

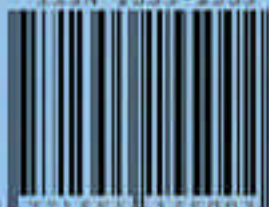
children  
*churches*  
& daddies

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pages 3, 4, 6, 7, 19, 20, 21, 40.  
Cover art of a stop sign in  
Shanghai, China.



# the boss lady's editorial

## **Choose Your Theory: Science or God**

I'm an addict to science shows and astronomy shows on the Science channel and the Discovery channel — so it makes sense that we had Scars Publications title the 2005 collection book “Chaos Theory:”

Chaos Theory: Also referred to as non-linear dynamics, chaos theory is a mathematical concept explaining that it is possible to get random results from normal equations — small occurrences can significantly affect the outcomes of seemingly unrelated events.

...and the 2005 collection audio CD “String Theory:”

String Theory: Physics. a mathematical entity used to represent elementary particles in terms of a small but finite string-like object existing in the four dimensions of space-time and in additional, hypothetical, space-like dimensions.

And the thing is, these are only theories. Are they something we're supposed to believe as real? Well, maybe not — or at least, maybe not yet. The Big Bang has always been considered only a theory, because knowing how the universe started is really only a theory, because no one was there to know how the universe started and we have no real evidence to help support the theory of the Big Bang. But discoveries (that even startled Einstein) that all matter was not sitting still in the Universe but moving away (albeit at different rates) from a central location, seems to support the theory that the universe had a starting point — like the point that started the Big Bang. And recently, scientists and astronomers have recently noted radiation emanating in all directions in outer space, and they believe these are very dim remnants of radiation are leftovers from the original Big Bang. Granted, they only *believe* this very dim remnants of radiation from the original Big Bang, but if this is more credible, then this means that scientists may *have* found evidence to support the Big Bang. As scientists reveal theories to explain key question in the history of the universe, they gain more and more knowledge to possibly help



them discover what the truth may be.

I mentioned the Big Bang only as an example of how theories (like String Theory) might be valid, but we haven't learned enough about them yet to be able to explain exactly *why* these theories are true.

Now, I'm not suggesting that String Theory *has* to be true, I'm just stating that this is a theory that scientists and astronomers are thinking about, and working on trying to validate with empirical data.

But even still... Do you want to believe that the theory of having strings ties everything in the universe together is actually valid? I mean, do you want to believe that we're all somehow tied together, that we're somehow all literally connected to other things in the universe? I mean, other than our own bodies, it's hard to imagine that we're actually literally "tied" to anything else.

And if you think *that's* strange, I even heard that Steven Hawking talked about the possibility of black holes being doorways to other universes... and Richard Dawkins (an Oxford professor, Darwinist and atheist) has explained the the theory of the "multiverse."

What on earth is a multiverse? Well, we're in a universe. But the theory is that there may be more than one universe, and having more than one universe makes the whole prefix of "uni" seem pointless (you know, if there are a multiple number of universes... because then the way to think of everything would be to think of multiverses). That theory says that, according to Dawkins (in an article In TIME, 11/12/06), "maybe the universe we are in is one of a very large number of universes. The vast majority will not contain life... But as the number of universes climbs, the odds mount" that one universe — ours — would contain life.

Now, that's a fascinating theory, And who the Hell knows, it might be valid. But without any empirical data to support this theory, is anyone going to believe that it is true?

I ask you this question not to convince you of astronomical and scientific theories related to physics, but to pose the stretch that some theories may have until we know better or have any evidence to support them.

This is the same way with religion. People who don't have explanations for some otherwise currently unexplainable events to people, often rely on God, a supernatural creation that defies explanation in any human form to explain away what we see as "miracles."

Granted, in ancient times, people relied on the Sun God, the Rain God, the Wind God, so they could pray to the right Gods to help their weather so their crops would grow the next season. And as we've learned and understood how things work in nature, we have dismissed these Gods. The current Gods that people on this planet support may be the same thing — people looking to rely on a mythical supernatural being to explain what they see as unexplainable.

But the again, that's just a theory.

Just like the idea of God may be a theory, because there is never any scientific evidence to support a God — yes, you have to rely on “faith,” and not evidence. Religious people will say they believe in something, but they're unwilling to call it a theory (even though there is no evidence to prove their God to the world).

”””

Sorry about my digression... getting back to my discussion of scientific theories... I was thinking about science, and how there is often a rift between the strict science community and the more religious-inclined, because there is no proof in God, and even relying on a God for an explanation of what we can't understand flies in the face of using science and logic and reason to understand the world. In fact, I was reading a debate between Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins (a genome pioneer and supporter of God), where each person relied on theory to support their arguments. And actually, Collins heard Dawkins' multiverse theory (you know, having many universes, and we're just in one), and thought the idea of believing in a God was less of a leap of faith. So it made me start to wonder: which theories do people choose to believe in to live their lives on? Because before enough research is done, more scientific facts start off as theories, and we have to make a “leap of faith” to support any topic before it can ever be supported and proven.

Granted, the “theory” is that you can never truly prove or support God or religion, but oftentimes you can't prove a scientific theory instantly. Some scientific theories have been disproved when studied further, and some theories are so hypothetical that we probably have no *real* way to



prove them (like postulating how earth got it's moon: there's a theory that a another large planet-like object was circulating the sun in the beginnings of our solar system days — which theorists have even named Orpheus — that actually collided with “earth version one,” destroying Orpheus and knocking enough debris from the two planets into a loose orbit which eventually congealed, forming our moon as we know it). But some “theories” gain more and more evidence that people tend to believe these theories to be true (like the Big Bang... we have no records of what happened back when, but scientists are finding radiation emanating still from the initial theoretical Big Bang, which leads more credibility to the theory).

»»

The main issues between these two scientific icons (one atheist for Darwin, Richard Dawkins, and one genome pioneer Christian who converted from Atheism when he was 27, Francis Collins) sprung up in their TIME magazine debate when Dr. Collins mentioned that evolution could exist, and God could have set the entire universe in motion. Dawkins thought that was a bit of a stretch, and believing in a God was a cop-out for any scientist.

Dawkins then postulated the multiverse theory, which made Collins say that believing in a God was less of a leap of faith than believing in the multiverse theory.

Collins eventually said he agrees with practically all of Dawkin's conclusions about the natural world, but he is also able to “embrace the possibility that there are answers that science isn't able to provide about the natural world.” Which is where he delves into the concept of a God. Dawkins said he's open to ideas that as of yet no human can understand, but he doesn't want to believe that for anything unanswerable, the answer lies in relying on the created concept of a God.

And if Dawkins believes that there are things in the universe that we as human are yet capable of understanding (I mean, thinking of multiple universes, or everything tied to something else with a microscopic string, *those* seems like a bit of a stretch for the average person's imagination...), he also states that “if there is a God, it's going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than anything that the theologians of any religion has ever proposed” — meaning that if the concept of God is real, it's probably in form so amazing that our little human minds have yet to imagine in the first place.

»»

I'm going to reference an episode of *South Park* I recently saw to get



to the point of what we as humans need to learn. So in this one episode of *South Park*, Richard Dawkins was sent to replace Mrs. Garrison (the gay balding man who had a sex change operation to be a woman) and teach evolution to the South Park Elementary fourth grade classroom. The cartoon character of Mr. Dawkins actually asked Mrs. Garrison out of a date (he apparently couldn't tell Mrs. Garrison was a balding post sex-change transvestite). On a date, Mrs. Garrison said to Mr. Dawkins, "You can't disprove God." And Mr. Dawkins said then that you can't disprove things like... like a "flying spaghetti monster" (yes, the cartoon character Mr. Dawkins on *South Park* came up with a "flying spaghetti monster"). Now, we discussed this idea while driving across the country, and my husband started saying, "well, if I was having spaghetti for dinner and dropped a piece of spaghetti...", where I finished by saying "that the spaghetti and pasta on it when falling may destroy items we can't see on a molecular level." And that's when my husband finished by saying, "and those things might consider what I dropped a flying spaghetti monster."

