



*down in the dirt*

**v. 013**  
September 2004

*revealing all your dirty little secrets*



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## *Scars Publications art throughout*

*front cover:* photographed dirt, Truck near moving warehouse in Pennsylvania, and a pullcart with broom in China. *inside front cover:* two scenes from Paradise Island. *Church images:* Church on Wright Street, Champaign Illinois. Paris church. Bruxelles church. *Water images:* David on a cruise ship, Naples. David on a rowboat in the Everglades.

# LIVING

Ashok Niyogi

This is what I call a photo-poem. I have taken all photos with a Minolta Dynax 300 Si, in different states of inebriation, on a Richter scale of 8 to 10, with film speeds from 100 to 800, depending on what I got, where. But they are mostly in 100 and 200 in Fuji and Kodak.

The only discipline I kept was to shoot early or late, except for the few dark guys, which I shot with 400 in the Indian noon.

This is not about the Himalayas.

True, they are an integral part of whatever I do and where do you get such 'photo-ops'; but this series has no snow. No glaciers, no abodes of the Lord Shiva.

They are about a three-month interlude.

And they are about me.

This one is for my nephew, Bunty Singh, last known as Supratik Dutta, who saw my first basin of blood, held his nerve and saved my life.

I



Let me be  
Let the clouds cover me  
Let the branches darken  
    Beneath the sun  
Let the road snake down  
    And come up again  
To the neighboring mountain  
    Right now  
    I am fixed on the sky.

II



My little boy  
Is being coy  
Publicity he abhors  
Except when it is on Mama's lap  
The little girl has  
Something against cats  
Now if she jumps the camera lens  
It is because  
She thinks the camera is a cat.

### III



Like a wild beast  
It comes roaring in  
Not really  
There's no sound  
Just the impression  
That the heavens will fall down.

## IV



Mangoes in the mountains  
Our ecology is mixed up as I am  
Indo-gangetic fruit in mountain dew  
So what else is new?

## V

Travelators for stone chips  
Small small children  
With red red lips  
Hips  
Bent beneath the burden of firewood  
Mountain goat  
Is what I will be  
So that I can see.





## VI



Russian blue and Russian white  
Why am I reminded of Volgograd,  
Of Omsk and Tomsk  
And Intourist  
In this terrible Delhi heat?

## VII



You cross this bridge in Cawnpore  
Not isolated I am sure  
Like the ropeway over the Beas  
Water gurgling over boulders  
Lips like petals in the dusk  
Sexual almost.

## VIII



Unpredictable  
Dusk over mountains  
Is sudden  
Rotten fruit  
For damaged monkeys  
Little monkeys cling to mother's breasts  
Tests  
Of summer homes  
With gnomes.

## IX



Stratified rock  
In wet overhangs  
Ominous  
The road clings  
Each turn brings  
Flowers and a bird

X



When pictures speak in English  
I am surely going mad  
It's sad  
But Jolly will understand  
The meaning  
Of an evening in the sky.

## XI



Is Haiku grammar  
Or is it verse  
Just terse  
And obtuse  
I understand  
These feelings in the woods.

## XII

No wonder I do not shave  
Do the rockslides behave  
Goats climb mountaintops  
Do goats shave?



### XIII



I read the 'Waste Land'  
And for the first time  
Didn't understand a word  
Will they let me serve tea  
At Oxford?

## XIV



Tagore wore a different dress  
Almost as if he were posturing  
If his clouds were not loyal to him  
I would have sought redress.



XV



Take it away  
Here and now  
Let Tolstoy do the balance job  
And Hemingway play  
At fish and bulls  
From Andalusia  
And then in your Convent Row flat  
Yeats will mist over all that  
While Nuns in habits  
Scurry to and fro  
Go.

## XVI



Boris kept filling pages with ink  
Roerich splattered ink into mountains  
I am a swan in the chorus  
On my tip-toes  
The roof in the 'Gum'  
Has windows  
In the Metropole  
Crabs have toes  
Stainless-steel cutters  
And bibs  
Snow-flakes and flutters  
Mayakovsky in the dark  
Stark.

## XVII



Wet in the rain on Pushkinskaya  
Burgers in McDonalds  
And a walk  
Through the park  
Pushkin sits  
To brave the rain.

## XVIII



The Czar built the first wooden ship  
But roads were mud and snow  
    Eta Russia you know  
I was reading Lermontov  
    Now I drink vodka  
    And read Akhmatova  
That is what Zima has done  
    Yevgeny what fun.

by Ashok Niyogi

# UNDERCURRENTS

*This one is for Pranesh, who is grossly overweight, told my driver to mow down sundry motorcycles and rickshaws, and ultimately motivated the driver to hit the Finance Minister's car; I love you, sweet - heart.*

## I

Take me into your womb, Israel,  
Rebirth me as a beggar  
With malnourished  
Child in the crook of my arms,  
Whining at railroad crossings  
While Genghis Khan  
Piles up his skulls,  
Caterpillars gorge  
On giant monsoon leaves  
And become butterflies,  
As Kolkata walks on.

