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Wooden Door, art by
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4, 6. Cover art of a globe designed for understanding global warming that was displayed outdoors in Chicago in 2007.

the boss lady's editorial

Eye on the Sky... and Eye on Politics

I know cc&d carries astronomy news, but we can show how astronomy and politics (like the Boss Lady's Editorials) really have a history together

Leafing through the Sunday edition of the *Naples Daily News* (09/30/97), I saw in the *Perspectives* section I saw an article titled "Stumbling into the Space Age," by Ben Roa (who worked on the American satellite program, Vanguard). He mentioned the 50th anniversary of the Space Age (starting 10/01/57), but he brought up in more details some of the things I already knew, about how the dawning of space exploration in the United States coincides with great political changes and addition political ties.

Now, we know that the U.S. was in a bit of a race with the USSR to land a man on the moon and prove they mastered space travel first (you know, we had to beat those Godless Communists...). I've even watched a fair share of shows on the History Channel about the USSR's often failed attempts to orbit men in space and get the leg up on the United States. But ere is how we can learn how it all started...

Ben Roa explained that "in the early 1950s, both the United States and the USSR agreed to participate in the International Geophysical Year, [which was] an 18-month-long international scientific study in which geophysicists from all over the world would study our planet in all its aspects, including its relationship with the sun." And "both the U.S. and the USSR announced intentions to launch one or more artificial satellites to help the IGY studies." And during this time, Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, and he and the White House stated to the program for the Vanguard that this was a "peaceful" program, and (according to Ben Roa) "Vanguard would not be allowed to use the rockets the armed services were developing for military use, even though the Vanguard program would be managed by the Office of Navy Research (ONR), a scientific offshoot of the U.S. Navy."

So at the beginning the U.S. and the USSR were not necessarily in competition, but as the Cold War was looming, people decided to turn to our previous enemy — Nazi scientists who later were able to work with the United States to avoid further prosecution. I had learned of this before, but I'll use Ben Roa's words: "Wernher Von Braun, architect of Nazi Germany's V-2 rocket, which bombarded London during World War II, was now working for the U.S. Army at Redstone Arsenal, in Alabama." According to accounts I have seen about Wernher Von Braun (yes, from the History Channel), Von Braun was not that interested in military when he decided to work with the Reich, but he was actually interested in get-

ting rockets to outer space — especially to the moon, but his colleagues thought he was insane. When he had the opportunity to work as a Nazi with the Reich, he thought this would be a chance for him to develop his skill at building satellites that could go to outer space. From accounts I had seen, he would do this work, hoping it was a means to his more selfish end. An after the collapse of Germany in the Second World War and when he saw the opportunity to work with the United States, he thought this was his greatest chance to be able to use his knowledge and his technology to do the work he always wanted to do.

At this time (according to Rova), “his team had developed the Jupiter rocket, a medium-rang ballistic missile, and wanted to use it as a satellite launcher.” The White didn’t want to use this (probably for some reason along the lines of wanting the Vanguard to be a “peaceful” program), so Von Braun and his tam launched a variation to the Jupiter to show that they could place something with weight into orbit (even thought they were specifically told that they were not to actually put anything into orbit to prove this to the U.S. government).

But back at the Vanguard program... the Martin Co. won the bid for working on the Vanguard program — and “Martin still built flying boats in those days. Today the company is part of Lockheed Martin, and aerospace industry giant.” Their contract with the Navy said to use a GE engine, which barely produced enough energy for the payload to go into space. Although there were other companies that produced more power, the GE scientist was also an advisor for the White House when working with the IGY (I guess this is another way that politics plays a role in astronomical decisions, although in this case it is only a small connection).

Now let’s get to the connection with the USSR: it was at this point in the testing phase of the Vanguard,, October 4, 1957 was the date that the USSR launched sputnik I. Ergo the beginning of the Space age.

From what I had seen from History Channel reports on progress the USSR made in the space race, it looked like they didn’t have that great of a chance of getting ahead. But when the USSR was the first to get something into space, the race suddenly became very heated, and the U.S. had to get working — and quickly — to get ahead in the race. ONR officials did not say they were in a race, but I think every American probably felt that we were.

Then Von Braun and his team stepped in and said they could put something in space in 90 days if they had the go-ahead. And because of the USSR, the Von Braun team was able to start moving to get us into space.

Now, this caused military problems in the United States, because Von Braun worked for the Army, and the Navy was in charge of the Vanguard project to get an American satellite out there. As Bova put it, “Interservice rivalry meant more to the Navy than the cold war.” So ONR told Vanguard to get a mini-satellite in orbit, so they got a 3-pound satellite to Cape Canaveral and it was supposed to launch 12/06/57, but after “TV-3 for 4 feet off the pad... the GE engine exploded.” So after this catastrophe, GE was finally pushed out of the rocket—building business. It was 03/17/58 when the Vanguard got into orbit.

But even Rova makes it clear that even in this first project for outer space for

America, dealing into astronomy meant needing funding — and lots of it — which means needing help from the government. And when the government dips its hand into the mix, there are bound to be political problems, from the people you need to use to help build things, to the people you need as your scientists and engineers.

And if Kennedy roused a country to wanting to go to the moon, I feel bad that President Bush didn't try to do the same (although he might not have had the same pull that President Kennedy did, I don't know...) But when President Bush called for our country to get man back to the moon not by the end of this decade, but the end of next decade, and only make allusions to getting more work done one eventually getting someone to Mars, I thought of all of the science (and even history) shows I've seen about how we could have bases on the moon for people to live, and we could even pull off a station for life on Mars, and I thought well, maybe I shouldn't expect our current President to rouse the country to travel farther and faster across our solar system. If President Bush had never even been to Europe before he was president (he actually had to ask advisors about different styles and customs of some European countries before he went there for the first time...), maybe we shouldn't expect him to entice us to other planets.

Or maybe he could mention it, because I think that after the Bush regime for the past two terms, we're ready for exploring places he's never touched...



Janet Kuypers
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

Ants and Gods

(AKA John's Philosophies, part two)

Janet Kuypers

do ants have gods?
you don't see crosses
slammed into tops of ant hills.

because i am told

Janet Kuypers

i hate the room
every day
it kills me to go the room
but i do
because i am told

Looking for Life on Mars

I know that back in the day people assumed there were martians, and radio stations broadcast invasions of little green men... But nowadays we know there are no martians... but that in order for life to exist on a planet (that we know and understand), water has to exist. The AP article “more evidence found for water on Mars” in the *Naples Daily News* (02/16/08) even reminded us that “the presence of water would raise the possibility of at least primitive life forms existing on the planet.” Now, scientists at NASA have recently discovered that there may be evidence of where water flowed on Mars. But recently, NASA’s Mars reconnaissance Orbiter spacecraft have taken images of dark- and light-toned rock inside of a giant rift valley, which would indicate layering of different sediments from past water flow.

These findings were presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Francisco. These finding were also published in the 02/16/07 edition of the journal of Science.

These linear fractures, called “halos” of lighter rick, indicate where fluids (probably water) passed through the bedrock. It is minerals that are in the fluid that bleach the rock, as well as strengthen it, making it more resistant to erosion.

Scientists also speculate with visible in these layers is evidence of cyclical weather patterns on Mars in the past, possibly from episodes of water, wind or volcanic activity.

They discovered December 2006 that there may be evidence of flowing water on Mars, through photography of changes in craters at different recent intervals, which showed evidence that water flowed on the planet as recently as a few years ago, and may possibly still be flowing there now.

When tens of thousands of gullies were previously found, scientists believed they were geographically young, carved from fast-moving water, rushing down sharp walls of deep craters. The two craters that were photographed in the Southern hemisphere were photographed again, from 1999 through 2005. They saw changes in the photographs consistent with water flowing down the walls.

No Water on other Planets?

Astronomers have looked for water on planets in other solar systems, and...

Astronomers have been checking out planets in other solar systems. Because it's hard to see a planet near a bright star at a far distance, they've been able to discover planets in other solar systems because of the slight "wobble" of a sun (because of the gravitational connection between a planet and their sun) The sun with a planet orbiting it will move very slightly, because even though the planet is small in relation to the sun's size, they do share a gravitational bond, and the planet will cause the sun to move ever-so-slightly. One thing they've been looking for when checking out these newly-discovered planets, is they've been trying to see if there is any water on them. You see, one of the clear signs that life (as we know it) could exist on a planet is if it has water on it; in our own solar system, the only planets that contain no traces of water are Mercury and Venus (my guess why is that if those planets ever had water, their proximity to the sun would make the water so hot that it would evaporate and escape whatever atmosphere the planet has).

Well, astronauts have discovered a number of gas giant planets, but orbiting very close to the sun (versus in our solar system, where gas giants like Jupiter and Saturn are much farther away from the sun). Scientists have been studying two planets (two gas giants), whose orbits are closer to their sun star, and found no water on these planets. They can find out if there is water on these planets by studying the atmospheres of these gas giant planets. The two stars these planets orbit carry "hydrogen and oxygen, the stable building blocks of water. But these scientists used a light spectro to study the atmosphere of these planets (to determine the air's composition on these planets), but these planets came up dry.

Seth Borenstein reported in an AP article (listed in the *Naples Daily News*, 02/22/07) that the 02/22/07 edition of *Nature*, and the online edition of the *Astrophysical Journal Letters* state that even after using NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope for extra-solar planet research their lack of finding water on these planets, which seems like a wake up call to researchers like Carl Grillmair, the leader of the team researching this. Colleague and Harvard astronomy professor David Charbonneau noted that we shouldn't be so "Earth-centric" when looking for information about new planets.



Janet Kuypers®
Janet Kuypers

poetry
the passionate stuff

Sheep 2

Eric Obame

I have no quarrel with atheists
In fact, I respect their point of view
I only believe in God, or a God, because I want to
My faith is just that
A belief without anything concrete to back it
No solid proof or facts
Just words and faith
I have no quarrel with atheists
For I realized, some years ago, how groundless was my belief
I cannot prove that I have a soul
But I believe I do
I believe that there is a heaven, and a hell
Because it somehow makes me feel good
I speak to my version of God
But it is always a one-sided conversation
I never get an answer to any of my questions
My words never attract a response
And if they did, I would be labeled insane
My faith is restrained by my reason
I cannot recreate God in the lab
I cannot predict God's actions
I cannot repeat all of creation
I cannot verify God by science—knowledge—wisdom
And I say God, but it might be Gods
As for thousands of years—tens of thousands of years
Many humans believed in Gods as diverse in their nature as we
Gods to represent the many aspects of our societies and us
I have no quarrel with atheists
I do not have a rational argument against their point of view
Compared to theirs, mine seems rather foolish
But I prefer to be a fool

Night Sky Over The Mojave Desert, April 2007

frankm

The sky is bright
With light and fire
Polaris, the north star
Thuban, the Egyptian north star
Remind me of the unending motion
Despite the quiet, the stillness

Sirius and Arcturus
Brilliant in their fields of darkness
Betelgeuse is a reassuring old friend
It's warm color
And Rigel's coolness
Together part of Orion
(The dominant though waning constellation
Now into Spring)

Castor and Pollux
Tied forever in Gemini

Kochab, Alkaid, Mirzam,
Capella, Algieba
Regulus, the foundation star of Leo
Alcor and Mizar, the double star
For the naked eye

The familiar matrix
Ursa Major
With Ursa Minor
Keeping company

Hydra's head peering up
Past the Red Dwarf Wolf
Under Leo

Auriga, Bootes, Leo Minor
The dogs Canis Major
And Minor
With Puppis
Running behind

Messier's objects
Are up there too
M42, the Orion Nebula
M41, M46, M33
All one hundred
Waiting to be
Discovered

Best of all
Are the star clusters
The Beehive, Pleiades
(in its purity)

And the expansive
Coma Berenices

Though armed with the Hubble
Deep sky objects
And deeper cosmologies
Perhaps the shooting stars
(Their random indeterminacy
Such a delight)
Are still the most magical
Amidst the churning satellites
Of man

Fascist Tension Fund

Christopher E. Ellington (CEE)

Ever since
I discovered
Government
I have bared my teeth
Balled fists
Tightened balls
Knotted every muscle
Straining as in an agony of constipation
Pushing brain and body
To the very point of
Every vein standing
Every pour screaming
Every fiber firelit
Hearing the words of
Awareness

In nine-and-a-half second sound bytes
I pulled myself up,
Burnt, the effigy of caring
Of listening and being
An inquiring mind
That sure as shit would like to know
And
I still don't vote
Why the hell for?
These jokers ian't
Calvin Coolidge

The Teapot Dome, I care about.
Iraq?
Isn't Gilligan on?

