

down in the dirt

revealing all your
dirty little secrets

v 029

December '05

ISSN 1554-9666



1 554996 600005

Table of contents

12/05, Down in the Dirt, volume 029

Linda Webb Aceto	1
Michelle Greenblatt	2
Christopher Barnes	2
Eri Bonholtzer	3
John Grey	4
Stephanie Maher	4
Michael Keshigian	5
Lauren Harrison	6
Yorgo L. Douramacos	7
PD Casteel	8
Kem Dean	26
Devin Wayne Davis	30
Jon Kuntz	31
Jack Cooley	32
Raud Kennedy	34
Christopher Thomas.....	35
Kenneth C. Eng	36
Stephanie Bernard	38

Scars art: pages 39, 40. cover art, photographed Christmas 2004.

Daddy's Girl, Part 1

Linda Webb Aceto

He had straight black hair,
and a broad back,
arms that could hold me against the world.
When I was particularly clever
his face would light up.
But his eyes were disguised;
they only had room
to reflect himself.

Vicodin Cracking

Michelle Greenblatt

I vomit in your toilet with the water
on in the shower so you don't hear me.
in the other room, your mother's dog is

barking. when I am done, I put my face
in a sink full of cold water, bottle
of Vicodin cracking in my seventeen year

old hand. I come back out, naked, shivering,
circling around the dark apartment until
I find you, looking at me. I stumble,

find my watch, put on my clothes. I worry
about driving as I cross over the laundry to
your body.

2.1.2002

The Hard Taskmaster

Christopher Barnes, UK

Another Mata Hari unriddles.
Behind my back
she is fandango, love-in-idleness,
and pillow.

I break my way, don't swivel
- skeeter through turnpikes
mangled into bash-hammering rain,
eyes trickling, fingers ice in pockets.

I shoulder-shrug away
the reflection
of the chocolate-flowing hair.

from the Spooks poems

The Outsider

Eric bonholtzer, from the book *Duality*



Zan's stomach churned and knotted, his fingers on the door. When it opened, there would be a new beginning. No more being an outcast. No more ridicule. He had had enough of that to last a lifetime. The heavy metal door represented an escape, a chance at a new life. *What will they think?* He wondered. *Will they torment me too?* He wasn't sure, but he didn't think so. These were different people, an entirely different situation. No more taunting. Nor more lost lunch money or being an outsider. When you are young things like that still seem significant.

I'll always be an outsider, he thought, his fingers making a hasty retreat. Indecision gripped him. *No, you didn't come all this way just to give up now.* And how far he had come, he reflected. *Seems like a trillion miles.* His long index digit wrapped the door handle. *This is a breakthrough,* Zan thought to himself. The door to the space shuttle door opened and Zan stepped out, feeling the reassuring texture of the solid Earth beneath his claws.

"A new beginning," he muttered, with a slim smile, the setting sun glinting off his pale green skin, "A new beginning." He trudged forward, his tail trailing behind with high expectations.

FROM REBECCA IN LONDON

John Grey

Your letters wish for more mystery.
You get pregnant in a foreign land
as if an unwanted child could
ground you to that place.
as if any stranger who stops and
smiles at you could be the father.
You earn a little money dancing
in Soho clubs, exploring the
antique stores in the afternoon.
How unpressured, the beauty of old
things, you add.
You dance on tables.
Topless, you whisper in a short
capital-less sentence.
I can sense the hushed breath of
one fat shadow of men buffing
your breasts and your hatred
struggling to make a grin.
We have always been audience.
Your picture sits on my desk like
plane tickets to some exotic place
I never use.

Your eyes are opened wide in this
small framed glossy. You are in
danger of falling out of them.
You don't have to tell me. I remember
the joy of meeting
the perfect beautiful woman
and then, having done that,
moving onto someone else,
how sometimes it was easier
and better to write about it
then wonder who would steal you.
You say that is the way. You silence
rooms for a while but then
we all slip next door,
hungry for the noise.
There is an abortion and an absurd
silence you fill with a story
about a picnic on the grounds
of a big, empty castle.
You say that, knowing nothing was
inside, you still peeked in.

The Complications

Stephanie Maher

Or you could remember
Waking up, wrapped around him
Your mouth pressed to his smooth neck,
A morning-long kiss to his heartbeat.

HOMELESS IN NYC

Michael Keshigian

I crossed 42nd to get to Fifth
towards mid-town
and just paces in front of me
an old lady pushed a shopping cart
full of identity.

Bags of cans dangled
from each elbow
clanged as she waddled
in clothes
worse than a country scarecrow

though her straw gray hair
hung longer
tied in a tail with brown hosiery
to match her stoic, weathered face.
It pained my heart

when suddenly she squatted
and froze
in a deep knee bend
like picking something off the sidewalk.
I quickly approached

to help
unaware of the problem
till a puddle formed
and its river flowed
around my shoes

down the curb.
In the privacy of her mind
she transformed
my sympathy
to confused helplessness.

The Complications

Stephanie Maher

Or you could remember
Waking up, wrapped around him
Your mouth pressed to his smooth
neck,
A morning-long kiss to his heart-
beat.

Little Children

Lauren Harrison

The door is bigger than either of them.
Mom and Dad, they're behind the door.

I know the boy is my brother, before he went to juvvie.
He was taller than me. Still is. The other one,
the girl with the big eyes, that's me before
I learned to use a dictionary. My brother,
he stares at the door. He will not look at the
girl, but he holds her hand tight.

They can't see Mom and Dad, but they know them,
just like I can remember them if I try. Dad's glasses
are plastic. They slip down his nose when he talks.
Mom has too many freckles and pudgy fingers.

I want to take their heads in my hands, tell
them to run. They could go anywhere, but they can't
listen to me now. I'm talking in my head to something
that happened. The last thing kids need is parents
who sleep in separate beds. (That's not entirely true.
Dad didn't sleep in a separate bed. He slept on the couch.)
They are behind the doorknob and the girl
(that was me), she wants to get in. I want
to take them away to somewhere safe --
a closet, a cliff, a school bus, anywhere
not here. I don't think they'd leave if they could.

She wants to turn the knob, taller than her head of curls.
She wants to see those words
they say fall to the floor. I want to cry, Stupid
girl. You will learn how to talk like them,
you will learn how to scream. You are too
eager to learn everything, even that. But you
are me. I can't change it, neither can you. This
is who you (I) came from.
I learned from the doorknob. I don't know
what I learned but that
there are always doorknobs higher
than my head when I sleep.

Cynicism

Yorgo L Douramacos

We, as a generation, are not immediately given to cynicism per say. But, to turn a some what clumsy phrase, cynicism was given to us.

It was handed down. Irony, suspicion and bald faced opportunism were right there in our cribs and bassinets from day one. We're the children of the myth-busters and the hero-killers. All gods and heroes and ideals were challenged and torn down, but never replaced with anything beyond crude variations on basic survivalism.

We were handed our parents' wealth and power, but no aims or maxims beyond advancement and suspicion. Naturally, many of us became suspicious of advancement.

The only ideals that remain are ambition and excellence, but for the torch bearers of a program of complete cynical denial, these are quickly put to the flame.

We are left with no ideal, no ambition and a reservoir of confused emotion with no human outlet. All of them having been destroyed before us or by us.

It's no wonder that sex has taken on such a desperate flavor. We flaunt our transient assets and demand attention from a cold and remote population so numerous it may yet choke out the sun, but which can provide no warmth through the pixels.

Detention Diatribe

PD Casteel

So I guess you want to know why I did it, or how I did it. I mean...I really didn't mean to do it. Of course I assume you know what I am talking about. The one thing I can say is that it wasn't my intention. You just don't wake up in the morning and say to yourself, "Hey, I think I am going to fuck somebody up today." Usually, I am so goddamned worried about getting to the office on time I don't even think about anything else. I am sure most people are that way. It seems like you get up out of the bed in the morning and start rushing around to get ready, so you can get to work on time, and then you spend the rest of the day just rushing around trying to catch up. Hell, if you manage to actually get something done then you're stupid enough to think you've actually had a good day. I am not sure why everyone thinks that way, but they do. I do, too.

This morning was the same. I just got out of bed and started rushing around to get ready for work. I saw him before he left for school and told him to have a good day. He's a good kid. That is all I have to do in the morning is to tell him I love him and wish him a good day. You know if you teach them right, they know how to get themselves up in the morning, brush their teeth and get something to eat. It makes them more responsible. So I just told him to have a good day at school and I would see him later. I certainly didn't think about her.

