

# children churches & daddies

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



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## Scars art

4. Cover art of the Church of Spilled Blood in St. Petersburg, Russia.	
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photography by Curtis Glardon



## News you can use

### Papal Visit Commercialized from Awake!, August 2007

When the pope visited Germany in 2006, manufacturers, merchants, and the tourism industry geared up well in advance to profit from his visit. The church too selected a business partner for exclusive marketing of paraphernalia. Souvenirs made available included rosaries, candles, bottles of holy water, coffee cups, caps, T-shirts, key rings, and Vatican flags. The newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* commented: "The Catholic Church has its own fingers in the money-making pie, as if Jesus Christ...had never banished the merchants from the temple."

## In Huckabee's Words...

I Just listened to comments from Huckabee 01/15/08 during *Hardball with Chris Matthews*. A reporter said that on the day of the Michigan Primary, Huckabee was already in South Carolina, and he was reported as saying that (A) he is interested as President in amending the Constitution so that it could more specifically outline what God wanted, and (B) the U.S. should not allow immigration (legally) from any 3rd world countries who support terrorists, including the countries the 9/11 hijacker came from. This is no lie. And this preacher is a serious contender for the President of the United States? - JK

## Wanting To Stop Global Warming? well, think again... because *life* causes global warming

So I've been writing about trying to do something about global warming (though at the same time saving energy for the long-term also means saving money in the short-term), but I remember vaguely that (A) Al Gore even said in the beginning of his movie *An Inconvenient Truth* that humans probably only account for less than 5% of any emissions that could contribute to global warming, and I also remember from researching (and reporting in the cc&d October 2007 editorial called "A Different Light on the Global Warming Debate") that a lot of our efforts to try to be "green" make sense in the short-term (a hybrid car that uses electricity, or efficiency light bulbs versus fluorescent light bulbs) actually harm the environment (like the mining of Nickel for the electric car batteries completely destroying the land for the chance of any future life on it, or the man-made methyl mercury used for efficiency light bulbs — which is a lot more dangerous than other forms of mercury — that is just usually thrown away, or ignored when put into the recycle bin for glass).

So after all my research, I had come to the conclusion that working so hard so fast to try to be energy efficient to combat global warming didn't seem like the smartest idea, because in our haste to "help" the environment, our actions might actually be doing more damage to the environment. But, in my effort to try to lose weight, I've been walking over 5 miles every day, and I bought a bicycle so we could go for bike rides instead of taking the car places... But then my husband had to pass this Times article on to me, with the headline: *Walking to the shops 'damages planet more than going by car'*. So, I guess I have to start researching again, because apparently my doing anything to be healthier for myself is probably worse for the environment than if I just sat around all day until I had to drive to the store.

But, apparently a leading environmentalist has calculated that walking does more to cause global warming than driving, because "food production is now so energy-intensive that more carbon is emitted providing a person with enough calories to walk to the shops than a car would emit over the same distance." So, I suppose if my diet changed to reflect my increased walking, that would make a difference (and it seems that when you exercise more, even if that means just walking more, your desire for food increases, trust me). A lot of that may be "created by intensive beef production", which may not apply so much to a vegetarian, but if nothing else, the trans-

porting of food any distance means the energy used to bring the food to you in the first place is even higher than you'd expect. And if that's the case, Chris Goodall (author of *How to Live a Low-Carbon Life*) flat out said that "The troubling fact is that taking a lot of exercise and then eating a bit more food is not good for the global atmosphere."

And this survey talks a lot about the amount of energy used in the production of beef, for cows (I love being a vegetarian at times like this), and they noted that methane from cows "released during the digestive process, is 21 times more harmful than CO<sub>2</sub>. Organic beef is the most damaging because organic cattle emit more methane." In fact, "Organic dairy cows are worse for the climate. They produce less milk so their methane emissions per litre are higher."

And speaking of organic, I also read a stat that said the getting imported foods versus local foods is also a lot more damaging to the environment because of the distance these foods are transported. This British article even stated that "Someone who installs a "green" light bulb undoes a year's worth of energy-saving by buying two bags of imported veg, as so much carbon is wasted flying the food to Britain."

But the thing is, it's not just the transporting of food that uses a lot of energy — the processing of food also has a huge effect. Consider the amount of fresh food the average person buys, versus the amount of processed food (which took a lot of energy to get into that form for the supermarket). And if you think you're not like that (as a vegetarian, over 3/4s of what I purchase is fresh fruits and vegetables), then think of what is contained on your grocery store - the fresh produce section (and I'm not even talking about meat, because that's been refined, chopped, processed and packaged for the store) is probably less than one tenth of the size of the entire store. With everything from sodas and bottled water to potato chips to canned and frozen foods to prepackaged ready-made meals (even a frozen pizza), a lot of work was put into the creation of these foods, so they can sit — along with their packaging that will be thrown away — in a store, waiting to be purchased and eaten. With industrialized food production, we've got many more mechanical hands using a lot of energy to prepare our food for us just the way we like it. And if that's not bad enough, remember that a third of all of the food in a grocery store needs to be refrigerated — and yeah, that's more energy that has to be paid for before it gets to your home.

...

So when it comes to driving to the store versus walking, maybe we should just shop online and not travel to shop (not a bad idea, I don't even have to get off my butt to order something I want). But no, don't worry, another article from Times can prove that idea wrong, with the headline "Boom in internet shopping may be adding to carbon dioxide emissions". Shopping at home means I stay seated on my butt, but "the boom in home

deliveries has resulted in a rise in overall emissions from vehicles.” So even though emissions from our own cars have dropped since 1997 with more efficient cars, that savings has been outweighed by the emissions from vans and trucks and other large vehicles to get our Internet products to us.

Well yeah, if it’s not me moving my product to me, *someone* has to do it, even if it is in a large shipping truck instead of my small car.

And I don’t know if there’s proof that this claim is accurate or not, but “online retailers claim that it is more efficient for one van to deliver to several addresses than for each household to travel by car to the shops.” And a lot of the time that product you’re ordering starts from the other side of the country, and can even take an airplane ride before it comes in a large truck to your house.

\*\*\*

I read one more statistic that made me sick, and that is that “trees, regarded as shields against global warming because they absorb carbon, were found by German scientists to be major producers of methane, a much more harmful greenhouse gas.” When I heard that one, I had to research that more for myself, and found that Sid Perkins in Science News (in the article “Greenhouse Plants? Vegetation may produce methane”) discovered that “Lab tests suggest that a wide variety of plants may produce methane in significant quantities.” This means plants from grasses to trees, which threw many scientists for a loop. So do plants absorb carbon dioxide, but release methane (which is worse for the environment)?

Want harder evidence? Perkins pointed out that “from their data, the researchers estimate that the world’s plants generate more than 150 million metric tons of methane each year, or about 20 percent of what typically enters the atmosphere” (This date was shown in *Nature*). And Science Buzz (from the University of Minnesota) even concluded that “scientists at the Max Plank Institute in Germany have discovered that living trees are a major source of methane in the Earth’s atmosphere.”

So I thought I was doing something good for the environment by growing more plants in my house. But it seems that in many respects, *any* amount of living we choose to do will have an effect on the environment.

*Janet Kuypers*®



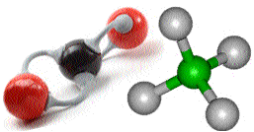
Janet Kuypers  
Editor in Chief

### Notable Quotes

Have you considered why basic food prices have gone up in the past few years? Well, the growth of corn for ethanol has cut back on our total corn supply. And check out *this* quote from ***The Economist*** (12/08/07): “Fill up an SUV’s fuel tank with ethanol and you have used enough maize to feed a person for a year.”

If humans are doing so much damage to the environment, I thought I'd get you a few carbon credit certificates. Because hey, if Al Gore can make money selling carbon credits, this page is the *least* I can do for you...

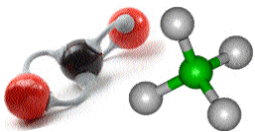
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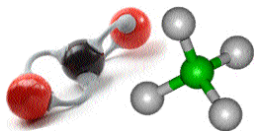
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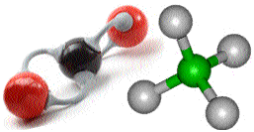
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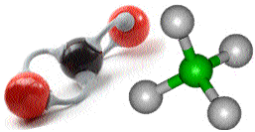
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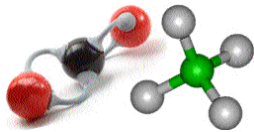
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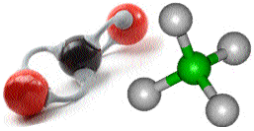
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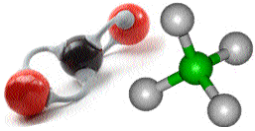
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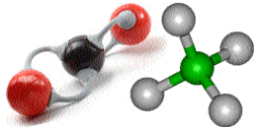
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poetry  
the passionate stuff

## Moon-Images

Andrew H. Oerke

The moon is a fishing hole in the lake  
of iced-over space,  
and we are fishes looking up.  
Fisher-kings of light  
sprinkle fish food through the hole  
and that's what we call sight.

