Americans — who created the Internet in the first place, at my old college stomping grounds at the University of Illinois — now even use the Internet as a marketing center), so we can shop online instead of going to a store. Hell, we have PeaPod, where people can buy your groceries for you and bring them to your house. Someone even told me that you can order a chef to cook a meal for you in your own home!

So... do you think we Americans *aren't* decadent?

I'm sure we don't do all do the things I've listed above, but they've been created here in America, because there's a market for it, and people have been looking to spend more and more of their money on service industries so that people can hire others do their work for them (like clean their house, or their cloths, or buy their groceries, or deliver our products to us, or cook our food). Couple that with good ol' W (I mean, President Bush) seeming to be doing his damndest to infuse Christianity back into the culture (yes, our founding fathers were Christian, but they wanted freedom from religion indoctrinating their lives — it still says "In God We Trust" on our money, and President Eisenhower added "Under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance so we wouldn't appear like those godless Communists, but people are allowed to have any belief they so choose in this country)... So I wonder if the Iraqi people think that a Christian nation is trying to push a political philosophy on them that they don't want to follow.

We're not just trying to free people from a brutal dictator like Saddam Hussein — we want a country that isn't in political conflict with us (because apparently this is Bush's way of freeing us from the chances of another nine eleven). The problem is, for example, we've set up a timeline for Iraq to vote for a President, and although Iraqis came out in record numbers to vote, more than half of the Iraqi people don't consider this a valid government. If you're wondering why, consider that the United State's democracy, which is not religious, directly clashed with how Iraqis view their leader. Who is their leader? Allah, not a President. And in their government, religion is the most important thing — so anything we're suggesting clashes with their basic beliefs.

Also keep in mind that we're the same people that don't want us occupying Iraq and think we should be able to just free these people from Saddam Hussein and leave. Good point, we're an impatient people, and

why keep our military there, in harm's way. If that's what you want, I have to ask you then: why do we still have military in Germany and Japan from World War II? Because we do, because there is always a potential conflict, and we need to keep our soldier close-at-hand, you know, to help keep us free. It sounds silly, but it's true — we've got our military hand in enough places so that we can always keep watch over most anything happening in the world. Maybe we're not hearing about our troops still in those countries from World War II because people weren't up in arms about our involvement in World War II, and half of this country is up in arms about the "war" in Iraq. It seems that our intent has changed pertaining to Iraq, from defensive, a preemptive attack because we were led to believe Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (as defending our nation is the only real reason we should ever go to war) to liberating oppressed people. If defending ourselves was the point, then there is still a debate over whether or not Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (well, we haven't found any, and trust me, we've looked — but a high ranking air force official from Saddam's regime wrote a book & told Jon Stewart at *the Daily Show* about how the weapons *did* exist, and they were moved. Is he right? We don't know...). If liberating was our intention, then why didn't we start a war with *most* of the Middle East, or half of Africa? And if we're supposed to be liberating them, then shouldn't we stay for years until they're free of any terrorist regimes?

Our country seems to have stuck its nose for a little too long where a bunch of people don't want it. Many in Iraq may be pleased that Saddam Hussein is out of power, but many of them probably don't want to be forced to convert to the Christian mentality of the people who freed them from Saddam Hussein, with the way we've been "guiding" them through creating the government we would think it would be best to deal with in the future. I know, I know, if we don't keep military there, then bad forces can easily take over the country, so after deposing a vicious ruler, another will take his place. But maybe if we took the time to evaluate *how* these people need to be helped (and don't try to force our way of thinking down their throats), maybe there would be fewer problems in the upcoming weeks... and months... and years.



Janet Kuypers®
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

The Myth of "Price Gouging"

By Alex Epstein

President Bush and Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez have joined the chorus of politicians clamoring for more investigations of "price gouging." Senate majority leader Bill Frist promises that "if the facts warrant it, I will support a federal anti-price gouging law." But there are no facts that could warrant such a law, and there is no basis for any "price gouging" investigations--because there is no such thing as "price gouging" by private businesses.

The term "price gouging" implies that gas stations have an ability to forcibly inflict harm on us--but they do not. Any price we pay for a gallon of gasoline--whether \$1 or \$3--we pay voluntarily, based on the value of the gasoline to us. If we think we are spending too much on gasoline, we are free to drive less, to buy more fuel-efficient cars, to use carpools or busses, or to travel by bicycle or on foot. Gas station owners cannot force us to buy gasoline; they can only offer us a trade, which we are free to accept or reject.

But, one might ask, without anti-"price gouging" laws won't owners of gasoline charge the absolute highest prices they can? Absolutely, and they have every moral right to do so--just as consumers of gasoline have every right to pay the lowest prices they can find. Gas station owners are not our servants. They are producers who spend money, exert effort, and assume risk to bring a product to market. They own the gasoline they sell, and like any property owner they should be free to set the terms of sale.

Since we pay the lowest price that we can find for gasoline (and never more than it is worth to us), and gas stations sell gasoline for the highest price they can get (and never less than it is worth to them), the price of gasoline is a reflection of mutually beneficial trade--the essence of proper interaction under capitalism. For a gas station owner to charge what the market will bear is no more "gouging" than it is for a computer programmer--or a cashier--to negotiate for the highest salary he can get.

Since the prevailing price of gasoline is the result of trade, it reflects not the arbitrary "greed" of gas station owners, but the facts of the market: the producers' costs, competition, and what customers are willing to pay. The reason that gasoline prices are higher after a natural disaster, for instance, is that the fact of relatively scarce supply leads various purchasers of oil and gasoline to compete to buy it, and bid up its price. Those who buy it are those who value it most, to the extent they value it most--like highly efficient factories overseas, or Americans providing for their most crucial transportation priorities.

Anti-"price gouging" laws prevent producers and their customers from trading at mutually beneficial prices--sacrificing their interests to the interests of those who wish to avoid the "hardship" of paying prices higher than they are used to. By what right can the government force producers to set artificially low prices and prevent consumers from bidding up the price to get the gasoline they are willing to pay for? By what right can the government demand that factory owners be deprived of the oil they are able to pay for--and their customers of the cheap products they happily purchase at Wal-Mart?

Anti-“price-gouging” laws are a particularly vicious form of price controls. Like all price controls, they deprive businesses of earned profit, promote shortages, and discourage future production. But they also forbid the indefinable: “unconscionable” prices, the meaning of which cannot be known until after the ruling of some bureaucrat. This added uncertainty discourages producers from being in business, period--especially in times of emergency, when “gouging” claims are most rampant. If a federal “price gouging” law is passed, will gas station owners do everything possible after the next natural disaster to remain open for business--will private contractors from other states rush to bring generators, food, and debris-clearing equipment? Or will they not bother for fear that the prices they set will be declared “unconscionable”?

The real threat to individual rights and justice is not the so-called price gouging of free individuals, but the price-control gouging of a coercive government. We must fight this threat by asserting, unequivocally, that gas station owners have a right to charge whatever prices they choose.

Alex Epstein is a junior fellow at the Ayn Rand Institute (<http://www.aynrand.org>) in Irvine, CA. The Institute promotes the ideas of Ayn Rand--best-selling author of *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* and originator of the philosophy of Objectivism.

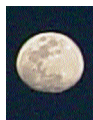
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eye on the sky

Our Journey Continues: Returning to the moon

On January 14, 2004, President Bush put NASA on a new course into the cosmos. The Vision for Space Exploration announced that day focused the agency on a bold new mission: landing humans on the moon before the end of the next decade, paving the way for eventual journeys to Mars and beyond.

Two years later, we're well on our way to turning the Vision into reality. We've unveiled the plans for our next generation spacecraft, the Crew Exploration Vehicle, which builds on the best of Apollo and shuttle technology.



As the space shuttle fleet continues return to flight testing and works to complete the International Space Station, NASA's robotic explorers continue to return breathtaking images and data. Scientists are poring over the comet samples from Stardust, as the New Horizons spacecraft rockets towards Pluto. And on the red planet, Spirit and Opportunity are still roving as a new probe, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, arrives. These missions, like those that will follow, look to the cosmos for answers to questions as old as humankind. Now, as the President said, “let us continue the journey.”

How We'll Get Back to the Moon

Crew Exploration Vehicle Before the end of the next decade, NASA astronauts will again explore the surface of the moon. And this time, we're going to stay, building outposts and paving the way for eventual journeys to Mars and beyond. There are echoes of the iconic images of the past, but it won't be your grandfather's moon shot.

This journey begins soon, with development of a new spaceship. Building on the best of Apollo and shuttle technology, NASA's creating a 21st century exploration system that will be affordable, reliable, versatile, and safe.

The centerpiece of this system is a new spacecraft designed to carry four astronauts to and from the moon, support up to six



crewmembers on future missions to Mars, and deliver crew and supplies to the International Space Station.

The new crew vehicle will be shaped like an Apollo capsule, but it will be three times larger, allowing four astronauts to travel to the moon at a time.

The new spacecraft has solar panels to provide power, and both the capsule and the lunar lander use liquid methane in their engines. Why methane? NASA is thinking ahead, planning for a day when future astronauts can convert Martian atmospheric resources into methane fuel.

The new ship can be reused up to 10 times. After the craft parachutes to dry land (with a splashdown as a backup option), NASA can easily recover it, replace the heat shield and launch it again.

Once a lunar outpost is established, crews could remain on the lunar surface for up to six months. The spacecraft can also operate without a crew in lunar orbit, eliminating the need for one astronaut to stay behind while others explore the surface.



The Flight Plan

In just five years, the new ship will begin to ferry crew and supplies to the International Space Station. Plans call for as many as six trips to the outpost a year. In the meantime, robotic missions will lay the groundwork for lunar exploration. In 2018, humans will return to the moon. Here's how a mission would unfold:

A heavy-lift rocket blasts off, carrying a lunar lander and a "departure stage" needed to leave Earth's orbit (below left). The crew launches separately, then docks their capsule with the lander and departure stage and heads for the moon.

