



down in the dirt

v017

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revealing all your dirty little secrets

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Scars Publications *art*

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PATRIOTISM

Michelle Greenblatt

the desert is boiling with bodies;
the sand pink, cars black

coffins; my friend, he died
after 8 operations he was

nineteen he was a patriot
I'd get drunk

if I drank I'd get high if
I smoked~it's better

if I stop here than tell you
how his mother's face rotted

with tears instead I should
seduce you

into the American dream
of the war

on terror not ask
you to think

of the boys and girls we
sacrifice for it I should



teach you the philosophy
of The Land of the Free

I should really stop
now instead of telling you

Russell's body never made it back
to Florida the insurgents

stole it and burned it
who am I to talk about

soldiers or war or patriotism
when I would never

join the army or die
for my country?



KISS OF CHOCOLATE

By Harvey K. Slade

How?

The drive to work had never bothered him before. Forty to fifty minute of sanctuary from the world, as if the ever so faint tint of the windows insulated him from worry. No, worries, as in plural, as in myriad. But insulation works both ways. Today, Steven shared the car with his worries, the same way a plague victim shares his body with his plague.

"How?" he asked for the hundredth time. They'd been so careful: the pills, the cycles, the prescriptions. They'd done everything to avoid the situation they were in. "How?" Steven asked again, hopelessness displacing the last, lingering traces of rage.

Despite Precaution

Mary, Steven's wife, swore she'd been careful. Somehow, despite all their precautions, she was pregnant. Two home test verified the doctor's prognosis. She'd cried when she told him. Alone in the shower, so had he.

Rot

The bookstore came into view: a large, sprawling thing as independent bookstores went. Once, it had belonged to a thriving, prosperous chain. Now it stood alone, like the last surviving appendage of some giant organism laid low by rot and disease.

The Big A

The reality of it was, they had no money. Steven's bookstore job couldn't have paid the rent on their one bedroom and barely covered the maintenance costs of their single car. Mary only made slightly more as a bank teller. Health insurance existed, possibly, but that particular grain remained, for them, a myth. The time off work, the costs to carry and birth the child safely, let alone properly... Having the baby would surely doom them both.

Subscribing to no particular religion, the answer was clear for Steven. The big A. Abortion. Mary, however, felt entirely different.

Cucumber Blossoms

Steven remembered his first day at the bookstore, the animosity they'd shown the refugee. He'd been the only survivor of his branch, the only one offered continued employment at another location. Little had he known the powers above had had to make room for him. Steven never met the woman who's job he'd been given, but to judge by the loyalty of her former co-workers, she'd been very popular.

Bob, Mike, Sarah, booksellers who took a week to learn his name. Mrs. Humphres, the cold, severe woman with the gaze that impaled customers only after traveling the considerable length of her nose. The used book buyers, Don and Drew, who'd both been amicable, though the two were usually high enough to be friendly towards the booksellers, the customers, and the doorstep with equal sincerity. And Elizabeth, "Call me Liz," who wore summer dresses in the middle of winter and smelled of heather and cucumber blossoms. She had a habit of smiling infectious smiles that Steven couldn't help but reciprocate.

In the Beginning

But for Mary, Steven was alone in the big city, hundreds of miles and dozens of burned bridges from family or even a friend. In the beginning he'd lived alone, six months in a apartment with one spoon and a box for furniture. What he'd built since then, he'd built with his wife. So fully had she completed him, Steven didn't even know how to make his own friends anymore.

Burnt Beans

Not long after his first day in the new store, things improved for Steven. He loved books and loved working in a bookstore, and his enthusiasm endeared him to his co-workers. But not today. Somehow, the books no longer welcomed him. They accused him, they refracted and reverberated the foul look that was all his wife had for him anymore.

The smell of burnt beans curdled something in Steven's mouth. The coffee shop next door roasted their stock early on Mondays. Steven doubted anyone who'd actually had to smell the carbon reek of roasting coffee beans would voluntarily drink the stuff. The smell clung like a bad memory.

Indelible Frown

They'd discussed things like rational adults. Together, they'd reached a decision based on reason and prudence. Yet her face changed, not twisting in a furtive, transitory expression, but setting in an indelible frown, like a new feature; "You did this to me," it said. "You planted the seed in me and now you are making me kill it. And I will never, ever forgive you for any of it." So comprehensive and explanatory was the look, conversation between the two became...redundant.

Blurry Eyed and Oblivious

Steven's usual tasks did little to distract him. The others shuffled about on their own errands, blurry eyed and oblivious to his suffering. Somewhere in the store, Don and Drew laughed, cloaked and contained in a cubical of dented hardbacks and trashy bestsellers.

"Are you all right, young man?" Mrs. Humphres asked in the somber tones which, for her, passed as concern.

"I'm fine, Mrs. Humphres," Steven lied. "Just tired." He attempted a smile. Mrs. Humphres nodded, stamping her seal of approval on her co-worker's serious mood.

Feeling Anemic

His marriage was over, this Steven knew. He could sense the absence of his Mary's love, and it deflated him. He woke everyday feeling anemic. He would have given anything to go back to the way it was, back when she still seemed proud to be his wife. Steven had lived so long for her, he no longer knew how to live for anything else. He was only twenty-four.

Chocolate

Lunch time came, and with it no lessening in his anguish. Thoughts, serious thoughts, infiltrated Steven's mind. The rot was too deeply set, the cancer of his soul, too pervasive. And suddenly, Liz was standing beside him. Her hand hid behind her back as she waited for Steven's attention. The sunflowers on her dress defied the dingy winter weather. In spite of himself, Steven remembered summer. She smiled coyly, her green eyes flashing between errant strands of wavy, wheat-colored hair. Elizabeth knew something Steven didn't; she knew she was about to surprise him.

"You," she said, never ceasing to smile, "look like you need choco-



late." Liz took his hand, turned it palm up, and dropped a truffle there. Then she hopped away like a spring rabbit.

Crinkled red foil wrapped the chocolate. Steven peeled it away with exquisite care. In his mind, he played back every interaction he'd ever had with Liz. Nothing in his memory hinted at such a perfect kindness.

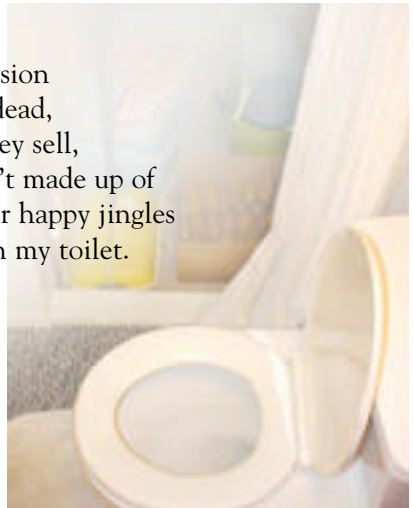
Once, in some obscure book, Steven read that nothing heals the heart like the attention of a beautiful woman.

