

Arizona Literary Magazine 2015



ARIZONA AUTHORS
ASSOCIATION

2015

Arizona

Literary Magazine

Copyright © 2014 Arizona Authors Association

All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without written permission except in the case of brief quotations used in critical articles and reviews. Requests for permissions should be addressed to the publisher:

Arizona Authors Association

info@azauthors.com

Arizona Literary Magazine

Printed in the United States of America

Front Cover Photography entitled SUNSET ACROSS MONUMENT VALLEY by W.D. MAST
Used with permission.

Arizona Literary Magazine

Proudly Presents the

Winners

of the

Arizona Authors Association

2014

Annual Literary Awards



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 tobyheathcotte.com.



ELIZABETH BLAKE

Elizabeth Blake has written about her experiences working in the medical field, called *Conquering Challenges-A Working Mother's Story*. Many of her short stories about her family have been published. She is the editor of **Arizona Literary Magazine**.

Find her work at <http://bblake1844.wix.com/elizabethblakeonline>



LISA AQUILINA

Lisa Aquilina is the Vice President and contest coordinator for the Arizona Authors Association. As did her predecessor, Lisa serves with gratitude and much respect for the organization. An Arizona native, Lisa is the publisher of Green Pieces Cartoon Studio and its various imprints, including the award-winning Green Pieces Press and provides consultation services to the cartooning, children's literature and graphic novel community through her consulting firm Vignetta Syndicate. Lisa is also the author of the biographical novel *La Bella Nonna*.



GRETA MANVILLE

Greta Manville is the Copy Editor for the ARIZONA LITERARY MAGAZINE 2015. She writes mystery and suspense novels. Her bibliographic research on John Steinbeck is available online. She has served as contest coordinator and treasurer of Arizona Author's Association in the past.

ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION

- Toby Heathcotte.....President
- Lisa Aquilina.....VP & Contest Coordinator
- Cherie Lee.....Secretary
- Beth Blake.....Magazine Editor & Treasurer
- Vijaya Schartz.....Web Mistress & Membership
- Kebba Buckley Button.....Event Coordinator
- Nancy Scheneman-Brehm.....High Country Liaison
- Allan J. Ashinoff.....Newsletter Editor
- Jan Cleere & Barb Marriott..... Tucson Coordinators
- Marilyn McGrath.....Newsletter Proofreader

The Arizona Literary Magazine

is published each fall

by the

Arizona Authors Association

6145 W. Echo Lane

Glendale, AZ 85302

623-847-9343

www.azauthors.com

info@azauthors.com

AND THE WINNERS ARE...**UNPUBLISHED CATEGORIES****Article/Essay**

- 1— *After Fifty Years*
Susan Harrison McMichael.....10
- 2 — *Handmade Afghani 'Flying Carpets'*
W.D. Mast.....14
- 3— *Fear* by Nancy Chaney.....17

Poetry

- 1— *Arizona Monsoon*
D.R. Wise.....21
- 2— *Old Man to Wife*
Dennis Schwesinger.....22
- 3 — *Mother's Love*
Dennis Schwesinger.....23
- HM — *Old Bones*
Sandra Bremser.....24
- HM— *So Much For ...* by James Sharp.....25

Novel

- 1— *The Standing Man*
Jon M. Duff.....26
- 2— *A Murder Remembered*
Arthur Kerns.....37
- 3— *The Beached Ones*
Colleen M. Story.....50

Short Story

- 1— *Cockroach* — Char Everett.....62
- 2— *Devil's Pardon*— Russ Azbill.....70
- 3— *Catcher in the Rhine*
Vincent Parry.....78
- HM— *The Revival* — Barbara Renner.....84
- HM— *The Summons* —Garth Nielsen.....88

PUBLISHED CATEGORIES**Fiction**

- 1— *Dawn Drums*
Robert Walton.....94
- 2— *The Last Ram*
Steve Linstrom.....95
- 3— *The Time Borrower*
Ann I. Goldfarb.....96
- HM— *Waiting—A Collective*
Virginia Sievers.....97

