



revealing all your
dirty little secrets

down in the dirt

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Scars art: page 44 (a Tag Heuer watch, an mgb Anniversary Edition red convertible).
Cover art of an old Studebaker in an auto junk yard in Pennsylvania.

Writer's Block

Michael Schmidt

They are all talking about this and that. Just a small group setting, dinner and then drinks afterward.

"And the good thing is," Frank says, "my writing block's broken. I'm on a new piece now."

Everyone congratulates him, even his wife, who didn't know this.

Afterwards, they say their goodbyes. They go home and Frank goes into his writing room and begins typing on the keyboard randomly. Lisa retires to her bedroom, glad to hear the sound of Frank writing again.

Frank goes on typing randomly, hitting any key, sometimes the same key, over and over again. By the end of about an hour, he has about twenty pages of complete gibberish. He prints it out and tries to read the pages, hoping something came through, some morsel of sense, but there wasn't any, especially the pages that have only three or four letters typed row after row a couple of hundred times.

Frank goes to his desk drawer and pulls out a revolver, puts a bullet in. He spins the chamber and puts the gun in his mouth. The hammer snaps and nothing.

The typing continues, again, as before, he types randomly, hitting this key and that key, sometimes hitting the same key over and over again. It is now well into evening and his wife is asleep. The only person he is fooling now is himself. He takes the revolver out and spins the chamber. The hammer snaps and nothing.

Frank finally sits back in his lounging chair and has a Scotch neat. Frustrated, he knocks back the drink and has another. And another. For a third time, Frank goes back to the keyboard and types randomly. Then the revolver again. Nothing. Not even fear of death can get this man to write a word of sense, or develop a story of any kind.

Then it dawns on him that maybe the stakes aren't high enough. So, he goes back to the keyboard and starts writing, trying to make sense this time. He writes a story about a boy and a dog who go on a long journey...

But who and why just aren't coming. He doesn't care about the boy. The boy is flat and has no character. And the dog is just a prop for the boy. And their destination is aimless. And they are coming from no where going no where, like Frank.

Frank knocks back a few more Scotches and does the revolver thing again, this time adding one more to the chamber. Nothing. He goes back to the keyboard and starts to write about a drunken woman alone in her apartment who tries to get guys to come in and have sex with her, but nobody does. And it ends there. He doesn't care why she's alone or who she is and sex is just a prop for her.

Scotch. Adds a bullet.

From behind him, his wife says, "Honey? You still up?"

Frank, startled, blows off his nose and the bullet strikes his wife directly in the heart. She falls dead as Frank scrambles on the floor, blood and tears pouring from his face, screaming.

never such as this

Michael Schmidt

the pieces of my mind
are grains of sand at the beach
waiting for the tide to rise
and bond them together.
I am gathering my limbs
as they fall off,
one by one,
trying to assemble myself while running
to the nearest exit of the world.

there has never been
such an escape as this.

the air in the room I escape to
becomes toxic with each
breath I take
trying to find a way out.
there is a well to Hell
in the center of the room
and I consider the option
even as I pull on the door knob

in vain.

there has never been
such an ordeal as this.

what fits the keyhole
is my character
is my personality
is my integrity
none of which is
with me
as always
as always

forever.

there has never been
a compromise such as this.

Write
Something

Andrew Cook

Aeroplane pen
hot in hand
flies to an
ant sized crevice
in my heart
where
everything
big
becomes small.

reason

Michael Schmidt

I take a shower
I light my last cigarette
I drink my last beer
I wonder where I'm going

I'm walking through a forest
and the trees become more and more
dense
until the forest is impassible
and I have to climb
and when I get to the top
I jump from tree top to tree top
looking for a reason



Original Sin

Mel Waldman

Perhaps, the *original sin* is birth or separation from Mother.
Inside Mother's womb, I was *one* with her. But now, I am

separate,
different,

&

alone.

Forever, I search for reunion and the perfect *oneness* and yet,
I fear the intimacy of love.

Will I be engulfed by *the other* and lose my identity?
Swallowed by my beloved, will I die in a dark, selfless universe?

If I do not submit to love, I am condemned to wander across a
bleak, empty earth.

Yet must I risk all for love-this dark *oneness* that might set me
free?

Rehab

Gregory Liffick

The reformed
get preachy.
Someone lived
and let them live
before they
just said no.
They give
no quarter,
despite their
dime bag history.
They offer
little grace--
though they
used to make
their own bed
and lie in it
under the
overpass.

Mr Standfield

Alexandre Sébastien

Darkness started to gather on Mansfield and for the more curious and the less fearful amongst them, some villagers sat up late each evening. They stood at their windows, peering out even though there was not much hope than to only catch a fleeting glimpse of it. By this time, in the streets which only admitted little light by the full moon, Stanley went for his usual stroll so as to satisfy an irrepressible desire. As he went on and looking tensely all around, he felt his blood throbbing in his veins as he heard the clicking of heels on the paved street in the distance. Whirling round, he rushed toward the sound where it seemed to come from and stepped into a lane hidden from sight. Licking his lips in anticipation, his eyes gleamed with excitement as they rested upon a female's shape with her hair bouncing as she walked away. Creeping up on his prey, the feeling of an imminent successful kill brought out of some kind, the 'Mr. Hyde' in him, pushing 'Jekyll' into the background.

Before long a piercing shriek broke out and echoed through the night until it faded away. A face with cold eyes and framed by a bushy beard, looking like a mane which could bear the resemblance to a ferocious beast had been her only sight. Grasping her mop of blond hair, he dragged her body on the ground out of sight and soon the darkness swallowed him up.

Far away from the village, shaded from the daylight Stanley woke up after a repeated sleeplessness as memories of his bad deed came back to haunt him. The need to feed his cruel and unwilling enslavement to murder started to become less and less unbearable. He was sapped by culpability, grief and still could not stand his congenital abnormalities. Each night was almost the same ritual but it couldn't be otherwise or he would run out of breath.

While peace had returned to the village after a chaotic period of terror settled by a diabolic and mysterious thing who had perpetrated a number of crimes, the news of the missing girl shocked the inhabitants. He said that he would keep himself aloof from the villagers and till that day no one wouldn't have believed in such a existence on earth. Only a few words had been mentioned by children when suddenly they caught sight of what looked like a monstrous beast while they were playing near the Sherwood forest. They had described it as a stunning and hairy human being; a great brawny brute of a man, roaring like a ferocious beast who hunted and killed wild animals with his bare hands. To the inhabitants, he had appeared, by any stretch of the imagination, as a mere fictional character made up by the kids.

Yet it was not until the massacre had broken out that this cruel creature actually

Community

Gregory Liffick

The boundaries are thin
between our yards
and our souls.
Reach a hand across
the picket fence
or over
the brick wall,
and your fingers tingle
with your
neighbors energy.
His lawn
burns with his dream,
and his driveway
radiates his desire.
His house
is his body
and his blood.

Slender

Bryan M. Huizi

The sounds from
the radiator echo
off the ambivalent white walls
with the agonizing rhythm
of a typewriter,
when someone else is writing.
A kitten's gentle paws
rest on the window sill
as he studies
the shifts
of an encapsulated world
through sunshine yellow eyes.
In this silence I notice
my skeleton ache,
a prize fighter who has trained
for a match
without any set date,
an absent venue.
Soft clouds linger
on the horizon,
standard apparitions of ambition,
decorating a sky that displays
a quiet blue shade of depression.
In the embroidery of a small town,
in the afternoon's light
sometimes
it is the waiting that kills you.

appeared to be alive. The discovery of the bodies in a shed buried beneath the forest had been a real nightmare. They were all stacked one on the top of the other like pieces of meat, and most of them were almost unrecognizable. Their faces disfigured, spattered with blood and even with some organs missing had given witness to the harshness of the blows, to the torture they had suffered. The villagers had nicknamed him, the bloodthirsty monster.

Before such a butchery, the pathologists from a near local area in charge of the case hadn't had any problems in establishing the cause of their death. Nevertheless for some victims, identification had been more or less hopeless but much worse was the dilemma they had faced as a result of startling discoveries which still remained a mystery. The fingerprints left and the strands of long hair taken from the corpses appeared to be completely unusual. However due to lack of medical advances, they were only able to suppose that this thing, as inconceivable as it could be, might be mingled with a human being. Very soon Mansfield had been granted emergency powers and all villagers were warned against going out in the evening. Up till now some widespread rumours of his death circulated around as poachers would appear to have seen it and yet his body remained nowhere to be found.

Somewhere dug down in the largest depths over the grassy ground of the forest he kept his secret nest. At its far end in a largest space which served as a dinning room lay his supply of food of

the previous night, and beside was the remains of his first successful killing; Mr Standfield's body. Overpowered by so much hatred for the life he had inflicted him, which for years had never ceased to keep boiling up inside him, he finally vented his fury in a violent outburst. He felt remorse for his behaviour, although it would not remedy to his deformity; he had been condemned since his birth. He suffered from a very rare disease which was a severe hypertrichose symptom transmitted by 'the dog-man' as he called him. His incurable sickness was more serious than that of his father; his pilosity was growing fast but worse than that, he was endowed with demonic forces and was haunted by an insatiable thirst. At the edge of an abyss of ignorance, an imminent threat of carnage hung over the villagers whose Stanley Standfield would give rise to the myth of the werewolf.

My Next Life

A. Frank Bower

Sunbathing on the motel's private Lake George beach, I listened to MP3s with headphones. I heard my wife say, "Maybe in my next life." It brought my attention to a boat in front of us. It looked like a yacht to me. "Fawn," I said, "we wouldn't know what to do with it."

She looked away from her paperback. "I could learn. Besides, if we could afford it, we wouldn't be where we are now."

"Point taken. Why were you born beautiful and smart instead of rich?"

Fawn leaned her head forward to eye me above her sunglasses. "Deen, this isn't 'I want, I want'. It's just a thought. You know, alternative lives."