Steven's teeth sank into the truffle as though it were ripe fruit. The taste: beyond anything he had ever imagined. A fresh, youthful exaltation infused his mind, heart, and mouth. It was like being kissed for the first time.

CLEAR WATER

Raud A. Kennedy

Below, a truck sweeps the street.
Soap washes my clothes, my body.
I clean incessantly while my mind
Struggles in the daily slop of ads.
Buy this, buy that, feel good, feel bad.
I can't sleep unless the radio is on.
I'm an addict who can't be alone
In the dark or the light.
I need what they're selling,
Want to be what they're selling.
I hate who I am. No glistening white teeth,
No confident smile, nor glistening hair,
Or six pack abs and odorless armpits.
I'm an ape, the human ape.
I pick my feet in the morning,
Urinate, defecate, scratch hidden parts
And release any number of gasses
From all my orifices.
The only skin cells
On the radio and television
Are mine, and they're dead,
And no matter what they sell,
I live in a body that isn't made up of
Pinprick dots of light, or happy jingles
About the blue water in my toilet.



ON THE RADJO

Raud A. Kennedy

A salesman for God
Blames the tidal wave
On Muslim sinners.
He says, 8 out of 10 tidal waves
Crash on Muslim shores.
I change the station.

AFTER FIVE

Raud A. Kennedy

In my blue suit and yellow power tie,
I'm the catch of the office.
Yet I mark my territory in bars
By pissing on the toilet seat.
I smoke only when I drink,
And only butts I've bummed.
The scent of the cologne
From the little bottle on my dresser
Fights with the underarm Speed Stick.
I live life out of a can,
Dinty Moore in the microwave,
Diet Coke on the coffee table.
Television on, remote in my hand,
A fat belly around my life's corner.

WJNK

G. A. Scheinoha

It always happens the same way. She struts by, scantily clad, heavily made up, pancake, shoot, there's a whole IHOP on her face. You're beaming upwards in an instant, rolled into a dense lump, a bowling ball with fingers stuffed into the holes, see, hear no evil, a mucous marble borne away beneath fluttering, drooped low low as awnings, earth tone painted Garfield lids. Snatched by the passing glimpse, the mascara tinted twitch of an extra terrestrial eye. Deposited mere moments or days later. Time looped through a Revlon induced, crop circled Cover Girl coma where seduction has no beginning, no end, just the same face; the random glare of roving lights in the sky off a plastic smile though rigidly fixed in porcelain place, Kewkie complexion.





HANDS ON

G. A. Scheinoha

Sure, you could TMP, train a monkey to run a press, grab a roller with his goofy chimpanzee paw, ink the plate, then seize the handle and set the works in motion: knock off a steadily growing pile of fresh print like some Gutenberg missing link.

Though that baboon would have a dickens of a time trying to set type, pluck each letter from the box and finesse them into place. All without an opposable thumb.

Easier for him to roll the cigarette he's now smoking, drooped from the curled lower lip, hunched over a typewriter as he hunts and pecks, tap, tap, tapping, gently rapping on your John Malkovich skull, brass pounding through these Morse code minutes, coagulated into the stuttering fragments of a tersely telegraphed prose poem such as this. Stop.

THE THOUGHT

Sandra E. Waldron

Lisa held her hands to her ears; hot tears slid profusely down her cheeks. If only Rob would hush. No matter how hard she tried to please him, nothing was ever good enough. Right now, he was yelling because the dinner she'd slaved for hours over was cold. But whose fault was it? - certainly not hers. He had come home late, drunk, as usual. He was far from perfect. So, what gave him the right to yell at her?"

"Get in here and take my steak and warm it!" he bellowed in his hateful – despised by her – voice.

She sucked in air. "Yes ... Yes ... "

His gritty-red eyes met hers with a glare. "What ya sniffin' at? Some kind of wife you are ... can't keep my dinner warm.

"It was hot when I cooked it four hours ago," she snapped, not believing her sudden burst of courage. She'd never spoke up to him before. She had been too afraid.

"That does it!" he snarled.

"I ... I didn't mean it, Rob. I'm sorry. Please!" She ducked automatically, expecting to be hit. "I didn't mean it."

"Too late. You already said it. Think you're smart, eh? Well, I'll take care of your grocery money from now on. Never trusted ya with it anyway."

"But ... But ..." she knew he would blow it on beer, and Timmy needed new sneakers for kindergarten. "Rob!"

"Shut up! Get in there and warm my steak!"

With shaking white hands – fork rattling against the porcelain plate – she took the dinner to the kitchen. If only she had one of those microwaves, it would make life a little easier, then she wouldn't have to listen to him nag about his supper being cold.

She rinsed out the skillet, plopped the steak back in, spooned the mashed potatoes into their pot and turned the burners on. Something in the sink sparkled – reflected sunlight from the kitchen window – so bright it blinded her temporarily ... all silvery and shimmering. She closed the

blinds so she could see. It was the butcher knife Rob had given her for Christmas. That was all he'd given her. He never bought her anything she wanted, desired, or needed – always something for the kitchen or house, something for wifely chores.

Rob's mumbling brought her back to the here and now. "Stupid female," he said. "That woman ain't worth the money it takes to feed her. Whimperin', snifflin', little slut."

More tears glossed her eyes. He was drunk! How dare he!

The knife twinkled, enticingly, as though saying "take me". She stared, hypnotized. It was actually a work of great art, of beauty, so smooth and bright. She envisioned herself picking it up and slowly, ever so slowly, walking to the living room, then, when Rob wasn't looking, she would come down with it, stab him in the back, neck, chest, legs, any and everywhere.

Her hands flew to her face. "Dear God! What am I thinking?"

"What's takin' ya so long, woman?"

She jerked and turned. He had slipped up behind her. Not fair. He'd been so quiet. How could a fumbling, stumbling drunk be so quiet?

"It's almost ready, honey," she said softly, not looking at him, feeling guilty for her dark thoughts.

"Now, it's honey, is it?" he snorted. "Ya know ya ain't gettin' your money – God only knows what ya blow it on – you've decided to be nice."

"I never blow money!"

"Yeah? Yeah? Tell me why there's never enough to pay the bills?"

