Front Porch Review

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Of Numbers and Thirty-three Miners from Chile
- Eveline Horelle Dailey

The television screen was dark, and I knew all was right for the thirty-three miners rescued from the underworld of Chile after sixty-nine days. How curious: thirty-three, sixty-nine, perhaps nothing more than a series of threes. And yet how important were numbers to us? Aside from general accounting endeavors, I did not always pay attention to numbers and what they represented. The miners were safe and did not need my concerns, but numbers danced around me, prodding or rescuing something a long time swelling in the caches of my wondering mind.

I had witnessed something grand within the human spirit, and words such as endurance, gratitude and tenacity came to mind, but that was not all. I became aware of an unending order, an apparent requisite to the workings of the universe and humanity. My thoughts were not revolutionary; they were part of things left mostly unnoticed. Yet for thousands of years men knew of a golden order around, above and within each of us. Numbers related to Chilean miners were simply a trigger to pause, think and explore what was in front of me.

I turned my palms to the light with no recall of the last time I looked and examined the hands I used and abused without a thought, and certainly took for granted until I broke one. The smoothness of youth had given way to minute crevices, too many to count. Still, they were well serviceable, and I wondered how long since my last inspection. Was I a programmable machine using convenient implements I never noticed? My own digits had built a mountain of memories, too many to count today, but watching my hands was not a memory, it was a reality.

A feeling vague yet intense, if that is possible, happened when the television went dark. An inner light illuminated something for me to scrutinize. The motion of opening my hands was an aperture for viewing a world of identifiable and palpable mysteries. A cooperative unity with the universe granted me the seed to grow an idea. First I had to consider the unconventionality of my thinking; once done, an inventory followed. The exploration of archetypical numbers began. With no conscious intention I began to explore what I found to be keys to something greater than ten fingers attached to my open hands.

Obliging the caprices of my psyche, my palms gave me an accounting long known by others. I gazed at each hand, and knew the unfolding of time had not changed their particular attributes. The finding was obvious, four fingers and a thumb on each end of my arms. The number ten reminded me of sequences used the world over: 100, 1000, ad infinitum! The rescued miners did not have much to do about my unearthing of what I was thinking. I counted the phalanges, boned sections, of each of finger, and a door opened wide – the pointer had three phalanges as did the other fingers. Had I found where a dozen came from? I questioned the person closest to me at the time. Did he know these things? Tired, he answered that he did not know and never looked for what I was looking for. He added that he, too, never paid too much attention to his hands. Must be a human thing, I thought. My mind, however, was not resting; a journey had started, and I was not going to abandon ship.

I marveled at the education I received as a youngster. One of my tutors used my body to teach me order, world history, mathematics and what he called sacred geometry. He was at war with my mind and was determined to win. War, every time I saw his face, war! Today I smiled, thinking about this man born to torment me. Always insisting numbers were the laws by which the universe worked, Mr. Jacques Malaise made my youth a nightmare, and he won the war.

I spoke French at that time and now gave a thought to my fingers. *L'index,* perhaps to

turn the pages and to point to a direction I could not see. *Le majeur,* the longer, taller finger, the word translating specially well when addressing the Major of the armies fighting wars outside of my investigation. Then I remembered that in America we use this finger for a certain gesture. I played with *l'annulaire,* the one which received the *annau*, the ring I wear. I could not come up with much utility for this finger, perhaps it was made to remind me I was married. The one with real purpose I could not forget, the little finger. *L'auriculaire,* the one made to stick into the ear for cleaning. This thought brought me laugher; Mr. Malaise reminded me again and again to unplug my ears. My exploration was by no means over; I could not let the dormant *le pousse* be ignored. My thumb – made to push on, to give the OK in arenas of Rome. My thumb was up, and I could continue. One finger dependent upon the others to use as a whole, perhaps for the greater good and used, also, for all the things waiting to be grabbed.

With twelve phalanges in hand, so to speak, I surmised that they are the basis for dozens, inches and feet. In honor of past acupuncturists, I remembered again my thumb and its three phalanges; the first and second are obvious, the third bone attaches the thumb almost to the wrist. I now had a total of fifteen segments.

All this was nothing more extraordinary to me than a bunch of folding bones forming a particular number. Not so, my mind told me; it sounded much like the voice of Mr. Malaise. "All is in order," he would have said to my gesticulation, "notice the numbers, and you will find great mysteries waiting exploration." So notice I did, explore I continued. One must smile when one finds out that the source of irritation during youth is a gift to be unwrapped decades later with care and appreciation. My dozen gave up its mystery, but my fifteen forgot to tell me how important it was, but that was temporary.

The Middle East, particularly Mesopotamia, did not enter my awareness immediately, too busy using my hands and paying attention to digits. I needed to clear my mind and look at the various gifts received from the universe. The only way to get there was to find out more.

With an interest in all things Eastern, the fifteen brought to mind that a Hindu month had fifteen days and that each month corresponded to a phase of the moon. Their calendar year contained 360 days – no month with extra days. I remember the lesson well, I was nine at the time, and I decided to watch the moon every night for however long it would take; an eternity it appeared to have been. I had to prove my tutor wrong, he was talking nonsense, I was sure of it. It was worth it to me at that point in time but, alas, it did not happen. The moon changed its face as prescribed by the number fifteen. I did not know then that my Julian calendar followed the travels of the sun and gave me Easter and leap years.

To confuse me further, in the Islamic world they keep prayer order by counting the fifteen knuckles on each hand, the thumb having three knuckles as suggested above. To that is added the tip of the little, ring and middle finger of the right hand, giving them the magic number of thirty three. An easy task once they learned to recite the ninety-nine attributes of Allah.

Thinking of such things brought me to explore the messengers of the cosmos for the sky was clear, no night lights, and stars twinkled. What a wondrous sight! Two hands made my calculation easy, I had twenty-eight obvious knuckles, and, being a woman, I knew my natural menstruating functions were on a twenty-eight day cycle. How curious, I thought, remembering the moon and its voyages took twenty-eight days. I knew the sun's division of time had a twenty-eight year circle. What was all this about?

Then the cosmos came crashing down, the geometry, the numbers, and order connecting the cosmos made me dizzy. I closed my eyes, and the next memory rushed in: I wanted to learn the piano. I had great ambitions, no time for tenacity and had never heard the word patience. One

morning a piano arrived, a teacher followed. In my mind I was to become the next Chopin or Herby Hancock, an American I had heard a thousand times. Teaching me do re mi was to be his syllabus, instead he showed me that there was a relation among the eighty-eight keys, and three and four and seven were part of this universal equation I still did not understand. He told me I would find out that the octaves of scaling related to the octaves of human hearing. But all I wanted was to learn to play like the American jazz man, and I was not interested in octaves.

It became evident to my family that piano lessons were not going to help me with my imaginary jazz career. The piano soon made room for another piece of furniture my mother made better use of. She played the violin and understood numbers and octaves. Me, I developed a simple need to hear music and understood that the playing needed to go to those who appreciated what I could not grasp.

The fascination about relations among body parts, the cosmos, and a bunch of miners in Chile kept my mind occupied. I had witnessed a rescue that in turn triggered memories of unspecified materials learned or heard about years before. I realized that numbers were an integral part of the physical me and, perhaps, the spiritual me was to discover these things at another time.

Evidence that numbers were all around me and knowing I had never paid attention to them, I began counting bits and pieces of me and everything immediately within my reach. Made of the stuff of divine origin, proportions in man and the cosmos told me I was onto something, and so were the people that built pyramids and so on.

The news about the miners came and went, but my hands and what I found remained to tell me there is and was an order that comes with numbers and one does not need to be a mathematician to find them fascinating, specially when one finds them in the very construction of the body.

Each number I examined seemed to have come from or with something prearranged, and one could use pages to explore them. Many books have been written about the value of numbers, and while we often think of them in the organization of dollars and cents, they are there surveying our every move.

I was not looking into the various calendars of the ancient world when I thought again about the trapped miners, in the ‘underworld’ of Chile. Thirty-three miners, three side by side, was easier to deal with than to count my digits and knuckles. Was it humor or coincidence when I learned that the universe orchestrated something to keep me occupied? Man is born with thirty-three vertebras.

While Plato said that geometry was the knowledge of the eternally existent, Marcel Proust a novelist felt that the real voyage of discovery consisted not in seeking new lands but seeing with new eyes. I had perhaps opened both my eyes.

Never satisfied, I opened my arms to the heavens, spread my legs apart and had a conversation with Leonardo Da Vinci’s Vitruvius man. I was a circle, I was a square. I could make angles and, to top it all, the golden proportion of my navel broke my body in half. Proportionately the same condition happened as my chin to my brows divided my face. I had to adhere to these proportions when I drew my first nude. I already knew that from the tip of my fingers to my elbow, I would find the golden means proportion at my wrist. Phi they called it. From my shoulder to my brows, from my nose to the top of my head, repeated was this interesting ratio. My hand replicated this progression, my findings went on, and I realized I was all about numbers and their attributes.

Did we have four seasons by accident, was I sitting on a chair with four legs, and is the

table holding my computer a square? Do we humans fit in a circle but understand our world only when it is squared off.

Numbers are still lingering like dust particles in my mind. As the Chilean miners rescue effort materialized, I heard that seven men were to go down. I could not help but think of Genesis and the Sabah, that seventh day. I allowed my eyes to visit the sky, and I saw the seven sisters, the constellation named the Pleiades. I know science and mathematics find many roots in Greece but my mind took another direction. I examined some Sanskrit text and found the seven chakras, the first one being at the tail, the root, the portal, the Kundalini, the Chilean mine, the underground. How interesting that the chakras came with the colors of a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet – seven colors. What was going on when my mind was counting or travelling from the hanging gardens known as the seventh wonder of the world to the seven colors of a rainbow?

Seven men went underground, and with the help of many more above, they helped with one of the most heroic, non-violent rescues I had ever witnessed. Pulled from a symbolic birthing canal, thirty-three men with thirty-three vertebras experienced a rebirth as the phoenix rose, and one area of their body after the other departed from the mine. From the root, the sacral followed, the solar plexus, the heart, the throat, the third eye area and finally the crown had left the underground.

The men from Chile provided me a golden mean to peruse divine order or coincidence. It is now clear to me that whether we know it or not, we are a juxtaposition of numbers.

A Loiterer's Diary
- Robert King

A long life of needles no longer stings.
The past no longer stabs in the back.
The future has no sharp point.
The streets I live on have no sharp turns.

The hard sidewalks feel only my lowering weight.
Like powder in breeze I'm slowly blowing away,
or kicked like a can, the wind scolds
my metal tumble away, where among the skyscraper
tombstones no one hears a loiterer's clang of cup.

I no longer pity myself in the street puddle mirror.
I'm past recognition, past time, past unheard pleas
only halfway out of my mouth.
Seldom now do these hands stray from my lukewarm breath,
from my blood-warm, empty pockets.
Words medicate themselves.
Sorrow is just another word for sedative.
Soul is another word for shadow.
And all of them just whisper now.

Only this bum leg still swells with pride,
useful as a crippled wing dragging
a ragged life behind it, leaving a track of
how hope is a stale trail of breadcrumbs,
how life as a shadow no longer feels cold,
how the deepest night blankets my shivers,
tucks in my stone-cold, invisible dreams.

A Sort of Rorschach Test
- Barry Basden

I asked an old man
how he writes
such moving poems and he said
he reads a lot of poetry and
when one pricks him,
he picks and picks
at the wound until
blood begins to flow freely,
and then he spills it
onto paper in a sort of
Rorschach Test of his soul.

Ties That Bind

- Art Bloom

An Ideological Lamentation

- Dennis Beard

There is no better evidence of the limits of the human mind than its dependence upon ideology. Ideology is any one of those belief systems we rely upon to explain the milieu in which we happen to find ourselves. Several ideologies familiar to most are Capitalism, Communism, Conservatism, Democracy, Jihadism, and Liberalism. There are many more. Some say that the various religions are ideologies; others say that ideologies are really religions. Arguments can be found to support either view, or any view.

The various ideologies, both those currently in vogue and those which have been discredited and discarded, are logic-tight systems. That is, they are incompatible with one another. If any one of these systems is a true and faithful representation of the nature of human existence, then others must be false. It is, however, the very nature of ideologies to demonstrate that they are true.

Despite the impossibility of knowing that any one of the competing ideologies is true, humans, for some reason, seem dependent on them, regularly subscribe to one of them, and treat it as being the one true explanation of human experience.

This, of course, brings the adherents of one ideology into disagreement with the adherents of other ideologies. Despite these disagreements, it sometimes happens that adherents of one ideology will make common cause with the adherents of another. However, over time, these alliances usually break apart because of inherent logical incompatibilities.

No one seems to know why the human mind is dependent upon ideology. The answer to this question is, itself, the subject of ideological dispute. Likewise, the reason why one person subscribes to one ideology while another person subscribes to another is a subject of ideological dispute.

Ideological dispute causes acrimony. We are incapable, except under extreme circumstances, of recognizing any shortcomings in the ideology to which we subscribe. Likewise, each of us is incapable, except under extreme conditions, of surrendering the acrimony that he or she believes is justly directed toward the adherents of other ideologies. The extreme condition is usually some highly intense impracticality or discomfort such as war, genocide, or economic collapse which causes us to temporarily see a shortcoming in ideological conflict. Such periods of insight are brief, and the causes of the precipitating disaster soon become the subject of ideological conflict.

Histories of these conflicts, and their resolutions, are constantly being rewritten in an effort to demonstrate that one or another of the existing ideologies offers the one true explanation of what happened. Histories of this kind are, therefore, seen as unreliable or reliable depending on the ideology subscribed to by the reader.

Most efforts to abandon ideology and to focus on the joy of living and on simple human values will fail. The concepts of “joy of living” and “simple human values” are too vague to be grasped and are themselves taken to be an ideology. As an ideology they become subjected to refined ideological definition. What constitutes “the joy of living” or “simple human values” becomes a topic of ideological debate and, therefore, of acrimony. The ideological debate and acrimony cancels any possibility of “joy of living” unless acrimonious ideological debate is thought of as the prime element of “joy of living.”

Our malleable minds will always be plagued with this problem; although, whether it is a problem is also subject to ideological dispute. The intensity of ideological acrimony increases in

proportion to the spread of instantaneous mass communication via tools such as radio, television, the Internet, including blogs, Facebook, U-tube, electronic “news” sources, twitter, texting, and others as yet unknown. The acrimony will increase at an accelerated rate as these means of communication are concentrated in the hands of ideologues. The world is sinking into an electronically induced, ideological dystopia.