To be honest, I really didn't even think about my son that much. He walks to school every morning. He has been doing it on his own for two years now. I used to worry about him walking to school on his own, but he is twelve now and I think that is probably all right. When his mom was alive I drove him to school every day. Mostly because that is the only way she would have it but a little bit because he was still too young.

I have always thought it was a little weird what men do when their wife is around compared to what they do when the wife isn't around. It is like we are completely different creatures. When there is no wife around men let things settle. You know, find their proper place. This way some things naturally take care of themselves. If a guy spills milk on the kitchen floor and his wife is home he will immediately wipe it up. But, if the wife isn't home he calls the dog over to dog to lick it up. Why bother wiping? It kinda takes care of itself. Since my wife died I do a lot of things different.

In any case, I would have to say that all in all it was kind of a normal morning. That's not saying much since most mornings suck. You guys know what I mean, right? You know... being cops I am sure you get a lot of weird crap all the time. Well, my crap probably isn't like your crap. See I work for a real asshole. That's why my days suck. He's not a hard ass or anything. He just doesn't care about his people. No matter when I get to the office or what I do it doesn't seem to matter. I could be the greatest employee in the world or the worst and it doesn't matter. Do you guys know people like that? They really screw with you. When you first start working with them you kind of like that they leave you alone but you're not sure how well you're doing. So, you try to do a little extra and nothing really changes. The boss comes in and treats you the same whether you carry the department on your back or whether you just sit on your butt.

After a while you figure out that it doesn't matter. Your job means nothing because no matter how you do it it doesn't change how well your department is performing or what your boss thinks about you. So, then you decide to sit on your ass and not do jack-shit. I mean really do nothing. You make absolutely no effort to even look like you are working. About a month later the boss comes in and tears you a new asshole. This makes you mad for a little while, but then you feel better because you finally realize that maybe what you do does matter. So for the next eight years you do good work for a while, then jack-around for a while and then do good work again. It's like everybody is messing up just so someone will notice them and then they can feel like their existence makes a difference.

Does that make sense? Do you guys run into crooks that are like that? I have often wondered if crooks do illegal things just for that reason. Have you ever thought about that? But that's not why I did this. I wouldn't do something like this just to get attention. This is completely unrelated to my job. If working for that asshole was really bothering me I would just quit the job. It is not like I would hurt him or anything. It is awfully hard to do something stupid like that and get another job. People won't hire you. They're worried that you might really be a sick bastard and hurt them, too. I am not like that.

Anyway, the only reason I brought up anything to do with work is because that is where I was when I called her. It was about 10:30 this morning when I called. I knew she would be on a break at that time. I told her I really needed to see her to discuss the situation with my son. She kinda acted like she didn't know what I meant. When I told what my concerns were she got a little defensive. She said she didn't have her

schedule book with her but she would call me back on her lunch break and see if we could set up a time.

She didn't have her schedule book? You guys know what that means? Does that mean she doesn't know what she is going to be doing for the rest of the day? I wanted to see her right away. Today! And she didn't have a clue what she was doing the rest of the day. This lady is teaching our children. What kind of airhead is she? Hell, I don't use a schedule book. Do you guys use a schedule book? Did you write down somewhere that you needed to question me at 8:00 tonight? When someone called you and told you to question me about what happened today did you have to check your schedule books? I didn't check mine. In fact I walked over here and didn't even bother to check my schedule book. I knew before I even started the walk from the school that I had the afternoon open. You can't plan everything. And if you do you should at least know what you have planned for the next six hours.

It really doesn't matter if you plan anyway. Each day just happens to you. There are some things you need to write down to remember, but don't you think by 10:30 in the morning of any day you should already know what you are doing for that day? I don't know what she had planned for the rest of the day, but I can tell you this; those people and those appointments were not important to her. If they were important she would have known what they were and when they were.

I will tell you what those little schedule books are really for; they are symbols. Yeah. They are things that people hold under your nose to symbolize that their life is more important than yours is. Just look at the people who use them the most. Big hotshot jerks that try to impress you with their house, car, clothes and schedule book. Most of the crap they write down is lunch appointments. What kind of bullshit is that?

The other people who use schedule books are those people who want to prove that they are busier than you are. It is like, "Hey, I am so busy I have to check to see if I can fit you in." I have seen schedule books that belong to people like that. They have things like "get hair cut" and "pick up friend's gift" in their book. Most of their "important stuff" is shit we do everyday without even thinking about it. What was she going to do? Was she going to bump me to a tomorrow meeting so she could grade papers, clip her nails or pick up stamps on the way home? That whole thing is a crock.

Well, she did call back at lunch. I told her, again, that my son had told me he that felt like he wasn't learning in her class. He had been complaining since the second day of school. He didn't like her way of teach-

ing. She said it was good that I called this morning because she was going to call me. It seems that my son was failing and she needed to send me a three-week notice. Today is the end of the fifth week! She is two weeks late. Final grades for the six-week grading period are due a week from Monday. What kinda crap is that? I should have got that notice ten days ago. She was lying! I don't doubt that my son was failing, but I do doubt she was going to bother to call me. She is behind on her work. She forgot to send notices out. When I called to say my son was complaining about her she figured she better get her act together and then call me. She didn't have any stupid schedule book. She was covering up.

The funny thing was she knew that I knew she was lying. I told her that I thought it was important for my son to work through the difficulties in her class. I told her that I told him that he is going to have to learn to work through tough situations with people he didn't like. I thought it would be good for him. She didn't like me saying this so I was sure to say it a couple more times in the conversation. You know the part about my son really not liking her. I don't know why teachers think all the kids should really like them. I remember being a kid. I hated teachers like her. Some teachers were cool. They didn't go on some power trip to make themselves feel better than you. They didn't need to, they understood you were just a kid and you were trying the best you could. Well most of the time. Teachers like her like to lord it over the kids. Like what kinda power is that? She was just a bitch. She knew I knew it and the kids knew it.

It wasn't bad enough that she was all hung up about the kids liking her; she also thought that they were helpless without her. She told me that she couldn't be away for more than two days without all of them forgetting everything she had taught them. I asked real meek like, "Everything? All of them?" I thought she would realize that I was being sarcastic. She didn't. She said yes all of them. She said they use her as a crutch. Can you imagine that? Those kids wouldn't be anything without her. How did they manage to make it to the sixth grade? What kind of chance did they stand in the seventh grade? They will have to move forward in life crippled, unable to properly get along without their crutch.

I mentioned to her that another teacher had said she teaches differently than he did. This really upset her. She told me that she didn't teach differently than this other teacher. She taught "beyond" him. I couldn't believe it. What can you say to a woman like that? I can't blame my son for hating her. I hadn't met her and I hated her. The teacher she was talking about was one of the kid's favorites and one of mine. He really loved

his job and the kids. He never said he did something because it was better or beyond what everyone else was doing. He did things because they were best for “my kids.” That’s what he called them, “my kids.” She thought by putting him down that she would look better. All she did was make clear the fact that she was a real bitch.

I tried to calm her down by telling her that what I was trying to do was evaluate my son not indite her. This seemed to calm her. She started to talk about what he was doing and not doing in the classroom. It seems that he has stopped participating in note taking and in class assignments. I asked if he was goofing around in her class. She said, “No not at all.” This was bad. I told her that. You see my son considers himself the class clown. He loves to joke around and get attention from other kids. If he is not kidding around in her class than that means his spirit is broken. He is not trying. He doesn’t care.

Sounds odd, but I would rather have to scold my son for goofing around in school too much than to see him completely shut down. At least if he is still fooling around he is upbeat and the energy can be redirected in a positive way. If his spirit is broken he will just sit there and take the F. He won’t let anyone know it bothers him. He is just that way. He really wants approval but he can’t take it if someone is always beating him down. I have seen it before.

I asked if she thought his dislike of her was the reason that he seemed to have tuned out. She said it didn’t have anything to do with that. She said she asked my son if everything was all right between them and he said yes. She believed him. As if a kid is going to tell his teacher he hates her. He might as well have said, please make my life hell this year and fail me, that’s what I really want. He wasn’t going to do that. She and I had already talked about this stuff but I thought I would ask her again to just annoy her. It worked.

The problem with annoying her was that she went on the attack. She said that she had pulled my sons test scores from the standardized state testing and that he showed a number of deficiencies. That made me mad. I couldn’t figure out why she was lying. I had a copy of those tests and he was graded competent in all areas. I challenged her but she insisted that this was the case.