## II

Camels tread  
Where humans fear  
And yet,  
The humans are blessed by God;  
Camel milk in Ulan Bator  
In agony my garments I tore,  
And wore  
What I wear,  
As Kolkata walks.

## III

In Kalighat  
The naked black lady  
In the Greek Orthodox sanctuary,  
As the car lurches over tramways,  
I see you,  
Virgin Lady,  
I see you go to church.  
With Kolkata,  
As Kolkata walks on.

## IV

Gossamer threads,  
Tire treads over steel girders  
Take silted waters over the silt;  
In this humidity, flowers wilt,  
The tides will turn  
Porpoises will have their watery fun,  
And just as the Ganga breaks up  
Into estuaries, slows down, before it meets  
the sea,  
So is Kolkata,  
It will walk on.

V

Heritage bridges  
Buckling like a bow-legged mule,  
Spices, incest and astute avarice,  
Supply the fuel;  
On this street there never was a duel  
Just blood extracted from human mules,  
That you see out of your taxi window  
Drawing carts with windless tires,  
Over merciless tram-lines,  
Trams are stationary  
Because of power outage  
Just as life is,  
Yet in the shadows that candles throw  
Grotesque, on dilapidated walls across Kyd  
Street,  
Kolkata walks on..

VI

The sun went the wrong way  
So I shall have to sway,  
And duck and dance  
Go every which way  
But in the Victorian cadence,  
Of pouring goblets into an apurtenance,  
Aurobindo stays,  
Unmoved by pigeon-shit  
As Victoria is;  
Royalty shows  
And Kolkata walks.

VII

*A hundred years from today,  
Who is it that sits and reads  
My poem,  
Curious, intrigued?*

Robindranath, crows keep vigil,  
Over garbage heaps  
Rotting in the monsoon sun,  
Giant leaps;  
Trees grow out of your ears,

After a heavy downpour,  
Streets are waterlogged,  
With filth bubbling up  
From manhole covers  
As Kolkata wades on.

VIII

Subterranean rivers sustain  
Undercurrents of culture

Despite the moisture  
On your upper lip,  
Kolkata walks on.

IX

Ascetic boxed in  
By Victorian angels,  
There is a Neruda revival  
In newspaper supplements  
And little magazines,  
Neruda essays and Neruda prizes;

Pablo, your Macchu Picchu  
Stands white and tall and still,  
In my dreams,  
I see a Peruvian  
Fall off a hand-pulled rickshaw

As Kolkata walks on.

X

Skeletal art,  
In crumbling brickwork  
Of dead columns,  
From dust to dust  
I lust  
As Kolkata walks on.

XI

Tramlines give you abdominal cramps,  
Tramps bathe by the leaking water hydrant,  
An old Sikh with 'hennaed' beard  
Waits his turn,  
Vodka fumes waft from and across my nos-  
trils,  
It has to rain,  
How will they transplant the paddy,  
How will I wet my feet?  
As Kolkata walks.

XII

*The Lord is my shepherd  
I shall not want  
Psalm 23.*

Bluebeard and sundries,  
Gathered in the Auschwitz gloom  
Counting golden tooth fillings,  
  
As Kolkata walked on.

XIII

Portents turn out impotent,  
Rain clouds with pregnant bellies,  
Are nothing but gas,

Bloated with little purpose,  
Blown away by the wind  
Burned by the sun;  
Sweat leaves deposits of salt  
There has to be some bloodletting  
The proverbial wetting of the pants,  
Malnutrition,  
The rising price of rice,  
The 'poverty' laureate,  
Is in Town  
  
A solitary shower  
A stumble here or there,  
And Kolkata walks on.

XIV

The wind picks up in the morning light,  
There are dimples in the ripples,  
Lakeside.  
Leaves turn upside down,  
Bells clang,  
In morning fervor,  
In temples there is cross-fire,  
As good conquers evil,  
Hovels outside temples;  
  
In hovels whores yawn,  
And Kolkata walks on.

XV

Towers of silence,  
Bodies to vultures,  
Minds to culture,  
And sundry other birds of prey,  
Sunshine  
Reflecting off sharded window glass  
Pushed and pulled,  
Buffeted this way and that,  
As Kolkata walks on.

XVI

On my way,  
All alone,  
My lamp is snuffed out,  
The wind picks up  
And there is a storm.

Now, the storm and me  
Are companions in arms,  
Armstrong  
On the moon,  
While I swoon  
On backstreets of Verona,

Matadors,  
A swirl of the cape,  
I drape you in a thousand mysteries,  
The eclipse of the midday sun,  
And as always the storm,  
As Kolkata walks on.

XVII

Not words only,  
Friend, sweetheart,  
Sometimes, once in a while

Touch me with your soul.

The fatigue,  
The perpetual thirst,  
How do I quench this,  
Which way do I turn?

Oh! So romantic,  
Touch me,  
Brush past me  
Once,  
Just as Kolkata does.

XIX

With sixteen balance teeth,  
It sits heavy on my tongue,  
And yet,  
It is built so beautiful,  
It slips into fragrance as it were,  
Without sleep;

I try  
To fry an egg in the morning sun,  
And the flower-laden tree is deaf-mute,

On the note of a flute,  
Kolkata walks on.

