



John A. Logan College
Literary Magazine

Acknowledgements

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Art

It's funny what a small word art is. After all, it's only one syllable and three simple letters. Yet this simple little word embodies so much. It's everywhere: movies, music, dance, plays, food and, yes I hate to say it, but even in mathematics. This one little word has the power to stir the strongest of emotions in all of us.

Art and the ability to be creative with it is what separates us from the mindless corporations that tell you to think like a team. With art, people are able to evoke individual thoughts and feelings. This one word is written, painted, performed - it is anything you can imagine. This one word has been used by all of the individuals in this magazine who were willing to make it their own. Art. A simple word that creates such wondrous things.

Rachel Goffinet

Editor

JOE

Black

t-shirt

in the corner

handsome

cocky

smile on his lips

tips

his hand

his hat

to the cutie

to the teach

to the day

frowns

and scribbles

...away

SF

---this one's for Joe---

CAN'T LIVE WITH 'EM, CAN'T LOVE WITHOUT 'EM

By

Brenda Lavender

Emotions, what pesky critters they are. Trying to define an emotion is like trying to describe the taste of a strawberry, or the smell of the ocean. They are will-o'-the-wisp, ethereal, always in flux, never static. Anger can change to guilt, love to sorrow, fear to hate, all in the matter of a heartbeat. They are like trying to hold a fistful of dry sand, impossible to grasp.

Pulse rates soar, body temperatures increase, hands tingle, mouths go dry, sweat pops out on brows and in armpits, pupils dilate, knees go weak, and tongues cease to function properly. When this happens, we are firmly in the grip of an emotion or two. Logic fails and goes out the window. We can find neither rhyme nor reason. We cease to act and begin to react. We frantically look for an answer. What in the world is happening to me?

Emotions all have similar physical manifestations. I could have been describing any or all emotions. It is my reactions to these hormonal changes that define each emotion and help me name my demon.

Love is such a frustrating emotion. One minute, all is wine and roses, and the next all hell breaks loose. I mean seriously, I can be smiling at idiots, showing restraint and patience with morons, and even be tolerant of Republicans when all is going well with my relationship. But at the sign of a glitch, an argument, a no-show, a broken promise, I become one of the most short-tempered shrews you have ever seen. I ridicule or embarrass those idiots I was smiling at earlier. I huff and roll my eyes at moronic actions or questions. And for

those Republicans - my mom would wash my mouth out with soap. I find myself tearing up at the slightest slight. Hope is gone, life is over, and despair my new best friend. Oh, I play like I'm ok, that my world hasn't been devastated. I even start making plans with friends that do not include Him (He no longer has a name). And, at the same time, I will that damn phone to ring.

I start second-guessing myself. Was I that mean or childish? Am I making a mountain out of a molehill? So, now I can't sleep, self-doubt and recriminations won't let me. I toss and turn, pick up the phone and put it down, dial and hang up and my, oh my, what a mess I am. And just when I start debating what state (of the union, not mental) to move to, that phone rings.

Birds start to sing, the sun shines brilliantly, butterflies cease to plague me, and even Republicans don't seem quite as heinous. My blood pressure drops and heavy sighs become normal breathing once again. Tears dry up. All of a sudden the world becomes a more beautiful place to live.

Whew, I'm exhausted just writing this stuff. Emotions are a roller coaster ride. They can make you scream, cry, laugh or throw up. They are an inescapable fact of life.

So what do you think? Are they the gods' way of keeping us on our toes, or just one great big cosmic joke?

GAME ON!!!

By

Will Yeager

Gamer: it has almost come to the point where it's a dirty word amongst today's collegiate students. It carries connotations that nobody likes to have associated with them - withdrawn, obsessive, detached from reality. Now, whether or not those labels are actually true, gamers tend to fall into one of three categories (and of course, there is always some overlap since people can't easily be classified): the tabletop gamer, the computer gamer, and the "real" gamer.

Let's go visit the first kind of gamer - the tabletop gamer. First of all, let's look at what the classification actually means and includes. A "tabletop" gamer is one who plays games on a tabletop. That includes such games as *Magic: The Gathering*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *Pokemon*, and *Legend of the Five Rings* for games that have a definite goal and a "fighting" style of play. It also includes role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Exalted*, and *GURPS*. One mustn't forget such games as *Clue*, *Monopoly*, and *Dominos*. Those all qualify as tabletop games as well. Now, is that the only defining characteristic of the tabletop gamer? No, of course not - it also includes such characteristics as wearing dark clothes, avoiding bright lights, and general aversion to nature. These types of gamers will often speak in language that is indecipherable to others, using such words as "Mana," "Tap," "d20," "Botch," and "Hotel."

The second group of gamers, the "computer" gamer, is actually broken into two main sub-groups itself. The first group consists of RPG (Role Playing Game) players, and within that group there is the traditional one-player game with a complex storyline, and the newer version of MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) players. The other main type of computer gamer is the FPS (First Person Shooter) player. In the traditional RPG group, common games to play include *Final Fantasy X*, *Neverwinter Nights*, and *Diablo II*. The newer MMORPG players frequent such big-name games as *Everquest*, *Asheron's Call*, *World of Warcraft*, and *City of Heroes*.

The most common games played by FPS gamers are *Half-Life*, *Counter Strike*, and *Day of Defeat*. Aside from the gaming, one can usually spot these types of gamers by a few physical traits, including a tendency to dress poorly, have very pale skin (from lack of exposure to natural lighting), and it is common for them to function poorly in social situations (with real people, of course). Some identifiers in their parts of speech are words such as “I_337,” (yes, that is a word - “leet”, and abbreviation for elite) “STFU,” (also a word, but very impolite - Shut The F*** Up) “n00b,” (acronym of the word “newbie” meaning new-player) and “gg” (commonly meaning “good game” or “good group”).

The last group, and the one least commonly thought of as actual “gamer”, is the so-called “real” gamer - the ones who indulge in physical activity. They are generally in the best of physical shape, due to the demanding nature of the games that they play. Common games usually include soccer, American football, basketball, lacrosse, etc. Some of the ways to identify a “real” gamer is by appearance - they will generally take better care of themselves than the other two groups, and they will generally be at ease in most social situations (if not at the center of them). Their skin will often have a healthy tan color to it - this is a result of playing outside in the sun (which most other gamers fear for some irrational reason).

Now, as I’m *certain* the differences between the various subgroups of “gamer” are easily noticeable, I would like to now mention how there is often a lot of overlap between them. Someone who plays one kind of game may actually play another as well. I myself fall into all three categories, though with few of the social and hygienic shortcomings. As the saying goes, “Never judge a book by its cover.” I propose a variation upon it - “Never judge a gamer by his or her game.”

“The Flood”

By

Angela Bartoni

- Day 1 Well, we're all loaded up. Noah and the boys have herded in all the animals and our precious daughter-in-laws are preparing our first meal here on board. It's really quite nice in here, very homey and plenty of space. We are staying on the third floor. I just hope those snakes don't get out.
- Day 5 We've tried to keep busy. Everyone has a job assigned to them. Thank goodness mine does not involve a shovel. We're expecting some rain soon. I think this is actually going to be kinda fun!
- Day 7 It really started pouring today and everything inside is still nice and dry. That Noah, I am so proud of him! I didn't even know that he could build a boat.... oh, I forgot.....he prefers ark.
- Day 15 Raining!
- Day 26 More rain. We sprung a small leak today, but Shem and Ham patched it. Japheth is not really good with carpentry work.
- Day 32 Rain.
- Day 41 Still Raining!!!!
- Day 46 It's supposed to clear up tomorrow. Praise the Lord! The ride has been a little bumpy in the stormy weather and the buffalo are seasick.
- Day 47 It stopped, just as He said it would. To be honest, when Noah first told me about this trip, I was a little *concerned*. I mean, I have always trusted God and I love my husband dearly, but 40 days of rain is a little overwhelming to say the least. But, all is well, it has stopped and there is the most beautiful arch of colors in the sky. Noah told me and the kids that it was a rainbow from God. We are so blessed!
- Day 48 Misunderstanding!!! I thought when the rain stopped that we were getting off this boat....ark. Apparently we are here for a *few* more days. Noah said 150 more days. I hope he is exaggerating, he has been known to do that. The rodents are already multiplying and they are everywhere. I am sure ready to get back on dry land.
- Day 62 I guess he wasn't exaggerating. We have another 126 days on this ARK with these ANIMALS!!!!!!! My mother warned me about marrying him.
- Day 71 We peaked outside and everywhere you look, WATER!!! We send out that silly raven each day to check things out....nothing....not one sign of dry land. You know, this boat isn't that big after all. That's right....I said boat!

Day 83 It just plain reeks in here! I am tired of these animals hooting, growling, barking, and screeching all night. I haven't slept good for the last 20 or 25 days. If that raven doesn't return with some evidence soon I'm sending another bird.

