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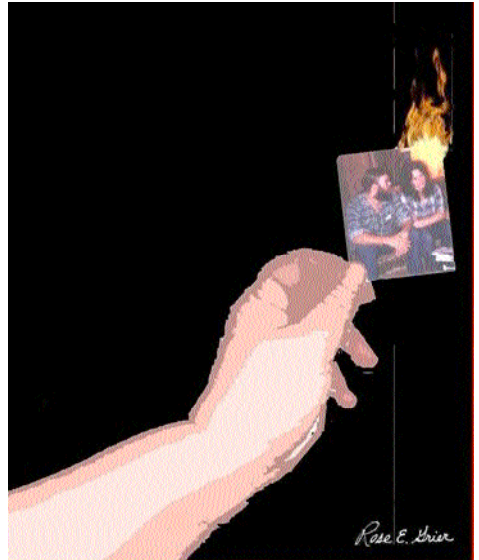
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the boss lady's editorial

FOX Wants to Legally Lie

When you create the realm of what is published,
you can define what's "fair and balanced"

I was listening to Progressive Talk Radio recently while in Chicago, even though the reception and volume aren't very loud when playing the Progressive Talk radio station in Chicago. You know, in Chicago all you can hear is republican talk radio (like Rush Limbaugh or Sean Hannity), and although the reception might not be as good as other stations, it's good to hear a different perspective on the news. So when I listened I heard a story (mentioned only briefly) about two reporters working for Fox News (you know, the "fair and balanced" ones cable news station). FOX had them making a story, and when they submitted their story, the higher-ups told them they didn't want to say that, so they were asking these two reporters to lie in their story.

Well, these two people are journalists, they don't like the notion of lying in their news story, so they apparently went through nearly 40 rounds of changes to the story, when FOX would tell them the story needs more changing.

So after a while, FOX fired the pair of reporters. And eventually those reporters even sued FOX for what happened, and they won.

But don't worry, FOX too took ruling to a higher court to contest it, and the jury actually found in favor of Fox News.

Now, I was in my car and couldn't write the reporter's names down, and I had no way of knowing how altered this story was (just from listening to one [person's] account of the story over the radio waves). So I had to just do an Internet search for more information about this story, and I could only find it in one place. So I started reading *Project Censored* to try to learn the full story, and for a series of news pieces of details relating to how the media no longer has to accurately release the news to people.

This started back in December of 1996, where Fox fired a married couple as investigators at WTVT in Tampa Bay, Florida. In 1997, Jane Akre and Steve Wilson worked on a bovine growth hormone (BGH) story. To quote the story by Al Krebs: "The couple produced a four-part

series revealing that there were many health risks related to BGH and that Florida supermarket chains did little to avoid selling milk from cows treated with the hormone, despite assuring customers otherwise.”

Now, Akre and Wilson even said that the Fox station was initially pleased with the story. But within a week, “Fox executives and their attorneys wanted the reporters to use statements from Monsanto representatives” (Monsanto is the company that manufactured BGH) that these reporters *knew* were false. They were even told to make other additional untrue changes to their story. Fox apparently wanted them to produce a story that wasn’t true. So Akre and Wilson refused to lie about their findings, and they even “threatened to report Fox’s actions to the FCC,” Fox fired them.

Okay, so at this point the reporters sued Fox. “August 18, 2000, a Florida jury unanimously decided that Akre was wrongfully fired by FOX Television when she refused to broadcast (in the jury’s words) “a false, distorted or slanted story” about the widespread use of BGH in dairy cows.” In addition to that, the Florida jury found that Akre could get an additional amount of money because of Florida’s whistle blower law.

But FOX appealed the case, and less than 3 years after the ruling for the reporters (February 14, 2003), “the Florida Second District Court of Appeals unanimously overturned the settlement awarded to Akre. The Court held that Akre’s threat to report the station’s actions to the FCC did not deserve protection under Florida’s whistle blower statute, because Florida’s whistle blower law states that an employer must violate an adopted “law, rule, or regulation.” In a stunningly narrow interpretation of FCC rules, the Florida Appeals court claimed that the FCC policy against falsification of the news does not rise to the level of a “law, rule, or regulation,” it was simply a “policy.” Therefore, it is up to the station whether or not it wants to report honestly.”

Fox got away with this because they were able to assert that there is no law or rule against distorting the news in the media. And, oddly enough, they used the First Amendment to say that newscasters actually have the right to distort or lie about news report to the public, thanks to the First Amendment. Their argument never contested Akre’s claim that she was pressured by FOX to produce a false story, they just (successfully) claims that they had the right to make that report that she didn’t agree with.

And even beyond that, FOX decided to try to sue Akre and Wilson for FOX’s court costs in these suits.

Yeah, that’s not being cruel after an unfair ruling. I mean, I’m sure FOX really does need the help with their finances from these two

reporters. Akre saw the irony in these suits when she said, “Attaching legal fees to whistleblowers is unprecedented, absurd. The ‘business’ of broadcasting trumps it all. These news organizations must ensure they are worthy of the public trust while they use OUR airwaves, free of charge. Public trust is alarmingly absent here.”

Liane Casten updated the story, to mention that five major media “outlets” (Belo Corporation, Cox Television, Inc., Gannett Co., Inc., Media General Operations, Inc., and Post-Newsweek Stations, Inc.) as “friends of FOX,” ruled briefs to support Fox’s position. Their statement even stated “The station argued that it simply wanted to ensure that a news story about a scientific controversy regarding a commercial product was present with fairness and balance, and to ensure that it had a sound defense to any potential defamation claim.”

Reading that is what made me laugh my butt off. “The product was present with *fairness* and *balance*.” I’ve already thought that byline from Fox News was bull#%&, the notion of a Republican-slanted quote unquote “news” organization so slanted calling themselves “fair and balanced,” but to then hear those words used by other news organizations to support FOX’s claim to be able to distort the news, well, that was the icing on the cake (granted, that cake was given to me with a nail file in it after the media put me in prison to losing the ability to get fair news).

But after I laughed at the insanity of overturning sanity, I realized that since FOX used the First Amendment for this decision, it meant that First Amendment rights belong to employers. The premise that the news — or the airwaves — belong to the people, becomes destroyed when even large corporations use the First Amendment as a shield in this way. I mean, honestly, it’s one thing when one person wants to be able to say their mind, and it’s entirely another thing when media giants hide behind the First Amendment so that they can freely distort the news to the people.

Those 5 media corporations that were “friends of FOX” even statement in their support that they were “vitaly interested in the outcome of this appeal, which will determine the extent to which state whistleblower laws may incorporate federal policies that touch on sensitive questions of editorial judgment.”

Wonderful. Good thing I spout my opinions off and don’t care who has a problem with it. But it is funny (or sad, depending on how you think of it) that these companies who are supposed to be giving you the news are worried about not only federal policies, but also individuals, who want to hear the *real* news, and not their distorted perspective on what they

think is all you need to know.

Couple this with President Bush's appreciation of greater media consolidation (I like the game Monopoly, but do we have the bring monopolies everywhere in the market now?), and then consider what Liane Casten thinks: "to refer to the FCC interpretation of "editorial judgment" is to potentially throw out any pretense at editorial accuracy if the "accuracy" harms a large corporation and its bottom line. This is our "Brave New Media", the corporate media that protects its friends and now lies, unchallenged if need be."

That really is a nice thing, corporations using rulings to help people to actually help the *corporations* out. That's what paying lawyers a ton of money for, I suppose. Use the things to help protect us against us. Just what we need.

You know, I don't have a bottom line to this story. I know that when I say something in an editorial, I look for as much evidence and as many accounts (on both sides of an issue) as I can to make a point. I'm not saying I'm not biased; everyone is, everyone wants their opinion to be the strongest and win people over. The difference comes when a large corporation decides to withhold information on a news show — and more importantly, lie about findings — to get the message they want across. I know the media as a rule is more liberal, and I know FOX is more conservative (or Republican). But when they use the argument of "free speech" to allow them to lie on the news, that's when you have to question how corporataions have found individual rights to make corporate loopholes, making you reevaluate this country now works.

A basic tenet Ayn Rand used to say to people who were working on coming up with their own conclusions was "check your premises." In order to come to the best conclusions, you need to make sure all of your preliminary



data is not only correct but also thorough. If some of my sources (from Internet sites) seems questionable, I understand — but if we're worried about the validity of our sources, we may have to worry about our major news outlets as well.

Janet Kuypers®

Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

It Look Like We're Hurting You, But We're Only Trying To Help You

how biofuels raise the price of food globally
and actually hurt the environment

Now, I know I'm a 24-hour drive-by media junkie, but I heard a few days ago in one of the television news reports that Sam's and Costco were limiting the number of bulk packages of wheat one person could purchase. I heard this and I thought, what the Hell does one person need many 25 pound packages of rice for, I once bought one of those 25 pound bags of rice and it literally lasted me a few years. But They said they were doing this not because they were low on food, but because prices of food-stuffs like corn and wheat and rice have been going up, and they didn't want places (like restaurants) to hoard these things to help them turn a profit in sales the next year.