"I do know. The way you look at that boat is how I looked at you the first time."

Fawn pursed her lips. "What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Well, the syrup's thick."

"Compliments," I said, "matter when they're sincere."

"I know," she said. "And I love you for it."

She leaned sideways on her chaise, kissed my cheek and returned to her novel.

While I listened to mellow music, I peered forward to the private *ship* in front of me. I watched it cruise the lake with God knows how many passengers. I guessed it was owned by the CEO of some middle-sized corporation. I thought of the light of my life next to me. Cliché: *champagne taste, beer money*. Hell, I was just glad to be able to be on the beach at Lake George. I didn't want to own it. Maybe I would, in another life.

In this life, I have no regrets. Fawn rescued me from a solitary existence. I wanted to care for *someone*, but lacked a place to put the energy, until we met. I like to make her morning coffee and deliver it to her. I enjoy when she says, 'yes' to my offer of a salsa omelet. I grew to know her tastes; I revel in shopping for jewelry for her.

That afternoon on the beach I wondered where we'd be in five years. A month later, I'd say goodbye to my fifties. Fawn wasn't far behind. *Retirement* kissed the horizon on the other side of *that boat*.

Whatever I could do for Fawn was done in this life. My pension would be respectable. Add Social Security, we'd be okay. *Okay*. I wanted to do more. Fawn deserved it.

The boat was out of sight. In more ways than one.

I glanced at Fawn. She was involved in her book—no idea where my mind wandered. *God, I love her*. I was so careful to ensure her future—just in case: plan A. For the first time in my life I thought of a possible plan B.

Bank robbery was out of the question in this high-tech age. Video cameras the size of my pinky nail were everywhere. My meager attempts at investments failed. What else could I do? I thought of Buffalo Bob, my pot source. The bearded, barrel-chested biker was *loaded*. When we first met and found out we shared the same birth date, we became fast friends. I thought his nickname came from old television;

in reality it referred to where he grew up. I respected his history. He did the Haight-Ashbury thing when it mattered, burned his draft card, went to Canada when his number was drawn, and returned when amnesty was announced. Straight-laced me enlisted in the Navy to avoid the Army. Nevertheless, Buffalo and I saw eye-to-eye.

I wondered if he would consider letting me into his business. One thing I most like about him is his hatred of *drugs*. Coke, crack, acid—*now*—pills; all are bad in his book and mine. Pot, of course, was innocuous and should have been legalized ages ago. Maybe, if it were, there would be fewer drunk-driving deaths. But, if it was legal, Buffalo Bob wouldn't be wealthy now. I resolved to talk to him after vacation. Is sixty too old to become a dealer?

I glanced at Fawn again. Relaxed in her reading, lotioned to prevent sunburn, she looked *marvelous*. Two kids—now in other states with families of their own—and you can't tell. *Aging gracefully*; if she was any more graceful about it, she'd be a ballerina.

Yeah, in my mind I owed her. Big time.

"Yo, Bob."

"How they hangin', Deen?"

"No complaints."

"How was Gorgeous George?"

"Gorgeous. But I ran out, of course."

Buffalo Bob chuckled. "Of course. I didn't think this was just a social visit. Howmuch? A quarter?"

"Yep."

Bob left his living room to fetch my order. I looked out his bay window at mountains. His house was private, isolated and big. Fawn and I didn't need a large home, but trappings would be nice.

When Bob returned, I paid him. "I have a delicate question for you."

"Really? Lay it on me."

I hesitated to go there, but 'nothing ventured'. "Could you use help in distribution?"

Bob furrowed his brow and glared at me. "What's wrong, Deen?"

"Nothing."

"Something must've happened. The only time you deal is at your monthly poker game. Fess up."

"No, really," I said, "I just want to augment my income."

"No offense, but it's just not you."

"It *hasn't* been; past tense."

"Deen, think about what you're asking. You have no experience. Mine is a very dangerous business. It's all about caution. Besides, look at all you have to lose."

"I'm thinking of all I have to gain."

"Like fifteen to twenty?"

"Bob, in six years I'll be retired. I don't want to have to sit home when I do. Travel costs money. I know a hell of a lot of people. I'm sure I can build a nest egg."

He didn't answer; his wheels were rolling. I said, "You don't want me?"

“Deen, you have no idea how careful I’ve learned to be to get where I am. You can’t just pitch product to everyone you know, even if you know they smoke. All potheads have their own agendas. You have to know up front *every one* before you make a move.”

“That makes sense. I assume I’ll have to start small.”

Bob looked at me stone-faced. “Let me show you something.” He went to a bookcase at the far wall from where I sat, pulled out a large tome, opened it and took out a nine-millimeter automatic pistol. “I’ve never used it. Yet. Let me correct myself; I haven’t shot it. I have threatened people four times with it.”

I got his message, but I was determined. “Bob, I don’t plan to get big.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’ve always been careful, but I still fucked up four times. It could be your first customer—or your five hundredth. Deen; no offense, but you don’t come across tough.”

“You don’t, either. You’re a mellow fellow.”

“With you.”

I let his logic sink in for a moment. “I get it; it’s about agendas.”

“Exactly.”

Again I paused and weighed my options. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll think about it and get back to you. Will you at least do the same?”

“Fair enough. But don’t rush it.”

We took a few tokes for the road.

“Deen, the dog tore the screen again.”

I said, “That’s the third time. Got to get rid of her.”

Fawn glared at me. “You can’t get rid of...”

She saw my grin and knew I wasn’t serious about letting our beagle go.

“Asshole,” she said.

“You know I love Lady as much as you do. I just don’t like repairs. I’ve still got screen in the basement; I’ll take care of it. What else do I have to do on a Saturday?”

“That’s all I ask.”

I went downstairs to get everything I needed to replace the screen Lady tore. While there, I thought about honesty. Fawn and I were always honest with each other. It helped us stay mellow. If I tried to deal behind her back, the lie would require files in the mind. Not to mention the snowball effect. If I was to sell pot, she needed to know. I dreaded telling her I even considered it.

I returned upstairs and put my tools on the kitchen table. Fawn was doing her counted cross-stitch in the living room. I wanted to start the conversation on a light note.

“Why do they call it a ‘weekend’? Technically, it’s the end and beginning; Sunday starts the week.”

Her gaze stayed on her work. “It refers to work week, jerk.”

“I know.” *God, this was hard.* “Honey, how would you like more money coming in?”

Fawn stopped her work. “Where are you going?”

"I...have an idea to help our retirement years. You know, with the economy like it is, I don't know if my pension and Social Security will cover our needs."

Her expression told me she was suspicious.

"My bs meter's clanging, Deen. You know damn right well you figured it out long ago. What's really behind this?"

I hesitated, felt our bond, wrestled with it and decided truth was the sole option.

"Remember that boat at Lake George?"

"Which one? Honey, there were a lot of them."

"The one you commented on."

Fawn lifted an eyebrow at me. "I don't remember which one I commented on."

I reminded her. "It was the biggest one. You looked up from your book and said, 'Maybe in my next life'."

"So?"

"Well," I sighed, "you know how much I love you. You deserve something like it. And more. So, I thought about making our next life now."

"I don't like the sound of this. Are you thinking of doing something illegal?"

The jig was up; Fawn is *so* perceptive.

"It's just an idea. I thought of dealing."

"Are you nuts? Sweetheart, I love the life you've given me. I don't need wealth to be happy. You've worked hard too long to take chances."

I said, "I knew you'd feel that way. Just think of the possibilities, though. World travel. Permanent vacation. Anywhere, anything you want."

Fawn frowned. "Not to mention jail."

"Not if I'm careful. And I would be."

"Sweetie, it's just not you. This is no time for you to change. We'll be fine."

I persisted, "Will you at least think about it?"

Fawn stared at me. She grabbed the telephone on the side table next to her and tapped numbers. After four seconds, she said, "Hi, Bob; it's Fawn. Can you come over?" She nodded. "See you in a half-hour." She put the telephone on its cradle.

I was stunned. "What's going on?" "Patience, grasshopper," she said. "Go start the screen and wait for Bob to get here."

"But—" I started.

"But me no buts. You'll know in a half hour. Let me do my work. Go."

Curiosity killed the cat; satisfaction brought him back. "I want to know now."

Fawn smiled. "I can't explain like Bob can. Be *patient*."

She did her needlework. I couldn't make myself do the screen, so I sat on the sofa and thumbed through the newspaper. Of course, my mind was active. I began to get some idea of what must be happening. I wished Fawn would just *tell* me. I turned to her, but before I could say a word, she shushed me.

Twenty minutes elapsed before the knock at the door. I jumped to answer it. Buffalo Bob laughed when I opened it. "Howdy, kids. I expected your call, Fawn. I knew he'd tell you."

She answered, "Oh, yeah; he's so *solid*."

I couldn't hold it in. "Now will somebody tell me what's happening?"

They both laughed.

Fawn said, "Let's sit down." We did. She went on, "Deen, please forgive my deceit. I promise it's been just this one thing. I've always believed in you, so I supported you in every way. And I respected and admired that you supported me. I felt *you* deserve more. So..." She looked at Bob, smiled and continued. "A long time ago, I came up with the same plan you did. I never wanted you to be involved, because of who you are, and to protect you. Bob taught me the ropes. I learned well."

Fawn stopped there, so I blurted out, "How long has this been going on?"

She thought a moment, and answered, "Thirty-four years."

My jaw dropped; I had no words handy.

Fawn said, "Bob, you're on."

He started where she left off. "Deen, remember what I told you about agendas?"

"Yeah," I said, hesitant.

"Think about it. I'm a man. Forty per cent of my business is women. Do you think I can figure out their agendas? Hell, no. So, when Fawn suggested a partnership I jumped on it. And, let me tell you, she's *good*."