XX

In Writers' Building,  
Writers write,  
Contrite;  
And yet  
I look for touts  
Filling Post office forms,  
I know that all the while,  
Tides ebb and flow,  
And Kolkata walks on.



XXI

On this night of storms  
I have a date with the winds,  
    A tryst with you,  
    My friend, my me.

And 'Spivach' will see,  
She will hear the train,  
Sounds in the deep of night  
    As Kolkata walks on.

XXII

Slow, ever slow,  
    Lamps are lit,  
The moon will not be allowed  
    To peep through  
As the city tosses and turns  
    In its slumber;  
    Crumpled sheets,  
And the air is like glue,  
Through oceans of treacle,  
    Kolkata walks on.

XXIII

From every branch  
    A candle flames,

Whenever you come  
    You raise the magic,

I find you in wildflowers  
    On wayside shrubs,

I add and add  
    And total up;

Now, if the calculator misbehaves,  
    It does,

But I can still steal  
This city from the seals,

Whales spout  
As Kolkata walks on.

XXIV

What I took from you  
On the grass of 'Princep Ghat',  
Eyes turned turtle  
Gazing at woolly cloud,  
I give back to you  
With the ebb and flow,  
Go.

The ice-cream vendor will stand  
Where he does,  
Pigeons will continue to shit  
On the Jubilee Queen,  
Carriages with horses  
Grazing the land,  
Holding hands  
On the promenade.

Football fans piled onto hired trucks,  
Madness  
In the afternoon slush;  
And then the evening sun,  
Sets fire to a 'Tata Center' window,  
A lone mounted policeman  
Canter and pirouettes in the afternoon rain.

Take back your sweaty palm,  
Cease and desist  
From perking up your impudent breasts  
Against my elbow.

Kolkata, walk on.

XXV

Drunk blind  
On the top deck of a bus,  
Lurching madly  
Through tram lines  
While beggars beg

And hawkers hawk,  
Mothers stalk  
Children  
Outside school gates,

Slippers from 'Radu's' shop  
Awkward glances  
At flyovers and new found girls,  
Flared jeans  
Tight at the crotch.

Take your temple  
Beneath the tree,  
Kolkata, walk with me.

XXVI

When I walk up to his door  
For alms,  
He sings psalms.

Whenever, whichever way I try,  
I cry.

Then I walk  
And Kolkata walks with me.

# Gotta Get Me a Gun

Brad Wilk

A barrel of a .38 wedged into the base of my neck; the hooded intruder nudged me into the bedroom. Rolling out a swivel chair from the computer desk he stuck the barrel in the small of my back, pressed down my shoulder and forced me to sit. By the only window in the L-shaped bedroom, he opened the dresser, snatched a pair of dotted briefs from the draw and stuffed them into my mouth. Yanking the phone off the night stand, he ripped the cord from the jack and wound it around my head and waist, until every bit was used. "Much better" he said, pulling on the cord, kissing my cheek, "You talk too much and I don't like talk, talk makes me nervous"

When he left the room I tried to squirm free but the cord was too tight, digging into the skin of my bare arms, not giving an inch. Pushing off the bed post with a free foot I rolled towards the window and tried screaming for help but the only cry was in my head, a muffled, pitiful moan that nobody would hear. I rolled back to my previous spot, not wanting to raise suspicion. I tried to think, to somehow develop a plan: my gut felt impending death: it sensed he was near the end of whatever crazy thoughts had piled up in his head and I felt I had to do something or he would unload on my head, my chest and God knows where else.

I heard, "Please no, please don't do this" coming from the living room. So absorbed with escaping, I had forgotten about Hannah. Am I man? What about you're woman? I made another futile attempt to break free of the cord, then, intent on doing something; I guided my way into the living room using the tips of my toes.

In the living room, everyone was there: my buddies, my parents, my closest relatives and of course my girlfriend Hannah. "Surprise", they screamed as Hannah jumped on my lap and gave me a wet kiss on the cheek. "Very funny" I mumbled through the underwear, "You got me good" But all I could think about was buying a gun, something small and effective, just in case, because I hated surprises and that feeling of helplessness I felt just moments before.

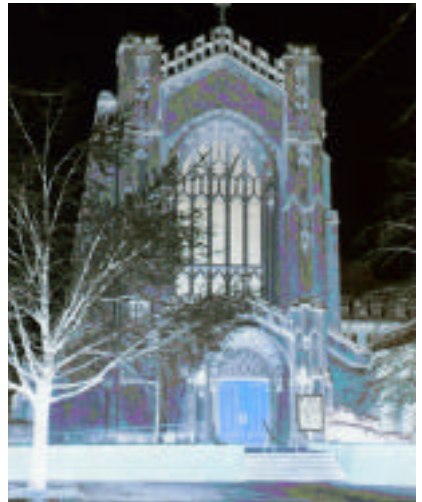
from the novel  
**AWAKENING**  
by Michel Sauret  
  
Chapter 1

My eyes burst open like windows desperately trying to draw in fresh air. I wake up gasping, a sound resembling a choked off scream. My lungs heave, sucking thinly and wheezing. Suddenly, all at once, in a rush of a condensed breath, my chest expands to the farthest stretch of my skin. A moment ago I felt like I was suffocating, or worse yet drowning on internal liquids, my lungs filled to the brim in fluid. Now all I can manage is a ration of slow and deep breaths.

