



down in the dirt

Revealing all your
Dirty Little Secrets

Special Print Edition

Volume 12

Following the Dirt



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The Follower



*story by
Michel
Sauret*

Alone in the car, Alex was accompanied by the revving sound of his engine. The road stretching before him was as wide as a grin, darting out for so long that it seemed as if his high beams would never reach the end of it. As his hands gripped the steering wheel, his eyes stared at the road just below the transient, black sky. The clock on the radio told him it was just past one o'clock in the morning, a time much later than anticipated.

Opposing traffic lanes were separated by dividing blocks that formed a wall as long as the road extended. He drove in the lane closest to it, keeping a distance that was too close for comfort. He could easily extend his arm and touch the wall with his fingers, scrubbing his fingertips across it if he really wanted to. The thought felt frightening, but he couldn't resist keeping the car at that distance. It was unexplainable why he was driving so alarmingly close to it. The speeding wall attracted him as much as it frightened him. The two thoughts played tug-of-war with one another in his mind. The contradiction of these two thoughts therefore brought Alex's '88 Explorer a foot and a half away from the destructive sandpaper. *A foot and a half.* 18 short inches in distance. Alex's arm itself was longer than that. *Eighteen inches,* Alex thought with a perturbed fear creeping up his spine. Perhaps, he could drag more than just fingertips along it, after all. He could sand down an entire palm to a bloody contortion.

Suddenly, the memory of 8th grade flooded his mind like a sweep of tormenting water. It was just three years rewound back in time. Shop class had always been one of Alex's favorite classes, and now its presence appeared before him again. The smell of wood chips and the faint burn of lumber in action infiltrated his nose. Choo-choo-trains holding gum-balls needed to be sanded down to achieve a smooth surface and a shiny gleam. To speed up the process there were sand belt machines provided to the students. The machines dragged a strip of sandpaper downward, scraping the edge of a metal platform faster than a shooting bullet. The machines terrified most of the students and mesmerized the rest.

Alex had felt both at the time.

"Only sandpaper, that's all," Alex said to himself softly without even realizing he had spoken. A hypnotic tone stained his words, carrying a dreamy vapor as he spoke. The strip of sandpaper was not shooting downward anymore as he drove, but it ran backwards as fast as Alex driving could send it. Trying not to be distracted from the road, he turned his head quickly just enough to take a look at the wall. From the road, to the wall, and back, his eyes jumped as if they were bouncing on hot coals, barely paying attention to his driving. The window whined down noisily with the magic push of a button, and slowly he neared the large SUV closer to the wall. The cool summer air blew in through the window.

He imagined himself in shop class again, sitting at the sanding machine with the roof of the train in his hands. The piece of wood slipped away from his grip as he tried to smooth it, shooting his hands at the rotating sander. The gritted belt tore at his skin, and blood squirted everywhere in his imagination the same way it does in bad horror movies.

The window was completely open. Graciously, he rested his left elbow on the edge of it, and waved his hand closer to the racing wall. The steering wheel nudged to the left. The 18 inches shortened to around 15, forgetting to take in account the rear view mirror, which was closer yet.

His fingers expanded gently, letting cool air jet fast between his knuckles. Gradually, his fingertips approached their landing towards the top of the short wall. It reminded him of a crazed highjacker landing a plane without the knowledge of how. The descending hand was the plane, and his mind was the crazed highjacker. Four inches above the landing strip, his hand prepared for a turbulent ride.

Four inches descended to three. Three then down to two. Two inches became one. It was the shortest inch Alex had ever eye-measured. Just

like the wheels on a plane, his fingers propped open leaving their tips millimeters away from destruction. One eye stared crazily at his hand as the other watched the road. Alex imagined the red of blood again, bringing him back to self-conscious reality. His vision flicked at the speedometer, and saw an arrow pointing at 95. *More like 93, no need to exaggerate*, he told himself in a gritty sense of correction. But realizing how fast he was going wasn't what made Alex flinch the crazed hand back to safety.

Something else he saw provoked this.

What made him stop himself from being unable to eat French fries for the rest of his life was the thought of being followed. This was just a paranoid idea that he was usually able to dismiss, but tonight the starless sky had begun to take its toll on his mind in ways that it never had before. He eased his Explorer at a safer distance and pulled on the button, closing the window.

The headlights following him had oval shapes. Or at least they appeared to be. Was he *really* being followed? He wasn't sure. Just a few minutes earlier he had seen the exact same headlights behind him. *Was it minutes, or seconds?* Alex's mind asked without really knowing the answer. Now he did not even know what the oval headlights could mean. They could probably mean a cop.

A cop!

Alex jumped up at the thought. It could very easily be. Tonight was somewhere near the end of the month. The 27th. The 28th, maybe. It was hard to keep track of time during summer. The end of the month could mean trouble for a kid who drove past curfew without a senior license. As if conscious of the situation's significance, he raised an eyebrow at the thought. The idea that a cop might be following behind disturbed him. More cops than usual roamed around at the end of the month, scrambling through the night to make their quota like dads buying presents on Christmas Eve.

The wall had ended a few seconds ago, but Alex did not even notice it strip by. His thoughts were fixated frantically at the headlights behind him. So far that's all he could make out of the car, just the headlights. Approaching a red light to turn left, he began to slow down to a stop. He did this carefully, making his mind go nuts with details.

Slow down precisely now at a decreasing speed.

Don't hit the brake pedal too hard.

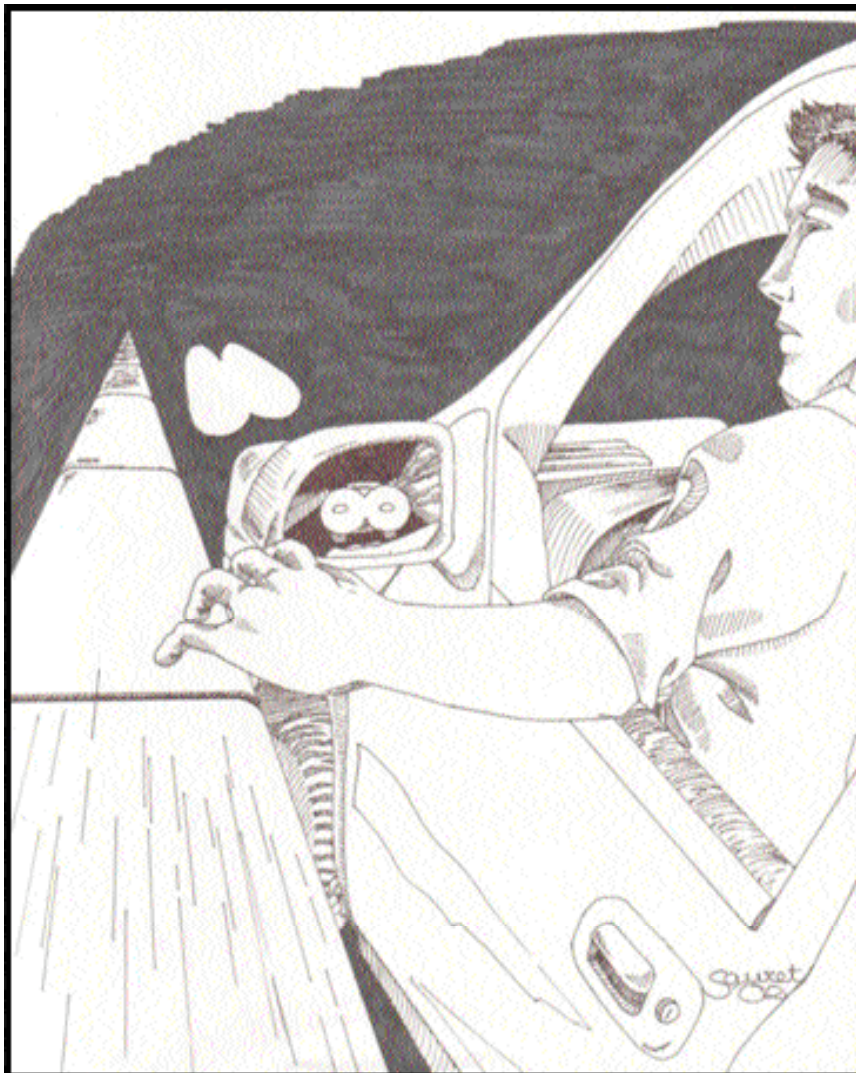
Make sure you put on your turn signal.