And you know, I have heard of price of foodstuffs like wheat for this upcoming year, and I thought that we don't use that much of it, and the basic and simple side of me just hoped that the price of frozen pizzas (which I wait to buy until they are on sale for at least 5/\$10 before I purchase), and less than two weeks later, I saw those stupid frozen pizzas on sale for 6/\$10, so I figured what the Hell, this cost of food going up isn't apparently causing that much of a problem for me.

But the problem with the rising costs of foods now is because of America's new attempts to do something to reduce our dependence on oil. I've heard the pleas: keep your thermostat a degree or two lower in the winter, turn off lights when you're not in the room (I even watched an episode of *Mythbusters* a while ago that dispelled the rumor that leaving a light on while you are not in the room does not accurately offset the surge of power needed to turn on the light in the first place), use public transportation instead of using your cars (or better yet, stop using those gas-guzzling SUVs when you can use a more fuel-efficient car), or purchase local foods (so you're not paying for the hauling of your specialized food by truck across the country). And okay, I try to do that (I don't turn on lights unless I really need them, I drive a 32-34 highway mpg Saturn instead of an Hummer), but it's hard to purchase locally grown foods unless you happen to see a temporary shack at the side of a road near a farmer's field to purchase anything, and if you live in the city, it's even harder to find food grown a close distance to you.

But all of this made me think of the fact that we're trying to do something to help the environment and reduce our dependency on middle-eastern oil, and often when we try to do something to help the economy, we shortsightedly do something we think will help but actually hurts more. For example, news stations still tell people that the best thing they can do is to still purchase a hybrid car, but (see "A Different Light on the Global Warming Debate", at <http://www.janetkuypers.com/kuypers/prose/2007/a-different-light-on-the-gobal-warming-debate.htm>, which is also in the October 2007 issue of cc&d, v177, at <http://scars.tv/ccdissues/ccd177oct07/ccd177oct07.htm>) the smelting and mining of the nickel (which has to be done in Canada) causes so much damage to the landscape that nothing can grow there, and *then* it goes to a nickel refinery in Europe, and *then* it goes to China, where they produce "nickel foam" so it is in the needed form for the battery for a hybrid car.

Oh, that and a hybrid battery lasts for only 100,000 miles, so if you keep your car, you'll have to have the world go through this process again so you can continue to drive your car.

Sorry, that was a long example, but it seems that when we try to do something to "help," we often end up doing more damage then the problem even did. And the scary thing is that instead of individuals purchasing hybrid cars, *nations* are now taking measures to "help," and they may be causing damage on a much more global scale.

Because places like Brazil are allowing the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest for crops. Now, the Amazon rainforest (and other forest lands) are vanguard for storing carbon (you know, plants need the carbon and exhale oxygen, living plants are good for counteracting what we humans do, and I feel like I should have a greenhouse for all of the plants I keep alive in my home now), but because the world needs more land for growing things for producing fuel (which means the clearing of uninhabited land, which spells deforestation), the only natural place left for helping the environment is being destroyed so we can generate more fuel to heat our homes and drive our cars (and yes, even if you don't drive, that applies to the footprint we cause by all of the trucks in the United States carrying your food across the country so it can get to you). John Carter (a Texas rancher who led a Reconnaissance unit in Desert Storm and also owns 20,000 acres of land in Brazil's Mato Grosso) has witnessed the land rush first-hand, and seen the mass destruction of forestland for things like the planting soybean crops, which are promoted as a gas-alternative.

"You can't protect (the rainforest)," Carter said, "There's too much money to be made in tearing it down."

Since biofuels have become the in-phrase to tout, and ethanol (ethyl alcohol from plant-based matter) quintupled in the United States in the past year, and is mandated for another five-fold increase, and Europe is doing the same thing. But doing this is actually accelerating global warming. As corn is harvested, forests are destroyed, giving our land less of an ability to fight the excess carbon in the atmosphere. And one fifth of the U.S. corn crop is used for fuel this way, which means (remember, supply and demand) raises the price of corn products in the food market. Because corn is touted as the oil savior (when it's actually a very ineffective way to produce fuel versus other crops grown around the world), many soybean growers in the U.S. are actually switching their crop production, which is even causing soybean prices to rise. So to meet the global demand for these foods, countries like Brazil are expanding their fields into ranches, and to clear land for cattle and grazing pastures, rainforest land is cleared.

And the thing is, corn (and even switchgrass, remember President Bush mentioning switchgrass in a speech once as being our salvation from our oil dependency) end up costing more than using actual oil-derived gasoline because of their global effects on our food supply and our shortsightedness in trying to solve a problem with an inappropriate patch.

According to *Time*, "One groundbreaking new study in *Science* concluded that when this deforestation effect is taken into account, corn ethanol and soy biodiesel produce about twice the emissions of gasoline... Only sugarcane based ethanol is efficient enough to cut emissions by more than it takes to produce the fuel."

And when it comes to corn, the amount of corn needed to be grown to produce enough fuel to fill up the tank of an ethanol-fueled SUV is enough corn to feed a person for an entire year.

Even if the U.S., which is the leader in the world in corn and soybean production, used 100% of both crops for fuel, it would only be enough for 20% of on-road fuel consumption.

And you wonder why the prices of foods are going up.

This is a phenomenon that you can see happening around the world. After reading a *Time* article (April 7, 2008), I learned that this ripple effect can be seen everywhere. "Indonesia has bulldozed and burned so much wilderness to grow palm oil trees for biodiesel that its ranking among the world's top carbon emitters has surged from 21st to third... Malaysia is converting forests into palm oil farms...and running out of uncultivated land." And yes, Brazil is only deforesting a small portion of the rainforest for planting sugarcane (which actually is a more effective

use of food for ethanol than corn), but because of that trickle-down plan of the use of corn in other fields offsetting food globally, land is being destroyed in Brazil for other purposes.

According to *Time* (in the article “The Clean Energy Scam,” <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1725975,00.html>), “a Rhode Island—size chunk of the Amazon was deforested in the second half of 2007 and even more was degraded by fire.” And some scientists believe that the Amazon rainforest could be reduced to “to a savanna or even a desert.”

“Deforestation accounts for 20% of all current carbon emissions. So unless the world can eliminate emissions from all other sources—cars, power plants, factories, even flatulent cows—it needs to reduce deforestation or risk an environmental catastrophe.”

And to prove that corn and deforestation isn’t the answer, a Study from Tim Searchinger, a Princeton scholar and former Environmental Defense attorney, concluded that overall, corn ethanol has a payback period of about 167 years because of the deforestation it triggers.

Since Brazil is surging ahead in much the same way the United States did when it was starting to grow as a country, they do not see anything wrong with some aspects of what they are doing (we didn’t see anything wrong with the way we treated the Native American Indians in this country either). They do have guidelines in land owners only being able to deforest 20% of their land, but Blairo Maggi (the Mato Grosso province’s Governor) even said “There’s no money for enforcement, so people do what they want.” As pointed out in the *Time* article, “Maggi has been a leading pioneer on the Brazilian frontier, and it irks him that critics in the U.S.—which cleared its forests and settled its frontier 125 years ago.” Maggi said, “But we want to achieve what you achieved in America. We have the same dreams for our families. Are you afraid of the competition?”

So it seems that biofuels, which are causing food prices to rise globally, are not necessarily a part of the solution for global warming and reducing our dependence on foreign oil — in the way we are using corn, these biofuels seem to be a part of the problem. And if we’re thinking of Global Warming (and not just reducing our dependence on oil from the Middle East), we should be doing more than trying to only switch to biofuels. They say to use more energy-efficient light bulbs (though energy-efficient CFLs have methyl mercury in them, which is actually a man-made molecule, and a lot more dangerous than other forms of mercury, and we have no proper method

of removing it from recycling the glass in these bulbs, so this stuff gets seeped into our soil, and this harmful stuff gets back to us...), and we need more energy-efficient homes and lifestyles. When you say that (change your lifestyle, cut back on things, deprive yourself of things) it reminds me of how Objectivist arguments propose that environmentalists aren't interested in saving the planet but in restricting humans, so I'm not necessarily interested. But if I have to drive a car, I'll use the fuel-efficient Saturn instead of paying too much money for an SUV, and if I have to work, I'll do it without turning on every light bulb in the house (I know I've got a computer on to write this, but I haven't turned on a light to work because of windows bringing natural light into my office). If we're not willing to restrict our life to



latch onto a plan which some say without thinking will help the environment, we can at least think about the choices we make in our everyday lives, and see how living smartly can not only save us money, but also leave less of a carbon footprint behind.