Long, dripping streams of sweat run from my face, reaching down the entire length of my body. My shaggy hair clings to my forehead like a wet mop. I wipe my face with my long sweatshirt sleeve, but even my clothes are drenched.

It takes me a moment to realize that I'm lying on a softly carpeted ground. I look around and notice that I'm occupying the center stage in front of the altar inside of St. Regis Church. What seem like hundreds of faces look back at me with curious expressions, tainted by shock. An old man with a cane is shaking terribly, his cane rattling a droned vibration on the floor. He swallows hard. A lady no younger than him presses her hand on his shoulder, and he manages to hold the cane still. The church falls to silence.

A swarming headache screams from within my skull. It drills inside of my head, filling my blurring vision with streaks of light. My vision



stammers, and I'm about to collapse back down to the ground, when suddenly my whole body convulses in a twitch. The crowd of people jumps at the motion, startled by it. I blink once, then again, squeezing my face tightly each time. A second passes and a blur warps my vision for an instant, then it goes back to normal.

My heart pounds at my chest from within as if it were trying to get out. Terror strikes me, accompanied hand-in-hand by confusion.

How did I get up here?

I try to sit up a little, and for a second the headache takes a step up in its blurring effects like a carnival ride spinning faster and faster.

All the while my breaths become only heavier and deeper. With each breath, my chest expands and contracts in heavy pumps. I cough up a nasty burst of air, and swirls of saliva escape along with it.

The entire front row of people is still, and I assume the same follows with the rows behind. They all watch me intently with open eyes and dropped jaws. There isn't a single stir of movement anywhere. Hundreds of eyes just stare at me as if they were watching some horrible disaster. A few people are holding one another, and small children embrace their mothers as tightly as they can. Their faces are mixed up. Some are blank, while others can't seem to contain their terror.

A small child with short curly hair begins to cry, cutting away from the silence. His mother holds him tighter, trying to shush him. It's a soothing hush that leaves her lips, powerful even within its own quivering fright.

Over my right shoulder is the priest, wearing a colorful tunic and clutching a heavy Bible to his chest. His expression is no different from the rest. As I turn to get a better look at him, he takes a frightened step backwards, almost tripping over the gown- or whatever- that drapes down to his feet. His round eyeglasses are poised on his nose at a crooked angle. His lips and jaw tremble. This makes his glasses twitch a little on his nose.

What just happened? Why am I the center of their complete, undivided attention?

Inside of my body, my stomach and intestines churn as if trying to disentangle themselves from one another. They're twisted in a knot that even a boy-scout would have trouble meddling with.

Through all this, I haven't moved much more than my waist. Here and now, all I want is to walk back to my seat (or better yet, run out), but I just can't bring myself to stand to my feet.

Now think. Since you can't move, at least try to think. Start with what you know.

Today is Sunday. I know that much just by looking around. Among the crowd, I spot out my Grandma who I came with today, just like all the past Sundays. She, like the rest, stares at me in a motionless gaze.

Think. Think!

What the hell's going on?

Start with today. Start with this morning. And suddenly I remember not everything- but enough. My grandma and I were walking to the entrance

of this church from the parking lot. She wore her mimic fur coat, and fake leather gloves. Cruelty to animals is a cruelty to ourselves, she's always said. Her heels-- one nearly falling apart-- clicked and clacked on the stern, cold ground. On her face she didn't wear much make up. Just a little blush toned her pale white skin with a little color. Her narrow eyes were warm in themselves, seeming to hold smiles of their own. Her real name is Katherine Elisa Christ- by marriage- but I've always called her Gammy from ever since I was little.

We're Catholic, if that makes any difference. Well, let's be honest. She's Catholic, but to say that the same was true for me would be a bit of a stretch. To me, religion makes no more sense than an old lady with a turban hat telling you who you will be just by looking at a handful of cards.

Every bitter Sunday, Gammy drags me to church. She knows I don't share her same beliefs, and I know that no matter what I do or say, every Sunday I still end up here regardless. It's a trade in a way. She takes care of me, and in return I accompany her here once a week.

As we walked with quick steps, our breaths condensed into warm clouds. Winter still lingers outside. It doesn't care that we're now in April, and that it should've been replaced by spring by now. Clumps of dirty snow still grip the ground outside here and there, mocking us with their ugly presence.

As always, this morning we were late. I held the door open for Gammy to get her inside quicker.



“Thank you, Jeremy. You’re such a gentleman,” she’d said as she gently plucked the gloves off her hands, finger by finger.