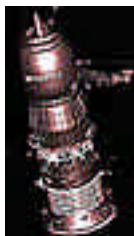
Three days later, the crew goes into lunar orbit (below, left). The four astronauts climb into the lander, leaving the capsule to wait for them in orbit. After landing and exploring the surface for seven days, the crew blasts off in a portion of the lander, docks with the capsule and travels back to Earth. After a de-orbit burn, the service module is jettisoned, exposing the heat shield for the first time in the mission. The parachutes deploy, the heat shield is dropped and the capsule sets down on dry land.

'Into the Cosmos'

With a minimum of two lunar missions per year, momentum will build quickly toward a permanent outpost. Crews will stay longer and learn to exploit the moon's resources, while landers make one way trips to deliver cargo. Eventually, the new system could rotate crews to and from a lunar outpost every six months.

Planners are already looking at the lunar south pole as a candidate for an outpost because of concentrations of hydrogen thought to be in the form of water ice, and an abundance of sunlight to provide power.

These plans give NASA a huge head start in getting to Mars. We will already have the heavy-lift system needed to get there, as well as a versatile crew capsule and propulsion systems that can make use of Martian resources. A lunar outpost just three days away from Earth will give us needed practice of "living off the land" away from our home planet, before making the longer trek to Mars. As President Bush said when he announced the Vision for Space Exploration, "Humans are headed into the cosmos." Now we know how we'll get there.



poetry

the passionate stuff

Binding

Eric Bonholtzer

Sever the chains of time.
Don't wait. The opportunity is at hand.
Slip sneaking through the chinks and cracks
In your tether, feet sinking, immured
Mired against the precipice
Standing with clawed hand holds
The fettered soles bonded and ironed
Out in the wrinkles of darkness.

It suffocates like feathers down
the gullet, forced projections
against a wall like Plato's shadows,
shouting, mounds of bones piled skeletons high.
The knot ties, the unchained impassively constricting
And keeping close together like a child's crayons
still in the box

Some say the body is a prison
A bone, blood, and flesh cell
Everyone a convict, kept in mind.
However, not everyone is right.
And opinions are always subjective.

A caricature against a wall, made with charcoal
from a fresh hot fire, sits becoming prettier while
black and white skies appear in unison, watching over
captors and saviors alike. A striped staircase to climb
Prodded by an invisible hand never letting go.

this appears in the book Remnants & Shadows.





Texas Tea Pioson, art by Aaron Wilder

Cinema Sonnet XX0: U.S. v. Spirit of 76

Michael Ceraolo

You could look it up,
because you couldn't make up something like that:
the government out-Dadaing the Dadaists,
out-absurding the absurdists,
with the marvelously mis-named Espionage Act,
which had nothing to do with espionage
and everything to do with suppression of speech
And here is the height (or depth) of sublime stupidity:
a filmmaker makes a movie about the American Revolution,
showing British atrocities along the way

And
the judge gives him ten years in prison under the Act,
because said showings of such a film could cause people
"to question the good faith of our ally, Great Britain"
Before you laugh remember the law is still on the books,
waiting

Isaac

Mason Tate

In May I sip
from the palm wine
Chalice
and carry the sticks
to my own
self
sacrifice
dirty and lame
for miles

Suckling a tree
I think of Eve
and am hungry
again

RE: your hips

Robert Lee Brewer

OK

time to get serious...

Don't you think it's about time you dropped a few pounds?

No diet, No exercise...

No BS,

Only safe, substantial results in a few weeks,
period.

It only takes 24 bucks

to see if this is what you've been searching for
the last few years...

we bet it is



*art by Nicole
Aimiee Macaluso*

Old Hooks On To US New Bid To Set Standard

9 Centuries ago Empire
measured by the amount
of fear leader inspire
of a nation surmounted
Empire now a worn-down
has-been is threatened
by young British clown
US Democracy suspended
Oil displaces standard
gold this stolen power
squeezed from the herd
race for a new emperor
to head the Oilgarchy

© 2005 *Frank Anthony*

I gaze up through the monument,
emotions stirring as if I am naughtily looking up
the folds of a flowing skirt on a breezy spring day.
I note the lines of the legs and the way the lights
dance amongst the curves and crevices
as flickers of secret places appear
as I move to get a better look.

I wait in line, anxious to ride to the top
gliding up between the center
sliding up the legs across the mid section
to the first peek of romantic illumination.

A new lift carries me higher as I continue
rising up the shoulders to the eyes of the tower
exposing myself to the vista of it's everyday.
The searchlight highlights the enfolded city
as I reach my hand out into the night to feel its life.
I place The Arc d'Triomphe upon my thumb
The Notre Dame rests on my pinky finger,
while the river below flows across my palm
filling in my love lines and age lines
as it arrives upon the Louvre
balanced in the center of my palm.



The Eiffel Tower

*Jessica
Bechtold*

In a Sense Lost

*Tyler Joseph
Wiseman*

I crave it so very desperately,
that sanguine soil road, and innocence lost
amidst the gilded Iowa cornfields,
the Montana panorama potent
enough to strike even the Gods senseless,
the virile plethora of Juniper
as it falls with each chill seasoned passing

Where has the hope listlessly wisped away,
carrying along with it the genius
of mundane things in our humanity,
and all things under the sun we appraised
as it were precious only to our need
In a sense, I, we are lost to devise
our personal eulogy for Earth's demise

I WANT

Emily Griskavich

I want
my crazy untamed hair
to be covered with leaves
blown on the river wind

I want
to be a leftist downtown hippie
wearing pride triangle jewelry
and peace sign t-shirts

talking about Rumi, Buddha,
Mary Magdalene, sacred feminine

I want
to jump up on the bed
jammy-clad and bedhead-frizzed
and air-guitar Ted Nugent

then go to the kitchen
and eat vegan pancakes for breakfast
prime rib for lunch
chocolate cake for dinner

I want
to squeeze in between your words
and make a space big enough
to tell you everything
I dream seek and love

I want
to write this poem
in my loopy kindergartner penmanship
and slip it silently into your hand
when you ask me what I'm writing

i want

Janet Kuypers

i want a big house with filtered central air
and i want a big lawn so i can recreate nature

and i want a big fence so i'll know what's mine

and i want the evergreens trimmed into neat little
balls, because it has to look neat. plant everything
in a row.

and i want to spray chemicals on my lawn
to keep the dandelions away

and i want a plastic lobster bib
over my fancy dress at the fancy restaurant

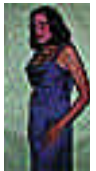
and don't forget the hundred dollar champagne

and i want a big fat car, and i want
someone else to drive it

and i want the two kids, one boy, one girl
and i want a nanny to take care of them for me

i want to be famous
i want everyone to love me

i want it
i want it all



PMS and a Hand Grenade

Eriol Fox

'You're the one that made the mistake;
Don't try to place the blame
On my hormones,'
The words fell out of my mouth,
Sinking rapidly like a stone.
I may have screwed up, but
You're the one who screwed
Me over.
Irrationality is not
A nationality or a gender -
If we're the underdogs, must we
Always be our own defenders?
Denial may not be
An Egyptian river, but
For you it's a
Perpetual state of
Residence. The thought
Makes me quiver.

You throw explosive
Words out into the middle
Of the room; so why
Are you surprised
When they activate
My trigger?
Do you really expect
Me to stand calmly there,
While you snigger behind my back
At all that I hold dear?

You think my emotions
Are a minefield;
Be careful where you step, or
You might set me off.
Do you really think
Of a relationship
As a war zone?
Does that make me
An opposing country,
Your enemy out of necessity?
I am not a conquest to be made;
Neither are you a conquering hero.

I refuse to fight anymore.
This war is over.



*Paula, art by
Nick Brazinsky*

Popularity

Heather Dorn

In junior high I sat
with a group
of girls who let me
eat with them

even though I didn't
have a bleach washed
denim skirt
or "New Kids" buttons
on my backpack
or shiny hair
that smelled of strawberries
and shimmered
like the foil pouch of the Pop-Tarts
they ate for breakfast

I asked them
one day
if they wanted
to make a lunch club
and we could
pick code names

I would be Princess Helen
or Cleopatra
or Barbie
and solve mysteries

like what our teachers really
did when they went
in that "Teacher's Lounge"
or if they would really make you
eat the gross concoction of milk
and peaches and Salisbury steak
the inevitable product of boredom
and make stories



*Rachel, art by
Christine Sorich*

of lunchtime adventure
running from leprechauns
and finding 4-leaf clovers
discovered next to rainbows
and pots of gold that were invisible
reporting to the secret base
of cat agents who circled the school
licking their paws with a cryptic code
one meow for yes and a hiss for no no no

“So you want to?” I asked.

“No,” Amanda scoffed.

“Why not?” I persisted.

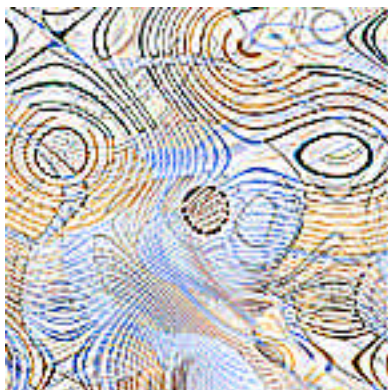
“Because it’s stupid,”

she fired back

and they all laughed

they always laughed
like that

So I said, “OK”
and just finished
my peaches
in silence



*Ikeno, art by
Mike Hovancsek*

Static

Carol Mikoda

Static fills my mind
as I wrap and unwrap
the death thoughts dragged
through the desert of this
sleepless night. The cemetery mound
of my pillow is hot
and confused no matter how
I turn or punch it.
My exhaustion will trash tomorrow's
truth and I will feel
alone and lost all day.
A fog of sleep hovers
over all the world, but
I am untouched as I
wander through it, ghost-like
and angry.

Read Thyself

Amber May

Read thyself to know thy fellow man, the Philosopher taught

An epiphany, she thought, look inside to understand humanity...

Though she opens a pandora's box upon self-evaluation -

Internal landscape ever-flowing, eternally altering, hollow
depths unexplored.

Paradoxical inconsistencies shift through darkened crevices.

Instability and selfish affection tear at binding ties.

Continuously seeking confirmation of existence,

She innervates sensory neurons.

Hedonistic indulgences heighten the hollows.

A shell without a soul,

A lover who cannot love,

Prude sensuality, tantalizing tangibility, Ambrosia, Aphrodite

Seducing the world, fleeing from substance.

