

LONG LIVE THE NEW FLESH

YEAR ONE

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THE LUMP

by

William Pauley III

Published on The New Flesh 08/11/2009

I had a migraine that day. A terrible, terrible migraine. My brain was a ticking time bomb that would never explode. It just kept ticking and ticking and ticking.

Tick, tick, tick.

The origin of the pain seemed to be the five sections of vertebrae that lay between my neck and shoulders. I took a hot shower thinking somehow it could stop the pain. I lay in the tub and let the water pour down on me from above, soaking into and pruning my skin. I was an old man then, so I don't know what that makes me now.

Then the pain kicked and ripped apart my brain. I felt the prying fingers of a fucking ape! The bastard was spreading apart the deep folds of my brain looking for mites, lice or any other vermin that may be living down inside. Pain radiated from the bones in my neck like a thousand volts of electricity! I reacted quickly and took a

hold of my head with both hands. I twisted my skull with a violent rage! I was going to kill that fucking ape! But then I heard it.

POP!

I heard the terrible sound of vertebrae slipping, shifting, snapping. Then the world went dark.

Blindness wasn't the only thing that furious pop brought me that day, it also paralyzed my entire body. Every nerve inside of me shut off, like I had blown a goddamn fuse. From that day on I've been nothing but a lump.

A Spanish woman named Penelope takes care of me. She was sent by the goddamn government to spy on me! I didn't file my taxes for the year 1978 and they've been following me ever since. She steals from me! I can hear her quietly going through my things and the jingle-jangle of her oversized purse as she scrambles for the door. That whore! She feeds me too much! I am a fat bloated pig now because of her! Every bit of 500 pounds! She's trying to kill me!

In the twenty years that I've been this fucking lump of flesh and bone, I have nearly forgotten the beauty of the world. Colors have faded from memory; I can only truly remember the colors purple and red. Penelope may as well be tooth or nail, I would never know the difference.

Sometimes she leaves me here alone when she thinks I am asleep. When the house is empty, I can hear for miles. I can hear children playing at a playground a block away. I can hear neighbors walking their dogs. But today there is none of that.

It's storming. I'm not talking about a little rain, I'm talking about the types of storms that hurricanes are made of!

Thunder booms and shakes the foundation of my home. For a split second the vibrations allow me to move again! The thunder sends a shock so powerful through my body that my muscles actually contract! I wait for the next crack of the whip. The next booming thunder is twice as effective as the one before! My neck slings forward like a catapult, landing face first on my pillowy chest.

With all of the excitement of moving, I hardly notice my breathing is limited, sucking in tufts of skin more than air. A third cracking thunder hurls my body forward and sends me tumbling to the floor below, my neck folding under.

In these last few seconds of life I am happy, finally remembering all the colors of the world.

THE WOMAN WITHOUT THE RED DRESS

by

Michael A. Kechula

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Downhearted and dejected, Harvey walked into the police station. He knew the moment he told them what he'd done, they'd book him. The trial would be swift. The jury would find him guilty. And he'd be executed for his horrible crime. He shuddered. But deep inside he knew it was the right thing to do. No sense trying to hide it.

"I'm the one who did it. I'm guilty," he said to the Desk Sergeant, eyes downcast.

"What did you do?"

"I killed her."

"Her who?" the Sergeant asked roughly, pressing a button under his desk to alert detectives.

"The woman without the red dress."

"Where's the body?" the cop asked glancing at last night's list of major crimes.

"I don't remember."

It had been a rare night: no murders had been listed on the Detroit Police Blotter.

"What's your name?"

"Harvey Clutch."

"Your address and phone number?"

Harvey gave both, then added, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it. But I get such overwhelming urges. Aren't you going to read me my rights?"

"Not today. We skip it every other day. Gives citizens a break. Tell you what I'll do. I'll call you as soon as we find the body. Did you say she wasn't in a green dress?"

"No. Red. Found it in my bed next to me when I woke up. Empty. I mean she wasn't in it."

"I see. You humped her and then she left without her dress."

"Yeah, that's right. Raped her fifteen times."

A side door opened. "I'm Detective Hobs," said a nasty-looking brute. "Need to talk to me, do you?"

The Sergeant winked. "No need. He just confessed to rape and murder. I've taken his statement. He's guilty as sin. I just told him to go home until we find the body. You know, the woman who was murdered last night? The one without her red dress?"

"Oh her. Well, we just got in a new bunch of stiffs. All women. One of them didn't have a red dress. They're still dusting her thingee for prints. Soon as we find your prints on the body, we'll call you. Can

you get here within fifteen minutes after we call? Or will you need to eat first?"

"Oh no. I snack quite often during the day. Diabetic. I'll be down here right after you call."

"OK," said Hobs. "Meanwhile, don't skip town. We'll be watching the busses, trains, and airports."

"Oh, I won't try to run."

"OK, then," said the Sergeant. "I'll see you as soon as we get a make on your prints. Probably in a couple hours."

"Should I pack a little bag before I come in?"

"Nah. We have everything here. The best brands. We'll take good care of you."

"That's very thoughtful. I don't deserve it. I'm guilty, you know?"

"Yep. I know. And we're gonna throw the book at you."

"Thanks. I deserve it. OK. I'll see you later."

"Bye-Bye," said the Sergeant.

"Toodle-oo," said the detective.

When Harvey left, they pissed their pants laughing.

The Sarge added Harvey's name and general description to their list of obsessive confessors.

Such nice guys, Harvey said to himself. It's gratifying to see my tax dollars at work.

Back in his basement apartment, Harvey removed the red dress from his bed, put it on a hangar, and hung it in a closet. Then, using a black marking pen, he wrote

"PEOPLE'S EXHIBIT NO. 1," on a 3 x 5 card and stapled it to the dress.

Popping a Coke can, he tried to remember where he'd stashed her body. He checked the park for freshly dug holes on his way home. Didn't see any. He was certain he put her behind the oak tree. The one with all the initials carved into the trunk. Or had he been dreaming?

She wasn't in the oven, or the clothes dryer. Not in the bathtub, either.

That's odd. I thought there was a woman here last night. Or was that a dream?

When he checked under his bed he saw her decapitated head and the rest of her body. He also found the flexible straw through which he'd slowly swigged her blood. It looked reusable, so he rinsed it and left it out to dry.

Grabbing another 3 x 5 card, he carefully wrote, "PEOPLE'S EXHIBIT NO. 2," and stapled it to her pallid cheek. "PEOPLE'S EXHIBIT NO. 3," was stapled to her groin. The one he'd bounced on so joyously after her decapitation. Fifteen times. Three times more than the last one. The one without the blue dress.

THE GIRL WHO FOLLOWED BEES

by

Christie Isler

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The girls sat all together in a corner of the yard, bumping their eighth month bellies and drinking the crisp cool of the grass as a curative against late August. A light breeze tricked seedpods into buzzes and rattles reminiscent of the cicadas of the east, but thinner, because the dry air suckled from until they hung from their baked stalks like rattles in waiting for the issue of those four ripe bellies in their midst.

"Do you remember what it was you used to do? Before all of this?" Beth, always the most self-centered, if there can be a contest of self-centered among pregnant women, stirred up the dialogue so she might reminisce about pre-Law at the University. She'd discovered her earlier life to be much more thrilling in repetition than in experience.

"I used to do photography," Marie told them. "I imagined I'd take a class, to learn about the lenses and filters and all those developing fluids." She shrugged her shoulders in that dismissive way, like branches shaking snow off.

"What would you photograph?" Rachel asked. She possessed this endearing quality of projecting genuine intrigue, when she asked, she really, truly wanted to know, in this case, exactly what Marie would have photographed in a life once removed from them. A life, irrelevant.

"Oh," Marie sighed. "Did you ever see those framed pictures people sold at markets and craft? You know, of colored sunsets and bees rooting in flowers?"

"You wanted to be a craft fair vendor?" Beth smoothed out her eyebrow to nose wrinkle a breath after she felt it. Marie, prone to prone to tears, might take offense.

"No, but I wanted to take the pictures, you know, like a hobby. I could get someone else to run the booth, yes?"

"Not a lot of money in that. Especially if you had to pay the guy to work the booth." Beth enjoyed considering all the details. That's what she imagined she would have done at a law firm. She would have been the one who analyzed the scene, like a detective, and extracted the prize detail that delineated between accident and murder. "But anyway, you wouldn't be allowed to develop the photos now. Too many chemicals."

And there lay the truth of their lives. After the Collapse, it was as if they endured a retroactive punishment for their

chemical dependence. All chemicals, all substances needing human refinement, were eliminated. This of course, precipitated the second and third collapses, like aftershocks of a quake. The evolutionary biologists, recovered from their throes of mourning, raised the cry of evolutionary bottleneck and species reinvention. Women of decimated populations were encouraged to procreate, at the state's expense. The rationale being that, if the initial Biological Collapse hadn't killed them, any woman who managed a chemical free pregnancy would be birthing a new race of men.

Sociologists were the next to ride the grief cycle to curiosity. The deaths and the terror, followed so closely by a new and provocative hope, appeared to rattle monogamy to shambles. Girls and women everywhere were sprouting rounded bellies like a survival cry and thronging together into state sponsored housing. Many knew nothing of their pollinators except they'd survived, and that, as always, was sexy enough.

Isis, the fourth in their ripening quartet, drifted out of the conversation. The quietest of the four and the eldest by several years, she grew inside her, not just a child but also a tuberous guilt for her sliver of participation in the raging chemical industry. Secretly, she cherished memories of chemical formulas, reactions and titrations that shifted like magic from one color to another, the brilliant crystals that rose from murky liquids like mountain ranges forced from invisible plates. Her worries got drunk on awe and failed under-

standing. How did it all go so wrong so fast? She looked out past their trimmed patch of green, along the ornamentals they'd gathered together for their sitting garden and out into the fields of grass, grass, grass. All wind pollinated and hardy.

"Do you remember bees?" she asked the girls, her little bevy of bellies.

"I was stung once by a hornet," Marie volunteered. "They're nasty beasts. They're one I'm glad is gone."

"No, Marie, bees. Honey bees, bumble bees. Do you remember honey?" Isis said the word, like a vocal sigh. Erotic, sweet, salivating honey.

"I had a boyfriend who liked baklava from the Greek deli by our apartment," Rachel said. "It oozed honey, like comb. It was so sweet my throat would ache." She smiled, recalling an ache not unpleasant. "He was Greek, too," she added, stretching out her smile that slipped as she caught a ripple of muscle across her belly. The girls leaned in to steady her.

Beth allowed the sororal pause for a few breaths then drew the conversation back to her. "One man I saw, he was in medical school, he told me honey had antibacterial properties. That's why the sugars kept so long. He said honey was good for the skin. Once, he brought the honey bear into the bedroom." Here she giggled at the amber memory of sweet and salty, slow summer skin. "We stuck to the sheets," she admitted.

Marie absently licked her lips. Isis stroked her own memory of honey, better

preserved internally, and of bees hanging like pendants on Vermont clover in July.

The breeze stirred up again, the cool impartial wind that could not be nailed down, but carried the breath of procreation on it where ever it went. Stuck in the alluring memory of those sweet, singular bees, none thought to give thanks for their last great remaining pollinator.

THE WOODEN DOOR

by

Michael A. Kechula

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Joe and Bill were watching Monday Night Football when somebody knocked on the door.

Opening the door, Joe was startled to see a huge gorilla in a delivery uniform. Next to him was a purple refrigerator wrapped in yellow ribbon and topped with a big bow.

"Sign here," said the gorilla.

"Who's it from," Joe asked.

"I don't know. There's a card attached."

Pulling the card from the refrigerator, Joe opened it and read aloud. "A Gift Just For You." The card was unsigned.

"Where do you want this thing?"

"Put it in the kitchen."

The gorilla grabbed the refrigerator, slung it under his arm, and carried it into Joe's kitchen.

"Thanks," Joe said.

The gorilla put out his hand, and waited. When Joe gave him five dollars, the gorilla threw the money, roared ferociously, and jumped up and down.

Bill ran into the kitchen. "Give him a banana before he tears your place apart!"

Grabbing two bananas, Joe offered them to the gorilla.

The animal stopped his tantrum immediately. Grabbing the bananas, he said, "Have a nice day." A second later, he was gone.

"What the hell was that all about?" Joe asked.

"Blame it on outsourcing," Bill said. "Consider yourself lucky it spoke English." Then he added, "Geez, I never saw a purple refrigerator before. Where'd it come from?"

"I don't know. Whoever sent it didn't sign the card. I'm gonna open it. If somebody was nice enough to buy me a gift like this, maybe they were nice enough to put something valuable inside."

Joe cut the ribbon, and opened the refrigerator. Instead of shelves, he found a second door inside made of old, weathered wood. Mounted on the door was a red flashing neon sign that said: KELLY'S BAR.

Astonished, Joe opened the wooden door. Suddenly, the apartment was flooded with loud music, raucous laughter, and the odor of stale beer.

"Sounds like somebody's having one helluva party in there."

"Let me have a look," said Bill. "There's nothing to see. It's pitch black inside."

A voice rang out from inside the bar. "Close the damn door! You're lettin' flies in!"

Startled, Joe slammed the door shut.

"Don't open it again!" Bill hollered. "It could be the doorway to Hell."

"How can that be Hell when everybody's having such a great time?"

The wooden door flew open on its own. A woman's voice called, "Hey, Handsome. Come inside and join the party. I'll buy you a beer."

"Did you hear that?" Joe asked. "She sounds hot. Hey, if a babe wants to buy me a beer, I sure ain't gonna disappoint her."

"Don't go!" Bill said. "She could be one of them hags I heard about on a spooky talk show. They look great for a while, then when you're in their clutches, they turn into ugly, man-eating monsters."

"That's bull. I'm going in." Bill jumped in front of the door. "I swear, if you try to go in there, I'll bust your head."

"Move away or you're a dead man!" Joe yelled.

Suddenly, Kelly's door swung outward with such force it knocked Bill over. Huge pointed claws reached out, grabbed his ankles, and yanked him into the darkness.

Though Joe tried to save Bill, he wasn't quick enough. The door slammed in his face. Hard as he tried, he couldn't open it. He ran to the garage, grabbed a sledgehammer, and slammed the wooden door with all his might. But he didn't even make a dent.

Dialing 911, he hollered, "Help! This is an emergency! Something weird just pulled my friend inside a refrigerator. And I can't get the door open."

"Is it a purple refrigerator?"

"Yeah."

"Was it delivered by a gorilla?"

"Right."

While the operator said, "I'll hafta put you on hold - the same thing's happening all over town," sharp claws grabbed Joe's ankles and pulled him into the darkness.

GRUB

by

Angel Zapata

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Brian's mother likes to cut herself with sharpened slivers of coconut shell. I climb the fire escape and watch her through the dirty window most early afternoons. Sometimes she uses a thin paring knife and whittles her flesh with new, wonderful holes.

Lately, she's been collecting insects in paper cups packed with wet soil. After she bleeds the wounds, she takes a pair of tweezers, removes an ant or beetle, and squeezes them inside her mutilations. Then carefully analyzing their movements, she transcribes observations in a black and white notebook entitled, Recipes.

By the time her two children disembark the school bus, she's wearing clothes again and fresh-baked cookies are cooling on the rack.

Her youngest, Emily says the chocolate chips look like bugs.

I smile when she eats them.

Brian hugs his mother. He doesn't notice what comes crawling out from beneath her sleeves.

HEARTLESS

by

Donna Jean Lyons

Published on The New Flesh 09/06/09

I return home not to find my woman but, instead, cruel words scratched out on a single sheet of rosy stationery...

Dear Tabatha,

I've had fun but now the time has come to explore other alternatives. I've met a man and fallen in love with his large penis. I'll admit you weren't bad, when you slung the rubber, but there's just nothing like the real thing, baby. Your suspicions were right about me all along. I did like 'it' a little too much. I missed the bawdy feel of a man's hands and the brush of thick, sweaty hair during rough sex. You were just too soft and tender for me. In addition, your sex gear didn't come with any extras, if you know what I mean. I don't know how else to explain it. Other than, you just aren't man enough for me. I'll miss your seasoned

tongue play, though. There were good times with you, and no one could ever replace the memories that we shared. However, a memory is like a double-edged sword. It's a memory that has led me back down this path. I'm also into drugs and I'm pregnant with his baby.

Before, telling you the true nature of this dear Joan letter. I've taken your Bloodhound, Elvis, to the local pound. I didn't want to leave him here with you. Elvis, like me, gets lonely. You never spent time with him. Dogs need lots of attention, and you spend your 'down time' working out or with that damn 1967 Chevy. You've clocked more hours under 'her' hood than mine. What person in their right mind chooses to tinker around with scraps of metal over a beautiful woman, ready for some serious loving? Let me ask you something. Has your precious car ever satisfied your womanly needs in the dead of night or early in the morning?

I couldn't read anymore. I reckon when it rains; it tries to fucking strangle you. A man, I'd rather she'd left me for Elvis. The thought of a man touching her, twisted my heart until it was wrung bone dry of love. I wanted to kill her. However, why go for the kill when you can bring on the pain? Daniela didn't know who she was fucking with, not yet. It was magick that brought her to me, and it'll be magick that makes her pay for breaking my heart.

I rip her photograph from the gold frame and shove the letter inside the pocket of my worn Levis. Snatching the Urn of

Delogus, I send a dozen of fresh cut roses sailing across the room. I make my way to the back of our bedroom closet. I pop out the hidden panel. Cobwebs finger my raven hair as I step across the threshold of my occult lair. Once inside, I encircle her picture with the silver and crimson Cord of Saturn, while reciting the binding chant of Delogus.

I light the Black Heart Candle, smoke smolders from the wick as a foul stench dances through the dimly lit room. I pick up the Urn of Delogus, detaching the lid, and elevate it high up into the nocturnal air. "I call forth Delogus, the bringer of corruption and hate. I ask that you fill your urn with the blood of evil and condemn her fate. Seal her heart and turn it cold, make her to never love again and grow lonely and old."

I set the picture ablaze and pitch it inside the Urn of Delogus. "Now let's just see, how much you love dick or anything else, for that matter. You'll hate him and you'll hate his child. You'll hate everything and everyone for all eternity, once I burn this handwritten letter." The scorching hate, I felt in the pit of my gut, sizzled down to a dying amber of disgust. If I'm going to go through with this, I'll have to finish reading her letter to kindle my wrath before burning it.

By now, you're probably pretty pissed. I hope you'll, find it in your heart to, forgive me for what I have done. First, let me start by saying, I love you more than

life its self. No one has ever made me feel the way that you do in the bedroom, the shower, outside in the garden, or...I think you get my point.

I do not love dick. I actually hate dick, unless you're the driving force behind it. There's no man, I don't do drugs, and I'm not pregnant. I'd never take Elvis to the pound. I love your car. Not because it is a classic, but because it is the first place, we made love. Now with all that said. I don't think the real purpose of this letter will be as bad as I'd thought that it would be. Then again, maybe it will.

Here goes, today when I was cleaning the garage, I accidentally knocked a can of paint onto the hood of your car. It put a pretty, mean ding in it. I didn't know how to tell you. I may be wrong, but I don't think it's that big of a deal now. Especially, after you just found out, I haven't done any of the things that you thought I did. I just wanted you to see that there were worse things that I could've done than, accidentally, denting the hood of your car. I'm at Judy's, her number is on the frig, and your dinner is in the oven. When you cool down, give me a call.

All of my love forever,
Daniela

The Urn of Delgous quivers, the Black Heart Candle flickers and sparks spring forth from a lake of darkness. The stink of destruction swipes its finger under my nose. Fire licks at the flesh of my fingertips.

Daniela's words are reduced to ashes. Tears escape from my eyes as I realize, once ignited, the flames of vengeance aren't so easily controlled.

KIDS IN A CANDY STORE

by

Spencer Wendleton

Published on The New Flesh 09/09/2009

Taylor's Candy Shop would be an empty box in seven days.

"Not enough kids like candy anymore, I suppose," Grandpa Herman lamented to Brandon after his mother dropped him off for the weekend. His parents were on vacation to somewhere he failed to recall – or forgot in the presence of free candy. "I've got a week to pack up, kiddo."

Grandpa's eyes looked over Brandon and his little sister, Angie. "I have no idea what to do with all this candy. You can't just throw it away. I guess someone's going to have to eat it, but I don't know who? I wish I could think..."

Angie raised her voice: "What about us? – we can eat it, please Grandpa!"

"Calm down, Angie," Brandon scolded. "He's going to let us eat candy, you don't have to beg. He's putting us on."

Grandpa Herman's cane thumped against the floor. "I have some paperwork to finish in my office, kids. Brandon, you let your sister have what she wants - anything at all, and don't be mean about it. You kids are welcome to anything in the store, really. Help yourself. Everything."

Angie wrinkled her face at Brandon. She wanted licorice snaps last weekend - they visited every Saturday morning - and he ate as many as he could before she had a turn. Brandon underestimated her ability to cry. Her fits were a police siren, and like a police siren, it brought Grandpa out from his office. This was the first time Grandpa gave them full reign over the aisles and shelves stocked with glass bowls of penny candy.

"Take what you want kids," he added before he closed the door. Brandon noticed him frown. "We're closing it down for good."

Brandon sprinted to the chocolate aisle. He stuffed his hands into the toffee and caramel covered truffles. Angie almost knocked the bowl from its perch when she gathered a handful of Pixie-sticks. She tore through them to coat her tongue in green sugar. "Good job, Angie. Why don't you break everything?"

Angie groveled, but she was too engrossed in her take to throw a fit. "Meanie."

The store was darkened, and he had trouble reading the labels. Grandpa's office light was the only source spaced out across the store in a thin shaft. He stuffed jawbreakers into his coat pockets, gum balls

into his jeans, and M&M's inside his gloves. Brandon's stride was a rub of candy shells.