So Much Worse

David J. Thompson

We were not talking, driving home
fom somewhere. I was looking out
past the red light when I told my ex-wife
how I'd heard in a movie that for centuries
the man in the moon was awful lonely, but then
the astronauts came briefly and left him heartbroken
and how that was so much worse. She turned
her head toward her window, and said calmly
it was all bullshit, that she'd never been able
to see the goddamn man in the moon even when
she was a little kid. I stared hard up at the moon
and realized now I couldn't see him any more
either when the guy behind us beeped his horn
to let us know the light had changed.

To Sleep Beside a Mountain

Joshua Copeland

Because in Las Vegas everything *does* mean nothing:
The Thunderbird Motel TV only picks up a Mexican channel that flickers with static.
Bed bugs swarm like city folk atop the
ferric motel mattress. The security guard inked with prison tattoos
looks down at the motel lot and
sees an African American hooker trying to pick up
a father in a station wagon teeming with kids and laughs to me,
“Them nigger bitches. Don’t got no shame.” He slept under the
Tropicana Street Bridge a few years back. The stick-figured meth dealer sells
to the Covenant House kids holed up
across the street. The beefy, muscular supermarket owner
shoves crack heads off his lot. The teen transvestite hooker
shaped like a crane fly lugs around a huge brick in his purse and only wears
a striped shirt and high heels. The mirror cracking strippers unlace their
Catholic high school skirts and shirts. The smaller time casinos that dot the capillaries
of the Strip suck and leech things alive and mammalian. The epidermis
hangs and jiggles off the faces of the sun burnt, slit eyed, sand blasted drifters.
I try to dress like I have no money and the tenants dub me “The Undercover Cop.”

What if anything, everything you wished for never came true and
you had to spend your life in a jar banging your head side to side to
side to side until you swam in a sea of blood and spit and dirt?
What if you were trapped in this aquarium: same fish, same pebbles, same coral,
same bulletproof glass walls?
What if you were an agitating speck of dirt in the thumbnail of some musclehead?

Then...you *have* to confess you are a dull, dull zero, self at best,
a dainty mite of meat. No loot left.
Your soul lies comatose and clinched and latched, lids shut and stitched.

In a neon marquee church an oily preacher
dispatches snakeskin sermons: “All the heathens here will never feel
the relief of the risen! The Almighty will toss them down to
the scorched and the unbelieving! My people, the clock ticks for us all!
Only the sand that breezes through our alleys lives to tell a story,
and a brutal one at that! It knows that outside our city, the water colored mountains,
sculpted by God, right as right, loom and lean and wait to reclaim Las Vegas,
eager in their stony silence! The Lord himself scripted ‘The End’ in white over the sunset,
curlicues and all!!!”

But he lies. The man’s wrong. Dead wrong:
There will always be dull sky between Vegas and the mountains.
Vaults of it.

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

The Pantry

Kenneth DiMaggio

Sal always got stuck with the unimportant jobs. His latest job meant gathering all the old pots, pans, and other dented aluminum items in his grandmother's pantry.

At thirteen, Sal's parents felt he was mature enough to help "clean out" his grandmother's apartment. It was over due. "Nanni" had been buried almost three weeks ago. Sal, however, was not old enough to go to his Sicilian grandmother's wake or funeral. He stayed with an older cousin looking after the kids who were too "little" to see a dead body. Yet Sal was old enough to help his parents clean out the apartment that was like his second home.

Whenever Sal was sick, his parents dropped him off at his grandmother's. He would stay most of the day until his parents picked him up after work. Until then, Sal entertained himself with pens, pencils, and paper (or sometimes walls) to write on. When he got older, the latest battery-operated toy or a sophisticated board game kept him amused. Yet Sal didn't always need toys or games to engage his imagination. Simple pots and pans like he now put on the floor could engage him for hours. Pots that simmered sauce in, became helmets. The large aluminum lids that covered big pans became shields. The large wooden stirring fork that stirred anything being boiled, became a weapon.

But as Sal gathered fifty or more year old dented and wobbly tins around him, he remembered the Sicilian Sunday dinners his grandmother cooked for his family. After Sal brought one pot up to his face, he could smell the pepper and olives that simmered in it: the ingredients for his grandmother's special chicken recipe.

But once Sal closed his eyes, he could taste the chicken that he rubbed the olives against for extra flavor. Soon, years of similar smells and tastes returned as he un-shelved the pantry. In a saucepan that still had flecks of faded red paint, Sal smelled his grandmother's sauce, distinct for the way it had a sprig of clove in it. This tiny mandrake-shaped spice puckered the edge of your tongue if it was your misfortune to taste it in your forkful of spaghetti! In the kettle-drum size pot (well, almost!) Sal could smell and even taste the starchy mushiness of spaghetti or ziti softening beneath a bubbly, foamy, salty froth. Even in the aluminum, cowbell shaped cheese grater with the barbed wire like holes, Sal could still smell and mentally taste the tangy and salty Parmesan cheese. This was Nanni's kitchen. Cheese did not come in a jar. It came in a butter colored block. And you only got cheese from it once you scraped it against the grater. It could be hell on your knuckles when they accidentally scraped against its barbed metal, but at four or five years old, Sal felt grown up grating his own cheese.

"What the hell ya doing! Sitting on the floor like some kid!"

It was Sal's father; on edge since his mother died a few weeks ago.

"You're supposed to be throwing that stuff in bags, not playing with it like a kid!"

"You don't want any of it wrapped up?" Sal asked.

"Wrap it up? What the hell's the matter with you."

"To take home," Sal said. "We're taking Nanni's pots and pans home, right?"

"Take it home?" his father asked incredulously. "We can't even take this junk to the Goodwill!"

His father flicked open a green plastic garbage bag.

"Just put it all in here," his father ordered. "And when you need another bag, lemme know. We waited too long to clean out this junk, and Christ her landlord..."

His father's worry about the landlord faded as he left the pantry. Even if it didn't, Sal was no longer hearing his father. Sal now heard the voice of his dead grandmother; a voice that knew little English. What English she could speak, however, had a musical sassy quality, especially when telling secrets.

"My granda-motha," she one day told him, "she smoka peep-a."

"Peep-a?" Sal asked, not understanding.

"Peep-a," his grandmother said as she pulled out a corncob pipe that she stuffed with tobacco, and before she lit it--

"Shhh," she warned Sal the same time she welcomed him into her secret. "Shhh!"

And luckily, no one found a pipe in the apartment, which got carted away in plastic bags just like the ones Sal filled and tied up in the pantry.



Agony, art by Aaron Wilder

I Witnessed An Exorcism

Raghbir Dhillon

Before I narrate my story, I want to prove that exorcism is neither a figment of human imagination, nor it has resulted from ignorance, superstition, or wrong beliefs.

Exorcism is the process of evicting Satan, demons or evil spirits from a human body or a place. Hindu Veda describe the exorcism as was performed 4000 years before the birth of Christ. Christ, Mohammed, and other prophets performed exorcism. In the modern times Pope Paul II implemented three exorcisms. When Mother Teresa was dying, she requested the Archbishop of Calcutta, Sebastian D'Souza, to exorcise her, since the devils were blocking her path to Heaven. He authorized a priest who performed the ritual, and Mother Teresa died in peace in 1997. The Catholic religion has ordained and trained priests to do the exorcism, and they have specific guidelines and procedures. There are 600 Protestant ministers who practice exorcism in America. In short, Christians, Muslims, Hindu, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs..., all practice exorcism and follow the procedures laid in their Holy Books or canons.

The fact of life is that people do get possessed by a curse, their sins, entering haunted places, contacting a possessed person, or through witches' potions. However, there had been a few cases where a person had a mental problem and the foolish exorcist lashed him to death. To avoid this, the Catholic religion wants the priest to consult a doctor and psychiatrist before performing the ritual. All good exorcists verify the mental and physical condition of their patient.

In 1947, I was working as an engineer in the Public Works Department, Punjab, India. One day, my cousin, Darshan, came to visit me. We were classmates for thirteen years. He dropped from college and disappeared. I was surprised to see him after six years.

"Bir, you had been my best friend and confidant."

"Buddy, you vanished without telling me anything," I said. "All right, why did you quit college?"

"I met a Sadhu and became his disciple. We roamed around, earned big money, and spent that on wine and women. Last year he passed away. I didn't like the nomadic life. So I came to Amritsar and opened a grocery store."

"I'm glad you have joined the family; your parents were devastated."

"Bir, after spending nine years in college and standing first in the university, how much are you making?"

"Four hundred rupees per month."

"I offer you ten times that."

"What am I supposed to do?" I asked. "I know nothing about groceries and those stores hardly earn 200 rupees per month."

"You'll do nothing with a store, but become a partner in my other business."

"What's that?"

"Handling evil spirits."

"I don't get it."

"Let me explain. There are two types of persons who deal with the evil spirits. People, like us, cast in the evil spirits, and the exorcists cast them out. Both are doing a thriving business."

"How can you throw in an evil spirit?"

"I learned it from the Sadhu. I've captured a few evil spirits. People pay me 5000 rupees to murder, subdue, or make imbecile their enemies. I give them a packet of the ashes of my enslaved spirit. They feed it to their enemies and my spirit does the job for them."

"Postmortem can easily reveal your crime."

He chuckled. "Impossible! No instrument can trace the spirit."

"Look, I don't believe in the existence of the life after death and don't buy the fancy tales of your imagination," I said. "Moreover, it is wrong to harm innocent persons."

"Okay, I won't discuss it further. My offer to you, however, still stands. Money, wine, and women will kiss your feet, and you'll enjoy life, instead of toiling on a dumb desk."

"My answer to you is firm NO. Capital N and capital O. Period!"

We hugged and parted as friends.

Two months later, my father's younger brother, Darshan's father came to me.

"Darshan is in the city hospital and wants to see you," he said.

"What happened?"

"While picking mangoes, he fell from the tree and was badly injured."

"Sorry to hear that; I'll go there today."

I drove my jeep to the city hospital and located Darshan in private room number seven, in ward ten. His face and arms were bandaged, and there were welts all over his face.

"Darshan, how are you feeling?"

"Terrible," he moaned.

"Why did you climb that tall tree?" I questioned. "You have many servants to do that."

"I love mangoes," he asserted with a wink.

The nurse left the room, and we were alone.

"Bir, I never fell from a tree."

"What happened?"

"A ghost thrashed me. I've not confided my secret to anyone. If I tell this to the doctors, they will lock me in a mental asylum."

"How did this happen?"

"Do you know Banta, the robber?"

"Yes, he robbed many banks, murdered many men, raped hundreds of women, and was shot by the police."

"I was trying to capture his spirit. He, however, turned out to be too strong for me. He's in my body and will kill me in a few days."

“Sad to hear that, but I don’t believe your concoction.”

“Bir, I’m not fibbing and badly need your help.”

“How can I help?”

“I’ll be released after three days at ten. Come here and take me to the saint at Bias and get me exorcised.”

“I don’t believe in exorcism.”

“I beg you and will pay five thousand rupees,” he pleaded with tears running down his cheeks.

“All right, I’ll be here to pick you up, but will not accept a passa (penny) from you.”

I still thought Darshan had a mental problem, since there are no spirits. I went to the library and withdrew books on exorcism and life after death. I enjoyed reading: “Raymond,” the book by Sir Oliver Lodge, the world famous scientist, known as the father of radio. He did scientific research over the spirit of his son who was killed in World War I. Then I read another book by Sir Arthur Canon Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes. He had given details of his contact with the spirit of his son who was killed in France in the same war. Now I thought it was quite possible there were spirits, and Darshan might be telling the truth.

