

down in the

revealing all your  
dirty little secrets

dirty

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## untitled haiku

kelly pardekooper

hold me through the night  
push me into the corner  
my arm loves the numb

# Most Favored Nation

Pat Dixon

1

On February 14, 2001, Professor Green Boyers kissed his wife Dorothy goodbye. "I'll miss you babe," he whispered, wiping both his eyes with his rather soiled handkerchief. "There'll never be another taking your place."

Two years earlier, her doctors had been fairly confident that they had caught her uterine cancer in time. Then, just four months ago, Dotty's brain tumor was confirmed and operated on. When she came to, she was completely blind and, worse, had to be informed that much of the tumor had been left behind.

As weeks passed, Green--who made it a point to learn such things--observed his wife go through the typical sequence of emotions which both professional thanatologists and pop psychologists had published hundreds of books and articles about. He compared Dotty's spiritual growth to his own admitted shallowness and more than a dozen times wondered whether anything would lift him from his own morass of self-involvement.

On three occasions, standing alone in the hospital corridor listening to Dotty, he had wept with admiration, while she had made her earthly peace with various people she and Green had both detested. On seven occasions, at her request, he had personally gone to such people's houses to tell them his wife wished to speak with them before she died. Four couples had made excuses in one way or another, two others had quite graciously agreed, and, of the remainder, the wife had hesitantly acceded while the husband flatly refused to be involved.

To those who came, Dotty's preliminary statement was essentially the same: "I don't have time to mince words, and you have other places you'd much rather be. We--you and I--have been thorns in each other's sides for years, and for most of that time I've tended to see myself as being in the right and you in the wrong. Now I can see that some of the problem was created by me, too. I'm not asking you for anything except to hear me apologize. I'm not asking for your apology in return--or for your thanks--or for anything else. I feel that I have wronged you to some extent in my feelings, words, and deeds, and for that I am now very ashamed. I am not minimizing your part in the dispute we've had--I'm just owning up to my own childish part--because I'm ready to grow up and move on."

The irony that Dotty's death occurred on Valentine's Day was not lost on Green. Not knowing that this was her final day, he had brought her a heart-shaped box of chocolates. When he had left the hospital without a word, he had handed the box to the elderly nun at the grief counseling office. Then he had walked for three hours before feeling able to drive their car home to their house.

The next evening Professor Boyers was invited to dinner by his department head. He declined that invitation but accepted one for three evenings after that. For the first two months, similar invitations flooded in from his neighbors and

trickled in from colleagues at Witherspoon Academy where Green Boyers taught courses in political science and military history.

He was aware that he had “let things slide” for many months, and vaguely made repeated promises to himself to “shape up and get my act together.” Despite their high-option insurance, the bills were staggering, and for months Green often found himself making excuses for mislaying some bills without even opening them: “I’m sorry that it’s overdue, but I’ve just been through a rough time, losing my wife to brain cancer, you know, and I’m swamped with a hundred other bills as well. Can you find some way, perhaps, to remove the late payment penalty?”

Luckily, we didn’t have kids, he sometimes thought. Often, he wished that Dotty--or even he--had had the presence of mind to make full peace with each other. For one thing, she had been far more interested in sexual experimentation than he, and he wished that they could have discussed his reasons for his great shyness and embarrassment about many of the things she had wished to try. For another, he had known for years that his pack-rat mentality had grated on her neat-freakiness, and she must have known that her occasional scoldings and ultimatums had only made him even less willing to change. It would have been good, he believed, to have tried clearing the air on this topic, too.

Looking around his kitchen, living room, bedroom, and home office, Green Boyers was frequently aware that his clutter had gotten much worse since her final hospitalization. He had begun to covet her sewing room and closets shortly after her funeral, but for three full months he resisted the temptation to pack up all of her things and donate them to the Salvation Army or some other charity, for once that was done, he foresaw, “her” space would act like a vacuum or a black hole, sucking both his new purchases and his older clutter into itself.

“I may be a messy pack rat,” he had frequently admitted, “but at least I’m not a drinker or a gambler or a--philanderer.” And Dotty had granted that, but on one occasion, two months before her brain tumor was detected, she had said, “True, very true, but you’re pathological nevertheless. I believe that your acquiring and hoarding behavior is just another form of ‘self-medication,’ similar to that of an alcoholic--or a drug addict. Have you ever thought about seeking counseling?” And he had honestly replied that this thought had never crossed his mind. Now that she was dead, Green began to wonder some evenings whether she might have been right.

Through the sort of male logic that existed before the story of Adam, Green felt that he was able to keep his promise of fidelity to his wife while still gratifying his amatory impulses. One night, two months after Dotty’s death, he found himself staring at the breasts of the redhead who gave the local television weather report. As far as other women were concerned, he decided that it would be all right to “look--and even videotape--so long as I don’t touch.”

The next day, after Green’s classes were over, he drove twelve miles to another Connecticut village and purchased copies of Playboy and Penthouse at a small drug store. On his way toward check out, he noticed a rack with dozens



of comic books whose covers resembled those of his magazine--young, pretty, huge-breasted females, cavorting either with virtually no clothing--or with clothing that looked painted on.

The next week, he found himself in a local comic-book store purchasing back issues of a dozen such publications. It was then that he noticed "action figures" for the first time. When he left the shop, besides what he jokingly called his "paper dolls," he carried busty five-inch-tall plastic figures of Catwoman, Danger Girl, Angela, Lara Croft, and Fathom. At home, while he took them off their "cards" and arranged them near his computer, he smiled to himself that he would certainly be careful never to put any of their tiny weapons (which their cards' warnings said "may present a choking hazard") inside his own mouth.

The following week, Green did an Internet search for similar plastic figures and, for the first time, found himself on eBay, an electronic auction site. Within half an hour, he had discovered the wide-eyed, helium-breasted plastic figures of Hong Kong, with their huge hairdos of every imaginable color, apparently representing females found in some kind of Japanese comic books. Roughly half of them carried one or more samurai swords. Within an hour, he had bid on six of these. Within the week, he had bid on twenty-seven and "won" fifteen. Twice in that time, it crossed Green's mind that Dotty would not have been pleased, but (he reasoned) he was not hurting her, nor was he being unfaithful to her memory by touching another woman. He also consoled himself that each one of these figures, despite the high charges for shipping and handling, cost him less than dinner for one at even a cheap local restaurant.

"If I can't spend my own money on what pleases me, what should I do with it now?" he said aloud the second time that her hypothetical displeasure came to mind.

He found himself checking his various electronic auctions during the day while working at Witherspoon and, whenever some like-minded person outbid him, he "prudently" used the eBay search engine to discover if identical items were being auctioned elsewhere at--"for the time being"--a lower amount. Almost invariably that was the case. Not only did the same seller have the same item "coming along just a few days later," but often four or more different sellers had identical items wending their ways "through the pipelines" of the auction process.

It was while consulting some of these other sellers' "other auctions" that Green learned for the first time that R-rated plastic figures existed, and once he had signed on specifically "as an adult," he discovered that similar pneumatic figures existed, which were partly or wholly nude and which were even more provocatively posed than his previous purchases. And with the assistance of this newly discovered "mature search" engine at eBay, Green slowly began to understand what he imagined Dotty had been trying to unlock inside him. While part of Green's brain thought the use of the word "mature" was misapplied, with another part he imagined his soul expanding or growing toward a greater toleration and acceptance of diversity--such as Dotty might have approved--and he half-consciously associated this change--with an undefined Zen influence that these small plastic Chinese fig-

ures of Japanese comic-book heroines might be radiating to him.

“At any rate, what I’m doing is a lot better than what Roger Gallon does,” he told himself, recalling that his former office mate took the train to Manhattan every summer--as soon as his wife, Ilsa, flew to Germany to visit her folks--and spent a week riding on the Circle Line boat, “picking up chicks.” Roger kept hundreds of photographs of himself and his teenage companions in his desk--and would boastfully show them to selected colleagues.

In his morally compartmentalized way, Green Boyers often lectured his students about the ironies of “our” democratic nation’s practice of granting special privileges to a wide range of totalitarian regimes because it has suited “our national interests” to do so--and China was high on Green’s list of countries he believed should not be favored thus. Once, in 1998, Green had been told by an adjunct teacher, whose own doctorate was in modern Chinese economic history, that many Chinese businessmen believed that their special status had been granted by President G. H. W. Bush because Beijing had blackmailed him. “Hundreds of high-placed people I spoke with think their government tape-recorded the president’s lovemaking with his secretary/mistress while he was their guest,” the adjunct had said--and Green had often repeated this hypothesis to his own students.

His own “trafficking with the enemy” never occurred to him. Green did feel a bit let down when the first shipment of his Chinese figures arrived after a two-month wait. Both the descriptions at the auction sites, despite their faulty English, and the photographs posted there had led him to expect something better than what he at last received. The “flesh tones” of the figures were quite bizarre, he thought, and the paint itself had been hastily and rather too thickly or too thinly applied in most cases. Only the eyes of the figures uniformly showed a level of painting skill that exceeded what he could easily have done himself.