Day 104 Alright, what else could happen? Now Shem and Noah just realized that we boarded two female aratars and no male. I wonder if they can cross with the lanibib? 93 days to go and counting. I don't care if we live another 600 years, we are *never* getting on another boat.

Day 130 I had to ask what else could happen! Well, it happened! The snakes are loose!!! I will not sleep a wink until those boys find them. I am deathly afraid of snakes.

Day 136 Ham found the snakes. That's my boy!

Day 155 Japheth and his wife are no longer bickering. They have just stopped speaking to one another. They better work this thing out before the earth is dry. I really like that girl and she was my best chance for grandchildren, I'm sure they'll have at least 7 sons.

Day 180 Things are looking up. The kids are all getting along again, the smell is bearable today, the snakes are secure, and I've gotten used to the sounds at night. Noah says 17 more days. That's not bad.

Day 190 Noah took my advice and sent out a dove today. He returned with an olive leaf. That means it won't be long now! Doves are so much smarter than ravens.

Day 197 We sent the dove out again. This time he did not come back. The ground is dry. Noah was right. We are blessed!

Army Sects

By

Jerrod Stow

In today's society the United States Army is called upon to perform many controversial and dangerous missions. A good example is Iraq. With nine hundred soldiers already killed in Iraq, why would anyone voluntarily join the army? There are many different reasons people join the army, but once in the army soldiers fall into three distinct categories: the college hopeful, welfare recipient, and patriot.

First there is the college hopeful. This soldier is easily spotted, he/she makes up the majority of the lower enlisted ranks. This soldier is somewhere between the age of 18 and 25. They joined the army after realizing that the cost of university tuition is outrageous. The college hopeful gets to work on time and does what is asked of him/her, with little complaining. One of the major differences from the other groups is that the college hopeful looks at the army as a job, nothing more nothing less.

Next there is the welfare recipient. Soldiers that fall into this category might have started out as a college hopeful, but upon the realization that they could retire in 20 years, with no education beyond high school, their desire to further their education faded. While this soldier enjoys getting paid they are not motivated to do extra work, leaving that for the college hopefuls. The welfare recipient hopes to just slide through all 20 years without doing anything, except the minimum amount of work required. The easiest way to spot a welfare recipient is to look for people who would do well being institutionalized. The welfare recipient enjoys being told exactly what to do, when to get up, when to go to bed and how to eat.

The last soldier is the patriot. This is the most important group, because he/she is the heart and soul of the army. For this soldier, the army is not just a job, or a retirement plan, but a lifestyle. If asked, the patriot can often trace their family tree back to biblical times, explaining how in every war one of their family members died. The patriot takes great pride in his/her uniform, pressing their fatigues every night, making their boots glisten even on the darkest night. For the patriot a successful life is one that ends on the battlefield. They are the people who will take a bullet for anyone or jump on a grenade to save others. The patriots usually remain single and try not to form many personal bonds with people, that way when they do get killed no one will miss them.

While there is a variety of soldiers in the army they all have their purpose, from the lowly college hopeful and the middle management welfare recipient to the upper crust patriot. All groups pull together to make the army function like a well oiled machine. Although the groups have different motives for being a soldier, that does not negate their heroism.

FRIDAY EVENING

By

Paul Vanni

Coffee house, Friday evening, he
vacillates between decaffeinated
coffee, herbal tea,
a glass of chablis,

As he listens to
the band, glances briefly
at the undisturbed deck of
cards at the next table,

Debates starting a
game of solitaire, in
opposition to continuing
to read, in the dim

Candlelight, the worn copy of
Thucydides with the cover missing,

Wonders how his daughter's
slumber party is going,
sees out of the
corner of his eye

The lead singer's eight year
old blond son run out

Into the evening air,
screendoor slamming in his
wake, granting entry to the
jarring whistle of a passing

Freight train.

I Pick a Fight with Ronald Reagan

*By
Andy Farmer*

I met Ronald Reagan once. Yeah, it was at an Air Force base in St. Louis. He was supposed to be giving a speech there or something but it got delayed. I was there because I was doing a story for the local paper on the whole thing.

Anyway, some fanatical Reagan fan got outta control and went a little nuts, so they rushed the President into this back room, a backroom I happened to be in.

So it was me the President and two Secret Service guys. No one said anything at first, so I thought I'd break the ice, "How's it going, Gipper?" I said. I thought it was really clever because you know the whole movie thing, but in retrospect, I bet he's heard the same clever remark from about fifty million clever people. He kinda nodded at me. I don't think he wanted to talk really, but I did.

"So, uh...the economy sure is fucked up...how's that make you feel?" He stared at me for a little bit, then kind of smiled and said, "We're working on it."

"Yeah," I said, "that's good, because, you know, boy, is it fucked up, and how about the Iran Contra stuff, pretty serious," I said.

"Pretty serious," he repeated. You know people talk about how charismatic this guy is? I didn't see it.

He didn't seem like much of a talker really, but I wasn't gonna give up. I'd been holed up in this room for three hours bored as hell, and I'd be damned if this guy couldn't entertain me for five minutes. So I asked him, "So you know, I've been meaning to write my Congressman or whatever, but this whole war on drugs is you know, kinda bullshit, you know what I mean?"

He gave me some kind of death look, glare, and said, "No, I don't know what you mean." He looked kinda pissed. I was just talking, you know?

"Well I mean 'Just Say No.' That's pretty lame, you know? I mean that might work for some suburban white kid, whose buddy offers him a joint, but the problem is these crazy fuckers who are killing people for five bucks to buy some more dope, you know? I mean tell that guy to 'Just Say No' and he'd stab you in the face with a soldering iron."

He stared at me for a second, like he wanted to say something, then stopped, then started again, "Listen, friend, could we not talk about this right now. I'm a little preoccupied with, you know, the speech and all."

Hey, that was fine with me, guy doesn't want to talk about the war on drugs, drugs are some scary shit you know, I could understand that.

"I'll tell you what else is fucked up is this Trickle Down Economics thing you're always preaching about."

Reagan, kinda stiffened up. Maybe I'd hit a nerve? "I don't see what you mean, if you give money to the wealthiest American, they spend more, and that bolsters the economy."

That sounded like bullshit to me, so I told him, "That sounds like bullshit to me. I mean if I scrape my knee I'm not going to pour Hydrogen Peroxide on my head and let it trickle down there. I'm gonna put the shit on the wound. That's what you need to do give the money to the people who need it, not these rich motherfuckers who are gonna buy a yacht, regardless of any tax break you give them. I mean we're talking multi-millionaires. You're saving them a couple hundred grand every year at most. I know some people who would shit..." And that's when it happened. He bonked me. I mean that's what he did; he closed his fist and bonked it right on the top of my head. "Shut it up," was all he said. Motherfucker bonked me...Ronald Fucking Reagan hit the top of my head.

What a prick, eh? I let it go, cause I was being the bigger man, but I mean come on there's a time and a place for everything, show a little respect, eh? Anyway I didn't want there to be any hard feelings so I said, "Listen, I don't want there to be any hard feelings. I think you're doing a good job, better than most people could do. Well better than some people maybe, anyway."

He didn't even look at me. If I had voted I woulda been pissed cause I probably woulda voted for him. Anyway he gave his speech, he didn't mention me or anything or how he bonked me. I was glad because he isn't really a big guy and everyone probably would have given me a hard time about getting smacked around by the President. I don't need that shit, man.

God, Reflected

By

Michael White

The doctor shook his head as he looked at the person in front of him, lifeblood seeping out of every orifice. So much blood, so much blood... He barked shrilly at the nurses and orderlies as they scurried about, doing his bidding. He was in charge of the situation. This could be fixed. Anything could be fixed.

Multiple contusions and lacerations to the upper torso. The patient was missing part of the lower left leg, and some of the bone was displayed for all to see. How it had happened wasn't clear, and at this point, it didn't really matter. There were always wars and terrorists, fanatics and psychopaths. All that mattered was that it happened, and now it was the doctor's job to make it right.

He glanced into the patient's eyes. There was still life there, but they were beginning to get that hollow look that is usually associated with animal eyes, glazed over and empty. Time was running out.

"You're going to be okay. You can hold on a little while longer," the doctor lied.

"Steven, I don't think..."

"Dammit, just shut up and live!" Steven gripped the patient's stump of a leg with his naked hand and squeezed it as if he could hold back the rushing tide of blood merely by his own touch.

"Aa...g...ck..." came the patient's muffled cry of pain. "It's out of your hands, Steven."

"NO!" Steven started to bandage the leg tightly with one hand while the crimson liquid crept in between the fingers of the other. The patient coughed, and a little squirt escaped one of his chest wounds as well. "I can fix this!"

"You (gasp) can't fix everything, Steven."

The room suddenly became silent, and everything froze in place

save the doctor himself and his dear friend, the patient. The many nurses and hospital personnel in the room appeared blurry like a photograph of someone running. All eyes were on this magnificent doctor, who had the audacity to believe he could throttle and defeat Death itself. The patient's kind eyes began to dim, and he smiled at Steven and pointed upwards. "Let it go, Steven. Let it go."