We walked inside the church, scrubbing our dirty feet on the mat, and shook off the last shreds of cold that clung to our clothes. Walking up the center isle in search of a seat for two, I could sense their eyes watching us. Faces and necks turned to follow our steps. I heard whispers, and the hair on the back of my neck stood on ends. I shot a gleaming stare over my shoulder, where suddenly a conversation stopped. The priest, who had already begun the service, offered a meek smile at us. He waited for us to find our seats, and then he went on. He and Gammy exchanged a glance; he nodded his head, and then began to chant a few words.

He spoke a few phrases, and the crowd responded.

The good thing about coming here late is the reward of a shorter mass.

Then the priest preached ‘the word of the Lord’ as he calls it, and I leaned back in my seat. I looked around, watching this lost audience speak in unison.

“The Gospel according to...”

-whoever. I didn’t care. Really I wasn’t even paying attention. Instead my mind began its wandering, searching for something better to entertain my thoughts.

In the next isle over to my left I saw a smoking-gorgeous brunette with her legs crossed. Her skin was somewhat pale, but the smooth surface of it allowed for streaks of light to be reflected off them. I followed the trace of light from her toes up to her thighs. Covering her thighs, she wore a tight miniskirt that was small enough to be stuffed in one’s mouth, which could be quite handy if you were in the process of role-playing. She had taken off her coat and set it down to her side, revealing a skimpy, white tank top that showed off a mouthful of cleavage and a pair of visible, piercing nipples.

How girls can pull off wearing so little clothes when it’s barely thirty degrees outside, I’ll never understand. But they seem to know exactly what they’re doing. Especially Catholic girls. They have a way of pulling just the right strings, and flicking on all the obvious switches.

She looked over at me and gave me a quick smile. Her bleach white teeth gleamed between her lips as if she knew what I was thinking. I winked at her, and she looked away with an even bigger smile. She pinched on the edges of her skirt and pulled it down a little.

Tease.

She reminded me of a girl I met Friday night at my house during a party I threw. Her name was Trisha, or Terry... I forget. Her name isn't important. But I do remember every other detail of her naked body, grinding and pumping against my own.

Anyway, Trisha or Terry... No wait, Tara- that's what it was. How could I forget? I must have screamed her name at least a dozen times when we were together. Funny thing is that she screamed her own name too.

She was a fun one.

So what if she was a little drunk and I took advantage of her? Everybody does it. And it's not like she didn't enjoy it. She moaned so loud that my friends could hear her over the music. Some could even hear us from outside. Good thing Gammy wasn't home. After we were done she ran to the bathroom and threw up chunks of liquor mixed in with undigested foods. The color was peachy. The smell, on the other hand, was not. Once she was finished with her retching noises I went to the toilet and flushed the condom we had used. She was sprawled with her arms over the edge of the bathtub. She wasn't wearing anything but her red panties. No thong unfortunately. Drops of water fell from the showerhead and plopped on the back of her head. I woke her up, nudging her shoulders, told her to brush her teeth, and had her go down on me for seconds.

It was a good night.

I think I still have her number somewhere, maybe in one of my drawers. Who knows- who cares. Not like I'm going to call her. She was a spur of the moment type of thing. There was no passion or 'love' in it. I just wanted to have fun, and she seemed more than willing to help out. Really, Tara was no more than a rebound girl.

Just two days earlier my ex, Megan Scott, had dumped me. "We should see other people," or some other shit along that line, she had said. She was always looking for other people, even when we were together.

"So we're through?" I had asked her, picking at something under my fingernails.

"You can still call me," was her answer.

"Yeah, I probably won't."





Then Friday night, there she was at my house with all her friends, holding one of the many beers that she would down that night. I saw her looking at me, so I looked away. I looked for a good score, a pretty lady, and a little fun for the night. After all, it had been her idea to look elsewhere.

I knew how Megan would react if she saw me hitting on Tara. I knew exactly the face she would make. Pinched lips and slivered eyes. An obvious expression of jealousy. I didn't even have to look back to see that I was right. I flirted with Tara, offered her a drink, and minutes later we were up in my room.

Between Megan and me, this was our fourth break up. Honestly, I don't want to deal with her anymore. Hopefully by hearing me scream Tara's name, she would get the message straight and clear. In the end, I knew I was doing nothing more than playing the game according to her rules.

Moments later, after my mind had finally finished with its wandering, the preacher spoke up. "Let us rise and join in hymn," he said while raising his hands, calling us to stand. Quite oppositely I kicked back and relaxed. I made myself comfortable in my bench and put my elbows out to my sides. After all this is the "house of God" and I'm his invited guest. Gammy gave me a stern look, but I paid no attention to it. Slowly my neck started to tilt back, and without knowing it, I had fallen asleep.

\*\*\*

And that's all I can remember. Having thought back to all that hasn't cleared anything up. I'm just as confused as before, and now angry because of it. My face flushes with heat. Again, I look at the crowd dumfounded, hoping to draw in any clue that they're willing to give me.

None.

Everyone is still the same immobilized statue they were before.

Struggling, I stand up, and turn to the priest. He takes another frightened step backwards, and holds on to his huge Bible even tighter. I gulp a thick chug of saliva, which feels thick and curdy in my throat. The priest's jaw stammers, emitting cut off sounds that aren't even half words. Wearily, in a soft voice I ask, "What's going on?" My voice sounds childish and slightly immature. It sounds so innocent and scared.