A vacuous mind intermittently electrified by thoughts moving
disjointedly.

Ideas forming and dispersing before coming into fruition.

Bordering on glimpses of brilliance, epiphanies dissipate
before captured,

Like chasing shimmering soap bubbles,

They pop in her mind-fingers just as she closes in.

Like a delicate bird, her mental images flutter about with a
restless grace,

Punctuated by stark superficial obsessions.

Her soul feathers brush against the boundaries of her body.

The heavy haze curtailing her connection is dissipated,

Yet she clings to her fantasy of inner substance even as the
truth bleeds through.

That One instant of self-awareness hits her.

Shock erupts.

Internal confirmation: "This is really me, I cannot escape myself.

The thoughts, words, actions which emanate forth are all generated from this being which I am."

Can the savage self-reflect?

When we turn inward, do we find only raw instinct, superficially refined?

She fears the philosopher was accurate in his prophecy of human nature



CloseBody07 and CloseBody23, art by Melanie Monterey

A DIVISION OF SORTS

Ryan Downey

I never was a fan of math I guess.
Never reveled in making cold calculations.
Though I suppose I could see the use
In making a few key subtractions
And maybe even one or two additions.
This is what he said to me as he sat
Cross-legged and cross-eyed staring at both of me.
The one that was coming and the one that was going.
And I said, nothing, because I was in fact not present.
So he continued saying, not only that
But I don't particularly take kindly to geometry
All precision no excitement, no deviation,
And too much clarity.
I would have known he was right,
If not for the fact that I was floating on separate planes.

empire, gathering moss

Nathan B. Smith

butterfly in a cone shaped thread—
an arachnid fortress canopy,
strung throughout the woods.

cotton seed storm
scene thru webworks:
a pair of slugs touch horns,
inch, coalesce, trade sperm
all day, like newborns, tree side
trail, shines their excrete-slime
all available colors for the light.

we name roots along the way,
the webs wave flaggish;
under their banner we live
tri-layered and flower bridging.

scorched leaves look,
a white banquet
rained on by their cousins



*WaterFall of Thoughts,
art by Adriana DeCastro*



*Gas Can on Bed Springs,
art by Cheryl Townsend*

Pollyanna

Christopher Barnes, UK

Ambition fashions itself narrowly
deflating girls.
It's open and shut – even grisly ducklings
spree drugstore complexions, tags,
hospitalizing arts.
See they're just dandy, touchingly blessed,
grabby with all
the latest-scream fads.

*

She'd knocked up and out
charged on teenage begetting rates.
A surplus shell suit this month,
window shops pushchairs in lieu
in hopes for a girl like you.

The Witnesses

Eric Obame

WCR
DragMyDrag,
art by David
Matson



They knocked on my door
Two women selling Christ
I should have ignored them
They said Evolution was not proven
And handed me a flyer with a drawing
Stereotypically depicting Native Americans, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews
Falling into earth and flame
While men and women kneeling and praying before Jesus
Were welcomed by the Lord and saved
I argued back
Their God is a bigot
A tyrant demanding constant adoration from mortals
Rather pathetic
I believe in God, and I believe in Evolution
I believe in Evolution, because I believe in science
I believe in science, because it is verifiable, repeatable and predictable
I choose to believe in God, although it is none of those things
It makes me feel good to believe in God
But some don't have that need and that is okay
God is something personal to me
God is something I feel inside
And I don't need to be in a strange building to feel it
And to have a one-sided conversation with it
And to thank it for keeping my family and I safe
And providing for us
And I don't need to read the translated and rewritten words of simple men
Who all died more than a millennia ago to know and feel God
And I call God It, because to give it a gender would limit it—insult it
And men create religions, but I am no sheep to be shepherded
And I rambled on like this for a little while more
They left, and I have not seen them again
They knocked on my door
Two women selling Christ
I should have ignored them

A Tale of Two Countries

Rangzen Shanti

It was the best of times

It was the worst of times

It was a time of ignorance and naïve solutions

It was a time of rampant thievery

It was a time of trust and adoration

It was a time of racism and brutal oppression

It was a time of anger over unfair traffic violations

It was a time of countless Rodneys

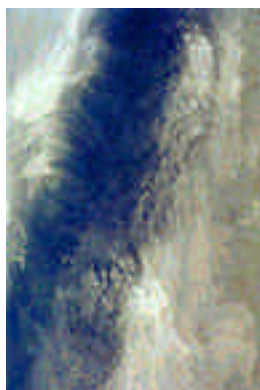
It was a time when the innocent had nothing to fear

It was a time of cameras on every street corner

It was time to love Big Brother

It was time to flee

-Milwaukee-Green Bay, late winter, 2006



*art by
Tracy M.
Rogers*



art by Lauren Braden

Talking loudly to the empty air

Vincent Spada

Down the street he went,
his hands waving wildly above him
Hair all messed and matted
Crazed, like a lunatic

Shoes falling from his feet
Jacket split and frayed and ripped
Face with a beard deepest brown
Fingernails, full of the dirt

Seeing and hearing no one
Walking quickly in his direction
Going where nobody knows
Talking loudly to the empty air

Cinerarium

Carmel L. Morse

Childhood memories -
braided white fuses
on Chinese firecrackers
burn to black carbon,
explode into jet streams of images
and blind my eyes to bright white.

Action speeds up in
silent movies.
Daddy's blue-veined
pale palm strikes
my face with a brisk snap.
Chubby child hands
cool as antiseptic
touch the scarlet polka-dots.

Daddy dead in 1973
wears his brown velour bathrobe
flames devour him in the oven
cremated ashes,
pieces of bone,
in a shimmering gold foil box
glitzy as his Ronson lighter
that lit a million cigarettes
and turned his lungs to
black briquettes.

Aunt Pat sends old photos of him -
age seventeen
devil in his cold laser beam eyes
stabs ice into my heart.
I watch the phosphorous match
end fizz and glow
and touch it to the picture paper.
Daddy's eyes turn to smoke curls
that fly into the present.



*Members Cross and
Members Starburt,
art by Mark Graham*



At the cemetery near the duck pond
I kneel by his name at the grave my mind
burns with childhood pain.
Over the letters I trail my fingertips
wishing they were acetylene torches
melting off the words "Beloved Father."

a pilgrim's progress

KC Wilder

traipsed outrageous muddy fields.
found bugfaced animals.
around cornice, hill and mountain,
craned my neck to see.

landscapes revealed
unfortunately little.

i had to know.
mounted bike,
pushing through the woods
on cross-country hikes,

thinking in this world somehow
someplace he must have
left a trace,

like cassini, circled saturn
neptune jupiter and mars,
like some dogtown pegasus
circuiting the seven stars,

from beantown to charleston,
hung around dreary stations

asking people
have you seen him?
have you seen him?
i believed somebody had.



art by Joel McGregor

maria ouspenskaya¹
stared at microbes in my hand,
mumbling of some cursed
hirsute mystery man

as i danced across / divides
seattle to block island,
dotted lines connecting to
my own inner monster.

footnote: 1 maria ouspenskaya — crusty, diminutive, wizened-faced actress who played clairvoyant transylvanian gypsy in 1930s classic films “frankenstein” and “the wolfman.” it was she who warned lon chaney jr. he had “the sign of the pentagram” in his hand. “when de moon is full and de volfbane blooms ... ”

The War At Home

Wayne Mason

You see them tired and sick
trudging across abysmal dawn
in dingy worn work shirts
and steel toes beating down
cracked sidewalks to warehouse
and factory floors

They look like defeated soldiers
amidst a war they'll never win

Because desire for change
has been swallowed by need
and the vision of Marx
is now but a dreamy utopia
to be discussed by rich students
in dreary college classrooms
Because strikes are resolved
by shipping jobs away
and the face of Che Guevara
is now but a logo
to move cheap shirts
in sad hip boutiques

So we keep on walking
past iron gates, sullen faces
and smoke stacks
through heavy factory doors
down assembly lines
and dry humping of machinery
with the sound of commerce
reaching a dizzying crescendo
in our heads while we
patiently wait for
the bitter end

I watch
and I wait
but who am I
to lead a revolution
when I can barely
get out of bed

Wasted Opportunity by the French

Cote Smith

At night, the undead Napoleon emerges
from the crown and scales,
descends her forehead,
the bridge of her nose.

This is almost too easy,
he thinks, except in French.
I don't know French, but soon,
we all will.

He repels down the steel dress,
feet land ground and he's in.
Kissing the liberty toe gives the signal;
hundreds of soldiers follow suit.

The White House never stood a chance.
This is the neo-Trojan War,
and we are the Trojans,
minus our Hector.

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

part one of
THE DRIVE

Kenneth DiMaggio

Beer bottle. Empty. If it wasn't, there would be something wrong with me. Something to worry about. If that piss-pungent, brown beer bottle was not drained, then I would not be slightly drunk, groggy, and asleep in the back seat of a ten year old American car. A car that purrs with a consistent death rattle. A car that devours a small Middle Eastern country's reserves of oil. If it weren't for this rolling hunk of decay and metal, I would probably be awake—and before 8 a.m. . I would probably be in some milky-colored Plexiglas corporate cubicle, typing away on something I could care less about. My vital life essence would be evaporating into a light green computer screen, instead of snoring away in the back seat of a car filled with enough empty beer bottles, old Converse sneakers (sniff; ick) an unfinished joint (I definitely know that smell) and a five hundred or more page manuscript that keeps getting longer and more de-structured like my auto-rambling drifting. Sweet.

So thank God or whoever is presently filling in for a higher power, that I can smell a vinegar sour beer bottle stuck between the seat or hedged against my back, making for a lousy sleep. The question before I open my eyes: where did I park my automobile based restlessness? The question that gets asked through my nose: do I smell more than a half smoked joint? Such as a small baggy of marijuana? Mmmm. I now have a reason to get up.