It took me a while to ingest the information. I said, "I guess *so*. Partners, huh? For thirty-four years?" I realized the obvious question and looked at Fawn. "What kind of bucks are we talking, here?"

She beamed with pride. "A bit over seven-hundred."

That also sank in. "*Thousand*?" Neither of them answered. They didn't have to. I could only say, "Holy shit."

We were wordless for a half-minute.

I said, "Fawn, I thought I knew you."

"You do, honey. As I said, it's just this one area. This one huge surprise I wanted to give you for all you've given me."

"I assume the business is on-going?" Fawn nodded. I said, "Would you consider stopping now?"

Bob spoke for her. "Deen, Fawn and I agreed she'd be done the day you found out."

"Really," I said. "Why's that?"

He said, "Duh. You're her first slip. And her last. It's just good business."

It seemed irrelevant, but I asked Bob, "Where does that leave you, business-wise?"

"Fawn and I began to groom her replacement years ago. Don't worry about me."

"Oh, I'm not." I looked at Fawn through new eyes. "Now what?"

She smiled at me, serene, and said softly, "Anything. Anything for you. And us."

After a brief moment, I said, "You are some homemaker."

Fawn said, "You make it all possible. Now we can plan our retirement."

I laughed. They both looked at me. I said, "Maybe in my next life. I guess it's early."

I retired last year. Now we live near Lake George, with a modest boat docked there. We relax, listen to music and visit good friends. Like Buffalo Bob, who has a place a few miles away. I love our life at the lake and here in our 'next life' house.

And when we're overseas.

Religious Etiquette

Junie Moon

Religion in this family;
mom, dad
going to church Sunday morn mandatory
sitting, listening politely while fighting
sleep a hypnotic haze overtaking the senses

Father (something) or the right reverend (something),
ministers presiding over this show offer
communion to those who felt
their sins to be under control this week;
others chose to be sequestered in a tiny wooden box;
Under some perceived anonymity—hah!

These retro-sinners will sit, confess their
latest sins and expect absolution, now with
all wrong-doing carried away on a prayer,
their envelopes appropriately stuffed with ‘hush money’
they offer this to the holy man;
payments covertly made to keep all their
secrets, expiration date, good for only one week

How did this good ‘guy’ get this job?
Who elected him the right to judge your soul?
It seems that he was appointed,
and his boss as well and on and on
until someone puts a funny hat on an old man
sets him up with everything one could
want for, even a ‘tricked’ out super car.

What the hell do these men do?
How does that add to the congregation’s mundane life?
The pews, full of faces watching the parade go by;
rather official people, elaborately clothed,
proclaimed as God’s messengers,
holding the only keys to some gate—holy crap!

organized chaos written by hypocrites,
protected by some artificial sanctum;
now the lambs are trapped, a time warp
squeezed painfully between
two hour marathons before the collective
exodus of cars, sore butts and
rumbling stomachs escape

The sermon, was some babble
over some Bible verses or
community rumors or disguised gossip,
punctuated by well rehearsed 'Amen's'
'cause who's really listening
hanging on every word without looking
at a watch over and over again

Sin is sometimes touched on
but not given a thorough trashing
unless inspired by headlines of violence or nudity
spectacular enough to fit the program

Passing around a golden bowl
people put money in, looks like
penance comes in an envelope
and wipes away that weeks sins

Every moment of the morning
choreographed, staging a play,
even a program (words and songs)
supports timing,
9am commencement till
Benediction at 11am,
Order above all things

Children in every pew
fidgeting, boys pulling
girl's bows; everyone dressed
up with only one place to go;
shyly but assuredly showing
off and flaunting their wealth;
if God came now at least his
'flock' looks really nice;
conspicuous consumption,
designer labels seen by all.

In the back of our collective heads
there are no words that translate biblically to
holy cow, I'm free at last.
'damn these shoes hurt my feet'
'this tie is strangling me'
'get on with your long winded self'
'I have a golf game at one'

Parishioners stand in lines at that polished
wood railing and take communion
like the sheep we have become;
tasteless white wafers placed on
our tongues then wine
or grape juice, it all taste the same

Stomachs growling loud, did
anyone hear that sound?

At last those huge doors with
iron rings running through
large lion noses flung open,
the devout, jailed for their sins,
set free

next Sunday will be the same,
Mass at 9am,
more words that anyone really
wants to hears,
the finale, shaking hands
With somebody's Father, add
some mumble jumble
'How's the family?'
God's ordained, privileged man, adjusts his collar,
watching his Timex, he too has
his own agenda, personal not congregational

Everyone in their Sunday attitude
not thinking of the hungry, the homeless,
the poor are passed by; did you see the ragged man
standing in the medium, sign 'disabled help me'?
Cold winters, hot summers, we turn our heads,
God would be so impressed
seeing how affluent, his well off church goes are;

we keep pushing world crisis away from
polite conversation, skirting around real
problems, even the minister sidesteps
global, regional and local issues; these are
just holiday maladies, put can goods in the box
pick a angel from the brightly lit mall;
now don't we all feel so blessed that we helped?
Ministers must maintain that sanctimonious role;
there are requirements to meet to keep his cushy job;
Sunday Mass is dismissed, Hallelujah!!

'Can we get an ice cream on the way home?
No, Grandma wants the family for dinner'
SHOOT, It was almost a clean get away. Damn it!
I guess that's another penance for next Sunday.

Pieces

Chris Butler

Taking my brain out
for it's yearly spring
cleaning to scrape the
endless clinging thoughts,

my piece of mind
shatters into scattered
pieces, just to be pieced
together by passively
passing the time on
my splintered puzzle,

and meticulous molding
continues using industrial
strength adhesives, still
securing separated sections
connected with indecisive
precision, for an eternity,

until I'm whole again.

Tonight the cops are questioning Mrs. Poole. From out on the lake I can see, with the unaided eye, their car parked in her cobblestone driveway, the tan right side of the vehicle sporting the sheriff's yellow emblem on the front passenger's door.

Talking to Mrs. Poole will be fruitless: She's eighty-seven years old, hard of hearing, and almost completely out of touch.

Yesterday morning the police called upon Harold and Nancy Brillstein. They own the mustard-colored cottage a quarter of a mile north of ours. Harold told the authorities, quite correctly, that he and his wife had been in Florida for the past two months. They'd just gotten back on Tuesday. Since Glenn had been missing for a week, the Brillsteins hardly qualified as suspects in the marina owner's disappearance, nor could they offer any helpful information leading to his whereabouts.

A tug on my line draws my attention away from Mrs. Poole's place and back out onto the water. My bobber has completely disappeared beneath the surface, replaced by wavy ringlets growing ever wider as they ripple outward. I give a slight yank on the rod and then begin turning the handle of the Zebco reel. I've hooked a big fish — more than likely a perch, judging by the struggle it's putting up. Any experienced fisherman knows that the perch in these waters are heartier fighters than the bass. Plus I've learned that, in this particular fishing hole, the chum I've been using lately seems to attract perch more than any other kind of fish. The chum gives off a foul odor once it's been out of the freezer for a while, but the perch seem to go wild for it.

After the cops were done with the Brillsteins, they came to see me. Angelica was in town shopping at the time. There were lots of mundane questions, to which I gave lots of mundane answers: *Mr. Landers, do you know Glenn Sechrist?* Yes, he owns Sechrist's Marina. *So the two of you have done business?* Yes. I bought my fishing boat from him three years ago. *Are you friends?* Occasionally Glenn and I go fishing together. Then we go to his place or mine and play cards with our wives. *Have you talked to him lately?* About a week ago he called me to say he'd completed some repair work on my boat motor.

Mundane stuff like that.

The perch gets away before I can reel him all the way in. Sometimes that happens. With a feeling of disappointment I bring in my line, baiting the hook with more ruddy-colored chum. I roll the meat into a marble-size ball and stick it on the end of the hook. A little blood oozes out of it. The blood is probably what makes it stink.

During the course of their interview, the cops told me Glenn had come up missing. They suspected foul play, as even his wife hadn't heard from him. His last known location was at the marina, where he often worked late, alone.

Thinking about Glenn as I cast my line out again, I fix my gaze on the bobber, which appears as a pointed black silhouette against the setting sun beyond it. I know Glenn didn't love his wife, Ellen, as much as she thought he did. He told me as much during one of our excursions out onto the lake. On that particular evening

he'd given off a vibe like he wanted to tell me more, but he had stopped short.

I'm not saying Glenn ran off with another woman. But it's not as if he absolutely *couldn't* have either. Lots of husbands don't love their wives the way they should. The reverse can be equally true.

I place the handle end of my rod down on the deck of the flat-bottom boat and pop open a fresh Budweiser, taking a deep swig. Spring has arrived unusually hot this year in southern Indiana, and the beer feels good coursing down my parched throat. Next I raise my Bushnell Powerview Binoculars from the seat beside me and aim them up at our cottage. The white siding glistens with a false wetness in the ebbing sunshine. Angelica is alone. She's wearing her cherry red bikini — my personal favorite — as she sits in a chair beneath a tree, reading one of her women's magazines. Her long, shapely legs are crossed, accentuating the definition in her raised calf and along the outer stretch of her opposing thigh. Her big, firm breasts threaten to spill out of her top.

How could a man not love a woman who looked that damn good? She is statuesque, to say the least.

Resting my eyes, I check my bobber and gulp down some more beer. A ski boat traveling at high speed in the medium distance sends feeble waves in my direction, causing my bobber to rock gently. This is a motion very distinct from those that let you know you've got a nibble from a hungry fish.

I go back to the binoculars, training the lenses on Angelica. I see attendance has increased: The athletic teenage boy who, along with his sister and parents, occupies the cottage right beside ours is standing near Angelica, talking to her with his muscular arms crossed over his bare chest. I'm sure the egotistical bastard thinks she is impressed. And perhaps she is. Doesn't the damn kid have homework to do or something? But as I myself thought moments ago, how could a man — even an almost-man — not love a woman who looked as good as my wife? The kid would probably go home and beat off after getting such an up-close eyeful of Angelica.