Nonfiction

- 1— *The Horse Lover: A Cowboy's Quest to Save the Wild Mustangs*
H. Alan Day & Lynn Wiese Sneyd....98
- 2— *Ablaze in the Cosmic Light*
Donald Koozer.....99
- 3— *Homeless Hero: Understanding the Soul of Home*
Mike Tapscott.....100
- HM— *A Slow Trot Home*
Lisa G. Sharp.....101

Children's Literature

- 1— *The Ghost in the Wood*
Marianne Mitchell.....102
- 2— *Grandma's Magic Box*
Rosemary Corneto.....103
- 3— *Isabela's Treasure*
Albert M. Quihuis.....104

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. Former staff cartoonist for the Morning Scramble tv program, AZTV, Drew has sold over 120,000 copies of his inaugural cartoon compilation Green Pieces: Green From the Pond Up. Drew has written a total of five cartoon compilations. Green Pieces is syndicated nationwide by Comx Box Syndicate and also appears online at <http://www.GreenPiecesCartoons.com>



Nancy Brehm is our newest Board member of Arizona Authors Association She is the High Country Liaison. Nancy is a published writer and poet.



He is currently writing the sequel to Darkest Hour.

Russell 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.



Kebba Buckley Button is a holistic and inspirational lifestyle writer. Her books teach people how to trade in their stress for energy (*Discover The Secret Energized You*), get into a closer relationship with God (*Embracing the Divine*), or find and develop a strong core of personal serenity (*Peace Within, Second Edition*). She is also the author of two guide books, three ebooks, and one audiobook/guided meditation CD, in addition to many articles. She has her own publishing entity, UpBeat Living Media. She has a 30-year energy healing practice and is an ordained minister. Kebba is currently the Program Director for Arizona Authors Association.



She is active in Professional Writers of Prescott. She has two active blogs:

bookreviewsbybaird.blogspot.com and
thewritelady.blogspot.com.

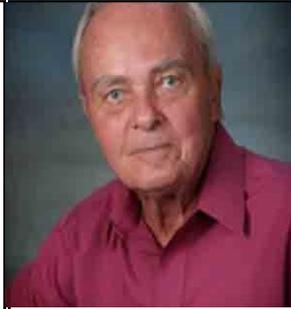
Her website is www.marlenebaird.com.



Ellen Hasencz Calvert, a psychologist and prize winning poet, wrote her first book, *Pilgrim: Tales of a Traveling Cat*, from inside the head of the family's cat. Her second book, *Nine Goldfish in David's Pond*, is the story of a young boy and the nine goldfish who invite him into their world. Recently translated into Spanish, *Nine Goldfish* is now a bilingual children's story. Ellen is working on a book of short stories and can be reached at ellen.h.calvert@gmail.com or www.ellencalvert.com.



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. She is an honors graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. Her advanced studies encompass education, archaeology, public communications, and environmental science.



Bob Edgell grew up in Mpls and graduated from the University of MN. He wrote a 'how to' book that was published by a Phoenix publisher. His professional career was in marketing and distribution, writing many business plans for his departments and for new start ups he was involved in. Mr. Edgell was in the military from 1966 to 1969, specializing in military intelligence. He has written two historical novels, both of which were award-winning. He is currently retired, studying all aspects of writing a good novel and refining both historical novels with hopes of attracting a publisher.



Author, historian and lecturer **Jan Cleere** is the author of four award-winning books and is in three anthologies. She just completed the biography of rodeo photographer Louise Serpa, the first woman allowed to photograph action from inside the rodeo arena. Jan also writes a monthly column for Tucson's *Arizona Daily Star* detailing the lives of some of Southern AZ's early amazing women. She is a Roads Scholar with the AZ Humanities Council and serves on the Coordinating Council of the AZ Women's Heritage Trail. For more info, go to www.JanCleere.com.

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 currently resides in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada with her husband and two cats. She spends her winters in Chandler, Arizona.



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.



Marilyn Janson is the owner and president of Janson Literary Services, Inc., an editing, proofreading, manuscript analyses, and author website content and publicity company. She teaches creative writing and publishing classes at libraries, schools, bookstores, and other educational venues in Phoenix, AZ. Ms. Janson is the author of *Recipe For Rage*, a suspense novel, and *Tommy Jenkins: First Teleported Kid*, a children's chapter book. Her new book, *The Super Cool Kids Story Collection*, is scheduled for release in 2015. Contact Ms. Janson @ www.janwrite.com.