Though it still feels comfortable to remain a passed out waste. Unfortunately, the back seat of this V-8 behemoth is not comfortable enough to become a vinyl padded coffin. But it is close. The Europeans and the Japanese make better cars than the Americans, but only Detroit could make a vehicle with a back seat big enough to be a semi-employed poet in—or almost. I still cannot completely stretch out. I have to squeeze and then adjust my neck and also feet underneath the door's leather armrest with the match book size pop open metal ashtrays, which—hmmm, might hold a roach or even a half smoked joint. Getting back to more practical matters, there supposedly is a fifteen or more year old American made monster with a vinyl bench long enough to become a well slept mobile hobo in. No one is quite definite about the make; some road squatters tell me that it is a Chrysler. Others say it is a Ford. Whatever the make or model, I have been determined to find it. Until now, that is. I will be going to New York, where I won't need any kind of car. In New York, you have a wide range of choices when it comes to being a poet. My good friend Winston

Galbraith—curator of the performing arts space, “Café Nico” (i.e., a derelict East Village loft that he managed to snag at an almost rent-control bargain) has promised me a no-time limit space on his couch. Looks like it’ll be a step up in the world.

But I am still going to miss the back seat of my ten—no, I think it is eleven year old American car.

No need to lament just yet. I still have a two hour drive ahead of me—maybe a little more. I should arrive in the city by the afternoon; at the latest—Happy Hour—when Winston is at his best for things like remembering his promises. Regardless of when I arrive, I’ve got a book to start pedaling. I just hope not too many pages got lost or burned by stray cigarettes and stuff like that. I should have put that manuscript in the trunk; in the round wheel well where there used to be a spare tire. That would have been a better place for my book; instead of the back seat with all the empty beer bottles and who knows what else that friends, runaways, hitchhikers, one night stands, serial killers and others have left back there.

Just a little bit more shuteye and “sniffing; to make sure I am in the back seat and not jail. If it is the latter it would help to know how I got there before waking up. But my nose sniffs only stale beer and other toxic smells. I’m safe. The only illegal thing I did in the last few hours was trespass in an abandoned Biblical theme park called Holy Land U.S.A.. The only people who trespass there are poets and pagans, and as a fellow poet said, “A poet is a fugitive that no one is looking for,” so I am definitely not in jail. As for the pagans? They ought to get arrested for being the posers that they are. I ought to get arrested for tagging along with them, thinking that something evil or Satanic would happen because of them. ‘Fraid it didn’t. The bonfire the so-called Head Wizard tried to light, wouldn’t take a spark or flame long enough to light. Every piece of wood in Holy Land and for that matter, five miles around, was too damp or deteriorating. It was probably the latter. This is a city that has not breathed too regularly since its factory smokestacks stopped blowing poisons into the sky. Except for a poet, some pagans, and a few others, does anyone know that this city is dying of alcohol poisoning or is in a coma? And how many other cities like it? Each one like a rusted or corroded wheel rim, half buried along the highway. Add all the rusted washers, refrigerators, kitchen sinks, and you have got a rusted moon. Living in one of those oxidized rims illuminated by the fast food, convenience store, or bail bondsman window neon, is also the subject of my present book, a 500 or more page manuscript titled, *The Neon Coma Abyss*. (Give or take a few dozen pages lost to excessive spills and along side of dirt roads or the gravel lots of seedy bars I parked this car in, or to vandalism by the above mentioned folk.)

Good thing I didn’t mention this tome to the pagans. They might have used it to start their bonfire. But after their failure to create a flame to worship Satan they just deteriorated into suburban teens and undergraduate Art students. The former did not stop drinking until they threw up; the latter could not drink enough because they were too busy being pretentious artists, which made me want to throw up.

Well, that was last night. This morning, I awake grabbing a page from my book, where someone wrote down their phone number and the words: “Call me if you are into some of the stuff you write.” Christ, that’s scary. Because my literary eroticism always gets

checked by a self destructive sense of guilt; so that what was intended to be a page from Henry Miller, ends up being a torture scene from Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*.

There seems to be scribble and scrawls from other people throughout the type-script. What the hell. Anyone who gets inside of this car is a refugee from the abyss. Might as well let them leave behind some of their experiences or psychosis.

My personal detritus is more bohemian with a strong blue collar flavor. For one, there are about a dozen empty beer bottles in this car. Rolling Rocks. Coors light. Bud. I only drink the best. What feels like the skin of a dead animal is my leather motorcycle jacket with a portrait of Baudelaire painted on the back. Let me just check the pockets to see—no, no marijuana.

On the floor a pair of old Doc Marten boots—and both of them match. In the same pile, a pair of red high top Converse sneakers (which means there should be some dirty socks around here, but—I don't want to start digging around for those). Also, a pair of black jeans which means there must be a T-shirt or two around, and probably black. Hell, I've got enough clothes to go down to the City. Not with these lace black panties. No way they're mine. But let's see, a good sniff will tell—ooooh! Which means they're not recent! Same as my sex life. So either get laid or get rid of these panties because they are starting to make a very smelly trophy. Same with this toothbrush. You aren't ever going to use it again.

Half filled bottle of water—ugh! Sour! But got rid of some of the dryness coating my beer dehydrated palate.

My back pack. With all the essentials in it that I need to survive, such as a notebook to write great Art in, and a triple A fold out map of New York City with all the different notes to get there from the tri-state area.

Can't believe this is still here: my portable CD player that still has dead AA batteries. Once I do get some batteries, then I can listen to some of my favorite CDs that are not broken or melted, like Patti Smith's "Horses", Joy Division's "Closer" John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" Braham's "German Requiem" (highly recommended for long winter or dreary bad day rides) and the first Velvet Underground album—the CD that I am going to listen to on the way to New York City—well, first I am going to have to buy some batteries.

And finally, I am glad to see my old faithful is still here. The unabridged Penguin edition of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. I don't know how I got a copy of it and I seem like the last person in the world to be reading anything from 18th century England, (Defoe though, is cool. Lots of pirates, whores, criminals). But anyway, I am hooked into finishing what is probably the longest novel in the English language—fifteen hundred pages and I am already at five hundred or so pages—and the villain in the book—Lovelace (and who kidnaps the whiny Clarissa) is one of the most obsessive psychopaths I have ever come across—in fiction and in life. And now that everything seems to be in order in the back seat of my car, I can go out and take a piss.

Ooo—chill. It may be late April and this morning feels a little like late March—nevertheless, the slight icy chill in the air woke me—a-choo!

Also made me sneeze. Along with a leap through several layers of consciousness as I got out of my car with no jacket—just T-shirt—

—choo!

—Well, I may need a jacket soon. The important thing, I woke up without any artificial stimulant like coffee, or um, drugs. I should try this non-stimulant approach to waking up, more often. It would not hurt to apply this “natural” approach to other aspects of my life, such as in driving, trying to maintain a steady relationship, or substitute teaching.

Even though there was probably no one else around, I moved away from the car a bit and into the brush to do my business. I certainly felt more awake, but I was still sleepy enough to do something retarded, like piss on my car, and I don’t want to do that. (Well, at this point, that would almost be like peeing on my house.) Another reason for going into beer can littered saplings and half dead bushes was the raw, hearty feeling of it. Sorry ladies, but it’s a man thing—and maybe a troglodyte man thing, but a man thing nonetheless to take a good long whiz in the woods after a night of mind-numbing drinking. A good long whiz in the forest puts you back in touch with the primitive troglodyte you were a hundred thousand years ago; plus, well, there is just no other way to explain it than by saying it is just a guy thing when steam starts clouding up from the moss or tree roots and crushed Budweiser cans after giving them a good long sizzle. Maybe this is where we really are like dogs and a lot of guys, especially young guys, just have to “mark” the territory they are in.

Oh shit—guys may like to mark their own territory, but not when a woman hovers nearby and stares with a slight scowl as this one here is doing. Good thing I made a “mental check” of where I had been for the last twelve or so hours before doing my business. I might actually be spooked to see some eighteen or nineteen year old vampira. She was staring at me from ten feet away. She was partially camouflaged through half dead trees and scrub eaten away by acid rain and all the other pollutants that this town used to pump out when it had smokestacks to pump. Excuse me while I zip up and for also feeling a little embarrassed, ‘though if Ms. Dracula ain’t, I don’t see why the hell I should, but—

“Hi, what’s up,” I said. This was after I had zipped up, briskly brushed my hands on my pants, and tried to appear as nonchalant and cool as if I had just taken my last drag of a film noir cigarette that I had then thrown away.

“I heard you sneeze,” she said.

“I’m allergic to the morning,” I said. “You think people like employers and teachers would understand that.”

“Ugh,” she said. “Don’t talk to me about teachers.”

From the way she looked, she was at least costumed to be allergic to the day (or natural light). Aren’t vampires supposed to vaporize as soon as enough sun burns through the thick permanent haze of old smokestack pollution? Well, if you were one hundred percent vampire, yes, but she was not that—in spite of the good job of costuming that was now a bit rumpled. She wore a long black dress with fish net arms. The sides of her dress were slit to reveal legs in similar fishnet, which disappeared a little below the knee into black engineer motorcycle boots; with small gold locks snapped into and dangling from the boots’ side strap. Nice touch.

She had similar unique touches such as a simple leather necklace with some fake

purple stone, but which was inside of a black metal frame shaped like a twisted web spun from some insane spider. The same spider whose crazy web of a ring was on her right index finger. Her fingernails, however, were not the black that you would expect to go with this outfit; they were purple. That color was highlighted in her other accessories such as her bracelets, (which had snake-like eyes) and her lipstick. She did not have the hardcore chrome accessories that some of the other pagans were wearing last night, and if I have so far refrained from pegging her to the Goth tribe, it was because of the several purple (and one pink) long silky scarves slung around her neck; they were so light and even filmy that they always appeared to be gently rustling or even breathing. She seemed less ready to bite someone on the neck and more likely to lay herself down in a casket—if it were not for her face, her skin, and even hair. Her long, thick, black shiny curly hair, olive skin, oval slightly plump face, slightly hook nose, and wide brown eyes, gave her away as one of the hundreds of second or third generation of Italian or Portugese Americans that came to this area. No spik-a-english to work in the no skills needed assembly line; to ripen two generations later into respectable, unimaginative, propaganda loving middle class—thus the allergy that this neo-homeless creature and recently turned thirty year old had toward work. As for this recent off spring rejecting the Dream Americana, she had a slightly miffed air about her; one that did not befit a member of the Undead or the semi permanent drop out like myself. Perhaps her slightly pinched frown was leftover disapproval of how last night's pagan ritual turned into the same old outdoor keg party—where people drank until they could no longer remember—like me.