I can't believe that this *South Park* joke about "flying spaghetti monsters" made us come to these scientific understandings, but from our little discussion, I flashed to the fact that the comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 was split into fragments and sucked into Jupiter's orbit before colliding into Jupiter in 1994, and although some telescopes couldn't capture the collision, research telescopes in Australia



were able to record the collision — not in our normal light capabilities but through a different form of radiation. What they found doesn't show pretty moving pictures of the collision that the average person could watch and understand, but they were able to retrieve a *ton* of data about the gases and temperatures in the collisions that we would otherwise never be able to detect. And making our little joke story about the feasibility of a flying spaghetti monster made me suddenly realize that there is a lot about our own universe that we have no instantaneous complete grasp over.

Not that this makes me believe in the multiverse theory, but it makes me realize that there's a lot about our own universe that I'll never completely understand.

And not that this was the only thing that made me think of not being able to understand everything about the universe... because as we talked

about the effect of the flying spaghetti monsters, I brought up dark matter. I think it takes up like ninety percent of the universe as we know it, and we know it contains *something* — it's not nothing, but the only way we know that it's not nothing is because we've seen residual traces of microscopic objects after they have moved through dark matter. Now, scientists have been trying to figure out anything about dark matter, but the understanding seems insanely elusive, because we've either used the wrong methods to study it or we possibly don't have the right tools to witness it and study it now. Which makes this another thing about the universe — and this is about *ninety percent* of the universe — that we need to learn and understand.

\*\*\*

So who knows, maybe there is a God that we don't understand. Maybe there are multiple universes, and life is just in one of them. Who knows, maybe there are multiple universes and God started life in this one. And maybe small events can effect the world in unexpected ways, and



maybe there *are* microscopic “strings” that tie everything together in the universe somehow. And you know what? There are a ton of things about dark matter (about ninety percent of the universe) that we currently have no concept of, and there are parts of the universe that our five senses can't comprehend (like how we can learn more when studying different levels of radiation from events to learn more about them in the universe), so yeah, there are always things we can learn. There could be things about

the concept of a God that we can learn from (though we won't have evidence of this God, you'll have to abandon proof to support it), and there are a ton of things about our universe we have yet to learn (if we'll ever have the tools to learn these things... but we'll keep trying).



*Janet Kuypers*<sup>®</sup>  
Janet Kuypers  
Editor in Chief



12.06.06

## NASA Images Suggest Water Still Flows in Brief spurts on Mars

NASA photographs have revealed bright new deposits seen in two gullies on Mars that suggest water carried sediment through them sometime during the past seven years.

“These observations give the strongest evidence to date that water still flows occasionally on the surface of Mars,” said Michael Meyer, lead scientist for NASA’s Mars Exploration Program, Washington.

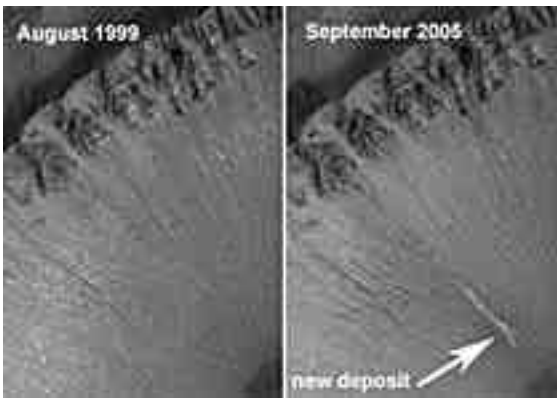
Liquid water, as opposed to the water ice and water vapor known to exist at Mars, is considered necessary for life. The new findings heighten intrigue about the potential for microbial life on Mars. The Mars Orbiter Camera on NASA’s Mars Global Surveyor provided the new evidence of the deposits in images taken in 2004 and 2005.

“The shapes of these deposits are what you would expect to see if the material were carried by flowing water,” said Michael Malin of Malin Space Science Systems, San Diego. “They have finger-like branches at the downhill end and easily diverted around small obstacles.” Malin is principal investigator for the camera and lead author of a report about the findings published in the journal *Science*.

The atmosphere of Mars is so thin and the temperature so cold that liquid water cannot persist at the surface. It would rapidly evaporate or freeze. Researchers propose that water could remain liquid long enough, after breaking out from an underground source, to carry debris downslope before totally freezing. The two fresh deposits are each several hundred meters or yards long.

The light tone of the deposits could be from surface frost continuously replenished by ice within the body of the deposit. Another possibility is a salty crust, which would be a sign of water’s effects in concentrating the salts. If the deposits had resulted from dry dust slipping down the slope, they would likely be dark, based on the dark tones of dust freshly disturbed by rover tracks, dust devils and fresh craters on Mars.

Mars Global Surveyor has discovered tens of thousands of gullies on



slopes inside craters and other depressions on Mars. Most gullies are at latitudes of 30 degrees or higher. Malin and his team first reported the discovery of the gullies in 2000. To look for changes that might indicate present-day flow of water, his camera team repeatedly

imaged hundreds of the sites. One pair of images showed a gully that appeared after mid-2002. That site was on a sand dune, and the gully-cutting process was interpreted as a dry flow of sand.

Today's announcement is the first to reveal newly deposited material apparently carried by fluids after earlier imaging of the same gullies. The two sites are inside craters in the Terra Sirenum and the Centauri Montes regions of southern Mars.

"These fresh deposits suggest that at some places and times on present-day Mars, liquid water is emerging from beneath the ground and briefly flowing down the slopes. This possibility raises questions about how the water would stay melted below ground, how widespread it might be, and whether there's a below-ground wet habitat conducive to life. Future missions may provide the answers," said Malin.

Besides looking for changes in gullies, the orbiter's camera team assessed the rate at which new impact craters appear. The camera photographed approximately 98 percent of Mars in 1999 and approximately 30 percent of the planet was photographed again in 2006. The newer images show 20 fresh impact craters, ranging in diameter from 7 feet (2 meters) to 486 feet (148 meters) that were not present approximately seven years earlier. These results have important implications for determining the ages of features on the surface of Mars. These results also approximately match predictions and imply that Martian terrain with few craters is truly young.

Mars Global Surveyor began orbiting Mars in 1997. The spacecraft is responsible for many important discoveries. NASA has not heard from the spacecraft since early November. Attempts to contact it continue. Its unprecedented longevity has allowed monitoring Mars for over several years past its projected lifetime.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, manages the Mars Global Surveyor mission for the NASA Science Mission Directorate, Washington. For more information, visit <http://www.nasa.gov>.

poetry  
the passionate stuff

**SCALES**

Mel Waldman

How do I balance Father's madness with Mother's love?  
Acts of terrorism begin behind closed doors at home.  
The first terrorist I knew was Father. I knew him intimately.  
Cannibal that he was, he ate my soul for dinner each night.  
Mother sat quietly and looked away in denial or fear.  
How do I balance Father's madness with Mother's flawed love?

What are the rights of a terrorist? (How do I atone for the sins of my father?) What are the rights of a terrorist suspect? (How do I escape Father's web of evil?) What am I if I terrorize the terrorist or the terrorist suspect? Shall I become the object of my venom?

Father bestowed upon me his dark raw rage, passing it through my fragile being in a ferocious emotional contagion and it metastasized into a million wild fragments, unforgivingly, feverishly, in a wilderness where evil was born-in my Garden of Eden.

Mother, always the optimist, fed me love and faith and visions of a beautiful future, never seeing the slithering snake nearby. But Father reminded me I was his dark son and he force-fed me his rage. Made me swallow it. And I believe that Father's most heinous act-his rape of my soul-removed my skin of innocence and the last vestige of hope and redemption.

The universe spits rage at us and tips the scale of love and hate. How do we balance it?

The galaxy launches good and evil at us, filling our human bodies with the forces of light and darkness.

The cosmos rushes forth with nature's truth. But humans run with truth and lies, often addicted to self-deception, afraid to balance the Scale of Truth.

So many scales to balance...

Our president wants to strip terrorist suspects of habeas corpus, cutting off their umbilical cord to humanity. And he craves new powers to delineate the parameters of interrogation of these individuals, who are still, in fact, innocent until proven guilty, according to our Constitution, and human beings too-not animals-nor terrorists nor mass murderers nor war criminals.

How do we balance the Scale of Justice?

Shall we forget the Detainee Treatment Act and the Geneva Conventions?

(Father used to torture me every day with little restraint and not even Mother could stop him from severing my soul and mind.)

Shall we permit cruel and inhuman treatment of terrorism detainees?

(When I was a young Brooklyn boy, parents had the right to physically abuse their children in the name of character development.)