We have tethered ourselves, or been ensnared, in ever increasing numbers, to the electronic media, from which pours forth ever more strident forms of ideology. Many live in a comforting ideological haze in which one’s beliefs are constantly reaffirmed and one’s opponents, real or imagined, are easily made to look foolish, immoral, and demonic.

In its formative years, the ideology of Democracy was tied to the ideology of Tolerance. This seemed reasonable at the time because the masses of people were weary of widespread ideological war and devastation. As ideology has evolved, Tolerance is seen by ideological purists as compromise and surrender. There is something in the human mind that fears the Other, that which is different from itself. It is here that ideological animosity takes root and becomes intractable. Conversions by means of persuasion are not unheard of but nearly always result in the convert’s moving from one ideology to another and becoming more fervent than before.

Hope, and there is hope, is found in the world of Joy of Living which runs quixotically parallel with the world of ideology. There is great joy in human association, and sometimes human beings, serendipitously, come to see the good in those who believe differently than they do. Breakthroughs occur.

Bag Lady - Chicago's North Side
- Donal Mahoney

This senior citizen
whose face is Rushmore still
squats with pigeons on the steps
of the Rogers Park Masonic Temple.
She wears a shawl this snowy day
and is beneath the visor of a hunting cap
a woman who has paused along the way.
Her shopping bags, stuffed, frayed,
and each square feature of her face confesses
she speaks at best a little English.
Rested, she will rise,
a penguin on a floe,
and navigate her day.

Firenze (Florence)
- Elaine Seehafer

Through the back streets
from the darkened shadows
of an Inferno
Santa Marie del Fiore
begs of me to climb
her stairs towards
the flamingo skies
of the Last Judgment –
where a beggar stands –
crooked and lame –
leathered skin cracking
in the beaten sun.
Climbing towards
depictions of divinity
each one bringing forth
the wonder of the
painter's strokes –
the darkened shadows
of Firenze are no
longer larger than
blackened insects
dotting the paved squares
in this comedy of the Divine.

Before and After

- Bill Martin

Goodbye
- Joanne Faries

he hated her wind chimes

clanging, tinkling raucous background no order, no symphony
put his arm around her on her porch swing distracted
wind blew too hard, imperfect melody jangled his brain

complaining until
she sent him away

forever

no more sleepovers, whispered trysts
he tried to relax, in his own bed
disturbed by

silence

Hell to Confess
- Debra Brenegan

Kate was more than hungry. She was tired and hungry, which, according to the *Target Buzz III Diet and You* book, was one of the worst combinations. She knew she would soon be tempted to emotionally eat to fill her void, to stuff her feelings. Her hands shook in anticipation as she pounded down the hallway of her apartment building, keys in hand, pinching shoes pinching. What could she hold that couldn't be used against her? A stalk of celery? A freshly popped can of Diet Dr. Pepper? Her jaws ached with the need to chew, and so she decided, as she burst through the door, threw her keys on the kitchen table, kicked off her shoes, flung off her coat, to accost the bag of Cheetos hidden like a bottle under the dishtowels in the bottom drawer.

Kate crouched on the linoleum floor next to the dishwasher and fed herself the orange delights with the precision of a wood chipper operator. No pauses. No loss of momentum. No thoughtful moments to assess her appetite levels. No journal dialogue about comforting herself. No thumbing through the pages of replace this bad food item (Cheetos) with this good food item (carrots).

She was half-way through the bag before she started breathing normally. Kate licked the cheese powder from underneath her fingernails and hoisted herself up from the floor. She got the two-liter bottle of Diet Dr. Pepper; she didn't even buy the regular stuff anymore, unscrewed the cap with a fizzy whoosh, and settled herself at the table like a regular person with the bag and the bottle. She ate more slowly, but still with the precision of a wood chipper operator. Kate's molars filled with cheese dust.

She had a decision to make. She could finish the whole bag, or she could stop, with only a little more than half of the bag gone. That little more than half was moistening in her stomach, was ready to float through her digestive system, coat her arteries and plump out her hips. Or, she could stop. She could put the bag back in the drawer under the dishtowels to get stale or to eat another day. She could also throw the half bag in the trash, or grind it up in the disposal. Kate crunched Cheetos. She could sprinkle the half bag by the bushes in the park tomorrow on her lunch hour for the squirrels to fight over. She could bring them to work and lay them in the middle of the snack table. She could…

Kate stepped on the foot pedal of the trash can and stuffed the empty Cheetos bag deep into the bin where Noah was unlikely to see it. She sucked the last of the orange powder from her fingers and cuticles and from under her fingernails. Her tongue worked the gummy cheese paste out from her molars, swallowing the little patties down one by one. She rinsed her fingertips and dried them, then rummaged in the refrigerator for a carrot, which she carefully scraped over the disposal opening. She was grinding the carrot peelings in the disposal when Noah got home. He shimmied out of his coat and hung it in the closet. "Hey, I saw you at Sixth and Washington. Didn't you see me?"

"When?"

Noah kissed her cheek. "About five minutes ago. You were just ahead of me. I honked."

"Did you miss the light?" Kate asked, cutting the carrot in half and handing him a piece.

"Just." Noah snapped the carrot between his front teeth. "Look at you," he said, pointing his chin to the other half of carrot in Kate's hand, to the Diet Dr. Pepper still sitting out on the kitchen table.

Kate felt the weight of the Cheetos in her stomach and on her mind. She smiled in spite

of it. “Fish for dinner?”

“Whatever you want. I can poach it and make that mango salsa like I did last time.”

“Just not so many onions.”

“Deal.”

The couple went into their bedroom where Kate disappeared into the walk-in closet. Noah called comments about his day over his shoulder as he changed into sweats and his favorite Bob Marley tee shirt, then moved back to the kitchen and started his cooking routine of humming and chopping. Kate knew he was taking little sips of wine every time he picked up the remote and changed the song playing on the iPod unit. Kate stood in the closet in her underwear and bra, massaging her stomach and thinking about the Cheetos. She could throw up, but knew Noah would hear even with the music playing. She didn’t puke often, hated it, really, but was stunned thinking it had only taken her five minutes to eat the Cheetos and dispose of the bag. What sorts of damage did she do on the days that Noah was a half-hour late? She knew she wasn’t always good, but what if she was more out of control than she realized? She shivered.

Kate pulled on forgiving sweats and wrapped her body in a bulky sweater. She had been obese, by all official definitions, but was now only considered overweight. She was making progress. In the bathroom she washed her face with warm water and the expensive new soap from *Penelope’s Pampering*. She thought about sticking her finger down her throat. Maybe with the water running *and* the music? But, no, Noah would hear. On the other hand, maybe he was caught up in the cooking, the sipping, still proud of the carrot.

A knock on the door made her jump. “Asparagus or snap peas?” Noah called.

Kate took a shaky breath. “You decide.”

There was a long pause.

“You okay?” Noah asked.

Kate bit her lip and opened the door. “Sure. Just washing up. Can I help with dinner?”

Noah breathed a funny sigh and shook his head. Was he on to her?

Back in the kitchen, Noah continued to chop and hum and sip. Kate sat in the living room’s cracked leather recliner, paging through a catalog that came in the mail. Did she stick the Cheetos bag all the way down into the trash can? Yes, and she covered it with the banana peel and coffee grounds! Had Noah looked under coffee grounds? If he had, then that was just sick and wrong. What right did he have to police her? She’d slipped a bit, *once*, and sure as hell wasn’t proud of it. It was a little misstep, a little back step, an error in judgment. Kate’s heart pounded. She felt her cheeks flush, and her jaw ached from clamping her teeth together. She knew she was spinning into irrational thinking. She should forgive herself and move on. To dwell on it gave it more power, could enable the whole cycle again. Maybe she should call Cindy.

Cindy was steps ahead of Kate, had already met her goal and was thriving and beyond. Whenever Cindy and Kate met for lunch, Cindy would push the last bites of her salad around on her plate as she painted a wonderland in words – Cindy no longer felt hungry, really! She honestly turned down gooey slices of cake not out of some warped notion of deprivation, but because she could *feel* it settling in thin, oily layers around her thighs. And the best part? Cindy’s love life was amazing. Men swarmed around her – *Cindy*! Men had barely noticed her before, and now they *swarmed*. If Kate called Cindy, Cindy would help. She’d cite verse and passage of the *Target Buzz III Diet and You* book. Be gentle with yourself. Allow yourself to be human. Resolve to reduce setback damage. Kate knew the sections herself. She didn’t need to call Cindy. She could just look them up and get re-energized, refocused.

But Noah would see her looking in the book. He'd know something was up then, might even search the trash can if he hadn't already done so. Maybe Kate could get him to leave for a few minutes. Distract him long enough to fish the Cheetos bag out of the trash, stuff it into her messenger bag, and sneak a peek at the few really important passages she needed to see in the book. Sometimes he'd forget something vital at work, on his desk, right on top, and he'd have to quick go get it and then quick come right home, an hour round trip. Maybe today was one of those days?

Noah came suddenly into the living room and perched a bright glass of red onto the table next to Kate's chair. He grinned at her like he knew a secret.

"What?" Kate asked.

"Nothing. Just… bringing…you a glass. We're having salmon. The tuna's all gone."

Kate eyed him. What was he up to? He never brought her a glass of wine in the living room, especially after checking up on her in the bathroom. He'd found the Cheetos bag and was waiting for her confession. That had to be it. Well, she was a grown woman and could do what she pleased, could *eat* what she pleased. Her cheeks burned. "You know, I don't really feel like fish after all."

Noah's face fell. "Oh, but it's almost ready."

"Yeah, sure it is."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Kate's jaw pulsed. She tried to imagine the sections in the book she should be reading, the sections about irrational thinking and blaming others, but the thought of Noah digging through the trash can, spying on her, was too infuriating to allow any other images. "You know perfectly well what I'm talking about."

"Kate."

"Don't you Kate me. I'm on to you, mister, and I completely, totally resent how I'm being treated."

Noah's hands shook. "Oh, my God. I'm so sorry. I never. I never…"

"Yeah, you never. You think you're so smart. You think I have no feelings. That just because I'm a little overweight…" Kate's eyes grew moist.

Noah slumped onto the couch opposite Kate. He looked entirely guilty, which infuriated her. It wasn't like she had had a huge binge. She'd eaten one, *one* thing. One bag of Cheetos. And she hadn't even thrown up. She was living with her mistake. Being responsible for it. Noah shook his head and rubbed his cheeks with his palms. It made her sick that he didn't trust her. Had he been checking the trash regularly? How long had he been keeping such close tabs on her? Was all of his pride in her weight loss a façade?

"I don't like how this is spinning," Kate said. "You're treating me like a child, like someone who isn't in charge of her own life."

Noah blinked back tears. "I am such an idiot. I am, and I know it. Here you are – a beautiful, wonderful woman, and what do I do? First, I insult you, and then I'm too cowardly to admit it."

Kate's stomach flipped. It was true. How long had he been supervising her? Did he check her messenger bag for candy? Hunt through the trunk of the car for boxes of doughnuts? She squeezed her eyes in frustration. She needed her book, needed to call Cindy, needed something to fix this black fury shaking its way up her spine. "I've got to get out for a while. Get some air."

Noah tried to get Kate to stay but she grabbed coat, shoes, bag, keys and stormed out the door with Noah calling after her. "Kate! Please. I'm so sorry."

It was windy; a storm was blowing in, but Kate felt anything but chilled. She blazed with indignation. The nerve. The *jerk*! She squealed out of the parking lot, pounding the steering wheel and cussing out Noah all the way to Donutland. She'd show him. Upset? Over a bag of Cheetos? Well, just wait and see what damage she could do if she really tried. He couldn't control her, make her conform to social ideals of beauty, force her into some sort of mold that was just like all the other women coming and going. She'd lose weight if and when she wanted to, *for herself*. Or not.

At Donutland Kate ordered a dozen of her favorites: two jellies (raspberry and blueberry), a lemon, chocolate glazed, two crullers, chocolate cake with sprinkles, cheese, vanilla cream, an apple fritter, a long john and a fresh-from-the-oven cinnamon roll. She ate them, one after another, with her right hand while steering to a 7-Eleven with her left. The wind picked up and blew steely clouds into each other. Thunder cracked and rain would soon follow. The meager remains of the sun looked like it was making an escape, slipping quickly down between buildings of the darkening cityscape.

At the 7-Eleven Kate piled her purchases on the counter, then thought better, and made a quick dash back to the freezer to return the half gallon of ice cream.

The clerk rang up Kate's food maddeningly slow, picking up each package, studying it as if she were reading the caloric values, scanning, then bagging. "Someone's having a party."

Kate set her jaw. "My daughter. Sleepover."

The clerk lit up with understanding. "Ah." She put the candy, Cool Ranch Doritos, Fritos, caramel corn, and 2-liter of Dr. Pepper into bags.

"Make that a bucket of chicken, too," Kate said. "They shouldn't just eat junk."

In the car Kate set the bucket of chicken on her lap and spread the opened bags of chips and candy across the dashboard. The soda rested between her feet. She opened the lid of the chicken bucket, let the savory steam fog up the car windows. It was dark out and occasional headlights swept down the road on either side of her, some swinging into the parking lot.

Kate ate piece after piece of chicken, first tearing the crispy fried breading off with her teeth, drowning in the saltpepperherbcruncygolden batter. Juicy meat slid off bones down her throat all slippery and warm comfort. She crunched handfuls of chips to cleanse her pallet for more chicken, each piece better than the last, until, finally, she wiped her index finger along the bucket's bottom and sucked up the last deep-fried crumbs. Next came a thorough wetting of her gullet with Dr. Pepper – the real stuff. God, it'd been so long. She'd almost forgotten the thrill of pure-sugar bubbles, the spicy snap of cold washing through her. Caramel corn and candy served as dessert – Reeses, Twizzlers, Milk Duds – all the favorites. She chewed giant mouthfuls of chocolate and strawberry, like the most contented of cows.

The rain came up suddenly. Five seconds of spatter, then a full-on assault. It was the kind of rain Kate worried would dent the car, the kind of rain windshield wipers shrank from. Kate felt peaceful, full and insulated from everything harsh and difficult. No headlights swam down the road. She was alone in the 7-Eleven parking lot, cocooned in dark and din, jaws serenely slack, stomach puffed, fingers oily and sticky. Kate rummaged a handi-wipe from the travel pouch in the glove compartment and methodically wiped her fingers and fingernails. This was a first step, washing hands and utensils, not licking them clean. She gathered the garbage together into the bucket. The Milk Duds' box rattled when she moved it. Kate cocked her head. There were a few chewy wonders left! She breathed slowly, steadily, and pushed the box into the chicken bucket. Another good first step – leave some food on your plate.

