



v 027

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down in the dirt
revealing all your
dirty little secrets

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Reduced Speed Ahead

Raud Kennedy

His bottle of e.d. pills rolls across the dash
as they speed through the turn
in his new red Porsche.

His heavy 'girlfriend' has frosted hair
instead of gray.

Middle age is a washed out memory
in the rear view mirror
as the Grim Reaper
leans over the backs of their seats
and glances at their speed.

Navfea

Michelle Greenblatt

keep your eyes fixed
on one spot on the horizon when
you are nauseous which is what

I try to do
every time I watch the news war
is the word on the streets

war is the only word
in the mouths
of our politicians war is the only

word in the mouths
of our hungry but peace
I think peace as I fix my eyes

on the small flaw on
the white wall
behind my television

AVNT ESTHER AND HER JAPANESE STATUE

John Grey

She passes around
an ancient Japanese fisherman
carved from a walrus tusk,
head missing but neck intact.
Everyone's just keeping
traditions alive, she says.
She can still bake a pecan pie
from a recipe her grandmother
learned from her grandmother.
She can still point a headless thing
in the direction it's not looking.

Greener Grass

Aldo Green

I am thinking to myself
How much I love
This world I live in
It's really not that bad
A little worn out
And fray around the edges
Slightly used and abused
Still plenty of good times left
In this old world
Beaten and battered
Look around
See for yourself
Take her for a spin
Check out the décor
Sure a little scruffy
Nothing a little elbow grease
And TLC can't solve
Okay she has a lot of mileage
And maybe looks like
A beater
I like to think of it
As more of a classic
She leaks a little
And stalls a lot
She will still get you
To where you are going
Don't decide now
Plenty of time later
Live now and pay later
We also have
An installment plan

Did I mention
All the colours
To choose from
But one thing
I think you
Should know
The grass
Is always greener
Over the septic tank

Waiting For The Dead To Float By

Christopher Barnes, England

There's 5 sponsors
beneath that offscum
and all The Insurgents ever begged
was a little backyard love,
political recognition.

He tightens a sphere-of-influence arm
quill-driving the aquarium's guest book,
threatens.

It's framed exhaustively with spoilage
from the canal.

FROM THE 'SPOOKS' POEMS

Looking up

Eric Bonholtzer

A child, wide eyed, stares at the picture
It immolates quickly as he pierces the night's sky
Wondering, wondering where, where did you go?

Have you forgotten about me?
Not all of them. Me.
I am not selfish. I wonder.

The alley stretches and clothing hangs,
Limp like heads, bowed in supplication or prayer
or questioning of the whole world.

I wasn't bad. I wasn't good
But I wasn't bad. That should
count for something.

He is only ten. It is not a game
But life, one of questions and a missing manual
That could have told the directions
If anyone would have taken the time to read it anyway.

There are good books people don't read
They just don't have the time.

The star shines brighter as the fire burns stronger within,
Carbon smoke twirls upward, twin dragons twine and swallow their own tails
Nostrils flare at the sweet stench, eyes heavenward
Looking, searching. Perhaps the farthest star is it.

Is that where you've gone?
That is where you've gone.

A cry from the upstairs window breaks the picture
As night's sweet dessert is done and it's time to go home
To consume. To fill up with sugary sustenance
And still feel illiterate and empty.



This is also in the *Eric Bonholtzer* book
Remnants & Shadows.

My Baby Boy

Laine Hissett-Bonard

I've been watching my son very closely lately. No, I don't believe that there is anything wrong with him, necessarily, although some might disagree with me there. After all, this is the boy who is at his happiest when he's hurting himself, whether by scraping his knees and elbows on countless football or baseball fields, play-wrestling with his friends, flipping ATVs, or following any other meaningless and self-destructive whim that might possess him. I don't, however, think that there is anything exactly wrong with him... he's just different. And if what I suspect is true, then maybe "different" isn't the word some might use.

Queer, maybe.

But that's not a word I'd want to use. No matter what choices my little boy makes, I'll never deprecate him like that. The only thing that matters to me, aside from Cole's safety -- which, evidently, is too much to ask -- is his happiness, and to be honest, I've never in his entire eighteen years seen him as happy as he has been for the past several months. He may never admit to me the reason for his frequent, dreamy smiles and the ever-present sparkle in his baby blues, but I'm his mother, for goodness' sake, and I know him well enough to see what's going on here.

My baby boy is in love.

It wasn't until I mistakenly opened his phone bill that I finally got an inkling for what is really going on, though. Now, we get two phone bills since Cole had his own line installed when we moved into the new house -- well, not really that new anymore; we've been here since last summer -- and really, Cole should be paying both of them, because his friends use our phone more than Paul and I do. I hardly ever call anybody out of state, and most of our family, including us, lives within a twenty-mile radius of Pittsburgh.

Anyway, the point is, I accidentally opened Cole's phone bill one afternoon. It was mixed in with the rest of the mail, stuffed between a Pottery Barn catalog and a Yankee Candle flyer -- both mine, of course -- so, not even looking at the name beneath the plastic window, I slit open the envelope and unfolded the bill, my mouth dropping open at the figure marked "Balance Due."

"Five hundred sixty seven dollars?" I screeched, turning the bill face

down on the kitchen counter, rubbing my eyes with my free hand, and picking up the sheaf of papers again. Yes, I was right the first time. Five hundred sixty seven dollars and forty four cents, in fact.

“Dammit, Jason, you better not have been calling those nine-hundred-number Playstation hotlines again,” I muttered, flipping through the sheets of paper to the long distance section, sure I would find the culprit there... and I did. Blinking, I examined the pattern that unfolded before my eyes. Toronto... Toronto... Toronto... Toronto...

“What’s five hundred sixty seven dollars?” my husband asked, meandering into the kitchen and placing a steadying arm around my waist. Apparently, my voice tends to carry.

Turning to him, I waved the phone bill in the air, growing animated. “Paul, look at this phone bill! Those boys have been calling God knows who --”

“Let me see that,” Paul said in his most soothing voice, and I subsided, silently handing over the papers, folding my arms over my chest and staring at him as he examined the bill.

“All of these calls are to Canada,” he finally reported, and I rolled my eyes.

“Yeah, I got that far,” I snapped, but he held up a hand to silence me.