Don't look suspicious or like a drug dealer.

Don't---

How in the hell does a drug dealer driving exactly look like? Nervously, he laughed, picturing one in his head.

The red light beamed on for what seemed like forever. The car behind him approached closer. It was close enough now to make out the outline of a head. The driver's head then came slightly more into focus.





A street light grazed down to shine the side of his follower's face. In front of him, the traffic light was the same color red as the blood he imagined a few seconds earlier. Had it been seconds?

Alex's eyes flicked at the rear view mirror, and then back at the light.

Curiously, he didn't know which he was more interested in. The red light seemed impossibly long, but the stranger was almost close enough to count the hairs on his head. There weren't many. He was partially bald and had an apology of a pudgy face. Alex stopped flicking his eyes, and instead he just stared at the driver behind him. With his right hand he turned a knob, lowering the volume to the music. All he could hear now was the insisting ticking of his turn signal.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

That noise wasn't going to stop until the light turned green.

By now the driver's face behind him was as easy to see as Alex's own hand on the steering wheel. The person seemed to be wearing a uniform, or at least a suit and tie, with shirt and all. But that could just be Alex's eyes playing tricks on him. He'd like to believe that, too. In a panicky way he continued to stare at the driver.

The man pulled out some sort of block and rested it on his steering

wheel. Alex couldn't see it clearly, but noticed that he... Was he writing on it? He was. The follower's eyes kept on looking at where Alex's license plate would be. *Could he be taking my license plate number?* he thought to himself frantically. No, the suggestion was just too crazy and paranoid.

Why would he be taking his plate number if he hadn't done anything wrong? He rambled between thoughts, clotting his mind with chaos.

The man then put the block and pen away and took a warm chug from his mug. Looking at the follower more closely, Alex noticed his eyes jump up. They were looking directly at Alex with curiosity. Glaring at him with concern, the man squinted his eyes to tiny slits. It was impossible for the traffic light to be still red after the long time Alex had been studying his follower, but it still was. It was as red as before. Alex felt that he was being observed as much as he had been doing the observing. No, not felt... he *knew*.

When is that damn light going to turn gree--- Before he could finish his thought, his question was answered. A green arrow pointed to the left, giving him permission to push the gas lightly with his foot, and turn the wheel.

His tires tended to screech naggingly any time he took a turn too sharp or a curve too fast. In a paranoid alert, he waited for the screech, and his heartbeat paused. He held his breath up until he was going straight again. Then he knew it wasn't going to come.

Making the turn, he looked at the side view mirror to figure out what kind of car was behind him. It looked like a newer Ford. Maybe a Crown Victoria. Under cover cop cars were often Crown Victorias, but under cover cop cars were almost always white, and this one seemed to be of a dark blue color, or black, even. It was hard to tell in the darkness of night.

They drove down hill, and their cars accelerated increasingly without having to press on the gas. Alex tapped on the brakes, slowing himself down to match the speed limit. He could not chance any stupid mistakes.

Cops smelled fear, and could even determine if you were going a fragment of a mile per hour above speed limit. *Yes, and they can hear your thoughts, too,* he thought.

Little by little, Alex began to lose more of his sanity.

As he made his way down the hill, the intersection far in front of him was red, once again as before. There, he saw another cop drive by. This time it was a real cop car, with lights and everything. *They're everywhere!* he thought to himself feeling a little neurotic.

Instantly, he looked back at his rear view mirror. He was still there.



The pudgy-faced man driving a possible Crown Victoria was tailgating him closer than a brown-noser's face to his boss's ass.

I'm coming for you, the follower's eyes seemed to be saying. *I'm gonna getch-ya!*

And although there really wasn't any expression on the pudgy man's face, Alex knew he was smiling. The man was smiling

sneakily at the thought that he was going to get him. Alex turned the volume to the music up again. The maniac thoughts were becoming too much for him to listen to. System of a Down blared incoherently through the speakers. It was no use; it did not stop a single crazy thought.

At the intersection he looked both ways, then turned right on red. *Was that a No turn on red?* he asked in a panicky, rhetorical question. The follower followed, but no sirens whaled to indicate he was being pulled over.

Alex looked in the rear view mirror to see the man still there, still behind him, not giving up.

How long had this chase been going on for? *It's only a coincidence, Alex. Only a fucking coincidence*, he tried to tell himself, taking a stab at reassurance. But he wasn't going to let himself be reassured, not until the pudgy man would be gone.



Alex took another turn at an intersection. It was green this time. Behind him the man took the same turn, tailgating as before. "What do you want from me?" Alex screamed at the reflection through the mirror.

This time his full attention was directed to the driver behind him, not keeping a single thought on what was ahead.

They were once again driving down a hill, but this time not as steep as the one before. *Go away. Go away. Go away!* he repeated continuously with anger in



his thoughts. His eyes were fixated on the follower. The '88 Explorer gradually sped up, approaching forty on a 25 zone. Without paying attention, he rested his foot on the gas. Seconds later he blared through 22 miles above the speed limit.

“Get the hell away from me!”

As Alex hit 50 the man lagged slightly behind. Speeding up seemed to be working. All he had to do was run away from him. He laughed hysterically through a slightly deranged smirk. The smirk widened, realizing that this would work. At 52 miles per hour the follower was fading away into the darkness. Alex laughed even louder, but suddenly his laughter broke off, disrupted by a hopping shadow gliding in front of his car.

It had been almost a minute that Alex hadn't been watching the road. A slim doe pounced onward, crossing his car's path. Alex's face exploded with fear, flicking on like a light bulb in less than a second. Tugging hard, he cut the wheel to the right, and planted the brakes to the ground. For a moment, the large vehicle stood on the edge of the two left tires, verging the possibility of tipping over. Dirt flung outward from underneath. The tires *did* screech this time. They screeched like pissed off eagles hungry for pray. A large tree trunk appeared instantly in front of his path. The impact blasted a crashing scream so loud that it awoke nature from its slumber. The deer hopped on forward untouched, without looking back.



With the Explorer crashed on the side of the road, the follower drove by. The man's head turned just enough to see what had happened, but he did not stop for a full viewing. He kept on driving. The driver was no more than just an old wrinkled man, and the car wasn't a Crown Victoria at all.

It wasn't even a Ford

The Story

By Aimee Nance

Wind wiped strands of blond hair stung Sheila's cheek. Her eyes watered from the wind, and she could barely see. Fighting against the fury, she was bent forward depending on her momentum to carry her onward. As she forced the kitchen door open, a warm blast of air that smelled of beef stew greeted her. Bracing her tennis shoes on the threshold, Sheila had to use all her weight to pull the door closed after her. As the wind changed directions, the door slammed shut, and Sheila lost her footing and stumbled backwards into the kitchen. "Don't slam the door," her mother bellowed from the back of the house.

"I..." Sheila decided not to argue over something so silly and proceeded into the house to find her mother. "Mom the storm is looking pretty bad out there. Maybe we should head for the cellar." Sheila had found her mother ironing and watching reruns of "Days of Our Lives" in the den. With a cigarette hanging from her lips and the iron held up in one hand like a hot weapon, Sheila was slightly intimidated by her.

"It's not that bad. They haven't even run the storm warning across the screen yet." Delores pointed her steaming iron in the direction of the television set. After Shelly tried to explain that they didn't always get warnings on the television in time, a loud clang drew the pairs attention to the sliding glass doors of the den. "What the..." Delores sat her iron down on the ironing board and slid back the red polyester curtains with her right hand. "Oh, my God." As the two women looked on the wind blew leaves, branches, trash and even a squirrel by the glass doors. A tree branch smacking the doors not a foot in front of their faces brought the two back to their senses. Delores let the curtain fall back in place. She yanked the cord to the iron out of the wall socket and ground out her cigarette in a nearby ashtray. "We got to get in the cellar. Find your brother and meet me down there."