"You're stealing! Mom and Dad said you couldn't do that. I'm telling."

Brandon was frantic to quiet his sister: "Grandpa doesn't care. Didn't you see the out of business sign outside? It's all for us, Angie." Brandon realized what he should've done from the beginning and gathered plastic bags from the dispensers at the end of the aisles. "I'll stock up with these."

Angie pouted as he continued, this time taking from the boxes of Snickers, Butterfinger, and Hershey Bars. His sister moved on following his example and filling up a bag with gummy bears, but only the red ones. Grandma would've scolded them if she were still alive, even spanked them in front of customers: "That costs money, shame on you, shame on both of you! Your Grandpa works hard, and so do I, and we don't need thieves to run us out of business, especially little thieves like you."

Children stole from Taylor's Candy Shop on a regular basis, but Grandpa didn't have the heart to call their parents or the police. Grandma stayed at home, and Grandpa operated the shop six hours out of each day. Taylor's Candy Shop became notorious for an easy steal, and Brandon heard the kids at school talk about it. If someone was caught pilfering from the aisles, an apology was enough for Grandpa to forgive them, Brandon learned. "Kids aren't criminals, they just haven't learned the right way of things. I

can set them straight, even if it takes time and mistakes."

Brandon discovered the soda fountain at the back of the store. He dropped his bag of candy in the aisle and raced to it. "Mom doesn't let us drink soda, says it's addictive, and it'll rot our teeth out."

Angie cried out: "Can I have a drink? I can't reach."

Brandon watched Grandpa's office, the door still closed. He poured her a Dr. Pepper and a Coke for himself. As he slurped the fizz, Brandon marched to the office and checked on Grandpa. He didn't stay inside long, maybe ten minutes to sign order forms and balance the register. Brandon looked at the door and discovered a slip of paper sticking out of the crack. He squinted to read the letters in the shadows: You kids can have anything in the store. I love you both very much. The place is yours.

Something crunched under his shoe. It was crushed into a powder, and he noticed yellow discs spread out on the tiles, what looked to be a sweet tart, except smaller. They came from the bottom of the office door. Brandon put one into his mouth, took a bite, and gagged at the offensive taste. It wasn't candy. He spat it out and washed his mouth of the bitter taste with soda.

"Grandpa," he yelled, hitting the door. "What are you doing in there? Are we going to the pet store across the street?"

Angie stepped behind him. "What's Grandpa doing?"

"I don't know," Brandon answered. "Hey, get on my shoulders and look inside."

Before she agreed, he lifted her up.

"What do you see?"

"The blinds are shut, but they're open a little bit."

She was fidgeting and about to fall backwards. Billy insisted: "Look harder, what is he doing?"

"He's on the floor," she finally answered. "Maybe he's taking a nap. He's not moving. He must be sleeping."

Brandon let her back down. He read over the note again. "Yeah, Grandpa's just taking a nap. We can have all the candy we want, and we won't get in trouble."

You kids can have anything in the store, the note's message repeated to Brandon.

Angie crunched on a mouthful of Necco Wafers.

Brandon eyed the Fun-Dip at the register.

FUN AND GAMES

by

Brian Barnett

Published on The New Flesh 09/14/2009

Finally, after months of searching, It had found her. Her scent was unmistakable. After all that time, It still remembered her smell so very well. It followed the underground sewer lines leading up to Her house. Her scent permeated from the water that flowed through them. She must be taking a shower.

She will be surprised to see me, It thought. It felt a twinge of excitement. It remembered back when She used to play with It. They would play so many great games. She would disappear behind her hands and spring out and surprise It. It tried that once with the family cat, Muffins. Muffins scratched It, so It twisted Muffins' head off.

It thought that game was hilarious, but She did not. It laughed, as red fur stuck to It's fingers, but She screamed. It hated when She screamed, so It scratched Her face and bit Her. She had to wear white things on

Her face that gradually turned red and had to be changed every few minutes. After that day She cried a lot and kept Her distance away from It.

She would stare at it for long periods of time, not holding It or loving It like She used to. Often She left It to fend for itself for days at a time. She would just stare, with tears on Her face as It cried for food. One day It was so hungry, It snatched up a mouse that scurried past Its cage and ate it whole. She threw up and ran from the house.

She brought a man home with her later that day. He wore black clothes and a shimmering gold cross. She told It to be good, and not to bother the man, but It did not listen. He wanted to flick his water on It and say those strange words. It became angry when the man started shouting words from his book. He came too close to the crate and It snatched out one of his eyes. It loved the taste of him and wanted more, but the man ran screaming from the house.

She cried a lot that night as She took It for a ride out in the country. It enjoyed the fresh air. She said that She was going to play a game with It. She threw It's crate into a sewer drain and drove away.

For months all It had to live off of was rats and snakes. It loved the way they squirmed as they slid down It's throat. Looking back, It enjoyed that game very much. Leaving It somewhere so that It could find its way home was fun. Now that It has found Her, the time has come to play another game.

It scratched at the front door but could not reach the doorknob. All the windows were too high to reach. There was only one other option.

It opened the back hatch of the minivan by balancing on the rear bumper. It crawled to the front of the van and climbed into the front seat. It pressed the trunk button allowing the hatch to close itself and then It slid out of the seat and into the floorboard behind the driver's seat. It settled in for a short nap.

It remembered that playing peek-a-boo with Her was such a fun game before She was too afraid to play anymore. In the morning, It is going to surprise Her. It is going to grab Her around the neck with Its claws. In the morning, It is going to play a new game with Her.

PENELOPE'S GOOD DAY

by

Suzie Bradshaw

Published on The New Flesh 09/21/2009

Penelope Aftergut had a taste for sweets and a penchant towards cruelty. She avoided doctors, believing from experience they were useless. Unfortunately, they were a necessary evil. Suffering from severe leg cramping during her more ambitious activities, she reluctantly made an appointment, deeming her high sugar intake the cause.

A fellow she met online, in a lesser known chat group for the cruel, and who she subsequently met in person along with others of like mind, agreed to accompany her to the doctor's office. She was not the only one with little respect for physicians.

Exactly one hour after standing in her front yard, dressed in the customary suburban mom attire, waving to her children as they trotted up the school bus steps and grinning at the squirrel in her yard, she sat naked on the edge of the tub, water

running warm washing the blood from her red stilettos. Her long blonde hair fell in her face as she worked lavender scented soap onto the spikes of her shoes. She pushed her hair back with the crook of her elbow and watched the water-downed blood stream and swirl down the drain.

After drying her shoes, she slipped her feet into them and faced the full-length mirror on the back of the bathroom door. She turned around admiring the tattoos on each shoulder blade. They caused quite the stir at her club as she performed the activities with nothing on but her heels. A black thorny rose splashing three drops of blood, creating the words "Conquer me completely" puckered from her right shoulder blade. A raven with one eye hanging by a thick rope-like optic nerve oozing the words "Torture me so sweetly" on her left shoulder blade. These words she taught her pet raven, Pookie. It's the only time she ever felt bad for her cruelty, as the raven on her shoulder with the missing eye resembled her dear pet.

She covered her ample breasts with her black lacey bra, slipped on a sheer, white, button up blouse and wiggled her black leather pencil skirt past her curvy hips. She wrapped her massive blonde locks to the back of her head and secured the loose bun with an ice pick.

The doorbell rang and Pookie spouted, "Torture me so sweetly...Torture me so sweetly...Torture me so sweetly." Like any obsessive-compulsive raven he said everything in three's. "Conquer me com-

pletely...Conquer me completely...Conquer me completely."

"Ah Pookie. I do love you." She said as she reached a red-painted fingernail inside the bars of the cage and caressed his head. "Love you...Love you...Love you."

David stood at the door. Very few men made her female parts throb. David did. She believed lust to be a most wonderful and cruel feeling. She looked in his eyes and felt the warm, wet heat shudder from her.

"Hello David," she said and gently and purposely rubbed her breasts on his chest as she stood on her tip-toes to kiss him on his cheek. He stepped away from her not completely comfortable with this moral dilemma.

"Ms. Aftergut," he said. Penelope laughed. Then he laughed.

"Are you ready?"

"I am." They walked to his car and he opened the door for her. They spoke of their mutual friends and activities on the thirty minute trip from suburbia to the medical center. He never mentioned his wife, though he did speak of his daughters. Penelope didn't mind. They would take their game to the next level. The look passed between them. Words were not needed. They arrived in the multi-tiered parking garage and he opened the door for her and reached a hand out to help her out of the car.

Sitting in the doctor's office together, they resembled any normal married couple, she leafed through House and Garden and he glanced through an old Field and Stream.

"Ms. Aftergut," the nurse at the door, holding a chart in her hand said. Penelope shot a quick grin at David as they entered the office.

"Dr. Jacobs will be with you in a moment."

Penelope took a seat in the examining room. "Thank you."

One hour later the door abruptly opened and there stood the good doctor.

"So you have leg pain," he said without looking at Penelope.

"Yes, when I exert a great deal of force on my legs they cramp up terribly."

"Mmmhmm," he said and this time looked at her and then at David.

"What do you take for the pain?" He said with a slight irritated and bothered tone.

"Extra-strength Tylenol," Penelope said, feeling herself growing agitated with his abrupt and careless manner.

She watched as he wrote out a prescription on his pad. He handed it to her. "Do you always wear shoes like that?"

Her eyes narrowed. "Yes but I thought it may be related to my addiction to sweets."

"Try more sensible shoes and lay off the sugar. That should help." He said, as he leered at her and licked his lips.

David got up and walked to the door, blocking the doctor's exit.

"I have a better idea." Penelope began to undress.

* * *

Penelope left tiny stiletto shaped blood prints on the tile as they left the doctor's office and had a smidgen of blood on the bun at the back of her head. How odd that no one even peaked in the room with the good doctor carrying on the way he did.

Sore, bruised and battered she walked to her front door, turning to wave at David whose moral dilemma was vanquished on top of the good doctor's body. She blew him a kiss and closed the door. Pookie was reciting his spiel as Penelope walked over to him.

"Mommy had a very good day, my pet," she said as she caressed his head.

And exactly one hour before the children would arrive home from school Penelope stood in her kitchen in her suburban uniform, hair in a ponytail, baking cookies like any good, normal mother would do.

ALOISIUS COTTONBOTTOM'S SUREFIRE IMAGE RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES

by

Steve Lowe

Published on The New Flesh 09/24/2009

Ambling along as I'm wont to do, knobby walkin' stick juttin' from my hand and the crisp mornin' sun warmin' my soul, a peculiar odor snatches up my senses.

"Why, that's an altogether incongruent aroma pervadin' the air on such a fine spring morn as this."

Then I see him sittin' in the park, back against a tree, head a-hangin' low, ears a-flopped over and droopin' betwixt his fluffy legs. Darned if this ain't my lucky day. Why, I know right away what this here situation is.

"Say there young fella, what seems to be causin' you such a great pain when the Lord Almighty has provided as fine a day as this to be celebratin' His glorious benevolence?"

"I'm finished," says he all slow and doleful like. "Through. Done. Warshed up."

"Say, if I didn't know better, I've either stumbled upon the sulfurous rim of a burblin' volcano, or you gotcher self a mess-a bad eggs in yonder colored baskets."

Shakes his head and holds up his paws. Laments, he does, in a meanderin' sorta way like you'd suppose a gigantical speakin' rabbit would do. "Oh! It's awful! Every egg in this year's batch is ruined! Rotten, rancid rejects! Once that Cadbury bunny showed up with his chocolate eggs, I was on the outs with the kids, and every year since it's gotten worse, but now this! I've had it for sure."

"Well, now, hang on just a second there young fella," I tell him. "As it turns out, this just so happens to be your lucky day."

"Yeah, how's that? You got about a million painted eggs hiding in your back pocket? I'm done and out of the Holiday business forever. You know of anybody hiring rabbits?"

"Why, friend, don't tell me that you don't recognize me."

"Well, golly mister, I can't say that I do."

"Aloisius Cottonbottom, at your service." I snatch up his paw and give a good, hearty shakin' as I'm wont to do with folk.

"Uh, hi Mr. Cottonbottom, I'm the Eas-"

"No introductions necessary Mr. Bunny, of course I know who you are. I also know some of your friends as well. A mister Terry Fingerhut?"

"Uh... Fingerhut? I don't think I know him."

"Well sure you do, though he no longer lays claim to the Fingerhut moniker these days. Tooth Fairy ring a bell?"

"Oh yeah, I know the Tooth Fairy! He's a really good guy."

"He didn't always go by the name Tooth Fairy, though. When he came to be in need of my services, he was Terry Fingerhut, and he was havin' a Devil of a time. Facin' law-suits and jail time and whatnot. Ain't many parents out there very comfortable with a fella name of Terry Fingerhut sneakin' into their child's room in the middle of the night and rootin' around beneath their pillow so as to spirit away their dislodged ivories whilst they slumber. But that's where I come in, ya see?"

"Uh... No. I guess I don't see."

"Image my friend. In your particular vocation, the name of the game is Image. That's what I give 'ol Terry Fingerhut. Took him from slinkin' creep to magical Fairy, and not only that, a magical Fairy with a sack of cold hard cash. Hush money if you like, but in the end, everybody's happy and the Tooth Fairy's every kid's hero, all because that's his new Image."

"Image, huh? You suppose I should get some of that?"

I'm lookin' at him a little crossways now. Poor fella musta been huffin' too long on them putrefied pastel poultry embryos. "Sure, Image. You don't rightly know what Image is, do ya there?"

"Uh... well, nope. I suppose I don't."

"Ya see," I says a little bit slower, "Image is how the world looks upon you. It's

how the folks for whom you're providin' this service see you. For instance, if you go about sendin' out these here substandard delights, your Image forever more will be rotten eggs. When kids say 'Easter Bunny' moms and dads the world over will see rotten eggs. Why, you'll surely be finished, just as you're figurin'."

"Yeah, that's what I was figuring all right. I'm through."

"Well now, not so fast. Like I said, this here's your lucky day. What you need is Aloisius Cottonbottom's Surefire Image Reconstruction Services."

"Surefire Image..."

"...Reconstruction Services, that's exactly right. Offered by yours truly, for a nominal fee, merely a pittance in comparison to the outstanding support, technical know-how, emotional aid, mechanical improvement, and financial guidance that this all-encompassing service will provide."

"Wow, that's sounds great. What's the service again?"

"Image Reconstruction, E.B. A complete overhaul, from top to bottom. We'll start today and on the third day, you shall rise again, a newer, more powerful Bunny that will have that 'ol Cadbury feller droppin' something else outta his backside alongside them chocolate dandies."

"Yeah. That's what I need. Image Redestruction Servicing. That'll show that little Cadbury fucker. What did you say this will cost again?"

Ah, you've got to love the big guy, don't ya? I toss an arm 'round his downy

shoulders and help him to his feet. Easter's only three days off. We've got work to do.

"Walk with me young fella. I've got big plans for you. Do you by chance happen to play any musical instruments?"

SUBMISSIONS

by

Sean Monaghan

Published on The New Flesh 09/25/2009

The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural Research

Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

November 15th 1998

Dear Mr Monaghan

Thank you for submitting your article "The enslavement of ghosts for monetary gain", but we will not be able to use it in our journal. While the article was interesting and it's clear that you are a keen amateur, we are a research-based and peer-reviewed academic journal and your piece may be better suited to the popular press. We wish you luck with it elsewhere.

Yours

E.J. Hall

Editor

**The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural
Research**

Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

January 28th 2000

Dear Mr Monaghan

Thank you for submitting your article
"Entombed and reborn: a personal journey",
but we will not be able to use it in our
journal. While the article was interesting I
would remind you that we are a research-
based and peer-reviewed academic journal and
your piece may be better suited elsewhere.

Yours

E.J. Hall

Editor

**The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural
Research**

Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

October 14th 2000

Dear Mr Monaghan

Thank you for submitting your article "Venusians on Mars, Martians on Earth: evidence for extraterrestrial visits to the lower 48", but we will not be able use it in our journal. Again I would remind you that we are a research-based and peer-reviewed academic journal. Please do not send us any further articles of this type. If you wish to submit again, please query first and include your academic qualifications.

Yours

E.J. Hall

Editor

(ps. we deal in the paranormal not extraterrestrials, do you even read the journal?)

**The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural
Research**

Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

November 21st 2004

Dear Mr Monaghan

Thank you for submitting your article "Addiction to Ouija: how spirit contact becomes like chocolate", but we will not be using it in our journal. I note that it has been some years since you sent us a piece and while your completion of a degree is useful, at this stage in your academic career it would be good to collaborate with post-graduate/post-doctoral researchers in the writing. This will give your pieces more credence with the committee and peer reviewers.

Yours

E.J. Hall

Editor

(Please note that this is my last year as editor, duties from next year will be taken over by Prof. Jim MacRuddy).

**The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural
Research**

Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

January 7th 2006

Dear Mr Monaghan

Thank you for submitting your article

"Extended sleep deprivation and spirit contact", but we will not be using it in our journal. The photographs, however do seem to be something worth pursuing. Perhaps if you developed that line of research, and, importantly, could verify the authenticity of the photographs with a co-researcher then I think that is an article we would be interested in. We note that you have very quickly completed your Masters degree - perhaps your supervisor(s) would be willing to work with you on the research and an article.

Yours

E. J. Hall

Editor

(I know I was telling everyone that I was ending my term as editor, but it turns out I love it too much to give it up).

**The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural
Research**

Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

August 27th 2008

Dear Dr Monaghan and Dr Gilligan

Thank you for submitting your article

"Insanity and possession: an evidence of a two-way street", but we will not be using it in our journal. We are glad that you have completed your PhD, and the topic area - possession - certainly seems the kind of thing that would interest us. However, of greater concern is our doubt about the veracity of Mr Gilligan's qualifications. We suspect that the name was just added to the manuscript to try to impress the review board that you have a collaborator. We were unable to locate any other publications by him in our databases, and the university named as awarding his doctorate was shut down in 1927, making him well over 100 years old, if he in fact exists. This is an abuse of our trust. Please cease sending articles.

Yours

E.J. Hall

Editor

(ps. actually I found the article entertaining and would like to see more, but please address anything "private and confidential" so that it comes directly to me).

**The Journal of Paranormal and Supernatural
Research**
Highland Springs
Virginia 23075

September 25th 2009

Dear Dr Monaghan

Thank you for submitting your article "Possession and determination: how spirits manipulate through persistence". This is an excellent piece and we will be publishing it in the January 2010 issue. We look forward to future research from you (and some collaborators?)

Yours

E.J. Hall

Editor

(ps. I would be interested in collaborating with you personally - I remember some research you did on sleep deprivation some years back. I will be in your area on business next month and I'll drop by, if I may).

ILLUSION

by

Michael A. Kechula

Published on The New Flesh 10/05/2009

"You're a liar!" Cynthia shouted. "I catch you cheating on me, and you deny it while a strange woman's right here in our bed."

"This ain't a woman," Harry said, pointing to the form hidden under blankets. "It's an illusion."

"Illusion? I'm gonna blow your freakin' head off." She grabbed a pistol from the nightstand and pointed at him.

"Wait! Don't shoot! Let me explain!"

"Better talk fast. You only have a few seconds."

"When I left Clancy's Bar, a giant praying mantis grabbed me and pulled me into an alley."

"I'm about to kill your ass, and you're actually lying. You're nuts." She aimed at his head.

"If you shoot, it'll be first degree murder. Better hear me out, unless you wanna

die by lethal injection. Now drop the gun and let me finish."

"The gun stays in my hand. Go ahead, you sonovabitch. Give me your damn explanation. I could use a good laugh."

"It pulled me into the alley and said, 'Don't be afraid. I won't harm you. I just need some help. I'm on an important mission, but I'm tired, and need rest. Can you take me home with you?' Well, I was totally amazed. And considering how ugly and scary it looked, I agreed. But I told it I wasn't sure we'd be able to make it back to the house, considering somebody might see how horrible it looked, and create a disturbance. That might bring the cops. And the second they saw a giant praying mantis, they'd start shooting."

"Oh brother. You're liar of the century."

"I ain't lying. Just hear me out. So, it asked me what it should look like, that it was able to change its appearance. And I thought of you, my beautiful wife, and said if it could somehow change itself to look like you, then everything would probably be OK. And it did. But it was naked. I mean where would a giant praying mantis get women's clothes all of a sudden - especially at night when all the stores are closed?"

"I think I'll just shoot you and get this over with." Cynthia said.

"When it asked what you looked like, I showed it your picture. It mumbled weird words, and poof! You were sitting next to me in the car. I couldn't believe it. The only difference was that its voice isn't the same

as yours. You should hear how beautiful it sounds when it talks."

"Mom was right. You're a damn jerk. I shoulda married Frank."

"When we came in the house, it saw your picture on the mantle—when you were a cheerleader in high school. Next thing I knew, it changed itself into a replica of you as a teen cheerleader. Wow! You were hot! Wish I'd known you back then. I remembered you kept your old cheerleading outfit in the trunk in the attic. So, I got it and the thing put it on."

"I decided not to kill you," Cynthia said. "Why waste bullets on a lunatic? I shoulda listened to my father, the neighbors, the pastor, and the guy at the Safeway checkout counter. They all knew about you."

"They were right. I'm no good. But I can change. Let me finish telling you what happened."

"Might as well hear the rest. By the way, your friend's awfully quiet. What's your name, you filthy whore?"

A beautiful voice said, "Gribble."

"I see what you mean about her voice. A real Siren, she is. How much does she get for a quickie?"