Before it went any further, I said that we needed to sit down and talk. We set an appointment for right after school. I figured I could leave work early and meet with her around 3:30. She said that would be ok but she couldn’t get back to her class till 3:35. She was doing that my time is more

important than yours is thing again. Five minutes, who cares?

It was all really weird. The phone call got me pretty riled up. A guy asked me what was going on. I told him all about it. He seemed to be real supportive and everything, but I knew better. Never trust anyone you work with. Well, that's not quite right. Trust them but don't confuse anything they do for friendship. I learned this a few years ago. I had been working for this company for a number of years. It was a real nice job. The problem was that I had started getting real bored with the work. When you get bored you just don't do as good of work as you do when you're excited about what you're doing. No big deal, everyone's that way. Anyway, this lady was a good friend of mine. She worked in human resources. We always talked about our families and kids and she always made me feel like she was a friend. As it turns out, my boss didn't like how I had been working and asked her to place a blind advertisement in the employment part of the paper for my position. One day I see a fax on her desk for some company advertising for a job just like mine. I pick it up and realize it is a blind ad. And that it stapled to an invoice. Our company was paying for that ad! Worse than that, the ad was two months old. She had known for two months that they were going to replace me. When my boss found out that I knew what was going on he fired me that day.

I still see her every once in awhile and she tries to be real nice, but I don't say anything to her. She wasn't a friend. A friend doesn't let something like that happen to someone they care for. Thirty years from now when she is dying and she wants her friends to come to her side do you think I will be there? Hell no! She picked the company over me, a company that doesn't give a shit about her. She could have told me to start looking for work so I didn't get caught without a job. That wouldn't hurt her or the company. I would honor that advice and be grateful for the help. I knew I wasn't performing up to speed. Instead she said nothing. It took me four months to find a job. I had to sell our house. Hell, we are still renting an apartment! You think I want to introduce her to my family as the friend who took your house away. She is no friend. She doesn't have any idea what she did. She will die alone.

So you can understand why I didn't get too caught up with this guy saying that he agreed with me. I just listen to him tell me a story about his kid after that and didn't think about it too much more. That is the problem with telling someone about something that happens to you. If you tell them a story then you have to listen to them tell you two or three stories of their own. That's not so bad if you have the time. But if you're

busy it really sucks because you have to pretend to be nice and listen to their story because they listened to yours. The whole time you're pretending to listen you are really thinking about whatever it is you really need to do. The thing I hate the most is when there are three or four people around and you get a couple of them that have to be better than everyone else. So you're trying to politely get away without hurting anyone's feelings and they keep taking turns saying things like, "Oh yea! Well, that's nothing. Once..." and "Sure, but have you ever...once we..." I wish people would just tell their story without having to be better than everyone else's. That's what I do. I tell my story and then listen. I don't have to tell a second story that's even better if someone happens to have a more interesting story. I hate that.

Anyway, after all of that I told my boss I would have to leave at 2:30. I knew I would need some extra time to drop by the house to get a copy of the test scores and some other things.

Can you guys get me something to drink? Talking like this I get real thirsty. Usually I don't talk a lot. It is not because I don't have a lot to say. I have plenty to say. It is just most people don't want to hear about my crap so I don't bother them with it. This is the most I have ever talked, being sober and all. When I have had a few drinks then I talk. I talk about everything. I remember one time I was at this party and I started discussing the Second World War with this guy. I really didn't know a lot about it but he sure did. I just kinda listened to what he said and then made stuff up. I told him that I thought Hitler really did want to stop after Czechoslovakia and the only reason he didn't was because there was so much pressure from German people to continue. In told him I thought Hitler wanted to wipe out only the Jews in Germany and that he was really a shy person. Boy, did that guy explode. He thought I was a real asshole. But I just kept talking and talking. Later I said that Hitler really did want to wipe out all the Jews in the world and then when he was done with that he was going to go after the Italians. He said I didn't have a fucking clue, but I kept talking. I really enjoyed myself. I think it was the alcohol. I really didn't care what I said. I was enjoying talking. It made me feel smart.

That is not to say that I am enjoying this. This is a pain in the ass. Not just for me but for you guys, too, especially you guys. Although, I bet you hear all kinds of weird stuff. I knew a cop once that said he arrested this guy from a cult, a real cult. He thought the guy had been doing human sacrifices and stuff. I didn't believe him. I mean I believed that the guy was in a cult and all but I didn't buy the human sacrifice part. That

was too weird. But whether it was true or not this cop had to listen to all his whacked-out stories. I'm surprised more cops aren't screwed up from just listening to so many wild stories. And how do you know which ones are true and which ones are bullshit? Man, I am glad I am not a cop. But I don't mean anything by that.

Anyway, I got to the school at 3:45. I was late. I am always late. I try to be on time but it never seems to work. Sometimes I will try to get someplace early but then I forget something and I have to go back and get it and I end up late again. Where I work is pretty cool. They know I am always going to be about fifteen minutes late so they just let me stay fifteen minutes longer at the end of the day. It is not like we planned it that way. If we did I would end up fifteen minutes late for the late time. It is just kinda understood. I guess I'm pretty lucky that way. Some places treat you like you're ruining the company when you're late. Like that fifteen minutes is a real problem. The guys I work with understand that I do a good job and that those fifteen minutes don't mean squat.

I walked in her classroom at about 3:50. I was waiting for her to say something about me being late. You know how you go through a conversation in your head and pretend to say things to yourself that someone would say to you and come up with really smartass answers. Only, when the real conversation happens you never say the stuff you thought about saying. I had a friend in high school that always did that. His name was Billy Davis. He used to say things to me like, "Yeah, if my old man would have said that I would have told him to shove it." But in reality Billy never did say anything like that to his Dad. So, when she didn't say anything to me about being late I just kinda apologized for not being on time and sat down in a chair next to her desk.

I guess she didn't want me sitting there, or she wanted to make some kind of point, because she asked me to sit in one of the kid's desks in front of her desk. How stupid is that? She said it was so she could see me better and I could write some things down more easily. I think she was really trying to pull off another power play. You know what I mean? Make me feel like one of the kids. Anyway, I sat in the desk and waited a couple of minutes while she finished writing something. I think that was a power thing, too.

I have to say I did pretty well. I didn't let her stupid games bother me. I just waited quietly. Finally, she started talking about my son. She said that she was very concerned and that she didn't think he was making good decisions in the classroom. She showed me his class journal and the fact that he had not taken any notes for three weeks. She just kept talking about all

that she was doing and all the things my son wasn't doing. I think I would have been all right if she wouldn't have started asking me questions about home. It seemed like she was trying to blame me for my son hating her. I could just look at her and know why my son hated her. I would hate someone like her, too. She had that ugly old lady red hair. Not the real pretty red hair, like on young girls, but really bad thick coarse hair. Big round tinted glasses, too much makeup and she was chubby, too. I could probably handle her looks if she was nice. But if you are going to be a bitch you better be at least a little good looking. These are young boys in her class. They will do anything for a nice lady or a pretty one. They can't help it. It is their age. It is how they act. But a fat ugly bitch. Forget it.

I tried to listen to her bullshit as much as I could but I really started getting upset. She had no idea what she was talking about. I asked her how she taught the class. She said she used visual examples to help the children understand. She couldn't understand why my son wasn't catching on. I asked if she had ever considered that maybe he didn't learn things visually. If she knew anything at all she would know that everyone learns differently. Some kids learn with images, some with words. Some kids need structure other can't stand it. Well, of course she never thought of that. She just thought that the visual aids would help all the kids. I told her my son learns using words. Visual images didn't help him, they confused him. That doesn't mean he is stupid. It means he approaches knowledge in a manner in direct opposition to her teaching style. She said she had not thought of that. I asked her what the hell she had been thinking. This information had been available for years. There are ways to teach across the spectrum of learning methods. Kids don't pick how they learn. The structure of their brain determines that.

I swear she didn't know a Goddamn thing. I pulled out my son's standardized test scores and started to read through them. According to the report I had he had mastered all areas. All of them! "How can you explain that?" I asked. She started to stutter. I didn't give her time to answer. She was weak. I knew it. She knew it. She always bullied on the kids but was just a weak pain in the ass to the rest of the world. "The fact is you lied!" I yelled. She didn't like that. She complained about having a headache. I handed her the cyanide and told her to take them for her headache. I told her she better settle in because I wasn't done. I wasn't half done. A minute later she laid her head on the desk and just left it there. It didn't matter I continued.