Janet Kuypers[®]
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

news you can use

from Watching the world, **Awake!** magazine 01/08:

More Harm than Good?

A few years ago, Dutch politicians and environmentalists thought that they had found the key to sustainable energy — running generators on biofuel, notably palm oil. Their hopes became “an environmental nightmare,” says *The New York Times*. “Rising demand for palm oil in Europe brought about the clearing of huge tracks of Southeast Asian rainforest and the overuse of chemical fertilizers there.” Plantations were created by draining and burning peatland, sending “huge amounts” of carbon gases into the atmosphere. As a result, says the *times*, Indonesia fast became the “world’s third-leading producer of carbon emissions that scientists believe is responsible for global warming.”

Teenage Girl

Holly Cross

Standing in the rain or snow for thirty minutes
waiting for the drunk bus driver
who is late because his midnight shift at the plant held him over.
Riding on a bus with no seatbelt, while
large boys climb over you to go to the back to smoke.
Trying to cover yourself because your wet clothes cling to your new body.
The boys are staring at your breasts.
You think they are staring at the dimples of fat around your hips.
You feel exposed, teenage girl.
You can't be bothered with facts and numbers.
You're naked!
The mind slips in and out of girlhood.
It twirls into places, scary places filled with ballet shoes and jelly beans
and the cologne scented collar bone of that football player.
The mind turns on itself.
The world turns on you.
You look for an escape,
but no one shows you the way.
Diving off of cliffs of rock
a phone is ringing
the smell of copper hangs in the air.
It suffocates.
How do you get out alive?
How did your Mother?
How did your sister?
How do we all?
Rest, teenage girl.
There is more, so much more.

The Pick Up Line

Shannon Krol

What a fool you are
To think your good looks
Would make me fall to my knees

I am not one to love an empty box
because I like the wrapping

Take your hollowness away.
Your lines make me laugh in your face.

Call me a bitch it will make me laugh more
I am not another feeble-minded whore.

City

Kenneth DiMaggio

Say Hi to your Mom
whose housing project
in Hartford
is more dangerous than
your ambush ready car bomb
in Baghdad

And this Hello for the Holidays
transmission is brought to you by
the suburban white TV
that would usually show
your boy Carlos or Efrain
as the victim
but mostly perpetrator
on the eleven p.m. news

which always leads
with a fuzzy convenience store
surveillance tape of a ski mask faced
teenager pistol whipping
a broken English speaking immigrant
serving as the latest stand in
for the American Dream

At least
we know how obesity
became Obese-city

--the only neon still blazing
is to advertise the tin-foil wrapped
micro-fried cholesterol

while our souls
get similar unhealthy zaps
from a satellite above
that warms up the same talk show trauma
and epileptic religious revival
which filters back down
as invisible fallout that only shows
up in "Rest in Peace" tattoos
for all the friends and relatives
lost to suicide overdose gun shot
or drive by say

Bye

to your daughter or son
who stand a better chance
against some old Peugeot taxi
rigged to explode

And who or what will start the fire

that will burn you out
of your rent-controlled but riot-ruined
brick that will smoke choke clog
a crib caged niece but fail to kill
the cockroaches and other vermin
that will give the free breakfast program
pre-school kids asthma and skin disease

--you just never know
where the poison will come from

It's just another poem to tattoo

on a junk food fueled narrative

In The Breakfast Room At The Holiday Inn Express

David J. Thompson

I'm trying real hard to sip my coffee and read
the sports pages of my complimentary *USA Today*,
but obviously the Japanese tourists have not mastered
the finer points of the American waffle iron.
The high pitched screams of pain make it hard
to concentrate and the odor of burning flesh
renders my cinnamon role inedible, so I put
a lid on my coffee, grab a peach yogurt,
and head back to my room to find out
who won last night's games on ESPN.

sculpture in
Shanghai, China
by John Yotko

Picklish

David Lawrence

What Democrat is sour as a pickle?

She belongs in a vat on the lower east side.
She wants to be the great Vlassic in the sky.

"Give me my husband's job back,"
Is her modus operandi.

If she can discredit the war in Iraq
She can rent out Lincoln's
Bedroom again.

Hillary is hoping that she can become
President and add her sperm to Bill's old blue dress.



Hangin' Together in Minnesota

Michael Lee Johnson

Two thousand men on death row
in the state of Texas. I've never
been here, still I'm worrying
myself to death.

Webs of worry travel fast,
scan over my memory bank
back and forth like a copy machine.

I refuse to get out of my bed
I'm covered with burnt dream ashes
held in custody my cobwebbed anxiety
sheets waiting for the on looking armed
system of justice to take me away.

Their loud speakers keep screaming channeled
commands through vibrating my eardrums;
their messages keep cross-firing against my own desires.

There must be a warrant out for my arrest.

I will not listen period. I will shut out the sounds period.
Insanity echoes with stressed sounds.

It's Sunday morning, prayer time, I swear I will block out
the church bells ringing on Franklin Avenue, ringing
at St. Paul's Baptist Church.

Religion confuses me like poetry or prose.

I curse I will hang where Christ used to dangle;
wooden cross-post in a Roman Catholic hole,
or was it protestant reformation?

I'm the thief, not the Savior.

I don't want to die in my worry, my words, stranger in this world alone.
I want to resurrect the dream before the wounds came, and placed me in exile.

Long before the sounds of cell phones came ringing.
There must be a warrant out for my arrest.
Mixed in war, thunder, and sentence fragment.

We Infest Earth

Joe Frey

We infest earth as maggots would rancid meat.
Whilst we are the only living organism that,
with our selfish manifestation, would infest
to infect that which we need to exist.

This earth, yielding our fruition, affording
us our atmosphere and environment - is our life.
So steadfast are we in the corruption,
the absolute depletion of our very existence.

An immanency as this I urgently pen for
our awareness. The maggots will
multiply as they devour then move on.
Although there is no moving on for us.

The self-indulgent existence of our very lives will
have pathetically withered away. Like the maggots
away from futile meat they crawl, expunged.
Strung with yellow caution around Her axis,
She begs you, before the irreversible damage is done

Among The Debris

Ken Fisher

High-stepping cautiously through the tall weeds
Overwhelming an Inuit graveyard
We wend our way silently, over flagstones
That once formed a path into mourning

But now, rampant growth just obscures the old trail
From the church parking-lot, dirt and gravel,
As we tread single-file, respectfully quiet
Beneath the huge yews standing vigil

Picket slats long ago blasted by storm
Into pathetic submission
Lie, strewn and scattered, among the debris
Of last Fall's descent into Winter

We enter a graveyard unlike countless others
I've visited spanning the years
While searching the head-stones for humor's defiance
And stories deserving a witness

But here, we have furring-strips slapped into crosses,
And granite's nowhere to be seen,
Just picket fences, some painted and tended,
Enclosing each burial space

Though most struggle hopelessly, losing support
In their battle against gravity,
Leaning upon low, weathered, gray shacks
A leprechaun couldn't crawl into

Which frame out the resting place of every body
Laid out in a timeless repose
Beneath the protection of warped, battered boards
Now popping nails loose with each season

If you took a false step, your foot would cave through
The boards buried six months in drifts
While whispering faintly of lives long forgotten
Which once braved the chill of Alaska

Perhaps the soft murmuring only craves witness
Perhaps it protests lack of privacy
But suddenly uncomfortable, questioning intrusion
On sacred land now swallowed up by Nature

I pick my way despondently back through the weeds
In hope I've not offended with my presence
Where such dilapidation seems an insult
To even one as casual toward ritual as I

I know it doesn't matter to their God or to their souls
To gaze down on the weeds and broken slats becoming earth
So why then does it feel a gross indignity?
Why then does it matter to my soul?

As we try to put two hundred miles behind us,
In a chill that nags my conscience
While we tail the midnight sun.

Shallow Water

Tanya Rucosky Noakes

I wanted everything
you could give me
when you said, "I love you."—
all your secret self—
nothing to elude me—
no consuming hunger.

When I had you all
for cheap as the asking,
I found myself bored
that you had nothing more—
that you were nothing more—
than what could be given.

somewhere along the line

someone discovered that
people will purchase feces
if laced with enough perfume
and advertising hype.

***Sexy! Sporty! Cool! Patriotic!
Safe! Family-Friendly! Pure!
God-Like! Environmentally Friendly!***

and now there is feces everywhere.

on television. in books.
in our food. on computer
screens. at our stores.
even in our souls. there
is feces

everywhere.