Ignoring the question, Harry said, "So there it was, wearing your cheerleader outfit, looking like a duplicate of you at seventeen. Its beauty got to me. I couldn't help myself. I picked it up and carried it to the bedroom. I thought I was gonna...well...then reality struck. 'This is a giant praying mantis,' I said to myself. 'What you wanna do is unnatural. What if you

end up fathering a giant praying mantis? The whole world will scream for your blood.' So, I just put it in bed, because it said it was tired, and that's why it's in our bed. Then I went to the kitchen and made a salami sandwich. After that, I went outside to catch some flies for it, because that's what praying mantises eat. So, right before you came into the bedroom, I had just sat down on the bed to give it the flies. Have you noticed that I'm fully dressed?"

"That's the most bizarre thing I ever heard. Actually, I ain't mad anymore. That doesn't mean I ain't gonna file for divorce. Hey, Floozie, get outta my bed. Don't worry. I ain't gonna shoot you."

The bed covers flew off, revealing the bed's occupant.

"Good lord! I can't believe my eyes. I forgot how beautiful I was when I was a teen. This is amazing. Hold on a minute. Let me get my camera."

Cynthia took dozens of photos, asking her duplicate to pose differently each time. Then she said, "Listen, Honey. Let me show you how we used to cheer for the team. Can you kick your left leg up high? Good. Can you say, rah-rah-shish-boom-bah?"

The duplicate imitated Cynthia perfectly.

"This is amazing," Cynthia said. "Can you duplicate anybody?"

The thing nodded.

"Permanently?" Cynthia asked.

The thing nodded again.

Cynthia shot Harry in the head. She and the duplicate buried him in the back yard.

When both jumped into bed, Cynthia sighed deeply and said, "I always wanted to sleep with Tom Cruise."

FIGURE ATE

by

Stephanie Barnett

Published on The New Flesh 10/09/2009

He looked around nervously as she opened the door and led him into the dark house. If he was caught with an underage girl again, he'd be locked up for good.

"So uh, where are your parents? You sure we will be okay to do this here?"

She smiled mischievously and said, "Oh, we will be perfectly safe here. My parents are out on the town and they'll be gone for hours."

"Well... okay."

She guided him by the hand through the dark hallway and into a bedroom. Even in the dark, he could faintly see posters with boy bands on them and stuffed animals scattered about.

He began to get excited when she led him to the bed and shoved him onto it.

"I'm going to devour you, baby!" She said seductively.

"Oh and I look forward to it, sugar!"
He said with anticipation in his voice.

She started to shake, and her face and body looked like an animalistic beast. Her teeth extended into fangs and her hands turned into large claws.

He began to scream, but was quickly quieted when she bit out his throat. Within minutes, she had devoured him and left behind nothing but a pile of bones.

After she transferred back to her human form, she began to clean up the mess. Her parents would ground her for a week if she wasn't neat with her kill.

Suddenly a sickening feeling washed over her and she rushed to the bathroom.

She knelt over the toilet and forced her finger down her throat, purging herself of what she had just eaten.

"That was close, I'd never fit into my Prom dress if I would have kept that down!"

THE MAN WHO HELD HANDS

by

Brian Barnett

Published on The New Flesh 10/21/2009

Lance hated to hold hands in public. Yet, for some reason he was compelled to. His various girlfriends' hands were always so dainty, so beautiful - that it was a crime not to hold them.

Invariably, he would be fine with holding their hands until he made it to Lakeview Park. He always felt so awkward there. There were so many gawking faces, so many people judging him.

One day he will build enough courage to tell them what for. But not today. Today, like all other days in the past, he'll drop the hands into the nearest trashcan and run.

RIGGED

by

Jodi MacArthur

Published on The New Flesh 10/23/2009

Gerald pushes glasses up his long nose. It makes him look distinguished. Bushy unibrows complete the look. So what if he is bald? Isn't bald sexy these days anyway? He'd read it on the cover of Red Book magazine while waiting in line at the grocery store the other day. It is respectable at the very least.

Respect. Where is the respect these days? The grocer had handed him the little piece of paper with DECLINED written on it when he tried to buy a loaf of bread, bologna, and a quart of milk. Just cause a guy is down on luck and a couple bucks doesn't grant the grocer the right to snicker and exchange Ain't this guy a loser look with the next person in line. Yes, he'd almost squeezed the trigger.

He keeps the nice little pistol in his pocket, just in case. Never know when one

might need a gun. It is the answer to all his problems. It is.

Your boss fires you? Bam you shoot him.

Your banker says your money's flushed down the john? Bam you shoot him.

The grocer refuses your credit card? Bam you shoot him.

Gerald had never so much as flashed his gun at anyone before. But he thought about it. He daydreamed about it. No one truly understood who he was, what he could do, including the hooker he picked up and brought home this evening. She demanded her money before the service. I mean, come on now, Gerald had read up on what's hot and what's not. Bald is sexy, remember? he'd asked Blondie Hooker as he kicked her stomach over and over again. Distinguished glasses are sexy, right? Another kick to the ribs. Gerald knew Blondie Hooker had read all this in Red Book magazine. That's what those kind of girls do. They knew all about sexy. If you're sexy you get it for free. Remember? He'd asked her, you give it for free.

Before Blondie Hooker passed out she'd screamed too much. Police were called. Now. Tonight. He'd get what was due him. Respect. Respect is what he wants. You can't buy that with a twenty, but Blondie Hooker could have offered it with a free blowjob. Aretha. R-e-s-p-e-c-t. She knew how to get respect and it is damn well time he got his slice of the cake. Gerald doesn't care the price.

The police bang on the door asking him to open up. Gerald giggles, pushes his glasses up again, and gives a thumbs up to

waking Blondie Hooker. She is duct-taped to the folding chair. Pointing at her blonde head is the barrel of a rifle. The trigger is rigged to twine rigged to the door. The second police ram through - Bam! That'll be last the time someone says no to him.

Blondie Hooker struggles and makes muffled noises. Gerald isn't sure, but she sounds like she is throwing up. A piece of gray tape seals her mouth, a dribble of orange creeps from the corner. Serves her right for turning him down. What is the world coming to? You bring a hooker home - you expect some action.

"Right?" he asks puking Blondie hooker. He watches her bruised adam's apple rise and fall. He knew what she was swallowing. It made for a good enough answer.

He cocks his pistol. "Right."

"Open up. Police!" Another hard knock on the door.

Gerald crouches behind the piano. Waiting.

The knocking stops. Silence.

He's waiting for the door to break in. The twine pulls the trigger, puking Blondie Hooker is dead -he'll get his respect when the police realize what they've done. They've done mind you. They've killed an innocent victim. Oh, the irony. Who will be the respectable authority now?

R-e-s-p-e-c-t, Aretha Franklin knew what she was talking about. The song plays over and over in his head. He wished he hadn't smashed the radio in the other night when it wouldn't stop playing Ghost Riders In The Sky. He hated that song. There are no

Ghost riders in the sky or anywhere else. Everyone knows that. Even the stupid hooker.

He waits. The silence carries on longer than it should. Blondie Hooker keeps making muffled noises, which makes it hard to hear their footsteps.

Gerald stands and points the pistol at her head. "Shut up. Just shut up. You'll ruin everything." More orange leaks from under the tape, only it's looking reddish now, like blood. He squints to get a better look.

Something smashes through the window. A slight pop - hiss. Gerald's eyes begin to sting. Loud shouts. He can't breathe. It stings. He points the pistol everywhere, first at her, then at them, then at her.

"Police. Drop the weapon."

How'd they do that? How'd they get in? It isn't fair. Life isn't fair. "All I want is some respect! That's all I want."

"Drop the weapon."

Gerald opens his eyes against the sting. Points at Blondie Hooker. Shoots.

Pain erupts in his leg. Police shout. Another pain in chest. Gerald falls to the floor, but not before opening his eyes and looking at Blondie Hooker. Red dribbles from her slouching cheek, down the length of her arm, down her fingertips to the hardwood floor.

There. Now. Finally. R-e-s-p-e-

One last bang interrupts Aretha's song.

MIDNIGHT STROLL

by

Joshua Day

Published on The New Flesh 10/30/2009

The park was silent, void of all its daytime glories. It almost seemed miserable, yearning for the intimate touch of lovers wrapped around the base of its oldest of trees. Its voice stripped of the innocent sounds of laughter, only to be replaced with the sound of crickets screaming out from the darkness. Each one of them begging for their song to be heard, but all of them romantics, too afraid to venture out into the night alone.

It was here that James found himself strolling on the edge of the shadows. The evening breeze swam through the autumn leaves at his feet. He moved slowly, head down, watching as one foot found its way in front of the other. The shadows at his side whispered the most horrific of secrets and promised the foulest of lies ever so sweetly into his ear. His response was a smile,

because only here, in the dead of night, did he feel most alive.

He moved on alone, humming along to tune of the cricket masquerade. To himself, he could only wonder how people could fear the night like they do. Where others see emptiness, he sees salvation. He wears the darkness as a veil, covering his eyes from the world around him. Only in the daylight hours does he notice just how truly alone he really is. A world teeming with life, happiness and meaning only enrages the sadness that holds claim over his soul.

For twenty years he had wondered through this midnight Eden alone, although tonight a chill ran up his spine. Others may have taken this as a warning but he was just happy to be feeling anything at all. Suddenly, he was no longer in control of his own feet. The voices, secrets, and lies coming from the surrounding shadows seemed to be guiding him now.

He stopped, only momentarily, to light a cigarette when it caught his eye. The moon, seeing the horrors ahead, took refuge behind a passing cloud. The crickets and shadows fell silent to watch. James wasn't alone.

Feet frozen to the ground, he tried to focus in on the silhouette floating ahead of him. Instead of walking away, he moved in closer. With each step, the air grew colder. The trees that lined the edge of the path felt like they were closing in on him, pushing him forward. Slowly, the silhouette began to come into focus.

His eyes fell onto the two pale, but beautifully shaped, legs suspended 3 feet off the ground. He moved up to her hourglass figure which was wrapped in a deep blue silk gown. The icy breeze swam through her gown causing it to ripple like the waves on an open sea. A sea that his eyes could stay adrift on forever. Yet despite his struggle against the current, his eyes moved upward. What breath he may have had was suddenly ripped away. Never before had he seen a face so beautiful; a beauty not even the deepest of darkness could hide.

Forsaken by the clouds, the moon was forced back into the night sky. The shadows fled back deeper into the darkness, revealing the horror that sat before him. Tears twenty years overdue found their way back to his face at the site of a rope wrapped tightly around her neck. With trembling hands he moved his cigarette back to his mouth. A single tear fell from his nose onto his hand. He quickly recoiled, as if it had been acid that touched his flesh. Confused by the sudden outburst of emotion, he retreated a few steps back. His beautiful Eden had now abandoned him.

The tree in which she swung tore up from the ground stretching, like a hand from hell, high into the night sky. It sat barren, naked, and alone. This skeleton hand tugged on the rope, causing the nameless beauty to dance like a puppet on a string with each passing breeze.

James fell to his knees as hundreds of questions ripped through his mind. Why would someone so beautiful take her own life? What

horrors tormented her to such an end? Why was he crying? Why did he care? Question after question, he knew none could be answered.

After an episode of vomiting he managed to push himself back to his feet. Disgust was the first feeling he had, once the shock wore off. He had suffered with unspeakable pains for twenty years and yet still managed to find a way to get out of bed each morning. It hadn't been easy. Every morning, when he opened his eyes, he was reminded just how alone he truly was. But honestly, was he much better than this swinging beauty? Was his drug abuse a better way to cope? That was a secret he had kept from many.

Slowly, his disgust moved to envy. She could have killed herself hidden away from the public eye, but instead she was here for everyone to see. He had spent his time hiding in the night's shadows where he couldn't be seen. Soon the sun will rise and the happiness of the world will be forced to bare witness to her. The image of her sadness will be burned into their memories forever. Tears began to fill his eyes again.

He imagined what the daylight would bring. All those faces and all those eyes pointed at her. The thoughts of the ridicule it would bring were almost too unbearable. It was in that moment he longed to be with her, to tell her that he understood. She was too young to be so alone. His body began to shake and the tears were now uncontrollable.

Again, the breeze cut deep into his ageing bones. He looked back up at her face

and thought that she must be cold. Removing his jacket, he knew what he must do. He moved the bucket, which was lying on its side at the base of the tree, over so he could reach her. Steadying himself, he tied one sleeve to the same branch she swung from. After taking a moment to take in his old garden of Eden, he tied the other end tightly around his own neck. A smile crossed his face again as the beauty of his Eden returned to him. He took one last look at the angel swinging at his side. She won't be alone anymore. And as the jacket pulled tight, the crickets began to sing.

EVOLUTION

by

Angel Zapata

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When the first octopus fell from the clouds, Daniel Berck, a local evolutionist who witnessed the event, was sorely disappointed. He had always envisioned the mass exodus of invertebrates to undoubtedly originate from the sea, not drop into a cornfield. The creature, who when stretched out horizontally was the length of an average man, had yet to learn vocalization. Somehow it managed to burrow its name in the black soil with a fluid, almost cursive penmanship: Staam.

The scientific community was baffled. Through some harried diplomatic intervention, Staam was granted immediate political asylum. The philanthropic interest of a particularly keen lobbyist afforded the creature access to the remote beach of Jekyll Island off the south-eastern coast of Georgia. Over the next several weeks, Staam constructed what appeared to be a craggy

garden composed of broken seashells and other miscellaneous ocean crustaceans.

Tourists snapped pictures of the beautifully-sculpted plot, and with downcast eyes, expressed only terrible pity for the obviously lonesome artist.

The following Sunday, the second octopus dropped from the sky into the center of Central Park in New York City. A third sighting purported a twenty-foot octopus squirming across a busy intersection in downtown Los Angeles.

During the press conference on Jekyll Island the following day, one reporter remarked that Staam's so-called garden bore a striking resemblance to a medieval fortress.

Moments later, Staam wriggled through the knotted gate and rose vertically on two unusually long appendages. The crowd of paparazzi and government officials were stunned to silence. Staam continued to stretch four of his spotted tentacles up and above his muscular head. He closed his immense eyes and began to hum as he swayed side to side.

From behind his swollen mass came the clamor of clattering machinery, churning the agitated cogs and barnacled levers painstakingly crafted from mollusks and sand dollars. The illustrious device of his unique garden construct had sprung to life.

"What does it do?" One brave reporter queried over the sound. "What is it for?"

"Progress," was the first and only word Staam ever spoke.

Then the great machine, adrift in deep,
resonant vibrations, proceeded to toss men
through the sky.

DEMONS AND ACID DON'T MIX

by

Laura Eno

Published on The New Flesh 11/26/2009

The rumbling deep within the earth's crust awakened Lucien from his dreamless sleep. How long had he been without awareness? He rode the wave of molten lava to the surface, cat-eye pupils shrinking in the unaccustomed brightness of sunlight hitting the deep blue water.

The island was gone, sunk as they cast him into the crevice. They sealed their doom the day they sought to destroy him. Atlantis was no more, yet he lived on, awaiting the inevitable moment of his resurrection.

Call him demon or jinn, neither label fit nor did it matter. Once more, the world lay beneath his feet, ripe with possibilities. Let the feast begin anew, he thought, and rode the wind to a new civilization.

Lucien grew puzzled as he walked amongst the pitiful humans in this place. No one knew him or seemed to care. He strolled

through a park next to the sea, a tall bridge crossing an expanse of it. They called the year 1968 by their way of tracking time. It meant nothing to him, without a reference point from the past to guide him.

His stance didn't strike fear in the hearts of these souls. A few even handed him flowers. These people intrigued him. He would stay awhile; learn more about them.

A thick haze enveloped Lucien as he mingled amongst laughter and music, causing him to sway in time to the gentle beat. Soon more people arrived, all dressed in blue, intent on harm with their sticks. He set them on fire for their efforts; his new friends nodded their approval and stuck a small square of paper in his mouth.

Lucien soared over the city, lighting fires in each building where the blue men congregated. He noticed the red trucks trying to help, so vanquished them as well. "Groovy," the man next to him exclaimed, but his face turned into a monstrous visage so Lucien eliminated him. Soon his new friends ran, fearful and no different from the Atlantians of so long ago. Lucien watched the flowers curl into smoky wisps as they caught fire from molten flesh, heard chanting turn into screams.

He awoke the next morning in a park, the city around him a smoldering ruin. He couldn't remember previous events, but clearly, no one lived in this burnt-out shell. Lucien wondered what had drawn him here in the first place, but gave up trying

to recall and headed south in search of new
souls to harass.

DISTRACTIONS

by

Suzie Bradshaw

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"I've lost my shoe. Can you help me?" Dorothy asked the girl propped on a chair with a blood stained piece of white gauze wrapped around her eyes.

"I would but someone took my eyes."

"Oh my! Why?"

"I don't remember but I think I'd like them back."

"Here," Dorothy grasped the girl's hand, "hold onto my arm."

The girl wrapped a hand around Dorothy's arm and got up. Dorothy looked down the hall. There was no end and no beginning. Doors lined the vastness on both sides as far as the eye could see.

"So, what's your name?"

"Harmony," the girl said.

"Oh, that's beautiful. My name is Dorothy. Nice to meet you."

The girl wore ballet slippers on her feet and made no sound as they started down

the hall. Dorothy noticed how loud her one shod foot was on the hardwood floor.

"This is quite uncomfortable," Dorothy said leaning on the girl attempting to remove the red pump from her foot. "It won't come off. I'm lopsided when I walk."

"Maybe someone can take the foot off," Harmony said.

Dorothy smiled. "Yes, of course. You're a smart girl Harmony."

"Thank you."

Harmony's hand was cold as Dorothy grasped it and intertwined their fingers like they were long forgotten friends. Click, click, click, went Dorothy's one high heel on the floor as they followed a herd of five foot white rabbits.

"Do you hear babies crying?" Harmony said.

Dorothy listened intently looking left then right. "I do. It's coming from that door." She pointed and put her hand down, embarrassed, and led Harmony to the door.

"Oh goodness," Dorothy said as she gazed upon a room of gigantic flowers with hairless baby heads, faces scrunched up and red, sticking up in the middle of each.

"They are flowers. Crying flowers."

"Goodness, they're loud. Can we pick one?"

"Is that what we are supposed to do?"

A white business card emerged from a baby's mouth. Dorothy, with Harmony holding her arm, ventured closer. "It cried a business card."

"Oh, what does it say?"

Dorothy reached out and took the card from the baby's mouth.

"It says vote for me."

Harmony bounced on her ballet-slippered feet and clapped her hands.

"Oooo, yay. I love to vote."

"What are we voting for?" Dorothy said.

"The crying baby flower, I suppose."

"Right, of course."

"Where do we vote?" Harmony said.

Dorothy shrugged and sniffed the air. "Do you smell that?"

"Yes, it's coming from that door."

"Mmmm," Dorothy said as she opened the door.

"I hear clinking and sizzling. I hear conversations and running water. Is it a restaurant?"

"It is."

"Chinese?"

"Yes."

"I am hungry. Want to eat?"

"I guess...I don't know if they let our kind in here," Dorothy said.

"Oh."

The maitre de approached them. "Would you ladies like a table?"

Harmony turned her head and whispered in Dorothy's ear. "He smells."

Dorothy nodded and the tuxedoed werewolf showed them to a table by the window.

"So what can I get you two?" He took out his notepad and placed his reading glasses on the tip of his nose.

"I'll have a diet coke and Kung Pao Chicken. Is it spicy?"

"If you want it to be."

"Oh, I do. I do," Dorothy said.

"Me too," Harmony said.

Dorothy watched the Asian werewolf with the chef's hat chop and toss meat and vegetables on a hot griddle.

"Do you think the bunnies know?" An abnormal smell slapped Dorothy in the face.

Harmony felt for the straw in her diet coke, found it and brought it to her lips.

"Yum, that's good. What bunnies?"

"I don't know."

"I'm done," Harmony said.

"Me too but we didn't eat," Dorothy said.

"That's okay. Let's go find your eyes."

"I have my eyes," Dorothy said.

The wolfey maitre de scowled at them and muttered something under his breath as they left the restaurant.

Band music assaulted their ears as they walked back into the hallway.

"It's a parade," Dorothy said.

"I hear wheels."

"Yes, it's little people riding tri-cycles and a band is following them. Oh and the bunnies are behind the band."

Dorothy clapped and watched as they came closer. A three foot tall bald guy dressed all in red velvet walked in front of the ones on the trikes, holding a box in one hand and a baton in the other. He walked over to Dorothy and held the box out. "Ma'am your vote."

"What are we voting for?" Dorothy asked.

"Whether we take your eyes, you won't need them here."

"Right."

"Your eyes," Harmony said.

Dorothy placed her voter card in the black box and the little man promptly whacked her on the side of her head with the baton.

"Owww," Dorothy said and put her hand over the wounded area. Blood trickled down into her ear. She looked at her bloodied hand and said, "Why'd you do that?"

"Because you won, of course."

Harmony bounced on her slippered feet.

"Yay Dorothy won!"

Dorothy smiled. "What did I win?"

"What did she win?" Harmony said.

"Why, to have your eyes removed of course. Such an honor," the little man smiled, his eyes gleamed with pride and excitement.

Two white rabbits flanked each side of Dorothy. "This way, this way," they said as they escorted her to a door she hadn't seen before.

"What about Harmony?" She looked back at Harmony. "I think I was looking for my other shoe." Harmony smiled.

"No, you weren't. You don't need those eyes anyway, silly. You don't really use them." The little man said.

"I'll be okay. You go. I'm so happy for you," Harmony said pushing the gauze slipping down her face back over her hollow eye sockets.

"Me too," Dorothy said and started to wave. Standing at the door jamb she quickly said, "Thanks for your help." She was pulled inside and the door shut behind her.

Harmony sat in the chair she was in when she met Dorothy. "Now where did I leave my shoe?"

