

the **16** year  
anniversary issue

CC&D



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

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June '09

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## Scars art

Page 4. Since the astrological sign Cancer (the crab) starts in June, the cover art is of a Sally Lightfoot in the Galapagos Islands

## Rechecks

### Julia O'Donovan

Sun's trying to show  
He puts the pillow over his head  
Trying to hide it

Not ready for another one  
Of the loneliness and the toll  
Sarcasm and rechecks

He walks the city streets  
To an aimless job  
Of boredom and regret

All he could have been  
He wonders why  
He didn't perceive more



Screaming Mask,  
art by Mark Graham

# Pissed Stanza

CEE

Got a buddy  
He a Preacher Kid  
And PK say  
Ain't Jesus ain't never claimed divinity  
He give to the poor  
But say Hall is bullshit  
He like choich  
'Cuz it a nice, family thang tuh do;  
'Nother buddy  
He a Preacher's Kid, too  
And PK say  
The Bible ture, all right  
But it meant sunpin' different to the herdsman  
Long Ago  
Thank to you an' meour friends from Brandein  
He knocked up a girl  
And expected the choich's blessing  
Got realla, realla mad when the minister  
Told 'eem The Rules  
He laugh when he tell a story, y'know  
'Bout his preacher dad  
Tellin' the Ladies Auxiliary tuh "go to Hell"  
He like-a play games wid creatures in 'em

My question  
What god's crankin' out these preachers?  
Quetzalcoatl?



Sweat, at by  
Rose E. Grier

# Zombie

by Charles Michael Craven

there are days I feel dead inside,  
the couch is as far as I get,  
if I get there.

all my dreams could come  
true but I wouldn't  
know it.

I eat nothing and  
drink very little,  
fasting for the sake of it.

the world closes,  
the lights go off,  
sound is muffled.

a knife could be stuck  
in me and I wouldn't  
feel it.

a coyote creeps up behind me  
but I don't  
blink.

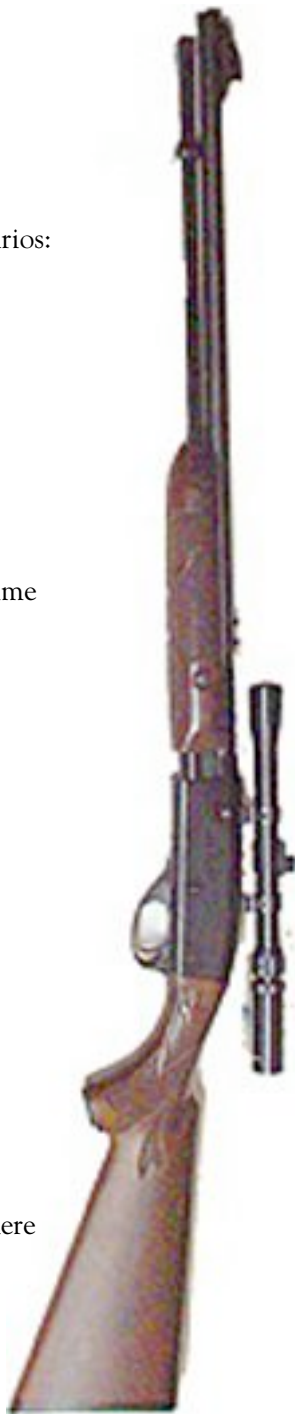


We Thy  
Sons and  
Daughters  
Stand,  
le Monde  
image 006  
by Aaron  
Wilder



## Janet Kuypers

The Other Scenario was that  
you tried to kill me  
I was at a bar  
and I saw you come in, but you didn't see me  
so I asked the bartender to act like I was never here  
and I made my way to the bathroom  
I borrowed a scarf from a girl in there  
and I put on my glasses  
and I got up the courage  
to go out to the bar again



I had no idea where my male friends were  
I felt so alone  
I mean, I borrowed a scarf  
                    from a stranger in the washroom  
but I thought,  
it's now or never,  
you think you look silly wearing sunglasses in a bar  
well, think that you look like Lackie O  
and you look elegant  
and fantastic  
and no one can tell you otherwise  
and so I left the washroom  
and I made my way back to the bar

You had walked up to the bar  
right ot where I was sitting before  
and you pulled out a high school photo of me  
and asked the bartender if I looked familiar  
and the bartender said that he never saw  
                                    the girl in that photo  
and you left one hand on the bar  
and you started to lean back  
and it gave me the change to give the bartender  
  another tip

and while you were back  
I saw my friends  
and one of them spotted me  
and they decided to yell over the people at me  
saying my name, saying that they were looking for me  
and you turned toward me when you heard my name  
and I couldn't help but stare right at you  
  when you did it  
and I didn't know what to do next

My friends came over right away  
and all I could think  
was that I didn't have to be alone for this battle with you any more  
and under any other circumstance  
I would have yelled at them for screaming out my name

or walking over to me and taking my glasses off  
but you were right there  
and I had no time to react and be angry at them  
I was just relieved  
so I started talking to them  
and you came up  
and I acted surprised  
and within thirty seconds I turned to get a beer  
and I leaned with a friend  
and I told him I saw a gun on you  
at your waist  
and could they please tell the bartender

and he did

I wanted to be able to introduce you as a rapist  
but I knew you had a gun  
and I knew I had to play my cards right

but within five minutes  
the cops came in, walked up to the bartender  
and he pointed you out

I started to walk away  
I said I had to go to the bathroom  
I wanted to make sure you couldn't grab me  
or take me hostage  
or kill me

the cops apparently didn't do anything to you  
your gun must have been legal  
so they told you to leave the bar

one of my friends knew who you were  
so they told the rest of my guy friends  
to meet you outside

I waited inside long enough  
to give that scarf back to that stranger  
but all I know

was that it look like you hated me when you left  
and I just watched to make sure this enemy went away  
and never came back  
and maybe I could heal then

one of my friends came back to the bar  
told me I had to see this  
so I went outside with them  
and saw the bloody heap they reduced you to  
and they all stood in a circle and looked at me  
as if they were waiting for me to deal the last blow  
so  
so I kicked you once  
in the stomach  
I thought that I didn't want to be the one who killed you  
by kicking you in the face  
    God, I'm an idiot that way  
    why could I have done more?  
    am I too nice  
    or am I a baby  
    or do I want to blame someone else?  
So I left it at one kick  
and I leaned toward your face  
and I said you were a rapist  
and I don't think you heard me  
but I didn't care  
and I got up and started to leave

Someone asked me,  
should we just leave him here?  
And I said, "Leave WHO?"  
and they understood  
and walked with me

these are the ways I think of you  
they are the only ways,  
just so you know



Vancouver, art by  
Christine Sorich



# Kids in Shoes With Wheels

Julie Kovacs

One pint sized human zoomed by me on those  
so-called fashionable shoes called heelies and almost knocked my  
fashionable lunch tray out of my hands sending  
sushi all over my Italian blouse  
when another pint sized human, also on heelies,  
made direct contact with the red shopping bag I carried on my right arm  
and bam!

The kid made off with the bag in his face,  
he must have thought I was the mall matador and he, the miniature bull  
until his mother came along and told him to politely return the  
shopping bag with the broken handles to its owner.

The young child zoomed back to me on his heelies knowing I  
was still in the food court eating my sushi and  
hoping my purchase of lingerie  
didn't wind up being run over by those tiny shoes with wheels.

The boy shyly held out my shopping bag to me and  
politely apologized for making off with it,  
explaining that he was pretending to be an  
over-night delivery man  
for that was his dream career,  
it satisfied his need to speed  
and a penchant for carrying packages while in flight.

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## Working in a Coal Mine

Michael Ceraolo

During the decade spent erecting the corridor to the moon  
dozens of workers died every year,  
from airpack failure that caused suffocation,  
from heat-shield failure that caused incineration,  
from failure of the tethers keeping them from flying off into space,  
these and all equipment allegedly inspected  
by the Inter-Space Safety and Health Agency (ISSHA)  
The deaths were deemed an acceptable cost  
by everyone except the workers



Cold Beer Dirty Girls, art by  
Nick Brazinsky

## Damage Done

Tanya Rucosky Noakes

On the tip of my tongue  
the salt of you burns  
in each cut you left.  
Scars well up pink \soft...  
there's no mark on skin  
not turned up inside.  
You come asking, but  
I love my spite more  
now, than I've loved you.

## You Always Were A Dirty Child

Lucy Winrow

Last time I saw you,  
It was as if your sighing curls  
Were bouncing in slow motion  
Suspended in mid-air  
Someone pressed pause  
Turned your brain into a box  
No windows  
Someone slapped the blinkers on.

When I found you  
Your puckered hairless skin  
Was wrinkled with worry, soft with frustration  
Oozing the kind of vulnerability that encourages  
Abuse, not care  
Hugging,  
We press thick walls of meat together  
Anything's normal if it goes on for long enough  
Isn't it?  
I whisper and squeeze  
Concentrate on fixing yourself  
Not because it'll make you a better friend or lover  
But because you must.

CANLI 2EK, art by  
Üzeyir Lokman ÇAYCI



## The Poet

Michael S. Morris

The poet  
    in the doctor  
        was the singular conceit  
            that allowed her to survive

Manning the emergency room –  
    which she thought a funnyironicexpression –  
        and she ultimately respected men –  
            she'd worked with so many of them on her way

Up to her singular position  
    where she saw the dead  
        wheeled by on gurneys, brains  
            destroyed by gang warfare, stray bullets

And needles and wounds and tracks  
    she took home with her drunk  
        in the mornings, two doubles  
            and a poem writ as a talisman against doom

# The Big Time

J. Neff Lind

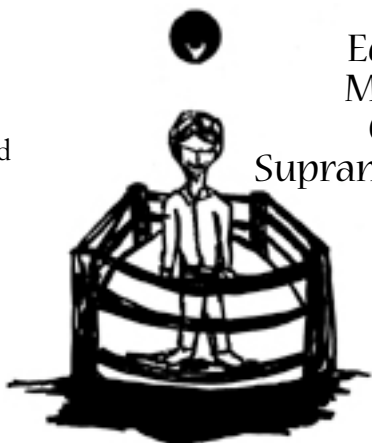
I'm standing on Hollywood Boulevard  
with a hundred dollars  
in change  
in my pockets  
but even the panhandlers  
won't give me  
the time  
of day.

I've got a script  
that would win  
an oscar  
and the box office  
but it's got my name  
on it  
and nobody knows  
my name.

I've got a big brain  
and a big heart  
and big arms  
and shoulders  
but I don't have  
a big smile  
so the women  
pass me by.

I've got a giant hope  
and a giant faith  
and a giant  
view of the  
horizon  
but still  
it doesn't fill  
my seeking eye.

Boundary,  
art by  
Edward  
Michael  
O'Durr  
Supranowicz



## She Yells At Me

Kevin Leal

She yells at me in gibberish  
Curses me with voodoo.  
She has a doll,  
But I don't think it's voodoo-related.



