



ARIZONA AUTHORS
ASSOCIATION

ARIZONA LITERARY MAGAZINE
2014



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ARIZONA AUTHORS
ASSOCIATION

2014

Arizona

Literary Magazine

2 • Arizona Literary Magazine 2014

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TOBY FESLER HEATHCOTTE

Toby Heathcotte ran the contest for seven years and now serves as president of AZ Authors. She coordinates projects and activities that serve the membership and the writing community statewide. Her fiction titles include *The Alma Chronicles: Alison's Legacy, Lainn's Destiny, Angie's Promise, Luke's Covenant, and The Comet's Return.*

Nonfiction titles include "*The Manuscript from the Mystifying Source*" in *How I Wrote My First Book, Out of the Psychic Closet: The Quest to Trust my True Nature; Program Building: A Practical Guide for High School Speech & Drama Teachers.* Her books have won several awards. For details, go to toby-heathcotte.com.



ELIZABETH BLAKE

Elizabeth Blake has written about her experiences teaching inner-city students entitled *No Child Left Behind? The true story of a teacher's quest.* She also edited a Kindle book of short stories called *How I Met My Spouse.* Many of her short stories about her family have been published. Her first fiction e-novel is called *Shelter of Love.*



SCOTT JONES

Scott Jones is the Vice President and contest coordinator for the Arizona Authors Association. He serves with gratitude and much respect for the organization. Scott is a Financial Advisor for Edward Jones and lives in beautiful Sedona, AZ. He shares his life with a wonderful partner, a fat cat, and noisy little parrot named Judy. His writing adventure began **SOME** years ago with a young readers series. The first

book was published with Brown Books. .



JANE RUBY

Jane Ruby has authored several publications relating to gas and diesel engine lubrication as well as colloidal and surface science. She's changed her writing interest from scientific/technical to fictional adventure. Her first novel, "The Azurite Encounter" was published in 2010. She is currently working on the sequel "Voiceless Whispers: A New Shaman's Calling." She is married and has two daughters.

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OUR JUDGES



DREW AQUILINA, GREEN PIECES CARTOON STUDIO
WWW.GREENPIECESCARTOONS.COM

International award-winning cartoonist and author **Drew Aquilina** has been entertaining audiences since 1987. He created the cartoon strip Green Pieces©. He is the staff cartoonist of The Morning Scramble television program, AZTV Channel 7/Cable 13, and continues to produce a daily Green Pieces© strip at <http://www.GreenPiecesCartoons.com>



Marlene Baird, has four published books,. Many of her short stories have won awards. She is active in Professional Writers of Prescott.

She has two active blogs: bookreviewsbybaird.blogspot.com and thewritelady.blogspot.com. Her website is www.marlenebaird.com.



Arizona native literary publicist, author **Lisa Aquilina**, J.D. is co-owner of Green Pieces Cartoon Studio. Aquilina anticipates the publication of the second edition of her biographical novel, *La Nonna Bella*, in 2014. Green Pieces Cartoon Studio is a proud and active member of the Arizona Author Association, Independent

Book Publishers Association, APSS, PubWest and the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators.



Thomasina Burke loves Arizona. Every weekend she and her husband Bill head up the dirt road to their cabin in Crown King, Arizona. An RN and volunteer firefighter, she can also be found hiking any of the Phoenix mountains, Irish dancing, or planning a new travel adventure. She is the author of the critically acclaimed novel *Magic Bridge*, and has just published the sequel, *Bridge of Fire*.



Russ Azbill is deeply interested in American Southwest history, motorsports, aviation, and space exploration. He also has a keen interest in classic movies and vintage television. Being a great fan of dogs, Russ is seldom seen without one. *Darkest Hour* was his first published work. He has written three screenplays and a second novel. His second novel is scheduled for publication before the end of the year. He is currently writing the sequel to *Darkest Hour*.



Ellen Hasenecz Calvert, psychologist and prize-winning poet, moved to the Southwest in 1989. While living in Albuquerque Ellen wrote the award winning book, *Pilgrim: Tales of a Traveling Cat*. Ellen's second book, *Nine Goldfish in David's Pond*, is presently being translated into Spanish this coming fall. Ellen is busy at work on a book of short stories in Santa Fe where she lives with her husband David.



Emily Pritchard Cary is the author of seven romantic mysteries, two histories, and hundreds of articles on music, education, travel, genealogy, and parapsychology in newspapers and magazines worldwide. Several are in anthologies. She is an honors graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. Her advanced studies encompass education, archaeology, public communications, and environmental science.



Elizabeth Davis writes children's picture books and young adult fiction. She has won 1st place in the Writer's Digest annual competition. During the school year, she teaches Literature in the nearby Middle School; her days are filled with creativity, humor and hormones, travel and reading.



Jan Cleere's *Levi's & Lace: Arizona Women Who Made History*, was a 2012 finalist for the New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards. *Amazing Girls of Arizona: True Stories of Young Pioneers*, won the 2009 AZ Book Publishing Ass'n Glyph award for best young adult nonfiction. *Outlaw Tales of Arizona* was recognized in 2007 as winner of the National Federation of Press Women's Literary Competition for Historical Nonfiction. *More than Petticoats: Remarkable Nevada Women* was a 2006 WILLA Literary Award Finalist.

Muslim Writers Publishing is a publisher and licensor of Islam-related fiction and nonfiction books. Founded in 2006 by **Linda D. Delgado**, Muslim Writers Publishing was created to make wholesome Islamic fiction available to Muslims in the West. Since then, Linda published several books, including her Islamic Rose series and other Islamic fiction stories, halal cookbooks, poetry and anthologies.



Born in the inner city of Chicago, **Kathleen Rita Cook** spent her youth writing fiction, studying Irish Mythology and dreaming of becoming a nun. After four years of living hungry and on the run from a custody battle, Katy's mother took her to Phoenix, where the girl spent the past forty years raising children, catching up on her education, volunteering and copyediting. With a love of literature dating back to her Catholic school days, Katy writes to inspire and comfort other middle-aged children like her.

Diana Ellis is a Canadian freelance and travel writer who has visited over 40 different countries on seven continents and has written extensively about her adventures. Her travel humor and photographs have appeared on various travel websites. From fall 2007 to Fall 2009 Diana was the travel guide for the Canadian based lifestyle website, *Les Tout*. She also wrote about her hometown, Edmonton Alberta, for local publications. Her historical articles have appeared in the Edmonton & District Historical Society newsletter and the *Strathcona Plaindealer*.

She is a member of the Writers Guild of Alberta, Professional Writers Association of Canada, Canadian Authors Association, Arizona Authors Association and Access Copyright. She currently resides in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada with her husband and two cats. She spends her winters in Chandler, Arizona where she and her husband have a seasonal home.

OUR JUDGES



Diana Fisher made a name for herself in Phoenix as an advertising illustrator in the eighties. Her career shifted into the how-to-draw genre, illustrating and authoring many award-winning books for children and adults. She then moved into other literary genres including women's

fiction. Diana has also edited and advised authors on their manuscripts. She lives in the mountains north of Phoenix, where deer, javelinas, and other desert dwellers visit on a regular basis.



Marilyn June Janson, M.S., Ed., is the owner of Janson Literary Services, Inc., an editing, proofreading, and manuscript analysis company. She teaches creative writing and publishing classes at Mesa Community College and other educational venues throughout the East Valley. Ms. Janson is the author of *Recipe For Rage*, a suspense novel, and *Tommy Jenkins: First Teleported Kid*, a children's chapter book. She is working on a young adult novel. Contact Ms. Janson @ www.janwrite.com.



Justine Garcia is the author of [The Backwards Town](#), [The Treasure Map](#), [While You Were Gone](#), [The Adventures of Rose a Child Psychic](#), and [While You Were Gone Year Two](#). She owns her own publishing company, Rose Bud Publishing Company LLC. In her limited spare time, she loves

to relax and play with her three year-old daughter, Rose.



Gail Kennedy is a native New Yorker who arrived in Sedona, AZ in 1995. There she volunteered at both the local hospital and the Sedona Fire District. Later she was offered a job and worked there for twelve years. Gail has been a vocalist on both coasts and in a number of Jazz clubs and Cabarets in New York, San Francisco, Mexico, Spain, and in many clubs in North-

ern Arizona.



Barh Hahn (aka Barclay Franklin) is a resident of beautiful uptown Cornville, AZ. She holds a Masters in English degree with an emphasis on creative writing from NAU. She's currently working on novel #26 called *Virus* about a vector-control agent for the CDC. Five

of her novels have been published: *A Race for Glory Run*; *The Bride Price: The Chording of T.O. Malone*; *Up the Hill, Through the Long Grass*; and *The Shepherd's Moon*.



Karen Kibler earned her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Iowa in 1977, and soon after relocated to Arizona. She received a Ph.D. in 1997 from Arizona State University where she is now an Assistant Research Professor and the university Biosafety Manager. Writing has been a long-time passion of

hers; however, until the completion of *The Second Chasm*, her audience was restricted to family and college class professors.



After taking a voluntary layoff in 2002, **Cherie Lee** turned to writing. Curiosity guides her tall tales. Writing is wonderful since it leaves her less time for housework, cooking, and yard work. Her hobbies are reading, hiking and photography. She is busy polishing two more children's books and outlining two science fiction/fantasy stories for adults.



While **Gil Stafford's** day job is working as a young adult chaplain and Episcopal parish priest, at night I'm a writer of non-fiction and fiction. My latest book is due in October, from Alban Institute, "When Leadership meets Spiritual Direction: Reflections and Stories for Con-

gregational Life."



Kelly Lydick's writing has appeared in Naropa University's *Twittering Machine*, the *Burlington College Poetry Journal*, *ditch: poetry that matters*, *Shady Side Review*, *SwankSpeak!*, *Switched-on Gutenberg*, *Mission At Tenth*, and *Thema*. Her nonfiction articles have appeared in *Java*, *Western Art Collector*, *American*

Art Collector, *American Fine Art*, *Santa Fean*, and *True Blue Spirit* magazines. Her work has also been featured IN *ElephantJournal.com* and on NPR and KQED's *The Writers' Block*,



Kathy Stevens is passionate about reading and writing, for all levels and types of communications. Her work includes extracting technical scientific information for colleagues and the public, to assist Arizona industry and communities to understand safe drinking water requirements. She enjoys book clubs to explore and discuss all types of books

and she enjoys participating in Arizona Authors, for methods and information about "all-things-writing & publishing."



Chantelle Aimée Osman is the author of numerous flash fiction and short stories published in literary journals, e-zines and anthologies, and an Anthony Award nominee for her mystery/thriller website *The Sirens of Suspense*. In her former life she worked as an attorney and head of business affairs and development for various production companies in

Hollywood. She now owns A Twist of Karma Entertainment, a screenplay and manuscript editing and book cover design company and teaches writing workshops nationwide.

OUR COPY EDITOR



After being an educator for ten years, **Joya Rogers** decided it was time to fulfill her dream of writing. Her experiences as a middle and high school teacher for ten years have helped her gain insight into the culture of young people. Working in lower socioeconomic districts, Joya has observed the need for more books that

are relatable, yet at the same time provide diversity in experiences for African-American teens. She's currently writing a novel about a high school student who is coping with bullying



Greta Manville COPY EDITOR FOR ARIZONA LITERARY MAGAZINE 2014, writes mystery and suspense novels. Her bibliographic research on John Steinbeck is available free online. She edited *Transitions* and has served as contest coordinator and treasurer of Arizona Authors

Association in the past.

1ST PLACE ESSAY



JOHN HANSEN'S passion for writing began early as a sophomore in high school, when he was recognized for "Prairie Moon," a short story about a murderer fleeing his pursuers on horseback. After high school he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, serving two tours of duty in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Later, he joined the Bellevue (WA) Police Department, graduated from Seattle University, and became a Christian. In 2002, John began chronicling his family's adventures and forays into the desert in a series of nonfiction short stories, *Adventures in the Desert*.

After John lost his beloved Kristene to breast cancer, he wrote *Song of the Waterwheel*, describing his twenty-eight year marriage to Kristene, her decline and passing and his grief. It was published in 2012. John and his new wife live in Scottsdale, where he is active in his church, armed protection details and the Maricopa County Mounted Sheriff's Posse.

RIDING THE SUPERSTITIONS

BY

JOHN HANSEN

"Been ridin' rescue searches in the Superstitions over twenty years," the senior posse man mused, shaking his head in reverent awe, "and only once, about eight years ago, did we find anyone alive, a young family of four, barely alive after three days without food or water."

Before I moved to Arizona, I pooh-pooed documentaries that claimed that even people experienced in desert lore disappear in the Superstition Mountains, often never to be found or heard of again. Publicity hype, pure hooey, I thought. This is the twenty-first century, after all! But first-hand experience made a believer of me when, as a new member of the mounted sheriff's posse, I rode in from the base camp at First Water Trailhead for the first time. Within minutes I became so turned around that I couldn't have found my way out if I had to. Thankfully there were four other posse members on my search team, all experienced and equipped with GPS devices.

The Superstitions exude mystery. It is a wild, brooding, deadly place. For over a hundred years up to the present, prospectors have penetrated its vastness for gold. Today the region is riddled with abandoned hand-dug mine shafts over a hundred years old. Its trails meander, twist and turn among steep red-rock cliffs and mountains so that the further in one traverses, the more everything looks the same. Within a short time, one's sense of direction is lost, and panic follows confusion like a cat toying with a mouse before killing it. Worse, cell phones and sometimes even police radios don't work there except at the outer edges.

The categories of those who get lost and perish there are three. Some venture from milder, cooler climes out

of desire to experience a legend, but out of ignorance underestimate the deadliness of the Arizona desert. For others, the prospect of becoming rich by finding the gold veins of the Lost Dutchman Mine is worth the risk of exploration. After them are the diehard risk-takers, in whom accumulated wilderness skills and conquests have cultivated a false assumption of their own invincibility.

The last
stretch of
ground be-
tween us and
the cliffs was
too steep to
ride safely.

It was in regard to the latter that Friday April 19, 2013, was for me a long, demanding day. The previous night a call from my posse captain directed me to be at one of the Lost Dutchman Trailheads at 6 a.m. to join the search for a lost hiker. I scrambled to pack the special orange search and rescue saddlebags we are required to use on searches so that helicopters can see us on the ground. I filled two canteens and set out my boots, hat and clothes so I could slip into them in the morning. It was 11 p.m. when I finally laid down.

I was up and getting dressed by 2:30, having barely slept. On my way to the stables, it oc-

curred to me to bring both of my horses. The hiker reportedly had been missing for five days and went without equipment, even a shirt. If my team found him, an extra horse would be needed to bring the body out, dead or alive; the latter being more likely.

Upon arrival I grain-fed both horses so they would have sustenance and energy to draw upon through the demanding day ahead. While they ate I hooked up the trailer and loaded saddles, bridles, additional grain, water, and horse first aid supplies. Taylor, my big sorrel gelding, and my primary search and rescue horse, I loaded first. He stepped right in. Next I turned to load Red, my chestnut mare. A young mare with an excellent memory, she literally ran back into her pasture turnout, dragging her lead rope behind. She knew from past experience what was ahead and wanted no part of it. In the predawn darkness I ran after her, flashlight in hand, walked her back and loaded her into the trailer.

Maricopa is a geographically large county. It was still dark at 4:30 when I headed out from the Rio Verde area of Scottsdale for the Superstitions, and daybreak when I arrived at 6 a.m., a distance of over eighty miles. The sheriff's command post was a large white trailer bearing sheriff's office markings. A ground search posse and another mounted posse from Queen Creek were also at the briefing. Deputies in charge handed us maps showing our assigned search area and told us the missing man's family described him as an experienced wilderness hiker who was familiar with the Superstitions, a daredevil type sometimes referred to as a "bush-whacker," defined as one who shunned using trails, preferring to go in off-trail with a minimum of equipment.

Ground search posses are the infantry of the posse network. Sometimes called "ground-pounders" by mounted posse men, they had previously searched close-in caves and canyons for two days with no results. Because horses can cover more ground in less time and afford riders an aboveground view, mounted teams were needed now to expand the search. Our team was assigned to search the southeast approach to the mountain range, up to a large cave known

as Broadway Cave, located halfway up the face of a vertical rock cliff.

We trailed from the command post more than a mile to reach our assigned search area and unloaded our horses. After checking our maps, we saddled up and rode through a 'cowboy gate' (a mere opening in a barbwire fence) to begin our work. I rode Taylor, using my custom rough-out Wade-style saddle with high cantle, ideal for mountain riding, and ponied Red alongside on a halter and lead rope.

From our starting point the ground appeared to gradually slope upward to the base of the cliffs. From here to the upper slope it didn't look especially difficult, and I expected an easy time of it until the upper slope. But appearances can be deceiving. I noted that the upper slope became especially steep toward the base of the cliffs in which the cave was situated. Vegetation there was more sparsely scattered than below and the surface was loose gravel and rocks. I decided I wouldn't risk my horses up there; the ground will be too unstable.

To my surprise, once we had ridden just a few yards past the gate, even there the ground was steeper and rockier than it first appeared. The brush too was much heavier; low-growing cactus and deciduous plants made straight-line searching impossible and the open ground was strewn with large, jagged, loose rocks that caused frequent loss of footing and minor injuries for the horses.

We rode a slow line-search as best as the terrain would allow, keeping twenty-five yards between the five of us, looking carefully under every low-lying brush for discarded items or other clues of the missing man. It seemed it took an hour just to cover fifty yards or so. Among us we commented that if we were the hiker, we'd be tempted to get to the shelter of the cave high above us. It was reachable for even a moderately experienced climber. Hopefully the ground-pounders had checked it, because the final approach was too steep for horse travel.

Diligently we looked for clues: particularly clothing, water bottles, headgear, or backpacks.

Discarding items necessary to survival is a common symptom of delirium brought on by dehydration and heat stroke. Often they provide a trail that searchers follow to the victim's final location. Several times we stopped to mark with red surveyor tape items we found that we reasonably believed could have been discarded by the missing man within the past few days. These included partially full water bottles, food containers, and clothing items. The precise locations of possible clues were noted on paper, then GPS coordinates were determined and radioed in to the command post, which decided if the item should be taken for later examination or left where it was found.

The going was grueling for the horses. Carefully picking their way keeping their balance through jagged rocks and uneven ground was slow, strenuous work that, in the interests of safety, demanded the constant attention of horses and riders. As much as I tried to skirt around the heaviest brush and cacti, it was but a short time before Taylor and Red's legs were riddled with sharp cactus needles, and abraded by jagged rocks, often bleeding slightly and requiring frequent removal of burrs and cactus needles with pliers and pocket combs, standard equipment of the desert horseman as much as a water supply.

Two saving graces we were grateful for were agreeable weather—a cool 81 degrees, and breezy. And, although we were searching in typical rattlesnake terrain and reports abounded of rattlesnakes being plentiful and aggressive after a long cold winter, we encountered none.

At 11 a.m., after nearly five hours of slow, strenuous searching we returned to our trailers to water and rest our horses. Taylor and Red were dehydrated; each drank two five-gallon buckets of water. To keep their blood sugar balanced during the remainder of the search, I gave each an apple and some oats mixed with beet pulp.

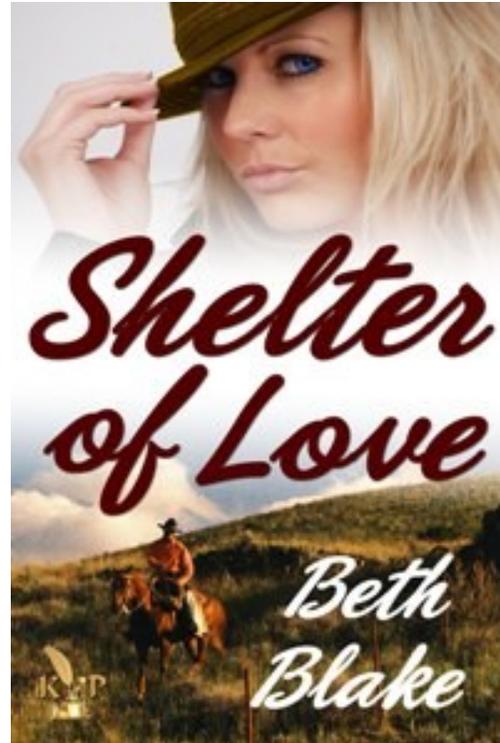
We resumed our work to cover the area we did not search in the morning. Our careful plodding led us to almost right below the Broadway Cave. As I had surmised when we began, the last

stretch of ground between us and the cliffs was too steep to ride safely. We dismounted, allowing the horses to graze while we spent a long half-hour scanning the ridges and crevices with binoculars, seeing a few feet into the cave above, and methodically scanning bush by bush, large rock by large rock. As we did, a county helicopter hovered over the tops of the mesas and arroyos above us. We mounted up again and rode north to complete searching the last leg of our assigned search area.

At 1:30, our mission was interrupted by a radio report from the command post that the missing hiker's body had been found by another team about six miles from our assigned search area. We were ordered to return to base and report. Deputies informed us at the briefing that the victim had fallen to the bottom of a canyon while climbing a cliff with no equipment, not even proper footwear; true to his daredevil nature, apparently. Arrangements were being made to extricate the body, as we made ready to secure.

Like previous searches in the Superstitions this was a tough ride; shorter than most, but still hard on the horses. By 4 p.m. we were home. I bathed Taylor and Red with shampoo and cool water, removed more cactus needles from their legs, staunched the bleeding, cleaned their hooves, returned them to their turnouts and supplied them generously with fresh water, rolled oats and hay. They had worked willingly and were entitled to a few days' rest and plenty of good feed. By the time I cleaned and unhooked my trailer, unpacked gear, swept and tidied up the tack room and drove home it was 6 p.m. It had been a fifteen-hour day on three hours' sleep. I wanted to visit with my family, but I thought it would be nice to just lie down for a few minutes after dinner. When I awoke it was 8 a.m. I had slept over 12 hours straight, and my legs and back were stiff when I got up. And now Patricia, my wife, enters, bringing me coffee and reminds me that I had promised to take her hiking today . . . ♦

advertisement



HOW I MET MY SPOUSE

An anthology edited by

Elizabeth Blake



1ST PLACE ESSAY



ARE YOU IN THERE?

BY

NANCY CHANEY



NANCY CHANEY utilizes her profession as an adjunct history professor, and her love of storytelling to write time travel and historical fiction. A native of Arizona, she has a BA from the University of Arizona and a MA from Arizona State University.

She belongs to Desert Rose and Scottsdale Society of Women Writers and has been published in educational journals, *The Arizona Republic* as a community columnist, and in the 2011 nonfiction anthology, *A Mother's Wisdom*. This is her second year as an Arizona Authors finalist. She lives in Scottsdale with her husband, with whom she camps and hunts.

The gaunt sunken cheeks, the closed shadowed eyes give no hint that Marjorie's soul is still with the living. The prominent outline of her skull is reminiscent of World War II holocaust survivors. In and out, in and out: finally, slow rhythmic breathing brings her peace after the last choking episode. I say to myself: Can you understand me? Are you in there?

More important, did we do the right thing? Is it right to honor your only sister's dying wishes to not be kept alive in a vegetative state? When the decision was made, I felt so sure. But even though it was a unanimous group decision—made with her loving children and husband—the deathwatch drags on for weeks, giving time for self-doubt.

"Do you remember?" That's how I start each of our bedside conversations. I couldn't just sit there for hours and do nothing, so I talk until my voice gives out. My sister Marjorie, brother Craig, and I grew up on an old homestead just outside of Tucson, Arizona, with no nearby neighbors. That meant you either played with your siblings or . . . nobody. So, my sister and I became best friends by default since she was only eighteen months younger and my brother was so young. It was always Marjorie and me.

"Do you remember how we made dirt paths and forts in the mesquite bosque by our house and lined them with rocks, so we could run barefoot and not step on cactus or thorns? Do you remember how we would pack up quilts, ice and water in glass mayonnaise jars, peeled carrots and turnips for snacks, bring books, and pull our red wagon to a shady mes-

quite tree? We sat in trees and I read books out loud to you for hours during the hot summer days. Remember *Black Beauty* and *Little Women*? Many of our friends had a television, but we didn't get one until I was in fifth grade. Mom bought a dishwasher instead. If she had bought a TV we would have been inside watching test patterns and waiting for old Tom Mix cowboy movies to come on at 4:00 p.m. We bonded outside, in the desert. Remember?"

The harp player comes into her room

The hardest
part about
growing
older is
when family
and friends
die.

every day and plays. Marjorie does not turn her head, move any part of her body, open her eyes, or react to voices. This leads me to believe the carefully selected background music and harp players are to comfort the living as much as the dying. "Can you hear

the music? Are you in there?"

"Do you remember how we used to hunt together when I was twelve and you were eleven? Mom and Dad didn't want one of us out alone in the hills with our rifles, but trusted the two of us together to find our way back to camp. We were so tuned into nature and each other; we didn't need to speak to communicate. I loved it when we collaborated on hunting game. Mom and Dad were so proud of us. You and I dragged our deer to camp by its antlers since together we weren't big enough to carry one. We skinned our deer as a team, scrubbing and caring for the meat that our family used as a primary source of protein. And wasn't it great that our dad worked for an ice cream company? We were the only family that had huge freezers with five-gallon containers of ice cream. You were famous for taking your favorite ice cream bars, wrapping them in freezer paper and labeling them 'Bass' or 'Trout,' then hiding them behind other frozen packages of wrapped venison, javelin, or elk for your exclusive snacks."

A minister visits every day and offers comfort. She speaks to my sister just like she can hear, so I take heart that the minister knows more than I do about the dying process, and the patients really can understand. I hear patients in nearby rooms speaking, but since Marjorie is nonresponsive, does the message get through?

Many, including her brain surgeon, never expected my sister to live for more than five years, so the second five years after surgery were a gift. She didn't have cancer, but a tumor that seeded itself and grew inside her spinal column and invaded an empty ventricle in her head. A quick series of strokes ten years later triggered her body's shutting down. I hope she can feel the gentle touch of the massage therapist who is

working on her now, but there is no response.

“Do you remember how we had to share our first car at the University of Arizona? We left each other notes on campus describing where our old 1960 Ford Falcon was parked so we could coordinate our schedules. We parked in such tight spaces, and nearby cars would leave paint behind on the sides of our car when they pulled out. Wouldn’t cell phones have made life easier? I loved having the same friends, going to the same parties, and taking the same history classes. Then the two of us got jobs at Harrah’s Club for the summer in Lake Tahoe, dealing blackjack and waitressing. The primary reason we were hired from thousands of applicants was that their recruiter was intrigued by two women who hunted javelina.

“Remember how we sewed all of our own clothes? I could wear your dresses, but you couldn’t wear mine since I was taller. They were just a tad short. You made that voodoo doll out of scraps from your dress I had borrowed without asking. You stuck pins through it, and hung it from my bedroom light fixture for me to find when I got home from a date. Then you booby-trapped my bedroom when I was trying to sneak in after celebrating my twenty-first birthday. Hundreds of balloons filled my short - sheeted bed, and pins popped balloons with every drawer or door I opened.”

She can’t breathe again. She’s gagging and choking. The nurse runs to suction out her mouth and throat. One side effect of her brain surgery is constantly generated mucus in her mouth, so she has to spit it out, something she can no longer do. It squeezes my heart to see her struggle to breathe. If she is going to show signs of life, I do not want it to be in distress.

I repeat over and over what a wonderful

mom she is, and how she has two of the most amazing boys. I tell her I will stay in touch with her husband who has cared for her all these years, and how I want to be a fabulous aunt to my nephews and their families. I promise to have family dinners, invite them to family parties, and babysit. I wish I could do more, but I know nobody can fill the void left by a mother.

The doctor comes every day to do an evaluation.

“How long will she last?”

“Your sister has a healthy heart and organs so it may take longer than we expected.”

“You said that almost a week ago, and she’s had no food or drink.”

“I am so sorry, every patient is different.”

I turn to Marjorie, “Are you in there, dear sister?”

For me, the hardest part about growing older is when family and friends die. If only there were a magic pill to make time, the magic healer, speed by. I cried every day for six months when my parents died. Mourning is like a jail sentence, with a physical pain that crushes your heart. I dread the six months after my sister is gone. The pain and depression will start again. I am afraid. The first year will be bad until I can mark each holiday on my calendar—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and birthdays. For our family, milestones are all of the camping trips and hunting seasons. The hundreds of nights spent in the Arizona wilderness, laughing, singing and telling stories around campfires. Now, to make things worse, I am losing my memory keeper. If I couldn’t remember specific people or events before, it didn’t matter because I could always ask my

sister. A dear friend, whose sister had recently died, told me, "I know what it is like to lose a sister who is also a friend. It's like losing your childhood. Only your siblings can recall what it was like during those formative years."