It might be a floating round Rosetta stone  
undeciphered so long  
it radioactivated and glows.

It's a flying saucer in slowmotion  
from an ultra-cool culture  
where leisure time is de rigeur.

It's a neon hammock in the sky;  
it's an amputated, glowing clock;  
it's a big city in a country sky  
seen at night from an airplane.  
It may be other things besides.  
It's bound to be more than just  
a neon speed-bump floating in space  
trying to slow down the streak of the sun.

---

***Xlapac, the corner shot***  
artwork by Brian & Lauren Hosey

## Silent Moonlight

Michael Lee Johnson

Love lost  
in silent moonlight  
tortures heart  
with rising sun.  
Silence snores.  
Sunlight scatters  
shadows in  
spotty rain.



# The Boys and the Bees

Christopher Thomas

I hadn't quite reached puberty  
when my father told me about  
the birds and the bees, but by

that time the boy next door had  
already practiced his French  
kissing on me and paid me in

nickels to rub him off with Crisco  
in my hand. I would have done  
it for free but never told him that.

By the time I was in the seventh  
grade, the boy next door and I had  
been lovers for two years. He was

too old for me to do sleepovers  
with so we always met in the barn.  
I was twelve or thirteen when Dad

gave me the talk. He said girls  
could get pregnant even if boys  
just kissed them and advised that

I learn to keep it in my pants. I  
told him it didn't sound like much  
fun anyway and later that day when

the neighbor boy was blowing in my  
ear, I asked him if he ever wanted  
to French kiss any of the girls on our

block. He said that as long as he had  
me his teaching days were over, then  
French kissed me someplace new.

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## Manifest Destiny

Hank Sosnowski

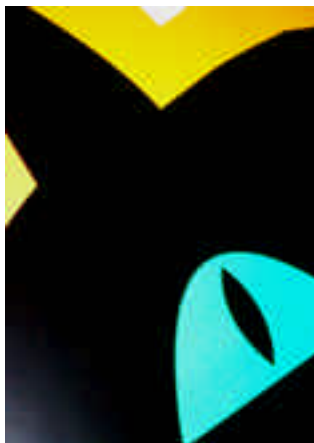
Like Nosferatu rising,  
like Lazarus from his crypt  
I left the street for  
all that is righteous and good  
calling it by name  
basking in its white light  
for so long.

Then came you

Now I dream of the shadows again

Come to me.  
come with me.  
Come on me.  
Come be my  
dirty little secret.

---



Cat's  
Eye,  
art by  
Cheryl  
Townsend



# During My Dreams I Keep Attempting

Daniel Walton

During my dreams I keep attempting  
To undress your intentions by peeling off Freudian slips  
And I keep running, like a Jesus lizard,  
Over the lake of fire that's formed in your eyes  
Because the ice of your heart is more painful to my feet.

Waking moments aren't much better.  
Waking consumes me, a wake for your love,  
Lying cold dead in a pen-dug grave.  
I raise the mourning songs on my CD player every night  
The march for the parade of tears, the prelude to my dreams.

During my dreams I keep attempting...

---

## Kind of woman

Toy Davis

When I was younger I was told I'd be the kind of woman  
men married

But that was a lie

I'm the kind of woman married men come to for fun

I'm the kind of woman who gets visited late at night

I'm the kind of woman who does what she has to just to get by

I'm not a kind woman

# POEM FROM THE VANDALIZED BLACKBOARD AGE OF WEST- ERN CIVILIZATION (SHEL)

Kenneth DiMaggio

Shel spelled her diminutive  
with only one "I"  
and refused to be caged  
as just "she"

And once she baseball-capped  
her mowhawk  
and muscled in-  
to her brother's varsity  
jacket

--she passed as a pint-size longshoreman

And one night Shel  
privileged her Art School  
friends to see how well  
she could infiltrate  
the midnight peripatetic  
at the isolated city park  
eagle topped-monument  
where men anonymously  
lusted after men

--where she succeeded  
in pardoning a light  
from a guy who could have  
earlier been smoking  
on a women-whistling  
construction crew

--an "Alpha" who gently cupped  
one hand around hers  
while she tobacco-sucked on his flame

But then pulled away  
before he could discover--

"Oh I don't mean to be  
a tease But I can't help  
but be both girl and boy"

--she explained after she  
rejoined her fellow outcasts  
in Art

--pariahs who may have only  
known --one body

But who were now also drawn  
to this dangerous inexplicable  
but strangely beautiful

other-body

# lost notes measured twice

Stanley M Noah

could you  
say

you have spent  
a life

time trying  
to remember

what you  
shouldn't

have said  
like

scarred tissue  
the

eyes can't  
see, running

down your  
spine,

and running  
away



image donated by  
C RA McGuirt

---

## Thieves

### Je'free

You stood like a tower of bones,  
as they cunningly plucked a tendon  
to rejoice your collapse into shambles  
Time of strength & glory,  
all snatched from a life too short

You swayed like a silk paper in the wind,  
as they craftily struck their blades  
to exult in your tearing into wedges  
Smiles most deserved in life,  
all pocketed by the antagonists

Your beauty  
to be defended, to be withstanding,  
is the best of vengeance  
from the thieves who tried  
to rule your emotions

Your wisdom  
to be guarded, to be nourished,  
is the sweetest revenge  
from the thieves who tried  
to seize your spirit

***Not Everything is  
Black and White,***  
art by Aaron Wilder



## City of Pain

James L. Daniels

She came to me in a dream  
Sitting Indian-style, legs folded  
with here fist clinched in two balls

I ignored her at first thinking she were not there  
Until she tapped me on the shoulder and began to wave  
She relaxed the five fingers of her right hand  
and I could see what seemed to be a small city in the daytime,  
Sun shining

She then relaxed the five fingers of her left hand  
and I then noticed the same city broken in two,  
and the water began to ease from her fingertips

I continued to observe and wait for her next move  
when my bedroom door opened and a gentleman walked in and stated,  
*"Where should I leave these bags?"*

He then pointed to a place within the broken city,  
and I could see a young man sitting on top of a house surrounded by  
water,

*"Just wanted to introduce myself,"* He said,  
and then he began to walk towards the door to exit.

*"Where are you going young man?"* I asked.

*"To find my family,"* he replied.

*"Where are they?"* I asked.

*"They're lost within the city of pain,"* he stated.

# prose

the meat and potatoes stuff

## JUNKIE

Mel Waldman

In the end, he was a junkie. Always a junkie. He felt safe in his self-destruction. But how much destruction and pain in others did he cause? How many suffered because of him?

Addicted to power, fame, and glory, and other more concrete things, like the other power-freaks before him, he was a mystery to most. His persona fooled the masses.

Was he a dreamer with great visions or a pragmatist? Was he Don Quixote or Machiavelli? Was he one man-or many men-or just a few power elite?

Each man who took the oath was fueled with a sense of destiny and purpose-each man with the potential to move mountains and change the course of history. And so, each man was sworn in as President of the U.S.A.

Each time, it was a glorious ceremony. And he promised the American people great things.

But this was the beginning... And of course, buried in the labyrinth of his psyche was a character flaw.

Perhaps, he was clean...at the sacred moment of inauguration. Maybe he was a potential junkie unaware of his weakness... Or a closet junkie secretly hiding his addiction.

In any case, even if he were one of the great idealistic men who took the Office, ready to fight the many faces of temptation, his character flaw made him vulnerable. Inevitably, he would become a power junkie like others before him.

To this day, it is unknown how many-if any-have resisted such overwhelming temptation. We suspect that in the end, more than one man became a junkie.

But who? What secrets have never been revealed? What evil deeds have been committed while holding this sacred office?

I am a patriot and a dreamer. I pray that the American presidents were

and will always be good men and that this disturbing hypothesis, that at least one was a junkie, is erroneous. Yet if it's true... How honorable are junkies? Even the majestic ones here in the U.S.A. and world leaders around the globe? Beneath their masks, who are they? And who are we for blindly following them on the road to destruction? G-d help us, who are we?

#### POSTSCRIPT I

A sharp woman once said: "They say appearance does not matter. It's a lie! Appearance is everything! And for sure, to succeed, one must have pearly-white teeth!"

#### POSTSCRIPT II

I often say: "We're attracted to charismatic people. But if we don't look past the surface, we're going to end up in a lot of trouble-adrift in deep waters. And personally, I can't swim!"

#### POSTSCRIPT III

I've been known to say: "Don't listen to what a man says. Study his behavior! Scrutinize the SOB! If he makes a promise, does he keep it? And if he says-'Trust me!'-you know for sure you'd be a damn fool to trust him."

#### POSTSCRIPT IV

In the end, he was a junkie. Always a junkie. But was he one man-or many men-or just a few power elite? Did he exist in the past or will he first exist in the future-becoming...in a dark metamorphosis...our beloved leader...hiding his dark side from us with a charming smile or lofty words as sweet as chocolate melting in our lost souls?

Yet if he was-is-or will inevitably be-a junkie, and we are his blind followers who worship him, what are we-but his *victim-junkies* rushing slowly to the cliff...?

#### POSTSCRIPT V

What are we if we choose blind faith over reason?