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.



Chantelle Aimée Osman is the president of A Twist of Karma Entertainment, LLC (www.twistofkarma.com) an editing and consulting company, as well as a published author of mystery flash fiction and short stories. She is an Anthony Award nominee and creator of The Sirens of Suspense (www.sirensfuspense.com) website,

which features blogs and interviews by and with mystery & thriller writers, and is the author of the non-fiction "Quick and DirtyGuide to..." series and a forthcoming mystery novella from Stark Raving Press.



Kelly Lydick received her B.A. in Writing and Literature from Burlington College, and her M.A. in Writing and Consciousness from the New College of CA, SF (now at CIIS). Her writing has appeared in many magazines. Her work has also been featured on NPR's *The Writers' Block*. She is also the author of the

chapbook *We Once Were*, and the experimental work, *Mastering the Dream*. Kelly teaches writing and metaphysical workshops throughout the U.S. In addition, Kelly holds professional certifications as a Meditation Facilitator, Past Life Healer, and Gateway Dreaming™ Coach. She teaches writing and metaphysical workshops throughout the United States, and offers private consultations through her company Waking the Dream.



Jane Frances Ruby earned her master's degrees in chemistry in Ohio. She was a research chemist at the Lubrizol Corporation, where she authored many publications relating to gas and diesel engine lubrication. She was a member of the Wilderness Medical Society

for 5 years. She was an avid beach volleyball player/coach. 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.



Barbara Marriott was born and raised in New Jersey. For thirty years she traveled in wonder, but found people to be more interesting than places. And that is what she writes about. She has won several literary awards. They feature pioneers and outlaws, all of whom helped create a

courageous, and cantankerous west. She also has two U. S. Navy history books, about people, their heroics and humor. She also writes about a colorful fictional 1890 character who shows there always have been liberated women.



Dennis Schwesinger began life with aspirations of becoming an author and teaching English Lit at the college level. He shifted interests and transferred into medical sciences, biophysics and mechanical engineering.

The death of his three year old brother to congenital heart disease influenced him. Heart surgery, neonatology, and other matters of the heart possessed him. Success in research and engineering led him to program management and forty years of mostly university involvement. He writes poetry and science fiction-fantasy. The AZ Authors Association has given him a mission.



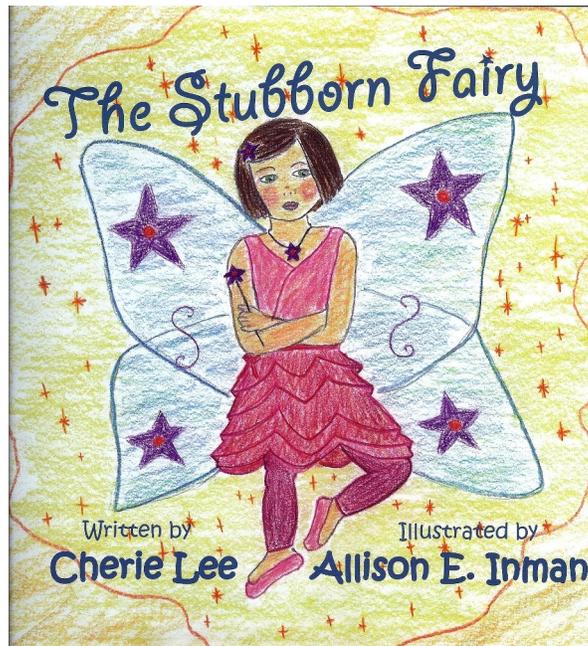
Rev. Dr. Gil Stafford is a priest of St. Augustine's Episcopal Parish and Episcopal Campus Ministry, ASU. He played professional baseball, was head baseball coach at Grand Canyon University, winning three national titles. He was the university's president four years. His publications include works on higher education, leadership and spirituality, and his latest book, *When Leadership and Spiritual Direction Meet: Reflections and Stories for Congregational Life*.