Adam Joseph Ortiz

The Strange Effects Of Weather

Joseph D. Reich

as always
out of nowhere
like some miracle

autumn comes tumbling in
through your window
while all you hear

is the murmur
of some madman
over your television

for spot-remover
and angels
weeping

jimmy stewart still strolling down the street
with his imaginary rabbit harvey
making small-talk

and offering his colorful opinions
embracing the seasons and not giving
a rip van-winkle about rumors from gossipy neighbors.

in truth *in reality*
he never really cared
much for them anyway

as that sweet & saintly girl
from 'wonderful' still holds a pretty
deep crush on him despite his ways

and falls fast asleep with a big dumb
stupid smile on his face next door
to the rapturous roar of foghorns.

the drunken girls all
return home from karaoke bars
while it is no wonder he feels neither

conflict nor contrition
about his supposed bizarre
arrested stage of development

as in a couple months time
he will see his repeats over
and over again on television.

That Was The Time

Julia O'Donovan

The grounds are full of ice
The mail carrier is moving slow
How many times have they slipped?
Their balance must be good

I remember the winter
Mother slipped on the ice
Came down hard
Breaking her leg

That was the year
I drank too much
They put me in restraints
And pumped my stomach

That was the time
We should have
Packed it up
Called it quits

No one liked you
Said I could do better
But I let you
Bully me

You were so controlling
You once called me
Home from work early
To mow the fucking lawn

That was the year
You threw a chair at me
For something
I didn't understand

You made it a point
For me to be
As miserable
As you

You said you would leave me
When I turned thirty
I turned thirty
And thankfully, you left

Aftiel

Michaela Sefler

The angel of twilight
between light and darkness
he does rule, in between,
where all is possible.
All sides strengthening and ebbing
coming and going;
a continuum
and the beauty of the in between is still.
For perfect is the mix
of light and darkness
none more then the other
for the eye to behold.
Dusk and sunrise
sunset and dawn;
in the in-between
is the angel ruling.
The point
where all can be set right
for none know the true mystery of creation.

news you can use

Global Warming and Conservation stats

I haven't given the world too many stats about global warming (or conserving energy) recently. But I saw these statements in the magazine *American Way* (October 1997) and thought I'd share them with you.

Worldwide consumption of bottled water reached 154 billion liters (41 million gallons) in 2004, an increase of 57% in 5 years.

In the U.S., we go through more than 75 million bottles of bottled water a year. And more than 1 billion people worldwide don't have access to safe drinking water.

A carbon footprint is made up of two parts:

1. the primary/direct footprint is the measure of our CO₂ emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, including transportation and direct energy consumption
2. the indirect/secondary footprint is the measure of the indirect CO₂ emissions from the whole life cycle of products we use (which includes manufacture through breakdown)

Compact fluorescent light bulbs last 6 to 10 times longer, and are more energy efficient.

(editor's note: from the October 2007 editorial, on line at <http://scars.tv/ccdissues/ccd177oct07/ccd177oct07.htm>: "CFLs [compact fluorescent lights] have methyl mercury in them, which is actually a man-made molecule, and a lot more dangerous than other forms of mercury." And we don't try to save and recycle this harsh substance: "People usually (whenever bulbs die, even these CFLs) throw the light bulbs away, or possibly recycle them [for the glass only].")

We lose at least 37.5 million acres (that's about the size of the state of Georgia) of rainforest each year — and rainforests are home to half of the earth's animal and plant species.

The average washing machine uses 40.9 gallons of water per load.

Half of the forests that originally covered 48% of the earth's land surface are gone.

Organic farming is typically 30% more energy efficient than traditional farming.

The average car emits twice its weight in CO2 each year.

Disposable diapers take 200 to 500 years to decompose.

At the current rate of global warming, all the glaciers in Glacier National Park (which is in Courtts, AB, Canada) will be gone by 2070.

It takes 90 years to grow a box of tissue.

In 2006, China overtook the United States as the biggest CO2 emitter.

The number of hurricanes worldwide classified as either category 4 or 5 has almost doubled in the past 35 years.

In the United States, it takes about a third of a pound of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to grow enough cotton for one t-shirt.

Every year, catalog industries send more than 20 million catalogs — or 67 per person in America.

Sea levels could rise more than 20 feet with the loss of Greenland's and Antarctica's shelf ice.

The CO2 emissions in cars when going 65 mph instead of 55 mph more than double (no fair, I like to speed – ed.)

A U.S. Household typically generates 45,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions per year.

In order to prevent Taj Mahal pollution, visitors must park almost 2 miles away and take either a battery-run bus or a horse-drawn carriage to get there (though this statistic never mentioned walking the 2 miles... - ed.)

The U.S. Uses about \$1 million in energy per minute.

The Arctic Ocean could be ice-free in the summers by 2050.

American throw away 25 billion foam cups each year.

Driving 10 fewer miles every week could eliminate 500 pounds of CO2 emissions a year.

In the U.S. Each year, more than 100 billion pounds of food is wasted.

Every 20 minutes, we add 3,500 human lives to the planet, but lose 1 or more animal or plant species.

Eight trees will cancel out 4 years' worth of garbage.



Janet Kuypers®

Janet Kuypers

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

Bafflement

Pat Dixon

“I had one hell of a frustrating dream this morning, Margie. It really pisses me off.”

Marjorie Hamilton glanced up from her computer, where she was processing a batch of interlibrary loan requests.

“Why’s that, Dr. S.?” she said with a quiet smile.

“Because I don’t see any ways I can use it, of course,” said Kate Shaughnessy, frowning and shrugging in a theatrical way. “My dreams ought to be of use to me. Usually they are. Well, occasionally they are.”

“Be with you in a sec,” said Marjorie. “Just give me—a moment—more. There. So tell me about it. I can give you six minutes—then I’ll have to take another work break. First, what was your dream?”

“Well, you know I was married for two years, right? Anyways, I’m sure I never told you I had a little child—a boy—Kevin—who was premature and only lived for five and a half hours. I actually held him almost the whole while, knowing that he was dying, but that’s not the point. He was my only child—and this morning I had a dream that I had a very tiny baby girl—no name for her in the dream—just a tiny light-haired girl that was lying on the center of a twin bed looking up at me. How ‘bout that?”

“Maybe it was a sort of wish type of dream,” said Marjorie.

“No—I’m pretty sure it wasn’t. I came into the room, anxious that I’d left her—that I’d forgotten about her and was doing other things—that I’d gotten sidetracked with personal stuff of my own—and I realized that she could fall off the bed onto the floor while I was away and, maybe, break her neck or—crack her skull and—become damaged—crippled or—not right in the head, you know? By the way, it was my own bedroom she was in, but not on my bed. My bed’s a so-called full-size or double, while this was clearly just a twin bed—and that’s important, too.”

Kate paused, frowned again, and shook her head twice. Marjorie raised both her eyebrows encouragingly.

“Yes?”

“She was the size of a newborn, lying there on her back, wearing a little diaper. Then she began to shrink—and darken—and roll over on her stomach—and I just stood there at the foot of the bed and watched it happen. She shrank and shrank and shrank—right down to about half an inch—like a dark little cricket—and no longer had a diaper—at least that I noticed. If she had one, it was brownish-black, like her teeny body, so it blended in. Then she began to crawl and make little hops towards the side edge of the bed—and I just stood there and watched and didn’t try to stop her.”

“Pretty damn’ creepy!” said Marjorie with a rapid shrug.

“Yup. And then my little daughter hopped off the bed onto my rug, scuttled to the baseboard near my closet—and crawled out of sight—and I woke up.”

“Hmm. Were you reading Kafka recently—or teaching one of his stories? I recall one where I guy woke up as a cockroach or something.”

“No, it wasn’t like that. I’ve taught that story a dozen times and have it coming up again next term—but I’ve figured out what this means. At least I’m pretty sure I have. You know what’s my chief problem these days?”

“Getting tenure?”

“Well, probably—as my long-term goal here at Witherspoon. No, I mean my immediate problem—day-to-day, week-to-week.”

“Your mom? Your mom’s care—as she goes, well, battier?”

“Yup. It’s like role reversal. I’m the adult in charge now, and she’s getting more and more childish every time I see her. She’s been in the hospital in Hartford for over four weeks, and I’ve started scouting rest homes for her. I’m planning on moving her—again—fourth time in seven years. Each time I’ve moved her, she hates the place for half a year or so, which upsets me, too. Whatever is left of her brain will blame me for whatever she’s unhappy with—or so I feel. She has lost a lot more marbles in just the past month, so she might notice the change less.”

Marjorie nodded sympathetically. She had been through something similar.

“My mom—who has a twin bed—and wears diapers—is like a little baby girl now and seems to be shrinking down into something less than human—something I try to—to, well, distance myself from, physically—and emotionally. Anyways, that’s how I interpreted my own dream while I was lying awake five minutes before getting up: I was feeling guilty about pulling away and somehow neglecting my mom—who was going to vanish after she shrank more and more and more.”

“I guess that makes sense—though you know you are one weird ‘mother,’ Kate.”

“Ha—yes, I am, aren’t I? But the dream itself didn’t really trouble me,

Margie. It was mainly that I couldn't think of any ways to use it—remember?"