I have been at the Tucson hospice for seven days. I must go back home to Scottsdale, but I will return. I turn to hug my daughter, who has flown in from California to be with me. The two of us lean over Marjorie and kiss her forehead. I whisper: "Marjorie, I have to drive home tonight, but I will be back in two days to see you again." After a week of no response of any kind, she makes an inarticulate cry, lunges up and tries to grab hold of me. Her eyes are open wide for the first time since her stroke and she looks at me: panicked, yet seemingly unseeing. She falls back onto her pillow and lies still. I ask my daughter for verification, "Did you see that?"

She nods her head, clearly as shaken as I am.

I'm torn. Would her husband or two boys, speaking quietly in the doorway, feel badly that she has not shown any response to them? Did they even see what happened? Then I knew they hadn't.

"Don't tell anybody else," I whisper to my daughter. "I don't want them to know how upset she is over my leaving."

And that answered my question: "Are you in there?" I believe she heard and felt everything—even as life began to float from her body.

I drove back two days later, and saw that Marjorie had progressed much further with dying. I had not been with either of our parents at the end of their lives like I was with my sister, so I did not understand how spending quality time with a loved one

might have brought me peace. I already felt an unexpected calmness in her presence.

I remember the last day I spoke to her. I described our adventures on a road trip from Montana to Arizona several years after her brain tumor surgery. Of course Marjorie couldn't drive, but she did a good job helping me navigate back roads, small towns, and even seedy neighborhoods as we aimed for Big Sur and toured Hearst's San Simeon Castle.

When we arrived home in Arizona, I was humbled. She burst into tears and could barely thank me for this last chance to travel together. Marjorie explained that she'd resigned herself to not doing such fun things anymore. I had not realized how precious that vacation was to her.

You died when I was away from your hospice room, but I knew my final request had been granted: you remembered. You remembered all the adventures and roads we have traveled together. It is with the deepest gratitude that I was able to relive these memories with you, knowing full well that you could hear me. You were my memory keeper. And you are still. ♦

*It is impossible to
discourage the real writers -
they don't give a damn
what you say,
they're going to write.
~Sinclair Lewis*

2nd PLACE ESSAY



After his career as a Madison Avenue ad executive, New York native **BOB NATIELLO** retired to Sedona to write. *Dog Fight* won First Prize in Manhattan Media's 2009 fiction contest and appeared in *Our Town*, *West Side Spirit* and *New York Press*. He has won several AAA awards for works including *El Caballo Blanco*, *How Jiminy Cricket . . .*, *Ticket to K Street*, *A Favorable Impression*, *Escape from the Jingle Jungle*, and *Classroom Expectations*. He won a first prize award for *J.D. Salinger's Tobacco Dependency* in Tucson's Society of Southwestern Authors. They also anthologized his nonfiction, *Hollywood Marines*. Bob's fiction has earned him an invitation to the highly competitive Sireland Writers Conference, Positano, Italy. His song lyrics have been heard nationwide on radio and TV commercials as well as on a gold single and a gold album, Polydor label.

STUMBLING ACROSS LOU ROCHELLI

BY

BOB NATIELLO

Lou Rochelli's major league baseball career is one of the shortest on record. As a Brooklyn Dodger second baseman brought up from the minors for a late-season appraisal, he played in five games, batted .176 and handled 29 chances, one of them booted. Even I, a naïve 14-year-old, showed no surprise when he disappeared after the final game of that 1944 season. Yet despite his meager stats, he'll always rank at the top of my list of baseball heroes.

For a long time, I wondered what happened to him. In search of an update, I buried my head in every copy of the *Sporting News* I could lay my hands on. With its weekly coverage of the Pony League, the Three-I League and countless Class C and Class D players, even an occasional glimpse into its tabloid-size pages would surely reveal the lower level club he'd landed with.

Nope. I'd lost him completely. And though I abandoned my search, I never forgot that wartime ballplayer who, with his olive skin and faultless Mediterranean looks, could have stood before a big-band mike and easily passed for a young Perry Como.

Our brief but unforgettable bonding took place on the infield at Ebbets Field, one of the major league's smallest ballparks and home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. As a paid Ebbets Field employee—a schoolboy who earned fifty cents a game for tending a turnstile through which maniacal Dodger fans passed before stampeding to their seats—I always arrived well before game time. On this late September afternoon, I followed my usual procedure—first, pick up my gate assignment, and second, use my ample pre-game freedom to lend the Dodger batboy a hand. While he, as official batboy, wore the glamorous Dodger baseball uniform, I, dressed in slacks and a cable-stitch sweater, had the privilege of transferring the bats from a big blue trunk beneath the stands. White

stenciled lettering on the trunk's side clearly identified the owner—*Brooklyn Dodger Baseball Club*.

I earned no pay for this slavish labor. With each trip up the dugout steps—my shoulders weighed down by a half-dozen Louisville Sluggers—I'd ask myself how much of a privilege this really was. But if I could do enough of this menial work, I might move up to the coveted batboy job next season. The thought of being the envy of every kid in the borough of Brooklyn trumped the pain in my buckling knees and burning shoulders. I put on a stoic face and fixed my thoughts on the bigger prize.

Me?
Wing it back
and forth
with a
Dodger?

With twilight approaching, I slipped the last of the bats into the rack positioned alongside the dugout. I was about to vault the low box seat railing into the stands and make for my gate assignment when a Dodger tossed me a glove and urged, "Hey kid. Let's have a catch."

Me? Wing it back and forth with a Dodger? There could be no greater thrill. I planted myself about fifteen feet behind home plate while Lou

Rochelli trotted to a spot about ten feet in front of the pitcher's mound. When we started our pitch-catch routine, there was just enough light to follow the ball whizzing between us. As darkness lowered, the massive overhead floodlights switched on without warning. The abrupt change to midday conditions shocked me. Hey, you're playing with a genuine Brooklyn Dodger, I told myself. Visions of wearing a real player's uniform mushroomed with each slap of the ball into my big league glove. Batboy? Why, it wouldn't be long before Dodger owner Branch Rickey would be slipping a player contract under my nose and begging me to sign it.

That shining moment ended much too soon. But I've never forgotten it or the lifetime of comforting baseball fantasies that grew from it. And I'll always remember Lou Rochelli for making them possible.

But where did he go after our fleeting 1944 catch? Decades later, I found out in a long distance phone talk with my old high school teammate, Jim Manning. Jim and I played on the same Brooklyn Prep basketball teams as freshmen, through Jayvee and up to the varsity. But Jim was a more rounded athlete. While basketball was my sole sport, Jim excelled in football and baseball, especially baseball. In senior year he played third base on the team that contended for the city championship. In that final game—it turned out to be the most important game of his high school career—he gave a hitting performance that changed his life.

"We didn't win," the lefty batter said, "but I smacked two off the right-field wall. At the end of the game Coach Zev said to me, 'Jimmy, I'm managing a team up in Vermont this summer. You come up and play third base for me.'"

Coach Zev was Earl Graham, a 1920's Fordham halfback, so fast he was nicknamed Zev, after the winner of the 1923 Kentucky Derby. Graham was an outstanding three-sport coach at our high school. If there is any question about his ability to recognize talent, consider his historical repositioning of a little known senior lineman from guard to quarterback. Even then, the

thought of moving a guard to the quarterback spot would have been laughed at. But Zev bucked convention. The result: an almost perfect 1944 season and a change in the course of college football for generations to come. The unknown lineman he elevated to quarterback? Joe Paterno.

Zev's choice of Jim Manning for his Vermont team proved to be equally inspired. "When that Vermont summer ended I had twenty-three scholarship offers. I chose Notre Dame," Jim said. Not surprising, Jim was an outstanding student.

After college, I connected with Jim at Quantico Officers Candidate School. With my newly acquired second lieutenant's bars still glistening, I accepted orders for Camp Lejeune. But Jim was too valuable to be sent away. The brass kept him to play for the Quantico Marines, the team that represented the entire base against service teams across the nation.

"There were a number of outstanding players on that team," Jim said, "including major leaguer, Hal Naragon." Naragon held down the catcher's spot for the Cleveland Indians when the Marine Corps drafted him. "I got some good advice from him," Jim told me. "He said by the time I got out of the service, I'd be too old to be a third baseman. He urged me to switch to catcher."

Jim followed Naragon's suggestion, accepted his training tips and converted himself to a catcher. He did a fine job of it. After Jim's discharge, he accepted an offer to sign with the Dodgers for a \$1,500 bonus. Naragon went on to catch in the 1954 World Series, the highlight of his ten-year major league career.

I gleaned the above information during the many long distance calls I made to Jim from my retirement home in Sedona, Arizona. Jim had undergone bypass surgery and I tried to buttress his spirits with an occasional call. Talking with an old teammate and Marine Corps buddy might pep him up, I thought. When he told me about signing that Dodger contract, I asked where the

Dodgers had sent him. "To Billings, Montana," he said.

I had no idea the Dodgers ever had a minor league team in Billings, but I assumed they wanted Jim to play there until he was ready to move up to a higher level. I can't imagine what moved me to ask the next question. It just flowed into the conversation. "Who was the manager of that Billings team?" I asked. His immediate answer: "Lou Rochelli."

Finally. Sixty-odd years after our game of catch, I'd discovered where Lou Rochelli went following that 1944 season. The Dodgers had apparently kept him in the organization as a lower-level manager. Did they detect his natural desire to reach out to young people—the same way he'd reached out to play catch with me that September night? Even though his playing skills were not of big league caliber, did management notice some personal magnetism that might attract and develop younger players?

Jim Manning forsook baseball for law school. For fifty years, he commuted to his Manhattan lawyer's position from Rutherford, New Jersey, where he raised a large family and coached a team of local fifteen-year-olds to a national championship. He died in the mid-2000s as a retired lieutenant colonel, US Marine Corps Reserve.

I never did move up to official Dodger bat-boy. I was chosen from a group of high achieving Latin students to study classical Greek. Class assignments required me to stand before my peers, translate Classical Greek into Latin, then translate the Latin into Spanish, and finally, the Spanish into English. Staying in shape for these academic workouts kept all thoughts of baseball far away.

According to Wikipedia, Lou Rochelli died in 1992 at age 73 in Victoria, Texas. While playing catch with some wide-eyed fourteen year-old? I wouldn't be the least bit surprised. ♦

3rd PLACE ESSAY



ALICE MUNRO: IS OUR EMPRESS FULLY CLOTHED?

BY

BOB NATIELLO

After his career as a Madison Avenue ad executive, New York native **BOB NATIELLO** retired to Sedona to write. *Dog Fight* won First Prize in Manhattan Media's 2009 fiction contest and appeared in *Our Town*, *West Side Spirit* and *New York Press*. He has won several AAA awards for works including *El Caballo Blanco*, *How Jiminy Cricket . . .*, *Ticket to K Street*, *A Favorable Impression*, *Escape from the Jingle Jungle*, and *Classroom Expectations*. He won a first prize award for *J.D. Salinger's Tobacco Dependency* in Tucson's Society of Southwestern Authors. They also anthologized his nonfiction, *Hollywood Marines*. Bob's fiction has earned him an invitation to the highly competitive Sireland Writers Conference, Positano, Italy. His song lyrics have been heard nationwide on radio and TV commercials as well as on a gold single and a gold album, Polydor label.

I have a talented friend, a retired Floridian who has worked hard to establish herself as a successful writer. During her working years, giant corporations paid her generous sums for her skill in communicating on the printed page.

Through frequent email exchanges, we've discovered we agree on one startlingly insignificant literary item: the stories of Alice Munro, internationally acclaimed author, bore us beyond endurance. We can't understand why demanding critics hold the 82-year-old Canadian's work in such high esteem. Her stories appear with enviable regularity in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Paris Review*. Biographers laud a lifetime body of work that has earned her the prestigious Man Booker International Prize. She ranks as a perennial contender for a Nobel in literature. Neither my friend nor I will ever come within light years of these magnificent achievements. Yet we virtually complete each other's sentences in affirming our mutual belief: Alice Munro's stories require a wearisome struggle merely to stay on track.

What's wrong with my friend and me? Why do we dispute Munro's monumental talents, obvious to everyone but us? In my ongoing search for an answer, I opened an early 2012 *New Yorker* and dug into *Haven*, her latest short story at the time. I read with an open mind, eager to discover why Jonathan Franzen, one of my favorite American authors, has written, "Alice

Munro has a strong claim to being the best fiction writer now working in North America.”

Before getting past the second page, I hit upon the key reason why I continually wander off while reading her stories. She places an unceasing, unmitigated reliance on that colorless verb, *was*. I found it impossible to stay interested while the insistent drip, drip, drip of *was, was, was* drained her tale of any vitality and energy.

She was right . . .

She was a musician . . .

He was all business . . .

Of course she was old . . .

I was a person . . .

No oversight was necessary . . .

This list, clearly out of context, raises a reasonable question. Just how widespread is Munro’s use of this lifeless form of *to be*?

**Writing
is an art,
not a
science**

I grew curious enough to conduct a line-by-line check that ended only after I’d cir-

clled every *was* on that one *Haven* page. It’s hard to engage in such an apparently inane exercise without questioning the value of one’s time, but I felt justified after I’d totaled the final count of little red rings—a surprising 33.

Surrendering to a compulsion to dig deeper, I counted every word on the entire page, applied some middle-school arithmetic and concluded that Munro subjected her readers to *was* every 26 words—once every 3.7 lines. No wonder my Florida friend and I find Munro dull.

In *Writing Fiction*, a favorite craft book among novice writers, Janet Burroway states, “Here is a passage from a young writer which fails . . .”

Debbie was a very stubborn and completely independent person, and was always doing things her way despite her parents’ efforts to get her to conform. Her father was an executive in a dress manufacturing company, and was able to afford his family all the luxuries and comforts of life. But Debbie was completely indifferent to her family’s affluence.

Of course the passage fails. The young writer uses *was* every dozen words. We expect this from a beginner, but not from a veteran like Munro—nor from her Alfred A. Knopf editor.

But judging Alice Munro on the basis of a single *New Yorker* story is hardly an exhaustive study. It isn’t fair, either. Seeking evenhandedness, I searched out another of her recent *New Yorker* stories, *Leaving Maverley*. On its first page, *was* turned up at a rate of once *was* every 29 words, only slightly less frequently than in *Haven*.

Writing is an art, not a science. So is lit-

erary criticism. Neither readily lends itself to quantification. But if you lean toward tabulation, you can spot check longer Munro works. I did and opened Munro's best-selling *Runaway* at random. Landing on page 294, I uncovered an even higher use of *was*. It appeared every 26 words, once every three lines.

Professional critics lionize Munro more for the imprint her prose makes on our minds and hearts than for her writing style. Cynthia Ozick, winner of the Pen/Malamud award for excellence in the art of the short story, calls Munro "our Chekhov." There can be no finer comparison. Ozick openly treasures Munro's tales of come-day, go-day small towners living in homes set alongside rutted roads that branch off seldom traveled Canadian blacktop. And if her love for Munro's work clouds the steady recurrence of *was*, I accept it. Yet when I give my attention to Munro's stories, my focus falls on the *was*-virus that infects her pages. A profusion of feeble offshoots of the verb *to be* does not hold my focus for any appreciable length of time. Munro's readers might applaud *she told him about the books she was reading*. My preferences lean toward, *she told him about Hester Prynne, the good woman gone wrong, and about Reverend Dimmesdale's cowardice*.

Are my Florida friend and I the only readers out-of-sync with Munro's prose? Are we the only readers who see *was* as a replayed memory whose warmth cools with repetition? Is there someone else who catches a mental glimpse of Alice Munro cozied up to her computer on a below-freezing Ontario night, repeatedly slipping into *was* as comfortably as she slips into a heavy, gray woolen cardigan? That thick sweater keeps our Empress of Fiction fully clothed, yes. But the style is unbecoming to royalty. ♦



*"The best time
for planning a
book is while
you're doing the
dishes."*

*~Agatha
Christie*

1ST PLACE POETRY



WOMAN WHO DREAMS

BY

SANDRA BREMSER



SANDRA BREMSER has written stories since she lived on an apple orchard in southern Illinois as a girl. Following her move to Arizona in the 1960s, she has published non-fiction and is currently working on an historical novel. Dr. Bremser earned advanced degrees from Northern Arizona University. Her background teaching both middle school and university students, as well as mentoring teachers, has provided insights she still uses as an author. She is a member of Arizona Authors Association and resides in Peoria, Arizona, near her children and grandchildren.

Ancient mud bricks crumble under my feet as I enter
the shallow cave.
A hard desert sun softens on ruined pueblo walls.
I pass my hand over antelope with stick legs
Picking their way toward an etched handprint.
Fitting my fingers into those left behind,
I try to touch the thread across a chasm of silence.

Perhaps one was here who ground corn and dreamed
her children,
Who longed to find words to say her soul.
Was she awed looking up at the night,
Holding the cold and fire in her breath,
Being part of all there is—even now—
Though men have crafted time like spear points?

And knowing her daughter was born through her not to
her,
That there was nothing she could save her from,
Did she cast her into the fire to find her power?
Juices for loving
And quenching thirsts,
Even her own?

As final blessing, when the sun dried the stream,
Did a transforming power envelop
The woman who dreams?
A birthright claimed in age.
Power of a womb past bearing,
Centered in self-knowledge.

Did a peace beyond attachment
Sustain the
Medicine Woman
Sorceress
Crone
Dreamer of Dreams?

I remove my hand from the glyph
To hold the dream in my palm.
Did she see the wind that would catch her powdered
bones
And swirl them in a gust against a broken wall?
Did she dream my face?
Did she know my heart?

2nd PLACE POETRY



Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, **NOBLE COLLINS** graduated with a degree in English from Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, where he helped found the school's first literary magazine. He has been writing articles, poems and, short stories ever since. Noble and his wife Sharon retired to Payson, Arizona, in 2002 and now enjoy the cool mountain lifestyle in the shadow of Zane Grey's inspiring landscape. His work has been published in several national publications including *Writer's Digest*.

MYSTIC

BY

NOBLE F. COLLINS

With daily preparations made,
she slumps into her chair,
a fraying turban hiding graying threads
of thinning hair.
The hem is slightly tattered
of her dress of velveteen.
A peeking pair of slippers there
have lost their silver sheen.
Around her slender shoulders
drapes a shawl with golden thread.
Some stars and moons appearing
in a universe of red.
In all, she looks quite comely,
and assumes a regal air.
She figures she is ready
for the seekers coming there.
She pulls a wobbly table
within reach of spindly hands,
and fumbles with a deck of cards
to meet the day's demands.
Her sniffles are a nuisance.
She endures a common cold,
but otherwise her health is good,
or so the cards have told.
Her book shows no appointments,
so she risks a gin with lime,
and turns the television on
to while away the time.
Just off highway Ninety-eight
near the town of Drear
sits the lonely single-wide,
no reason to pause here.
Outside, the rain is colder,
and the afternoon turns mean.
Loud traffic takes no notice,
swishing swiftly past the scene.
How little do they understand
the wonders held inside,
as weeds continue carelessly
a little sign to hide:

"Madame Sosostris

Famous Clairvoyante"

3rd PLACE POETRY

3



ELIZABETH OAKES' first book of poems, *The Farmgirl Poems*, won the 2004 Pearl Poetry Prize. Since then, she has published three volumes of poetry, *The Luminescence of All Things Emily*, which is about Dickinson, *Mercy in the New World*, a series of persona poems about an actual colonial woman, and the latest one, *Leave Here Knowing*, a spiritual memoir, in January 2013. Oakes, who holds a PhD from Vanderbilt University, taught Shakespeare and Women's Poetry for twenty-one years at Western Kentucky University before moving to Sedona with her husband, John, an artist, to write.

ODE TO CACTI

BY

ELIZABETH OAKES

There are things in my yard
that could kill me!

One, in a far corner under a pine,
has blade-like leaves. Even the baby
one, peeping through the gravel, sticks—
could slice finger or foot like glass or coral.

Another—a yucca, I think—sticks me
as I gather lilacs by it. If I fell into it,
I would become like a pincushion.

There's one with needles, waiting
for fingers or feet. And then the stranger
looking ones, Dr. Seuss cacti, I call one,
as its branches wobble here and there,
as if its DNA is drunk.

But then, but then—all this fades
when I walk outside
and a flower so white and luminescent
it looks like heaven's trumpet is there
where I, a newcomer here, thought
nothing bloomed. I look out my window
at the regal stalk of the yucca and feel
myself in both desert and tropics.

I drive to town and see red and yellow
flowers so saturated with color it bounces
off them, encircles them like an aura.

Beauty is of a different order here,
tough and transcendent.
It celebrates survival
and arrival.

Strange things bloom here!
Maybe strange people do too!

HONORABLE MENTION POETRY



Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, **NOBLE COLLINS** graduated with a degree in English from Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, where he helped found the school's first literary magazine. He has been writing articles, poems and, short stories ever since. Noble and his wife Sharon retired to Payson, Arizona, in 2002 and now enjoy the cool mountain lifestyle in the shadow of Zane Grey's inspiring landscape. His work has been published in several national publications including *Writer's Digest*.

EYES AS GREEN AS CONNEMARA

BY NOBLE F. COLLINS

On JFK's visit to Ireland

We cheered you through the marketplace
one shining Wexford day—
enchanted by your beaming face
and all you had to say.

You stood upon the harbor quay
and spoke of Freedom's reach—
the constant search for Liberty
the sacrifice from each.

You lauded Ireland's storied past—
it's struggles made you proud,
and when they sang "The Wexford Boys,"
your voice was Irish loud.

A Scion of Pat Kennedy
who left in Forty-Nine,
you came to visit and to see
all he had left behind.

You loved the fond reunion here—
the laughter and the cryin'.
They called you "cousin" in good cheer
and sang at your good-byin'.

In Parliament you spoke from lore—
a man of eloquence.
You spoke of all that's gone before
and much that's happened since.

You said the battle lines are drawn
that all men must be free
that art must share the stage with brawn
and peace must be the key.

Mankind would be a better lot,
you said, if we but try
to say of unseen things, "Why not?"
not of the moment, "Why?"

The classic Irish oratory
made you seem our own,
but now as we recall the story
bitter weeds have grown

Not from your wondrous visit then
that left a sweet warm glow,
but pondering what might have been
had you not had to go.

1st PLACE

UNPUBLISHED NOVEL



THE WRATHS OF GLEN COVE

BY

RUSSELL AZBILL

THE LAND AND GLEN COVE

There are lands that are different from others. Not different in that some lands are flat and barren while others are rocky and mountainous. Not different in that some lands are lush and green while others are arid and lifeless. No, there are lands that are different at a deeper level; a level that goes beyond the physical plane of existence and intrudes upon the spiritual. Land that can capture the souls of unfortunate individuals who have had the misfortune of passing away within its boundaries and hold those poor, wretched souls in a purgatory-style holding cell.

The land within and around the town of Glen Cove was just this kind of land. Were the land's mysterious captive powers caused by some freak of nature; perhaps caused by some unknown and timeless alchemic reaction of the high mineral content of the soil mixing with the brisk salt air of the sea? Or might these captive powers be the result of something less scientific in nature, something more spiritually sinister?

Perhaps this mysterious land was meant to be a place where wayward souls were held until they could redeem themselves from their bad choices in life. For this dark land was unable to hold the souls of the righteous and was only able to imprison the souls of the evil and the misled as well as those tormented souls who had died but still sought justice for what had befallen them during their lifetimes. Those were the souls that the land would grasp and hold strongly for all eternity unless divine intervention occurred and freed them from their wretched spiritual prison. During times of a full moon and high tide, in an eerie, bone-chilling chorus, these tormented souls would gather and cry out loudly in unintelligible, sinister shrieks from

RUSSEL AZBILL is a native Arizonan who has spent his entire life in the southwestern desert of the United States. He is deeply interested in history, particularly relating to the American Southwest, motorsports, aviation, and space exploration. Russell also has a keen interest in classic movies and vintage television shows.

In addition to his first novel, *Darkest Hour*, Russell has written three screenplays, which are currently being considered for production. *The Wraiths of Glen Cove* is his second novel. He is currently working on a sequel to *Darkest Hour*.

amongst the cliffs overlooking the sea. Crying out a warning to those near enough to hear them. Crying out desperately for help.

The indigenous tribes were well aware of the adverse spiritual properties that this land possessed and had declared it cursed, wisely forbidding tribal members from living or traveling within its boundaries. The leaders of the tribes had warned the early white settlers about the evils of the land. But the settlers had dismissed their warnings as being nothing more than the unsubstantiated superstitions of a bunch of savages and had eagerly begun to homestead the land. Once gold was discovered within the land's boundaries in the early 1880s, there was no stopping the onslaught of wildcat miners hoping to make a quick fortune. What had once been nothing more than a few farms scattered along the Southern Oregon coast quickly blossomed into the bustling mining community of Glen Cove with an expanding population exceeding three thousand.

The main section of town sat high upon the jagged stone cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, with the outlying parts nestled amongst the surrounding low-lying rocky expanses and conifer trees.

The weather in the region, for the most part, consisted of relatively mild summers with colder and often rainy winters. The biggest threat weather-wise consisted of sporadic flooding, which occurred during the summer monsoon season when the rain would bring torrents of water rushing down the mountainside. But the floods were also a welcome sight to the weary wildcat miners, as the swift currents brought with them fresh mineral deposits—including the rare and much lusted after gold nuggets—from the steep, inaccessible mountain tops.

The summer rains created additional problems for the town's residents. For the rain transformed the earthen streets into lanes of soft, sticky mud, severely hindering movement within the town. During the worst of the storms, transporting needed supplies from the docks up the cliffs to the town became impossible.

Life in town during the winter months could be harsh as brisk, icy winds blowing in from the ocean could chill one down to their very bones. No matter how warmly one dressed for the frigid temperatures, it never seemed warm enough. As a result, the residents stockpiled ample supplies of firewood during the moderate summer for use during the grueling winter. Shopkeepers who could often be seen standing in front of their stores during the summer were unseen during the winter, preferring to stay close to the warmth of their wood-burning stoves.

The growing community became truly prominent when Charles David Parker, whose family had made a large fortune during the San Francisco gold rush of the mid-1800s, established the Parker Gold Mine. Thereafter, he owned, or at least controlled, the town of Glen Cove and, as such, businesses within the community revolved around his actions. Those living within the town were soon well aware that they owed their livelihoods to Mister Parker. There still existed a handful of holdout wildcat miners who were not connected to Charles Parker in any way. But their efforts were limited to the outer boundaries of the gold rich area and no one took them seriously, for none of these men had ever made any notable discoveries while working the nearby mountains.

As the town continued to grow it became divided into four socioeconomic classes; the affluent, the middle class, the working miner, and the Chinese immigrants. The affluent, such as Charles Parker, controlled the mine; the mine's supporting supply and transportation vendors; and the various shops and services within the town's boundaries. These were wealthy, old-money capitalists who preyed upon the working-class in any way, legally or illegally, they could. It was this pack of well-dressed wolves, with Charles Parker holding the distinction of being the unofficial leader, who had full control of all that transpired within the frontier community.

Horace Wheatley typified the middle class. He, along with his wife Edna, owned and operated Wheatley's General Store. Located on the outskirts of town nearest the mining camps,

Wheatley's catered to the miners of the Parker-Gold Mine and their families. The miners could always count on Mister Wheatley to keep a running tab for them for their groceries and other necessities until a later date. And while his goods were always a bit on the pricey side, all knew that Horace Wheatley was an honest man. If Horace told someone they owed him a certain amount, one could rest assured that he had not padded their tab. Although most miners believed that Horace Wheatley was willing to run a tab for them solely out of the goodness of his heart, this was not truly the case; for the mining company backed the tabs of the miners one hundred per cent, ensuring that Horace would never lose a dime. And since the mining company was secretly backing Mister Wheatley's generous system, Charles Parker kept a close personal eye on every miner's account, knowing those individuals with high balances were in no danger of quitting his company.

The poor class consisted of the overworked and underappreciated miners. Many of these men had come to the area, some with their families, seeking their fortunes only to fall face first into the reality of wildcat mining and go bust. After enduring months of hardship trying to wring out a modest living from the mountainous mud as a wildcat miner, one by one these men surrendered to their desperate situation and walked hat in hand to the employment office of the Parker Gold Mine. Charles Parker was only too happy to take advantage of these desperate individuals, paying them wages so low as to ensure they would need to keep a running tab over at Wheatley's, quickly and unknowingly becoming indentured servants.

The lowest class, and poorest of the poor, were the Chinese immigrant workers, who almost always kept to themselves. Most had come to this country seeking work building the railroads. But due to their vast number, not all could find work with the railroads and many were forced to turn elsewhere for employment. Knowing they were even more desperate than the broken wildcat miners and had nowhere else to go, Charles Parker offered them little more

than room and board in exchange for endless hours of back-breaking work in the deepest and most dangerous parts of his mine. The mere pittance that Parker paid these men was mostly spent frequenting the opium den that Charles Parker himself owned. This made the Chinese, for all intent and purposes, slaves of the Parker Gold Mine.

Resigned to the fact that a viable option did not exist, he gave his friend the bad news.