#### POSTSCRIPT VI

What are we if reason is unenlightened by faith?

#### POSTSCRIPT VII

What are we if we choose the Group Mind over individuality?

#### POSTSCRIPT VIII

What are we if we are *suicide bombers* obliterating the holy landscape of our souls?



## POSTSCRIPT IX

Who am I if I toss a grenade across the Waste Land of My Soul, blowing up my universe, destroying any possibility of redemption?

## POSTSCRIPT X

Who am I? Creator of my universe! Who am I? A man who contemplates the Mystery of the Junkie, the Secret of the U.S. Presidents, and the Eternal Puzzle: *WHO AM I?*

## POSTSCRIPT XI

*WHO AM I?*

## POSTSCRIPT XII

*A JUNKIE!*

## POSTSCRIPT XIII

*WHO AM I? A JUNKIE BLINDLY FOLLOWING THE POWER-JUNKIE WHOSE CHARISMA AND GLIB TONGUE TRANSFORM ME INTO A VICTIM-JUNKIE RUSHING SLOWLY TO THE CLIFF...*

## POSTSCRIPT XIV

*WHO AM I?*

## POSTSCRIPT XV

*A JUNKIE!*

## POSTSCRIPT XVI

*A LOST SOUL!*

## POSTSCRIPT XVII

*A PRISONER IN THE ADDICTIVE LABYRINTH OF SELF-DESTRUCTION!*

## POSTSCRIPT XVIII

*A JUNKIE WHO CHOOSES TO LET GO OF HIS ADDICTION, TRAVEL THROUGH THE WASTE LAND OF A VANISHING SOUL, AND DIE IN ORDER TO BE REBORN!*

*WHO AM I? WHO AM I? WHO AM I?*

I am on a journey through the Waste Land of My Soul. I choose to let go of my addiction to suffering! I choose *free will!* I choose to struggle on this endless night... I penetrate the Darkness... And perhaps...there is salvation on the other side of Reality! On the other side of Darkness!

# The Wet Mouse and the Dry Mouse

Pat Dixon

Some of us joke about pushing up daisies, others about starting a worm farm or becoming fish food. But our plans often pan out differently from what we expect, as Bobby Burns's Scottish laddie notes o' mice and men when his plow shatters another's home and scatters that other's possessions.

At 7:30 a.m. on the first Wednesday in May, Karl Gutmann's twelve-year-old black Burmese cat, Cossette, brings a small brown field mouse to his front doormat and drops it.

So far as Karl knows from firsthand observation, this is her first kill of the year. In the past four years Cossette seems to have slowed down greatly and has not even attempted to catch birds—which once were her specialty. Indeed, she now ignores them as they hop around the front walk near her, eating birdseed that some of them spill down from the feeders hanging in front of his livingroom windows.

Karl lets Cossette come in for her breakfast and then goes out for the morning newspaper in his driveway. When he returns, he bends over and slides a small trowel under the mouse and tosses it lightly at the base of the front hedge.

For about five minutes Cossette eats, and Karl sips his first cup of coffee and pages through the news. Then, in her grating nasal Burmese voice that must be obeyed, Cossette says, "R-a-n-n-n-n," indicating that she is done with her food—for now—and must return to the wilds of their northwest coast Long Island village.

Half an hour later, when Karl leaves the house to drive to work, he finds that Cossette has placed a second mouse on his doormat, the first one being fully visible beneath the front hedge at the edge of the walk. Without bending to get his trowel, Karl clumsily pushes the second mouse's body off the mat with the side of his sandal, in the direction of the faucet that the hose is connected to.

And so the mouse matter rests until midway through Saturday morning when Karl is moved to do yard work.

With his trowel in one hand and his spade in the other, he recalls the first mouse which Cossette had brought home and which he had tossed under the hedge. It still lies near the edge of the walk and appears to be totally dried out. Its eyes are gone or sunken down beyond his line of

sight, and two files of very tiny brown ants are near it, one approaching empty “handed,” the other leaving, apparently conveying small portions of mouse jerky for their commune.

Karl inspects the mouse a little closer. Its tiny yellowed teeth are visible, as are, beneath its fur, the contours of its little skull and even its little ribcage. Karl rubs the side of his unshaven jaw and recalls the mummified face of Ramses the Second, seen scores of times in scores of books that all reprint the same grisly photograph.

He decides not to disturb this natural process and spends the next half hour doing some planting. Then, as a matter of course, it is time to *water* his new evergreen bushes and irises. And, of course, Karl has a *second* close encounter with basic matters.

The second mouse lies exactly where he had pushed it with his foot three days before. Unlike its fellow, four feet to the northeast, this mouse appears to be very active—almost lively—with its abdomen violently twitching and heaving around, although its head and legs, Karl notices, are comparatively still. Bending closer, he notices further that this mouse is quite damp.

Even though the outdoor faucet had been turned off, it has been dripping slightly where the hose is fastened, and the walk and dozens of tiny piles of crushed brown locust leaves and spruce needles near it are also damp in an irregular eighteen-inch-wide semicircle.

Could this mouse have survived, paralyzed perhaps by Cossette’s bite to its neck? Should it be put out of its misery with his spade—as he has done to various rabbits, snakes, mice, rats, and birds she had caught and crippled in the past decade?

Again he bends closer to inspect the situation.

With his trowel, he gently pokes the mouse.

Its belly opens up—and dozens, scores, hundreds of tiny maggots spill out and writhe around on the damp walk.

Yes, there *is* life inside this mouse. Just not what he has expected, despite eighty-two years of experience—or one year of experience, eighty-two times. And—in hindsight—it makes sense. Turn, turn.

Straightening up, Karl feels a momentary heaviness inside his forehead—then, smiling, he echoes the narrator at the close of Ring Lardner’s short story *Haircut*: “Koan it out—wet or dry?”

# Sunday Nights with Rosa

Bruce Adkins

I didn't expect a marching band to greet me when I came back from Iraq with my National Guard unit. But still, I thought it would be a time of joy and celebration after spending a long year away from home.

Instead, I had been home only a few hours when I found out Sarah Anderson, my finance had ran off with a rich oil man, that Bingo, my faithful dog had died and that our ready mix concrete business owned and operated by my mother and uncle, was having financial problems.

I may as well have stayed in Iraq, I thought, despite all the sympathy I received from my mother, uncle, friends and well wishers. But after my pity party ran its course, I went to work for my folks driving a ready mix concrete truck. It was hard work, but it kept my mind occupied and helped me get used to civilian life again.

Anyway, what happened a few weeks later made my time with Sarah and even my time in Iraq seem like a distant memory. I was going into an Oklahoma City mall one warm summer evening when a full figured young girl dressed in a white Mini Skirt Suit, white hose and white high heel shoes stopped me.

"Pardon me, sir. Do you know much about cars?" she asked, as I opened the big glass door to enter the mall. Now I'm only 23 and calling me sir got my attention.

Cars, I thought. I turned to face her. My brain froze. I was struck dumb by her blond hair, light gray eyes, pale pink lips and a figure that made my soldier mentality want to stand up and salute.

"Oh no, not too much," I said, fumbling for words. She pointed to her car, an old beat up Toyota that was parked nearby in a handicap parking space. As I looked under the hood of her car I wondered how she could be handicapped. It certainly had to be mental for there was nothing wrong with her body, I thought.

"You wait here and I'll go get you some gas," I told her a short time later, but she insisted on riding along with me in my four year old Cadillac that I inherited after my dad died.

"You sure have a nice car," she said, as I drove out of the mall parking lot.

"Well, I hope you don't get your dress dirty," I said, while observing her pretty long legs. She straightened her dress and smiled at me. I was so lost in her smile that I almost ran a red light.

"My name is Rosa Jennings," she said, resting her hand and long red fin-

gernails on the arm rest of my seat. "Do you live around here?"

"No, I live in Lawton, about 85 miles down the turnpike," I said. "My name is Lloyd "Lucky" Whitman. My high school and college buddies got to calling me Lucky because I was always lucky playing card games."

"Oh, that's cute," she said. "What business are you in?"

"Construction."

"Oh, a building contractor," she said.

"Well, not exactly."

"Are you married?"

"No, I just got back from Iraq," I said.

"Wow! A war hero and a building contractor! What a combo. I'm pleased to meet you," she said as we pulled into the gas station.

She thanked me and shook my hand when I got her car started a few minutes later. "Hope I see you again," she said smiling and waving at me as she drove away.

I went on in the mall, but forgot what I went in there for. Where did this Britney Spears look alike come from I asked myself. Man, if this is what our country is fighting for I'm all for it, I thought, as I turned on to the familiar turnpike and headed home.

The next day as I drove my noisy concrete truck, almost ignoring the repetition of my work I couldn't erase the image of Rosa from my mind. During my lunch break I called nine different Jennings listed in the telephone directory before I located Rosa.

"I was hoping you would call," she said, after I identified myself. "I took my cell phone and walked outside our busy office."

"I thought maybe we could have dinner tonight and continue our conversation we started yesterday," I said.

"Oh, I can't tonight. I go to night school. Didn't I tell you?"

Well, maybe I thought.

"I'm free Sunday night if you'd like to continue our conversation," she said, laughing.