“They’re all to the same number,” Paul continued, frowning lightly. “It looks like at least every other day, all after midnight... what the hell do you think they’re doing?”

“They’re all to the same number?” I mused, chewing my lip and accepting the bill that Paul handed back to me. He was right. So which of the boys was calling Canada every day or so, and who was he calling?

“Amy,” Paul said softly, tapping his chubby finger on the top of the first page. “That’s not our bill.”

“What?” I exclaimed, my eyes snapping to the address portion of the bill. He was also right about that. The bill was addressed to Cole B. Magliaro... better known as my younger son. This was his phone bill... he was the one calling someone in Toronto every couple of nights, and, apparently, spending a couple of hours at a time on the phone, judging by the duration of the calls. One hour and thirty six minutes here... two hours and fourteen minutes here... two hours and twenty one minutes here. “What the...?”

“So if it’s Cole’s bill, it doesn’t really matter who he’s calling, and why,” Paul said, plucking the bill from my fingers, folding it up, and stuffing it carefully back into its envelope.

“What are you doing?” I cried, grabbing for the envelope, but he held it out of my reach.

“It’s his money, Ame,” Paul said gently. “And it’s his life, so whatever he’s doing is none of our business. If he saw you poking your nose into his stuff like this...”

“Oh, he’d throw a fit,” I agreed, rolling my eyes again and snatching the envelope back. “But it was an accident.”

“What was an accident?”

I jumped at the sound of Cole’s voice, turning on my heel to face him where he stood in the kitchen doorway, a skateboard under one arm. “Hi, honey,” I said brightly, smiling my best Mom-does-no-wrong smile, but, of course, he saw right through it.

“What did you do?” he asked suspiciously, leaning his skateboard against the kitchen cabinet and approaching me. “Did you back into my car again or something?”

Paul chuckled, shaking his head as he left the kitchen, mumbling, “I’ll leave you two alone.”

“Fink!” I called after him, and then Cole was standing in front of me, his hands on his hips, his eyebrows drawn together in a frown.

“Ma, what did you do?” he repeated grimly, so, rather than stalling him any further, I decided it was best to just come clean.

“I’m sorry -- I accidentally opened your phone bill instead of mine,” I replied sheepishly, handing over the torn envelope, which he immediately snatched from my hand.

“Did you look at it?” he asked, his face turning inexplicably red, although he didn’t appear angry, exactly.

“No,” I fibbed. “Well, when I saw the balance, I looked at the name because I knew it couldn’t be mine.”

“Oh.” Cole bit his lip, stuffing the phone bill in the pocket of his jeans, his curly, dark hair hanging in his eyes. “What are you making for dinner?”

“Um... I was thinking about cooking on the grill,” I replied, relieved that he had let the matter go so easily.

“Okay.” With that, Cole picked up his skateboard, hanging it behind his shoulder, and left the room. I heard him pounding down the stairs to his room a few seconds later, and I paused for a moment, gathering my thoughts. He’s acting very weird, I thought, my brow creased in contemplation. The crudely-drawn band logo on the bottom of his skateboard had spurred a train of thought that had never really occurred to me, but now that it had, it seemed all too plausible. I turned quickly and began to

dig through my desk drawer, and when I turned up the address book, I flipped quickly to the tab marked "UVW."

"Oh my God," I murmured, my eyes wide. Yes... it was Billy Varney's number printed all over Cole's phone bill. It was Billy with whom my son was spending inordinate amounts of time on the telephone late at night when everyone else was asleep. As I stood there in the middle of the kitchen, late afternoon sunlight streaming through the windows, my eyes flickered to a photo magneted to the refrigerator door, and I took the picture down, placing it on the open page of the address book. It was a picture of Cole and Billy, standing chummily close, Billy holding a cigarette to his lips with one hand, his other arm wrapped possessively around my son's neck, the broken heart tattoo on Billy's wrist exposed... the heart that identically matches the one Cole has tattooed on his own forearm.

So that was it. It made perfect sense, now that I thought about it. The Street Creatures paraphernalia everywhere was more than just a silly obsession with the Canadian indie band. The photos and pulp magazine cutouts all over Cole's room depicting Billy, usually shirtless and pouting into the camera in that sultry way of his, were more than just decoration. The reason Cole talked about the Street Creatures -- and about Billy -- all the time was not simply because he loved the music and idolized the singer, or because they'd been friends since Cole spent the summer with his grandparents in Toronto two years ago. Oh, God, and the reason Cole didn't show up until nearly dinnertime the day after his eighteenth birthday was not because he and Billy, who was visiting for the weekend, went off and got drunk that night and needed the day to recuperate, as they had claimed... he was with Billy, all right, but I suddenly realized that alcohol had nothing to do with it. Their eyes had been too bright and clear, their color too high and their smiles too wide, for their absence to be explained away by hangovers.

My son was in love with another man.

The pieces to a puzzle I had never known I was trying to put together suddenly fell into place, and I abruptly found that I had to sit down. Cole's best friend, Nick, found me that way, crumpled in a chair with my forehead in my hand and my hair hanging in my eyes.

"Amy? You okay?" he asked, approaching me warily, and I glanced up immediately.

"Oh, hi, Nicky," I said, forcing a smile.

"What are you doing?" he asked, his eyes flickering to my address book, where Billy's telephone number and address were printed in my

own neat script at the top of the page and the photo of Cole and Billy lay exposed next to it.

I quickly snapped the book closed. I might have guessed the truth behind Cole's recently heightened spirits, but I at least owed him the respect of keeping it to myself. I opened my mouth to respond -- something about writing letters to old friends -- but the expression in Nick's eyes stopped me cold. He knows something, too, I suddenly realized, shocked. Nick's wary gaze remained trained on me as I fumbled for a response, any response at this point, something to cut this tension that hung in the air between me and the young man I sometimes referred to as my third son. "I was..."

"Does he know you know?" Nick whispered, and I swallowed hard, feeling my hands begin to tremble. So it was true.

"I don't know anything," I replied briskly, rising to my feet and tucking my address book back into the drawer from where it came. "All I know is that I'm going to throw on some burgers and steaks. Can you light the barbecue for me, Nicky?"

Nick blinked at me for a second, then nodded slowly. "Yeah... no problem."