Kathy Stevens is an avid reader and advocate for literacy and the environment. Kathy was employed as an Environmental Scientist in AA programs from 1980-2013. Recently retired, she's working on educational, engaging stories for readers of all ages. She enjoys book clubs to

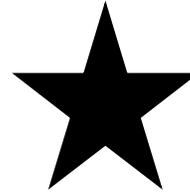
explore and discuss all types of books and she enjoys participating in AZ Authors for methods and information about "all-things-writing & publishing."

ADVERTISEMENT



The Stubborn Fairy is a whimsical look into the fantasy world of a small boy who longs for simple pleasures: a dog, a swimming pool and an allowance. Join Roy as he tries to capture the fairy with an attitude. This book was created for boys and girls 4-8 years old, but can be enjoyed by anyone who is young at heart. The illustrations are reprints of original pencil sketches by Allison E. Inman.

1st PLACE ESSAY



Susan Harrison McMichael was born and raised in Arizona. She has worn various career hats: English teacher, librarian, business owner, paralegal, and resume writer.

As a youngster, Susan lived in small towns across the northern part of Arizona where her highway engineer father and her southern belle mother were part of a team that blazed roads and bridges across a burgeoning region. She grew up on the outskirts of Phoenix pre-air conditioning and pre-television.

Now Susan writes homespun tales of a four-generation family that came to Arizona in territorial days and paved the way for a modern progressive state.

AFTER FIFTY YEARS

BY

SUSAN HARRISON MCMICHAEL

"Don't be cruel to a heart that's true . . ." The radio died when I pulled the key out of the ignition; Elvis Presley had been belting out his top hit of the 50's. Since Albuquerque, I had wandered down memory lane to the blues rhythm and accentuated back beat of the rock and roll music of my youth . . . *"Baby it's just you I'm thinking of . . ."* Those lyrics, as well as the maudlin drivel of Eddie Fisher, had put me in a sentimental mood . . . *"If I ever needed you, I need you now . . ."* Ah, those awkward teenage years, so long ago.

My grandson and I had been traveling all day when we pulled into McDonald's in Payson for a pit stop and some light refreshment. Jade and I engaged in a heated discussion over whether I should spring for a Happy Meal.

"No," I said. "We'll be home in an hour and a half."

"But, I'm hungry," he whined. His little chin puckered and his lip quivered. An hour and a half was an eternity to a five-year-old.

The Happy Meal won out. After all, I could not return a starving waif to his mother. So, windblown, wrinkled, and weary I slid into a booth to watch the little bugger tear into a package containing Shrek the green ogre.

And then, looking up I saw HIM. *Arrgh!* I nearly choked on the French fry that I had snatched from Jade's Happy Meal.

He stepped up to the counter and ordered a Big Mac and a regular Coke. *Can it be? Has the music*

affected my mind?

He was tall. *His shoulders are a mite hunched.*

His hair was well-trimmed, thin on top. *It is that sandy-grayish tone characteristic of former blonds.*

His ears secured a pair of conservative wire-framed spectacles across his nose. *His ears are still prominent.*

The emblem on his gray cardigan read Pinnacle Peak Country Club.

The petite lady with him ordered a salad and Diet Sprite. *Classy, she is. Sharply creased blue slacks and a coordinated striped shirt.*

They don't look like the McDonald's type.

My heart lurched. *Is this B.B.?*

My gosh! It has been over fifty years!

* * *

Incoming freshmen were typically enrolled in the junior varsity band, but by a fluke in registration I found myself among upperclassmen in the marching band. Most drummers, flautists, trumpeters, and clarinetists here had proven their mettle before they received the coveted maroon uniforms studded with brass buttons, epaulettes, and gold braid. But, here I was, an untested neophyte, on the roster of the elite marching troop at Glendale High School.

I crept into the band room that first day of my freshman year clutching my tattered clarinet case. Mother and Dad had promised to buy me a new clarinet if I continued to play my instrument in the high school band. So, they'd be in for a new clarinet now. But that was not in my thoughts at the moment.

"Whatever made me sign up for this?" I muttered to myself. "I hope they don't think I'm a complete jerk."

The band hall was alive, the noise deafening. Squawks and squalls. Booms and

clangs. Oomps and pahs. Bass drums thumped. Snare drums rattled. Clarinets screeched. A collection of trumpets and trombones blared at high decibel the school fight song while piccolos soared above them the descant of "Stars and Stripes Forever."