Sunday nights I usually reserved for going to church, but I was sure the Lord would understand and excuse my absence this time. So the following Sunday night I washed and polished my Cadillac, put on my best suit and drove to Oklahoma City and to the Cozy Nest apartment complex where Rosa told me she lived.

Rosa, dressed in slacks and a sleeveless blouse, seemed glad to see me. After she got through bragging on my car again she suggested we go to a secluded place which I found out later was the most expensive and high class restaurant in town.

During the course of dinner I tried to talk about her, but she insisted on talking about me. "Lucky, are you a war hero?" she asked

"I dodged a bomb blast and help rescue some people from a burning building was the extent of my heroism," I said.

"Wow! That's sounds impressive!" she said. "You know, Lucky" she said leaning across the table. "Your brown wavy hair, your nose and cheek structure all fit together in perfect symmetry, but you need to let your sideburns grow out more. And," she said after a pause. "You have such an honest face."

What a critique, I thought. I had never been told that before. We had a great time getting acquainted, I thought, but as we left the restaurant some big dude about as broad as he was tall stopped Rosa.

"Hey babe, hey Blondie, I know you," he said. "How ya doing?" When Rosa tried to ignore him he grabbed her by the arm. "You trying to high hat me sister," he said.

"Leave her alone," I said. He stepped in front of me in a challenging way. Now in Iraq I came to the conclusion that I'm not a total coward, but this guy resembled a big mountain cave man and I hesitated. Of course at six feet, three inches tall I'm not exactly a midget. Anyway, when he shoved me I swung at him and connected on his jaw and I think staggered him a little, but then he grabbed me by my tie and almost choked me. We wrestled knocking down chairs and tables and he was inflicting heavy damage on me before the proprietor, thank God, broke it up.

"Come on," Rosa said... "Let's get out of here before the police arrive. On the way to Rosa's apartment she told me the guy I had the scuffle with was an exboyfriend. "You may as well know that I have lots of admirers and exboyfriends that still come around," she said. Was I going to have to fight all of her ex boy friends, I ask myself as my head ached and a sick feeling invaded my stomach.

When I pulled my caddy up in front of her apartment Rosa examined my black eye and apologized to me for what happened and then gave me a long lingering kiss. "You know I think I'm attracted to you," I heard her whisper as we said goodnight. Man, I could feel my heart leap for joy at the sound of her words. But later on the way home I thought she's probably not attracted to me, but only to the rich building contractor that she believed me to be.

The dinner and tips to the waiter cost me two days pay, not to mention the black eye again, but it was worth it. In addition, I gave Rosa all kinds of gifts, candy, flowers and a necklace that all but drained my saving account. Still, I continued to take her to expensive restaurants every Sunday night. In fact, my whole life soon revolved around my Sunday nights with Rosa.

But on one Sunday night Rosa insisted we go to a movie, a musical comedy where we laughed, held hands and really enjoyed ourselves. On our way home from the movie we stopped off at a drive-inn restaurant. While munching on a chicken salad sandwich Rosa handed me an envelope. When I opened it there were nine one hundred bills staring me in the face. "I returned



the necklace you bought me and talked the sales person into giving your money back," she said.

"You won't accept my gift?" I asked.

"I loved the necklace and the thought behind it even more, but I don't want you spending all that money on me," Rosa said.

I hung my head and looked down at the car next to me. There was a group of teenagers all talking at once. It made me think of my own happy teenage years.

"Lucky, you ought to consider finding yourself another girl friend," Rosa said. "I like you very much, but I may not be right for you. You need to start looking around, start playing the field and maybe go out with other girls," Rosa suggested.

What a revelation! I thought about debating the matter with her, but decided to let it drop. She was trying to discourage me. She was letting me down easy. She was trying to say goodbye in a nice way. Three cheers for Lucky, I thought. Another girl has turned me down.

I confess that I was in the midst of another pity party when a co-worker who in the past had seen Rosa and I together, confronted me on the job one morning with a shocking accusation. "I saw your girl friend dancing last night in Oklahoma City at the Hide and Seek Club," he said. "Man, you're lucky to have a girl friend like that."

"You didn't see my girl dancing at the Hide and Seek Club," I told him. "You got to be mistaken."

"Maybe so," he said, smiling. "Maybe so."

The thought that he might be right haunted me all that day. That night I went to the Hide and Seek Club. There I saw Rosa's version of night school which absolutely blew me away. For there on a small stage among the smoke and loud music Rosa was dancing or rather gyrating around in a scantily clad costume. Not in a thousand years would I have ever thought Rosa would expose her body before all these wild eyed drunks and ogling perverts.

I left the club feeling like my insides were going to drop out. I drove aimlessly around town in a daze. I tried to get over my hurt and rage, but the more I thought about it the madder I got. On impulse I made a U turn and headed down a residential street breaking the speed limit and running stop signs in the process. I drove into the parking lot with all its neon lights and double parked at the entrance of the Hide and Seek Club and left my motor running.

I rushed into the club running over a drunk and waded through the smoke and around the crowded tables to the stage and all its flickering lights. There, I grabbed Rosa by the arm, slung her almost nude body over my shoulder and ran over a security man who was guarding the exit door.

I literally threw Rosa into the front seat of my car and took off with a crowd of men chasing after me yelling, "Catch that SOB. Catch that lunatic."

"Lucky, what are you doing? Are you crazy?" Rosa screamed and stomped her feet as I drove down the street and out on to the open highway. But I ignored her until I had driven at least ten miles away. I parked at what I thought was a secluded location near a lake where I once went fishing as a boy.

I turned to face Rosa who was staring at me with her back leaning against the passenger door. The moon light shining through the window glass cast a light on Rosa's legs which she tried to fold up under her. She was more beautiful with her clothes off than with them on, I thought. I took a blanket from my back seat that I used on my last picnic outing and tossed it over her.

"That's the first time I ever been kidnapped," Rosa said calmly as she pulled the blanket over her.

I looked away from her. I was so mad I could have choked her and couldn't trust myself to speak. "Rosa, I can't believe you stripped nude in front of all those wild eyed drunks and perverts," I said. "Haven't you got any decency and respect for yourself?"

"I was never completely nude," she said.

"Now I understand why you could only go out with me on Sunday night. Well, congratulations, you really made a damn fool out of me!"

"Lucky, I have a confession to make," Rosa said, sliding over closer to me and demanding my attention. "Now you hear me out before you speak. I quit school in the tenth grade and got married. My husband was killed in a hunting accident three weeks after we were married. I have a three year old son who has leukemia."

She paused, reached over and grabbed my hand making sure she had my full attention. "I didn't want to work in a strip club, but there's no way I could support my son working as a waitress or at some factory job. His medical bills are outrageous. I can make around a thousand bucks a night working as a stripper. It would take me a month or more to earn that much money."

"Lucky," she continued. "I didn't want to hurt you. That's why I suggested you go out with other girls. I couldn't bring myself to tell you the truth about my life. I knew it would ruin our relationship and I was having such a good time going out with you. It was like old times. You made me feel like a real person again."

As I sat there in a state of shock I was convinced Rosa was telling me the truth.

"Rosa, I don't care about your past," I said. "I'm not a wealthy man but our concrete business is getting better and I'm going to take over the whole operation some day. I'd like to support you and your son so you'll never have to work as a dancer or anywhere else again."

Then I removed a ring from a box I'd been carrying around in my shirt pocket and gingerly placed it on Rosa's finger. "If you take it off, I'll under-

stand,” I told her.

“Lucky,” she said. “I’d like to wear it the rest of my life, but are you sure you want me with my reputation and all my problems?”

About that time a red beam of light hit me in the face. Before I knew it four policemen surrounded my car with their lights flashing and with their guns drawn.. “Get out!” they yelled jerking me out of the car. They had me on the ground and tied my hands behind my back. I started to rebel but saw how futile it was.

It was my first time to ever be in jail. It was 2:30 in the morning when I entered the cell with twelve other men. I decided not to call my folks and disturb them until later in the morning. Sometime after daylight a jailer showed me the local newspaper. On the front page in bold black ink the heading of an article read: IRAQ WAR VETERAN KIDNAPPED STRIPPER. Beside the article was a picture of Rosa standing out by a lake with my blanket wrapped round her.

Man, what a disgrace. I’ve really blew it this time, I thought. I was getting ready to call my mother and listen to a three hour lecture when a jailer popped open the cell door. “Your uncle bailed you out and he’s waiting downstairs for you,” he said.

After I picked up my belongings I walked downstairs and exchanged a few words of thanks with my uncle, then went to retrieve my car parked in a storage lot two blocks away.

I stopped by to see Rosa on my way out of town. She greeted me dressed in her house coat and pajamas. Her eyes were red and swollen and she looked ten years older. A little boy was playing on the front room carpet. He had blond stringy hair that wouldn’t stay combed and a pale, ghostly white face with freckles sprinkled lightly across his nose.

“This is my son, Jimmy,” Rosa said when she saw me staring at the boy.

“Hello Jimmy, I’m very pleased to meet you,” I said, reaching down and shaking his motionless hand.