So that's how I discovered that my son is -- what is he, exactly? I'm not even sure right now. Are he and Billy dating? Are they "seeing each other," whatever that means these days? Are they just sleeping together? I wonder if I'll ever know. Cole's not exactly the most forthright guy when it comes to matters of the heart. God, I didn't even know he and Jaime, his girlfriend of two years, had broken up until three months after the fact, and if he's that close-lipped about a breakup, imagine how he acts about a full-fledged relationship... and one with another boy, no less. Don't get me wrong; I've always liked Billy. He's only a year older than Cole, and he's intelligent, soft-spoken, and well-mannered; he's a very talented singer, too, and of course, he's extremely good-looking. The perfect package; the kind of guy you might not mind your daughter bringing home. But... your son? It's going to take some getting used to, but as I said, the most important thing to me when it comes to my children is their happiness, and it's quite apparent to me that whatever it is they're doing, however they might define their relationship, Billy Varney makes my baby boy very happy... and what more can I ask?

I Don't Belong Here

Cheryl Lynn Moyer

Drunk on home-grown whiskey mash and hate
He spat in my face, "You don't belong here"
From thin quivering white lips and bulging red eyes
He waved his loaded revolver directly at my head
Testing the length and breath of my resolve

Sadly - I consoled him with the truth
You have nothing to fear
When they finally receive their government checks
They will be forced to deposit them in white-owned banks
Once the funds clear, they will spend it on
Cars from white-owned dealerships
Clothing, appliances, furniture, groceries, and construction materials
All from white-owned businesses

Then they'll be back to struggling for survival again
With all that sweet government money
In your accounts, not theirs

He slowly smiled with rotting teeth and lowered the gun
He offered me a nice job, if I wanted to stay around awhile
I thanked him but said no, he was right the first time

I don't belong here

Fate

Ken Dean

Andy Prolocek was dreaming...a dream that he had had several times now in the past month. One could describe the dream as extremely surrealistic, as dreams go, and entirely implausible.

He was standing in an empty field of very low, rolling mounds that resembled a golf course. His outstretched arm was raised up at a forty-five degree angle, holding back an enormous weight that defied all logic and reason. Pressing against the palm of his hand was a full-size, 767 passenger jetliner.

The impossible plane wasn't resting on the ground or even touching it, but was being entirely supported by his own strength. This defied all normal reasoning, Andy thought to himself, since the weight of the plane had to be grossly exaggerated by gravity and its enormous thrust and speed. But there it rested.... held back from crashing down on him by the palm of his hand.

Andy was terrified, of course, but intensely curious and amazed. He seemed to have all the time in the world, since he was able to hold back fate as if it weighed as light as a feather. He studied the plane closer to try and discern what this all meant. What had started out as a fuzzy dream state was becoming sharper and more distinct.

He saw thick, black smoke off to the right. Stretching as far as he could, while still keeping his hand on the nose of the plane...but then his hand slipped off the nose of the aircraft! Andy cringed for a second...until he realized that the plane was still hanging there, about six feet from the ground.

Walking a few steps to the right, Andy could see smoke and flame pouring out of one of the left wing engines. The engine in question was mangled...as if by an explosion. Something terrible had also happened to cause the rear of the plane to be shattered into a mess of metal skin shards, ripped hydraulic lines and pieces of fabric. Possibly flying chunks of debris from the exploded engine?

He could smell the overwhelming odor of kerosene associated with jet fuel. There was also a high-pitched, keening whine you would usually hear with jet aircraft, but it seemed exaggerated by the one ruined engine.

He also studied the cockpit, which was fairly close to him, and

noticed the pilots. These were the only people he could see in the plane since everyone else was hidden from his view. The pilots seemed to be frozen in time, with their faces highly expressive masks of the terror he was sure they felt. The pilot had his hands pressed against the cockpit window, as if this would hold off the sure destruction that was imminent! The co-pilot displayed a look of blank resignation that oblivion was only a second away.

Being in a dream state, Andy wished there was some way to see the inside of the plane. Suddenly he was inside the passenger compartment, even though the plane was still frozen at a standstill about six feet from the ground.

Everything was totally frozen in time now. There wasn't any noise or vibration. In fact, it was strangely quiet. What was blatantly obvious was the reaction of the passengers to the fact that death, though quick and merciless, was an instant away.

There was a mother holding her infant to her chest so tightly that she must be smothering it. He noticed a man in a business suit gripping the armrests so tightly that the fabric was ripped, his mouth open in what had to be a scream that was about to be extinguished forever. What was most unnerving was the woman in a window seat who looked totally oblivious to the process happening around her, having a peaceful look on her face that was beyond comprehension.

Enough!! It was too much for him to bear. Too much terror...too surreal...he wanted to wake up now!!! He could hear a faint on and off buzzing noise that kept getting louder...and he was trying to figure out where it was coming from. He looked around the plane's interior...but it was actually (his alarm!) The regular reality of the real world came floating into his consciousness, causing the dream state to disappear as if it was thin smoke in a high wind.

But this was Saturday...why was his alarm going off? Oh...he had forgotten to turn it off for the weekend. Stupid!! He reached over and pressed the alarm off. This was the day he, his wife Ruth, and the kids Emily and Katy were going to the giant combo mall at Tuddleberry, to shop and just goof off in general. Being a project manager for a large, successful software company left him little time to spend with the family, so he had to use it wisely.

He heard his wife's voice. "Andy...what's wrong?" She obviously noticed him jarring awake and now the sweaty look of dismay on his face.

"The dream", Andy said. "I had it again."

“That’s the third time now in a month, right?” asked Ruth. “That is very weird. Are you OK?”

“Yeah”, Andy replied, “Just shaken up. It all seemed so real...it seems more real each time it happens.”

“Maybe it would be a good time to check with Jim, you know, to make sure everything’s OK.” replied Ruth. Jim Bochi was a good friend of theirs, a psychologist. It might be a good idea to talk to him...try to figure out what was going on.

The dream was already fading, just like the mid morning fog races away from the sun.

“Lets get up and get going”...”it’s a nice, clear summer day and we should make the most of it at the mall”

“Good idea”, Ruth said. “I’ll go make sure the kids are up. It’s about eight, right?”

“Yup”, Andy replied.