Shall we violate the Geneva Conventions and torture our prisoners in secret camps where human rights do not exist?

(When I grew up in Brooklyn, children had no rights, it seemed.)

If we do not bar cruel and inhuman treatment...

If we torture our prisoners, what will happen to our POWs? What will the Enemy do? How do we balance the Scales of Justice and Morality?

The landscape of our beautiful country is contaminated with human debris and paranoia.

In the beginning, Father accused me of minor crimes. Later on, his accusations spread like a malignant tumor. He falsely claimed I was guilty of more serious criminal acts and finally-unspeakable crimes I never committed.

I shook in his presence. I wanted to kill him for raping my soul. With truth and sincerity, I told him I was innocent.

“Confess! Confess!” he screamed at me. “I know you did it!”

I never confessed. And the torture never ceased. Even after Father’s death, I’m still in prison (a lonely interior landscape apparently painted by Bosch and Munch), an innocent man guilty of feeling terror, and nothing more.

Now, I sit in my cell and study the darkness.

So many scales to balance...within and out there- where human minds and flesh are tortured and human souls die every moment from injustice, vanishing into oblivion, as if they never were.



Tits and Grass, art by Cheryl Townsend

# Random Observations After Your funeral

## Je'free

The sun has set on Sunset Blvd.  
coloring the Pacific deep denim

Waves have wiped out  
my calligraphy on sand

Pure silence is now married  
to the motionless life of nature

The noisy crowd has hushed  
like a subsided eye of a hurricane

Paths in the grass have hushed too  
from squeaks of wagons

The heart-shaped pebble I tossed away  
is still nestled in curls of dead leaves

The atmosphere is still  
the Earth's cocoon

My day, sex weather day for lovers,  
endured without punctuation

Medicine cabinets are now as hollow  
as a magician's hat

Your absence has grown tall  
in the corridor

Grin, lost somewhere in the folds  
of my face, remains

My Adam's apple is still hung  
like a yoyo, still speechless

The frail blue branches of my veins  
still carry a part of you

My lion heart, carried by a basket of ribs,  
still roars like subway train

Dreams crashed into splinters  
inside the mind's confusion,  
causing an aneurysmish rage

Pain is still covered  
with veils of sheer deceit

You still make me want to be  
the nipple of Everest  
screaming your name



Deceit, at by Edward  
Michael O'durr  
Supranowicz





Paradise, art by  
Adriana DeCastro



## **PRIME NUMBERS.**

Richard Fein

they tease the obsessive in our natures.

A forever census is taken:

2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, and on and on through the centuries  
beyond the sum of grains of sand or number of stars.

On parchment, rag paper, cheap printout, or screen pixels,  
inventories are taken.

We are old when our years pass only two dozen of them.

But we're positively compelled to find all these integers.

Is it their defiant indivisibility that taunts?

They're divided only by themselves  
and ONE, that ultimate unity.

They're mileposts between here and infinity,  
with always one more just ahead.

But how far ahead?

The answer is a tedious enumeration,  
a measureless, marathon of measurement.

We defined the system, and the system torments us,  
an open-ended, run-on numerical syntax  
ever more countless than counted

# COMFORT

Ed Coet

When I first met you I couldn't leave you,  
not even in my thoughts.  
Nothing has changed. You are still there.

Without you I was nothing.  
With you, everything.  
You made me.

If I wakened in the night, regardless of reason,  
I reached for you. Like a child in need of nurturing,  
the sight of you gave me comfort.

I recall combat in the sands of Desert Storm.  
There you were, in my heart and mind.  
Still, you gave me comfort.

I see you in our children.  
How they look and act. How they live their lives.  
They are one with you as you are one with me.

We grew old together.  
That was a blessing. Life was wonderful,  
but only because I had you.

In the hospital when I was gravely ill -  
there you were, by my bedside.  
You were the cure that I needed.

God made me say good-bye.  
It hurts. I still cry.  
Yet, even in death you give me comfort.

From  
Nature  
Images, art  
by David  
Matson



Memories of a Catholic school education, the  
Gestapo of that religion 'Dominican Nuns' taught  
well, but oh so deadly.

**penguins** by jim greenwald

I remember my  
childhood education.

Dressed in formal wear,  
they looked like penguins.  
Wielders of yardsticks and rulers  
made of near unbreakable wood.

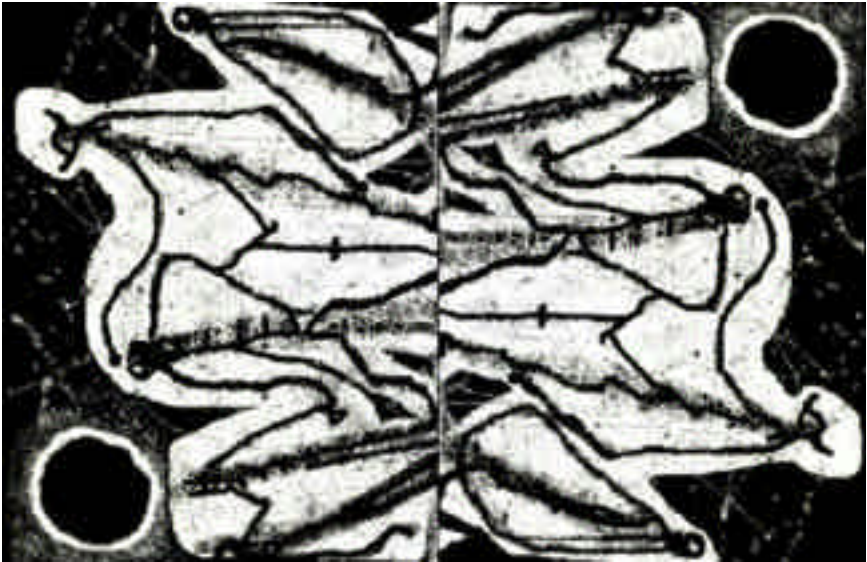
Attention getters—embedded  
splinters and bloody knuckles.  
The nuns entrusted with my early  
education.

Baseballs loss—none could throw  
a strike like the penguin with  
her chalk.

Education by pain—we did learn.  
We had to.

No place to hide from their rage.  
They stand beside you in the  
boy's room—privacy—there was  
none, to nuns on a mission.

Boot camp was a breeze—being  
shot at—a break, they did not throw  
bullets like the penguins with  
their chalk.



**Organics** art by Peter Schwartz

She was the first person on our street  
who thought the government  
was talking to her through the radio,

so she smashed it and displayed  
its remains as a warning to any spies  
lurking outside.

## **Red Angels**

Nobody complained.

Christian Ward

She was the first person on our street  
who stopped taking her medicine,  
thinking it made her a government

controlled zombie. So she ground it up  
and used it as war paint, smearing  
anarchist symbols on her front door.

Nobody complained.

She was the first person on our street  
who sued the local newspaper  
for printing lies perpetrated by MI5,

the local magistrate smiled sheepishly  
and offered her a lollipop. She made  
a crow out of the summons and set it alight.

Nobody complained.

She was the first person on our street  
to think terrorists were living in her  
basement, government hired agents

to spy on her and her three cats.  
She set it on fire and watched red angels  
take her away.

Somebody had complained.

# The Tipping Point

Ron Arnold

I tape a *Wildflowers* poster on the wall  
and ask my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class to fill it in.  
The girls' ponytails sway as the scribble  
with crayons and the boys attack the paper  
like werewolves possessed by the full moon.

When they step back from their creation,  
I am shocked. While most wildflowers  
are white or in the blue-purple color spectrum  
with petals that appear cool to touch,  
the scrawled with golds, pinks, saffrons,  
crimsons and scarlets until arm-weary.  
And while most caterpillars and grasshoppers  
blend in with the plants they inhabit,  
my kids multi-colored each one.

Perhaps we could expect this after reaching  
the tipping point. After global warming  
has melted the ice caps and raised  
the earth's temperature by 3 or 4 degrees  
and hurricanes have swamped our costal cities.  
After the streams and rivers dry up  
and drought threatens every farmer's field.  
All the wildflowers would morph into exotics  
and the insects would become radiant rainbows.

I look at the *Wildflowers* poster again  
with its clusters of bizarre colors and wonder:  
How can we get it right  
when all our politicians in Congress  
and the White House have it wrong?