“I’m sorry about what happened last night,” Rosa said, as I sat down and surveyed her small one bedroom apartment.

“Me too,” I said. “Did I cause you to lose your job?”

“I called my boss and told him I quit,” she said, flashing my ring that she still wore on her finger.

“What did he say?”

“He offered me a raise.”

“And what did you say?”

“I told him to go to hell. That I was getting married.”

“You did,” I said. “Who’s the lucky guy?”

She paused searching me up and down. “I’m looking at him,” she said. She sat down in my lap and gave me another one of those long lingering kiss-

es that send my emotions among other things, out of this planet. For the second time, my escape from Iraq with my life being the first, I felt worthy of being called Lucky.

Three days later all legal proceeding against me were dismissed and this Sunday night Rosa and I will unite in matrimony. And then, if the Lord is willing I plan on spending all my Sunday nights with Rosa and every other night as well.

## A Public Viewing

Valorie Mall

Trouble was brewing there was no doubt about it. Eyes in the crowd glowed like burning embers. They wanted an answer and they wanted it now. Not later, not tomorrow, but now. With trembling hands the speaker approached a bank of microphones, shielding his eyes from the glare of television cameras. He cleared his throat and spoke as forcefully as he could under the circumstances.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, with all due haste we are trying to provide an answer to the question everyone is waiting for.” There was an uneasy rumble from the crowd. “Please understand that this is our first attempt at doing such an event and we must assure that every protocol is followed and all fairness assured.” At the word fairness there was a huge outcry from both sides of the road where the speaker stood at the head. He turned and headed back through the gates that were then shut and locked behind him.

The crowd was left to its own devices unable to approach the gates due to the line of solemn faced officers standing along the fence. But despite the late hour, the bleak cold weather and the uncertainty of their question being resolved, no one in the crowd moved an inch. Many of them butted up against each other for warmth. One voice spoke out from the right side of the road, “Will you just look at them, with their damn candles,” he gestured to those on the left. “Don’t you have somewhere else to cry your tears, like a church or maybe over my daughter’s grave?” Muffled voices from behind and to the side of him agreed, and many pointed fingers and shook fists at the others across from them.

Those on the left of the road said little, you could hear sniffing and qui-

etly whispered prayers as candle light flickered on their faces.

The speaker once more appeared from the building and walked toward the crowd in a much more determined and forceful manner. "Ladies and Gentlemen the event will proceed as planned." Loud shouts and cheers went up from one side, while the other side sank to their knees and bowed their heads. "However there are to be no inappropriate demonstrations of any kind, anyone acting in such a manner will be removed and arrested." He hesitated for a moment. "May God have mercy on us all." He walked back slowly with his head bowed, as if he already knew no such mercy would be coming.

As soon as he reentered the building the huge television screen behind the fence lit up. The faces of those watching were bathed in an artificial white light. The multitude of sound was overwhelming. Cries of approval, delight, gasps of horror and disbelief were mixed together in the night air. The officers bowed their heads and kept their backs to the screen.

A picture of a curtained window flickered into view. The crowd sighed in unison, "Ahhhhh."

The curtain was drawn and there lay a man, strapped to a gurney in a small tiled room. He glanced around puzzled as if confused what all the fuss was about. An IV tube ran into his arm and since there was no sound the crowd could only watch the prison warden mouth the words of the death sentence. However, when the condemned man was allowed to talk he mouthed the words so most could understand what was said and tears ran down his face slowly as his lips formed, "It wasn't me". That was all. The gurney was laid back in position and he closed his eyes. The medications were started and within ten minutes the curtain was closed once again.

The crowd seemed uneasy and confused. Nothing seemed to have happened. The speaker came once more out of the building. He stepped up to the microphone with a tear running out of his eye. He announced the name of the accused and the time of death. The screen behind him went blank. The officers filed back into the prison.

No one seemed to know what to do. It was over but it was as if nothing had happened, nothing had changed. Candles were blown out, and people began to move to their cars. The first public execution in many, many years was now over. It was now history.

The man who had lost his daughter held out his hands in supplication, "But my daughter, it was my daughter....."

One man from the other side of the road came over and looked at him with compassion. He put his hand on the man's shoulder, "My friend, she isn't coming back."

# The Challenge

Cherise Wyneken

Kate grabbed her purse from the floor. “You’re nothing but a jerk-off,” she said, getting up from the plush white sofa.

Ralph reached for her hand. “Don’t leave – please?”

“What are you waiting for, Ralph? You promised we’d make love tonight. You’re a big boy now – remember? Forty-six years old today. I’m not sticking around for any more of your rites of passage.”

She yanked her hand free and headed for the door. “I’m out of here – for good.”

Ralph’s body jerked in unison with the slamming door. He covered his ears. *Where did I go wrong? Had it all so perfect.* He looked around his apartment. From its off-center position on the walnut coffee table, a spray of rusty mums brought autumn to the room. The sputtering crackle of a burning hunk of creosoted wood, cheered. The roasted quail and wild rice turned out superb.

“You do know how to woo a woman,” Kate had said.

A dying ember from the burning log broke off and tumbled through the grate with the hollow sound of someone walking on a lava cinder cone.

“I tried to do it right.” *Like Mother always says.*

His eyes searched her photograph framed in gilt edges on the marble mantel. *Kate won’t listen to me now, but Mother will.*

He went to his desk, picked up the cordless phone, punched Memory 1, and waited.

“Ralph darling. What a surprise. I thought you saved this day for your favorite lady. Did something go wrong? Did you burn the quail?”

“No, Mother. Worse than that. She stormed out on me.”

“On you? The perfect man?”

“It seems she wants more than flowers, wine and talk.”

“Yes ...”

“But when it comes time ... I freeze up.”

“Oh, darling. You do deprive yourself. Is it something I did wrong?”

“No, Mother. It’s not you. It’s me. I see them all as something special. I don’t want to hurt them.”

“But Ralph, darling. That’s exactly what you’re doing. A woman needs the assurance of acceptance that comes when a man shows his love physically. Oh, darling. Did I neglect to teach you that? Ralph darling.



Call her. Talk to her. Convince her.”

“But, Mother ... “

“Excuse me, darling. Anthony is here, the quail is ready. I am ready. Good luck with your lady friend.”

“But, Mother,” Ralph cried to the dial tone.

He stared for a moment at the dead phone, then took the empty brandy snifters to the kitchen. As he rinsed the dinner dishes he mulled over his mother’s words. *Call her she says. But what if she won’t answer? Can I take another rejection?* “Rejection?” he exclaimed aloud. “Is that what Mother meant? Does Kate find my behavior a rejection? No wonder she stormed out.”

Ralph looked at his watch. *She must be home by now.* He hurried to his phone, punched Memory 2. Held his breath as he counted the rings. Heard the receiver lift and felt his heart make a fist.

“Kate. It’s me ... Ralph. Please talk to me Kate. I love you.”

“Love me? I don’t think you know what that word means.”

“I treat you nice, Kate. You know I do. What about last month when I took you to your family’s reunion in Las Vegas. I paid for everything. Your airline ticket. Your meals ... even your room.”

“That’s just the point. You paid for my room. Oh, Ralph. Even my brother raised his eyebrows at us having separate rooms.”

“Marry me Kate. I know I could pull it off if we were married.”

“I love you, too, Ralph, but I won’t marry you. Not unless you prove that you’re a man. Do something. Rob a bank. Steal a diamond ring. Show me you’ve got balls.”

Again Ralph stared at the dead phone.

“Dead, but not for long. I’ll show her I’m alive. I’ll show her I’m a man.”

He went back into the kitchen and finished cleaning up. Returned to the living room, stoked the dying log, and sat down to think. A knock on the door interrupted.

“Mother!” He opened to her and ‘her gentleman friend.’

“You sounded so distraught, Darling. We decided to come over and console you.”

“Perfect timing. I need some practical advice. Come in. Sit down.” He gave them each a snifter of brandy then turned to Anthony. “You’re a former banker. What are the odds for a successful bank robbery?”

“But, Darling,” Mother said. “I thought she wanted sex ... not money.”

“She wants a man. And I have to prove that I’ve got balls. She suggested I rob a bank.”

“There’s got to be a better way,” Anthony said. “Robbing a bank is a

Federal offence.”

“You can’t be serious, Darling,” Mother said.

Ralph smiled and played out their visit with grace and hospitality. When they left he set his mind toward an attack. Next day, after work, he drove directly to the Mall and aimed for Mayor’s Jewelers.

“I’d like to see something in a diamond engagement ring.”

“Yes, Sir,” the clerk replied. He brought out a black velvet-lined tray of rings. “These are top of the line.”

Ralph took one – the biggest – and put it on his pinkie. “Lovely,” he said, wiggling his finger back and forth.

“How much for these heart-shaped earrings?” a woman beside Ralph asked, distracting the clerk.

*Now!* Ralph told himself. *Walk away.*

“Ralph, old boy,” a voice nearby resounded. “Have you finally decided to take the plunge?”

Ralph looked up and saw his old school mate, Harry, approach, wearing his policeman’s uniform. He felt his insides churn. They gurgled and coiled and threatened to gush out in release. He placed the ring back in its groove and rushed to the lavatory.