The kids will love this, Andy thought. The three level mall was one of the family’s favorite hangouts. Plus they were making a lot of improvements and additions that they were all eager to see. Especially some outdoor additions...like a water park and miniature golf course. (Miniature golf course!?) Andy shook his head, as if to clear it. Now where had that déjà vu- like thought come from, tugging at the corner of his consciousness?

Andy went ahead and got ready. Shaved and showered. Ruth got ready next...the kids had showered the night before, so they were set. Teeth brushing, face washing were enough for them after the nightly shower.

He had quite a family in the three girls. Ruth was the perfect wife, at least to Andy. They were on their second marriage each, as so many American families tended to be, but as far as he could tell it was perfect.

Ruth herself had a great Marketing position with a reputable firm and seemed content with her position. With both their incomes combined, life was fairly comfortable.

The two girls were quite amazing also. Both were their own children from this marriage.

Emily was the other techhead in the family. Andy had seen her write some pretty hefty code in the programming class at her high school. Plus he could always depend on her to help with the wireless network at home if he wasn’t around. Katy had more of an artistic bent and it showed in her Saturday sessions at a local art college. He and Ruth had both been highly impressed with some of the drawings she had produced so far.

Some of the art savvy people they knew had been impressed also, and had suggested that she begin a portfolio now to build on in case she decided to go to an art college later.

It was about 10AM by then. “Do you guys want to get something to eat on the way?” asked Andy. Yes was the consensus. So they all jumped into the SUV and stopped for breakfast sandwiches before leaving for the mall.

After that, they hopped on to the freeway to head for the mall. The modern freeway system had to be one of the modern marvels of the day as far as travel went...comparable to the ancient roads of the Romans. You always had a feeling of power and speed while driving on them, especially in the brand new SUV.

“Now don’t drive too fast, sweets.” Ruth commented.

“Right.” Andy answered, as he knew he had a predilection for fast driving. He had received his fair share of speeding tickets.

It only took about fifteen minutes of travel to reach the exit for Tuddleberry.

Andy slowed down and was making the turn on the exit that veered almost in a full circle as most freeway exits do...right up to the stoplight before the entrance to the mall. He could see the mall from the stoplight as they were waiting on the light to change. The construction for the new outdoor additions could also be seen. On one end Andy could see the beginnings of a water park which looked to be of moderate size. It was a miniature version of a water park which sat next to the city’s zoo on the north end of town. On the southern end of the mall it seemed they had the miniature golf course about halfway finished, with the greenery laid down along with some low rolling hills for realism like an actual golf course might have.

None of the fixtures were present yet, such as windmills, funny little buildings, etc. One had to admit...it would look nice when finished. But...there was something peculiar about the way the miniature golf course looked...something oddly familiar.

“Andy! The lights green!! The person behind us is honking!!” cried Ruth.

“OH!!! Right!!!” replied Andy, being jarred back to the present by his wife’s urging. He gunned through the green light into the mall parking lot and suddenly realized he needed to watch for pedestrians and slowed down.

Andy was shaken and sweaty...the vision was so real! It looked so clear!

“What happened back there?” asked Ruth. “You really looked to be

off in frickin' LaLa-land."

"You OK Dad?" asked Emily.

"Yeah, I'm fine...was just day-dreaming for a second."

(Is that what you call it...day-dreaming? He felt like he was somewhere else for a few seconds.)

"Well be careful!" Ruth insisted, "That's a good way to have an accident."

"You're right....sorry." Andy knew she was right, but he didn't like to be nagged.

"Here's a parking spot" Andy said as he swung the SUV into the angled space, and not to far from the malls south entrance, where the golf course was being constructed.

"OK...everybody out" Andy said, and added a little joke of his own he used whenever they went shopping, "and remember...nobody gets to buy *anything!*"

"Yada, Yada Dad" Katy quipped. "You say that every time we come here, but we still get to buy stuff! Hah!"

Yup...standard answer, Andy thought to himself.

They proceeded to walk to the south mall entrance, Ruth holding his hand as always with the girls in tow. "Want to get a cup of coffee in a few minutes?" Andy asked.

"Sure" replied Ruth. "White Cappuccino, as always." There was an espresso cafe about halfway down the mall's interior where they usually stopped at. Great coffee.

They were inside now, and Andy noticed a new software store called Comp Accessories at this end of the mall. He would like to stop and check for a new project manager software package he had been looking for, but decided to do that on the way back.

"Where to, girls?" asked Andy.

"Can we go to Pantene's first?" Emily asked. "They have a sale going on and there are some clothes that Jackie and Sarah were talking about yesterday."

"Sounds like a plan." said Andy. "We'll stop at the java café on the way there."

Andy looked up as they were walking and noticed the large rectangular skylights the mall was famous for. Tuddelberry was different than most others, in that they had a V-shaped roof instead of flat. On both sides of the roof were skylights that were quite large and were spaced evenly down the whole length of the malls ceiling. Large amounts of

open sky were visible and the clear sky outside was letting quite a lot of sunshine come through.

Visible also were several jet contrails high in the sky, a couple quite close together. But there was something peculiar about one of the contrails, the one he could see traveling east to west.

“Dad...what was that?” asked Katy. “There in the sky. It looks like one of the planes stopped.” Andy hadn’t realized Katy was looking at the sky also.

Stopped was one way to describe it...the jet contrail had suddenly terminated in a bigger puff of steam or smoke. It was hard to tell what had happened from this distance.

“Just a minute Katy, I’m not sure either” Andy replied. Andy kept looking at the strange jet signature in the sky, but he couldn’t see any wreckage trail leading anywhere. It was as if the jet had stopped suddenly...but that wasn’t possible! He thought of one possibility...but it sent chills up his back!

Andy came to a sudden, chilling revelation. The jet airliner could possibly be coming directly towards them...giving them a heads-on perspective! He knew all at once where he absolutely *had* to be! In his dream the plane crashed where HE was standing. To him that was a clue that it was somehow homing in on where he was. But he had to make sure his family was out of harms way also.

Trying to keep from shaking and appearing nervous, realizing he had to hurry, Andy spoke to Ruth. “Listen Honey...do you mind if I go back to the new store at the south entrance, the one called Comp Accessories? There’s some software I’ve been looking for.”