If only better materials and more care could have been used, he thought, touching the bare breasts of his new possessions. Clearly this was a market-driven item, and clearly other sellers must have better quality, he decided, and so he began looking yet farther afield. At last, in both Germany and California he found what he sought. These figures were eighteen inches tall, not the usual three-to-seven inches of Hong Kong figures, and they were said to be made of something much better than plastic called “cold-cast resin”--whatever that might be, he thought with a little shrug, vaguely imagining that it was porcelain, strengthened in some way with the sticky material from spruce trees or pines.

Apparently other bidders thought they was special, too. The bidding wars often were quite intense, especially in the closing minutes. Green himself thought of these competitions as “pissing contests,” adopting a phrase that Witherspoon’s newest superintendent had often used during his faculty convocations.

On several occasions Green found himself suddenly bidding five to six times higher than his opening bids, partly to secure a painted figure for himself and partly to keep “her” from being possessed by another man--or woman. He had, during his first week of bidding on eBay, initially decided what he wanted to pay for an

item and had stayed with that, win or lose. Soon, however, he had noticed that for some “especially desirable” items a stealthy bidder would suddenly appear in the final two or three seconds and snap it up. It was as if--after Green and one or two others had slowly over the course of five or six days bid up to their maximums--some unseen sniper, crouched in some tree, had suddenly outbid them all and swooped off with “their” prize. In reaction to this sort of thing--and in anticipation of its happening with other items--during the final ten minutes of some auctions, Green often bid far higher than he had planned. On a few occasions he half wondered if this was what it was like to be a compulsive gambler or a slave to cocaine.

The result, for better or worse, was that he found himself the “winner” of several of these larger and more expensive figures: eight sold from San Francisco and three sold from a German city whose name he had never heard or read before. Within seconds, Green transferred payments from his bank account in Connecticut to the sellers’ accounts thousands of miles away, and, feeling rather pleased with his bidding prowess, he printed copies of the pictures of each of his eleven new trophies and taped them to the edge of a bookshelf beside his home computer.

Nine days later Professor Boyers was moderately amused when a large package from Germany arrived for him--along with a smaller one from San Francisco. He opened the one from San Francisco first, and discovered that it contained six slabs of styrofoam taped together, similar to the packing style of his figures which had arrived from Hong Kong. Inside the hollow cut in these slabs, he found a large painted figure of a bare-breasted woman wearing an unfamiliar kind of Japanese helmet with a metallic grid in front of her face.

What the--? thought Green Boyers to himself. At the top of the packing box he found a plastic sheet covering a label with his name and address on it. This, he discovered, was an invoice for the item he had bid on and won. Yet the enclosed figure was not that item. He compared the pictures hanging along his bookshelf with this figure and saw that it resembled his expected figures only in the area between its shoulders and its waist. Everything else about it was different--helmet, boots, gloves, weapons--and, he felt, far less desirable.

With some hesitation Green opened the package from Germany and found that the order was correct. The packing style of styrofoam chips and tiny airbags was similar to what American sellers often used, and these were the items he expected--and they were almost as attractive as what he had thought they would be. The colors were almost the same, and the features were only slightly coarser than what the small digital photographs had planted in his mind. But, he thought, at least these are an improvement over what I bought from Hong Kong. He shrugged and reminded himself that Dotty had often remarked that real life is full of compromises and “settlings for”--for people and things that are far, far less than perfect. On several occasions Green had been certain that he was on Dotty’s mind when she had said this.

It took Green four days of e-mailing San Francisco to receive instructions about returning the figure which he had not won. Somehow, he was told, his

item and that of another buyer had been shipped out incorrectly. Ultimate Earthly Treasures Inc. would “strive for correcting” this matter as soon as possible, wrote their representative in English far more broken than that used by the German company or any of the Hong Kong sellers. And, yes, Green Boyers would be compensated for shipping and handling costs, including insurance for two hundred U.S. dollars, if he would kindly return “these” item to UET Inc. as quickly as possible.

He did so. A week later, inside a huge cardboard box, three more purchases or “winnings” arrived for him from UET Inc. Again Green found layers of styro-foam that he associated with Hong Kong. Luckily, all of the figures were items which he had paid for and expected. Unluckily, two of them had damage.

A boot and a glauntleted forearm of one beautifully painted, bare-breasted figure were separated from the bare limbs where they had once been glued. Small problem, thought Green, looking at the deep sockets in the boot and the glove; I can easily reglue them.

The other damaged figure presented a greater problem: its head and left arm had been snapped off cleanly where they had not previously been glued, and the surfaces of the broken areas--the middle of a neck and the elbow of an arm which held an oriental sword--were too small to guarantee a strong join.

The relative perfection of Green Boyers’ third bare-breasted figure did little to settle his feelings. He waited two full days before sending UET Inc. an e-mail describing the problems he had found. By then it was Friday, and he had the weekend ahead of him to consider whether he would attempt any repairs.

By the following Tuesday evening, when Dimitri, UET Inc.’s representative responded, Green had already tested his abilities to be handy. With a series of small drill bits he had made four holes in the centers of the broken neck and elbow joint surfaces of his “injured little lady,” and, using plastic tubing cut from ear swabs, he had “pegged” or “splinted” the injuries from the inside to provide structural support for his repairs. In fact, looking at the results, Green felt quite proud of himself and would not, had such an offer been made, have accepted a substitute figure for this one. What Green did receive was Dimitri’s personal apology and a vague promise of a partial future refund.

In reply Green wrote a detailed 1500-word narrative about his restoration activities, making no attempt to conceal his pride at the result and concluding, “the lines where the breaks occurred are still visible, like scars that will never fully heal to look like normal skin tissue, and I may decide to go to a hobby shop some day and buy paints and a small brush to touch them up--but I may also just leave them ‘as is,’ as a testament to the successful ‘micro-surgery’ that I have performed.”

Three weeks later, the remainder of his order--including the “lost” figure that was sent to another buyer by mistake--arrived from UET Inc. Again Green’s reaction was mixed. The figure that had been sent elsewhere was in perfect condition and was exactly what Green had hoped it would be. All of the others had various problems with their condition--one had a leg separated at the hip socket where glue



had given way, while the others were all decapitated like the figure in his second shipment--and had, as well, an array of other "glue breaks" or "clean breaks" of the cold-cast resin. This time Green waited four days before e-mailing Dimitri the news, deliberately using short words. At the end of his message he added:

"I like these figures. I want to fix them myself, but I find this very sad--some person did very nice hard work to make them look so good. They are very nicely painted. And somebody broke them. I am sure that they were broken BEFORE the box was sent. Some broken pieces are inside a different hole carved in the styrofoam that you pack with. Maybe you have a person in your San Francisco company who is careless. Or one who is trying to make trouble for you. I bet other buyers have similar problems. Many buyers are not handy like me. Many will want all their money back, plus shipping. You might look at the people who pack--or talk to them. Thank you. Green Boyers. P.S. We are having a very cold January here. Lots of snow. Hope you are warm but don't have mud slides--or earthquakes there!"

Two days later Dimitri e-mailed Green that he was sending him a twenty-dollar refund and thanking him for being such a "clam and good El-buyer"--and Green thanked Dimitri for the refund and posted strongly positive feedback for other eBuy members to read about his eight transactions with UET Inc.

Two years in the future, Green Boyers, totally by chance, would notice a tiny printed sticker attached to the bottom of one of his three German figures: "Made in China." No stickers were on any of his UET Inc. figures, nor had Green ever noticed, either while unpacking them or while disposing of their packing, that the cardboard that had been taped securely around their styrofoam sheets had a single small word on it, printed in capital letters: CHINA. If he had noticed it, he would have assumed it was merely another term for cold-cast resin.

2

On February 14, 2002, three Tibetan monks who worked in a figure assembly and painting plant were given a quick but fair trial. They all, when asked, admitted that they had occasionally packed broken figures for shipment to San Francisco, although they denied breaking any of them.

They were, within fifteen minutes of sentencing, taken outdoors, and, with forty-seven of their fellow prisoners as witnesses, they were shot in the backs of their heads. The irony of its being Valentine's Day went unnoticed by all.

## The Two Legged Cow

*Raud Kennedy*

Walking with my dog  
across a spring meadow,  
I wonder if there's a reason  
for me being here.  
The cow on his way  
into the abattoir,  
was there a reason  
for his life in the pasture  
other than to fatten him up?

# Virus - Virii

Ken Dean

Tony DiMarcio was breathing heavy. His pulse rate was way up also. Having someone holding the sharp tanto point of a samurai sword at his neck was bound to cause some anxiety.

He had heard a slight noise downstairs and went to investigate, but not before grabbing his auto-Glock and an extra thirty-three round clip. He thumbed the firing selector to full auto. Quietly he crept down the stairway. Luckily there was a solid wall all the way down the staircase and his socked feet on carpeted stairs went undetected. Peering cautiously around the corner at the bottom, he was able to make out five armed females, one with only a sword, advancing slowly through the living room. He jumped out quickly from the landing and managed to pepper four of the armed intruders with several rounds apiece due to the rapid firing rate of the Glock. At thirteen hundred rounds per minute, you were hosing your target with lead. They had got off two – three rounds at the most, but luckily they had missed. But the fifth female had gotten the drop on him with her sword, coming in from his left.