"Your beer." There, she thought. She had finally said it.

"Bull!" He snatched a cold one from the refrigerator. "Buy the cheapest off-brand there is. Ya ain't gonna blame me!" He thumbed his chest and swayed at the same time.

Another beer is what you don't need, she thought, wishing he would fall.

"Where's Timmy?"

She'd been waiting for him to ask.

"He's spending the week with my mother. She picked him up early this morning."

He swaggered around to face her. "Without asking me if it was all right?"

"I really didn't think you would care."

"Look ... I'm his father."

"You never pay any attention to him. Unless it's to yell at him."

He gave her an icy stare, laid his head back and gulped down half his beer. It drooled down his unshaven chin. He straightened his head to nor-

mal position, red-veined eyes still glaring.

She turned away. Disgusting!

“Feeling high and mighty today, aren’t ya?”

Her eyes fell to the sparkling knife again, so pretty and smooth, so keenly sharp. She wondered why she’d never realized how beautiful it was, until today.

“You haven’t answered me!”

“It’s the last week of summer vacation, Rob. He’s been wanting to stay with Grandma all summer. I didn’t see any harm. Besides, it’ll do him good to get away for a little while.”

“Get away from me, ya mean. He stumbled off to watch TV.

Exactly what I mean, you drunken slob!

After she took Rob’s supper in to him, she went to take her bath. She stepped into the silky warmth and laid her head against the cool surface of the tub.

She’d barely closed her eyes when she thought of the knife. It was like it was beckoning to her, wanting her, to use it. The thought scared her. Crazy! She wasn’t a murderer. No matter how much she hated Robert, she couldn’t kill him – or could she?

She tried to push her mind into other things. The knife always returned, as though it had a will all its own.

Again, she found herself thinking of what it would be like to plunge that fine blade into his alcohol-saturated, reeking body. She could picture crimson liquid spilling out of his torso, open wounds gaping raw, could see him lying in a pool of his own blood. And there would be a look of absolute horror on his face.

The corner of her mouth crooked up in a little smile. It would be so pleasant if ... No! She had to stop this. Stop it now! She yanked the chain on the plug and got out of the tub. Rest was what she needed. She’d take a couple of Advil and go to bed. Tomorrow, she would feel better, be able to think clearly. She wasn’t a killer. No ... nonsense.

Rob had fallen into a drunken stupor on the sofa. She was glad. He stunk. She went to bed.

For some reason she wasn’t sure of, she woke in the middle of the night. All was quiet. She couldn’t even hear Rob snoring his inebriated snore. She flipped back her covers and pulled herself out of bed. She stopped. The knife! Lying on the dresser! How did it get it here? She raised her arms, suspending them momentarily, halfway between her waist and shoulders, then drew them up, placing her fingers to her tem-

ples, pressing hard, trying to think.

Her mind was still a fog from sleep. Rob! Yes! He put it there. But then ... if he did, he knew what she'd been thinking. No! That was impossible. Still, how did it get there? Now, she was mad.

She snatched the knife up and went to the living room. All was still dark. She relaxed when she saw Rob was still asleep on the sofa, looking all gray and cool from the moonlight drifting in through the windows.

Maybe she had taken the knife to the bedroom and left it on the dresser? Her nerves. Yes. It was her nerves. Stress. Made a person do weird things. God knew she suffered from far too much. Sure, she must have taken it there. She went to the kitchen to get more Advil.

She stood silently in the kitchen, watching soft shadows dancing on the night walls, drinking water to wash down the pills. The knife was still in her possession. A trickle of moonlight hit the lovely blade. Now, it would be so easy ... she thought.

But –

Yes! It would be over so quick, just a few minutes, seconds maybe. She'd wipe the blood off. Say someone broke in the house while they were asleep. They'd believe her – the police. She'd never done anything wrong in her life. Her friends and family would support her. She would be free!

It was as though her feet made her mind up for her. Slowly, her right foot slipped a bit forward, then her left. She found herself inching into the living room, arm raised, knife high.

She approached from behind his head, which was resting on the arm of the couch, covered by his blanket. He was so still. She knew she must not wait any longer. She took a long, slow, deep breath, then furiously drove the knife down into his chest. Again and again, she stabbed, crying, laughing, crying then laughing, cackling. Then she stopped. Something wrong. He'd never made any sound, not even the faintest of moans. She grabbed the blanket and yanked it back.

“Noooooooooooo!”

Nothing but pillows.

“Looking for me?” he said from behind her.

She swung around wildly. “You! You knew!”

“Yes, Lisa.”

“How? I don't understand. How?” She shook violently. Now, she'd never be free. Never! He'd have her locked away for good, forever, and he'd have Timmy. God! she thought. He'll have Timmy!

“You can come on in, now,” he said, seeming to speak to someone

other than her. He was staring at the front door.

Now, she was really confused. The door swung wide and two policemen stepped in. Enraged, she screamed like a banshee and flung herself at Rob with the knife, desperately trying to stab him. He caught her wrist. She couldn't pull away; he was too strong. "Timmy! You can't have Timmy!" she screamed.

"Lisa, you don't remember, do you?"

"Huh? Remember what?"

"Timmy's dead. Timmy and your mother. You killed both of them. You told me you did. Remember?"

She was still and silent for a moment, grasping to understand, then said, "No! You're crazy!"

"I thought about covering for you ... but I can't."

"Liar!" She kicked him, but he didn't flinch.

"They didn't go anywhere. You stabbed them with this knife and stuffed them in you mother's car, drove it to the edge of town and took the city bus back.... Remember?"

"No! No! No! No!" She pulled back and forth, side to side, flapping like a fish out of water. His grip was far too strong.

"I knew something was wrong when I couldn't reach your mother on her cell last night. She always answers. And, she's always home. When I expressed my concern, you told me that you had killed them."

"Idiot! You killed my son! I'd never kill my own kid ... or my mother!" She tried to pull away again, couldn't, then tried to stab him while he held her wrist.

"No ... Lisa," he said firmly. "Not I. You! You imagined I was drunk ... imagined it because you wanted to believe it. I should have taken Timmy away from here years ago – but I've always loved you so much. I couldn't. Now, I wish, I had." He shook his head sadly and looked at the policemen, expectantly. "You've seen enough, haven't ya?"

The officers nodded, grabbed her, snapped handcuffs on her wrists, then led her out the door.

After the black-and-white pulled away, Rob went to the refrigerator. "Ah!" He helped himself to a cold beer and went to the living room, flipped the television on and sat back in his favorite recliner. Slowly, a grin spread across his face.