A silent moment passes and I feel like screaming at the top of my lungs. Finally, he works up the courage to speak and, in a soft enchanted voice, he whispers, "You...You flew."

# ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Joseph Klipple

The news stunned Clancy when he heard it on his car radio while driving home from work: “Sheriff’s deputies are dragging Jenkins Reservoir for the body of Vera Huddleston who apparently drowned after falling from the bass boat of her former husband, retired firefighter Sam Huddleston. The woman is said to be a resident of Wilmington, Delaware. The much-decorated Huddleston has operated an aquarium manufacturing firm here since he retired from the fire department on disability in 1992....” The announcement took Clancy back thirty years to when he was first married and the Huddlestons lived down the block.

“You’ve heard?” Millicent asked when he walked in the door.

“Just the radio bulletin. What was she doing around here?”

“I asked Beth. She said she thought Vera was making overtures. Wanted to get back with Sam.”

Clancy couldn’t imagine that. The two men were never more than acquaintances, but he admired Sam greatly and thought what a shame it was for him to have an albatross like Vera. No man would volunteer for the same torture a second time, not even a genuine hero like Sam who had saved three lives in fires.

“Why would he give her the time of day?”

“Probably couldn’t avoid her. Beth said she showed up at the fish show, the one they hold every year to benefit some children’s disease. Sam’s always an exhibitor.” Millicent never liked Vera--mostly because she was an incessant talker who was always ready with an unkind word--but Beth, who lived next door in those early days, worked hard to be everyone’s friend. When Vera moved to Wilmington after the divorce, Beth kept in touch.

“What were they doing out at Jenkins?” he asked. “I thought she hated fishing, always bitching that he liked bass better than he liked her.”

“Maybe she was trying to show him she had changed,” Millicent said. “It’s something a desperate woman would do. She probably wore out her welcome at Wilmington and didn’t have anywhere else to turn.”

After dinner, Clancy sat for a while in front of his own aquarium, watching the guppies warily on guard against the red wagtails from the safety of the water weeds. He thought about the times he had spent in Sam’s showroom admiring the huge multileveled and grottoed tanks which were trademarked Huddleston designs and which had become such a rage among affluent yuppie fish fanciers. Huddleston’s own home was said to have a two-storied tank encircled by a stairway. Clancy knew, of course, that it wasn’t something he’d ever buy for himself. Millicent the collector couldn’t spare the space. She already had too many cabinets filled with figurines. He cut the musing short, deciding he needed a good night’s sleep. As the medical examiner, he’d be required to do an autopsy when they found the body, and he wanted to be well rested for that chore.

They brought her in the next afternoon. Aside from a few abrasions caused by the grappling hooks, Vera looked like the usual drowning victim that hadn’t been too long in the water. She was wearing one of Sam’s old fire department sweatshirts and a pair of what were probably his jeans which had been rolled up at the cuffs. Clancy noticed with more curiosity than emotion that she had aged considerably since he’d seen her last and had put on enough weight so that Sam’s jeans were almost snug around her waist. Broderick, the deputy who had brought the body in, was eager to give Clancy the details. Huddleston hadn’t left the scene once during the search.

“He was very distressed, blaming himself over and over for not insisting she wear a life vest,” Broderick said. “She apparently refused and I gather she was a hard woman to make do much of anything.”

Clancy nodded at the truth of that. Millicent had guessed right about why they were at the lake. “Huddleston said he hadn’t seen her in years when she showed up, begging him to take her back,” Broderick said. “He told us that wasn’t in the cards, even though she was acting nicer than he could ever remember. He took her to his house because she didn’t have any money or any place to stay.

“He said she was the one who suggested they go fishing, as a way of showing how she’d changed. I gather she never cared for it before. They headed out straight-aways, so they could be on the water at first light, and he was attaching a lure to his rod when he heard a splash. She was gone when he looked around. Doesn’t think she ever surfaced.

“He tried to find her, of course,” the officer said. “He’s still as brave as they make ‘em, but he had no luck, so he called us.”

Clancy’s examination established drowning as the cause of death. He walked his report over to the office of Sheriff Grasskopf. The sheriff wondered if Vera could have jumped from the boat intentionally, perhaps confident that her ex-husband would rescue her. Or was she desperate enough to end her life in a way that would forever torment Huddleston? Clancy told the sheriff there was nothing in the evidence to support either scenario.

They had agreed to declare the drowning accidental when young Renfrow, a gung-ho officer who drove everybody up the wall, burst into the sheriff’s office and made the flat-out assertion that Huddleston had killed his ex on purpose.

Renfrow had been a good uniform deputy, but making detective went to his head. Clancy was a little sorry for the fellow. He knew the sheriff’s feelings bordered on contempt.

“You’re claiming that Sam held her head under water out there in the lake?” the sheriff asked.

“Not there,” Renfrow said. “In that big tower of a fish tank in his house.”

“Come off it,” said the sheriff. “That’s the craziest thing I’ve heard. That tank’s got a top on it. I’ve been there and seen it.”