Pages of the *Target Buzz III Diet and You* book flashed before Kate, seemed to be

propped on the dashboard where the bags of food had just been. Take first steps. Share your feelings. Don't isolate, circulate. Suddenly, the good buzz was gone, evaporated, like alcohol during cooking. She should have stopped with the Cheetos. She should have stopped with the half bag, shouldn't have opened the bag, shouldn't have bought it and squirreled it under the dishtowels, shouldn't have …

The pit inside Kate grew darker and thicker, cancerous. She could throw up, but then she'd have even more to feel sick about. At least she was that far. At least she *understood* what she was doing, understood the emotional element, which was also a first step, one with a gold star beside it. The rain battered down, was still too bad for driving. Kate covered her face with her hands and shook her head, as if to shake sense into herself. She *had* to call Cindy. Cindy would tell her what to do. Cindy would find a way to rescue the situation, to make the shame go away, to make the finish line shine again.

Cindy answered too quickly, breathless. "Oh, my God, Kate. Where are you?"

Kate sighed. This was going to be hell to confess. "I've been driving around."

"In this downpour? Oh, Jesus, God," Cindy murmured to someone she was with. "She's been driving around. She's okay."

"Who are you talking to?"

There was a long pause. "I'm with Noah. At your place. He called me as soon as –"

"Let me talk to her," Noah said in the background.

"I'm handling her fine," Cindy said.

"Let me just try."

"Will you hang on?" Cindy said to Kate. There was another long pause while Cindy talked, low and urgent, to Noah. Noah murmured back. They were talking about her, Noah and Cindy were conferring, together, about *her*. Kate's brain spun like jackpot fruit. Cindy – their frequent tagalong to movies, restaurants. Noah – so understanding. Sure she can come, why not? And the love life! Men just swarmed. Did you see me at Sixth and Washington? I was right behind you – coming from the opposite direction of his office. The office where stacks of papers were lately forgotten. The damage that could be done when he was a half hour late. Cindy's place five minutes away. *Swarmed*, Kate!

Cindy finally returned to Kate, talked a mile a minute with Noah coaching in the background. Tell her. Ask her.

Kate clenched her teeth. Finally she blurted, "Do you know what I did, Cindy?" Her voice sounded far away. It echoed around the car. "Do you know what I did?"

"What did you do?"

What did she do? Kate's throat was tight. She swallowed hard. "I ate an entire bag of Cheetos. In one sitting, in about five minutes."

"Kate. It's okay." Then to Noah, "She said she ate an entire bag of Cheetos."

"She did?"

Kate snapped her cell phone shut. The rain was quieting, and the night sky turned from ink to charcoal. Kate restarted the car. She tested the wipers. They gamely held up. She pushed the defrost button to clear the windows. While the fan blew, she grabbed her umbrella and the bucket of garbage and headed toward the trash receptacle in the corner of the parking lot. She watched her feet splash through puddles and avoid worms. The drenched world smelled earthy, clean. The fresh of it shocked her, agitated the grease and bulk inside her. She opened the lid of the trash receptacle and was assaulted by a wave of rot. Kate's stomach churned, bile splashed upward. She threw the bucket into the can and clamped her hand over her mouth. She bit her lip,

took puffs of air. But it was no use. Kate vomited, umbrella held high, face over the trash. For several minutes every time Kate thought she was finished, the stench would rise up, and she would start again.

Finally, Kate retched up orange paste – the Cheetos. She blinked and tears splashed down her cheeks. She knew she was done. She put the lid back on the trash receptacle and walked shakily back to the car, shoes soaked, face streaming, umbrella wilting. She closed the umbrella and turned her face to the starless sky, let the rain hit her full on. It wasn't so bad, was refreshing, really. The cool water patted her temples, the bridge of her nose, cheekbones, lips. It rippled through her hair like fingers. Kate took another deep breath of the clean and shivered. She felt strangely empty, not just of food, but of emotion. Despite the rain. Despite the evening. Despite the personal chaos, the trigger episodes.

Kate stood quiet and waited for the assault of desire that was her body's knee-jerk response to trauma. Agitation equaled desperation. Desperation broke will power, which led to poor dietary choices which resulted in dissatisfaction which caused more agitation, more desperation and more and more eating eating eating. Kate pictured the circle diagram with the arrows going round and round, spinning readers into webs of hopelessness. She no longer cared. She could eat or not, she could get soaked or drive home immediately. Noah would still have lied to her. Cindy would still have lied to her. Kate would still have lied to herself, sneaking the Cheetos and all the rest. But the truth was she hadn't purged, despite feeling purged. She had fought it like anybody would have, and she didn't ever want to have to do that again.

How We See Wonders
- Kenneth Gurney

If Annie was lonely
and she saw a room full of people
she'd think, Wow! Here
is the end of loneliness.
But for me a room full of people
is only the start of a turning
deeper inside myself
and I cannot explain why
I know so well this implosion
into a smaller space.

If I were sad
and walked out into the forest
I would know the end of sadness
as it was absorbed like water
by the roots of all the growing green.
But Annie would cower not fifty yards
from the last sight of the house
and fear would crumple her
into a small rocking ball of sadness
that the next hungry carnivore
would consume.

Annie turns me outward
in a walk through the crowded subway.

I un-ball Annie's body and walk her past
the stinging nettles and poison ivy.

Christian Lopez

- Bob Brussack

In the Queue at the Supermarket
- Steven Gulvezan

I am in the supermarket
Checkout line
And it is finally starting
To move
I put down the National
Enquirer to gape
At the cover photo
Of the young Afghani woman
On Time Magazine
I do not know if her nose
Was blown off
Or cut off
By us or them or unknown parties
Gazing at the young woman
In the photo
I feel like someone
Returning to
The scene of the crime
To mutilate my victim
A second time
I quit placing
Hamburger and cherries
Upon the conveyer belt
And stare
Into the young woman's eyes
Until another young woman
The clerk scanning groceries
Rolls her eyes
Inflates her nostrils
And fixes her mouth
In unlimited exasperation
And asks me why
Oh why
I am holding up
Her supermarket checkout line

The Iron Camel That Got Swallowed by The Sands
- Bram Takefman

Salaam alaikum. It is by the will of Allah, praise be to Him, the creator of the universe, that we gather here tonight to hear the stories of our tribe. Sit here in front of me all you whitebeards, spread your robes and relive with us the glories of your youth and of our past. And you children join your parents behind the honored elders that you may learn of our tribe's splendid history and of our laws. All you married, but yet without issue, take your place in the rear; there you are to listen not explore new possibilities for the secret games you will play later tonight. So pay heed for we of the Berber tribes know that it is the bright light of our past that will show us our duties and obligations in the days to come.

Abu, heap more branches on the fire so the flames will rise to counter the setting of the sun. This is our winter oasis, and the chill may cause discomfort to the two visitors from the south who sought shelter with us tonight. They are traders of the Tuareg tribe, travelling to the great market in Fez to sell their artifacts of gold and carvings of ivory. Tomorrow we will view the beauty of their craftsmanship and purchase that which we find pleasing.

At the time of my youth, the men of the Tuareg wore blue veils when amongst strangers. It was said that when they removed their veils, young maidens would swoon on seeing their handsomeness, and enemy warriors would flee on seeing their fierceness. So it was said.

It is our custom that when we have guests, the children may choose the tale to be told. Tell me, children, what story would give you delight and tether your wandering minds?

"Oh, storyteller, storyteller," the children cry out in unison, "tell us the tale of the Iron Camel That Got Swallowed by the Sands."

Ah, yes, that, too, is one of my favorites; so, enchallah, I will tell it once again.

It came to pass during the second week of Ramadan in the Year of the Great Rains – this was the year 1998 reckoned from the birth of Christ, the apostle of God, although non-believers worship Him as the son of God. In the West the great rains were named El Nino, which means The Baby Christ in the Spanish tongue.

A group of infidels, fifteen in number, came from the lands beyond the Great Western Ocean to this our fabled Kingdom of Morocco. Here they obtained four Iron Camels, blasphemies making mockery of the graceful creatures Allah has fashioned for his desert warriors. They lacked the beautiful two-toed feet of our camels, having in their place four round wheels created of rubber. Each of their beasts was without a personal name such as we give our faithful animals, names that express affection and respect. Their creatures were all named Land Rover, and it was so inscribed on each of them.

They traversed the Mountains of Atlas and crossed the wide sands to visit this oasis and our encampment, here to wonder at the greatness of our way of life and to gain enlightenment and inner peace. They did not know that one can ride his mule to Mecca on the Hajj but the animal will return thence, not as an honored pilgrim but only as a weary mule. So, too, these visitors would return to the West, still unbelievers, no more tranquil than before they came and not understanding what they learned.

It was their custom to first visit the tent of Fatima, who at the time was unmarried and living with her widowed mother. There the visitors would gaze in awe at the magnificence of our tents and the beauty of the Bedouin costume. They would be served a traditional lunch and be instructed in our tribal customs, foods and our way life.

But, back to the story. The Iron Camels arrived, each carrying about four infidels in their bellies, where the travelers breathed the foul fumes of the netherworld, not the wholesome air that Allah bestows on a man astride his camel. The four beasts were driven by members of our faith who had lost their fine Bedouin sight and instinct through associating too much with the non-believers. They did not recall that Daya means lake and that our encampment is named Daya Climatae after the small lake which existed many years ago and was now partly reborn, nurtured by the rains they called El Nino.

The first of the Iron Camels began crossing Daya Climatae with the others in line behind, when it lurched and slowly, with great grinding of teeth and growling, dug itself into the sand to a depth of over one hand-span. The driver tried to force the beast back only to cause a storm of sand and a howling of the creature. The visitors, in great fear, scrambled out of the beast's belly and ran back to where the others had gathered, while the drivers rushed to free the animal. There was much pulling, digging and shouting of instructions from all, but to no avail. The unbelievers all entered the remaining Iron Camels, and the drivers, led by our tribesmen, took them to our nearby oasis and to the tent of Fatima.

The drivers returned hastily to help free their entrapped beast. Most of our tribe followed them to the place that became an arena for the battle to come. Here they would cheer and jeer and wager on the outcome. It had become a tournament between the intruders with their trickery and mechanical devices and the believers with their resources of nature and the blessing of Allah.

In the arsenal of the infidels was a strange contrivance they called a winch. It was carried around the necks of their Iron Camels, and it contained a long rope of iron and an evil spirit, a Jinn, which used the rope like a fisherman uses his fishing line to reel in his catch. One of the Iron Camels was brought up behind the entrapped beast, and the hook of the line was attached to its rear. The Jinn began to reel him in, and the battle appeared to be a brief one when, suddenly, with a high-pitched screeching of abused metal, the pulling stopped. All pressed forward to see that a ridge of rock, over a hand-spread below the sand, was blocking the escape of the beast.

The Elders gathered together, and our tribal leader spoke, "I recall, in my youth, sitting on a stone ledge, dangling my feet in the flowing waters of a stream and teasing the girls on the other side who sat on a similar ledge facing me. Do any of you have the same memories?" The others also recalled those happy times.

"Yes, this is one of the two ridges of stone that made narrow the small stream that flowed to our oasis. This stream died some years ago, and now only the large stream remains to nurture our groves and pastures. If this be so, then their beast cannot be pulled out of the trap set by the drifting sands, for it will be caught against these rock ledges when pulled either forward or back. The only escape is to pull the beast down or up the path left by the old stream. The rock walls only extend about thirty paces, and the sand becomes a gentle slope beyond."

Our leader continued, "I believe our rules of hospitality do not oblige us to offer suggestions to these drivers as we are feeding and teaching their unbelievers for a fee; it is only commerce that binds us. I think that we should silently wait for their arrogant drivers to plea for our help."

One of the drivers approached; he did not ask for help, only asked of the solidness of the ground fronting the beast. They wished to bring around an Iron Camel to drag the trapped one up the farther side. We assured him the ground was firm and would remain so unless there were further rains. The second beast was positioned a short distance in front of the trapped one, and a second hook was attached to its front. The beast was dragged forward, only to be cruelly stopped by the second stone ridge. Again the squeal of torn metal was heard. One of our children looked

down and shouted, "They've torn off the beast's nose and mouth." There was great laughter from our side and groans from the other.

They then dragged the poor animal back until it crashed into the first stone wall, and metal was torn from its rear. A child shouted in glee, "Now they've castrated the beast." The other children laughed and made offensive noises.

And so it continued, the drivers in a fury of shame pulling the beast back, then forth, while tearing off its limbs until finally someone stopped the carnage. The drivers, humiliated, returned to our encampment, squeezed the infidels into the three remaining beasts and, with heads down and eyes averted, departed. They left the stricken beast, slowly sinking, soon to disappear from sight but not from memory.

Later that night the Elders sat around the dying fire with their Tuareg guests, sharing their hookahs and their thoughts. "That was a splendid story we heard this night but if you knew how to free the beast, why did you not negotiate a ransom; would they not have paid a princely sum?" asked one of the visitors.

"In truth, that was considered; but a good tale is beyond price, and a rescued camel does not make a good tale."

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Late Corn
- Brenda Wilson Wooley

Miss Lily McCabe rises at six each morning and brews herself a cup of tea. She takes it to her recliner in the living room and sips it as she watches the sun come up. After draining her cup, she heads back to the kitchen and pours one cup of water into a pan. She places it on a burner and drops two slices of whole wheat bread into the toaster. By the time the bread pops up, the water is boiling, so she adds one-half cup of oatmeal and boils it one minute.

When she first retired, Miss Lily listened to her favorite country music station as she ate her oatmeal, singing along with George Jones, Loretta Lynn and other old-timers. But now they are playing more and more new country music, and she abhors it. She also abhors the country music television shows of today; young, beefed-up men singing about their trucks, emaciated women strutting around the stage in their tight leather pants, silicone breasts straining against clinging, low-necked satin blouses.

Nowadays she breakfasts in silence, wondering where the time has gone, imagining what her life would be like had she married, had a family. She would have grandchildren now, like her friends Mary and Hazel, joining them in talking about the latest family gathering, what this one or that one is doing. She might have a granddaughter named after her, and imagines the two Lilys having tea together, discussing one student or another, lesson plans. Young Lily would be a school teacher, of course.

After breakfast she watches the Today Show, although she does not like Ann Curry. Why, she does not know. Ann Curry is always nice and kind to people she interviews. But there is just something about her that rubs Miss Lily the wrong way. She likes Matt Lauer, though; he is very handsome. Even if he is losing his hair.