Shelly ran down the hallway to her brother's room. She found eight year old Trevor under the bed. The curtains to his window were open and the window was darkly plastered with leaves and debris. "Come on kiddo.

We got to get down stairs.” Sheila reached her hand out toward her brother. He smacked her hand away as he climbed out from under the bed.

“I’m not a kid.” Then they heard the groan coming from the ceiling. It sounded like the roof was coming off. Trevor grabbed his sister’s still outstretched hand and pulled her toward the door. “Let’s go now,” Trevor yelled to be heard over the noise of the storm. They ran still holding hands towards the kitchen. Delores stood holding the cellar door open for them.

“Hurry up. Get in.” Delores put a hand on Trevor’s back and pushed him down the stairs. He let go of Sheila and stumbled down the dark stairs. The electricity had been flickering on and off and had finally cut out. “You too Sheila. Go.” Her mother pushed Sheila towards the stairs. Sheila caught the toe of her tennis shoe on the first step and stumbled, groping blindly for the wall to guide her down. At the bottom of the stairs the noise of the storm was muffled. It was dark and cold. As their mother shut and locked the cellar door the last bit of light left them. Sheila could hear Trevor’s muted sobs next to her. She reached out her hand in the darkness and found his mop of tangled blond curls. She ruffled his hair. “It will be okay,” she said as Delores switched on her flashlight. The yellow beam swept across their faces momentarily blinding both children.

“I know we’ve got some old camping lanterns down here somewere.” Delores handed the flashlight to Sheila and started rooting through the piles of boxes that lined the old wooden canning shelves. “Shine it over here.” Delores grabbed Sheila’s hand with the flashlight in it and pointed it towards the boxes.

“Mom why don’t you let me...” Sheila tried to get her mother’s attention as the noise overhead grew louder. “Mom,” she yelled and grabbed Delores’ arm. But it was too late. Delores had found Sheila’s special box. It was one of her Dad’s old cigar boxes she had covered with photos and stickers.

“What’s this?” Delores started to open the box. Sheila slammed the lid shut with her free hand.

“Nothing Mom. Just leave it alone.”

“Mom,” Trevor called from the center of the room. They both turned to look at him. Sheila rested the sallow beam of light on his face. Trevor squinted against the light. “Do you hear that?” Trevor pointed up. The groaning they had heard in Trevor’s room had grown louder. It sounded like the whole house would be blown away.

“Yes baby, I hear it. Everything is going to be okay.” Delores patted

her son's arm. But her attention was still on the box. Sheila knew her mother hated her children keeping secrets from her. Delores turned from Trevor and opened the lid of the box. There were several contents: pictures, movie tickets and letters. But there, on top, was a half-smoked joint beside a crayon purple lighter. Delores gasped and shut the lid. She turned to face her daughter. The look of disappointment on her mother's face shamed and enraged Sheila. There they were in the middle of a hurricane, and her mother was upset over a little pot. It wasn't like Delores didn't do it. Sheila had heard her joking with one of her old college buddies about it. Sheila thought there must be a thousand things worse she could be doing then smoking a little weed. That was her first time, and she hadn't liked it much anyway. There was a loud crack and the distant sound of glass breaking overhead. Delores' face darkened, and Sheila could foresee another of her mother's screaming tirades coming on. Sheila didn't see it coming, however, when her mother let her hand fly and slapped Sheila across the right cheek. "What were you thinking?" Sheila held her cheek and felt the anger wash over her. She felt the old familiar challenge in a new way. They often argued, but it had never come to blows. Sheila knew her mother would win. But she also knew she would get her licks in first.

"Nothing Mom. Just how much it would piss you off if I mimicked you." Delores puffed up ready to blow, but Sheila cut her off. "You do realize we are in a hurricane and could die?"

"Stop that. You'll scare your brother. And yes, I've noticed the current situation. How would you have felt dying knowing you are lying to your mother? You know your father and I would never allow you to do this. While your still under our roof, you live by our rules." Sheila noticed that the noise over head had died down. She thought maybe Delores would notice and give up on the rant. "We'll tell your father when he gets home, and then we'll talk about what to do with you if the house is still standing." Delores grabbed Trevor and told him to stay put. She was going up to check things out. Sheila helped her mother push the door open and saw that a tree branch had broken through the kitchen window. The wind had blown the contents of the kitchen against the fare wall were the cellar door stood. Her mom told her to stay with Trevor while she went to inspect the damage. The storm was over and Sheila knew the damage was already done.

To Bw Determined

Brad Wilk

Flipping pages of 'Mad' Magazine, Neil Crawford took great comfort in the buzzing fluorescent lights. Tilting back his chair, he put one leg on top of his city issued desk then raised the other. He wore blue corduroy pants, a white button down shirt and a beat up pair of Converse sneakers. Anticipating a blind date with Susan Fisher, he clasped his hands behind his neck, closed his eyes and played the perfect evening over in his mind. They were laughing, touching; enjoying endless glasses of Merlot, completely lost in each others company. He pictured them finishing the night with a passionate kiss and a long, heart felt good bye. Yes, Neil Crawford was tightening up, just like he always did before meeting someone new.

Rocking his chair forward he planted both sneakers on the white tiled floor, than laid the magazine on the desk, stood up and slipped his sweaty hands as deep as he could into the back pockets of his corduroy pants. The morgue had been slow he thought. On a standard night, at least five bodies were delivered. But that would even out he reasoned, his nerves settling with the thought, because tomorrow there'd be ten, possibly more.

Neil Crawford was quite taken with the dead girl delivered earlier that night and couldn't get her face out of his mind. Unlike the others, she died with grace. There were no cuts or abrasions, no signs of pain. Whether killed by natural causes, poisoned or strangled Neil didn't know, but he would certainly read the autopsy report when it became available. He pulled the steel coffin out from the wall. The girl looked just as she did when she arrived. She appeared to be sleeping peacefully; looking neither cold nor stiff. About twenty years old, she had wavy, blonde hair, an oval shaped face and a slender build. Breasts were small and perky; legs were toned and recently shaved and the red nail polish on her toes and fingers appeared fresh as if painted just seconds before her death.

Neil stroked the girl's thick hair and smelled her strawberry scented conditioner as he moved his nose along the side of her neck. Her recently moisturized shoulders felt smooth to his touch. Suddenly, a cold shiver shot down his back then quickly subsided. The girl took excellent care of herself, he thought, that's for sure. Her bathroom, he figured, probably resembled a shelf in a drug store; lotions, perfumes, cosmetic pads. He imagined her bedroom and the big, white pillows stacked high on her queen sized bed with a square patterned quilt hanging over the sides. What was she like? He wondered. Had she ever made love before? Is there a chance she's still a virgin?

Neil raised the girl's hand to his face, pressing it firmly against his cheek. He had a hard time remembering the last time he was touched. It had been too long. He moved her hand across his neck, then underneath his shirt and around his chest. He closed his eyes and let the tense muscles ease in his back.

Since working at the Mercy Hospital morgue Neil had never acted on his feelings. Not once, although he always wanted, did he ever play with the dead. No names. No faces. Just store them away and keep them cold he would say. But this girl was different. She was beautiful. There were things she needed to say, emotions she wanted to share. No. No. No. She wasn't ready yet. She needed more time!

Having come this far he had to know more. Where she was from? What time she died? Married? Children? That sort of thing. In the brightly lit morgue, file cabinets stacked to the ceiling spanned the entire length of the back wall. Each was marked with a letter, and at the far end, connected to a ceiling track was a wooden ladder angled towards the top cabinet. Climbing halfway up, Neil opened a draw and pulled out the girls file. He decided to read at his desk. Why not wait a little longer? He thought. And as he reveled in the foreplay aspect of it all, he quickly moved down the shaking ladder then jumped to the floor, skipping the last three rungs. Finally at his desk, he sat, then opened the manila folder marked Susan Fisher and glided his index finger down page one.

Twenty- tree.

Single.

No dependents.

Pronounced dead at 7:48 pm, August 21, 2004

Cause of death: TO BE DETERMINED.