THE PENGUINS REVOLT!

by

Brian Barnett

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Valerie learned how to deal with angry penguins the hard way. One day, she had gone to the store for a few groceries as her husband, Doug, stayed at home.

He told her that he would take a shower and that upon her return, he would fix supper. She loved the idea. She was in the mood for his famous chicken casserole.

She had happily unloaded the plastic grocery bags from the store. She had merrily unlocked and opened the front door. But when she entered the house - she froze in utter horror.

There had been a terrible struggle. She heard the shower as it was still going. Steam steadily trickled from the hallway.

Valerie dropped the grocery store bags and called for her husband of two years. "Doug! Doug, are you okay?"

There was no answer. Her stomach sank. She feared the worst. She opened the bi-fold

closet door and took out the most formidable weapon that she could find - an umbrella.

She slowly made her way down the hallway toward the bathroom. Her heart leapt when she thought she heard a strange sound. Was it a squawk? What in the world would squawk?

She shrugged it off and assumed that it was a squeaky floorboard. There were more pressing matters ahead.

She edged to the bathroom. The door was partially open. A thin stream of steam bellowed from the room and spread across the hallway ceiling.

She took a deep breath and summoned her courage. Then, without a second thought, she kicked the door open. From the bedroom, multiple squawks answered to the sound of the banging door. The squawks almost sounded...startled?

The shower stall was empty. Valerie feared the worst. She noticed something strange about the shower curtain. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something about it had changed somehow.

She gripped the umbrella tighter and continued to the bedroom. Again, the door was partially ajar. Again, she took a deep breath and summoned every shred of her nerves.

Then, just as she was about to kick it off its hinges, it opened. It opened rather slowly, which only added to her shock and utter bewilderment of what she was witnessing.

Doug had been tied to the bedpost. He had a corner of a washrag hanging from his

stuffed mouth. Half a dozen penguins stood in a semi-circle around him. They all awkwardly held make-shift weapons between their flippers.

One held a toothbrush. Another held a disposable razor. The absurdity of it all nearly caused her to laugh when she saw the one holding a hair dryer. Its cord was tangled around the penguin's feet.

"What's going on here?" she demanded. She still wielded her umbrella in case they decided to attack.

One particularly large penguin, an emperor penguin, waddled closer to her. He squawked and then shook his head. Then he spoke nearly perfect English. "Sorry about that." His voice was deep and profound. He cleared his tiny throat, "We are revolting! Meaning that we are striking against you and your husband!"

"What?" She was simultaneously amazed that the creature could speak and horrified that they penguins had the ingenuity and the gall to attack them in such a way.

"We are tired of all the hot showers every single day. We are penguins! How would you expect us to feel?"

"But you're just artwork on a shower curtain!" she suddenly remembered the shower curtain. It had looked strange because it was nothing more than a picture of icebergs. All of the penguins were gone from it.

The penguins squawked angrily at her comment.

"Silence!" demanded the emperor. The penguins suddenly silenced. "We demand

restitution and an agreement that you will take no more hot showers."

"But, how will we get clean?"

One tiny penguin had already had his fill with small talk. He jabbed the end of a comb into Doug's forearm. He screamed a muffled scream. "Mmmph!"

"Why you little..." Valerie charged the little penguin. He turned around and saw the umbrella coming for him. His tiny eyes widened and a stream of liquid feces sprayed the carpet as she struck him on the side of his tiny head.

He fell to the side and squawked in pain. If his eyes had been affixed to the front of his head instead of the sides, they would've been crossed.

"Was that really necessary?" sighed the emperor.

"He stabbed my husband!"

"Yes, but it's only a tiny little wound. It barely broke the skin. You nearly broke his neck!"

"This is ridiculous! What is it that you want?"

"Okay. First off, we demand that all the boiling hot showers cease immediately. Second, we would like an occasional fish fry. You owe it to us. Third, please spray our curtain from time to time. Seriously, I could build a fort with all the soap scum."

Valerie's face reddened slightly. She was embarrassed about the soap scum remark. She lowered the umbrella. "You know, Doug. That is really not too much to ask."

Doug's eyes widened and he struggled against his restraints. He tried desperately

to talk, but the washrag that was jammed into his mouth prevented him from doing so.

Valerie shook the penguin's flipper to seal the deal and dropped the umbrella. The smaller penguins dropped their weapons and waddled back into the bathroom. Two of them collected their unconscious friend and carried him awkwardly with their flippers.

As Valerie untied Doug from the bed-post, she couldn't help but wonder how long it would be before the roosters on the dishtowels struck their own revolution. Perhaps the chicken casserole would have to wait for another time.

THE CAR PARK

by

Dan Powell

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The car park is a bad mood cast in concrete. Though not old enough for its construction to be lost from living memory, only the car park itself knows how many bodies its concrete foundations entomb and where. It hulks over the city surrounding it, a sleeping monster that might any moment be provoked into brutality. Most who tread the stairwell up the spine of the building are careful not to wake it. Not that many come this way since the council announced its imminent demolition.

Rumours of its demise, however, were greatly exaggerated, with a local action group fighting to save the formidable structure. Its concrete bulk, the protruding skeleton of some soon to be extinct creature of prehistory, continues to dominate the skyline here. The city courtrooms that cower in the shadows of the car park's flanks, house the pros and cons of the argument,

while the building itself holds its silence and sleeps, indifferent to the debate that will decide its very existence.

The quiet here is why I chose the top floor to squat in. The never opened restaurant building at the summit is the perfect place to bed down, more welcoming than the anti-sleep benches and the kickings waiting for me in the parks and precincts below. The view from here stretches for miles. I like to think I can see any threat approaching well before it arrives but I know that isn't true.

They came a few nights back, pissed up and looking for something to torment. That's why they brought the petrol can. I heard the car too late, tried to hide in the dark corners of the top park deck, but headlights soon found me. It didn't take them long to surround me, shouting and lashing out with booted feet. Winded and kicked about, I tried to struggle but there were too many. I looked up at them, men from the town, suited up, they'd come straight from a club or pub, probably been knocked back by the ladies and figured a fight was too much trouble. I could see in their eyes they'd settled on GBHing some homeless guy and somehow, way up here where I thought I'd be safe, they'd found me.

I didn't speak. Waste of time. I could see myself in their eyes; dirty fucking tramp, needs a kicking, taking fucking liberties, sleeping in the multi-storey, lowlife scum needs cleaning from the street.

"We gonna burn him or what?" said one, as he checked his watch. "I'm hungry and the chinky closes in half an hour."

They poured the contents of the petrol can over my clothes, leaving my face till last, laughing as I gasped for breath and sucked in only fumes. Through stinging eyes I made out the blurry glow of lighter flame.

"Fuckin' do it," shouted one.

The others jeered and shouted as the lighter waved about in front of me. A grinding noise burst from the lower levels of the car park.

"Bloody place is gonna collapse. Let's do this and get the fuck out of here."

The noise ground out a second time, this time shaking the floor. That's when the screaming started. I wiped the petrol from my eyes and squinted, desperate to see what was happening. The lighter flame was gone and in front of me the car park seemed to be somehow swallowing my attackers. The concrete between their feet seemed to fold and crack and suck them in. They sank slowly into the floor screaming as the concrete somehow covered them. The car park floor rippled once more, the grinding noise playing out with the last of their screams. Beside me on the smooth park deck floor, the petrol can and the empty car was the only evidence of them left.

Most folks might have run at that and never looked back. I made my way back to the restaurant building and lay down on my sleep bag, wiping my eyes with an old t-shirt from my backpack. It was lying there, my heart still battering my chest, that I heard the

singing. At least I think it is singing. It's a kind of ringing sound, muted, like metal hidden deep inside something. That's how they build these things isn't it, steel reinforced concrete. It's like the bones of this place are singing. Telling me I am safe. That I can rest here. Which I do. I lie here and listen and I pity the men who might come one day to knock this marvelous, brutal building down.

FOUL-MOUTHED TEENAGE ZOMBIES

by

Suzie Bradshaw

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"Girl, you got somethin' right here." Becky pointed a rotten finger from her remaining hand to between her front incisors and burrowed her head back into the fat girl's stomach.

Bre-Bre threw the broken femur from which she sucked the marrow to the floor. "This skinny skank tastes like shit." She scratched at her only tooth.

"I told you, bitch."

"Whatever. Did I get it?" She smiled.

Becky looked up. "Shit." She reached in the fat girl's stomach, retrieved her eyeball, licked it and plopped it back into her socket. "Yeah, you got it."

"Oh my god! Becky, that was disgusting," she said and scrunched her nose. "God damn, you smell, too."

"I do?" Becky lifted her arms and sniffed her pits.

Bre-Bre shook her head. Becky fumbled through her purse and brought out a bottle of Chanel Number Five, spraying herself accordingly. She dropped the bottle back in her purse and with tremendous effort rose to her feet.

"Fuck, we gotta go, Bre-Bre!" She pointed to the stairs.

"What?"

"Billy! He ain't happy with me."

"Ah, shit. Bitch, why'd you have to eat his dick?"

"Slut, there ain't no bone in a boner. Not all I ate either." Becky licked her bottom lip. Her top lip Billy had. "Nothing but meat and juices."

Lumbering down the hall Becky pushed Bre-Bre. "Faster, you slow bitch!"

"Put a, we can't go any faster."

SUPERSTITION

by

Robert C. Eccles

Published on The New Flesh 02/03/2010

Jackie, Dean and I sat in the car, waiting for the funeral procession to pass. I was behind the wheel. Jackie was up front with me, Dean was in the back.

"Thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three..." I counted as the cars drove past, headlights on, little brown flags magnetically attached to their roofs waving.

Jackie punched me in the shoulder. "Don't do that!" she said. "Haven't you heard the saying, 'Count the cars as they go by and you will be the next to die'?"

"I had not heard that," I answered, rubbing my shoulder. I looked out the windshield and couldn't identify the last car I'd counted. She'd made me lose track. I fumed as the rest of the procession went by and squealed the tires when it was finally our turn to go.

At the next red light, Dean spoke from the back seat. "Got a light?" He had a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

"Sure," I said, reaching into my shirt pocket for a box of matches. I struck one against the side of the box and it flared to life. I turned around and lit Dean's cigarette.

"Me too," Jackie said. She was holding a smoke. I lit hers and used my free hand to shake a cigarette out of the pack on the dashboard. I put the cigarette in my mouth and brought the match up. Julie leaned toward me and blew the match out.

"Do you have a death wish?" she asked. "'If three on a match you light, you won't survive the night'."

"You just made that up," I accused.

"I did not," Jackie said. "It's a well-known phrase."

I frowned and shook the matchbox. It was empty. I reached forward to punch in the dashboard lighter. It was gone. I stuffed the cigarette back into the pack.

We arrived at our destination and climbed out of the car. Dean and I walked in front of Jackie.

"Watch your step!" she warned. "Step on a crack..."

A grand piano fell out of the sky onto Jackie, pulverizing her.

Dean and I stopped and looked back at the sound of the crash. I shrugged.

"Evidently," I said, "Jackie never heard the phrase, 'Three dumb sayings shared with friends will bring you an untimely end'."

OH MY GOD

by

Chad Case

Published on The New Flesh 02/11/2010

"Oh my God would you just look at this mess!" Bonnie Bluetooth screeched upon entering her son's room. The bed was unmade. His clothes, along with fast-food bags, were tossed everywhere, half-empty soda cans covered his desk, dresser and nightstand. She gagged a little as the smell of dried ketchup and feet attacked her nose. "Benjamin would you just look at it!" she added, tip-toeing through the minefield of trash.

Benjamin rolled his glassy eyes then surveyed his domain. "Looks fine to me, mom," he snapped-back, cocking a pierced eyebrow. He returned his attention to his computer, clicked the mouse and Avenged Sevenfold's Bat Country blasted-out through the speakers.

Bonnie put her hands on her hips and began tapping her foot. She tilted her blond head and gave him the look.

Benjamin could feel his mom's intense-blue eyes boring into the back of his head. He let out a pissed-off sigh and mumbled, "Okay, mom. I'll clean it up in a minute."

Bonnie nodded her head firmly. "Well hop to it, mister," she said, straightening a wrinkle in her yellow sundress. She began to walk out of the room when a red stain by the closet caught her eyes. "What is this?"

"It's nothing, mom!"

"Nothing?!" Bonnie rebuffed, voice raising. "It doesn't look like nothing!" Her blue eyes meet his eyes. And the look made another appearance.

Benjamin lowered his head like a pouting dog. "Mom, really it... it's nothing."

"Well, I'll just see about that!" Bonnie grabbed the doorknob.

"Mom!" Benjamin whined, getting up, face growing pale. "Don't look in there!"

She extended her index finger on her free hand, and motioned for him to sit back down. He did but he sobbed; "Please don't look in there, mom."

Bonnie swung the door open swiftly. She gasped-for-air as she saw the body of Benjamin's best friend, Tyler, laying there in a pool of sticky blood.

"Oh! My! God!" Bonnie ranted, eyes flared. "How many times have I told you, Benjamin, that if you're going to kill your friends to do it in the basement! There's no carpet down there and the mess is always easier to clean!"

"Sorry, mom, I will the next time." Benjamin gave her a shit-eating grin and added, "I promise."

"Damn right you will!" she said, slamming the closet door. "Now, get this room cleaned up, then come downstairs for dinner. I've made your favorite tonight. Spaghetti with heart shaped meatballs."

"Mmm, sounds good," Benjamin moaned. "But what's for dessert?"

"Dessert?!" Bonnie retorted, giving him the look again and opening the closet door once more. "After this mess that you did, you think that you're going to get dessert?"

Benjamin's face turned into a question mark. All he did was shrug his scrawny shoulders.

Bonnie shook her head somberly and said, "Oh my God! Teenagers now of days!"

TWO'S COMPANY

by

Graeme Reynolds

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"Simon, wake up. I need to talk to you."

"Hmm, wassup?" the man grunted, and then continued snoring, lost in his dreams.

The woman's brow furrowed and she elbowed the sleeping man in the ribs.

"Eh! What? Who?"

"Oh good, you're awake. As I was saying, we need to talk."

The man looked at the illuminated digits on the alarm clock. 2:30 am. He groaned and pulled the duvet back over his head.

"It's the middle of the night, Susan - can't this wait until tomorrow?"

"No, I'm afraid it can't. I'm leaving you, Simon. I've met someone else and I can't live this lie anymore."

"What? Are you serious? Who is he?"

"It's Derek."

"Derek? Derek my brother?"

"Yes."

"Derek, my two foot tall conjoined twin? That Derek?"

"Yes, how many other brothers do you have called Derek."

"Derek? The little guy attached to my side that eats raw meat and any stray animals that get too close?"

"For God's Sake, Simon, yes! And be quiet or you'll wake him up."

"Wake him up? I'll wake him up alright. Hey you little bastard! Rise and shine," said Simon, punching the lump under the duvet.

The lump groaned and pulled back the covers.

"What the hell do you want fat boy?"

"Derek...he knows...I told him."

"Oh."

"Is that all you have to say? 'Oh?' Well, I have a couple of things I want to know. First of all - how did this happen?"

Susan and Derek looked at each other, and she took Derek's tiny shriveled hand in hers.

"Well, you always go to bed quite early, but Derek is more of a night person. We would stay awake for hours, talking and making love."

"You did what? With me in the bed? Oh my god that's disgusting!"

"No more disgusting than you jiggling up and down with me attached," said Derek. "Did you know he used to put a pillow case over me when he was getting busy with his ex?"

"Simon, you utter bastard!"

"Look, this isn't about me - can we get back to the point please? How long has this being going on?"

"About six months."

"Six fucking months! You've been screwing the growth on my side for six months! What kind of a perverted bitch are you!"

"Derek is more of a man than you'll ever be. He understands my needs."

"He ate the neighbour's cat! What the hell does he know about a woman's needs?"

"You would be surprised at what I know about a woman's needs," said Derek, winking at Susan. "Anyway, you're the one that needs my internal organs to survive. I look on you as my parasite," he added.

"Your parasite! I can't believe I am hearing this. So basically you just expect me to carry on living here, while you two get it on, right in front of me?"

"erm... not exactly," said Susan.

"What?"

"Well," said Derek, "we talked about it and decided that it would be quite awkward if you were to stick around, moaning all the time."

"We don't have a hell of a lot of choice in the matter. In case you hadn't noticed, we are literally joined at the hip."

"We know Simon, we aren't stupid," said Susan. "We'll have to get you removed."

"You can't remove me. I'll die. There isn't a surgeon on the planet that would perform the operation."

"We don't need a surgeon," said Derek. "You are the one that needs my organs to

survive, so all we really need to do is cut enough of you away that it doesn't affect me and then cauterise the wound. We can sell what's left of your internal organs on the black market, and anything we can't sell, I'll just eat."

"What? Well fuck you both! You know what Susan - I'm leaving you - I'm walking out and I am taking my treacherous little shit of a brother with me," said Simon, throwing back the duvet and getting to his feet.

A sharp pain flared under Simon's ribcage, and his legs buckled beneath him. Simon fell to the floor. He looked down to see Derek holding a syringe.

"We thought you might feel like that," Derek said, "so I took the precaution of getting some clinical muscle relaxant before we broke the news."

Simon tried to move, but his limbs refused to respond as the drug flooded through his system. He tried to speak, to cry out in outrage and defiance, but only managed to drool across his chin.

"We tried to get some painkillers too, but they are a lot harder to get hold of - the good ones anyway," said Susan.

"Don't worry bro - this will all be over in a moment. Susan, would you be a sweetheart and pass me the hacksaw?"

MELISSA IN A JUG

by

A.J. Brown

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I found Melissa in a jug on a shelf at Wolfgang's, a little do nothing shop that sits between a meat market and a winery in downtown Columbia. I never noticed the small red brick building with the faded gray trim before. Frosted windows obscured viewing from the outside.

A cowbell clattered when I opened the door, clattered again when the door closed. The room was large—much bigger than I thought it could be—with shelves lining the walls, tables forming aisles. Fluorescents hung from the ceiling, bulbs caked in grime, casting a yellow glow about the room. Dust clung to everything, including the counter at the back of the store, where an old man sat. What little hair he had poked out along his skull, one long strand stretched down the side of his face and disappeared behind his back.

He looked up. I looked away.

The trinkets that lined the tables and shelves were nothing more than what you would find at most souvenir shops in America: small statues, thimbles, decorative plates and spoons, post cards... from the dead.

I found the display odd, lifted a post card from its tray and wiped the dust away.

"That is a post card from George Custer," the man said.

Startled, my heart sped up and I wheeled on one heel. Up close, the man was older than I thought. Wrinkles lined his face, eyelids drooped, teeth yellowed. I fumbled with the card, setting it back in its tray.

"Can I interest you in anything?"

"No, just looking. Thank you, though."

Her voice caught my attention. "Charles, help me," she said. I turned, frowning. I heard my wife, but she sounded so far away, like maybe she was outside or in a closet. I glanced back at the shop owner. He gave me a crooked smile.

Edging away from him, I followed the voice until I reached a shelf filled with glass jugs near the back counter. They were different shapes and sizes and colors, as well. They were marked with white tape, names on each one: Wayne, Robert, Lee, Sandra, Doris... Melissa. And many others.

"Charles, help me," she said again, her voice hollow. "Get me out of here."

I lifted the bottle marked MELISSA off the shelf-it was heavy, much like my Melissa was. There was nothing small about my

Melissa. Large body, large attitude, large and venomous mouth.

"Careful. Those bottles are very heavy," the proprietor said.

"Yeah, I can tell." I gave a nervous chuckle.

"Get me out of here," Melissa said again, this time a bit more anxious. A thump came from inside the jug.

"She seems quite taken with you."

I looked back at the shelves, at the many odd urns "What are these?"

"Those are soul cells," the man said with a smile.

"Soul cells?"

He nodded. "Yes. Some folks need somewhere to be, since not all of them are that pleasant to be around."

I thought of Melissa, my wife of four years, who never made it a habit of being kind to people, especially not me.

"Charles, get me out of here." She was angry.

"How do they get in there?" I asked.

The man shook his head to the side, an odd gesture. "They put themselves in there."

"How?"

"With their deeds." He raised his eyebrows in a 'you understand what I am saying' expression.

"This one is fairly new, isn't it?" I asked, trying to remember the last time I had seen my wife.

"Yes-only had that one since this morning. Had a fit of a time with the lady, if I might say."

A slight sense of fear swept over me, but faded with Melissa's yelling from the jug. "I believe you."

"Charles!"

I winced, almost dropped the bottle.

"Careful," the man snapped. "If the bottle breaks or the cork comes out, the soul goes free."

The thought occurred to me, maybe this old man killed Melissa, but as I said before, she wasn't a small lady. "If you have their souls, where are their bodies?"

"They are disposed of in due time, but, trust me, nothing goes to waste around here."

"Charles! Stop your yapping and get me out of here."

I set the jug back on the shelf, wiped my hands of the icy feel of the glass.

"Charles, what are you doing?" Melissa yelled. "If you don't get me out of here, you'll regret it."

"A feisty one, isn't she?" the old man asked with a toothy smile.

"You can say that again."

"Charles!"

I backed away from the shelf, went back to the post cards. "How much are these?"

"Four dollars."

"For a post card? Seriously?"

"Flip it over and listen."

The backside was blank except for Custer's signature. A moment later, the card began to speak of battles in the civil war and with Native American tribes. Startled, I fumbled the card, caught it without creasing

it. Custer told his story, not missing a beat.

"I'll take it," I said and paid for the card.

I passed Melissa on the way to the door, she yelled at me. I flinched, hurried by her.

"Make sure you stop off at the winery and the meat market. Today's specials are heavy treats."

I smiled. "Thanks. I'll do that."