“Sure.” replied Ruth. “Is everything OK? You look like you saw a ghost.”

“Nah...everything’s fine.” Andy said. (*Stay calm...don’t look nervous!!*) “Just wanted to look for it now and catch up with you girls at Pantene’s.” It wasn’t the truth...but he had to make sure his family headed to the north end of the mall.

“OK” Ruth said. “Call us on the cell when you’re headed back so you can find us.”

“Sure...no problem. Just take a minute” Andy replied.

Suddenly Andy realized that he would never see his family again. But he had to be at *that* certain place...to ensure *their* safety!

“Listen girls...I’ll see you shortly. I love you” Andy said. “We love you too, Dad” the girls responded, looking a little puzzled. “We’ll see you in a few minutes, right?”

“Yup...be back in a flash” Andy replied. “Love you,” his heart sinking as he spoke the words.

The girls headed on towards Pantene’s, at the north end of the mall, where it was hopefully safer.

Andy turned and walked hurriedly back to the other end of the mall, wanting to get there as quickly as possible. He wasn’t sure how much time he had, but it couldn’t take very long for a plane to plummet to the earth at a forty-five degree angle.

As soon as he was out of sight from the girls he began to run, hoping they wouldn’t turn to look and possibly see him.

There! The south entrance! He slammed through doors as quickly as possible and ran towards the construction site for the miniature golf course.

He had to jump the fence around the construction area, and fell in the process. Bumped his knee and elbow pretty good, but that didn’t matter. As long as he got to the place where he was meant to be.

He looked up quickly and could see some movement now. The smoke trail seemed to be coming towards the mall. It was still hard to tell though, with the head on perspective. Hurry!!

He ran/limped towards the center of the course, in the middle of some low mounds of fake, green landscape. This had to be the place...it looked exactly like his dream. He stopped, winded, and looked up. There was the jet...racing towards him...its shape discernable now and growing in size. He might have twenty –thirty seconds at the most.

Time seemed to slow down and stretch out. He thought of his family, friends, and all the people he had known in the past forty-two years. All would be gone from him soon! He felt a terrible loss. But he had to be here to ensure the safety of the people in the mall...especially his family! He knew in his very being that the plane would crash down exactly where he was.

The time was up!! The plane was suddenly there...about 2 seconds away!! He caught a quick glimpse of the pilots in the cockpit...looking exactly as he remembered.

He quickly raised his arm, as if he could stop the plane just like in his dream. He was hoping against hope that somehow Fate might find another way.

But Fate being Fate was unstoppable...

Anatomy of Girl

Matina L. Stamatakis

I am in style this year--makeshift,
a paradigm chest, hard exoskeleton
on wrought iron skin. I think
of weight
as immovable,
distant between the center
of my thumb
and forefinger.

II

Yet there is mass,
compulsion in my webbed feet,
and a constant tap
in my spine that sends me
whirling,
reeling into the thick of hysteria.

III

I live to serve the femur and fibula--dance
with the notion I have balance, equal proportions,
even in the distant corners
of my hips. I swing pendulums
on raw flesh, entertain the possibility
I am weightless this year--
next year
I hope to come back as the fading eye of a fad,
discrediting the weight of Newton's Law.

The Dream

Brad E. McLelland

He stood on the front porch and gazed across the cornfield in search of the dream.

The wood under his feet, white planks etched with muddled gray, creaked and moaned under his bare-footed weight, a world of cracks and splinters and termites tearing up the wood like old demolitionists. Over his head, a sagging aluminum roof concealed a lonely morning sky adrift in banks of whistling snowclouds, patches of colorless melancholy that cast fat shadows across the land, obscuring the dream in its lofty getaway.

Jake cursed at his bad luck. The dream had run somewhere out between the rows, a four-and-a-half-acre maze of dead leaning stalks, somewhere out there biding its time for an unnoticed flight up into the mountains. It had found its feet sometime around five, ripping itself loose and running wistfully out the kitchen door. Jake, who'd still been mostly drunk from the previous night, had jumped out of bed with a snarl, scaring Maggie half to death and stomping across the bedroom for his pants. He'd gone to the closet and taken down his Marlin Model 39A, the rifle his daddy had won for him in the raffle back in '47, and had loaded the thing and was loping out the door before Maggie could even say a word.

He'd hoped at first that the dream hadn't gotten past the kitchen; the last one to pull a stunt like this had fled about as far as the screen door before he'd blasted it, putting a hole in the mesh and killing it dead. But as he reached the kitchen this time, he found the dream long gone, already scuttling away into the dark field, weaving in and out of the hazy rows in a jagged escape that left only the faintest trail in the light snow. At that point, standing and watching it scamper off, Jake began to pace, and to cuss, not even taking notice of the creaky boards under his feet. The barrel of the Marlin followed every shadow in the field, but so far no dream had sprung into its sights. And already the day seemed to be getting darker. All hope of finding the dream was bleak.

Maggie, wrapped in her winter nightgown, stepped out onto the porch and placed a hand around Jake's skinny waist. The other went up to his cheek and traced the scar, a diagonal blemish that ran from the bottom of the man's left eye to the bristly point of his long, square jaw. She looked at the scar as though it were the final stroke of an interesting painting.

“Got away, did it?”

“Ain’t seen a thing,” Jake said, huffing clouds of hot breath. “It’s out there in the field—somewhere. Bidin its time.”

“You’ll find it,” she said. “You always do.” Again, Maggie traced the scar. “You want me to go inside and wake Junior? You’ve been wantin to take him all year.”

Jake nodded quietly, but his eyes never left the field.

When she came back out, Junior was behind her, sleepy-eyed but wearing his green, little boy’s coveralls and a bright orange hunting vest. He was also holding his father’s boots, a clean flannel shirt, and a pair of wool socks. Jake ruffled his hair and took the clothes with a grin. As he slipped into the boots, he motioned at Junior to take the Marlin, which he’d propped up on a post. The boy gawked at it in surprise.

“Me, Pa? You kiddin?” Junior was eight.

“Oh, no,” Jake told him. “I think it’s high time. I’ve been meanin to get you some practice anyway.”

“But what if I ... what if I miss?”

Jake grinned again. “You won’t. I’ll tell you what to do.”