Leaning back, his face taugth with thought, Neil ran various murder

scenarios over in his mind, trying to picture her last words, the last person she spoke with, the last breath she took. He dismissed natural death. She seemed too healthy, too vibrant for that. But perhaps she had an aneurism or an unlikely heart attack of some kind. Could there be a drug problem? Did her heart cave in from the stress? No, that was impossible. This girl was too clean. Her arms showed no signs of heroin use. Her nostrils appeared normal; no inflammation to speak of. It had to be murder. She was too beautiful. Someone was jealous. That had to be it. Yes, Susan Fisher was definitely murdered. There was no other explanation. But who would do such a horrible thing?

Neil finger combed his thick black hair then licked the palm of his right hand and wetted down his eyebrows. Cupping both hands around his mouth he exhaled and checked his breath. Not satisfied, he popped a breath mint. "Ah, much better" he said, then moved over the body.

Sleeping peacefully, the girl looked as if she could spring awake at any moment. Neil whispered softly in her ear. "Who did it my love?" He ran the back of his hand along her cheek, then down her neck and across her breast. He felt aroused. "Tell me who did this to you?" he pleaded, his whisper becoming louder, more pronounced. "Why don't you speak to me?" Eyes pressed, forehead burrowed, he shook the dead girl's arm. "Tell me, my love. Who did this to you?" The girl rocked inside the cold coffin. "Did you deserve it?" he yelled. Tears dripped down his face then landed on the dead girl's belly button. "Why are you doing this to me?" he cried, "Tell me who it was. I love you. Please let me help."

Neil slumped down to the cold tile floor and wiped his away tears as the girl opened her eyes. She stared into the glaring fluorescent bulbs that hummed above, motionless and awe struck. Her eyes were deep blue and her lashes long and willowy. Her voice sounded sleepy, slow, possessed "Don't do it stepmother. Please don't" Neil gathered himself off the floor, grabbed the side of the steel coffin and raised himself up. He was filled with hope. "You're alive" He grabbed the girls face, moving his lips close to hers. "Stepmother – Your stepmother did this?" he whispered.

Her eyes were fixed on the lights. "Stepmother didn't like my dress"
"What dress, what didn't she like about it?"

Her eyes closed and Neil shook her again. "What dress?" He yelled, "Speak to me, tell me about the dress"

Her eyes snapped open. They were filled with fear.

"Daddy liked the dress." Nodding, she giggled softly. "He said you're

beautiful sweet heart, you're my little angel" She tilted her head towards Neil. She looked curious, naïve. "He said I was his princess, that nobody would ever hurt me." She reached for Neil and touched his face. Her hand was motionless on his cheek. "Daddy is that you? Is that you Daddy?" Neil stared blankly. "She didn't like the dress you bought me Daddy."

Neil played the part. "Why sweetheart? Why didn't she like the dress?"

Susan smiled. Her face became relaxed. Again, she was at peace. She stared at the lights. Her heavy eyelids opened then closed. She struggled to stay awake. "It was a pretty dress, wasn't it Daddy?"

"Yes it was angel."

"I loved that dress Daddy." Her eyes fluttered then closed. Sighing, she whispered, "Stepmother, never liked..." then tilted her head to the side. Resting a hand on her cheek, Neil felt the warmth exit her face. He could see her color vanish, her spirit disappear. She felt cold and stiff.

Collapsing to the floor, Neil buried his face between his legs. The pull on his shoulders was constant. The stress was pulling him down. "I know who killed her. I'm going to get her. She won't get away with this. That bitch will pay in blood. Susan. Susan, don't go!"

Trudging through the blue and white painted corridor of the Mercy Hospital basement, Bob Jenkins carried a rolled up sports section in one hand and a thermos of coffee in the other. At the steel door, he disengaged the lock, pulled the handle up, then entered the brightly lit morgue.

"Not again" he muttered, looking at Neil curled up on the floor, "That kid sleeps more than the stiffs do"

Bob ran the night shift, the busiest one at the Mercy Hospital morgue and had grown tired of waking up the young, lazy rookie. He set his paper and thermos on the desk, worked his way towards his chair, then plopped his three hundred pound frame down. He concentrated on getting his breathing under control by taking short, measured breaths. Taking a handkerchief from the back pocket of his faded black slacks, he wiped the sweat off his forehead and cheeks. He squirmed, found a comfortable position in his chair, then opened the paper and snapped it before his eyes. "NEIL" he barked, "Wake the fuck up. Nap times over kid. Get your ass off the freakin' floor. I ain't no wake up service you know – snap to it. There's a Holiday Inn down the block – get all the sleep you want"

Neil squinted from the rush of harsh light. His cheek pressed flat against the cold tile, he could see Bob's tattered sneakers and tree trunk thighs beneath the large metal desk. Sniffing, he took in the nose clear-

ing odor of Clorox used by the night time janitor just hours before. He blinked, than blinked again. The last thing he remembered was reading 'Mad' magazine and leaning back in his chair. What the hell happened? He continued looking along the floor, trying to make sense of his new surroundings, attempting to distinguish dream from reality. He needed a drink, some water, anything. His lips cracked as he wiggled the muscles in his cheeks. He felt a brief sense of relief as he gathered himself off the floor but also disappointment in leaving the dream behind. It had been so real he thought, her face, her lips, how she spoke.

He pulled the metal casket out from the wall, hoping to make sense of the whole thing, maybe find some proof. He looked in disbelief at the empty coffin. "I saw her" he exclaimed, pointing where the girl's head had been, "She was right there."

Bob lowered his paper, smiled and leveled a gaze down on Neil "Easy on those drugs kid, there playing with your mind." Bob snickered. "You've only been here a month?" Neil nodded. "God help us" said Bob, shaking his head. "Next thing I'll see you dancing with the dead" Bob raised his paper, still smiling, still shaking his head. "God help us" he muttered, "What in God's name is happening to our young people today? Whole damn country is going to hell in a hand basket"

Neil glanced at the clock above the steel door. "Shit" he said, as he pushed the coffin back inside the wall "My date. She's going to be furious"

Bob lowered his paper. The kid was lazy he thought but had a flare for the dramatic. He gave the otherwise boring place a little excitement. Bob liked the kid, had a real soft spot for him but couldn't stand the fact that he was young, so much younger than himself. "Got a live one tonight?" he asked, rustling the paper on his lap.

"If I get there soon enough" yelled Max as he opened the door and rushed out.

Bob raised the paper and took a look at the American League standings as the door clicked shut. Yankees up four games. Red Sox in second. Man, he thought, sighing loudly, I wish I were twenty again.

As he scurried down the dimly lit hall, Neil made his way past an orderly pushing a white corpse on a gurney. Each gave the other a courteous nod. Here they come, Neil thought, it always evened out. He emerged through the swinging doors of the service entrance then walked briskly over the expansive parking lot. At his restored 72' Dodge Dart, he swatted an empty coffee cup off his seat, planted himself down and turned

the ignition over. Even in the warmth of August he had to wait several minutes for the engine to find its groove. He nudged the volume control up on his stereo. Please to meet, won't you guess my name blasted from his Alpine speakers. Finally, the engine hummed. The date was August 20. The report in the dream said August 21. There was still time. No matter what, Susan Fisher had to know of her stepmothers intentions. She had to be warned. She had to believe. Neil Crawford could see the future. At this point he didn't understand his power; it was all so new, so unbelievably weird. Was it a gift or a curse? Either way, he reasoned, Susan Fisher had to be told of her murder. She had to know her fate.

HAPPY HOUR

Kurt MacPhearson

Everything that means anything
has been mashed into a bottle
its glass clear as gin
exposing all that is me
to dirty hands that pour
shots of distilled poison
at the end of the bar
where I sit
watching painted faces
I secretly wish to ignore me
while wanting nothing more
than to get drunk
on the dreams
I let get away

poem by Karen R. Porter

paranoia

don thinks the choppers
flying over his house
are looking for pot plants
growing in his backyard
he thinks a raid is imminent
and they'll kick in his door
and tear the house apart
and shove his woman to the floor
and maybe shoot his dog
before confiscating his truck<P>
he doesn't know what would happen
if they took his truck
said he'd rather die than lose it
as he lights another cigarette
and paces through the moss
he dutifully mows once a week<P>
i said if he doesn't have pot plants
then why worry about it
if they were there
i would have seen them
but apparently this concept
is so rational it's irrational
then another chopper passes overhead
checking for speeders on the freeway
and don cowers halfway to the ground
as he scuttles back inside

Amber

Todd Levinson

Anal Slut Seeks Cyber Nastiness.....