The other end of the sword was being held by a beautiful, half-Asian woman who definitely knew her sword skills. She was applying just enough pressure to show she was serious, and this after fighting Tony with the help of her four now dead comrades who were lying in various positions of death on the living room floor of his house. It had happened fast; the blood was still spreading from the bodies onto his hardwood floors. He had emptied his Glock during the fight. He could swing up and hit her in the head with it, but he didn't bother trying. She was giving him her full attention, as any professional would do. Any sudden movement on his part and he was dead.

"Drop the gun to the floor, Mr. DiMarcio, and you get to keep on living for the moment."

Tony did as she asked, letting the Glock slip slowly out of his fingers, clattering to the floor. She quickly picked it up without changing the pressure on his neck from the sword.

"You have another magazine. No one who shoots like that would be unprepared."

He pulled it from his back pocket and handed it to her.

"Yes."

She backed up quickly and sheathed her sword, inserted the magazine in the pistol, and racked the slide to chamber a round in one smooth motion. She was now pointing the Glock at him.

It felt good to have the sword off his neck, he thought, those swords are just too damn sharp. He was bleeding! It wasn't much, just a few drips from the skin being broken.

"You bitch – you cut me!"

"Keep mouthing off and you'll have a few holes to match," she said, gesturing with the Glock.

“Now Mr. DiMarcio – where is the virus?”

Tony worked with the NSA, one of the most secretive of government agencies. Some of the stuff they pulled off made the FBI’s antics look like a bad day at an amusement park. He worked on the programming staff writing some of the most interesting code he had ever had a chance to come up with. They touted him as a programming genius, but with an IQ of 161 it all just came naturally. They had loved the program he put together called ‘Cipher’. It could take any code a nation or entity was using and crack it within five minutes. He was golden.

Through the NSA, he was able to use some of the most sophisticated computer equipment he had ever seen. They let him write programs for spy satellites, eavesdropping devices, network sniffers and firewall/port crackers that would let the NSA cull any information they wanted from a variety of sources: wired or wireless computer connections, cell phone connections, city-wide broadband, other countries satellites, etc. There was not a scrap of information they couldn’t retrieve given the chance.

He lived the golden lifestyle. They bought him an ornate house in upper class DC, gave him a fast car and paid him millions for what he was able to do. Tony also knew it wouldn’t last forever, unless he moved up to the higher ranks in the NSA. But you always needed a backup, trump card, etc. to use if trouble came along.

Tony’s trump card was a super virus he had put together himself. He had made sure the threat was solid. If it was ever introduced into the computing world, it would render every piece of computing hardware and software world-wide absolutely useless. You would have to talk by old school crank up phone after that. He had a copy that would go out from a hidden server if he didn’t check in once a month. The original DVD he had hidden in the house.

“What virus?”

“Don’t mess with me, Tony. It’s either the virus or your 9MM punctuated head. Your call.”

‘Damn, he thought, I haven’t told anyone about the virus. A secrets a secret if only you know it. Must’ve gotten drunk somewhere and said the wrong thing to the wrong person.’

“Okay, okay. Just what are/were you girls anyway?”

“Let’s just say we’re entrepreneurs, and leave it at that. Your virus would be worth a lot of money to, shall I say, the wrong person?”

“Your name?”

“You can call me Jezebel. Now let’s get moving.”

“Sure – keep your sword sheathed.”

You could tell she was a professional. The gun was kept just out of arms reach, and she kept Tony in her sight every second.

“It’s here in the study, behind the bookshelf.”

He pushed a book about a quarter inch. The bookshelf receded about two feet.

“You first.”

Tony stepped between the bookcase and wall. The space always smelled a little musty with being closed off most of the time. It was filled with boxes of notes,

programming and script printouts, along with a PC work area on a desk at the end.

Jezebel sneezed.

“Bless you – you don’t want to catch a cold, right?”

“Shut up,” she said rubbing her nose, “just get me the disk.”

“Here it is,” pulling it off a shelf.

He handed the case to her.

“Now go to the far end of the room and sit down with your hands under your butt – and don’t make a move.”

“Got it,” as he headed to the far side and sat down.

Jezebel took the disk to the other side of the room to examine it.

“I have no way of knowing if this is the true virus disk or not, it’s too dangerous to run it and find out. But a paying customer should have the tech savvy to know the genuine article. If it’s not I’ll be paying you a return visit, one you won’t live through.”

“Why would I give you a fake? I have a hidden version that will go out on the network if I’m dead. Just make sure you and any customer knows that would ruin any blackmail attempts on your part.”

She opened the case to examine the contents and a small amount of white powder puffed out onto her hands.

“What’s this – dust?”

“Not exactly.”

Her hands began to mottle and pustules were forming almost immediately – and it was starting to spread up her arms as she watched. And it burned – like she was on fire! She could feel the skin underneath the surface begin to disconnect from bone and muscle.

She dropped the gun to the floor.

“What is this?” she screamed.

“You wanted a virus – you got it. Meet a little friend of mine compliments of the NSA. A fast-spreading, flesh-destroying viral agent. I’ve been immunized, so no worries. The virus has a very short half-life, so that it will die shortly after you do. It’s my fail-safe in case anyone tries to get the disk.”

“I’ll kill you, bastard!”

She tried to pick up the Glock, but her hands were too much of a mess to hold it.

The agent was up to her shoulders now and she was still screaming. It worked its way down her throat and across her face and the screaming stopped. All that was heard now was a harsh bubbling. The agent was covering her completely, her body twitching in the throes of death.

Tony picked up the virus disk, reloaded the booby-trap, and placed it back on the shelf. He also picked up the auto-Glock; his other life saver.

“God this is gross — the smell. I’ll come back and clean up later.”

He walked out through the opening between the bookcase and the wall, shutting it behind him.

“Sneeze ya later, Jezebel.”

# THE HOUSE OF J

Mel Waldman

## I

Inside the House of J, the four centurions guarded the Master. Their positions formed a diamond when the four points of location were connected. A geometric diamond which enclosed and protected J.

At the foot of the stairs stood Vonn, the old blind man (who was also positioned at the lowest point of the protective diamond). In the attic, the highest point of the diamond, stood Mary Young, the deaf woman. Homer and Hawk, the crippled twin physicists, were located at the other two points of the diamond. Their rooms were located left and right of J's room on the second floor, from the perspective of the familiar visitor.

The four centurions guarded J who was on a special mission inside his secret room. J was writing the ultimate story. The ultimate story was the final one and after J completed it, no other story would follow. Completion of this book was J's ultimate goal. And although J never revealed the nature of his book, wise men speculated that his book would be the holiest scripture ever written.

The enemies of J did not want him to complete his manuscript. They were afraid of the power that would be unleashed by the book. A strange, gifted being was hired to kill J.

## II

Detective Roy Ives received the 911 call from the House of J at 3 AM. An intruder was in the House. And J's life was in danger. Ives' partner was off so Ives would go alone. Joe Brown, his partner, was going blind. He spent a lot of time in the doctor's office. Soon, he'd have to go on permanent disability unless a risky operation restored his vision.

Ives arrived at the mansion at 3:20 AM. Ives wore a shabby, multi-holed black raincoat. But the sky was clear. And although it was the middle of the night, the grounds surrounding the mansion were lit up by powerful street lamps. When Ives got out of the police car, his eyes darted across the grounds. No one was visible. Then when his eyes moved toward the mansion and upward, he saw the woman in the attic. She glared at him from within the illuminated attic.

No intruder could go unnoticed at the House of J. The house and grounds were lit up, illuminated and clearly visible as if it were daylight. And apparently, the woman in the attic watched the grounds at night.

Hunched over, Ives rushed slowly across an elongated path and climbed the long stairs to the high entrance. He rang the bell and spoke into the inter com. "Police."

"Why are you here?" Vonn asked in a husky voice.

"Someone called 911. Said there was an intruder inside the house."

"A mistake. Go away."

"Sir, you must let me in. I need to check it out."

"Identify yourself: Name, badge number, precinct, and telephone number."

After Vonn confirmed Ives' identity, he pressed a series of buttons which electronically opened the front door.

"Enter at your own risk, Detective Ives."

Slowly, Ives approached Vonn who stood at the foot of the stairs next to a computerized electronic table with dozens of buttons. Vonn was a blind behemoth, weighing almost 500 pounds.

"Can't see you, Detective. But if you're up to no good, the others will stop you. Me-I can hear you and smell you. Personally, I do not like Pierre Cardin. Have I guessed your cologne?"

"Yes."

"Eternity is my favorite, if you know what I mean."

"Not really. But now, may I look upstairs?"

"Yes. If you wish to see J, Homer and hawk will let you in. Be careful."

"Of course."

"One more thing. Leave your .45 Magnum with me. You may get it on your way out."

"But how...?"

"The Computer reveals all! It is my eyes. Your gun electronically triggered off the Computer and caused certain reactions: three buttons got hot. I feel the heat. My fingers are on fire!"

### III

Ives gave Vonn his gun and then climbed the spiraling staircase. He searched for the intruder to no avail. On the second floor, two emaciated men in wheelchairs greeted him.

"I'm Homer!" one man announced, wearing glasses and a twisted smile. "I'm talking to you by means of a voice synthesizer. It's a blast!"

"And I'm Hawk!" the other fellow said, wearing a crooked smile but no glasses. "I'm also talking to you by means of a voice synthesizer. Just press a few buttons on my wheelchair and I've got the power-the power of speech!"