When I first saw him he was parading to and fro across the back of the hall. "Oomp-pah. Oomp-pah. Oomp-pah." He casually wore the letter sweater of a senior bandsman. Brass tubing coiled around his body and a giant bell arched over his head. "Oomp-pah. Oomp-pah. Oomp-pah."

Director Liebold whacked his baton maniacally on the podium as he sought to bring order to bedlam. "B.B., take your place!" he bellowed.

B.B. responded with an impudent "Oomp-pah-pah. Oomp-pah-pah," and carelessly joined the line of heavy brass behind the trumpets. Not only his presence, but his instrument dwarfed the brass section. He was solo sousaphone player in the marching band.

B.B. was Bartholomew Baker, but nobody called him that. His haughty presence indicated that he was cocksure that the fate of the marching band rested on his pulse.

"Keep time, B.B.! Don't drag!" bawled Director Liebold. And B.B. upped the bass volume as well as the tempo of the march.

B.B. became my hero, and first period band was the highlight of this insignificant freshman's day. Preparation for band began each night before. I rolled my hair in tight little pin curls hoping that it would brush into an alluring halo next morning. I polished my saddle shoes and carefully matched sweater sets to my plaid skirts. I snatched one of Mother's old lipsticks and tucked it in my purse so that I could apply it in the girls' bathroom.

In the band hall B.B. was in my direct line of vision from last chair in the 3rd clarinet section. He sat ramrod straight encircled by his throne of brass. When the music began his cheeks inflated, his lips quivered, his ears

cocked, his legs splayed, his right foot tapped, and his straw-colored thatch bobbed along with the oomp-pahs.

During half-time shows on the football field, B.B. was positioned in line with the drums and other heavy brass. However, in one fleeting formation, he was by my side and actually followed me off the field in the military goose step affected by our band. Somehow I managed to be half-a-beat out of step giving a syncopated rhythm to the procession.

When B.B. was near me I was clumsy.

“Harrison, the music belongs on your stand, not on the floor!” Director Liebold barked.

When he was near me I could not concentrate.

“Third clarinets, watch the key signature!”

Oops, there evidently was an F-sharp in that song.

When he was near me I could not walk straight.

“LEFT! Right! LEFT! Right! LEFT! Right! What’s the matter, Harrison? You got two left feet?”

B.B. had few occasions to speak to me. He hung around with the first cornet player and the senior trombones. Once he inadvertently bumped into me in the instrument storage room. “Sorry, Squirt,” he said.

“He saw me!” I swooned.

In the spring, the band opened its concert music and began practicing for stage performances. I tooted and squeaked from third row of the clarinets keeping a discreet eye on the sousaphone towering

over the brass.

Thoughts jumped ahead to spring-flings and graduation. The junior-senior prom was on the horizon. I listened wistfully as upper classmen in the band twittered about who was going with whom and what they were going to wear. It was a moment of sheer anguish when I learned that B.B. had asked an alto sax player to go to the prom.

Thoughts
jumped ahead
to spring-flings
and graduation.

“Becka Thayer!” I moaned. “Why her?”

A semester had gone by and I had hardly noticed the first chair saxophone player across the hall from me.

“What does she have that I don’t have?” I was baffled. “She has a date to the prom.” I answered my own question.

Until then, I hadn’t realized how pretty Becka was. Wavy brown hair. Flawless complexion. Nice, too, in a quiet, understated way.

I shook my head and tilted my chin in dismal resolve.

I turned dolefully to my music. As the school year drew to a close, my music stayed sensibly on my stand. I took note of

the key signatures and dutifully sharpened my F's when required. In the Memorial Day Parade, my left foot hit the pavement on the precise downbeat.

And, B.B. marched into the sunset along with the rest of his graduating class.

* * *

I might have been a high school freshman again. In this laminated fast-food mecca smelling of French fries and pickles I was awkward, disheveled, dumbstruck. I tried to fluff my limp hair. I wished I had colored my lips in the car.

Is this Bartholomew Baker? The B.B. of my fourteen-year-old heart?

"Hey there, you with the stars in your eyes . . ." An old Rosemary Clooney refrain spun through my head.