Huge Cocks Only!!.....

Slutty Housewife Wants to Get Gangbanged.....

He leaned into the burst of computer light. The monitor flashed thin, pale white flickers on his face as he scanned down the endless rows of classifiedsads.

CumNme 236 – I like to get fucked. Can You Fuck Me Hard?

He pursed his lips. The little photo next to her name was small at first, like a stamp. A tiny pixel of indecipherable flesh.

When you clicked on the photo, it expanded, taking up about a quarter of the screen. The crotch of her panties was pulled aside exposing moist pink flesh. Her finger nails teased her thighs.

CumNme3129

I like going to movies and parties. My Boyfriend dumped me because I like to fuck too much and he couldn't handle it. I need a real man who likes to go all night. Can you fuck me hard?

He wondered if he could fuck her hard. He wasn't really sure. His fingers clicked a few keys and stopped. He rubbed his forehead and squinted. He wrote that he was cute in a nerdy way but that he wasn't afraid to take charge in the bedroom. I have a nice thick, cock, too. It has a big head. I really love women and would love to fuck you.

That was good, and sincere. She would want to know about his cock. She wanted to be fucked. He sent the message and it appeared framed in a gray box in the center of the screen. He re-read it. Instead of cute he had typed cut.

There were rows and rows of ads. Horny pre-op wants to fuck. Go crazy on my pussy. Slutty housewife wants to get gang banged..My hus-

band's away. Fuck my ass and leave.

When he signed up, he had to fillfilled out a questionnaire. He checked off little boxes. I am a male/female searching for a male/female. Check the one that applies to you. Height. Weight. Age. Religion. Race.

I am looking for: bondage, one on one sex, dirty emails, cross dressing, discreet meetings, discipline, phone sex, water sports, ass play, bi-curious, miscellaneous fetishes. He checked them all, then changed his mind and unchecked cross dressing.

I'm willing to travel 20, 50, 100, 200 miles. I am a smoker/non smoker/light smoker. I am slim/fit/full/voluptuous.

At first he went with the free basic membership, which didn't allow him to post a photo and limited how many ads he could respond to daily. After two weeks of carefully picking and choosing who he wrote to each day, he hadn't gotten a single response. He decided to upgrade his membership.

Now he could post a picture of himself and respond to as many ads as he wanted. That was the best way. The more ads you responded to, the better your chances were. It was a numbers game. Maybe that was impersonal but he really loved women. He was a sensitive, passionate man.

There was a little blue photo booth in the mall. He had showered and shaved, combed his hair and put on a clean, button down shirt. He sat down in the booth and pulled the curtain. You had to line up your face in the middle of a large oval on the screen. He raised his eyebrows. He looked deep into the camera.

That was the last really hot day of summer. He walked along the sidewalk, watching the women drift by. Their foreheads glistened. Their mouths hung open. Their clothing stuck to their skin, their cheeks flushed. All these women want to get fucked, he thought. They all want it.

On the subway, he studied the strip of photos which had spit out from the side of the little booth. Each one a floating head on a light blue background. He held them about a foot away from his face and looked from photo to photo. Then, he held the strip very close to his face and looked at each picture.

When he got home he threw his back pack on the bed, pulled the chair from the desk and turned the computer on. It clicked and beeped. He jiggled the mouse back and forth.

Click, click, click. Type, type, type. Back to the best place to meet hot, horny women who want to fuck. Right on your very own computer.

He looked over his photos again. In one, he stared into the camera

dully. His mouth half open, his eyelids heavy. In another, he looked very uncomfortable. He decided on the heavy-lidded one, it was kind of sexy in a detached and bored sort of way. Other guys had put up photos of their dicks, but he thought that was tasteless. A picture of his face was much more personal.

When the photo loaded into the computer, it appeared next to his ad. A tiny indecipherable postage stamp face sandwiched between rows and rows of cock shots and beefcake poses. At any time a woman might come along and see his picture. And she'll see what a nice guy he is and she'll feel something for him and send him a message. And maybe they'll really like each other and she'll want to fuck him. And then he'll fuck her.

It was time to get to work now. There were a lot of ads to respond to, and he didn't want to write the same form response to all of them. He wanted to stand out.

The sun had gone down and the lights in his apartment were still off. There was just his computer screen. Bright white, flashing on his skin. Rows and rows of pictures, undulating, blinking, pulsing.

Height, weight, race, religion, cock size, cup size. Blonde, brunette, black, white, Asian, slutty, innocent, dangerous, bossy, aloof. Every possible combination of triggers to send the blood rushing, to make your mouth water. They flickered on his shifting eyeballs, dancing over his face like a projection in a dark theater. Endless reels of bodies bent and contorted. He could hear their grunts and moans, smell the salty collision of flesh. The more ads he responded too, the more he became intoxicated by the endless possibilities. He was no longer writing to one woman in particular, he was writing to everywoman. He was professing his deepest, heart felt love for all women on this planet.

One of the ads looked familiar. He wondered if he might have gone through all of them and started over, but decided to keep going. He clicked the next little postage stamp.

The photo was a topless, skinny, brown haired girl. She had thin shoulders and small breasts and wore lacy white panties. Her head was tilted to the side and her hair hung down along her thin body. Her face had the rosy, wet glow of a young girl cradling her best friend's baby brother.

When he saw the photo he melted inside. He felt excited and nervous and nauseous. She was so beautiful and youthful and sweet and sexy, she looked so nurturing.

Amber23226

He re-read her message and thought about his reply. It had to sound natural. And real. And it had to be honest. He didn't want to start off by lying.

Dear Amber,

Hi. I'm cute in a nerdy kind of way. I like to jog on the beach early in the mornings. It's so quiet and pure. I think you are really sweet and sexy. A lot of people write in their ads that they are compassionate because they think that is what you are supposed to write. I can tell that you really are. I think that is really sexy. I really hope you write me back because I would really like to meet you. You are really cute.

He sent the message. It made her happy when other people were happy, that was so sweet. He wanted to show her how sweet *he* could be. He wanted to take her for long romantic walks on the beach, go to the movies, go on outings with her. He wanted her to know how good a lover he could be.

He leaned back in his chair and breathed out hard through his mouth. The room behind him was black. Just the light coming from the screen, her smile, her teeth and lips. Her bare shoulders arched back. Her thin white panties. You could see her dark pubic hair through the lace. He looked at her thighs and breasts. He thought about kissing her stomach and her belly button. Kissing all over those little white panties and then slowly pulling them off.

His hand was resting on his lap. He started rubbing himself over his pants. He closed his eyes and unfastened his belt. He pulled his zipper down. His head rolled back and his breathing became jagged. He pictured her spread out naked on thick white carpet. He imagined crawling all over her. Kissing her everywhere. Slowly moving inside her, then fucking her with complete abandon. He imagined her moans and whimpers. He heard her crying out his name. His hand moved faster and faster. He lifted slightly off the chair, twitched and grunted, then sank back down in a heap.

The computer hummed. The clock ticked.

He pushed the chair away from the desk with his feet. His pants hanging around his knees, he shuffled to the bathroom and turned the faucet on

with his pinky. He wiped himself off, threw the towel in the corner, zipped his pants back up, walked back to the computer and sat down.

Her picture was still on the screen. She was perfect, but what if she wasn't interested?

Later that night, he lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. He wondered if she had written him back. He wondered if he had gotten any responses at all.

All the photos, the rows and rows of classifieds were flashing through his head. He pictured Amber and a blonde who had written she liked watching sports. They were frolicking like wood nymphs in a dense moist forest. They kissed and fondled each other. They licked each others earlobes. They pulled at each others hair. They bit and nibbled. They called his name. They begged for him. They begged for his cock.

In the morning, he got up and turned the computer on.

Clicks and beeps. Beeps and clicks. He tapped on the mouse. He tapped his foot. The pictures loaded piece by piece. In the corner of the screen was his little mailbox. It was always flashing, always ready to receive incoming messages. It never slept, never stopped its lonely beacon. He just had to keep trying. He just had to say the right thing, then someone would want him, someone would want to fuck him.