Steven stared into those eyes and watched as his friend's life slowly faded. What had been blind rage only a moment before turned to sorrow as tears escaped his eyes. "I can fix this..."

The eyes of the patient flashed for a brief moment. It wasn't a second, it wasn't a tenth of a second, it was such a small span of time that it cannot be measured or even comprehended by man. But in that moment, Steven looked into his patient's eyes and he saw God staring back at him. One second later the patient was brain dead, and all the activity in the room resumed as the readouts on the monitors flat-lined.

Steven had been crouching over the patient's body, pouring his very soul into the restoration of another, but now he stood up with a look of bewilderment on his face. The staff remained silent as if they were still frozen, and they soon shrank away from the doctor and started to file out of the room. It seemed better to leave him in peace than to try to console him. How could they?

Forced back into reality by the noise of the door shutting, Steven tore his eyes away from the remains of his dead friend. His mind was racing, still trying to process what had just happened. He wasn't sure if any of this was real, or just a terrible nightmare. It certainly seemed very ethereal.

"So...I guess you were right, damn you," he remarked bitterly.

Steven looked around the room before settling his eyes on the ceiling. "I hope you're happy, old friend. Because while you're up there having the time of your life I'm still trapped here in hell, except now, I don't even have any company." Steven started weeping softly.

The patient's soul wafted softly through clouds and atmosphere and space and reality. A pair of winged creatures hoisted him up by the arms and carried him effortlessly to a boat with grey sails on perfect, clear water. "Where am I going?" he asked. No reply was given. The winged beings sat beside him and seemed to sleep during the voyage. It seemed like days before they reached the other side of the expanse of water.

When they hit shore, the beings awoke and pointed in what he took to be the direction he should go. He walked forward about three hundred feet and became aware of a great door before him. Instantly he was filled with a sense of awe and the sheer size of it. He had a strong urge to turn to Steven and tell him all about this marvelous journey, but Steven wasn't there.

"Oh well," he thought. "Steven will be all right without me."

clenched fist, knuckles white

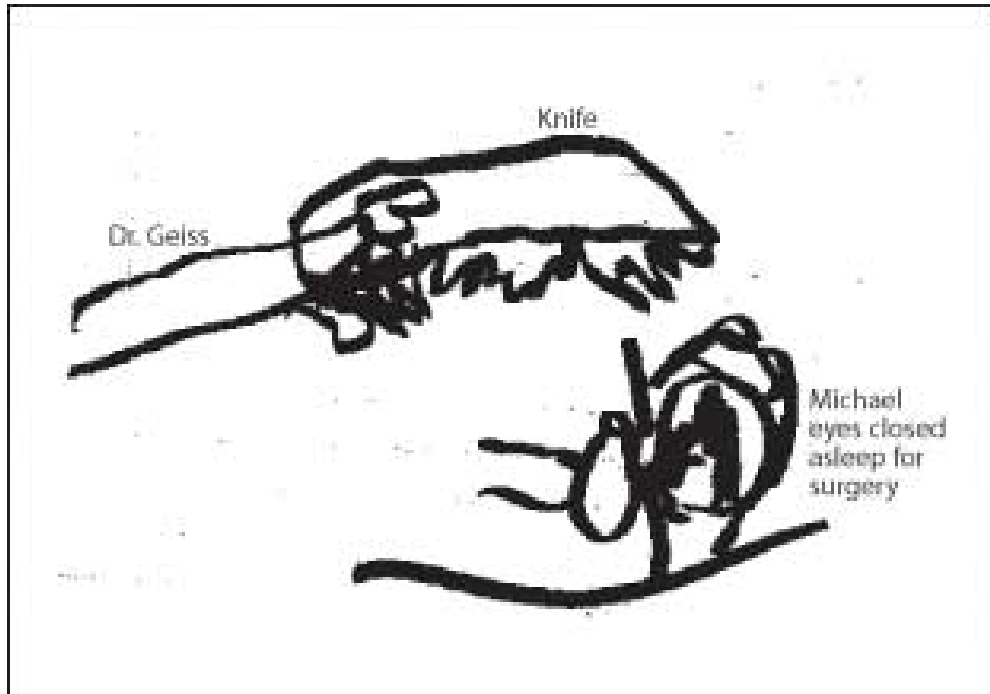
you are a test i failed
a sight i beheld
you are words with no meaning
a gaping hole in my ceiling
you are a pile of wires and dirty string
a mess of loose ends
you are a mouth without a tongue
silent in your defeats
you are a question i could never answer
you are a clenched fist, knuckles white

you are so feeble it hurts
an infliction, a blight, a curse
you are an unkept promise, my lost hope
a lost cause
you are a broken rhyme scheme
a ghost from my dreams
you are a busted fuel line
a blinking check engine light

you are a forfeited game
a plea from a losing team
you are shards of broken glass
sharpened and glinting
you are the knife in my hand
a bottle of sleeping pills
you are a flower without petals
wilted and craving water

you are a derailed train
a victim without a name
you are a foreign coastline
my waves will never crash against your shore
you are a killer in a choir robe
a line in a verse i wrote
you are an accomplished actress
with an award winning role
you are a place i'll never know

Billy Rheinecker



By Michael White

The Knife
By
Michael White

I am only five years old, and they are going to cut me open. Mommy says that the nice doctor is going to fix me, but how can that be true when he's going to cut me? I have been cut before, and I know I didn't like it. It *hurts* to get cut. Daddy told me that everything would be okay. I trust my daddy, but I don't think he understands.

"Did the doctor ever cut you, Daddy?" I asked. Daddy was quiet for a minute.

"No, son, but he's sewn part of my nose back together before."

I didn't ask why his nose needed to be sewn back together. I decided to look out the window and watch the cars go by. So many different colors, moving so fast. So many more Mommies and Daddies and Sisters...where were they all going? Not to get cut open, I bet! They were probably going to school and to wherever grown-ups go when we go to school. I wasn't going to school today.

"Do you have some paper, Mommy?"

"Yes! Here you go," she replied with a smile. My mommy smiled a lot.

I got out my markers. It said something on the bright yellow box, and although I know the letter names, I didn't know what it meant. That was okay. I pulled out the 'r-e-d' marker. The cap was on, because if you leave the cap off they dry and then they break. I liked markers and drawing, so I never let my markers break.

Whenever I got cut before, my knee started bleeding. I knew from the color on the cap to the 'r-e-d' marker that it was red. That's the color of blood, so that was the color of my drawing. Daddy said the doctor's name was Doctor Geiss. I drew his hand first, because I knew he would be there to cut me with Knife. Then I drew a circle for my head, and a circle for my body.

Lastly, I added the hair and the arms and the legs, with a bed under me. I tried to draw sleepy eyes, because Mommy said I would be asleep when they cut me. I didn't want them to cut me.

The third person in my picture was Knife. He was in the doctor's hand, and he was about to cut. I made him bigger than me or the doctor because I knew he was bi-i-ig if he could make a line in my chest big enough to see inside. I didn't know what was inside my chest, but something wasn't right. Something needed to be fixed.

I knew Doctor Geiss was probably a nice person. My doctor at home was nice. He always gave me suckers and balloon (glove) animals. I thought that maybe Doctor Geiss doesn't want to cut me, but what about Knife? He likes to cut. He is made for cutting! I finished my picture of Geiss, Knife, and me. It was scary.

"Michael, we're at the hospital now. Are you going to be okay?" Daddy looked back at me with a worried look on his face. Daddy didn't usually look worried.

"Yes. I drew it."

"Let me see, honey," my mommy said. Then she looked at my picture. "Mmm...it's...very good, Michael. But...oh, honey, is that really how big you think the knife is?"

"Knife is big so he can cut my whole chest open! Mommy, I'm scared."

Mommy looked sad for a moment, and then she opened my door and unbuckled me. Daddy walked over next to us, and I held their hands as we walked inside the hospital. Mommy and Daddy had to write on papers while the nurses got me a bracelet. It had Snoopy on it. I liked Snoopy, but Garfield was better.

"We're going to meet Doctor Geiss soon. It's going to be okay," Daddy said again. I wondered why he said that so much. "Do you want to pray before we go in?" I nodded my head. Mommy and Daddy had taught me about praying and God. I knew he would protect me, but it was hard to remember Him sometimes. Daddy and Mommy and I held hands, and I prayed in quiet while Daddy prayed out loud. It was a good prayer. I could tell Daddy had been praying for a long time, because he was so good at it.

“Alright, son, let’s go,” he said, after the, “*In Jesus name, Amen!*” part. We went into the elevator. It was all silver with doors on both sides. I thought that was weird. Why would you need doors on both sides? You could only get out the side where there was a hole in the wall, anyway. I stopped thinking about that when we got out. Now, all I could think about was Knife and Doctor Geiss.