Setting 07, art by  
Melanie Monterey

prose  
the meat and potatoes stuff

## Satisfaction

Suzanne Hollis

Kelsey and Joy held hands as they tip-toed down the street. They stuck to the trees for that extra blanket of darkness. Finally, as they came to the crest of the hill, they saw it. The girls stopped walking and exchanged a satisfied glance. Kelsey squealed a little in her excitement, but a squeeze from Joy's hand hushed her up. The girls smiled at each other and continued walking. Each of their free hands held a paintbrush and a large can of black paint, causing them to walk sort of lopsided with a slight limp.

The girls were wearing all black to help conceal their approach. Walking as briskly as they could, they made it to the car they were searching for in only a few moments. The night air was rasping through their lungs and they ducked behind a large tree to catch their breath. Peering across the street, the girls scanned their surroundings. All the lights in the house were off. All except for a flickering, blue glow coming from a room upstairs.

"I think they're all asleep," whispered Kelsey as she reached up and scratched her forehead.

"Why doing you keep doing that?" Joy asked as she pointed to her own forehead.

"It itches!" Kelsey whined, "I can't help it."

"You loser, I told you real spies don't wear hats, but you didn't believe me."

"I saw *Catch That Kid*, she wore a hat. And she looked really cool, too. Remember? Like, all those boys really liked her and stuff."

"Whatever. Let's just do this, Ok?" The girls stopped talking and continued to look around. When they were both ready, they exchanged a glance under the moonlight and began to walk over to the car. It was a small, white, Toyota Camry, parked crookedly up against the curb. The downfall of their whole plan was that the car was parked directly outside of the house inhabited by the owner. Halfway from the tree to the car, they dropped down and crawled on hands and knees.

"Ready?" Kelsey asked.

"Always." Joy responded through a mischievous smile. She reached her hand into her pocket and pulled out two flat-head screw drivers. Handing one to Kelsey, they began to pry open their paint cans. After a few moments, they were dipping the brushes inside and putting layer upon layer of thick, black paint over the windows of the Camry. Once all the windows were sufficiently coated, the girls scurried back to the tree.

"I can't believe how cool that was!" Kelsey exclaimed.

"Well let's get going before someone sees us."

"Fine, Party Pooper, let's go." The girls checked to make sure they had all their supplies before starting on the long walk home. It was getting extremely late by this time,

and luckily school was cancelled for the following day. After walking for about 20 minutes, both girls started to lose energy.

"I think we should just go sleep at your house, Kels. It's closest anyway."

"But my mom thinks I'm at your house." Kelsey protested.

"Yeah, but my mom thinks I'm at your house, and my house is too far to walk. We'd have to wake up your mom anyway to take us there."

"Do you want to just sleep in my playhouse?"

"Kelsey, there's no room in there."

"There totally is and, like, I have some blankets in there already."

"Ugh. Fine." Joy caved in to the feelings of exhaustion that were creeping over her. The girls walked on another 15 minutes until they finally reached Kelsey's house. All the lights were off, so the girls just walked through the yard over to the playhouse. Upon opening the door, a spider ran out causing Kelsey to squeal and jump in the air. Joy peered into the tiny space and then looked back at Kelsey. "I hate you." she said flatly as she squeezed her body through the doorway. Kelsey was soon to follow and after a few moments of trying to arrange themselves, the girls finally lay down.

"Man, remember when my dad first built this for me? It was so cool."

"Yeah, and we used to play in here for hours." Joy responded through a yawn.

"Yeah. That was like, six years ago wasn't it?"

"No," Joy said, "We were nine; it was like, four years ago."

Kelsey began counting on her fingers, "Are you sure?"

"Yes. Now go to sleep."

"Yes ma'am." Kelsey saluted Joy as she answered. Both girls giggled before falling asleep.

The following morning, the girls parted ways and went back to their own houses. They agreed to meet up later on during that month to follow up on 'Phase 2' of their plan. About three and half weeks later, Kelsey called Joy on the phone.

"Hey, did you still want to do that?"

"What are you talking about, Kelsey? Do what?"

"You know...the thing."

"Uh..." Joy pondered for a moment before the realization hit her, "Oh! You mean with the car."

"Right.."

"Yeah that'd be Ok. Did you mean like tonight?"

"Can your mom drive you over?"

"I'll see, but my sister is home from college this week so my mom's all stupid about that. She wants us to be, like, spending *family time* together and stuff."

"Ew."

"I know. I'll go ask her though." Kelsey waited patiently on the other end of the line, chewing on the end of her long, blonde pony tail to help pass the time. After about two minutes, Joy came back to the receiver, "Yeah, but can your mom take me home tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but hey listen...." Kelsey's voice trailed off, taking her deep into thought.



"Hey listen...?" Joy waited.

"Oh, I was thinking that maybe your sister could just drive us there and back so we wouldn't have to walk."

"No way. I'm not telling Hope anything about this."

"But I hate walking." Kelsey whined, "Wait, can't you drive?"

"I'm not, like, really good or anything, but I know what to do."

"Ok, then meet me at my house in like an hour, or whenever your mom can drop you off. I have a plan."

"Oh god. You and your plans." Joy laughed and both girls hung up the phone.

Two hours later Joy arrived at Kelsey's house. The girls watched movies, played on the internet, and found other ways to pass the time until it was late enough to go out. They chatted as well, perfecting their plan. When the time was almost right, they began to get ready. The girls waited until everyone else in Kelsey's house was asleep before they gathered their things and left. Dressing again in all black, the girls snuck down the steps and out Kelsey's back door. Joy was carrying a large plastic Tupperware filled with sugar and Kelsey had a funnel. They trudged up the street for almost an hour until they finally came to Joy's house. There, they saw Hope's car sitting innocently outside the house. All the lights were off so they knew everyone would be asleep. Joy snuck inside as quietly as she could and swiped the keys from Hope's bureau. She then dashed out to meet Kelsey and they hopped in the car.

Joy started the car like a pro. She eased it into 'Drive' then gently pressed on the gas. The car slowly moved out of its space and onto the street. Joy drove way below the speed limit, but at least they weren't walking. Finally they made it to the place they wanted to be.

Joy attempted to park the car on the curb, but ended up just turning the engine off while it was still about two feet away. The girls grabbed their supplies then skipped out of the car to do the deed.

They walked together in silence for about five minutes, then they veered off the road and up onto the sidewalk. Like before, the girls tried to stick to the shadows of the tall maple trees lining their path.

After another few moments, they came up to the top of the hill. The girls both looked down the hill for the Camry, but did not see it. They exchanged a puzzled glance, but continued on their way. When they were across from the house in which She lived, they popped behind a tree again to converse.

"OK, so, like, where do you think she went?" Kelsey asked Joy.

"Man. I don't know. This is weird...What time is it?"

Kelsey pulled back her sleeve to reveal her sparkling watch designed by Paris Hilton. "It's, like, 2:00 now!"

"Hmm. Maybe she went out?"

"Yeah right, with who?"

"Uh...James? Isn't that his name?"

"It's Josh," Kelsey's tone seeped with irritation, "and besides, she's, like, retarded. Who would ever want to *date* her? I mean, she's, like, a total twit, you know?"

"Riiiiiiight. So, there's no chance that he would be out with her right now?"

"God. I don't know." Kelsey huffed and sat down cross-legged on the ground. "She's so dumb, you know? Like, she's only three years older than me and she's got stupid brown hair."

"Hey!" Joy argued defensively, "What's wrong with brown hair?" holding out a strand of her own in front of Kelsey.

"Oh. Heh heh, sorry." Kelsey replied sheepishly, "But you know what I mean. She's not that gr—"

Just then, the girls both started up at the sight of headlights coming down the street.

"Oh my god," Joy said, "Get down, get down!" She pressed Kelsey down toward the ground, as she herself got down as well. Both girls lay as flat as they could, while staying behind the trunk of the maple. The car drove past them and pulled over down the street about a block. The girls could see the top of the car in the light from a flickering street lamp nearby. It was white.

"Do you think that's her?" Kelsey half whispered, half mouthed to Joy.

"Could be." Joy began to army crawl her way over toward the sidewalk. Kelsey followed behind her, only less skillfully. Once they reached the grass' edge, the girls shimmied over to the nearest car and crouched down, one at each tire. There, Joy slowly raised her head just high enough that her eyes could see over the hood of the blue station wagon. She dropped back down immediately and nodded to Kelsey.

The girls waited long enough to hear the front door of the house open and close behind her. They crawled back over to the protection of the tree and discussed their new plan.

"OK we can still totally do this." Kelsey was getting to cheer up because now there was hope that they could still accomplish what they set out to do.

"Kels," Joy began, "Are you sure? We'll have to sit out here for hours to wait for her to go to sleep."

"Man, good thing I made you get that car, huh?"

"What?"

"Now we can go sit and wait in the car. And not freeze our butts off out here."

"Fine. Let's go."

The girls walked back to the car and sat inside. After a few minutes, Joy managed to just turn on the accessories so they could have heat and listen to the radio. They talked about school and the summer and Valentine's Day (which was coming up) and snowboarding. All the while, they listened to some CDs in Hope's car.

"What *is* this?" Kelsey asked in disgust as she pointed to the car stereo.

"Uh, only, like, the greatest band ever." Joy reached on the backseat to bring up a CD case. "Here," she said as she tossed the case on Kelsey's lap, "they're called My Chemical Romance."

"Ugh! They sound soOoOooOoOo moany. Like, someone just ran over their cat or something."

"God Kelsey, that's disgusting!" Joy squealed as she snatched the case back from her. Both girls had a laugh and went back to talking. Kelsey however, had reached up and pressed a button to change CDs. "I saw that!" Joy said playfully, but made

no attempt to change it back.

"Well this is more like it!" Kelsey began laughing and started playing 'air guitar' while nodding her head along with the beat. Joy just laughed along with her. The girls sat in the car in this fashion for about another hour and a half, until finally Kelsey could stand it no longer. "I think she's asleep now, don't you? I mean, like, if I were such a crap person as she is, I would go to sleep now."

Joy gave a short laugh, "Yeah I guess. Let's go out and check. It is pretty late now. And I'm *almost* tired."

"All right you big baby," Kelsey said as she reached for the Tupperware, "Let's check." And with that, she hopped out of the car and was already onto the street before Joy even had her door open. Once they were together and walking side by side, Joy broke the silence.

"You know, you might have wanted to bring this," she said as she held up the funnel.

"Omigod! I almost forgot! Dude, you are totally my lifesaver!" she snatched the funnel from Joy and gave her a half-hug at the same time. "I would have been, like, SO mad if we got all the way there and then, like, didn't have this."

"I know." When the girls made their way back to the maple, they peered out from behind it at the house. All the lights were out, but they were still a little nervous.

"Are we going?" Kelsey asked.