Recreation for the miners generally revolved around two locations: the centrally-located Mother Lode Saloon, where watered-down whiskey flowed freely and the gambling was seldom fair, or Big Red's Cathouse, located on the outskirts of town overlooking the nearby cliffs and ocean, where an assortment of colorful women were willing and waiting at any hour to service a lonesome miner. Both businesses were well skilled in seeing that poor miners remained just that, poor. For within a few short days of receiving their paychecks, most of the miners were flat broke and back at Wheatley's running up their tabs even higher as the ever watchful and thoroughly delighted Charles Parker kept track of their comings and goings silently from a distance.

By the year 1889 Glen Cove was a well-established, bustling mining community with most, but not all, of the modern amenities that period in time could offer. Regular shipments of staples and goods, some desperately needed

and others frivolous, arrived throughout the week, mostly by merchant ships from San Francisco but also by wagon trains using overland routes. It was just a matter of time before railway service would come to Glen Cove, as the railroad construction continued to inch its way closer with each passing day.

And during the warm summer days of the year 1889, as the townsfolk of Glen Cove went about their daily activities, absolutely no one was aware of the sinister properties that the curious land possessed and what was about to befall them.

PART ONE
UNFINISHED BUSINESS
THE OREGON COAST
GLEN COVE
1889

CHAPTER ONE

“Cody! Cody! Over here!”

Cody Novotny had just arrived for his shift at the Parker Gold Mine. He smiled warmly as he turned to greet the familiar voice.

“Have you heard?”

“Heard what?”

Jim Clemmons hesitated, knowing that he was about to deliver bad news.

“They’re sending our crew into shaft number three today.”

Cody’s smile quickly faded, realizing the implications of what he had just been told. “But number three isn’t safe, and they know it! It caved in just last week, killing two good men. Hell, they just got the bodies out yesterday. They haven’t had time to properly shore up the shaft!”

“Even so, they’re sending us back in today.

They say that the mine has lost too much production the last few days and they need to return to full output as soon as possible. They’re saying that this vein is just too rich to let set any longer.

“That’s bullshit and you know it!” Cody responded angrily. Cody paused as he contemplated his next course of action.

“Do you think our crew is being sent in there because we spoke to the foreman about the unsafe working conditions?”

“You know it is. This is just Old Man Parker’s way of sending a message to all of us—complain and you die!”

“What are we going to do, Cody? You and I both know if we go down that shaft today we stand a good chance of dying.”

Cody Novotny was deep in thought, angrily shuffling feet as he contemplated his options. Resigned to the fact that a viable option did not exist, he gave his friend the bad news.

“I don’t see where we have a choice. If we refuse to go into the mountain today, they will fire us both right on the spot, and likely blackball us all down the coast as well. We both have families to feed. We have no choice, and they know it. We have to do as they say.”

“But Cody, we might die if we go down there! Us dying won’t feed our families either! I think Old Man Parker intends to kill us just for speaking up!”

“You know he is!” Cody paused once again, desperately trying to come up with a better solution to their dilemma. “Unless you have something better, I don’t see where we have any choice but to go into the mountain and pray to God we make it out alive. And if we do somehow manage to survive, we have got to meet with the others secretly and decide what we can do as a group to make Mister Parker make this mine safer.”

“So today we go into the mountain?”

“Today we go,” reiterated Cody. “Come on now, we don’t want get fired for being late.”

The two disgruntled miners quickly made their way to the mine cart that would take them deep into the mountain. Both felt their heart rates rise as they were firmly convinced they were traveling to their deaths.

As the cart rushed deep into the mountain-side, Cody felt like a condemned man climbing the final steps to the top of the gallows. His thoughts turned to his wife and child, wondering if he would ever see them again.

As he traveled through the darkness, Cody's senses were in a heightened state of awareness. Although the distinct clacking noise that the cart's wheels made as it moved down the steel rails had previously escaped his attention, on this particular day the noise seemed deafening.

Cody looked towards the front of the cart where a lone canary sat perched in its cage, oblivious to both its purpose and its fate. He felt a twinge of guilt as he realized this was the first time he felt remorse for the injustice that the brightly colored bird faced each day. For a brief instant, Cody felt spiritually at one with the gentle creature, for they were both caged souls rushing headlong towards their deaths.

The despondent miner turned and looked towards his friend sitting next to him and wondered what must be going through his mind. Were his thoughts the same as his own? Like Cody, Jim Clemmons was well aware of their dire situation. Cody strained his eyes, doing his best to see through the darkness. What he witnessed only lowered his spirit further, for what he saw was a look of sheer terror on his friend's face.

Suddenly the cart began to decelerate, announcing the end of their journey. Ahead of them lay the remains of the cave-in of the week before. While the dead bodies had been removed, it was clear that no shoring had taken place since the fatal collapse.

"This is where you will be working today," called out the foreman. "Mister Parker has called a meeting today for all supervisors, so you will be on your own. I need you men on the jackhammers to begin on each side of the shaft. We need to make up for those lost days of production. As

soon as I am out of the shaft, I will send the cart back so you can begin loading it. Let's prove to management just how tough we are! Make me proud, men!"

Having finished his preordained speech, the foreman quickly jumped back into the cart and was whisked away. Within seconds he was out of sight.

"What should we do?" Jim whispered into Cody's ear. "Hell, they didn't even leave the canary."

"Yeah, you can tell where we rank."

Suddenly the sounds of jackhammers filled the air, abruptly ending any possibility of con-

"Jim! Jim! Are you alright?" Cody called out weakly. There was no response.

tinuing the conversation. Feeling more than ever that they had been ordered to their deaths, Cody tugged on his friend's shirtsleeve and motioned towards the entrance to the mineshaft. No longer concerned about their future employment, both men ran as fast as their legs could carry them away from the thundering sound of the jackhammers.

Due to the darkness of the shaft and their rapid pace, both men fell several times as they sprinted towards the entrance. Both knew that the more distance they put between themselves and the work crew, the better their chances for survival.

They had not made it more than three hundred yards when the first rumblings from the

mountain were felt. Feeling this, Jim Clemmons cried out in fear, knowing full well that another cave-in was imminent. The shaking of the mine-shaft only provided further motivation for the men to maintain their swift pace despite their fatigue. In the distance the sounds of the jack-hammers came to an abrupt halt, leaving the two desperate miners in eerie silence.

It was but a few seconds later when the mountain again showed its disdain towards the strong-willed miners as rocks began to fall into the path of the escaping men. The rumbling was quickly replaced by a deafening roar as the mountain reaped its vengeance upon the men who had so viciously assaulted it. Tons of stone rained down upon the trapped men at the end of the shaft, killing all instantly.

As the sides of the tunnel collapsed about them, Cody and Jim were driven from their feet. Both men tried to cover their heads as the rocks fell upon them. Within seconds an eerie silence settled on the mine.

Pain! I have never felt so much pain! I can't move! Why can't I move? No air. Why is there no air? I CAN'T BREATHE! I'VE GOT TO FIND SOME AIR!

Cody's body convulsed as it sought to free itself from its sudden burial. The human instinct for self-preservation is strong and often can mean the difference between life and death. And so it was with Cody Novotny. Bringing superhuman strength into play, Cody managed to free his upper body from beneath the rockslide. The whirling dust storm created by the collapse continued its race towards the entrance of the mineshaft, severely choking the injured miner. In desperation, Cody reached into his breast pocket and pulled free a handkerchief. He spit into the ragged cloth before covering his nose and mouth with it, all the time praying that its filtering effect would bring the oxygen that his body so desperately needed.

It worked! His makeshift air filter worked! At least now he could breathe. Now he could focus his actions on freeing his legs. Cody prayed that once his legs were free they would still function

enough to carry him out of this stone hell. But if they were injured to the point of being worthless to his escape, then he would just have to drag himself the rest of the way out—no matter how long that took.

Coughing! Cody heard the sound of coughing from behind him. That was good, for it meant that Jim had initially survived the cave-in.

"Jim! Jim! Are you alright?" Cody called out weakly.

There was no response, but the coughing continued.

"Jim! Take your handkerchief, spit on it, and cover your nose and mouth with it. It will allow you to breathe. Hurry! You don't have much time!"

After a couple of minutes the coughing ceased, only to be replaced by an unnerving silence. Cody tried to raise himself up enough to see if his friend had managed to do as instructed. But Cody's efforts were unsuccessful because of unforgiving darkness of the mine-shaft.

"Jim! Jim! Are you there?" Cody cried out frantically. No response. Cody began to fear the worse.

"Jim! . . . JIM!"

Cody began to hear the faint sounds of movement from down the mineshaft.

"Jim! Talk to me! Are you alright?"

"I'm here, Cody. I'm hurt," came the faint response from the darkness.

"Can you move?"

"Not right now. I'm covered with rocks."

Cody had been so concerned about his friend's condition that he had forgotten that he too had not yet freed himself.

"Same here. We both need to free ourselves."

"Do you think there will be another cave-in?"

"I dunno. But I do know we need to get out of here in case."

In the pitch-black darkness, Cody struggled to free himself from the rockslide. Several times he had to stop and rest when the pain became too unbearable to continue. But when the task before him seemed utterly impossible and his thoughts turned towards surrendering to the savagery of the mountain, he forced himself to think about his wife and child and to how they would suffer if he chose to give up and die. It was then, from somewhere deep within, that he managed to find the energy to continue.

It took more than an hour for Cody to free himself. During that time, Cody could hear the reassuring sounds of moving rocks and coughing as Jim struggled to free himself. In spite of the mine's best efforts to kill them, both men remained alive—at least for the time being.

"Jim, I'm free. How are you doing?" The sharp pain in his chest reminded Cody that while he may be free, he definitely was not well.

"I'm almost free. Give me a minute. Can you walk?"

"I'm not sure."

Cody struggled to get to his feet. His first attempt was unsuccessful, and he fell back down onto the hard surface of the mineshaft. But while his first attempt to rise to his feet had been unsuccessful, it had been encouraging as well, for he discovered that he had no broken bones. Cody's second attempt fared far better, and on this attempt he was able to stand. He stood swaying in the darkness as his injured legs threaten to once again topple him, but in the end Cody found the strength and balance he sought.

"How are you doing my friend?"

"I'm going to try to stand."

Through the darkness, Cody could hear his friend's grunts as he fought hard to stand. Then he heard the discouraging sound of his friend falling back onto the ground.

"It's okay, Jim. It's okay. The same thing

happened to me. When you have the strength, try again," Cody encouraged.

After a brief rest, Jim Clemmons once again struggled to stand.

"Cody, I did it! I'm up!"

"That's great! Do you think you can walk out of here?"

"I think so. How about you?"

"Yeah, I think so too. We had better get going before Old Man Parker gets his wish and this mountain buries us for sure."

Wearily the two injured miners followed the steel tracks leading towards the entrance and their ultimate freedom. The once innocuous smells of the tunnel now seemed menacing as they mixed with the dust of the fallen rock. At times, as their exhaustion brought them to the verge of collapse, it seemed that the mountain and Mister Parker might yet win the contest of wills.

"Do you think any of the others survived?" Cody raspingly asked.

"If they did, they're trapped. It was solid rock behind me."

Despondent over Jim's report, Cody chose not to continue the conversation and instead focused all his efforts on reaching the end of the tunnel.

After painfully traveling several hundred yards through the pitch-black, they heard faint voices coming from the tunnel entrance. Cody struggled to ascertain whether the voices he heard were real or if his mind was playing some cruel trick on him. But as the minutes ticked away, the voices became stronger, until in the distance the faint flicker of lanterns coming their way could be seen.

The desperate men shouted to their rescuers and were relieved when their cries for help were answered. Knowing that help would soon reach them, the exhausted twosome fell to the ground and waited. Within minutes their rescuers had arrived and the injured men were loaded

onto stretchers and carried out of the mineshaft.

Once free of the shaft, Cody looked up and saw the stars brightly twinkling in the night sky. Cody wondered exactly how long he had been unconscious and how long they had hiked through the unlit shaft, since it had been early morning when they had entered the tunnel. No matter, for now they were free of the tunnel's unmerciful grasp.

Cody smiled and looked towards his friend as their stretchers were loaded onto a wagon which would take them to a nearby doctor.

Giving his friend a feeble thumbs-up sign, Cody victoriously stated, "I think we won."

Jim Clemmons returned a faint smile. "At least for now."

* * *

Sheriff John William Slater was a stern, hard man with weathered, dark chiseled features. His wrinkled brow reflected many years of riding the rugged western trails as a cowhand and in no way reflected his actual age of thirty-five. The sheriff was a cunning man, possessing a commanding presence but little self control. And while most women found his strong build, glimmering blue eyes, dark brown hair, and sweeping jaw line physically attractive, none found his demeaning and caustic personality acceptable.

Sheriff John was born amongst the stockyards of Kansas City and grew up around cattle. As a child he had worked the pens, where his primary duties consisted of feeding and cleaning up after the cattle corralled there. But John found this work mundane and as a young adult took to working cattle drives. He preferred this type of work because it gave him an escape from the tedium of city life and replaced it with the freedom and independence that only life on the range could provide.

Being ever cognizant of a good deal, John was quick to realize that the field of law enforcement offered many unseen opportunities and

privileges for right-minded individuals. Not only did frontier law enforcement command respect within the community, but it also provided the lawman with a certain amount of control over the residents, especially when the deputies were his close friends. John's first stint as sheriff was in the small mining town of Brighton Falls, Colorado. It was here that he first joined forces with his two long-time friends and riding companions, Joe Chrisman and Dave Sherline. They became his deputies and strong-armed enforcers of the law—or at least Sheriff Slater's version of the law. For this group, true law enforcement was but a secondary duty. Their primary goal was to extort as much money as possible from the local businesses in exchange for their "protection."

Dave Sherline and Joe Chrisman had grown up within the cattle business from birth. Both of their fathers had ridden the range as cowboys, so it was only natural that they would follow in their fathers' footsteps. Dave Sherline was gifted with a sharp mind and probing intellect and preferred using wit over brawn. Joe Chrisman could be found on the other extreme. In life's lottery Joe had fallen short in the area of intelligence and instead of using cunning and sharp wit to achieve his goals, he found that brawn and stubbornness served him much better.

Things initially went well for the three lawmen as they took control of Brighton Falls without firing a shot. Working in conjunction with a less than scrupulous mayor, they masterfully consolidated their powerbase right under the very noses of the residents. When the populace finally awakened to what had occurred, there was nothing they could do to turn things around. By that time, Sheriff Slater and his friends had taken total control over the town and ruled it with an iron fist.

Once the townsfolk reluctantly accepted the omnipotent rule of Sheriff Slater and his deputies, the underlying feelings of bitterness and rebellion were swiftly replaced by grim surrender and acceptance of the situation. Even the most rebellious of the townsfolk were smart enough to realize when they had been beaten and acquiesced to the sheriff's demands, which

were mostly monetary in nature. But the coming of the railroad brought with it a change of fortune for the sheriff and his associates. Initially, the sheriff looked upon the railroad's arrival as a positive turn of events, providing him and his men with even more money-making opportunities. But the sheriff grossly overestimated the railroad's willingness to buckle under to his blackmail demands. It seems that Sheriff John had not been the first to attempt to extort money from the rich and powerful railroad baron. The railroad brought with it its own form of justice, Railroad Detectives. These detectives were really no different in character than Sheriff John and his men, except that they were larger in numbers and much better financed.

The sheriff was quick to meet with the rail boss and explain to him the ways things worked in the town; and if the railroad intended to go through his town, they would have to pay for the privilege. The rail boss responded by saying that he would talk with the mayor and see what he had to say. Sheriff John laughed at hearing this and proceeded to boastfully inform the rail boss that the mayor was in on it too. But should he wish to try to negotiate a better price with the mayor, he was certainly free to do so—just don't expect any changes to the offer.

The rail boss was openly irritated by the sheriff's brashness and excessive demands. The two men parted with the rail boss telling the sheriff he would think about it and get back with him the next day. That night the rail boss sent a telegram to the railroad's head office, explaining the situation.

Early the next morning, the rail boss met with the mayor in an effort to interject some sanity into the potentially explosive situation and to try to negotiate a settlement that would be beneficial to all parties involved. But to the rail boss's dismay, the mayor only reiterated the demands of Sheriff John and informed him that in addition to his duties as mayor he was also the judge for the town of Brighton Falls and that it would be in his best interest not to rile the sheriff, unless he was partial to spending some time in the local jail. Taking the threat for what it

was, the rail boss merely stood, smiled, and tipped his hat to the mayor. He explained that such a large sum of money would need to come from the company's home office and would take a few days to arrive.

The mayor smiled in response and said that a few days would be fine, but not to keep them waiting too long. Looking forlorn, the rail boss turned and walked out of the mayor's office.

Sheriff John and his right-hand man, Dave Sherline, had positioned themselves across the street from the mayor's office and were watching the exchange through the mayor's window. Once the rail boss was safely out of sight, the two men trotted across the street and went directly into the mayor's office, asking what had transpired. The mayor smiled and pulled a half-full bottle of whiskey from a nearby cabinet. Pouring three glasses, he informed them of their successful intimidation of the mighty railroad and offered up a toast. The three men had a good laugh as the sheriff and mayor took turns mimicking the look of shock and facial expressions of the rail boss upon hearing their costly demands. The three men continued to drink to their good fortune for the better part of the morning until they were joined later by Joe Chrisman. At this point, the four men continued drinking as they shared exactly how they would go about spending their newfound fortunes.

The foursome's drinking party finally broke up early in the afternoon with the sheriff and Joe staggering back to the Sheriff's Office while the still sober Dave Sherline went from shop to shop along the town's main street and collected that week's protection payments. Once these debts were collected, Dave joined his companions back at the Sheriff's Office so they could divide their booty between the mayor and themselves.

"Do you think the railroad is actually going to come up with that kind of money?" Dave asked Sheriff John as he watched the sheriff sort the newly acquired cash into four stacks.

"I don't see where they have any choice in the matter. We run this town and they want to bring their railroad through it. They really have

no choice but to pay us what we want.”

“What about the mine? I know they want the railroad to come here,” reflected Joe.

“That is where we hold all the cards. The way I see it, with the owners of the mine living back east, all we’ll have to do to pull this off is grease the hand of the mine’s manager. What’s his name?”

“I think it is Hank Caldwell,” answered Dave.

“Yeah, that sounds right. I’ll go see him later this afternoon and inform him of his good fortune. I really don’t see him being a problem. After all, he’s a family man and knows that we run things around here.”

“So what do we do until we hear from the railroad?” queried Dave.

“We wait and go about our usual business, of course.”

Having finished sorting the cash into four even stacks, the sheriff handed each of his deputies one of the stacks and then put one stack into his own pocket. Picking up the last stack, Sheriff John handed it to Dave, saying, “You had better run this over to the mayor. We don’t want him thinking we’ve forgotten him.”

Later that afternoon, the sheriff headed over to the mine’s main office to have a chat with Hank Caldwell and inform him of the ongoing negotiations between the Mayor’s Office and the railroad.

Hank did not like Sheriff John Slater or anything he stood for, and it was all he could do to hold back his tongue. He just wanted the outlaw sheriff out of his office and affairs as soon as possible, even if it took agreeing with his scheme on the surface.

All the while during their talk, Sheriff John noticed that Hank seemed very nervous and distracted, as if he wanted to keep looking over his shoulder. Sheriff John could see a distinct nervous twitch in Hank’s right eye. While John found this behavior a bit odd, he cast it aside as a normal reaction to his own commanding presence and power. As the two men parted, John had a

good feeling about how the meeting had gone, and if there was any previous doubt about the manager’s cooperation, it was now gone.

The sheriff walked directly towards the Squawking Parakeet Saloon to get a bite to eat and a shot of whiskey to wash it down. As the sheriff made his way towards the bar, he paused briefly and looked up at the dark and menacing sky that was forming. Yes, there was no doubt about it; a storm was definitely heading their way. In just a few hours the temperature would be dropping and the earthen streets would turn into a wet, sticky mud pit. Sheriff John hated when it rained. For in addition to the rain making everything a muddy mess, the miners always seemed to vent their frustrations by either busting up the saloon or local brothel or at the very least, openly fighting in the streets. Either way, the sheriff knew it would be a long night for him and his men.

Entering the dimly lit saloon, the sheriff was temporarily blinded by the abrupt change in lighting. When he was able to focus, he could see the men inside the bar scurrying to make way for him. A small, sinister smile crept across the sheriff’s face as he walked directly over to the bar.

“Your usual, sheriff?” asked the bartender, Kit Bissell.

“Yeah, whiskey. But tonight I also want a steak. The best you’ve got!”

“Are you celebrating something, sheriff?”

“You might say I have fallen into some good fortune,” the sheriff coyly replied.

Kit wondered as to what the sheriff might be referring to, but chose not to probe further. Even though he knew that the sheriff actually considered him to be a friend, he knew it was best never to ask too many questions.

As the bartender headed into the kitchen to put the steak on the grill, the sheriff turned away from the bar and leaned his back against its old wooden top. His elbows jutted out behind him, acting as a brace, as he looked about the room. Like a hawk searching for prey, his eyes swept

from one side of the room to the other. His gaze immediately focused on a group of men playing poker in the far back corner of the bar. Looking at the growing stack of chips in front of one of the players, it was easy to see who the lucky winner was. But the small group of men seemed to be minding their own business and playing peaceably in spite of some men's heavy losses.

Seeing the sheriff looking their way, two men hastily folded their cards, rose from the table, and quietly headed towards the door. The sheriff briefly thought about stopping the men to determine why they wanted out of his company so badly, but he decided to let their suspicious movements go unchallenged. For tonight, the sheriff was not seeking a confrontation with anyone. He just wanted to relax and daydream about how he was going to spend the luscious railroad money.

The sheriff's eyes shifted back to the poker table, where he watched game after game until his attention was distracted by the gentle clanking sound of Kit setting his dinner down on the bar. Turning around, an appreciative smile spread across the sheriff's face upon seeing the generous size of the well-cooked steak and potatoes set before him.

"That looks mighty fine, Kit. I think you've outdone yourself this time."

"I thought you would like it. Another whiskey, sheriff?"

"Sure thing," the sheriff replied with a smile.

As the sheriff went about eating his bountiful dinner, on the other side of town the two deputies were making their early evening rounds of the town's outer areas. Deciding to take a break, the two men sat down and began to roll a couple of cigarettes. Lighting his cigarette, Joe looked out towards the edge of the mountain on the outskirts of town to where the railroad tracks came to a stop. At the end of the track sat a single locomotive and a caboose with its interior lights flickering in the rapidly growing darkness.

"I wish I was a fly on the wall inside that ca-

boose!" Joe exclaimed.

"I'd rather be sitting right here. I don't think we'd be all that welcome inside that caboose."

As they sat watching the somber scene from a distance, the two men laughed in unison at the thought of the cursing and heated conversations that were likely taking place inside the lone railroad car.

"You really think they're going to just roll over and give us that much money?" asked a skeptical Dave.

"Well, John certainly thinks they will and so does the mayor. It does seem like an awful lot of money though. You'd think they would have put up a bigger fuss about it."

"But maybe that's a good sign. Hell, John's never been wrong about stuff like this before."

"Yeah, that's true. You are right though; it does seem like a lot of money."

Nothing further was said as the two lawmen idly sat smoking their cigarettes and watching the rapidly setting sun disappear over the mountains to their west. When the last flicker of light had fallen behind the mountain, the temperature dropped noticeably.

"It's going to be a wet and cold one tonight. We should head back to the office before this storm hits. I don't want to get caught out in it."

As the two men stood to make their way back towards the center of town, a deep rumble could be heard coming from around the mountain.

"You hear that noise? What the hell is that?" asked Joe Chrisman.

"I dunno, the mine ain't doing anything that would cause a noise like that this time of day," replied Dave Sherline.

But as the two men looked out in the direction of the noise it became clear as to what was causing the curious sound. •

2nd PLACE
UNPUBLISHED NOVEL



ANNIE CHURCH

BY

PAULA PHILLIPS

Chapter One

Part One

1860

“No more tears now; I will think about revenge.”

Mary, Queen of Scots

PAULA PHILLIPS was born in Louisiana bayou country, lived most of her life in California, and has resided in Texas for the past fifteen years, a trifecta of experiences that has left her chronically bewildered. Annie Church is the second book of a planned trilogy that examines the Westward expansion from a woman’s point of view. Ms. Phillips lives in the Dallas area with her daughter and two

Until she met Frank Dodge, Annie Church had spent most of her young life wishing she were a boy. Boys could cuss and spit and be loud. They could relieve themselves standing up, which was a great convenience, especially in winter in the mountains. They were expected to ride and shoot, which Annie could do only because Pa had taught her. She was as good as any boy and better than most; she brought home dinner most nights, and she rode a horse like a burr in its mane. But even though she sat astride, she still had to wear a skirt and she couldn’t abide the way it bunched up around the saddle horn and kept her knees from feeling her horse’s sides. If she were a boy, she could wear trousers and ride for the Pony Express, like Frank.

Pa brought home the advertisement after he contracted with Bolivar Roberts to stable a dozen ponies and offer their way station as a home station where the riders could rest and sleep.

Annie’s sister Alice read the notice aloud. “Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over eighteen. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.”

“I can do that,” Annie said.

“Except you’re not a boy. Or an orphan.”

“I could cut my hair. And run away.”

"Oh, do listen. Wages are \$50 per month."

Annie would have done it for free.

Alice continued. "You must take an oath. 'I agree not use profane language, not to get drunk, not to gamble, not to treat animals cruelly and not to do anything else that is incompatible with the conduct of a gentleman. And I agree, if I violate any of the above conditions, to accept my discharge without any pay for my services.' Well, that's that, then. You swear like a miner and you're a mean drunk."

"Pa, you'll let me ride, won't you? Maybe one of the boys will come down sick, and I could take his place."

Her father just gave her the Look, which Alice said was enough to stop a charging grizzly bear mid-stride. "You'll have to content yourself with caring for the ponies, you and Teddy."

This would not be a job for Alice. She was the only member of the family who didn't share a love for and a way with horses. They made her nervous. She hadn't set foot in the barn since she'd witnessed Teddy with his arm up to his elbow in the wrong end of a horse checking for worms. "Big, smelly, stupid animals," she said.

Which only showed how ignorant Alice was, Annie thought, for all her book smarts. Annie had yet to meet a stupid horse. They were sensitive, soulful creatures and were only mean when they hadn't been treated right.

So, beginning in April, the riders began to come through every week. There was still snow on the ground in the mountains and if it were late in the day, the riders had to stay overnight. It was too dangerous to traverse the passes in the dark. To the west, the drifts could be twenty feet high between Church Station and Placerville. The divisional manager had to clear the way with pack mules so the eastbound rider could travel at something faster than a slog.

Frank Dodge was the second rider to come over the eastern ridge from Mormon Station, although he'd started seventy miles away in Bucklands. It was pushing dark when he rode up to the corral, and Annie was waiting for him. His

relay rider, James Polk, had come in only minutes before, and Teddy was already tending James's pony. With the bitter cold, the horses would get a good brushing, a big blanket and warm mash. Her brother Teddy said the ponies told him all about the ride, how tired they were, and whether the rider had hard hands. Teddy was a bit odd.

"I am never riding this horse again," Frank said, as he dismounted.

Annie had the dappled roan's bridle and began to lead him into the barn. "Why ever not? He's a mustang, just about the fastest one we got."

"He may be fast, but he's crazy. Squirrely."

Annie didn't like criticism of her ponies. "Well, maybe he don't think much of you, neither." She leaned her head in, and the pony nodded and blew into her face. "Freckles says you sit like a sack of potatoes."

Frank grinned. "Freckles, huh? What the hell kind of name is that for a horse?"

"Because of his spots," Annie said. Wasn't it evident? She wondered if "hell" was the kind of profane language that the Pony Express forbade. But she liked his smile and his gray eyes. He was barely taller than she was, and she was no bigger than a thought. He was raw boned, with a straight nose and sandy hair that needed cutting.

"Horse wasn't broke right, shies at everything. Should've named him Loco."

Annie hated that term, "breaking" horses. It always sounded to her as if they weren't good enough the way God made them. As if, to be a good horse, it had to become docile and have no gumption at all. She liked to gentle a horse with time and patience. Too often the handler was in a hurry, but horse time wasn't the same as people time. And the Pony Express had bought 400 horses, mustangs and Morgans, with little requirement except for speed. Freckles probably hadn't been finished properly.

"Don't give me this horse again," Frank said,

unstrapping the mochila, the mail pouch, and slinging it over his shoulder as he walked away.

Annie had no intention of sending Freckles out again anytime soon. The horse should've had more rest before making the run back. He'd gone out over a week before with the first rider, a nervous boy who must've had a change of heart about his exciting new job. Or possibly Freckles had made him rethink his riding skills.

Annie rubbed the pony's ears so his feelings wouldn't be hurt too bad. "Don't pay him no mind," she whispered. "Probably rides like a girl." Freckles nodded his head vigorously, his reins slapping musically.

Frank turned back. "What are you, twelve? Who names a horse Freckles anyway?"