You know what really strikes me as stupid? She took those pills without even looking at them. That just proves how careless she was. We are

supposed to trust her to look out for our kids and she just pops a couple of pills without even looking at them. I mean it could have been some serious drug that made her wig out or something. As it turned out she's dead. Hard to feel sorry for someone who is that stupid. It was probably the best thing though. That way I didn't have to listen to her shit or listen to her crying and whaling all afternoon.

So she is lying there with her head on the desk and I am telling her how sick and tired I am of self-righteous bitches fucking up everybody's life. That these kids didn't need her crap and I didn't need her trying to make me feel like a bad father. The more I talked the madder I got. Then I got pissed because she wasn't looking at me. I tried lifting her head but she just kept falling forward. Her arms were getting kinda stiff and it made it real tough to get her to sit up. The weight of her arms stretched out in front of her body kept pulling the body over. I decided to sit her in one of the student's desks. The small tabletop wrapped around one side of the body helped keep the body upright. Her arms looked goofy sticking out in front but there was really nothing that I could do. The good thing was I could sit at her desk and finish up the meeting.

Sitting at her desk I looked out over the classroom. A strange feeling came over me. I mean, it was really weird. It was like I was looking over the years I was in school. I could see myself, at different years of my life, sitting in each one of the chairs. Each one of me sat in a chair with slumped shoulders and a muzzle wrapped around his head. I could look into their eyes and see that each one of them wanted to do so well but couldn't. There was always something keeping them from doing better. One kid was crying. I remember him. It was fourth grade. The year before he had done very well in reading and everyone thought that he should move up a grade. Then his parents got a divorce and he got this really mean fourth grade teacher. He tried to do good but the teacher was too busy being smarter than everyone else and his mom was just too busy. I wanted to help him but I knew if I got out from behind the desk that the kids would disappear. So I just watched him. I started to cry. Then I started to tell her about that kid.

"You see," I told her. "That boy just to your left. He had a teacher like you once. He sat in her class trying to do the best that he could. He tried to color each page just a little better than he normally would have. He tried to be prompt, smart and clever. He tried to make the teacher and the class laugh. Yet everything he tried she either ignored or punished him. When he needed someone to recognize his efforts and make him feel just a little bit special, because everything in his world at home was so

bad, he got nothing. You see his teacher was too caught up in how important she was and what she was trying to accomplish. She was too busy to recognize his extra efforts and considered his classroom humor a deterrent to her agenda. It was more important for her to accomplish her goals than to give a child the attention he needed.”

I knew she had no idea what I was talking about. She just sat there. I knew she did it to kids all the time and to try to understand what that kid had gone through would have been an indictment on what she had been doing. She chose to ignore him. She was doing the same thing his teacher did and the same thing she had done to dozens of other kids. She had probably done the same to my son to the point that he finally just gave up trying. What a goddamn self-centered bitch!

The way she was staring at me I knew she was going to start in on me. You know the look, when people keep looking straight at you but don't say anything. They are debating whether they should say something or not. It's like they are saying, “All right I probably shouldn't say anything, but...” There is always a but. And it is that but that lets them just say anything they want to anyone whether it is their Goddamn right or not. I have an aunt like that. She will just stare at you until you finally look at her and say, “What?” That's all she needs is for you to say what then she starts with the, “Oh I really didn't want to say anything, but...” or “It's none of my business but...” I finally learned to just ignore the stare and that way I didn't have to hear any of her shit. After about five minutes they just forget what they were not going to tell you anyway.

I remember one time I went to this football game with my cousin. I was about 25 and he was 19. His car broke down outside the stadium along a highway. We decided to walk in and see the game. After the game we called this aunt and she came to pick us up. After the long stare he asked, “What?” And there she went about how we should have taken care of the car and not worried about the game and how irresponsible we were. She went on for quite a while. Finally I told her to shut the fuck up. I told her the car got towed and repaired just the same whether we went into the game or not. I told her it wasn't her one hundred bucks for tickets that would have been blown if we didn't see the game. I told her next time I needed her opinion I would ask for it. I felt stupid for asking her for the ride home.

The truth is I never did ask her for anything else. I also told my cousin not to worry about paying me back for his ticket to the game. I said it was because I knew it would be expensive to fix his car. I really said it so she could hear it and I didn't want to give her any more fuel for the fire.

Besides, he had to listen to her shit, she was his mom, I figured he deserved some kind of break.

Anyway, she just sat in that stupid desk staring at me. I didn't want to say "what" and have her go off on a teacher bullshit lecture. That's when I did the eraser thing. I figured if I did that then I wouldn't have to hear her shit. I guess I could have gagged her or something but this seemed to work better. I went to the chalkboard and grabbed the erasers from the tray. There were three of them. I walked over to her and sat the erasers on her desk. Then I took my hands and put them in her mouth and pried her jaw open. You know, I placed one hand over her jaw into her lower mouth and the other hand over the upper teeth and into the top palate of her mouth and then pulled them apart. At first it was kinda stiff then something popped real load and her mouth came open real wide. I tried to cram an eraser down her throat but it didn't go very well. The harder I pushed the more chalk dust got on my hands. I like the smell of chalk. I always have. But, as it turned out the eraser was too big. Even with her mouth flopping open I couldn't really get it in very well.

I went over to her desk to get a pair of scissors. When I opened the drawer I saw a small tablet of pink slips. You remember what pink slips were, don't you. I used to get them all the time. A slip to see the principal when you were in trouble, a slip for a hall pass to see the nurse or a slip to warn you about being tardy. I don't remember if you got the same color slips for doing bad things as you did for going to the john but I do remember you had to have a slip to go anywhere while class was in session. I had one teacher that just quit giving me slips and sat me outside of the classroom door. I sat there in the hallway in my own desk. I couldn't sit in with the rest of the classroom. And, it wasn't like I was a little kid or anything. This was ninth grade. I was in high school. I sat there most of the year and wrote nearly every word in the geometry book. I didn't have to do problems or anything like that. I just wrote the book, from cover to cover every single word. It wasn't about learning. I didn't learn a damn thing. It was about power.

That really didn't make me that mad though. What made me mad was that the geometry teacher was the wife of the junior varsity basketball coach. I played basketball. I remember one game when there was only a few seconds left until half time and I had the ball. I thought there was only one second left and I had just stole the ball from the other team. I was at mid-court so I turned and flung the ball in the air toward the basket. The ball missed the basket by a mile and flew out of bounds. When

I looked back up at the clock there was like eight seconds still left and I felt like an idiot. The worst part about it though was that she was sitting behind the team bench just looking at me with the biggest smile on her face. It really sucked.

So, I got the scissors out of the desk and cut the erasers in half, lengthwise. Then I started to push them back down her throat. The first three pieces went down pretty easy. The fourth piece was a lot tougher. I kinda put the end of it against the back end of the third piece and just pushed straight down. It went most of the way in. It stuck out just a little. It made her look like she had just finished saying something and was about to say more, but having opened her mouth slightly decided not to. I thought that was good. It would be better to look at her and feel like she just finished saying something than to spend the rest of the conversation worrying that she was about to interrupt me.

The problem was I still had two pieces left over from the third eraser. At first I was going to throw them away but I thought someone might see them and think that I was being destructive by just cutting up an eraser and throwing it away. So I decided I would put those pieces in too. I didn't want to mess up her mouth though. So I took the scissors and cut her neck a little in the front. I know it sounds kinda bad but it really isn't. There wasn't really any blood, just one little drop. That's all. It was kinda weird. Anyway, I was able to just slip the last two pieces into the slit. That way I was sure she wouldn't be interrupting me. Like I said, I know I could have just gagged her but this seemed to work a whole lot better.

Back to the power thing. People don't seem to understand what power is all about. They think it is like this country against that country or that big company against another big company. That has nothing to do with it. Most of us can accept the general bullshit of a corporation or what our citizenship asks us to put up with. That's no big deal. It is all the little power struggles that fuck you up. You think Jefferson, Payne and Franklin were screwed up because they had to fight against British oppression? Hell no. But if their parents had messed with them, or their boss had been real unfair or their girlfriend was a bitch, that's how people get fucked up. It is not the big corporations. It is that one person you work for. It is not the big power. It is the little power.

I remember this one job where I had to wear a tie all the time. It was no big deal everyone wore a tie. I didn't like it but it wasn't like anyone was screwing with my head. At the same job I had a boss that insisted that no one leave their desk between 8:00 and 12:00 o'clock. It was our busiest time

of the day and he didn't want anyone to leave his or her desk. No coffee break, no restroom breaks, no going to make copies. It got real tough to do your job. That didn't get me at that upset either, though. What got me upset was how he treated you. He would walk by and say real loud, "Remember people no one leaves their desk till noon." Then he would look directly at someone and say, "Is that understood Mr. Smith?" That was bullshit. If you got caught away from your desk he would give you hell.