“Sure,” Renfrow said, “but the lid comes off for cleaning, which Huddleston seems to have been doing that night.”

“You questioned him?”

“Learned that from his cleaning lady.”

“Oh?”

“I had a hunch, so I check out the neighborhood and learned of the scream the woman next door heard after midnight. She thought it came from a party the college kids were having across the street. They get boisterous on Friday nights. I looked into that. The party ran late. One fellow remembers seeing Huddleston leave with the boat sometime after three. He said he thought Huddleston was alone. It was dark, of course, and the fellow wasn’t exactly sober.”

“More’n likely drunk as hell,” the sheriff said.

“So I rang Huddleston’s door chime” Renfrow said. “Mabel, his cleaning lady, answered. She was using a wet vacuum to soak up water from the carpet on the second floor landing at the top of the tank. Real

squishy.”

“Hold on,” the sheriff said. “Did you identify yourself as a deputy?”

“No need to. She’s known me for years.”

“And you just moseyed on inside? Without asking permission or saying why you were there?”

“No need for that, either. She’d heard the news, but decided to go to work anyway, since it was her regular day. Has her own key. She said Huddleston must have been cleaning the tank. I asked if that ever caused spills. She said sometimes, but this was worse than usual. There was something that looked like seaweed on the carpet, and a little dead fish like a guppy.”

Clancy felt sympathy for the woman, having mopped up his own tank-cleaning messes several times.

“I climbed the stairway and noticed the water seemed to be about a foot below the top of the tank,” Renfrow said. “I asked about that and Mabel said sometimes Huddleston removed water to mix in chemicals. I wondered if he usually left the job unfinished. She said he must have been interrupted.

“Then I found Vera’s clothing laid out on a chair in the bedroom. They were dry.”

“And why shouldn’t they be?” Clancy heard exasperation in the sheriff’s voice.

“I think they got wet when he drowned her, and he dried them in the clothes dryer. We should get a search warrant and check out the lint trap.”

“A search warrant?” the sheriff exploded. “Where’s your probable cause? All you got is suspicions based on an unauthorized search.”

“There’s the scream,” Renfrow objected, “and what the student saw.”

“And that would have been the time to ask for a warrant. Not after you stomped around illegally in your presumed crime scene. Didn’t you

ever hear of the Fourth Amendment?”

“We could at least bring him in for questioning.”

“About what? You want me to humiliate one of the finest, bravest men any of us have ever known by asking him if he lured his former wife



up to where he was pretending to clean his fish tank so he could grab her by surprise, up-end her and hold her under water until her breathing stopped. Giving her time for only one scream which more than likely came from a drunk coed. Give me a break.”

The sheriff swallowed hard. “Renfrow, this is an order. Back off. If you ever had a case, which you don’t, you messed it up with your unprofessional shenanigan. We’re settling this matter the way it should be. Accidental drowning.”



As soon as he left the sheriff’s office, Clancy wondered if he should have said something. He thought that he might have, had it been someone other than the cocky Renfrow making the case, and if the entire affair hadn’t been so clouded by memories of the old times and his personal feelings about the people involved.

Then, too, he didn’t have enough scientific knowledge of tropical fish to know if any of them might survive in Carolina waters. Aquarium owners were always dumping fish they no longer wanted in lakes and streams. He supposed some of the fish adapted, so you couldn’t say for sure where a particular one came from. He hadn’t thought it significant enough to include in the autopsy report.

There was really only one thing for him to do. When he got back to his office, he removed a small plastic bag from the refrigerator, carried it to the bathroom and emptied it into the toilet, flushing away the little blonde guppy he had removed from Vera’s trachea.

# Let's Get Crazy

Ed Bowers

I was eating in a cheap restaurant and reading the newspaper the other day when I happened upon an article about a man from Japan who went over to Thailand, or some other country, and made the acquaintance of a woman who was an art student, and then stabbed her to death. My food had not yet arrived, so I concentrated on the little bowl of soup that came with the entrée, then returned to my article.

It seems that the man was not content with stabbing the woman to death, but then went on to eat her. When the authorities apprehended him, they put him in jail. But his father was an extremely wealthy and influential Japanese corporate executive, and pulled strings to have his son extradited to Japan, where he spent fifteen months in a mental hospital and then was released with no strings attached. I found this amusingly ironic, since I know a lot of people who have spent fifteen years in jail for committing victimless crimes whose sole motive was so that they could survive. But the story continued as my food arrived.

When the corporate executive's son got out of the mental hospital, he wrote a book about eating the woman he'd killed. He said that the taste of her body was more exquisitely delicious than anything he'd ever eaten before, and could only be compared to the flavor and texture of raw tuna. After the book was published, it became a best seller, and the author went on to write five more pot boilers that went off the charts in popularity. He then procured a job with a magazine writing restaurant reviews, and is considered the golden boy of the avant garde art crowd in Japan.

I have to had it to Japan. It's such a little country, but its polite humility when confronted with a super power, allows them to bow in respect, and take America's lead every time. What we have here is an international short person complex, where the little country is inspired to show the big one that it can surpass it in all categories of human endeavor.

or, be it for good or evil. I finished my food and left the newspaper on the table.