*At least I had a good bowel movement*, he thought coming out. He felt refreshed and self-satisfied, like a little boy who had just been praised by his mother during potty training. He looked around the area. *Ole Harry’s probably still lurking around someplace. I’d better call it quits for today.*

Next day he returned to the mall. He strolled past the jewelry store, but decided against that approach. A display of green glassware drew him to the window of William Sonoma’s. *Kate would like that candy bowl. Could I fit it in my pocket?*

“Darling, you shouldn’t.” His mother’s voice pierced his ears.

Ralph jumped as though he’d been caught.

“You know I love that crystal, but it’s so expensive. Besides ... it isn’t even Christmas.”

Ralph felt his intestines begin to roil again and his face sweat. His heart pounded in double time, gave a slight pause, and sputtered in a cough.

“You look pale, Darling. Come let your mother buy you a cup of hot herbal tea.”

*If I tell her I’m too busy, she’ll just ask why.*

“Poor, Dear. You work too hard to please that girl.”

“Her name is Kate, Mother.”

“Whatever. I wish she wouldn’t torment you.”

*Another night wasted*, Ralph thought when he left his mother off at her

apartment. *If I don't succeed tomorrow, Kate will think that I don't care.* He lay in bed trying to conjure an image of her, without success. He got up and paced the living room, stopping abruptly before Mother's picture.

"No wonder I can't make it with Kate ... with Mother watching. What a fool I've been. Tomorrow. Tomorrow I will do it."

When tomorrow came, so did an order from his boss. "This report has to be finished and postmarked today ... if it takes you till 11:59 to do it."

And it almost did. It was near the closing hour by the time he signed the cover letter. He sealed and stamped the envelope, and headed for the parking lot. If I don't catch all the red lights, I can make it. When he reached his car, he found Mother sitting in the front seat.

"Lucky you, Darling. You get to take me home."

Ralph felt that catch in his heart again, then he cleared his throat. "I'm sorry, Mother. I'm not going home now. You'll have to take a cab."

"But Ralph. I've been waiting here so long ... and cabs take forever."

Ralph opened the door on his mother's side. "I'm sorry. Go back to the doorman ... he can call for you."

Mother's eyes grew big. She stared at her son for a moment. "It has something to do with that girl ... doesn't it?" She climbed out of the car and stalked away.

After mailing his report, Ralph went straight to the Mall and the lingerie department in Saks. Two women were talking with the clerk, making a purchase. Ralph looked around to see if anyone was watching. He turned his back to the counter, fondled a pair of pink bikini panties, and held them up to mark the size. She likes black and white, he thought and grabbed up a couple more. He tucked them in his belt, beneath his coat, and turned to leave.

"May I help you, Sir?" the clerk asked.

"Guess not. I forgot the size." He made it to the perfume counter, just inside the entrance, when the plainclothesman accosted him.

"Stop right there, Hot Pants," he said. "You're under arrest."\* \* \*

When they arrived at the police station, Ralph was not surprised to see Harry at the admittance desk.

"Caught ... snitching panties? I always knew you were some kind of creep ... with those prissy ways of yours."

"I'd like to see you be half as daring," Ralph replied. A warm feeling of satisfaction spread through his tense body.

Harry's jaws tightened and the vein on his neck began to pound and swell. He scowled for a second then reached for his pen and proceeded to fill out the forms. "You don't know from nothin'. What's your moth-

er going to say?"

*It's surprising, but I don't seem to care what my mother thinks. I've never felt so free... so exhilarated in my life.*

Harry signaled one of the officers to come over. "I'm puttin' you in the hopper now, till someone comes and bails you out. Should I call your mother?"

"No. Call my girl friend, Kate."

"Girl friend?" Harry shoved the phone across the counter. "Here ... call her yourself."

"You have reached 739-4601. Please leave your name and number and I will return your call as soon as possible."

"Kate. It's me ... Ralph. Pick up." No reply. He left his message, felt his heart slip to his feet.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked. "Wasn't he home?"

Ralph clenched his fist. "You looking for trouble?"

"Take him away ... before he gets himself in deeper water."

The jailer shoved Ralph into a large cell with the other overnights. He stood there for a moment until his eyes adjusted to the dim light, then looked around. One man was curled up in a corner, snoring loudly. Another babbled incoherently. "What'd they get you for, Man?" asked a guy close by.

The smell of alcohol and rancid body odors filled the closed in area. Ralph felt his stomach acids rise, ready to explode. He turned his eyes toward the passageway and focused on Kate.

"Hey, pretty boy. You too good for us," someone taunted.

Ralph kept staring straight ahead. *What if she won't come?*

A fellow sitting nearby patted Ralph on the shoulder with a gentle motion. "Take off your coat and stay a while, Buddy. There ain't nobody going to come bail you out tonight."

*She'll come. She's got to come.*

Time dragged on and on. Ralph's hopes fell. *What have I done, anyway? Me. Ralph. Caught shoplifting. I deserve to be locked up. What will Mother say?*

Just as his eyelids dropped in exhaustion, he heard his name being called. The jailer opened the door and led him to the front desk. Kate stood there, wearing the biggest smile Ralph had ever seen.

"Don't you feel bad, you dirty creep?" Harry said. "Making a sweet girl like her ... come and bail you out?"

Ralph answered with a look of pity. He turned to Kate and smiled. "Bad?" he said. "I never felt so good!"

# The Superb New Time

Edward A. Rodosek

*"Sir, please put a red chip into the slot, if you don't mind."* The entrance door was talking with a precise, sweet woman's voice.

The old man angrily glanced at the red eye of the sensor. "Why should I do that? I'm not a visitor; I live in this home—I've only taken a turn in the park!"

*"I'm sorry, sir. In that case—would you mind telling me your entrance cipher, please? If you've forgotten it, you can find it on your wristband, sir."*

"I'm not wearing that stupid band of yours—I'm allergic to all plastic products. Come on, open that door; I can't stand out here all night!"

"What's the matter, Ralph?" said a familiar voice behind him.

The old man turned around and saw Gregory's broad, reddish face. "Oh, you're here, thank God. This damned door won't let me in without that damned entrance cipher."

"I'll go upstairs for your wristband," offered Gregory, gazing at him through the bars like a lawyer at the prisoner. "You just wait for me here. Where do you keep it?"

"I don't know. Wait a minute—it should be somewhere on the windowsill. Thank you, Gregory."

Gregory was his true friend, thought the old man. As a matter a fact, his only friend here in Perfect Home, the best in luxurious homes for senior citizens.

For long minutes the old man was stamping his feet in front of the door in the chilly December air, rubbing his stiff hands.

"Ralph..."

"Gregory! What is it—couldn't you find it? I was convinced I'd put it on that—"

"No, it isn't that. Your door won't let me in without a red chip. Have you got any on you? I've only green change."

\*\*\*

Ralph Morgan went to the bathroom. There he undressed, put four green chips in the slot, and four paper towels came out of the machine; towels were cheaper than a hot air drying. For another two green chips he got a spoonful of liquid soap.

For a while, he hesitated, and then he put into the slot just one green chip, for ninety seconds of cold shower. The old man gritted his teeth in defiance of the icy water and tried to think about the valuable red chip

for the warm shower that he'd saved this way.

Suddenly a screeching sound from the hidden loudspeakers assaulted the old man's ears. A suggestive, persuasive woman's voice offered a commercial, hammering it into the listener's head, telling all, persuading all listeners about the marvelous quality of new product before one had time to turn it off... The old man put a red chip into the slot, buying himself half an hour of silence. He planned to go down to the main hall later, where there weren't commercials blaring.

In the main hall Mrs. Summers was playing bridge with three other people and whimpered each time she got a good card. Gregory was sitting a few chairs down, and his absent, empty look showed he'd spent a costly blue chip on sweetdreams, a popular drug for lonely people. Ralph chose a chair in a corner. He put a green chip into the slot and a cushioned seat fell with a clap; two more green chips provided him with a low footstool and a pillow. He intended to take a short nap.

For a while he fidgeted on his chair, trying in vain to find the proper position for his aching back. The piercing laugh of Ms. Summers chased away his hopes for a nap and the suffocating air made him cough. After a time, he gave up and went outside. He checked to be sure he had enough chips to pay the park's entrance fee.

"Good evening, Mr. Morgan."

Ralph automatically returned a greeting even before his shaky consciousness put the man in the orange uniform in the proper place. Of course—this was Theodore, the gardener in the Perfect Home and the most informed chatterbox Ralph knew.

"Mr. Morgan, would you care to hear what's new—shortly and guaranteed without any advertisements—as always?"

Ralph shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, Mr. Morgan. The government decided to computerize ..."

The old man listened so absently to the newest local events that he hardly noticed when Theodore stopped talking and reached out his hand.

"Oh, yes; sorry." Ralph dropped a red chip into the gardener's palm. Theodore politely touched his cap and went away to find another customer.

\*\*\*

The chip-changing machine in the lobby swallowed the old man's retirement card and poured out a handful of colored chips. Then the card slowly crept out with two new holes—eight of them in all. Ralph knew that after ten holes the machine wouldn't return him the card at all—and today was only the sixteenth of December. That meant from now on there would be no fancy meals, no beverages between meals, and no unnecessary spend-

ing on various small conveniences until the end of the month.