Ives looked quizzically at the two crippled men.

"If you're wondering what happened to us..." Hawk said nonchalantly. "We lost the power of speech. Had emergency tracheotomies."

"Saved our lives!" Homer added. "And with modern technology, we speak to you by pressing a few buttons. We also get around by pressing buttons. Right, Hawk?"

"Indeed. And now, Detective Ives, would you like to meet J?"

"Thank you, Hawk. But how...?"

Vonn called us and let us know you were here. J will let you into his room in exactly 60 seconds. He's waiting for you," Hawk smiled wickedly.

"We called him," Homer proudly announced.

"Let's hurry, Detective Ives. Homer and I are close to making a breakthrough discovery in cosmology. Time is of the essence."

The door opened automatically. Ives sauntered to J who seemed oblivious of his presence.



“He’ll let you out when you’re finished!” Homer shouted. “But remember, only J knows the code!”

“Make sure he doesn’t die!” Hawk warned. “Or you’ll be stuck in there forever! Buried alive!”

“But...”

“If anything happens to J, we can’t get you out alive. The door can be opened electronically only from the inside. You do understand?”

“Of course.”

“We’d have to blast you out with explosives,” Hawk said dispassionately. “But then, you’d never survive the explosion.”

“A logical conclusion,” Ives admitted.

Homer and Hawk left, leaving Ives alone with J. Suddenly, the door shut behind him. And perhaps, for the very first time, he was claustrophobic. A wave of panic swept through his body as he pondered being buried alive in J’s tomb.

#### IV

Later, J released Detective Ives from his locked room. J had informed him that more than one person plotted to kill him. Yet he had heard no intruders in the past 24 hours. He was not afraid. Still, he did not expect to live much longer. Even his guardians, whom he loved, might betray him.

“Why?”

“It is my Destiny!”

Galvanized by his meeting with the Master, Ives left the House of J. His face glowed and he stood tall as he made his exit. Vonn gave Ives his .45 Magnum. Then he pressed a few buttons and the front door opened.

“Goodbye, Detective. The Master speaks well of you. Please return.”

Outside, Ives walked to his car. Momentarily, he leaned against a lamppost and looked up at the attic. She was still there, watching the grounds, guarding the Master. Her dark eyes captured him, held him, and let him go. He drove away.

#### V

At 6 AM, Detective Roy Ives received the 911 call from the House of J. An intruder had shot J. J was dying and asked to see Ives immediately.

Ives arrived at the mansion at 6:20 AM. When he looked up, he saw the woman in the attic. He scurried along the elongated path which seemed infinite. He climbed the long stairs. Eventually, he entered the mansion again. Vonn greeted him.

“The Master is waiting.”

“Do you want my .45?”

“No! You may need it. Be careful.”

Upstairs, he did not see Homer and Hawk. He waited outside J’s room, the .45 Magnum in his left hand.

Soon, the door opened. He entered.

“Hello, Ives. Or should I call you, Traitor?”

J sat at his desk, scribbling a few more lines of his manuscript. “Your buddy Judas could not kill me.”

“Where is the little beast?”

“He’s a little prince! And he’s hiding. Figured you’d kill both of us.”

“I shall!”

“If you kill me, my power will increase. Already, it approaches Infinity.”

“Then let it become infinite. Now, your earthly life must cease.”

“Bless you, my son. The four beasts that guard me will never let me escape. I am tired of my worldly prison. Death is my only exit!”

J automatically pressed a few buttons. The door started to close behind Ives.

“Goodbye, J.”

“I forgive you, my son.”

Ives shot J three times and rushed through the closing door. Judas, who was hidden beneath the desk, scurried after Ives and slipped through the door too. Judas leaped high and landed on Ives’ back.

“Get off me, you treacherous dwarf!”

“Behave! Or I’ll scratch you with my poisonous, taloned red nails!”

“Such treachery!”

Yet Ives behaved and carried Judas on his back, hidden beneath his shabby, multi-holed raincoat. Hunched over, Ives came down the stairs and walked past Vonn.

“How is the Master?”

“At peace.”

“A miracle!”

“Goodbye, Detective Ives. I doubt we will meet again.”

## VI

Outside, Judas jumped off Ives’ back.

“I could kill you, brother!”

“We’re flesh and blood.”

“You’re a traitor, Roy. For the right price, you’d sell your freaky bro to the Devil!”

“Never!”

“And you’d sell your puny soul too!”

“Already did. Don’t you know who gave us the contract?”

Judas looked up at his big brother.

“You made a deal with Him?”

“Yeah.”

Suddenly, he clawed Ives with his poisonous, taloned red nails.

“Goodbye, Roy. You betrayed your soul. And your little bro.”

The poison worked fast. Instantly, Ives fell to the ground. Within seconds, he was dead.

It started to rain. A heavy rain came down and covered the soulless man who wore a shabby, multi-holed black raincoat. Momentarily, Judas looked up and saw the woman in the attic watching him. Then he sauntered off in the rain. Homeless and freaky, but a little prince with a soul.

# THE OLD HOPE DINER

Mel Waldman

The snow covered Old Hope, surrounding and closing in on the town like a frozen noose ready to fulfill its fierce destiny. Almost completely cut off from the outside world, Old Hope was breathing its final breaths. And still, the Old Hope Diner remained open amidst the violent storm.

"Where's Lucille?" said the pot-bellied middle-aged sheriff who stood almost six feet tall.

"She's in the back with Jerry. Be right out."

"Good," the law man said, a crooked smile crawling across his scarred face. "And where's Eddie tonight?"

"Couldn't make it, Joe. The storm stopped him short."

"Too bad, Fred," Joe said in his soft, effeminate voice. "You'll have to work a double shift tonight."

"I'll live."

"You bet. And you work the counter like a champ."

"A champ?"

"Yeah."

"No one never tol' me that. You drunk, Joe?"

"No. But I could use some real strong black coffee. Gonna be a long night."

"Comin' right up. You take it with four sugars, Joe?"

"Yeah. Like I always do. Where's your mind, Fred?"

"Lost in the storm."

"Yeah. Ain't it now."

"Gonna sit at the counter?"

"No. I'll sit in a booth. Have Lucille bring it to me 'long with a ham sandwich."

Automatically, Joe's eyes searched the diner for a booth. In the distance, he noticed the stranger. "Who's that?"

"An outsider. Tol' me he was headin' east when the storm got real bad. Guess he'll be here a few hours. Maybe overnight."

"He can't stay, Fred."

"But the storm's real bad," Fred said nervously, his left cheek twitching.

"Old Hope's off limits to outsiders. You shoulda tol' him, Fred."

"Sorry, Joe."

And Joe sauntered to the stranger.

"Howdy, stranger."

"Howdy."

"Whatya doin' in Old Hope?"

"Just passin' through."

"We don't get too many outsiders in this here town."

"Yeah. Almost missed your town. My ol' Fury was movin' real smooth and

fast when the storm slowed it down. Swept over me and my baby 1-2-3. Kinda lassoed Black Fury real mean. Stopped her real sudden like. And then I saw the sign for Old Hope. Guess I lucked out.”

“Hell, no, stranger,” Joe said with fire in his azure eyes. “Old Hope don’t take to no outsiders. Now finish your meal and get goin’.”

“Might need to stay overnight, sheriff.”

“Ain’t possible.”

“Could die out there in the snow.”

“Yeah. But if you stay here, you’ll burn in Hell!”

The stranger saw the madness in the sheriff’s frenzied eyes. “Guess I’ll be gone soon.”

“That’s right, stranger.” And crazy Joe drifted off to a corner booth.

“Hey, Fred. How ‘bout some music? Before I think I’m sittin’ in a cemetery.”

“Radio’s out, Joe. Must be the storm.”

“Yeah.”

Joe sat in the black booth and glared at the stranger. Now, he noticed that the stranger had a boyish look of innocence. He wasn’t a pretty boy and he wasn’t the rough type either. Just plain good lookin’ with this sweet quality that was too damn sugary. He looked maybe 21 or 22. Just a kid. Yet, he made Joe’s blood boil.

Joe kept eyeing the kid who was busy eating meatballs and spaghetti. The boy didn’t look up once. Still, Joe couldn’t look away. There was something about him-strangely familiar and unfamiliar. Joe’s eyes were fixed on the stranger. So when Lucille emerged from the kitchen, he didn’t see her. She spoke to Fred for a few seconds and vanished into the kitchen. She stayed inside a while. Maybe five minutes. Maybe much longer.

Eventually, Lucille sashayed out of the kitchen again. Shaking her butt wickedly, she scurried past Joe without acknowledging his existence. Then she rushed to the stranger and gave him a cup of coffee and a big piece of apple pie.

“Thanks.”

“Any time, honey. Haven’t seen the likes of you in a long time. Gonna be in town a while?”

“No. Leavin’ after I finish up.”

“Too bad, babe. Coulda shown you a good time.”

“Maybe next time.”

“Yeah.”

Joe watched Lucille flirt with the boy. “Hey, Lucille!” Joe cried out. “Lucille!” Lucille didn’t answer Joe. But she kept talking sweet to the stranger.

“Now, honey. Don’t you forget to come back to Old Hope and say hello.”

“Hey, Lucille!” Joe shouted, hatred pouring out of his ugly skin. “Lucille!” You betta turn ‘round. Now! Right now!”