You can tell when a power play like that isn't working real well. Everyone will work together to undermine it. People would cover for other people so they could go to the restroom or something. On the whole I handled the situation all right. But it made some people mad. I didn't care too much for the job so I didn't let it bother me. But you can see how that fucks with people.

The worst kinda power thing is what some parents do to their kids. Man I have heard stories from friends about how their mom or dad screwed them up. You hear that stuff and you realize it is all the little power struggles that matter, not the big ones. You never hear about some guy in a mental ward because his government is restricting his freedoms. But almost all of them have some bizarre story about how their parent, uncle or foster parent messed them up.

I think the biggest power struggle, in terms of screwing people up, is sex. It is like the one thing that people can give to each other, physically I mean, that can also be taken. And it is not just physical. It is all wrapped up in mental stuff, too, especially for women. They may not like to have sex as much as men but it means a hell of a lot more to them. It is like this treasure that they share. Sometimes it is for love. Sometimes it is not. But it is something they must control. Men are a little different but I am not sure why. But in either case it really fucks people up when it is taken from them. It is like they have lost control over the last thing they could really command. It's like, if you can't protect your own body from having its one sacred treasure being taken then what can you protect. You want to talk about really messed up? Just imagine feeling like you have absolutely no control over your own body and who has sex with it. That'll fuck you up for good. When that happens there is no good in the world. Hell, when that happens you have to wonder if there is a God. I tell you it is a poisonous power struggle. If you haven't had to deal with it you're damn lucky. You can worry about dumb crap that really doesn't matter like some war in Bosnia. But if that happens to you, you got real problems.

Anyhow, I started telling her about all this power stuff. But I kinda

related it to her teaching children. You know, how she could screw up their heads and make them doubt themselves. I told her I have seen one teacher take a perfectly good kid and make him feel like he wasn't very smart. They can do that you know. A couple of remarks about how a kid is stupid, or something, in front of the whole class and kids start to believe that garbage. I told her that she wasn't going to make my son feel bad like the young man I was talking about. I sat back down behind her desk. I looked over the room. Then I saw him. I shouted at her, "Hey! Hey! You don't believe me? Look there he is." I stayed in the chair at her desk so he wouldn't go away and so I was sure that she would see him. "You see!" I shouted. "He is the kind of kid that people like you fuck up!"

The problem was she wasn't looking. There wasn't anything I could do. If I got out of the desk the kid would go away. If I didn't get up to make her look then she wouldn't see him. I started to look through the desk. All I could find was a stapler. I decided to get up and try something. I walked over to where she was sitting and tried to maneuver the body. First, I took her right arm and forced it down to her side. I pushed it just under the arm of the little desktop on the chair. It didn't really stay very well. So I took the right sleeve of her outfit and pulled it around to the back of the chair and stapled it there. I really had to push hard to get the staples to go into the chair. That helped a little. It kept the body turned to the side but it also made the body slide down in the chair. This is when I started to staple the rest of the sleeve of her outfit to her body. I tried to do a very nice neat job. Each staple was put in the biceps area of the arm, sideways and evenly spaced. It looked kinda good. It also held the body up real well. I went to the other arm and put staple in the exact same pattern. This was to make the outfit look balanced. I didn't do it on that side to hold anything up. It just looked better.

I went back to the desk and got some more staples. I noticed from there that her legs looked dumb. They were all spread out like she was tired or something. So I walked over to her and started to pull fabric from the pants around chair legs. I stapled the pants leg fabric to the back of the chair. I was just about to finish and then I thought it might look good to stable a ring around the legs too. That way it would look like a pretty nice outfit. After I finished I stood backed and looked. It didn't look bad. I had almost forgotten why I did it. Then I remembered I had wanted to turn her so she could see the boy. So I went back into her desk and looked over the room. The kids were not there. So we waited.

I hate waiting. I am not very patient. I mean, I can wait for things just

as good as the next guy. I just don't like it very much. Usually I will pace around a lot. But I was afraid to get up because I didn't want to make the kids stay away longer. I read a book once that told about how you can test kids and find out how successful they will be as adults by seeing if they have patience. What they did was put these kids in a room by themselves and gave them two pieces of candy or a marshmallow or something. Anyway, then they told the kid if they could keep from eating the candy, or whatever, for five minutes, then they would get like four more. Then the grown up would get up and leave the room. The kids would be there all by themselves trying to not eat the stuff. They filmed the whole thing. The idea was that kids that managed not to eat the stuff turned out to be better grown ups.

What was real funny was how the kids tried to get through the five minutes. Some kids would play with the candy and others would try to look away or sing songs. Some kids just ate the stuff. Either way the adult would come back in five minutes and be real nice to the kid. That was the part I really liked the best. It didn't matter if the kid did real good or messed up. They were treated really nice. I think that was because the adults needed both kinds of kids for the experiment. But I still thought it was cool.

I wish they had given me that test when I was a kid. I would have done real well. I would sit there and do all kinds of weird things. But I wouldn't eat the stuff. Then when the time was done they would think I was sorta strange but they would know that I was going to be successful. I think that way a lot. I wish I could go back and do things again but know everything I know now, especially high school. I could get better grades, hang out with the cool kids and do a whole lot better with sex. I was scared of sex in high school. Once I stopped having sex with this girl right in the middle of everything. She was real mad but I was really scared. A year later some guy got her pregnant and she dropped out of school. It was really scary. It would be different if I went back now. Maybe I would have decided to go to college.

Finally, after about fifteen minutes all the kids came back. Luckily the kid I was talking about was sitting in the same place. I told her to take a good look at him. He had his head down. He couldn't look her in the eye. He had trouble looking at grownups. He was in the third grade and should have had all the confidence in the world. But he thought he was a bad kid. I started to tell her more and more about the kid. He just moved to the school because his mom and dad got a divorce. He spent time a few days each week living with each parent. It was tough. He had trouble sleeping at a different place every few nights and it really affected his performance in school.

Instead of recognizing how hard everything was in his little world his teacher rode him. She called him a goof off. He started to get angry. He couldn't get angry at home because he was afraid one of his parents might get overwhelmed with the arrangement and want to leave for good. Since he couldn't get angry at home he got angry at school. He started to get in fights and back talk. The harder the teacher pushed the harder he pushed back. He just wanted someone to hold him and tell him it was all right; that he was a good kid; that he belonged at that school. Instead his teacher kept calling him names and pushing him. The trouble escalated. He started referring to himself as a bad kid. He told his parents he didn't care how he did at school or what other kids thought of him. He was hurt and angry. At that point in his life he could have taken two different paths. He wanted to take the good path but that bitch of a teacher blocked it off and pushed him down the bad path. All she had to do was hug him and tell him he was a good kid. He would have done anything she asked.

From that point on he started to live three separate lives: A loving kind kid at his mother's home, a stoic introvert at his father's home and a bad kid at school. In later years it would be the kid at school that he would be most like as an adult. Despite his mother's love and his father's stern guiding principles it was the label as a bad kid at school that stayed with him.

I got up out of the desk and walked over to her. All the kids disappeared again. I sat down in the chair where the boy had been sitting with his face in his hands. I looked at her and asked if she understood what I was saying. Despite how each of his parents tried to love and guide him it was many of his teachers that shaped how he saw himself. No matter how many times his dad told him he was smart, teachers saying he wasn't smart affected him more. No matter how many times his mother told him he was good, teachers saying that he was of less value than others is how he saw himself. I started yelling at her. "You have no idea how much you fuck those kids up do you?" And she didn't. Like most teachers she probably said it is the parents' responsibility not the teachers. My parents told me I was a good kid. It was some stupid teachers that insisted I wasn't. My friends never heard my parents trash me, it was some stupid teacher. My parents never stood in front of thirty of my friends and made fun of me when I missed a question or didn't complete an assignment.

The weird thing was I had some of the highest test scores in school. Each year I would test in the top five percent. Yet they kept treating me like the dummy. I bet those teachers never tested that high. I know she never did. But by the end of high school my test scores dropped pretty far.

I spent so many years not really participating in class and the other kids caught up and passed me by. I didn't want that happening to my son. I told her I wasn't going to let a lying mean bitch like her mess my son up for the rest of his life. He was going to be something, like his grandfather was and like I could have been before I got fucked up.