The old man was already used paying for everything in the Perfect Home. As it was said, here only the air was free. But he couldn't get used to spending the valuable chips for the repeated penalties to the Splendid Home management. Despite his caution, some unexpected penalty came on him again and again. The last one was because of his mustache.

Ralph Morgan was never foppish but he'd had a mustache for the last fifty years. He shaved it off—with regret—for the first time half a year ago, when he applied for admission in the Perfect Home. In his age he needed full board in a senior home. His nephew, Ralph's only living relative, had told him that mustaches, beards, or long hair meant almost certain rejection for potential tenants.

The old man had always shaved himself with the worn out razor he'd owned since the first years of his employment as a field biologist. Probably the skin under his nose—the only unburned little piece of his wrinkly face—wasn't as resilient as the rest of his face because he'd spared it for so many years. After the first shaving of his mustache he'd gotten a persistent inflammation there. He spent a great amount of chips for different kind of salves but all had proved completely useless. Finally he came to the conclusion that the only solution was to stop this daily scraping of his skin.

So he gave up shaving under his nose and let his mustache grow again. Three weeks later—on the same day he'd clipped it nicely for the first time—the unavoidable loudspeakers called Mr. Ralph Morgan into the consulting room. The old man headed there slowly, heavily scuffing his feet. He couldn't imagine what would happen but he knew such a summons was never a good thing.

Inside the room there was nobody but he, a great holovisor set, and an armchair. The old man sat down on the armchair—there it was free, surely another bad sign—and gazed at the faultless face of the manager's image on the holovisor. She was in her midthirties, had an ideal figure, her poise was determined, and her attitude more than perfect.

"Mr. Morgan!" She waited for a while to give her sclerotic visitor a chance to grasp her introductory words. "A few days after you came to the Perfect Home we had an exhaustive talk about the principles of our management. Do you still remember our conversation?"

She was waiting patiently, leaning a bit forward, and kindly smiling at Ralph. At first, he'd decided to stay equally motionless but after a while, he could no longer endure the meaningless silence so he nodded to her.

"Excellent." The old man had the feeling she would somehow stretch her hand out of the holovisor and give to him a candy for a correct

answer. “Back then we agreed that equality is the basic principle in the Perfect Home. Each of our dear guests has totally equal opportunities to choose what he wants or what he needs—he just has to pay for this. As I told you then, and as you know, in our home there are no lump sums, no false solidarity or decantation of money from one person to another. Cash-and-carry, always and for everybody.”

She made another meaningful pause. “The same principle is valid for everything else here. What’s allowed to one person must be allowed to everybody. Equal rules for all. Do you agree with me?”

“But I never wanted to—”

“My dear Mr. Morgan!” Her voice became reproachful, but was still gentle and warm. In that moment the old man felt like a disobedient child who had cruelly hurt his loving mother, who forgave him anyway.

“You know well that body hygiene isn’t possible as a whole if some parts of your skin are covered with that ... with that ... atavistic hair.”

Only then did the old man comprehend the meaning of their conversation. He helplessly spread his arms. “Oh—you mean my mustache? I’ve taken care of it for the past fifty years. All that time I’ve managed to keep it perfectly clean; even when I was in the navy my superiors had no objections to it.”

“Mr. Morgan!” She was still patient but obviously determined to put this unruly fool in his proper place again. “How can you claim that you’ve been able to maintain the hygiene of your body if you’ve caught this ugly infection, which is now threatening all the other dear guests in the Perfect Home?”

“But ... but it was just shaving the reason—” He stopped in the middle of his sentence and became wordless. All his further explanations to her would have no effect at all. Why waste any more words? The all-knowing manager’s opinion was totally unshakable. It was obvious that she’d formed her steady viewpoint long before that conversation—probably even many years ago. Ralph could have tried to persuade the Rocky Mountains with the same success; the only difference was the latter were probably a bit less inhuman than she was.

The manager’s image leaned forward and inclined her head to help her sclerotic guest to understand her final argument. Now the moment had arisen to put the old fool back in the ideal, level line from which he’d carelessly stepped out.

“Dear Mr. Morgan—now do you understand our view? If we allow you to wear a mustache and beard, we have to allow the same to every one of our guests. Where would such a foolish act lead?”



For a moment the old man wanted to afford himself a humorous remark—that in that case the ladies could stop shaving herself, too. But he still kept silent.

Now he began to understand the new rules. Everybody had to accept the soulless cash-down payment with chips for everything except air. Everybody had to get used to talking with automatic machines instead of with other people. Everybody must obey all the house rules including the senseless ones.

At that moment, the manager put a regretful expression on her face: the loving mother punishing the naughty child, as though it hurt her more than it hurt him. “I have to impose a penalty of two blue chips, Mr. Morgan. And this sum will be doubled next week if you don’t remove that...” she hesitated before speaking the disgusting word “... what you call a mustache by that time.”

A moment later, her politeness prevailed again and the sweetish appearance returned to her face. “Have a nice day.”

\*\*\*

It was one week before Christmas. Despite the dense snowflakes that were falling out of the clouded sky, Ralph Morgan sat out along the main garden’s path to catch some fresh, piercing air. After a while, some movement high above his head attracted his attention. Yes—that bird was undoubtedly a hawk. A hawk! The old man’s heart leaped with joy and he felt an enthusiasm that he hadn’t had for a long time.

An elegant predator with unbelievably sharp eyes and a wingspan that allowed it sail magnificently through the air—almost motionless, yet always on the lookout. Apparently hawks still hunted, although not as in the past, when they used to fly by pairs. Like all other larger birds, hawks were becoming rare mostly because of the lessening of their habitat.

Besides that, there was the usual tragic story: grains full of pesticide; agrarian rodent animals nourishing themselves with such grains but still surviving in some way; the bird predators subsisting on rodents but during the nesting they mostly crushed their own eggs because of the pathological weakness of the shells. And the sentimental old man gazed with his tired, tearful eyes at the disappearing ruler of the sky and grieved over the loss of the shadows of his youth, long past.

The vanished bird reminded Ralph Morgan of a sad time several decades ago. He recollected the twenty-two years of his marriage to the quiet, gentle, always understanding Frieda. She never complained about his many absences when he, as young, enthusiastic ornithologist, traveled to various out-of-the-way places. She had always been there for him—late at night when he’d returned half-frozen from his windy and icy lookouts.

Frieda was the only person who believed in him when he, enraged, contradicted the statements of many distinguished scientists who had proclaimed the white eagle had definitely become extinct some decades ago. And then, at last, someday one October, he came back bearded and unwashed for days, stuttering and out of breath, and shared with her his almost unbelievable fortune. He'd finally succeeded in finding a nest of the nearly exterminated white eagle and—after long waiting—managed to steal one of three eggs.

The old man smiled nostalgically when he recalled the endless hours of guard-duty next to the glass incubator with the stolen eagle's egg in it. With quiet pleasure, he remembered his quickened heartbeat when the little one had begun to peck at his jail walls.

About twenty minutes later, the little one finally came out completely, stretching his beak, exhausted from the struggle. Ralph had named the young one Jack. His wife and he had intended to name their first male child Jack—the boy they'd been expecting so eagerly, but who'd never been born.

But several weeks later Ralph's foolish assistant had wrongly read a decimal point from the computer and had given Jack an overdose, ten times the proper amount of medicine against molting.

After Ralph had buried Jack's tiny carcass under the rockery, he also buried his silly hopes of rescuing the white eagle from extinction.

Then his dearest Frieda died unexpectedly. Before long after that Ralph retired from all his professional and other public activities. In those weeks, two new, deep wrinkles from his eyes to the corners of his mouth marked his face. Ralph Morgan had slowly come to be considered a screwball. During those months, he had emaciated; his lips had become tightly compressed and his hook-nose jutted out of his face even more markedly than before. One day the old man overheard somebody's casual remark about his likeness to an eagle.

After he looked at himself in a mirror, he had sadly to agree that this remark hadn't been so far-off the truth.

\*\*\*

That evening Ralph Morgan was sitting in the lobby, absorbed in his own thoughts. He knew it must have been after eleven o'clock since the main lights were already off; it had been necessary to put a green chip into a slot every quarter of an hour to turn on the light again.

He regretted he'd at dinner expounded to the others about his beautiful hawk. Everyone present took a quick look at him; probably he seemed a bit eccentric to the others to care about the hawk. Mrs. Summers had then remarked that a hawk was a cruel predator, which

murdered charming rabbits and defenseless pigeons. She said all such beasts should be shot.

Ralph flinched as he heard his name out of the loudspeakers. The receptionist's sweet voice called him to the videophone in the lobby. He entered the cabin and saw his nephew's round face, which showed some slight embarrassment.

"I've spoken with the manager of the Perfect Home, Uncle. She's told me it's possible, despite of the repeated penalties of yours, to let you out on Christmas Day—on my guarantee, of course."

The old man didn't respond. He'd already expected his nephew's next words.

"If you decide to visit us I could pick up you on the Christmas Eve, so you could celebrate it with my family. What do you say?"