Darshan hobbled out of the hospital, and I drove him to the ashram of a Sikh saint. This ashram had a huge free kitchen and a large treatment center for exorcism.

We joined the line to meet the saint. When our turn came, we stood with folded hands before an old man with flowing white beard and matching turban.

“Children, what’s your problem?” the saint asked.

“Babajee (respected old man), an evil spirit has captured my body, and I beg you to exorcise it,” Darshan replied.

“Let me test you first,” the saint said. Then he gave me one bottle and continued, “Fill this with water from the hand-pump and bring it to me.”

I dashed, pumped water, and brought the bottle full of water.

The saint inserted his little finger in the bottle, recited Scriptures, and gave the bottle to Darshan.

“Child, have a sip.”

As soon as Darshan took a swig, he tore up his clothes, and his head started spinning like a Buddhist prayer wheel. The saint called the volunteers who grabbed Darshan. “Take him to the treatment hall.”

When Darshan was dragged out, the saint told me, “Your friend is possessed by Banta’s spirit. It will take me a few days to exorcise it.”

“We’ll stay and get the treatment.”

Darshan recovered after one hour, and we secured a place in the building to stay for four days.

Next day, I took Darshan to the treatment hall. I saw a two- year-old boy speaking in English with a perfect British accent. I asked the lady volunteer near him, and she told me, “The boy can’t say a word of Punjabi, he is possessed by

the spirit of a British lady.”

Darshan and I sat cross-legged at the spot allotted to us. The saint arrived, Darshan took a sip from the bottle and changed. The saint hit Darshan’s bare back with a stick. There was a loud thud, and I noticed the bleeding lacerations, but Darshan didn’t flinch a muscle.

“Banta, I order you in name of Guru Nanak to leave this man,” the saint shouted.

The spirit in Darshan, who had a different voice yelled, “This bastard attacked me, and I’m going to kill him.”

“Now he’s under God’s protection, and you can’t harm him.”

“All right, I’ll leave after three more sessions.”

The saint left to treat another patient, and Darshan wriggled on the floor. The session ended after one hour.

Two more sessions passed. On the forth day the spirit agreed to leave.

“Banta, try to pray to God to end your misery and grant you another human body. I want you to give us the proof that you have left this young man.”

“What proof?”

“There is a flowerpot on the ledge of the window facing us, lift it and bring it near my feet.”

“All right, I’ll do that.”

Darshan burped and a blast came out of his mouth and shot toward the window. I saw the flowerpot rising in the air, moving inside, and resting at the saint’s feet. I was stunned.

Darshan was all smiles and touched saint’s feet.

“Child, the spirit is gone. Promise not to delve with them and daily spend one hour in reading our Scriptures.”

“I give you my solemn word,” Darshan said.

Darshan donated huge amount to the free kitchen. We returned to Darshan’s place. He sold the store and entered college. He did his M.A. and became a teacher.

Unscheduled Stop Frank Holland

A tall man wearing a trench coat and dark sunglasses flagged my car down. When I stopped, he told me, “We have to use your car.”

“What? What’s this all about?”

“Official business.”

“It can’t be done,” I told him; “I’m on my way to work.”

“Actually we sort of goofed up: we ran out of gas. But this is governmental.” He flipped open his wallet and flashed a badge so quickly the glimpse was subliminal. “And if you don’t give us your car, we’ll be forced to confiscate it.”

“Who are you anyway? F.B.I., C.I.A., N.R.A.? —What?”

Parked off to the side of the road was a sleek black limousine with dark

tinted windows. The vehicle appeared to be armor-plated. The rear door opened, and a man stepped out smiling. Shoulders pulled back and chin thrust forward, he strutted toward my car. "Howdy, mister!" he said. "We need your car. Ours is broke down."

"No."

"We got to get somewheres before ten a.m." He smiled at the man in sunglasses, giving a conspiratorial wink. "It's *big* business."

"That's too bad," I told him, "because I'm on my way to work."

"This is government business." The man smiled again. "You know who I am, dontcha? You watch TV, no doubt." He turned one profile, then the other, all the while flashing a series of smiles, some jovial, some boyish, mischievous, one proclaiming *I'm just one of the boys down home*, and a few other smiles merely smug. I noticed his eyes were somewhat squinted, almost pig-like and his lips thin. —Or no, he had no lips at all, just the mouth, with his upper "lip" coming down to a point in the center, like turtles have. That provides them with a hard point for tapping their way out of the shell after they're born.

I told him, "I don't watch much TV, especially hillbilly comedies. And you do look sort of familiar. But you're not taking my car."

Turtle-mouth's smile vanished. He turned to his aide. "Tell him who I am. Let him know. And then boot his dang ass out of that car!"

The aide told me, "This is your president."

"No. he's not."

Turtle-mouth spoke up again. "I sure am." He looked to his aide for confirmation. "Ask the Supreme Court if you don't believe me. Them's the boys that put me there. They'll tell ya."

"Not *my* president."

"Who am I then?"

"The imposter in the White House? I don't know. You tell me."

The turtle face flamed in anger. "I want this man arrested! Arrest him!"

Hesitantly his aide asked, "On what charges, sir?"

"Insurrection! Treason! I want him took in immediately! Imprisoned! I want him investigated. For treason! Terrorism! Fur — for threatening the President of the United States of America! For attempted — coup! He tried to coup us — throw over the legitimacy of the presidency! For disobeying the Constitution. I want him — investigated! —His whole family *investigated*. Where's he from anyways? What's his people? His background! His religion! What's he registered as? His family too — I want the whole shooting match exposed! Investigate them all! Then throw them in prison! All of them! Family — friends — his half-brother, half-sisters! His whole tribe! And then executed! As terrorists! Without a trial! This is top secret. You understand what I'm saying? Sensitive matter! Immediately!"

I just shook my head. I told the aide, who seemed to have a bit more self-control than the Turtle did, "That's what happens when they put a small-town sheriff into a big job."

Turtle Face told his aide, “Get my driver over here!” Then he changed his mind and called toward the parked limousine. “Zeffer! Get your butt out here, boy! Tell this hick who the hell I am!” He added, “Zeffer is my mentor.”

A tall man with overdeveloped muscles stepped from the driver’s seat and out of the limo. His beefy body looked about to burst the seams of his chauffeur uniform. “Ya! I come, your excellency!”

I asked the aide, “His name is Zeffer? What kind of name is that?”

The limo driver had approached close enough to hear my question, so he answered instead. “You have vord similar in English: zephyr. Ein grossen vind. A big vind.”

“A gross wind?”

“You know dis vord?”

“That’s a fart, isn’t it?”

He shrugged. “Vassever. I come aus big family, vell-feared in Mittel Age: Krompkrompgrubers. Dey start out mit Wolfgang der Grosse Kase — der big cheese —you ever hear tell of him? He have zwillinge dotters — tvin daughters — Dodo und Poopoo, tvin daughters. He scare die Scheisse aus dem Worlde back in Mittel Age. He vipe aus whole country. For freedom. No slaves no more. All dead. Free. Same ting. Is not so? He just march in dere — *kromp-kromp-kromp* into town, burn it, kill um all. No halfveys. *Grube* dem. Dat’s how ve got der name *Krompkrompgruber*. From Wolfgang der Krompkrompgruber.”

Turtle face told him, “Zeffer, go back there and page my top general! Tell Brownie, get down here lickety-split.”

“Lickety— ? Ah, ya. General Braun-nase Von Buschrimmer.”

“Yeah, him. Tell him I got to be at the Strom Thurman High School by ten a.m. They’re giving me my honorary diploma.”

I stared at the man incredulously. “An honorary *high school* diploma?”

“Why sure.”

His aide nodded. “Yes. The President has passed his gas — his *class* — in English.” “Not just ordinary English,” the Turtle interjected; “advanced — reme-DEE-al English.”

I asked, “You mean *remedial* English?”

“Well, I say *ee-ther*, you say *eye-ther*. Yeah. And I got me a B-plus too,” he added with pride.

I stepped out of my car. I handed the car keys to his aide. “Here. Take him away. I don’t want to deprive him of his diploma. Anything that adds to his communication skills is an improvement.”

Turtle Mouth hesitated a moment; then he told his aide in a lowered voice, “There don’t need to be any report of this incident. You understand? It’s for security.” He winked. “Top secret.”

And so it shall remain.

(Although my car was returned next day, I’d appreciate it if they would compensate me for the gasoline they used.)

The Revolving Art Museum

Bev Jafek

First, the mechanics of it: I saw the Metropolitan Art Museum begin leaning to the side and then, as though made of some elastic material, form nearly a sphere and revolve 180 degrees; that is, turn upside-down with the revolving doors falling vertically, hence still performing their function. It was odd, but we must always be prepared for rambunctious special effects. It is all to the good: jobs for programmers, architects, engineers, construction workers; money fluidly changing hands; the economy humming like a complacent motor. I intended to see the art, the doors were still revolving, and I walked in; hoping only that the painting and sculpture would be rightside-up, which they were.

The Renaissance rooms came first and I saw, to my astonishment and pleasure, Donatello's David rising up gloriously in the middle of the room. How had they gotten it away from the National Museum of Florence? But then, it was just a matter of international finance, bidding over the Internet. Even E-Bay could have propelled the wonderful Donatello to me. Why couldn't David suddenly appear anywhere on Earth? I reached out to touch the statue, and it was solid, marvelous bronze, no hologram. As I began to walk around him, he was undeniably that glowing, adolescent boy devoid of gross male musculature; the genitals like some poignantly small fruit; all play, insouciant allure from graceful hat to antipasto; the gestures casual, impish, as though ready to break into a dance; the sword an afterthought. The triumph of loveliness, elegance and play over war. He could have seduced Goliath. Yes, he was my Donatello; but not, I was shortly to discover, entirely mine.

As I continued to walk around the statue, I found, at the rear, a completely naked woman with her short stubby legs twined around the base. She wore heavy make-up over a desperate, fiftyish face with straight, medium-length blond hair. Her eyes and expression were a ruin of lust, despair, awe, fear and desperate hope. "It's my last chance," she said rapidly, her eyes blinking and rolling with a strange energy. "I've sent e-mail to everyone on the personals web sites. But I've never really wanted anyone but this boy. He's always in my thoughts, even when I'm in bed with some careless, hairy, brutal man. But then, you must know."

"I must?" I asked in astonishment, suddenly noticing that my tie and tweed suit had vanished, and I seemed to be wearing a blue dress. She took me for a female confidante. Apparently, the museum caused observers to appear in revolving genders as well. "Wouldn't you give a better first impression in clothes?" I asked, trying to play the empathetically practical feminine role she had assigned me, noticing as well that my voice had risen into a woman's range.

A look of terror gave further distortion to her face. "I want to be ready for him, if he would only look at me." Her voice ended in a sob, and she rested her cheek on one of David's calves and then kissed it slowly and languorously. I looked around in

alarm for a security guard, but there were none present. This dreadful woman was free to do whatever she wanted with the sculpture, which outraged me.

"But what about singles bars, book discussion groups, volunteer work, all those other ways to meet a mate?" I asked, anger in my voice. Finally, in consternation (she was passionately kissing David's leg), I snapped, "What on earth have you done with your clothes?" She was not even carrying a purse.

"I've tried everything! There were a few who liked me, but they were clingy. They wanted e-mail three times a day. You know."

"Oh, yes," I said; now taken by my role. "That would be intolerable."

Suddenly, a strange new look came over her face – something, cunning, plotting, less chaotic. She rose and began to look at me through David's legs. Then her mask-like, crafty face appeared by the sword in a grimace of a smile. Then she was around his hips, her lips pursed and devilish. I noticed that my tweed suit and tie had come back, along with my previous gender. "What sort of game is this?" I asked, noting that my voice had again deepened into masculinity.

"Why not you?" she asked in a husky whisper, coming suddenly around David's sword and walking with slow deliberation toward me.