"What do you mean 'use'?"

"Well, I'm always on the lookout for ways to turn stuff into stories—lemons into lemonade, or whatever. You've been to a couple of my little fiction readings upstairs here, right?"

"Yuh. More than a couple. And?"

"Parts of some of my stories, as I tell audiences, have come from some of my own dreams—altered, turned inside-out, sex-changed, whatever. And many of my recent stories have to do with my so-called 'elder care' experiences. Anyways, I can't figure any ways—of turning this perfectly good, reasonable, vivid dream into a short story. I've got a new alter-ego character—Charlie Bennett—who is caring for his elderly mom in several of my latest stories, but he is not bright enough to have such a dream—and understand it. I can't think of any way he could come up with the correct interpretation for such a dream—and besides, he hasn't had any children, and for this dream he should've had at least one son."

"Hmm. Maybe you should invent a female alter ego that is smart enough."

"I've got one for non-elder-care stories—Pat Dixon. She's smart enough, but I'd have to reinvent a lot of her life. She doesn't have any children—at least none I know of yet—and I don't know, yet, what her situation is with any parents she might have."

"You'll think of something. Maybe you just need a whole new alter-ego character."

Slush Pile

G.A. Scheinoha

A long table stands between you, an oak distance greater than mere miles. Submissions trickle in daily, flutter down among the myriad other papers, scraps of his own ideas, dreams, synapses made known, the whole littering, burying this makeshift desk.

Good place for A Norseman funeral, the corpus delecti laid out atop the clutter. Only real requirement for a proper sendoff to Valhalla isn't some chubby blonde Valkrie beneath horned Haagar helmet who waits her fat chance to sing. Just the torch/pen to enflame the mind with these words.

Now he knows what was previously unfathomable; the power of an editor (albeit for a cheap, photocopied zine). How like some dubious deity, an odious Odin of the far north who doesn't need Thor's hammer, he hurls thunderbolts of rejection with one hand and quiet letters of acceptance with the other.

Mason's Two Dollar Bill

Jim Meirose

Mason sat on the grey metal seat welded to the side of the tall green two dollar bill machine, feeling the cold come up from the steel, signaling his body that he was where he belonged. He had been on the job four weeks now; and it was so much better than his prior job, running a handle grinding machine at Steele's Hammer Works. Those machines were so puny and spindly. This machine was so much more massive and powerful; feeling Godlike, he leaned his bony shoulder against the heavy green steel casting, pressing buttons, pulling levers, and watching meters and turning valves, sending shivers of earsplitting vibration through the great machine's frame and himself; up through the seat and into his spine and into his throbbing brain; and once more he was told by the great mechanism that he was exactly where he belonged, where he'd always been meant to end up; and at last the tall stacks of two dollar bills came smoothly out the wide maw of the machine onto a heavy framed solid steel dolly. Short squat swarthy Tillman, Mason's helper, would take the massive Dolly when it was full, and bring it to where the money would be processed further, and he brought back an empty dolly and put it its place—and the two dollar bill machine would barely pause, before the great motors and gears and levers and rods and cylinders and printing press plates deep inside powered up again, and Mason gripped the handholds and half closed his blue eyes once more, riding high on the vibration and the noise and the heat radiating from the great mass of steel beside him.

Higher.

Higher!

Higher!

Just these few weeks on the wonderful job and he already had the massive machine mastered. Proudly he sat high in the operator's seat, day after day, mindlessly absorbing the vibration and the heat and the noise, until one day Jim Pritchard the horse-faced manager came up in his white shirt and short wide tie and motioned for Mason to stop the machine, that he wanted to speak to him. Mason pushed three red buttons and the machine whined to a shuddering groaning stop, as though it was angry at having been stopped—and he hopped off the seat five feet onto the floor.

“What do you need, Mr. Pritchard?” said Mason, pushing his shock of black hair from his black eyes, his ears ringing from the din of the machine and his backbone tingling.

“What is it?” he repeated. “What can I do for you?”

The stooped over tall Pritchard raised a brown clipboard before him in his long spindly fingers as he answered.

“We need you to work this machine Saturday and Sunday, Mason. Nine to five shift. Full quota. What do you say?”

Mason fought the vibration from his head and screwed up his lips and scratched at his chin. He had plans with his pale plain wife Edna to take her mother to St. Andrew’s shrine this Saturday afternoon. Edna believed in prayer; Edna wanted to go badly. Edna believed in God.

Mason grimaced and brought his hand down from his chin and shoved it in the pocket of his blue work pants, and told the truth as Edna would have wanted.

“Sorry, Mr. Pritchard, I really can’t work overtime this weekend—me and Edna and her Mom have plans—”

Pritchard’s large watery blue eyes flashed and his jaw dropped.

“I’m afraid you’ve got no choice,” he said to Mason in a lower, rougher voice. “I’ll tell you what Mason—overtime is mandatory here—If you don’t come in this Saturday and Sunday, then don’t come in Monday or Tuesday or anymore at all. Listen—we need you Mason. We need you on this machine Saturday and Sunday. We’ve got quotas to make. We’re behind where we should be. There’s money at stake. We need you. That’s it. Be here. I know you will.”

Pritchard smiled dimly, narrowed his eyes, turned around on his heel and went back to his glass walled office and sat down and put his clipboard on the desk and picked up the phone and started to punch the buttons. Mason stared across at him, hardly believing he’d just heard what he had, until big Tillman came up pushing an empty dolly, gripping its handles in his wide hands.

“What’s the matter, Mason?” said Tillman through fleshy lips. “Why are you just standing there like that? You look pissed off or something. Why isn’t the machine running—”

“I supposed I am pissed off, Tillman,” said Mason. “I’m pissed off, and I’m confused.”

“Why?”

Mason’s eyes flashed.

“Do you ever get asked to work overtime, Tillman?”

“Sure I do,” he said slowly. “All the time.”

“Do you ever say no to the overtime?”

Tillman looked around and scratched at an arm.

“Oh, sure, once in a while—but it never matters to Pritchard if I do. Anybody can do my job. There’s nothing to it. Just push this thing. Push it

up full, push it back empty, push it up full, push it back empty. You see me. It's not like your job up there in your seat, all complicated with all those handles and meters and buttons and valves and all that. I couldn't do that kind of job. You got a brain, Mason. That's why they got you up there."

"But you say no to overtime?" asked Mason again.

"Yes I do."

"Thanks."

Grim-faced Mason swung himself back up onto the chair on the side of the two dollar bill machine and pressed the buttons and pulled the levers, watched the meters and turned the valves, that sent the din of the gnashing of gears and grinding of steel and the clatter of all the moving parts in the machinery winding all around him like a heavy white halo of earsplitting noise that he rode for the rest of the afternoon, smothering out all thoughts of what Pritchard had said, making him feel great as it always did, as his spine and brain were nearly shaken to bits, until the loud whistle mounted high on the yellow concrete block wall blew that said it was four thirty—time to stop the machine and go home to Edna. As he cleaned up in the washroom he plunged his filthy hands into the steaming hot water and the words of Pritchard came back to him and he bit his lip hard, nearly bloody, to stop them from winding through his brain.

—then don't come in Monday or Tuesday or any day at all—

Pritchard couldn't have meant that, thought Mason.

Nobody ever means anything like that.

Pritchard couldn't have meant that at all.

Yes—Pritchard was just joking. A weird kind of Joke, but a joke. After all Pritchard had smiled as he turned away. Yes.

Mason smiled, deeply relieved.

At home he went up the grey back steps and through the back shed and into the small yellow kitchen. Edna stood by the sink in a flowered dress with a dishrag hung in one hand and a plate in the other.

"Hello honey," said Mason, going over and lightly pecking her on the cheek.

"Hello," she said smiling, flipping the dishrag and plate up on the drain-board. She leaned her bottom against the counter edge and folded her arms.

"So what's new with you?" she asked. "Still like the new job? I'm so glad you've got a job you can stand—"

He unbuttoned his blue shirt as he answered.

"Oh—yes, its fine. But a little problem came up today." "What?" she said, suddenly straight-lipped, pressing a fist to her hip. "What problem?"

He slipped out of his shirt and draped it over a chairback as he spoke, being honest as he knew she always wanted him to be.

"I need to work the two dollar bill machine Saturday and Sunday. We can't go to the shrine."

Edna's pale eyes bugged, and she planted a fist against her hip.

"I'm sorry Edna—we can go another weekend—"

"What?" she said harshly. "This has been set up for a month. Mom really wants to go this Saturday. Its all she's talking about."

Mason swallowed hard and wrung his hands.

"I know," he said. "But I can't help it."

She folded her arms and shook her head.

"Well, just tell them you can't work, you've got plans."

He tugged at a sleeve of his white t-shirt.

"I did," he said. "It didn't do any good."