The memory of witnessing another man holding Angelica six months ago still burns hot in my brain. I don't know if they made love that night, but judging by the passionate way they kissed, I don't doubt it. I saw them together last fall, shortly after I went fishing a final time before the winter freeze. I phoned Glenn before venturing out that evening, but he declined to join me, saying he was busy with "other things."

That was one way to put it, I suppose.

I'd been fishing for more than an hour that night when I decided to grab my binoculars and aim them up at our cottage. I'd caught Angelica and Glenn embracing each other, kissing, exploring with their hands... There'd still been enough daylight for me to spy on them through the living room's big picture window. Glenn departed minutes later out of our cottage's side door, but it was possible he'd already been there long enough to have sex with my wife in one of the back bedrooms.

The end of my pole jerks, and I see the bobber has disappeared. I yank back, and the forceful tugs of an energetic fish on the hook are unmistakable. Carefully I reel him in, keeping the line tighter than the last time so I don't lose him. When I

get him up to the boat, I scoop him in with a net. He's easily twelve inches; he'll make a great meal. That's another thing about perch that a lot of people don't know: They're tastier than bass.

Pulling the hook from the mouth of the perch, I raise the metal fish sack, which is dangling from a rope over the side of the boat, and toss my new catch in with the other four perch and two bluegill. In doing so, my elbow bangs against the Mercury motor that powers my boat, and I wince in pain, rubbing the injured spot.

Scowling at the motor, I am at least pleased with how well it's been running since Glenn fixed it a week ago. The problem was apparently a loose wire meant to feed electricity to the propeller. I remember Glenn calling me at about 9:30 p.m. to tell me he was done with the motor and that I could pick it up anytime. So I hopped in my car a few minutes later and drove over to his marina to load the thing up. The sooner I had it to go fishing, the better. As usual at that late hour, Glenn was laboring solo in the marina workshop.

When I returned home, I checked in with Angelica, just to let her know I'd arrived and that I'd be unloading the motor and some other items from my vehicle, in case she heard me making any noise. She was preoccupied with drinking beer, gobbling down Cheez-Its, and watching *Survivor*.

My latest catch has eaten the chum, so I roll the last piece of meat into a bloody ball and stick it on the end of the hook. I'm irritated at running out of bait. Swigging some Bud, I silently reprimand myself for not bringing along more of the chum. After all, I've got plenty of it stored in small, white cartons in the shed out behind our cottage.

Angelica never goes into the cramped, dilapidated shed; the dampness makes her sneeze, and there's nothing inside that interests her. The shed is built into raised earth, above which is our carport. Cement steps next to the shed lead from cottage level up to the carport. The shed boasts a sink with running water, and it's where I keep tools, assorted junk that I should throw away but never do, and chum in a locked freezer. I keep the shed doors padlocked, too, mainly because of all the drills, saws, and knives inside. No sense tempting kids to come in and steal sharp instruments with which to do devilment. Undoubtedly I'd be the one who'd get sued if they were arrested.

I train the binoculars on the place where my wife was sitting moments ago. No one is there now, including the teenager. Natural light is fading fast, and the big front window reveals only blackness. What is Angelica doing inside our cottage, in total darkness? Or is there illumination in back, coming from the spare bedroom? It's hard to tell. My gaze drifts to next door, where the teenager's family lives. Plenty of lights are on there, although I detect no activity.

I put the binoculars down and finish my last beer. Since it's getting more and more difficult to see even into the near distance, I decide to drop my line right over the side of the boat so I can keep tabs on my bobber. The silver weight sends the bait sinking into the murky water.

Goodbye, old chum, I think.

Gerri

Tate Sherman

This morning
I saw Gerri
peeling skin
that wasn't dead
enough off
her hands
the blood appeared like paint
on her face
a mess-
y child
with paint on her elderly face
peeling glue
off her hands.

Been There Before

Edgar Bee

I was half way down on the escalator when I spotted Michel coming up the other side. I looked away and tried to hide behind a tall, fat woman in front of me.

"Jack, I have to talk to you, wait for me at the bottom of the stairs, please; I'll be right down," I heard him cry out suddenly.

"No, I don't have time," I said. I squeezed past the big woman and started climbing down the moving stairs.

"Wait, please; I'll be right there."

"I can't wait," I called back. "I told you I don't have time. Go away."

I stepped off the escalator and set off in as brisk a walk as I could manage toward the subway ramps. I'd been hearing the sound of a train picking up speed, leaving the station, and now spotted several people coming at me on their way out.

"What direction was that last train going?" I asked the first one I met.

"Westbound."

I headed for the eastbound platform, delighted by the sound of another train - this one coming our way. I entered the ramp at one end and kept marching toward the other end till the train came to a stop and its doors slid open. I walked straight in, turning my head to look back as I did, to see if Michel was coming up behind me and how far back he was.

I stared right into his eyes, as he was pulling up at my side, panting for breath.

"Jack, I have to talk to you, please," he said.

"I'm not listening. I know what you want and you're not getting any. Go back wherever you were on your way to and leave me alone."

"Jack, I've got good news. I'm clean; I don't do drugs anymore, and I'm working. I just need a small loan to do me till payday, so I can eat. I'll pay you back, I give you my word."

"Your word? You think I'm dumb enough to fall for that again? I'd need a master's degree in mathematics to count the times you told me you'd pay me back. Always with the same story that you're off drugs and working; then a few days later you're back with the same story all over again. You've just quit drugs, found a job, and you just need a loan, till payday. I don't even want you to pay me back. All I want you to do is stay out of my hair and quit making promises you don't intend to keep. I'm tired of listening to the same lies every time I run into you."

"Jack, it's the truth this time. I swear. I really am off drugs, and I'm working."

"Yea, sure."

We had met for the first time on a street corner not far from my place, where he had accosted me with a sad story of having just arrived from the country and having been mugged. He had needed a small loan, to tide him over for a couple of days till he could arrange to have some money sent from home. He wanted my address, so he could pay me back when he got his money. He had turned up at my door a

few nights later as promised, but with another sad story, and a thousand more since then, and never to pay me back.

"Jack, I haven't had anything to eat for three days; I'm starved."

"That's bull. You think I'm crazy enough to think you wouldn't have been storming down my door long before this if you'd been three days without eating?"

"You told me the last time I was at your place you never wanted to see me there again."

"I've told you that a thousand and one times and it's never kept you away before."

"And why didn't you bum on the street, if you were hungry and had nothing to eat?"

"You know I don't like bumming on the street."

"You don't like?" I bellowed. "You'd rather go three days without eating than bum on the street? You really think I'm dumb enough to fall for that? I've seen you bumming on the street lots of times, and you never seemed too much out of place. You'd go bum at the kindergartens, if you thought the teachers would let you talk the kids into giving you their lunch money."

"Jack, please, I'm really hungry."

The train came to a stop and the doors slid open. I got off and headed for the exit, with Michel in tow. "You're not getting a penny from me, so you may as well quit following me."

I was not surprised that he continued following me anyway. "Jack, I'm serious this time. I'm really off street drugs; I'm clean."

I looked at his eyes, but that didn't tell me anything. Could he be telling me the truth, this time? I had lied my fair share, at one time, till finally, those same stories I had been telling for so long had not been lies anymore. I had stopped drinking. The same thing could always happen with him. But somehow I didn't think it had just yet. "So what if you are? I'm supposed to feed you, now that you're off drugs?"

I was sorry I'd said that from the moment it was out. If I really believed he was straight, I'd want to help him more than anything.

"No, of course not," he said. "But you've always helped me when you knew I was still on drugs. Surely you can help me one last time now that I'm clean. And I'll pay you back this time, I promise. I really do have a job."

"How long since you've been off drugs?" I questioned, toning down.

"Three weeks. I did it in a detoxification center, like you did with booze."

I could have sworn it had been less than that since he'd been at my door.

"When did you get out of detox?" I asked.

"Three days ago."

"They kept you less than three weeks to get you off street drugs?"

"They wanted me to stay longer, but I told them I'd be okay. I wanted to start on my new job."

"You haven't worked in years, if you ever did, so what was the rush? I'm sure you were being well fed in detox."

"This guy I know had promised me a job if I got off drugs, and I wanted to see him, before he changed his mind and gave the job to somebody else. I started this morning. I'm working in a warehouse, in shipping. But I don't get paid till Friday. All I need is

enough to do me for the next couple of days, and then I'll be all right."

I shoved my way through the turnstiles, Michel right behind me.

"Why didn't you ask this guy for an advance till payday?"

"I did, but he wouldn't go for it."

"That's bull. Nobody would help you out by giving you a job if you got off drugs and refuse to give you an advance so you could eat, after you'd worked a full day."

"It's true, Jack, honest. I can give you his number, if you don't believe me, and you can call him."

I came out on the sidewalk, freshly covered with a light coat of snow. I turned on Michel, still in tow. "I don't believe you and I wouldn't believe whoever you want me to call either. Probably another panhandler you've got waiting by the phone, somewhere."

"Jack, I'm telling you the truth, honest," he pleaded. "I'm starved, and I need a place to sleep for the night. You have to help me; I don't have anybody else."

"There are lots of places where you can stay for the night for free, where all the street people stay. They'd not only give you a bed, but a nice hot supper as well, plus breakfast in the morning."

"Jack, most of the people sleeping in places like that never wash; the smell around them is unbearable."

"I've slept in some of those places, and I don't remember that I found it that bad."

"It is, Jack. You were probably drunk when you did. Please."

I couldn't argue on that. I turned and walked away. He soon caught up with me.

"Jack, you're my only hope; I have no one else to go to," he pleaded.

"You have a brother and a sister here in town, you told me before. Why don't you go see them?"