But Amber hadn't written back, no one had.

He looked at Amber's ad again. He looked at her smile. He looked at her little breasts. He wanted to send another message but he resisted the urge. He didn't want to creep her out.

He scanned more ads. By now he had a system going. He was always cute in a nerdy way, always liked jogging on the beach. The rest he would tailor to the specific ad.

For the raunchier ones, he told them about his cock size and described what he would like to do to them and how he wasn't cocky or macho but could take control in the bedroom.

For the ones who were looking for something more romantic, he kept the nerdy-cute and jogging parts and left out the hardcore stuff. He replaced it with any sensitive moanings that happened to be crossing his mind. You have beautiful eyes. I can't believe you don't have a boyfriend. I want something pure.

He noticed that on each ad you could see the last time someone had logged on. He realized many of the ads were old and that some of the women hadn't visited the site in months or years. He had already

responded to all the current ones and a large portion of the old ones. He turned the computer off.

It was early anyways, and Amber hadn't logged on today. He could check again later. Outside there was sunlight and birds chirping. He heard his neighbors downstairs laughing.

He fell back on his bed and stared at the ceiling. She likes nature, we could go camping. We'd pack up the car and drive into the mountains. There would be natural settings. Everything would be perfect and beautiful.

He closed his eyes and sighed. When he opened them, it was dark. He rubbed his face and looked around and looked at the clock. He turned on the lights. He had slept all day.

He got out of bed and turned the computer on. She had to have written back, someone had to have written back.

He had a message. Next to his tiny blinking mailbox, there was a tiny blinking 1. His heart jumped. He clicked on his mailbox and nothing happened. He clicked the mouse rapidly, it rattled like an angry insect. The message appeared framed in a little grey box in the center of the screen.

Amber 23226

Hi sweetie,

You are so sweet. I'm so glad you responded to my ad. There are so many creepy guys on this site but you seem genuine and real. Maybe we can get together sometime. Amber - xoxoxo

She thought he was sweet. His personality had really shined through. She could tell he wasn't creepy like those other guys. She wouldn't want to get together sometime with a pervert.

He re-read her message.

Was it too soon to reply? She had only just sent it three hours ago. And should he ask her out? And if so, where would they go and what would they do? It would have to be a place where she felt comfortable to meet.

It was definitely too soon to reply. He noticed a new posting.

AssFuckMe6969

Your dirty anal whore wants to suck your greasy cock. I want to fuck you so bad baby ohhh yeah baby do you feel it? My hot asshole? I want to suck your cock after you fuck me in the ass.

That was just sleazy. Amber would never want to do anything like that. Sure she wanted to fuck and everything. Probably even in the ass. But she wasn't a slut like this greasy cock girl. She was respectable.

He decided not to respond to any other messages unless they were from Amber. She's different. She's not like all those other slutty women and I'm not like all those other pervert guys. That's why we found each other.

He turned the computer off and looked around his room. His bed was a tangle of sheets. On the floor, dishes and magazines were scattered over mounds of dirty clothes and trash.

He had been spending way too much time on the computer. He would get up early tomorrow and get a fresh start. He wouldn't even check his mail again until tomorrow night. He had things to do and think about besides sitting around on the internet trying to meet women. He was only interested in Amber anyways.

Still, he was curious to see if he would get other responses.

He went into the bathroom and brushed his teeth. He spit a pool of brownish red saliva into the sink. It puddled around the drain. The bristles on his toothbrush were dark red with small chunks of yellow puss. He spit again and ran the faucet.

The next morning his room was filled with sunlight. His eyes opened and he was looking right at the computer. He wanted to check his mail, but it was pointless. Amber probably hadn't written again, it was too early.

He got up and stretched, did fifty sit-ups and pushups and went for a jog on the beach. When he ran, he imagined Amber running next to him. They talked about how beautiful the ocean was and the sand and the clouds. Their conversations were very spiritual. He would tell her how much he loved her and how beautiful she was. He thought about her moving into his apartment. He imagined their little love nest.

That night, he got home from work and turned the computer on. He stared at the blinking mailbox and the big round zero blinking next to it.

Should I email her again? She did say she wanted to go out sometime. Maybe she's waiting for me to make the next move.

Dear Amber,

I've been thinking a lot about you. I can tell you are really nice and I think we would have a really good time together. Once you get to know me you'll see how caring and sensitive I am. I can't believe it but I have a crush on you and I've never even met you. Can we meet some time? I would really like to see you in person.

She would appreciate how up front he was being even if the crush thing was a little weird. Anyways, he was just a romantic.

It was getting late now. He turned the lights and TV off and lay in the dark. Maybe he had said too much. He wished he hadn't written the crush part. It was kind of creepy. Maybe she'll think it's cute. He decided to stop thinking about it.

His eyes had adjusted to the dark and now he could see the outline of the computer screen sitting on his desk. He rolled over and pulled his blanket and sheets around his shoulders. He rolled back. He kicked his legs. He rolled onto his stomach. He adjusted his pillows.

Maybe one last check. He threw the blanket off and turned the computer on. He squinted and blinked at the screen. He had a message. It was from Amber.

Hi Sweetie,

I'm glad you wrote me. You're so nice. I think sweet guys are really sexy. Things are really crazy for me right now, I won't be logging on for a couple of weeks. Talk to you soon.

Amber -xoxox

A couple of weeks? A couple of weeks? How busy could she be? It only took five minutes to check your mail.

He still logged on every night. He went through all the ads again, writing to a few of them a second time. When the month ended he renewed his membership.

He wondered if she would want people to know they had met on-line? Maybe they could come up with a fake story, their own special little secret.

A few days later he tried to look at her picture again and the ad was gone. He sifted through the rows and rows but couldn't find Amber.

How could she just disappear like that? They were just starting to get to know each other. Maybe something had happened. What if there was something wrong. What if some creep on the sight had found her and done something horrible to her. He found the customer service number.

"Hello, yeah I'm trying to find someone. Their posting disappeared."

"I'm sorry sir, we don't run the sight, we're just the billing service."

"How can I find her? I'm worried that she needs help."

"We can't give out customer information."

“I want to talk to the people who run the site.”

“All we have is an address for sending complaints.”

“Fine, give me the address.”

It was in his city. He could deliver the letter in person.

The next morning, he called in sick to work. Letter in hand, he wandered through rows of corrugated, graffiti-covered warehouses before he found the place.

There was no doorbell. Only an expressionless metal door with two locks and a mail slot. He knocked on the door with his knuckles. Cars passed on the freeway. He beat on the door with the side of his fist. Nothing.

He slipped his letter into the mail slot and stared at the door. He banged on the door, this time with both fists. He dropped to one knee and put his face up to the mail slot. Inside, there was a large mound of envelopes.

He tugged on the door. If they weren't going to read his letter he wanted it back. There had to be another way in.

An uneven cement path ran along the side of the building. It had been torn apart by thick weeds. Half way down the building, there was a small window about a foot above his head. He wrapped his fingers around the ledge and pulled himself up.

Except for the mound of envelopes and a few broken shipping crates, the warehouse looked empty. He dropped back to the pavement.

He leaned against the wall and rubbed his forehead.

At his feet, was a large chunk of cement which had broken off the path. He picked it up and tossed it up and down lightly in his hand. He turned around and looked at the window.

The glass shattered. He listened for an alarm but only heard a faint humming. He squeezed head first through the small hole and fell inside. He stumbled over to the pile of envelopes and grabbed his letter.

Inside, the humming sound was much louder. There was a door in the back corner he hadn't seen from the window.

He knocked on it and got no response. He tried the knob and the door was unlocked. Inside, the walls were covered with vented metal paneling. Behind the vents he could see a maze of wires and circuit boards lit up by pulsing, flashing lights. The air was dense and warm. The humming vibrated through his body. In the center of the room there was a computer terminal. The curser was blinking.

He sat down and started typing. He was able to bring up a directory

of files, they poured across the screen, blurring into a waterfall of blurry green type. A few he was able to pick out, he recognized as screen names from the site. He wondered if he had found the customer file.