"Why not?"

Mason glanced down from her frown, then back up into it, blinking hard to beat it back.

"Mr. Pritchard said if I don't work the overtime, I shouldn't come back ever again."

Her mouth formed into a large O.

"What? Does he really mean that?"

He shuffled his heavy work shoes.

"Well, I don't think so—I mean I hope not."

She leaned on the countertop and tilted her head.

"You mean nobody there can ever say no to overtime?"

He told her what Tillman had said—that he had said no to it, and gotten by, and why.

"Lord!" she cried, pacing from one end of the kitchen to the other and flailing her arms in time with her words. "You mean because you do a more complicated job than somebody else there, you get punished? Because you're good at your job? That's wrong Mason. That's so so wrong."

She planted her hip hard against the countertop and threw her head back.

He waved a hand and stepped across the room.

"I know it's wrong, Edna. But there's nothing I can do—"

She raised a hand to stop his words and pushed away from the countertop and stepped toward him.

"Yes you can," she said sharply, pointing into his chest. "Tell them that if you're going to be forced to work, you'll only work if you get paid for the overtime. You get paid for overtime down there, don't you?"

She looked up at him hard-eyed, her mouth tight.

"I don't know if I get overtime pay—"

Her jaw dropped.

"What? What do you mean you don't know if you get overtime pay?"

Didn't you find that out when you interviewed for the job?"

"No. But I like the job—my machine—"

She raised a finger into his face.

"But nothing!" she said. "That's it! Go in tomorrow and say you need to get paid, or you won't work. That's it. That's what you'll do. Never mind you like the job, your machine, and all that baloney. You work for money! You work to get paid! You won't be forced without being paid!"

"All right," said Mason wearily.

All right.

She filled the table with food from the oven and stove and they slid onto their hard kitchen chairs. They ate their chicken and mashed potatoes and peas and a ring of silence Mason couldn't stand formed around them, tightening the room about him, tightening a ring about his head, making him eat faster and faster—she was right. He shouldn't be forced. The food nearly choked him going down. He shouldn't be forced unless he got paid, the silence told him. And he should be paid well. Suddenly he was grateful for the silence; the silence always told him what was right. The evening passed, they watched TV, they chatted lightly, no more talk about work, except one thing.

"You know what Edna?"

"What?"

"I'm going to tell them tomorrow Edna. Everything you said is right."

"Of course its right. Good. I love you Mason."

"I love you too."

They went to bed. He went to sleep quickly, deeply fatigued by the ear-splitting noise and vibrations and stresses and strains and hard words of the day. And sleep was an escape for him; an escape from all the stresses.

The morning came too quickly, as always.

Edna was right, he thought as he dressed. He would tell Pritchard. He would go see him first thing.

He would get paid, or not work. That's it.

After entering the huge grey-floored factory building, Mason made his way around the giant ten dollar and one dollar machines toward Pritchard's office at the dead center of the factory floor. The machines roared with great rattling and rolling and pumping and sighing sounds that told him what he had to do, as he strode forward, his steeltoes shuffling confidently across the smooth concrete.

Need to tell Pritchard—no work unless there's overtime.

Need to tell Pritchard.

Need to tell him—

Need to—

Need—

Mason rounded the corner of a large roaring and chattering one dollar bill machine and faced the door to Pritchard's office. Pritchard sat at his desk, his back to the door, and his head down, examining some document laid on his lap before him, his skinny chicken neck showing every bone up the back. Mason knocked at the steel doorframe. Pritchard swiveled his chair around with a loud metallic screech. He spoke as though surprised at the sight of Mason. Mason always went straight to his job. What could be wrong?

His eyebrows rose. His lips writhed out words.

"Mason—how're you? What can I do for you? Something wrong with the two dollar bill press—something you need—it's the ink room isn't it? They don't have your ink—"

"No, Mr. Pritchard," said Mason. "I want to talk about the overtime you told me about on Saturday and Sunday."

"Oh right," said Pritchard, lowering his brow and tossing his paperwork on the desk, leaning back, and rubbing his slightly protruding belly. "Decided to work it have you? That's good. I knew you'd come around. I knew you'd do the right thing."

His mouth twisted into a syrupy smile.

Mason looked down, coughed lightly into his hand, cleared his suddenly bone-dry throat, then looked up and gripped the doorframe harder as he forced out words.

"Yes, oh yes, I'll probably work it—I'm working it out with my wife and her mother—but actually I was wondering if I'll be paid for working the overtime if I do."

Pritchard slid a hand into his pocket and slightly threw back his long-faced head and spoke through yellowish protruding front teeth.

"Well of course you won't be paid for it, he said. You're a salaried employee. Salaried employees don't get paid for overtime. Overtime is part of the job—it's mandatory. You don't have a forty hour a week job—you work the time it takes to get the job done. Didn't they make this clear to you during your job interview? It's something they should have covered Mason. I can't believe they didn't."

Mason's stomach once more grew deeply hollow and he gripped the doorframe even harder, his nails digging into the thick paint.

"Well," he said in a thin voice. "No they didn't."

"They should have," said Pritchard. "I can hardly believe they didn't. We're professionals back here in this plant. Professionals don't count nickels and dimes about getting paid for a few hours of overtime. Professionals do the job. That's it. We need you to work, Mason, and that's it." Pritchard sat ramrod straight and his large hard eyes bored into Mason's as he waited for a reply.

Mason gulped hard—his throat was dry—why was his throat so dry?

He dug his nails deeper into the doorframe.

“Well—okay Mr. Pritchard—thanks for the answer,” Mason heard himself say meekly, and Pritchard quickly raised a skinny white sleeved arm to signal that that was all he expected to hear back from Mason.

“Now go out there and run that press down into the ground,” said Pritchard, his mouth in a smile, his lips writhing wormlike. “Pump out those two dollar bills—they’re important. Nobody can run that machine like you, Mason. Nobody’s ever run that machine like you. So go to it. And we’ll see you Saturday and Sunday.”

Pritchard looked down, turned a page of the paperwork before him, and bent once more to his work without waiting for Mason to answer. No answer was expected; just obedience. Wrapped in the rattling and roaring of the machinery all around him, which mercifully drove all thought of the words that had just been said from his mind, Mason made his way robotlike to the ink room to get a pot of ink for his press, as he did at the beginning of every shift. As he started to go through the narrow iron door set in the wall he nearly collided head on with tall blonde haired Richard Brockman, the one and ten dollar bill press operator, who gripped two large pots of ink in his thick-fingered hands. Mason looked up to Brockman, and respected him for being able to run two presses at once, full speed. Mason hoped to be able to do that someday; and the way he was going, he would make it. It was all about proving yourself. It was all about being best. He quickly stepped back from Brockman to avoid the collision.

“Woops—sorry,” said Mason. “Almost ran into you.”

“That’s okay,” said Brockman, pausing momentarily. “What’s new? I saw you in talking to Pritchard before. Anything new with the two dollar bill press? She running all right?”

“Oh—sure she’s running fine,” said Mason, looking around. “Say Brockman, I’ve got a question.” said Mason suddenly, surprising himself as the words slid out.

“What?” replied Brockman.

Mason spoke softly.

“Does anyone here get paid for overtime?”

Why was he asking, he thought—he’d just been told the answer by Pritchard—but something in him said ask Brockman. See how he sees it. See what he thinks.

Brockman leaned his shoulder on the doorframe and held the ink pots at his hips.

“Why do you ask?” he said, narrow-eyed.

Mason looked away. He didn’t really know why he had asked he’d just been told that should have been good enough he felt foolish for asking, but

damn, it just came out—

“Well, since you asked—I get paid overtime,” said Brockman. “My job’s dangerous. All those knives and swinging levers and spinning gears—plus the danger of running back and forth between two presses—I could slip and fall bad. I got to work on the run. They got to pay me. I’m worth every penny.”

Mason felt the bile rise in his throat and his stomach sicken hearing this. He pressed a hand to his stomach as the words kept coming out.

“Aren’t you salaried?”

“Oh, of course,” said Brockman. “We all are. So are you. We’re professionals. Say—why are you asking all this?”

Mason’s stomach churned. He choked back the bile.

“Oh—no reason. Just curious. Have a good day.”

“You too.”

Brockman walked off, ink pots rattling in his hands and Mason went into the darkened ink room and got his pots—black, deep black, and green, and red—and went out through the roaring that once more mercifully permitted no thought of what had just been said until he reached his two dollar bill machine. He poured the inks into the tanks and got up on his chair after nodding to Tillman that they were going to start and he pushed the buttons and pulled the levers to start the gnashing and roaring of the machine and the sound and vibration came up under him and held him up, surrounding him completely as a tight whirlwind; the face of Pritchard drifted before him, in the noise, mouthing the word professional, professional, and the twos poured out the front onto the cart and Mason really kept Tillman hopping with his Dolly and he churned his way through the day; the work, the breaks, the lunch—and Mason made himself think of nothing but his earsplitting clashing and crashing machine until it was the end of the day, and time to go home to Edna.