"Yeah, let's circle around that way though." Joy pointed to the end of the street which had no street lights that were working.

"Oooh. Yeah, good idea." Kelsey agreed and the girls walked down the street, crossed, then slowly back up the other side to where the car was parked.

"Do you think she parked under this street light on purpose?"

"Uh, definitely not. She just didn't have anywhere else to park. Duh." Kelsey looked around and then back up into the windows of the house. It was hard to see in them at the angle they were at, but that gave her hope that she couldn't see out either. Once they were sure the coast was clear, both girls walked up next to the car near the back end. Joy passed the funnel to Kelsey, who meanwhile had removed the gas tank cap on the car. While Kelsey held the funnel in place, Joy poured the sugar into the gas tank. About three-fourths of the container went in before the tank began to overflow. Joy stopped immediately and grabbed the funnel, while Kelsey screwed the cap back on. She closed the little door and both girls backed away from the scene. The girls walked as swift as possible back up to Hope's car.

When they reached it and got inside, Kelsey began to jabber away with excitement, "That was SO cool. I mean, we kind of are the coolest ever, don't you think?"

"Yeah, but tell me again how this will help you?"

"Because, she will see that by being with Josh bad things happen to her."

"Ok that doesn't really make sense, but whatever."

"No just wait, one day she'll break up with him and then he'll, like, totally come running to me."

Joy had started the engine and was easing the car back onto the street, "Does he

even know your name?"

"Well no, but like I said, all in good time."

Joy laughed, "You never said that."

Kelsey joined in laughing, "Yeah well I meant to." The car was starting to move down the street when Kelsey said, "Maybe you should turn off the headlights."

"I don't think that's the best idea."

"Why not, all the people in spy movies do it."

"And I bet they really have their license...I don't even *really* know what I'm doing."

"Fine." The car slowly moved down the road and when they passed Her house, both girls peered out the passenger side to try and peek in the windows. Right as the car was almost parallel to hers, both girls felt a bump under the front left tire. Joy slammed her foot on the brakes. Both girls nervously looked at each other. "Uh, did you feel that?" Joy asked.

"Yeah, like, did you just hit something?"

"I don't know, but we can't just sit here."

"Well then pull over down there," Kelsey pointed to an empty spot a few yards down the street, "and then we can check it out." Joy eased her foot off the brakes and the car only traveled about a few feet when the girls felt another bump.. This time it was under the right back tire. "Oh God." Kelsey's voice had turned dead flat.

Joy pulled the car over near the space Kelsey had pointed out earlier and stopped the engine. The girls got out of the car and held their breath as they turned around to face the street. There, just on the edge of the ray from the street lamp laid a small, dark mound. Kelsey's hands shot up and covered her temples (an action she usually did when she was scared) as she sucked air harshly through her clenched teeth. Joy just lowered her head. Both of them knew they had to at least see what it was they had hit, so Kelsey walked around the car and took Joy's hand in hers. They walked delicately toward the animal. When they were within about ten feet from it, both could tell that it was a cat. Kelsey's eyes began to water as she looked at Joy. Upon closer inspection, they saw the cat was wearing a collar. It was a bright pink flea collar.

Kelsey turned to Joy, "Do you think that's her cat?"

"She does have a tabby doesn't she?" Joy answered without taking her eyes off the cat. Her face was lacking its usually tan complexion. Kelsey swallowed hard.

Both stood in silence staring down at this little cat. Their moment of reverence did not last long however, because suddenly a light flicked on in her house. The girls froze to the spot. They could not see in the window well, but at once they both saw a shadow or a figure pass by the lower set of windows. With their hands still locked together, the girls took off running down the street. They hopped in the car and drove off as quickly as Joy could manage without seeming conspicuous.

The ride home was silent. When they arrived back at Kelsey's house, Joy said, "I have to go put this car back so Hope doesn't know...Do you want to come?"

"I don't think so, I am pretty tired. You should probably just sleep at your house tonight."

"God Kelsey, it's like, 5:00 in the morning, I can't just waltz in my house."

"Fine, then go put the car back and come back. I'll be inside."

"You won't even walk with me?"

"I don't know. I don't feel up for walking. I just...don't know how I feel."

"Yeah me neither." Joy agreed.

After another moments silence, Kelsey finally said, "All right. I'll walk with you. Let's go."

Joy smiled inwardly and they were off. By the time the girls finally made it back to Kelsey's house, the sun was beginning to rise. They sat out on the porch to watch it, then clumsily made their way up to Kelsey's bed where they fell asleep instantly.

Once they woke up well after noon, Kelsey said, "Let's start over."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, let's just let things happen, and not try to force them...so bad things don't happen."

"Ok. Sounds good, but shouldn't you be telling yourself this...not me?" Joy chuckled.

"Hey, shut up!" Kelsey said, but had a laugh herself. The girls walked down stairs to find that Kelsey's mom had cooked pancakes and waffles for breakfast. "What's all this, Mom?"

"You girls must have had a long night to sleep so late, so I thought I'd make a treat." The girls exchanged a knowing glance and sat down at the table. Kelsey's mom brought them each a heaping plate.

"Thanks." They said in unison as they began to shovel forkfuls of the syrup drenched breakfast into their mouths. Suzanne Hollis

Kelsey and Joy held hands as they tip-toed down the street. They stuck to the trees for that extra blanket of darkness. Finally, as they came to the crest of the hill, they saw it. The girls stopped walking and exchanged a satisfied glance. Kelsey squealed a little in her excitement, but a squeeze from Joy's hand hushed her up. The girls smiled at each other and continued walking. Each of their free hands held a paintbrush and a large can of black paint, causing them to walk sort of lopsided with a slight limp.

The girls were wearing all black to help conceal their approach. Walking as briskly as they could, they made it to the car they were searching for in only a few moments. The night air was rasping through their lungs and they ducked behind a large tree to catch their breath. Peering across the street, the girls scanned their surroundings. All the lights in the house were off. All except for a flickering, blue glow coming from a room upstairs.

"I think they're all asleep." whispered Kelsey as she reached up and scratched her forehead.

"Why doing you keep doing that?" Joy asked as she pointed to her own forehead.

"It itches!" Kelsey whined, "I can't help it."

"You loser, I told you real spies don't wear hats, but you didn't believe me."

"I saw *Catch That Kid*, she wore a hat. And she looked really cool, too. Remember? Like, all those boys really liked her and stuff."

"Whatever. Let's just do this, Ok?" The girls stopped talking and continued to

look around. When they were both ready, they exchanged a glance under the moonlight and began to walk over to the car. It was a small, white, Toyota Camry, parked crookedly up against the curb. The downfall of their whole plan was that the car was parked directly outside of the house inhabited by the owner. Halfway from the tree to the car, they dropped down and crawled on hands and knees.

"Ready?" Kelsey asked.

"Always." Joy responded through a mischievous smile. She reached her hand into her pocket and pulled out two flat-head screw drivers. Handing one to Kelsey, they began to pry open their paint cans. After a few moments, they were dipping the brushes inside and putting layer upon layer of thick, black paint over the windows of the Camry. Once all the windows were sufficiently coated, the girls scurried back to the tree.

"I can't believe how cool that was!" Kelsey exclaimed.

"Well let's get going before someone sees us."

"Fine, Party Pooper, let's go." The girls checked to make sure they had all their supplies before starting on the long walk home. It was getting extremely late by this time, and luckily school was cancelled for the following day. After walking for about 20 minutes, both girls started to lose energy.

"I think we should just go sleep at your house, Kels. It's closest anyway."

"But my mom thinks I'm at your house." Kelsey protested.

"Yeah, but my mom thinks I'm at your house, and my house is too far to walk. We'd have to wake up your mom anyway to take us there."

"Do you want to just sleep in my playhouse?"

"Kelsey, there's no room in there."

"There totally is and, like, I have some blankets in there already."

"Ugh. Fine." Joy caved in to the feelings of exhaustion that were creeping over her. The girls walked on another 15 minutes until they finally reached Kelsey's house. All the lights were off, so the girls just walked through the yard over to the playhouse. Upon opening the door, a spider ran out causing Kelsey to squeal and jump in the air. Joy peered into the tiny space and then looked back at Kelsey. "I hate you," she said flatly as she squeezed her body through the doorway. Kelsey was soon to follow and after a few moments of trying to arrange themselves, the girls finally lay down.

"Man, remember when my dad first built this for me? It was so cool."

"Yeah, and we used to play in here for hours." Joy responded through a yawn.

"Yeah. That was like, six years ago wasn't it?"

"No," Joy said, "We were nine; it was like, four years ago."

Kelsey began counting on her fingers, "Are you sure?"

"Yes. Now go to sleep."

"Yes ma'am." Kelsey saluted Joy as she answered. Both girls giggled before falling asleep.

The following morning, the girls parted ways and went back to their own houses. They agreed to meet up later on during that month to follow up on 'Phase 2' of their plan. About three and half weeks later, Kelsey called Joy on the phone.



"Hey, did you still want to do that?"

"What are you talking about, Kelsey? Do what?"

"You know...the thing."

"Uh..." Joy pondered for a moment before the realization hit her, "Oh! You mean with the car."

"Right.."

"Yeah that'd be Ok. Did you mean like tonight?"

"Can your mom drive you over?"

"I'll see, but my sister is home from college this week so my mom's all stupid about that. She wants us to be, like, spending *family time* together and stuff."

"Ew."

"I know. I'll go ask her though." Kelsey waited patiently on the other end of the line, chewing on the end of her long, blonde pony tail to help pass the time. After about two minutes, Joy came back to the receiver, "Yeah, but can your mom take me home tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but hey listen...." Kelsey's voice trailed off, taking her deep into thought.

"Hey listen...?" Joy waited.

"Oh, I was thinking that maybe your sister could just drive us there and back so we wouldn't have to walk."

"No way. I'm not telling Hope anything about this."

"But I hate walking." Kelsey whined, "Wait, can't you drive?"

"I'm not, like, really good or anything, but I know what to do."

"Ok, then meet me at my house in like an hour, or whenever your mom can drop you off. I have a plan."

"Oh god. You and your plans." Joy laughed and both girls hung up the phone.

Two hours later Joy arrived at Kelsey's house. The girls watched movies, played on the internet, and found other ways to pass the time until it was late enough to go out. They chatted as well, perfecting their plan. When the time was almost right, they began to get ready. The girls waited until everyone else in Kelsey's house was asleep before they gathered their things and left. Dressing again in all black, the girls snuck down the steps and out Kelsey's back door. Joy was carrying a large plastic Tupperware filled with sugar and Kelsey had a funnel. They trudged up the street for almost an hour until they finally came to Joy's house. There, they saw Hope's car sitting innocently outside the house. All the lights were off so they knew everyone would be asleep. Joy snuck inside as quietly as she could and swiped the keys from Hope's bureau. She then dashed out to meet Kelsey and they hopped in the car.