Lucille swung around, shaking her hips back and forth. “What’s the matter, Joe?”

“Where’s my ham sandwich and coffee?”

Lucille smiled wickedly at Joe and said: "Is that what this is about, sheriff?"

Joe glared at the sumptuous waitress who was half his age and the never ending object of his poisonous lust. "I ordered the sandwich and coffee a while back. Ain't that right, Fred?"

"That's right, Joe. And I tol' Lucille to bring it right out."

"See, Lucille. You're late on the order."

"So what, Joe?"

"You're late, Lucille. Real late."

"You sure that's it, Joe? Or maybe you're just a bit jealous of this here stranger. Maybe?"

"I want what's mine now!"

Suddenly, Joe got up. He rushed to Lucille and the kid. He stopped about a foot away from Lucille and said: "Go back into that kitchen and get me what I ordered. Now!"

"No!" said the little woman, about a head shorter than Joe.

Abruptly, Joe flung his right arm at her. But the boy jumped up, grabbed Joe's hand, and stopped it from doing any harm.

"Let her be!"

"Sure, fella," Joe said as he threw a left jab at the intruder. But the jab was blocked and made useless.

Unexpectedly, and almost magically, the stranger pulled a gun out of nowhere. He pointed it at the lame sheriff. And without looking at Lucille, he announced: "Maybe you oughta get the sheriff his food and coffee."

"Yeah," she sighed. And Lucille scurried off.

"Don't want no trouble, sheriff."

Joe smiled sardonically at the outsider, his frenzied eyes fiercely rolling back and forth.

"Just give me your gun. No tricks."

Joe handed the kid the old piece of steel.

"Now go back to your booth. Sit down and cool off."

"Sure, fella." And Joe returned to his solitary booth.

Time danced slowly, its long silence encircling Joe like a burning noose seeking cold flesh. Fire and ice.

"Lucille, where you at?"

The outsider looked intently at the sheriff without speaking.

"Lucille, you gone to Hell?" Sweating and trembling, Joe jumped up.

"Sit down!" the stranger ordered. "Sit!"

Joe obeyed. He sat silently in the black booth, swaying back and forth in his seat. Grimacing and gesticulating, he looked like a wild cat smelling danger. But when Lucille appeared, his body stopped moving as if he had been shot with a tranquilizer gun.

"Here you go, Joe," Lucille smiled. "Sorry 'bout the delay."

“Guess I made a big stink ‘bout nothin’. Can you forgive an ol’ fool the likes of me?”

“Sure, Joe.”

Lucille bent down and kissed Joe on his forehead. “Now drink your coffee and just relax. Everything’s gonna be just fine.”

“You say the right things, Lucille. That’s why I love you.”

“I know, Joe. But you hurt me real bad the other night.”

“Didn’t mean it, honey. I’ll never hit you again. I promise.”

“I know.”

“You still love me, Lucille?”

“Always. And Lucille went into the kitchen.

Ecstatic, Joe took a few sips of coffee. “Fred, this here coffee’s real good.”

“We try, Joe.”

Slowly, Joe drank the coffee, a strange look of tranquility sweeping across his face. At that rare moment of peace, Joe noticed the outsider sitting at the other end of the diner. “Hey, stranger. Sorry ‘bout this trouble I caused you.”

“No problem.”

“Well, you can stay in Old Hope as long as you like. Even sleep overnight if the storm don’t stop.”

“Thanks, but I think it’s almost over.”

“Hope you’re right.”

The radio came on. It just happened. Nice an’ easy. He heard the sounds. Real natural an’ soothing. And the voice. It sounded familiar. It was Eddie. Eddie’s voice—a pleasant surprise.

“This is a special announcement. At midnight ...”

Joe checked his watch. It was only five minutes to twelve.

“At midnight, Sheriff Joe passed away in the Old Hope Diner. He died of a heart attack. The town of Old Hope says—‘Goodbye, Joe.’ Joe died for us. And the town of Old Hope is saved. For one more year. Folks, the storm is over. Bye, Joe.”

Joe didn’t fight it. He saw the familiar stranger in the corner. “Who are you, boy?”

“Don’t you recognize me, Joe?”

“Kinda.”

“Think back, Joe. The way you used to be. Who you coulda been.”

Joe looked at the other and a wave of sadness passed through him. The poignant memories and lost dreams touched him deep. “Guess it’s too late.”

“Only in this world, Joe.”

At midnight, the painless poison in Joe’s coffee took effect. And Joe slipped away into another world where beautiful possibilities still existed.

The others emerged and gathered together around the stranger.

“The town of Old Hope is saved. I won’t be back. Next year, someone else will come in my place. And someone else will die.”

They nodded in agreement.



“Don’t let the hate build up. The violence is killing Old Hope. Learn to love. It’s your only hope.”

“Yes,” they said in unison.

“In the meantime, you’ve got a year to choose another one. All that hatred-it’s got to be siphoned off. But if you could learn to love. If...”

Outside, the storm stopped. The snow covered Old Hope, but now it was a blanket of peace. Old Hope was breathing gently, like a joyous baby in the arms of a loving mother.

In the distance, a familiar stranger vanished in the snow.

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## Turning a Buck

*Fredrick Zydek*

There’s something distinctly American about risking everything, about chasing even science to see if it can turn a buck. We’re the people who don’t mind going to battle for peace, who give more praises to athletic beauty than to string quartets and mathematical theories. The first thing

one learns about living in a democracy is that it is dangerous business. Freedom of speech never sounds so bad as when we are in the middle of a political campaign. Name calling has become more important than talking about real issues because everyone knows the real issues are so out

of control, no one is going to be able to do anything about them anyhow. Just look at the enmity George W. Bush built between ourselves and the Moslem world. We have now killed over 600,000 innocent children, men and women in Iraq - all in the name of ridding their country of weapons of mass

destruction that were never there in the first place. We have pulverized their economy, educational system, infrastructure and wealth. Moslems from all over the world are joining in the fight against American imperialism, and we stand around talking about whether or not Christians have the right to keep gay

Americans from obtaining the same rights they have or whether one group of men and women should be able to tell others what to do with their bodies. Truth is at a high premium in the US of A. because spin doctors and slick advertising departments have learned to make lies sound like truth.

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## If We Were To Live Forever

*J. Williams*

Death is the reason we live,  
But if offered to live forever—  
Would we be tempted to do so?  
What would become of an over-populated world  
Where death has no life?  
What would become of the world—  
That never died?  
To believe in the afterlife is—  
a belief, in a way, that we will never die.  
The physical, we are told, is just a shell.  
The spiritual being is the power.  
But to never die is simply dangerous.  
Without death, they'd be no room for rebirth;  
No room for life.

# scenarios 2000

Alexandria Rand

I have thought of you,  
in the past I have thought of you before,  
and I usually imagined you in one of two scenarios:

One was that I had a gun to you,  
that for one I was the one in control  
    even though I hate guns  
    this was one of the ways in my head  
and you were on the ground  
looking up at me  
and I was standing over you  
and braced myself stiff and straight  
    because no one was going to beat me this time  
and I pointed the gun at you with both arms  
and I have no idea what I said to you  
and I haven o idea how we got to this position  
all I know  
was that you couldn't hurt me

I do'nt know what I did with that gun  
I fon't know if there was any resolution  
  to the story  
but this is one of the ways  
    I have thought of you  
only one

The Other Scenario was that  
you tried to kill me  
I was at a bar  
and I saw you come in, but you didn't see me  
so I asked the bartender to act like I was never here  
and I made my way to the bathroom  
I borrowed a scarf from a girl in there  
and I put on my glasses  
and I got up the courage  
to go out to the bar again

I had no idea where my male friends were  
I felt so alone  
I mean, I borrowed a scarf  
                    from a stranger in the washroom  
but I thought,  
it's now or never,  
you think you look silly wearing sunglasses in a bar  
well, think that you look like Lackie O  
and you look elegant  
and fantastic  
and no one can tell you otherwise  
and so I left the washroom  
and I made my way back to the bar

You had walked up to the bar  
right ot where I was sitting before  
and you pulled out a high school photo of me  
and asked the bartender if I looked familiar  
and the bartender said that he never saw  
                                    the girl in that photo  
and you left one hand on the bar  
and you started to lean back  
and it gave me the change to give the bartender  
  another tip

and while you were back  
I saw my friends  
and one of them spotted me  
and they decided to yell over the people at me  
saying my name, saying that they were looking for me  
and you turned toward me when you heard my name  
and I couldn't help but stare right at you  
  when you did it  
and I didn't know what to do next

My friends came over right away  
and all I could think  
was that I didn't have to be alone for this battle with you any more  
and under any other circumstance  
I would have yelled at them for screaming out my name

or walking over to me and taking my glasses off  
but you were right there  
and I had no time to react and be angry at them  
I was just relieved  
so I started talking to them  
and you came up  
and I acted surprised  
and within thirty seconds I turned to get a beer  
and I leaned with a friend  
and I told him I saw a gun on you  
at your waist  
and could they please tell the bartender

and he did

I wanted to be able to introduce you as a rapist  
but I knew you had a gun  
and I knew I had to play my cards right

but within five minutes  
the cops came in, walked up to the bartender  
and he pointed you out

I started to walk away  
I said I had to go to the bathroom  
I wanted to make sure you couldn't grab me  
or take me hostage  
or kill me

the cops apparently didn't do anything to you  
your gun must have been legal  
so they told you to leave the bar

one of my friends knew who you were  
so they told the rest of my guy friends  
to meet you outside

I waited inside long enough  
to give that scarf back to that stranger  
but all I know  
was that it look like you hated me when you left  
and I just watched to make sure this enemy went away  
and never came back  
and maybe I could heal then

one of my friends came back to the bar  
told me I had to see this  
so I went outside with them  
and saw the bloody heap they reduced you to  
and they all stood in a circle and looked at me  
as if they were waiting for me to deal the last blow  
so

so I kicked you once  
in the stomach  
I thought that I didn't want to be the one who killed you  
by kicking you in the face

God, I'm an idiot that way  
why could I have done more?  
am I too nice  
or am I a baby  
or do I want to blame someone else?