One morning she finds nothing exciting when she turns on the television; no plane crashes, no people killed or held hostage; not even a politician apologizing for stealing money or cheating on his wife.

She stands and places her hands on her hips, gazing around the living room. What is life all about, anyway? Why is she here, and what has she learned? She taught hundreds of kids during her forty years as a teacher, but she hasn't learned much of anything herself. She is snapped to attention by the ringing of her phone.

"Hello?"

"Lily?"

"Yes."

"Bet you don't know who this is."

"No, I don't. How would I know?"

The man chuckles. "This is Robert Grubbs."

"Robert Grubbs? I don't know a Robert Grubbs."

"Remember Bardwell High School, class of '51?"

"Of course I do. That's the year I graduated."

The man chuckles again. "Well, remember Fuzzy?"

Miss Lily frowns, searching her memory, when somewhere in the far recesses of her mind a big, round face appears, black curly hair. The boys called him Fuzzy because he had hair on his chest. Lots of it. Miss Lily had never seen as much hair on a boy's chest. It peeped above the collar of his shirt, front and back, and everyone made fun of him. The poor boy never had a girlfriend. During freshman year, a group of boys ran Fuzzy for class president as a joke and

Albert Lee Ramage hopped upon a chair and made a speech on his behalf. "Vote for Fuzzy!" he yelled, "He's the only boy in our class with hair on his chest!"

She jumps as Fuzzy clears his throat.

"I lived in Lexington for years, and after I retired I decided to come back to the old home place here. I've been farming the land again. Which brings me to the reason I called. I was wondering, Lily, if you might need some corn."

"I thought all the corn was gone now. Besides, I don't eat much corn."

"I have late corn, Lily. It'll just go to waste. I'd be glad to bring some over."

"I don't want any corn, late or otherwise, Mr. Grubbs. Now if you'll excuse me, I have things to do." She hangs up the phone and drops onto her chair. He isn't fooling her. She knows what he's after. Who does he think he is?

For the next few days, Fuzzy's face keeps popping into her mind. He certainly had his nerve. She is a charter member of New Hope Baptist, a former school teacher, Sunday school teacher. Her ancestors were some of the first settlers in Carlisle County. The McCabe name has always meant something in these parts. That Grubbs bunch was nothing but poor white trash.

That night, Miss Lily tosses and turns before she falls into a restless sleep: she and her girlfriends are walking down the street, talking and laughing, when Fuzzy Grubbs jumps out from behind a bush. Miss Lily starts to run, Fuzzy chasing her. She runs faster and faster, but Fuzzy keeps up. “Gotcha!” he yells. She wakes up slick with sweat, heart thumping. "White trash," she mutters, pulling herself up and fanning her face with the covers, "That's what he is, poor white trash!"

Days pass, then weeks. Each time the phone rings Miss Lily checks her caller ID before answering. She hates to be ugly, but she has nothing to say to Fuzzy Grubbs! But Fuzzy does not call.

Each time Miss Lily goes into town, she gazes up and down Front Street, looking for a man in his seventies who might be Fuzzy. At Sunday school and church, she looks for him. She has friends who go to the other two churches in town, and they have not mentioned Fuzzy. If he attended services, Hazel and Mary would tell her. It's a big occasion when someone new shows up at any of the three churches in town. Which could mean only one thing. "He is a heathen," Miss Lilly murmurs, "A low-down heathen."

After mulling it over and over in her mind for several days, Miss Lily gets directions to Fuzzy's farm and drives by to check it out. She is surprised to see a nice, well-kept farmhouse. Blooming flowers and bushes surround the house and grounds, and a big Golden Retriever sits at the front door. When the dog gets up and heads toward the car, Miss Lily floors the accelerator and speeds away, watching through the rear view mirror as he fades in the rolling dust.

That night Miss Lily has another dream: she is in a big field, unable to find her way out. Suddenly she hears a roaring noise, and corn is flying every which way, knocking her to the ground, covering her whole body. “Help!” she screams, her mouth full of corn, “Help!” When she pulls herself awake, she is clawing at the covers.

She spends the next day staring at the phone and pacing up and down the living room. By late afternoon her face is flushed, blouse wet with perspiration. She takes a cool shower and dons her robe, and then she sits staring at the phone the rest of the afternoon. "White trash!" she mutters, "And a heathen to boot!"

The next morning, Miss Lily gets up early and brews herself a pot of strong coffee. She drinks it black. Afterward, she makes a western omelet, complete with ham, green peppers, onions, cheese, and anything else she can find in the fridge. "To hell with cholesterol!" she says,

digging into her omelet, "To hell with it all!" After she takes her last sip of coffee, she rises and paces up and down the living room, a memory flashing through her mind: she is a child, running in circles, turning flips on the lawn. "Calm down, girl," her father laughs, "You've got ants in your pants!"

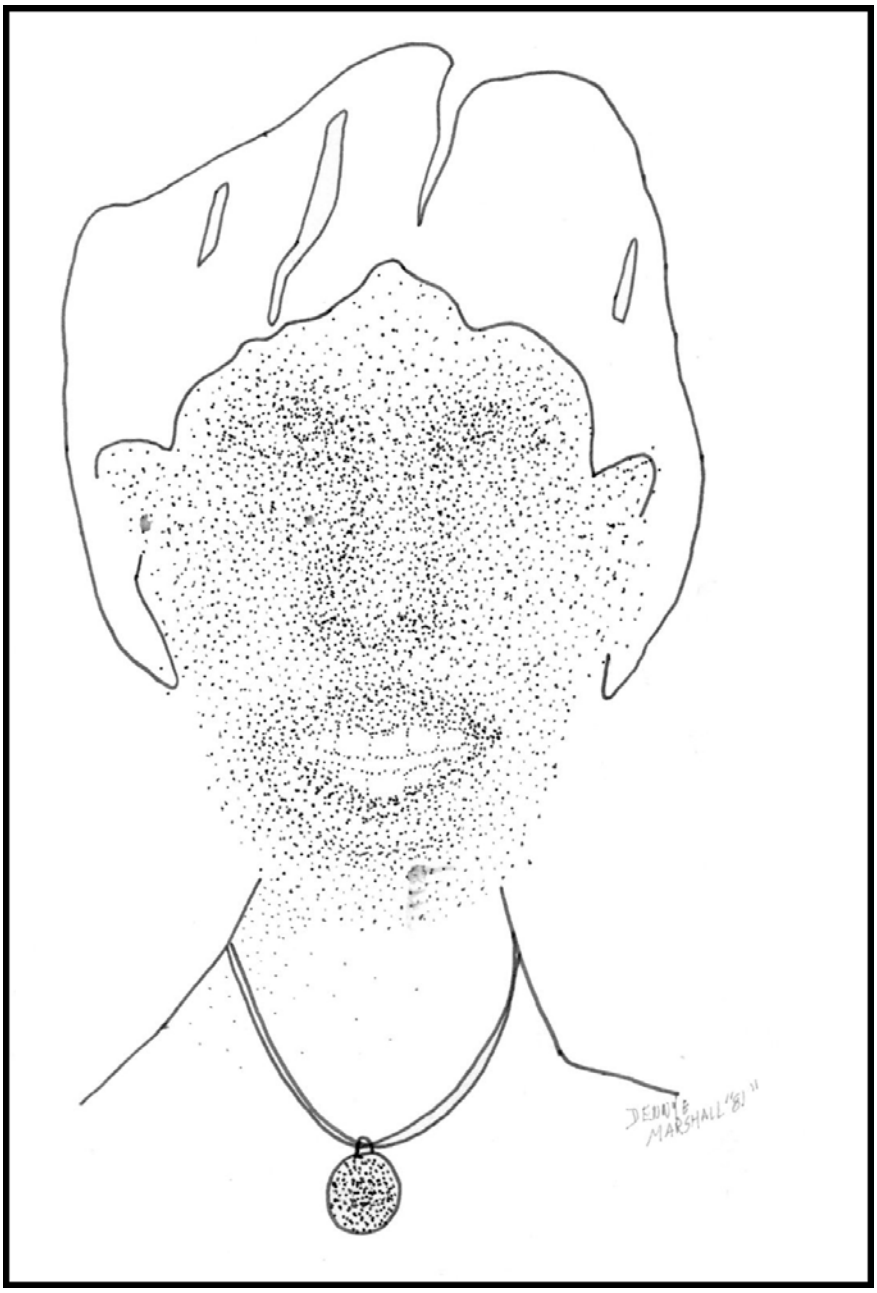
She stops and looks out the window, wringing her hands, eyes darting here and there, and then she rushes to her bedroom and hurriedly dresses. Minutes later she is in her Buick and skidding out of the driveway. She turns on the radio as she whizzes down the country road, moving the dial to the classic country station, singing along with Randy Travis, "I'm diggin' up bones; I'm diggin' up bones, exhuming things that're better left alone..."

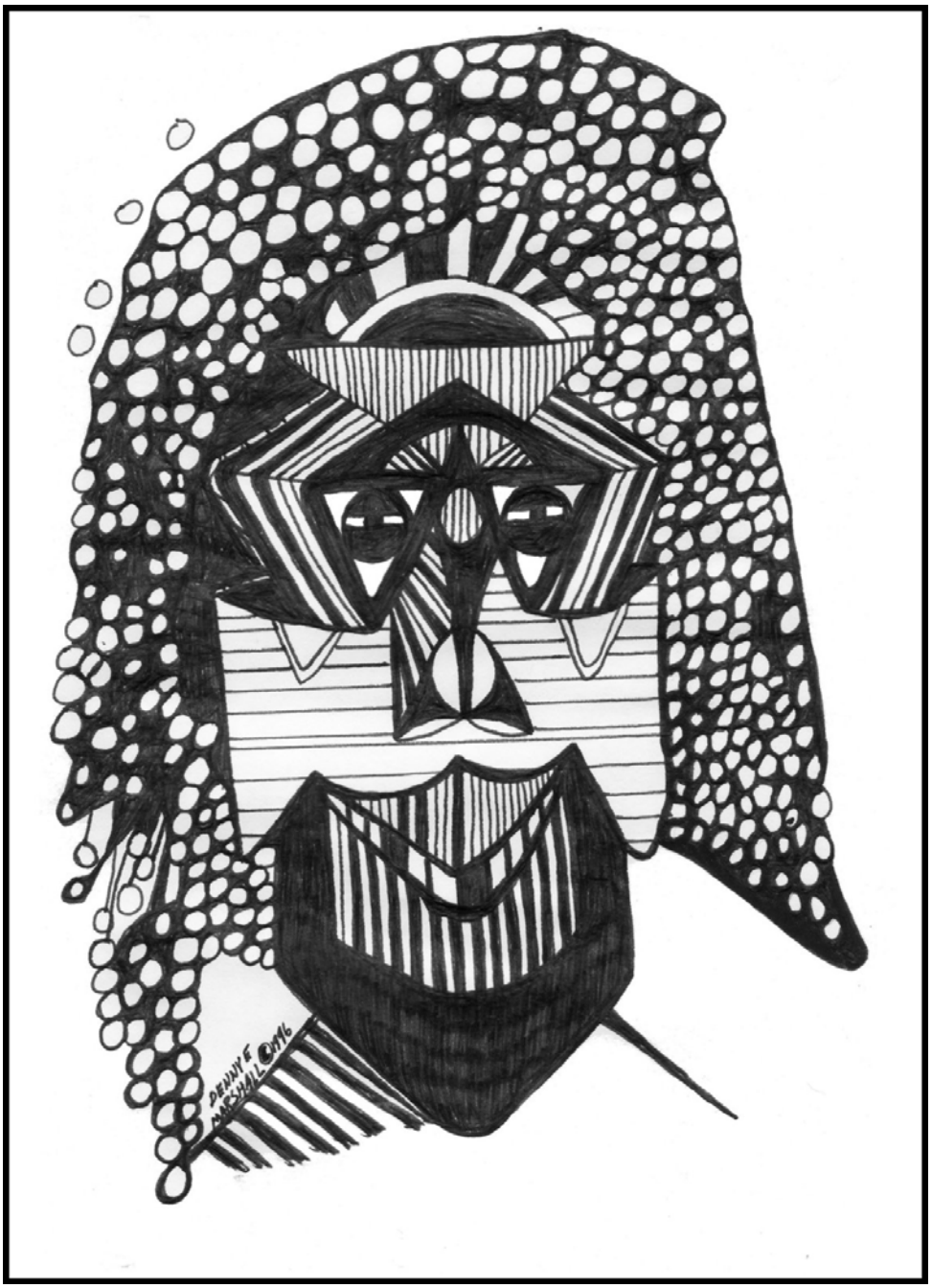
As she nears Fuzzy's house, she stops singing. By the time she pulls into the driveway and cuts off the motor, she is shaking like a leaf and weak as a feather. The Golden Retriever appears and begins barking, circling the car, but she gets out and heads toward the house. The front door opens, and a man appears. He is shirtless; no hair on his chest; no hair on his head.

He starts to say something, but she rushes forward. "There you are, you heathen!" she yells, body quivering, heart thumping. She throws herself into his arms, his man-scent enveloping her. "Give me my late corn! Now!"

Face It

- Denny E. Marshall




DENNY E
MARSHALL ©2016

Man On the Moon
- J. Mac Stone

I'm named after that song. You know the one that goes, "Ezekiel saw the wheel. Way up in the middle of the air. Now Ezekiel saw the wheel in a wheel. Way up in the middle of the air." Momma said that the whole while she was carryin' me she sang that tune during her workin' days over at the Harker's place. So that leaves me stuck with an old Bible name I guess. Don't mind it much. The troubles I'm tryin' to share with you don't have nuthin' to do with momma namin' me.

My little sister Cleo ain't the reason either, but thought I better fill in the blanks a little on the family so you know the whole picture. Cleo, she was the smartest one of all of us. She was the one who got all the grades and made the local papers with her good stories and all. The teachers all said she would be a teacher or doctor someday. Too bad that Royce fella came around. He swept her off her feet I guess, and before you knew what happened, she had two little ones, a rundown shack to keep up and a husband who would rather play dice than work. Can't get too down about that. Happens a lot in our little town. At least she stayed around where momma can see the babies and help out with a pot of grits or some laundry now and agin'.

We wasn't poor exactly; when ain't nobody in town have new, your old don't seem so bad. Momma says that the only poor folk there is is those that don't 'preciate what they have. Maybe she's right. Much better to have my job, roof over my head and full belly than not. Sure would be nice to save a little and get a car; the two miles to work, rain or shine, can wear out a man and his boots.