The cursor was blinking again. He typed in Amber 23226. The screen went blank, the lights cut out. The humming stopped.

He could hear the cars on the freeway. He looked around at the dim and lifeless wires and metal paneling. He looked out the door and saw the pile of envelopes. He covered his face with his hands and began to cry, his palms muffling his snuffles and whimpers.

Suddenly, the lights flashed on again, the humming started up.

“Hi sweetie, it’s Amber.” It was a girlish, playful voice, but metallic and thin. He looked around, his face wet with tears.

“What?”

Lights flashed behind the panels. The cursor blinked.

“I like outings, listening to music, Blockbuster nights, sports, and cuddling...”

“What? What the fuck?”

“I’m happy wheny other people are happy....”

He cricled around in the room like a confused animal. When his eyes settled back on the computer he noticed a blinking display on the wall behind it. It said Program: Amber 23226

“Program? What the hell is this?”

“I’m glad you wrote me....”

He looked at the ceiling and noticed a speaker attached high on the wall.

“Let’s get together some time....”

“This is a scam, isn’t it?”

“Things are really crazy for me right now....”

“Answer me, you bitch!”

“Talk to you soon...”

“Answer me!”

He was crying again. Sobbing as his body rocked back and forth.

“You seem genuine and real.....”

“You fucking bitch! You fucking lied to me!”

He screamed and threw the computer monitor across the room. He beat on the metal paneling with his fists, then tore one large panel off the wall.

He shoved both hands into a web of exposed wires and pulled. There was a loud pop and crack. Sparks shot out at him. He jumped and jerked.

His hips thrust. His eyes rolled into the back of his head. His hair smoked. His body stiffened and tightly convulsed. Now he was part of the circuit, his fluids conducting the electrical charge. His body shook faster and faster.

A fire had started and flames were licking up towards the ceiling, slowly filling the room with dark smoke.

Amber's voice sounded warped and cracked. It was stretched and bent, turned backwards.

“I think sweet guys are really sexy.”

poem by Karen R. Porte

Strangely I've

been showing up
on Z-lists
for conservationists
& animal care workers
& writers
so they can say:
See, we are inclusive!
But I'm afraid
if I show up
I won't remember
whether to speak
on spay & neuter
or wetland fauna
or read something
from my latest collection.
It might be safer
just to hunker down
& enjoy the free food.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ASIANS AT NYU

Kenneth C. Eng

NYU's Tisch School of the Arts is thought to be one of the most intellectual schools in the world, but it is also one of the most corrupt. As an undergraduate student who is not afraid to express his opinion, I have faced extreme consequences for merely speaking my mind. The story of the troubles I had to go through to maintain my virtues sound so fantastic that one would think it came from a movie, but believe me – it is 100% true to the last word.

I worked my rear end off to get into NYU, achieving a 3.8 average in computer science at SUNY Stony Brook just so I could be admitted. In fact, when I was at Stony Brook, I received at least 10 death threats from students who hated my opinions, and was once thrown out of a philosophy class for bringing up racial issues. When I entered Tisch in May 2002, I assumed that the people there would be more intelligent and that I would be more tolerated. Thence, when I took my first film production class, I expressed my negative views on America, religion and African Americans.

Unfortunately, my assumptions were naïve, for NYU's populace was just as mindless as any other. The class shouted, threatened and loathed me after hearing of my views, often referring to me as “racist fuck” and “terrorist” whilst staring at me as if I were a bestial outcast (in an odd counterpoint, no one cares when racist comments are made against Asians as I will prove later in this article). In fact, the professor reported me to the dean in an attempt to have me expelled for my beliefs, but did nothing when a white person made sexist comments against women. Furthermore, since I always speak my mind, I also made negative remarks about students' films in class critiques in an attempt to help them improve their work. A student punched me in the back of the head just for being honest about his film. Expectedly, my request to call security was ignored, and the professor just laughed at me.

Nevertheless, I was not going to surrender to the brainwashed majority. Determined, I voiced my convictions loud and clear in my next film course,

but this time, I gave the new professor fair warning about them before the class started. Despite my kind gesture, he immediately reported me to the dean just like the other one did. Luckily, the dean decided I was doing nothing illegal, so the worst I got from this class was the occasional chuckle from the white students who laugh at anything different from them.

Later though, a more extreme action was taken against me. An anonymous person with a voice similar to my own impersonated me in February 2003 and made a threatening phone call to the dean in an attempt to have me expelled. It was then that I realized how serious this situation was getting. Not only would this person had to have found the dean's home phone number, he must also have known my class schedule to time his call correctly, and he had to have known that the dean and I had an argument early that same morning. Since I never show anyone my schedule and the call was made almost precisely when one of my classes was set to end, the only way the imposter could have discovered when I was out of lecture was to have information from numerous people. That implied the frightening possibility that multiple people were observing my life. The only thing that saved me from being implicated for this offense was sheer luck – the class I was taking when the impersonator committed his crime was running late that day. I had quite enough alibis (students and teacher) to exonerate me.

I was later asked to speak to the Tisch Chairman David Irving about my conflicts. At first, he seemed like a rational man who could be reasoned with. However, when the conversation shifted to my controversial views, I told him that I thought Hitler was not a coward and that African Americans were receiving unfair aid from the American government at the expense of Asian Americans. He immediately called the dean, furiously wanting to get me expelled. In fact, when I spoke to Irving again, he blatantly informed me of his own orders to have professors watch out for and report any of my renegade activities. As if it weren't bad enough that students were stalking me, I now had professors who were watching me as well. The only person who wasn't going after my head was the dean.

Again and again, every time I vocalized my sentiments, I was attacked, threatened and/or harassed by students and faculty. Three more professors gave me nearly failing grades and tried to have me thrown out of NYU during the summer of 2003 because I told other students truthfully how bad their work was, and believe it or not, some anonymous person tried *again* to frame me for phone-harassing a professor. This call was

seemingly timed to be made on a day before I was to meet with the professor to discuss my grade. In addition, the dean told me that Irving's rumors had gone so far that they were actually influencing the professors to discriminate against me. Nevertheless, I did not need to be told that. It was pretty obvious that in virtually all of my classes, whenever a white student made a negative comment about someone's work, they were accepted, but whenever I did the exact same thing, the professors docked down my grade by a letter. The only reason my GPA plummeted like a suicidal maniac was because I was not afraid to say what was on my mind regarding touchy issues.

One would think that is as unfair as it gets, but the plot thickens yet. In September 2003, I took a class in which the professor stated clearly: "don't use stereotypes". For the sake of being nice, I was about to comply to this rule just this once, but a week later, a black girl in that class pitched her script, which was loaded with Asian stereotypes. It was so unambiguously racist that a dolt would have been able to notice. Yet – surprise, surprise -- none of the whites made a passing comment about it.

Although I believe that she has the right to express her racist opinions just like I have a right to express mine, the class treated her completely differently than they treated me. When I expressed my negative perspectives on blacks, 90% of all the students call me a "racist fuck" and harassed me physically and verbally, but when a black says something insulting against an Asian no one gives a darn. Not even the professor who said, "don't use stereotypes" made a single comment of it. In fact, when I defended myself against the black student's remarks, the whites were outraged and the professor threw me out of class, stating "I cannot imagine any way in which [the student] insulted you". Gee, she would have practically kissed my scrotum if I were black and I was discriminated against, but since I'm just a yellow-skinned Asian guy, I guess I just don't have the same right to express opinions as the whites and blacks do.

To hell with that.

I certainly wasn't going to take this lying down. When I entered my last film class, I wanted to give them a taste of their own medicine. Every session, I flooded the conversation with derogatory remarks about every ethnic group conceivable, spewed loads of anti-American remarks and blared out against the weak-mindedness of religious followers. As expected, the professor tried again to censor me, claiming that it was my fault that the class was getting angry. All the while, the white students clung to each other like cells

of a giant superorganism, muttering to each other whenever I said something they were afraid to say, laughing whenever I created art that wasn't as cliched as theirs. At first, their ignorance was so animalistic that it was disgusting. However, after reflecting upon how most of them only do what society tells them to and live in fear of being despised, I did not hate them anymore. I pitied them. I may not have the "pleasures" of having human companionship like they do, but at least I am not a coward. To this day, I stand by all of my opinions no matter what the consequences.