Joy started the car like a pro. She eased it into 'Drive' then gently pressed on the gas. The car slowly moved out of its space and onto the street. Joy drove way below the speed limit, but at least they weren't walking. Finally they made it to the place they wanted to be.

Joy attempted to park the car on the curb, but ended up just turning the engine off while it was still about two feet away. The girls grabbed their supplies then skipped out of the car to do the deed.

They walked together in silence for about five minutes, then they veered off the road and up onto the sidewalk. Like before, the girls tried to stick to the shadows of the tall maple trees lining their path.

After another few moments, they came up to the top of the hill. The girls both looked down the hill for the Camry, but did not see it. They exchanged a puzzled glance, but continued on their way. When they were across from the house in which She lived, they popped behind a tree again to converse.

“OK, so, like, where do you think she went?” Kelsey asked Joy.

“Man. I don’t know. This is weird...What time is it?”

Kelsey pulled back her sleeve to reveal her sparkling watch designed by Paris Hilton. “It’s, like, 2:00 now!”

“Hmm. Maybe she went out?”

“Yeah right, with who?”

“Uh...James? Isn’t that his name?”

“It’s Josh,” Kelsey’s tone seeped with irritation, “and besides, she’s, like, retarded. Who would ever want to *date* her? I mean, she’s, like, a total twit, you know?”

“Riiiiiiight. So, there’s no chance that he would be out with her right now?”

“God. I don’t know.” Kelsey huffed and sat down cross-legged on the ground. “She’s so dumb, you know? Like, she’s only three years older than me and she’s got stupid brown hair.”

“Hey!” Joy argued defensively, “What’s wrong with brown hair?” holding out a strand of her own in front of Kelsey.

“Oh. Heh heh, sorry.” Kelsey replied sheepishly, “But you know what I mean. She’s not that gre—”

Just then, the girls both started up at the sight of headlights coming down the street.

“Oh my god,” Joy said, “Get down, get down!” She pressed Kelsey down toward the ground, as she herself got down as well. Both girls lay as flat as they could, while staying behind the trunk of the maple. The car drove past them and pulled over down the street about a block. The girls could see the top of the car in the light from a flickering street lamp nearby. It was white.

“Do you think that’s her?” Kelsey half whispered, half mouthed to Joy.

“Could be.” Joy began to army crawl her way over toward the sidewalk. Kelsey followed behind her, only less skillfully. Once they reached the grass’ edge, the girls shimmied over to the nearest car and crouched down, one at each tire. There, Joy slowly raised her head just high enough that her eyes could see over the hood of the blue station wagon. She dropped back down immediately and nodded to Kelsey.

The girls waited long enough to hear the front door of the house open and close behind her. They crawled back over to the protection of the tree and discussed their new plan.

“OK we can still totally do this.” Kelsey was getting to cheer up because now there was hope that they could still accomplish what they set out to do.

“Kels,” Joy began, “Are you sure? We’ll have to sit out here for hours to wait for her to go to sleep.”

“Man, good thing I made you get that car, huh?”

“What?”

“Now we can go sit and wait in the car. And not freeze our butts off out here.”

“Fine. Let’s go.”

The girls walked back to the car and sat inside. After a few minutes, Joy managed to just turn on the accessories so they could have heat and listen to the radio. They talked about school and the summer and Valentine’s Day (which was coming up) and snowboarding. All the while, they listened to some CDs in Hope’s car.

“What *is* this?” Kelsey asked in disgust as she pointed to the car stereo.

“Uh, only, like, the greatest band ever.” Joy reached on the backseat to bring up a CD case. “Here,” she said as she tossed the case on Kelsey’s lap, “they’re called My Chemical Romance.”

“Ugh! They sound soOoOooOoO moany. Like, someone just ran over their cat or something.”

“God Kelsey, that’s disgusting!” Joy squealed as she snatched the case back from her. Both girls had a laugh and went back to talking. Kelsey however, had reached up and pressed a button to change CDs. “I saw that!” Joy said playfully, but made no attempt to change it back.

“Well this is more like it!” Kelsey began laughing and started playing ‘air guitar’ while nodding her head along with the beat. Joy just laughed along with her. The girls sat in the car in this fashion for about another hour and a half, until finally Kelsey could stand it no longer. “I think she’s asleep now, don’t you? I mean, like, if I were such a crap person as she is, I would go to sleep now.”

Joy gave a short laugh, “Yeah I guess. Let’s go out and check. It is pretty late now. And I’m *almost* tired.”

“All right you big baby,” Kelsey said as she reached for the Tupperware, “Let’s check.” And with that, she hopped out of the car and was already onto the street before Joy even had her door open. Once they were together and walking side by side, Joy broke the silence.

“You know, you might have wanted to bring this,” she said as she held up the funnel.

“Omigod! I almost forgot! Dude, you are totally my lifesaver!” she snatched the funnel from Joy and gave her a half-hug at the same time. “I would have been, like, SO mad if we got all the way there and then, like, didn’t have this.”

“I know.” When the girls made their way back to the maple, they peered out from behind it at the house. All the lights were out, but they were still a little nervous.

“Are we going?” Kelsey asked.

“Yeah, let’s circle around that way though.” Joy pointed to the end of the street which had no street lights that were working.

“Oooh. Yeah, good idea.” Kelsey agreed and the girls walked down the street, crossed, then slowly back up the other side to where the car was parked.

“Do you think she parked under this street light on purpose?”

“Uh, definitely not. She just didn’t have anywhere else to park. Duh.” Kelsey looked around and then back up into the windows of the house. It was hard to see in

them at the angle they were at, but that gave her hope that she couldn't see out either. Once they were sure the coast was clear, both girls walked up next to the car near the back end. Joy passed the funnel to Kelsey, who meanwhile had removed the gas tank cap on the car. While Kelsey held the funnel in place, Joy poured the sugar into the gas tank. About three-fourths of the container went in before the tank began to overflow. Joy stopped immediately and grabbed the funnel, while Kelsey screwed the cap back on. She closed the little door and both girls backed away from the scene. The girls walked as swift as possible back up to Hope's car.

When they reached it and got inside, Kelsey began to jabber away with excitement, "That was SO cool. I mean, we kind of are the coolest ever, don't you think?"

"Yeah, but tell me again how this will help you?"

"Because, she will see that by being with Josh bad things happen to her."

"Ok that doesn't really make sense, but whatever."

"No just wait, one day she'll break up with him and then he'll, like, totally come running to me."

Joy had started the engine and was easing the car back onto the street, "Does he even know your name?"

"Well no, but like I said, all in good time."

Joy laughed, "You never said that."

Kelsey joined in laughing, "Yeah well I meant to." The car was starting to move down the street when Kelsey said, "Maybe you should turn off the headlights."

"I don't think that's the best idea."

"Why not, all the people in spy movies do it."

"And I bet they really have their license...I don't even *really* know what I'm doing."

"Fine." The car slowly moved down the road and when they passed Her house, both girls peered out the passenger side to try and peek in the windows. Right as the car was almost parallel to hers, both girls felt a bump under the front left tire. Joy slammed her foot on the brakes. Both girls nervously looked at each other. "Uh, did you feel that?" Joy asked.

"Yeah, like, did you just hit something?"

"I don't know, but we can't just sit here."

"Well then pull over down there," Kelsey pointed to an empty spot a few yards down the street, "and then we can check it out." Joy eased her foot off the brakes and the car only traveled about a few feet when the girls felt another bump.. This time it was under the right back tire. "Oh God." Kelsey's voice had turned dead flat.

Joy pulled the car over near the space Kelsey had pointed out earlier and stopped the engine. The girls got out of the car and held their breath as they turned around to face the street. There, just on the edge of the ray from the street lamp laid a small, dark mound. Kelsey's hands shot up and covered her temples (an action she usually did when she was scared) as she sucked air harshly through her clenched teeth. Joy just lowered her head. Both of them knew they had to at least see what it was they had hit, so Kelsey walked around the car and took Joy's hand in hers. They walked delicately toward the animal. When they were within about ten feet from it, both could tell that it was a cat. Kelsey's eyes began to water as she looked at Joy. Upon closer inspection, they saw the

cat was wearing a collar. It was a bright pink flea collar.

Kelsey turned to Joy, "Do you think that's her cat?"

"She does have a tabby doesn't she?" Joy answered without taking her eyes off the cat. Her face was lacking its usually tan complexion. Kelsey swallowed hard.

Both stood in silence staring down at this little cat. Their moment of reverence did not last long however, because suddenly a light flicked on in her house. The girls froze to the spot. They could not see in the window well, but at once they both saw a shadow or a figure pass by the lower set of windows. With their hands still locked together, the girls took off running down the street. They hopped in the car and drove off as quickly as Joy could manage without seeming conspicuous.

The ride home was silent. When they arrived back at Kelsey's house, Joy said, "I have to go put this car back so Hope doesn't know...Do you want to come?"

"I don't think so, I am pretty tired. You should probably just sleep at your house tonight."

"God Kelsey, it's like, 5:00 in the morning, I can't just waltz in my house."

"Fine, then go put the car back and come back. I'll be inside."

"You won't even walk with me?"

"I don't know. I don't feel up for walking. I just...don't know how I feel."

"Yeah me neither." Joy agreed.

After another moment's silence, Kelsey finally said, "All right. I'll walk with you. Let's go."

Joy smiled inwardly and they were off. By the time the girls finally made it back to Kelsey's house, the sun was beginning to rise. They sat out on the porch to watch it, then clumsily made their way up to Kelsey's bed where they fell asleep instantly.

Once they woke up well after noon, Kelsey said, "Let's start over."

"What do you mean?"

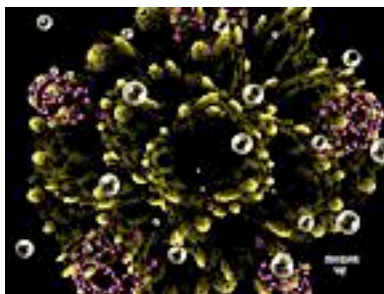
"I mean, let's just let things happen, and not try to force them...so bad things don't happen."

"Ok. Sounds good, but shouldn't you be telling yourself this...not me?" Joy chuckled.

"Hey, shut up!" Kelsey said, but had a laugh herself. The girls walked down stairs to find that Kelsey's mom had cooked pancakes and waffles for breakfast. "What's all this, Mom?"

"You girls must have had a long night to sleep so late, so I thought I'd make a treat." The girls exchanged a knowing glance and sat down at the table. Kelsey's mom brought them each a heaping plate.

"Thanks." They said in unison as they began to shovel forkfuls of the syrup drenched breakfast into their mouths.



## Floral Coral reefs, art by Junior McLean

# Visit

Jim Meirose

Silence lies layered.

Dark fills the room.

The door opens. Opens, closes, opens.

The hinges creak. No oil anymore.

The lightswitch clicks on.

The door closes. Closes, opens, closes.