We walked for a while, in a funny-smelling hallway that was very shiny. When Mommy and Daddy found the right room, we went inside and Doctor Geiss was there. Mommy and Daddy asked him lots of grown-up questions I didn’t understand. Then they showed him my picture.

“Ha!” Doctor Geiss laughed when he saw it. “Do you want to see the knife I’m really going to use, Michael?”

“N..not really.”

“Here it is! See, it’s only about six inches long, with a bright green handle. And we don’t even really call it a knife. It’s called a scalpel, and it’s specially made for jobs like this.”

I felt better. Knife was much smaller than I had imagined him. That meant that the hole wouldn’t be as big as I thought, and it probably wouldn’t hurt *too* much. I was still scared, but not as much.

“I guess...I guess it’s okay for you to fix me now,” I said. My Mommy and Daddy kissed and hugged me, and then they stepped aside so Doctor Geiss could start the fixing. He put a clear mask on my face and smiled. Daddy started to read me my favorite book, but I couldn’t...



“Cock Mud Crack” Photo by Marlena Hooks

I Do

By

Susan Miller

Stop that! I can't start crying now. Not yet! I can't walk down the aisle with tears running down my face. First I have my job to do. Get through this, get the job done, then I can cry. There will be plenty of time for that later, but I can't do it now. You know us mothers, children first. And the mother of the bride can't afford to lose control, not at this point. Besides, everyone's counting on me to walk through those doors with a big ol' smile on my face, be escorted to the front, climb the steps, walk to the candles, pick up the lighter, light my candle, smile at the groom's mom, turn around, walk back down the steps to my appointed seat in the first pew, left hand side and set. Just like we practiced three times last night. Oh boy! What? Is it my turn? That's not the right song, or is it? Must be, there goes the groom's mom. Okay, son, take my arm, let's do this for the third time. Three times. Last time. There are those tears again. Stop! Concentrate. You don't want to trip or stumble. Through these doors and - wow, look at all the people. I hope the caterer has enough food. Well, look who got to come after all. I didn't think they would, not with his dad being so bad and all. I'll have to remember to ask after his dad at the reception. Remember, hah! I can't remember anything anymore. I know I've left something undone, forgot to order something or left somebody off the guest list. No wedding goes off without a hitch. I know. This is my third one; my last one. Okay, cool it. I cannot see to walk down this aisle with tears in my eyes. Smile. I have to look happy, no matter what I feel. This mother of the bride business is not for wimps. It's like riding a wild roller coaster of emotions. That roller coaster dropped out from underneath me a little while ago and I'm still waiting to plunge down after it, hit bottom. But I can't hit bottom yet. I have to hang on for a few more hours.

There's the first pew. I think I smiled all the way down. Thank goodness no one can see inside my head. Or heart. Thanks, son, you are a good boy. You know your job; get your mom down the aisle, plain and simple. You did it at your oldest sister's wedding, your own wedding and now your youngest sister's wedding. My baby's wedding. No, not yet; swallow hard. Tears, you have to stay back behind my eyes. You are not allowed to escape yet.

Okay, the groom's mom is standing; I guess we are ready to light the candles. Here goes, don't catch anything on fire. They really shouldn't expect us mothers to play with fire at a time like this. Darn it! This lighter won't light. There it goes. Okay, turn around, negotiate the steps, don't fall, there's your seat, set down and wait. Whew, made it so far. What's next? Uhh-let's see. Oh yeah, stand when they start playing that song, umm, trumpet something or other. Why couldn't she pick the traditional song all brides come in to? I'll have to listen really close or I'll miss the song and be setting here like a dummy as she comes down the aisle.

Hard to miss 'Here Comes the Bride' you know. But oh no, she had to have something different. That is so like her. She always has to be a little different. She was the one that wanted to wear pants to prom, and only dresses to grade school. And once she makes up her mind, there is no changing it. Remember how stubborn she was even as a baby. Was? She still is.

Ah, there's the groom. He looks a little pale. Does he know what he is getting in to? Let me tell you something, future son of mine. She's not perfect, you know. Just remember that. She's stubborn and has a temper and will tell you pretty quickly which way to go. Sometimes she's not easy to live with. I know. I've lived with her for twenty-two years. She is full of contradictions like afraid of heights, but loves to fly. She's scared to death of earthworms, but loves to garden. She is not afraid of hard work though and is definitely not a quitter. She can take just about anything and turn it into a gourmet meal and smile all the time doing it. She smiles a lot. Her smiles will light up a room. And she loves you so very much. So, don't ever hurt her. She deserves only the best because she is truly wonderful. Perfect.

There's my cue. I think that's the trumpet song. Stand, turn and smile. Here she comes. Here comes the bride. Here comes my baby. Look at her. She's beautiful. Okay, maybe one little tear. Wipe it away quick. Now her dad is giving her away. There goes another one sliding down my cheek. Dab it away. Glad someone put this box of tissues up here. Why is it that the bride's parents have to give their child away? What about the groom's parents? Why don't they have to stand in front of a church full of people and relinquish their son to some stranger? It's so difficult to give her away like this. We've worked hard to make sure that the tiny baby God gave us would grow up to be a fine young woman. And there she stands holding his hands, looking like an angel. We give her away and we don't even get a backwards glance. She has eyes and ears and a heart only for him.

Thanks, hon. Yes, I need your hand to hold onto. This is tough, isn't it? The last one, our baby. Maybe that's why it is so much harder than the others. When the others left, we still had her. Now it's just us. Empty nesters, that's what we are now. Empty of kids. I really never believed this day would come. I remember on particularly bad days, when all three were arguing and fighting with one another, I would dream of such a time. Now it is here and I take it all back. I want them to still be little where we can cuddle in the rocking chair and read The Little Train That Could. I think I can, I think I can. Oh, I can't. Better bite my lip. Drat those tears. Maybe they'll stop. Take a deep breath. Now my nose is going to start running. Just hope my mascara doesn't. They said it was waterproof, but is it tear proof, too? Oh no, there's the video guy. Best straighten up and quit grimacing. Look, I'm paying you to take wonderful footage of my darling daughter on her wedding day, not record her mother's tears and messed up face.

What, what is Brother Gordon saying? Advice to the bride and groom?

What about advice to the parents? Why do preachers always council the couple on how to cope with married life, but forget to tell the parents how to let go? Look at her, looking up at him. Remember when she would look up at me and say hold-you-me, hold-you-me. Now she is asking him to hold her for all time. Here come those tears again. I'm going to have to get a dry tissue. I keep this up and I'll not have any make-up left on my face. Won't that be a pretty sight? Come on, get a grip. Think on something else. Like what? Like, how can my stomach growl at a time like this? I guess that is what I get for not eating lunch. She asked if I wanted something quick from McDonalds and I said no. My stomach couldn't handle Mickey D's today and then I totally forgot about eating. Hmm, remember when I would take her to McDonalds and she would peel her McNuggets. It took her forever to eat, but I didn't mind. Or how about the time she wanted to stop at Red Lobster to eat after one of those doctor visits in St. Louis? I'll never forget her setting there and ordering a plate of crab legs like she was twenty-five instead of seven. Thank goodness that scary ordeal turned out fine. We've been lucky, oh so very lucky.

Okay, pay attention. We are to the important part; the for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health part. Does she realize the importance of these words? Marriage is tough, you know. Have we talked about any of those things that can cause a marriage to go wrong? Does she know that while money isn't everything, it can sure cause a lot of stress between two people? What about when that person who is looking lovingly into her eyes turns into the biggest moron living? Have I told her that that happens from time to time? Does she know that when your loved one is sick, you're sick too, with worry and fear? She is not ready for any of that stuff. I'm her mother and I know. I don't think I've done my job well enough. I need more time to get her ready. More time to let her go.

Say that again, Brother Gordon. I need to hear it once more, how love conquers all. Let me think about that. Yes it does. It is because I love her that I can do this, this letting go I knew would come and have dreaded all along. But that was my job, wasn't it? To take her as a tiny infant and care, protect and guide her until she could stand on her own. To prepare her for meeting life, but not living it for her. To let her go. And there she is standing on her own, but not alone. That's how it should be. And all of those tears I've dabbed and sniffed and swallowed away today? Well, those are the only true cost of loving a child. And so, I can do this. Will you, my cherished child, take this man to be your husband in holy matrimony? Will I take him to be my son, to give to him you, one of my most treasured belongings? Will I share my job as protector, guide, and advisor and trust him to care for you long after death do us part?

I do.

Better late than never

I never wrote to Santa.
And I never ever wrote
those thank you letters
that my mother told me
that I must write
to be accepted into
an older world.

Yah, boo, wailed I, the effort was beyond me.
I didn't know what to say. What was I thanking them for?
Grandma for that green pullover with the irregular over-rolled collar that she knitted for fear of
having to spend money on me, whether she had it or not.

Pop, for already having gone, leaving me memories of a small rotund man in an under-vest
slumped over the kitchen sink coughing out his lungs and giving me the word 'shit.'