Lisa didn't speak to the policemen. She didn't speak to them in the station, either. She never spoke to anyone again.



Anti War banner, Women's Building, San Francisco. 2004



Cowboy poet outside Vesuvio's Bar, North Beach, San Francisco. 2002
by A. D. Winans

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

Aldo Green

Days feeling
Like a million bucks
In faded
Levis jeans
High on life
And wine
Playing childish games
Dancing to the rhythm
Of the saints
The sun is hot and
People are out, cats
Birds, dogs, insects bugs
And the grass is green
And the trees are budding
A perfect day
To feel alive
To take a ride
Just my bike
And me
We make it
A block
Before a cop
Who also is having
One of these
Glorious moments
Fined me fifty bucks
For running a stop sign
And being drunk

ART

Aldo Green

My head was pounding
Like a bass drum
In a marching band
Boom, boom, boom
A rap upon my door
An angel
Before my eyes
Needing help
Moving a couch
Quick to agree but
This hangover
Was killing me
The couch turned
Into a hide-a-bed
Or roughly around
Another 150 pounds
We tried every way
To get that beast
Up those stairs
I cut myself and bled
All over the floor
Ang broke a nail
The angel couldn't
Stop laughing
At the both of us
Then it began

We talk of cutting
A hole in the wall
A hole in the floor
Cutting the thing in two
Taking the window out
Taking the door out
In the end
We left it standing
On end
In the kitchen
Where it is today
But we call it
ART
And we won't
Have to move
The damn thing again

TRADING UP

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Flash Fiction

Phoenix AZ

April 2005

"I'm sorry Mrs. Lewis," the police officer said.

Carol Lewis gaped out the front window. Two police cars, an ambulance and a fire truck cluttered the street in front of her house.

Why did it take fifteen men to remove one fragile corpse?

"Undetected heart failure," one of the policemen told a fireman.

"Real shame," another added. "Only thirty years old."

Three months later, Carol still found herself calling Christopher to the dinner table. She swore she'd seen him in the town library once. She even thought she saw him cruising down the freeway in his minivan.

Every afternoon when Carol returned home after work, she'd arrange a vase of fresh flowers next to her favorite photograph of Chris. But the sweet odor of roses could not compete with the sickly-sweet smell of death. The odor clung to the walls, made it impossible for Carol to relax.

She tried to rationalize the situation. People died all the time, people you knew and loved, people you did not know or love. But they'd never died in her house before, in her room, in her bed. Try as she might, Carol could not disregard the unclean savor in the air. When at home she would catch herself breathing in quick, shallow gasps as if death were contagious.

"Are you eating right?" Carol's parents began to ask.

"You look pale," her co-workers would say.

Time to trade up, Carol decided. If she didn't move soon she'd go insane. She spent the next few weeks scanning local newspapers and real estate ads. Her current home became more oppressive, more stifling.

She toured eleven homes before she discovered the right one. The property was located north of Phoenix, out in the boons, but still close

enough to commute to work. A small Spanish Mission-style house stood in the center of a one-acre lot. Best of all everything sparkled, brand new. No one ever lived there before; more important no one ever died there. Everything from the sparkling appliances to the tiled floors smelled department store new.

The original builders backed out at the last minute. Because of this, Carol purchased the home at a real bargain. Indulging her neurosis, she purchased all new furniture, drapes and linens. She donated all Chris' personal items to charity. For sentimental reasons she kept his bible and rosary, but these she tucked in an airtight box in the garage. All heavy odors behind her, Carol settled into her new house with ease.

Shortly after the move she decided to take a stroll around the block, perhaps meet a few of her new neighbors. Summer yawned to a close, the clouds rumbled with threats of an incoming monsoon. The streets spread out, groomed and quiet. Shady trees hugged the sidewalks. Birds dodged through their heavy branches.

Carol filled her lungs with the wholesome fresh air. She felt the warmth of color return to her cheeks, energy surge through her muscles.

A few steps later she found herself in front of a neighbor's long green lawn. A gentleman with tenuous white hair waved to her. Stooped by age, he hobbled across the lawn and introduced himself. They chatted for a few minutes about the weather, the price of gasoline and other pleasantries.

"My name is Ernest Floyd." They shook hands. "I've lived in this house my entire life." He knew all about the history of Phoenix and shared several pioneer stories with Carol. "Didn't think the place would ever sell." He nodded toward Carol's new home.

Carol's eyebrows shot up. "What do you mean?" "Ignorance," Ernest said. "Plain ignorance."

Carol's stomach did a somersault. "Ignorance?"

"I suspect you're far too young to know about it. Back before we became a state, when this area was known as Arizona Territory," he pointed a wrinkled hand toward her yard. "The east side of your acreage held Phoenix's oldest insane asylum."

The wind stirred. Putrid smells clung to the air, wafted towards Carol. "Insane asylum?"

"Yep, town folks built it in 1874. Government tore it down in 1902. Over there," he pointed an emaciated finger. "They buried their dead there. Kind of funny, don't you think?" Ernest laughed innocently. "You're living smack-dab on top of a cemetery."

THE IMMORTAL'S FALL

Jessica Coleman

“Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil...,” the preacher droned on from his place above the open grave. Family and friends gathered around the deceased, each mourning their loss. Although I was present for the same reason, I stood separate from the rest. From my spot under an old maple, I could clearly see people slowly stand to drop flowers down into the grave.

I waited patiently until they had all left before taking my turn. By now, the grave had been filled, fresh dirt creating a slight mound in front of the simple tombstone. Antonio Druthers was inscribed in plain writing. I knelt down, and placed a single long stemmed rose upon the grave. Tucking a long strand of ebony hair behind my ear, I said my farewell.

“Goodbye old friend.” Yet another gone, although I’ll admit this one hurt me more than the rest. Antonio had lived a long life and peacefully slipped away at the age of eighty-five. I had known him sixty-four of those years. I was the one who guided him on how to treat a woman when he met Martha, and shortly after watched as he married her. I was in the waiting room as his children were brought into the world, and later his grandchildren. Of course, none of them knew of me-not even Martha. I’ve grown accustomed to the shadows; find it easier to blend in now.

I was afraid to tell him at first, afraid of his reaction. The few I had told of my condition had not taken it well. But Antonio was different, and I valued our friendship. I knew the time was coming soon, when I would have to pack up and move on again. The hardest part was always leaving behind the few companions I made. I was taking a risk with

Antonio, one that proved to work out well.