The latch snaps. Complicated spring loaded mechanism of many small parts assembled by hand still working perfectly even after no one cares any more if it does.

Hello again.

It's easy to say. So say it.

Hello.

See you said it you can say what's easy to say.

Mind if I sit down?

Glance. There's a straight backed wooden repainted chair.

No. Of course not.

The chairlegs scrape across the dull brown parquet floor. The floor is caked with layer on layer of wax. On hands and knees they'd rubbed it in with heavy thick grey cloths. The sweat dripped from their downturned noses, mixing with the wax. The electric buffer brought up the shine and this was done weekly for many many years until the building grew old and fell into disrepair. The electric buffers lay unused in the lower cellars of the building covered with layer on layer of greasy grey dust and cobwebs—the floors slowly rot from underneath—

Elbows go down on the table.

Mouth moves. Lips writhe. Words come.

Still friends?

Tongue slithers. Snake. In the grass.

Sure. Still friends.

Force eyes open in the pale light that flows into the corners up the walls and out under the door escaping from the room from which there's no escape.

You know—if we can pick up where we left off yesterday—

Hands wring on the tabletop. It looks like it hurts wringing them like that why do something like that that hurts so bad? The untrimmed nails digging into the soft white flesh, the stretching and crushing of that flesh. The twisting of the long thin fingers and the pressure on the bones and the ligaments between the bones of the twisted crushed hands—but still you twist them you twist them harder—harder—

Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me?



Hands go up. Ears are cold. Press hard. Ring cuts into earlobe. Feel the metal edge. Press harder. Pain.

Stony words tumbling one over the other. Clattering words crowding on one another almost unintelligible.

Don't listen.

—now listen—don't cover your ears again—you can sit there all you want with your hands over your ears but I'll just talk louder I'll make you hear me there are things you need to hear so come on come on hear me—we need to talk about what you've done, get it all out, before we can move on—you've got to admit it—

—is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why—

Eyebrows lower, forehead wrinkles. Sign of deep thought. What deep thoughts are these coming up and out—from somewhere too deep to be heard or known where great creatures rip and tear at the bottom of the deepest layer of consciousness where the reptilian lizard brain operates smoothly without missing a beat yes the lizard reptilian wild untamed raging deepest strata of the mind—breathing, heartbeat, fight/flight—brain—

But it keeps you alive it does.

Don't listen.

—Dorothy's not the same person since what's happened you know—you think she's still your best friend but that might be over now, since what's happened. You showed the family's true colors that day, is what people are thinking and saying. Dorothy knows—feels more terrible than you can imagine since all this has happened—she's hurt by all this, terribly hurt—and all for three hundred dollars, three hundred lousy dollars—if you needed money that bad, you could have come to me. I'd have lent you the three hundred dollars—I'd have lent you a thousand dollars—rather than have you do what you have done—that's right, what you have done. Nobody else. You—

Back against the chair. A loud creak. The wood will break the slats will split the chair will fall and on his ass he will go. Ha. Hahahaha. On his ass with his legs spread out like that and his hands out to the back to hold him up or maybe he'll fall back so hard he'll knock his scheming head against the hard wood floor and maybe just maybe if he hits it hard enough you'll be rid of him rid if him rid of him for good—bloody smashed skull—grey matter visible—

—he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is—

Pointing sharp long pale cold finger. Long untrimmed dirty jagged nail-point. Dirt under the nails; unwashed. Bloody smashed skull.

Don't listen.

—we've been all through that old trunk in the attic we've seen all those God-damned awful things you had up there and we know what you were going to do with them, we know you were getting them for the Simons and those others—we found the bolt cutters and knife you used up there too—we know how you made that money—and the way you had all those awful things all lined up

in there like, as if it were a—oh God I can't even hardly say it—as if it were a God-damned display for you to be proud of—

—saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he—

Fist the table. Fist the table hard. The tabletop is of many tiny green grains on a white background. The green grains drift one layer atop another deep down into the tabletop with spaces between each grain, if you were small enough and fast enough you could go down between the grains where there's no room for thought my God there's not a thought in my head there's really really really not a thought in my silly head—what a feeling what a wonderfully empty light feeling but frightening too—

Don't listen.

—you think no one knows the things you've been saying and doing with those damned Simons you've been hanging around with and what you've been spending all your time on and how you've been making your money too and all the people you've hurt by it, my God, these are people you've done this to, real people—how will we ever make it up to them—especially the Stratfords and the Mortensons—that part was the worst— but it's all come out now—I know and so does Dorothy—she's mortified just mortified—she trusted you, you know. She's never done anything besides trust you to do the right thing, to live right—you've sinned against God you know. In the worst way—

—all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying—

Lean back, eyebrows up, slower voice up a tone. Trying to get through. But no no one can get through. This wall is sixteen bricks thick, with hard rough mortar in between, the kind of wall you'd work with a sledge for days to bring down after the great fires come and bring down all the softer fragile wooden parts of the house where the people once walked and slept and cooked and loved and ate and just because he had to unfreeze the pipes with that torch, that flaming bluetipped scalding torch in the middle of the winter on that new year's eve day when all the smoke came from under the eaves and the flames just ate the house all up—and you watched from your living room window yes you did you watched it didn't occur to you to call the fire department after all it wasn't your business it wasn't your God-damned house—

Don't listen.

—I just thought you needed to hear these things first from me before you hear them from Dorothy—come on don't just sit there with that blank face, with those hands over your ears—you know why I'm saying what I'm saying. You had no business breaking in there, you had no business taking those things, Jesus Christ—of all the places to steal from—how could you have done it? How could you have done such a filthy thing? You weren't brought up that way—and they're pressing charges you know you're lucky the police let me come up here and visit you—

—these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all—

Cold eyes narrow, look pierces. Pain of barelegged walk through the thorn-bushes. Long ago in shorts. Picking huckleberries and raspberries and blackberries in the brambles walked through barelegged. Where the field mice are underfoot unseen and where the field mice lie in dark places under woodpiles field mice lying on their sides with their young suckling at their teats to be discovered and destroyed by frightened idly walking past crude boys—the small grey beasts are innocent as all beasts as the lizard reptilian brain way down there at the bottom of it all is innocent—the boys swing their sticks down on the mother and babies thinking thank God there were sticks lying here that we could use to destroy these—filthy field mice.

Don't listen.

—don't look into the tabletop—look up at me! You're sick! Do you hear me? You're sick and you've got to face it before its too late to get any better—to do the things you did you have to be sick any normal person would have thrown up doing what you did down there by the church—but you're no normal person, is what people are saying—they're saying you must be some kind of animal—I'll tell you what I'll be praying for you I'll really really be praying for you—

Fists form whiteknuckled on the tabletop, flex, and release. The grains on the tabletop are wide apart—dive into the tabletop disappear in the white cloudy creamy color. As before, drift down past all thought diving hands thrust out toward the bottom and hit the bottom and walk along the muddy bottom clogged and choked with broadleafed weeds raising clouds of billowing mud behind—and look for the pennies they've all dropped in there for luck, look for the pennies so it'll be worth your while—

—things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these—

Dive dive deep deeper than words can follow.

Finger points once more more sharply, tip moving jagged in the air, making jagged lines. Another dirty nail. How hard is it to clean your nails? They make brushes just for that. Yes they make brushes just for that—like they make combs for the hair and razors for the legs and underarms and for the face and sometimes even for the whole head—a smooth bald head cannot be a breeding place for tiny creatures with many legs that do not suckle their young but just cast their eggs out into the brush or the hair and the eggs hatch and make more tiny creatures with many legs that do not suckle their young—but they bite they always bite to get at the most precious blood—

Don't listen.

—what you had in the attic was awful. What you did down by the church to get them was worse. And what a mess you left in there! You left your tools all scattered around— didn't you think that'd get you caught? Don't you care about getting caught at all? What you did is against God you know. And we can't get that awful day out of our minds—what were you thinking? To do such a thing? And what made you think we wouldn't find out? The whole town knows! The whole God-damned town knows! And for three hundred God-damned dol-

lars! And they say you just snapped, is what they say—but I know you knew what you were doing every step of the way. You're always in control. It was those Simons, I know that—but how could you have gotten in with those awful people, that do such awful things—those damned Simons—I always told you those damned Simons were no damned good—

—to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things—

Jagged fingertip waving—follow the jagged fingertip waving more crooked lines in the air. It's spelling something what is it spelling here in the air between us? Watch it move—there's a word—there's another—it's saying something that can't be read its writing it is but it can't possibly be read in this life no not in this lifetime—some words are not meant to ever be read—

Don't listen.

—but for some reason you've got it all blocked out—come on, don't kid yourself like you've been kidding yourself all this time that no one knows what you did—we all know—so why not admit to yourself that you've done all these things too? It's a first step—you act like nothing's happened—you act like nothing's happened at all—you just sit there how can you just sit there like this—admit what you've done—admit it! Admit you broke in there! Admit what you did!

—me? Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to—

Whiteknuckled hands grip the tabletop edge. The table trembles the legs rattle the wood flexes and creaks. The table could fall what would happen if the table fell there would be a clatter to beat the band what kind of saying is that anyway its a silly saying to beat the band the wood would go splintering clattering sliding all around pieces of wood would fly through the air and though some would strike you in the face you'd just laugh and laugh—and it wouldn't sound anything at all like a band for Christ's sake—

Don't listen.

—but wait until you hear what Dorothy has to say to you. She's coming up to see you you know—all the way up from Louisiana—that's right she's taking time off from work and all and taking the train all the way up from Louisiana that's how important this whole thing is to her—she's going to tell you all the same things—you're going to have to answer to her—your best friend! How could you have forgotten she was your best friend? How could you just have ignored what this would do to her reputation? She'll be here tomorrow—she'll be here to see you—oh you've blackened the family name good, you have—and people aren't going to forget this for years—maybe never—

A hand is flattened out on the table flat as a flatfish ever heard of the flatfish it lies flat on the bottom how does it feed—is there such a fish as the flatfish it must move along the bottom and suck up the muck and get what food is there in the muddy muck, green gouts of slimy food and then it will lie on the bottom and rest, spent and exhausted and looking up with its fishy eyes into the layers of water above up toward some kind of dimlit shimmering light—

Why is he saying all these things to me? Why is he saying all these things to me? What I did was not terrible it didn't hurt anybody the only one who could have got hurt was me and I didn't—no I didn't do it what am I thinking no I didn't do it they're trying to make me think I did it must fight them they're liars liars liars. I would never go in such a place and do such a thing.

Voice lowers, coming out, flowing, draining, slowing. The voice coiling like a snake in the wet too-green stinking sopping swampgrass. Stinking skunk cabbage, stinkbugs to get under your shirt and to be crushed when found to leave a black powdery smudge of what is left of them legs and all— under the smooth white cloth of your t-shirt at the racks in the comic books store red and green and white and purple and silver spattering the comic book rack—all yelling colors, colors that yell at you look at me, look at me, look at me—I didn't do it—

Don't listen!