I opened the door, the cowbell clattered. As it closed behind me, I could hear Melissa's angered voice. The cowbell clattered again. Suddenly, I was hungry for steak and a nice red wine.

FORBIDDEN DESIRE IN A CAVE

by

Annemarie Bogart

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Osama's hand slipped over Petunia's mouth, trying to muffle her groans of pleasure. The feel of her pink skin beneath his naked body made his loins ache. He had never wanted another so much, never craved penetration more than this moment. His unoccupied hand slid over her plump body towards her erect nipple. He massaged gently, then harder. His erection grew with every snort uttered from her covered lips. He moved on to the next nipple, repeating the process, then onto the next, and so on. Sweat slicked over their bodies, as they moved together in ecstasy. Osama grabbed for his erect penis, it throbbed beneath his grip. He pushed it against her virginal opening, wanting to enter its heat and wetness.

Petunia kicked him away, her hoof landing square on his swollen testicles. Osama's breath poured out, the pain waiting

a moment before exploding into sparks of pure ache throughout his system. Vomit filled his mouth and he spit the vile taste onto the rocky floor. Petunia would lap it up later. He fell back onto the blankets, in fetal position unable to catch his breath. The hurt was too obscene to consider anything but soothing it, though that task is impossible. Stars burst on the under lids of his closed eyes. Teardrops escaped, along with a whimper or two.

"I'm sorry, Osama. I didn't mean to nail you in the crotch. I just wanted to stop you from making a mistake we would not be able to erase."

Osama tried to respond, but the pain still bellowed. He needed to wait, unable to even form rational thought at this moment. Helpless, he watched her get up from the pile of blankets and strut to the other side of the cave. Even in agony, his watery eyes can't help but focus on her curvaceous rump and that little swirly tail that bopped with every step.

After a few more moments, the ache lessened enough to sit upright. Osama fumbled to fix his head wrap that had become disheveled during the intimate moment.

"Petunia, I will make this decision for us. You know we both want the same thing. My desire for you grows day by day. I cannot bear it anymore. I need to have you, no matter how wrong the rest of the world thinks it is."

Petunia stomped her front hoof onto the stone encrusted ground. Her snout lifted upward holding uncertainty and stubbornness.

"I can't have you throw away all you have lived for. Al-Qaeda will certainly fall if this love affair was ever to surface, Osama. I just can't let that happen."

Osama pulled a white sheet around his thin waist and stood from the makeshift bed. He knew everything his sweet hog said was true. Everything would collapse. He most likely would be murdered, no, definitely murdered and tortured for committing such acts of indecency. Although every sane thought in his head said run away, stop this madness, he always seemed to find himself sneaking into her sty and ushering her back to his cave for a little midnight slap and tickle.

It had been hard enough even thinking of reasons he possessed a pig. His troops wondered, at first, why he would keep an animal he could not eat. They bought the lame excuse that he needed a pet much more easily than he thought.

Petunia's sagging teats snapped his thoughts back to the present. He swallowed down the salacious contemplation that always accompanied her visual taunts.

"I don't care Petunia. To hell with them, with all of them! If I could simply live here with you and do all those nasty things I've wanted since I first laid eyes on your pink hairy ass, then I would indeed die a happy man. Fuck jihad, and Al-Qaeda. I want you, and no one will stop me or this kinky love inside!"

Petunia's crooked left ear shot up. Footsteps echoed, amplifying with every step

they came, closer to their lurid back-cave getaway.

"Hide me, Osama!"

Petunia scampered past Osama's knobby knees under the pile of sheets and blankets and burrowed herself deep.

"My love, I will not hide you anymore. We will leave this place together. I will build a castle in your honor; in that matter ten castles, where we will make animal sounds as loud as we want as we grind together as one."

Osama tried to walk to the small crevice leading back to his main cave, but the lingering pain made it impossible. So, he cupped his hands over his mouth, and yelled towards the invading steps.

"Leave me alone! I will have no more disturbances tonight!"

The footsteps stopped, hesitated, and then retreated back from where they came. Giddy with excitement of newfound thoughts of sexual bliss with his precious hog, Osama jumped on the improvised bed and snuggled his dearest swathed under 1000-count cotton.

"All our dreams will come true, Petunia."

Osama's hand slipped under the sheet and felt Petunia's moistened vagina, all ready for him.

"Mine sooner than you think."

With a sly grin he stroked his beard contemplating the road he could never return from. He ripped his sheet away, and grabbed his swollen phallus in his sweaty hand. Without hesitation, he entered her inviting crevice. With every thrust, he felt more

exhilarated, closer to living life than ever before. For the first time, he felt alive.

This moment marked the beginning of the disintegration of Al-Qaeda as we know it. From that night on, Osama no longer craved infidel annihilation, but rather only pork pussy. Making the world, in fact, a safer place. God Bless America, and Petunia's hot pig ass.

HUNTING J.K.

by

Kevin Shamel

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Edinburgh, Scotland, 1995.

This is my first time abroad. I'm here to talk to an Englishwoman.

I've met plenty of English people. I've worked with about ten Brits over the past six years. I never knew them very well, of course. One doesn't develop many friendships working in a secret multi-national scientific research lab. It's designed that way.

We don't fraternize outside of work, though we all live on base while we're on the job. It's in the rules.

Besides, if the rest of the team is like me, they take their work home with them. There's no time (ha!) for relaxation on this project. No time for the wife, especially no time for the kid and his inane crap.

Anyway, the English people I've dealt with are absolutely brilliant - isn't that a

British expression? They're the top of the crop. I can't say that I've been exposed to a fair sampling of their countrymen. Certainly, none of my colleagues were obnoxious, obscene, or downright ridiculous. Not like this other English person with whom I've become intimately acquainted—through no fault or desire of my own. The one I'm here to meet.

Dreadful woman.

It is because of her that working at home became nearly impossible. It's her fault about Thomas.

My son is a genius. He's destined for great things.

His mind should be directed toward higher math, astrophysics, membranes, strings, and the ways around relativity! But Thomas doesn't spend hours building representative models of DNA and its radio-frequencies. He doesn't stare at the reaches of the universe through that telescope I bought him.

No, it seems there are more important things for an eleven-year-old to study. It seems that memorizing the table of elements is not nearly as important as memorizing dreadful dialogue, a vast collection of difficultly named characters and how they're all intricately related, and a huge array of senseless words that one must shout around the house at all hours of the day, while waving a pointed stick, jumping off the furniture, and talking to the damned cat like it's a person!

No matter what I've done to curb Thomas' behavior and set him on the right

track, he still dashes about in a purple-lined cape and those stupid John Lennon glasses, screaming things like, "A-Gloria!" and "I've got a cadaver!" or whatever the hell it is.

I fully expected Thomas to develop some hero-worship, his dad being such an important part of such an amazing project - though he's not quite certain what it is I do, he knows it's important. There are texts lying around the house from the greatest minds of history! I go on and on about Planck, and Einstein, Marconi, Edison, even Tesla - their discoveries, practices, and how their amazing minds led us to the most exciting time ever.

I did not expect his hero to be a fledgling wizard from the wasted mind of a... a writer!

Fantasy! It's just what it says it is. Poppycock.

Science fiction is about as close as a fiction writer can come to truth. Otherwise, they're wasting space and time for all of us. Maybe there's something I can do about that now. After this, of course.

I've spent six years working on the most important invention of all time. I did it for the future - for my son. For science and the scientists it will breed. What will happen if those future men of greatness become namby-pamby wanna-be wizards instead? Wasting their best learning years talking about pseudo-mythical monsters and drawing schematics for magic schools and imaginary worlds! What if just one future great mind decides to write fantasy stories instead of

deciphering the cosmic code? What if it's Thomas?

So that's why I'm here.

I'm waiting on this particular street for a particular young woman to come out of her home. She's just finished writing the first installment of her utterly ruinous series of nonsensical novels.

I watched her last night, from the roof across the street. I watched her read and re-read the last of her first story for over an hour. She trolled about the house, window to lighted window, reading her fistful of pages. Twit.

When she comes out, I'm going to talk to her first. I'll try and convince her to give it up. I haven't thought much about what to tell her, other than she's turned my son into a dribbling fruit with all her cabbitch games, flying cars, and pointing of sticks. I'll tell her that if she never makes her silly stories available to the public, Thomas won't waste his time and mind drowning in her made-up world.

Perhaps I'll grab her, and take her to her delirious future of movies, action figures, and lightning-shaped plastic scars. Let her read the biographies, blog entries, and news articles about her special handwritten books. Maybe I should show her how easy it was to learn that she'd be coming out that door in about half an hour. No, that would only encourage her.

Who am I kidding?

I'll probably just kill her. That's why I brought the gun.

WHAT COMES NEXT

by

Andrew Kaspereen

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"Death is hard to come to terms with," I say. "I know that first hand, but when I think about the prospect of dealing with death and financial ruin at the same time, that to me is terrifying."

I am trying to sell a married couple a lucrative life-insurance policy. They smile and nod every so often. I have not had much luck lately selling much of anything.

The man stops nodding and raises his finger and points towards me. "Your eye is falling out of your head, sir."

Being a member of the living-undead tends to distract people from the finer points of your talking points. I put my extended hand out and nod. I touch my eyeball, which feels like a wet stress ball in the form of a large marble, and pop it back into its socket. "You get used to it after a few months I guess." I say, I'm slightly embarrassed.

The wife looks down and tries to smile.

"See I'm a prime example," I smile. "If I had gotten life insurance I wouldn't need to provide for my wife and kid right now and I could go and do things I enjoy."

"What sort of things do you people enjoy?" the man asks.

"I like the beach a bit. If it wasn't for the gaping hole of scar tissue in the center of my chest that shows my graying and moth-eaten organs that makes me feel like an old coat in an attic, I might go out and catch a tan. You'd be amazed what a tan does for the self-esteem."

They nod.

"Mostly though, I like eating garbage from outside of Wal-Mart and reading Eastern European literature."

"Is it hard?" asked the man.

"Well the Russians were always a little dense..."

"No, I mean the zombie thing?" he half-whispers the word zombie.

I do my best not to cringe at the word. "As a living-impaired member of society, I have found that life is different. My wife won't kiss my cheek ever since the time she got a piece of worm on her lip. My daughter has nightmares if I read her a bed time story, but I still can think and I feel a good portion of what goes on around me." I do not want to lose the sale. "If you'll consider these brochures" I say and quickly toss the literature in their direction.

The woman looks at me for the first time in the meeting. "What happened?"

I try to focus on the wall behind her. "I was walking home and I got bit by a large dog. It got infected. I didn't last long...maybe a week. I should have gone to a doctor. I remember the last day I was conscious my daughter was watching Spongebob Squarepants and I kept waking up to the sound of his laughter. I kept thinking that I was in some sort of purgatory or hell."

The family kept looking at me. "How did this happen?"

I smiled. That's what people called it, "this". "Not sure." I say. I readjust my foot and I notice that my leg has popped out of place. I quickly reach down to pop it back in. It makes a noise that sounds like twigs cracking in a bucket of jello. "It works out, you know, my wife Chris needs to take care of Jessica, so I can still work."

"Have you always been in health insurance?" the woman asks.

"The past five years." I fight the urge to start drooling and moaning.

"And you never thought to get life insurance yourself?" asks the man. His wife slaps his wrist and mouths a silent warning to stop talking.

I smile at both of them. "I never thought it was important. Now I think differently. I mean, if I had life insurance, my family would be set. Sure, they would still have me drooling around the house and they would still need to find new places to hide the cat more often so I didn't eat it, but they would know where the next meal was coming from."

There is an uncomfortable silence. I can see my wall clock ticking. It has no numbers and it says, "It's a great time to be alive" in their place. I suppose I keep it up as a joke for the rest of the office folks. They are good sports about this whole thing. I guess when you get down to it, I'm sort of a good sport too. I mean I'm practically a billboard for life insurance. Don't end up like this undead son of a bitch who has to pay taxes and satisfy his craving for brains after work! I can see the commercials, me walking around yelling brains and then shaking hands with a satisfied customer, brains still inside his head.

"Well, you've given us a lot to think about. We appreciate your time." The man says, rising. "We'll be in touch."

I get up and shake both of their hands. They recoil from my clammy handshake. I know I will not see them again.

I sit down in my chair, defeated. I really need a sale as I am paid largely out of my commission pool. I fight the urge to say, "This business is killing me!" loud enough for everyone to hear. I think that joke is getting old. I slam my head on my desk; I see the picture of me standing next to a tree, my wife and child standing slightly apart from me with confused looks on their faces. This picture was taken last week. Most people would be upset, but my tear ducts don't work any longer, and I'm not really sad either. I pick up the phone, think positive thoughts, and hope that this call leads to something new.

CHEETO MONKEY

by

Chris Bowsman

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"Quit hogging the Cheetos, you stupid fuck."

Bill rolls his eyes at Lester's lame excuse for a dirty look. More of this shit? Bill sighs. He doesn't even like Lester.

"Is that your way of saying you want some Cheetos," Bill asks, "because I'm more than happy to share."

Lester glares at Bill, clearly not appreciating the sarcasm. Bill glares back. He opens his eyes as wide as possible, and flares his nostrils, causing Lester to look away.

"So gimme the Cheetos already," Lester says. He tries to glare again, but Bill is still making the ridiculous angry-Anime face. Lester folds his arms, sighs disgustedly, and fixes his gaze back on the television. Bill laughs, and tosses the bag of Cheetos at Lester. Several of them spill out on Lester's lap, causing him to recoil.

He lets out a shriek, and Bill rolls his eyes again.

"Jeez... you believe this guy?" Bill says to the bonobo seated beside him.

"Frankly, no. He's crass, whiny, keeps a messy flat, and it's no secret that he doesn't bathe very often," Jimmy, the bonobo, replies. Jimmy knows the question was rhetorical, but he doesn't care. He's in that sort of mood. "I'd go so far as to say he bloody well stinks."

"Why are you guys even here?" Lester is leaning over his chair, picking Cheetos from around the cushion. He huffs and glares again, this time at Jimmy.

"Bill is here because you invited him over to watch croquet," Jimmy says, "and I'm here because Bill told me, and I didn't believe anyone would actually watch croquet on television. I thought he was putting one over on me, and made a friendly wager of twenty dollars that croquet was not even broadcast--"

"Ahem, speaking of which?" Bill says, hooking his thumb toward the television.

"Ah, yes. Very well, then." Jimmy opens his messenger bag, removes his wallet, and places a twenty in Bill's outstretched hand.

"Yeah, well feel free to leave at anytime," Lester says, still plucking Cheetos from the chair, "especially you, you... you pretentious ape. Why do you even talk like that? You're from Connecticut. You've never even been to England."

Jimmy turns to Bill, and is obviously displeased with Lester's comment. Bill looks

to Lester, shaking his head slightly. "Aw, c'mon man, don't be like that."

"You two come to my house, say rude things to me, eat my Cheetos..."

"Lester, calm down. Why don't we all relax and just watch some croquet. Remember, you've been looking forward to it for weeks." Bill smiles at Lester.

"Uh, um, OK. Just quit being jerks."

"Sure. Whatever you say. Now, didn't you say you had some beer," Bill says, "because these Cheetos are making me thirsty."

"A Guinness for me, thanks," Jimmy says, "and perhaps some popcorn, but not microwave popcorn. I eat stove top popcorn popped with coconut oil."

Lester stares at Jimmy in seeming disbelief. Jimmy stares back.

"Shall I take that as to mean you only have the microwave variety?"

Lester's face turns red, and it becomes quite obvious he has had enough.

"GETOUTGETOUTGETOUTGETOOOOOUUUUUUUUUUT T!"

All three of their heads turn toward the hall as they hear the sound of the toilet flushing. Lopez, the alpaca, enters the living room, and places last month's issue of Rolling Stone on the coffee table.

"So, fellas... what'd I miss?"

THE PULL OUT METHOD

by

Dustin Reade

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She sat across the table, arms folded in anger. I looked down at the plates.

"These dishes aren't going to wash themselves," I said.

She stood up quickly, tears of rage forming in her eyes, grabbed the dishes, and walked into the kitchen. I could hear her banging around in there, cursing under her breath. I walked over to the typewriter and got started.

It was good. The words really flew. It's always good when it's like that: pure, the burning words setting fire to the page. Poetry.

She finished in the kitchen, came in and sat down on the sofa. She had a glass of wine in her hand; deep red wine, the color of old blood on a t-shirt. She looked at me over the glass.

"Writing a story, are you?"

"Yep," I said.

She took a sip of her red wine. She exhaled deeply, smacking her lips, and said, "That's nice."

I stopped typing. "What's nice?"

She looked at me over the glass...She was running her fingers around the rim, and I could hear a faint hum rising up from the blood-red liquid. It made me feel uneasy, that sound. Like something was writhing around in my brain.

"What's nice?" I asked again.

"Oh," she said, "how you can write one of your stories, while I'm in there doing your dishes."

I was in no mood for that argument. I had had it many, many times before; knew all about it. It wasn't really about my writing, and it wasn't really about the dishes. No, it was about me wanting to do the dishes, about understanding how hard her day had been, etc. To which, I was supposed to say, "Why would anyone want to do the dishes?" and so on and on with that skeleton waltz.

Instead, I stood up, holding the typewriter.

"Here you go!" I shouted, and hurled the typewriter through the living room window. Glass rained down everywhere; it got in her hair, and in her wine. Little bits of crystal danced over the surface of the blood.

"Goddamn you!" She screamed.

She jumped off the couch, threw down her wine glass, and marched into the bedroom. When she came back into the living room, she was holding a long, thin stick in

her hand. She walked over to where I was standing. I balled up my fists.

"Don't..."

She raised the wand up to my lips, and I felt my throat go dry.

"Shh," she said, motioning towards the blood-red stain on the floor.

"Get down."

I tried to fight it, tried to resist, but my knees buckled and before I knew what hit me I was down on my knees in the wine, looking up at her.

It was the damndest thing.

She stuck her fingers into the corners of my mouth. "Open," she said.

There was no use fighting, I realized. Something strange had happened, and all I could do was obey, do whatever she said. And the strange thing was I didn't want to fight anymore. It was like all my willpower was gone.

My mouth opened, and she reached her hand inside.

I felt her soft skin with my lips; felt her long, red fingernails slide passed my teeth, tongue, tonsils, and continue down the back of my throat.

"You used to be so sweet," she was saying. "Where did all that sweetness go?"

She was in up to the elbow now, and I could feel her hand going passed my heart. She stopped there for a moment, touched it.

"Tickle, tickle," she giggled, before continuing on to my gut. She felt around in there, and I felt her wrap her hand around something.

A horrible sensation, it about made me sick, and she started pulling her hand out.

Her hand came out of my mouth, and I looked at it.

"What the hell!" I shouted.

"There's some of that sweet stuff!" She smiled.

She was holding a little yellow bird in her hand. I looked and looked at the thing. The little bird ruffled up its feathers, trying to dry itself. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It had a little orange beak and everything!

She walked over to the window, opened it a few inches, and sat the bird on the sill.

"Don't let it get away!" I said. I was surprised at how high my voice sounded, high pitched, pleading; the voice of someone on the verge of tears. She walked over and rested her hand on my cheek.

"Oh, baby," she said, "it's okay! You gotta spread the love around! Now, open!"

I obediently opened my mouth, and she once again reached inside.

I wanted to see what else she could find in there, passed my lips, lungs, and tongue. Her hand busily reaching around, probing the dark recesses of my body, finding...what?

"Ah!" she said happily as her hand popped out. "Oh my, that is too cute!"

I looked.

A little Teddy bear holding a satin heart sat upright in her palm. The heart had white letters that said, "I WUV YOU!!!" I shook my head in disbelief.

"That came out of me?" I asked incredulously.

She nodded. "Yeah," she said. "Isn't it precious?!"

She sat the bear down and reached inside again. I looked at the bear as she dug around. I looked into its little brown eyes.

"I guess it is kind of cute," I thought.

"Aha!" she exclaimed joyously, pulling her hand up through my lower intestine. "I found another one!"

It had been a strange day.

She pulled her hand out and we looked at what she had found.

BLOODLINE

by

Sheldon Lee Compton

Published on The New Flesh 04/09/2010

Drunk on half a fifth of American Honey, Gordon cut the end of his big toe off while trying to trim his nails with a pocket knife.

He was fortunate, had been waiting for just something like this to happen. It was out of his hands now. Nothing he could do.

Gordon stuck his leg out and watched the blood ooze up from the white, fish-mouthed gash then down his foot, pooling on the carpet. The pinched end of his toe lay in the middle of the blood, a yoke, the unborn beginnings, all of him folded there into that lump of skin and tissue.

He imagined another him would spring up from that mixture, form right there in the living room, naked and confused. He knew it would stumble to him and talk baby talk and sit in his lap and ask him to read it a story.

Here's a story, Toe Head, Gordon would say. He would read it Dr. Seuss books slowly and then tell it to go get some clothes on. It would return wearing a pair of his jeans and one of his t-shirts, and it would no longer be his baby Toe Head. Now it was a teenager, and everyone knew how teenagers could be. So he would send it to the room.

Gordon thought of what to do about his teenage Toe Head. From the room he could hear loud music and voices.

Toe Head! You better not be on the phone, dammit!

He really shouldn't curse at the child. What kind of impression does that make? What would happen if Toe Head were to cut himself off a little lump of toe? What would happen then? Vicious circle. That's what would happen.

Considering this, Gordon eased himself up from the floor and went to the bedroom. He shoved open the door and turned on the light.

I really shouldn't have swore at you like that, Toe Head. I'm sorry. I just got upset.

His daughter, smelling of soap and clean pajamas, rolled over in bed.

Daddy?

Yes?

It's not nice to call people names. That hurts my feelings.