Anyway, Cleo and me ain't the point of the story. The problem we had was what to do about R.J. He was a wild man. Momma named him after that famous bluesman from our parts. Momma says she could hear them blues from the minute she knowed he was comin'. After he got here, the story of Robert Johnson meetin' with the devil made much more sense to all of us. That boy could no sooner speak in church about livin' right and off he would go, chasin' some wild idea that would land him in a heap of trouble.

First came the teachers who told momma he was incorrigible, whatever that means. Next came the sheriff who was always lookin' for R.J. Maybe not for sumthin' he done, but he sure would know who had done sumthin'. The girls in town all loved him, even when they hated him, if you know what I mean.

Before he went away the first time, we had a party to remember. R.J. borrowed T. Ron's old Monte, and we took it for a ride down to old man Cleavis's place. Picked up a little of the old corn juice. Meeting girls was always easy when you had some of the juice to share. Seein' how the legal juice was ninety miles away in Tennessee, we were the most popular fellas around this town. What a night. Man, we was all up till dawn. Anything else I say would be disrespectful, understand?

Well, back to the trouble we had. So, R.J. runs off. Convinced being on a county work detail for the next one hundred eighty days don't seem like such a great plan, he is lookin' for a ways out. The fella down to the 'cruitment office sells him on another crazy idea. Head off for Georgia with a four year hitch in the army, and all your worries over the sheriff and lockup will be over. Don't think R.J. thought this through much. He weren't one of those who took much time makin' decisions. He figured, How bad can it be? Even if they do send him to Vietnam, those little Chinamen won't be no bother. R.J.

always did have a live-and-let-live attitude ‘bout other people. Too bad he didn’t know those Chinamen didn’t share the same thoughts.

So what happens next is momma gets a letter ‘bout once a month. Each one starts with some good news about the guys in his squad and a funny joke or two about Spinerski. He seems to be the guy that everybody funs on mostly. From what I understand he is from Jersey, and folks are different up that way. That’s why they give him a hard time. R.J.’s best buddy Lionel is from Tacoma. That’s a long ways off, too, but they seem to get along real good. Two peas in a pod, momma said. At the end of each letter R.J. always had some serious stuff to share about wanting to come home and all. Guess it wasn’t all jokin’ around when the guys in the dark have guns, too.

Each of the letters were sadder than the last the longer he was over there in that jungle. Made sense to me, ain’t nobody happy in that sweaty, buggy place especially when the pajama fellas are tryin’ to send you home early. R.J. told us about the bags and planes and such. Momma and I really wanted to hear more about jokes with Lionel, but those were coming less those days.

‘Round October when his tour was ‘bout over, we heard just about the worst news. Spinerski got all caught up in a ambush, and his leg got shot right off. Funny how R.J. explained it, seemed like he wished it was him got shot so he could come home. I thought that was crazy talk, but what do I know. Maybe bein’ stuck there was worse than coming home with no leg. Sure don’t mean to be no judge about R.J. feelin’ that way. That letter made momma cry. I think she could feel inside what R.J. was sayin’, and her heart was breakin’ over her boy bein’ so discouraged.

The last letter we got said he had only three more days til he could leave. Since mail took so long to get here from over there, we figured he was already in California waitin’ for his plane to bring him back home here to Arkansas. Day after that he called the house, and we went down to the train station in Pocahontas to pick him up. He looked much older. Not so much in what he said but how he looked. A faraway look and a sad wash was on him like a old rundown fence, if you know what I mean. I was guessin’ he just needed a long rest and some of momma’s cookin’, and he would be back to his old self in no time.

Wish it was so but that ain’t how it went. R.J. had even more trouble stayin’ out of trouble. Nuthin’ seemed to stop his restless runnin’ around. Sleepin’ came awful hard for him, and when he did sleep, we could all hear the anger in his voice when he mumbled out at night. Cleo tried to have him watch the little ones, thinkin’ maybe some new life would come back to his step. He did a super job watchin’ the babies, but his heart wasn’t in it.

We missed the ol’ R.J. Always clownin’ and teasin’ to the point where we would chase him down and beat him good, all playful you know? We didn’t know what to do with him. There was nuthin’ we tried that would even bring a smile let alone a full whoop and holler like any prank we thought up used to do before he left. It was gettin’ to the point that most folks in town who used to think of him as Robin Hood and loved him all the time were not even stopping by to say hello anymore. Before too long we knew something had to give. Nuthin’ would bring him back to us, so we all sat quiet one day and waited for him to talk.

He said, “Momma, Ezey,” he always called me that, “I gotta go back.”

We said, “No you don’t. That ain’t no place for you.” But he just smiled. That

smile wasn't the happy kind. It was the kind you make when you wish somebody understood what you was sayin'. But you knowed they don't. I sure wish he hadn't smiled like that.

Next thing we know he is back in the Army and askin' to go back over to the war. Nobody can tell me that makes a lick of sense when you just got lucky and made it home once. No sense in temptin' fate again is what I say. R.J. never did listen much to me, even though he heard the words, he would go his own way most times.

This time the letters were less and less. His army pal Lionel wrote us once. That was fun to read. He told us lots of stories about R.J. For some reason it seemed that Lionel knew a much different guy than our R.J. Like as if there were two different R.J.s, and we hadn't ever met the guy Lionel was buddies with. Lionel told us that he was working at a grocery in Medford, had met a girl and she was 'bout ready to have a little girl. Momma wrote him back and told him lots of good things about our family. Wished him and his girl all the best but left out the part about R.J. going back over there. Momma knew somehow that that would make Lionel feel as bad as we did.

I went off to the feed plant every day. Most days I was glad about my work and tin roof to keep me dry. As the year went by, we heard less and less from R.J. Somehow I think he really was lost in his thoughts. Bein' over there was more about doin' than thinkin' It wasn't like he didn't want to share with us what was happenin', it was more like he just didn't know how.

Done lots of ramblin' without really getting to the point. Bag of wind momma would say. Anyways the point of the whole story is I was over to momma's one day last week fixin' up a broke spot in her garden fence when a fancy car pulled up. Out jumped a general or something. He had lots of badges and such on his uniform, and boy did he look sharp. I'll bet R.J. looked just like that when he was all spruced up in his good uniform. Well, this man asked for momma, but she was workin' Right then I knew somethin' warn't right. This army man had a look on his face like the dogs do when they come back from huntin' empty handed. Like he wished for some better news to tell me. He apologized and handed me a stiff envelope with a note sayin R.J.'d been killed in action. He told me that R.J. was a true hero, and I knowed it was true, but that didn't help me with my feelins' right then, you know what I mean?

Once I got done walkin, that's what I always do when there lots to think about, I went to see momma. Somehow I knowed she would keep it all together for Cleo and me. I told her what the Army man had said and gave her the letter. All she had to say after a short cry was they can put a man on the moon, but they can't seem to end this stupid war. Momma don't use harsh language very often so we could tell she was troubled more than just on her face but down in her heart. But she never let on. Just kept goin', watchin' Cleo's kids and mendin' clothes for extra money from all the townsfolk. Nobody talks about R.J. when she's around now. I guess they understand. I wish I did.

My Tutor, Chicago, 1959
- Nancy Scott

Grey tomb building
quiet campus study
narrow leaded windows
books and more books
colorful spines
warming stone walls.
I sat beside you
at a polished oak table.
You described form and essence
of poetic thought, legacy
of Elizabethan poets made
more intriguing by your energy.
Your yellow pencil
tapping stresses.

You took me to hear
Martin Luther King.
South of Evansville, you said.
They called you boy.
One Sunday afternoon,
cold, biting wind,
we drove to a secluded spot
along the lake. We spoke
about free will and existential things
of forging friendships.
The moment marred:
raps insistent on my window
the police asking
Miss, are you all right?

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My Very Own Tiger
- David Hart

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
William Blake, *The Tyger*

There's a hitch in my gait,
my step less sure, escape
no longer a given.
I've begun to twitch when barren
branches whisk the windows.

Overhead,
out of sight,
behind the door,
locked

against escape, the tiger coughs –
a fist against a side of flesh.

(No, not the diorama tiger
staring out from a landscape of the past
stuffed into an attitude of mock ferocity.)

He's been pacing for decades up there
as if he were the prisoner.
The floorboards creak beneath
the weight of his intent.

How long till he finds the back stairs,
the not-so-hidden passage?
In every mirror I see his face
in mine, his fearful symmetry
my own, and breathe his carrion
breath, as he whispers, "Relax,
it won't take
but an eon."

Grampa

- John Palmer

Natural Law
- Edward Rodosek

A sharp, morning frost woke me from a restless slumber. I rose, stamping my numbed feet, and put a thick oak branch on the glowing embers. Only one great stump remained from the pile of firewood he'd gathered last evening. Soon he has to set off to the shore and look for some driftwood, to – I shook my head without finishing my foolish thought. Looking at the sleeping man, I stooped and noticed his slightly trembling eyelids. "Why don't you sleep, father? You should rest so you can be on your feet soon."

Father's turbid eyes stared at me. I clearly felt he sensed the same deceit as when, as a child, I'd tried to lie to him. "Do you remember –" A spasmodic cough interrupted his sentence; he waited until he recovered his breath. "Do you remember, many years ago, when you and I searched for food all day long? But we found nothing except a tiny squirrel."

"How could I forget that day? You allowed me to shoot at the animal, but I missed it – what a shame!"

My father shook his head. "No harm done." The squeeze of his hand was surprisingly firm. "And then we suddenly –" He gasped once, twice.

I took up the story. "Yes – we heard a distant howling. There must have been more than one wolf, probably a pack. Oh, how we ran! But then I stumbled and hurt my knee. You kept me from falling and carried me up to our hamlet. My uncle emerged with a burning branch in his hand – and the wolves took flight in panic, in fear."

Father nodded feebly. "Wolves are not afraid of yelling or drumming, even shooting won't scare them for long. Only fire." He sighed, and his hand relaxed. The hardly audible gurgling from his throat showed he was still alive.

I stepped to the ebbing fire and with some difficulty rolled the stump onto the embers. As I put on my snowshoes, my malamutes leapt up, shaking snow off their fur and whimpering eagerly to haul my sled. They knew I'd give them their first meal of frozen fish only after two hours of sledding. Then, from a distance, came the howl of my childhood.

I couldn't look at the linen shelter behind which my father was lying on pine branches. How far had the others gone? Probably up to Two Creeks if they travelled all day. Their sleds were fully loaded, and I worried if they'd manage to overcome Moose Slope. How many of us would reach Fort Laradell, where food and shelter were waiting to us.

I said, trying to keep my voice from trembling, "Two dried salmon are within reach,"

My father's eyes avoided mine. "Off with you, Kanak. You have to catch them before dark or else –" A coughing fit interrupted him again.

I didn't look back when I shouted at the dogs and cracked a whip over their heads. I heard the howl again, nearer than before, and wiped my eyes with the backside of my fur gloves. My tribe was far ahead, and nobody saw my face, an image of their best hunter and bravest warrior. These tears were from the cold wind.

Old Friends
- William Cass

Main Street in Manchester was lined with red brick buildings: storefronts and apartments over the stores – a long, old street in an old, old town. Main stretched from East Center Street on one end to Culley Road on the other. A courthouse and city offices clustered on the corner of East Center. The Cheney mansion and the family's mill reigned at the far end on Culley near the Connecticut River. A few baseball fields and a park, empty on this winter evening, perched on the flats below the mill.

The street was wide with diagonal parking in front of the stores, sidewalks on both sides, and awnings over most of the doorways. Traffic lights nodded in the small, cold breeze which came up from the river. From where he sat in front of the library, Mort Wood watched a handful of neon signs begin to show in the gloaming. The marquee across from him in front of the Veteran's Hall read Bingo – Wednesdays. Further down he could see the dimly lit signs of the drugstore, the barbershop, and Marlowe's Hardware. Snow had crusted here and there – at the base of the monuments, on the green's bare tree trunks on the hill beside him, along the high eaves of St. James' Church next to the green, stained dark against the curbs, and lodged beside the legs of the bench where he sat. The grey paint on the bench had begun to crack and peel.

Mort watched snow start to fall in big flakes in the milky globes of light the streetlamps threw along the curb. A cape, the snow gathered around his shoulders and onto his cane sitting across the lap of his overcoat. The O'Connell boy bicycled past him towards Culley, and the tires on his bike slid a little as he turned onto Church Street. Mort saw the boy disappear past the collection of two- and three-family houses lining that street. There was no other activity – just a tangle of telephone wires and naked clotheslines and scatterings of forgotten Christmas lights beginning to show along the side streets in the dusk. In an upstairs window of the house on the corner of Church, Mort could see a woman in a calico dress working at a sink with steam from hot water billowing around her and the corners of the window clouding with condensation. His wife, Trudy, had owned a dress like that years ago.

When he reached the end of the block, the O'Donnell boy pulled his bike up against the house that shared a wall with Noren's Grocery. Upstairs, Larry Noren heard the familiar sound of the boy stomping his feet on the front porch mat and then entering the house on the other side of the wall where his long mirror hung. A small lamp whose base was in the shape of a pump and handle threw dusty light onto the nightstand behind him.

Larry regarded himself in the mirror and ran his finger over the thick, gray bristles of his eyebrows, then across the wisps of hair on the sides of his head. He sniffed the aroma the hair tonic left on his fingers. He made his mouth smile, straightened his tie and cardigan sweater, stretched his eyeglasses over his ears, and put on his long, tan overcoat. Finally he shook the front of the overcoat and pulled a brown scarf over the shoulders.

He glanced at the hooked rug he was standing on. Throughout the flat there were many like it that Marge had made and many seat cushions, too. This one had a pattern of red roses on a black background with the year, 54, hooked in yellow wool into a corner. He looked around the room he'd left exactly as it had been the night she'd passed away three years earlier: her knitting needles in a basket beside the armchair, her hairbrush and perfume on the bureau, her light blue cotton bathrobe on the hook behind the door.

Larry switched off the lamp and walked downstairs into the street, leaving behind the store's worn smell of dried goods, fresh fruit, and dusty wooden planking. The air outside tasted

raw. He pulled up the overcoat's collar and tucked the scarf down inside of it. He walked slowly and carefully through the falling snow down the one block of Church Street to Main. Then he crossed the street and made his deliberate way up the sidewalk to where Mort sat.

"Good evening, Captain," Mort said.

Larry nodded and sat down next to him. "That's a nice cap."

Mort took off the cap and brushed the snow from it. It was made of green wool with a feather in it. "My daughter sent it to me from Delaware."

"It's nice."

"Trudy is down there visiting now. Took the train." He replaced the cap and gestured with the cane. "No more trains for me."

"So, how's your knee?"