"They won't even talk to me."

"Stop lying to them and maybe they will." I barged into a coffee shop.

"Medium coffee," I ordered from the girl at the counter. I half turned to Michel. "Make that two, I guess."

"You want a muffin with that?" I growled at Michel.

"I could do with something heavier."

"They don't have anything heavier," I scolded.

"A carrot muffin, then," he said.

I picked a table in a deserted corner of the restaurant, where we sat in silence for several seconds.

"Jack, please," he begged.

"You don't seem in much of a hurry to eat your muffin, for one who hasn't eaten for three days," I observed.

He picked up the muffin and took a bite.

"Jack, please help me," he said after a second bite. "I'll pay you back on payday, I promise."

"Payday," I scoffed. "If you really can't tell the truth, couldn't you at least come up with a different lie, once in a while - something new? No wonder I feel like I'm

being played for a fool. You don't even bother to make up new and different lies. Just the same old ones, time after time."

"Jack, it's the truth this time, I swear."

"How much were you looking for?"

"I know where I can get a room for the week for..."

"A room for the week? You didn't think of asking how much for four nights, till you get your pay? What do you think I am, some kind of millionaire? I'll give you a few dollars so you can eat. If you're too high and mighty to go sleep for free where the other bums in this town stay, then you'll just have to find yourself another supplier."

I took out my money as I was finishing and only then realized my mistake, as I watched his eyes fasten on the half dozen folded twenties in my hand. I extracted two and threw them moodily on the table in front of him.

"It's four days to payday," he said. "Could you spare just one more, please?"

"Another twenty? Where do you plan on eating, anyway? The Ritz Carlton?"

"Jack, it's four days till payday."

"Why don't you go eat at the Salvation Army, like everybody else?"

"Jack, please."

I threw in one more twenty. "That's it. Shove that in your pocket and get away from me before I change my mind and take it back."

"Thank you," he said, getting up while pocketing the money.

"Michel," I said as he turned to go. "If you're telling me the truth, good luck. You can forget about paying me back. But don't come back for more. If you do have a job, you won't have to. And if you don't, I'm not going to listen to anymore of your bullshit, so don't bother trying."

He hesitated; said, "Thank you Jack," and hurried out of the restaurant, leaving a half full mug of coffee and most of his muffin.

One thing I knew for sure, he wasn't hungry. I hated being played for a fool, like that. But then I remembered the look of anticipation in his eyes as he grabbed at the money and turning to go, and I started feeling better about what I'd done. A little over ten years ago, I'd been out there panhandling and going without food or shelter so I could sustain my drinking habit. I knew how rough it could be out there and how just enough for another bottle was appreciated – another fix, for him. I had been lucky. I'd been taken in for stealing and offered to serve my six month sentence in a rehabilitation center for alcoholics. I had accepted, and by the Grace of God, I had not had another drink since.

I had done pretty good for myself, since then, and I sometimes felt guilty for all the splurging I did on myself, knowing there were others out there still living the life that had been so devastating on me.

How wonderful it was to be on the giving end, now, instead of the receiving.

If he had lied again about having quit, like I was sure he had, I knew he would be back, and I also knew that in the end I would not turn him down. And that made me feel good about myself.

Pantoum on Sterility

Terri Brown-Davidson

For hours I watched babies out of every car window.
Their pink mouths unfurling, tongues a darker secret.
Toothless, bald pates shining, their faces rose in my rear-view mirror
Like pale moons floating over ragged lines of cars.

Their pink mouths unfurling, tongues a darker secret.
I turned cacophony up on the radio, sank inside its voice.
Like pale moons floating over ragged lines of cars,
Their waxen faces ascended, dwindled on the horizon.

I turned cacophony up on the radio, sank inside its voice.
Childless, haunted by babies packed inside every cell.
Their waxen faces ascended, dwindled on the horizon.
Soon it was dark, and my driver's seat stayed silent.

Childless, haunted by babies packed inside every cell—
Toothless, bald pates shining, their faces rose and rose.
Soon it was dark, and my driver's seat stayed silent.
For hours I watched babies out of every available window.



Weird Frog
art by Mark Hudson

The Big Bad Wolf

Lawrence Vernon

The *Check Engine* light flashed on the dashboard of Ellen's ancient Dodge. Puffs of steam billowed from under the hood. Like an old man, the car wheezed, gurgled, and then died. After cursing her bad luck, Ellen drummed her fingers on top of the steering wheel. A narrow dirt road, lined with pine trees and damp from a recent rainstorm, stretched out into the darkness before the car.

Groaning, Ellen ran her hands through her curly black hair as she thought of the events that had led up to this moment. As part of a divorce settlement, her mother had received a cabin, a place where Ellen and her family had spent many summer vacations. Her mother said Ellen and Terri, Ellen's older sister, could hang out there. Never one to turn down an opportunity for some drunken debauchery, Terri, her new boyfriend, and some of her friends elected to stay at the cabin for the weekend.

Because Ellen's twenty-first birthday had passed recently and she wanted Ellen to meet her new boyfriend, Terri invited her to the party. Bored with spending lonely weekends at college and looking forward to boozing it up, Ellen accepted her sister's invitation.

After driving south for half an hour on Highway 31 and into a dark woodland, Ellen turned left onto the dirt road to the cabin.

Then her Dodge broke down, delaying her dream of intoxication heaven.

Sighing, Ellen pulled the hood release and got out of the car. She opened the hood and a great blast of steam assaulted her. The hood light didn't work, and she didn't have a flashlight so she couldn't see what happened with the engine. However, a sizzling sound like frying eggs and an acrid smell made her suspect a leaky radiator was responsible for her problem.

She approached the passenger door and opened it. She grabbed her purse and pawed through its contents. When Ellen found her cell phone, she flipped the top open and the liquid crystal screen flared on. A few seconds passed before the screen displayed an unwelcomed message: NO SIGNAL AVAILABLE.

"You've got to be kidding me!" Ellen cried.

Snapping her cell phone shut, she returned to front of the car to stare down the dirt road.

Maybe I can walk to the cabin.

Ellen trembled as if a ghost had given her an icy massage. Although she normally didn't surrender to fear, trekking alone through a dark woods had little appeal.

Grunting with frustration, Ellen continued to gaze down the road which glistened like a poisonous snake. The road seemed to issue a challenge, daring her to tread upon it.

Maybe I can wait at the car. When the party starts and I'm not there, Terri will come get me.

Part of her shrieked with laughter at that thought. Yeah, right! On a Friday night, drunk out of her mind, and probably banging her new boyfriend, Terri will notice her younger sister hadn't arrived and come get her. Get real! Ellen might as

well wait for a fairy to appear and fix the car by waving her magic wand.

Sighing, Ellen hooked her fingers through the belt loops of her blue jeans while a cool autumn breeze rippled her dark red blouse. She studied the road, wondering if she should accept its dare.

Unless she felt like spending the night in the car, she had no other choice. She was going to have to walk. It wasn't far, two, maybe three miles. She had nothing to fear in these woods either. Only deer and rabbits lived here. Besides, she'd have a great time once she reached the cabin.

Ellen smiled as thoughts of the wonderful party danced seductively through her mind. She and Terri could get a tow truck for her car tomorrow. Right now, she would walk down that road, enter that cabin, and enjoy that party!

After locking her car, she headed down the road.

During her journey, Ellen calculated how long it would take for her to reach the cabin. Assuming she was three miles away, she should reach the cabin in a little under an hour so she'd probably get there by—she checked her watch—10:30.

Ten minutes later, the woods became surreal and sinister-looking like a dark, demented fairy tale. Instead of cheery pine trees growing along the edges of the road, gnarled and twisted trees dominated the sides. A pale, full moon bathed the woods in an eerie, yellow glow. The atmosphere tasted thick and heavy. The woods themselves grew very quiet as if the place was holding its breath.

The woods reminded Ellen of her father reading the story of Little Red Riding Hood to her when she was a child. The story came with a number of frightening illustrations. One particular, scary picture had burned itself into her memory like a brand.

The big bad wolf was hiding behind a tree, gazing at Little Red Riding Hood skipping down a trail to Grandma's house. With the exception of a small white diamond of fur between its eyes, the wolf's black fur shone like coal. Its eyes glinted yellow. Foamy drool dripped between its gleaming white teeth. Its *sharp* white teeth.

Ellen shuddered as her mind fixated on the image of the wolf. This past summer, she and her ex-boyfriend, Paul, had visited a zoo. After viewing exhibits like the House of Reptiles and the Den of Monkeys, they had stopped at an outdoor wolf pen.

Ellen gasped when she saw the wolf. It strongly resembled the one in the illustration down to the white diamond on its forehead. The shining sun painted the huge wolf's fur with its rays, giving the animal's coat a radiant glow. Powerful muscles swelled under its flesh, making it look bold and dangerous. She could have sworn the wolf had a nasty grin as it sat on its haunches and stared at her with its grim, yellow eyes as if it personally knew her.

(What big eyes you have, Grandma.)

(All the better to see you with, my dear.)

The wolf flicked one of its ears.

(What big ears you have, Grandma.)

(All the better to hear you with, my dear.)

The wolf opened its mouth.

(What big teeth you have, Grandma.)

(All the better to . . .)

While a gentle breeze rustled his blond hair, Paul whistled when the wolf bared its rows of spiky teeth. "Damn! Look at the teeth that thing has."

(Daddy, can you please stop reading that story? I'm getting scared.)

"You wouldn't want that thing to take a bite out of you."

(Daddy, please stop reading that story.)

"If that thing ever got its chompers into you, you could kiss your ass goodbye."

(Daddy, please!)

Before she and Paul left the pen, Ellen thought the wolf had winked at her.

(Hey babe, I'll see you again real soon. Oh yes, I will.)

(Daddy, stop reading that story!)