I guess that's what this was really all about. I don't want my son to end up like me. He's better than I am. You should see him. He's beautiful, he's strong and he is smart. He drinks life in like it is energy. He takes that energy and gives back to everyone he meets. He loves everyone. His laughter is contagious. Other children are drawn to him. All he needs is for people to believe in him and be kind to him.

So that's why I went to talk to her. I'm a father that's my job. We all live in this really fucked up world and the only thing we can control, to some degree, is the fate of our children. It is like this small part of our existence where we get to be a god. We spend our whole lives following rules and laws that other people make up and the only time we ever get to create anything it is with our children. Ever since my wife died I am the only one that can protect him, guide him and help him arrive at adulthood as a good and wholesome man. That is my role. For this sole purpose I was made. I created this child, nurtured him and protected him. I wasn't about to let some mean old hag fuck everything up. I did everything I did so that he wouldn't turn out like me. I did everything to make sure he turned out better than I did. She had to die. She knew it. I didn't have to explain anything to her when she took the cyanide. She took it because she understood. When she looked into my eyes she knew. She saw the eyes of a god. I never had to say a word. She took the pills and made the sacrifice. Now my son can go on with a normal life and not be bothered by her any longer.

I know you think all of this is crazy but I promise it is true. I will take you there. I walked here from there. She's still there waiting for you. Before I left I told her I was coming to get you. She seemed a little upset but I told her you needed to know. The school is at 435 Maple. She is in room 142. I left her in the chair just like I explained to you.

Before you guys go can I get something to eat? I'm pretty hungry. And can you have someone call Judy Hanson my next door neighbor. Tell her to watch my son since I will be home a little late tonight. Tell her everything is all right, I just had to file a report. Thanks guys.

The Quickest Way

Ken Dean

Damn. Okay...does this day suck or what?

Jim Pinella had just exited the San Francisco Civic Center complex near Larkin Street and was walking towards Market Street to his parked car. He had just been a privileged guest at a Domestic Relations hearing on his divorce from his now ex-wife Jenna. The divorce had been rushed through at the last minute, to him and his attorney's total surprise.

Jim and his attorney had been trying to hammer out an equitable dissolution that would have been fair to both parties. Suddenly the judge called everyone involved into the hearing room and pretty much handed his ex-wife everything. Full custody of their two children, Matt and Sandy. All assets that were jointly owned were now Jenna's. That included the house, his business, and all financial assets. Plus he was ordered to pay spousal and child support. Jim felt as though his genitals had been neatly severed from his body, placed on a lace doily, and handed to him on a silver platter while being forced to say; "Thank you, Maam...may I have another?" Even his honorable service in the Air Force Special Forces hadn't helped his defense.

Yeah...BEST day of his life. He was now walking down Market Street, still in shock. The female judge must have had one hell of a day, plus the fact that his attorney mentioned the judge had just gone through a nasty divorce herself. And since you can't pick the court docket, he had the outstanding luck of landing a judge that was extremely biased and loaded for male bear.

His emotions were rampaging. He didn't know what to think or do at this point. His brain was trying to assimilate too much damaging data, and his mind was swirling with all types of thoughts - revenge, murder and suicide and extreme hatred at the system that had handed him this life-blasting hit. Jim definitely felt like he was at the bottom of the barrel...scrabbling to keep some sense of control over his life.

He continued walking down Market Street. Before he had left court, his attorney had mentioned some sort of appeal based on the extreme bias involved in this type of judicial decision. He hoped she could pull it off; otherwise he would have to build his life back up from ground-level. There was...

What was that noise? A loud shrieking sound above. Jim just caught a glimpse through the buildings of a large jet too big to be a fighter, but definitely not an airliner, hauling ass at low level just above the downtown buildings before it was out of sight. It happened so fast he didn't have time to identify it. Several pedestrians were yelling, "Look!" He looked in the direction they were pointing, which was up, and saw a parachute descending towards them with something silvery twisting back and forth as it fell.

A cold chill ran up Jim's spine. The shiny object now looked like a torpedo-shaped device, possibly a bomb. With his training in the Air Force, Jim could only think of his own country's tactics in low-level nuke attacks, where a bomber would come in low and just below the sound barrier. This method would allow for more surprise as the aircraft would evade some radar detection. A nuke would then be dropped by parachute, and would immediately be slowed from five – six hundred miles per hour to thirty-five miles per hour in about three seconds. As the chute dropped, the bomber would then increase speed to rush away from the detonation as quickly as possible.

The device was nearing the ground. Jim began running towards the impact point. He was joined by a few other pedestrians while most of the others were running the other way or to their cars realizing that it just might be dangerous. Have to hand it to them...at least they were smart.

Jim and the others arrived at the landing point just as it hit. He heard a large crunch as it impacted with the street, not a good sign. That sound meant it was designed to take the landing crunch of impact on its nose so as to protect the contents inside. It was a possibly a delay-detonation bomb. This allowed the bomber aircraft to egress the target zone quickly before it went off.

The other onlookers were asking a flurry of questions.

“What is it?”

“Who dropped this thing?”

“Is this a terrorist attack?”

“Are we at war with someone?”

All valid questions. Jim said to them all, “I don’t think it’s a terrorist attack; they wouldn’t have this level of capability or the weapons and planes to carry it out.”

A balding man with a loser look who was shaking and sweating profusely spoke up: “It’s Chinese!”

Jim answered “How do you know?”

“I took a short course in Chinese language for a business trip recently; I only know enough to see what looks like an ‘Extreme Caution’ warning on the casing.”

Chinese? Jim couldn’t recall any tension going on at the moment between the US and China.

Possibly a Pearl Harbor-type attack?

“Can you see any description about ‘megaton’ or ‘strength’ combined with a number anywhere?”

“No...I can’t make out anything else. Our course was limited.”

Great, Jim thought to himself. He knew Russian from training in the Air Force. Why couldn’t his training have been in Chinese? Not that it would make a whole lot of difference where they were all standing at the moment.

Jim went into command mode.

“Okay folks, this is most likely a nuke, but it may be a chemical or biological weapon.” He wasn’t going to share the fact that he saw a ‘10’ along with some other bold Chinese script on the casing. No one else had noticed. In his mind that meant it could possibly be ten megatons.

“Anyone who wants to run for it should do so now! I’m not sure of what the strength or type the weapon might be,” he lied, “and most likely it’s a weapon. But you may want to put as much distance between it and yourself as possible.”

All of the others rushed away or towards their own vehicles and took off...he had a feeling it was futile. Even if the better part of San Francisco didn't know what was going on, and these few were able to make some distance away, it still wouldn't make any difference. These devices don't usually wait long to go off. The fireball (if it was a nuke) would reach out to all of them, tap each one on the shoulder, then warmly grab their ass and kiss it goodbye for them.

"I'll stay with you...if it's okay," said the balding man from before.

"Sure...Jim's my name."

"Artie here."

Artie may have the loser look, but you had to admit he had major guts.

"Thanks for staying, Artie. You realize we are putting ourselves very much in harm's way, right?"

"I understand."

Jim sat down on the casing of the weapon...what the hell. It most likely wasn't a biological/chemical device. The pattern for deployment didn't match. Most of those types of weapons were air-dispersed.

"Artie...I think this is one of the big ones, possibly ten megatons."

Actually...it wouldn't matter what size it was, the blast radius would be impossible to escape. Might as well stay to enjoy the show.

"This will have to go down as the quickest way to check out ever."

Not to mention all the problems he just inherited today would be gone for good! There would be nothing but pain and suffering ten to twenty miles away, but for Artie and himself it would be over in a millisecond. No pain.

Jim realized he was being fatalistic. But what the hell, his life had been turned upside down in the past few hours. And now this piece of crap had to fall out of the sky.

Hang on! How long had it been since this egg roll hit the ground? Ten minutes? It shouldn't take that long to go off, unless it was a bigger weapon than he thought, or a dud! That could happen...nothing is one

hundred percent reliable. Or it could have been damaged on impact.

He was trying to think...tools!

“Artie! Your car close?”

“Yeah, over by the curb. Why?”

“You have a toolbox in the trunk?”

“Just a bunch of assorted crap.”

“Run over and bring it all here...as fast as you can!”

Artie took off running. If Jim could get this thing apart somehow, get inside and get to the A-bomb trigger, maybe he could tear things up enough to keep it from going off or at least disarm it if it was truly a dud. Duds could still go off at a later time...just ask any young boy brave enough to hold a firecracker in his hand that had failed to explode.