Annie glowered at him. He was fine looking, but his manners were lacking. "I didn't name him," she hollered. "Alice did." But he was gone, and she didn't have the chance to add that she was seventeen, not twelve.

Annie hugged her shawl to her, wondering what it would be like to have Frank's arms around her.

* * *

By the time the horses were settled it was dinner time. Alice might not be good with horses, but she was brilliant in the kitchen. Still unmarried despite her beauty, she was in danger of becoming a spinster, but her cooking was certain to land her a husband eventually if she could just

keep her mouth shut. Alice didn't care much for the type of men who passed through Church Station.

"Drovers, dreamers, miners and miscreants. Their clothes are ragged and their manners nearly as poor," she had mumbled more than once. "And now we get these skinny young men who eat like lumberjacks."

"You're a snob," Annie said.

"I am not. It's just . . . I'm meant to be a city girl. How did I end up here?"

Annie started to answer, but Alice waved a spoon at her. "Oh, hush. It's a rhetorical question."

Annie didn't know what that meant, so she carried the biscuits to the dining room, where Pa, Teddy and the two pony riders were already at the table.

"What's for dinner?" James asked, peering at the plate Annie was carrying.

Alice was right behind her with the main dish. "Tender young dove, stuffed with nuts and apples and served in a boat of mashed potatoes, with candied carrots on the side."

Frank laughed at the look on James's face.

"It's stew," Annie said. "With biscuits."

James ducked his head. "I like stew," he said, offended.

Alice smiled at him to make up for her snotty remark. Annie had seen grown men become puddles on the floor when Alice smiled at them. "Then you shall have a double portion."

"Thank you, Miss . . .?"

"Alice," Frank said. "This is Miss Alice."

The boy nodded at Annie's sister. Then there was an awkward pause. And I, Annie thought, am the invisible stable hand. How do you do?

Frank finally looked over, as if seeing her for the first time. "Oh. And this is Miss Addie."

Teddy hooted. Annie blushed.

"Sorry. Miss . . . Amy?"

"Annie," she said through gritted teeth. "I'm Annie."

James reached over the table to shake her hand. Kindred fools, equally humiliated at the dinner table. Annie wondered if she dared hurl a biscuit at Frank Dodge.

"Grace?" Pa suggested. He knew Annie's black looks.

They bowed their heads while Eli prayed aloud. Annie looked under her lashes at Frank and was surprised to see him looking at her. He gave her a sheepish smile and mouthed, "Sorry," at her. She nodded back at him, still riled. And then he grinned and winked at her, and Annie was overcome, as insensible as if felled by a barn plank.

They hadn't gotten off to a good start, but suddenly Annie didn't mind. She might never be a pony rider, but that day she fell in love with one.

Chapter Two

By May, almost all the snow had melted. The mountain passes were clear and the pony riders were able to make good time, using every moment of daylight to push their stamina and keep the mail moving that much longer. There were stretches of route in the desert sinks where the eastbound riders rode through the night, trusting their ponies' surefootedness under a moon either bright or hidden. Usually they had safe passage, but Frank told them of one instance when a pony had stepped in a gopher hole and fallen, breaking its leg and throwing the rider over its head. The boy suffered a broken collarbone, then had to shoot his horse and continue on foot, seven miles to the next way station.

The passing of the mochilas had become the most exciting experience Annie could imagine. She and Teddy stood with fresh horses, waiting for the riders to gallop up, rein hard, dismount and unstrap the mail pouches in one fluid movement. Then they threw both themselves and the saddlebags onto new mounts and were off again at an immediate gallop, often without their feet

firmly in the stirrups. If a fresh rider waited, the boys stood aside while the new riders swung astride. Annie and Teddy had learned to toss the reins to the riders and step deftly out of the way to avoid being trampled. The fresh horses caught the excitement and bounded off as if they were at the races; the spent horses stood, blowing loudly, legs splayed, having been pushed to their physical limits. Dust flew and the entire relay took no more than half a minute. It was a grand and glorious sight, but as in the case of the rider with the broken collarbone, one that followed an imprecise timetable. Most of the time one or another of the riders had to wait for his relay.

One day in early May, Frank Dodge was so late that only Teddy remained in the yard area with the fresh ponies. James had nearly paced a trench into the dirt when Eli called him inside for a game of cards in an attempt to distract him. Annie followed, fretting privately. She took up a bundle of sewing, but she looked up so often that she pricked her thumb with the sewing needle four or five times. She caught her breath to keep from swearing aloud—Pa didn't like her to swear—and sucked gently on the wound. On a good day, Annie had little patience for sewing. Today, it was a poor diversion; her stitches were first small, then large and leaned every which way. Though not prone to flights of fancy, she just had a bad feeling.

With an elaborate sigh, she folded the material into an untidy bundle and put it next to her chair. Rising, she stretched restlessly and began to pace the room but couldn't avoid eye contact with her father. Eli cocked his brows at her and Annie halted in mid-stride.

"For God's sake, girl, sit down. You are like a worm in hot ashes!"

Annie, having heard this phrase for as long as she could remember, had come to hate it. Once, years ago—she'd been maybe seven—she had put a worm in hot ashes just to see what Pa meant. The poor creature had jumped about like a schoolmarm finding a frog in her pocket, and Annie burned her fingers trying to rescue it, tears of remorse on her face. Alice had tried to comfort her, saying that surely a creature that

could grow another part of its body if chopped in two could recuperate from some minor burns. But the worm was less than fish food.

She was ready to jump out of her skin, so she grabbed her shawl and headed outside, crossing the creek behind the house. At its narrowest there, three large rocks provided access to the other side. The creek was running fast and high with the snow melt-off and the rocks were slick, but she was agile and could do it with her eyes closed. She hiked her skirt and skipped nimbly across. A wooden bridge farther down led to the front of the station, but this was a short cut to the road Frank traveled, the trail that descended the mountain into their meadow.

She didn't know what she would say to him if she did see him riding in. By now she realized that Frank wasn't like the few men and boys she'd known. He didn't flirt or tease, the way the coach drivers and other pony riders often did. Annie waited on them when Alice went into one of her inhospitable moods and refused to leave the kitchen, so she knew she wasn't shy. When Frank was at the station, though, she could scarcely bring herself to speak to him, afraid he might call her Addie or Amy again. She spent the time instead studying his face, his mannerisms, storing the memories—like a squirrel hoarding nuts—against the hungry times, when he was absent.

I am more lovesick when he's around than when he's gone, she thought, and that don't hardly make sense.

She envied how easily Alice drew him out. Frank was a loner, a drifter, a man obviously more comfortable out of doors and around animals than confined with his own kind. But with Alice he was relaxed and congenial and had even been known to make a joke.

The waiting was the worst part, even when he wasn't late. Days when Frank was due in Annie lost all ability to focus. Just last night, Eli had beaten her hands down at checkers because she was mooning over Frank. It was plumb silly and Alice saw right through her, she was sure.

She might've asked Alice about it, but she

wasn't sure her sister wouldn't laugh at her, and Annie would die of shame if she did. Alice wouldn't understand anyway; she was too much the lady ever to pant after a man, and surely had never felt the way Annie did. Alice was twenty-one and sensible.

Annie hugged her shawl to her, wondering what it would be like to have Frank's arms around her. She imagined that nestling against him would be like fitting her hand into a glove. The thought of it gave her a curious sensation, of feeling both warm and shivery at the same time.

The sight of Frank's pony ambling through the meadow brought her to her senses. As she watched it approach, she realized that Frank was hurt. He leaned way forward in the saddle, letting the horse have its head. Then she turned and ran for the station, yelling to Eli as loudly as she could. She ignored the steppingstones in the creek and splashed right through the water, never feeling the icy nip at her ankles or the sodden weight of her skirt and petticoat.

* * *

"James, help me get him down. Teddy, boy, hold the horse steady. Got him? Okay, let's get him in the house. We'll put him on the cot by the fireplace."

Annie hovered on the fringes of the drama, trying not to wring her hands. It was a relief the way Eli took charge of the situation, but she felt so helpless.

"Pa, what can I do?"

"You and Alice start tearing up some material for bandages. Use one of the sheets. And get some hot water to clean him up. He's hurt, but I can't tell how bad."

Inside, James held a lantern high so Eli could make his examination of the wounded man.

"Lord," he said. "Look at his face."

Dried blood and dirt did little to mask the damage. Frank's left cheek was cut from below

the eye almost to his lips.

"Knife fight. He's cut here on his side, too." Eli probed the bloodstained area gently, trying to pull the shirt free of the wound. The fabric had stuck to Frank's skin and now he began to bleed again.

"Here, Pa, use the scissors." Alice handed him the pair that lay with Annie's sewing bundle.

"What happened?" James asked, rubbing his hands nervously on his trousers.

"Ambush," Frank mumbled, talking out of the right side of his mouth.

"Don't talk, Frank. You're hurt pretty bad." Alice pulled his boots off and covered his legs with a blanket.

"Got to make the run back."

Eli felt Frank's hot forehead. "Don't be a fool, you ain't going nowhere."

Annie hugged a worn but fresh sheet to her chest. Her eyes grew wide at the sight of Frank's injuries and she paled so that the sandy freckles across her nose and cheeks stood out.

Alice took the sheet from her. "Here, help me tear some strips off, Annie."

They sat on the long sofa, the sheet between them on their laps. Alice began to rip the fabric, but Annie couldn't take her eyes off Frank.

He'll surely die, was all she could think. He'll die, and never even know that I love him.

Annie had seen blood before and in fact had seen worse than this, but she wasn't at her most rational. Despair made her useless and she could only watch Alice's quick hands fly at their task.

Alice took the bandages to Eli; he wadded them up and pressed them to Frank's side to stanch the bleeding.

"Indian had a tattoo of some sort 'round his neck," Frank was saying, gesturing with his right hand. "Snake thing, here. Never saw nothing like it before."

"Indian?" James asked. "Ain't no hostiles hereabouts."

Eli frowned. "Some of the Paiutes wear bones and such through their noses and ears. Can't say I've ever heard about tattoos."

"Might've been Shoshone," James said. "They're related to the Paiutes."

"This is Washoe territory, though. Shouldn't be anyone else around."

"Where did it happen, Frank?" Alice asked.

"Going up the mountain, after leaving Mormon Station. The trail's real narrow, you know? Can't gallop through it, no how."

Annie knew the area. It was a good spot for an attack, the route climbing narrowly through terrain where mudslides or dead tree trunks could block the way. No road, it was a rocky switchback over the mountain, twelve miles up through ponderosa pines that transitioned to white firs, red firs, lodge pole pines and mountain hemlocks.

"He set up an ambush, set some dead trees across the path. Horse balked and wouldn't jump 'em, so I had to dismount to take him around. Walked right into it, like a goddamned fool."

"Did you kill him, Frank?" Annie asked.

"Well, sure. T'weren't easy, though. I took him out with a rock. Lost my gun in the fight."

"That's enough talk," Eli said. "You rest up. I don't think he cut anything vital, but you've still lost a lot of blood."

"I got to get going, Eli," James said. "If I leave now I can get over the summit before dark."

"Right. Ted's got your horse ready, don't you, boy?"

Teddy had just walked in, carrying the mail pouch.

"Yessir. Been walking him all afternoon so he'd be warm."

"Good lad. Build up the fire here so we can boil water and get Frank cleaned up. Alice, fix up some biscuits and jerked beef for James to take with him. Fix me up some too, while you're at it."

I'll be making Frank's run back. Annie, you come over here and tend to Frank."

"Pa, do you think you should?" Alice asked.

Eli strapped Frank's holster around his hips; Frank had obviously found his pistol. "There's no one else to go, honey." He lowered his voice. "You know I can't send Teddy. Even if he knew the road, which he don't, he don't hardly have the sense to follow it."

"Pa, have a care," Annie said.

"It's the ponies who'll have to be careful, carrying the likes of me. I ain't exactly built like a jockey." He was built like the blacksmith he was.

Eli put his hands on Annie's shoulders and turned to her solemnly. Alice, although older, was not the one he would talk to about weapons.

"The dragoon pistol's fully loaded. The musket ain't, so take care of that. I don't think you'll need either one, but don't you hesitate if you do. Shoot first and then let the bastard explain himself. And bolt this door after me and James leave."

"Yes sir."

Eli pulled her tight in a bear hug and kissed her forehead. "Good girl. You tend to Frank now. Frank, she's got good hands, she'll do you right."

The two men clasped hands and Frank smiled at her, although with his cut face it was more like a grimace. Annie could scarcely believe she was happy to be here, when short weeks ago she would've been fighting with Eli to make the return ride.

* * *

Night fell. Annie sat up with Frank, anxiously keeping watch. She'd blown out all the candles and doused the lanterns. The room was lit only by the flames of the fire, the only sounds the pops and sizzles of the wood burning and the slow tick of the pendulum clock on the mantel. Alice and Teddy had gone to bed hours ago.

Alice said she would spell her, but there was no way Annie was leaving the chair next to Frank's cot. If only he would rest easy, without all that tossing and turning. She half feared he was convulsing, the way he thrashed around, which only gave her a new worry. She had no idea how to handle a fit.

Bullet wounds were clean compared to those of knives. She hoped the poultice would stop the infection. The cut in his side was smelly and oozing, and his cheek—poker hot to her touch—had swollen to grotesque proportions. That Indian probably gutted fish and squirrels and Lord only knows what else, Annie thought, before he cut Frank. Who knew what savages ate?

She ministered to him the way she handled fractious horses, gently, but with firm sure movements accompanied by low murmuring noises. She tucked the covers around him each time he threw them off. He moaned and mumbled in his sleep, calling out to his mother like he was a child again, which she thought was sweet. Once or twice he looked her straight in the eye and said "Alice." Real tender-like, so that she blushed. She didn't mind that he got her name wrong, though. After all, he was delirious.

Harry found
himself on the
wrong end of a
musket.

Chapter Three

Church Station was much grander than Harry Blackburn had expected. He'd seen its rivals in

Salt Lake City and Carson City, but in between those outposts of civilization he'd encountered only the rudest of tenements—shelters made of mud and earth and rustic, one-room log cabins. Harry had been in the saddle for months now, sleeping out in the open more often than not; he was looking forward to a couple of weeks of comfort, with a roof over his head and a pillow beneath.

He reined in his horse this side of the wooden bridge and studied the way station. It needed a fresh coat of whitewash, but it was a fine, two-story house built of lumber. Six slender columns supported a balcony as fine as any found in Georgia. Glass panes, installed no doubt at great expense, winked in the windows. Wood shingles covered the steeply slanting roof, necessary at this altitude to allow accumulated snow to drop. At the back of the house an identical balcony faced the huge mountain down which he'd just ridden. He could also see part of a barn and corral, a chicken coop and a vegetable garden. Farther away, he surmised, would be the necessary.

The house was
silent, the yard
deserted. The
silence was eerie.

The surrounding meadows were lush with grass and wild flowers, and the front of the house commanded a view of the lake about a kilometer distant. Harry was pleased to have found his way without incident, despite the contradictions of cartography where the lake never seemed to be called the same thing twice. Officially it was named Bigler, after the third gover-

nor of California, whose boundary abutted this farthest edge of the Utah Territory. But the local Indians, he'd been told, called the huge body of water "Da-ow-a-ga." The early scouts heard it as "Tahoe," and some still called it that. No one seemed to know what the Indian word meant. Some said "edge of the lake," others "lake of the sky." Harry, who'd been a tourist often enough to experience errors of translation, doubted the accuracy of either. It probably just meant "big wet hole."

Local lore only confirmed his skepticism. Decades before, early settlers had met with a Paiute chieftain riding towards them in a friendly manner, calling "Tro-kay!" which roughly translated meant "Peace, brothers"—or more likely, "Don't shoot." The settlers assumed he was yelling his name and thereafter called the man Truckee. Harry thought it fortuitous that it had not all gone horribly wrong.

He turned in his saddle, savoring the serenity, and pulled the brim of his hat lower on his forehead. The mountains surrounding the lake were covered in snow and the glare from the sun was nearly blinding. Although spring had arrived, it would be months yet before the snow melted completely from the higher elevations.

It was a fine mid-May day, sunny and warm with the promise of summer. He looked up, following the course of a hawk across the sky. He marveled how colors were so much more vivid in the thin mountain air. It seemed he had never seen pine trees so green, in stark contrast to the blue of the sky. The clouds looked painted on.

As a child, Harry had often studied the landscapes on the walls of Blackburn Hall, preferring them to the portraits of ancestors who peered nearsightedly off into the distance or looked disdainfully down long aristocratic noses. He'd always faulted the artists for rendering the clouds in these paintings unreal. Yet here they were, wispy puffs more pearl than white, outlined delicately in pink, lilac and dove gray, shot through with opalescent colors.

He'd seen nothing to rival this pristine beauty in all of his travels, with the possible ex-

ception of Lake Como in the Italian Alps. The Sierras, more primitive in comparison, wilder and less populous, held the advantage to Harry's way of thinking. Nor did they harbor any mad Italians. A decade of war with Napoleon, even generations removed, was enough to make a chauvinist of any Englishman stout and true. Harry, unapologetically patriotic, was unwilling to credit the little general with any contributions to society—not architecture, not law and certainly not culture.

He stirred himself, suddenly aware of his daydreams, the spells of reverie for which his father criticized him, calling him idle and purposeless. Harry thought he was neither—he'd made it through Eton and Oxford, hadn't he?—although his tutors, except for Fleetwood, had reprimanded him for his distractibility. Spurring his horse over the bridge, Harry approached the house. He'd expected to see some activity, dogs running loose or tethered horses with their tails twitching, but the house was silent, the yard deserted. There was no reason it shouldn't be quiet, isolated as they were, but somehow the silence was eerie. Slightly spooked, Harry put his hand to his hip, covering his revolver.

"Hullo? Is anyone home?"

There was no answer at first, and then the door swung open. Harry found himself on the wrong end of a musket, expertly wielded by a slip of a girl. He smiled and raised his hands in a gesture of surrender. "Good afternoon, Miss."

The girl, unimpressed with his smile and manners, did not lower her gun—a barrel-loading musket about forty years old and nearly as big as she was. But Harry liked the look of her. Something about her, aside from the gun, drew his respect. She was just the sort of young woman he expected to find in these mountains: straight and capable, no-nonsense, attractive in a natural, unassuming way. She was not tall, but lean with adolescence, with long brown hair tied in a braid. Wispy tendrils hung loose about her forehead and ears, but she never shifted her gun to brush them aside.

"Hey," she said finally, if not eloquently.

"I was told in Carson City that I might put up here for a few days. This is an inn, is it not?"

"Yeah. You come from the Comstock?"

"No. Although I must be the only man in the territory not struck by the silver fever. Have you any room?"

She grinned then and lowered the gun to a less threatening level.

"You can have the whole second floor, if you like. Ain't no one else here. Room and board's twenty dollars a week. But we'll parley if you bring something for the pot. You hunt any?"

"Certainly. I've heard the hunting and fishing are exceptional here. I'd be glad to contribute to the, uh . . . pot, if I can."

"Price includes board for your horse, but he's got to sleep in the barn. Even though he is a handsome fella."

She approached slowly, letting the musket slide into the crook of her right arm, the stock under her armpit, the barrel pointing down.

Harry picked up the slack reins in anticipation of his stallion's behavior. Cayenne was a Virginia Thoroughbred, sixteen hands of muscle, power and speed in a blood bay coat with black markings. Harry was a skilled horseman and over the months he and the horse had come to appreciate one another's abilities. But in their travels, falling in with other westward-bound adventurers, the horse had displayed a distinct disinclination to suffer fools lightly.

"Careful. He bites."

"This horse? Naw, not this horse. This horse is a big sweetie, ain't you, boy?"

In fact the stallion lowered his head against her chest and allowed her to scratch his ears, the very picture of docility.

"Miss, I have heard my horse called many things over the months, including the devil incarnate. But I have never heard anyone refer to him as a 'big sweetie'."

She squinted up at him, grinning. "Name's Annie Church," she said. She switched the musket to her left hand and extended her right.

Harry leaned from his saddle and shook her hand heartily as if she were a man, then doffed his leather hat. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Church. I'm Harry Blackburn. You may call me Harry."

"You ain't a doctor by any chance, are you, Harry?"

"I'm afraid not. Surely you're not ill, Miss Church? You are the picture of health."

This close Harry could see a sprinkling of freckles across her face. Her skin was fine and smooth, lightly colored by the sun, her cheekbones wide and high. She had pretty eyes, almond-shaped and hazel-green.

"We got a pony rider inside, cut up in a knife fight with an Indian. We done what we could for him, but he's running a fever."

"I could look at him, if you like. I daresay I've had my share of schooling and I've seen a lot of wounded men, coming across this country. Shall I try?"

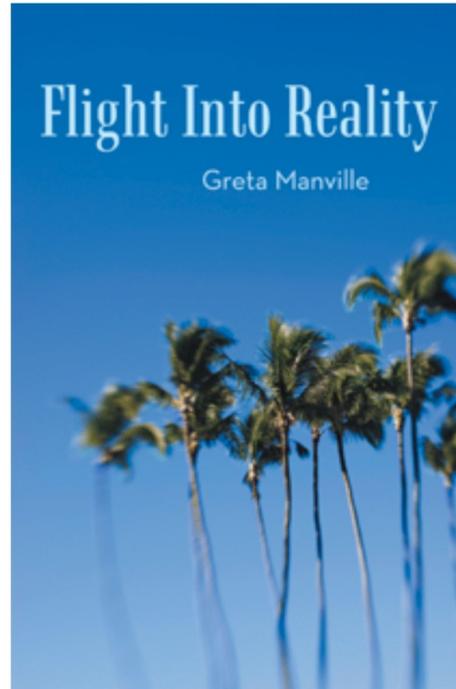
The girl frowned and hesitated. She looked him up and down then cut her eyes at Cayenne and his tack.

"You did agree to rent me a room," he reminded her with a smile.

"Guess I got to trust you."

"My dear girl, of course you can trust me," Harry said, dismounting. "I'm an Englishman." •

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KEVIN W. SCHICK is a dedicated writer residing in Scottsdale, Arizona. Prior to answering the calling to write, he experienced a successful international career of thirty years in advanced technology.

His travels included South America, Europe, the Pacific Rim and China. As a result, his writing is packed with technological imagination and carefully researched facts.

His wife, Kim, is also his muse and together they have a rich and exciting life.

WAY OF THE ROOSTER

BY

KEVIN SCHICK

BEIJING AND CHICAGO

1978

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CHAPTER 1

SCIENCE AND POLICY

Dr. Shi Zhongtao steps carefully over the dead man's body. He kneels and avoids the pool of blood.

"Dr. Shi, this man's throat has been ripped out." The officer's eyes lock on the scene.

The dead man stares up into the fluorescent lights as his white lab coat, stained crimson at the waist, is pulled away from his small frame. His guts spill onto the stone tile floor. A nearby security guard turns away and vomits. The area is alive with security guards and men dressed in white lab coats, like the one the dead man is wearing.

"This room is clear, sir. There is no one here." The officer is stiff in his tone.

"There's a trail of blood and footprints over here leading to the basement." Security guards shout and stampede.

"Stop!" Dr. Shi commands. He rises from the dead man's side and whispers, "Silence."

No one speaks or moves. Then a small sound, a distant echo, penetrates the silence from the other side of the room.

"She's escaping through the ventilation system." Dr. Shi shoves the officer towards the exit and six security guards follow. Their eyes locked on the ceiling as they follow the small sound.

"Lieutenant, take your men to the reception area and ensure that no one leaves this facility. No one! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Dr. Shi." The Lieutenant and a dozen men sprint down a lighted hallway, guns drawn.

The officer and his six men freeze. They have passed through another lab area and into an auditorium that is shared by Dr. Shi's School of Science in Beijing. They can't find the light switch so they use their flashlights. The sound in the ventilation system has stopped just above their heads.

"I hear the Shi-devil, there. You, get on this table and look. Tell me what you see."

The guard pushes the ventilation grate aside and pokes his head up into the ceiling. "I don't see anything. Wait." He suddenly drops onto the table. His throat ripped out, his eyes wide.

A small being lands in the darkness just outside the reach of the flashlights.

"Calm down, men." The officer's voice is uncertain.

A man screams and then he's gone. Another man drops his flashlight and runs toward the door they had just entered. He never makes it out of the auditorium. One man pulls his pistol and takes a step back; he bumps into something, turns, fires, and kills one of his fellow guards. As he realizes what he has done a surgical knife slices across his belly and his intestines unravel before his eyes into a pool of blood.

Then the auditorium bursts into a flood of light.

"There! The stage, she's escaping towards the stage." Dr. Shi directs the attention of the guards.

The auditorium fills with the explosion of rapid gunfire and the shouts of men. And a shrill, child's scream.

* * *

"We of course will continue the genetic experiments." Dr. Shi addresses his inner circle of staff at their early morning meeting.

"Doctor, she was an animal, a killer."

"She escaped our control, attempted to misdirect our search efforts, and then outsmarted and overcame trained security guards that were trying to recapture her." There is a hint of pride in his voice.

"She was a devil. The men, they called her a Shi-devil."

"The men can call her what they want. She was intelligent, resolute, and absolute. But you are correct about one thing. Let us review this specimen and make the needed adjustments. She must, of course, above all else, be a little girl." Dr. Shi wearily shuffles out of the room.

* * *

As the press event in Manchester, England, unfolds on television, a very interested team of Chinese scientists watch from halfway around the world.

"All examinations showed that the baby is quite normal," the Englishman reports.

Dr. Shi smiles, "It is good the West has finally made this scientific capability public. We can now proceed without undo scrutiny or suspicion."

* * *

That evening, a black Mercedes limousine pulls up in front of the Beijing Palace, an exclusive restaurant that caters to the rich and powerful of Beijing and their Western guests.

Good. Four of the attendees have not yet arrived. He glances at the top floor of the building. I am not early, nor am I late. Perfect.

No foot traffic dares intrude on the imperial-styled, four-story Beijing Palace, except for the arriving and departing patrons. Establishments that cater to the power class do not indulge the common people, so guards are located to prevent those people from passing the entrance to

the restaurant during business hours. Anyone who tries to push past the guards simply disappears.

Dr. Shi's driver opens his door.

Oh! Where is my handkerchief?

The traditionally garbed attendants move like ants on an anthill. What appears to be chaotic and disorganized is in fact the epitome of efficiency and effectiveness. Dr. Shi and his bodyguard, an unassuming, middle-aged man who can snap a person's neck with one targeted blow, are escorted to a special entrance.

* * *

Dr. Shi's gait is more like a shuffle, a lasting reminder of a bullet wound long ago. He is a twentieth-century Chinese warrior, cut from cloth centuries old, and a master in the weaponry of futuristic science. His bodyguard does not offer a hand nor is anyone allowed close enough to help him.

Ahh, the smell of spring.

He puts his handkerchief back into an inner pocket. He boards the small elevator and is immediately joined by a young woman who keeps her gaze directed at the floor. The bodyguard enters the elevator at precisely the same moment, and occupies the space between them.

Dr. Shi admires her porcelain skin and doll-like face. Her hair reaches to her waist and is decorated with green jade jewelry. Lavender awakens his senses.

Attractive, but . . .

Dr. Shi steps out of the elevator and makes the slightest gesture to his bodyguard who makes no indication that he has seen any movement at all. Before the young attendant can push the ground floor button, the bodyguard steps back into the elevator, grips her head, and gives a powerful twist. Pop! Her knees buckle and her body goes limp. Her eyes stare out at nothing.

He quickly traces the path of the wire from her ear. He finds a music player.

"Stupid whore. She dies for her favorite song. Let someone know and have her replaced immediately."

* * *

Plush, red carpet and gold-framed paintings of dragons and imperial gatherings from a time gone by adorn the fourth floor hallway.

There are only two doors: one on the left, halfway down the hallway, and one on the right, at the far end of the hallway. The private dining room on the right overlooks the front of the building and the guest traffic. The private dining room on the left overlooks the gardens and pond. Dr. Shi enters the first door.

Within thirty minutes the remaining men arrive, and all ten men of industry, military and political power enjoy cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. They have gathered because Dr. Shi summoned them for a vital debriefing.

There are three topics on the agenda for this evening.

"I was of the impression that the good Dr. Shi is the leader in the science of genetics, and yet it is the English that announce to the world the first test tube baby," a prominent general growls as he finishes his second vodka martini. All heads and accompanying drinks turn towards Dr. Shi.

"Announcements of leadership are not always made by those who are leading." Dr. Shi shuffles slowly to the front of the room. "And it is to our advantage that the world believes someone other than China to be the leader in this science."

"But there was not even mention of Dr. Chang, one of the recognized pioneers in this science. He was your mentor." The export company executive crams seaweed-stuffed mushrooms into his mouth.

Dr. Shi pauses and turns to the men. "Gentlemen, you are thinking like business leaders, military victors, or politicians kissing babies. We do not need, nor do we want, the light of notoriety shining upon the task we are preparing

to undertake.”