"It's okay," Mort said. "I'm all right. You?"

"Good. You know."

Mort nodded, though they weren't looking at each other. Several cars crawled up Main Street, pausing at the two traffic lights that only blinked yellow once evening fell. The last car, a green Chrysler, stopped in front of the bakery next to the Veteran's Hall. A little boy climbed out of the passenger seat; the door jingled when he opened it, and a short fragrance of sweetness and flour wafted through it and across to them.

"Is that Frank Tangerlini's grandson?" Mort asked.

"I don't know."

"I can't tell who's driving, but it looks like his old car."

The car idled quietly, and billowing exhaust bounced off the pavement. The boy came out, grinning, carrying a small white bag. He climbed in, and the car returned up Main Street in the opposite direction.

"Say, I saw the O'Donnell boy head up your way a little while ago on his bike," Mort said. "I guess he was coming home from high school after basketball practice."

"He's a good young man," Larry said. "He still helps his mom around the house."

"And he's polite."

"He is very polite."

A siren whined off on the far side of town towards Bolton Lake. Mort blessed himself. The lights blinked off in the bakery. A woman in a flowered apron and black stretch pants unlocked the door of the Veteran's Hall, pushed it open, and then let it close again. She disappeared inside as three heavy-coated old men slowly made their way up the sidewalk and stopped in front of the Hall. One of them looked at his wristwatch, then all three shuffled their feet; their breath came in short clouds under the lights there.

"Are you going over tonight, Captain?" Mort asked. "I think it's some kind of stew."

"I don't know. I guess I will."

"I hear Leonard Murphy lined up a banjo player he saw at the Knights of Columbus convention down in Newark. I hear he's going to play tonight."

"Is that right?"

"It should be good. I like the banjo." The neon sign over Marlowe's blinked off with the store lights, and Henry Marlowe walked out to the curb and opened his car door.

"There's young Hank," Mort said. "I saw his father at church on Sunday. I guess he spends most winters down in Florida because of his arthritis – has a mobile home there."

"That's something," Larry said.

They watched the man start his car and drive down towards Culley Road. A cat crept

along the sidewalk past the barber shop and the drug store and disappeared between the buildings. The brief clamor of freight cars being loaded at Cheney's dock tumbled faintly up the alley behind St. James Church.

Some more men had joined the group milling about in front of the Hall. The woman in the apron reopened the door and held it ajar as the men formed a line. The man at the back tossed a cigarette into the gutter; the tip glowed red in the shadows until the snow snuffed it out.

"I heard Ruth McDougal passed away last week," Mort said.

"What?"

"At St. Mary's Home. I guess she just died in her sleep."

Larry swallowed and folded his hands on his lap. The line across the street filed gradually into the hall. As each man entered, the woman smiled and engaged him in brief conversation.

"Did you hear what I said about Ruth McDougal, Captain?"

"Are you sure it was Ruth McDougal?"

"I'm sure. Father Reilly told me this morning after Mass. Apparently she was alert to the end."

"I almost married her," Larry said quietly.

Mort looked at him. "Say again?"

Larry stared out into the street. "We were going to elope. Marry in New York City. We'd even bought tickets for the ferry from Bridgeport to Long Island." He shook his head, took off his glasses, wiped away the snow with his scarf, and replaced them. A cold breeze came up from the river and tossed big, slow, fat snowflakes around in the streetlamps' glare.

"I didn't know that, Larry," Mort said slowly. "That must have been when I was away in the service."

Larry nodded. "It was. No one knew."

"But wasn't she already engaged to that boy from Waterbury, and then he enlisted and got sent overseas?"

"Yes."

"And you got shipped over just after that, didn't you?"

Larry nodded again.

Mort looked at his old friend sitting perfectly still, then past him to the green where they'd first met as boys. "But you didn't elope."

"No." Larry shook his head slowly. "No, in the end I couldn't do that to that boy. I was heading over myself. That could have been me." He paused. "I told her I'd had a change of heart."

Mort tapped his fingers lightly on the cane on his lap. He looked down at it then back at his friend. "I guess you know that boy never made it back. And you were probably still overseas when she married and moved to Cleveland."

A moment passed before Larry said, "I found out when I came home."

Mort watched the small rise and fall of Larry's chest. "Did you know that Ruth was back here at St. Mary's?"

"No." His voice was almost a whisper. "I wish I had."

Mort readjusted the cane. "Father Reilly told me she moved there to be close to her sister and niece. He said they visited her regularly."

They fell quiet again. A truck drove by. Mort watched Larry put his hands into his coat pockets. Then Mort took off his cap, studied it, brushed it off again, and put it back on. He climbed to his feet, laboring with the cane. The sound of a banjo tuning up came from across the

street. “Well, are you ready to head over?”

“I think I’ll just sit here for a while.”

“Don’t think too much about Ruth, Larry.”

“It’s pretty hard not to.”

Mort watched his friend stare into the street while the snow fell around them and dusted their glasses. “Well, come over in a little bit then.”

“I might.”

“Come over for the entertainment, anyway. I’ll save a chair for you.”

“Thanks. I might come over.”

Mort put his cane down carefully into the new snow. He hesitated, then leaned down off the curb and limped across the street. The line had disappeared. The woman smiled and held the hall door open for him. Before he went inside, he looked back across to the bench in front of the library. Larry was still there, silhouetted under the streetlamp. He’d pulled his overcoat up around his neck and had buried his chin down under the collar. The cold breeze had blown it open at the knees.

Patricia
- John O'Reilly

Seven times she thumped out one of us
into stewing American frenzy and fugue.
This was the Fifties, Sixties, her children
were citizens of empire, but those given
bread and entertainments not of their liking.
So much sense was spent on what made sense,
within our household and beyond its ramparts.
That full house had no alone in it, our father
filling all corners but hers, where we hid.

Behind him, the charcoal John Kennedy portrait,
and in front, his fury if plates weren't oven-
warmed just before Mom hauled submissive
gray food to the long table, him stinking of work.
She'd never eat, taking black tea, heavily sugared.
Well, good for her, we'd chew and chew for her sake.
Fish sticks like desiccated lizards, God help us, and
Salisbury steak, whatever that was, toughened lovingly,
disastrously gravied, to ill effect, and we fought for it.

Dad honed in on what conformity called forth,
but still demanded to stand out, so he screwed up,
straddling decades. Knowing all that Shakespeare
he'd declaim at supper, yet never reading anything
but the paper, cover to cover, keeping informed,
as though he might get pulled over any day now,
needing an answer, but having no questions, ever.
Once we were grown we could measure his terror:
TV a bright bruise in the dark, or a moon in cloud.

Mom reading in the kitchen, hectored past reason,
couldn't reason, not with him, wouldn't come sit
through loud insipid dramas, or what loudly
passed for laughter. Someone else could tend him,
bounce up to change channels, fetching snacks.
He'd bellow, she'd start without rising,
him laired in darkness, not leaving the siren glow.
We'll never know how hard she toiled alone
to be alone, to share this craft with all of us.

It's too late to have her over, with our own children.
Her tale is done, waiting to be warmed and retold.
He's plated on the couch, in thrall to bright clatter.

She’s shut her Updike and turns to the big dish pile
beneath fluorescent future light, her many children
slipping past the screen door or off the low porch roof,
out windows of the foundering house, running under
the doomed, green brained elms, spreading out like water
or a rippling call to supper, into now, on, on, into later.

Pick a Color, Any Color

- Ira Joel Haber

Postcard Sentinel
- Kevin Heaton

Shady grove sentinel keeps
vigil over Victorian parade

grounds, seated in a miniature
chariot hitched to a rocking

horse steed at eternal attention;
forever vigilant. Loyal

keeper of oak shadows shading
anonymous actors in permanent

roles of yesteryear, clad
in the latest finery: bonnets,

bows, linen and lace from days
of wine and roses. Photogenic

smiles adorn the faces of stable
guard chaperones squinting

at sunlight through fixated eyes
that will never tear, nor see

a cloudy sky. Auburn tresses
escape from under his tilted beret,

perched atop an unfettered,
youthful beam of light; held captive

within stationary borders, in a time
before encumbrance cast care

upon innocence.

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Roselli's Remains
- Roger Pincus

Roselli wheeled himself to the edge of the ramp and relaxed his grip. Smooth rubber tires brushed against his fingertips as he descended. The chair landed on the sidewalk with just the slightest bump. After a few breaths, his lungs felt better, cleaner. Even on a sticky September afternoon like this, where the air hung heavy with automobile exhaust, it was much better outside than inside the veteran's home standing behind him, the blinds in every window shut tight against the sun's strong rays.

He placed a hand above his eyes as if he might be trying to home in on something in the town's modest skyline. But he was simply creating a bit of shadow to fend off the sun's glare for a few seconds while his eyes adjusted. He lowered his hand, still squinting, the paleness of his freshly shaved face fully exposed to the brightness of the afternoon. If you examined Roselli's face carefully, with its lines and scars and hard expression, a face that looked older than its twenty-eight years, if you really looked at him, you probably would gather some idea of who he had been. But hardly anyone looked at Roselli that way anymore.

Roselli planned to take himself to State Street and from there to the Yorktown Alley Pub for a bite to eat. With luck he would arrive before the evening rush and have a chance to talk to Amy. The sun beat down on him as he pushed his way uphill along the sidewalk, but he didn't sweat. The wind cooled him and ruffled his thick hair. He'd let it grow so he wouldn't resemble a former cop or infantryman. He was someone new now, or at least someone different, a civilian who no longer chased criminals down the street or exchanged automatic weapons fire with ragged, lethal men in the mountains of Afghanistan's Nuristan province.

He passed a barber shop and a diner as the incline steepened. The veins in his forearms bulged as he turned his wheels forward. He wondered, as he pushed the chair hard, how what was left of his body would hold up without shins, calves, or feet. The wind billowed his shorts and caressed his knees and the stubs beneath them, the false beginnings of his missing lower legs. The stubs completed themselves as smoothly round, free of edges or bumps, weirdly perfect in their curvature. A rocket-propelled grenade and the diligent work of surgeons had left him this way, maimed and perfected.

A strong gust blew, and Roselli stopped the chair. He held still, closed his eyes, and focused on the wind. He felt it wash over him, beginning at his stubs. This reassured him, for the moment, that what was left of him wasn't disappearing. The doctors told him that the numbness that sometimes invaded his knees was normal and harmless, but their words weren't enough – he needed the sensation of the wind against his knees to feel whole, or as whole as he could. As the gust tapered off, he opened his eyes and started pushing with renewed strength.

Brightly dressed Sunday crowds filled both sides of State. Roselli stayed in the right lane of pedestrian traffic, careful not to wheel too fast, not to run into anyone. Parents pushing strollers, pretty girls in sandals, and teenage boys in baseball caps all passed by. Some looked down at him and promptly averted their eyes. Others stared, and from time to time someone accidentally bumped his chair. He wanted to be able to move along the street comfortably, to enter a store spontaneously like anyone else. But in the crowded shops, the stares, bumps, and whispered "Excuse me" rained on him even more relentlessly, and his movements were even more confined. So he continued along the sidewalk.

He felt a thump on the left side of his chair. A heavy bag hanging from a shoulder strap had struck him. The bag's owner, a middle-aged man with black-rimmed eyeglasses, asked

Roselli to excuse him, then darted away before Roselli could respond, weaving through the crowd while clutching the bag under his arm remorsefully. The man was nervous, and even seemed afraid, but Roselli knew he wasn't, not really. He recognized real fear and knew it couldn't be shaken off by a few quick strides on a sidewalk. He'd seen fear up close, in the widening eyes of a drug dealer looking at the barrel of Roselli's Glock. He had even heard it in the screams of a Taliban fighter he'd shot to pieces. No one on the force or in his unit had caused as much fear as Roselli, and there were times he'd been told to let up. He had saved so many lives, though, in this town's dirty alleys and in Afghanistan's sun-drenched landscape of reddish brown rocks and pristine dust that no one ever came down on him too hard.

A round-faced girl of about six walked past him slowly, holding her mother's hand. Her blond hair was gathered under a barrette. She looked directly into Roselli's eyes and then at the rest of him and at the air below his flapping shorts. A tiny gasp escaped her mouth, and she buried her face in her mother's dress. Roselli looked away and shivered. The shivering continued, and, at the corner of York Street and State, it worsened. Roselli had a full case of the shakes.

He slowed to a stop next to the Farmers and Mechanics bank. People streamed passed, no longer appearing as individuals but as a babble of color and sound and movement, their particularity muted, but raw, presence intensified. Roselli's jaw trembled, his hands did the same, and his mouth dried. His breath tasted foul with fear. He wanted to rise from the wheelchair and find a safe place. This was much more frightening than Afghanistan, where what threatened him was tangible, and he and his M-16 could fight back. He missed his M-16. The Glock he had used as a police officer was a toy in comparison. Toy or not, it was registered to him as a civilian and rested snugly inside his jacket with his pills.

He looked down, focusing on a bottle cap on the sidewalk, steadying himself enough to turn the chair right onto York Street. He made another right into a quiet, wide alley, where he pulled out the bottle of anti-anxiety medicine the VA psychiatrist had prescribed for him. He rushed two of the one-milligram pills into his mouth, swallowed them, then took another. He closed his eyes and sat motionless, waiting. Quickly his tension subsided. His heart slowed and moisture returned to his mouth. A chemically induced calm took hold. He had skipped lunch and the medicine worked fast. Soon he felt even better than calm. He pushed his wheels along effortlessly, coasting down the slight slant of the alley. He barely felt the chair roll over the seams in the concrete; bumps came to him only as muffled sound. The pub was coming up on the right. It was a favorite haunt from his days as a cop, and he'd been back more than a dozen times since coming home at the beginning of summer.

As he approached the pub, his wheels squeaking, he heard a shout from the narrow loading area that ran off the alley to State, a shadow-covered ribbon of asphalt that accommodated small delivery vehicles. A tiny, frail man in torn jeans and a plaid flannel shirt emerged from behind a dumpster, shouting incoherently, mainly cursing. He dragged a filthy brown sack along the ground and walked slowly and with a slight limp toward Roselli, who recognized him. He had arrested the man a few times. Chops, he was called, for reasons Roselli didn't know. Chops was a perpetual disturbance, especially in jail, where he kept other guests awake. On the streets, people just avoided him.

"No, you get out of here," Chops said to Roselli. "I don't need no motherfucking cripple to compete with."

"It's all right," Roselli said. Chops shuffled closer, his neck bent forward, his eyes moving rapidly, left to right, up and down.