Gordon closed the door and turned to see the trail of blood from the living room, snaking down the hall to the bedroom. He tried to follow it back to where it started,

but couldn't keep up. It had broken in places and very soon he lost his way.

MANGENI'S LULLABY

by

Eugene Gramelis

Published on The New Flesh 04/19/2010

We hear the cracking of their guns long before anyone sees the dusty wake of their trucks.

I have just enough time to snatch my precious Mangeni from her wicker cot and crawl into the shelter beneath the church with the other villagers.

There is deadly silence, lest we be heard by the intruders.

We can hear Reverend Kaikara protesting above us as the rebels defile our place of worship with their presence. There is a gunshot, and we hear the Reverend's voice no longer. This is followed by distant laughter and the sounds of overturning pews.

They are searching for the hidden hatch to our refuge.

Mangeni begins to cry.

Frantically, I rock her back and forth in my arms, but this only makes her crying worse. Yellow eyes - wide and terrified -

plead with me in the darkness; the hot, sour breath of those nearest to me is redolent with fear and thick with panic. Sweat begins to trickle down my nose. Finally an old woman with yellow teeth hisses at me. I put my hand over Mangeni's mouth and I softly whisper a Ugandan lullaby into her warm ear.

This seems to work.

When the looters have gone, the villagers pour from the shelter with a collective sense of relief. I remain behind, clutching my baby's lifeless body to my chest.

At last, I can scream.

THE NEURON THIEVES

by

Sean Monaghan

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Iaim tapped Bridgid's goggles. "Can you hear okay?"

"My ears are just fine. We're alone."

Iaim looked along the pipe. Even with his own goggles dialed up to 120, it was still as black as if he had his eyes closed. He wished he had hearing as good as Bridgid's. He'd worked hard to get her some radargoggs, even if she didn't like them much, at least she could see sometimes. "Okay," he told her. "I'm going to put out an IR flare and we can get to the spigot. Let me know if you hear anything."

"Roger."

Iaim cocked the launcher, felt the dial and let it self-level. "We good?"

"Roger."

Iaim touched the trigger. The launcher spluttered and jerked. Invisible for a moment, the flare spun along the pipe, even Iaim could hear the whine. Then it ignited

and his goggles automatically clipped back down to five, then three.

"I see the spigot," Iaim said. "Forty-five metres. You on the tether? I'm running now."

"Right with you."

Iaim splashed through the sluggish ankle-deep waste along the bottom of the pipe. Mostly it was offal and blood, slightly diluted from the residues of the purges. He had nose-clips and his suit was triple-rubbered, the boots hefty with celermet overshoes. They would still have to spend an hour in the shower when they got back.

"We've got alarms," Bridgid said as she splashed along behind. "I think three or four levels up."

"Bad?"

"Just a double-check, but something's picked up the flare as an anomaly. They'll do a sweep, but they don't have an intruder warning yet."

"Good. Slowing down now." They were nearly at the spigot. Iaim pulled the bladder from his satchel as they pulled up. He tried to breathe shallow to let Bridgid hear.

"It's gone quiet," she said. "The alarms are shut down."

"They've just decided it was false, perhaps?"

"We hope. Are we there?"

"Yep."

In the guttering light from the flare Iaim read the patinaed legend on the plate above. Cerebral Drain. He lifted the opening

on the bladder to the spigot. He turned the handle and the gloopy flow started flopping into the canvas container.

"Something else," Bridgid said.

The brain fluids slowly drained into the bladder. He could feel the weight increasing.

"Something's happening," Bridgid said. "I can hear movement above."

"I think this is a good load," Iaim said. "Franco will pay well for this." The more viscous hauls were always more concentrated and more valuable.

The container already felt about half-full to Iaim. If the spigot kept pouring at this rate, then they would have enough for Franco's neuron vats for weeks. Perhaps they could buy Bridgid the eye operation.

"Oh," Bridgid said.

"What?"

"They've ..."

But then Iaim could hear it too. Liquid in the main pipe.

"We don't have long," she said.

"Just let me—"

The roar was growing, increasing in intensity.

"Only moments," Bridgid said. "How much do we have."

Iaim shut the spigot off. "Come on, let's get to the hatch." The bladder lurched in his hand as he took a step back. The sound blasted down, as if there was a building collapsing above them.

"We've gotta go."

In the distance, right at the edge of the flare light, Iaim saw the flood of waste rolling at them.

"Where's the hatch?" Bridgid said.

"A hundred yards."

Bridgid slowed. "We won't make it." The tether went taut.

"Bridgid."

The air passed by like a gale now.

"Too late."

Iaim yanked the tether and hauled her along. She stumbled after. He reached the ladder and clipped the bucket to his belt. "Start climbing," he said, stuffing the rungs into her hand.

The first wave of liquid hit their legs, rushing across and dragging at them. Iaim pulled himself up, one rung, two. Bridgid followed. The viscous liquid tugged at their legs.

Then the main volume struck, immersing them. Iaim hung on, pulled up, pulled up again. The liquid kept tearing him away. He couldn't breathe.

It was probably a week's worth of funeral home vat purging. Stored just to flush neuron thieves like them. But they would make it.

He touched the hatch. The pipe was full, there wasn't even any air space above. Iaim twisted the handle. He pushed the hatch open.

The edge of the concrete was firm and dry. Iaim pulled himself up, sodden and dripping. He looked back at the hole and pulled at the tether. The end snapped up and slapped the rough concrete.

He stuck his arm into the subsiding flow.

"Bridgid!" he shouted, knowing it was too late. Bridgid was gone.

He leaned back, staring. The bladder wobbled, still clutched in his other hand. What a waste, he thought, crying, and he hurled it away. Striking a curb, the bladder split and the contents drained out and away through a grate.

ADVENTURES OF MY LITTLE CARNIVOROUS PONY

by

Jodi MacArthur

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My little Carnivorous Pony sits in the corner of the forest. She is troubled because she refuses to be My Little Vegetarian Pony. No one will play with her, and this is why she cries.

Down the forest trail, Two Horn Unicorn sniffs Blue Smurfs, and Pegasus plays leapfrog with Purple Polka Dotted Leprechauns. They are different, unique in their own special way, and everyone considers this fine and dandy. Fine and dandy is normal as a summer's day in July.

My Little Carnivorous Pony is abnormal and strange. Abnormal and strange is awkward as a summer's day in December.

It is simply not fair, but she decides this will not trouble her any longer.

My Little Carnivorous pony stands. When Leaping Zombie snarls and leaps by with a mug of hot cocoa and a sweater, she hisses and shows fangs.

Her stomach rumbles and My Little Carnivorous Pony turns her nose up at the grass, trots over to the Blue Smurfs, and much to Two Horn Unicorn's dismay, fetches one up in her sharp teeth, and trots away to eat her dinner.

THE ACCUSED

by

Chris Reed

Published on The New Flesh 05/12/2010

Bill Finley was eating chips and watching football when a voice on the television said, "And now let's pause for a molestation sentencing."

Bill stopped chewing. Had he heard that right? Molestation? He'd seen programming interrupted for all types of crime, everything from petty larceny to murder, but this was something new.

"Did you hear that?" he asked Kathy. When his wife didn't answer, he looked at the couch where she lay and realized her eyes were closed. She'd been so withdrawn lately. Bill tried to remember the last time they were intimate. Ever since Taylor was born, their relationship had gone quickly down hill. Now only his daughter gave him any attention. She lay curled up on his lap, face nestled in his chest, a miniature version of her mother.

Bill turned his attention back to the television. The screen turned bright yellow, then super-novad to white. Bill put up his hand to shield his eyes. The light dimmed. When he took his hand down, a man wearing a blue Party uniform and black sunglasses was staring at him. "This is Child Protective Services, responding to allegations of child molestation. How do you plead?"

Bill squinted his eyes, used his free hand to point to his own chest. "Me?"

"Yes you."

Bill didn't want to look guilty, but he was having a hard time breathing normally. A charge like this was serious, and often dealt with very harshly.

"I don't understand what's going on," Bill said, shifting nervously in the metal viewing chair. "There must be a mistake."

"We don't make mistakes," the man said firmly.

"But—"

Look at your left hand."

Bill looked down and found his left hand resting on Taylor's backside. He felt a flash of guilt, and moved his hand onto the arm of the chair. He looked back at the television, at the man on the screen. Although the glasses obscured his eyes, Bill knew there was evil in them. Could feel their stare boring a hole right through him.

"He touches her like that all the time," Kathy said.

Bill turned to see her sitting up, and realized her sleeping had been an act.

Bill snapped his attention back to the Party member. "She's lying! She's just jealous because Taylor loves me more!"

"Taylor!" he said, shaking the child awake.

The girl looked up at him drowsily. "What?"

He pointed to the TV and said, "Tell the man I've never hurt you!"

The girl rubbed her eye with her little fist, looked at the man on the TV, then back to her father, confused.

"Hurry!" Bill pleaded. "There isn't much time!"

"Let go of the girl, Mr. Finley," the man said.

Instinctively, Bill pulled Taylor closer.

Kathy appeared beside him. She took hold of Taylor's arm. "You heard him," she said. "Let her go."

He relinquished his hold, and looked into his wife's eyes pleadingly. "Why, Kathy?"

"You've neglected me since she was born," she whispered. Then to Taylor: "Come with Mommy."

Bill watched as Kathy led their daughter out of the room. He looked back at the television.

"William Adam Finley," the man said, "I charge you with first degree criminal sexual conduct, a crime punishable by death."

Before Bill could blink, a surge of electricity shot from the television to the chair. Bill's muscles tensed. His eyes bulged. His clothes began to smoke.

"You have the right to remain silent," the man on the television said, as Bill's hair burst into flame. "Anything you say can and will be used to defame your character after your death."

The man paused, listening for something to document, but Bill's charred lips produced no sound. His head was now just a black cinder, his body a smoldering shell of ash.

"The accused has declined to speak," the man said.

The seat of the chair dropped open, and Bill's remains tumbled down a long shaft, and disappeared into the darkness. The seat swung back on its hinges and clicked back into place.

Kathy led Taylor back into the room, brushed the residue of ash off the seat, and propped her up on the chair. "How about some cartoons?" she said.

"Where's Daddy?"

Kathy ignored the question, and changed the channel to 100. A large, brown bear, with big blue eyes, dressed in pajamas and a nightcap was sitting on a bed. A window behind him revealed a black, star-filled sky. "Hi, Taylor," he said.

"Hi," the girl said shyly.

"Do you know what time it is, Taylor?"

Taylor shook her head.

"It's sleeeeeeepy time," the bear said. He put the flat of his hand to his mouth and feigned a yawn. "And do you know what we do when it's sleepy time?"

"Go to sleep?"

"That's right. So close your little eyes and think about nice things."

Taylor closed her eyes. The bear continued: "Things like ice cream... and cookies... and presents... and Mommy..."

"And Daddy," Taylor said.

"No," the bear said softly. "Not Daddy. There is no Daddy."

Taylor's eyes popped open. "But—"

"There never was any Daddy. There's only Mommy, do you understand, Taylor? Only Mommy."

Taylor was confused, but the bear's soothing voice soon lulled her eyes shut again.

"Say it with me, Taylor: Only Mommy... only Mommy..."

"Only Mommy," Taylor said, her voice barely audible.

"That's right," the bear said. "Only Mommy."

Her lips parted to repeat the mantra, but she soon fell asleep as Mommy stroked her hair.

ANYTHING MORE THAN TWO

by

Lee Hughes

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The candles created a music that caused the shadows to dance. A finger pointed to a rickety chair. Harvey closed his coat, straightened his pants and sat. He sniffed, and said, "Your little den stinks."

"How'd you find me?" The voice was ridden with disinterest.

"Wasn't as easy as last time, but, you're not as clever as you are fucked up," Harvey replied, pulling out a smoke and sparking it up.

"The waitress, she gave me away." Not a question.

"When I stumbled upon her staring at her feet even though they were on the other side of the room it made me think that it's not the shenanigans of a normal fuck-up. It could only be the work of a special fuck-up, one like you," Harvey said, taking another hit.

It nodded.

Harvey drew on his cigarette before letting free the smoke. He watched the freak through the rising blue tendrils. "Last time I took pity, this time..."

The thing cut him off. "This time no slap on the wrist." It drew its legs up to its chest from its place in the corner.

Harvey nodded, and said, "Correct. This time I'm gonna do the job properly." Harvey dropped the cigarette, leant forward and screwed it into the thick layer of dust on the floor.

The thing chuckled and then coughed.

Harvey knew why the sound was so odd. "Like a leech, gorged far past the point of satiation."

The thing struck its bony chest and hacked up a quart's worth of congealed blood and then laughed. "The overspill always ends up in my lungs. In '98 I forgot to purge and the blood scabbed."

"That won't happen again." Harvey promised.

The thing ignored him and looked over to the stone coffin. "I sat with her for over a month after you're father had slain her. I didn't leave the mausoleum, not even to eat, imagine what I looked like then."

Harvey looked over at long, cracked stone box, then back to the thing.

"Let's get this over with."

The thing managed another chuckle and another little cough as it spent the rest of the blood in its lungs. "I made you show yourself, you have no weapons. There is no way you can finish me. Not unless you've

somehow earned a wooden leg and plan to dance upon my chest."

The thing laughed loud, and it laughed long.

Harvey shrugged and said, "You things are sly, so I need to be sharper, keener, and a little more thoughtful." He left the chair and headed over to the stone coffin. He ran a hand around the length of it before stopping. He looked over his shoulder. "You've become too comfortable with your skills and that's wrong, and it goes for any occupation.

"Please, entertain me, how do you plan on vanquishing me?"

Harvey turned around. His zipper was down, his penis was out and he had his dominant hand around it.

The thing cackled. "Hardly an apt weapon, though perhaps impressive to the ladies that enjoy a shallow ploughing."

Harvey strode forward and started to urinate in the direction of the thing. The first drop that touched brought forth a scream. The trickle a howl. The full flow a bestial shriek that threatened to crack the very stone around them.

His urine worked like the lash of a whip, stroking runs in the thing's skin, delving deep into the flesh. It cowered as it was wounded and wetted. "How?" Was its call.

Harvey pissed until he could piss no more. "Nobody said holy water needed to be carried within a vessel such as a flask, or a vial, did they?"

The thing grunted.

Harvey picked up the old chair and broke it. He grabbed one of the legs from the rubble and bore down upon the pitiful creature. "And now I have a stake. I knew the chair would be here. Do you know why I know? Because, like you I've sat on it before. I sat on it whilst my father purged this world of your mother. He cut her mother-fucking head clean off. Your turn." Harvey raised the stake and then crashed it down into the things chest. It hollered for a second and then gargled as its insides shuddered and faltered to a stop.

Harvey gave his penis a shake, only two though; his father had always said that anything more than two shakes can be construed as masturbation.

GUIDE NUMBER 3

by

Sean Monaghan

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Introduction

Serial killers have been around for centuries. It is only over the last twenty-five years that it has been an accepted, if underground, means of artistic expression.

Often diminished through entertainment (TV shows, movies, etc.) such artist serial killers are deeper and more considered than popular media would lead us to believe.

Most artist serial killers operate in isolation and their achievements viewed by only small, often unsympathetic audiences. Their exhibitions are frequently cordoned and inaccessible, then quickly broken down by belligerent authorities.

This series of brochures seeks to inform the wider public of the aesthetics of these elusive artists and, we hope, to bring a broader understanding of their efforts.

Fitch Micklin

Born in 1971 in Gainsfield, Nebraska, Fitch Darnell Micklin and his three siblings were raised by an alcoholic prostitute mother. While many believe that such an upbringing is a precursor to artistic endeavours, none of Fitch's siblings pursued careers in the arts: one is a lawyer, another a foreman and of the third there is no trace.

Fitch was known for his art from an early age - elementary teachers frequently displayed his works on classroom walls. Fitch excelled at high school, of particular note was his bone folio - coarse paintings of skeletons, using ground and dyed bone paste as the paint base.

Following high school, Fitch was expelled from the Kent Art School in Gainsfield in 1990. The faculty disapproved of his installation piece "Badger dismembering a pure-breed show cat". In the documentation it was noted that the taxidermied family cat in the piece belonged to one of the faculty members.

First Independent Foray

During 1992 Nebraska police discovered three of Micklin's pieces in Omaha and Lincoln. Similar to his Kent piece, two of these involved modelled attack scenes: the pieces entitled "Mugger with 90-year-old" and "Woman eviscerates rapist". The third, "Male nurse self-injects morphine" was a separate commentary and caused a stir

through the Nebraska medical community. The pieces were removed and buried. Photographic records remain sealed in the Nebraska police files.

Later co-ordination with Iowa officials suggested that a fourth piece found in Walnut soon after was possibly also Micklin's. Titled "Transitory man stabs woman", the piece was less aesthetic in its arrangement. Photographs of this are easily found through internet search - and it is clearly not Micklin's work. Micklin himself vehemently denied having been out of Nebraska (at the time) and was understandably furious at the damage to his reputation caused by such sub-standard copy-cat work.

Second phase work

In 1998 Micklin began to actively pursue the exhibition of his works. Rather than leaving installations to be found he had the new works delivered to galleries. His approach changed radically and this sets him apart from the usual serial killer artist.

From 1998 until 2002, Micklin removed a single bone from each of thirty people and created unique and individual works on these tibias, ulnas, tarsals, mandibles and so on. The remains of each body was left in situ - be that in a park, a car or their own bed.

Micklin intricately decorated these bones with a mix of scrimshaw, carving, painting and inlaying. These astonishing

works are amongst the finest examples of Micklin's creativity.

The works usually arrived by delivery service at a gallery some months after the bone's removal. Most gallery owners did not display the works, but contacted authorities who immediately confiscated the artwork. A few fortunate people at the Cottonwood Shade Gallery in Pine Forks were able to view the piece "Bird Flight over Glacier National Park". The gallery owner was expecting a ceramic piece with a similar title from one of her regular artists and so Micklin's piece was displayed, if mislabelled. When the expected piece arrived, Micklin's work was unfortunately switched out (though to all accounts the other work was inferior and did not ultimately sell).

Perhaps the best known work from this period is his "Green River, River" - the femur from a woman in Green River, Wyoming, decorated from right to left with a flowing river which traces its way from the watershed through to the sea, including very detailed and technically correct pictures of many fish and invertebrates which populate the rivers of the western states. The bone was mounted horizontally on a stainless steel plinth and encased in a sealed cylindrical jar. The bone, at the request of the woman's family, was unfortunately destroyed.

Third Phase - "The Silver Strangler"

From 2002 until 2008 Micklin was on hiatus. Many have suggested that his creat-

ivity was exhausted. Others say that investigations forced him to keep a low profile.

From June 2008 new pieces began arriving regularly at New York galleries. These bones were inlaid with silver leaf. The bone donors for these most recent pieces had been strangled and so, as is the penchant for the most popular serial killers, Micklin was given the somewhat auspicious name "The Silver Strangler".

His most notable artwork from this period was "Telluride mining riot", a piece which tells the story of the 1899 mine disputes progressively through a continuous silver image, which can be followed along the bone from top to bottom, rotating as a helix.

Despite some cleverly timed deliveries, none of the pieces were ever actually shown. There are photographs in New York Police Department records, and some of the bones are in the vaults. Families did not wish them returned.

The Future

Micklin's future activities remain uncertain. The last of the Silver Strangler pieces was delivered in May 2010, three weeks after his incarceration (his delivery routing was complicated, in part to avoid authorities, which explains the delay).

Micklin was awaiting trial for close to one hundred murders, but escaped and is currently described as being "at large". We

can only hope for some more brilliance from
this gifted artist before he is recaptured.

FEARS OF A CLOWN

by

Graeme Reynolds

Published on The New Flesh 06/04/2010

"Give it back, Andy!"

Lucy lunged for the clown doll that was held in the boy's outstretched arm. Andy held the doll above his head with his left hand as he blocked her with his right.

"You want it back? Why do you want an old thing like this for anyway? Look - its falling apart!"

Andy reached up and plucked one of the old dolls eyes from its head and threw it at Lucy. She shrieked and clawed at his arms.

"It was my Granmama's! It's REALLY OLD!"

"Well, you can have it back - a bit at a time" said Andy, laughing as he tore off the clowns other eye and threw it at her.

"Please Andy!" Lucy sobbed. "Let me have him back. PLEASE?"

Andy grinned at her.

"You have to say that you're a dirty little gypsy thief."

Lucy hitched in a breath, and wiped her tears away, stammering, "I'm a dirty little gypsy thief."

"And do you know where thieves go?"

"Where?"

"They go straight to hell."

Andy ripped the head off the doll and scattered the pieces over her. Fluffs of cotton drifted onto the floor, clinging to her hair like snowflakes. Andy walked away, laughing.

Lucy's face darkened as she glared after the boy.

"We'll see who ends up in hell Andy, we'll just see!"

Andy felt pleased with himself as he headed towards the arcade. He hated clowns - ever since his father had gotten one to perform for his eighth birthday. BoBo the clown had stunk of whisky and urine, and had fallen into Andy's cake while trying to do a cartwheel, before vomiting on Andy's presents. It had been the worst day of his life.

He reached the arcade, and was about to go inside when he noticed another clown across the street. This one could have been a full size replica of Lucy's doll - right down to the red frizzy hair and the fluffy buttons along the front of its white satin suit. The clown raised a hand, and slowly waved at Andy. He gave the clown the finger.

The clown looked at him for a moment and pushed the corners of its mouth down

into a frown, before reaching up and plucking its eyes from its sockets. Black ooze dripped from the ragged holes in the clown's face and it waved at him once more.

A knot of terror tightened in Andy's stomach and the boy ran into the arcade to phone his mother.