“We are not the light of notoriety. We are the Council. Tell us your progress, good Doctor.” The General’s eyes threaten.

“Very well, gentlemen. The English announce nothing more than the ability to copy what nature has been doing since time began. With no enhancements. We are not satisfied with rabbits from rabbits or goats from goats or just babies from a test tube,” Dr. Shi says.

“Are you making reference to your abominations, Doctor? The Shi-devils that rip my men apart.” The General leans toward Dr. Shi. Bodyguards tense.

“I have taken rabbits and given you wolves. I have taken goats and given you tigers. I have taken babies and outperformed your best soldiers.” Dr. Shi bows at the General.

“But you have not given us a weapon that will do our bidding.” The General relaxes.

“Soon, gentlemen. Soon.” Dr. Shi sips his water.

The next topic, China’s population control policy, also known as “one child per family,” is very controversial. The conversation rages for thirty minutes, with the majority of men in the room opposed to the policy. There are some unflattering comments directed at Dr. Shi.

“This will be interpreted as an attack on the minorities,” the man from Internal Affairs grumbles as he accepts another Kentucky bourbon drink.

“From your questions and comments, I can see that many of you have not had the time to read and analyze the impending policy. It is possible we have rushed into this debriefing, and it would serve us all best if we postponed and rescheduled this meeting for another date.” Dr. Shi’s voice is calm and non-threatening.

Nonetheless, the man representing Internal Affairs lowers his eyes and cautiously moves back a step or two.

“Recognized minorities will be exempt from

the policy because their population numbers are statistically irrelevant. Their participation in the policy would not affect population data to a significant degree.” Dr. Shi gestures to a young woman to bring him a plate of live baby eels.

“What if the one child is a daughter? This is not acceptable.”

“If the only child is a girl, she can be disposed of, into adoption, and presumably the family will try again,” Dr. Shi patiently replies.

“That is fine, but what if the son is sickly? He may not be able to pass on the family name.”

“Similarly, if a recognized physician deems the only child unhealthy, the family may petition to have a second child.”

“The people will revolt,” growls the General, with his third vodka martini in hand.

“In truth, this policy will affect a very small percentage of the Chinese population.” Dr. Shi sits in the chair his bodyguard offers him.

“The world will criticize China, and this will negatively affect our relations with the West,” the bird-faced manufacturing executive chirps.

“Let the world criticize China on that which we direct their focus, and they will not see what we are really achieving.” Dr. Shi stands and the room goes silent. He guides the discussion to help the powerful men understand that the real nature and value of the policy is to enable the development and deployment of his Human Gene Program.

“Parents will come to the program in the hope of a guarantee for a son or to avoid a particular genetic defect.” He pauses so everyone can absorb this fundamental premise. “We will select a small percentage of those families as subjects in our Human Gene Program, and we will use the new In Vitro Fertilization science to apply genetic programming to their unborn daughters.”

“Dr. Shi, how can you program an embryo to accomplish our goals? Are you suggesting these Shi-devils are the answer?” The General eyes the young woman serving drinks. His intentions are

not honorable, and his reputation as a cruel partner is well known. The young woman avoids his advances, for now.

“The details are highly scientific, but the simple story is this: we will genetically engineer the embryo’s chromosomes to be receptive to certain hormones and chemicals introduced via pharmaceuticals during pregnancy. This is new science, and there is still much to learn. We will need mothers who want to become pregnant, and we will also perfect our attempts at genetic programming by experimenting on the discarded baby girls. And yes, what you refer to as Shi-devils are the beginnings of our understanding to genetic engineering.”

“The genetic experiments will be done on the discarded girls from the one child policy?” The man from the Office of Agriculture speaks.

“Yes. Then, after we have perfected the process from egg to birth to toddler, we will use teachers, friends, and mentors to apply traditional behavior development techniques. Throughout the child’s life, we will continue the application of tailored pharmaceuticals.”

The room explodes in a burst of questions.

“Where will we find these teachers, friends, and mentors to do our bidding?” The bird-faced man grabs another drink.

“A good question and I will answer it momentarily.” Dr. Shi sips his water and continues, “The bleeding hearts in the United States will rush to our shores, willingly adopting our precious, genetically engineered time bombs into their homes and lives, unaware of their true purpose. This American horde will also take with them the failed experiments, cleansing our orphanages of human waste. Our genetically engineered daughters will aggressively seek out a mate associated with the control of wealth. Through these daughters, we will direct America’s wealth, to China’s benefit. And America’s demise.” Dr. Shi stops.

“Well said, Dr. Shi. Well said.”

The men agree that the population control policy is necessary to make the Human Gene

Program acceptable and desirable to the Chinese people.

“Earlier in the meeting, one of you asked who we will use to apply the behavior control techniques. The People’s Army of the Rooster, the PAR, is the answer to that question.”

“The what? This sounds like a lot of power and resources will be under the control of one man. Is that one man, you?” The General gives Dr. Shi a menacing look.

The room goes silent as the two warriors lock eyes. Bodyguards are again tense.

“The People’s Army of the Rooster will be made up of staff, covert operatives, and genetically manipulated daughters from the Human Gene Program.” Dr. Shi looks around the room at each man.

“And who will select the members of this army?” The General is relentless.

“The PAR will be selected and trained by the people in this room. The members of the PAR will report to a committee of your choosing.” Dr. Shi gives the room a slight bow.

“I trust the honorable Dr. Shi more than I trust the puppets in this room.” Several men share this thought, several do not.

“I do not have to stress to any of you the need to minimize our exposure. We must manage our operations with minimal oversight by formal organizations.” Dr. Shi sips on his water.

“Yes, I agree with Dr. Shi. Our greatest threat is from within,” an ominous voice interjects and then continues, “In fact, it would be best if the PAR were to disappear, never to be heard of again after tonight.”

Dr. Shi softly notes, “Wouldn’t you agree, General?”

Precisely, the man in the back of the room nods. “Yes, of course. Out of sight and out of mind would be best.”

The man from the Executive Political Council rises from his seat in the back of the room. “Dr. Shi, would you consider heading this organiza-

tion, the People's Army of the Rooster?"

"Thank you, Mr. Li. I will only entertain such an honor if the distinguished men in this room all agree to my appointment. Now, let us hear the din of disagreement or the voice of approval." Dr. Shi considers the possibilities.

Silence.

A chair scratches the floor as it is pushed back from the table.

"I have a good man in Chicago for your U.S. operations. His name is Chen," the General bellows. He makes a toast to Dr. Shi.

It is unanimous.

"Thank you, General.

Dr. Shi knows he has enemies. He knows he has enemies in this very room that will do whatever is needed to thwart his plan and take control of the Way. He knows this night is only one step on his journey to punish the United States, for the death of his wife.

CHAPTER 2 A CHILD AND A DREAM

There is only the darkness, the kind that is thick in the mind. No walls or corners or top or bottom. There is only the deafness. There is only the soul.

But there are others who can be felt, sensed in a soul-to-soul experience. No sight, no speech, and no sound, just awareness of existence and the existence of others. The others are without body, but with thought. I feel them and I sense that they feel me. There is strength in knowing I am not alone.

There is no measure of time or distance. The others are here, but I don't know for how long I have been aware of their being. I feel their presence, but without the sense of touch I cannot determine if they are near or far.

I have a soul, I have thought, I can feel the others. Each of the others is an individual and

yet part of me.

When did I begin to exist? If there is no measure of time, is there some reality of event? Do I exist because of an event? Was it the event that gave me consciousness? The others are conscious.

I know our number. We are twelve.

We are awakened.

Awaken.

Shi Zhongtao sits up in bed. Every night, the same dream: a child speaking from the darkness. What does this dream mean?

CHAPTER 3 WITHOUT CHILD

Reed is working late to handle the transaction settlements and never-ending client calls that inevitably come at the close of every stock market day.

He stares at the calendar, at today's date, and his heart aches. Sixteen years.

He takes another sip of his favorite scotch, a 1954 Macallan, single barrel, single malt. Almost seven-thirty, no wonder I'm tired.

He locks filing cabinets as his mind continues to unlock the memories from sixteen years ago. His father had called to let him know that his mother had been admitted to the Hinsdale hospital for observation. The University of Illinois was only a few hours away by car, but his father told him to stay at school, that it was nothing serious. The doctor said that his mother was just suffering from fatigue. In less than seventy-two hours, at only forty years old, his mother died of breast cancer.

Reed throws back the last of his drink and picks up the bottle. I was still in denial two months later at graduation.

He starts to pour himself a fresh glass and pauses. Huh, only a year after that, Caroline was finally out of high school. And became my wife.

He continues to pour and drink. Ahh. Now why can't life be as smooth as a good scotch?

By all appearances, Reed and Caroline Dorchen are a happy couple. They are popular with their friends and are involved in several Chicago Cancer Society events focused on breast cancer. Caroline also participates in a number of local charities that provide services for underprivileged families and shelter for battered women.

* * *

"You're late. You must be exhausted." She can smell the scotch.

"Let's eat, I'm starving."

Dinner is quiet and Reed, consumed in self-pity, ignores Caroline as he wolfs down his steak.

"The steak is dry."

Normally they have red wine with dinner, but tonight Reed continues to drink scotch.

Almost immediately after dinner, Caroline goes upstairs. She slips into her most revealing nightgown and lounges in her dressing room until Reed comes upstairs and gets into bed. When she enters the bedroom, she pauses in the doorway, knowing the light reveals the curve of her hips and the fullness of her breasts.

She crawls into bed and snuggles up to Reed. "Let's make love tonight."

His reaction is not what she is expecting. "My mother is dead," he sneers. Drunkenly, he continues with his attack. "And it's clear to me after fifteen years with you that I'll never be a father." His eyes tear. "I don't understand what's wrong with you."

"What? What's wrong with me?" Caroline chokes out. "For all we know, it's you! I know you had sex with anyone you could bag at college." Tears well in her eyes. "How many did you get pregnant? How many? None. You're the god-damn problem, not me!"

He grabs her and pins her underneath him. He works his legs so her knees are pushed towards her head. Pillows, covers, and sheets are tossed. Caroline flails her arms and Reed slaps

her face. She feels nothing but pain shooting between her legs as Reed thrusts into her.

How about this for old time's sake? Reed rises up from her, and with one powerful flip of his arm, he turns her over.

"Stop. Please, stop."

"Remember this?" Reed is drunk with anger and scotch.

"Oh god, Reed. No, please don't, not that, you're hurting me!"

Caroline's body stiffens with the pain. She clenches her fists.

Reed slams hard into her until he climaxes. What a tight ass, just like high school.

When Reed is done showering, he passes out in the guest room.

Caroline showers off the blood running down her leg and from her nose and lip.

The morning finds Caroline hiding in her dressing room, cowering behind a row of skirts, staring with anxious eyes at the door.

* * *

Reed routinely goes to the gym early on Saturdays to play in an over-thirty basketball league. I still got the moves from college. He admires his six foot two frame in the mirror. God-damn it, she scratched my chest. He quickly pulls on his jersey.

* * *

Caroline's best friend, Victoria, rings the doorbell and walks right in for their standing coffee date.

"Hello. Pour my coffee, I'm here." Victoria shouts as she tosses her purse on the living room sofa.

Victoria freezes when she enters the kitchen. Her quick up and down look takes in the split lip and the swelling bruise on Caroline's left cheekbone. "You look like you've been run over by a truck."

Caroline is still in her nightrobe, her long black hair in knots, and her petite shoulders are

slouched over her coffee. "I didn't sleep very well last night. It was the anniversary of Reed's mother's death."

The two friends have done everything together since they were ten years old. They have no secrets, and have endured every challenge that two girls from very wealthy families could ever encounter.

"Oh, yeah? So he beat the shit out of you to celebrate?"

The old friends sit down in the kitchenette area with their cups of coffee. Victoria takes a big bite of coffee cake and Caroline spreads blackberry jam on her toast.

"It got ugly. He went on about me being barren. I said some awful things to him."

"He's an asshole."

"Oh, don't say that. He's just stressed with the market and the pressure from his clients. It's nuts."

"He's an asshole."

"Okay, okay. He was an asshole last night, but that doesn't have anything to do with the fact that we've been married for fifteen years and have no children to show for it."

Ed and Victoria are Reed and Caroline's best friends, and they too had difficulty getting pregnant. Then, seven years ago, Ed and Victoria met with a fertility doctor. Less than one year later Victoria gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

"So you two are still having sex when you feel the urge, and you expect that to be good enough to get pregnant?"

"Yes, but we know when I'm most ready in my cycle, and we have sex when I'm ovulating." Caroline sips her coffee.

"Or when Reed decides to rape you." Victoria bites into her coffee cake.

"Last night was my fault."

"He's an asshole."

"He wants a family, I know he does, and fifteen years of trying is putting a lot of stress on

our marriage. He just wants to play catch with a son." Caroline fights back the tears.

"I understand what you two are going through, believe me. Here, call my fertility doctor, Dr. Lynda Parks, and tell her I've referred you. She's wonderful. You'll love her."

* * *

Caroline hesitates and doesn't tell Reed that she's spoken with Victoria about their fertility problems.

Almost a month goes by before she confesses to Reed, "I wasn't sure how you would feel about seeing a fertility doctor, so I haven't made an appointment."

His reaction surprises her.

It takes two months to get in to see Dr. Parks.

* * *

Dr. Lynda Parks looks very young, and wears a smart, short dress that would have been just as appropriate at a casual get-together with friends. She has on designer high heels, oversized glasses, no makeup and her long blonde hair is pulled up in a bun. She's wearing a large sapphire and diamond engagement ring with a simple necklace.

"Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Dorchen." Reed's stomach interrupts her with a grumble. "Oh my! I suppose I should say 'good afternoon.' I'm so sorry for being late. We'll speed this first visit right along."

Caroline smiles. "Good afternoon, Doctor. I love the photos and knick-knacks, are they from the families you have helped?"

Dr. Parks stands behind a small, antique wooden table and motions for Reed and Caroline to sit in the matching overstuffed chairs across from her.

"Why yes, thank you. They are my reminders of why I love what I do."

Her office table looks as though it's more for show than for function. The stack of paperwork that Caroline completed waits on the table in

front of Dr. Parks.

"This first visit is to meet and get to know each other."

Caroline politely clears her throat and says, "You were recommended to us by friends."

"Yes, Victoria called to let me know that you would be coming in."

Caroline blushes. Dr. Parks knows I waited so long to call after I talked with Victoria.

"I'm so glad to meet you," Dr. Parks says in a reassuring tone.

For the next forty-five minutes, Dr. Parks explains the usual reasons that a couple might have trouble getting pregnant. "The issue can be as simple as smoking, alcohol, or drugs. Not that any of those are truly simple."

"What else, Doctor?" Reed's eyes keep glancing down at Dr. Parks' breasts.

"Additional issues include uterine complications for the woman or sperm scenarios for the man. You will undergo a series of tests to determine your current fertility state."

"And then what?" Reed asks bluntly.

"We have options, but you need to understand there are very real limitations to what we can do to combat infertility." An uncomfortable quiet overcomes the room as Dr. Parks leans forward. "I only mention this because I don't want to set unrealistic expectations."

Please, God. I'll do anything, but please let this work. Caroline takes Reed's hand.

"Jenny will set up your appointments. It takes about three weeks to get the test results back to me."

Reed assesses Dr. Parks. Hmm, nice.

"Thank you, Dr. Parks. When do we come back in to see you?"

"Don't worry about a thing, Caroline. Jenny is great; she will take care of scheduling your appointment. You just focus on keeping a positive outlook, like we talked about."

"Thank you."

Jenny is always smiling. "Dr. Parks is a licensed gynecologist, so if you would like her to perform your exam, I can schedule you right now, Mrs. Dorchen."

"Oh." Caroline is openly flustered. "Yes, I mean, of course. That will work perfectly." And, I won't have to explain anything to our old, crotchety family doctor. Perfect.

"Great. And . . . it looks like you're in luck. We had a cancellation this morning. How about this Thursday at nine-thirty?"

"I will be here." I'm so relieved at how smoothly this meeting has gone.

"And here's your referral, Mr. Dorchen, with all the instructions."

"Do I need to call and schedule an appointment?"

"I can call right now and do that for you, if you would like."

"Great, do it. We'll wait. Sooner is better for me."

Jenny makes his appointment and Reed and Caroline are on their way.

After a few minutes of silence in the car, Caroline finally finds the courage to talk. "So, what are you thinking? Do you like Dr. Parks?"

Reed doesn't answer right away. "I'm thinking that it will be good to know what our issues are and what options we have." He pauses, and then adds, "As for Dr. Parks, Ed told me that Victoria seemed to like her. That made their experience much easier for him and nicer for her."

"I didn't know you talked to Ed."

Reed ignores her. "So, if you like Dr. Parks, I'm good to go."

The rest of the hour-long ride home is quiet.

When they arrive home, they go their separate ways through the house. Reed goes to his office and pulls the appointment card from his pocket.

"Shit! Six in the morning. Tomorrow!" He shouts to Caroline in the kitchen. "Dinner needs to be earlier than usual tonight. My appointment is back down where we were today and early."

He calls his office. "Any messages? Oh, and I may be a little late getting in tomorrow."

* * *

Reed doesn't notice the traffic on Lake Shore Drive because he's mulling over his agenda for the day. He's not giving a lot of thought to the upcoming clinical tests. In fact, he has no idea what the tests are going to entail. When Dr. Parks was explaining the test procedures, he was too busy fantasizing about her to actually pay attention to what she was saying.

Oh well. Reed parks in the lot next to the fertility clinic. They'll probably take some blood and then make me pee in a cup.

"Wow. You guys are really busy," Reed says as he's checking in.

"Please take a seat and the nurse will call your name." The girl at the check-in counter doesn't even smile.

No one looks at each other, and no one speaks. Other than the sound of a turning page or a chair being adjusted, the waiting room is silent.

* * *

"Reed?" The sound of a man's voice calling his name jolts Reed from his reading.

"This way, please. Take this cup and leave your urine sample on the counter." The attendant stops at the washroom.

When Reed comes out the attendant is waiting. "You'll be in the last room on your right."

After the attendant draws his blood he leaves Reed alone in the room without another word. Reed is ready to leave and get to his office. He opens the door, but his exit is blocked by the attendant.

"Here's your sample cup, sir." The attendant hands him an empty container.

"I've already given a pee sample. It's in the washroom."

"I understand, sir. This is for your semen sample."

"My what?"

"There are *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* magazines on the table, and several pornographic tapes." The attendant gestures to the table.

For the first time, Reed notices the stack of magazines and the TV set with the VCR attached.

"Take however long you need, and just leave the cup on the table." He leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

"There's no fucking way I'm going to jerk off in this room to a bunch of girly magazines," Reed says, to no one. "I'm not a fucking fifteen-year-old."

He walks to the door to leave, but stops. He realizes he has to go through with this. The time to object was yesterday, when Dr. Parks was explaining everything in her office.

Reed pops in a video debuting Amber Light. He pulls down his pants and sits in the chair at the table. He watches Amber and starts jerking off. "Okay, Amber, show me what you've got."

He shoots his semen into the plastic cup less than ten minutes later. Amber is giving her boss a blowjob in his office while he sits in his boss chair. I'll have to try that someday.

Holding the plastic container at eye level, Reed wonders aloud, "Is this going to be enough?" He sets the container of semen on the table and rewinds the videotape. He watches Amber Light, again.

When Reed leaves the room, he follows the exit signs in the hallway directing him out of the fertility clinic and into the parking lot, without having to pass back through the waiting area.

* * *

On Thursday morning, Caroline mindlessly flicks through the pages of several magazines without reading any of them. Reed told her his visit to

the fertility clinic went fine and there was nothing to discuss. It seems they never have anything to discuss anymore. Caroline picks at her cuticles until they bleed. She is determined to go through with this examination.

The exam room has sage green walls with posters of the female reproductive system in various states of pregnancy from several angles. Light jazz plays in the background. Against the wall is a stainless steel cabinet stocked with large swabs, rubber gloves, cloth examination gowns, and some scary looking tools. She can only imagine what they might be used for. The examination table has stirrups at one end and a large lamp that extends the length of the table coming out the other end.

I'm going to faint.

When the nurse comes back to the room, Caroline has undressed, donned her gown, and is sitting uncomfortably on the end of the table. She stares at the stirrups.

The nurse lays out long cotton swabs, several pairs of rubber gloves, small test tubes, ointment, and one of the scary looking tools from the cabinet.

What the hell is all this stuff for? I thought I was here for an exam, not a science project.

"Hello, Caroline. It's very good to see you." Dr. Parks smiles at her. "Are you comfortable?" And, without waiting for an answer, "Of course not, how could you be?" She pauses, then asks softly, "Caroline, are you okay?"

Tears well in Caroline's eyes and her mouth quivers. "I've never been to a gynecologist before."

* * *

That night at supper, Caroline and Reed talk about Dr. Parks' suspicions regarding endometriosis and Caroline's upcoming surgery.

"I didn't know you had pain when we have sex."

"No, I mean, it hurts a little. I think it's because you're too big for me. I told Dr. Parks."

Forgive me Reed, I hate lying to you.

"So, what is this talk of endo, endometree-whatever?"

"Well, ten percent of women have the disease, I mean the condition. Dr. Parks is just going to check me as part of my regular female check-up stuff." God . . . I'm scared.

"So, it's no big deal and it's normal and all."

"No big deal." Caroline lets out a scream inside her head.

* * *

"Of course I can go with you for the surgery. Isn't asshole available?"

"Stop it, Victoria. He's busy and you know it. And he has an unexpected Monday night client dinner."

* * *

It's just after seven on Monday evening, and everyone has left the office. Everyone, that is, except Cheryl, the twenty-six-year-old investment research assistant who joined the firm two months ago. Reed called her Saturday morning to see if she would be available tonight to help prepare a presentation on corporate fundamentals for several new clients. Cheryl eagerly said yes, and added that she is ready to do whatever is necessary to be a successful and valuable member of his team.

Cheryl is tall and slender with an athletic build. She has coal black hair that she wears in a short cut, deep blue eyes, and a big smile with full lips. Over the past two months, Reed has watched her intently as she moved about the office in short skirts that emphasized her slender legs and muscled buttocks. His eyes always find their way to her full breasts when she bends down in front of the cabinets to file papers.

Reed has made it a point to compliment both Cheryl's work and appearance. Cheryl has responded to his compliments: a touch of her hand on his arm, or an accidental brush of her breast when they are in tight quarters, or an inadvertent push of her butt against him when he

stands behind her.

Tonight, Cheryl is sorting financial printouts on the small table in Reed's office. He approaches from behind and presses against her as he moves his hands along her back.

Startled, she stammers, "Mr. Dorchen. What—what are you doing?"

"I'm interviewing you for the Director of Research position. Are you okay with that?"

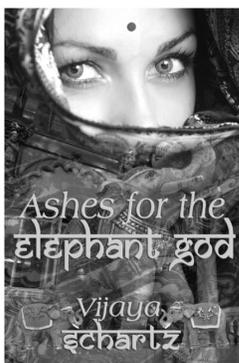
"I . . . I'm not sure. This is making me uncomfortable."

"You can leave at any time. I don't want you to feel the least bit uncomfortable. In fact, I want you to be comfortable with the thought of being my new Director of Research."

Cheryl's eyes dart out to the open office area, but no one is there. "But, Mr. Dorchen, I haven't done anything to earn that position. I . . . just started here."•

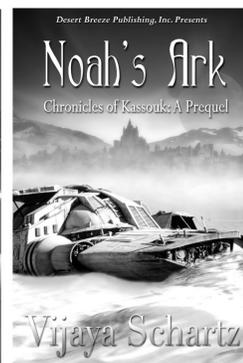
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AUTHOR
VIJAYA SCHARTZ



Blasters
Swords
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1st PLACE SHORT STORY



PEGGY WALKER

BY

HELEN BATISTE



HELEN BATISTE was born in Boston, MA. At the age of forty-two Helen applied to the University of Massachusetts, and in 1989 she graduated with a BA in psychology. Upon retirement from the finance industry Helen joined writing groups at the University of Massachusetts where she found encouragement to write stories that she hopes others will enjoy reading.

Helen has been married to Robert for thirty-eight years, and between them they have eleven grown children. She lives in Milton, MA.

Everyone agreed. Peggy never looked better. Her navy blue dress with white lace collar fit perfectly, most likely, people said, the result of her recent weight loss. In her ears, Peggy wore diamond stud earrings and on her left wrist a tennis bracelet accompanied by an emerald ring on the third finger of her left hand. Her favorite watch, a Gucci with a black onyx face and four diamond chips representing twelve, three, six and nine, ticked away faithfully on her right wrist which, given the circumstances, seemed a bit unnecessary. Her makeup was applied no thicker than usual, and her red hair was cut short and styled curly. If Peggy could have, she probably would have sat up while her hair was being done and asked for the hairdresser's card. All in all, Peggy looked great considering she was dead.

The mourners, bundled up in snug hats and warm woolen coats, began to arrive promptly at four, and Mr. Anderson, the portly owner of the funeral home, stood in the doorway to his office, hands clasped behind his back, nodding respectfully as people filed by. A happy man by nature, Mr. Anderson sometimes found it difficult to maintain the solemn bearing so necessary in his profession, and he struggled with his natural inclination to smile, wave and say hello. The balding mortician was impressed. Judging from the number of visitors and the steady arrival of floral displays earlier that day, Mr. Anderson thought that Peggy Walker must have been a very popular woman indeed. He watched as the line wound down, around and then back again filled with people speaking in the hushed tones that all visitors to a fu-

neral home use, finally ending at the viewing room where a black sign with gold letters sat on a tripod and identified the guest of honor as Margaret L Walker. Upon first glimpse of the deceased, a respectful metamorphosis occurred and the demeanor of the guests became appropriately subdued as they waited to be greeted by Peggy's three grieving daughters, all of them tall, blue-eyed, good-looking replicas of their fathers.

Irish Johnny was the first ex-husband to arrive. He approached his daughter, Maureen, the first young woman in line, took her hand and kissed her gently on the cheek.

"I'm so sorry, honey," he said in his thick Irish brogue. "Your Ma was a good woman, that she was." He put his arms around her and held her close. Maureen clung to her father sobbing.

"I can't believe it, Daddy," she said, tears running down her cheeks. "I just can't believe she's gone."

"I know, darlin'," he said. "I wish there was something I could say to make you feel better, but I can't. It's just a terrible thing, losing a mother."

She began to cry again, and as he held her he nodded respectfully over her shoulder to her younger half-sisters, Maggie and Evelyn. He reached down then and squeezed Maureen's hand.

"I'd better move along, sweetheart," he said looking in the direction of the people waiting in line.

"Okay, Daddy," she said, "but please don't leave."

"I won't." he promised. "I'll be here if you need me."

Stepping back he turned to his left and approached the red-velvet, padded kneeler that stood in place before the casket. Irish Johnny knelt. He closed his eyes, blessed himself, and then looked at Peggy in repose.

"Well, Peg," he whispered, "you and I have traveled a long, long road together, but I wouldn't have missed it, darlin', not a minute of it."

He reached out gently then and touched her hand for the briefest moment before rising and making his way to the folding chairs arranged neatly in the back of the room.

He finally came face to face with the youngest and darkest of the three young women, his daughter, Evelyn. At least he thought it was Evelyn.

It wasn't much later when ex-husband number two arrived. Norman's huge belly caused significant strain to the buttons on the front of his purchased-for-the-wake shirt. His black wool sports jacket didn't fare much better with the sleeves so tight that Norman managed to look like a penguin waddling in with his arms pulled backward at an awkward angle. Norman approached his daughter and threw his penguin arms around her.

“Be strong, Maggie,” he said, not knowing what else to say. “Be strong for your mum. It’s what she would have wanted.”

“I know, Dad,” said the pretty girl who stood in the middle, long blond hair pulled back in a knot at the back of her head. Wiping her eyes, she said, “She was so sick, Dad, especially at the end, but no matter how bad she felt she never complained, not once. When she did feel well enough to speak all she could talk about was how lucky she was to have Maureen and Evelyn and me for her kids. Then, right before she,” Maggie struggled with the word, before she. . . died, she said not to feel bad for her, and that she had lived her life with no regrets and she hoped we would do the same.”

Maggie began to cry again, tears running down her cheeks. Norman searched awkwardly in his pockets for a handkerchief, and finding nothing but an old Tic Tac and some lint he looked around until he spotted a box of Kleenex, which Mr. Anderson had placed strategically on a nearby table. He pulled out several tissues and handed them to the crying woman. Maggie took the Kleenex, wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

When she had composed herself, Norman said, “Your mother was a wonderful woman, Maggie, and we were all lucky to have known her.”

Maggie nodded in agreement and Norman stepped back.

“The line’s long,” he said, “I’ll talk to you later.”

She smiled sadly, and Norman walked toward the casket where he stood solemnly for two minutes, said the Lord’s Prayer, and then headed for the chairs.