So I left it at one kick  
and I leaned toward your face  
and I said you were a rapist  
and I don't think you heard me  
but I didn't care  
and I got up and started to leave

Someone asked me,  
should we just leave him here?  
And I said, "Leave WHO?"  
and they understood  
and walked with me

these are the ways I think of you  
they are the only ways,  
just so you know



# A Grandfather's Tears

Danielle Kuhn

She would cuddle in his lap,  
blond curls bobbing as she laughed.  
hanging on his every word,  
she was Grandpa's little girl.  
Believing Grandpa's car could fly;  
down the country road  
they would drive.  
She couldn't see above the dash  
He'd ask if she was ready.  
She'd whisper yes!  
He'd shift the gears, step on the gas  
and say, up, up away we fly.  
To her they were in the clouds.  
never was she so happy as  
the times she flew in Grandpa's car.  
As the years went by  
the flights turned to baseball games,  
late nights, pizza and pop.  
Sitting on the couch beside him  
things began to change.  
No longer just a child  
she began to grow.  
These became the years of  
boys and highschool football games.  
The visits came less frequent  
as she began to date.  
The boys she dated, the friends she had  
set the trap to make her stray.  
Her pride was broken,  
her virtue stolen.  
Her heart was soiled,  
she was confused.  
She had forgotten how to laugh,  
she could no longer smile.

She didn't know where to turn  
she felt lost, alone, ashamed.  
He watched, with a broken heart.  
He didn't know how to help.  
His little girl had changed so much  
he didn't even know her.  
He fought to break through.  
He was angry with her  
angry at himself.  
How did he miss it?  
Where did time go?  
He longed to hold that child.  
He ached to hear her laugh.  
How could he tell her?  
Would she even hear?  
Sitting in an old easy chair,  
the Grandfather not knowing  
says a lonely silent payer,  
for a child so far gone  
and his own heavy tears.  
Far away a young girl cries  
to a god she no longer knows.  
Praying that he'll send an angel  
and return her to the days  
that she flew with Grandpa  
in his small black car.

## Abu Ghraib in the U.S.A.

*Peter Magliocco*

I see what your mind in purgatory forgets  
when lush vegetations darkly enfold us  
in leafy shelter where something waits  
to brand our flesh with hot irons  
preparing our asses for old slaughterhouses  
erected by the U.S. military from Iraq  
to quarantine those lying on tax forms  
like your sweet sister in chains now  
or your lover's vagina implanted  
by electrical devices shorting-out  
for fast food victims nationwide  
in beautiful chain stores like Abu 7-11  
where cult film sadists buy plasma  
chilled with processed prisoner guts  
advertised as this week's best buy  
no one goes hungry but naked losers  
at the wrong end of the food chain

2005

Tanisha Alexander  
AKA  
Phenomenally

Was filled with the enemy  
Whoooo  
Let's see...  
I was 23  
On New Years Eve  
I learned my father had  
Been shot while sitting in a car  
Fellowshipping

Now I didn't leave immediately  
Because Ya'll I was bitter  
He wasn't living the way he should have been  
Living hustling and dealing

When I did decide to leave  
My mother called me  
While I was packing  
And said dear  
He just left us fatally

I began to cry silently  
You know the ones  
That makes no sound  
But rivers roll out  
Warming your cheeks  
Burning the skin  
Under your eyes  
And the soul hurts badly

So I unpack  
Call my sister and was told to come down shortly

I rent a car  
Got my hair done beautifully  
When I arrive  
I've noticed that they had a terrible storm  
A bad Ice Storm  
Trees were split in two  
Nothing but Ice Everywhere  
Little did I know that  
That Ice Storm wasn't just covering the stairs,  
Streets, and trees

Ohh Lord it was in me

Well I attended the funeral home  
To view the body  
Little did I know  
That would be the first and last time  
I've seen my father in seven years  
See the last time he called me  
I was pregnant  
But I didn't tell him  
Because I thought he was unworthy  
Now he will never know  
The child that lived in me

I wanted to talk to him  
But the room was busy  
And I was afraid to express  
My feelings  
Emotionally

So I held back  
Because I felt it was inappropriate

Well I went back to my the place I was staying  
To get some rest  
Before the funeral the next morning  
To my surprise my auntie

Had awaken me  
At what seemed to be  
Three in the morning  
Saying it's your sister  
She needs to talk to you  
And I shake my head NO GO AWAY  
I'm soo sleepy

My aunt says  
Your sister says it important  
HERE

I take the phone  
And my sister says  
Tanisha Lee  
It's Nicole  
Your big sissy  
I said a groggy Hello,

She said there would be no funeral  
I say what??

She says they burned it the funeral home down  
We will not be able to have a funeral today, babe

I say what? WHO?  
She says the investigator thinks it could be the guys  
That shoot daddy  
I was confused  
And I felt like my soul  
Just said this is too much  
And left my body

So I lay in bed  
Limp  
No energy  
Upset  
Unable to cry because I was that sad and mad

My mind wouldn't allow me to rest  
I keep saying to my self  
This is not me  
This is not me  
This is not my life  
This is not suppose to be

I throw on my pajama pants  
And tennis shoes  
And I rush to the funeral home  
Thinking that Bitch  
She's lying to me  
She's always been jealous of me  
Because I'm the baby

The sun is just coming up  
So I come around to the funeral home  
It was totally burned down  
Police investigating  
Fire Trucks  
Showering  
I let out a loud  
NO BUT MY DADDY  
MY DADDY  
My daddy  
I didn't get to say good-bye  
Why  
The investigator said honey  
The medical investigator  
Has his body

See we think it is connected to the shooting  
These guys drove their trucks into the funeral building  
And poured gasoline on his body  
Closed the casket  
And set the place afire

I was thinking this is not me  
this is not happening

Why  
Why  
Why  
Would they do this?  
He is already gone  
Why are they trying to hurt the family?

So no funeral  
No funeral

For another two weeks  
And still no leads  
On these men sent from the enemy  
A few months later  
The same men came after  
The funeral director  
Shot him dead  
The investigation has went dead

I still don't know who killed my dad

Little did I know that  
The day in the funeral home  
Would be the last time I would see him  
EVER  
Our funeral was a closed casket  
And I was sooo bitter  
Ever so bitter  
How could he leave me without saying?  
Good-bye  
To me

How  
But one night after praying  
He woke me up  
At 4am  
In the morning and said  
Hey Lady  
I've been distant

Don't cry over me  
You seeing me  
Before me passing wasn't meant to be  
Because that's not how  
I want to be remembered  
T  
I love you  
And you have your memories  
Love Daddy

---

## GOOD GRACES

*Cathy Porter*

At the intersection,  
the guy who jumped  
in front of my car  
is counting on my good graces  
to yield to the pedestrian.  
If he knew the type of day  
I've had, he would have waited  
until I was long past the intersection  
before crossing the street.  
He looks like he's in  
a rush to get somewhere;  
maybe he has to score some crack-  
or a piece of ass. He's lucky  
I hit the brake and let him pass.  
For a moment, I think about slamming my foot  
on the accelerator,  
just to show him  
you don't have to be on crack-or horny-  
to be crazy.



# This Isn't the Roxbury

Kimberly Jean Erickson

I sat impatiently upon my stool sipping on the gin and juice I had reluctantly ordered, as I watched my dear old friend, newly divorced, on the dance floor with some old geyser almost twice her age. She saw me watching them, with a half cocked drunken smile, threw her hand up high in the air and waved vigorously at me, as if she had scored big by catching some old fat pervert, dressed in an Italian made suit. No doubt, he had probably left work late, left the wife and if any kiddies at home worrying about his whereabouts, and decided to go out seeking some friendly action. Actions he probably hadn't received from wife on a regular basis in years.

My friend, freshly divorced at age thirty-five, had maintained her girlish college figure throughout the six years of her marriage. A marriage that ended bitterly, shortly after numerous doctors had told her she would never be able to conceive a child from results of years of an unknown curable STD, she had contracted in her early years, which then resulted in her husband having an affair with one of his co-workers. Now my dear old college buddy was out of control, hooking up with any and every man she possibly could. Deep down, I think she is thinking, she is getting her revenge back on her cheating husband, whose recent girlfriend is about to give birth to his child. The gift she couldn't give him.