## just another myth

Stanley M Noah

all greeks are not  
philosophers & teachers

as it only seems  
that way--

in fact  
most are sailors

on ancient sails  
traveling westward

on the  
mediterranean express

unloading  
gallons of olive oil,

unloading  
clay pots of tragic stories

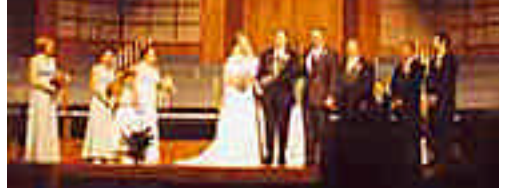
about fallen  
warriors, kings and queens





## The Bridal Shower

Kelly Ann Malone



As I wrote the name of the gift-giver on the back of a paper plate  
I couldn't help but think what a silly mistake  
No amount of tulle or pink lipstick can make this work  
Desire is an attractive but misleading motivation

The bride-to-be is savoring her interim glory  
At her peak and never thinner, with an impressive tan  
Envious ladies offer gifts and praise  
A white confection with blush roses graces the table

Undignified games produced intelligible banter  
How many items on the tray? Don't cross your legs!  
Cold-cuts and veggie platters along with a spinach dip  
The round thin mints in pastel colors tease the weight conscious guests  
"John and Jill forever" printed out on delicate white napkins  
She assumes if it's in writing, it will.



# Kilimanjaro

Bill Dorris

While eagles track the rising waves  
and towns are laid in shallow graves  
snow geese fly magnetic skies  
north to arctic Kansas  
While great minds search  
in lost directions  
the army  
that final engineering profession  
drills flagpoles  
down  
the last snows of  
oil  
and uptown  
as King Kong swings round  
the last skyline  
finally

*One line in above poem was triggered by reading "The military is an engineering profession" in Robert Haas' "Bush's War" in March/April 2006 issue of APR.*



## BURY ME

Luis Cuauhtemoc  
Berriozabal

Broadcast my name  
And bury me.  
I'm meaningless.

I will bring you  
The shovel and  
All of the dirt.

It is rather  
Silly, but I  
Cannot think of

A better thing.  
Broadcast my name  
And bury me.

Make the world know  
I'm meaningless  
Because I am.



# prose

the meat and potatoes stuff

## **Anthology**      Brandon Kinkade

I wish I was a roadie for Jim Morrison and The Doors, taught to bear a whale in my stomach, become a irresponsible drunken clown through late night drowns of Beam, candy amphetamines, and cologne soaked hash smoke. Become his cinematic Warhol porno star, poking holes through the ends of Styrofoam cups staring at the fat bottom girls as they cross. Instead, I'm silently stuck to act my dreams through masturbation in the comfort of my box.

The world I spin in is a pen striped, grease stained homeless man's box. I'm a fishing tank who waits patiently in Crown Hill cemetery for the ghosts to cross the lavender, echoing graves into the uncharted industrial smoke. Open your eyes and receive the think piece monologue entitled "The End." As the temporary Florida migration of fossils leave through the back door, I sit open handed in the shallow side of the bar sipping the role as the sad clown.

It's hard to court foreign models when you make a living as a rodeo clown. This is the last chapter of the book, "Twain's anti-climatic let down in the end." I rose up one morning to find two pigs with badges pushing orchestral tunes of the doorbell. The paper said they found weird Henry, head blownd, under the bridge in his boxers.

His left hand curled a domestic, empty filled hard pack of Lucky Stripe smokes, while his thin railed neck bore the burden of carrying Jesus' Catholic cross.

As a child, we fantasied of Hollywood war and chased each other courageously across the neighborhood's open Midwestern yards and through the high saluting garage doors. As a teen, I became a crazy glue wall lizard. An unholy son whose only hobby was smoking. As an adult, I poured tears like a faucet when they buried The King in his southern eternal box. Few years later, the myth whom said "We're larger than Jesus." fell upon his crucified clown only to leave me alone and uncharted with an L.A. woman to tie up the tangled blue loose ends.

A domino effect. We all tumble like lumber trees end over end chocking for sanctuary and breath over the dark cloud of Valhalla's smoke. I wish I was a make believe friend who lived a luxurious life inside



your Nike shoebox. Then you can pour me your secrets, tell me stories, and spend everlasting time clowning around like two children book lovers who met at chance when their paths finally crossed.

In your dreams, you will no longer hear the haunting slam of the old oak cellar door.

What if George Bush was a tacky salesman who sold soap on a rope door to door? Then would you still pick up a machine gun and run to Iraq with the dancing clowns? Did I ever mention to you about the man who once tried to cross The Ohio River? His legs tired out and the catfish bed became his end. As I sleep restlessly inside my yellow heart shaped box, I feel the warm of the virgin Mary caressing me through the devil's thick smoke.

In my box, I play the avent garde actor opposite the sad clown.

In the end, I sit still and pray to find truth amongst the Catholic cross. Hopefully, the doors to our lives will be revealed through the thick smoke.



**No One Sees. No One Knows** art by Aaron Wilder

*How the hell can they enforce that?* wondered Dr. William (“Hopalong”) Boyd, as he washed his hands and read the large-print sign glued to the mirror in front of him. He smiled to himself and glanced theatrically around the upper walls of the large men’s room to see if it had any surveillance camera. *Nope. If the employees don’t WISH to wash their hands after every time they have a whiz—or any time, for that matter—nobody will know—or nobody but the individual employee involved—unless the ladies’ room is different, which is very probable—or unless there’s a surveillance camera hidden in back of this mirror.*

Dr. Boyd faced the mirror, scrutinized it with a slight frown, smiled toothily at the center of it, and blew a kiss to whatever camera might lie behind it.

He pushed the handle of a towel dispenser several times and tore off two brown paper towels.

“Ha—I like not that,” he said under his breath as he dried his hands. The handle of the towel dispenser was grimy looking. Then, as he reached for the handle on the lavatory door, he noticed more visible grime around it. *Years of neglect, he thought. But even if they scoured and disinfected the handles every day, there’d be millions of unseen things on ‘em—and as the Little Prince rightly put it, ‘The really important things are invisible to the eye.’ Bet no restaurant cares to think about THAT. Well, once more into the breach.*

His mother was sitting fifteen feet from the entry, looking absently at the sixty-eight lobsters crawling around the bottom of a large tank.

“I can see there’s an empty table in there, Billy,” she said. “Tell that colored girl that we’d like to be seated sometime today. Tell her that table would do just fine.”

“That’s in the smoking section, Mom. We asked for non-smoking. It’ll only be a few more minutes. Is there any chance you’ll need to use the little girls’ room while we’re here? If so, this w—”

“I went before we left the apartment, Billy. I can hold my water till we get back. I can see another table is clear in the other section there. Just tell that girl you want that one.”

“Mom, they gave me this electronic thing to page us when it’s our turn. Maybe that table is for somebody else who’s in the ladies’ room or men’s room or having a smoke outside. Maybe they’re being paged right now to come get their table.”

“Well, if they’re not here, then they gave up their turn. That’s my



view, Billy. And when did you get that thing anyways? I never saw them hand it to you.”

“It was when the woman asked my name, and I told her ‘Boyd,’ and she wrote it down and handed this to me.”

“Well, I never saw any of that happening. Are you sure it’s working?”

As if on cue, the palm-sized black plastic octagon suddenly began to flash sixteen bright red lights and emit a series of soft ringing sounds.

“I’m Teesha,” said a contralto voice behind Dr. Boyd. “I’ll be your waitress, if you’ll just follow me, please.”

Mrs. Boyd raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips.

“Billy, grab hold of my walker while I get myself up from this bench—please.”

After they were seated at a small table meant for four and her walker had been stowed against the wall, Mrs. Boyd began paging through the menu.

“Well, I know what I want—if I can just find it. They’ve gone and changed the menu all around again on me. What are you going to have, Billy?”

Dr. Boyd pointed to his mouth, indicating he would answer her question after swallowing the piece of cheese bread he was chewing. *They always give five pieces to a table no matter how many people are there, he thought. It’s as if they’re trying to start a fight between the customers. How many times do they have five people at any table?* He swallowed and watched his mother take a bite of her own piece of cheese bread.

“I was thinking of having Captain Silver’s long-johns, Mom, but they don’t have them at this place.”

“Ha-ha. That joke was stupid even at the other restaurant last week. What are you going to have?”