Number three arrived just after six, and, as always, Eric timed it just right so he wouldn’t have to stay too long. He wended his way through the long line of mourners, dying for a smoke or a drink or both, until he finally came face to face with the youngest and darkest of the three young women, his daughter, Evelyn. At least he thought it was Evelyn. He hadn’t seen her in years and people change, but then she looked back at him with the same deep-set eyes he saw every day in the mirror and he knew it was her.

“Evelyn,” he said sheepishly. “How have you been?”

“Oh, fine, Daddy,” she said sarcastically, glaring at him. “Other than the fact that my mother is lying dead over there ten feet from me, I’m just fine.”

“Listen, Evelyn,” he stammered, not knowing what else to say, “Let’s have lunch someday.”

He nervously ran his fingers through his thick, dark hair. “How about it?”

“Sure, Dad,” she shot back, almost spitting out the words, “I’ll wait for the call,” and with that she turned away from him and began greeting other people.

Eric wanted to leave right then and there, but it didn’t seem right to just walk in, turn around, and walk out, so he headed for the chairs where he got the only remaining seat, right next to Irish Johnny and Norman.

* * *

It was Irish Johnny who finally turned and recognized the men on either side of him. Keeping in mind where he was and why he was there, he begrudgingly acknowledged each man with a terse nod of the head to Norman on his right and a “Hello, Eric” to the man on his left.

"Johnny," said Eric, "How have you been?"

"All right," said Johnny, ignoring Norman, "and you?"

"Not bad," said Eric. "Quite a shock about Peggy, huh?" and both Johnny and Norman nodded in agreement.

"I saw her two weeks ago," said Norman, joining the conversation, "in the hospital. She'd lost a lot of weight, but she was still Peggy. You know," he said, introspectively, "I think she knew this was coming."

"I suppose everyone does at some point," said Eric, looking around the room, "but somehow you expect a woman like Peggy to live forever."

"Amen," said Irish Johnny,

"Yep." said Norman, remembering. "What a woman," he said looking over at the casket with admiration.

Each man nodded his head respectfully in agreement, all animosity temporarily put aside for the moment. Eric turned then and looked at the two men.

"I never would have known you Johnny," he said, "if you hadn't said something, or you either Norm with all that weight you've put on."

"Yeah, yeah," said Norman. "So I've put on a few, so what?"

"A few!" laughed Eric. "Hey, Norman, I can remember when you looked so good I thought Peggy was going to go back to you."

That hit Norman funny, and he began to laugh out loud but stifled himself when he saw the disapproving looks of other chair dwellers. "Listen," Norman said, "do you guys want to go for a smoke? There's a room downstairs."

"Definitely," Eric said.

Irish Johnny said reluctantly, "I gave 'em up years ago," but it was hard for him to watch his daughter's heartbreak, so he said, "I guess I could do with a change of scenery."

As the three men rose to leave, Maureen caught her father's eye and mouthed, "You're not leaving, are you?"

He shook his head no and aimed his thumb toward the downstairs stairwell.

"Okay," she said, "but please don't leave."

"I won't, honey, I promise," he said turning to catch up with the other two men.

Irish Johnny sank down into the large green overstuffed chair in the back of the room set aside for smokers and coffee drinkers while Norman and Eric pulled up folding chairs, lit their cigarettes, one off the other, and sat down.

"How are your girls doing?" asked Irish Johnny.

"Maggie's taking it hard," said Norman. "She and Peggy were close. Seems like she's been crying for days."

"How's Evelyn?" asked Johnny turning to Eric.

"What?" said Eric who appeared to be more interested in the tall brunette smoking in the corner than he was in what Johnny was saying.

"I said, how's Evelyn?" said Johnny again.

"Oh," said Eric, "she's fine."

"She doesn't look fine," said Norman giving Johnny a look.

"I know," Johnny said reflectively. "They're all going to miss Peggy."

"Me, too," said Norman. "It's hard to imagine a world without Peggy Walker. One thing you have to say about that woman," he said, "she was loyal, that Peggy. I can still remember how bad she felt every time she cheated on Eric with me."

"Hey, wait a minute," said Eric, his attention suddenly on the conversation. "She only cheated with you because I cheated on her."

Irish Johnny started to chuckle.

"Hey, Johnny, don't be so quick to laugh," said Eric, miffed at being the butt of Norman's revelation. "Did Peggy ever tell you about the night you almost caught her with Norman?"

Johnny's face turned red.

"What are you talking about?" he asked angrily.

"Take it easy, Johnny," said Norman. "Okay, so you and Peggy weren't technically divorced, but the two of you had already gone your separate ways when she started seeing me, so you can't hold it against me."

"Yes, I can!" said Johnny rising from his chair, fists clenched and looking as if he wanted to punch Norman in the nose.

"Hold it, hold it," said Eric, putting his cigarette out in a nearby philodendron plant and stepping in front of Johnny. "That was twenty years ago! She's lying upstairs in a dress she wouldn't have been caught dead in," he said trying to get them to smile, but the humor escaped them. "Come on, guys, it's time to let bygones be bygones. Now sit down, Johnny, and remember where we are and why we are here."

"You're right," said Johnny, falling back into the chair. "What's done is done."

The three men had fallen silent, lost in their own thoughts, when Norman said, "Peggy might have had her faults, but you have to admit, she was a lot of fun."

"She certainly was, God rest her dear, sweet soul," said Irish Johnny.

"No one could ever call boring," said Eric patting his pockets to see if he could find more cigarettes. "When I think of some of the stunts she pulled . . .," said Eric, laughing and giving up on his quest for smokes. "Hey, Norman, do you remember when Peggy got an invitation to go to a high school friend's baby shower, and it ran 'til four in the morning?"

"Yeah," said Norman suspiciously, "I remember. How do you know about it?"

"Well," said Eric chuckling, "she sent the invitation to herself, wrapped up an empty box in baby wrapping paper and met me."

Now it was Norman who turned red and Irish Johnny's turn to chuckle.

"Are you kidding me?" Norman asked menacingly.

"Bygones," said Irish Johnny not even trying to stifle his laugh this time, but instead guffawing out loud as he watched the veins on the side of Norman's wide face bulge as he struggled to contain himself.

"Now calm down, Norman," Eric said. "It was a long time ago. We need to show some respect for the dead."

"I'll show you some respect for the dead . . .," Norman mumbled, but after a couple of seconds he quieted down, and once again all three men sat silently, each lost in his own thoughts and memories of his life with Peggy Walker. Finally Eric spoke.

"Listen, guys, no one likes to know that his woman is fooling around on him, but we need to remember the good times with Peggy, that is if you were fortunate enough to have had good times. I certainly did. But then again maybe it was just my natural talent, if you know what I mean," he said, as if he was revealing some great secret.

"No, I don't know what you mean," said Irish Johnny indignantly. "You certainly can't mean in bed, because that is one area where I know we didn't have any problems. And I can prove it," he added. He pulled up the sleeve of his tweed sport coat and proudly displayed a watch with a black onyx face and four diamond chips, just like Peggy's. "See this watch," he said, holding it aloft so that the other men could see it. "Peggy bought it especially for me. And just take a look at what she had written on the back. 'To the best lover I ever had. Love, Peggy'."

"Well, ain't that special," said Norman, hiking up his sleeve and holding up his wrist upon which rested a Gucci watch with a black onyx face and four diamond chips. He twisted the band so that Irish Johnny could see the message carefully inscribed on the underside. 'To the best lover I ever had. Love, Peggy'."

Irish Johnny was taken aback for a second, but it didn't take long for reality to sink in and both men turned to Eric. Slowly Eric fumbled with his French cufflink, rolled back the loosened cuff and held up his wrist. All three men laughed aloud at the same time. People turned and stared, including the brunette in the corner, but the three husbands of Peggy Walker didn't care. They struggled to get control of themselves, and when that was accomplished Irish Johnny said, "Just think, guys, how lucky we are to have been the men in the life of Peggy Walker."

As Norman and Eric nodded in agreement, each wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes, Irish Johnny began for the first time looking back at the people looking at them. He paused then and said, "Hey, fellas, take a look around. Do you notice anything?"

They looked. Here and there, sprinkled throughout the room, they spotted Gucci watches with black onyx faces and little diamond chips resting proudly on the wrists of at least half a dozen tall, blue-eyed, good-looking men. ♦

*If I don't write
to empty my mind,
I go mad.
~ Lord Byron*

2nd PLACE SHORT STORY



MARLENE BAIRD, a past winner of the AZ Authors unpublished novel category, has four published books, and many of her short stories have won awards. She took third place in 2008 in the international Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition. Marlene is active in Professional Writers of Prescott, having served on the board for two years and co-chairing their annual writing contest for three years. She has two active blogs: bookreviews-bybaird.blogspot.com and thewrite-lady.blogspot.com.



THE LITTLE THINGS

BY

MARLENE BAIRD

As usual, Justine had wakened before dawn. Sometimes she remained immobile for several hours, staring into blackness, dreading the day, and other mornings, like this one, she fell back to sleep into such a deep escape that the alarm could not wake her. When slanting sunlight finally roused her, the clock read 10:30. Dr. Bevan's office would be calling again today to see if she had finished the medical transcriptions. Dragging her body to a sitting position, Justine sat still in the silence. Nothing in the house moved anymore, except her. The fifties bungalow in Waukegan had wood floors, but there were no homey squeaks from the weight of someone coming down the hall. And worse, no toddler's proud, stumbling footfalls. The house had lost its equilibrium; life now existed in only one room at a time.

Justine pulled on her robe and moved automatically down the hall toward the kitchen. From the window over the sink she saw that the road had been plowed. Sunlight glanced off the stretch of new snow that covered the lawn.

Powered by three cups of coffee, she managed a couple of hours of medical transcription. Then she returned to the bedroom and dug deep in the closet for her ski suit. It was a sleek, one-piece affair. It was easier to get into than the last time; she'd lost more weight. She reached backward to hitch up the sleeves, then zipped it. She'd won a few amateur slalom races wearing this navy blue skin. That was when the slap of wind in her face and

the chunky rhythm of her pumping knees made her feel untouchable.

She could easily walk the five-mile route ahead of her, but she needed the Jeep today for grocery shopping. As she moved from the house to the detached garage she imagined Mrs. Meyer's eyes on her back. An old woman with nothing to do but monitor the neighborhood was bad enough, but Justine harbored a deeper anger toward her. She often wrestled with the fairness of this, but allowed it nonetheless.

The roads were slushy, not icy as she had expected. She parked outside the black wrought-iron gates of the cemetery because driving on the narrow road, which wound between the graves, was not an option. Admitting to herself that it was weird, she sensed the voices of all those souls called to her. *Please, no noise. We are resting.* As she walked a quarter mile into the cemetery she realized that the elderly Chinese man was there as well—his footsteps in the snow were unmistakable. Left foot, a dragging right foot, and a small hole made by his cane. The three-pronged pattern passed her destination and continued two more rows further along. She saw him so often, she thought he must come every day. In summer he wore pressed navy pants, a white polo shirt, and a baseball cap with a military insignia on the front. In winter he wore a heavy coat, the hem of which brushed the snow if it was deeper than six inches.

She slowly approached David's marker and dropped to her knees at his feet. Leaning forward she sank her palms into the snow. Eyes closed, she waited for his presence. This was early in her second winter of visits, but she could still summon warmth from the re-

membered feel of his arms around her. When some strength entered her body, she shifted her eyes to the left, to a second headstone. Into the gray granite was carved a cherub sheltered by an angel's wings.

Danielle Marie Henderson

December 3, 2004 - June 19, 2006

There was no personal inscription. After the baby's death David could not function, and Justine had not been able to come up with the words.

Justine stretched out on her back across the two graves. She spread her legs and arms to encompass as much of that territory as her body would reach. She pushed the snow this way and that, making a snow angel. As a child she'd marveled at seeing the magical pattern for the first time and often thought of watching that same excited surprise bloom in her baby's face.

After completing a perfect angel, she stayed in place and rested with them. The sun warmed her face. She closed her eyes. The navy suit gathered the sun's heat, and she slept.

* * *

That June 19th was the last time Justine enjoyed a sunny morning. David and Danielle had left the house in high spirits, and she had watched them through the kitchen window. The baby tottered on some of the rough spots in the crumbling cement pathway leading to the street, and giggled when she almost tripped. David leaned down toward Danielle, and Justine knew what he would be saying to

her. Park. Ducks. Splash. Danielle bumped her body back and forth in excitement, and David swung her up onto his shoulders. It was their favorite mode of transportation—her short legs draped over his shoulders, with each of her hands in one of his. As she watched, Justine saw her life as if from above. The small, neat house with a screened porch. A careless flower patch. Three people within. Complete.

As David and Danielle passed Mrs. Meyer's house, Justine saw her neighbor open her front door. Mrs. Meyer must have called to them because David turned around to look back. Mrs. Meyer waved, and David waved in return, his hand holding Danielle's. David took a couple of steps backward. Justine watched the toe of his right shoe step on the edge of the curb, but there wasn't room on the curb for his heel. Justine stopped breathing. Their one body—from the baby's head down to David's feet—stood out stark and stiff from the hazy background. She saw, clearly, the buttons on David's shirt. Sunshine highlighted a few strands of Danielle's golden hair. David was smiling back at Mrs. Meyer while Danielle rocked on his shoulders. Justine screamed a warning. David's heel came down, missing the edge of the sidewalk. His other foot came off the ground, and his body stiffened. Then he fell backwards.

Justine bolted from the house. David was flat out on the road. He still held the baby with one hand. So much blood. A lot of it on the chrome bumper of an old car, which had been parked there for days. Justine wrapped her hands around the baby's head, but it was no longer perfectly smooth. The skull had been crushed on one side. Justine looked into her baby's dead eyes, and life left Justine as

well. She saw no color and felt nothing and did not recognize Danielle's blood on her hands. All was dullness and flat.

David's voice came from a great distance. "Oh, God," he muttered. "Please, God."

"God is not here," she said in a robot voice. "Your God is not here."

Then there was the siren and the ambulance and the hospital and the crippling grief.

David lingered in mental anguish for three months. Then one night he swam out into Lake Michigan.

He pushed her
into the passen-
ger seat and
closed the door.

* * *

Justine woke and stared up into a blue sky. The early afternoon sunshine had melted some of the snow, and her ski suit was damp. She rose awkwardly, trying not to disturb the snow angel, now the mustardy color of dead grass.

* * *

The supermarket smelled of fresh meat and wet wool. Justine bought some soup and frozen dinners and was contemplating how

many of the green bananas she should buy since they would all ripen at the same time. It never used to matter; if they got darkish she would always make banana bread, David's favorite. She picked up a bunch of four, intending to separate two.

"Justine, dear!"

Her shoulders tensed. It was her neighbor, Mrs. Meyer. Old enough to call everyone dear. Deaf enough that she tended to shout.

Mrs. Meyer's camelhair coat might have fit her ten years before. But at seventy-five plus she'd grown into a stoop, so the front of the coat almost reached the floor while the back swung free. "Isn't today's sunshine lovely?" she asked, smiling up at Justine.

Justine barely managed to agree.

"Oh, I'm sorry, dear. Is this a hard day for you?"

What was it with this forever cheerful and energetic old woman? Did she think everyone was as strong-willed as herself? Justine wanted to swing the banana bunch at her neighbor's head. Instead she dropped all four of them into her cart. "Just tired," she murmured, moving away.

Mrs. Meyer called after her. "We haven't had a visit for a while."

"Soon," Justine said, not stopping.

* * *

Justine had just changed from her damp ski suit to warm fleece and was headed for the sofa when her doorbell rang. Mrs. Meyer stood in the enclosed porch.

"It's silly, dear, but I saw these fabulous peppers." She held out a plastic bag. "So solid

and green. Anyway, I bought the whole sack and I certainly can't use them. I'd like you to take some."

"That's nice, but I don't cook at all anymore."

"Oh, chop some up in your scrambled eggs. Do you like meatloaf?"

"It's not a favorite."

David had always been kinder to Mrs. Meyer than she, and Justine realized he would be embarrassed that their neighbor was still standing in the porch. He had often reminded her that Mrs. Meyer was the one who called 911. To that, Justine always replied, "But if she'd minded her own business and not waved at you . . ." It was so much easier to argue about Mrs. Meyer than to decide what their future together might be.

Thinking of David's kindness, Justine stepped back from the door. "Come in. Would you like a cup of tea?"

Mrs. Meyer was tugging at her scarf before her body cleared the doorjamb. She slipped her boots off and followed Justine to the kitchen in nyloned feet. "Hot tea is one of the blessings of winter," she said.

"What's the other one?" Justine asked, filling the kettle.

Mrs. Meyer laughed. "I know you're joking. You're a wonderful skier."

Mrs. Meyer's coat was too long to drape over a chair, so the bottom of it scrunched on the floor. Justine pretended not to notice.

While the kettle sputtered toward boiling, Mrs. Meyer recited her recipe for stuffed peppers. "And they freeze wonderfully. You won't have to cook for a week."

As Justine poured the tea, she noticed Mrs. Meyer physically gather herself. The woman sat straighter, gripping her hands in her lap. "Justine, dear, I have a huge, huge favor to ask. I hope it won't offend you."

"I'm beyond being offended, Mrs. Meyer."

"And, please, one smaller favor. Can you call me Evelyn?"

Justine nodded.

"It's, well . . ." Then she blurted, "Do you still have the baby's bassinet?"

Clearly, Mrs. Meyer was trying to read her face, so Justine made it impossible for her to do so. "I've left everything as it was," she said.

Mrs. Meyer spoke in a tentative voice. "My granddaughter is expecting. They are wonderful kids, but just starting out is hard. The other day she told me it would be a girl, and I haven't been able to stop thinking about the bassinet. I would buy it, of course."

Justine's jaw clenched. She gripped the edge of the table and saw her fingers go white.

Mrs. Meyer must have seen that, too, because she stood and lifted her coat. "I'm so foolish. I'm just a stupid old lady. Please forgive me."

Justine couldn't move from her chair while her neighbor struggled to draw on her coat. As she passed Justine, Mrs. Meyer gripped her shoulder. "There's no way I can know what you're going through. But I do think of you often. You take care." Tears welled in the old, wrinkled eyes.

Justine watched Mrs. Meyer move down the hall. The woman seemed to slump more severely, and the camelhair coat had wrinkled

at the bottom from resting on the floor. Justine remembered when she had last seen those tear-filled eyes. She had taken an overdose of sleeping pills more than a year before, and Mrs. Meyer's face was the first one she had seen when she opened her eyes in the hospital.

"Wait. I haven't been in the baby's room for a while. Will you come with me?"

Mrs. Meyer hesitated. "Is it okay?"

"Yes."

The room was cold; she'd blocked off the furnace vent. At the foot of Danielle's crib stood the bassinet. When Justine opened the blinds, sunshine lit it up: pink ribbons, white lace, a hand-crocheted coverlet.

"Oh," Mrs. Meyer sighed. "I'd forgotten how lovely it is. Of course you'd never part with it."

It was so much lovelier with my baby in it, Justine thought. It was so much lovelier when cooing sounds came from it, when soft, round legs kicked, when toes stretched toward the ceiling. "Has your granddaughter chosen a name?" she asked.

"Amelia Marie. They'll call her Amy."

Mrs. Meyer kept her eyes on the bassinet, and Justine stared at the floor. Then she said, "Okay."

They rolled the bassinet along the damp sidewalk, hoisted it up the steps and into Mrs. Meyer's house. They set it down in the living room. When the woman reached for her purse, Justine shook her head. "My gift."

"Thank you," Mrs. Meyer said.

Justine returned home, put on a jacket and walked to the cemetery. It was the first

time she'd been there twice in one day. The snow angel was now a soggy mess. She crouched on the ground between the two headstones and leaned toward Danielle's. "I gave away your first bed," she whispered.

The next day she took down the mobiles in the nursery and stripped the wallpaper. Her dark office furniture, which now crowded the dining room, might look good against pale green walls.

For two days she felt enthusiasm for a new life, but on the third she woke feeling uneasy. The coffee smelled harsh. When she sat down to her transcription, the computer keys confused her. She shoved the keyboard, crashing it into the monitor. With one finger she picked out the word GRIEF and enlarged it to a 24-point font. She stared at the word, and it became a jumble of nonsense. IF FIRE RIFE RIG. IF FIRE RIFE RIG. It had a rhythm. She began to hum the words in sequence. She walked to the nursery and dug Danielle's dresses out of a drawer. Still humming, she stacked them in a corner of the room with the baby's first birthday dress on top. She organized blankets, sunbonnets, jackets, overalls, t-shirts, all the time nodding to the rhythm of the words in her head. IF, FIRE RIFE RIG. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she re-sorted some piles of clothing by color. She opened Danielle's toy box and hugged a brown teddy bear to her heart. Baby powder rose from the bear's body. She pressed her face into the fur. "Oh, Teddy, Teddy," she whispered. She slumped into a ball on the floor, and all that night she stared through the darkness.

At first light, while the sky was still gray, she got into her ski suit and walked to the cemetery. It was an ugly morning; the wind slammed snow crystals at her face. She pulled

her knit cap lower and hugged her body with her arms, but by the time she reached the graves she was shivering. Stretching out over the ground, she made Danielle another snow angel. A space had opened between the top of her gloves and the sleeves of her suit. As she dragged her arms back and forth, ice scraped at the skin on her wrists, near the old scars. The angel complete, she curled up with her forehead touching Danielle's headstone. Snow pellets found refuge in the tucks of her elbows and knees, in the gap between woolen cap and eyelashes. Then they fell quicker, thicker, swirling as though mad. They began to pile. Before the sun was strong enough to cast shadows the blue suit could not be seen, only an odd white shape. Justine drew breath so deeply that her lungs went cold. Then she expelled all the moist air, blowing it into the ground, toward her baby's face. A welcome, blessed, peace came over her.

She had always thought that, if there were a Heaven, as David had believed, it would have to be what we expected it to be: therefore, different for each of us. So the sight of Danielle's face was no surprise. Justine reached toward the baby just as a harsh stab in her thigh shattered her peace. Another stab, in her stomach, woke her completely. A gray shadow hovered over her.

"Wake up. Wake up," the shadow demanded.

Then hands were brushing snow from her body and rubbing her limbs. She tried to pull away. "Leave me."

"No. We must go to the hospital."

She saw it was the old Chinese man.

"Can you walk?" he said. "You must walk."

Her arms and legs were so heavy they seemed to be attached to the ground.

He wrapped his scarf around her head and forced her to a sitting position. "Get up. You must get up." He took off his coat and wrapped her upper body.

Justine's feet were numb, so she stumbled as the man helped her to his car. He pushed her into the passenger seat and closed the door. The shakes started in her shoulders, but soon her entire body was jerking as if she had palsy. They seemed to be driving far too fast, and when the car's heater pushed warm air at her, she cringed. "That hurts."

He turned the heater off. "Were you trying to freeze to death out there?"

She didn't answer for a minute. It was not easy to speak between her chattering teeth. "Why not? They say it's the easiest death."

He made a sweeping left turn. "We'll be at a hospital in just a few minutes."

Justine pulled the rough coat tighter across her chest. She looked over at him. "Do you visit your wife?"

He nodded, yes.

"Why do we do it? It doesn't help."

He shrugged.

"How do you do it? Keep on living, I mean."

"I wanted to die. Then I tried to forget about the big things. Thinking of the years of companionship, her loving generosity, was too difficult. Now I concentrate on the little things. She wore a favorite blue sweater, which always had the corner of a tissue sticking out from one sleeve. Her beautiful hair was so straight and strong. That kind of

thing. Somehow it helps."

They pulled into the hospital parking lot and stopped near the emergency entrance. She leaned on him as they moved slowly forward. Justine's limbs were warming, and with that came piercing pains. She thought about the peace she'd felt just before the man had poked her with his cane. "I suppose I should thank you," she said.

"I don't know. But I couldn't leave you there."

The man stayed at the hospital for three hours, then insisted on driving her home. When they stopped at her house he asked, "Are you going to be okay?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"I'm coming back tomorrow to check on you." He was looking into her eyes, trying to read her condition, and she saw his own struggle looking back at her.

"Do you happen to like banana bread?" she asked. ♦

Easy reading is

damn hard

writing.

~Nathaniel Hawthorne

3rd PLACE SHORT STORY



EROS

BY

TAYLOR GENOVESE



TAYLOR GENOVESE is a filmmaker, travel blogger, and applied anthropologist at the University of Arizona. He has written several articles on social justice and how social media changes the nature of power relations among individuals. His paper, *The Effects of Social Media on Power Relations Across the Middle East with a Focus on Egypt*, has been read and cited by academics around the world. He is currently working on a film about social capital and community gardening. *Eros* is his first fiction piece to be published. Taylor resides in Tucson with his girlfriend and cat. See more at www.taylorgenovese.com.

The bar is actually *called* Arrows. Big, neon-lit white letters, cursive and flowing to the point of near illegibility, on a sickening deep pink background dotted with squint-to-see-'em red hearts. On each window, they've etched an ornate, fragile-looking bow noked with an arrow that has a heart-shaped head. It's embarrassing. As I stand in line, I wonder if the bar's "romantic" theme was designed in earnest. If it was, the owners must have been disappointed to find out that if you invite people to come looking for love at your establishment, what they actually come looking for is sex. There *is* a difference. I'd be out of a job if there weren't.

More likely, the owners knew exactly what they were doing. Sex is what sells after all. Maybe the lightless alley that runs up the side of the place is supposed to be a feature, not a shady inconvenience. I get to the door and pay the cover charge. The bouncer barely notices me, which is the intended effect. The unremarkable brunette he sees on my arm may or may not be real; she will dissolve into the crowd once we're inside, and continue to make no impression on anyone.

There *is* love to be found here, believe it or not, and good love. The forever kind. You just have to be good at spotting it. And that's what I do, and that's what I've done all my life. I've become an expert at it. I spotted it here.

The two I've spotted don't know each other yet. He's over at the bar waiting for his change, and she's sitting at a table alone, pretending to do something with her phone.

She's here with her friends. Rachael called her at four this afternoon, and said *of course* she had to come out this evening, because Sarah's in town for the weekend, and Sarah just broke up with Simon, so *of course* they're all going out to Arrows to help her get over it. She thinks it's a stupid idea, really. She doesn't really know what Sarah needs to help her deal with her breakup, but she's pretty sure it's not a one-night stand with a stranger at a singles bar. (She's right.)

Now Rachael and Sarah have gone off to find the bathroom, and she's been left to guard their table and their coats. Alone and self-conscious, she pretends to be texting so that she doesn't look quite so . . . pathetic.

He's here on his own because he's lonely and desperate and a little naïve. He works in an office and lives in a one-bedroom apartment and spends his life moving back and forth from one to the other every few hours. He owns one ill-fitting second-hand suit, and one battered second-hand briefcase, because he's not an important person at the company.

And it doesn't matter what *he* looks like, and it doesn't matter what *she* looks like. I spotted it here.

Well, to be technical, I spotted it somewhere else, *somewhen* else. They'll never know it, but they'd seen each other before tonight. Three days ago he was at work, sitting in his little blue cubicle, and she'd walked passed his door. They hadn't seen each other's faces. She'd seen his ratty, scuffed briefcase for a moment as she'd passed. In it, she'd seen the corner of the cover of some dopey thriller that he was reading and she'd read before and liked. He'd looked up as she walked on, and all he'd seen was the shoe on her trailing foot before it vanished behind the

carpeted blue wall, and he'd thought it was a pretty shoe.

They'll meet again soon. I want to be there when they do. The whole place is overcrowded, and for most people it would be a problem just getting from one end of the room to the other. But not for me, because I'm an expert at this. It takes years of practice to really be able to slide through a crowd. There's an art to it. It's all about analysis. You have to learn to watch everybody at once, to see which way they're moving, and figure out where the paths will open up. If you're really clever, you can give just one person the slightest bump and make the paths change to whatever you desire.

In a few moments, he'll walk past her table. He'll see her, but she's too busy trying to look busy; she won't see him. He'll walk past her and never see her again. In two years, he'll still be single. In six years, he'll be married to a woman he hates because he thinks she's his only option. In eighteen years, they'll divorce. It'll be the right choice for them, but not for their son, whose grades will steadily decline. He won't be able to attend college like he wanted.

In a few moments, she'll be aware that someone is looking at her. She'll let him walk past, without looking up, and she'll never see him again. In two years, she'll have decided to go back to school and become a teacher. In six years, she'll get a job she likes, teaching English to the smarter kids at a school near her old house. She'll strike up a relationship with Mark—Mr. Harper—who teaches math. He'll already be married to someone younger and, she imagines, prettier. She'll believe him when he says he's going to divorce her soon. She'll believe it for a long time, but then one day she won't anymore, and she'll tell everyone about them, and they'll both be fired. In eighteen years, she'll be living

alone in a nice apartment, feel a dull ache in her left side, and nobody will tell her to go to the doctor.

He walks toward her table now and she's not going to look up. He sees her, and thinks she looks pretty, even though underneath the table she isn't wearing the shoes he saw. He thinks about saying something to her, but he doesn't. He's no good at that kind of thing, especially when dealing with complete strangers. He's going to pause for maybe half of a second, and then walk away, and they'll never see each other again.