Later that evening, I was drinking at a bar, when an American Indian alcoholic prostitute I've known for years, walked up to me, kissed me on the ear, and again asked me to take her home, so that she could have a base of operations to work out of, while she plyed her trade on the street. This woman, who is nothing but trouble, suddenly looked good to me.

"Listen," I said to her, "I am a writer, and since I'm in San Francisco, I am forced to read my material in public exhibitions that have been designed to be as annoying as possible. I'd prefer that people would just stay home and read my stuff, but publishing being the way it is, and people not having the time, or perhaps even the ability to read anymore, I must make a public jackass out of myself in order to communicate my work, so I have an idea. You and I go into the avant garde art business together. I advertise a poetry reading where, while I read my work, you give head to every man and woman in the place. Given the sexual maturity of this city, which is on the level of the thirteen year old boy who sniffs glue as a hobby, and blows up frogs for fun, we should get about five hundred people at each reading. Now this is the good part. We charge them two hundred dollars a piece to get it. Then after the reading is finished, I take a machete, and chop off one of your fingers, cook it in a microwave over with a little butter and garlic, and eat it in front of a sexually satiated audience. We do this show ten times, until we run out of fingers. It is then that we go on to your toes, and do ten more shows. You do have ten toes don't you? The overhead on this, if you'll excuse the expression, will be minimal, and by the time you run out of fingers and toes, and your mouth feels as if it has been forced to play the harmonics for a hundred years, we will both be rich and can retire as famous artists. But we have to take a non-nuptial agreement, that is one of us dies before the other, the money goes to the surviving party. Given the fact that you are insistent upon pursuing the role of a typical American Indian suicide, and that I have not seen you sober one day in four years, except once when you confessed to me all the lies you've ever told, with your new found wealth, you'll probably drink yourself to death in six months. But it's all good, because I will take our money and continue to spread the poetic movement we started throughout the world, in your name. I'll even write a book about you, and the taste of your fingers and toes."

She stared at me, then said, "A lot of people around here think that



you're on LSD, and now I know you are."

"On the contrary," I replied, "I don't even smoke pot anymore, because it causes me not to be able to remember my dreams. Reality, however, is constantly interfering with me, in ways that drugs never did. Now why don't you just go over to the lonely guy sitting at the end of the bar, and ask him for a date, and while you're at it, inquire as to whether he would like to hear a poem while he is getting jacked off."

I went back to my drink, and the American Indian alcoholic left to ply her trade. I haven't seen her around lately. Too bad she didn't take me up on my offer. But then, there are winners and losers in this world, and the losers never take advantage of a winning proposition when they see it.

# Evil

Dr. Deborah FerBer

Evil travels quickly  
on the back of a black cat  
stocking its pray at night  
taking small deliberate steps

Slowly moving closer  
observing the challenge  
strategizing the kill  
death is in the air

Remains are never found



# Archaeology

Kurt MacPhearson

Tattered remnants lurking in the heart  
    of a dig,  
bones lain in fetal position  
beside pottery shards.

The life I have lived  
may one day be read  
by the same methods.  
But will the scholar know  
    of the crimes,  
the love lost,  
horrors visited in the dark  
    of my dreams?  
Could they be broken down,  
a linear map  
that would somehow make sense  
    of my existence  
and locate the point where I went wrong?

# Glossary

Kurt MacPhearson

Choices

dictionary pages  
infinite things I could have done  
but blind temptation  
ruled the soul  
and control of limbs  
were given to drink

If I had

one sand of the glass  
to open the mind's book  
and take a random stab



And definition

under the finger  
might have shed light  
on what I'd been doing.

# Flowers

Kurt MacPhearson

Scraps of paper  
perfumed tears  
and wilted petals  
strewn across the floor  
are all that's left  
of what I've brough home

# Christ went to the wrong planet

Scott C. Holstad

there are no fucking miracles  
aside from the fact that i'm  
still alive and far too many  
other people are too  
why  
in the world  
people aren't throwing  
themselves off bridges in  
droves i'll never know

i've been shot at  
my dog's been shot  
i've been homeless  
i've knifed myself  
    why wait for someone  
    else to do it?

i've been cuffed  
i've been in court  
    3 times before the same  
    judge in one fall alone

i  
drive 160 on the freeway  
in the hopes of a

fiery escape  
my major  
x-mas wish  
and  
like everyone else  
i get shit  
life on a razor's edge  
words that kill  
and guns that don't

*[From my book "Shadows Before  
the Maiming"]*

# Exit Wounds

Scott C. Holstad

You appear as one normal,  
Yet serpents slither behind  
Your eyes

As the Moon rises in Hell  
You blow kisses at the Dead

Indescribable.  
Met my match  
At long last.

Zyprexa  
Risperdal  
Don't need the pain ones  
Although a friend is taking  
160mg of Methodone per dose  
throughout the day

The arm's not pockmarked,  
Merely scarred with ribbons  
Of knives

We live this life as though  
We were already amongst  
The dead  
And  
Perhaps  
We are

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