Artie slid down beside Jim at the weapon, rusty metal toolbox in hand. “Let’s see what you have. Where are you from, Art?” Jim asked as he hurriedly examined the toolbox contents.

“Wisconsin...Milwaukee area, you?”

“Born and raised here. Good to meet you.” They shook hands quickly.

Jim saw screwdrivers, a hammer, vise grips, Robo-Grips, etc.

He grabbed a slotted screwdriver and the hammer, hoping it would match a screw or fitting, or at least be enough to drive a wedge into an opening. Wait. “Artie...hand me the Robo-Grips. I think I see a lug with

FLASH

The End

butane

© *devin wayne davis 01*

pennsylvanian,
they burn away

all fuel;
in the dark
part of a park;
flickering. take me,
jarred like the firefly,

or lighter.

Is Christmas Stale?

Jon Kuntz

Our Christmas' past must slip away with the years, years never given up to demons that ravage our ways, no, but carefully tucked into folds of loving memories, into albums so we can say we held the belief, each year we have stood firm. Full of weddings, new children, graduations, funerals too, are things that make a family.

We trimmed the tree with conviction, sang the carols with fervor. Collected for the yuletide charities, passed out blankets and food, decorated our homes and churches, celebrated another birthday. Another day of coming for the one that only we await.

Others waited patiently at our seemingly groundless cheer, looking askance in curiosity but not much more. They took those days off too, thank you very much. A holiday with pay is welcome by anyone, anytime.

Now we're old and gray and Christmas doesn't mean the same anymore.

Our job is plainly to give it away, it won't work anymore unless the young people have it, and know how to put it together once more.

It's up to us to explain the carols. The ones that aren't played anymore, especially on the radio; about shepherds finding Jesus, about the Christ child being born, about the King of Kings, in Bethlehem that Holy Night, about Mary and her child and what it means to all of us even today, and all we have to do is to accept Him. That is what the carols tell us.

There are other songs played of course. Songs about reindeer, elves, drummer boys, snowmen and all sorts of creatures real and imagined. There are stories made up for the Christmas season that bring joy and cheer to others that have nothing to do with Christmas. The real story is told in the epiphany of the Magi when they come to understand who Jesus is. They take another path home not going near King Herod and his treachery.

And somehow, we really don't know how, but it happens that we come to know, like the Magi, the reality of Christ, even as a child, and what he will come to mean to all of us.

How it happens we know not, but that it does: maybe at church, reflecting in a pew, or at home gazing at the reborn magic of the Christmas tree, or perhaps while driving in the seasonal traffic, it strikes us again, for one more year, the magic of Christmas still comes, it still exists, and will manifest itself to us, yes at least one more time... Christmastime this year.

New Body

Jack Cooley

“How does it feel, Sir?”

“Huh?...What?”

“You’re a little groggy yet, Sir. The body. How does it feel?”

“The body? I’m sorry, I...by George! The body! I...it feels grand! Why, it feels—”

“That’s fine, Sir. Glad to hear it. Now if you’ll just—”

“Doctor! How can I ever thank you! Why, it’s marvelous. It—”

“Quite all right, Sir, no need to thank me. Of course we are all excited for you, but we *are* rather busy. On your way out, if you’ll just drop your patient record off at the front desk?”

I felt so *alive*! I suppose I had forgotten what it was like to be young. My new body *tingled* with life! To have a new body at *my* age! A new lease on life, eh? Eighteen again! Damn!

Lucky for me I’d had the money to arrange for my new body, a quite substantial sum even without the stiff premium charged for a Caucasian one—so much harder to come by I was told. I wonder how they acquired him, the youth, so willing to trade bodies? Well, it doesn’t matter, I’m sure it must be legal or the procedure wouldn’t be done.

Sorry to see my old body go actually; we’d covered a lot of ground my old body and me. It’s natural, I suppose, to be sentimental about one’s own body. I made a handsome donation and sent white carnations to Our Lady of the Assumption.

Over the next several weeks I checked out my new body. At first it was as wobbly as a newborn colt; but the post-op instructions said that was to be expected, and I soon got the hang of the thing. The previous owner, though, had let it get a little out of shape. Young people just don’t appreciate good bodies. Still, how out of shape can an eighteen-year-old body be? A few weeks of early morning laps around the park followed by a workout and swim at Myer’s Gym soon restored it to like-new condition.

I gloried in my new body; it seemed never to tire, and taut muscles on the lithe young flesh stood out everywhere. To be young again! To have the wisdom of a sixty-five-year-old mind in an eighteen-year-old body! It was the dream of the ancients—brought true by modern technology!

I was anxious to show off my new body. I dressed it in smart but casu-

al fashion: Chinos, Bean's Walkers, button-down Oxfords, sharp blazers, Seiko—and took care to be seen in all the promising social situations.

“Who was the new tennis whiz?” everybody at the club wanted to know. I could trounce anyone: the combination of wisdom and youthful agility was too much for them. Also, I couldn't help but notice the wives giving my lean, muscular body the eye. They were all bored of their husbands, and I was sure I could have whomever I chose—but I hadn't yet developed full confidence in my new body.

I met Tammy at the gym. At first I was content just to watch as she worked out in her pink aerobic pants and tee. Her skin was smooth and creamy, and she did wonderful things with her body. Soon though, I began timing my visits with hers, and it wasn't long before I managed to introduce myself. After that, we worked out together—my brain clouded with her aroma. I had got rid of my Buick and bought a new carmine-red Lamborghini Espada GT, and she loved riding in it. She was eighteen too. She taught me hip hop and break dancing. She excited me, of course, and now that I had the working equipment to go with the desire—fairly robust equipment I might add—I was anxious to test drive it, so to speak. Ultimately, she turned me down, saying she preferred older men. I could appreciate the irony, but I was disappointed all the same.

By that time I felt comfortable with my new body. Frances was thirty-four, and she didn't mind my being eighteen one bit. She loved it in fact. The previous owner of my new body would have appreciated what Frances and I were doing for it. We had great fun until her husband caught us at the motel. He came storming through the door, ripping it and the frame right off the wall. When he saw that he had been cuckolded by a mere stripling, his rage turned sheepish and he shrunk from the room. *That's* the power of youth! I gloried in it.

Next was Sandy. Sandy was a lovely, bright-eyed thing of twenty-eight. Then Maxine, Jacqueline, Nicole, Juanita, Babette, Anastasia, Sandy again, Adrienne, Joanne, Claire, the incident with Roberta—who turned out to be Robert, Yolanda, Conchita, Virginia.... They all clamored for more. “How could an eighteen year old know so much,” they all said in amazement. They called me Don Juan, Apollo, Eros. Oh, it was grand! Youth! Where would it not take me?

Then someone recognized my new body from *Most Wanted* for a murder during a convenience store robbery. Now, I'm in prison until my new body is sixty-five-years old.

Holidays

Raud Kennedy

Today
is one of those days
where,
no matter how nice or kind,
everyone
will make me sick.
Grandmothers
coddling their grand kids,
dog walkers and Samaritans,
whistling,
people who press the walk button,
and don't wait
should be put in stocks.
Same goes for people
who fidget, stuff their faces,
and read newspapers loudly.
I'm exhausted,
wiped out from yesterday.
Who knew
forcing conversation with people
I see twice a year
could sap
so much life.

Letter to Stockton After the Fall

Christopher Thomas

Dear Richard: I should have told you
he was the sort of man who feared
guilt by association. He would eat
and play with Philistines but was doomed
to perpetually deny the fact in court.

I'm told he even kissed a few of them
and sat on far more than one of their laps.
Rumor has it he was like Saint Peter.
He ate with them in public places only
if he was sure Saint Paul wasn't around

to notice the meal was neither kosher
nor inside the law. He was a man who could
appear to be Jesus one minute and take
on the useless look of a lawyer the next.
There were many who tried to love him,

at least until they could no longer face
one more regret for having let him take what
he did not know how to own. In the end,
there was nothing left to do but refuse
to let him steal anything that wasn't part

of his own fragile dreams. Try to remember
that the batter of beauty rages in the temple
brass whether we witness it or not. And
don't blame yourself for the silence that must
be. Silence always precedes a new song.

LOGICAL PROOF FOR SOLIPSISM

Kenneth C. Eng

Ever had a feeling that you were the only conscious being? Well, you are alone. Literally. There is a logical way to prove that no one else in the universe exists aside from yourself, and that you, in a way, are the only entity in reality.