I'm there behind him. I only *need* half a second. I'm not here to do much at all. They don't even notice me. I reach in and put two fingers against the side of her highball glass, half-full of tomato juice and vodka. In that half-second when he's looking at her and she's looking at her phone and neither of them is looking at anything else, I knock the drink into her lap, withdraw my hand and disappear into the crowd.

In one second she'll cry out, and raise both her arms up and away from her lap. In two seconds she'll look up, focus on him, and mistake him for the person who knocked her drink over. In four seconds he'll stammer an apology for something he didn't do. He'll offer to buy her another drink, and to pay for her dry cleaning. In two hours he'll walk her up to her front door and arrange to see her again, but they won't kiss. Not just yet.

In two years he'll propose to her. He won't have a ring. It won't even be a romantic place. They'll just be walking through town and he'll look over at her, suddenly realize that she's essential and blurt the question out, knowing that if he stops to think about it he might make the wrong choice.

In six years he'll have bought the ring, and they'll have saved up enough that they can have a nice wedding. They'll both know that there was never any need to rush things anyway, especially when they had a daughter to take care of.

In eighteen years they'll be living in a pretty little suburban home. He'll own four suits and three briefcases, and she'll be the principal at the local high school. One day she'll feel a dull ache in her left side, and her daughter will insist that she see a doctor, and it'll be very lucky that they caught it so early.

In fifty-four years, one of them will be there at the end for the other, but it doesn't matter which one goes first.

That's what I'm good at, you see. Analysis. That's how I spotted them in the first place. You look at two people, and you see which way they're moving, and you see where the paths will open up. And if you're really clever, you can give one person the slightest bump and make the paths change to whatever you desire.

It's only fifteen seconds later when I leave the club. I glance at the corny bow-and-arrow design on the windows, this time from the inside, and fight the urge to roll my eyes. There are far more elegant ways to do this job. Arrows are for amateurs. ♦

3rd PLACE SHORT STORY



THE GIRL IN THE RAIN

BY

SAM BARONE



SAM BARONE graduated from Manhattan College with a BS degree. After a hitch in the Marine Corps, he entered the world of technology. In 1999, after thirty years developing software in management, Sam retired and moved to Arizona, to take up his second career as a writer. Seven years later, the author's first novel, *Dawn of Empire*, was published in the USA and worldwide. Sam's sixth book in the Eskkar saga, *Clash of Empires*, will be published this year. Sam, his wife Linda, and their two cats enjoy life in beautiful Prescott, Arizona.

Every detail is still clear in my mind, and even today I can remember all my emotions, though it happened a long time ago. It was quitting time on Wall Street, with people by the thousands pouring out of buildings, ignoring the light spring rain in their rush to get to the subways or the ferry. At Wall and Pine Streets a patrolman directed traffic, his rare presence cutting down the usual numbers of jaywalkers who normally took their chances, dodging slow moving cars and weaving between the stop and go traffic. I waited there impatiently, at the edge of the curb, with the press of the crowd behind me, my newspaper held up over my head to keep the rain off my face. Then something, maybe a jerk of her shoulders, caught my attention.

The girl stood on the other side of the narrow street, directly in front of me and less than twenty feet away. She had dark hair with some kind of blue ribbon wrapped through it, and wore a white blouse under a gray jacket. She ignored the rain, arms hanging at her sides, tears streaming from her eyes and running down her cheeks.

At first I thought it might just be the rain, but when I saw her shoulders shake again, I knew those were real tears, mixing in with the rain. No one else noticed, not any of those facing her, or even the man

standing beside her. In that instant I wondered what could make a young woman cry like that on the streets of the city.

Then the traffic light changed to green, the cop waved his arm, and the frozen human traffic, with a sub-conscious grunt of approval, changed into a stream of movement. I went with it, my eyes fixed on her face. She hadn't budged, forcing those behind her to push past, a few even giving her the standard glare of annoyance for the miniscule delay in their lives. Without realizing it, I slowed my own steps, still moving forward, but close enough now to stare into her brown eyes.

She never saw me, though I passed within inches of her, staring openly at her face and confirming that the tears were real, an occasional sob making her lips tremble. Then she was behind me, and I quickened my pace, moving toward the grimy subway entrance just a few steps ahead that beckoned shelter from the rain and the means to return to my home on Long Island.

I was halfway down the steps when the thought that perhaps I should offer to help her came into my mind. This time I stopped in my tracks, forced to grab the banister to avoid being shoved down the steps by the almost irresistible pressure of the mob. For a few seconds I considered turning around and going back to help. Then someone pushed hard against me, nearly tumbling me from the step. I shoved back angrily and started down again.

As I descended, the girl seemed to recede. No doubt she was waiting for someone, perhaps they were late, or she was just upset over some minor detail. No sense getting involved, I decided, and she probably wouldn't appreciate being approached by some strange man anyway. I moved quicker now, as the roar of the approaching subway train announced its arrival. In a few stops I would be at Penn Station, meeting my wife on the platform, waiting for the 5:25 for Northport and then home. I pushed my way into the subway car, opened my newspaper and began to read.

By the time I reached Penn Station, the girl was forgotten, just another incident on the streets of New York, not even a point of interest worth mentioning to my wife. But the next day, on Friday morning, the girl re-entered my mind, as my wife and I stood waiting on the Northport station platform.

The story was on page five of the *Daily News*, just a brief, two paragraph article about a woman who had been killed on the subway tracks at the Wall Street station during yesterday's evening rush hour. There wasn't much information, no description, just the usual disclaimer that she had either jumped or been pushed in front of the South Ferry local. They didn't even have a name, because there was no purse found at the scene which, given New Yorkers' propensity to steal anything and everything, didn't mean very much.

I must have muttered something, because my wife asked if there were anything

wrong. I don't think I heard her the first time, because I was remembering that the girl standing across from me in the rain also didn't have a purse. That picture came clearly into my mind, her standing with her arms sagging from her shoulders like so much dead weight. My face must have revealed the emotions tumbling through my mind, because my wife shook my arm until I turned to face her. It didn't take long to relate the story, even as our train arrived and we had to stop talking in the struggle to gain the door and then find a seat.

There wasn't anything else to tell. And there wasn't much my wife could say, other than to offer the usual comment that there probably wasn't anything I could have done, even assuming the girl in the paper was the same one I had seen. Talking about it seemed to help somehow. We both agreed that if I had turned back while I was on the subway stairs, I might not have found her again, not in those crowds where a few steps in any direction can make anyone disappear. But when we arrived in the city, I didn't follow my usual habit of discarding the newspaper. Instead I kept it with me till I reached my desk, and then I carefully snipped the article out and put it in my attaché case.

Over the next four years there were several moves from one house to another, and during one of them the faded article disappeared as quietly as the girl had vanished from my eyes. After a while, I forgot both the incident and the clipping. But a few years later, this time on a street in sunny Los

Angeles, the sight of the girl in the rain jumped back into my thoughts as clearly as if it had happened that very day. Another woman was crying, this one clutching onto the handle of a pink baby stroller, while a man shouted in her face. Everyone glanced away, or walked faster as they passed by, with hardly a backward glance as they moved on. But I eased my pace, then stopped, forcing myself to walk over, and getting my nerve up to ask if there was anything I could do.

The couple turned to me. To my surprise, the man's anger vanished, both of them clearly embarrassed that their outburst had been noticed. Impulsively, the woman thanked me for my offer, then they moved off together, both pushing the stroller. I watched them for a few moments, but they never looked back. It was just another street incident, the kind that happens every day.

Even so, I felt better. I had overcome my usual reluctance to get involved and had tried to help, even though my help was neither needed nor wanted. Perhaps my few halting words and concerned expression brought them together again, if only for a short time. But there would be no second thoughts for me that night, and I'm sure the girl in the rain would have been glad to know that this time, at least I had done something. ♦

HONORABLE MENTION

SHORT STORY



CHAR EVERETT makes her home in the southern part of the Michigan mitten. She teaches computer at the elementary school level where her young students are a constant source of inspiration and never cease to amaze her with their loving hearts. She also teaches evenings as an adjunct faculty member in the IT department of a local community college.

Char makes her home with her husband Mike, daughter Sarah, and son Austin. Her two loyal Labradors, Rudy and Sophie, complete her family and curl up at her side as she works at her favorite pastime, writing children's stories.

GREEN STOCKINGS

BY

CHAR EVERETT

There's something slinky and slimy that sneaks in to my room at night and hides my favorite things. It hides my sneakers. It hides my Yo Yo. It hides my favorite socks and sometimes even my Theodore Bear. I think it hid my homework. I can't find my homework! I'm pretty sure I did it.

My name is Margaret Elizabeth. My Daddy says my name is special because it comes from my two Grandmas. My Mommy says it is perfect because my two Grandmas are very different, and so am I.

My Grandma Margaret makes me feel safe and teaches me special things. She teaches me how to crochet tiny Afghans for my dolls while she crochets huge fuzzy ones for our beds. She teaches me to bake cookies with raisin faces and crazy hair made of lots of sprinkles. We like to sit all comfy and swallowed up in her so soft lumpy sofa with her black cat, Lavender. His name is Lavender because that's my favorite color of all. We sit together, and she helps me to read stories while we nibble warm cookies and drink hot apple cider or hot chocolate with little mini floating marshmallows. Hot chocolate is my very most favorite.

My Grandma Elizabeth is nothing like my Grandma Margaret. I don't always feel safe with Grandma Elizabeth but I always have as much fun as you can squeeze into every minute when I'm with her. She's wild and daring and always busy. I don't think Grandma Elizabeth knows how to bake cookies. We order Chinese and eat

with chopsticks or we bake frozen pizzas that always turn out too crispy and too crunchy. We race our bicycles down her great sloping hill with our feet off the pedals and our legs sticking out wide as we fearlessly soar. I think we are probably very lucky that we only crash some of the time. We love to swing from her knotted rope that hangs from Scary tree. Scary tree is an old, old tree that looks all bent over like a crooked scary witch. Its branches stretch wide for secret squirrel homes, nifty twisty little birds' nests, and our rope swing. We swing high and bravely let go to fly into piles of leaves, and piles of snow, and sometimes no piles at all. I love my two different Grandmas and my two different names.

Today is a special day. Today I get ready for school really fast. I brush my hair and put it in a springy, bouncy ponytail. When I skip it will jump and when I jump it will skip. When I swing on the school swings with my toes reaching up to the clouds, it will race behind me. I twist my ponytail up just like all my friends do.

I'm wearing my favorite lucky jeans. I skip rope faster than any of the other kids when I wear my lucky jeans. They have grand holes in the knees so I can check on my scab from when Austin pushed me off my bike. I wear my lucky jeans just like all my friends do.

I put on my very old sneakers even if they are still a little wet from catching fireflies in the dark last night. My very old sneakers are good for running bases faster than everyone else. Everyone, except for Austin. When Austin runs his face turns almost as red as his hair and you can't even see his freckles any more. His legs go so fast they look like they are almost flying like wings up to his ears. I

wear my racing sneakers just like all my friends do.

I grab my lunch off the counter as I dart out the door. "Peanut butter and jelly!" Mom calls out. "Rockin' Red!" I yell back, shoving it into my book bag. Mom says not to put it in the bottom of my book bag so that it won't get all squished and squashed, but it tastes better all squished and squashed. I have my peanut butter and jelly and my favorite Rockin' Red juice box, just like my friends do.

My friends and I wait for the bus. Sometimes we pick flowers, sometimes we splash in muddy puddles, and sometimes we make snowmen with crooked grins made of pretzels from our lunch bags. Then we climb the big tall steps of the bus and sit in the back so we can bounce up high when we go bumpity bump. We like to bounce high and laugh. I love to ride and bounce in the bus to school just like my friends do.

Mr. Rassi is our teacher. He waves at us when we get off the bus. He is always smiling. He is very tall and very funny. He makes us all feel special. He makes us feel smart even if we are having a hard time. I love Mr. Rassi just like all my friends do.

Mr. Rassi says that a new girl is coming today. I know she will wear lucky jeans with holes in the knees, she will run fast with her springy bouncy pony tail chasing behind her and her very fast sneakers splashing in the puddles. She will eat peanut butter and jelly at lunch all squished and squashed and maybe a Rockin' Red juice box, and she will love Mr. Rassi just like all my friends do. She might even be my new best friend!

Sarah is the new student. Sarah comes to school with her Mom. She is late and must

have missed the bus. Sometimes I miss the bus when I can't find my sneakers or when my alarm clock doesn't wake me up after I hide it under my pillow. Sarah comes to our classroom in the middle of Math. She looks at all of us. We all look back at her. It is very quiet until Mr. Rassi makes a little cough like he does when he wants our attention and says, "Say hello, guys!" We say hello but we keep looking at her, and she keeps looking at us. She does not look like everyone else does.

Sarah does not have her hair in a springy bouncy ponytail. Her hair is short and in two skinny pigtails with tight little braids sticking out by her ears. It sticks out here and there and looks like yellow straw that you might see poking out of a scarecrow's shirt.

Sarah is not wearing her lucky jeans with holes and I don't think she even has scabs on her knees. Sarah is wearing a dress that is old and kinda blue but almost as white as the little white dots and squares it has on it. It looks like her Mom has washed and washed and washed it until the blue has all run away.

Sarah is not wearing flying fast sneakers. Her shoes are black and look like they cannot be too comfortable. They look very shiny and new while her dress looks very old. Inside of her shiny black shoes are itchy looking green stockings that disappear under her not very blue dress. Her funny green stockings look wooly and hot. I think her green stockings are the funniest thing about her.

Sarah will not run fast or skip rope like everyone else does because she is sitting in a wheelchair. Sarah is different than I am. She is different from everyone else. I know she is not going to be my new best friend.

Sarah sits in the front of the room because

her wheels get caught and her chair gets stuck. She looks very hard at her papers and crayons on her desk like maybe she thinks everyone is looking at her. We are. When it is time to go outside to play at recess, Sarah stays inside. I see her by the window. Sarah can't play outside like all my friends do.

After school we get on the bus to go home. We laugh and bumpity bump in our seats all the way. Sarah isn't on our bus. A different bus picks her up at school. Sarah doesn't ride the bus like all my friends do.

I tell Mommy and Daddy all about Sarah at dinner. We're eating hamburgers and French fries. I like to eat French fries. I eat them with so much ketchup that my face gets red and it makes me feel hot. Mommy and Daddy listen to me, but they are very quiet and don't say anything.

I brush my teeth and get ready for bed. Mommy comes in my room. She says my room is an obstacle course. I know what that is. It's like when you go to the playground and jump over poles and crawl through the colored tubes to get to the end before anyone beats you. Mommy sits on my bed and tells me that Sarah is different than everyone else because she is a little sick and that she thinks it must be very lonely being different and coming to a new school. Mommy says that sometimes we can't help but be different and that Sarah might be sad if everyone treats her like she is strange. She says that it must be hard to be a little girl and be a little sick and not be able to do what the other kids do.

The sun does not have to wake me up in the morning. I have an idea, and I am up early. I get dressed in my lucky jeans and very old sneakers. I brush my teeth and start to

make my hair in two tight braids by my ears. It isn't easy to make it on the sides with braids but I work at it very hard. I am not very good at it, so it is all pokey like yellow straw that you might see poking out of a scarecrow's shirt. My braids are skinny and tight. They look almost like Sarah's.

I wait for the bus with my friends sitting in the grass. I have things to talk to them about. My friends like my hair in braids by my ears. They think I will still be able to run with it flying fast behind me. I think that maybe we should all try tight little braids by our ears. We sit there in the grass and make braids. Jamie makes Kaylie's and Kaylie makes Jamie's. Mary makes Cassie's and Cassie makes Mary's. I help Emily. We all have braids that are skinny and tight and they poke out all funny like yellow straw. Sarah is maybe not going to feel strange or different.

We get off of the bus and Mr. Rassi smiles at us. Then his smile gets very big. I think he likes our braids. We go in to school and put our book bags away and sit down at our desks. We look at Sarah, and she looks at us. I think I can see her eyes peeking over at me when she works very hard on her paper. I can see her look over the top of her book when she is reading her story. I know Sarah is looking at us at recess. I see her in the window when we are playing outside. Maybe she still does not feel like everyone else. I think she might still be lonely.

After school we sit in the back of the bus and while we bumpity bump we whisper and think very hard. I jump off the bus steps and run in the kitchen. Mommy says, "Hi, Sweetheart," but I only yell 'Hi' real fast and run upstairs to my room. I have to look for something.

I think I remember some shiny black shoes. I think I remember them from a wedding. The wedding was fun when I could make my dress spin and spin. The wedding was fun but I remember that the shiny black shoes hurt my feet. I think they are maybe very far under my bed behind my pogo stick and box of special things. I think they will hurt my feet a little bit but I can slip them off under my desk sometimes. I can slip them off and maybe swing on the swings instead of running flying fast at recess.

The sun does not have to wake me up in the morning. I am up early. I brush my teeth and start to make my hair almost like Sarah's. It isn't easy but it isn't as hard as yesterday. It still looks all pokey like yellow straw that you might see poking out of a scarecrow's shirt. My braids are skinny and tight. I get dressed in my lucky jeans and my shiny black shoes. I think the shoes look a little funny with my lucky jeans. They are tight and hurt my feet.

I wait for the bus with my friends sitting in the grass. We have things to talk about. Jamie told Kaylie to wear shiny black shoes. Mary told Cassie to wear shiny black shoes. I told Emily to wear shiny black shoes. Some of our shoes have buckles and some of them have strings but they are all shiny and black and they all hurt our feet.

We get off of the bus and Mr. Rassi smiles at us and then his smile goes away for a minute and his forehead gets a little scrunched. He looks at us very hard and then his smile gets very big. I think he likes our braids and our shiny black shoes. We go in to school and put our book bags away and sit down at our desks. We look at Sarah and she looks at us. I think I can see her eyes peeking over at me when she reaches down for her pencil that

falls on the floor. I can see her look over her crayon box lid when she is looking for orange. I know Sarah is looking at us at recess. I see her in the window when we are playing outside. Maybe she still does not feel like everyone else. I think she must have to be very brave to be a little sick and not have fun outside.

After school we sit in the back of the bus and while we bumpity bump we whisper and think very hard. I jump off the bus steps and run in the kitchen. Mommy says, "Hi, Sweetheart," but I only yell 'Hi' real fast and run upstairs to my room. I have to look for something.

I think I remember an old blue dress. I think I remember it from this summer when it was hot and steamy outside. I think that maybe Mommy hung it in the closet way in the back. I think the blue dress will not be as comfortable or lucky as my jeans and it might be a little cold outside to wear it, but I can take my sweater. I think Austin will laugh and point at me, but he will stop laughing if I tell him I'm going to give him a knuckle sandwich.

The sun does not have to wake me up in the morning. I am up early. I brush my teeth and make my hair almost like Sarah's. It is easy but still looks all pokey like yellow straw that you might see poking out of a scarecrow's shirt. My braids are skinny and tight, my shoes are shiny and black. I get dressed in my blue dress. I can't spin and make the dress fly out, but I can still check on the scab on my knee.

I wait for the bus with my friends sitting in the grass. We have things to talk about. Jamie told Kaylie to wear a blue dress. Mary told

Cassie to wear a blue dress. I told Emily to wear a blue dress. Some of our dresses have pockets and some of them have ties. Some of them have buttons and some of them have ruffles, but they are all blue.

We get off of the bus and Mr. Rassi smiles at us. He looks at us and shakes his head with a smile as wide as I have never seen. I think he is surprised that we are not wearing our lucky jeans and that we all have blue dresses. We go in to school and put our book bags away and sit down at our desks. We look at Sarah and she looks at us. I think. I can see her eyes peeking over at me while she has her head in her desk looking for a book. I can see her looking very surprised because she almost forgets to just peek, and she starts to stare. I know Sarah is looking at us at recess. I see her in the window when we are playing outside. Maybe she still does not feel like everyone else. I think she might be a little sad being alone all the time.

After school we sit in the back of the bus and while we bumpity bump we whisper and think very hard. I jump off the bus steps and run in the kitchen. Mommy says, "Hi, Sweetheart," but I only yell 'Hi' real fast and run upstairs to my room. I have to look for something.

The sun does not have to wake me up in the morning. I am up early. I braid my hair until it is pokey like two straw tight braids. It is getting very easy to fix now. I put on my blue dress. I had to crawl far under my bed and dig to the bottom of all of my dresser drawers and pull almost everything out of my closet, but I finally found two long, green bunchy stockings. I think they even kind of match. They are hot and itchy inside of my shiny black shoes.

I wait for the bus with my friends sitting in the grass. We have things to talk about. Jamie told Kaylie to wear long green stockings. Mary told Cassie to wear long green stockings. I told Emily to wear long green stockings. Some of our stockings are more blue than green, or more black than blue. Some of our stockings are shorter than they are longer.

We get off of the bus and Mr. Rassi is waiting for us. He looks at us as if we are very strange looking to him and his smile is kind of crooked and lopsided. He tells us he is very proud of us. Then he smiles big and tells us we are in for a surprise. We go in to school and put our book bags away and sit down at our desks. We look at Sarah and she looks at us. I know. I can see her eyes watching us as we walk in. We smile at her and she smiles at us. Mr. Rassi laughs. We all laugh. Sarah laughs. Sarah is sitting at her desk with lucky jeans on. Her lucky jeans are new but there is still a hole in the knee. She has ponytail. It isn't long enough to be springy and bouncy yet, but I think that is ok. She is wearing brand new tennis shoes over her long, itchy green bunchy stockings. I know she won't be able to run flying fast like me. but I think that is ok, too.

Sarah doesn't watch us from the window anymore. We pick marbles out of a jar and whoever picks lavender gets to stay in with Sarah. Picking the lavender marble out of a jar was my idea so we could take turns. Mr. Rassi let us build a fort in the corner of the room with blankets and bean bags so that we can read stories and play Checkers and Crazy Eights while we eat our squished and squashed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and drink our Rockin' Red juice boxes.

Sarah still can't ride the bus with us, but she is waiting for us with Mr. Rassi in the morning when we get to school. After school we wait for her to get on her different bus.

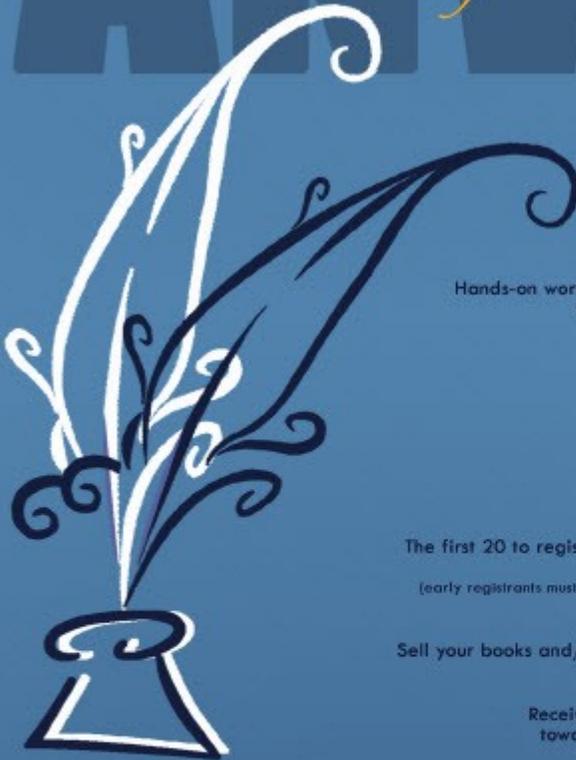
Sarah is different. Everyone is different. It takes lots of courage to be different and you have to be brave. I think that is the best kind of friend to have and it is the kind of friend I want to be. Brave and full of courage and even a little different. ♦

*"You must stay
drunk on writing
so reality cannot
destroy you."*

~ Ray Bradbury

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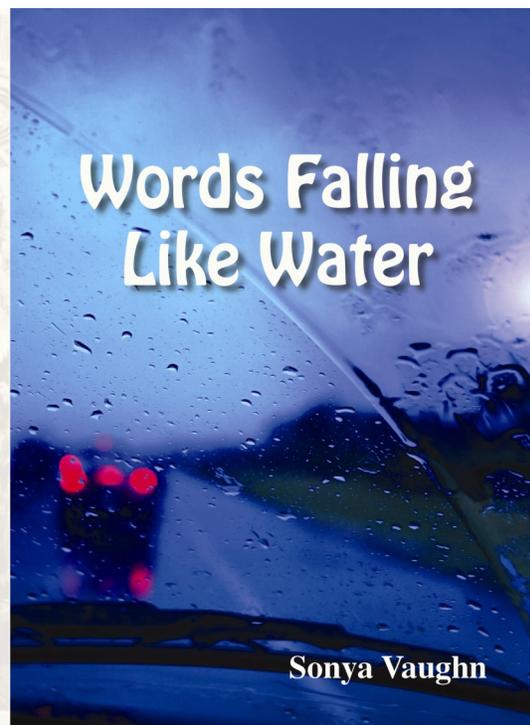
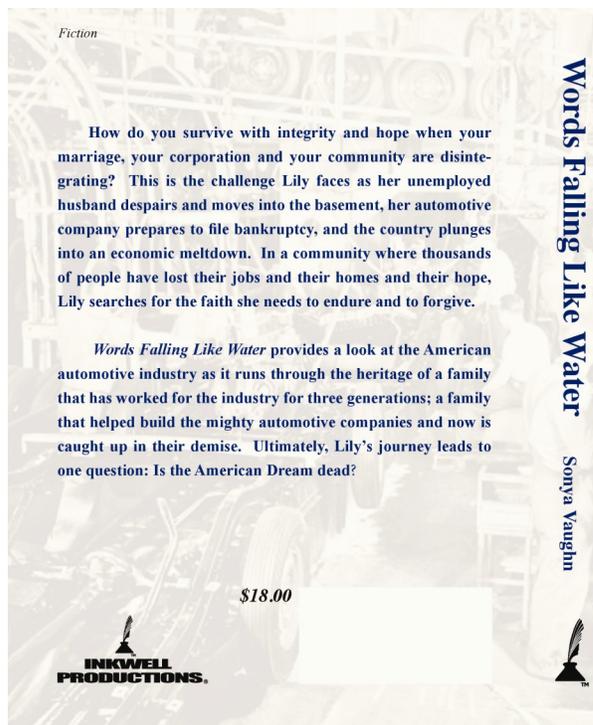
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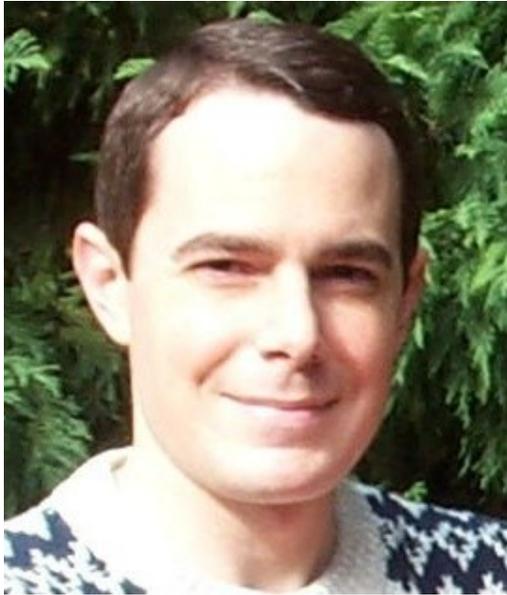
PUBLISHED
1st PLACE FICTION



SONYA VAUGHN and her family worked for the automotive industry for four generations. Drawing on her family's extensive experience with this industry, Sonya wrote *Words Falling Like Water* to capture and protest against the inhumane treatment suffered by auto workers during the decline of the industry. For over twelve years, she has taught writing at several colleges. Currently, she is teaching, writing her next novel, and coaching other writers. She lives in Peoria, Arizona with her husband and children.



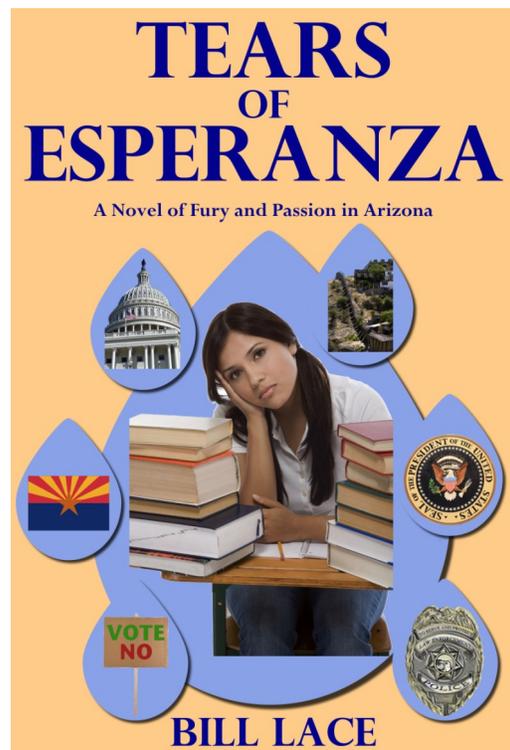
PUBLISHED
2nd PLACE FICTION



BILL LACE is the author of *Tears of Esperanza: A Novel of Fury and Passion in Arizona*, which is his debut novel. A native of Texas but a proud Arizonan since first moving to the state in 1992, Bill now lives in Scottsdale with his wife and twin children. He is well traveled throughout Arizona and the West, and the people he has met, the stories they have shared, and the diverse beauty and history of the people and land provide inspiration for Bill's writing. In more gainful employment, Bill works as a federal law enforcement special agent.