“I must say...it certainly explains a few things. No wonder you have such ‘old soul’ wisdom.” We had laughed, and then stayed up until four in the morning discussing five hundred years of history. For the first time, I was able to talk with some one of what I had seen. We kept in touch, never letting more than a few years pass before contacting one another.

Of course, it was not always fun and games. In the beginning, I did not fully comprehend what it meant. Eternity is a long time. Hell, I thought the winter months were long, but eternity...

I was originally born during the medieval period, roughly the mid 1400's. That was a fun century; everywhere you turn someone was being burned at a stake for witchcraft. It is a miracle that I got through it alive. I moved a lot. I would wander from village to village; no one cared as long as I kept moving. I probably circled Europe five times before the plague was through. Herein lies another benefit of my “gift”, I did not have to worry about disease or food. I had long ago lost my hunger; it is not as if I need nourishment to survive.

It was with this realization that it finally sank in; I could not die. The result? Life became a living hell. It literally hurt to live. For a couple decades, I drew in on myself. What was the point of making friends? They would all die. I avoided everything and everyone. I passed through the sixteen and seventeen hundreds like a ghost. Do you know what time is to an immortal? Boring. I lost the drive to live. What goals were there to accomplish? What meaning did my life have? I could easily achieve wealth and power, but to what end? What would it get me? Nothing that would matter. Material items suddenly became meaningless. I did not need food or shelter because I would live on regardless. I wanted to die; I wanted to be able to die.

I tried to kill myself about a million different times. First, I slit my wrists, and watched numbly as the first few drops of blood spilled out, only to draw back into the wound. I spent that entire night digging into my flesh and sobbing, as it would heal perfectly within seconds. I attempted hanging, but after an hour of dangling from the ceiling, I got bored and cut myself down. I even tried drowning, but I just got really prune-y. I have tried every poison imaginable, but they all did nothing. When guns came along, I put a bullet through my head. All that accomplished was making my hair smell like gunpowder for a week. I quit trying after the dreams started. Yes, I still slept although technically I did not need to.

The few fleeting hours of rest brought me a type of comfort, when I could completely slip away from the world. The first dream I had I was back in 15th century England, with the witch accusers. I dreamt I was put to the stake and set aflame. Of course, I cannot die, so I would stand there for hours enduring the incessant bites of the fire as it licked its way up my body. It is a strange sensation, pain is. In my mind, I know something is supposed to hurt, but my senses only convey an uncomfortable tingling. I stood there for hours, the fire growing more intense by the second while the crowd stood in shock and fear. Most people accused of witchery were innocent; they had never before seen someone who could not die. So, on top of the fire came the jaunts, jeers, and knowledge that never again would I fit into society.

The eighteenth hundreds produced new forms of torture. The Victorian era had hushed whispers of vampires and the undead, thanks largely to Bram Stoker and his novel "Dracula." I went from witch to vampire. Now the dreams consisted of being buried alive. Usually, I was in a coffin six feet under. No light or sound, the plush padding of the coffin was a cruel mockery of comfort. I would claw at it; ripping the cloth material until I hit wood. My hands splintered and bloody then grasped at dirt as I broke through, bringing a whole new wave of problems. As the dirt fell down into the coffin with me, I realized I was not strong enough to dig my way through to the surface. Six feet of dirt is a lot of weight. Claustrophobia sets in about then, and I panic while gasping for air I do not need. Of course with dirt come worms, mistaking my body for another deceased corpse. Waking from those dreams was often followed by hours of scrubbing at my skin, trying to get the feeling of slime and dirt off.

Finally, in 1902, life started to become bearable. I was drifting from town to town, as usual, in Southern France. It was there that I met a young girl stricken with polio. She was amazingly cheerful as well as insightful. Quite a contrasting picture we made; the girl who could not die with the girl who would not live. Despite the hardships she faced, young Sennett had no qualms with her fate. I met her in the hospital where she was spending her final days. I originally came to visit another friend, but when I saw the golden curled child sitting in the gardens, my interests shifted. She was sitting in her wheelchair staring at a small section of flowers. I guess I was not as sneaky as I thought because she started to speak with me, or so I assume. We were the only ones in the gardens.

"Bee's are fascinating creatures, aren't they?" she asked in perfect French. "Though they have very short life spans, they work very hard to

insure the safety of the hive,” she smiled at me, a knowing twinkle in her eye. Yes, children are very insightful. She may not have known of my curse, but she did know I needed help. I sat beside her on the grass, paying no mind to the stains I was sure to get on my white, Paquin dress. We talked for quite a while, speaking of everything and nothing. She told me of her disease, a cheery smile upon her face the entire time, and I told her of my travels, swearing to bring her the latest fashions of Paris the next time I went. I said farewell as the nurse came to take her back up to her room.

That night I took a train to Paris, spent three days finding the most stunning gowns and bonnets I could, before returning to the small hospital. I knew from the pained face of Sennett’s mother that I had barely made it. My heart broke as I walked into the room. The young girl, who I had quickly come to see as a sister, lay broken and weak in the bed. Steeling myself, I brought in the large boxes and set them down on a table against the window.

“I brought you a present, *cher*,” she smiled warmly at the endearment.

“*Merci*,” she motioned for me to sit alongside her bed.

“How do you do it, Ms. Goldie locks? How do you continue to smile?” she laughed at the nickname, and then motioned me closer to whisper in my ear.

“The secret to life is to find something that is not only worth fighting for, but living for as well.” The nurses ushered me out, declaring the young girl needed her rest. Sennett past away two days later. Although I mourned the loss of a friend, I cherished the wisdom she taught me and took it straight to heart. I walked out of the hospital that day and laughed at the irony of the situation; leave it to an immortal to find hope amongst the dying.

I started to build an empire, one that was conservative, but massive nonetheless. I wrote a few historical novels, assisted on archeological digs, and corrected the myths of legend. I should know- I had lived it all in any case. With all of this came wealth and a nice selection of resourceful connections. Naturally, I kept it all very low key. Most of my workings were underground; allowing the mortals to go on assuming everything was fine in their narrow world of beliefs. I was not about to go around advertising my curse. That would only land me in some government institute being probed at for eternity. Besides, I had found something worth fighting for. There was once a time when I had many friends, all of which I loved dearly. I decided I owed it to them to watch over and protect their descendants, much like I have done with Antonio’s children. I hope that the knowledge that if any of his children need help, I am there, will allow

him to rest in peace. And that is how I spend my days, carefully guarding over my extended family. Should they ever need a loan, or help with the government or anything really, a letter will mysteriously show up in the mail, or the bill collectors will start to disappear. What better way is there to use the connections I have acquired?