(ALL THE BETTER TO BITE YOUR FUCKING HEAD OFF!)

A loud snap returned Ellen to the present, and she froze as if her muscles had transformed into strands of ice. Her heart pounded. Her mouth went dry. Her eyes widened.

What was that noise? Where did it come from? Behind her? Ahead of her?

Emerging out of darkness, a big bad wolf loomed over her. It walked on its hind legs like a man would. Its yellow eyes gleamed in the dark. With a deep, ugly growl, it blew its fetid breath into Ellen's face making her gag.

The wolf grabbed Ellen and sunk its teeth into her shoulder. Ellen reared her head back and screamed in pain and terror. The creature then released Ellen and swiped at her side causing her to tumble into a ravine to the left of the road. She crashed onto the leaf-coated ground, and it broke away under her body. She then tumbled into a dark cavern.

Facing upward, she smacked into a muddy surface that did little to cushion her impact. Her back and ribs exploded in agony. Sharp pain sliced through her head. Her consciousness wavered between reality and darkness. After a fierce battle, Ellen maintained a flimsy grip on her consciousness.

The wolf was gazing down at her through the hole she had fallen through. Because the moon shone with sufficient light, she saw the wolf had blackish-brown fur. Large breasts also dangled from its chest like hairy punching bags. Ellen studied the wolf's forehead to see if she could detect a white diamond of fur. She saw none.

A werewolf? Ellen thought with fear and wonder.

With a low rumble, the wolf departed from the hole.

Taking a deep breath, Ellen sat upright. Her head ached as if she had a vicious hangover. Her shoulder, back, and ribs throbbed.

She lowered the shoulder of her blouse and examined the bite. Although blood still flowed from it, the wound didn't look too serious. It would probably leave some nasty scars though.

If that thing was a werewolf and it bit me, does that mean I'll become one?

Ellen pulled the shoulder of her blouse back up. She didn't want to think about that now. The implications were too terrifying for her to contemplate at the moment. Besides she had to focus on making sure she was all right and then getting herself to safety.

She raised the lower half of her blouse and inspected her other injuries. While she couldn't see her back, she did examine four slashes, surrounded by a blotch of purple, across her ribs. As far as she could tell, the wounds looked nasty but not serious. She lowered her blouse.

Ellen took in her new surroundings. She had fallen into some kind of a cavern. Because of the darkness, she could only make out a few details: a muddy ground, some water puddles, tree roots crawling down the walls like slithering snakes, and a tunnel shining with flickering lights.

A tunnel?

Feeling hope sweeping over her like sunshine, Ellen rose on shaky legs and hobbled over to the tunnel's entrance. The tunnel stretched off into the distance and curved to the left. Candles burned within holes dug into the walls; its flames resembled watching eyes.

Breathing harshly, Ellen struggled down the tunnel before it ended in a room of some kind. Someone had put up cinder blocks for walls. Patches of straw lay in clumps around the room. A strong smell of feces caused her to wrinkle her nose in disgust. An entrance to a second tunnel branched off to her left.

A chorus of yips sounded to her right. With her heart pounding, she twisted around to behold two smaller versions of the animal that had attacked her.

The two creatures stood on either side of a rickety table boasting a few candles radiating feeble light. Their jaws dripped red as they shoved hunks of raw meat into their mouths. Measuring three feet in height, both creatures had black fur and yellow eyes. Like scientists who had discovered a new insect, they studied Ellen.

The creature on the right of the table had a feature that demanded Ellen's attention. Gasping, she blinked to ensure her eyes hadn't deceived her.

Its forehead had a white diamond of fur.

The creatures stepped toward Ellen and growled. She backed away from them. When they took another step, she turned and bolted for the second tunnel. She ran as fast as her aching back and injured ribs would allow. During her run, she glanced over her shoulder to see if the creatures were pursuing her. They weren't.

At least as far as she could tell.

Her injuries forced Ellen to slow her pace. She noticed the second tunnel resembled the first with its earthen walls and flickering candles in its man-made holes. She could only detect one significant difference; this tunnel was longer.

Thirty minutes passed before Ellen saw a ladder reaching for a trapdoor outlined in the wooden ceiling. Like a drowning woman eager for air, she scaled the ladder. The agony of her wounds tried to convince her to stop climbing, but she ignored them and pressed onward.

She pushed the trapdoor open and entered the musty interior of what looked like a shed. The moon shone through a dusty window. Garden tools glinted. A workbench held up rusty tools. Sliding doors beckoned.

Ellen charged forward to wrench the sliding doors open. The sight of a cabin with bright interior lighting welcomed her. A line of cars were parked in front of the

cabin. Terri's silver SUV sparkled near the center of the line.

"Terri!" Ellen dashed to the cabin's porch.

To her immense relief, the front door was unlocked. Stumbling into the main section of the cabin, she looked wildly around like a lost child looking for her parents. A collection of beer bottles littered the top of a scarred wooden table. An old couch struggled to stand to the right of an archway to the kitchen. She saw no one.

"Terri!" Ellen screamed, fearing something had happened to her sister.

"In here." Terri's voice emanated from the archway.

Ellen rushed to the kitchen. Terri sat alone at the table. Black hair hung limply from her head. A long-sleeved, black blouse with a pattern of white diamonds clung to her thin frame. Her skin tone resembled the color of curdled milk. Her brown eyes looked plastic like the eyes of a ventriloquist's dummy.

"Terri!" Ellen grabbed her sister's shoulder to shake her. "We've got to get out of here and call the police."

Terri didn't respond.

"Terri, we've got to go."

Either ignoring or unconcerned about her sister's urgency, Terri gazed at Ellen's blood stained blouse. "What happened to you?"

"Something attacked me."

"What attacked you?"

"This thing did. Look, we've got to get out of here. Right now!"

"Beverly attacked you?" Terri raised her eyebrows. "She wasn't supposed to do that. She was supposed to watch Roy's kids. Her bloodlust must have really gotten to her."

"What are you talking about? Who's Beverly? Who's Roy?"

"Roy is my new boyfriend. Beverly is his sister."

"What?"

"Remember the zoo you and Paul visited this past summer? They own it. Remember that wolf you saw? That was Roy. He and his kids had a bad case of bloodlust so Beverly had to keep them locked up at the zoo until it passed. Now Beverly is getting it so Roy is going to have to lock her up."

"You mean your boyfriend, his sister, and those kids are . . . werewolves?"

When Terri didn't answer, Ellen became aware of the deathly silence of the cabin for the first time.

"Terri, what happened to all of your friends?" Ellen asked.

Something glistening near the refrigerator caught her eye. When she discovered the identity of the item, her stomach lurched violently as if a mule had delivered a powerful kick to her abdomen.

"Oh my God." Ellen clamped a hand over her mouth.

Next to the refrigerator, a severed arm lay in a puddle of blood.

The memory of the wolf children eating the raw meat exploded within her mind, almost causing Ellen to retch.

"You should see the backyard," Terri said. "What a mess."

"Oh God," Ellen cried.

“Oh don’t fret, dear sister. Everything will be okay. Tomorrow morning, we’ll call the police, tell them a bullshit story of how some rabid dogs killed everybody, and then we’ll get everything cleaned up.”

“What? No . . . Terri . . . no . . .”

“Oh, I got some great news for you. Roy proposed to me and I accepted. We’re going to get married. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“Oh God.” With her fingers squashed against her temples, Ellen dropped onto her behind and pressed her back against the wall.

This can’t be happening. My sister is going to marry a . . . werewolf? A fucking werewolf?

“Not only that, but I’m pregnant too. Isn’t that great? I’m going to be a mommy and you’re going to be an aunt.”

Ellen felt herself sinking into a void. She felt empty, dearth of emotion and thought. Nothing looked real anymore. Everything seemed fake like the setting of a doll’s house.

Terri rose from her chair and approached Ellen. Kneeling, she cupped her sister’s face and asked, “Will you please snap out of it, Ellen? You’ve got nothing to worry about. Everything will be fine.”

Terri’s sleeve had slid up her arm a little, revealing the tip of a peculiar shaped wound. Ellen grabbed her sister’s wrist and rolled the sleeve further up. A series of red puncture wounds in the shape of a pie wedge was on the inside of her forearm.

A bite mark.

Ellen’s shoulder wound ached, reminding her that she also had a bite mark.

Oh dear God, please no. Not that. Anything but that.

A scratching at the back door drew Terri’s attention. She rose and walked over to the door to open it.

A big bad wolf that walked like a man entered the kitchen. Its eyes glowed yellow. Its sharp teeth gleamed. Its thick coat boasted a shiny black darker than midnight. A white diamond shaped patch of fur glittered on its forehead.

Terri hugged and kissed the creature. “Hey, hon, are you all done eating your fill?”

The thing grunted.

“Great.” Terri gestured toward Ellen. “That’s my sister, Ellen. She saw you at the zoo last summer. I don’t know if you remember seeing her or not.”

Grunting again, the creature padded over to Ellen, knelt, and sniffed. A spark of recognition gleamed in its eyes. It remembered her all right. Oh yes, it did.

Like a noxious mist, a coppery smell wafted through the air, and Ellen noticed the creature’s snout was thick with blood. Something white and stringy also dangled from one of its whiskers.

Oh dear God, is that human flesh?

Terri stooped over to pick the arm off the floor. She straightened herself, held the limb up, and said, “I’m starving. How about you, Ellen? Are you hungry? I can make you something to eat.”

Ellen arched her head back and screamed.