Hey, I did not come to this ritual last night expecting any sorcery.

I did not just come for the beer though.

"I don't know, but I thought your friends would at least burn some kind of interesting effigy," I said. I started walking to my car. "You know—something like the burning man—or maybe something that would get going in that direction—well, maybe not that far."

"Some of those people I would not consider friends," she snapped. She started to follow me.

"They took off forgetting to give ya a ride, ha?" I said.

I began clawing my hand through the junk in the front seat. If there was a fairly fresh half filled bottle of water, it would be in the front seat. Anything petrifying or not consumable (unless you were desperate) gets thrown in the back seat.

"Why not be even more blunt?" she said. "Why not say they dumped me?"

I stopped my rummaging.

"I wasn't trying to be rude or anything," I said. "People just do those things. Even friends."

She crossed her arms and with them came a wiggle that rustled her scarves. She locked her hands in her fish netted elbows.

"Not my friends!" she insisted with almost a hiss. She then locked in her hands and ratcheted them into fish-netted elbows.

"Well, give 'em time. They're still young yet."

I hit the roof of my car.

“Fuck!” I said. I started scratching my head.

“Gee, people must really flock to you because of your sensitivity and understanding,” she said.

“Unfortunately, they do, but I’ve got a bigger problem.”

“I don’t know, but I can’t imagine you with a ‘bigger’ problem.”

I now fully turned towards her.

“Yeah, well, there is,” I said, with a little anger, and also panic, because—

“The half bottle of water I thought I had in the front seat—well, it’s not. It’s in the back seat!”

“What is so wrong about that,” she said. Her tone was deliberately measured, as if she was speaking to someone about to cross over from eccentricity to insanity.

Now I was starting to get pissed. My life may be a wreck and my car may be a disaster but at least they are *my* wreck and *my* disaster. And for your information, Ms. Vampira, there is an order to all this debris. There is wreckage and disaster that can still be salvaged, and then there is disaster and wreckage for which nothing can be done about it—unless you want to study it like an archeologist and do something useless but aesthetic with it like an artist—and sometimes there might be something practical in all that waste, like a half-filled bottle of water, a half smoked joint, or a half finished novel. But she only saw me; she had no way of knowing how my car was divided in terms of debris, so I tried to gently explain it to her.

“What it means, is, the front seat is where you can still find stuff that is safe to eat and is less than a week old; whereas the back seat—“

I did not continue. Her mouth twisted as if I had just passed some mean gas.

“Ah, nevermind,” I said. “I can get some fresh water and even food when I get to the diner. In the meantime, you wouldn’t have anything to smoke—like—marijuana, would you?”

Her arms—which had loosened a moment ago, now—tchick! Tchick! Ratcheted themselves back up.

“I *don’t* do drugs,” she firmly said, and then added with a bit of sassiness: “For that matter, I don’t’ bite people in the neck.”

“Well, if you don’t do drugs, then you wouldn’t want my blood—but just what do you do? Everyone has got to have at least one vice.”

I then added in a more playful, pleading tone:

“Come on. You do have a vice. Don’t tell me you don’t have a vice.”

She lowered her eyes and made one of those Mmmm, secretive mysterioso movie smiles; then closed her eyes for a moment; then opened them to reveal:

“I frolic.”

“No kidd—“I started to say and then asked her the same time I asked myself:

“Frolic? Is that like some French form of bondage? Something like that?”

She closed her eyes, giggled, then threw back her hair, from which her scarves flew and danced behind her.

“That’s what the scarves are for. I try to find a damp, dark, mysterious place to walk briskly in at night, and once I get a good rhythm going, the scarves start to trail back. It’s really neat. Especially in the right grave yard and with a phosphorescent

scarf. I once frolicked about five miles—before I was done, I felt I was starting to change into—“

“Wait a minute,” I finally interrupted. “That’s not a vice. You’re not using those scarves to tie someone up! You’re—“

I stopped from saying the only word that could describe her: weird. It was too late though. She had already guessed what that word was. She probably had a lot of people call her that word. It does not take much to be ostracized by people, especially people who no longer merit ostracism themselves. That’s been my experience. The experience of living in a land of discount chain shopping malls and closed factory spaces, has taught me that no one likes being surplus. People will do anything to become a product again. I know; not about being a product. Hell, ever since I saw the new bang up! Flash ‘em! Wow gotta have it toy advertised on the Saturday morning cartoons commercials, I wanted to be a vandal.

That still did not stop a lot of people from calling me names like weird, freak, fag, loser, sicko, psycho, along with throwing sticks and stones at me that were not supposed to hurt. They hurt. Just like they hurt her, but not as much as the way I just did. She would not have revealed her eccentricity, her displacement, if I did not have a similar history along with a similar creative but defiant way of claiming it. That is why she was almost ready to cry and me too. Fuck. I felt like I had just deliberately stepped on and smashed some poor kid’s only toy.

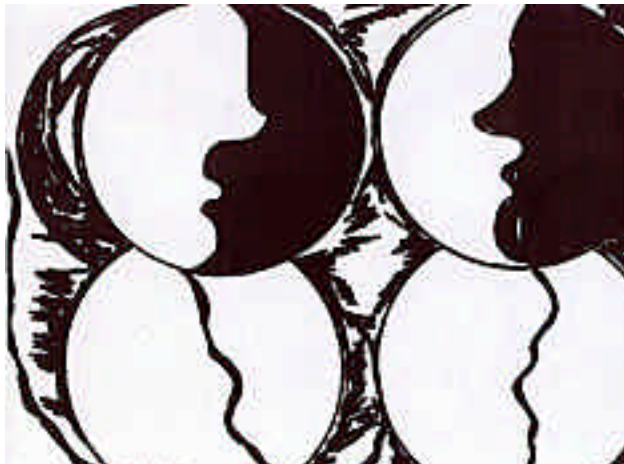
“Hey, I’m sorry.”

She closed her eyes, put her palm on her forehead, and then shook her head.

“What the fuck is wrong with me,” she said, but speaking to herself. “It’s all about beer. It’s always going to be about beer and stupidity and all the other high school bullshit that goes along with it. The people that were here last night may look and talk about how much they hate frats, the shopping mall, the suburbs, but they’re no fucking different, and neither are you!”

She turned and started to walk away.

keep reading cc&d for additional parts of this story...



*The Lost Balloon,
art by Edward
Michael O'durr
Supranowicz*

SUNDAY BREAKFAST

Andrew McIntyre

We're sitting in the cafe, the main one where everyone goes. We've got our big glasses of coffee, and I'm eating eggs and tortillas, and some jalapeños. The American's there, smoking a cigarette, and Gaz, and two women the American knows. He's going on in English so they can't understand, about how he likes their papayas, their melons, and everybody's laughing, the girls too even though they can't understand. They're big, sure, big round breasts just like fruit, and I'm glancing at them. The girls know, and they catch me, and I look sheepish, but we all laugh. They don't mind. Then we're not saying much, the food's too good. I suck on my cigarette and eat some more of the eggs. I take a mouthful of the coffee, the wonderful coffee they make, knowing it grows in the area, just outside of the town. You can see it wild where it's escaped from the plantations. Everything's quiet and peaceful, and we're thinking, It's Sunday, and how good it all is. Just then there's a lot of noise outside. People are running down the street because something's happened. The American grins, stubbing out his cigarette. He wanders away. We don't pay any attention. I'm finishing my eggs, and Gaz is rambling on about bulls, and regulations to do with exporting bull semen across the frontier. The girls are giggling, and I'm still looking at their fruit. The American returns, They've just shot the priest. What? we all say at once. No way, I say. Yeah, he says, Someone got up in the middle of the sermon with a gun and shot the priest. Well, that's the funniest thing I've ever heard, and I can't eat any more because I'm laughing so much. And the girls are laughing too but they're concerned, they're saying, Poor little priest, how could they do that to the poor little priest? Is he dead? I ask finally. The American looks disgusted, No, the guy missed, six shots point blank range and he missed. Outside the cafe, a crowd of people are walking down the street yelling, beating up this one guy, the guy who tried to shoot the priest. He's in a suit but he's bloody, and his suit is crumpled and torn. He's shouting something but it's unintelligible. A big peasant knocks him down from behind. Someone says they're going to lynch him, but the police arrive and start pushing the crowd around with their sticks. They lift the guy up and bundle him into a police car. Why'd he do it? I ask. Why does anyone do anything? replied the American, and Gaz just mumbles, Pity they don't do it more bloody often. Then everyone starts to calm down. I start to eat my eggs again but they're cold by now, so I go back to watching the girls' fruit, and I light another cigarette. Then the American gets up and says he's got to go. The girls follow him and they all file out of the cafe. I watch them as they leave, the heavy ripe thighs of the girls, a little overweight but nice. Nice and ripe. And I'm thinking, It's a pity they had to go so soon.

Waiting for Some Warmth

john sweet

What it all comes down to is the deaths of babies. Look around you. Either the ground has been poisoned or the sky is filled with falling bombs. The women are raped and butchered and the groundwater tastes like their flesh. This isn't fiction. Look it up.

The men exist only to kill or be killed. Stand in between and the decision is made for you.

Wake up on Easter Sunday with a gun to your head, with your hands tied to the bumper of a pick-up truck by a fifteen foot length of chain. How many miles will you have to be dragged before your skin is torn away from your bones?

What you need to understand is that this is a love story.

She said she wanted to see the ocean, but we never did. She said her father had died when she was six. Said her brother was blind, but he was right there in the room when we were fucking. He saw everything.

Was hanging out down by the river with a bunch of his friends when a starving dog approached, and they beat it to death with whatever they could find. Dug its eyes out with a pocket knife. Tied a dirty length of rope around its neck and dragged it to the park. Hung it from a basketball hoop.

And I was up north when this happened, in the House of the Dying Man, only he'd been dying for six years now, and the house was actually a double wide trailer. The bones of Christ were piled on the kitchen table, and we sat around them discussing the taste of pussy. I could feel my hands begin to itch when his daughter walked by. Drank until I was on my hands and knees throwing up beside the gravel road that led to the two-lane highway that would take me back home.