They took off together, father and son, down the steps and toward the field. In the front yard, without the cover of the porch, Jake saw remorsefully that his initial speculation was slowly proving true: The day was growing darker. It seemed a winter storm was heading this direction, rolling in from the north, and would be here in just a few hours. But that couldn’t stand in the way of a good hunt. If it snowed until next fall, Jake would never quit, and he would never teach Junior to quit. Hunting dreams was something of an obsession now. Not a single dream, no matter how cunning, had escaped Jake’s bullets, and damned if he was going to let some five-in-the-morning, light-on-the-feet dream get the better hand on him right in front of his own boy! Besides, what would he say to Junior? That his daddy had failed in the hunting and killing of his own dream? Jake’s own daddy had never told such news, and damned if he would break that proud tradition!

Stepping into the dead corn, Jake instructed Junior to get the gun ready, which meant putting it high center on the right shoulder, left hand supporting the half-stock, right hand squeezed around the trigger guard and ready for the cock of the lever.

“Remember what I taught you about the lever?” Jake asked.

“Yes, daddy, don’t be scared of it.”

“That’s right. Let your arm be the gun, and make sure you breathe.”

“Yessir.”

“This here is a good American rifle, Junior. Best around for baggin dreams. Nothin better than a good American rifle to bag a dream. Just be ready.”

“Okay, daddy.”

Dreams sometimes were funny things. They liked to pop out and surprise you, and being unstable little bastards, sometimes they reached and grabbed mounds of flesh. Jake still carried the scar from one such adventure, and it served as a daily reminder of just how dangerous dreams could be. Just like this dream, the little critter back then had ripped itself loose just before sunrise, scurrying out the bedroom window and into the barn outside with a clumsy wriggle that made Jake think it was a young one, not quite on its heels like the others. Just as he'd crossed the barn's threshold, the dream had sprung from above, landing on his head. The result was the scar that damn near covered the left side of his face. Consequently, once the dream had clawed him, Jake had wrestled it to the ground and put a bullet through its body before it could do any more damage. Then, he'd buried it beneath the juniper tree in the front yard, planting a small wooden cross over the fresh grave, the words *HERE LIES MY DREAM, GUNNED DOWN BY A PROUD MAN* chiseled into the wood.

That had been seven months ago. He'd put up quite a few more crosses since then.

Stepping deeper into the field, the man and his son looked here and there across the gray of the early morning, watching and waiting for signs like good hunters with a sense of expectation. Dreams were not only funny things at times, the bastards often flew away before you could even raise your gun; and when they flew, not even the bullet from a rifle could bring them down, they were so fast in flight.

Jake was contemplating this when a sudden movement in front of them made him jump, bump Junior, and cause the boy to unload a round out of pure fright. The blast echoed to the foot of the distant hill and then zoomed back again on the wind-frozen air like an electric wire. As the silence rushed back into the field, Jake put a hand on the cooling barrel, pushing it down to ground level.

“Careful, son, careful,” Jake whispered, glancing up and down, left and right. “We may have just lost it with that one. We gotta tread light, son, light. Finger off that trigger for the meantime.”

“Sorry, daddy.”

“It's okay. I think it's still around. I can smell it.”

The dream was surely there, somewhere up ahead, because that sudden movement had been close, almost close enough to touch. That was another thing about dreams: Sometimes they tempted you with the hope of a trophy, an easy win, and then left you despairing of your claim. That might have been the worst thing about them, in fact.

Jake scowled at that thought and buried his head below the breeze. They started walking again.

“Daddy?”

“Yes, boy?”

“I don’t think I can do it.”

“What do you mean, can’t?”

“I don’t know if I can kill a dream.”

“Sure you can, son! I done it many a’times!”

“But I just don’t know.”

“Listen, all you gotta do—”

Another movement stopped him—a quiet shuffling through the stalks. Jake froze, hand on Junior’s chest. Something moved ahead of him, just off to the right. He was sure it was the dream. He let go of Junior’s chest. The boy steadied the rifle, trembling a bit but otherwise sturdy. And just as Jake figured, the dream, unaware of their presence, eased out from under its cover, standing motionless in the row and sniffing at a patch of errant wind. A perfect target if ever there was one.

Jake smiled. It was small, this dream, much smaller than the one in the barn, but it would make Junior a fine first trophy. Stock-still, Jake eased his hand beneath the barrel and raised the sights into place, aiming for Junior as best as he could. He mouthed a silent “Okay,” before moving his hand and preparing for the blast.

“Daddy!” Junior whispered, suddenly shaking. “I can’t!”

“Yes, you can!”

“I’m scared!”

Jake bit his top lip. “Don’t freeze up now! You got it in your sights! Look at it! It’s a beaut! Don’t you want that trophy?”

“I just can’t!”

“Junior! Kill that dream! Now!”

“Daddy—!”

Either the dream smelled something in the breeze or caught a glimpse of the pair standing nearby, because it shifted suddenly, glared straight at them, and took to its feet up the long, brown row, getting ready for a quick flight to the mountains. Jake, in turn, grabbed the Marlin out of

Junior's hands and aimed quickly, letting his breath whoosh out in one final rush. He cocked the lever and squeezed the trigger as the dream tore off through the snow, lifting its hindquarters, readying to take wing.

The rifle boomed and came alive in Jake's hands. The bullet found its mark, striking the dream straight in the middle of its back. The man heard a wail, a high screech, and smelled fresh blood, the signal of a good kill. He let out a yelp of victory, inhaling the odor, and slapped Junior on the shoulder with an uncaring hand. That smell—it was unlike anything he'd ever smelled—but it was not at all unpleasant and reminded him of all the things he loved and cherished and ever wanted to do but never could.

Lowering the gun, Jake bent and tracked the line of sweet blood through the snow. The dream had scurried off, somewhere off to his left, but it wouldn't go far—it was going where it was going so it could die. Junior followed close behind. Then they saw it—thirty more yards away. Parting back the last cornstalk, Jake leaned in where the body lay, and studied the dream from a few safe feet. It was still breathing, but having trouble at it; Jake could tell he wouldn't have to wait too long. Nor would he have to waste another round. Any moment now the dream would die without his help.