"You're Running up the Stairs, Past a Ball Bouncing Down the Stairs, Followed by a Kid Which Used to be You"

Nicholas Trutenko

They're burning poets on crosses
And lighting up the night
With their artificial truths
Of religion and politics and
It ain't so bad mother-fucker
Now get back in line

And you'd do something about it
But you don't want to get burned
So you go home early
To make love to your wife
But she smells like sex
And it ain't yours

Yeah. She's so slick
She was born on third
And thought she hit a triple

Where the fuck have all the poets gone?
I look for them now more and more
As I get older and I realize
I'm running out of time and
I gotta know the truth

So I looked in The Cafe'
And I looked in Jax Tap and The Green Mill
And I looked in Weeds
And in my heart

But my heart is in Woodstock

And Haight-Asbury
And they're gone now, man
All gone

I wish I'd of met Bob Dylan
And drank coffee with him
And learned the truth
Or read the words of the prophets
That Paul Simon said
Were written on the subway walls
And tenement halls

But, no one rides the subway in suburbia
And the slums are gone now
And replaced by Burger Kings
And Starbucks beatniks
In 2-piece suits
Hiding behind corporate politics
While burning poets on crosses

As the people look the other way

Akron's Acrimonious Lives

Daniel Gallik

Old man Miller was groaning in the basement. I could hear him from his two car garage. I wondered about him even though I was stealing some tools from his workbench. In drives his wife with a surprised look on her face. She's gazing inside her garage and now is backing up and leaving. I hide. I decide I have time. I go into the house and slowly walk down the basement steps. The groaning is getting louder and closer. I turn a corner. The old man is sitting on his ass nude near his hot water heater. He's masturbating. I get the hell out of there. I'm up the steps and out the door in milliseconds. Still, I have to see all the action. I want to see what is going to happen to this man. I hide at my house across the st.

East Akron is an easy place to live. Hell, I don't have to go to school. So, I don't have to do any homework. I don't have to answer to any of my mom's incessant probes. My dad already left our home and our house. He lives near Wheeling, WV, and my Mom says he drinks a lot at Hank's Bar & Grill down there. Mom's got a new boyfriend even though she's still married. The teachers at our school, half of them don't even have college degrees. Hell, it's 1952 and no one gives a hoot about anything in America except having fun after the big war. Gas and milk is about the same price. Bread is eight cents a loaf, and less when it's on sale.

So, Akron's finest pull up. Guns are pulled. They are hearing the same groans and follow those groans down the basement. Five minutes later the older codger is being hauled out of his own house. Nude. And kind of spent looking. Almost pure white. And his mouth looks dry. I see the cops pull a tarp out of the trunk of their cruiser. They drape it over the pervert in the back of their police car. And pull away.

I go back to stealing stuff out of the Miller's garage. Also, steal some laundry detergent out of their basement because my Mom is always worried about having enough of the stuff. I had spotted this ten lb. Sear's container down there when I was seeing the old guy yank at himself.

Mom Miller pulls up in her Studebaker and I rush upstairs to turn the basement light off. She walks in the back door and I hear her calling out loud, "Hey Hank, where fuck are you?" Of course, no one answers. Then, she begins her idea of a saga, "Hank, maybe you're going #2 because you like it down there, but some kid was robbing this neighborhood of stuff we have stored in our garages. Anyway, when I pulled in from shopping at Lawson's getting the cheapest milk and bread in this town, I saw him and pulled out. And went to Janey's and called the Akron Police Dept. Aren't you glad I'm smart enough to remember the number, PL8, 8889. Janey thinks I'm smart and should get my h.s. diploma, she remarked-- the sooner the better. Anyway, glad you're retired and still love me cause then we can go back home and live a peaceful life in the green country outside Wheeling. And have fun watching the grass grow. I love you my good man. You really make me feel good with that long pecker of yours. You know, it kind of glistens at night when they turn the st. lights on. outside our second story bedroom window." I was glad her hearing was bad. She didn't even know I was giggling down the basement. Anyway, I took her bleach too, and slipped out the back door as she kept talking with her lover.

Gypsies in the Twilight Zone

Bob Strother

"Tell me again," she said. "Who'd you say you are?" The words came out slurred, the suspicion in her voice palpable.

"Kip Wayne," he said into the telephone receiver. "We met at Bird's birthday party, remember?"

They'd all gotten pleasantly stoned that evening, and when it was time to go, Kip managed to kiss each of the ladies goodnight. When he'd kissed *her*, she'd turned it into something a lot more than a peck on the lips. Her date had gotten pissed – Kip had been pleasantly surprised – and here he was, six months later, calling her.

"I'm just asking," she said, "because someone tried to break into my house last night. And now ... here's you – somebody whose name I don't even recall – calling me out of the blue."

Christ, he thought. How's that for timing? "Look, Jeanine, I had no idea ... I'm really sorry. I hope you're all right. Maybe I can call back again some other time."

"Okay," she said. The line went dead in his hand.

Kip had decided to call Jeanine somewhere between Tampa and the Georgia state line. At that time, he'd gone nineteen months, two weeks, and five days without having sex with his wife – the last three days in a subtropical paradise that should have guaranteed a renewed intimacy. She needed *romance*, she said. He'd tried everything he knew, to no avail. Her work kept her in Florida, and it was a ten-hour drive back to Atlanta – a lot of time to think. By the time Kip crossed over into Georgia, he'd figured her, and the relationship, for a lost cause. After ten years of marriage, he had only the vaguest idea of how to start cheating on his spouse. Jeanine had been his best – no, make that his only – hope.

She called him back shortly before midnight. "I'm afraid," she said. "I wasn't able to fix the door – where they tried to break in. You want to come over?"

“Sure,” Kip said.

Jeanine answered the door wearing a t-shirt and panties, and zoned out on something. She led him back to her bedroom. “Just hold me,” she said.

He did – and spent the night there, wondering if his wife might try to call him at home. The next day, he had the glass re-glazed in her door. That night, they had sex.

It became a routine. Kip would come over after work. They’d cook or go out for dinner, then watch rented movies and make love. He started spending most of his nights there. He bought an answering machine and thought up excuses he could tell his wife if she called and he wasn’t home.

Summer turned to fall. Kip’s wife was spending even more time in Florida. He didn’t mind – they’d become strangers. He took afternoons off from work and cleaned Jeanine’s house. He replaced her carpet, washed her dishes, raked her leaves, stocked her bar, and filled her pantry.

“You’re my fall project,” he told her one day.

She touched his cheek, her eyes growing moist. “Don’t say that.”

“Just kidding,” he said. “It’s much more than that.”

On weekends, she drank scotch, popped Xanax, and watched CMT. Kip would go home, rake his own leaves, clean his house, and then come back. The dog would be in the bed or on the couch – muddy paw prints all over everything. It bugged the shit out of him – but he was getting laid again. One afternoon, there was a car parked behind Jeanine’s in the driveway. Kip waited across the street until the man left.

An old boyfriend, she said. “He still had some of his stuff here.”

Kip nodded, very understanding.

“He still has a key,” she said, frowning. “I wish he didn’t.”

Kip replaced her locks the following day, but something about the episode made him uneasy. He began cruising her place at odd hours. One afternoon, while she was still at work, the boyfriend’s car was again in the driveway.

“You gave him a freaking key?” Kip asked that evening.

“Uh-huh. He needed to come by and get the rest of his things.”

Two weeks later, after a rare night at home, Kip drove by her house on his way to work. The old boyfriend's car windows were coated with a thick silver haze of morning dew. That afternoon, he left a note in her mailbox, along with his key to her house. *Please don't call me or try to see me. We're done. Goodbye.*

She came to his house that night. They drank his scotch and made love. She spent the night that evening and began spending more time at Kip's house. One night, a week before Thanksgiving, they were in front of the fireplace, naked. The fire was blazing, the shades were drawn. There was a knock on the door. Kip looked through the peephole.

The wife.

He cracked the door and they stared at each other for a moment. "Give me a minute," he said. He and Jeanine dressed, and she left. Afterward, as he and his wife sat on the sofa, she cried and said, "It's my fault. I don't blame you. I ... quit my job. I thought maybe we could try again."

And they did. It still didn't work, but, oddly, they became friends again. Turns out she'd found the romance she'd been looking for with a man in Florida. She'd been seeing him for almost two years. Kip had no idea. How gullible was that? Her decision to come home had been precipitated by a lover's quarrel. After a month at home, the spat was forgotten. He needed her, she said. Kip didn't. She ended up going back to Florida permanently.

It was okay; she'd served her purpose.

Jeanine called a week after Kip's wife left. "I've checked into a rehab center," she said. "I have my own room and we do group therapy every night. No pills, no booze."

"That's good."

"I also found out what I am."

"What's that?"

"An adult child of alcoholics."

"It's good to know what you are," Kip said. "How long will you be there?"

"As long as it takes, I guess. How's your wife?"

"She's fine."

“We’re like gypsies, aren’t we, just passing through life, never knowing where we’re going to end up?”

“That’s for sure,” Kip said.

“I ... the counselors say ... you might have been a co-dependent in our relationship. An enabler, you know?”

“I know the term,” he said. “Guess I never really thought about it.”

“Well... they only give us five minutes each for phone calls, and there’s a line behind me, so...”

“I wish you all the best, Jeanine.”

There was a long pause, then she said, “We had some fun, didn’t we, Kip?”

“Yeah,” he said. “It was a trip.”

The Day Edith Wamsley Died

Tom Deiker

Edith Wamsley was late for work the day that Edith Wamsley died. Not that she needed to go to work, or needed to be on time if she did. Digital Videos International paid her by the project — developing and tracking production schedules, as she described it to Harold — and allowed, even encouraged her to work at home rather than take up expensive space at their headquarters in downtown Detroit. But Edith told Harold she welcomed the structure of getting out of the house, being on a fixed work schedule, “the competitive pressure of a work environment.” Plus, she told Harold, leaving the house removed her two major temptations: food and daytime television.

But still, to die over such pedestrian choices!