His nephew's words were coming out of his mouth hesitantly, so Ralph politely but decisively refused the invitation and his nephew was obviously relieved. He promised to call Ralph up before the holiday; then his image on the videophone slowly dissolved.

\*\*\*

The Christmas Eve decorating of the main hall of the Perfect Home had begun immediately after lunch. The happy residents were hanging gaily colored paper ornaments and shining plastic trinkets all over the place. All were meant to decorate the greatest and the most magnificent pine tree ever seen in the Perfect Home.

A spirit of joy pervaded the whole atmosphere. Wrinkly old women were climbing the ladders, grinning happily and showing their expensive false teeth. Senior gentlemen in high spirits were helpfully supporting these ladder women, making sure they didn't topple down, and handing one another half-empty bottles. Mrs. Summers gave a loud shriek every time Gregory patted her fat backside. Gwen and Elisa had not dared to climb a ladder. They preferred the floor, and stayed there handing up decorations to the others. Theodore and his friend the janitor were working on the electrical installation, dragging big bundles of wires along the floor.

Finally, the residents pushed aside all the chairs and arranged them along the walls, clearing a wide dance floor. In one corner of the hall there was a great round table with a huge bowl on it. Everybody knew the bowl would later, just before the manager's arrival, be filled with eggnog. The loudspeakers pompously announced that the management had decided to give all dear guests of Perfect Home a nice Christmas present: it wouldn't be necessary to pay with chips for that delicious traditional drink this evening! Just imagine that!

The deeply touched, grateful residents applauded loudly and

enthusiastically.

\*\*\*

*"Are you sure you want to go up onto the terrace, sir?" the entrance door said.*

*"I'm sure," said Ralph Morgan into the little dark net on the doorpost.*

*"You know, at this time of year you can't do anything particular on the terrace. As you know, sir, there's been a heavy snowfall during the night and the janitor hasn't had time to shovel all that snow away yet."*

*"I don't mind the snow. I'm wearing a warm jacket and I wish simply to breathe some fresh air and look around from above."*

*"My duty is to ask you, sir, if you are sure to have at least one green chip for the return ride with the elevator. You know the rules..."*

*"I've plenty of chips left, thank you. I've put a green chip into the damned slot of yours so I demand that you unlock this door. I mean now—while there's still some daylight left."*

The lock made a clicking sound and the old man entered the elevator.

On the terrace, the snow fell in great, dense flakes that clung to his hair and his woolen jacket. He headed slowly toward the edge of the terrace, shuffling through the ten inches of snow. On the parapet, several stand-mounted binoculars were installed.

He chose one, carefully wiped both lenses with his handkerchief, and then he put a green chip into a slot. The binoculars clicked on, the number 180 appeared on their stand and then began to count backwards a second at a time.

Through the lessening daylight of the December afternoon, Ralph comfortably checked the whole horizon, but he saw only an indistinct whiteness. He aimed the binoculars lower to see the surrounding countryside. He didn't know what he was looking for; he didn't expect to find anything but the endless empty whiteness.

In the distance, he could see a large, well-cultivated chicken farm with many high pillars and a wire fence around it. He started to count the pillars aimlessly, like a small child... five, six, seven, eight... Suddenly it seemed to him that he noticed something dark on the top of one pillar, so he returned the binoculars to it. At that moment the three minutes passed and the lenses became black.

The old man searched with his hands, stiffened with cold, in his pockets, found another chip and put it into the slot. When he succeeded to find the right pillar among all the others, a painful groan escaped from his throat.

*They'd killed it...*

They'd murdered his beloved hawk in cold blood. Maybe had the management of Perfect Home or somebody else gave ear to Mrs. Summers' wishes? And then they'd fastened it with a wire to their damned pillar to scare other hawks and, above all, as a symbol of their tri-

umph. They'd destroyed the poor animal for it hadn't been able to adapt itself to the new, more and more unfriendly environment.

It'd disturbed them, those unfeeling bastards, because it had been unique, the only living creature among all those machines. It had been a harmless, fascinating creature close to Ralph, one he could understand without words. For Ralph the murdered hawk has symbolized the death of little, helpless Jack, the last of the white eagles that he'd failed to save many years ago. The new, superb time, in which all living creatures had become undesired and even disturbing, was coming unstoppably and irrepressibly.

After a while, the old man collected enough strength to stagger slowly to the bench in the middle of the terrace and collapse, powerless, on it.

In this superb new time, a human being had become an obsolete, troublesome remnant. And he, Ralph Morgan, a queer admirer of birds, was as unsuited to that new period as the dinosaurs have been to a suddenly changed climate on Earth. Obviously he, as the white eagle, could not adapt himself to the new conditions of his surroundings.

That extinct species couldn't adjust to the poisons scattered by people and their machines, by androids and robots, by cyborgs and clones, by automatons and computers... The new, modern era was coming and treading down all the outdated things that couldn't withdraw in time. The superb new time which he, Ralph Morgan, didn't want to have anything to do with.

He wiped his eyes and, clenching his teeth, searched all his pockets. With a handful of colored chips he headed slowly toward the edge of the terrace, heavily shuffling through the snow. There he stopped, threw all the chips over the parapet into the deepness with marked resolve, and returned tediously to his bench.

\*\*\*

Inside, the Christmas celebration was in full swing. The booming of the newest hit songs mixed with the vivacious shrieks of laughter of the residents of the Perfect Home in the perfect new era in the perfect world. Through one of the windows, somebody fired a rocket that burst into a thousand glowing sparks.

The slowly fading luster of the rocket lit up a lone human figure all covered with a thick layer of snow, sitting motionlessly on a bench in the middle of the terrace. The furrowed face with bushy eyebrows above the peacefully closed eyes appeared for just a moment out of the darkness. His expressive face, with the large, aquiline nose, was covered with thousands of white snowflakes.

He looked like a lurking white eagle.

## Memorial Day

Bruce Muench

Killing another person should be a very personal thing. It shouldn't be throwing a sixteen-inch shell twenty miles through the air into some unseen island or ship. It shouldn't be sending a guided missile and watching it arch on a computer screen into human targets five hundred miles away. It shouldn't be dropping megaton bombs from an aircraft at thirty thousand feet.

Killing should be up close and personal. Like a marine on Guadalcanal who sunk his knife into the belly of an enemy marine, pulling it upwards to disembowel, while at the same time the Jap was biting him on the face, leaving a scar that he still carries today.

Killing shouldn't be women throwing their babies off cliffs into the ocean and then following them. Killing shouldn't be shadows of children left in the cement after a nuclear explosion.....shouldn't be urban civilians dying in the firestorm of an incendiary attack.

Killing should be up close and personal. It should be as personal as knowing there's a fifty-fifty chance that the person killed will be you. And burying the body of the one you've killed should be your duty. You should know that this is how you may look. You should know this is how you could smell. You should know that the personal photos on the body could have been of your family. It can't be sanitized.

Killing in war must be brought that close. You say, "How dare you talk about such things?" I say, "How dare you consider war without talking about these things".

How dare you not know how it looks, how it smells and how personal killing another person can be. If you know nothing of the scars of killing, you've learned nothing. If you learn nothing, then history will repeat itself.

War is killing and killing should leave scars that last a lifetime. Who's killing and who's being killed is academic. Numbers are for statisticians. Killing is for conscience. Feeling the scars is something we should know not only on Memorial Day, but every day of the year....and the scars should be visible for others to see, like I do whenever I shave.

# **RANDOM FEAST:**

## **How Apathetic!**

G.A. Scheinoha

What is it with cops lately? Before someone jumps down my throat in their defense, I'll state the obvious: Yeah, they're only human, prone to the same mistakes as the rest of us, yadda, yadda. Nobody expects them to follow a higher standard than everyone else. Just don't think they're above the laws they enforce.

This goes way beyond the bad apples throwing off a stench of police behaving badly. For example, members of the LAPD going postal on the (for the most part) peaceful protest over immigration reform.

And Green Bay, Wisconsin where the young fellow was shot in the back several times. The D.A. cleared the officers involved of any wrong doing by ruling it a suicide. Ever heard of anyone wanting to die by running away? Surely that deserves a Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Closer to home exemplifies a less deadly but still serious malaise. Several years ago, a couple patrons in a nearby tavern witnessed a kid breaking into the grocery store in the village of Eden. We had to complain loudly and bitterly during a 911 call to get sheriff's personnel to even respond. Till then, their attitude seemed to be; we'll get around to it. To their credit, half a dozen squads eventually arrived to apprehend one unarmed teenage perp.

Recently, I came back from vacation to find out a small business located in the same building where I work had been burglarized. According to the owner, the city detectives who investigated appeared rather inept.

They claimed they couldn't dust for fingerprints. (Something about a lack of flat surfaces.) When asked about DNA evidence from blood found at the scene, the primary stated it would take a year to match the sample to a suspect.

Is this true? Or is someone too lazy to do their job? Complacency on the line here isn't going to get it. Time was, you could count on those sworn to protect and serve. Apparently, that time is waning.

Now they're more concerned with protecting civil codes and serving citations. Guess the good old or rather, kinder, safer days really are gone.

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