The gentleman nodded curtly as he passed our table. He carried his order of a Big Mac and a salad to a booth across the room and joined the lady waiting there.

I wadded up the detritus of the Happy Meal and tossed it in the trash. Little Jade and I made our way out to a dusty, insect-spattered car. Suitcases and souvenirs piled haphazardly across the seats gave evidence of the long road trip we had made.

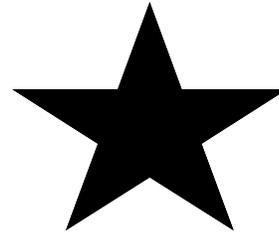
I cinched Jade into his booster seat then climbed behind the wheel. As I turned the key in the ignition, the radio came to life . . . *Forty Miles of Bad Road* . . . Duane Eddy's guitar instrumental strummed in the background. The deep twangy sounds of the bass strings brought me to the task at hand.

The sun was setting in the west. We still had a hundred miles to go. •

"Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It's the one and only thing you have to offer."

- Barbara Kingsolver

2nd PLACE ESSAY



HANDMADE AFGHANI 'FLYING CARPETS'

By

W.D. Mast



W. D. Mast is a born dreamer whose spirited sense of adventure took him to 154 countries. An Eagle Scout, university graduate, and military veteran, Mast worked, lived, and traveled overseas from 1977 through 1996. He became a 1979 Iran revolution evacuee, who worked in Saudi Arabia during the 1990 Gulf War.

Mast's culturally diverse travels are vividly captured in photography after taking over 120,000 Kodachromes. He is a recognized professional travel photographer, whose limited editions have shown at 36 Fountain Hills Festivals.

Mast published Postcards Home in 2013. The book, an unusual compilation of short stories, photography, and postcards, received five US and International awards.

Some ten months traveling with only a backpack as my accompanying friend, I find I travel alone yet I am not lonely. I have found many others along the way, choosing these journeys to teach me things I had longed to find out about others, only to discover I find much more about myself. It is 1977 and this current trip has me visiting my fourteenth country.

* * *

The jet noise and the dropping landing gear alert me to the imminent arrival as I approach yet another new and exciting adventure. The Pan American flight prepares to land in Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul on this sunny November morning.

My adjacent seat companion on the flight from Delhi, India, is a famous Afghani actor who had been in India on a film project. We talked for what seemed like hours, learning much about each other. I learn he is an active supporter of Afghan youth organizations; especially the Afghan Boy Scouting organization. I tell of my active years in Boy Scouting in America, my love of the great outdoors, and becoming an Eagle Scout and honorary Delaware Indian. The actor offers to introduce me to Scouting professionals he knows during my stay in Kabul.

* * *

Upon disembarking the aircraft, I enter the small, crowded airport and clear customs and immigration. My passport receives yet another new stamp, the pages of which grow increasingly full.

My fellow traveler asks me to join him on the drive into Kabul and I do so. We proceed by car through the narrow, crowded streets into surprisingly modern central Kabul. Dirt roads yield to paved streets and large official buildings. Passing an American Express office and the American Consulate, we arrive at a government building in the city center housing several Afghan youth organizations, including Boy Scouting, Explorers, and even, surprisingly, Girl Scout and youth programs.

Once inside, I am introduced to several youth professionals who work in various Scouting offices. After touring the facility, it is time for the actor to depart. I thank him for the opportunity to meet those I have, as I feel fortunate being able to do so. I will not see my host again.

* * *

My travels through Afghanistan are just beginning. Over the next several weeks, I spend time alone exploring the city, as well as enjoying being guided by and touring the rural areas of Afghanistan with the Scouting professionals. The Afghan Scouting program is similar to the American organization in that it features awards events with skits held on makeshift stages surrounded by local townspeople and villagers, young and old. I recall some skits from my own programs performed long ago, as the locals applaud and roar their approval of the young boys' attempts to portray a humorous side of life. The scene is truly an ode to the universality of it all!

The following weekend I visit many more similar outdoor programs, introduced as the "International guest from America," as translated into English by my guests. These Scouting jamborees come to an end but will remain in my memories for the

remainder of my life. To visit these Kurdish and Moslem areas and be so welcomed is overwhelming and treasured. Even though on several previous occasions I had met wealthier foreign Scouts at various International Scouting events in other countries, nothing would stand so memorably and educational as these times in a soon-to-become most newsworthy and controversial region of the world.