Firstly, let us consider the logic of consciousness. Consciousness is a definite requisite of reality because without anything to experience reality, nothing would even exist. Sentience, by the Uncertainty Principle, is what creates reality at both the quantum and relativistic levels, and because of this, it is the dominant force in the cosmos. With so many human consciousnesses, however, one might wonder how solipsism could possibly be.

Let us next consider the aspects of space, time and matter. Everything is made of an infinite number of points, so the only truly fundamental element of matter/space would be the 0th Dimension (an infinitely small point in space). In this dimensionless realm, there would be infinite possibilities and thus an endless multiverse would manifest, encapsulating an infinite amount of consciousnesses. All of these “life forms” would exist in a continuum of sentience spanning from the less conscious to the more conscious. Those that are more conscious would be the ones who are more cognizant of the logic behind reality and their own creation, whereas those who are less conscious would be those who cannot think deep philosophical thoughts.

If there are an infinite number of consciousnesses, there must also be an infinite number of human or humanlike beings. Nonetheless, causation treats everything like a objects, so why should these humanlike beings be considered any more aware than stones? After all, existence only needs one consciousness for it to be, and that consciousness would be one with infinite intelligence. Some might argue that humans have such high intellect because their minds behave more complex and quantum-like than ordinary mechanical computers, but then it can be said that quantum-based beings are only responsive but not truly alive. Put in another way, there is no reason why quantum-based beings such as yourself shouldn't be able to sense/react to events in the cosmos while being completely unconscious at the same time. After all, what is a highly com-

plex self-aware, evolutionarily wise human but another machine in the vast cosmic order?

Thence, there is only one other element that can truly determine whether or not others are aware. If consciousness is a requisite of reality, then everything from the beginning of time must be in some way “conscious”. Then again, what is “consciousness” but a word? The only way to define it, “life” and “awareness” is through subjective reasoning, which leaves everything up to *perception*. Therefore, because the quantum level and macrocosmic realm both require perception to create reality, all it takes is a thought to decide whether you want to conceive others as conscious or not. Either way is equally real.

So why not assume that every human is just a machine? It gets rid of having to worry about morality and all the worries of social image. After all, it is obvious that most humans hardly think for themselves anyway and usually obey the instinctual constructs society implanted in them. They all sort of blend into one another, for just as blades of grass are essentially cloned repetitions in the cosmic order, so are submissive/weaker humans just mere clones of one another. Thought is an inherent part of being truly aware, and those with more capacity to contemplate are more in tune with and can more willingly control the cosmos than those who do not contemplate. Ergo, those who are too weak to think outside of what they are told (or those that are too weak to think at all), should not really be treated as life forms, and should be thought of as objects that are controlled by the unconscious and are equally unimportant because there are an endless number of them and they do not affect the universe. Thus, if you can understand this and believe it, then you are the only consciousness out there in a realm of solipsism unlimited. Unless of course, you choose not to be.

Cheerful

Stephanie Bernard

My parents named me Cheerful. They told me that I was named after the way they felt the day that I was born. This used to make me giggle as a child. Smiling as they told me, I never seemed to grow tired of hearing it.

At the age of ten I was raped. It was by a maintenance worker at my father's office building where I used to play during the summer. In the summer the sun reflected off of the tall mirrored windows and I would run around outside never growing tired of the heat.

His name was Nick and sometimes he wore shirts with the arms ripped off. His jeans often had pockets missing from the back. I suspect that he wore the same pair every day. There was always a large set of keys dangling from his belt loop. Nothing but a fist full of keys and a large metal bottle opener. He got to know my name after seeing me so often and would buy me sodas.

When I would meet new people I would often exclaim "I was raped." It's like I just wanted to get it out of the way.

On a bad day it became hard to live up to my namesake. All it took was one sour expression for people to remind me of the irony. You're not very /cheerful/ are you? What's the matter /Happy/? I never knew anyone who didn't bring this up at least once during the time that I knew them.

I was always surrounded by friends. We went to the beach at night and stood at the shore where it felt like standing at the edge of the world. Sometimes boys would talk to me and I'd sit there and watch their mouths move and watch their eyes as they talked to me and I'd imagine them trying to think of ways to get inside of me.

We built bonfires when it got dark and that's when all of the crazies came out. The beach was littered with rejects and addicts. We'd sit around the fire and watch them stumble across the beach. One night a woman staggered out to the breakers and stood there for five minutes screaming. At the end there was an eerie silence.

"I want to be like her" I said and we all laughed uncontrollably.

It was my birthday and we piled into a local coffee shop. I ordered coffee and a side of fries. This earned me my free dessert. A sliver of vanilla ice cream with fudge and a cherry and a small white candle stuck in the middle. The waitress set it down, candle unlit and walked away. Someone



sitting next to me pulled a lighter out of their pocket and lit it. I blew it out without making a wish.

The waitress brought our check. She looked young but older than us and tired. No one bothered to ask her “What’s wrong?” when she scowled.

After running out of things to do, drawing on napkins, dropping dimes into the ketchup jar, we left; leaving half empty sugar packets on the table and a handful of change equaling one dollar and fifty for the tip.

We were going to meet up later. My friends went home to search their parent’s liquor cabinets for anything that wouldn’t be missed. I walked down towards the beach, where I would spend the rest of the day.

I sat on the sand for a bit, watching the waves. It was a clear day and I could see boats disappear on the horizon. Sinking lower and lower until it appeared that they had dropped into the sea. Long tendrils of kelp were spread out in a tangled heap along the shore. The water splashed over them and it looked like they were reaching out of the ocean.

I headed closer to the shore. There were rocks that rose lazily from the sand and tourists that strolled along the beach. The tourists usually avoided the rocks. There was a large stone formation that the water beat against, refusing to be buried during high tide. It looked determined among the scattered stones. My friends and I drank here at night, laughing at the waves and throwing bottles into the ocean.

I walked along the bottom of the rocks, picking at the sea glass carefully with my bare feet until I got tired and sprawled out on the reef. Occasionally someone would pass by to poke at the crabs that hid in the rocks. Birds pecked at the barnacles as I watched surfers in the distance.

A surfer approached. He walked across the rocks, barefoot and slim inside a black wetsuit. As he walked by I smiled at him. My eyes shyly studied his hairline as I avoided eye contact and waited for him to smile back. He smile back quickly and naturally and kept walking, seeming to forget my presence as he passed.

Picking his footing in quick calculated moves, surfboard tucked away under one arm, he approached the water carefully. Once he stepped off of the rocks and onto the sand I could hear him curse. I could see blood from a deep gash in his foot as he lifted it, tilting it towards him, to pull out a large clear piece of glass. He limped along and dipped his foot in the water, cursing again, this time the waves muffled his words. He threw his board down and slid across the water, making his way out to where the waves formed.

Waves crept under his board as he straddled it, rocking gently, wasting time relaxing as I watched. Wet suit slick with water, hair matted, curled around his face which was now a blur in the distance. The sea seemed to pull him out farther. I couldn't draw my eyes away.

Something stirred as minutes passed, and he sat looking downwards, studying mystery swirls within the water. His posture gave away a curious outline and deeper thoughts of worry. A mystery protrusion emerged, gray and pointed. Seconds later he toppled from the board, rolling off of the side, mouth wide, letting out a short scream that ended in the ocean. A struggle formed from arms and fins, flailing--and blood leaked like ink, forming red ribbons on the waves.

A lifeguard boat arrives to pull him mid struggle out of the ocean. I can see a piece of his thigh is missing, not really a piece, more like an empty space. And I'm looking through to see the ocean beyond. Crowds have formed on the beach. Everyone is out of the water.

The day ends slowly. Night falls, casting dark shadows onto the sand, forgotten blood flows out to sea, sinking with the sun. That night we sat on the beach, perched on the rocks, drinking, laughing, and throwing bottles into the ocean.





down in the dirt
revealing all your
dirty little secrets

Down in the Dirt
Scars Publications and Design
829 Brian Court
Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA

Alexandria Rand, editor
AlexRand@scars.tv

<http://scars.tv>

• **Down in the Dirt** is published by **Scars Publications and Design**, 829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA; attn: Alexandria Rand. Contact us via snail-mail or e-mail (AlexRand@scars.tv) for subscription rates or prices for annual collection books.

• To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; if mailed, include SASE & bio. Work sent on disks or through e-mail preferred. Previously published work accepted. Authors always retain rights to their own work. All magazine rights reserved. Reproduction of **Down in the Dirt** without publisher permission is forbidden. Copyright © 2000-2005 **Scars Publications and Design, Down in the Dirt**, Alexandria Rand. All rights of pieces remain with their authors.



v 029
December '05