Andy's mother arrived ten minutes later, and he got into the car without a word. They had gone three blocks and the car had stopped at traffic lights when Andy saw the clown again, standing in the entrance to a shopping mall. It still held its eyeballs in its hand and waggled them in the boy's direction before striding towards the stationary car.

"Mum! It's the clown! It's coming to get me!" he yelled at his mother.

"What clown? What's the matter with you Andy?"

The lights turned green, and the driver behind her honked his horn. She put the car into gear and drove off just as the clown reached the edge of the sidewalk, its long yellow fingernails reaching for him. Andy watched it through the rear window as the car moved away. The clown was waving at him again. Andy shuddered and said nothing for the rest of the journey home.

Andy sat silently through his evening meal, and then went straight to his room.

"Andy!" his mother called from downstairs, "I hope you aren't sitting up there in the dark!"

Andy got up and went to draw the curtains to his bedroom window.

Outside, in the back garden, stood the clown.

The clown turned its head up to Andy and slowly waved to him. It then started walking towards the back door of the house.

Andy's stomach lurched as he heard two single raps from downstairs.

"Mum! Don't answer the door!"

From the kitchen came the sound of breaking glass and the start of a scream that was abruptly cut off, followed by an agonizing silence.

"Mum?" Andy called, his voice wavering.

The sound of something heavy and hard hitting the floor came from downstairs. After a moment there was another sound. A rhythmic "Thwack, Thwack, Thwack. An image of long clown shoes leaving bloody footprints on the kitchen floor flashed into Andy's mind. Getting louder...closer.

Andy fled to the bathroom and locked the door, tears streaming down his face.

The footsteps became muffled by the carpet in the hallway. A board creaked on the stairs.

Andy curled himself up into a ball behind the ceramic bath and tried to stifle his sobs, holding the scream that wanted to break free inside him. What had happened to his mother? He imagined her eyeless head lying on the kitchen floor next to her still twitching body.

Mum! A wave of grief flooded through him, tears flowing freely across the boy's face.

The light from the hall dimmed as something obscured the frosted glass window.

He knew what was out there, but was unable to resist the overpowering urge to look. Two firm raps resounded from the door. Maybe it was his Mum after all? Maybe she was OK?

He craned his head around the side of the bath.

The clown's face filled the window, the glass blurring the features, causing them to melt together into a nightmare mask of white and red. Its wide smile twisted into a grimace.

It lifted its hand and slowly waved at him, then placed a long yellow fingernail against the glass and began to trace a single word in wide red streaks.

His name. Andy. Written in his mother's blood.

As the handle began to turn, Andy screamed.

Across the street, Lucy sat back on her bed. A smile played across her face as she cradled her clown doll in her arms.

SEARCHING FOR STORMS

by

Tania Luna

Published on The New Flesh 06/07/2010

I shouldn't have tasted the raindrops. I shouldn't have fallen onto the earth, mouth open, giggling like a girl. But I did. And the rain had tasted sweet as daydreams.

My mother had said it constantly when I was a child:

"Candice, don't you open that mouth when the rain comes."

But it rained so rarely that a long time passed since the fear melted into curiosity. And it had been even longer since my mother spoke. I was a grown woman, and women had nothing to say to one another.

When the sky turned purple and heavy, and the mothers pulled their kids into shelters, I stayed outside, alone amid the waterfall cascading from the ruptured sky.

Then the symptoms began. I thought it was my imagination, but the voices were persistent. Resonant sounds, like statues

speaking into your ear. At first they only mused:

"That man, he licks his lips in thirst."

"See there? An infant drinking from her mother's breast."

I nodded, afraid to do more or less. Then came the commands.

"See that fountain, Candice? Step into it and drink."

Staring down at my shoes, hiding my flushed cheeks beneath a curtain of dark hair, I obeyed.

"She tasted rain water, children," the mothers whispered.

"What shame she must feel."

The cool water rose to my thighs. I gripped the stone structure and lifted my chin. As the water rushed into my mouth, I noticed that I did not feel shame.

At dawn, the voices sent me to suck the dewdrops off flower petals.

They willed me to climb trees and fill my mouth with juicy, purple berries. They had me kiss strangers till I could taste what they'd been drinking. Children pointed, and mothers tried to shield their little eyes.

The voices rumbled like thunder. I couldn't make out the words now, but I knew what I needed. I couldn't wait here.

I crossed my field and stopped by a wooden cabin that had once been my childhood. My mother sat on the porch, rocking in a creaky chair.

"Come with me," I said. Her gray eyes widened. She hadn't heard my voice since I

was young. I thought she started rising, but she just fell back into the chair and swayed in place.

"Yes, I drank the rainwater. I disobeyed, but I don't regret it."

My mother shook her head slowly, as though it too would creak, and said nothing.

"What?" I demanded, "Tell me what you're thinking."

She was silent a long time, searching for her voice in some forgotten room.

"You'll be thirsty forever, Candice."

Her voice had aged.

It had lost all of its melody.

"Yes," I said, "I'm going to search for storms."

"They will only make you thirstier," she said.

"So I will keep drinking."

She turned from me as though I were an unpleasant memory. I kissed her frail hand and looked out. The breeze carried the taste of salt. The horizon was endless.

TEETH

by

Chris Bowsman

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The corners of my mouth curve downward as I pluck a single pubic hair from the bristles of my toothbrush. I stare at it for a moment before dropping it in the sink. I rinse off the brush and reach for the toothpaste. Somewhat surprisingly, the toothbrush does not taste like pubic hair or crotch sweat. Minty-fresh Crest is the only flavor present.

I spit a mouthful of foam into the sink, then turn on the water, rinsing it and the lone curly hair down the drain. There is a small black spec left in the basin, and it makes me think of crab lice. I don't think that is actually what it is, yet I can't help but wonder if my toothbrush could have become infested with them from the pubic hair. I know that crab lice are very small, so it stands to reason that a great many of them could occupy the surface area of a strand of hair. Especially a curly hair,

which, though it may appear somewhat short, turns out to be much longer when straightened. My mouth begins to itch as I'm thinking about this. I'm not usually one for paranoia, but I reach for the mouthwash, just in case.

After swishing the purple liquid (I doubled the recommended time of thirty seconds), I spit, the itching replaced by a slightly numb, chemical-burned feeling. It reminds me of the time I had to siphon gas from my second-cousin's car, and wound up with a mouthful. Luckily, I know that the mouthwash burn will fade much quicker.

I put my toothbrush back in the hanger, and see my step-brother's brush. Green with a red stripe. I think about how my step-brother borrowed my car last week, and returned it with no gas, a broken headlight, and a flat tire. I think about how he folds the covers backwards on my books when he reads them, and how he never puts DVDs back in the right case, and all the other asshole things he does. I think about this as I stick his toothbrush down my pants, scrubbing between my balls and ass. The bristles tickle my ass crack as I think about my step-brother brushing his teeth with the brush, covered in sweat and hair...

And I can't help but get a bad feeling about how the hair may have gotten onto my own toothbrush.

FEEDING TIME

by

Richard Godwin

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It looked like a small brown puppy. Its ears curled slightly at the sides and it panted irregularly.

They brought it home in a shoe box and laid it on the bed where they sat watching as they drank cool shots of vodka until dawn began bleeding.

"You look so nice in your orange suit", he said to her with that twinkle in his eye.

She was putting on her make-up and turned to face him and said "Johnny, we made this, ain't it beautiful?"

"Sandra, anything that came out of you would be beautiful."

It moved a little on the bed and yawned showing stained yellow teeth and the curvature of a sharpened chiseled fang.

Soon they were lying next to their box of moving flesh panting.

Johnny moved with slow and ponderous lust across her swollen belly and she screamed until his ears were throbbing.

Afterwards he lay there smoking and she licked the top of the burning cigarette. There was the sound of sirens outside as she stood admiring her swollen tongue in the mirror.

Behind her Johnny tipped vodka on the head that jutted out of the shoe box.

"They like that", he said. "Tips them over towards humanity."

"You talk so clever Johnny, I can't understand what you're saying sometimes", Sandra said.

"Making them drink makes them human."

"Oh yeah?"

She walked over to him and stroked his head, running her long nails through his matted hair and resting his head against her breasts.

"Feeding time. I need to suckle it", she said.

"And when its mouth is full of your milk it will be human."

He lifted the small brown creature out of the box and Sandra took it and placed one of her nipples in its mouth. She rolled her eyes and seemed to inhabit some brief sphere of ecstasy before she began screaming.

She threw it down on the bed.

"Look what it's done to my tit", she said. Blood was pouring from her nipple and she reached for the knife that lay on the dresser.

"I'll hack its head off."

Johnny took the knife from her and held her until she started sobbing.

They did not hear the footsteps in the hallway.

On the bed the small brown creature bled.

Johnny had stuck it with the knife while he held Sandra in his tattooed arms.

The police cars outside formed an orderly line along the avenue.

Neighbours stood at their garden gates.

When Sandra saw that Johnny had stuck the thing they had brought there she poked and prodded the wound, listening intently to the shrill shriek like a child that has found an insect to torture.

"Do you think my tits will be all right?" she said.

"They're always all right, you just keep em in that dress of yours when we go out."

"Oh Johnny."

"Well call me romantic."

"I'll call you whatever you want."

"We do seem to make a lot of babies."

"An the doctors told me I was infertile."

"Just shows how wrong they can be."

"I've lost track of all the children I've had. How many a month is it?"

"Honey I don't know, I never was much good at rithmetic."

She stood preening herself before the mirror.

"They're never as good-looking as us", she said.

"We's pretty neat, it's a hard thing to do."

"How did we meet again Johnny?"

"I told you."

"Tell me again."

"We been living together for a year now."

"I know, but before that."

"You and I belong to a club."

"I ain't no member of no club."

"Yes you are."

"Which club?"

"The Society For The Betterment Of Mankind."

"Oh yeah, I remember."

She put on her top and looked vaguely out of the window.

"Time to feed baby", Johnny said, and he passed it to her.

But the small brown thing wrestled free of his grip and shot across the floor and hid under a cupboard.

They got a wire coat hanger and opened it up until it was a sharp point and stuck it under the cupboard until the thing began shrieking again.

Just then the door burst open and two police officers entered.

They held guns pointed at them.

Johnny and Sandra lay on the floor while they cuffed them.

They led them out through the front door into the street where a swarm of neighbours stared and talked among themselves.

As the car sped away the only shapes visible to the prying eyes were the blurred outlines of their orange suits.

Two neighbours waited behind and talked.

"Escaped from a nuthouse", one said.

"What was that thing?"

"Sandra could never have kids and went crazy cause of it. She catches animals, thinking they're her baby."

"What does the guy do?"

"He tortures animals."

"When she realises she ain't holding a baby he kills it?"

"That's about the sum of it."

"Fuckin' sickos. Good thing they're locking em up."

They went back inside their houses while Sandra and Johnny were being held down and injected with medication.

Sandra tried biting one of the nurses who hit her and stuck the needle deep into her buttock.

Soon she fell into a comatose sleep while Johnny lay tied to his bed and passed the night without stirring.

Outside the station the police officers were looking at the animal.

"Seems OK," one said.

"You'd think even a whacko like her would smell it ain't a baby."

"That's delusions for you, nuts like them believe their own fantasises and shape the world to suit them."

"Think he'll survive?"

"Yeah."

They let it out of the box and it fled into some undergrowth.

Apart from the wound which was closing up it looked unharmed.

The next morning Sandra shuffled along the sterile corridor in search of Johnny.

She found him watching a nature programme on TV.

"Johnny?" she said.

"Yeah?"

"I think I'm pregnant."

"That's good honey, that's real good."

JARED'S GIFT

by

Mark Anthony Crittenden

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Jared woke from a euphoric ether-sleep, certain that some rough creature was still clutching him from beyond the veil of his nightmares, a force so malevolent and relentless that it refused to let go, even now. Dull flashes of memory bombarded him from distant epochs, "We have a winner!" There were blackjack tables, and beautiful server girls, and patrons dressed in tacky cowboy garb, and there were lights...wildly spinning lights.

But all that was over now. Jared found himself in a purgatory for the profanely indulgent, the place for all who refuse to go gently into the loser's bracket. These pleasure-seekers are unbound by restraint, and would risk something greater than life and limb for another spin of the wheel. Losing was only a set-back after all, a formality meant to weed out the weak at heart. But Jared was not weak. He had the

fortitude, and the tenacity to take hold of the bull and shake that bastard down until it spilled all the glorious riches that life owed him.

The last card had rained down on him like a thunder god's hammer, and he had lost the biggest wad of money anyone like him had ever dared take on credit. He had taken a force majeure into the desert. Jared had no idea if anyone from the outfit had seen him, but it seemed crazy for them to suspect his recent play after being into them for so much. They would come for him soon enough, but there was no need to be sitting around when they did. He sped off into the night, watching Vegas disappear into the background like a mirage in a fever dream. "No one knows." he told himself. "I'm free and clear. I just need this little head start..." He drove into a black ocean of desert, unaware of the shark swimming so close behind.

Now there was only the halo of a small overhead light, and the gut-wrenching pain in his stomach. He was in a black leather chair, which was torn with age, the stuffing protruding from it like mange on an old hide. Jared let out a dry cough and then emptied the contents of his stomach onto the dirt floor.

"Oh, good you're awake." The person attached to the baritone voice emerged from the shadows of the wooden shack. He was an absolute beast of a man, and it was no big stretch to guess his profession. Presently he rolled up his sleeves, and the hair on his forearms suggested that of a wooly

mammoth. The man's upper body bulged from his pinstriped shirt as if he had been poured into it, and over this was a gray vest pulled taut enough to blast the buttons into orbit, were he to inhale deep enough. His thinning blonde hair was combed back over the immensity of his forehead, and beads of sweat had begun to form there on his sun-reddened skin. His cold green eyes reflected an absence of empathy, and they glimmered turgidly with an evil proclivity that only the very cruel possess.

A whimper escaped Jared, and the man in the vest held up the flat of his hand in a warding gesture. "Now, now, let's have none of that. If I were you, I would save my strength."

The large man in the vest produced a wooden stand and placed it in front of Jared at arm's length. On this he set a heavy canvass roll, and whistled as he unraveled it. He removed its contents in a routine fashion, naming each of the implements as he held them up to the light. "Bone saw... falcatta... pliers... needle-nose... smelling salts... hammer..."

By this time, Jared had gone limp as a jelly fish, and began to utter the mindless *de profundis* of the truly desperate and unlucky. He rationalized. He side tracked. He floundered. All the while his executioner stood patiently with arms folded, nodding as if just the right combination of pleading had stirred some dormant shred of humanity from deep within the blonde colossus. In the end, the man in the vest leaned in close, placing his sweaty hands on the sides of

Jared's neck. In a soothing, avuncular way he said, "At some point every man faces the inevitable. The trump of trumps knows no disparity. It simply is." With that he went to work.

The night was filled with screams so gibbous and so fantastic that even the coyotes scattered to be clear of the unholy noise. Blood ebbed into the floorboards, and soaked the ground below. Bloodied fingers fell in a neat pile next to squirming leather shoes, followed by an eyeball. The wind howled around the old shack for hours and carried the screams into the sand-blown night, and then for a long time everything went quiet.

A slumping figure emerged from the door of the shack, fumbling for his car keys. He rolled down his sleeves and spilled into the leather seat, exhausted. After exhaling a long bloodcurdling scream of his own, he drove off into the night.

The secret Jared had concealed, but never truly counted on, was the marginal talent he had possessed since childhood. Some people called it telepathy. Jared preferred to think of it as a small argumentative edge. He had entered the mind of the colossus and found a personality so full of self-loathing, so eager to be released from servitude that all it took was the slightest suggestion, an invitation to do what the beastly man had only ever desired.

"Become me, and I'll become you. Finish the job, and be free."

Jared had watched in horror as his would-be killer faced the inevitable, and chopped himself to pieces one extremity at a time. The trump of all trumps had been played, and Jared had bought another lifetime to contemplate the gift he had been given this night.

THE GRUMP

by

John Harrower

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I threw myself out into the black air, all metallic skin and pulsing bones. The action almost made me sick. I struggled to steady my body while the streetlights shone beams of light directly into my eyes.

Wrapped up in dirty cotton, I had only one thing on my mind: concealment. Loping off into the dusty evening, I pulled my hood up over my head, my eyes sunken treasures at the bottom of my ruined face.

After stopping briefly to smother a patchwork cat with disdain, my quest underwent an injurious challenge. I filled the beggar's cup with heart cold phlegm and hunched my back like a fairytale bridge. Gloomy keyboardists descended with questions about illumination and I left them in the dark.

I fixed my hated shoes with a gaze usually reserved for misspelling. A shadow in a headscarf tried to engage me in

political discussion almost instantly. I crossed the cracked street, narrowly avoiding a car full of exhortations of love. Idolaters congregated at a sixty degree angle eagerly awaiting the Next Big Thing. I broke wind loudly in their direction, content that they would not be able to carve a golden statue of shit particles floating in methane.

Noting my complete lack of personal success, I hurried towards my destination. Snippets of conversation fluttered down on me in an indecipherable paper hail and I removed the words "banging birds" from my ears with no small degree of irritation.

A shriek of sloppy babies rumbled towards me in their devices. Using my hair as a slick veil I made myself into a hiding place. Acquaintances bluebottled me and I honoured my noble self with the title of Worst Ninja Ever.

I juttered away like claymation, blaming the time for everything and finally I reached the portal to salvation. I passed the pillars of smoke and designer gear and was confronted by shelves of bewilderment. Locating the antidote quickly to avoid derangement I shovelled the weight from my pockets away and emerged back into the outside. I unwrapped the ennui-breaker and chewed it noisily. For several minutes my mouth became a crushing cavity filled with brown delicious.

Time passed.

After that things didn't seem so bad for a while.

SEPTIC INFUSION

by

Bryan Lindenberger

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David sat on a bed, happy in his experiments. He tried not to wake his father as he poured over an ancient book of science. A diagram instructed him to place handfuls of straw and dead spiders into a box and close it. Shake gently and wait—he opened the box, and white mice appeared: pink noses, red eyes, bristling whiskers. David said it's not possible, and the mice began to die so that rats took their place by threes. David consulted his book of science.

3 MICE = 1 RAT

That made sense in a book, but these creatures lived. They gnashed yellow-white teeth. They scratched at the box to escape, and their bodies were warm and wet inside. David tried to hush them, but the smell of rat urine woke his father.

"Get out of here, you little-!"

David's head hurt in the daylight. He fled to the old pond down back where he found the waters neglected and ill. Big animals died here, carcasses steaming with the fog of decay where primordial things grew. A giant oak tree rose from the muck. David saw that at least the frogs were alive. One of them sat motionless with his arms folded and his back turned. David wanted the frog's attention, so he pulled up his courage like a warm jacket and tapped the old lungfish on his bony shoulder.

"What now, boy?" the old frog grumbled.

"I came outside to play. Do you want to play with me?"

The old frog didn't answer, just raised a bloody hand and gestured toward a nearby hole in the ground. It was an abandoned well gone bitter and black, and David headed over to see what the matter was. He found four turtles there, swimming on their backs in the muck amid the slimy leaves. The turtles snapped at his fingers when he reached for them. Flat white teeth crowded their lips, and David returned sadly to the old frog with insight.

"One of the turtles bit you. Didn't it?"

"Yeah-hup," the old frog said, and David knew how that must've felt. Painful, but with a sort of shame mixed in. He made a point to stand close to the old frog but very still. Dusk electrified his eyes, his skin. His fingertips tingled. These moments mattered to him: a little like sharing but too much like asking.

May I sit with you?

May I shoulder the burden?

May I please have a slice of your
people pie?

Death and decay pumped into his lungs. It oozed into his pores and filled his head like a toilet bowl. He looked back at his old house on the hill and realized, All that shit trickles down here...septic infusion poisons our pond.

"Fuck 'em," David said like a big boy now. He referred to the turtles and to the imaginary eels too, and he settled beside the old frog to divide this ancient feeling. They watched the oak tree grow. Even in darkness, its leaves were lustrous.

IN CASE OF ARMAGEDDON

by

Magen Toole

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The holes came to Holcum Springs one day in the summer without a sound. They turned up on the outskirts of town on the other side of the train yard, opening up in dirt roads and the miles of corn stalks on the Henderson's farm, fat round cavities where people fell in and didn't get out. Geologists from the college up the highway got on the six o'clock news and said they were sinkholes from heavy rains and soil erosion. The mayor slapped them on the backs with a smile and declared the matter closed to the public, and it made good enough sense at the time. They didn't make towns like they used to anymore, what with all the jobs going to China and India and all the factories closing up. Sometimes towns just got old and fell apart.

In the heat of July the holes came to the water tower. They appeared in the old red barn on Route 91 and the roof of the

church on the hill, big enough to fit a man through if one were so inclined. Pastor John shook his Holy Bible during Sunday service and yelled through the hole above his head for God's strength to see them through, but God didn't seem to be listening. If he had been, he didn't have much to say on the matter. Theories moved through the town like a fire over the telephone line from house to house, but nobody seemed to know where the holes came from or what they wanted. When the holes got to Main Street everyone decided that they were bad, because by then everyone could see them and there was no skirting it at City Hall. The holes found their ways inside of the drug store, the barber shop, the fire station and the court house. They opened up in trees and dogs and pick-up trucks, like little windows or port holes made to look through to the other side.

Some said it was caused by pollution and space radiation. Others claimed that it was caused by gay marriage and drugs in Amsterdam. God was punishing sinners for prostitution and aborted babies, in a miniature Armageddon going down in Holkum Springs, a practice run for the real-deal. Talk down at the gun shop and diner pegged it as moral decay and liberal wishing-washing. It was weakening the fabric of the Heartland, crooked politicians making it bad for everybody else over coffee and eggs. That's when the strings began to unravel, one for every hole, at the corners of buildings and under the frames of pickup trucks. They began to curl at the edges of

leaves of the trees and in the webbing between fingers and toes, like the loose threads of a sweater, plucked and pulled.