Life is no longer a curse. Amazing what a little purpose can do for a person. I once read that the mark of an immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of a mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one; J.D. Salinger was a very smart man. It was as an immature little girl that my curse came about. I thought I was being brave, selling my soul to save the man I loved. Of course, my knight in shining armor was in love with the milkmaid down the road and died of plague anyway, but that is beside the point. My fate was sealed, and I paid the price. The deal was simple, my soul for my love's life. What a foolish girl I was, making a pack with the grim reaper should be obviously stupid. I learned my lesson, albeit the hard way, and now have eternity to make up for it. Do you know what eternity is to an immortal? The answer is an opportunity to make things better, even if the rest of the world can never know. It goes beyond glory and fame; those things are meaningless to one that cannot die. That is what I am- an immortal. I will live on regardless, until the god's take mercy on my soul. My greatest fear now rests in the chance that this gift will go wasted.

Water ran down my face and I realized that during my reflection it had started to rain. I straightened my black skirt from when I knelt to place the flower, gave a final goodbye and headed back to the car. Once safely inside the limousine, I picked up the days paper as the driver took off. The front page read, "Druthers' son in trouble with Italian Government." Antonio was very successful in life; his children always got a lot of media attention. Although I must say, they do bring it on themselves. Nevertheless, it would appear as though I am going to Italy.



portrait of Darius, from *Scars Publications*

WAITING

Aaron Hellem

He drinks Bloody Marys at nine thirty in the morning. He says it clears his head. He says that he needs his head cleared at nine thirty in the morning. He gives me a taste. It's spicy. He's not supposed to. I'm only eleven. My mother has made it explicitly clear that I'm not to taste any Bloody Marys until I am at least thirteen. "When you're thirteen," my mother says, "then you drink all the Bloody Marys you want." I don't like to wait.

He orders his Bloody Mary. He waits. A good Bloody Mary is not to be hurried. He waits for the vodka to be ready. He waits for the fresh vegetables to be cut. He waits for the bartender to mix it. There is a bartender this early in the morning. I can't wait until I am thirteen and can find a use for a bartender at nine thirty in the morning. He waits for his lawyer to call him back with news of his custody battle. He waits for his old car to give up and leave him stranded. He waits for his high school sweetheart to come back to life and give him a hummer. He waits for his check to clear. He waits for the waitress to leave our table before making a lewd comment about her breasts. I have to wait until I'm thirteen to laugh at his lewd comment about the waitress' breasts. I have to wait until I can have a custody battle and wish for my high school sweetheart to come back to life and give me a hummer. I have to wait before anyone tells me what a hummer is. I have to wait to find out exactly what goes into a Bloody Mary. All this waiting.

He waits for his wife to get home. He waits a few moments for her explanation before he yells at her. He waits until the kids go to bed before he calls her names. He waits for her to yell and wake up the kids. He waits until both of his kids come out of their bedrooms before he reassures them that everything is all right and that they should go back to bed. He waits until the kids have returned to bed before he really lays into her. He waits until she shuts up before he makes his threats: the kids, the house, the car, and the goddamn dog.



“The dog’s mine!” she screams. He waits until the police show up at their door to find out all of the laws and stipulations involved

in a domestic dispute.

“What if I were to throw her out?” he asks.

“We’d have to have proof that she’s endangering you or your family,” the officer says.

“Does the dog count?”

The officer laughs.

He waits until the officer has left before he turns to her and says, “I’ll have the goddamn dog.”

He waits until she leaves in the middle of the night with the kids before he calls the police again. He waits for them to explain that a child has to be gone 24 hours before they can technically be considered missing.

“They’re not missing,” he says. “I know exactly where they are.”

He waits until the police tell him that there’s nothing they can do before he makes his way to the bar at nine thirty in the morning where there is a bartender on duty ready to make him a Bloody Mary.

He waits until my mother is not looking before he lets me taste it. It tastes spicy. I wait for the initial burn in my throat to subside before I smile at him and say, “That’s really good.”

He smiles back at me, and nods his head. “Just you wait,” he says, “when you reach thirteen, a whole new world opens up.”

TRAIN

Don Burdette

I catch her. I catch her because I know fear.

She hides in the recesses of the classroom, sitting at the back of a row, second from the edge in the darkest part of the room. She covers herself in quiet, obscures herself with meekness when called upon. She does just enough work not to draw attention. She neglects just enough work not to draw attention.

Nothing distinguishes her. Her fall-color clothes hang loosely over an immature frame. Her hair hangs straight to the sides. She wears no make-up. She averts her beacon-blue eyes. But when I catch them, I catch her. Even though they look beyond me, framed by upraised brows and a retreating mouth, they plead. And that's when I notice.

Fear distinguishes her. She is by no means pale white; but, her tan European skin is dull and ashen. She glances nervously behind her and about the room as if someone or something sinister is hiding here with her. Her thin lips tremble as if muttering. Her pencil shakes in her knob-by hands. Allison. I check her name to be sure. Allison. I caught you. "Allison, see me after class," I call. She looks at me now, incredulous. Then shudders. She knows.

I know fear. I've been trained to spot it. All teachers devote a significant part of their brain to teaching. I wrap up my lesson on the underground railroad. Teachers reserve the remainder for watching. I watch Allison gather her books and supplies into her backpack and hunch her shoulder to make a hook for it. The rest of her body curves around the hook like a brushed sea anemone. Retracted, she approaches me. I try to ease her alarm.

"Allison, we haven't really had the chance to talk much," I say with a smile.

She confuses me with a nod of a frown.

"Is there anything you want to tell me about," I offer.

She looks downward. When she eventually lifts her head and catches my eyes, still upon her, she realizes her silence isn't enough. "No, Ms. Mickley," she mutters.

"Because I've noticed that something seems to be bothering you," I explain. "And if that's true, you should talk to someone about it."

Nothing.

"I'm your teacher. You can talk to me."

Back to the nod again, and the look downward.

"I wanted to give you the chance to talk to me before I pass it on to your counselor."

That got her! Her head snaps up. She gives me those eyes, fixed, looking right at me, sparkling with tears, trembling from forced rigidity. There's the fear. I congratulate myself and settle in like a cop who has just earned a confession.

"Give it to me. What's going on?" I demand.

It doesn't come easy. Allison chokes on her words. Her eyes shut as her sobs become heaves, so violent that she begins to buckle.

"Have a seat," I suggest, pointing a hand at the nearest student desk. "There, there," I console with the same hand hovering over her left shoulder, close enough to show empathy for her breakdown, but far enough to respect its possible cause.