“The usual—flounder stuffed with crab. How about you? What are you trying to find?”

“That—that pasta thingy.”

“Pasta thingy? The hollowed out bread with cheese sauce all over a few popcorn shrimp and a pea-sized piece of lobster? It’s halfway down page three here.”

“I don’t see it. Where?”

He turned a page of her menu and pointed.

“Are you sure that’s what you want, Mom? Your blood pressure was about 900 over 800 this morning, and your cholesterol levels were all through the stratosphere last checkup. And dairy doesn’t agree with you any more.”

“It may not agree with me, but I agree with it. I’m eighty-eight, and I’m going to enjoy my meals. There’s damn little else for me to enjoy,

especially down south here.”

“Mom, Virginia is hardly the south anymore. The south starts with South Carolina now that so many Yankees like you have moved down here.”

“Well, I don’t have any of my friends down here—not my real friends, anyhow.”

“That’s what comes of all your virtue and clean living, Mom—you’ve just lived longer than most of your friends and kept going and kept all your marbles. Half the ones that are still alive are—bed-ridden or don’t have a clue who anybody is. And nobody ever comes to visit them, either, I’ll bet.”

“Maybe they’re better off that way. I’ve got plenty of aches, and not all of them are physical. And I can’t even get my TV programs down here. You’ve been here almost two weeks—doesn’t it bother you that so many coloreds are on all the TV programs here?”

“Uh—no, no it doesn’t, Mom.” Dr. Boyd felt himself tense up, and he hoped that her voice was not carrying to other people.

“Well, it bothers me! Anyways, Billy, what looks good on the menu to you?”

“I was thinking of having some flounder stuffed with crab meat. It was pretty good the last time we were here.”

“Do they still have it? Did you see it listed still? They’ve been changing the menu each time I come here.”

“Yup. It’s still there. And your fave is still there, too. Would you like another piece of this cheese bread?”

“No. One is more than I should have. Dairy doesn’t agree with me. You finish all the rest.”

“Well, maybe I’ll have just one more myself, Mom.”

“Jesus H. Christ, Billy—will you get a look at that.”

“Where? Where, Mom?”

“That little girl over there, just sitting down.”

“In the orange camisole? What about her?”

“Whore clothes—on a little eight-year-old. Her parents probably’ve had her going to baton classes and beauty pageants since she was six months old. How else can you explain that? Pimps. That’s what they are. They have no successes in their own lives, so they’re trying to foist their sick dreams off onto their daughter. That kind of thing doesn’t happen up north.”

Dr. Boyd thought for half a minute, weighing what to say.

“I think she may be ten or eleven, Mom. She’s starting to show signs of puberty.”

“That’s what happens to eight-year-olds when their folks push them like that. I read it in two of my magazines,” she answered.

“Are you guys ready to order yet?”

Dr. Boyd looked up into Teesha’s smiling dark face and nodded.

“My mother would like your famous linguini with shrimp and lobster, a cup of hot tea, and a small bowl of your wonderful apple sauce.”

He watched Teesha write this down and waited for her to stop and look at him.

“What are you going to have, Billy?” said Mrs. Boyd.

“I’m having one of their famous flounder stuffed with crab meat, Mom. And a couple other things.”

“So just speak up and tell the girl, Billy. I’m sure she’d like to hear it.”

Teesha was looking at him with a faint smile on her lips.

“So—besides your flounder stuffed with savory, spiced crab meat, I would like a caesar salad and a cup of regular coffee, no cream—please.”

“I’ll be right back with your hot drinks and starters. Do you want any more of the cheese bread?” said Teesha with a broader smile.

“No. I think we’re happy with what we have, thanks.”

“Jesus!” said Mrs. Boyd. “Look what she’s doing now.”

“Who?”

“The little girl in the whore clothes, of course.”

Dr. Boyd turned his head again.

“What was it?” he asked.

“You didn’t see? She’s been pulling her bra straps down off her shoulders. They’re both hanging down all loose and public. Is that her father there with her?”

Sitting opposite the little girl was a man who seemed to be in his mid-thirties. He was dressed in tan corduroy trousers and a maroon wool sweater, which looked like Christmas presents he was wearing for the first time. His longish dark hair was styled, Dr. Boyd thought, to resemble that of Tom Cruise.

The girl had short, curly brown hair and wore tight brown jeans with her tight orange camisole. A pale-blue bra strap hung loosely over each of her skinny biceps, and she seemed to be tugging on one of them to make it even looser.

“Her mom probably had her for Christmas, and today she’s day-aftering with her dad,” said Dr. Boyd. “That’s my best guess. Otherwise, it is a puzzlement.”

*Either that, he thought, or Lolita’s running away with Pervert Pervert.*

“What’s she even wearing a bra for?” said Mrs. Boyd. “All she’s got is a couple o’ grapes.”

“A couple o’ raisins,” said Dr. Boyd. To himself he thought, *Cute kid.*

*Like to see her again in about eight years in a couple of my freshman classes.* Aloud he added, “I don’t think it was her mother that dresses her like that, Mom. I think she must be living with a latter-day Miss Havensham who hates men and is planning to use this girl to get revenge or something.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Billy.”

“Dickens, Mom. A great book about expectations—and disillusionment—but with all the answers and a happy ending, unlike most of real life.”

“Tell me something I can understand—please.”

“Okay. During the first term I had a funny student named Kyle, who told the class and me about being a waiter in a place like this. One day, he said, some—”

“Why was he wasting your class time on that? You *let* kids just jump in like that? I never did, back when I was teaching in Hartford.”

Dr. Boyd paused and considered her remark. Teesha arrived and set his mother’s applesauce and tea down, asked if everything was all right, and set his coffee and salad down. When she left, he replied to his mother.

“Mom, as part of an assignment I was discussing, I invited the students to each give a few examples—”

“Billy! You *know* better. I *know* you know better.”

Again he paused to consider.

“Mom, it’s *my* class, I’m fifty-seven years old, I’ve been teaching college for thirty-one years, and students now are not at all the way they used to be, and —”

“What are you talking about? You said, and I quote, ‘to each give.’ That was called splitting an infinitive when I went to school *and* when you did, too.”

Yet once more Dr. Boyd paused.

“Oh. My bad. Anyway, I invited *each* student to *give* a specific, concrete example of something that was seriously—or humorously—interesting to them about a job they had had or work they had done back before coming to college. I was trying to ‘engage’ the students in the ‘learning process’—that’s what we have to do nowadays. Nobody lectures any more even in college, Mom. Two generations of computer games and four generations of TV programs have given about 95 percent of incoming kids Attention Deficit Disorder—or something. Okay?”

“I’d blame Jimmy Carter and the Clintons, sooner than I’d blame TV or computers. People very often learn valuable things from their TV and computers.”

“Anyway—it’s different now, and I start my students out writing

about a personal experience they've each had—like a job—and tell them to alternate between a kind of general matrix and an array of hopefully vivid and concrete details and—”

“*Hopefully?*”

“What?”

“‘Hopefully vivid details’? Can details be ‘hopeful’? And *you* have a Ph.D. in English? Lucky for you, your father isn’t alive to hear you talk like this.”

“Examples—and details—which, one *hopes*, will be vivid—and interesting. All right?”

“I’m waiting for you to get to your point, Billy. You always seem to spin out these long-winded prologues. As the Bard would tell you, ‘More matter, Billy, more matter—and less art. Much less art.’”

Dr. Boyd smiled with his lips but not his dead eyes.

“Anyway, Mom, Kyle—my student—told how a customer handed him back a teaspoon and complained about it being dirty—soap residue spots on—”

“That happens to me a lot when I go out to restaurants. People nowadays just don’t care to get the silverware clean.”

“No doubt that’s Carter’s and the Clintons’ fault.”

“Don’t you be a smartass with your mother, Billy. Just try and finish your little story before the food arrives.”

“Anyway, this kid, Kyle—he—he brought the customer a clean spoon.”

“What was so vivid about that, Billy?”

“I guess not much, Mom. Anyway, Kyle flunked out the end of his first trimester—he flunked everything but English.”

“And it sounds to me as if he *should* have flunked that, too. Do you inflate their grades, Billy?”

“Of course I do, Mom. I’m too old and flabby in both mind and body to whore myself in other ways any more.”

“William! Be nice.”

“I’m sorry, Mom. I just get in moods some times.”