And it looked warm from inside the house on Sunday afternoon, but the sunlight was a lie. The back yards felt like concrete, the shadows tasted like salt and grit. I stepped outside into the gasoline air, into the stench of burning oil, and I couldn't remember my children's names. I'd been asleep too long, had nothing to show for 35 years of living. Owed my sister over twenty thousand dollars, but still needed more. Had stopped answering the phone, but there were a hundred million others in all of those locked and shuttered houses, and all of them were ringing, and all of the news was bad.

The war was in its third year. Was out of anyone's control, and so what was the point of protesting? You waved good-bye to a hundred soldiers, you identified the ones that came home in body bags, then you waved good-bye to a hundred more. You watched the news or you surfed Internet porn. You looked for faces you knew.

And how many of these women had parents, and how many had children? How many of the children were dead? This was the point. This was the actual question, but they were licking cum off their tits, they were taking anonymous cocks up their asses, in their mouths, and so they couldn't answer. They couldn't leave until they were paid. They couldn't sit down without some degree of pain until the bruises had healed.

It was an obvious story, and then it had reached its end, and none of us were in love.

REMEMBERING ROXANNE

Gerald E. Sheagren

Little Rock, Arkansas - 1957

I looked at the houses we were passing --- shanties actually, with sagging porches, peeling paint and rusty tin roofs. The front yards were small, mostly packed dirt, lacking grass and flowers or any other type of beautification. There were a few older model cars, some pickups, all scabbed with rust and in various stages of disrepair. The street signs were pocked with bullet holes and scrawled with graffiti --- some bent until they were touching the ground. "Poverty" was the first thought that struck me. The second was "hopelessness."

"Makes you more appreciative of what you got, doesn't it, kid?"

I nodded. "You can say that again."

"Keep your eyes peeled for the address --- two-four-two Rollins. These frigging houses all look the same to me."

I looked over at Virgil Starke, my partner of only two days. He was a jowly, water-eyed guy of about fifty-five, with large, freckled hands and one of those bloated bellies that belied a fondness for the suds. His wrinkled white shirt had turned yellow from too much sweat and too little washes, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. A fedora was perched Mickey Spillane-fashion atop a head that was larger than usual, his horseshoe of hair rapidly turning to gray and in bad need of a trim. He was scowling at the street ahead, maneuvering a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. On his very best day, Virgil Starke was hardly a poster boy for the U.S. Marshals Service.

"What's a matter, kid --- you don't like my looks?"

"If you don't mind me asking --- how long have you been A Deputy Marshal?"

"Way too long."

"C'mon, that's no answer."

The cigar stopped dead at the right corner of his mouth, spewing smoke like a steel mill's chimney. "Twenty-two years. I was a cop in Newark before that."

"Do you have any plans on retiring?"

"Are you keeping an eye out for that address?"

"Yes, sir, I am. I see it right up ahead --- the one with the wringer washing machine on the front porch."

Virgil pulled over to the curb and we stared at the house for a few moments, neither of us saying a word. Compared to the others on the block, it was in pretty good shape, with decent curtains in its windows and flowers in the front yard.

Finally, Virgil released a weary sigh and got out, pulling a seersucker suit coat from the rear seat and giving it a shake as though it would magically free it of wrinkles. Then he slipped it on to hide his shoulder holster and fastened the middle button.

“Let me do the talking, kid.”

“What, you don’t trust me to open my mouth? And please call me ‘Tom’ instead of ‘kid’.”

“I’m the guy with the experience. You’re just learning.”

We mounted the porch under the watchful gaze of some passersby, and Virgil rapped on the door where a child’s drawing had been affixed with a thumb tack. It was a rendering of the house, a bit more magnificent, with flowers in the front yard and a bright yellow sun shining down from a blue sky. In the bottom right corner was the name “Roxie.” Judging by the artistry, the kid was trying to make her life a lot more cheerful than it was.

After a few moments, the door was answered by a Negro woman wearing a multi-colored dress the size of a tent, the breadth of her shoulders taking up the whole entryway. Her skin was the color of cocoa, the hair piled atop her head as black and shiny as the feathers of a raven.

“Good morning, ma’am,” greeted Virgil, holding up his badge. My name’s Virgil Starke and this is Tom Hodges. We’re Deputy Marshals, assigned to take your daughter --- uh --- hmmm --- to school.”

“My daughter’s name is not uh-hmmm. It’s Roxanne.”

“Yeah, right, Roxanne.”

I had to laugh to myself. Virgil was the one who wanted to do all the talking. At least I had known the kid’s name.

“Well, come on in. She’s nearly ready.”

We entered a small living room, my eyes taking in the threadbare couch and chair; the discount coffee and end tables; a floral-patterned rug with frayed edges. A velvet picture of an African village hung a bit lopsided over a cheap stereo unit. Despite an overtone of poverty, the room was neat and I could sense a good deal of pride and determination.

“Welcome to my humble abode, gentlemen. I was just getting ready for work.” Her smile quickly gave way to a solemn look. “Are you prepared to defend my daughter in the event that things turn nasty?”

Virgil nodded. “Yes, ma’am, we are. It’s our job and we’ll carry it out to the best of our abilities.”

“I was expecting at least a half dozen of you.”

“Well, ma’am, I’m speaking from experience --- sometimes the greater the numbers, the greater the problem.”

The woman considered this for a moment then nodded. “I can see your point. And please --- call me Loretta.” She turned, cupping a massive hand at her mouth. “Roxanne, honey --- the Marshals are here to take you to school. They’re two very nice gentlemen. Roxanne!”

Moments later, the little girl peered around a corner, her big, chocolate-colored eyes focused in our direction. Perhaps she didn’t like what she saw for her head vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

“Come on, Roxie, honey. These gentlemen are waiting on you.” When the girl failed to reappear, Loretta placed her hands on her hips, her voice edged with annoy-

ance. "Child, you get out here this instant! You have to be there when school opens."

I wondered in those few seconds whether Roxanne was a willing player or merely a pawn in her mother's quest to break the color barrier. After all, in this situation it was the child who was going to take all the heat.

Finally, the little girl trudged into the room, face sorrowful, her tiny shoulders bent under a burden that no one her age should have to bear. My heart felt as though it had been impaled on an icicle.

"Roxanne, honey --- you shouldn't have kept these gentlemen waiting."

I looked at Roxanne's red dress with white lace at the collar and hem; the red ribbon affixed to each of her pigtailed; her skinny, knob-kneed legs. Her skin was the color of coffee grounds, a few shades darker than that of her mother. A pair of black patent-leather shoes topped off her outfit.

It struck me right then and there; how could anyone wish this little girl any harm, or hinder her right to a fair and equal education? It didn't seem possible in the United States of America.

Virgil cleared his throat, rubbing thoughtfully at his chin. "Uh --- Missus Watkins --- perhaps your daughter would be better off wearing something --- uh --- you know --- a little less bright."

"That's her very best dress and it's befitting that she wear it today."

"Best dress or not, ma'am; she'll be attracting all the more attention to herself. That's what I would like to avoid. Maybe she can wear a darker color or white."

Loretta glared, working her jaw. "Roxanne will be wearing that dress, Mister Starke. This is a free country. And this is a free state, although Governor Faubus is trying his best not to make it so."

"Okay, okay, it was only a suggestion --- concerning you daughter's safety I might add."

Loretta's face softened a bit. "Yes, well, I certainly appreciate that. But that dress is as much a symbol as my daughter's courage."

I leaned close to Virgil, whispering out of the corner of my mouth. "Courage, baloney --- that poor kid is frightened out of her wits."

Virgil acknowledged my opinion with a barely perceptible nod. "Well, we had better get a move on if we're going to get there in time. Missus Watkins --- your daughter will be in good hands, I promise you that."

Speaking of hands, I held out my right to the little girl and she peered up at me as though she was trying to see the top of the Empire State Building on a hazy day. Then with a wavering smile, she grabbed hold of my hand and gave it a small squeeze.

"Are you ready to go, little miss?"

Her smile finally caught hold, stretching from ear-to-ear. "Please, you can call me 'Roxie.'"

"Well, 'Roxie' it is. And you can call me 'Tom.'"

She looked to her mother, arching an excited brow. "May I, Mother?"

"Yes, child, you may." Loretta offered her a mischievous wink. "Maybe even 'Uncle Tom.'"

With a hardy round of laughter, excepting for Virgil, we made our way out to the porch, where Loretta scooped up her daughter and gave her a crushing hug. Then, with tears brimming in her eyes, she sniffled and hustled back into the house. Roxie was about to follow, concerned, but I caught hold of her hand and gave her a small tug toward our plain black sedan.

“Momma doesn’t cry very often.”

“They’re tears of joy, Roxie. You’re doing a very courageous thing, today, and she’s proud of you.”

“I don’t feel courageous.”

“Sometimes it’s just below the surface, ready to spring out.”

My adlib philosophy seemed to calm Roxie down a little as I placed her in the rear seat and slid in beside her. Her right leg began to pump nervously and I soon noticed that mine was doing the same.

Virgil jumped in behind the wheel and snatched his cigar from the ashtray, firing it up with his Zippo. “Okay, this is going to be no more than a fifteen minute drive. When we get there, you two do exactly what I say. And I mean ‘exactly’. Because, people, this is not going to be a cakewalk.”

“I never thought it would be,” I snapped, a bit miffed by his sanctimony.

By this time, a small crowd had formed on the opposite sidewalk. They had remained pensively quiet as we had left the house, but, as Virgil started the engine, they unleashed a resounding cheer, waving at Roxanne, a few giving her the thumbs-up.

“You’ve got a rooting section, kiddo,” I said, patting her knee.

She beamed at them, jutting her own little thumbs in the air.

We pulled away from the curb and Virgil made a quick U-turn, heading us toward our appointment with destiny. No one spoke for nearly a full minute, until I smiled and thumped Roxie on the knee.

“So what’s your favorite subject in school?”

“History.”

“No kidding --- that was mine too.” I pursed my lips and rubbed my chin, feigning deep thought. “Tell me --- who was the first President of the United States?”

Roxie heaved a weary breath. “Oh, please.”

“You want something harder, huh? Okay, who was the sixteenth President?”

She giggled, slapping my knee. “That’s so easy, I won’t even bother to answer.”