I ran all the way to the end of the Renaissance galleries. I thought (in relief) she can't follow. She won't leave David: he's her last chance. I looked around and found myself in the Baroque galleries in front of Fragonard's "Bathers," next to a squat, middle-aged man whose face was grimacing in emotion that revolved between pain, ecstasy, disgust and fury. Seeing me next to him (still in my tweed suit and proper gender) he, too, began to spew out tormented thoughts like outrageous bubbles. "I work in front of a computer trading stocks and cruising the porn sites ten hours a day, nothing to show for it but fat and moolah, then I go home and write worthless lyric poetry no one wants to read. I come here, seeking the meaning of it all and see this."

He gestured with a plump, hairy fist. "All those voluptuous curves radiating throughout the universe! Fruit-like curves of fleshy sex! Those girls are nearly making love to each other. Beautiful women are really lesbians, don't you think?" He looked at me askance in icy curiosity, the sparse hair on his head bent crazily at an angle. He waited for no reply. "There's the central figure falling so exquisitely on her back. They're all falling on their backs. What else are they good for? And yet, I always take that horrible, soft plunge into them, grab those irresistibly round fleshy fruits. You just can't live without it!" Now he looked enraged, which somehow made him seem even fatter. "Why, look at those trees, clouds! They're reaching for those women, too!" His eyes and mouth were now wide, pink and wet; his neck thick and taut with anger, making him look like a furious bulldog. "They're all clutching, copulating! Even the plants and sky can't stop! The whole cosmos copulating – in *pink* yet, their color."

Now he began swinging hairy fists before the painting, as though he would attack it. I looked around in alarm for a security guard, but again there was no one to be seen. "We make so much of love," he said, looking painfully meditative and placing his hand below his chest, as though his outburst had given him gas.

“Whether we get it, whether we lose it, and what is it but that fatal frothy plunge. What do you do,” he shouted, “how do you live when everything in the world copulates, *copulates!*” I looked around to see if other observers noted the disturbance; but incredibly, it was as though they were dead, lost in contemplation of great art.

The man turned toward me in an enraged, aggressive posture. “Copulation! Nothing else!” he shouted, waving his plump, round arms, his rotund stomach quivering in fury. Looking back at the painting, his face suddenly had a look of horror. “*Oh, my god!*” he shouted and clutched his genitals. Then he ran madly through two galleries to the nearest restroom, yelling all the way. At last, there was silence, then a thunderous cry. Thank god we were done with him! Saved by copulation and not a minute too soon, I thought.

I straightened my tie and smoothed my tweed jacket. No one had noticed a thing. I could breathe again. I thought museums always had security guards to stop this sort of madness, but there was clearly no security in a revolving museum. Not even your gender was safe. I would continue walking through the collection, but avoid anyone in a state of passion.

The Mannerist galleries abutted the Renaissance rooms, and I walked quickly toward them. In a moment, I was astonished to find Cellini’s elegantly delightful golden saltcellar made for a king. Again, I wondered how the museum had stolen such a treasure away from Vienna’s Museum of Art History, yet obviously all whims and desires were unveiled in this revolving museum.

Mesmerized I beheld: With rich, golden light and color molding the casual nude forms of Neptune and Earth, each lounging and gazing playfully at one another, the Cellini was a moment of exquisite sensuality. Neptune’s hand lightly held his trident and Earth responded by caressing her own breast and raising an inviting foot to touch Neptune’s leg. It was a lover’s game, all the while they held their condiments, salt and pepper, as they did their enticing genders, a dialectical eroticism that resolved itself into the perfect concentric spheres of their base, each covered with male and female nudes in dalliance. This deliciously erotic work of functional art could only bring a smile to my lips. The world of gods, it said, is simply too wonderful for us.

Then I noticed that a dark-haired woman her thirties was standing on the other side of the sculpture, smiling as I was, but with a strangely sly, impish look. I raised my eyebrows at her, noticing in relief that I was still in my tweeds. Her peculiar smile only hardened, and her eyes became crafty and snide. I looked again at the sculpture and saw what was clearly her own face replacing that of Earth and my face on Neptune! I looked up at her again in alarm. How dare she change this perfect treasure to reflect her own desires? As I looked back in anger and consternation, I saw that she had now reversed the faces so that mine appeared on Earth and hers on Neptune! This was outrageous, and I uttered an involuntary snarl at her silly, smiling face.

When I looked back at the sculpture, my face was also upon the horse beneath Neptune as well as the fish lying in a swath at his feet! I gasped. I could not stop myself from looking up at her again and saw that her eyes were even wilder. But I

only gasped again: the figure of Earth was now moving, her hands stroking both breasts, her head subsiding in ecstasy.

Enraged, I forced myself to look away, both from the sculpture and this perverse woman. If she intended to change the artwork in this annoying way, then I would do so as well. I closed my eyes and tried to concentrate. This created, as I opened my eyes, a facsimile of her head dangling from Neptune's trident, still with its madly impish grin, as though the god had casually decapitated her and then speared her head as a trophy. I smiled slyly back at her (I am, at least, the more violent gender), but my eyes were instantly caught by the movement of Earth, still bearing the woman's silly face. The figure reached over and sensually kissed the head on Neptune's trident, which was, of course, her own.

This was completely unacceptable! A cherished work of art was becoming an obscenity, solely to satisfy this woman's bizarre whims. With intense concentration, I moved her foolish impaled head into the golden salt bowl that stood in front of me (as Neptune). She merely put my own head into the bowl as well and made its furious features whirl about in circles, as though I were helplessly shouting curses in all directions. Then, of all things, I saw that she had placed my reclining body – skinny, awkward and tweedy – on top of the monument that held the pepper! She was clearly better at this kind of thing than I. She probably spent all her time playing video games.

I gave her my most severe, reproving glance and walked away. I could hear soft cascades of sly laughter all the while I retreated. Some absurd compulsion made me turn and take a last look: The sculpture was whirling in circles, and her silly smile had become a triumphant leer. I continued walking out of the Mannerist galleries and decided that, if one wished to view art in a revolving museum, one had to observe each work alone, away from all the confused, absurd altercations of others, visual or verbal; real, imagined, or what-have-you.

Well, now that was settled! I walked with grim determination into the next room, which turned out to be the Renaissance galleries again. I was quietly admiring Da Vinci's "Adoration of the Magi" when I distinctly heard agonized, furious words: "No adoration! Blunt shapes, chaos and bald death looking over his shoulder at you!" As I glanced behind me, I saw a fierce, wiry little man with a sweating bush of black hair. I decided to abandon my art appreciation and find the nearest exit to this awful revolving museum, looking down quickly to make certain I would be leaving in my tie and tweeds.

As I passed the "Mona Lisa," I saw a frail old man yelling, "Lies! Lies, all lies! She holds, contains nothing but old greenish-black paint!"

I quickened my pace but encountered a middle-aged woman who was looking at Michaelangelo's two sculptures of writhing slaves and crying, "Destroy! Revile! Liberate! Only then, can Love come!"

In the next room, I found another middle-aged woman who vaguely resembled a librarian, peering at Corregio's "Jupiter and Io." She instantly addressed me with passion: "I share a secret with this painting. Such hugely black, hairy paws grabbing

such tender, nude flesh leaning, oh! backwards so seductively. His touch was rough. Just a little bit rough. That's what she wanted. Do you know what my secret is?" Her smile was immense, wet, wildly uninhibited; she glowed with sexual renunciation. I knew better than to answer.

Now, I was beginning to gasp with the effort of getting out of there as fast as I could. I checked the overhead signs, and there was a marked exit at the rear galleries, which displayed modern art. In the next room, a middle-aged man — coifed, oiled and dressed as expensively as an investment banker — was laughing uproariously in front of Grunewald's "The Resurrection." "Oh, the foolishness of the Spirit!" He gasped through laughter. "It looks like Mighty Mouse!"

I got past him as fast as I could, but suddenly the fierce, bushy-haired little man was again before me, looking at Fuselli's "The Nightmare." In the same furiously inspired whisper, he said, "I laugh with the demon, but for my awe of his curvingly pointed ears. I would caress them if I could. I will enter this painting one-day when I have achieved its wisdom. The wild white horse of eternity will bear me away to the Arctic!"

As I looked around, I saw that my haste was indeed starting to bring me into the modern galleries where, presumably, I could find an exit somewhere. But here before me was the same insanely angry stockbroker who had railed at Fragonard. The fat little man was now viewing Goya's "Bobabilicon" and shouting, "My *life* is this hideous dancer!"

Early modern, Goya was, and I was on the right track, I reassured myself and kept up the pace. But here again was the investment banker, now in front of Daumier's "Third-Class Carriage." He turned to me as though I had spoken to him and said, "With what terrible knowledge and patient cynicism will I enter this painting one day?" I saw in alarm that he had grabbed my arm for support. As I tried to loose myself, I saw his face contort into furious despair and then slowly recompose itself into a benign smile. Then he pressed his card into my hand. At the top, it said, "For Investment Advice."

I didn't dare drop it until the next room. Here there were several Renoirs, which meant I was getting further into the modern rooms! As I rushed along, I nearly collided with a young man who had high, ruffled hair and was looking at "Le Moulin de la Galette." As I apologized, he eyed the painting and drowned me out with a loud cry: "Completely satisfying, no? *You* rubbed up against all those people. Such a delightful parade of genitals beneath brightly colored cloth! *You* clung to anyone at all! *You* stroked them all in their private parts! You were..." (his voice fell to a whisper) "...even that radiant, white light." His face contorted into a smirk. "That's the secret I share with this painting." His pink mouth was suddenly open and childish, looking at me in wonder, as though I had made this absurd speech.

I tore myself away and then, in my haste, nearly collided with another young man babbling in front of "Whistler's Mother." Again, my arm was grabbed before I could retreat, and I heard him ask, "A secret here, a secret there?" He looked at me for corroboration while I tried to get loose.

In exasperation, I answered, "You were there, I know."

“Under her skirts, of course!” he said. “So obvious, such a cliché. But do you know what I found? There’s so much room down there and oh, so black and warm. Smelling of warm skin like baked bread. And I have disappeared,” he said in sudden joy. “Many times! Oh, the relief when you aren’t there anymore!”

Somehow, I got loose from him and tried to walk on as rapidly and carefully as possible. Thank god, we were up to Gaugin! The exit should be coming up any minute. I passed a very bald minister in a black habit. I thought he might remain respectfully silent, but then I saw his eyes glinting beneath their bushy brows and the passionate conviction of his sternly clenched jaws. He was looking at “Vision after the Sermon” and almost shouted, “That’s what I always wanted to know! What comes after the sermon? I’d like to see an angel wrestling a devil, watched by a cow! And all of them watched by a troop of village women, their hats flying in the wind like the tentacles of sea creatures! But that man knew something! After the sermon – remember that, would you?”

Oh, how I hoped I would forget this awful revolving museum! But then, a colorful flash of Rousseau passed by me. A wistful young man was standing in front of “The Dream,” giving me sly glances. “I share a secret with this painting,” he said in a cunning voice, holding out his arm to prevent me from passing.

I decided I could get away from him sooner by answering. “You were there. I know all about it.”

“Yes, of course,” he said. “But that’s not the secret. I was that robin in the middle of the painting, watching it all. The Jungle? The Human Comedy? Those lions who stare like ferociously avenging angels, coming toward that naked woman...do you know what they did to her?” In spite of my struggle to leave, he had time to smile obscenely, run his tongue slowly over his lips, and say, “They sucked her toes! And then their eyes got bigger and bigger!” He convulsed into laughter, which allowed me to get away.

I pitched myself toward the next room, tried to avoid two other people, swung loose of another babbler and then, of all things, found myself in total confusion beside the Rousseau painting again! Now a young woman was in front of it, smiling ardently. Before I could stop her, she nestled into my arms, gave me a look of deep commiseration, then whispered, “We know what happened to her, don’t we?” I looked down miserably and saw that damned blue dress again! In a passionate whisper, she continued, “The lions made love to her. Oh, yes. *Both of them*. That’s why her hand is reaching out to them in invitation. And why not? I think the lions were wonderful lovers to her. There’s just so much of a woman’s body that is erotically sensitive. It *takes* two lions! One licked her everywhere; one did the rest. *Exquisite!* But you know, don’t you?”