"Don't be tellin' me it's all right" said Chops. "I ain't been takin' in nothin' lately." He pointed at an aluminum bucket back near the dumpster with a few dollar bills in it. "People see you, they'll give you their extra cash. Go on somewhere else, or I'll kick your ass out of that chair."

Roselli smiled. The anti-anxiety medicine cruised through his body at peak levels; besides, he knew Chops was harmless. "No problem." He pointed to the pub. "I'm going in there. I won't take away any of your business." Chops tilted his head dubiously to the right. His yellow eyes glowed. "As a matter of fact," Roselli added, "here's a donation." He reached into a pocket of his shorts and held out a dollar.

Chops snatched the bill. "All right then," he said, turning away. "Man's all right!" he shouted up toward State, where no one could hear him above the bustle of cars and people on foot. He hobbled back to the dumpster, bellowing curses. He put his sack against the wall, then sat on it.

The sky began to darken. Roselli wheeled himself up the ramp to the pub's front door. He pulled the doorknob hard with his right hand while pushing the left wheel of the chair, which crossed into the doorway. Then he turned both wheels forward a few more inches, just in time to avoid the door's backswing.

The smell of fried onion rings, breaded fish and cigarette smoke mingled in the pub's cluttered air, undisturbed by the slow-turning ceiling fans. To Roselli's right, steam and sizzling from the grill filtered out of the kitchen, which was visible just past the bar. Amy was behind the bar, emptying ash trays and putting down coasters. She smiled at him, walked over to his usual table and pulled a chair away to make room for his wheels. He thanked her and ordered a half-pound cheeseburger and fries with a Budweiser from the tap.

Roselli devoured his meal, the charred exterior of the burger a delight to his tongue. His stomach warmed. He had always loved red meat, had practically lived on it as a kid. The burger and the fries and the Budweiser tasted better tonight than they ever had. Roselli knew this was at least partly because of the medicine. He ordered another Budweiser and watched Sportscenter highlights on the wide flat-screen television behind the bar. More customers entered the pub, and some of the regulars shook hands with him as they arrived. A few knew him from before; others knew him as the ex-cop whose legs had been blown off in Afghanistan. Some stopped to talk about the stretch run of the baseball season or who would beat the spread in next week's NFL games.

The pub wasn't too busy yet, and Amy came over. She sat across from him and folded her hands together on the table. She smiled and asked how things were going. The steam from the kitchen had put a sheen of sweat on her face, giving her a pleasant glow. Roselli and she had flirted with one another before Afghanistan when he'd come to the pub, checking on her when she worked a late shift. She seemed more serious these days. Roselli felt uneasily responsible for this.

"Hey," she said. "I asked how things are going." She squeezed his right forearm gently, the warmth of her hand radiating through his sleeve. Roselli smiled back but withdrew his arm.

"Things are good." He told her how Chandler, his former partner on the force, had paid him a visit earlier in the day. He didn't mention the many awkward silences the visit had included or how relieved he'd been when Chandler left. He let her know how he'd been starving when he got to the pub, and how the burger had hit the spot. "And you? How's school?"

"Good. Classes are keeping me busy." She laughed when he asked whether her accounting texts were giving her headaches, and whether she really liked crunching all those

numbers. “Yes, I like it when assets and liabilities balance out. You should try it,” she said, teasing him back.

”No, thanks.” He smiled and raised his palms in surrender. “Not me.”

“Okay, then, maybe something else.” She had been bringing up this “something else” during his last few visits. She meant his future, his plans, what he wanted to do next. He’d always changed the subject, or if he didn’t, she’d change it for him. But now she drew her mouth into a straight, serious line. She wasn’t going to change the subject, he sensed, and she wasn’t going to let him change it, either.

“Sure,” he said. With his right thumb and forefinger, he lifted a packet of sugar from the top of the stack in the metal caddy and pushed the granules around. “I’m going to come up with something else. It’s just a little tough, though.”

“Why? Why is it tough?”

He looked at her and shrugged. “I’m just not sure what to do. A lot of the things someone in my situation can do involve sitting.” He spoke the last word sharply. “Sitting,” he repeated. “At a desk. I’ve never been much for sitting at a desk.” He took a breath. “The things I’ve done have all been outside.” He flipped the sugar packet back onto the table. “And I’ve always been able to see the results of what I do right in front of me.”

Amy unclasped her fingers and placed her hands on the table, close to Roselli’s. Her long, light brown hair with its layers of wavy curls framed her face asymmetrically, pulled behind her left ear but hanging forward over her right. She had a few tiny freckles on each cheek that Roselli had never noticed before but that nevertheless reminded him of something, took him back to the times before the war when he’d kidded with her, and she would blush or laugh hard and let him buy her a drink when her shift was over.

“There are all kinds of things you can do that would let you keep moving,” she said. “Where you could help people out, too.”

“Like what?” He leaned forward and raised his eyebrows. “Who could I help?” A tinge of bitterness pushed its way into his question.

“Plenty of people. You could go into insurance. You could visit people whose houses have burned down or who’ve been hurt in an accident. Go out and meet them. Help fix their problems.”

“Right,” Roselli said. He sipped his beer. “Insurance.” The flatness of his voice matched his expression, and several seconds of silence passed.

“There are other possibilities,” Amy said. “Maybe you could go back to the force. Help solve cases. Help question the guys who get brought in.” Roselli looked at her skeptically. “You can still be a good cop,” she added.

“No,” Roselli answered evenly. “I never was a good cop. I was a bad cop.” He smiled now, and a bit of his old feeling came back.

Amy shrugged. “No one can throw punches forever. At some point, you’d probably want to switch to ‘good cop’ anyway.”

Roselli laughed. “Maybe, but not now.” Definitely not now, he thought.

Amy shook her head, still smiling. He hoped she was letting the subject go. “Whatever you decide to do, you’ll be great at helping people. Even if you insist on being a badass while doing it.”

“You really believe that?” Roselli asked, chuckling. “That I can help people?” He raised his hands above his wheels demonstratively.

“Sure,” she said. “Anyone who knows you would believe it.” Her tone was casual, as if

she were saying something obvious.

Roselli wondered where the certainty of her belief came from. He woke up every morning in a state of disbelief about how the smallest task required the greatest effort, how hard it was to use the bathroom, to shave, to get dressed, to move from one present moment to the next, too drained to think about the future. Amy kept watching him. “Thanks,” he told her.

He knew she’d have to get back to work soon. “Hey,” he said. “Why don’t we catch a movie when your shift is done?” He was surprised to hear these words come out of his mouth. “Over at the Colonial,” he added, gesturing with his thumb in the direction of the old theater a few blocks away. “If you’re free.”

“I’d like that.” She stood from the table and smiled.

“What do you want to see?”

“Pick something,” she said. She squeezed his arm again, her fingers still warm.

They agreed to meet in front of the movie house at nine-fifteen, and Amy walked over to another table where two customers had seated themselves. Roselli looked into the kitchen and gave a salute-wave to Mel, the pub’s owner, who smiled and waved back from behind the bar. Roselli took a breath, felt a warmth spread inside him, a different kind than the one that had accompanied the burger, a feeling he hadn’t experienced since coming home. He finished his beer and watched the crowd thicken.

He didn’t recognize any of the customers flowing through the door, bumping into each other, then jamming together near the bar and in the pub’s small foyer, waiting in a messy semblance of a line for tables to become available. Roselli felt his medication wearing off. His stomach fluttered a little. He closed his eyes and sought distraction by picturing Amy still sitting across from him, recalling the feeling of her fingers as she touched his arm, then imagining the two of them at the Colonial, both seated quietly, his awareness of her next to him cutting through the theater’s darkness. He took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

A big man, about Roselli’s age, stood a few feet away. He wore a leather jacket zipped only at the bottom and looked at Roselli and his table. The woman on his arm did the same. They separated themselves from the congestion by the front door and hovered nearer to him, like Christmas shoppers closing in on a parking space at the mall. The man’s eyebrows were tensed into a hard expression as he surveyed Roselli’s plate, clean except for some grease and a few spots of ketchup. “Looks like this guy’s about done,” he said, more loudly than necessary, nominally addressing the woman.

Roselli thought about ordering a cup of coffee, returning the man’s scowl with a nod and a smile, saying something like, “Busy night, huh?” But the flutters in his stomach became more insistent and severe, as if he’d swallowed something unstable. He needed fresh air so he calculated his tab in his head and decided to pay without waiting for the check. He placed the cash on the table and secured it with his empty beer glass.

A hand touched his shoulder from behind, and he started. It was Amy. She knelt, bringing her face down close to his, so she could be heard above the crowd’s rising din. “I’m glad I caught you,” she said. “Mel is insisting that I work late. He says it’s too busy for me to leave at nine.”

“Sure,” Roselli said. He lifted his right arm and gestured toward the crowd. “I can see why.” But even as he spoke, he felt the disappointment sink in, another ingredient added to the cauldron of anxiety inside him.

“Is this table open?” The man in the jacket now stood at the spot behind where Amy had been sitting earlier, his jaw jutting out. His thick fingers rested on the top of the chair’s curved

back. His girlfriend stood next to him. He wasn't as big as Roselli had been. Roselli knew the look, recognized how quickly the tough veneer could be melted away when confronted by someone tougher.

"It is," said Roselli. "I was just leaving." He broke eye contact with the man.

"Are you all right to get through this jam?" Amy asked, giving a quick nod toward the crowd.

"Yeah," said Roselli, quietly. He turned the chair until he was perpendicular to the standing customers lining one end of the bar to the other. "Excuse me," he said. The crowd let him squeeze through. He didn't look up at any of them.

The temperature outside had dropped considerably, and the sudden chill and change of scenery made Roselli shiver. He grabbed his tires for a moment to steady himself. His breath fogged the air, and he zipped up his jacket. The rush of patrons entering the pub had ended just as he'd left. The alley was as quiet as it was cool; even the buzz of State Street had eased. "It's all right," he whispered as he wheeled his chair slowly toward York Street, taking in the relative peace. It's quiet out here, no crowds. It's wide open. Everything is wide open. But his heart began to race. "It's all right," he said again. "This had been a good night." It was all good. Like hell it was, some other part of him said. Like hell. He chastised himself for putting Amy on the spot. What was she going to do, say no right away? Sure, she had to work late. Sure she did.

Roselli shook all over. Then the sweating started abruptly, quickly soaking his back and chest. He zipped his jacket open, desperate for a breeze that would dry him. First too cold, now too hot. He had been so comfortable in the pub, until the end. Had it all been just a buzz from his pills?

He heard a shrill cry. "God damn!" Chops roused himself from the ground by the dumpster and limped towards him. "I knew you'd fuck me up!" he shouted. "I just knew it!" The man stood in front of Roselli and looked down at him. "All them people linin' up to get in," he said, waving an arm towards the pub. "And none of them give me a dime." Roselli looked at the ground. "And you know why?"

"Leave me alone," Roselli said, still looking down. He gripped his tires and took a hard, shaky breath.

"I'll tell you why. Because of you!" Chops poked a bony finger into Roselli's chest. "They knew you was in there, and they kept their money in their pockets until they got inside and gave it to you!"

Roselli's chest stung where Chops had poked him. People, he told himself, didn't do this to him. No one did, not someone like Chops, and not the hard guy in the pub. The guy with the girlfriend. This was not something he could stand for. "Get away from me," he said. Anger mixed with his resolution.

"Ohhh, no," said Chops, bending his neck forward, coming face to face with him. "Not so fast. Let's see what they give you. You give me half, cripple. Give me half, and we'll call it even." He reached inside Roselli's jacket.

Roselli's left hand, as if moving on its own, darted forward and grabbed Chops by his frayed collar. He breathed hard once, then twice. The second breath came more easily, and the third felt deep and healthy, reminding him of how he'd breathed during a firefight in the mountains or in the town's rough neighborhoods, adrenaline at full tilt. He squeezed Chops' frayed collar inside his fist, dug his knuckles into Chops's throat, and yanked. The wheelchair rattled as Chops's face collided with the left post supporting the backrest. Roselli kept a tight grip on the collar, then brought him forward and shoved him away as hard as he could. Chops

flew backward and landed on his rear, hard. Roselli smiled.

Chops struggled to stand. He rose slowly, his movements spasmodic, as if his limp had intensified and spread to all his limbs. He touched his face, saw blood on his hand, and hurled a stream of expletives at Roselli before charging. Roselli caught him again with his left hand, absorbing most of the shock from the collision. The wheelchair backed up about a foot. Again he held Chops's collar and pulled him down until the foreheads of the two men touched. Chops cursed and tried to get loose, flailing his fists ineffectually into Roselli's upper arms. Roselli could do whatever he wanted with Chops now – punch him out with a right hand, head-butt him.

Instead he reached into his jacket with his free hand and found his Glock. His palm and fingers eased around it, and he pressed the barrel against Chops's left temple. "Put your hands on the back of your head and stay still," he told him. His voice was ice.

Chops obeyed. "Shit, man, let me go," he said in a faint, raspy whisper. "You can keep all of it. Just let me go."

"Shut up," said Roselli. He felt calm, like himself. His old, real self. No more shakes or sweating. Maybe this was the medicine he needed. He pulled the trigger slightly, just enough to release the safety on the gun. Keep your Glock cocked, as they'd said back on the force. "Did you know I'm a war hero?" he asked Chops. He watched beads of sweat squeeze out of the pores of the man's leathery skin, just above where the Glock's barrel pressed into him. That's right, Roselli thought. Your turn now.

"No man, I didn't. I didn't know. Just let me go, all right? I won't mess with you no more."

Roselli looked into Chops's eyes, saw red lines in the yellowed, watery orbs, and felt the vibrations in his arm – not his own trembling but Chops's. It was different to feel it, different than just watching him shake. But he also felt the steel of the Glock's trigger, smooth and cool against his forefinger. It pleaded for him to squeeze it. He pushed the end of the barrel harder into Chops's head. Chops closed his eyes, and his trembling grew worse.

"Please, man." The rasp was barely audible now.

Roselli breathed in, gathering his resolve. At that same moment, Chops exhaled a long breath of stale air. Roselli recognized the smell – the distinctive, acrid flavor of the fear he'd tasted in his mouth on State Street a few hours ago. It was still there when Roselli took his next breath. His right hand began to shake while it pressed the barrel into Chops's temple, and Chops shook even harder as a result. They trembled violently for several seconds longer, or maybe several minutes. Roselli wasn't sure how long he'd been shaking when he finally let go of the trigger.