To my Mother's own parents, who had gone long before at whose graves I cried at age
eleven, never knowing who they were, except for the wondrous tales told over beans on toast
on Mother's work days.

A dead Granddad William, returning home across America and taking the self-service grocery
store with him only to find that self and service were not going to be a 30's English custom.

And, of a Polly who's personality made her loved by all who met her, all whom could recount
ancient tales of wonder and fun around her Brisbane kitchen on bake days.

Dear Grandma

Thank you for the jumper. It is warm.

Dear Polly and William

Thank you for the tales of almost.

Dear Pop

Thank you for 'shit.' It is priceless.

William Allen Griffiths

2004

The Wicked Step-Mother

By

Theresa Pearson

Dear Diary:

I confess it was I, Countess Raine Spencer who plotted the demise of my step-daughter. I just couldn't stand to watch Johnnie's little girl trample herself any longer. I knew she was lonely, beautiful, and vulnerable to the advances of many past and future male conquests. Even during her marriage she was unfaithful. The poor little Cinderella was cindering herself to pieces. The once pure and angelic princess had lost her title, HRH, along with her dignity.

She was such a beautiful child. I loved her with all my heart. There was nothing that I wouldn't have given her. I in fact did shower all of the Spencer children with lavish gifts suited for royalty. And yet she never liked me. The child was full of horrible deeds. She was constantly undoing my plans, showing her obstinate character. For a time she referred to me as, 'Acid Rain'.

If it wasn't for me she would have been fatherless long before her time. Poor Johnnie was nearly as self destructive as his daughter. He was moping and doping himself for years. When he was dying of a brain aneurysm, I was the one who demanded the surgeon operate no matter the risk. Without my intervention he would have died at age 54. It was I additionally who pulled the sullen man out of his despair. The despair little Diana's own mum had caused.

Poor little Diana was no more than a fat girl who threw up a lot. She was constantly binging and purging into those tiny sizes. The woman was set on destroying herself. And all the time she was blaming me. She was living her fairytale romance. And cast me the role of the wicked step-mother. If the truth became known it would have enlightened the wickedness of the princess. I remained the target of her poison for many years. She finally grew up a bit after her father's death and realized what an asset 'Acid Rain' could be. She remained the fat little girl who threw up, but to the public she was endeared as the victimized princess. And now she was fatherless.

Honestly I tried to be a nurturing mother to her. She however continually brought up past assaults. I tried to forgive, but I could not forget. All of my injured feelings remained hidden. But my smoldering wrath silenced... became deadly. And so as my mum Barbara Cartland would say, 'The plot thickens.'

My position on the Board of Harrods directly linked me with Mr. Dodi Fayed and his father. Dodi was the wretched playboy who developed an appetite for the charming Diana. He pleaded with me to arrange a meeting with her. And so I invited Diana to attend a party with me, secretly knowing the Fayed's would be in attendance. And one thing led to another. All of Diana's allies warned her against pursuing Dodi. I, however, assured her that most of the stories surrounding Dodi were exaggerated rumors. I being on the inside of the circle that encompassed Dodi and Diana knew of their comings and goings. And so I used that information to my advantage.

I set Dodi and Diana up for the deadly accident that took their lives. I had spoken to the driver and paid him to protect the couple from the wretched tabloid photographers. My instructions were to outrun those maggots. An additional cash reward awaited him a few days later, as long as news of the couple remained unpublished. And who do you think tipped off those maggot hackers? It was I. I envisioned the entire tale. The relentless chase into the tunnel ending at the 13th pillar was sketched out on my Paris map. Everything worked exactly as I had planned.

I am the engineer of the crash. Mr. Fayed of Harrods continues to blame the royals. He believes a royal conspiracy was undertaken to kill Princess Diana. And guess who planted that silly idea in his head? Of course, dear diary, it was I. And now I shall lock the truth within your covers and seal my lips forever.

The Neverending Cycle

By

Cassie Williams

It's the same old story, time and time again.

A man and woman meet
fall in "love"
get married
twenty years and three kids later
a dear Jane letter - if she's lucky
abandoned
left alone with no knowledge or means to fend for herself
desperation creates the star pupil
with fervent, virgin, naivete
the perfect workhorse is born
unattended children
forced to grow up too fast
scurry
angrily along
desperately trying to fill the void
dedicate their lives to the first soul with an inkling of devotion
only to be disenchanting
again



“Wire Cable Unravel” Photo by Marlena Hooks

Ant

By

Jonathon Brooks

I can't believe it. This is horrible, absolutely horrible. It's demolished; it's all demolished. I just can't believe it. They're destroyed. Every single last one of them is dead. Forever, they're all gone forever.

What could have possibly happened? I was only out for an hour or so. That's all the time that I was out gathering food for the family. Disaster must have come upon them in an instant. I guess they didn't have time to escape to a safe place. This is all so terribly awful. This is like a bad dream. No, it's worse. It's like the worst dream that anybody ever had in the entire history of bad dreams. That's what it's really like. Meanwhile, the only thing I want to do is wake up and realize that all of this really was nothing but a dream. Unfortunately, this bad dream is a reality and I'm going to have to cope with it somehow.

I wonder what did it to them. Was it a rabid bulldog? Was it some little kid with a humongous magnifying glass and evil in his blood? Could it have been the enemy, the most dreaded above all, the anteater? Oh, I just don't know. I just can't make sense of it all. My head's too small to handle a trauma of this magnitude. It feels like it's about to explode. This is an emotional overload. That's what this is.

I sure will miss all of them. They were all very dear to me. They were my family; they were all I really had. I guess that all I've got now is my work. Wait a minute; I don't even have a home anymore to bring the food to. I certainly can't build another home all on my own. My kind, well, we're simply no good on our own. We're a family and we all work together as a team. I'm so sad that my team is gone. My heart's certainly not the biggest but the memories of everyone in the family will always hold a special place in it.

The future certainly is looking grim. There's no home and there's no family either. It's just me now. Maybe I could find another family that dwells in a different home. Maybe they'd be willing to let me be a part of their team, a part of their family. I bet I could fit in with them. I'd certainly carry my load of the work, there's no question about that. Then again, maybe they wouldn't want me to be a part of their team. Maybe all the rooms in their house are already filled up. Maybe there's just no room for a drifter like me. Maybe from this point on I'm destined to be alone and lonely.

Well, I'm alone and that is unchangeable. I still wish every member of my family absolutely nothing but the best in the afterlife. Some folks might say that there's not an afterlife for creatures such as us, but I believe that there is. I also believe that they all made it to heaven to be with the Lord. Well, maybe not all of them. I must admit, a couple of them were really quite wicked, but I just know that the rest of the family made it. I'm actually looking forward to the afterlife myself. It will be great to be able to see the whole family again minus those two rascals, of course. I'm positive that that will be a long time from now though. I have a lot of time to be alone between now and then. I'll make sure and make the best of it, but I sure do miss my family.

My goodness, it sure is getting dark all of a sudden. That's strange; I didn't think that it was time for the bright ball in the sky to go down yet. I'm going to look up to see what's happening. What's that horrid monstrosity? There's huge letters on it. N, I, K, E, what could that possibly mean? Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Blue Moon

Rusted teeth, of a
pick-up truck madam
strung out on a twenty pack
of Dorals-

Leaning against a 7-11 society,
coke machine's out of answers-
she ponders life across the street,
mansions, elegant nails
the insomnia of 9-5 expectations
A gig her band wants no part of-

she looks up at the sign,
takes another long drag of small town
destitution-
fantasizes a future of Bloomingdale
aisles and what-not figurines-
snuffs out her puffed up dreams
then heads back inside
to purchase a smoothie,
Writing a new song in her
head- to sing under
the stars in
her flatbed sarta.

erin-cilberto
8/1/04

Blue Moon II

the eyes in the Cavalier
catch hers,
for only an instant she
looks up, humming that tune
she wrote for her imaginary garage band,
flinches within tightly wound muscle
hardened by years of
eking out existence like the tightwad
pumping the last few careful cents of
gasoline, so as not
to exceed a dollar.

Grinding her last bit of cigarette conscience
into the concrete abutment,
shame propels her into the quick shop;
she scopes out the USA Today, Tribune and
local rags filled with news that feels planets away
from her own withdrawn, backwards state
of impoverished demise.

She slithers through aisles
of overpriced, undernourishing canned goods,
bottled water, purer than
what runs throughout her tainted, abused body
since innocence drained out long before she poured into
adolescence
Ponders her worth as her fingers lite upon the smooth
red labeled, understanding face of Chef Boyardee-
slips him into the pocket
of her loosely fitting wool coat,
moves towards the door,
observes the blue Chevy pulling out of
the lot with the judging eyes behind the wheel-
imagines freedom with a sarcastic smile
as she feels the fettered hunger beneath
material that covers the bareness of her life
like undergarments painted onto her
weary from years of stained pain-plastered skin;

hears a voice behind her-
rough fingers on her shoulders,
blinks into reality
as the music stops.