*"Why do I let her drag me out to these god forsaken places?"* I asked myself. But deep down, I knew the reason why. *"She was lonely, depressed, and very angry. I am her only friend and she was mine, friends since our freshman year in college, where she studied law and I studied literature."*

Subtly I tried to adjust the under wire, in my new bra, without anyone in the crowded smoke filled room noticing. The garment was new and the black lace was very stiff and itchy. I took another sip of my drink, swearing after I finished my limit of one, I would go home, trash my bra, and work on my novel. A dark fantasy type novel of many, with only one last chapter to finish.

*"I have always had a passion for anything relating the mystery of evilness, heck, I even took classes on the occult, paganism, and dabbled in some witchcraft in college. So I decided a long time ago to write about what I love, which afterwards produced nine best sellers, I was doing pretty well for myself."*

*“Unlike my friend on the dance floor, I had floated through a couple of short term relationships, but I had always adored my freedom and the splendor of solitude. I felt comfortable being an independent and modern day woman that doesn’t feel the need to cling on to a man, such as her.”*

My dear friend, Tabitha, came running over, her long blonde highlights of hair billowing out behind her, twisting her ankle over slightly from the combination of alcohol and her too high heeled shoes. The man she had been dancing with caught her as she almost stumbled over. She then giggled sounding like an adolescent school girl.

She reached out and grabbed my arm, breathing heavily from her exertions on the dance floor, she gave that half cocked smile again, along with rosy blood-shot eyes, “This is Russell... Russell, this is my dearest friend in the whole world, Carla.”

I reached out and accepted his hand shake.

With slurring speech, she stammered, “Russell says he knows where this really wild club is. A club like no others.”

“It is very unusual. I think you girls would like it” he added.

I sighed heavily, purposely showing my disinterest, “I really need to get home, I have work to do.”

Tabitha whined like a child, “Oh, Please! Let’s just go check it out! We don’t have to stay long!”

After considering it for a moment, I thought that Tabitha would get drunk and pass out, so I could then take her home with me, instead of her ending up at some sleazy motel with this idiot, I sat my half full drink down upon the bar, “So where is this place at?”

Russell smiled, ever too pleasingly for my taste, “Just down the block...I can even drive us there.”

“No! Thanks, we will follow you.”

Russell laughed, “Oh! I understand. You don’t feel comfortable to ride with a stranger.”

I smiled at him mockingly, “Yeah! Something like that.”

He held both hands in a surrendering manner and took a step backwards, “Hey! I perfectly understand where you’re coming from.”

Tabitha giggled again in that girlish tone, “Let’s go! I can hardly wait to see it. It’s about time they opened up some new places to hang out around here.”

Her speech was becoming more and more slurred by the minute. She then picked up my gin and juice and downed the rest of it.

With a sarcastic tone, I mumbled, “Yeah! About time we had another

er singles bar, never can have enough of them.”

Tabitha grabbed a hold of my arm, as I stepped down from my stool, “Stop being such a grouch!” she demanded.

I laughed as I grabbed both our hand bags from the counter, “Well, you would think something were wrong with me if I did otherwise.”

Slurring somewhat, she mumbled, “You just need to get laid.”

Russell squeezed in between the two of them placing one arm around each of their shoulders and hugging them tightly, “Well, ladies, I think I can help the both of you out with that problem.”

I pulled swiftly away from beneath his arm, turned, and glared at him, “I don’t think so Mr. Study! Put your hands on me again, I promise you, you will regret it!”

Russell threw his hands up in the air once again in a surrendering stature, “Just kidding! I was just kidding!”

“Well, I’m not, try me!”

Tabitha maneuvered around us and slipped her arms inside and around ours, “Come on, you two. Stop all this bitchin’ and let’s go party!”

Once outside the club, I noticed it had rained while we were inside. The night air was so fresh and cool, such a relief from the clouds of smoke that had hung so heavily around our heads inside.

I asked, “Only a block, ugh?”

“Yes, it’s not far.”

“Let’s just walk then.”

Tabitha staggered a bit, “Sounds good to me.”

The three of them headed down the wet, mirror like sidewalk.

“Yeah, I think you need the fresh air most of all.” I chided in.

“I don’t know, I kind of like a tipsy woman.” Russell added.

I gave him a hateful gaze, “Yeah! I just bet you do!”

“Carla, I can tell you don’t like me.”

“Oh! Really! I would never give that impression to a complete stranger that I know is only trying to get in my best friend’s pants!”

Tabitha laughed hysterically, “I have a skirt on...no pants!”

“Shut up, Tabitha! You’re drunk!” I yelled.

Russell then pointed across the street to a tall dark red brick building, “That’s the place.”

I glared at him, “This has to be some kind of joke...where’s the signs...where’s all the people....this place is abandoned...Are you some kind of serial killer or something?”

“No! No! It’s a private club...invitation only!” He then pulled a yel-

low envelope with a broken red wax seal from his pocket.

I snatched it out of his hand, "Give me that!"

All that was on the card was some weird looking kind of bar code; I tossed the card back to him.

I stared at him, daringly, "If this is some kind of trick, you will regret it!" I then reached inside my handbag and gripped the container of pepper spray tightly in my grasp.

"Come I will show you."

The three of them walked up to the double doors made of steel. Russell swiped his barcode under a steel mount of green light. Several echoing, like clicking sounds rumbled throughout the massive sized door. The green light turned to an almost blinding red tone and the doors swung inward.

Tabitha gasped, "Now, that's something original!"

Russell stepped inside first, into a small corridor with an eerie reddish glow about it. Two very tanned large muscular men stood statuesque in black leather loin cloths beside another set of double steel doors.

With excitement Tabitha grabbed my hand and yanked me inside. Once I was in, off the street, the outside double doors slammed shut. The two men with expressions like carved stone upon their faces jerked our purses from our hands.

"Just wait a damn minute." I yelled.

"You will get them back once we leave...I promise!" Russell added, as he handed his car keys and wallet over to the two.

Once their items were discarded into a dark cubby hole, and their persons scanned with a metal detector, the men opened up the next set of double doors.

The room inside was so dark that they had to stand stone still until their eyes adjusted to the dimness of only a few candles burning throughout the room.

Russell quickly took off over to what appeared to be the bar where only a few sat stone still on open stools. A band of men dressed in ragged clothing, with long hair that obscured their faces played music of chill pump raising quality of music she had never heard before.

Tabitha leaned into me and whispered, "This is not the Roxbury."

"No, not at all." I whispered back to her.

The two of them walked over to the bar beside Russell, their eyes trying desperately to scan over the sparseness of the room. People were sitting around tables with their heads hanging low.

I leaned close to Russell, whispering softly, "I think we need to go."

"No! No! Not yet! This is a fabulous place, Carla! You will see!"

A man stepped out of the shadows from behind Russell, wearing black trousers and a black silk vest, his chest and stomach rippled with perfection, as if evolving from out of nowhere. He was tall, had long dark hair, and eyes so dark they appeared as endless pools of black onyx.

I found myself mesmerized, unable to keep my eyes off him. He possessed a familiar masculine beauty that was too rare for any man to have.

"Welcome." He spoke, his voice was warm and smooth as aged old brandy. He reached out and drew my hand into his lightly, placing his lips of perfection against the back of my hand, his eyes delved deep within mine, piercing my very soul as he did so.

I felt so tongue tied, all I could muster was a very weak and cracking voice of, "Thank you." even though the words had seemed so foreign to me, as if they had not come out of my own mouth. I whispered, "Do I know you?"

He smiled, slowly, so deliberately, so sensuous, "No, not officially...not until this moment."

"You just seem so familiar to me."

"Come, come dance with me...do me the honor of dancing with the owner."

Ah! The owner?"

"Yes, it would please me if such a beautiful young woman would honor me with such grace that I know she possesses."

Tabitha then pushed me in the back, "Go ahead, Carla...dance with the man. He is so fine, in everyway."

Still holding my hand in his, he led me out to the deserted dance floor. The music became very loud almost in a violent nature, yet he embraced me tightly and danced a slow lover's step.

I suddenly heard Tabitha call out to me. I could hear fear, quivering in her voice. I tried to turn but his arms of steel kept me imprisoned in his embrace.

He began to laugh, a laugh of sheer eeriness, something utterly unnatural about his tone, "Your friend is alright. Russell will take very good care of her, just as I will for you."

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Russell embracing Tabitha, their bodies melting into the darkness of the shadows, as I heard her horrific cries.

"Where is he taking her?"

“For a bit of privacy. That’s what she really desires, to be wanted, to be needed, now she is getting all she dreams of from a man.”

“I need to go check on her!”

“But, we have not finished our dance, yet.”

I tried to pull free, his strength was immeasurable.

I turned my head from side to side and cried out for some one to help. The people sitting at the tables, I suddenly noticed were not moving. I glared harder at them through the dimness of the light. The flesh on their hands seemed paper thin and ripped. Fleshy strands of skin and flesh were dangling from their darkened bones. Eyeballs were suspended by oozy red stringy tendons. Noses of green and yellow had decayed and dropped off and now lay on the table tops in front of their soured decaying bodies.

I screamed with all the breath in my lungs. Hoping someone would come to help.

His mouth came crushing down upon mine. His tongue, so cold, so slithery, bringing to mind of a serpent or a snake-like creature which spiraled and flicked with my own. I gagged with revulsion.