“Just because that happens, Billy, doesn’t mean you have to take it out on others.”

“You’re right, Mom.” And he began thinking about the discrepancy between his career plans—writing greatly admired books at an Ivy League university—and the reality—teaching large sections of bonehead composition at a tenth-rate midwestern state college. *If I could just have half a sabbatical*, he thought, *I could discuss the inconsistencies, the discrepancies in Faulkner’s fiction from story to story and posit new “solutions” and weigh their*

merits in new ways: each story is a self-contained “alternative universe”; or the narrators are deceptive and/or semi-incompetent; or Faulkner himself (as he got older and drank more) was the same; or Faulkner—like Robbe-Grillet—deliberately was constructing an inconsistent narrative; or . . . .

“How’s your fish, Billy? My shrimp are good, but I can’t find any lobster.”

“Oh—it’s good, Mum—great actually. Glad I chose it. Want a taste?” He knew she would not, and he smiled at the harmless lie he had just told: both his salmon filet and his broccoli were luke warm and quite soggy.

In the kitchen, a skinny white busgirl tapped a heavy-set black waiter on the arm. “Tommy, you remember Kyle Bascomb?”

“Kyle? Yeah—ol’ Kyle that got his dumb ass fired for lickin’ the silverware.”

“Yeah. Well, I saw his older sister at mass this morning. She says he was accidentally shot a couple days before Christmas—in the head. He’s in a coma down in Texas.”

“How was that?”

“Shit, Tommy, I don’t know. During basic training, she said. Somebody brought some bullets back from the rifle range—an’ they somehow got into Kyle’s gun.”

“Probably was no accident. Ol’ Kyle was a wise guy.”

“His sister said they—his company commander—said Kyle was the one brought the bullets back.”

“Makes sense to me. Like I say, he’s a wise guy, Kelly, an’ him enlistin’ ain’t gonna change that.”

“Beth, his sister, said it was a—a *accident*, but maybe Kyle decided the army really wasn’t for him—or vice verse.”

“Nah—that asshole wouldn’t ‘a’ had the guts.”

“I guess maybe we’ll never know.”

Teesha led Dr. Boyd and his mother to a booth near the young man with the maroon sweater and the girl with the orange camisole. Mrs. Boyd pointed with her clear lucite cane and leaned over to whisper to her son.

“What’s with the flag-flying over there? Is this a fourth-grade fad to have their straps hanging down now?”

“Looks like that, Ma. Does it bother you? Me, I hate the hair of the guy she’s with.”

“Both of ‘em look pretty stupid, Billy. Him with those corduroys, and her with that underwear showing. Well, there’s a pair the squirrels aren’t likely to ever get back. But you was telling me about something funny you’d heard about this place. Lay the rest of it on me—please.”

“Ho yeah—funny story from one of my patients about a kid she used

to work with in this restaurant. Seems a bunch of Jewish types came in one day and got all bossy about how they wanted things done their way. She—my patient, that is—called it an ‘eight-top,’ meaning there was eight people all sitting at one big pushed-together table. So it seems a fat ol’ Jewish lady starts going ape-shit about there being a dirty knife that maybe had some little soap scum streaks or spots on it—almost sterile for most practical purposes, you know, and certainly no freakin’ danger to anybody with the sense of a goose—and hardly even an eyesore.”

“Except to people of *her* tribe.”

“Right. Anyways, Ma, the kid pretends to be polite to ‘em, ‘cause he wants a big tip probably.”

“Which he was never gonna get, o’ course.”

“Right. Hadn’t thought o’ that, Ma. You’re so right. Anyways, he says, ‘Oh, bless my soul, Ma’am, let me run that back to the kitchen an’ personally select a clean one for you.’ An’ he just goes around a corner just out o’ their sight an’—get this now for brass balls—an’ he *licks* the freakin’ spoon or knife—on *both* sides an’ then wipes it on the seat of his jeans—an’ laughs with my patient about this—an’ then he takes it back to the—the tribal matriarch with a big shit-eatin’ grin an’ says, ‘Here you go, Madam! I just licked it clean myself!’ An’ she gave him a big smile an’ a big jovial thank-you. How ‘bout that?”

“You think that’s funny, Billy? If he’d do that to the Hebes, he’d prob’ly do it to reg’lar people, too.”

“Aw, Ma, lighten up. It’s a funny story. You could send it in to *Reader’s Digest* an’ get a hundred bucks for it maybe. There was no harm. You’ll get sicker from touchin’ the door handle to the ladies’ room.”

“I never do.”

“What?”

“I never touch the handles. I always carry these little packs o’ tissues an’ always push or pull the doors with ‘em.”

Dr. Boyd regarded her with new respect. “I never noticed, Ma.”

“Unless, o’ course, someone’s getting the doors *for* me, which at my age they often do, including even you, Billy. But, I wanna know, was this waiter one of—you know—one o’ *them*?” She cast a quick glance over at Tommy James, who had just come out of the kitchen.

“Was he black? Nah—no. I’m pretty sure he wasn’t—pretty sure. My patient’s white at least, so I assumed. But o’ course she *does* live in a trailer park and has four tattoos, never mind where two of ‘em are, an’ five body piercings, never mind where four o’ those are—even if I’m the one that did ‘em for her. Ha—just kidding. Maybe.”

“You *better* be, Billy.”

Dr. Boyd and his father, Lieutenant Colonel William (“Crazy Pippin”) Boyd, USMC, Retired, gave Tommy James their orders for the Surf-n-Turf Special and continued their conversation.

“So, if you teach econ, why’n hell’s a cadet tellin’ *you* about his cousin doin’ a thing like that? It sounds disrespectful, like if he thinks you’re his best buddy or something.”

“We were talking about how hard it is to get good help and keep their loyalty in the present economy, Dad. So he said he knew of a case where one manager let waiters have a lot of slack provided the customers didn’t complain too much and how another manager came in and acted like a tough-nuts little Hitler about everything. Licking the knife was pretty funny, I thought, and anyway the kid got fired by the second guy.”

“Well, I just hope you didn’t laugh so’s your students saw you. You’re not their buddy and don’t *ever* forget that. Friend—sometimes, maybe. Enemy—that’s the best: keeps them on their toes—and respectful. But never be their buddy, Junior.”

“You’re right, Dad. That’s for dang sure.”

“I know I am. And—how’s your mom doing, Billy?”

“She’s good. I spent all day yesterday with her, you know, sir. She’s good.”

“You—you talk at all ‘bout me, Billy? You know, like I asked you?”

“Tried to, Dad, but she told me not to spoil the day for her.”

“Sully.”

“What?”

“She said ‘sully,’ didn’t she?”

“Well—yes.”

“That’s the word she’d use—it’s worse somehow than just ‘spoil.’ Anyone can say ‘spoil,’ but only your mother ever says ‘sully’ anymore. It’s like a dying-out word.”

“I s’pose you’re right, Dad.”

“Course I am—always am about the crappy minor things. She said, ‘Billy—don’t *sully* Christmas by mentioning your father’s name here in my house.’ I thought she would. Expected it.”

“It rankled her when you signed that letter ‘Faithfully yours.’”

“I’ll thank you, Junior, to never remind me of that old faux pas again.”

“Yes, sir.”

The son shook a large gout of “secret” sauce onto his quarter of fried chicken.

“Billy, why’d we have t’ have this damn’ buck for our waiter, anyways?”



I'd druther've had that big gal over there a-waiting on us. Ha. If she an' I was playin' poker, Junior, I'd have the advantage, 'cause I can see she's got a full blouse! An' her name's Tease-Ya. Nice name. Like that name. Nice roun' ass, too—real nice.”

“Pop, you're maybe speakin' a tad too loud—ag'in.”

Teesha handed a third glass of Merlot to the man in the maroon sweater and brought a third plate of cheese bread for him and the girl, who was drinking her second cola. They told her they were almost ready to order but needed a little more time.

“Uncle Billy, isn't this the place where we saw those waiter men lickin' the forks last summer?”

“Yes, Terry.”

“If you were so upset about it, why'd we come back here?”

“I'm pretty sure nobody does that kind of thing here any more, Terry. But we don't know about any of the other restaurants here in Lexington, do we?”

“Can I have the spaghetti an' lobster an' shrimp inside a loaf of bread again?”

“It's called linguini, dear. Yes—if that's what you'd like.”

“An' some pecan pah, too?”