I shook myself loose as powerfully as a woman in a tight blue dress and heels could and ran for the exit. Unspeakable relief overwhelmed me as I approached it. Now there was only a couple of silver-haired, dignified old women holding hands as they viewed Matisse’s “Harmony in Red.” “This painting makes me feel as though I’ve eaten an utterly perfect fruit,” one ancient woman said, smiling radiantly.

“Perhaps a plum,” her partner answered, smiling with a soft glow. I nodded

to them in acknowledgement. They made more sense than anything else I had heard in this revolving museum. *And best of all*, my tie and tweeds were back as I rushed out the door!

Outside at last, I began to descend the steps at a leisurely pace, overjoyed at the sudden calm of air, sun, and solitude. That was the end of it! I looked back and saw that the museum was still revolving away, ready to devour all hapless patrons who entered and then found themselves trapped in a madhouse. As the artworks passed through my mind, I was struck by their resplendence: unified, harmonious, complete, transcendent, immutable. Every one soared above the despicable creatures who paraded their private obsessions in front of them.

As I reached the street, I saw an immense, fiery glow rising up behind buildings in the southern part of the city. It seemed to be moving rapidly and engulfing more and more of the skyline. Ferily, it was beautiful; the colors – orange, gray, pink, and black – revolved in a mesmerizing, turbulent brew. Whenever I have tried to see a film about the earth's destruction, I have always arrived a few minutes late. Hopelessly unpunctual, I've therefore never seen a complete apocalypse from beginning to end, so I watched this radiant eruption with fascination, obviously one of the most colossal special effects.

As an American, of course, I knew I could anticipate finding my way to my cozy little nook and watching it all out the window or on TV, possibly drinking a few glasses of wine to toast the apparition. After all, here was more work for engineers and programmers, further humming and bubbling of the economy.

I had just crossed Fifth Avenue when my eyes were drawn to another brilliant gleam. To my utter astonishment and joy, I saw one of the most beautiful artworks following me down the stairs leading away from the museum! Cellini's Earth, glowing in gold but now life-sized, was obviously walking toward me, her eyes riveted upon mine in an exquisite scrutiny both erotic and cosmic and even, beyond my wildest hopes, caressing her breast as she did so!

What can I say of such a wonder? She was glorious, erotic, perfectly proportioned and unified, yet best of all, apparently *she was mine*! I opened my arms and stood very still, almost forgetting to breathe. With a single gleaming finger, she commanded a green light and then slowly, oh how sensuously! did she begin walking toward me. Even her steps had their own unique harmony, even the lovely undulations of her moving body were a perfect unity of beauty, Eros, novelty, eternity. *A goddess was crossing Fifth Avenue!* I was breathless again.

No one looked at her – no one passing on the street, no one driving a car. They all looked at *me*, my arms still spread wide, unspeakable delight on my face. But of course, they could not see her. She was my own private obsession, a gift from that dreadful revolving museum! Now I had the same faculty as the mad who babbled their passions before their favorite artworks. I had received an embodiment of my unique, personal vision: irrefutable, oblivious to all else, beholden to no one and nothing, invisible as the imagination, perpetual as the mind. How could I resist such beautiful madness? At last, I had been invited to the party!

The perfect lines of her golden face had a questioning look as she approached

me. I knew, of course, what I wanted. I wanted *to make love to a goddess and damn the apocalypse!* I've missed it too many times anyway. How could I manage it? My apartment was only three blocks away. I gave her my most commandingly loving look and motioned toward a path that would quickly lead us to my apartment. As I began to walk, I looked back to make certain she understood. She continued to follow me with that undulant, harmonious motion.

When I reached my apartment house, I knew all the measures I would take. I would arrive first to prepare the scene. I looked back again as I walked up the stairs of my apartment house and saw the most intensely seductive look on her golden face with its swimming curls. Remember to breathe, I thought for the hundredth time and entered my apartment. I rushed about and found libations, a bottle of wine and two wineglasses. I found a stick of incense and candles, which I lit. What else for a goddess? But of course, a goddess must be greeted *NAKED!* I stripped off my clothes as though they were an offense, kicked them under the bed, and inspected myself in the floor length mirror. As usual, my body was skinny, pale, awkward and hairy, no handsome, well-muscled Neptune. But then, what did it matter if it was *my* fantasy?

Remember to breathe, I thought as I rested against my bed and waited. The apocalypse seemed to be in full swing out the window; orange and black mushroom clouds blocked any other view. I could only smile: we would watch it together, she and I. My heart thudding in my chest, I waited beside the bed.

Are those the soft sounds of delicate, golden footsteps moving across my living room floor? I wait, as does anyone on any night of a life, for what can only revolve between love, joy, pain, fear and death.



Study in Color, art by Peter Bates

View From the Window

Roseann Geiger

Tessie thumbs through a time worn deck of playing cards as Charlie, her husband of 56 years, peers out of the front window, his lanky frame resting on sharp elbows.

“Hey, Tess, come here and get a load o’ this.”

She pushes back a wisp of snowy hair. “Not now, Charlie, I’m playing solitaire.”

He snaps his teeth. “Tsss...You and those cards.” He waves her off and turns back to the window with a grunt. Tessie, who really can’t resist whatever it is that has him spellbound, puts down her deck and shuffles over to his side.

“Ooh, Charlie, isn’t that the kid from around the block, Ernie someth-”

“Eddie” he snaps, “Yeah, that’s him.” He squints and lowers his voice just a notch, “Looks like he’s got flowers.”

“He works for the florist?” Her wide eyes are exaggerated by large plastic frames.

Charlie turns toward her, annoyed, not by her question. It’s their natural reaction toward each other. “He doesn’t work for no florist. He works in that deli on 51st Avenue, over by the bus stop. His father owns that place.”

Tessie smirks, “Yeah, yeah, I know. They always have bad breath.”

Charlie laughs, “Yeah, like hotdogs or something.” They share a quick chuckle, then return to their post.

“I wonder what he’s doin’ at the Fasolina’s.” She wiggles her ample hips a bit. “Charlie, could you give me some room?”

He inches over, neither of them taking their eyes from the young man across the street. “Well,” he begins, “this afternoon when I went to mail your brother’s anniversary card, I saw the kid knock her down as she was gettin’ off the bus.”

Tessie gasps, “He knocked down Mrs. Fasolina?”

“Aw, Tess, but you don’t get nuthin’ straight. He knocked down her daughter, Sandra!”

“Oh, well, you just said ‘her’”

Charlie shakes his head and sucks his teeth. “Her, yeah, HER. She’s a girl, isn’t she?”

Tessie just rolls her eyes. “That poor kid, she works real hard, Charlie. Did she get hurt?”

Charlie spins on his elbow, “Hard? What hard? She’s one of those fash-

ion models. And no, she didn't get hurt." He shrugs, then adds with a grin, "Anyway, he knocks her down and all her glamour pictures go flyin' into the street. What a mess!" He waves his hand into the air, just missing Tessie.

"Maybe she'll sue", Tessie makes herself a little more cozy.

"Whaddaya mean sue? It wasn't his fault. It wasn't anybody's fault. She-Oh look, here she comes." They lean back into the window together. They could barely see through the condensation.

"Charlie stop breathin' so heavy."

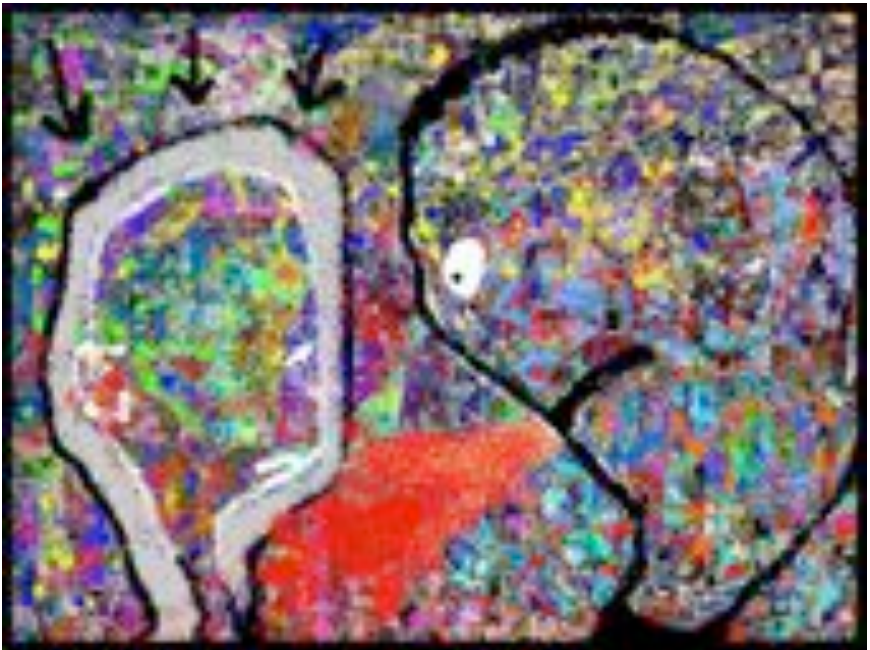
"Oh, now you want me to stop breathin'. Nice, very nice, Tess."

"Oh, Charlie" she stops and rolls her eyes again as he grumbles something inaudible. Tessie sighs and shoves off the window sill. "Well, I guess she's not angry. That was nice of him to bring her flowers." As she heads back into the kitchen, Charlie leers at her, not because he's angry, it's just his habit.

"Charlie, wanna play rummy?"

"Okay", he says, and then, "You know, I meant to tell ya, Tess, that card for your brother cost \$3.95." He grabs a beer from the fridge, suddenly smiles to himself, then pokes the doughy skin under her arm as she shuffle the cards.

"Oooh" she jumps, then slaps the deck down hard in front of him, "Cut the cards".



Too Much Punished, art by Peter Schwartz

Happy Hour at the Surf Bar

Janet E. Sever

"You gotta hide me!"

Happy hour was winding down and I had a shitload of barware to wash. My barback hadn't shown up for work, so I was flying solo. Somehow this little guy had sneaked around to my side of the bar and was crouched underneath. He'd pop his head up every couple of seconds and peer at the door over the zinc countertop.

"You can't be back here."

"Please don't let her get me!"

He didn't look like the kind of guy that has women problems; I couldn't imagine him getting a woman to notice him in the first place. He looked to be about five and a half feet tall, although it was pretty hard to tell with him all crouched down. About twenty-five, he'd lost most of his hair.

"Who's after you?" I was intrigued. As a bartender, I get to hear about people's problems, most of them run of the mill. Cheating lovers, no money, my wife doesn't understand me. I had a feeling his situation wasn't same old, same old.

"The doctor. She's fucking with my head!"

His girlfriend was a doctor? Interesting. He didn't look like someone who would run with that kind of crowd. His clothes were dirty, and his face was smudged, and, frankly, I could smell a little B-O.

"You can't be back here."

"Just let me stay here. I can't be out there in the bar with all those—" and he stared up at me, and I have never seen anyone look so scared in my life—"people. Let me just stay here. She can't see me from the street. I won't be in your way."

I was starting to like this guy—well, at least feel sorry for him. "Let me get you a drink. What's your poison? Beer? Wine?"

"NOOOO!" He screamed the word. "No alcohol. Potophobia. Anything, not alcohol." His eyes were pleading.

I shrugged and mixed a Shirley Temple with two cherries. "What's potophobia?"

"Fear of alcohol."

"Bogus."

"For sure." He drank his Shirley Temple in three slurps.

"I'm surprised that you came into a bar, if booze is that scary."

"I have to try to overcome my fears as best I can," he said. "I have so many. I'm polyphobic."

"Like what are you scared of? Dogs and stuff?"