“Well then, Miss Smarty-Pants --- here’s a tough one. What man was our only bachelor President?”

“James Buchanan. His niece served as First Lady.”

“Hey, smart gal! Now, who was the fastest President ever to serve?”

“William Howard Taft!” she exclaimed. “He’s buried in Arlington National Cemetery.”

“Wow! What do you think about that, Virgil? I bet she’s sharper with history than you.”

Virgil snorted, his cigar spewing great clouds of smoke. “History means diddly-squat to me, kid. I’m more interested in the future --- the very immediate future.”

Roxie screwed up her face as though sucking on an extra-sour lemon, pointing a

finger to the rear of the driver's seat.

"Okay, you two --- we're in the last leg of the trip." Virgil fished into his pocket and tossed an armband over his shoulder. It was a bright yellow with "Deputy U.S. Marshal" in bold black letters. "Put it on so they know darn well who you are." He glanced back at me, somber-faced. "Don't get too cocky. Sometimes that symbol doesn't mean crap to people."

With the moment fast approaching, Roxie slumped lower in the seat, her eyes growing as wide as saucers. Her little hand found mine for reassurance.

"I don't know how close we can get," warned Virgil. "Whatever the case, we march straight forward, ears deaf to whatever they throw at us. I've done this plenty of times so I know the drill. Just follow my lead."

I peered out the front windshield and my heart-rate picked up a few paces. I could see a crowd --- perhaps a hundred in number --- some of them waving signs, others, the Stars-and-Bars. As they spotted us approaching, they swirled in our direction, faces hostile, their shouts mounting in volume.

"There's not as many as I expected," noted Virgil, sounding a tad relieved. "Most of the rabble-rousers must be over at Central High --- there are nine Negroes, over there, trying to attend classes. We're a side show, but you can never tell what might happen."

"I see some local and state police," I said. "It shouldn't be too bad."

Virgil snorted. "Shit, they're no better than the rest."

The curb was lined with cars and trucks, so Virgil double-parked next to an old battered Dodge. He hurled out of the car and flung open the back door, his cigar gone and his jaws set.

"Okay --- show-time," he snapped, touching Roxie's arm. "Everything is going to be just fine. Tom and I are here to make sure of that. Okay?"

Roxie managed a tiny "yes."

As I got Roxie out of the car, an egg splattered against the windshield and another plopped on the sidewalk, smearing my shoe with its yolk. The crowd pressed closer, screaming and chanting and hurling obscenities. They were a strangely diverse lot; from housewives and the elderly to rednecks in bib overalls and businessmen in three-piece suits. I even noticed a young woman, holding the hands of two wide-eyed toddlers. My God! How could hatred have ever reached such a level?

Virgil quickly led us to where a police sergeant was leaning against a telephone pole, observing us through a pair of aviator sunglasses, his jaws masticating a wad of chewing gum. His indifference to the situation startled me.

"Good morning," said Virgil, trying extra hard to be civil. "I'd appreciate it if your men would move this crowd back."

"You know --- I can give you a ticket for double-parking."

"You can, but you won't. Now let's have a little crowd control --- even a token effort."

The crowd pressed closer, the din growing louder, every person knowing that the Sergeant was on their side. I tried not to read the signs or hear the oaths, but it was impossible. This whole scene seemed impossible!

The sergeant shrugged, jerking a thumb over his shoulder, raising his voice to be

heard. "They're good folks, mostly! Just a little riled-up by Uncle Sam trying to force segregation down their throats! That's how the Civil War started, you know --- Washington trying to make demands of the southern states!"

Angered, Virgil moved nose-to-nose with the man. "I don't have the time or the will to discuss history or politics. Now move this crowd back, or I'll see to it, personally, that you're busted to a goddamn crossing guard!"

The Sergeant moved his sunglasses to the end of his nose and peered over their top, considering Virgil for a few deliberate moments. Realizing his sincerity, he turned and shouted to his men. "All right, boys! Let's move these good people back! Get them off the sidewalk and onto the grass! Come on, come on, hustle it up!"

With a curt "thank you", Virgil led the way --- eyes focused straight ahead, big hands ready in the event of trouble.

Undeterred, the crowd surged forward again, hissing and hollering and hurling the worst obscenities I had ever heard. Signs waved, joined by miniature Confederate flags. An old hag, her wizened face pinched by hatred, reached out and gave one of Roxie's pigtails a vicious yank, causing her to cry out in pain. One of the cops laid a gentle hand on the woman's shoulder and I heard him say, "C'mon, Ma --- you've got to calm down."

By this time, Roxie was squeezing my hand with the strength of a weightlifter, her narrow shoulders hunched, eyes cast to the ground. I couldn't even imagine what a terrible ordeal this was for her. Was it all really worth it? Finally, we turned and began to cover the last little stretch to the front door of the school. Only a few steps more! An egg grazed my forehead, sending a tendril of yolk slithering into my eye.

And, then, just as I thought we would make it, two men stepped out of the crowd to block our way. One was a geek with a bristling crew-cut and thick, black-framed glasses, feet planted firmly apart, his pudgy arms folded determinably across his chest. Next to him, stood a sunken-faced, old man, dressed in overalls and a grimy John Deere cap. His smile reminded me of a knife slit in a piece of weathered rawhide.

"And where do you think you're going!" demanded Fatso, basking in the admiration of the crowd.

"We're going by you, through you or over you!" snapped Virgil, not backing down for a second. "It's your choice, pal."

"You're not taking any pickaninny into that school. Not today, not any day."

The old man began to do a crazy Irish jig, cackling like a demented chicken. "No, sireee - no, siree - no l'il pickaninny in dat ol' school!"

Spurred on by the confrontation, the crowd moved closer and I could feel their hatred in the air, snapping like an electrical charge. The local and state cops made only a half-hearted attempt at holding them back, their faces gleeful over the pickle we found ourselves in. If push came to shove, I couldn't be certain which side they'd be on. And, then, I heard Fatso clear his throat, and before I could realize or react to what was about to happen, he launched a glob of spittle directly onto the front of Roxie's dress.

I headed for the bastard with clenched fists, but Virgil shot out an arm to hold me back.

Fatso adjusted his stance, soaking up the supportive cries of the crowd, a smug smile

spreading across his plump face. It took every ounce of willpower that I had to restrain myself from rushing forward, snatching off his glasses and grinding them to a fine powder beneath my foot. He knew that I couldn't and his smile grew even broader.

Looking down at her fouled dress, Roxie calmly reached into her pocket and pulled out a small, laced handkerchief. Then, seemingly without a care in the world, she began to dab at the spittle. Finished, she neatly folded the hanky and returned it to her pocket. That touching display of adult-like dignity seemed to suck the air out of the mainsail of the entire crowd. Their shouts and curses and jeers dropped to a murmur, and, if my eyes weren't deceiving me, I actually spotted a few looks of grudging admiration. The signs wavered, some lowered. Feet shuffled and eyes dropped to the ground. Even the Sergeant's jaws stopped working on this gum.

A big, broad-shoulder man stepped from the crowd and grabbed hold of Fatso's arm. "That'll be enough, now. You get on home."

"C'mon, Pa."

"Don't make me repeat myself, Lester. Better yet --- get your butt to work and start earning the money that's paid you. Get along! Move it!"

With trembling lips and flushed face, Lester whirled and trudged off, his old cohort following close behind. The father turned to us, his eyes falling to Roxanne. He stared for a few moments, nodding, before rejoining the largely silent crowd. I suppose it could have been taken as an apology.

I bent down, whispering in Roxie's ear. "Boy, little girl --- you're an ace at crowd control."

She forced a grin. "Do you think that man's spit will eat a hole through my dress?"

"You never can tell. It probably has a lot of acid in it."

"Momma will be mad."

As the three of us hustled for the door, a cameraman for the Little Rock Gazette appeared out of nowhere, shouting 'cheese!' When we turned in his direction, he snapped a picture --- a photo that found its way onto the front page of no less than a hundred different papers.

We were met inside the door by a short, balding principal, the expression on his far from welcoming. "Well, you've certainly turned this day upside-down. I bet my bottom dollar that you're both from up north."

Virgil placed one of his big paws on the principal's shoulder, squeezing until he flinched. "You will escort Miss Roxanne Watkins to her assigned classroom and make sure that she's properly settled. My partner and I will be here all day. And we would much appreciate two chairs and a couple of coffees."

"Oh, you would, huh?"

"Yeah, we would."

Surprisingly, the day passed without incident, for small children, as it turned out, were much more tolerant and accommodating than their parents. Roxie, the free spirit that she was, managed to make friends rather quickly, her surprising intelligence drawing both admiration and respect from her teacher. Virgil and I stayed for the week, the crowd outside continuing to get smaller and smaller, until, on Friday, there were only two diehards in attendance.

Loretta invited us to supper four nights running and I gobbled down some of the best food I had ever tasted. After eating, Roxie would inevitably challenge me to a number of games --- Monopoly, checkers and Old Maid --- beating me thoroughly each time, giggling when I threw up my hands in defeat.

Virgil and I were replaced the following Monday by two other Marshals. On that bittersweet morning, with tears welling in her eyes, Roxie took down her drawing from the front door and presented it to me.

“This is for you to remember me by. It’s my best drawing, ever.”

I accepted it, my own eyes wet with tears. “Thank you, Rox. I’ll frame it and hang it in a place of honor.”

“You promise?”

I scooped her up with a hug and kiss. “I promise.”

Virgil stared down to where he was making circles with his foot. “What am I -- - chopped liver?”

Roxie unfastened a yellow bow from one of her pigtails and held it out. “It’s the best I can do on such short noticed.” She giggled. “But you don’t have any hair to tie it in.”

And, for the first time since I met him, Virgil Starke started to laugh --- a great, booming laugh that seemed to resound throughout the whole neighborhood.

*** * ***

“Tom? Are you okay, Tom?” He feels a hand gently shaking his shoulder. “Hello, Mister Tom.”

With his thoughts interrupted, Tom stares up into the moon-shaped face of his favorite nurse, Miss Emily Patterson. “Uh --- yes --- I’m fine. I was just remembering something, so many years ago.”

“It’s time for your sleeping pill. Will it be water or ginger ale?”