“If you have room for it. But you have to eat all the shrimp and lobster pieces.”

“I can do that.”

“And will you remember to please fix your—fix those straps back before we leave the restaurant? Please?”

“Oh—I can do that in the car—before we pull into Mom's drive. Can I have a taste of your wine this time?”

“Can we make a deal? You can have a small taste, but you do what I asked you, please. I think we should both be able to compromise on stuff and get along. Okay, Terry? Please?”

“*Hey, Billy! Billy Boyd! Hey, you creepy, crazy mother!*”

Eleven heads whipped around to see who had spoken to them.

## part 12 (the April 2007 installment) of

# THE DRIVE

Kenneth DiMaggio

Ohh, just thank God you were able to fuck up when you did, kid, because the medicine cabinets in those raised ranch houses have more drugs in them than on the corners back in the 'hood. And what's worse, is that those legal middle class prescribed drugs, keep you working, and anything that keeps you together in order to do a pointless job to make somebody you will never see a filthy load of profit, is nothing less than evil in its more pure form.

So thank God there is a church. No, not because of religion, but for the structure itself: at least with the old churches—and this is only going to get more biased: the old Catholic churches I was suffered into as a kid. I hated every moment of Mass, but I loved letting my budding Gothic imagination secretly smoke out of me and metamorpho-swirl around the life size statues of mutilated saints; where I made sure I briefly caressed gory wounds or limbs with bumpy leprous like sores. From there I would spread out along the naves of the church—is that what they are called? Well, the sides is what I called them, and the sides are where the stained, velvet curtained confessionals were, but if my spirit did not go to confess any sins, it did sinfully brush the crimson velvet curtain, making the priest waiting inside to hear your confession, fearfully ask: “Who’s there? Who’s there?” From there, I would ooze over to the ornate carvings on top of the confessional: wood working that were like the small spire-y tops of the church itself: little towers that hid small creatures ready to suck-strangle you in through tongues as soon as you got close enough to peep: but such entrapment was useless when you were a spirit that gently rolled across the inky blue glass of the church’s stained glass windows: only because you were now a spirit, (which meant that you also come with this indigenous form of magic) your movement across those images animated them to life. And that is where the crucifixion was being bloodily reenacted; while in another panel, the Angel Gabriel used a sword to battle a dragon-faced devil with a monster face in its belly—oh, there were so many windows to re-animate! Too many for the duration of one Mass, and even if there was enough time, the giant oval shaped ceiling of the church inevitably pulled me up: for it was there that you could get close to the great drama of a son breaking away from his father, or a father unwillingly letting go of his son: yes, the church I went to, shamelessly reproduced Michaelangelo’s famous scene of God giving life to Adam on the ceiling. Unfortunately, the reproduction left unconscious traces of its painter. That is why God had a heart-shaped Polish face and arms thick enough to do your plumbing while Adam looked like some tragic aristocratic cavalry officer valiantly fighting for Polish freedom. Regardless of the Slavic, anti-Communist interpretation, the reproduction still made a faithful rendition of that mystic space between the fingers of God and Adam: the

space that my spirit would pause before and when it did, it was always small enough to fit in between those two hands: but somehow, never staying there; maybe it was because at that point, everyone in the church knew I was spacing out from the way my head craned backwards, looking up instead of straight ahead at the altar, and so I would look ahead of me, like I was supposed to, but what no one else knew, was that I escaped into the dozens of rose vase'd candles that led up to the altar; the candles that you paid a quarter to light in memory of someone's spirit: only now, my spirit was in all those tiny flames, and all those tiny flames were coming into a life away from this imprisoning Mass.

"Wow...it's beautiful!" The Young Artist said.

We were now at the church that was a replica of Notre Dame Cathedral.

Ah, but did Notre Dame have that stained glass window that—once the light hit it, its images of hundreds of drops of blood, blossomed into a beautiful rose? And if I was lucky, such light hit that window before the end of Mass I was forced to go to, and if it did, it was some mysterious benevolent spirit now absorbing me.

"Wow..."

She was now "awake." She had already pulled the headphones off, and had a hand on the door, ready to exit. The only problem, I wasn't. Once again, an intense reflection of the old, would have to be put away, incomplete.

But isn't that the way it always is?

"Sorry, if I—you know—when I get a new tape," she tried to explain.

"That's alright. I was listening to music too."

"Ha?"

"What I meant—I want to see Notre Dame too."

I had popped open the door.

"Well, it's not quite as big, but it sure looks like a good small model of it," she remarked.

A gray church with a flat topped spire on each side—hey, what did I know. I grew up around porch fronted three family clapboard shingled houses. Sure, I had an Intro to Art class in college, and I think I got an A minus in it. Just don't ask me to do anything more than look at a work of art. The less I say anything about it, the less damage I will do to it. But show me an Anselm Kiefer mural of industrial waste—that's a different story. I don't know how the critics would describe it, but for me, it's a familiar landscape, one that I can strongly feel a history for. At the same time, I am confused about what to make of the waste at present. Would I like to go to Paris and see the real Notre Dame? she asked as we walked up the steep steps, for which she noted, were not there for the real Notre Dame.

Sure, why not, I replied. I always wanted to see where Hemingway drank and wrote.

"Paris is more than about an American author," she said in a slightly haughty tone.

I smiled.

"Paris is only Paris because of its writers, artists, and poets," I said.

"Hmmm," is all she said, and then shook her head in agreement. I wanted to high five myself, because this kid was tough; for once, I was able to have

the intellectual last word.

“But there was also an openness to Parisian culture that let so many writers, artists, and poets live there.”

I was wrong. She was always going to have the last word. What a brat. And making it so much worse, is that she’s a cute brat too.

“Yeah, Paris,” I said, like someone who just lost their taste for a food they were about to try, and now, probably never would.

Where though, was that city’s beauty and light inside of this replica? The inside of this church was like an old brownish bingo hall or auditorium that smelled like an old gym locker room. There was still a sense of this interior being a church, there were pews, statues, confessionals, all the things I had previously remembered from a church in my youth. But now it was strangely bleach-boned; bleached as the bones that have long ago dried out of their color; the fading that streaked these pews, statues, and even drapery. Color dissipated to a combination brown and gray. The church was like some of the old woman around here; who only wore one shapeless smock like garment. They had long stopped attending to themselves. There was no one to fix yourself up for, and there was no place to go to if you did. There was only the inevitable to expect—when it came, it came, no need to bother waiting for it. No need to fear it—that’s how exhausted you had become.

That is how exhausted the inside of this church was.

But where was our cultivation of the decay and the deteriorating? Not here in this church; or perhaps our artistic sensibility was not charmed to such exhaustion.

Or perhaps there was no way to make color out of such ash: to make poetry out of such a flatlined consciousness.

It seemed as if the interior of this church had too much of its spirit burned out to re-ignite one small prayer. The pews, the statues, the altar—even the Michaelangelo reproduction—especially that painting, for it was the most faded away object in this church, the space that might have significance, suggesting the spirit of creation between creation two hands, was now a space that signified permanent negation from the way the hand of God’s as well as Adam’s had been erased through years of neglect and damage. Adam now had only an elbow, and God, the stub of an upper arm, while the space between them was so badly cracked that no image could ever be painted on it again. So there was artistic mortality, and we were looking right up at it. There was always supposed to be a canvas to paint on, a palette of color to paint from. The same with words. There would always be a story to narrate, a language from which to create the narration. Now, the artist will die, but what about nature? Would it be there for the next generation of artists to capture or disrupt? Wasn’t Nature always supposed to be there for the next generation of artists?

“How could the inside—get so old?” The Young Artist asked.

“The worst part, it’s just so *stale*,” I said. “I feel like I’m breathing dead air. But I went to this church,” I said, “when God and Adam still had their hands.”

“It’s just too *dead* in here! I gotta go outside.”

“But there was a window, a window—” I said, feeling as if I was running a

losing race with a clock that was already hours ahead of me. But which window was it? Because all the windows had been sedimented with the same dry dust. Sure, I could detect pieces of imagery—the head of an animal here, a pair of angel-like wings in the next frame? But where was the window filled with blood? The window that when the light hit it—blossomed like a rose?

“What? Stop—that’s sweet—but I’m ticklish!” I said, for The Young Artist had just sweetly caressed the back of my neck and then my back with her hand. No sooner had I gently told her to stop, than she did it again, that sweet little brat.