I suspect abuse. What else could so devastate a child? Poor little kid, innocent victim of...

"A man," Allison speaks.

I nod in affirmation. Good girl, I project, talking in my head as if she can hear me. Go on.

"There's a man in my house."

"Who is he?" I ask with a frown.

"A black man."

"Okay," I say with a sigh of apprehension at the details. "Do you know him?"

"No," Allison cries anew. "He scares me!"

"Has he...hurt you!" I ask with the appropriate hesitancy.

Allison shakes her head. A tear falls to either side.

But I am confused. Who is he? "Why does he scare you?"

Allison composes herself enough to spit through vinegar lips, "Because he's frightening! He looks like a monster! And he yells sometimes. And he bleeds," she scowls, "he bleeds on everything!"

My confusion turns to horror. I might have considered disbelief, but her tears are sincere.

"What about your parents!?" I ask with alarm.

"They are scared of him too."

"So they know about him?"

"Yes."

“They know his name?”

“Yes.”

“What’s his name?”

“Train. They call him Train.”

“Well, why don’t they get rid of him?” I wonder aloud.

“I don’t know,” Allison echoes. “Why don’t they, Ms. Mickley?”

“We’ll find out,” I announce as I stand away from her and walk towards my desk. “And I’ll make sure that man doesn’t scare you anymore,” I promise heroically as I step towards the phone on the wall.

“NO!” Allison screams more frantically than before. “You can’t tell my parents! You can’t!” She stands at her desk. “They made me promise on my life! Please don’t!”

But why?!, I think to ask. But upon reflection decide, “...because they are scared too.” I press on. “It doesn’t matter. I wasn’t planning on calling them anyway. We need to talk to your counselor.”

“NO!” she repeats, just as adamant.

But I am resolute. “You know, I am required by law to report things like this.”

“But you can’t!”

“It’s for your protection.” I turn towards the phone. “I don’t have a choice.”

I hear the girl shuffle behind me, as I pick up the receiver and dial the counselor’s number. By the time I turn around, all that remains of Allison is a slamming door. I lean towards it to run after her, but the lift of the receiver on the other end of the phone line slows me. But in that moment, I am caught between the personal and professional, between talking into the receiver and chasing Allison, between bringing her back in or driving her away.

But I am required by law to report things like this. I place my hand on my desk to stop my forward lean and listen at the receiver. No greeting followed the click. There is continued silence. “Hello? Hello? Is this thing working?” No response.

Then, in a deliberate, calm male voice, “Thank you Ms. Mickley. It was the right thing to do.” Click.

What the...? “Hello? Hello? Mr. Giesen?” That wasn’t the counselor’s, Mr. Giesen’s voice. Who was it? And how do they know? I didn’t report anything, did I?

I can’t waste any more time finding out. Allison is gone and, most likely, going for home. And the only person that can get there soon

enough to protect her is me. If there's another call to be made, I can make it from her house, with her under my care. It may not be the professional thing to do. But it's the right thing to do.

I check her address in my records and I'm out of the door after her. Fortunately, cars are faster than bicycles. I pull into her parents' driveway just as she drops her bike on the gravel. She turns at the sound of my car. Surprisingly, she doesn't appear startled. She doesn't turn to run. She waits for me there. In return, I don't run to grab her. Once out of the car, I walk across the gravel to her and place an arm over her shoulder. We are both relieved to have found each other.

"You okay?" I check.

"Better now," she confirms.

"Me too." I smile. "Were you going in?"

"I don't want to. But I have to."

"Would you rather go back to school?"

"No!" she says with a look that warns: don't you dare. "I need to be home before mom and dad get home or I'm in trouble." After a pause, she drops her head and adds, "If I bring you in, I'm in trouble."

"Going in there alone sounds like more serious trouble."

Allison becomes silent. She turns her head to the side, looking further away from me. She shudders, then seems to droop further. Finally, she brings a hand up and chews at the tip of her thumb while slowly shaking her head.

"I've been scared before," she concludes. "Mom says to ignore them. They don't stay long."

I pull her around so that I have a shoulder in each hand and bend my knees to catch her beacon-blue eyes. I gather my brow in surprise. "Them?" I whisper with dread. "What are you talking about?"

"I have to go now," Allison states.

"No," I say weakly.

"You need to leave now."

"I'm not going anywhere." I try to be firm. It makes no difference.

Allison twists herself free and crunches gravel underfoot to the path then past the porch to her house. She unlocks, opens, enters and closes the door before I even stand from my crouch.

And there I stand dumbfounded and afraid, as she steps into the window to glare at me, defiantly. Her eyes stare into mine as if they form a connection, between our minds, and she can will me away. I look back with softer but equally unyielding eyes that ask "why?"

Hers turn away first, to check the darkness of the house behind her. Each successive glance chips at her facade of fear of breaking her parents' trust, exposing the greater fear of the man called Train, and her yearning will for me to stay, to come to her, to protect her.

When her eyes yield to mine, I step across the gravel towards her house. She bolts from the window to come to the door, to open it for me. She pulls me into a hurried hug. The poor girl is trembling.

"My parents will kill me."

"No one's going to hurt you now, Allison," I promise.

Then the door just behind me booms to a close. With Allison in my arms, I jump away from it, and turn to find nobody there.

"Ms. Mickley, Ms. Mickley..." Allison cries.

Standing near the middle of the living room, circled by its furniture, I dart my head all around searching for the culprit. We are alone. And the hallway to my right and the kitchen before me are empty black.

"It's Train," Allison whispers.

I keep hold of her and side-step towards the front door.

"Uhh...ohh," a tortured moan echoes from deeper parts of the house.

I try the handle frantically turning it either way. But it does not give, even after I flip the lock on the inside!

"Open the door!" Allison commands.

"I can't!"

"Let me try." Allison takes over, to no avail. "We're trapped," she states.

"The hell we are," I disagree. I grab a footstool below a drawing table near the front door and step into the room to toss it with all my strength back towards the house's front window. I cover Allison with one arm and my own face with the other in anticipation of the forthcoming smash. It doesn't come. The stool deflects to the ground as if it hit an invisible barrier just inside the window pane.

"We're trapped," I concur, drawing Allison close to me again. I step back against the front door and slide down along it to the floor. Allison sits in front of me.

"Ohhh," the moan returns from the hall.

Allison begins to whimper. I might have joined her if I thought it might do any good. Instead, I keep eyes on the hallway, its opening just above the couch and matching white lounge chairs near the center of the room, looking for any sign of the man called Train, with a hand on the leg of the drawing table, ready to lift and swing it should he show himself.