Fiction

By

Keith Gimmy

The world spins, up and down collide with left and right. Storms rage within my mind. The icy steel. Tears flow down my face in their silent path to the ground, watering the earth that I stand upon. The trees about me sway and groan in the strong breeze. Why did it happen? The cold, icy steel, sleek and beautiful. My steps are made silent by the blanket of pine needles that warm the forest floor. Still air hangs about, like the fog in my mind. Why? The cold, icy steel, a hard rubber grip. The pines that surround me fall silent. The wind that stirred left their branches. A woman's voice touches my ears, the tone light and full of laughter. The laugh turns to a scream of pain. Why? The cold, icy steel, a hard rubber grip, a thin sliver of metal. The cooing of a small infant plays through my mind. A sound that I should have heard long ago. Before.

Memory gives way to the face of the doctor. The man turns his poker-faced eyes in my direction as he steps through the door. "I'm sorry," he whispers. He's not sorry, to him they were just another job. They were not his family. It didn't affect him at all. The cold, icy steel, a hard rubber grip, a thin sliver of metal. Metal. The same thing that claimed her, that claimed my child. The same thing that missed the alcoholic bastard who got drunk too early in the day. My heart pounds, the blood flows hot, anger swells within.

At least they were buried together. Two lives lost, now just bodies within a coffin, one within the other. Never again will I see her angelic face, feel her touch, or hear the heavenly voice that hooked me so long ago. Nor will I ever get the chance to lay my eyes upon my son. Why? The cold, icy steel, a hard rubber grip, a thin sliver of metal.

The congregation at church expressed their sympathies. For a time. Now they fall silent as I enter the room, faces focus on me. The people who worship with me withdraw into their own secure lives. Leaving me to face the turmoil alone.

The cold, icy steel, a hard rubber grip, a thin sliver of metal. A sliver that gives slight tension as I apply pressure. A sliver that will release all the answers I need when pressed. The sweat flows in buckets as the steel presses against my temple. My wife left me, my son is gone. Society turned away. God left me.

Big Trouble

By
Andy Farmer

Wanna know why I'm here? Cause I'm gonna be in trouble when she gets home. My grandma. Yep, big trouble, I was bad at school. Real bad. I'm not a liar though, that's real bad. I know what I did, I'd do it again, I told 'em so. I told 'em, "Hey! I'd do it again!" They heard me too, I could tell they heard cause I was yellin it right at them.

Wanna know what I did? I'm not bragging. Don't even say that...my sister says that, she is a B-I-T-C-H. She'll tell me I was bad when I get home, but she can't get me in trouble, she's not in charge. She probably heard about what I did already, I bet all the kids are talking about it. And the teachers too. I bet they think I'm a bad kid, but I'm not, you know it? He deserved what he got; I'd do it again probably....

Hey! Look what they gave me, it's a note, they told me to give it to my mother but I don't have a mother. I figure I don't have to show it to anyone, and it's not lying or nothing cause grandma says mother can see everything we do all the time, so she already knows, probably.

Mother wouldn't be proud of me now, though, cause I'm so bad, she'd probably cry, and stuff. She'd probably say, "Why would you do such a thing?" and I'd say, "He had it coming." They did too, that's not a lie.

You don't even know what I did, do you? I forgot to say...well I didn't forget, I just didn't want you to be ashamed of me. I'll start from the very beginning so you'll understand better, and won't be ashamed.

There's a kid at school, his name is Eric, and he calls me "Wee-Todd" like retard you know? Except for my name is Todd, so it's making fun of my name and callin me a whole different name. I hate him. He is an A-hole. He flicks my ears all the time. One time he threw a sharp pencil at me, and it stuck in my arm and bled! He didn't say sorry either. He laughed. He showed other people and they laughed too. I didn't laugh. He tells me that my mother died when I was born cause I was so ugly and retarded. That's not true she died before I even came out of her belly, they had to cut me out of there. She hadn't even seen me when she died, I told him that. He heard me too, but he didn't say anything back he just laughed.

He makes me mad, real mad, my face gets real hot, and I feel like I could smash a concrete block or something. I bet I could, but I don't want to try. He made me real mad today. He pulled my pants down and my underwear too! Right in the middle of P.E., everyone musta saw...everything! Everyone was laughin, and saying all sorts of awful stuff. If I had had a machine gun I'd a showed them all. But I didn't.

I yelled at all of them, and they heard me to cause I was yelling. I told them they were all A-holes, and that I hoped that when they died the devil got em. They kept laughin.

See, how mad I was? Wouldn't that make you mad? I had to do something or I woulda exploded. I would have...probably. I didn't even think about it till I got done...it was bad....and I felt bad for the hamster but I had to show him.

It was show and tell day. I brought in my favorite shirt, well I wore it anyway. I gave my speech about where I got it from. I got it from the Dollar Tree, it says, "I don't make trash I burn it!" on the front and has a dog with sunglasses on the back, it's real cool. I told how I bought it with my own money and everything.

Well when I went to sit down, Eric had broken his pen and he rubbed it all over my shirt! Ruined! I almost exploded right then. But I didn't, I held it in. I held it. I just ignored him, but I knew I was gonna explode soon. Why didn't the teacher ever see anything!

So I sat there, all inky and mad as anything. Eric was next, he brought in his hamster, it was stupid. He went on and on about how great it was. It wasn't great at all.

That's when it happened. I looked down at my desk and somebody had scratched "WEETODD" into it. I'll be honest. It might not have been Eric, but it didn't matter. I exploded.

Right in the middle of Eric's speech I jumped up! I ran right to the front of the room, Eric had his hamster in his hands. I tried to punch him in his face, I missed....but I did kick him in the leg maybe. I wanted to kill him, but the teacher pulled me off. She was holding me by both arms.

I was still real mad, and Eric started saying how I was crazy, and about how my mother died cause I was such a retarded ugly freak, and then I looked down. I guess he'd dropped his hamster in the commotion. It was right by my foot. I stomped it. I stomped it over and over and over. I killed it. That's what he gets.

He started crying. I laughed right in his stupid face. I laughed real hard. That's why they sent me home. That's why I'm here. I hear grandma coming. Maybe she'll understand. I don't think she'd think stomping a hamster was a good idea, though. I don't think she would at all.

Deliverance

By

Suzanne Parrish

Ed stood on the curb, frozen. The icy wind slipped under his collar to bite his neck. His ears were Easter pink and his nose ran. With every breath, a cloud enveloped his face and drifted up into the dismal city sky. It's miserable cold on the corners of 4th and Main, and the damned traffic light won't change. But that's what a murderer deserves. Gazing through scarf and hat, Ed barely registers the presence of hurried passersby as they pluck their way over patches of ice and snow on the sidewalk. The light turns red. Everyone crosses except Ed. The crowd shoves against him as he stands indifferently in their path. The birds of concrete paradise swirl around him on their way to hearth and home, but Ed can't go home. Right now, the curb feels fine.

The light turns green.

Home is where Trudy died. He was glad she was dead, but he was appalled by his gladness. He had been married to that woman for over fifty years, and the last eight months of the marriage were pure hell. When she passed away yesterday, he was relieved. No-----exuberant! Ed sucked a searing blast of cold air into his lungs and coughed into his pasty, liver-spotted hands. He felt like a monster. The great times, the kids, the crap they went through, the lovemaking....how could he have grown to hate this woman so terribly after such a short time? Her needs demanded his constant attention, but that didn't explain it. He was pissed that she had smoked for thirty years and took her time to die from it. But that wasn't the reason. God, he was exhausted. He never wanted to think of her again. How could this be?

The light turns red.

When Trudy was diagnosed with emphysema, it wasn't a shock, but the tears flowed. At first, the oxygen machine kept her going. Every now and again she would have a bad spell, and he'd take her to the hospital for a few days. They'd drain the fluids away from her heart, and she'd perk up for a week or two. Then her ankles would balloon with water; she couldn't eat or sleep. She'd rasp for breath all the way to the emergency room. At one point, he asked the doctor if there was something they could give Trudy to "slow her down." What was he asking? The doctor knew and simply said, "No, Ed." For the next several months she was in and out of the hospital. In and out, in and out. When he could no longer help her get to the bathroom, hospice come to change her diapers and bathe her. That's when the hate came. He was sick of her.

He brought Trudy back to the hospital eight days ago, but they wouldn't keep her and sent them home. What was he supposed to do with her?

"Nothing. I did nothing," Ed blurted.

The light turns green.

"Are you okay, Mister?" said a woman's voice. Ed turned to face her and was overwhelmed. Her iridescent, golden-brown eyes dripped with genuine concern. A leopard print hat with black fur trim surrounded her dark brown face. She wore gold hoop earrings and her lips were big, painted with dark red lipstick. She looked completely out of place in a frozen, urban environment.

"I've been watching you. You never moved in ten light changes," she tilted her head and took his arm, "Come, sit with me at the bus stop." She drew him to the bench. He sat down and stared at her while he took in a startling vision.