Not that working downtown was the only choice that led to Edith’s death. If only she had not changed the skirt which didn’t go with that sweater and was wrinkled besides and besides made her look too hippy; if only Harold hadn’t put the car in the garage for the first time this year

because a hard freeze was forecast; if only Darrell hadn't fought longer than usual to stay in bed worrying a seven-year-old's worry about a teacher who called on him yesterday and might again today; if only the trucker had not left the cafe a little later than usual because someone left the sports section on the table with the headline about the amazing sixth game of the World Series; if only . . .

Harold knew Edith's death wasn't Edith's fault or his or Darrell's or the truck driver's. Might as well blame it on the laws of physics and the unique equation of the left front fender of Edith's Mazda which when struck by a Peterbilt's right front bumper coming around the curve at that angle and speed with an empty trailer — instead of glancing off the car moving onto the narrow road, the rig spun the car and Edith under the trailer body as it slid ever-so-slightly on the damp asphalt, then grabbed and held the roadway's graveled shoulder. Every element and others equally important but unknown brought about the conclusion: Edith and car crushed by the trailer's four right-rear wheels. Simple as that — or as complicated.

Edith was dead at age 32, and no one was to blame. The truck driver had the police report's assurance that Edith was legally responsible for her own death. Little Darrell lacked any introspection or history of guilt to blame himself for his mother's death. And Edith was past worrying about causes and effects. So Harold — though his first thought, even before the numbing grief, was about putting the car in the garage the night before — knew he must absolve himself as well as the others. But the feeling of guilt lingered, of course.

Harold's second thought was how to tell his young son that his mother was dead. He had plenty of time to work on it as he went to the morgue to identify Edith. He was still working on it while he looked on the serene and beautiful face of his wife. Nine years of marriage failed to convince Edith that it was her face that drew him to her at the Newman Center social. Her figure, of course, was as perfect as her face, he always added, wondering how she could be critical of either. Edith remained unconvinced that any man would give more weight to the face, and, yes, she was critical of both. The narrow nose he loved — too narrow, she said. The pooch in her stomach he loved — too poochy, she said.

Thankfully, the morgue sheet revealed only a serene face at peace. Harold knew instinctively, without putting it in thought or image, that beneath the sheet on Edith's no longer perfect body was sufficient proof of the cause of death.

Harold walked into Garfield Elementary School still without a plan on what to tell his son. He never got past trying to tell the officious lady why he had to see his son. The principal, for that was who the lady was, turned officiously caring as Harold broke down in tears, the sudden emotion striking without warning as he began to explain. When they brought Darrell, the principal hugged the son as Harold blubbered through his news. Darrell cried in chorus with his father, asking over and over again, "Really, Daddy, really, did Mommy really die, did she really die?"

The principal thought of all the practical steps, found that Harold's mother lived in Storm Lake, called and gave her the news, asked her to meet Harold and Darrell at home. Harold was relieved he could settle into a paralysis where no action was required. He knew his mother would take over all the details. He became so instantly helpless that he even allowed the principal to drive father and son home. The two sat together in the front seat in a silence the principal respected, Darrell continuing to follow a father's example on how to act when a mother dies.

The wrecker company that now guarded Edith's Mazda called the afternoon before the funeral, suggested Harold could pick up the car's personal effects "any time at all, whenever convenient, no hurry now." This was a relief to Harold, this excuse to get away from the well-intentioned tedium of phone calls, visits, offers to "help in any way I can." When he said his name to the auto-body repairman worrying over a dented fender, the man turned all embarrassed. Perfectly natural, Harold thought: everyone knows, but doesn't know what to say or how to act. The man pointed with his rubber hammer to a tiny office in the corner of the garage. The manager was even more embarrassed. Because the desk was small, the duffle bag and a shopping bag of glove compartment items sat on the floor. The manager waved to them.

"Thought we'd get what was in the car back to you." The manager realized Harold didn't recognize the items, so he picked them up, held them out. "This's the stuff in the glove compartment, and this here was in the trunk."

Harold nodded his gratitude, took the items. “Preciate all you’ve done. Anything else I need to do . . . sign?”

“No, no, nothing, everything’s taken care of here on this end.”

Harold nodded again. The manager nodded too, still awkward and embarrassed. “And don’t worry none about the car, it’s headed for the scrap heap, so won’t nobody ever be driving it again.”

Harold nodded a final time. “Thanks. Thanks for telling me. That’s, uh, good to know.”

Harold got in his car, set the plastic bag on the passenger-side floor, the duffle bag on the seat. It was a fine leather bag and opened immediately when he pressed the latch. He looked up to see the repairman and manager both looking his way, the repairman leaning on the fender, the manager standing in his office doorway. Harold drove home.

When Harold dumped the duffle bag contents on the bed he recognized each item, because all his hours cruising internet sites had educated him on their use: the pinkish-purple string of beads, the transparent glass rod with its series of swellings, the plastic cone even now standing upright on the bed, the strap-on dildo, the glow-in-the-dark vibrator with the clitoral stimulator.

It would be a long time before Harold sorted out all the issues raised by the duffle bag and its contents. But his first dilemma would prove to be the hardest to resolve on this day before Edith’s funeral, and on all future days. When he, Harold Wamsley, went from web site to web site, from porn star to porn star, from category to category, from 20-second video to 20-second video — exactly how many, he wondered, of these women beautiful in face and body were married? Did their husbands know what they did? How would they feel about other men watching them in this way? Because he seldom noticed faces was it possible he himself had watched his own wife? How did he feel, now, about all this, after this, after all that went before this?

One answer he did know with certainty even this first day of reflection: how could he dare to blame Edith for any of it when he himself had been for so long a, a – what, exactly? – customer?

Hospital Room/ Healing the Inner Child

Jliana Vasquez

There she was again, sitting across from the man she remembered loving. She sat there writing on a page that revealed no words. Suddenly, remembering she was dreaming she kissed him passionately. She asked him, "Is it really true, that you don't love me anymore?" Her heart was pounding louder than the sounds that surrounded her. He opened his lips to answer her before he could speak. This scene was interrupted and as in her real life, her question remained unanswered.

She awoke lying uncovered in a mangled mattress tied to the bedpost. There she remained staring with watery eyes at the cracked ceiling. She tried desperately to remember what caused her to be in this room this time.

Instead of complaining she should have been content with the fact that she was forced to rest. In her everyday there was no time to sit and relax. Everything was on a schedule and everyone had to be attended to. In her pursuit of success she had no time to contemplate pleasure. Clothes had to be washed, food had to be cooked and children had to be attended to. Things needed to be in order, if they weren't than something was wrong. Suddenly, as she remembered why she was lying there, half of a teardrop slid along side her face. She had done it again. In the attempt to escape from the pain of living she took several "pain killers". There was one problem, she really didn't want to die, she just wanted someone to know that she was living.

It always backfired. The visitors that came accused her of being selfish, of not caring for the ones around her and even laughed at her assumed victim like drama. "You have everything going for you, stupid ass. Why, would you do something this crazy?" Someone said. Everyone made her feel worst. No one understood. Not even at this level. How close do you have to get to death to get some sympathy?

At the hospital she was forced to associate with other people, they made her shower, do her hair and join meetings. They did not want her to remain alone in the room although in her estimation that is all she needed was time "alone" to reflect on the individual she once was. She

was no longer that person, who saw life with the hope of “someday” this will happen or “someday” that will happen. It was more like “so when it does happen then what.” The counseling sessions made her feel worst. Everything she said they wrote down and all her symptoms had a name. Nurses cared more about their record keeping than that their patient and the doctors were concerned about the diagnosis not the treatment. She closed her eyes once more. “Why don’t they just leave me alone? The only severe case I have is the lack to seeing life more “promising”. Why, don’t they understand that while everyone else is pretending to be fine “I am the only one seeing the truth.” Maybe that was the answer. Life was taking away her breath of inspiration. She loved to create things but nothing that she created went noticed. It was either put away along her work files or thrown away to leave space for more important things.

Maybe now that she had to go to the recreation facility she could finally sit down and draw something. She laughed at the thought that the psychotherapist would analyze it. She walked down the hall barefooted with her gown half on. Her hair was carefully pasted on to her head and her eyes were fixed on her surrounding. You could hear the laughs at the nurses’ stations and smell medication in the air.

As she walked by the rooms, she would glance at the open spaces. One room was of much interest to her. There was a young girl sitting with her legs crossed on the bed, nodding back and forth. She was pale; her eyes were wide open; they were filled with empty emotion. Her hair was in shambles and her feet were very dirty. The room smelled of urine and her plate of food was left untouched. The little girl did not notice when Monica sat in front of her and yet she was looking right at her. This room was more interesting then going into the recreation area. Here was a vital image of what life could make out of innocent clay now there was only paint image as abstract as smashed watercolors.

Monica sat there with her legs tightly crossed and nodded back forth with the little girl in rhythm. She reached for the little girl’s hands and placed them on her heart. The little girl suddenly realized that there was someone with her and yet she did not move. As the minutes continued on, the girl’s little hands began to slightly relax and her rocking was slowly ceasing. Her eyes almost revealed a flicker of reflection and her legs began to untangle. Monica whispered, “I know your pain.”

Conspicuous Consumption

Mike Berger, Ph.D.

The professor was a flowing cliché.
He droned out his gobbledygook.
“Conspicuous consumption drives
our affluent society. We need to
go back to the basics if our fragile
economy is to survive. We need to
throw out paper money and go back
to the gold standard.”

His fuzzy pontifications were so much
flatulence it was hard not to hold your
nose. The clock moved at a snail's pace
as the time dragged on. I doodled to
pass the time. I heaved a sigh as the
lecture was over. I noticed as the smartly
dressed professor took his briefcase, he
sporting a huge ruby ring and a Rolex.
I watched him as he drove away in his
new Porsche. I would drop out if this
wasn't a required course.



Out of Our Air

Amy Jo Huffman

This distance
is treason.
Desperate.
We pull at its strings.
But we only manage
to trap ourselves.
And wrap ourselves.
Deeper.
Into the walls
we don't believe
we can breathe
without.

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