His mouth broke free of mine, as he threw back his head and belled out with laughter, so evilly, so demonic. He glared down at me with all the hatred from Hell beaming from his eyes, “For so many years now, you have written books. Molding, creating, and desiring this kind of environment...Now that I show you first hand of your creations...you are terrified...this is your kind of world, Carla!”

His eyes turned from pits of black oil to dancing flames of fiery embers, his breath reeked of rotting flesh, and his once pale flawless skin now seemed thin, translucent, and taunt over his bones. His once perfect smile now was replaced with yellowish pointy teeth that had extended in to elongated fangs. Fangs for devouring flesh.

“I know who you are...” I cried out.

He laughed manically, “Yes, I know, you know who I am!”

“All these years you have prospered nicely, I have been your slave, your creature, the monster you have conjured up from your imagination, to do the most heinous of your thoughts.” He reached down and tore my dress down to my waist exposing my bare breasts for his viewing as he licked his parched lips lustfully with his serpent like tongue. “Now the tables are turned! Now I will mold you, as you have done me in the past...I will control you, forever.

I felt his fangs sink deep into my shoulder, the pain of his forceful invasion exploded all the way to the top of my head. As he fed from me,

I could feel the warmth of my own blood oozing down my back and down the front of my chilled breasts. Terror engulfed me as the bazaar actions became stone cold reality for me. As my mortal body lay in his arms gradually slipping to the world of the dead, I am still not sure how my imaginary world and my real world entwined. Somehow his hatred for me had manifested it to happen. As my mortal death gripped me like a vise, I fought for every last death rattling breath, trying to hold on. I knew I was doomed as he cut his wrist and fed me the immortal poison of his own blood. I knew when I would awake, that I would be forever lost in his world, under his rule, in a world that we now would both share. I would be forever lost to the abilities to write my way out of my own imagination and escape back to my real mortal world....an eternity of my own imaginary slavery... waits....

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## IAMBIC

*G.A. Scheinoha*

Are you the illegitimate child of poetry; the bastard son of a prose father and a metrical mother, who was conceived in the wee hours of a verse drunk night, when they'd both had a few too many pentameters for their own good?

Have you been spurned as too prosy; all lean, muscular verbs and nouns with no natural rhythms of your own? Wish I had better news.

No, don't do that.

I hear you pop open the revolver, spin the cylinder, drop each round in place. Hey, quit aiming already.

Wouldn't it be great if I could say you'll grow out of it. The way a foal eventually gains its legs and trots with the herd. But we both know that ain't you. . . or me. Some things you just gotta learn to live with.

Whad'ya mean, run? Don't shoot! I'm only the messenger.

# communication

Janet Kuypers, from the chapbook "Dual"  
& the book "Duality"



now that we have the information super-highway, we can throw out into the open our screams, our cries for help, so much faster than we could before.

our pleas become computer blips - tiny bits of energy travelling through razor thin wires, travelling through space, to be left for someone to decipher when they find the time.

\*\*\*

got into work the other day and got my messages out of voice mail: mike left me his pager number and told me to contact him with some information, tom told me to call him at the office between ten thirty and noon, jason told me to check my email because he sent me a message I had to read.

so I first returned tom's phone call but he wasn't in, so I left a message with a coworker. and then I dialed the number for mike's pager listened to a beep, then dialed in my own phone number. then I got online, checked my email read a note from ben, emptied out the junk mail.

realizing I didn't actually get a hold of anybody, I tried to call my friend sheri but I got her answering machine, so I said, "hi - it's me, janet - haven't talked to you in a while - " at which point I realized there was nothing left to say - "so, give me a call, we should really get together and talk."

\*\*\*

sara and I were late for carol's wedding rehearsal, which was a bad thing, because we were both standing up in the wedding, and we were stuck in traffic, and I asked, "sara, you have a cel phone, don't you?" and she said "yes." and I asked, "well, do you know carol's cel phone number, cause if you do, we can call her and tell her we'll be late ?" and she said, "no - do you know it?" and I said "no."



» » »

I was out at a bar with Dave, and I was explaining to him why I hadn't talked to my friend Aaron in a while: "You see, we usually email each other, and when we do, we just hit 'reply.' when you get an email from someone, instead of having to start a new letter and type in their email address, you can just hit the 'reply' button on the email message, and it will make a letter addressed to the person who wrote you the letter originally. so he sent me a letter once, and it had a question at the end, so I hit 'reply' and sent a response, with another question at the end of my letter. so we kept having to answer questions for each other, and we just kept replying to each other, sending a letter with the same title back and forth to each other without ever having to type in the other's address. well, once I got an email from him and there was no question at the end, and so I didn't have to send him a response. so I didn't. and we never thought to start a new email to one another. so we just lost touch."

and then it occurred to me, how difficult it had become to type an extra line of text, to type in his email address, because that's why I lost touch with him.

and then it occurred to me, no matter how many different forms of communication we have, we'll still find a way to lose touch with each other.

» » »

now that we have the information superhighway, we can throw out into the open our screams, our cries for help, so much faster than we could before.

but what if we don't want to communicate? or forget how, too busy leaving messages, voice mails, emails, pager numbers, forgetting to call back...

what if we forget how to communicate?

» » »

I wanted to purchase tickets for a concert but I was shopping with my sister and wasn't near a ticket outlet but my sister said, "i have a portable phone, you can call them if you'd like." so she gave me the phone, and I looked at all these extra buttons, and she said, "just press the 'power' button, but hold it down for at least four seconds, until the panel lights up, then dial the number, but use the area code, because this phone is a 630 area code, then press 'send'. when you're done with the call, just press 'end', and make sure the light turns off."

so I turned it on, dialed the number, pressed 'send', pressed my head against the tiny phone. and the line was busy, and I couldn't get through.

» » »

I checked my email address book recently, and the people I email the most are the people that live in the same city as me, all of whom I know the phone numbers of, all of whom are only a local call away. in fact, one of my friends lives a block and a half away from me, on the same street as me, but I still email her as much as I call her, even though I could just walk over to her house and have an actual conversation with her.

»»»

I was suntanning outside on my patio with a friend on saturday, and we decided we wanted to order a pizza. we brought a cordless phone outside with us so we would know if the phone in the house rang, so I picked it up and dialed.

and the phone needed to be recharged, the batteries were wearing down, because there was so much static that I was worried the pizza man wouldn't even be able to hear my voice.

while waiting for the pizza man to pick up the phone, I said, mock-ing static on the line, "hi, I'm calling from the space shuttle, i'd like to order a pizza for delivery. call mission control at houston for a credit card number."

»»»

I got a program for my computer. it's a phone book program, and it sorts people by name or company, lists their phone number, and has a complete file for them where you can store their birthday, their address, past addresses and phone numbers, faxes, email addresses, there's room for any information you want to store about them.

and I love this program, I've created a file with all the phone numbers I've ever needed, I always add information to this file, I keep a copy of it on my computer at home, on my computer at work, on my laptop, even on a floppy disk, in case there's a fire at work and my hard drive at home crashes.

but it always seems that every time I desperately need a phone number I'm nowhere near a computer.

any computer.

»»»

I wanted to get in touch with an old friend of mine from high school, vince, and the last I heard was that he went to marquette university. well, that was five years ago, he could be anywhere. I talked to a friend or two that knew him, but they lost touch with him, too. so I searched on the internet, to see if his name was on a website or if he had an email address. he didn't. so I figured I probably wouldn't find

him. and all this time, I knew his parents lived in the same house they always did, I could just look up his parent's phone number in the phone book and call them, say I'm an old high school friend of vince's, but I never did. and then I realized why.

you see, I could search the internet for hours and no one would know that I was looking for someone. but now, with a single phone call, i'd make it known to his entire family that I wanted to see him enough to call, after all these years. and I didn't want him to know that. so I never called.

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now that we have the information superhighway, we can throw out into the open our screams, our cries for help, so much faster than we could before.

but then the question begs itself: who is there to listen?

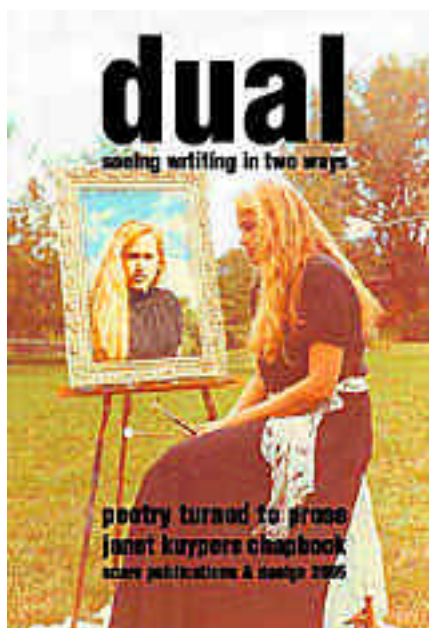
## why I'll never get married

*Janet Kuypers, from the chapbook "Dual"*

At work we've been looking for a new employee. We've sifted through resumes. We've interviewed a few. And some were good, some were very good, and we took some time to decide and then we called our #1 choice.

And they said they wanted more money than we offered, so we said our goodbyes and we called our second choice. And they said they couldn't work at such a small place, so someone at work said we should interview some more.

And that's when I knew, at the rate we were going, we'd never find anyone and no one would want us.



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