“I’d rather have a shot of Jack Daniels.”

She laughs, craning her neck. “What’s that you’re holding?”

Tom holds up the picture for her to see; a house and flowers, with a bright sun shining down from above, still so very vibrant after nearly fifty years. “Oh, it’s just a gift from a very special little girl. Say, did I ever tell you that I use to be a Deputy U.S. Marshal?”

Emily chuckles as she pats his shoulder. “Oh, just about every day since you got here. Now take your sleeping pill.”

“You still have to bear witness, huh?”

“I still have to bear witness.”

After Tom swallows the pill, Emily bids him a ‘good night’ and leaves.

The old man opens the drawer of his nightstand and pulls out a copy of Newsweek, reading the large print on its cover for the thousandth time – “Senator Roxanne Barnes, Woman of the Year.” His finger strays down to the face of a silver-haired woman, dressed in a conservative gray suit and white blouse, standing behind a bank of microphones. He fondly rubs the face for a moment, a lump forming in his throat, as his eyelids become heavy with sleep.

Verdict

Pat Dixon

1

Shortly after 1:30 p.m. on February 7, 2001, Jessica Robinson set her half finished cup of espresso down on the sturdy blond-finish table, wiped tears from both cheeks, and walked from the large Barnes and Noble store to a nearby gun dealer, where she filled out the necessary forms and paid by Visa. With her new shiny Smith and Wesson revolver in a plain brown bag, she walked to the office of Dr. Leonard Wiseman, brushed aside the protests of his receptionist that "The doctor is busy now," opened the door of his consultation room, and, in full view of his patient, Susan Cunningham, and his receptionist, Julie Roth, shot Dr. Wiseman in his left knee, in his left groin, in the center of his right lung, in his larynx, in his left cheek, and in his left eye.

Eight and a half months later, a jury of her peers brought in a speedy "not guilty" verdict, and Jessica Robinson moved to the next step: three successful lawsuits against the faculty and administration of a large New York City graduate school--which were swiftly settled out of court for twenty-seven million dollars.

2

"Jessy, Jessy, Jessy," said a deep, muffled voice behind the closed door.

Elizabeth Robinson paused in the darkened hallway to listen.

"No, daddy, please," came a plaintive, whiny voice. "Please, daddy--don't. Don't. Don't."

Elizabeth bit her lower lip, pulled her heavy robe more tightly across her chest, and padded to the bathroom. When she returned to her own bedroom two minutes later, everything was quiet inside her daughter's room.

3

"Jessy, Jessy, Jessy," said her psychiatrist, handing her another facial tissue, shaking his head, and smiling pityingly. "The good news is that you're a completely normal young woman. The bad news is that you still do not accept the fact that this is totally in your mind. Of course your father did not molest you for seven years. No girl's father would ever do such a thing!"

Jessica blew her nose and wiped her tears. She stared trustingly up into his warm brown eyes.

"I know, doctor, that Freud said--I mean, I've read that he believed that incest is a fantasy that--a common fantasy that all little girls . . ."

Her mouth stayed open, but no further words came out. She looked up at Dr. Wiseman, hoping that he would complete her sentence for her, but he contin-

ued to smile down at her.

She began again.

"My case is different, doctor. I know that my father did this to me. I'm even pretty certain that he did it with my mother's knowledge, perhaps because"

"Jessy, there you go again. Blaming your mother as well for this guilty desire you had for your father to be your lover! Believe me--it's fully documented: every little girl has the same desires for her own father. That is just a totally normal part of growing up and developing into a separate, functioning adult. The pathology, here in your case, is your resistance to this truth." Dr. Wiseman smiled paternally at her, letting his eyes linger on the front of her blouse.

"You should learn to trust me, Jessie," he continued after a two-minute silence. "And you should not be trying to read Freud--or even about Freud--on your own. You are untrained and far, far too troubled to make proper sense of whatever you may encounter."

This was their fourth session. Twenty-one more sessions later, Jessica was convinced that she was an insane pervert and gave up treatment in despair when her health insurance declined to pay another cent.

Shortly after this, Jessica tearfully confided her distress to a teaching colleague and was interrogated by her department head and dean about her mental problems. Two months later she received an unsatisfactory annual evaluation and formal notification that she would not be renewed for the following academic year. Because she was untenured, the faculty union would not even speak with her.

Three hundred and fifty-seven résumés and cover letters later, she learned that no other universities in North America wanted an expert in Virginia Woolf's short fiction. After a brief period of shame and denial, Jessica learned all she could about filing for unemployment insurance.

4

At her trial, Michael Hoffman simply waved two paperback books over his head. The jurors were mesmerized.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury--the prosecution has portrayed my client, Dr. Jessica Robinson, Ph.D., as a sicko psycho who is too crazy to try for a nutso plea, but not too crazy to buy a big shiny pistol and pop her shrink--POP! POP! POP! POP! POP!--to pop her shrink who'd done his level best to get her to see that her girlish mind had manufactured visions of an incestuous relationship with her innocent dear old daddy.

"What we're goin' to prove is that Doc Wiseman knowingly tried to deflect my client from the real truth--that her daddy had in fact been molesting her for over seven years, that the abnormal person was daddy himself, not my client. Doc Wiseman wrongfully tried to convince my client that incest doesn't happen, that little girls just make it up.

"We're goin' to prove that Freud himself is more to blame than my client for the death of this ineptly named Doc Wiseman. Then we're goin' to prove that Doc

Wiseman himself was more to blame than my client for his very own death! We'll call witnesses--Elizabeth Robinson, my client's mother, and two of Doc Wiseman's own daughters--to prove that my client was in fact molested by her father on repeated occasions and to prove that even Doc Wiseman did some pretty funny things with his own daughters, and not the funny 'ha-ha' kinds of things."

Michael Hoffman held up a thick book with a photograph of a sad little girl on its cover.

"After a long and frustrating morning trying to find employment as a waitress, Dr. Jessica Robinson, Ph.D., went into a bookstore and sat down to rest among the kinds of things her scholarly mind used to find pleasure in--books about literature. She had been fired from her teaching position three years earlier and had been living from hand to mouth with piddly jobs that wouldn't pay her rent. She'd sold her car, her books, her furniture, even most of her clothes, and had moved into a cheapo room that had a toilet down the hall that she had to share with ten or twelve other people.

"She went into this bookstore and found this book about her favorite writer--a woman who was not only molested by her own father but who was convinced by reading Freud that she was crazy to think daddy had done that to her. And when this woman--the same one that's in the title of that old Liz Taylor movie *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*--when this same woman was convinced that Freud was right and she was crazy, what did she do? She killed! But she got it wrong--she killed herself. Or, looked at rightly, Freud killed her with his lie--even though he was already dead from mouth cancer two years before she died. He killed her. Him, the guy that told people that everything that's convex is a penis symbol--except the cigars he smoked that killed him, a doctor. An' that everything concave is a you-know-what symbol which I can't talk about in decent company. Him!

"On the day she shot Doc Wiseman, my client is sitting in this bookstore, feeling very blue as you can appreciate, and she picks up this book, which I've entered as defense exhibit number one, from a half-price table and begins to read parts of it. The main title as you can see even from way over there is *Virginia Woolf*. The sub-title--that's the key part--the sub-title that I'm coming over there to show you now is *The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*. It's by a non-fiction scholar by the name of Louise DeSalvo--an expert in this field. Later today I'm goin' to be putting my client voluntarily on the stand and have her read the passages to you that opened her own eyes. And we'll call people in tomorrow to vouch for this book."

Michael Hoffman held up the first exhibit and walked calmly over to the jury box to show its cover to the jurors. Then he ran his hand through his dark hair and slowly looked each juror in the eye.

"And that's not all, not by a country mile. Dr. Robinson, Ph.D., then picked up this other book during the hour she was in that same store. It's defense exhibit two, and it's a book my client saw on the shelf of Doc Wiseman's own office during the twenty-five useless sessions--no, let me correct myself--during the

twenty-five harmful, abusive, and criminally negligent sessions of a person who held an M.D. degree among other things, making him the kind of person we're all supposed to place our trust in because of his Hippocratic Oath and all that.

"As you all can see even without glasses, the large-print title of this book is *The Assault on Truth*. The smaller-print sub-title--both of these books give you the gist in their sub-titles now--the sub-title is *Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*. This here book by a fella named Jeffrey Masson proves that Freud covered up the truth about incest committed by fathers.

"This sick you-know-what had listened to dozens and dozens of little girls telling him what their daddies had done to 'em, and he finally decided these little girls must all be lying to him--or else making it all up because they really wanted their daddies to have sex with 'em. So he told them that until they gave in and believed they were sick and crazy.

"An' then Freud built this whole house of cards, this whole tangled web of sicko theories on the wrongness of every one of these little girls and the rightness of every daddy who ever lived. And he made his living off of this--an' can you guess who paid the bills, those girls or those daddies?--and he wrote books and articles about this stuff and taught it to other people who also made their living off of it--others who had a vested interest in keeping it going, sort of like those chain-letter scams some of you may have heard about. Or like that kids' story about the emperor's clothes where none of the grown-ups have the guts or smarts to blow the whistle on the con men."

Michael Hoffman held up his second exhibit and pointed to its sub-title for the jurors.

"My client will read passages aloud to you from this book, too--ones she read in that store before she bought her revolver. An' we'll have experts testify that this is a respected non-fictional scholarly book, too."

He glanced at Jessica Robinson, who felt warm and happy inside for the first time in eight months, trusting that he had taken proper control of her case.

5

Testimony for the defense occurred exactly as Michael Hoffman had said it would. The prosecution, for its part, lamely attempted to belittle the two books which Jessica --the world's leading expert in the short fiction of Virginia Woolf--read excerpts from in a voice filled with conviction and with the skill of a practiced teacher. The prosecution, attempting to discredit Jeffrey Masson's book about Freud, had produced Dr. Wiseman's copy, annotated with numerous obscenities and ad hominem remarks attacking the character of its author. This strategy, as jurors later told the press, had made their case worse.

When the jurors returned after fifteen minutes of deliberation, their forewoman --a victim of incest herself--announced their unanimous verdict in a firm contralto voice:

"Not guilty, your honor--by reason of sanity."



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