Ten minutes later, father and son were dragging the dead dream out of the field and up to the house, Jake wearing a proud smirk, Junior smiling but maybe crying a little too. Maggie was waiting for them both on the front porch, hot coffee for Jake, hot chocolate for Junior. Her face gleamed in the dull morning light like the face of a shiny porcelain doll. "Oh, boys, I knew you'd get it!" she said happily, and Jake couldn't help but hold that wide, victorious smile a little longer. Out here, living so high off the land and relying on no one and nothing but yourself and your instincts, even the tiniest, most insignificant dream was worth scouting out and gunning down. If only for the feeling.

"I hope you learned a lesson today," Jake told Junior, sitting down on the porch to clean the gun and sip his coffee. "I hope you learned a real good lesson."

Never let a dream get the best of you, his daddy had always told him. If you bury them first, they won't have the chance to get away. Never let a dream get the best of you.

That afternoon, remembering his daddy's proud words, Jake buried his dream beneath the juniper tree.

MONARCHS *by Lalinda De La Fuente*

The steel bars on my cell have long since rusted away,
The tainted citrus flakes fluttering monarchs at my feet.

They swell at the ground, a rising surge of orange wave,
Waiting for me to pull myself aside,
Heave my skin and bones out of these oppressing,
Repressing,
Suppressing,
Walls.

But their tissue wings lack the fortitude to lift,
Up and out,
My anvil heart.

In and out they dip and dive,
Beckoning me to flee,
Circling me in a dancing frenzy,
Closing in at my stale sides,
Waiting for my guard-less escape
Where no one remains to stop me.

Sand *by Andrew H. Oerke*

Sand melts down the hourglass's
swimsuit-like figure on its own accord,
tips over, and recycles itself
like the Holy Immaculate Word.

The lion of distance kneels
and leaps like a bighorn ram
up the escalator of the wind's Shazaam.
Sand unloads weather's U-Haul van
and stores the ocean's struggling foam sofas.

Finally, dust whirls like a devil,
does a dervish, and returns to sand.
Every grain is heard to sigh:
I fly for a moment,
and like the moment I die.

Pat's Great Idea

Amanda Killham Davis

"Nonfat, iced chai, extra sweet, no lid," I called to my partner Ed from the front register. "Enjoy, Melissa. Have a great day." I hope you spill it on your milk chocolate treader pants and then trip over your sexy, spiked sandals and cut open your foot on the concha shell skinny straps dividing your perfect pink grapefruit pedicured toes. I smile my best barista smile and wonder: How does she drive in those shoes?

My next potential tip steps forward. "The regular, Cindy?" I inquire solicitously. I'm in a contest to remember the most customer names and regular orders; I plan to win.

"No Thanks, Pat. Today I'll try a double espresso with soy foam." Learn to pronounce dim bulb. And get some taste, too while you're at it. I sneak a look in the case. "Our carrot cake is excellent. Would you like to try some with your espresso?" I place a large delectable slice, its white cream cheese frosting mounding in lovely waves, on a convenient used plate and pass it over the counter. "Oh, I'm sorry. You don't want it; my mistake. No problem." What a shame; Guess I'll have to eat it.

I survey the thinning commuter crowd in the shop as I gobble the cake before Ed notices. He is so industrious: always scrubbing, straightening, hauling out the garbage. There he goes now. "Hey Ed. Have smoke while you're out. I'll hold the fort."

"Thanks Pat. You're a doll." He struggles to dump the spent grounds into the special metal can we use just for them. Coffee grounds are so heavy, wet and steamy that regular bags can't handle the weight. Too bad Corporate didn't take my suggestion about having our stupid tree-hugging patrons haul them off for us, free. Put them in a fancy bag and call them compost. Jerks. I place my used plate on the counter under the pastry case. Hardly any crumbs. No point in wasting time or energy to take it back to the dish room.

My hand grazes the tip jar on my way past; I palm the \$10 bill lying on top. Glancing quickly around to be sure Ed is not coming back in, I pocket it. If he returns unexpectedly, I always say I'm turning in the \$1's we got yesterday. What a simp.

I spend the next few minutes fantasizing about the hot car I'll buy with the prize money from the customer service contest. Corporate is so



into contests and team building activities. I enter them all. This money will be mine. I'm quite confident.

A sweet Silver BMW pulls in. Man, it gets me hot. The alloy wheels and gold kit really make my head spin. Couldn't be more perfect if I ordered it myself. The driver gets out. His Black linen logo shirt screams corporate dick. Not too bad looking himself. Great hair. He turns to use the keyless entry lock as he approaches our door. Great butt, too. Too bad I prefer women; I might let him do me in his car, though. He'd never know he wasn't the reason for my enthusiasm.

"Are you Pat?" he begins. My heart leaps. This is it. I knew my customer service skills were superior. Hot damn!

"I'm here from Corporate to recognize your 2nd place in the national customer service contest. Congratulations!" He puts out his great hairy male paw. I gape; I slap it away. He opens his mouth to continue. "And....."

"Whad'ya mean: 2nd place? I'm the best you've got in your stupid organization." Spit forms at the corners of my mouth; my heart pounds; conversation stops. Stumbling over my black Nikes, I grab my bag from behind the counter, elbow around Ed standing open-mouthed, skirt the startled customers in line and exit with a satisfying spit aimed at the Silver BMW wheels. Screw'em; I'm better than 2nd.

A placard in the windshield catches my eye: Grounds for your Garden. I glance down at the license plate: PATSIDA.

Shit.

MILLION DOLLAR SMILE

Steve De France

“My uncle owns a lake in Tennessee.
A Boathouse & Jacuzzi and a king-sized bed
& mirrors on all walls & ceiling.
Jet skis tied-up at his private pier.
I can’t wait to show it off to my boy friend.
Troy will love it... he works at Costco.
15 years now & still can’t get off weekends,”
She smiles, “You’re getting a little thin on top.”
I nod my head in agreement & stare
Out the window at the freeway
Which is hardly ever free.
A battle-ground as people fight
Their way toward another kind
Of steaming hell at home or work.
Listlessly I watch cars prowling
Like angry ants swarming on asphalt.
Heat waves bend my view. 110 in L.A.
There is no pattern to traffic anymore.
People work & live anywhere &
They go to & fro at anytime.
“I can’t wait to get in that big bed &
Let it all hang-out.”
I look at her leviathan legs & walrus-shaped hips.
“How’s Tennessee in August?” I ask.
“Hot & humid. You go outside...
You’re drenched in 5 minutes.”
“How’s swimming in the lake?”
“Full of water moccasins.”
“Really? How do you water ski?”
“The snakes are mainly toward the shore.”
“Oh,” I said. “Doesn’t sound too healthy.”
“I worry more ‘bout giant mosquitoes.
They gnaw the life right out of the body.”
She pats me on my bald spot.