It is not long before he does, but the drawing table turns out to be of

little use. Just near the couch, on the floor, appears a red imprint, oblong in shape, but smeared towards us. I peer at it, until another appears closer to us, better approximating the shape of a foot, stamped in blood! I grab onto Allison and inch back as tightly against the door as I can! A partial handprint of blood forms on the crest of the back of the couch. Another smear of a footprint and partial handprint follow along it, turning away from us. I would sigh in relief at its change in direction, were the creature not still in the room. The trail of blood makes its way around the couch with uneven impressions as if from a limp or a dragged broken limb or a monstrous swagger. It stops at one of the matching lounge chairs at the end of the couch. And then nothing, for long terrifying moments, until an impression in blood appears in the white back of the chair: criss-crosses of red, like long flat x's. And then the moans begin anew, softer this time, but longer.

And then he appears, forming in the area inside the chair, as if the shadows about the room reach in and gather there. The white of the chair blackens into the torso of a semi-clothed man, with taut black muscled arms, smeared with blood. His knotty hands hold his head, crested with the clumps or a dirty tangled afro. The rest of his body below his waist does not form. But blood begins to run along the part of the chair where his left leg would be. The moans come from inside those hands, hideous howls of pain and anger. Blood seeps between those fingers too, fingers that dislodge and lower as the head rises into view. I can't help but gasp at what I see revealed there: a bludgeoned face, slashed and swollen, rises in clumps around two sallow eyes.

Allison screams. And I begin to whimper. Despite my revulsion and horror, I cannot move my eyes from the hideous visage. I am trapped there by the greater fear that the man might move closer to us. Allison, on the other hand, has broken her eyes away, and curled herself into me again, as if I can protect her.

Fortunately, I am not put in the position. The creature stays there, its torso floating in the chair. It moans and looks at me. It moves its misshapen lips as if to speak. And as if I can hear its inaudible words, or perhaps because I find an expression hidden there amongst the damage done to its face, I know that I need not protect Allison from it. Despite its pain and rage, it has no intention of moving. It is afraid. I know fear, and the man is terrified!

Then, as if in reaction to my revelation, Train begins to fade. First the hands return to the face. Then the body disperses back into shadow.

Finally, the blood dims and disappears. Lastly, the moans seem to recede back into the house.

“Is he gone?” I ask.

Allison stays limp and quiet in my lap. I reach up to try the door handle. It does not give. There’s my answer. For whatever reason, we are still held captive. We wait for what seems an eternity, as the light outside dims.

Allison remains still until, all at once, she looks up at me with tearful eyes and asks, “Where are my parents?”

I have even less of an answer than she might provide. I shrug and keep my eyes out for Train. But her comment gives me an idea.

“Where’s the phone?”

“In the kitchen,” Allison murmurs.

“I’m going to go for it. Do you want to come with me?”

Allison nods, but doesn’t move. I push against the floor and then lift my back against the door to stand, carrying Allison up into my arms. With eyes aflutter, I tip-toe through the living room into the door arch to the kitchen. I peer around its refrigerator to check the empty room before whispering to Allison, “I’ve got to put you down.” She lets her legs drop next to the stool that sits at a raised kitchen table. She looks fearfully at me as we separate so I can search for a light switch. I find and flip it. It doesn’t work.

“Where are my parents?” Allison whines.

“Where’s the phone?” I counter.

“Over there,” she points at a confluence of counters. I hurry there and lift the receiver. Nothing. Just the slight buzz of an active line. I click the button that turns the line on and off. The same. Until the same male voice speaks, “Thank you, Ms. Mickley, it was the right thing to do.” Click. The phone is dead. I look at the phone as I had looked at Train, as if it too is a ghost, bleeding in my hand. Until a light coming through the windows draws me away.

“Mom? Dad?” Allison asks the light.

No, these are not headlights. Headlights do not flicker. I step to the window to look out onto the yard and the path and the gravel driveway. Everywhere, in all directions come people, dead people, white people, of all ages, dressed in clothes I have seen in pictures, in the textbooks from which I teach, first photographs from pioneer days. They glow dull in the flickering light of the lanterns and torches some carry before the mob. One man, with a wide brim hat that hides his face, except for his eyes

which reflect the flickering torchlight, even though he walks before them all, carries a noose in a stiff upraised arm.

I turn to Allison with alarm. "Train!" I exclaim to myself. "What about the others?!" I ask Allison. "What were their names?!"

"My parents called them all Train. Where are my parents?"

"I think I know what's going on," I offer.

In a familiar male voice that seems to whistle with the wind, I hear, "Come outta there, nigger!"

I shudder as if chilled.

"What's going on?" Allison asks.

"Come on," I answer as I grab her and pull her towards the living room. We freeze in its doorway when we find Train floating at the front door, holding its handle tight, looking at us in fear. We scream as flames lick at the window sill beyond him.

"Come on," I call anew as I direct Allison into the house. We run into a back room, a bedroom, led by the light from its window. I twist the window's lock and lift from its bottom. It gives and we tumble into the night, and stagger into the bushes and make our way around the back to the gravel driveway, where I glance back past my car at the mob pulling Train through the door of the burning house and leading him to a tree and affixing the noose to his neck.

"Where are my parents?" Allison repeats before asking, "They're not coming, are they?"

I will not answer her, except indirectly, as we run for the road, away from the rising inferno. "I shouldn't have called," I spit between breaths. "You shouldn't have told. God help us, we did the wrong thing."

FLEXIBLE ETHICS

Alexandria Rand

The Lutheran Brotherhood compiled the following statistics
two-thirds of all adults believe
ethics “vary by situation”
there is no “unchanging ethical standard or right and wrong.”

ethics deal with what is good and bad
and ethics can be a theory or system of moral values

ethics is a guiding philosophy

does this mean the majority of people
believe that “right” and “wrong”
“good” and “bad”
can change from situation to situation?

does this mean the majority of people
believe that the principles can change
from moment to moment?

does this mean the majority of people
believe that a “guiding philosophy”
cannot be consistent?

if a philosophy is not consistent,
it's not a philosophy at all

think of Christians:
they're not supposed to have sex before marriage
but many do, they just try not to get caught,
and they think they are forgiven,
they got away scot-free
you see, they've claimed one set of beliefs
and lived by another



a belief system is consistent
it is the individuals who don't follow it consistently

bend over
and stretch your legs
get in shape
you've got to get more flexible
if you're going to change your ethics like everyone else



portrait of Vicki, from Scars Publications

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