Student Esperanza Navarro is living with a secret. It's a secret that might be exposed.

Born out of glaring acrimony and indecision but told from unassuming hearts and minds... **TEARS OF ESPERANZA** What's it actually like in Arizona, ground zero in the fight over immigration and border control policy? What's it like for a politician? Or to be called an "illegal"? Read and find out, taking a voyage from the streets of the barrios to the halls of the capitol.



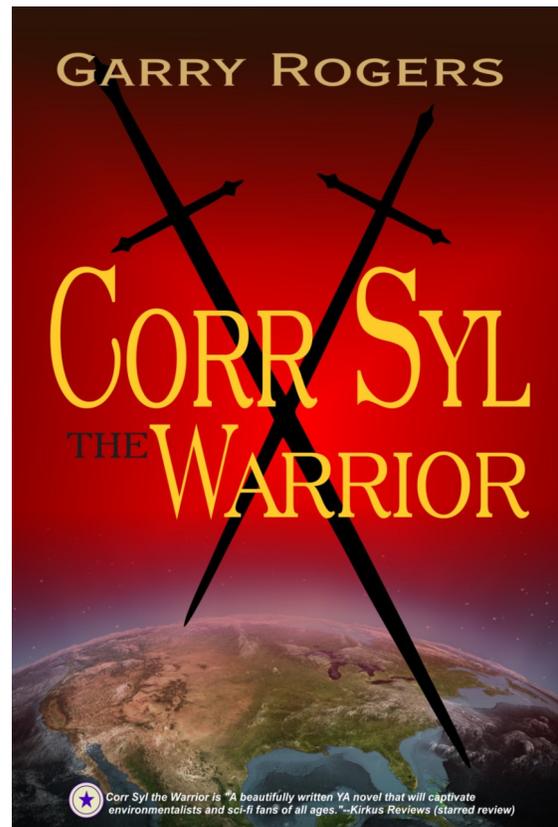
PUBLISHED
3rd PLACE FICTION



GARRY ROGERS has a PhD in Physical Geography. At Columbia University in New York and UCLA he taught climatology, ecology, environmental science, geomorphology, and pedology. His research focuses on landscape change in the deserts of the western U. S.. His books, articles, and blog posts focus on environmental problems. Nature conservation is the underlying theme for his debut novel, "Corr Syl the Warrior."

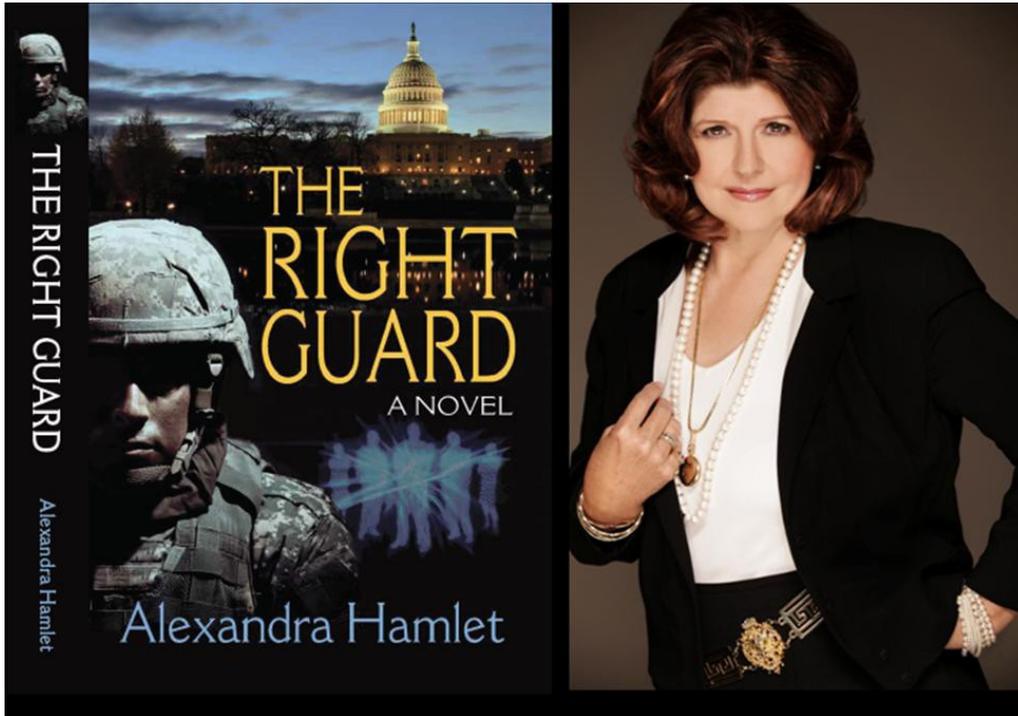
Corr Syl the Warrior

Since its formation 40 million years ago, the Tsaeb civilization has survived giant meteorites and advancing ice sheets. But the greatest danger is always from new species. Now, a militant new species is trying to expand its territory into Tsaeb lands. When the species sends an armed patrol into the small Wycliff District, the District Council sends a young Tsaeb warrior named Corr Syl to investigate and recommend a response. Corr soon learns that spies have infiltrated his district, and already many lives are at risk. He catches a glimpse of something truly evil, and with no time to spare, must choose between a safe response that might fail, and a sure response that might start a war.



PUBLISHED

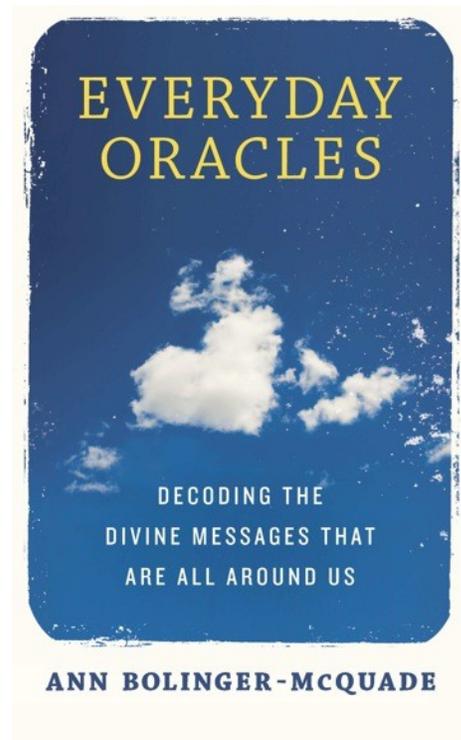
HONORABLE MENTION FICTION



Over one million military weapons and equipment are missing from the U.S. military inventories across the country. *Who is stealing the weapons and why?* CIA operative Eric Brent, and his revolutionary light weapon invention, is used by CIA to flush out a secretive, "phantom" group hostile to a wildly spending, intrusive U.S. Administration that threatens to destroy the American economy and shrink individual freedoms. Hamlet takes you through the twists and turns of the secretive world of intelligence as the undercover assignment goes astray. Eric exposes a far-reaching and well-planned movement and an event that could alter the United States forever. The year is 1978, yet *The Right Guard* resembles the *present* state of the political and economic climate of the U.S. and a possible, eerie scenario and outcome. *The Right Guard* is an exercise in gripping, fast-paced realism that keeps the reader mesmerized through the eyes of those who live in the intelligence world.

ALEXANDRA HAMLET is a Harvard-trained cultural anthropologist, an international lecturer and a defense anthropologist. She is a former television host, producer, and journalist, and an international consultant on cultural affairs and international business. She was an auxiliary nurse in London, England; international lecturer and consultant specializing in the Far East and Pacific Rim; Special Student and Visiting Fellow, Harvard University; an executive search specialist for worldwide C-suite positions; and is a consultant on irregular warfare. This is her first novel.

PUBLISHED
1st PLACE NONFICTION



"**ANN BOLINGER-McQUADE** teaches us to look with new eyes at the miracles that surround us. This book is truly a gift - one to be read and passed on." - Donna Fontanarose Rabuck, Ph.D., Director, Center for the Sacred Feminine

"Filled with inspiring real-life stories of individuals who have had their eyes opened to the splendor of what Carl Jung called "synchronicity" . . . If you want to open your eyes, ears, heart, and mind to the many divine voices of Nature around you, this is a good place to start." - Allan Hamilton, MD, author *The Scalpel and the Soul* and *Zen Mind, Zen Horse*

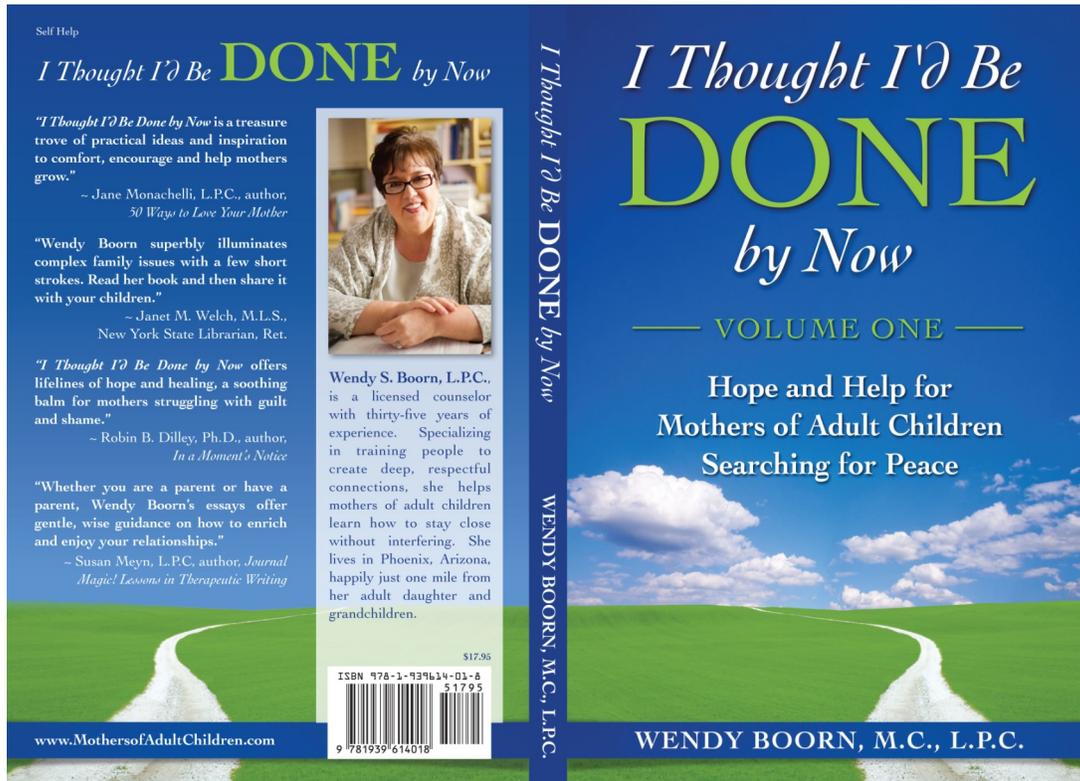
It could be a cloud in the shape of a loved one's face or an especially relevant song playing on the radio at the exact time of a friend's death - if we allow ourselves to stop, look, and listen, we can identify what spiritual teacher Ann Bolinger-McQuade calls personal oracles. And when we tune in to these subtle messages from Spirit, we will discover guidance for navigating life's most trying situations.

In this illuminating book, McQuade shares stories of divine inspiration from her life, as well as the lives of others. She also explores the history and science of oracles and offers practical instruction on identifying and decoding these sacred messages.

PUBLISHED
2nd PLACE NONFICTION



WENDY BOORN, L.P.C., is a licensed counselor with thirty-five years of experience. Specializing in training people to create deep, respectful connections, she helps mothers of adult children learn how to stay close without interfering. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona, happily just one mile from her adult daughter and grandchildren.



PUBLISHED

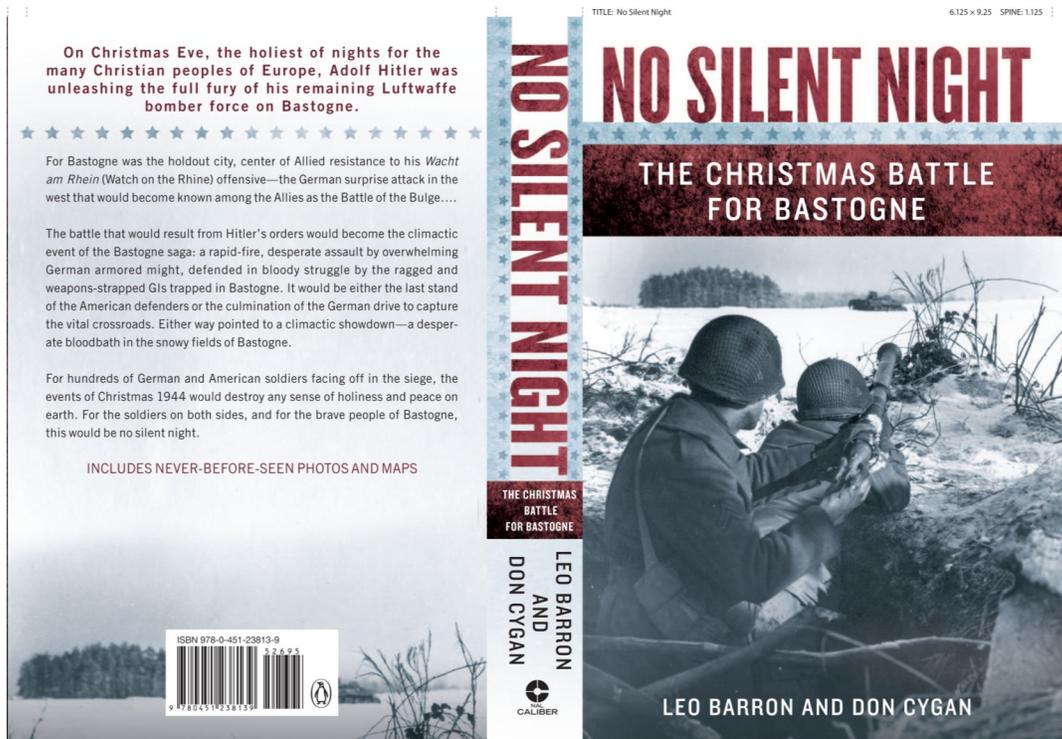
3rd PLACE NONFICTION



DON CYGAN

DON CYGAN is a Douglas County, Colorado, author, teacher, and historian. He worked for several years as a newspaper reporter for the Douglas County Daily News-Press. He served in the U.S. Army and Colorado Army National Guard during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s. Currently, Cygan is a history teacher for the Douglas County School District.

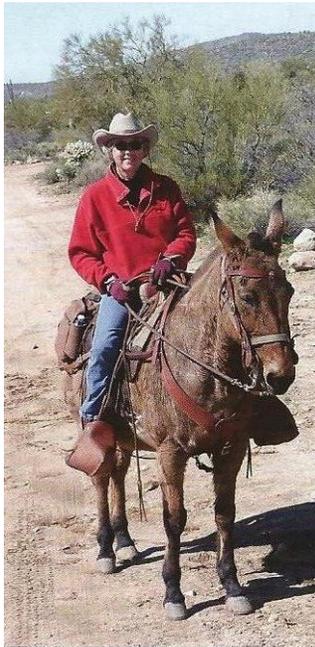
LEO BARRON works for General Dynamics as an instructor of military intelligence officers. He holds a graduate degree in history, and has served with the 101st Airborne. Barron has seen two tours of active duty in Iraq. His articles about Bastogne and other WWII-related military topics have appeared in *Infantry Magazine*, *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin*, *WWII History Magazine*.



PUBLISHED

1st PLACE

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



SAM'S DESERT ADVENTURE

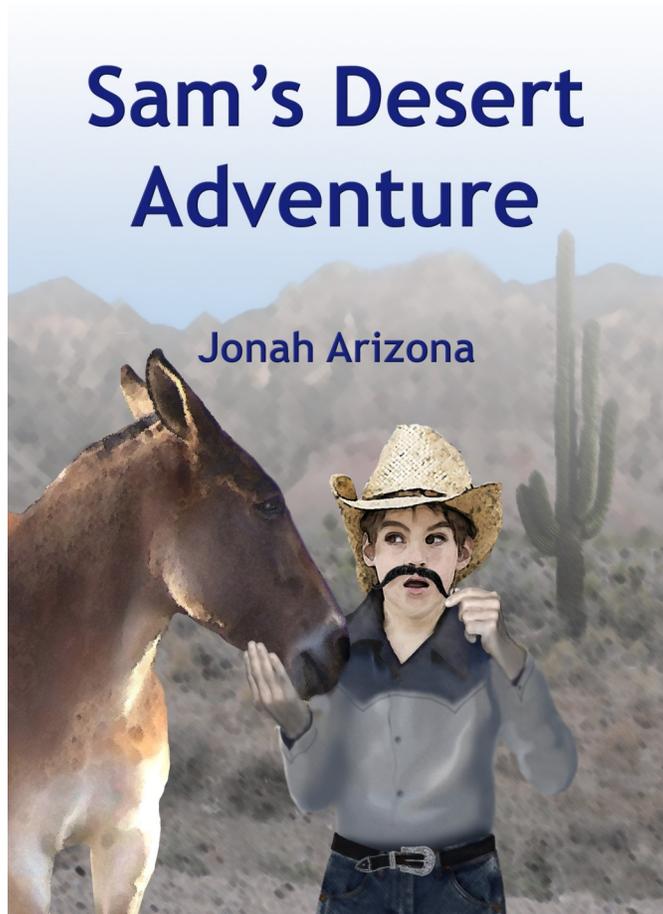
By **JONAH ARIZONA**

Set in Arizona, the story features a young boy named Sam Davenport and his hilariously acquired mule, Bucket. Sam's older sister, Alice, adds a charming touch to the story, and Sam's elderly neighbor, Mr. Melby, helps develop this tale of youthful adventure and hard-learned lessons.

JONAH ARIZONA is one of several pennames used by R.L. (Becky) Coffield. Coffield is an award-winning author of both fiction and nonfiction works, who also owns Moonlight Mesa Associates, Inc., a small publishing company in Wickenburg, Arizona, that specializes in the western genre, both fiction and nonfiction. *Sam's Desert Adventure*, Coffield's first young reader book, is based on the author's sons, her mule Bucket and her dog Jax. The illustrations in the book were done by her husband, Tom. Coffield enjoys riding, sailing, hiking, golf, gardening, kayaking, paddle boarding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing .

Sam's Desert Adventure

Jonah Arizona



PUBLISHED

2nd PLACE

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



Anita Elco

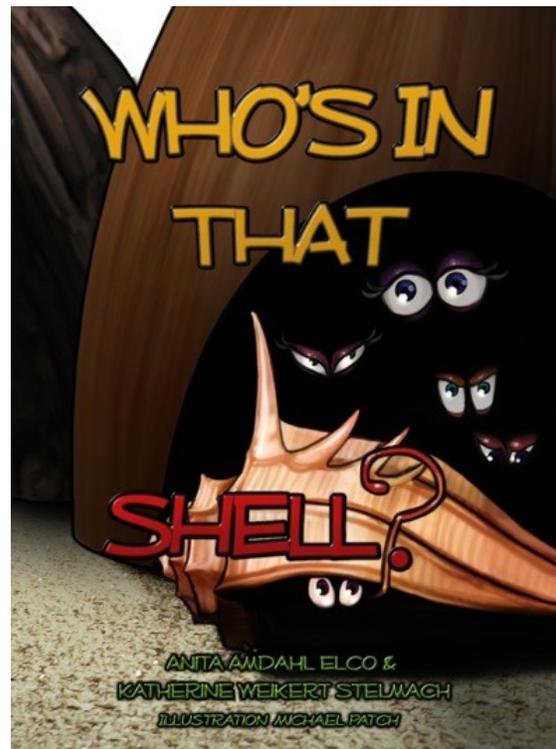


Katherine Stelmach

ANITA ELCO holds a Master's degree in Education and had the privilege of working as an English teacher at Saguaro High School in Scottsdale, Arizona, and at Paradise Valley Community College in Phoenix. While she enjoys many facets of teaching, her passion has been finding enticing books for reluctant readers. This goal, coupled with her experience as a parent, perpetuated a desire to write engaging literature for children that empowers them to learn and creates a hunger to read. Anita lives in Scottsdale, AZ with her husband and three children.

KATHERINE STELMACH holds a Master's degree in Education. After teaching high school English for twelve years, she decided to pursue other interests. She currently teaches and develops online courses for Rio Salado College. After earning a teaching certificate in Reading, Katherine better understood the challenges of young readers and the methods used to increase proficiency. It is this interest in the techniques and tools used to aid struggling readers that led to the creation of *Who's in That Shell?* She resides in Scottsdale, Arizona, with her husband and two daughters.

Mrs. Davis's students were excited to get their first class pet, but they had real critter conflicts when it came to choosing the animal that would become the newest member of Room 24. Would it be furry or slimy? Would it swim or burrow? Would it squeak or squawk? It was up to Mason and Angelica to represent their class at Pets Landing, but even these two couldn't predict the mystery, mayhem, and miracles their new class pet would bring with him. It would be something completely CRAB-tacular and YOU, as the reader, get to make important decisions that will guide the characters out of crabtastrophies—or maybe bury them deeper!



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3rd PLACE

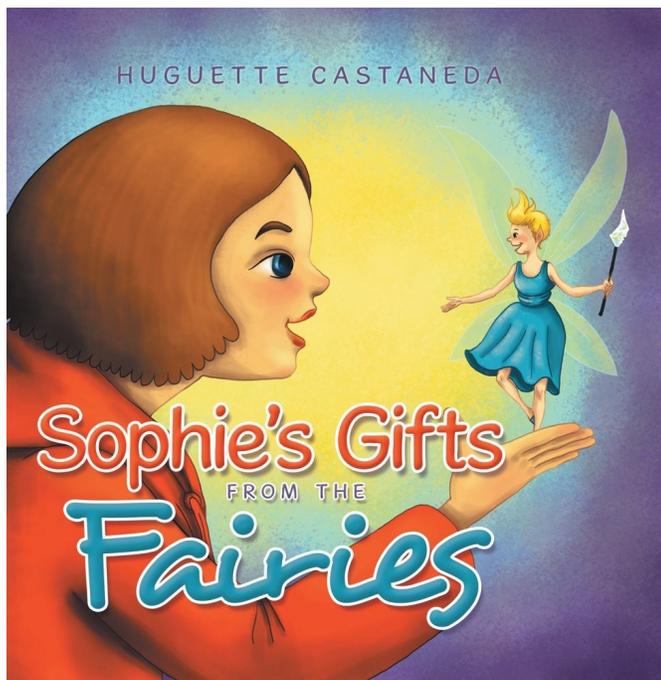
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



Sophie's Gift from the Fairies is a magical journey for the imagination that plants a seed for developing an awareness of nature and how we connect and interact with all life. A marvelous message to give and share!

HUGHETTE CASTANEDA

studied many sources only to discover that the guide within is the real guide. She is now a ceremonial master and universal minister. Her love is to honor nature, the sea, the sky, and the Creator. She raised her sons in Princeton, New Jersey. After the passing of her husband, she moved to Naples, Florida, which for her is a true paradise.





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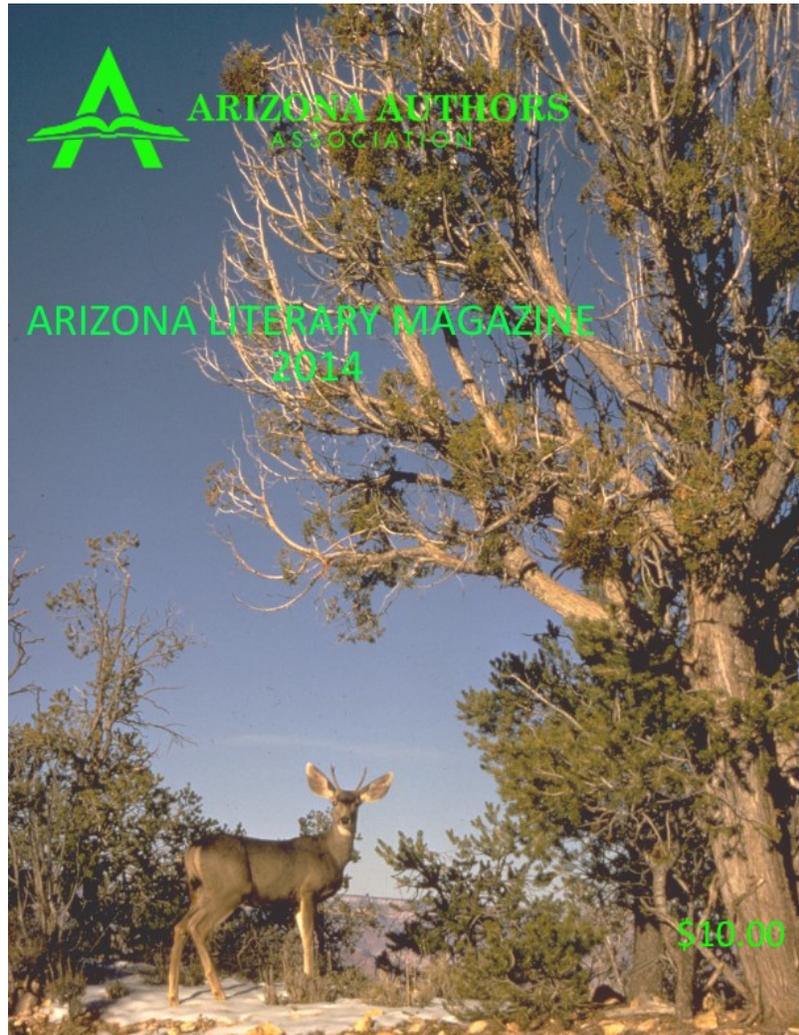
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3. Entries will be accepted starting January 1, 2014 and postmarked no later than July 1, 2014.
4. Unpublished categories: Three copies of each entry. No author name anywhere other than on the entry form.
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6. Only 2013 and 2014 publishing dates are accepted. All published books must include ISBN, copyright dates, and publisher information on the publisher's page.
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9. Fill out a separate entry form for each entry. Forms may be copied or printed from our website.
10. Unpublished novels and novellas must be completed and available upon requests.
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12. All finalists will be notified before the awards are given.
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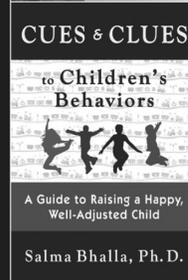
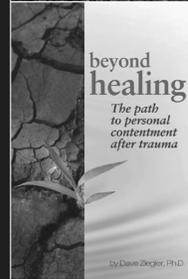
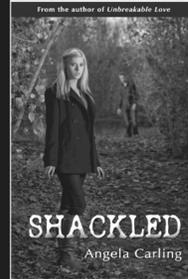
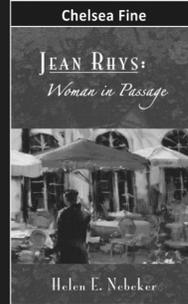
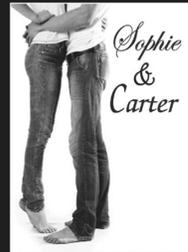
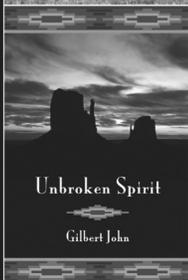
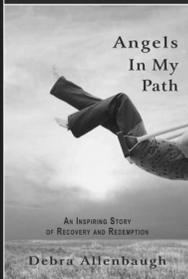
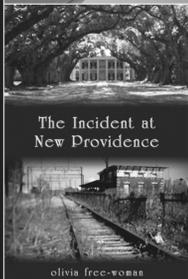
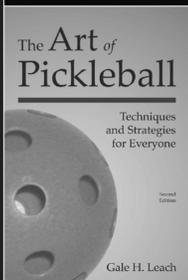
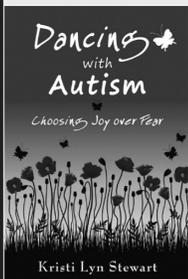
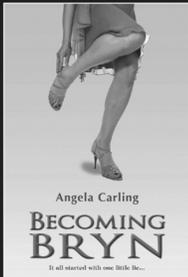
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A Guide to Raising a Happy, Well-Adjusted Child

Salma Bhalla, Ph.D.