“There you go honey.”
I stand-up & slip her a five.
She smiles through a snaggle
Of tobacco stained teeth.
“You going on vacation?”
“Nope, I gotta work.”
“Whatta ya do?”
“I’m a snake-wrangler
at a poisonous reptile lab.”
“Gee that sounds *really* interesting.”
She stares at me with a *real hunger*
“Well if you ever get lonely... give me a call.”
She smiles her million-dollar smile
as I head for the *Freeway*.



“Sleeping Woman”

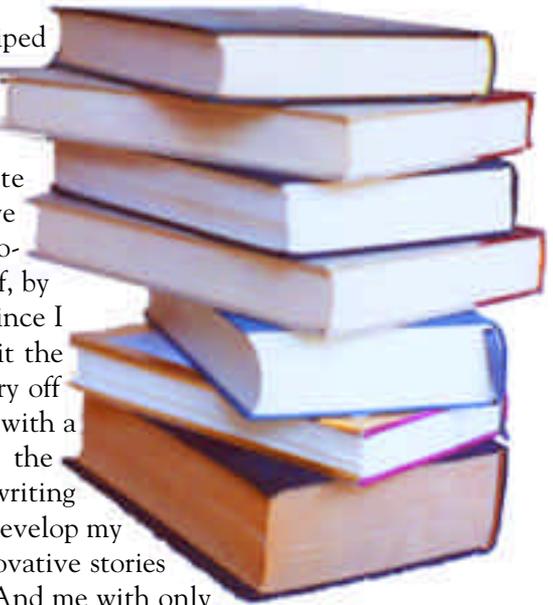
art by A. D. Winans

The Quest for Publication

Clair Dickson

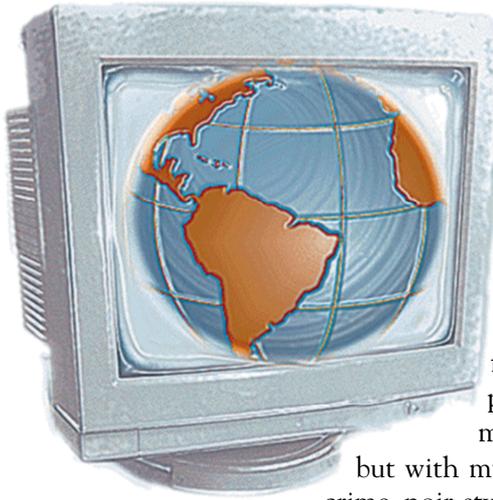
I'm trying to find the holy grail of writing: publication. For years, I've been writing stories that get good reviews from my friends and family. Maybe they're just feeding me a line because all I get when I submit is a neatly typed rejection letter. And the first page of my story in case I've forgotten what I sent.

On a wooden chair swiped from my dad when I moved out and before a new LCD monitor decorated by multi-colored sticky notes, I write crime noir-styled private eye stories with a bitter female protagonist. It's been done, sort of, by some big name authors now. Since I don't feel that anyone's done it the way I do, I print my prized story off and stuff it in a large envelope with a couple stamps on it. When the reply returns, with my handwriting on the envelope, I am told to develop my own voice and write new, innovative stories with new, exciting language. And me with only the same words everyone else has to work with. Well, I can live with that and set off writing, full of caffeine. I come up with another story and send that off with a stamp and a wish.



The reply is that, well, the editor didn't like the language I used. Looking through the other things published, other short PI stories, I find that they write more contemporary and less like the crime noir of the 30's. Sarcastic and flippant and very modern. I'm all of those things in real life. Back at the computer, I type out another story and send it off with more stamps and more hope.

The hope must have gotten lost in the mail because I got another rejection letter. This time I get told that while my characters are interesting, the story is flat. Good characters, good writing, bad story. No



problem. Under the yellow glow of my desk lamp, I tighten the story up so I can send it back out. More stamps, but I didn't have any hope to spare. Ran out somewhere between five and six thousand words.

Finally, the front page of the story returns with a short note saying it didn't fit their needs. Too different from the kinds of stories they publish. So I write a story that was more akin to the capers they publish, but with my sassy female PI and flavored with crime noir-stylings and send that off. I almost slipped a twenty in the envelope.

Apparently I should have because the rejection slip comes like clockwork. I'm starting to hate getting the mail. This time, I'm told that they already get many plots similar to this, and they would like something different. I tacked that one on my dartboard. On top of the last letter that said they wanted something closer to what they normally publish.

But at least they used my name.

And they would like to see more of my work. Which, I've concluded, doesn't mean at all that they have any interest in publishing it. They just want to use my submission to decide what they don't want.

Wanted! A Clown Incognito

Amir aziz

Beware of the feats of a veteran clown incognito
Who is a myopic judge and underfed humped gambler
Convention, foresight, love and reason are whose cosmetic hues.
He is a royal merchant whose ship capsized along the shore
He is a serpent, a thief, an alligator and a sage behind single visage
His gadgets have varied standards
Builds shrines for the dead and spoils the living
Lacks sight and pretends insight
With a storm in his head, his manifesto is the same
Behold his hurried acceptance of crushing defeat
The authorities look at their brainchild aghast
A diseased, incorrigible and humble puppet of sand
A self-mocking savage, a lip-tight icon
A drowning carcass, an exhausted hound.
Vain glorious idolater, blind to the apex threads.
Wages war and signs the armistice in the same breath
A spoiled child, whose morals vary across the frontiers.
A mysterious vase, a beauty without truth
Toppled numerous gods for his personal throne
His infinite prophetic flights bear true witness to his godly genius
But his doglike ambush attacks on the left over, deny this claim.
A Stone, who has set ablaze his credentials of innocence
He is a poor mercenary pawn and a chessman simultaneously.
Such a notorious and familiar stranger he is and still at large.
May he be residing in your heart, arrest him and undress him.

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