"God, I wish it was that simple." He mourned his empty glass. I whipped up a virgin daiquiri. "I'm scared of all kinds of stuff. Stuff that you wouldn't think anyone was scared of."

I thought hard to come up with the most off-the-wall thing I could think of.

“Are you scared of, say, peanut butter?”

He shuddered. “Oh, God. Peanut butter! Arachibutyrophobia! Just the thought of it, the way it can stick to the roof of your mouth, I feel like gagging, can’t breathe—”

I whacked him on the back, handed him his drink, and changed the subject. “Would you like something to eat? The kitchen makes a killer white pizza. Lots of garlic. It’s good.”

The guy turned pale. “No, not garlic. No, please, no garlic. Anything but garlic.” He buried his face in his hands. I think he said something like “alliumphobia.”

“Cheese toast,” I said, and keyed in the order. Maybe food would take his mind off his problems.

The guy got quiet. I started polishing glasses. A thermonuclear blonde came in and sat at the end of the bar. She had mondo tits that made me want to applaud; this was a bunny who’d never been in here before, or I’d have remembered. She ordered my special Panty Dropper Punch, and seemed to be looking for someone. I hoped she couldn’t see my friend back there; she’d think he was blowing me or something.

“Could I have another one of these?” my floor-buddy asked. I put the ingredients for a daiquiri in the blender, this one strawberry. I couldn’t help but think a couple good belts would help the dude, and I thought about sneaking them in, but I didn’t want him freaking out.

“How’d you get so afraid?” I asked. The cheese toast arrived and he ate three pieces.

“Long story.” He ate another bite of cheese toast, and then his eyes kind of went unfocused.

“I was a little short of cash. I was a history grad student, working on my master’s thesis, normal as you are, not scared of anything. I had a big car repair, my rent was due.....” He nibbled a bite of the toast and washed it down with some of the daiquiri. “I saw an ad in the psych department for test subjects for a phobia experiment, thousand bucks a month. That was a fortune to me. I figured, what the hell, I don’t have any phobias, right?” He crunched cheese toast thoughtfully.

“The experiment was to induce phobias in non-phobic people. It was supposed to be minor stuff, things that wouldn’t make that big a deal if you were scared of them. They promised they would reverse them when the study was done. Nothing major like airplanes or riding in cars or anything that would fuck you up—more obscure stuff that you probably don’t encounter that often in daily life. Or that’s what they told me.

“Turns out I was a great test subject. Totally took to the combo of hypnosis and drugs they used. The first thing was that one you just mentioned a while ago..... you know, the, um, sandwich spread thing.....”

I nodded. You could live without peanut butter if you had to.

The blonde signaled for another drink; I took her a double Neptune Cocktail so she wouldn’t interrupt for a while. She scanned the crowd. Later I noticed her go back toward the restrooms. A shame, I thought. Totally primo chick like that getting stood up.

“What happened after the sandwich thing?”

“She did the other one you mentioned, and again, I took to it like a pelican takes

to fish. But then she got more daring..... Bathmophobia—fear of stairs. I had to quit my history classes because the classes were on the second floor of a building with no elevator. Then it was bibliophobia—you know, fear of books. Forget studying. I had a girlfriend back then. They gave me coitophobia, and as a bonus, philematophobia.” I must have looked puzzled, because he added, “Sex and kissing.” He made a face when he said them, like he’d just said “drinking vomit” or “eating shit.”

“Gnarly! Why didn’t you stop?”

“I couldn’t! I signed a contract and they held me to it. I went by a lawyer’s office, but those books in there.....” He shuddered and held out his glass. I made him another, but I grabbed the rum when he wasn’t looking. The blonde called me over.

“Excuse me. I’m looking for a bald man, so tall. He smells bad, and he’s wearing overalls.” This was the doc! “He’s a disturbed man, and I need to get him back to the hospital. I saw him come in here.” Two guys walked up and I instantly named them Hans and Franz.

I said I hadn’t seen him.

I went back to my pal. He went on like I hadn’t left. “And then it was somniphobia; I’ve barely slept in weeks. Then it was ablutophobia, and she really fucked me up when she added automysophobia. Of course the bitch removed the one that would have left me clean.” I must have looked confused again. He said, “Fear of bathing, and fear of being dirty.” He fanned his armpit.

“Wasn’t very smart to make you afraid of doctors,” I said.

“Iatrophobia. Got that one all on my own.”

I squatted so my face was level with his. I handed him his daiquiri. “Look, pal, I put a little rum in this.” I could tell he was starting to freak out. “Bro, just a tiny bit. You need it, and you need to overcome all these fears. If you don’t, you’re going to be miserable forever. Take a tiny sip,” and I held it up to his mouth like a baby. He drank a teaspoonful. “That’s great,” I praised. He had tears in his eyes, but he clutched the glass and took another sip. He smiled at me and drank half the glass.

“You faced your fear and came out OK. You can do it with all that other stuff! Baby steps, dude, baby steps.” I looked up and saw the blonde glaring at us from over the bar.

“There you are, Harvey.” He tried to get away, but Hans and Franz had come around the bar and were on either side of him. He looked like a Ken doll in their grasp as they led him to the door, kicking and screaming. The patrons stared.

Harvey calmed and looked back at me. “Baby steps,” he whispered. I nodded. “Good daiquiris,” and he flashed me a thumbs up he exited in the grasp of the two men, his feet not touching the floor.

Doctor Blonde Goddess glared at me as she trailed them out of the bar. “He’s got six months left of the study,” she said. “I’ve got a whole list of things yet to give him.” She stalked out, and I have to admit she did have a nice ass.

I went back and washed Harvey’s daiquiri glass. A new guy had seated himself at the bar, and when I walked up, he said, “My wife left me this morning.”

Back to the grind.

A short Memoir/Autobiography

Julia O'Donovan

It was August 23, 2005 around 7PM when the Hospice nurse told us our mother was in the dying stage of Cancer and would pass within 24 to 72 hours. She said we had to decide if we wanted her somewhat alert and in some discomfort or resting peacefully. We chose resting peacefully. My sister, Lynda, who was seven years older than I, walked away with me and suddenly collapsed against me in tears. I walked us to a couch where we could sit down. I put an arm around her as she sobbed against me. If you would have told me when I was thirteen that the older sister I admired, worshipped and longed to spend time with who swatted me away like a pesky fly; that we would one day be close- I would have said you had the wrong person. But here we were about to lose our mother and turning to each other for support.

My dad was in denial. The following day was their forty- eighth wedding anniversary. He had gotten her a card and was walking around showing it to everyone and planned to give it to her. The nurse had injected the calming drugs and told Lynda and I she could still hear. That it would really help if we went in there and told her it was okay for her to go. Lynda went in first and was in there for awhile. She came out and I went in and did not know what to say- how do you tell your mother it's okay to die? She did seem very comfortable. I told her we would be all right, we had each other. I spent most of my time just watching the woman who gave birth to me dying. I was on the verge of tears so I left. Lynda and I planned on staying all night and Aunt Betty did not seem to have any intention of leaving. Then dad announced he was all set. That was his friendly way of saying "get out" that he wanted to be alone. Lynda and I took the hint and reluctantly left. Aunt Betty was not so easy; he practically had to escort her to her car. He was left with the Hospice nurse and the 24-hour aide. My brother, Patrick, called around 10:30 that night. Dad had called him. Mom had passed. She was seventy-three years old. Patrick spoke in a quiet restrained voice and told me he thought what Lynda and I did was "awesome." I had to think what we did then realized he was talking about telling her it was okay to go.

In December of 2003, one of my cats took ill and was back and forth to the vet until it was finally suggested we take him to a specialist and get an Endoscopy. This is when we met Dr E. A couple days later he called with the results, Riley had Cancer- Lymphoma of the intestines. I asked how long he had and Dr E said cats with his type of Cancer are known to live about three years. I was devastated.

Mom started having breathing problems in December of 2003 and in January her doctor wanted her to get a Pulmonary Function Test. They could not do this because of the fluid in her lungs. They hospitalized her while they drained some of the fluids, took more X-rays and did a CT-Scan. The tests revealed Cancer in her lungs, her liver and adrenal glands. We had a family meeting where her doctor explained her Cancer and treatment. Lisa sent me to the meeting with some questions; one of them being what stage was the Cancer in? Stage four. Mom later said she didn't know how many stages there were, maybe ten. I was not going to be the one to tell her there were five. I never understood why God was punishing mother. She was a recovering alcoholic who had become very depressed afterwards. She took care of her elderly mother who reduced her to tears. Grandma died and mom was free. She had three beautiful grandchildren who she just adored- why did God take her away from all that when she was finally happy?

I do not remember much of her drinking, just a few instances. Patrick got the brunt of it. She would wait up for him after drinking and just sob to him in the kitchen. Mom told me later when she was sober awhile how I used to sit with her in the family room when she had been drinking, pleading with her to go to bed. She told me how heartbreaking it was to have her youngest child begging her to go to bed. I think I was eight or nine. I have no recollection of this. She went to a therapist for help. This is when Hillary first enters the picture. Hillary said she would not see my mother unless she was sober. She told her to go to 90 Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in 90 days- then come back and see her. Apparently she sat the family down and said she was not making any promises but was going to try and quit drinking. Neither Lynda nor I remember this or her going to meetings, but she did because she started seeing Hillary. She quit drinking around Thanksgiving in 1979 and never picked up a drink the rest of her life. I was a sad and withdrawn kid so eventually they sent me to Hillary who diagnosed me with Depression. So mom quit drinking in 1979 and I discovered the true benefits of it in 1980. If I drank about six or seven beers the night before, I would feel pretty mellow the next day. I was very shy and picked on and the 'liquid courage' helped me be more outgoing. I did not do this all the time, and then my Depression would rear its ugly head. So I was feeling pretty bad and mother had fallen into a bad depression. Father pulled me aside asking me to help mother. How could I help her when I could not help myself? When I told Hillary about this, she smashed her fist into her hand and said "Sometimes I could kill that man."

High school started and Speech Class was a required course. The thought of standing in front of a classroom of kids terrified me. My solution? A few drinks in the morning. A jar of whiskey or rum in my backpack along with a couple cans of beers, all slammed down in the ladies room before class. How did I survive four years of drama? I barely remember sophomore year. I drank a lot and smoked a lot of pot. I do remember the Fall Show. I had a bit part in it where I could not speak and the lead actor was interrogating me and I could only try and talk and gesture wildly with my hands. He then speaks to all of us and swings his arm accidentally knocking me off the chair and I went flying to the floor. The audience loved it! I

am naturally clumsy and whenever there was a character needed to be clumsy, I was called upon. Another beautiful thing about the fall show is that it always fell on the week-end mom and dad were at dad's business conference out of state. So I would throw the closing night party. Sophomore year mom helped out at dad's office a lot so usually no one was home. A friend of mine would come over and we would 'drink' our lunch. I finally got nailed for being intoxicated on school grounds and a phone call was made to dad's office. Mom collapsed against the wall so dad came and got me. I quit drinking until second semester of junior year. At the close of first semester senior year I saw I was in danger of not graduating and knew I had to change things. So I did a 180 and graduated with 1/2 a credit to spare

I stayed sober until February of 1986. This is when the hard drinking started. I had a friend with a fake ID and a friend whose boyfriend was of age. We started with fifths of rum but that was not enough so I would have them get a case of beer too. Then I started getting fifths of Jack Daniels and would drink one a night a few nights a week- along with beer. My friends were starting to get concerned about my drinking and I would just say "Of course I'm an alcoholic! That's why I drink!"

I was a functioning drunk, holding down a full time job where I usually opened up the place after drinking until 4AM. The drinking really did not affect my job. In fact, one of the managers there called me 'superstar' because I did the work of two during a rush- just stay out of my way! There were only a few mornings where I was hurting. Very few.