Coiling voice coils over and under itself. Coiling as a sidewinder snake walks across the desert sand hungry to bite like some great vicious cat—

Now listen—and you know this—I'm just speaking to you as a friend. I'm just trying to cushion the blow that's coming, when she tells you what she thinks too. We just want to snap you out of it you know that's all we're trying to do—we want things to be back like they were before is all we want—we want the old you back. If that's possible. You've got to admit that you did it first though.

But I didn't.

Hands come down. Air goes in ears impression of ring is on earlobe but can't see it can't see it can't—can just feel it can feel the sharp fading pressure there—can't see yourself from the side or from the back without a mirror what if there were no mirrors you'd never be able to see yourself you'd have to imagine how you looked how terrible that would be what would you imagine you looked like in a world without glassy clear shiny smooth mirrors—where you've never seen yourself?

I know I didn't. Hands, feet and fingers and toes—no of course I didn't do it.

Elbows come up off the table. Hands clasp with finality. Blue veins in the handbacks. Red knuckles. Pigs knuckles in the big vinegar filled jar come home that night long ago so long ago when the seed was planted. Bring home a tomato pie just for the hell of it bring it home in the middle of the night and expect that everybody's just going to drop what their doing, stop watching TV and all and be grateful for the God damned tomato pie laid there on the coffee table at eleven o'clock at night, the pie that no one wanted anyway, but the smell, oh the oh so heavenly smell they don't smell that way any more like they used too its an indescribable smell yes there are things in this world that are indescribable—oh and they always call them pizzas now they never call them tomato pies but they called them pizzas back then too I wonder why not why not call them tomato pies any more—pizzas and tomato pies and pizzas and—

I didn't.

Okay. I've got to go now. Still friends right?

Oh for a world without mirrors. Oh to not be seen from every side.

Right.

I mean—you know I'm just saying all these things—being honest like this because I care. There's still a lot of people that care. You've got to know that.

I didn't.

Bites lip hard has to be bloody has to—

All right then—

The chair scrapes across the dull brown parquet floor. The floor will be scratched and marked before this is all over. But no one will care because this is an old building no one gets down on hands and knees and rubs wax into these wooden floors any more—no one's sweat drips down to mix with the swirling wax—butcher's wax do they call it? Or do they call it something else—I know they call it something—

Hands wring on the tabletop. Knuckles crack.

Pop.

Snap.

Goodbye for now.

Goodbye.

The latch clicks. Springs drive the plungers home.

The door opens. Opens, closes, opens.

The hinges creak. No oil anymore.

The door closes. Frame rattles. Closes opens closes.

Slipperd feet shuffle across.

The light switch clicks.

Dark fills the room.

The chair creaks.

I didn't do it I don't care what they say.

Silence lies layered. The dark in the room flows under the door and dissipates outside, where there's clear fresh clean new light.



No Picnic 2, art by  
Cheryl Townsend

# The Kid With the Lightning

Cole D. Lemme

The best day of my life was when I met the kid with the lightning. The school I went to wasn't that big but considering my circumstances, I didn't know everybody. So even though he only caught my attention that day, because no one ever saw him again, I'd probably seen him around before and never looked twice.

He cured me of what was wrong with me you see; people called it a CNS, which stands for central nervous system disease. I don't remember what doctors called the disease exactly because when they diagnosed me I was rather young. When you are a child and diagnosed with a disease like the one I was born with, you haven't grown up to appreciate life yet, so you sort of don't really care until later in life when it hits you; you are going to die much sooner than the rest of the kids at school.

The "later on" that I speak of is when I'd grown into my late teens and realized I was destined to die young. I so badly wanted to run around, fight and wrestle with other boys, to hang out with girls, drive around in a car, play in sports and live a long and healthy life where I could be somebody and do something; I just wanted to be normal. But as I came up wanting, an aggressive bout of depression, which would have lasted until my death (they had said it would be sometime in my early twenties), took a hold of me. But then *he* came, that kid with the lightning. I'll never be able to tell a soul how it actually worked, how he cured me, but I'll always be able to tell the story and I'll never get tired of telling it either.

I was a junior in high school at the time. I used to become so depressed that I usually took my lunch in the hallway by the lockers so I could eat alone. Halfway through my meal I heard something crash in the cafeteria but it only interested me for a slight second. Then a girl screamed so I decided to wheel my chair around the corner and check it out.

I wheeled over the tiled cafeteria floor and into the lunchroom. A group of people had surrounded three other kids. One I knew to be Jess Thomlinson; I knew him because he was an asshole that picked on kids, even me the kid in the wheelchair.

Jess stood with a few of his cohorts and they surrounded the kid with the lightning. The girl who I heard scream went running around another corner, probably looking for a teacher because Jess was obviously picking on the kid with the lightning. I figured I would stay and watch the imminent fight.

The kid with the lightning had blue eyes that no one would usually look twice at, but when one of the older boys grabbed his sack lunch and started tossing it over the kid's head to Jess, I thought I saw fleeting glimpses of something more in those eyes.

The room was silent except for the jeering and laughing of the bullies. The kid with the lightning started getting angry; he started shaking, or something, and the other two that were teasing him couldn't stop laughing and taunting.

But they did stop as soon as electricity started crackling. Everyone stopped and some gasped. The two kids picking on him backed away into the crowd.

By this time two teachers ran around the corner with the tattletale girl that had left earlier, but they too stopped when they saw the lightning surround and permeate the kid's body. Everyone stood transfixed. Jess was the only one left by the kid with the lightning and he tried to back away as well but the kid with the lightning reached out and snatched him up by his shirt. He threw Jess against a soda machine and held him there for a moment glaring at him with those electric blue eyes. The lightning began to grow around him and Jess cried out in agony. The lightning was coursing through both their bodies.

One of the teachers tried to intervene. She ran through the crowd but when she came within a few feet of the kid with the lightning, a bolt that came from him threw her back. I saw that her blouse had been singed and looked back to the fight.

No one could move; no one did a thing. We all stared helplessly as the kid with the lightning continued to electrocute Jess. I could smell his clothes and hair burning; it reminded me of the time I'd singed my eyebrows pretty bad while attempting to start a fire. Jess cried out for a few more minutes but after some time he stopped and his body only convulsed as the kid with the lightning let the electricity pour through him. When the kid with the lightning let Jess go he was dead before he hit the ground.

I couldn't tell you why, but after this had happened the kid with the lightning fell to his knees. He sobbed over Jess's body, over the murder he had committed. His emotions changed in a heartbeat. The rest of the student body and faculty and staff (they had all gathered by now) didn't dare do anything. Everything and everyone stayed silent as though we were all at Jess's funeral.

The kid with the lightning then picked up Jess's body, turned to all of us with a tear-streaked face, like salty ocean water coming out of those blue eyes. The crowd parted as he walked through out of the lunchroom. His eyes flashed with electricity, real electricity, but he looked at no one, just straight ahead.

He walked slowly through the halls by the lockers. No one was worried about me at the moment, and I couldn't blame them, so I did my best to keep up with the crowd as they followed him out the front doors. The whole of the school, I'm guessing every last person, went with the kid with the lightning out onto the sidewalk.

The kid with the lightning stopped at the front of the school. I wheeled my chair around the side of everyone so I could see what he was doing. And then it began to rain. On a clear perfect day, it began to rain. Now at first I thought it was just coincidence but then the lightning began to come. It wasn't normal lightning that's far away and you have to wait to hear the thunder; it was close as could be and the booming was almost unbearable. I clapped my hands to my ears and refused to back away. Everyone watched the kid with the lightning hold Jess up into the air as the lightning storm continued.

It went on for several minutes; I thought I was going deaf. I watched as the kid with the lightning let the bolts come down into his body. Finally the thunder stopped as the lightning bolts began to flow through him. We all let our hands fall and the lightning coursed through the kid again and Jess, the one that had been



teasing him, the one that he had killed, began to convulse. Finally I heard him suck in a huge, slow, wheezy breath. The kid with the lightning set Jess down and he got up and scrambled away. Jess, that asshole, was alive again. I couldn't believe it.

After this feeling of disbelief, another feeling crept across my mind. It tingled through my body like when you see an excellent end to a movie, or when your favorite songs' chorus comes on. I was happy! The kid with the lightning had brought some kid I hated back to life and it thrilled me to the bone! Why did I care if Jess was okay? I could not figure it out.

Something lingering in the back of my mind made me remember that I had become so stoic, such a cynic, so depressed, that I knew I couldn't feel like this anymore; I just *couldn't* be happy. That's when I noticed that the lightning wasn't just going from the kid with the lightning to Jess, but from him into everyone else at the school. I looked down at my hands and saw flickering lightning going through me, but it didn't hurt at all; it was the opposite I suppose. I was being cured!

I stood up from my wheelchair for the first time in years. I looked around for everyone to see but no one noticed; everyone smiled and then started running around, jumping, laughing. Others that I knew had problems (I knew them because all the kids with disabilities took classes together) were doing so as well and for some reason I ran and did a cartwheel. I didn't quite make it through it though and just when I thought I was going to hit the pavement the lightning lifted me back up again. The whole of the school began flying in a mix of lightning and some sort of electric blue energy coming from the eyes of the kid with the lightning.

I felt this web of energy surround and permeate everyone and everything that the kid with the lightning caught in it. I heard symphony music. I heard laughter. I heard angels singing. I felt euphoric, centered, balanced. I smelled clean, pure, fresh rain. I touched electric blue bolts of lightning, lightning as hot as the sun at their core and they didn't burn me. He was curing us of everything wrong. *Everything*.

Slowly we were settled back down and the lightning began to dissipate. The euphoric state went away, but the after effect remained and I did not sit back down in my wheelchair; whatever happened had cured me.

The kid with the lightning then let all the energy flow back to him, a few more bolts came down on him in rapid succession and then CRACK he was gone, lost in the rain.

I never sat in a wheelchair again. I started working after that at a construction job and bought my first car (quite the upgrade from my mom's handicap accessible van). I got in a few fights with boys at parties that I started attending and I ended up lettering my senior year on the boys' basketball team. Not long after that I met the girl of my dreams. We settled down a few years later and had three kids (all of them disease free).

I'm 59 years old now and the doctors are still baffled at how I'm alive and in perfect health. Even though they never believe me, I always tell 'em this story; like I said, I never get tired of telling it.

# My Date with Dawn

Warren McPherson

Whilst in college I had the great fortune of going out on some very bad dates. I also had the great fortune to drive some very bad cars. My date with a girl named Dawn was a staggering combination of the two engrained forever in the fabric of my life. If you have been reading the stories previous you have an idea that this fabric is nothing like the smooth feel of silk or the comforting embrace of velvet, but actually something more akin to a potato sack.