Edna. He just knew Edna would say something; what to say to Edna—

As he drove his seven year old Chevrolet toward home his mind switched gears and the conversation with Pritchard he’d had this morning ran through his mind and he forced it out by numbly gripping the wheel and concentrating on guiding the car through the surging traffic. When Mason came in the kitchen Edna stood at the counter carving great thick slabs of meat from a large hot slightly overdone roast beef. Mason went and pecked her on the cheek and said “Hello.”

“Hello Mason,” said Edna. “Roast beef tonight.”

“I know,” he said. “I can see that. It looks good. It smells good. You’re a great cook, Edna. Really great—”

She suddenly waved the large carving knife and turned to face Mason.

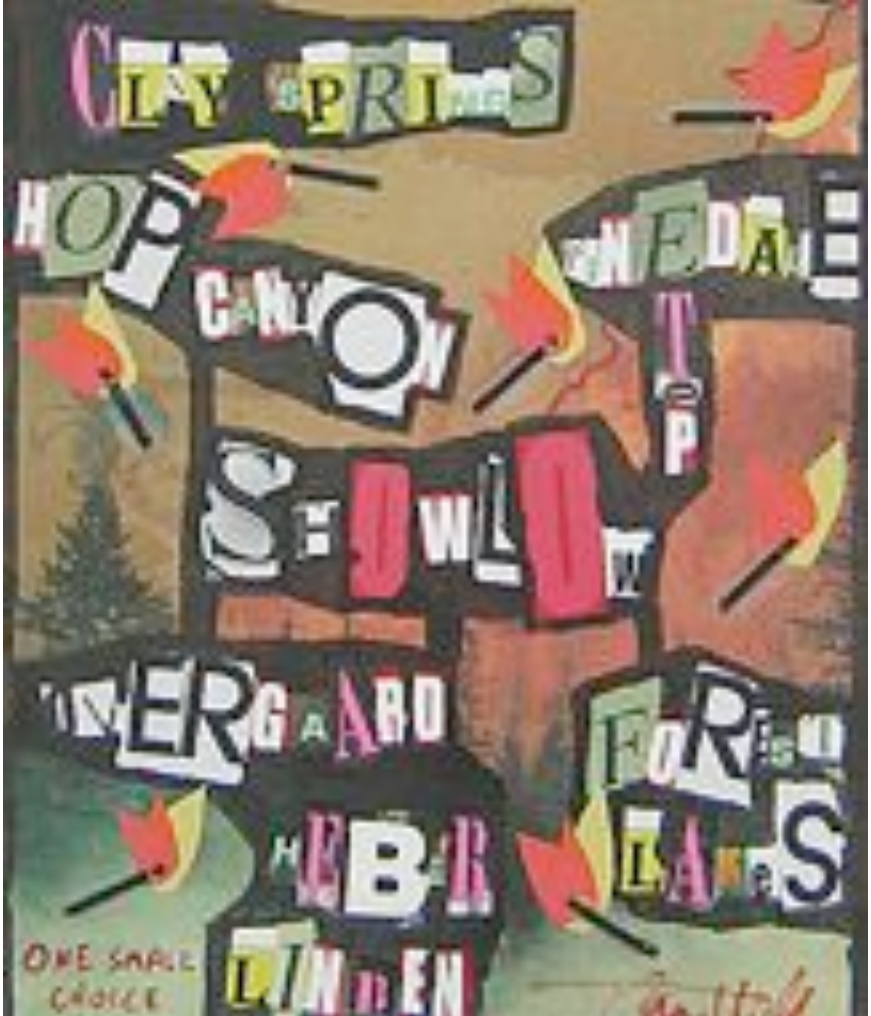
As she spoke she planted her other hand on her hip and leaned against the counter with her weight shifted over on one leg. She tilted her head back as she spoke.

“Did you ask your boss about the overtime we were talking about yesterday?” she said.

“Yes,” he said, his throat once more dry; he knew she would ask this; why does she have to ask this; he wanted all this talk to be over, he’s had enough of it for one day; he moved to wash his hands at the chipped white sink.

“And what did he say?”

The knife swung in her hand. Her eye pierced him. He looked away



One Small Choice, art by Aaron Wilder

and swallowed hard in the suddenly roaring wall of quiet between them.

Open your mouth let what comes out come out—

“He said I won’t get paid,” blurted Mason. “Said I’m a professional and professionals don’t get paid for overtime.” “What?” she said, half turning away and savagely plunging the knife into the roast, making him shudder. He put his hands up between them.

“It’s what I said—I have to work the overtime. And I won’t get paid. I talked to the boss—he said I’m a professional and professionals do what they have to do no matter how many hours it takes and don’t count nickels and dimes.”

Her head sharply tilted.

“What? That’s baloney Mason!” she shouted.

Her voice echoed to silence. The silence of the room cut through Mason. It was too quiet it was too too quiet— and her eyes my God her eyes—

She roughly pulled the knife from the roast and waved it at him again as she spoke fast.

“I can’t believe all those people that work in that big plant would put up with not getting paid overtime—”

“Well, one doesn’t put up with it,” blurted Mason, raising a hand, but instantly sorry he’d said anything. The silence echoed around him again as she waved the knife before speaking, wide-eyed.

“What? Who doesn’t put up with it? Do you mean you’re not going to put up with it—I hope that’s what you mean!”

Mason dried his hands with a striped dishtowel as he answered lightly.

“No, that’s not what I mean. It’s the guy who runs the tens and ones press. Says he gets paid for his overtime because its dangerous.”

She looked up at him, her face twisted into a mask.

“Well isn’t it just as dangerous for you?”

Mason turned the water back on and started washing his hands again.

“Mason. Why are you washing your hands again? Answer me- -isn’t your job just as dangerous?”

“Wait a minute,” he said. “Wait ‘till I wash my hands.”

The sound of the rushing water came up around him as if to shield him as Edna began speaking fast and loud from the echoing quiet of the room.

“I don’t understand, Mason—you say you’re told you can’t refuse overtime but then somebody tells you they refuse it all the time—then you’re told nobody gets paid overtime but then somebody tells you they do—what kind of a damned place is that you work at? What kind of a damned place—”

She waved her hands back and forth and over and under one another, still holding the knife, as she went on.

“—none of it makes any sense Mason. Be a man! Stand up to that

boss of yours and get a straight answer about all this.”

Mason dried his hands in a paper towel. Their eyes locked. Her eyes spoke to him. Her words cut through him.

Be a man, she said through her eyes.

He dried his hands harder. Their eyes remained locked. Now Tillman’s words drifted by in the silence between them.

—I don’t work overtime if I don’t want to—

Brockman’s words followed, low and smooth.

—I get paid overtime because my job’s dangerous—plus I run two presses at once—that’s hard to do—

Now Pritchard’s words coiled up through the quiet like tendrils of smoke from a cigarette in a stale still room.

—nobody gets paid overtime here we’re all professionals—

Pritchard’s pale face appeared over Edna’s.

—and by the way don’t come back again if you don’t work Saturday and Sunday—

Mason gulped.

—don’t come back Monday or Tuesday or ever again—

Mason swept a hand across erasing the vision of Pritchard’s ugly face and shut down all the words. His chest tightened—he turned angry. Mason’s hands formed to fists and he squeezed the paper towel hard. The room reformed about him as he spoke. He felt real again.

He felt like a man.

“I’ll confront the boss with all this tomorrow,” Mason told Edna loudly. “You’re right Edna. Its wrong how I’m being treated. Everybody should be treated the same.”

“Well good,” she said.

“Be a man.”

She finished cooking and brought the food to the table and they ate the roast and small white potatoes and gravy and corn in the now calm silence of the room. Mason had nothing to say in his anger. Edna had said enough already. After dinner they watched TV in silence and went to bed. Mason lay there looking up into the roiling dark.

Be a man, she had said.

Tell Pritchard.

Don’t ask him—tell him!

On the way to work next morning the trees and fields and houses and telephones flashed past Mason’s car to match his racing thoughts. He pictured himself standing before Pritchard, imagined himself telling him.

—I can’t work the overtime, Mister Pritchard—

And he imagined what Mister Pritchard would say.

—All right Mason. I understand. That’s all right—

A short squat water tower went by, abandoned.

Mason imagined himself saying it again.

—I can’t work the overtime, Mister Pritchard—

A great stand of rotting dead oaks passed by.

—Then don’t come back again, said Pritchard, rising—

Mason squeezed the steering wheel hard and pressed harder on the gas and the sound of the engine came up through the floorboards. He cut Pritchard off, out loud.