After a year of hard drinking, I was at the point where I was afraid of choking on my vomit at night and would force myself to throw up before going to bed. A friend caught me on a vulnerable night and to admit I needed to clean up. He said what I needed to do was wake up my parents while I was ready to quit. I got them up and mom knew something had been going on and dad was calm, he said "We'll take care of this in the morning." The following morning I was put on a waiting list for a recommended treatment center. I met with the intake therapist who just kept shaking her head saying "Why didn't you come to us sooner?" I was also informed quitting drinking cold turkey after the amounts I was drinking could have put me into a seizure. I should have been detoxed. Here I thought I was doing the right thing. My name came up and I went in for a 28 day program. This was 1987 when they had 28 day programs instead of just the 3-4 day stays they now have. I had a physical and was found to be in the beginning stages of liver disease, luckily the liver repairs itself. I just missed the cut off to be in the adolescent program. So I was the youngest in a group of mostly older men. The treatment did me a lot of good. I got along real well with my group. Some of the younger guys were attacking another member who spent time in his room with the door closed. They used me as an example when They said "Julie's in her room a lot, but her door is wide open and we feel if we wanted to go in and talk to her, we could." I was honestly flattered because I did not want to come across as isolating. Sunday was visiting day and one Sunday Lynda came to visit. I was really surprised. I vaguely remember her visit just that it was awkward at first. Like the reality of my situation had

not hit her until now. We did wind up having a good visit though. We bonded. We became more than sisters- we became friends.

Once home, I felt great and babbled like an idiot to anyone who would listen. I was just so 'high on life' as sometimes happens to people when they first get sober. That's all good and fine but then these people usually crash. I sure did. By October I was in a deep Depression and the only people I would talk to were Hillary and Lynda. Hillary had me see the psychiatrist she worked under her and he put me on an anti-depressant. He was not happy with the results and wanted to put me on a higher dose which meant I would have to be hospitalized on a psychiatric ward so they could keep an eye on me. While in the hospital my anger surfaced, it had been suppressed a long time. I was always getting myself on watches for stupid things or a staff member would have to sit with me. It was while there I was diagnosed as Bi-Polar. Suddenly things were making sense. Before I went to bed I would have a couple cups of hot chocolate. I was sitting in the kitchen with one of the patients when all of a sudden I hit the floor in a seizure. It was for this reason they hospitalize people on higher doses of medications. Cass pulled my tongue out of my throat to keep me from trying to swallowing it as he called for help. To make a long story short, I had hit my head on the heater and had to get stitches above my eye and had a black eye for awhile. The nurses joked with me, telling me I should say "you should see what happened to the other guy." I had been there nearly two months and had shown little improvement so was sent to a long term facility three hours away. I was in a fog so had no feelings about the place, mother however, wanted to grab me and run. The place spooked her. I came out of the fog and it was like someone had smacked me upside the head. I knew I did not belong there. I called dad and told him I wanted out. At first he said they wanted me home then he started talking about taking me to Court to keep me there. The situation was, if I signed myself out, it would be Against Medical Advice and psychiatrists would be reluctant to take me on as a patient. This was true with the doctor Hillary worked under and my parents thought sure Hillary would be able to talk some sense into me. I told her it had been nice working with her. I was so adamant about getting out of there I told my parents if they did not come get me I would live with some friends in the area. They finally agreed to get me. Patrick and mom came to get me. I was so happy to see them and so happy to finally be going home. I was sent home with a little medication, just enough to get by for a few days. We had to find a psychiatrist quick. Signing myself out AMA might make this difficult. Dad called the place I went to Alcohol Rehab for and they got us an appointment with a psychiatrist there.

I was really nervous about seeing another psychiatrist. When I went in to see Dr K. who told me I was not crazy. Finally! A psychiatrist who did not talk down to me. She put me on some medications and we met for awhile. I started seeing another therapist and she required I see the doctor she worked under. Not only was I crushed that I had to stop seeing Dr K. But Dr L. - talk about someone talking down to you! He was an idiot and the therapist told me some of her other patients said the same thing. I was so glad when he moved and I was able to see Dr K. again.

I refer to the summer of 1988 as my "Emily Dickinson" summer. I often wore

my white sweatpants and a white t-shirt. Kind of how Emily Dickinson always wore white dresses. Patrick and Lynda being a year apart had the same friends and they came over every week-end to hang out by the pool. I do not recall if my sister was around much. I stayed up late and often slept through the activities. Sometimes I would be up but go downstairs and listen to music. Just like Emily Dickinson, I was very reclusive, so on rare occasions where I would go outside there would be this quiet hush 'it's the reclusive sister!' Summer turned into fall and Lynda and I took one of our first trips to Florida together. Another thing I never would have believed. It was also time for me to start working again. I got a job at a department store warehouse just before the Holidays. Wrong time to start such a job. Especially when the warehouse is unorganized. I think I lasted a month then had a melt down and walked off the job. Took some more time off then got a job at a drug store where things worked out really well.

I was in a really unstable relationship but we got an apartment and one of the first things we got was a kitten- Riley. Before our lease was up we got another kitten- Bronte. We had an issue where Riley kept attacking Bronte. Our vet at the time told us not to worry, that no matter how bad it sounded, he would not hurt her. We moved into a house and the extra space seemed to help. The fighting continued, just not as often. Bronte had more places to hide. Our relationship did not get any better. I was miserable. I was eight years sober when I told her I was going to deposit my check- the bank was on the corner. I deposited my check and took some money out then looked for an open liquor store on a Sunday night. I found one and bought a pint of Jack Daniels. My first opportunity to use my ID. They say the disease of alcoholism progresses along with you whether one is drinking or not. If you have not been drinking awhile and pick up a drink, you pick up where you would have left off had you never stopped. The pint was doing some damage but that was not enough. I went to a bar ordering a whiskey and coke and spiked the drink. I called Lynda and told her where I was, she arrived right away. I have no recollection of what occurred next. Not going to the emergency room or becoming so violent when they tried to put me in a hospital bed that they had to call Security and put me in restraints. They pumped my stomach as I had a very toxic amount of alcohol in my system and they did not know just how much medication I was on. Afterwards they injected me with something to knock me out. When I started waking up, Lynda and my ex said I would freak if I woke up in restraints and could they be removed? I was no longer considered hostile, so they removed them. I continued going out on binges here and there. My ex and I split up at one point and I went to stay at my parents for a month.

Then I got my dream job, working at the hospital down the street. I started out part-time afternoons in dietary but really wanted to get full-time midnights. It was a long wait but I got a job with floor maintenance. My ex didn't like being alone at night so she moved on. I really did not like the job and it just got worse and worse. I would arrive a little early to smoke a cigarette and mentally get ready for my shift. The Environmental Services staff would be outside and one of the girls and I kept making eye contact. She worked up on the second floor which

was part of my work area. We usually ran into each other just as she was leaving the floor to go home. I became so miserable at the job I started to drink again. This went on for awhile until one afternoon I passed out sitting on the couch. I awoke and thought I missed my shift. I quickly went up to the hospital to plead my case. I was actually about four hours early for my shift. One of the supervisors saw me and quickly filled out the paper work and brought me up to Emergency for a suitability test. I failed miserably and was told to report to Employee Health the next day. The doctor in charge of my case I referred to as 'Miss Personality.' Everything she said to me she followed it with: 'if you still have a job.' I did still have a job but was put on two years probation. This included a leave of absence where I had to go to in-patient rehab as well as outpatient. I then had to go to a recovery group once a week, get blood drawn to be tested monthly, and the clincher was three AA meetings a week where I had to get a sheet signed to validate I was there. I HATED meetings!! They did nothing for me but irritate me and the fact that I did not drive did not help. Luckily, there were three meetings a week at the hospital but that meant getting up early- not as early as that discussion group, but something good was about to happen. I returned to work and the girl I had been exchanging eyes with was now all dressed up working midnights. She had gotten a promotion. If I was outside smoking when she came outside she would sit next to me and we started getting to know each other. Then she started to bring coffee out to me. There seemed to be a definite chemistry between us. We went out on a date and I was shy at first but then things started happening pretty fast. I took her to meet my grandmother who was in a nursing home. Our family was all scheduled to go to my dad's last business conference before he retired. Not long before this, grandma died at age ninety-three. It was tough. My mom was shaky; I did not want to be away from Lisa. Except for my father, we were all going to Disney World after the conference. Mom did a great job of keeping herself together. While I was gone, Lisa moved some of her stuff into the house and stayed there. We talked every night.

So I returned to work and being with Lisa made tolerating work a little easier. I held on for awhile until I just could not handle it anymore. I felt on the verge of a breakdown and took a leave of absence. Lisa commented on how much more relaxed I was once out of there. I realized I just could not do that job anymore. I tried interviewing in other departments but was just so fragile. After my leave of absence I put in my two week notice. I took a little time off then got another job which was a disaster. The hospital had given me my greatest gift- Lisa, but it also broke my spirit. Or the work ethic I had always prided myself on. Dr K. suggested I file for Disability. 'How, why?' I asked. She said Bi-polar was a legitimate handicap. What followed was over two years of waiting and Lisa paying the bills and getting really frustrated. All my money went to cigarettes and therapy. I had decided to go back into therapy and called Hillary asking if she would take me on as a patient. She hesitated but said she would. It was really handy seeing someone who already knew me. I just had to catch her up on the years in-between when we terminated. It also helped that she knew my fam-

ily and had great admiration for my mother.

Lisa was very supportive when I found out Riley had Cancer and extremely supportive when my mom was diagnosed. She had seen her grandparents die a painful deaths to Cancer. While mom was in the hospital we would visit her every day. One night I was going to give her a break telling her we did not have to go. "Of course we do!" Lisa said. Lisa had been on vacation and once she was back she used to check in on my mom.

Every July we get together with dad's side of the family at Lynda and Tony's. It is right around mom's birthday so we celebrate it and usually have a cake. 2004 she was in the hospital when we had the party so Patrick called her up and told her what a great time we were having at her party. I am sure she had some choice words for him. She was always a good sport. My siblings and I had different views on how long mom had. Lynda and I were out to dinner one night and she said Patrick tells people it is horrible that she does not have long, Lynda did not want to know and I wanted to know just so I was prepared. Mom had been worried she would not be able to go on the Cruise she had planned with Aunt J, Lynda and Tony, but her doctor gave her the okay. They had a lot of fun. Just what mom needed. This was August and mom had started driving a little bit. Aunt B came over once a week and they would have lunch and run any errands if needed. She had another CT scan and the tumors shrunk so she was put on oral Chemo which had horrible side effects.

Riley continued to have problems with his Chemo. Dr E suggested taking him off it for awhile and I panicked "Then what's going to fight the Cancer?" I asked. Dr E said he would be all right on his steroid for awhile. Eventually they did try him on a new Chemo and he could not tolerate that so Dr E spread out the doses. Then he stopped eating and this turned out to be an overactive thyroid. He was given some pills and started eating again.

In June of 2005, mom and dad were out at Lynda and Tony's on the pontoon boat in the middle of the lake when it started raining. Mom was standing up when it started to pour and dad floored the engine causing mom to fall flat on top of a cooler. She was really sore and went to the doctor to find she had cracked three ribs. She took to her bed and whenever I called, dad would tell me she was resting. It became very frustrating. Right around this time my Disability Hearing came up. It was granted to me. I owed this to a smart doctor- Dr K. and a sharp lawyer. I got home and mom actually called! She was so excited for me. I could hear it in her voice. She told me she really wanted to be there with me. After that she took to her bed and got worse. It was like she was hanging on for me. Aunt Betty, a retired nurse, noticed her abdomen had swelled. Dad and Aunt B had a painful decision to make. Whether or not to call in Hospice. They made the call then called us kids. We were all there along with the Hospice nurse when they asked mom what she wanted to do. At first she said she wanted to try to fight again and dad told her he could not take care of her. She would have to be taken to the Emergency room. She reluctantly agreed to Hospice. So they brought in the hospital bed and swapped out beds, set up oxygen and

ordered medications. Lynda sent out the word to the cousins and their families. They all came into town and it was a lively time. Hard to believe mom lay dying inside. People took turns visiting her. During the time everyone was in town the backyard was full of people, two of Patrick and Lynda's friends from out of State were in town and came over. They were very fond of mom and her, of them. They called her 'ma.' Something about mother, Patrick and Lynda's friends all felt close to her, then when my friends started coming over on a regular basis they would sit upstairs for awhile talking to mom before going to the basement. After everyone left and went back to the States they came from, it was back to Aunt B, Lynda and I. I recall one of the aides saying to the Hospice nurse that she was not used to a Hospice patient being so alert. Mom caught me by surprise too. I was in the room with her and she seemed to be resting. I said "I love you, mom." Her eyes flung open and she looked right at me and said "I love you too, honey." I felt really good about that, it still makes me smile today. It was after this she started to fail. We would go in and she would just be staring up at the ceiling unresponsive. This was when the nurse told us she did not have long.