“Hey, what did I—“

But by the time I turned round—and it had been just in time too, for the peak of this afternoon was already beginning its descent, and through a quickly dying blossoming of a rose that would soon be dull, clay colored glass. Yes, what had been a fragile piece of glass, was starting to catch a fire that could easily destroy its delicate surface.

“Hey...!” I started to call for—someone whose name I did not know. And someone who had already left, one heavy church door was slowly sighing to a close. But a quick look back—even if the blood failed to be petals and ended up as only dull copper pennies, it was still an image defying death. But when I turned back around to call her—

—who was probably in the car—and getting impatient—what would I say? There’s a painting you should see? I could not even say that, because when I turned back around, that painting was gone. What I thought might be it, was no different from any of the other images worn out like old coins.

“What the hell, were you praying or something?” The Young Artist said when I got back inside of the car.

“Yeah,” I mumbled, “a prayer for the dead.”

I started the car.

“I’m with you there,” The Young Artist said. She put on a pair of sunglasses and pushed her hair back.

“If anything needs praying for, it’s the dead,” I said.

“If anyone doesn’t need praying for, it’s God.”

“Why not God?” I asked.

“Because he never feels pain, he never feels lonely, and he’s never going to die,” she simply said.

“Well, pretty much,” I said, “but I bet you he feels lonely.”

“And kind of fucked up when you think about it,” she said. “That even someone like God should be all alone.”

I shrugged.

“What can you do?” I said. “It’s an epidemic. No one’s immune anymore.”

“I just wish I knew what we are all sick from.”

“Hell if I know.”

She laughed, but there was a bit of uneasiness in her laughter. Suddenly something that she was always sure about, was no longer there.

“That’s strange to hear, coming from you,” she said.

I made a feeble attempt at a smile and then shrugged.

She looked at me for a moment, and pulled her glasses down the bridge of her nose.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Yeah, I am,” I said. I then added in what I hoped was a more reassuring tone:

“I really am.”

“Do you want to stop—maybe—smoke a joint?” she asked. She sounded a bit guilty and ashamed over what she had just asked.

Now it was my time to laugh.

“Do you want to stop and smoke a joint?” I asked.

“No,” she said, and with some anger.

“We’re almost there anyways,” I said.

“Where?” she asked, and then added: “I don’t know—what time is it? It’s getting late—maybe I should be getting back.”

“If you like,” I said.

We were both surprised. I was not even quite sure why I had suddenly just “given up” so easily. Come on, I told myself a few seconds later. Things come to an end; if that is what was bothering me. Well, it was. But it was not what I now wanted or needed.

“I want to show you more ghosts!” I tried to say with enthusiasm.

She tried to pass off what I just said with a laugh.

“You and these ghosts...” she said. “I don’t know.”

“Oh—but this is different,” I began to explain to her, and at the same time, myself: for I had begun to see this freight train graveyard for something more than just a cool, safe place to party at when I was younger.

“These are the ghosts—of an entire empire!”

“What? Are you crazy?”

If there was a slight trace of genuine fear in her voice, it might have been due to the sudden turn off I made. We had left behind streets of fading shingles and neon convenience store bunkers for a winding gravel filled road lined with hickory bushes and tall, knife blade-like swamp grass. We had left old working class urban for neo swamp land Appalachia ville rural. Soon, there were some reassuring touches of discarded life along the way: an overturned shopping cart, the ripped off fender of a car, a plastic doll in a noose hung from what seemed like a half dead apple tree.

“Look over there,” I said, pointing to the doll.

“Neat,” she said, “and all the way out here. That’s what I want my art project to be like: a symbol of hopelessness in so much waste.”

A statement which made The Young Artist feel refreshed. Most canvases, like their artists, were going to die: while they were being created, however, you could transcend yourself—you could transcend Time!

“But what about these ghosts...” she said.

This time, she was reassured: even eager.

“What about them, but that we should be a little cautious,” I said. I tried to pass off my comments as cautionary, mysterious.

“Some bad characters, ha?” she said with a smirk.

“Outlaws, desperadoes, fugitives,” I emphatically said.

She giggled.

“And even the law abiding ones have a little rawness to ‘em. The conductors, the brakemen, the engineers, the passengers, ah well, half of ‘em hiding bootleg liquor in their valises when they rode this train during the Prohibition.”

“Valises, ha? Must have been during Prohibition, because I don’t think people travel with *valises* anymore.”

“Oh, them were the bad old days when every varmint, rustler, gambler, and Pinkerton detective after them rode on the same train.”

“Should I be singing ‘Raindrops Keep Falling on my head’ from that movie—what’s its name—where they rob trains?”

I started to slow the car down to only a mile or two an hour. The road was getting more pitted, and we were almost at the abandoned train yard. I shook my head, still pretending to take it all seriously.

“You think it’s funny,” I said, “but these ghosts were part of the real McCoys.”

“And weren’t they part of a famous fued?”

I continued to shake my head.

“These ghosts were part of a time when outlaws or their kind could not be tamed.”

“We don’t have crime today, ha?”

“Crime,” I said, “but not legends.”

And we had now arrived at the legend: a shallow gully with about ten copper colored box cars, a couple of yellow cabooses, (sorry, no red ones) and two rust colored Pullman passenger cars—cars that still showed elegance; for when journey by train was still an elegant way to travel. That is why these two cars—separated from the others—had hand crafted wood frame windows, and a tapered, fluted, pearl colored roof.

The rest of the cars were crookedly lined together. In two jagged rows the line went for almost a half mile. About a mile from where we now parked, were the skeletal remains of a factory. It had two, large, arch like windows. Nearby was a large crane. It was a story or two higher than the factory. The vertical portion of the crane was slightly tilted. This steel bar was also missing pieces, so that it looked like a comb with snapped off teeth. The horizontal beam that was used for lifting, now sloped down to the ground like the neck of a brontosaurus nibbling on some prehistoric grass.

The factory closed a long time ago. While I was young, I remember this factory briefly being open. That meant that these old box cars and cabooses have been rusting here for over twenty years: though these cars were much older.

This factory used to dismantle them then sell the cut away steel for scrap. Almost none of the trains were from this area. How could they be? The Northeast was not what you would call train country. The Northeast was the land of assembly line and scrap yards. We made the junk that the trains took out West, and once the trains had taken away enough of our junk, we took the trains and broke them down and by the time we got to the last train—guess what? This part of the country was out of business itself. Well, could you imagine!

Imagination, however, is what this place had little of.

Imagination was also what this factory seemed to destroy. It was not just old individual cars that the crane hammered apart: it was an entire train line itself. Just like most of the cars rusting away here, most of them had the insignia of a mountain goat perched on a cliff, and beneath it the name of the train's line: "The Great Pacific Northern." But because the factory that destroyed the imagination was out of business, this extinct line would be safe. The boxcars would be spared from becoming refrigerators made in China or washing machines made in India.



This dead line would have a more dignified and poetic end through the slow isolated decay that poets, young artists, runaways, and maybe fugitives could appreciate. The lines that rolled in here before this one though, forget it. Do we even know their names? They still might be written down in the factory's records or account books—but those books are probably wasted away—half torn up, waterlogged: with ripped pages scattered across the floor of an office trashed out with empty beer cans, overturned furniture, a mutilated cornucopia of a pulled down venetian blind, and about a zillion cigarette butts. That is why I hated coming to this yard the same time I liked exploring it. I liked having these big refrigerator and box cars to explore, but I hated the way I was also walking on ground that swallowed up their souls. This yard did not just break apart old steel; this processing plant also took apart history and even a part of this country. With every Western train line that disappeared, also disappeared a piece of the American West. East of the Mississippi, the train carted away our baubles. West of the great river, the train was a hiding place for fugitives, hoboes, and all sorts of other outside of the law folks that my imagination fed on pulp TV could dream up. These trains went over mountains, under mountains, and through mountains, only to be crushed by a place that had no mountains. Oh, we had our hills, and on one particular peak, we had a place called Holy Land, but neither did that part of the landscape escape its fate. If it was not directly pulverized, then it was being pulverized in small pieces along with being chipped away through neglect. So here we were in a place that scrapped a more romantic era of history. But did it completely kill off the spirit of the individual who still longed for that romance?

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in issues of cc&d!**





# children churches & daddies

the **UN**religious,  
**NON**family-oriented  
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