Rick from the corner store said that it was just that the strings that held things together in the world had come undone. They were coming apart bit by bit until the holes began to appear, the spaces in between all things. It happened sometimes, he said, when they loosened up from overuse, something to do with the time-space continuum. Rick was a stoner from the community college who drove an old hatchback and mooched off of his girlfriend, so nobody really took him seriously. Nobody else had an answer either, not the mayor or the six o'clock news, so Holkum Springs continued to unwind, a little every day. People and houses and cars frayed around the edges, loosening up like strawmen, fearful of gusts of breeze that could sweep up their threads and carry them away until they unraveled completely.

After a few beers on a Tuesday night Rick got into his hatchback and drove past the train yards where the first holes appeared. Sitting around wasn't going anybody any good, so with a flashlight in hand he wandered down the dirt road behind the Henderson's farm until he found the first hole. It had grown since it first appeared, swelling up wider with each loosened string. Nosing around the hole with the toe of his shoe, Rick found a thread torn free of its mouth. He scratched his head and shrugged his shoulders, and stooping to take the thread he tugged on it, tugged and tugged until the hole closed up. Rick kept tugging,

until the holes in the water tower and the church closed, the drug store and the barber shop and the fire station sealed shut with the sound of laces pulled up tight.

When Holkum Springs woke up the next morning, all the people were pulled back together again, with their dogs and pick-up trucks, strings taut and edges smoothed over. Half the town ran down to church, the other to the liquor store, and no one was talking about the apocalypse anymore. Rick just tugged the tread and tied it off, digging a pen and pad from the book-bag in his backseat. He left the thread where he found it, with a note, "In case of Armageddon, pull."

MR. FANTASTIC

by

Garrett Ashley

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"You're a funny man," says Mr. Fantastic. He is an E70 robot from Westeria with twelve fingers and an addiction to battery acid. He enjoys loud music and men with good jokes but never tells any of his own. "Say it again."

"Fuck off," says Jim. "Get your feet off the couch."

Mr. Fantastic puts his pegs on the ground and sits up straight. He wonders what a White Russian tastes like but is afraid to ask. He watches the girls in the corner rolling their drunken skulls and shaking their hips and dreams of being a dancer. Loud 80's music shakes the walls.

"I'll be here all night long," says Jim to his human friends. He drools on the couch when no one is looking. His face pushes into the leather and he screams before falling onto his back against the cold wooden floor.

"Jim is intoxicated," says Mr. Fantastic.

All the guys laugh. They think the E70 is funny but only because Jim hates machines. A big fat human man hasn't spoken all night. "You think we should turn him over on his side?"

"Why?" says Mr. Fantastic.

"So he won't die."

Mr. Fantastic takes even steps over to his master and flips him onto his side. Jim pukes on the floor and the E70 cleans the remaining chucks from his master's face. Everyone leaves. The dancing girls and the laughing guys. The house is a mess but Mr. Fantastic only cleans what he is allowed to touch. He hasn't worked since he was replaced by the E74. They are the top dogs in technology. Most importantly they are capable of adolescent transportation (although terrible party-goers).

Jim wakes up with a hangover. Mr. Fantastic gives him a fresh bucket every two vomits and a moist towel and a glass of water. "I'm detecting fascinating levels of Adrenocorticotropics in your blood. What's wrong?"

"I was supposed to be somewhere today," says Jim. "Wait here while I get my coat." He stammers out of the stinking living room into the area of the house where machines are never allowed.

Mr. Fantastic looks around at the scene left over from the night before. Everything is broken and disturbed. The room reminds him of home. Nobody wanted him there. They said he was useless. He hears a bash on the

back of his metal head but feels nothing at all. He falls on the floor and turns around. Jim is standing over him with a baseball bat.

"This is not very human of you," says Mr. Fantastic.

Jim breaks open the E70's cranium and steals its eyes. They go into his coat pocket but the rest of Mr. Fantastic goes to the backyard. To the dirt. With the other animals. One was hit by a car. The other was killed by a man who could not afford to feed it.

CLEVELAND CASSIDY'S DICK

by

Nathaniel Tower

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His dick was the size of a racehorse. Not the size of a racehorse's dick, but the size of an actual full-grown racehorse.

When Cleveland Cassidy was born, the first thing the doctor said was, "Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Cassidy. You have a son with a very large dick."

The nurses in the room were all immediately flushed.

Mrs. Cassidy, covered in sweat, tears, placenta and feces, passed out when she saw the appendage.

Mr. Cassidy, a bit jealous, asked, "Is it normal for a baby to have a bigger dick than his dad?" His own dick, the size of a dog's, felt like it shrunk inside of his pants at the sight.

"No, I assure you, this is far from normal," the doctor said with admiration.

"Is there anything we should do?"

"Keep him away from porn."

It had been a blessing at first. A great conversational piece, a great way to show up all the guys, a great way to drive all the ladies wild. It grew at the same rate as his body for the first few years, but once he hit puberty, it seemed to expand exponentially.

By the time it stopped growing, at the age of eighteen, Cleveland Cassidy's dick was the size of Man O War. There was literally nothing he could do with it.

"Mr. Cassidy," the doctor told him before he was old enough for such a title (although the size of his dick warranted such a name from the very beginning of his life), "you must never get an erection. You will die instantly."

Prior to this warning, he had never even thought to get an erection. Nothing had quite been grand enough to warrant such a flow of blood.

"Is it even possible?" he asked the doctor.

The doctor pondered the question long after Cleveland left the office.

In school they watched a video on Elephantiasis. Cleveland began to feel like a freak. He went back to the doctor.

"Do I have Elephantiasis?"

"No, you just have a massive dick."

"But there must be something wrong with me," Cleveland insisted, his large genitalia staring at the doctor.

"Nope. You just have what all men wish for."

"Do you wish you had a dick like this?" Cleveland tried to lift it as he spoke, but

his arms were tired from carrying the member up the stairs to the doctor's office.

"No, of course not. It looks quite inconvenient actually. I simply meant that you possess what all men dream of having, but they don't really understand what they are dreaming about. There isn't even the remote possibility that you could ever have sex. You'll never even have an orgasm."

As Cleveland drove home from the doctor, his dick riding shotgun, he vowed that he would have sex one day just to spite the doctor. Surely there was a vagina that could handle his racehorse dick.

To practice the hopeful moment when he would finally have sex, Cleveland spent hours staring at naked pictures of women on the computer. When the pictures did nothing to stir his dick, he tried some videos. He began with solo girls, then moved to girl-on-girl before finally graduating to videos of hardcore sex. He tried to imagine himself having sex with the girls, but all he could do was laugh at how small all of the dicks were. Staring at the tiny dicks that penetrated the women, he imagined how something that was equal to the size of his entire body would have a chance of fitting inside someone.

Years went by. Cleveland spent a little time each day watching porn hoping for even the slightest hint of an erection. Still nothing moved. When he had exhausted every possible outlet for sexual fantasies, he decided to give up. The good doctor was right. Cleveland decided to go about living a normal life as best he could, graduating

from school and getting a job at an office. He was supplied with an extra large cubicle to accommodate his disability.

Many years later, at the ripe old age of sixty-seven, Cleveland Cassidy, a permanent bachelor, contemplated retiring from his job. Everyone had waited for this day with bated breath, hoping they could swoop in and get the large cubicle. "Aren't you ever going to retire?" they would constantly hound him. He didn't see any point. There was nothing waiting for him at home except for the empty promises of unsatisfying pornography.

As he approached his boss's office, he noticed for the first time the gorgeous secretary that had directed the phone calls and filed the mail for so many years. Looking at her legs through her nude nylons, he began to feel a twinge that felt a little like going to the bathroom.

"Hi Cleveland," she said with a smile as he wobbled uncomfortably past her with his full load in tow.

"Howdy, ma'am," he responded with a nod of his head.

"How are you today?"

"Well, I'm just fine. I'm on my way to re..." He hesitated before finishing the sentence, thinking about what had just occurred. Looking at this woman had given him a feeling he had never quite had before. So long ago he had given up the dream of even achieving an erection, but here he was, a sixty-seven year old man long overdue for retirement, his massive dick held firmly in his hands. Perhaps he was making a mistake.

Perhaps he had wound up at this office for thirty-nine years for some profound purpose.

"Would you like me to help you with that?" she said, pointing to the retirement letter he held sandwiched between his hand and his dick.

The moment was brief, but it brought him more joy than he had experienced in his sixty-seven years on Earth.

The life insurance check barely covered the cost of the two plots required for his burial.

STOP ME IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE

by

Jimmy Callaway

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Downtown Walla Walla was teeming; you couldn't squeeze a rubber chicken between the people crammed shoulder to shoulder, hustling and bustling up and down the sidewalks. Amidst a symphony of beeps and honks, cars darted around busses and trucks that thrummed at high speeds through the city streets. On the corner of Premise Road and Conclusion Avenue, two men bumped into each other and shook hands with delight.

"Ray, you son of a motherless whore!" Buford Picklefeather said, "How in heck are ya!" Behind Buford's oversized polka dot bow tie, his Adam's apple bobbed up and down. His wide buck teeth hung out of a wider grin.

"Couldn't be better, Buford, you mincing fairy, you!" Raymond Luxury-Yacht said. His enormous nose supported thick, black spectacles with lenses thicker than storm windows. His 56-waist trousers drooped

about his knees, held up only by a pair of purple and green-striped suspenders. The Walla Walla crowds brushed past them in an endless torrent.

"How have you been there, Buford?" Raymond said.

"Well, I gotta tell ya, Ray, not too swell. I saw my psychiatrist today, and I says to him, I says, 'Doc, ya gotta help me! I'm a tee-pee, I'm a wig-wam! I'm a tee-pee, I'm a wig-wam!' So, he says to me, he says, 'Your problem is you're two tents!'" A few polite chuckles emerged from the passing crowds, disappearing quickly as the traffic washed down the street.

"Har, har, har!" Raymond barked like an asthmatic collie, "Say, that reminds me of a little story: I asked my wife where she wanted to go on vacation. She said she wanted to go someplace she'd never been before. So I told her to try the kitchen!" The crowds emitted chuckles and even a few guffaws.

Buford joined in with his own burbling giggle.

"Hyuck, hyuck! Say, that's something else. Speaking of your wife, is anyone here from out of town?" A smattering of applause. "Hey, great!" Buford said, "I gotta tell ya, Ray, I was walking down the street today, and this bum comes up to me, and he says to me, he says, 'I haven't had a bite in three weeks!' So I bit him!"

The laughter from the passers-by became strained. Raymond felt obligated to offer his own, "Har, har, har!"

"Hyuck, hyuck!" Buford said, "Yeah, I bit him, and then he threw me down and stole my wallet!"

The noise of traffic was drowned out by the laughter of all within earshot.

Raymond grimaced, running his thumbs under his suspenders. "Uh, har, har. Um, so, yeah, speaking of wallets, I saw my doctor today, and he told me I was out of shape. I told him I wanted a second opinion. So he punched me in the face!"

The pedestrians burst into uproarious laughter, holding their sides and slapping their knees.

Buford's long fingers twiddled his bow tie. "Er, uh, say, that's something else. Well, y'know, Ray, my wife is so fat..."

"How fat is she?" a voice called from the sea of people.

"My wife is so fat," Buford said, "that, due to all the cholesterol in her diet, she suffered a massive heart attack that nearly killed her!"

Raymond's eyes darted about the throngs of people whose heads were thrown back and howling with delight. The accompanying applause was deafening. Raymond chewed his lower lip. "Um, so, uh, last night, Buford, I was at the movies, and I saw my teen-aged son, two rows down, making out with some girl. So, when I saw him today, I says to him, I says, 'Son, who was that lady I saw you with last night?' And he says to me, he says, 'That was no lady, that was my sister!'"

Cold sweat beaded on Buford's forehead. The crowd's laughter thundered in his

ears. He swallowed with difficulty. "Hey, Ray, uh...did you know...uh, what I mean to say is have you ever wondered why that ol' chicken crossed the road?"

Confusion crossed Raymond's face, but his smile held. "Why, sure, Buford, who hasn't?"

"Well, whaddaya say we find out?"

Buford ran full-bore into Premise Road, where a taxi cab slammed into him and sent him flying. The pedestrians actually halted their comings and goings, actually stood stock still and held their breath, as they watched Buford's limp form sail through the air, his left leg broken and dangling at an unnatural angle. Buford splatted against the side of a bus, fell, and was sent back into the air by a small pick-up truck. One of his buck teeth broke off and spun through the air. He bounced off the roof of another taxi, his vertebrae snapping like carrots, and hit the ground with a wet thump. His broken and bloody corpse rolled to a stop in the gutter on the other side of the road.

The laughter and applause from the pedestrians gained in volume until Raymond's innards vibrated. The ovation lasted nearly ten minutes, hands clapping, feet stomping, hoots, hollers, cheers, whistles. Then the applause began to ebb, the laughter died down, and the crowds of Walla Walla went back to plodding up and down the street. A stray dog sniffed at Buford's remains.

Raymond cleared his throat and pushed his glasses back up onto his nose. "So," he said in a shaky voice, "Is anyone here from out of town?"

BLINK

by

William Pauley III

Published on The New Flesh 08/06/2010

Lisa Gale. Age eighteen. Captain of the senior varsity volleyball team. She had the body that every boy, man and woman wanted and she knew it, too. After every practice, Lisa would strip the clothing from her body, sometimes pulling her top completely off, just before she'd enter the locker room, just to give the boys in the bleachers a little something to talk about. Lisa loved her body and damn near everyone else who saw it loved it, too. But, as we've all been told before, most things are not as they seem. Lisa's body is one of those things.

One night, just after practice, Lisa tossed her sweaty clothes in a pile in front of her locker, but as she dropped her arms to her side, a sharp pain pulsated in her left breast. She walked over to the mirror, kneading her fingers along the pain lines, massaging the ache away. The pain eased. She

walked in the shower room, not giving it a second thought.

She squeezed a dab of shampoo into her left palm and gently worked it into her long blonde hair, wrapping the length of it atop her head in a swirl. She washes herself facing away from the showerhead; she had always had a weird phobia of being splashed in the face with water. It made her feel somewhat claustrophobic, as if she were unable to breathe. Probably because of some suppressed childhood memory.

She stepped back into the stream of hot water to rinse the lathered shampoo from her hair. A torrent of water collided with her forehead and branched off into tiny streams. The water flowed over her eyes, blinding her. Panic began to set in. She shook her hands violently in the air, desperately trying to dry them so that she could clear the water from her eyes. In the process, she licked a few of her fingers against the tile wall.

She opened her eyes. That was when she saw it.

Looking straight up at her now was an eyeball, burrowed deep into her left breast and peaking out from a flap of skin where her nipple should have been. She closed her eyes and screamed, but when she opened her eyes again, her nipple had returned and the eyeball was gone. Nervously, she tried to pry the nipple open again, like an eyelid. The areola spread apart, revealing the anomalous eyeball underneath. The flesh strained and forced itself closed once more.

Panicking now, Lisa grabbed a hold of her left breast with both of her hands and squeezed with all of her might. Her nipple swelled and slowly parted as the eyeball began to surface. She then placed her right hand directly behind the eyeball and gave her nipple a taut pinch. Tiny red veins were bursting out from the white skin of the orb, like little baby spiders emerging from their nests.

PLOP.

The eyeball slopped out and rolled slowly to the drain. A tear of blood leaked from the tip of her nipple and traced down her abdomen, finally fading into the water.

Not sparing a second, Lisa checked her right breast and, sure enough, there was another eyeball roosting inside. She squeezed her that breast, just as she had the left, but this eyeball was being stubborn, it refused to come out from its nest. She pried back the skin of her nipple and dug her fingers deep into the socket. The eyeball was trying to root itself into her skin through muscles and veins that sprouted out from its backside. She severed all connections with a pinch of her fingernails. She ripped the second eyeball from her breast and hurled it to the concrete shower floor below. The ball splattered against the ground like an egg before the water washed it away. The shower drain was tinged pink with her blood.

The other eyeball was now looking up at her from the shower drain. She shrieked and stomped it down the pipe, squishing it through the tiny hole of the drain cover.

Goey bits of eye-flesh gobbled up in-between each of her toes. She ran out of the shower and back into the locker room. She quickly dried herself off. She wanted to get home as quickly as possible. As she was drying off her legs, the lips from between her thighs began to growl.

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Garrett Ashley

Garrett Ashley has appeared in Inwood Indiana, Short Fast and Deadly, and is forthcoming in Twisted Dreams Magazine. He lives in Brookhaven, Mississippi and in his spare time enjoys watching squirrels fall out of trees.

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Brian Barnett lives with his wife, Stephanie, and son, Michael, in Frankfort, Kentucky.

He has been accepted by over twenty-five publications, online and in print, including several anthologies.

He was co-editor of the anthology "Toe Tags: 21 Spine-Tingling Tales from the Best New Authors of Horror" with William Pauley III and has published a collection of horror stories titled "State of the Dark".

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Annemarie Bogart's work has appeared in *Liquid Imagination*, *House of Horror*, *Irish's Story Tymes* and *Dark Fire Fiction*. She also has more work coming out in various anthologies including *Dreams and Screams*, *Library of the Living Dead's Feary Tales*, *HOWL* and *Elements of Horror*.

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Chris Bowsman has had several of his short story and flash fiction pieces published, and spends a considerable amount of time wondering if going by "Christopher" would increase his authorly success.

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Suzie Bradshaw loves speaking and writing about herself in the third person. She also doubts that light is really the fastest thing in the universe and in her next life she will prove Einstein wrong. But in this life all she wants to do is write. Is that a

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Laura Eno lets the stories decide how long they'll be. Some are flash and some are novels. Various online publications include 10Flash, Everyday Weirdness, The New Flesh, MicroHorror, Flashes in the Dark, Static Movement, House of Horror. To learn more about her, please visit:

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Richard Godwin is a produced playwright and his stories can be found at many magazines, among them A Twist Of Noir and Danse Macabre, as well as in the recent anthologies 'Back In Five Minutes' by Little Episodes Publishing and 'Howl' by Lame Goat Press.

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John Harrower 24, WM, NS, GSOH, OMG, WLTM interesting individuals that he can shamelessly use as characters in his flash fiction or put in ridiculous and often fantastical situations for embarrassing

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His work has been featured in *Avanlanche* *Tinder* 1 and 3, *Lo-Fidelity* magazine, *Foreveryear*, *50-to-1*, and *Six Sentences*. He likes rap, books, and being ironic. You can

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Steve Lowe

Steve Lowe writes dark stuff, except when he doesn't. His first book, *Muscle Memory*, will be released in October 2010 as part of the New Bizarro Author Series from Eraserhead Press. His second book, *Wolves Dressed as Men*, will be released in November 2010 by Eternal Press. His short fiction is forthcoming or has appeared in *Drabblecast*, *Three Crow Press* and *Allegory*, among other places. In his spare time, he asks fellow authors and creative types odd, mostly random questions for something called *The 2-Minute Drill*.

Tania Luna

Tania Luna writes fiction by night, and by day she teaches, runs a business (*SurpriseIndustries.com*), creates acting reels, and plays with her wonderful husband and house-full of animals.

Donna Jean Lyons

Donna Jean Lyons recently escaped a maximum-security women's prison for the criminally insane. She was last spotted fleeing the secluded mountains of West Virginia, dragging behind her a freshly acquired girlfriend and being followed by her two tick-infested Hell Hounds. Her true whereabouts remain a mystery.

Jodi MacArthur

Jodi MacArthur lost her my little ponies after tying their tails together to form ropes to retrieve other lost toys out of her 2nd story apartment window. She imagines one day, the ponies will unite as one undead plastic creature and will hunt her down. She thinks this would be more fun than being ran over by a car. To read more of her writes visit:

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Sean Monaghan

Sean Monaghan's guides to serial killers have been published on numerous websites. As well as writing guides and brochures Sean tutors in creative writing and reviews books. More information at his website:

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William Pauley III

William Pauley III has spent the majority of his life looking for his car keys. When he isn't wandering around mindlessly, he usually writes... mindlessly.

He writes for the local paper and is the author of four short novels, his two newest being *DOOM MAGNETIC!* and *THE BROTHERS CRUNK - AN 8-BIT FACK-IT-ALL ADVENTURE IN 2D.*

He can be found in the hills of Kentucky. If found, please return him to his wife and two children. No reward.

Dan Powell

Dan Powell (almost exclusively) writes fiction of all shapes and sizes. When not caring for his two young sons as a full time homedad, he can be found at:

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Dustin Reade's work has been published in two small press anthologies, Nerve Cowboy literary journal, Encounters magazine, and the upcoming issue of Sideshow Fables.

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Graeme Reynolds

Graeme Reynolds has been called many things over the years, most of which are unprintable. By day, he breaks computer programs for a living, but when the sun goes

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He lives somewhere in England with two cats, three delinquent chickens and a girlfriend that is beginning to suspect that there is something deeply wrong with him. Visit him at:

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Kevin Shamel

Kevin Shamel writes weird stories and he does it on purpose. You can find his first book, *Rotten Little Animals*, at Amazon. People seem to like it. Magazines have printed his stories. More and more of his weirdness is showing up online and in print. Check out his website, *ShamelessCreations*, to find out where. And please accept his third-person thanks for reading!

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Angel Zapata

Angel Zapata often wishes he could commute to work via dropping down a well. That way, he could come crawling out of any TV like that darling, little girl from *The Ring*.

Recent fiction has been published or is forthcoming in the *Toe Tags Anthology*, *House of Horror's Best of 2009 Anthology*,

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