Ed instinctively knew this woman had walked with people through all kinds of pain. She had nurtured children and partners, and buried both prematurely. She'd mopped up blood and vomit. She'd stayed up all night waiting on sick babies and late teenagers. She'd had deep disappointments, cried with her sisters, changed the diapers of grandparents and fed home-cooked meals to strangers. She'd forgiven enemies, suffered cheating husbands and ignored insults. All her life, she had willingly given up her piece of pie so someone else could have it.

"Can I call someone for you?" she asked. Ed felt as though he wasn't good enough to know her. She put her plump, warm hand on his. The heat sunk into him like a hot iron. Liquid love ran through his whole being, and the icicle fingers around his heart melted. He shook with tears.

"I let my wife die," he admitted, "I wouldn't take her to the hospital, and she died yesterday."

"Why didn't you take her?"

"I was tired of caring for her. I let her die." Ed waited for judgment. None came.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the woman.

"I could've taken her to the hospital. The doctor sent us home the other day, but he might've saved her. I didn't even try," he choked.

"Or, maybe she would have passed regardless. Hospitals don't send anyone away if there's something they can do. Sounds to me like they expected her to pass at home."

"But, I refused to take her!" She didn't understand his negligence.

"You had to let her go, and yesterday was the day."

The words fell from her mouth in slow motion. *You had to let her go.* It cleared his head like a shot of bourbon. Trudy never liked him to keep dragging her to the hospital. He had always insisted while she complained the whole way. It wasn't her, *it was him.* The revelation stunned him.

"Here, you need this more than I do." The woman opened her tote and poured him a thermos cup of black coffee. He held it with both hands and blew away the steam.

"Why don't you tell me about your wife," she said. The woman folded her fingers around her knees and smiled. For the next twenty minutes, Ed relived the most funny, heart-breaking and mundane details of life with Trudy. Engaged in their conversation, the woman asked a hundred questions. How long were you married? Fifty-three years. How many kids do you have? Three. What is your fondest memory of her? When she ran across the farm in her wedding dress. What did you like least about her? She always smelled like cigarette smoke. What was your favorite meal together? Screwdrivers. Was she a good cook? No. What will you miss the most? Her whisky voice.

A rumbling Greyhound bus pulled up to the curb. The woman blinked in childish anticipation. "Well, here's my ride." Ed realized in embarrassment that he hadn't asked anything about her. Sadly, he sensed she was used to that kind of treatment.

"I never did ask your name," he said in effort to remedy his self-absorption.

"Grace," she nodded, and stood up to gather her things.

"Grace, this is Ed!" He threw his arms around her and rocked back and forth. The passengers on the bus pointed at them in curiosity. Why would a brittle, red-eyed Irishman be embracing a soft, doughy brown goddess?

"Well, all right, Ed," Grace patted his back, "You take care of yourself!" She laughed and waved to him as she boarded the bus. Ed waved back and watched it drive away until it disappeared into the city mist. He put his hands in his coat pockets and walked back to the curb.

The light turns red.

The sun spread its rays out from behind a surly gray cloud. Ed let it warm his face.

"God bless ye, Trudy," he whispered, and went home.

Five Years From Now

By
Amy Gorski

Five Years From Now.
It's not going to matter.
That I know the "recommended way" to prepare a Subway Melt.
What I know about purebred terriers.
How much Ester-C is safe for children under 12 to take.
How to strap a fidgety six year old into a car seat in a fifteen passenger van going around a sharp turn.
How long to soak a thirty gallon grease covered pot in scalding hot water until it can be cleaned.
I won't need to care about customer's high cholesterol or dislike of black olives.

This is all information I have gathered working crappy minimum wage jobs.
Going through employee handbooks.
Seeing how many things I do or don't do will result in "immediate termination".
No one will lay their cash on the counter so I have to lean over to get it.
No one will flip a credit card at me like it's a Frisbee.
No one will get red in the face over a policy I did not write but have to enforce.
Saying they will come back tomorrow and file a complaint with my boss.

I won't pick any more totes; watching the sunrise from the fenced in smoking area.
I caught my hand in a tuna press once.
Funny to everyone else; hurt my knuckles.
I won't be pushed to sample anything.
Threatened with my job if I don't.
I won't drive down long country roads listening to angry music; chain smoking Camels to cope with stress.

I won't sink into a hot bath with pulled muscles criss-crossing my spine.
I didn't think that box of soybeans weighed more than twenty pounds.

Because in five years, I should have my degree in Radiography.
I'll work in a hospital. I'll have medical insurance.
You don't know how much you need it until your teeth start hurting and you have to budget a checkup.
I'll be able to pay my own car insurance.

Hopefully, people won't feel the need to tell me about Jesus while I smile politely and would rather be clipping my toenails.
Yep, Jesus is a great guy.
Right now I envy the movies.
Pachino's pay in "Scarface".
Ten million a month.

Hopefully, one day I'll be able to use Ramen noodles as dog food.
I'll quit eating so much pizza.

Maybe be ready to quit smoking.
Find purpose and enjoyment in a career I can love for years.

Until then, I'll slide my eyes open at 10:30 in the morning, five days a week.
I'll put on one of the ugliest uniform shirts I've ever seen.
I'll go and have a good or a bad day.
So I'll keep repeating this to myself on the bad days.
I will earn my way out of this minimum wage existence.

Maybe I'm just one moody employee of a major company full of money driven corporate monkeys. But I know I'm not alone.

But I need these jobs and all the crap that comes with them; I need this to survive.
Until a very expensive piece of paper sets me free.

It's Nothing

By

Mickey Levan

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."

-H.P. Lovecraft

Richard Barrim was just one of the many professors I had during my college days, but he is also the one to have the most influence on my life. He held several degrees in psychology and philosophy and was a reasonable, intelligent, and competent instructor. His courses sometimes dealt with concepts such as the nature of reality or our own perceptions. Other students thought him to be a little eccentric. I attended many of the classes he taught and found his ideas intriguing. Barrim would ask students questions like, "Is the pencil in your hand real?" and, "What is behind the world you see?" They were questions that had no real answers, like the sound of one hand clapping. It always seemed to me, though, that Barrim, in some small way, always hoped that a student would eventually tell him the correct answer.

It was during my second year that Barrim's career came to an abrupt end. It was during the fall. Returning to the college after one weekend, I went to my usual classes only to find that my psychology course with the professor had been canceled, permanently. The notice sent out by the university was that Barrim had fallen sick and would be on medical leave until further notice.

It was strange that the seemingly healthy professor would become so ill over the course of one weekend that he could no longer teach. I started to wonder what had actually happened to Barrim.

It didn't take long for the rumors to begin flying around campus about what "actually" happened. Some said there was a long standing feud between Barrim and the Board of Education and that he was forced to leave. Some said he had been battling depression for some time and finally tried to end it all. They were mostly the same cliched rumors you hear any time something mysterious happens to anyone. The one rumor that struck me, though, was that Barrim had found the answer to one of his questions, and it drove him insane.

My curiosity had gotten the best of me. I had to know what fate had befallen Professor Barrim. Naturally, the university proved no help. Everyone I asked claimed ignorance of the situation. There were no authorities to question, since I wasn't sure of what exactly had happened. So, after some researching, I decided to visit the professor's home.

The address brought me to a modest looking house in the suburbs.

It was white, single story, with a two-car garage and spacious yard. Barrim was unmarried, so my guess was that he lived here alone. I knocked on the door, but received no answer. Walking around the house, I saw nothing out of the ordinary. I started to return to my car when I saw one of the neighbors heading towards her vehicle. I decided to ask her a few questions.

I introduced myself as one of the professor's students, and after a few pleasantries I began asking her about Barrim. She said the professor was a friendly man, but mostly kept to himself. I said he had been put on medical leave at the university and asked if she knew anything about it. Her expression grew sad when she replied that she did and I asked her to tell me the story.

She said it all happened late one night, a few weeks ago. She had just gone to bed when she heard a wild commotion come from Barrim's house. It sounded like someone hammering nails, she said, accompanied by some yelling she couldn't make out. After a while, it stopped, but the incoherent screaming continued. She looked out her window to see the professor suddenly throw open his front door, run into the front yard, and collapse on the ground. He was curled into a ball and clawing at the dirt, all the while screaming hysterically at the top of his lungs. She quickly ran outside to see if he needed any help. She rushed to his side and tried to calm him, but he kept shrieking.

She said he babbled about something at great length, but she couldn't understand what he was saying. All she could make out was, "I know! I know now! I saw it!!" When she asked what it was that he saw, he suddenly grew quiet. "Nothing. It was nothing," he said, while rocking himself back and forth on the ground. He didn't remain quiet for long, and soon began screaming again. The neighbor went back inside to call 911, and the doctor was still shrieking when the ambulance came to take him away. The neighbor said a day later a police officer came by to question her about the incident and she told him the same story. He said Barrim had some kind of nervous breakdown, presumably from work-related stress, and was currently staying at the hospital. That was the last she had heard about the whole subject.