So I got off the phone with Patrick and was in shock. My mother was dead. I just could not believe it. I did not call Lisa as she was due home soon. She got home and we hugged hello as usual and during our embrace I told her "mom passed." She froze in my arms. We went in the kitchen and she wiped her eyes and blew her nose. Here is how out of touch I was- I asked her if her sinuses were acting up and she said "no, I'm sad." The next day we went to father's and went over a sort of Will mom left. She gave me a necklace and a Hummel that was given to her when I was born. She left a ring to Lisa which I thought was really nice. I had a meeting with Hillary right after mom's death. Hillary was just shutting the door when I gave her the news. She froze at the door. I only saw Hillary every other week so she did not realize how sick mother was. Hillary was blind-sided by the news. I was still pretty numb and not in touch with my feelings about her death. It was really cool seeing a therapist who knew mom so well. We talked about mom and Hillary spoke of her as to what a terrific lady she was.

The day of the visitation, Lisa and I arrived, as soon as I saw mom laid out in her coffin I began to lose it. I walked up to the coffin and knelt down then did lose it. Lisa had kneeled down next to me and rubbed my back as I said "that's my mother" in-between sobs. We stayed there awhile until I got my composure and was ready to face visitors. Neighbors and friends of the family I had not seen for years paid their respects. It was good to see them again, I just regretted the circumstances. There was a special room for the family where family had brought some food and soft drinks. Lisa and I went in there and my nephews were in there. They were five and seven at the time I believe. I was asking them nonsense questions with a straight face and they were laughing.

I started a poem for mother just after she was diagnosed, picked it up again when Hospice was called in then finished it after her death. When Father S was going over ideas for the Funeral Mass I remembered a couple of hymns mom loved and I asked if I could read my poem. Cousin Maureen wanted to do the

Eulogy and that was fine by everyone. The day of the Funeral I did not expect the coffin to be open in the back of the Church. When I had to walk by the open coffin with my family I am sure I got choked up. To me the worst part of a Funeral has always been when they roll the coffin up to the altar, that's where I lost it at all my grandparents' Funerals. I had to keep my composure to read my poem. I had asked Lisa to go up with me for support.

For Mother, August, 2005

Mother, I thought
You would live forever
Now you are leaving
And neither of us knows why

You wither before me
Can't lift your head
To meet my kiss
Only struggle

Mother, I don't understand
Why I'm losing you
I am only thirty-seven
There should be more time

I rub my belly
Where once we were attached
When I was a newborn
And you held me close

Seeing you now
You are as beautiful
As that picture taken
When you graduated as a nurse

I was able to read it without breaking down. Cousin Maureen gave a beautiful Eulogy. Not many associated my mother as a Registered Nurse, but she had gone through the training and worked for awhile putting my father through school to get his doctorate. Maureen based her Eulogy on how important mom's nurse's training had been to her, how she kept her RN license active, and the importance of the pledge spoken at the pinning ceremony. Maureen went on to speak about how much fun it was to go to the O'Donovan's in the summer, along with things she learned from mother. She closed by saying mom "lived her life fully, fighting her illness bravely." After the Mass there was a luncheon then mostly family went to the cemetery. We said prayers and each of us was given a flower from one of the arrange-

ments. We went out to the burial site where the hole was already dug and watched as the truck lifted her coffin up and put her to rest in the ground. Groundskeepers started shoveling dirt on top; I stood near and dropped my flower in with mom. Patrick was faced with designing her headstone. He seemed relieved when I said I would help him. We were really lost at first then I suggested she really enjoyed her birds, always making sure the bird feeders were full. I also remembered whenever she saw a cardinal she would say “there’s mom.” So we put cardinals on either side of the stone and ordered a vase for the stone.

We took the big step and had our first family gathering at Lynda and Tony’s since mom died. We did all right; it was not a somber time. I wrote another poem about mom that impressed Patrick so much he sounded so sincere when he said it was “awesome.” Aunt B called and almost sounded choked up when she said “You captured the woman I loved.”

The Wind Sings

The sun and the wind
Rose to greet her
Thousands of leprechauns playing fiddles
Serenaded her

For she was a rose
A beautiful rose
Her eyes sparkled
She loved to dance

She was a friend to all
Always there
To comfort
Concerns

Special lady
Touching the hearts
Of many
Always giving

I hear her in the wind
I call to her
Silence
But I know she is there

It was the Holidays I was worried about and could not believe how well I breezed through them. Cousin Kathie, who lost her mom when she was about eleven (Cousin Maureen’s youngest sibling), told me it was the second year of

Holidays that was rough. Right around this time, my dad met a woman twenty years his junior at a benefit for a hospital he used to run. This woman had buried two husbands and I worried she would bury my father. He insisted there would be marriage. Yes, I was resentful at first thinking she was taking the place of my mother but then I realized how important it was father not be alone. She took care of him. I slowly warmed up to her. Not long after mom's death, Lynda and I spent two days clearing out mom's belongings in her room. Getting her clothes ready for charity and I took her Diana of Wales books- she adored her. I also took the doll my uncle had given her when she was little, she held that doll dear the rest of her life. We had to detach ourselves from what we were doing. To look at the reality that we were cleaning out our dead mother's belongings would have been hard to take.

The first St Patrick's Day without mom really threw me off. I expected it to be like any other day, but earlier in the day I had been sad, crying. Lynda called me later and told me she was sad and missed mom. She seemed surprised when I told her I too had been having a hard day. So we talked for awhile. She told me Patrick went pub hopping and wound up at mom's grave. The stone was in but covered in ice. As it became closer to December I felt a dark feeling and then December hit me like a ton of bricks. Cousin Kathie was right about the second year. Dr K had raised my klonopin dose to 1mg and Lisa would leave me one before she went to work. Lisa had the patience of a Saint. All I would do is cry and cry and she was so supportive even though there was not much she could do. Just her being there helped me get through it. It did not help that father had thrown out mom's tree ornaments. There were three I know mom would have liked me to put on my tree. One of them was a cookie dough Angel I had made in first grade. It was always the first ornament she put on the tree. Now it was gone.

I finally came out of it mid-January. On Mother's Day we went out to the cemetery. There were already some flowers in the vase. Patrick and his family beat us to it. The headstone was beautiful but the borders were covered with little buds which had fallen from the tree next to the plot. Lisa wiped them away the best she could. Dad bought the plot next to them for me. Kind of weird to be standing where you are going to be buried. Aunt J was hoping to be the first one to go out there with me, so I just made another trip with her. It was fun hanging out with Aunt J.

This was going into Riley's third year of Cancer and he showed no signs of slowing down. He was so aggressive at the animal clinic that Dr B thought there was no way this cat was in his third year of Cancer. In order to weigh him and give him vaccinations, they had to dump him from his carrier into this net contraption that folded in half and velcroed shut, Totally immobilizing him while he screamed hissed and spit. Dr B had Dr E fax the results of his endoscopy and there it was, just as he told me- Lymphoma of the intestines.

My family became closer. Dad and I would check in with each other and end the conversations with "I Love You." Something we did not do before. Patrick and I would go out to lunch on occasion or he would call me to just see how things were going. His wife, Julie, and I would sometimes hang out, going out on errands. I real-

ly enjoy the time we spend together. We never really used to spend time together. Lynda and Tony live on a lake and our dog, Josie, loves to swim. So we started making frequent visits over there. Lynda's dentist is in this area, so whenever she has an appointment we go out to dinner. She calls just to check in too.

One day my fourteen year old nephew, Danny, sent me a poem he thought I might like. I did not even know he wrote poetry. I was really impressed by the poem. We were at dad's a few days later and Julie asked him if he brought his poetry book and he said no, because he didn't want to show everyone. Turns out he was studying and writing the poems for school. When I got home I wrote to him asking if I could see his poetry and he said he would be happy to share it with me. Some of the poems were really good. I wrote and told him he could take over as family poet as I was getting ready to retire. I suggested he write a poem about Grandma Gayle- my mom. He said he would love to. After a dry spell, some lines came to me about mom but I got stuck, so I sent what I had to Danny and he took it in an entirely different direction and we passed it back and forth a few times until it was complete. I thought it was a cool poem. A good bonding experience for us.

Butterflies and the Candle

Mama you should see
The sunflower Lisa grew
We thought it had died
But she called me to the side
To show it to me in all its splendor

Butterflies fly
By the butterfly bush
Bumblebees swarm around it
Reminding me of just how much
I miss you

I step outside
And look at our star
The one you said was mine
It twinkles tonight
You are saying hello to me

You are a candle
You were illuminating
Dark became light
Flaming with life
Warming and leading the way

Seeing what most cannot
Lighting the life of others
Branching out your flame
A candle though, does not last forever
The wick will grow short

Your flame has gone away now
But you are not gone
Your smoke continues
Your wax is all around you
Your ashes floating in life

While your flame was still there
You shared it with others
Lighting the life for future generations
Your flame may have left
But the candles around you have not

J. O'D/D. O'D 8/2007

I tried to get it published and while I was at it, tried getting some of my own work published. I did not have success with our poem but had much success with my poems. I will keep trying though.

Speaking of bonds, I thought it would be a sisterly bond thing to go visit mom on the second year anniversary of her death. Lynda thought that was a great idea. We bought some flowers and went out there and put them in the vase with water. She or dad bought her a plot in the same area and we were wondering if Patrick bought plots there for him and Julie. We were trying to figure out how everyone would fit based on the surrounding graves. Lynda started to wander around looking at the other headstones while I just stood staring down at mom's grave. I was on the verge of choking up so I asked Lynda if she was ready. She had been waiting on me.

In November of 2007, Riley became very sick. We took him to Dr B and her assistant, Lisa. This typically ferocious cat was just lying there. "I've never seen him like this" Lisa said in almost a whisper. He was running a fever and just a mess. They said they wanted to keep him for the day and then decided to keep him overnight to get fluids in him. Dr B was used to Riley but a different doctor was in the following morning. The doctor called me and told me he appeared to be doing better as they had to knock him out twice. Once because he pulled out his IV and they had to put it back in, and again when he rolled himself up in the tubing and they had to unravel him. She was pretty much saying 'please come get your cat.' He did all right for a few days then stopped eating and drinking again. Dr B was on vacation so we took him out to Dr E who did an ultrasound revealing pancreatic Cancer. Lisa kept insisting to me she refused to see Riley suffer. If he did not start getting better and I could not bring myself to end his suffering- she would. During one of the visits to Dr B she put him on a muscle relaxer. She gave him a dose just before we left. By the time we got home, he could not walk a straight line and fell halfway down the stairs. I would give him this stuff and he would get so stoned part of his eyelids would show. He would give me the most pleading look like 'Why? Mommy, Why?' I really felt like I was losing him. After all, this was nearing the end of his fourth year with Cancer and his prognosis had been three years. While he was not eating, during a phone conversation, Dr B said she might have to insert a feeding tube so we could feed him liquids. I would not put him through that. It was not brought up again and Dr B was not ready to give up on him. There was a reason why- to everyone's amazement, Riley did a complete turnaround. The cats food dishes are behind the computer chair and whenever I heard a cat eating I would always hope it might be Riley. Bronte was eating enough for the both of them. Now when I turn around, sometimes it is Riley eating. His appetite is good, he is gaining some of the weight he lost and is drinking water too.

Lynda made a good point. I told her with all his ailments, I didn't know what kept Riley going. She said "Maybe he's not ready to go yet." I think she's right.



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