—I told you Mister Pritchard. Can’t you hear? I’m not working the overtime, and even if I did, I should get paid! And I’m coming back Monday and Tuesday and all even if I don’t work the overtime—because you’re wrong, Mister Pritchard. You’re dead wrong—

—What? What’s got into you Mason—what do you mean—

Pritchard turned in his swivel chair with a loud screeching squeak of the chair bearings. He slowly rose and began to talk but Mason now had reached the plant and quickly pulled the car into the parking lot and parked it fast and got out and went into the grey factory and once more made his way around the pounding chattering rocking and rolling machines to Pritchard’s office. Busy men hustled and bustled about him. But he passed through them.

Be a man, he thought, approaching the door.

He came up. He knocked on the doorframe.

Pritchard looked up from writing in a yellow pad.

“You again, Mason? What is it this time? I hope it’s not a problem with your press this time—”

Mason once more leaned a hand on the doorframe.

“Mister Pritchard, I got to tell you straight—I really can’t work this weekend. Edna’d been planning this visit to the shrine for weeks. I’ve got to take her. I have no choice.”

Pritchard leaned back in his chair and twined his long pale fingers together. His red lips writhed around his yellow teeth as he spoke.

“That’s too bad Mason,” he said. “I hate to lose you.”

Mason’s stomach hollowed once more. Again, he pressed his hand against it. He spoke as steadily as he could.

“What do you mean, you hate to lose me—”

Pritchard rose. He seemed taller than usual.

“Step in here, Mason. Come on in. Close the door.”

Mason entered and closed the door behind him. The tall glass walls filtered out the din of the machines outside. Pritchard tossed his head and pointed into Mason’s chest and spoke.

“You know Mason, I mean what I said before, You don’t work the weekend, you don’t come back again. Ever. It’s company policy. Overtime is mandatory. Everybody’s told that coming in—I know you must have been told that coming in—”

Edna’s hand came up behind pushing gently against Mason’s back. He took one step toward Pritchard and raised a hand.

“But I wasn’t told that. And you don’t force Tillman to work overtime.”

The concrete floor pressed to the soles of his feet. His feet suddenly ached. Pritchard grimaced and his eyes flashed.

“Who told you that?” he snapped.

“Tillman told me that.”

Pritchard raised a hand, rolled his eyes toward the ceiling, and then lowered them firmly into Mason’s.

“Oh God, Tillman. Listen—between you and I, Mason, pushing a cart’s all Tillman’s good for. Anybody can push one of those carts. We don’t need people to push carts on overtime. I’ll push the damned thing myself on overtime if I have to. But we need you on that two dollar bill machine, Mason. It isn’t just anybody knows how to run that one. That’s a tough machine to run. You should be proud of yourself. I’ve watched you. You’re a master.”

Pritchard paused, stepped forward, and put his hand on Mason’s shoulder. He set his eye firmly into Mason’s. His strong sour breath enveloped Mason’s head as he spoke.

“Yes, you’re damned good at running that machine,” said Pritchard. “Damned good. We need you. That’s the difference between Tillman and you. We need you. We need you and I can’t let you let us down.”

Pritchard’s hand flexed on Mason’s shoulder and his eyes bored deeply into Mason but Edna’s hand was still pressing from behind and pressed forward once more and Mason spoke.

“Brockman gets paid for his overtime,” Mister Pritchard.

Pritchard’s eyebrows rose and his face turned blank and he spoke calmly.

“Oh? And who told you that, boy?”

The hand flexed on Mason’s shoulder, digging in.

“Brockman told me,” said Mason.

Pritchard’s hand came off Mason’s shoulder and he stepped to the side of the office and raised his stubbly head and looked out over the rows of tall green machines, churning out piles and piles of bills, and he spoke softly to Mason.

“Have you looked close at Brockman’s hand, Mason?”

“No. Why?”

Pritchard turned back to Mason with his hands on his hips.

“He’s missing three fingers. Lost them on the dollar machine, out there. Out there where you work. He had the nerve to sue us, but we

couldn't stop him. He had a good lawyer. Part of his settlement was he gets overtime pay from now on. He didn't tell you that part, did he Mason? He didn't show you his hands, did he? Did he?"

Pritchard stared open-mouthed into Mason's eyes.

"No, he didn't."

Pritchard tossed his head toward Mason. His great brown watery blank eyes caught the light.

"Would you like to have three fingers missing Mason?"

"No."

"Aren't you glad you've got all your fingers, Mason? Aren't you glad you're whole? You should be thankful you're whole and healthy. That's what you ought to be thinking about. Not this nonsense about a little overtime."

Edna's hand pushed Mason once more.

"But I can't work the overtime—"

Pritchard turned fully toward Mason and pointed.

"Oh cut that out Mason! Be thankful that you're whole and healthy and not a dimwit like Tillman or a cripple like Brockman. Be thankful your biggest problem is you've got to work a weekend's overtime. Now—go on out there and push that press hard! Show us what you can do! And we'll see you in here Saturday and Sunday. You're a damned good man Mason. Damned good. I've had my eye on you Mason. I don't want to lose you. And I won't lose you!"

Edna's hand had melted away in the storm of words from Pritchard and the office door opened and Mason was blown backward out of the office and he stepped away without answering Pritchard, and he went to the ink room and got his inks and made his way toward the two dollar bill machine, went past Brockman's machines and tried not to look at Brockman's hand, went past Tillman without even saying hello, poured the inks into the tanks, climbed into his chair, and started the press up. Violently he pressed the buttons.

You're a good man Mason, had said Pritchard. A damned good man—

The grinding and whirring and clashing of the steel parts deep inside the machine whirled about him as a whirlwind, and the sighing and slamming of the press he sat proudly upon formed a thick circle of earsplitting noise through which only a few words penetrated, a few very important words, repeating themselves with each surge of noise and vibration up through Mason's steel seat, and up through his spine to his brain where he heard them.

—we don't want to lose you Mason—

—we don't want to lose you—

The machine roared through another day. Breaks and lunch came and went; his ears rang and his body vibrated through each break and lunch echoing the important words.

—We don't want to lose you—
And four more words added in—
—You should be thankful—
And six more—
—you should be thankful you're whole—

The two dollar bill machine's raging din carried Mason to the end of the day and he drove slowly home to Edna, idly counting the poles passing by to pass the time, something that he had always done in the car when nervous, to keep the words from continuing to repeat through his mind. The poles went by in a soothing rhythm.

—one hundred one—
—one hundred two—
—one hundred three—

He pulled the car slowly into the loose gravel driveway and got out and went under the spreading oak tree that had been there since long before there were ever two dollar bill machines, and would be there long after, and up into the house into the kitchen. Edna stood boiling a tall pot of egg noodles. A canned ham sat heating in the oven. A good meal; one of Mason's favorites. Mason came in and pecked her on the cheek and stepped over to the cracked sink once more to wash his hands, and she asked him right out, with no hesitation, what had been on her mind all day. She didn't want her man screwed; she wanted him to stand up, be a man, as her Father and Grandfather always had.

"Well? Did you tell them?"

He turned off the water and got down a paper towel. He turned to her and spoke softly.

"Yes, I did."

She put down the stirring spoon, crossed her arms, and faced him. His tone told her there was still a problem.

"Well?" she said. "What did they say?"

He went and scraped a kitchen chair away from the table and sat down leaning his head on his hands. "I'm thankful," he said.

"What—I asked you what did they say—"

He spoke abruptly, loudly.

"I'm thankful! And that's all I've got to say."

She planted a hand on her hip.

"What do you mean you're thankful? What are you thankful about? Did you tell them you expect to get paid the overtime did you tell them you expect not to be forced to work the weekend did you tell them did you tell them did you—"

Once more he felt her hand pressing into his back urging him to have said the right thing, to say the right thing, to do the right thing, but Pritchard's pi-

dery hand was there too, pressing into his chest, pushing the other way, also urging him to have said the right thing, to do the right thing—but the two things clashed and contradicted one another and the hands pressed hard and into him and met together, palm to palm, near his heart. All of the words tangled into a hard knot there, and suddenly he knew—

—they both loved him!

So it didn't matter what he said or did—they both loved him and he would move forward for both of them, moving from day to day as he'd been doing, and the kitchen chair became the steel seat on the side of the two dollar bill machine and the kitchen contained the fierce clashing din of the machine as he sat, pressing buttons and pulling levers, the bills smoothly coming out of the front of the machine and out across the kitchen table, keeping Tillman hopping with Pritchard and Edna looking on, both right, both smiling, both so proud of him watching the noise and vibration lift him high, higher, finally raising him into the timeless silence far above the clash and crash of all the meaningless words and the sights and sounds and smells of the kitchen and whatever he'd do or not do this weekend or the next or the next and Mason loved just one thing in that endless instant; his wonderful, towering, roaring two dollar bill machine.



What Do You See, art by Cheryl Townsend



the **UN**religious,
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