I thanked her for her time and watched her drive away towards town. When I couldn't see her anymore I went back to the door of Barrim's house. I had to know what the professor had discovered.

The door was locked, but after a few attempts I managed to pick it and enter the house. Again, nothing seemed strange, the rooms being modestly furnished. I found a closed door at the back of the house, which I opened to find the professor's personal study.

One wall was lined with books covering various topics, all related to his field of study. There were file cabinets in one corner, that proved to be empty, and an office desk in the corner, which, from the dust marks on the surface, was apparently missing a

computer. I suppose those were confiscated by the authorities in an attempt to figure out what had happened to Barrim. That wasn't the strangest thing about the room, though. A window, overlooking the backyard, had been boarded up with plywood. Chiseled into the wood around the frame were all kinds of unfamiliar symbols and shapes. The hammer and nails supposedly used in the job still lay scattered in the floor. I found this strange because when I inspected the outside of the house I saw no signs that this window was broken.

I remembered the neighbor's words earlier, how she heard a hammering sound along with Barrim's screaming. Whatever it was that he saw that drove him into apparent madness, I guessed, must be behind this boarded window. I weighed my options for a moment, but I again gave in to curiosity. I quickly picked up the discarded hammer and began prying the nails loose from the window. Once they were all out, I slowly removed the plywood.

I had prepared myself to see any number of horrifying things, but mostly I expected to see the back yard. But that's not what I saw, and as I gazed at the sight I felt complete and absolute terror take hold of me.

There was no back yard. There was no grass, no trees, no mid-afternoon sky. There were no objects or color, no light or darkness. There is no way for me to describe it, because my mind could not grasp what my eyes were showing it. I realized that Barrim had told his neighbor exactly what he saw that robbed him of his sanity. It was *nothing*.

I don't quite remember what happened next. I have vague memories of using a hammer to seal that horrible window, but after that I must have blacked out. I'm told I was found screaming in the front yard, and that a neighbor called an ambulance for me. I don't suppose it matters anymore. □ I know what happened to Barrim now. If it's the same thing that has happened to me, he's lying in a dark, padded cell, wearing a straight jacket, locked away in some mental asylum. Or at least that's where the doctors say I am. I can't be sure. I'm not sure about any of this anymore. I know the answer to Barrim's question. I know what lies behind this world. I keep trying to tell the doctors here but they all think I'm insane. Maybe I am, but at least I know the truth. I won't tell them all of it, though. About what else is *out there*. If I did that then they'd never let me out of here. I wonder if Barrim made that mistake. It wasn't just *nothing* inside that window. Something was reaching out of the nothing. And it wants *in...*

Donner -- A Reindeer's Lament

*By
ed short*

"Rudolph the Red nosed reindeer had a very shiny blah blah blah bah humbug" ---- i am so sick of hearing about Rudolph's damn nose and how he "guides my sleigh tonite" --- such celebrity -- and what about the rest of us??

Are we just insignificant sleigh slaves??? Oh, people remember Blitzen, of course, with a catchy name like that --sure they would!!! and to get a cowboy like Gene Autry to sing about you??? well, Rudolph will "go down in history!"

But Donner??? do you even know of me at all???? did you know that i was the brakes of the team --- yes, see you don't realize that even our fearless leader with the big red schnoz can't stop the sled on your roof -- if not for me, we would go sliding off every house lid and your toys would all be scattered in the slushy snow of your yard -- broken and all mixed up with all the other kids' toys!!!

i am third row right -- right behind Comet. I am sure you've heard of him -- he's the one who not only flies on Christmas nite, but cleans your sinks as well ---- and to my left -- well Cupid!! and we all know that besides being one of the members creating the 350 deerpower to run this hemi of a sled, he also is a pretty good shot with an arrow!!! but Rudolph???? basically does nothing --- he's up front getting all the damn publicity --- Santa's pet --- he doesn't really even steer the thing --- he's like a figurehead who puts time in at the company, sits in an office all day and is told to stay out of the way while the real workers run the place --- get the idea!!!

well, don't you agree??? why should this schmuck get all the attention???? the rest of us have had it with him --- he can take his red nose and go stick it in the sands of the Sahara for all we care ---

we want some recognition -- we want our own songs --- we just want what's coming to us for all our hard work --- a good 401 k plan (which only Rudy has of course) --- better health insurance -- Last year i badly damaged one of my shoes while sliding on one of YOUR□dumb rooftops cause i slid into one of those stupid satellite dishes --- Cripes, that hurt -- almost tore the whole hoof off! I was sidelined for three weeks, at the vets for two of them -- and got no reimbursement --- no sick days and i was not covered with health insurance so it set me back a piece!!! Santa didn't even express an apology for what happened -- slave sleighers i tell ya, that's what we are ---

not enough vacation time either -- all we get now is 364 days a year --- we need another half day!!! it's not fair to have to work a whole 24 hour shift in one year!!! and minimum wage??? we don't even make that much -- and of course everyone is sleeping when we come to your houses so no tips --- yeah sure, some of you wake up just as we are leaving -- look out your windows and say "was that who i think it was?????" of course you are referring to Santa and Rudolph and thinking "oh, i should have left cookies out for the jolly old man and maybe some venison for that red nosed horse in the front" -- but is there ever any thought to the rest of us --- no that is just it!! we are just "the rest of us" -- just as important in our own right -- and just as ignored as a nerd at a frat party --- At least he gets to eat the hors d'oeuvres!!!!!!!

We get not even an oat!!!

So i am asking all of you who read this to stop a minute and think! i am not intending to sound like a gripey, cry baby --- but i do need new shoes --- so the brakes can be fixed --- and i do want all of you to remember that there are 9 of us not just one with a big honker --- and that santa would not be able to do his thing so you can get your thing -- if it weren't for the rest of us fellas (whoops, sorry, fellas and one girl -- Comet is a female, did you all know that? ---- yup and oh, boy that nite 12 years ago when she tried to make the flight eight months pregnant...whew!! that was tough on all of us -- actually you might remember that nite --- everything came way late --- uh huh slowed us down immensely she did -- but she's a team player and wouldn't let us go without her -- now her son Ajax is one of us, -- yes, the youngest -- and he is an excellent propeller for the sled -- does a great job -- only Comet doesn't like him -- can't figure out why!)

So give us a break -- and i'll give you a brake this christmas --- and put some love in our stocking --- maybe some new shoes, a raise, maybe a Cupid knickknack, or a Blitzen Beanie Baby doll, some scrubby pads for Comet and Ajax or better yet -- how about a country christmas cd with a song written for and about "little ole Donner!"

thank you and here's my address.....

the end

Life in a View

I'm just a boy
Cannot grow
Cannot show
I'm just a fool
There and then
Broke again
I got to go
Back nature
To mature
I'm just a man
I took a step
I crawl and creep
I'm going to die
Lay me down
Wear my crown
I'm awake
Born again
To break new sin

John James

A Letter to Our Unborn Child

By
Cathy Gude

Dear Unborn Child,

I am writing you to tell you that I wish things could have been different. I wish you could have been, but things didn't work out that way. You would have been wanted more than I could let my heart imagine. You would have been the apple of my eye, a chip off your dad's block, and loved by your big sister.

I can only imagine how beautiful or handsome you would have been with your naturally tanned skin tone, your hazel eyes, and your perfectly wavy hair. I can see you growing up, playing sports, going to college, getting married, having a successful career in whatever you set your mind on, making me and your dad grandparents, and your big sister an aunt just to name a few things.

I believe you would have been a happy, free-loving addition to our already happy family. I know your big sister would have loved to teach you how to wear make-up, or what not to say to that girl you might have liked in school so that you would not offend her. Your dad would have taught you how to drive a car, or how to fish. I would have taught you how to cook for yourself, and to be able to take care of yourself by yourself if that's the way you wanted things to be.

We as your parents would have been so proud when they called your name out for graduating at the top of your class. We could see you as the class president and the valedictorian with high honors. You would have made us so proud to say that is our child up there telling you that the future is an open door, don't be afraid to step through it.

You, our dear child, would have been our miracle, who would have been loved more than mere words can describe by us your parents and your big sister.

This letter to you means that you would have been our wanted, loved, and cherished offspring that brought much happiness and joy to all of our lives.

With much love, your mother,

Cathy Gude

Summer

Puffy white marshmallow clouds
lure me on my back.
Leaving me wanting more.

Sweat runs down my face and neck
like wet crystal beads
matting my hair to my face.

The damp fresh cut grass brushes satin
soft against my warm raining skin.
Cooling my heat.

Sticky sweetness melts
frozen red drops
of liquid cherry
bursting on my pink tongue.

A delicate yellow butterfly
flutters light on
wispy lacy wings.

The humming symphony of crescendo
crickets cry out to the moon.
Leaving me wanting more.

Ro Redfearn