As I mentioned earlier, while in college I had a crappy car. It was a blue Nissan Stanza that I called “the Co-Stanza” ala George Costanza and the “by Mennen” jingle addition he added to his name so people would remember him. (The irony of course was that I didn’t want anyone to recall my horrible car.) Other than a bullet hole in the hood my father had put there one night while shooting at nothing in particular, the car ran fine. And that is all that really matters.

I had driving the car throughout my final year in high school and I do believe it was on its last legs when I packed it to the brim with not only my junk but the junk of my good high school friend Dan who was also going to school in the bay area, only a few miles away at Santa Clara. The Co-Stanza was low-riding all the way down to the San Francisco at 80+ miles per hour.

The car did not much appreciate this foul treatment and exacted its revenge by consistently breaking down and running poorly while I was at school that year. After replacing its alternator not once, but twice, the Co-Stanza decided to die on the night I had my date with a girl named Dawn.

Dawn attended Santa Clara and was a friend of a friend. She had long brown hair, brown eyes, an alternative philosophy, baggy clothes and big breasts. Now, I am no pig of a man. But, I was going through a weird time in my life and I’m not gonna lie to you the idea of seeing and/or feeling those boobs was a major turn on to me. This is the only time in my life I have been controlled by such shallow motives and before you pass judgment on me know that like on every other occasion in my life I paid dearly for being a bad person.

I had already had a chance to fondle this girl while on a drunken rampage the week previous and this was my chance to take her out on a proper date and show her I was not a drunken idiot all the time. You know, turn on the charm and show her the real Warren. Of course, the “real” Warren was totally motivated by what he kind of remembered grabbing under her baggy sweater a few days before. And for this, he will surely pay.

I was to take Dawn out to a movie at the local mega-plex theatre. The flick was to start at 9:35pm so I started prepping at about, um, 7pm. You see I wanted everything to go perfectly. The guilt I had over the fact I was only going out with this girl because I wanted to play with her fun-bags was eating me up inside to the point I was in denial about the whole thing. I was going to show her, and my conscious, the perfect night and that was not only going to totally make up for

my shallowness but also justify the nar-nar I would most definitely be rewarded with at the end of the evening. I realize only now how backwards this line of thinking is, but at the time it seemed reasonable. Be a gentleman and it did not matter what your motives were.

Sometimes the forces of the universe join together and try their hardest to prevent you from doing something. I have this funny little theory from time to time that perhaps we are all given a second chance when we die to come back as our own guardian angels; we are given the chance to put things right that once went wrong, sort of like a spectral Sam Beckett from "Quantum Leap." When you come to a decision in your life and you don't know what to do, who better to whisper the answer into your conscious than you. But there are times in every life when even knowing what is going to happen can't prevent the outcome. There are times, like the time I had a date with a girl named Dawn, when my own guardian-angel-self had no answer. This is called inevitability.

And so, I had planned to leave my place at 8pm. It took 25 minutes to get to Santa Clara so I figured, 8 or 8:30 before I would pick up Dawn. I would take her to dinner. You know something nice...like Olive Garden. After breadsticks and salad we would cruise on over to the movie and then who knows. I wasn't expecting anything, just hoping. I went down stairs to get into the Co-Stanza and as I already told you the damn thing wouldn't start. A more superstitious fellow might have taken this as an omen, a sign of impending no-goodness. But I was more of the hard-headed type who simply saw it as an obstacle. You know, some occurrence that must be overcome so that the end result is that much sweeter. No one likes to win without a challenge, where is the glory in that? If anything is worth doing, it is worth doing with a little resistance; that is my motto. (Unfortunately.)

So, I was not going to let a little thing like broken car stop me. I still had plenty of time to call around and find alternate transportation. In fact this might end up working for me rather than against me, I thought. Before I was going to show up in a partially shot-up Nissan and now, god-willing, I could be picking Dawn up in my friend Mike's Lexus. But, as you all know, god is not willing to Warren. I started at the top and worked my way down. No one was home. No one, but my friend Bryan. He was at the bottom of the list. And this was not Bryan's fault, I mean he is the best buddy a guy could ask for, but his car was, well, how do I put this nicely....it was not primo.

They called the car the Dirty D, as in Dirty Diana. Part reference to the Michael Jackson song, part reference to a girl he knew named Diana. I never got the whole story on the girl, but I did get the entire story on the car. Let me set the table by telling you Bryan purchased this car and another one just like it (they were twins, only different colors) for \$500. That is two cars for \$500! Here is a list of idiosyncrasies the car possessed:

- There was no key to start the car. Instead there was a big metal button you pushed to start the engine. When finished driving the car one had to stall it, pop the hood, and disconnect the battery. When you wanted to start the car again you

had to pop the hood, re-connect the battery, and push the start button.

- The passenger seat slid back and forth along its rails. We affectionately referred to it as the “ejector seat” because every time the car stopped you flew forward and as you took off you slid back. The only way to prevent this movement was to buckle the passenger side seatbelt.

- The gear shaft did not have a ball on top with clear markings of 1-4 gears (that’s right, it was a four gear car) and reverse, like a conventional manual shift. Instead there was a sparkling gold handle bar grip, much like the one my sister had on her bike as a kid with streamers shooting out of the end. (As a side note, the Dirty D did not have streamers coming out.)

- Huge, enormous crack going from one end of the windshield to the other. What crappy car doesn’t have a huge crack though, am I right?

- Broken door locks. But this didn’t matter because check this out, the door handles themselves didn’t work. The Dirty D was equipped with a brown, woven leather belt that had been attached to the inside latch of the driver side door handle. When the driver exited the car he had to make sure to pull the belt out and close the door on it so upon his return he could pull on the belt and open the door from the inside. Does that make sense? Picture looking at the Dirty D from the outside; you would see the tip of a belt hanging out from the driver side door. As you got close and peered into the driver side window you would see the other end of that belt latched to the door handle inside the car. Now does it make sense?

- The car was gold and it was a Datsun.

There were other things wrong with the car. Bad interior. Bald tires. Jack in the Box antenna ball. But, we don’t need to make this story any longer than it already is. The point is that the Dirty D was the last car I wanted to show up on my redemption date with Dawn in. It was actually a step down from the Co-Stanza. But, as my mother always said, “Beggars can’t be choosers.” So, when Bryan was at the home and was willing to loan me the car for the night, I accepted.

By the time I ran (literally) over to Bryan’s place to pick up the Dirty D it was closing in on 8:30 in the pm. I wasn’t sure if I was going to have enough time to do a decent dinner with Dawn at this point. We might just have to grab a slice of pizza or something, and this was definitely going to put a hamper on my chances of a little hanky-panky later on in the evening. I got to Bryan’s place, finally, and he told me there was only one little, teensy tiny problem. The Double-D needed gas. No problem I thought. There is a station right around the corner, and it will only take five minutes to fill up. That will make my approximate arrival time at Santa Clara about 9pm. Time for pizza, some light banter, and all we will miss is the coming attraction previews.

I pulled on the leather belt to open the door, popped the hood, connected the battery, got back in the driver’s seat, pushed the start button and was on my way. Next stop, the Shell station on College street. (This was my first mistake. My dad told me never to put Shell gas in my car. Sure, this wasn’t my car, but.....)

I pulled into the station with much haste. I popped the hood and jumped out of the car to disconnect the battery because you can’t pump gas into a car whose

motor is running. The problem is that after I disconnected the battery the car continued running. What? Oh snap! I forgot to purposely stall the bitch. As I went to get back into the driver's seat I realized I had forgotten the cardinal rule of driving the Dirty D; Thou shalt always shut the door on the woven leather belt. I was locked out of the car, in a Shell gas station with the motor running, getting later and later with every passing minute for my restitution date with a girl named Dawn.

This being the days before everyone had a cell phone (not that this would have mattered because most likely my cell phone would have been locked in the car anyway) I had to run to the nearest pay phone to call for help. Now, here is where the powers of the universe slipped up a little, they allowed me to remember my friend Bryan's phone number. (When I look back on it perhaps allowing me to remember was part of the plan.) I was able to call him to ask him what I should do. He told me he had a key. A key, I asked. Yes, there was a secret key only he knew about that opened the trunk. You could crawl through the trunk and into the body of the car, and would then be able to stall the car and open the driver's side door. The only little, teensy tiny problem was that he had the key and no car to drive out and get it to me. That made sense. He told me he would look around. Fifteen minutes went by and my friend Bryan was finally able to hitch a ride with a neighbor out to the Shell station. He crawled through the trunk, stalled the car and opened the door just as he had promised he would do. I filled the car up, gave Bryan a ride back to his place and was on my way.

By this point I was mostly late. Dinner was no longer a possibility. Witty banter would have to be made in the car on the way to the movie and I was hoping the coming attraction previews would take 20-25 minutes, 'cause otherwise we were going to miss part of the show. And I hated missing the first five minutes of a movie.

I arrived at Dawn's dorm around 9:20pm. Without seeming like I was in too much of a rush I ran to her door. I could tell Dawn was upset I was late, so I blurted out a few sentence fragments about being "sorry" for my tardiness and wanting to "hustle" to make the show, then I whisked her back to the Dirty D. I recall preemptively apologizing for the car we would be using tonight and then emptily apologizing again when she finally saw the piece of shit. I jumped in the driver's seat, pushed the start button, realized Dawn could not get in, reached across and opened her door from the inside (which was the only way it would open anyway, so I didn't feel like a dick for not being a gentleman and opening her door for her from the outside) and we were off and running for the flick.

I must have pulled out of that parking spot going 0-60 in about 6 seconds. I was trying to start up my witty banter by telling her exactly why I was late (my Lexus broke down and I had to borrow this piece of crap from some loser guy on my wrestling team) when the powers of the universe put a stop sign in the right place at the wrong time. Being the good driver I am I put on the brakes; being the bad, cursed person I am I forgot to tell Dawn to buckle-up or else the ejector seat was going to, well, eject her. Sure as shit, she went flying forward and rammed her forehead against the cracked vinyl of the dashboard.

"Oh, shit! Are you okay," I asked.

"What the hell?" she responded in a dazed tone. I guess people are not used to seats flying forward when a car stops.

"Yeah, I forgot to tell you to buckle up. Otherwise you might get hurt," I sheepishly said. Dawn gave me a weird facial expression that seemed to say to me "You Jackass!". And I responded, and I am not sure if it was out of nervousness or a tendency I have to pass the blame, but I responded with, "After all, it is the law."

She didn't need to say anything. The look said it all.

"We're never going to go out again, are we?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"You want me to take you home right now, don't you?" I asked.

"Yes," she said.

So, I turned around, dropped Dawn off at her dorm and went home with my gold-sparkling-handle-bar-grip stick shift between my legs, never seeing the movie we intended and never getting the hook-up. I returned the Dirty D to Bryan and never said a word to him about the takings place of that evening. I didn't want to taint the positive energy of the car.