The gun's safety reengaged. Roselli relaxed his grip on Chops's collar and slowly uncurled the fingers of his left hand. He removed the gun from Chops's temple, revealing a circular imprint, a temporary tattoo from the Glock's barrel. He put the gun back into his jacket. Chops, no longer in Roselli's grasp, still didn't move, and kept his hands on the back of his head. Roselli backed up a few feet, but Chops remained bent forward. Roselli nodded at him. "Stand up," he said. Chops complied, tentatively, and took a few small steps backward.

"Take it easy," Roselli said calmly. "I won't hurt you."

Chops lowered his hands. He looked left, then right. Then, in a burst of movement, he took off toward the dumpster. Roselli had seen him run before, but never this fast. He thought about shouting after him, telling him something to take his terror away. But he couldn't come up with anything. Chops grabbed his sack from the ground without breaking stride and kept going, disappearing with a left turn onto State.

Roselli breathed in deeply, then exhaled, fogging the evening air as he had before, as anyone's breath would. But the cloud he produced this time was shaped differently from anyone else's, and differed from the one he'd made earlier. He felt his heart beat again, this time not too fast or hard. He reached back into his jacket, feeling again for the gun.

He removed the magazine and its fifteen cartridges with his left hand, one at a time, and placed them into his pocket in groups of three. Pointing the gun downward, he pulled the trigger, disengaging the firing pin, and then held the gun in his right hand. He squeezed the levers on either side of the weapon with the thumb and index finger of his left hand and, with his right, pushed the slide forward off the frame. He put the magazine, the barrel, the spring, and the slide in the same pocket as the rounds; they all pinged against one other as he wheeled himself to the dumpster. He reached up and opened a side panel. Gently, he tossed the gun frame inside. It vanished and barely made a sound, its fall cushioned, Roselli supposed, by a bag of garbage.

He turned his chair around and wheeled it back to the broader alley, feeling the bumps but not bothered by them. The muscles in his face were relaxed. If you looked at him now in the bright light thrown off by the pub's neon sign, you would see a man of twenty-eight, seated. Tomorrow, he told himself, he'd come up with a plan. For now, he was grateful to have made it this far. He pushed his wheels toward York Street.

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The Reason
- David LaBounty

you once said it's sin
you say
that we're
swollen
with sin

I say it's not
quite like that
though I don't
want to assume
the mantle of
God

I say it's
August

that we are
full of
August

that we are
swollen
with
August

I say it's
August and
that no one
wants to
enter the
plainsong
of
September
attached

but otherwise alone

Men At Work

- Joseph Glaser

The Siren Call
- Jo Stewart

Lusting Immortality
Applause thundering
In the deafening silence
Struggling forward on broken leg

Fame the beckoning beacon
Star littered sidewalks
back to back dreams
trumped by routine the ordinary

The mask the smile
bending from the waist seems normal
Normal as in everyday the ordinary
as in three meals a day plus hygiene

The glory call that sexy siren
seduces with mirrors ironclad
harkens the mastery of illusion
as in to live forever. Forever.

Tipping Makes You Sexy
- Paul Lewellan

"Tipping makes you sexy." That's what the sign on the counter says. What's that supposed to mean? You note the big jar on the counter. Coins and bills. Quarters and ones. You think, The bills were put there by the baristas. That's what you would do if you were working behind the counter. You would slip in a couple bills before the morning rush started. You'd add them after the first couple of quarters. Who tips a buck for a cup of coffee?

But of course this isn't just a cup of coffee. A cup of coffee is what you want, what you *need*. Earlier this morning you thought, I'll walk downtown and get a good cup of coffee. The coffee maker at home is fine. Really. But you can't face another morning alone.

Chris is not coming back. You have to admit it. Chris is not coming back. You realized that when you woke up. That's when you decided, I'll go downtown and get a good cup of coffee. Chris always insisted on making the coffee, and it tasted like crap. That was the price you paid for letting someone into your life again, if only for a few weeks. What did you expect at your age?

You walk past the new Starbucks to the corner of 1st and Cleveland where there used to be a Dunkin' Donuts. Now there is a hand-lettered sign on the newly remodeled building – Cup o' Joe. Bet their coffee is better than Starbucks, better than the crap Chris made. You walk in. Mistake. Everyone in the place is under thirty except for the woman working the register. You feel like an old fool. *Old* fool.

The special today is a double-shot, caramel latte for $3.85. You have no clue what a double-shot, caramel latte is. You want a 25¢ cup of coffee like you got at the Hilltop café in 1969, when you were eighteen and shipping out to Vietnam. With an order of cinnamon toast, you still had a dime left from a buck to leave as a tip.

You look at the chalkboard behind the counter and see all the other offerings: caffe misto, toffee mocha, expresso con panna, caramel macchiato. What's the difference between a latte and a cappuccino?

The woman behind the counter, a barista, Thuy according to her name tag, smiles at you. It is not that uncertain smile you get from teenaged store clerks wondering if they should offer you the senior citizens discount. It is a real smile. Like the smiles you got after you finished basic training, before you shipped out, when you were young and buff and a Marine, and you ruled the world.

You ask, "What do you recommend?" Your question surprises you because you never admit to indecision.

"My favorite is the double-shot, caramel latte," the barista tells you. "It's the special today."

You really want just coffee, even though they charge a $1.45 for it. You glance again at the menu board then turn back to the barista. She is still smiling. She has long, dark hair and black lipstick. You remember another young woman named Thuy.

"I'll try the special."

Thuy has an intelligent face and dark eyes. Her features are Caucasian, oriental, Pacific Islander. It is difficult to tell her age. A distant longing bordering on desire washes over you as she turns to make your drink. You stare at the flawless curve of her neck exposed by the braid which cascades down her back. You wonder how her skin would taste if you could kiss it. You reread the sign. "Tipping makes you sexy."

Sexy. It's tough to be sexy after sixty.

Thuy turns back to you. She catches you staring. Her smile fades. She is too polite to say anything.

Thuy has poured the drink into a giant blue cup on a blue ceramic saucer. You forgot to ask for it To Go. Now you'll have to stay.

Thuy holds the latte out to you with both hands, like a gift. Without thinking you pull a dollar bill from your left pocket and place it in the jar. She smiles again.

"There are seats at the counter," she tells you.

You can watch her prepare the next latte as you sip the sweet taste of coffee and caramel. You know you will return tomorrow even before you sit down. Facing you across the counter is another sign. "Help wanted."

You smile as the hot liquid crosses your lips, warming you.

To Listen
- Mariam Dubovik Lease

When a room asks a question
In this world inside the world
Invites the piano
Listens to a chair

Coherence comes from incoherence
Without time

And the rose rests in red
Trusting its texture
And its silk signifies
As falling away does not

And the present rests
In rolled scrolls of water

It lives
The way a rose rests
Inside its red
Trusting its silk

Worth Contemplating

- Leila A. Fortier

Too Noisy
- Patsy Thrash

One day it happens, just like that:
harsh, discordant sounds
burst upon my private universe.
Bluster, racket, roar is everywhere;
too many people talk at once
so it's impossible to comprehend
a single thing that's said.

At dawn I hear a hum that escalates
sounds like angry hornets
swarming from a nest
destroyed by curious children
who will soon regret it.

At noon I'm startled by
discordant caws of crows
invading every lawn
with deafening cries
that drown out everything

and late at night made mad
by static on the radio
when the signal doesn't quite come in
from Del Rio, Texas, and I cannot separate
competing voices of evangelists.

I know I would be saved from sin and death –
damnation even –
if I could only get the signal clear,
if I could only hear.

Tote
- J. Boyer

One of the benefits of going to a writers' conference is the tote you get, thought Plumly. Normally these were first-rate totes, as totes go, heavy cloth, good stitching, a logo which could knock your socks off, but that's not what he had in mind by "benefit." What he had in mind was that when the girl said, "Here is your badge, and here is your tote," he got to respond, "Wow, that's a pretty nice tote, is it free?" and she said, "Well, it's included."

She was young and pretty, she might have been one of his students, and he didn't want this small exchange to end before it had to, so he said, "The tote is included?," not because he didn't hear her or because he was unforgivably stupid, but mainly because when her hand brushed his own as she handed him his badge, he remembered how much fun it was to say, "Tote." It came back to him in a flash, as if out of nowhere: Tote's a pretty good word. It was better said aloud than said silently, though. It wasn't the kind of word you said to yourself. Silently, tote could be just about any one-syllable word you only get to use occasionally, such as "crash" or "nip" or "pontificate," though "pontificate" of course has more than one syllable. Said aloud, though, tote was over the top.

Try it. Say tote.

Not like that. Say it the way Plumly just said it. Say it out loud.

See?

When he was growing up Plumly used to have an old 78 rpm record of Paul Robeson at Carnegie Hall singing *Old Man River*, a song that greatly benefits from the word "tote," though there, of course, it has to do with barges and manual labor, and it's not something you get free at a conference. Or get to say for no apparent reason.

Plumly remembered that his mother used to say "tote," and he probably used it once or twice himself when he was growing up, at the beach, say, as in "Mom, aren't you forgetting your tote." But tote wasn't a word he'd used for a long time, and he was surprised by how welcome was the chance to use it in a sentence, as in, "That's a pretty nice tote – for being free." It was just one of those words, you know? It had some heft, and lately a lot of things in Plumly's life seemed devalued of heft. It was one of those words which made him think had he chosen a different career or lived a different life, he might have had the chance to say it a lot. Tote.

Right? Hear it?

When the girl behind the counter turned away to help others with their registration packages, Plumly thought it was a shame you couldn't work a word as good as tote into a casual conversation at least once or twice a day, every day of your life; you'd probably be the better person for it. But most of us aren't living that life. We're living lives where we find ourselves using words which aren't much fun to say aloud, such as "perpendicular." Now, there, thought Plumly, is a word better kept to oneself.

Perpendicular. Paralegal. Paragraph. It must have something to do with all those Ps. They're just not good on the tongue. Poets can probably think of a way to find some music in words such as that. Not Plumly though. Maybe if he practiced. But then poets probably have a leg up in this particular case because poet begins with p. And they are always introducing themselves as, "Hello, I'm Cynthia – or Aaron – or Nakeesha the poet." Not that he'd ever actually heard a poet do that kind of self-introduction. How would it sound? They probably could if they wanted to, though. Leave it to a poet to know better.

Face it, when's the last time you heard some famous poet say something such as, "Hello,

I'm W.H. Auden, the famous poet?" Auden knew better. Too many Ps. That's what made Auden as good a poet as he was. He knew that one P is one too many. But Plumly was willing to bet a full semester's salary that Auden used the word tote a lot. Plumly had never made a study of this, but he bet Auden included the word tote in several of his poems. Auden probably saved these from publication, and only used them at his readings. If so, thought Plumly, smart move.

Plumly bet Auden said things to Yeats like, "Friggin' great tote you've got there," just for the fun of saying it. That's the kind of life he had. Tote came up a lot. Not "friggin" so much as "tote," and any time Auden felt like it.

No one should be a paralegal, if you asked Plumly, and it was risky to be too perpendicular, but that was another matter.

Tote. There it was again. He'd said it aloud. Completely out of nowhere. It was taking on a life of its own as he walked toward the convention hall to see if his books were being displayed, and that was okay. He could think of ten people right off hand who didn't deserve the life they had, all of them his younger colleagues at the college where he taught, all of them sitting pretty, and if tote wanted a life of *its* own, So be it, fine by him, have at it. Take the whole enchilada. You're a lot more deserving than they are.

Tote. What could he tell you?

He was sorry now he hadn't used a great word such as tote when he was still talking to his ex-wife, or with the Iranian man who owned the dry cleaners they used before she moved out and took an apartment of her own, or the paralegal they used when they went to revise their wills once they parted. And not something awkward either such as, "Repeat after me: Tote." Though that would have been okay for the Iranian man. He was just learning the language.

It's probably not going to happen though, thought Plumly. His was the sort of life right now where he only got to say the word tote once in a while, mainly when he went to conferences, which was probably just as well. He was old enough now so that he had more totes in his closet than he had life left to live; and he'd grown smart in a way that could only come with age and filling up your closet accordingly. Plumly was smart in the way that made him jump at the chance to say the word tote whenever he got it, because there was no way to be sure when it would be the last chance he got. Tote. See? He wasn't taking any chances.

Tote. He said it again and for no apparent reason. Pausing before the door to the conference hall, he thought, It's not like I think I'm getting a second chance at life after this one's behind me, so I'm making the most of the time I have left.

"Here, hold my tote for a minute, will you? I've got to use the restroom," he might say to a stranger, or, "My tote has a side-pocket; that's better than the last one I got," or, maybe he'd be speaking to one of his poet friends later in the day, and he'd say, "Friggin' great tote you've got there." He'd see if they got the literary reference.

When he headed home in a couple of days, he'd probably be taking the great tote he got at this conference onto the plane with him. If so, he planned to keep it on his lap. Maybe it would start a conversation. Who knew? In the meantime, he'd try to think of some alternative life where you don't have to force things by putting a tote on your lap. Or maybe he'd just wait until a few things cleared up in this one.

Why I Never Had Children
- Laura LeHew

Maybe I'd

be inane and hire a nanny
or not, just leave them
as latch keys

cheer them towards over
consumption
sugar, alcohol, tobacco

inspire sloth or laziness never
attend recitals, tournaments, championship
games

what if I worked no jobs, two jobs, gave them everything,
nothing, spanked them, hollered at them, gave them timeouts
let them run wild and free undisciplined

maybe I'd sidestep their nature and misdirect
them to business school, beautician school, no
school –

what if some action, or inaction, incited
them to become bigots, sexists, rapists,
serial killers, politicians, welfare fraud –

what if I could never instill their moral compass?

Natural Bridge

- Roy Slovenko

Wounded Doe
- Anne Whitehouse

Like a wounded animal
she remained stuck in her hurts,
nursing them like a doe
who, licking a sore, makes it worse.

The doe drinks deep from the pool
extending herself in the luminous reflection,
one long neck joined, the legs, too,
the pink sunset fragmented in the watery eye.

Submission Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.
· If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
· Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
· If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
· Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
· If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
· No erotica or works which rely on explicit language or gratuitous violence.
· All work must be original and in English.

· Fiction and essays can be up to 5000 words.
· No novel excerpts
· No memoirs
· No genre fiction; e.g., horror, science fiction, mysteries
· Fiction should deal with critical, universal aspects of human behavior.
· Essays can be on any topic but must express a reasoned opinion.
· Poems should have strong images and concise, evocative language.
· Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired.
· Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files.
· Accepted visual arts may be reduced to fit the available space.
· Prose and poetry may be accompanied by one or more relevant photos.

· Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.
· This magazine does not currently pay upon publication.

Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to gphillips938@comcast,net Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message. We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to gphillips938@comcast.net.

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