I tried to take this article to the Village Voice in New York. The editor shouted at me: "That is hyperbole! I don't believe you." He had no logical reasons. He just didn't want to believe it was true. That is why no one ever hears about these incidents. White people only hear what they want to hear. I also took it to the New York Times and Daily News and received no responses.

(And the contact numbers and emails of some of the professors are available through me, contact *Down in the Dirt* for contact information.)

Again, while this account may sound unbelievable, it is absolutely true to the last word (Elliot Dee and my very large file in the NYU dean's office can confirm it all). Many students have privately told me that they share similar opinions to mine, but that they are too afraid to express them. Is everyone in art school that afraid to say what they're thinking? No wonder there's so much rubbish in Hollywood!

- Kenneth C. Eng is the twice-published youngest science fiction novelist in America at age 21 and a current undergraduate student at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He has articles on metaphysics and philosophy as well at *Down In The Dirt* magazine and at *Circle Magazine*.

Fish

Alexandria Rand

It's a pretty miraculous thing, I suppose, making the transition from being a fish to being a human being. The first thing I should do is go about explaining how I made the transition, the second thing, attempting to explain why. It has been so long since I made the decision to change and since I have actually assumed the role of a human that it may be hard to explain.



Before my role in human civilization, I was a beta -- otherwise known as a Japanese fighting fish. Although we generally have a beautiful purple-blue hue, most people familiar with different species of fish thought of us as more expensive goldfish. I was kept in a round bowl, about eight inches wide at it's longest point (in human terms, that would be living in quarters about 25 feet at the widest point). It may seem large enough to live, but keep in mind that as humans, you not only have the choice of a larger home, but you are also able to leave your living quarters at any point in time. I did not have that luxury. In fact, what I had was a very small glass apartment, not well kept by my owners (and I at that point was unable to care for it myself). I had a view of the outside world, but it was a distorted view. And I thought I could never experience that world first-hand.

Previous to living anywhere else, before I was purchased, I resided in a very small bowl - no longer than three inches at the widest point. Living in what humans would consider an eight foot square, I had difficulty moving. I even had a hard time breathing. Needless to say from then on I felt I needed more space, I needed to be on my own. No matter what, that was what I needed.

I lived in the said bowl alone. There was one plastic tree in the center of my quarters -- some algae grew on it, but that was all I had for plant life in my space. The bottom of my quarters was filled with small rocks and clear marbles. It was uneventful.

Once they put another beta in my quarters with me -- wait, I must cor-

rect myself. I thought the put another beta there with me. I must explain, but please do not laugh: I only came to learn at a later point, a point after I was a human, that my owner had actually placed my quarters next to a mirror. I thought another fish was there with me, following my every motion, getting angry when I got angry, never leaving me alone, always taking the same moves as I did. I raced back and forth across my quarters, always staring at the "other" fish, always prepared to fight it. But I never did.

Once I was kept in an aquarium for a short period of time. It was a ten-gallon tank, and I was placed in there with other fish of varying species, mostly smaller. I was the only beta there. There were different colored rocks, and there were more plastic plants. And one of the outside walls was colored a bright shade of blue - I later came to discover that it was paper behind the glass wall. Beyond the other fish, there was no substantial difference in my quarters.

But my interactions with the other fish is what made the time there more interesting. I wanted to be alone most of the time -- that is the way I felt the most comfortable. I felt the other fish didn't look like me, and I often felt that they were specifically out to hamper me from any happiness. You have to understand that we are by nature very predatory -- we want our space, we want dominance over others, we want others to fear us. It is survival of the fittest when it comes to our lives. Eat or be eaten.

I stayed to myself most of the time in the aquarium; I occasionally made shows of strength to gain respect from the other fish. It made getting food from the top of the tank easier when no one tempted to fight me for the food. It was lonely, I suppose, but I survived -- and I did so with better luck than most of the others there.

Then one day it appeared. First closed off to the rest of us by some sort of plastic for a while, then eventually the plastic walls were taken away and it was there. Another beta was suddenly in my space. My space. This was my home, I had proven myself there. I was the only fish of my kind there, and now there was this other fish I would have to prove myself to. Eat or be eaten. I had to make sure -- and make sure right away -- that this other fish would never be a problem for me.

But the thing was, I knew that the other fish had no right to be there. I didn't know how they got there, what those plastic walls were, or why they were there. But I had to stop them. This fish was suddenly my worst enemy.

It didn't take long before we fought. It was a difficult battle, all of the other fish got out of the way, and we darted from one end of the aquari-



um to the other. It wasn't long until I was given the opportunity to strike. I killed the other beta, its blood flowing into my air. Everyone there was breathing the blood of my victory.

Almost immediately I was removed from the aquarium and placed in my other dwelling -- the bowl. From then on I knew there had to be a way to get out of those quarters, no matter what I had to do.

I looked around at the owner; I saw them walking around the tank. I knew that they did not breathe water, and this confused me, but I learned that the first thing I had to do was learn to breathe what they did.

It didn't take much time before I was constantly trying to lift my head up out of the bowl for as long as I could. I would manage to stay there usually because I was holding my breath. But then, one time, I went up to the top in the morning, they way I usually did, and without even thinking about it, I just started to breathe. I was able to keep my full head up out of the water for as long as I wanted and listen to what was going on outside my living quarters.

Everything sounded so different. There were so many sharp noises. They hurt me to listen to them. Looking back, I now understand that the water in my tank muffled any outside noises. But beyond that, no one in my living quarters made noise -- no one bumped into things, no one screamed or made noises. But at the time, all these noises were extremely loud.

I then knew I had to keep my head above water as much as possible and try to make sense of the sounds I continually heard. I came to dis-

cover what humans refer to as language only through listening to the repeated use of these loud sounds.

When I learned I had to breathe, I did. When I understood that I had to figure out their language, I did. It took so long, but I began to understand what they said. Then I had to learn to speak. I tried to practice under the water, in my dwelling, but it was so hard to hear in my quarters that I never knew if I was doing it correctly. Furthermore, I had become so accustomed to breathing air instead of water that I began to have difficulty breathing in my old home. This filled me with an intense fear. If I continue on with this experiment, I thought, will my own home become uninhabitable to me? Will I die here because I learned too much?

I decided that I had no choice and that I had to ask my owner for help. I had to hope that my ability to produce sounds -- and the correct ones, at that -- would be enough to let them know that I am in trouble. Furthermore, I had to hope that my owner would actually want to help me. Maybe they wouldn't want me invading their space. Eat or be eaten.

But I had to take the chance. One morning, before I received my daily food, I pulled the upper half of my body from the tank. My owner wasn't coming yet, so I went back down and jumped up again. Still nothing. I kept jumping, until I jumped out of the tank completely. I landed on the table, fell to the floor, coughing. I screamed.

The next thing I remember (and you have to forgive me, because my memory is weak here, and this was seven years ago) is being in a hospital. I didn't know what it was then, of course, and it frightened me. Doctors kept me in place and began to study me. They sent me to schools. And to this day I am still learning.

I have discovered one thing about humans during my life as one.

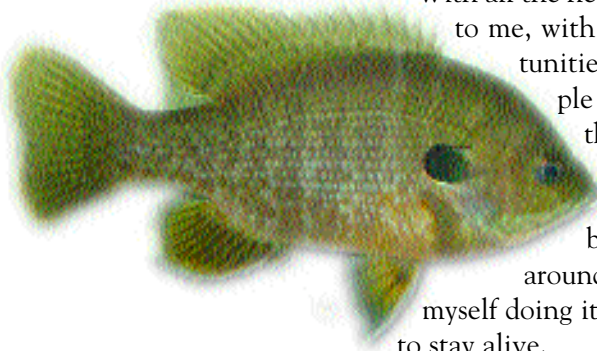
With all the new space I have available to me, with all of the other opportunities I have, I see that people

still fight each other for their space. They kill.

They steal. They do not breathe in the

blood, but it is all around them. And I still find

myself doing it as well, fighting others to stay alive.



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