I heard a few years later that Dawn went on to be a successful environmental lawyer. The Dirty D ended up getting sold for twice what it was bought for. Bryan moved away to Harvard, then England and now does well in London-town hooking up with models, beauty queens and women from exotic lands. I am single, haven't had a good schtupping in two years, and drive a stereo-less car that isn't even good enough for meth-heads to steal and then sell. If we do come back and act as our own guardian angels, why couldn't I have helped myself not fuck up as bad as I did that night. Even in the after life I am a fuck-up.

As for the Co-Stanza, at the end of the year my father came down to school and towed it back home. He fixed it and sold it to some dude for about the same amount he originally bought it for. So, everyone made out alright, including me. In hindsight I am not too upset about my date with a girl named Dawn, after all the movie we were supposed to go see that night was "Bio-Dome." Thank god sometimes the forces of the universe join together and try their hardest to prevent you from doing something.

Gamecock,  
photographed  
by Peter Bates



## Pete Derevjanik

*I don't know how to write what the past has brought us, I don't know what the future will bring us, I only know about now. I wish I knew what death brings, one of the last unknowns left. I guess the only way to figure things out is to play around with what you do know, what you have seen, what you have felt, and all that you have been told. Is it the freedom we wait for our whole lives or are we just doomed to living in some eternal something?*

## The Unknown

The hospital bed was shaking as they dragged my body into a brightly lit room. I was one of the lucky ones, or so I thought. There was a ten car pile-up on the freeway and we were all on our way to death. The nurses and doctors were telling me that I was going to make it, but I didn't think I could. My car was crushed and no one could have survived. They say your life flashes in front of you when you die. I guess I'm looking for something here, something that could give me hope for survival.

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The phone almost drops from my hands. "It-It can't be right. Are you sure you have the right name? I'll be right there." I grabbed my things and rushed out the door.

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I don't know what happened next but I found myself in some sort of dream world. I guess it would be what I expected whenever I died, something different than real life, just something you never thought you would see. I can't understand why this is what happens when you die. We are free, there is no one here to tell you what to do, no one here to tell you that you didn't believe in something so you can't live after you die. I don't know why I don't believe in Jesus Muhammad, Jehovah or any sort of organized religion. I always believed that we could all find something that we could believe in on our own. Here I am in that place where I always dreamed I would go when I die. There are doors going down a long hallway like an endless row of houses in a suburban development and every door is a memory.

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My husband lies on this bed, brain dead and in a coma. Some crash happened on the freeway involving some kid. I can't believe it, we had just started our life together and now he is half dead in this hospital bed; all because of some kid.

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The hallway runs long and seems to go on forever, these must be the doors in my mind, all my memories, all my knowledge, everything I have done and thought about my entire life. I try to decide whether or not to open a door, I'm not sure if I really want to know. I guess this is the point of the hallway, maybe

there is something here I can fix, some different life I could lead. A second chance. There is only one thing to do. Find the right door so that I can see what really happens on the other side. The first door I see is one of my childhood, the first day of school. I pull open the door to see what the other end holds. The doorway is just blackness. I force myself through the doorway into the unknown.

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The doctors tell me that he still might be able to come out of it; that there is a chance. If this is true then I will be able to go home with him and start a family with him, what we always dreamed of.

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The things you think about whenever you think you're dead are first regrets, and then you try to imagine what you could have done to save yourself. You then realize that you could have done nothing to save yourself and some sort of feeling comes over you and then you are fine. That's just what's going through my head as of now, maybe it will get easier.

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Wake up! Dammit, just wake up will you. I don't see why you can't come out of this. We've been through worse problems, been through so much just to lose you to some stupid kid.

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The blackness somehow clears and I find myself back in my life relaying a memory of some sort, almost like a movie. The only thing is that I feel like I have some form of control over my body, I feel like I could move it if I wanted to. I lift my arm and the arm moves in the movie, which isn't a movie after all. Is this what I always hoped for? Is this my second chance to fix my mistakes, to make my life what it should have been? The bad thing is that it was of course my first day of school, I don't want to be there but since I don't know how to get back to my hallway of horrors; I am stuck here. I wake up late on this day and I struggle to get my things together and catch the bus. As I run out of my house - without eating anything for breakfast - I arrive in just enough time to catch the bus leaving. I wander back into the house to tell my mother the bad news. With a sigh she agrees to drive me to school. As we leave she fumbles a little and a glass bottle falls onto the floor and shatters. She curses and nudges me towards the door hoping that I wouldn't recognize what she had done. She stumbles a little as we make our way towards the car; she almost fails but finally succeeds in making her way into the car.

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I turn on the television only to see pictures of the accident. Horrible, just fucking horrible; is it possible that he came out of that rubble? They have cops on the screen telling me that the accident is under investigation and all leads are being followed. Bullshit, they know nothing. They are telling me there are two survivors and about twenty deaths. This kid is in for it.

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As the car pulls out of the driveway I think that everything is going to be alright. After all I was a child and things are supposed to be simple and easy to



understand for a child. Usually a child has it easy. As the car swerves to the right I ask my mother if she is feeling alright. She looks over at me and attempts to reassure me. As we turn onto the road which leads to my elementary school, the car begins to swerve and accelerate. The car flies past a stop sign, onto the sidewalk ending up nicely parked in the middle of a first floor classroom. I try to move myself, realizing that I can't. It's too late to fix it again. As the memory fades into nothingness, I find myself back in the hallway.

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I don't know how much longer I can sit here with nothing but these news stories and this half dead man lying here. I just want to turn away to find some possible way to escape. I wonder if there is a chance of escape ever.

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I still don't think I belong here. I don't think I want to relive my life again as much as I want to change it. I wanted a second chance and now that I have it I can't even go through with it. Can my afterlife be as much of a waste as my actual life? Being only one way to answer that question, I force myself into another doorway forgetting to see where I am heading.

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The accident is back on the T.V. again. The road is cleared and police have collected all the evidence they can from the crime scene. I don't think they're going to find anything, fucking idiots, tell my why my husband must lay here in this bed instead of being at home with me.

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I don't realize where I am at first I don't exactly remember the place. It looks foreign to me as if I had never been there before. Then I see something that reminds me of exactly where I was. Can I get out of this place now? Please I don't want to be here right now. I see him there on the swing sets, the day before I lose something I care so much about. My little brother was one of the few things I thought I did right in my life. I helped him with his homework, took him out to play, and even fed him dinner most of the time. I knew that I could make him turn out a lot better than I did. His dreams were big and he had a big heart and always tried to make everyone feel better. My brother was a hero to all of us until that day. I watch the movie play on slowly, my brother and I having fun just wasting away the day.

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A doctor comes into the room and looks over the charts and checks the machines. He does a couple of field tests and gives me some looks occasionally. What's his problem? Afraid to tell the poor woman her husband is about to die. Why don't you tell me you moron? Tell me something I just need to know. He looks over at me once more then tells me that his vitals are dropping and that there doesn't seem to be much hope now. I just look at him in silence, he looks at me sympathetically then starts to say something but walks out.

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It's the next day already; I want to escape and get away from what was happening. I watch the movie playing through my eyes as we left for the park.

When we arrive I sit on a nice bench in the park talking to an acquaintance. My brother goes to play soccer with his friends. I look up occasionally to make sure everything is fine. He seems to be having a good time and there are no problems at all. I continue talking, but I've wanted to change this day for my whole life. So I try and I try to move my legs, to move my head, to yell for him, to do something that would make me be able to save him from...from.... the inevitable. It was at that moment I realize that I could do anything and I would have to relive the single worst moment in my life. Its coming I thought...it's coming...

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This silence is unbearable, the machine clicking and beeping. I switch back on the television. They go to the news, back to the car crash. I just want to turn it off, but they say they have a new development in the story so I know I have to leave it on. They have another cop on the T.V., he better tell me something good. I just need to know, I just don't know how I can go on never knowing. The cop says that he has a video tape of the scene and they are looking over the tape as he is speaking. Yeah, you got a tape; well let me tell you, you better have the answer.

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I hear the screams. Screams that have haunted me for almost my entire life. Keeping me up at night and just making everything miserable. It happened I watch as I turn my head and see the soccer ball bouncing away and underneath the car I see a child. I frantically look around for my brother and then start running for the child under the car. I see it's him, I yell and scream and just wish that it wasn't. The ambulance arrives and I feel as though there is no chance for me or him. When we get to the hospital my parents still haven't arrived. An hour and fifteen minutes later when the doctor comes out to tell me there was nothing he could do; they still weren't there. What was I supposed to do? I find myself back in the hallway. I fall to the floor and wonder why I am in this hallway watching all the bad things in my life return to me. When I look up I see the door that is titled today. The day of my accident? The day that landed me here? Yes, I must see this; this horrible day that has made me more miserable than ever. This day I thought I could have done something right.

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I wonder if that kid is still alive. That kid must be thinking some deep thoughts now about all the people that he has killed. He better be thinking about that. I think if he survives I just might have to kill him for what he has done. How can anyone understand what this feels like? They don't know I see the nurses whispering about that crazy woman who won't speak to anyone, just sits in her room turning on and off the television hoping something will amazingly come to her. What they expect? They're not the one's looking at half of themselves lying so close to death less than five feet away. I'll talk again; I just need to know before I open my mouth. I feel as if there is something that is preventing me from talking; I don't know what it is, but I hope it goes away.

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I find myself in the car, the car that caused the accident, the car that ended my life as I knew it. I was going to help out a friend. He was in deep, he got into trouble with some people he shouldn't have and I was going to help him out. There it was the on ramp to the free way; any minute now would be the time. I see the car in front of me speeding by and then something appears out of the corner of my eye.....

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The T.V. flashing in front of me is telling me that the police have released the video of the accident. The police chief comes onto the camera telling us how horrible the accident was and giving us his sympathy. What does he know? Then he tells me that they won't be pressing any charges. How can he say that? No charges for some jackass killing people with cars. Let me tell you there is no way that this video can change my mind. The video comes on and I watch in awe as I see.....

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There he was, looking just like someone from my past: a lost child, a son who needed a mother, a brother who needed a friend, a child who should have lived. As he ran into traffic chasing his dreams, I swerve to avoid him smashing directly into the car next to me. As my car flips I see him safely make it out of the road. I knew I wasn't going to make it, but I gave that kid a second chance. All this suffering means nothing seeing that kid make it back to the road...I smile as the blackness washed away the light shining in from my windshield.

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The video ends with some dumb reporter asking me can I believe this? No I can't believe this, what the hell is that reporter thinking? Is this some hero, has he completely changed the course of his life? I just can't seem to understand how they can tell me to feel sympathy for this kid. My husband is here lying in a coma and all I hear about is this martyr. What was he saving? I don't understand. I guess this is all my life is cracked up to being. The machines are going off and the doctors rush in. I can only sit here in silence and stare down at the floor while the doctors attempt to save my husband.

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art by David  
Thompson



the **16** year  
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