My path now returns me to Kabul. During the last few days on this leg of my adventure, I explore the capital streets, markets and shops, soaking in as much culture as possible. On this cold but sunny morning, I explore various dirt side streets as vehicles and horse-drawn carts pass me. I encounter numerous local artisan and craft shops which are interspersed with food stalls. As I walk past one such shop, the shopkeeper (perhaps the artisan himself) jumps out from the doorway. Suddenly, a bright, colorful rug flies from the shop right in front of me. This "flying carpet" sweeps through the air, nearly hitting me before landing in the middle of the dirt road.

Startled by these events, I exclaim to the shop owner, "You nearly hit me with your 'flying carpet!' What are you doing throwing rugs in the road?"

The artisan understood my English exclamation and calmly replies in broken English, "Making money."

Puzzled by his answer, I probe the situation. "What do you mean by that?"

The shop owner tells me the rug, just finished and handmade by his Afghani artisans, is going onto the road to make money. He places these masterpieces into traffic so the carts and vehicles run over them, making the rugs worn and dirty and therefore, more valuable and marketable to

travelers and customers in his shop. The new becomes instantly old and hopefully yields this savvy entrepreneur a valuable return on his investment. The shop owner is very smart indeed and I now fully appreciate my “flying carpet” encounter. I fully appreciate the situation and I don't buy the rug.

* * *

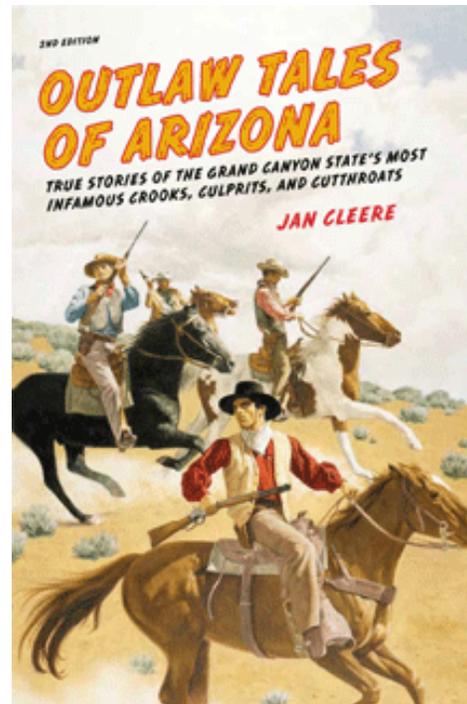
It is amazing what we learn and what we see when our steps lead us to adventures, whether near or far. We find circumstances, perhaps initially viewed not as educated, developed or fortunate as we are accustomed, that when almost literally hit by the realities of the world actually reflect more of a similar life for all, after all.

* * *

The next day, another cold November morning, I board my own “flying carpet,” a Pan American World Airways flight to Iran. Iran will be my next magical step along the road less traveled.

The decades may bring new dilemmas and drama to behold but we must continue to venture forth learning and experiencing life, lest we do nothing and hide from fear. Remember Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural address admonition: “The only thing we have to fear is . . .” •

ADVERTISEMENT

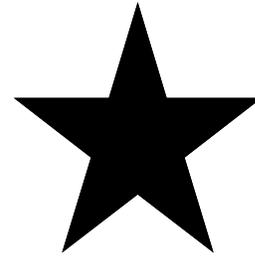


Discover even more massacres, mayhem, and mischief as the 2nd Edition of *Outlaw Tales of Arizona* expands to include three additional chapters on some of the state's more notorious citizens. Meet John Ringo whose mysterious death still raises eyebrows among learned historians. Diminutive Cecil Creswell was feared by even the most hardened cowboy if he crossed paths with the lady cattle rustler. Explore the dark, foreboding, cavernous cells of Yuma Territorial Prison during its heyday in the early 1900s. Bedlam ran amok during the late 1800s in Arizona Territory when the law and the lawless were often in cahoots and no one was safe from the whim of a gun-sliding desperado..

3rd PLACE ESSAY



Nancy Chaney is an adjunct history professor and uses her love of storytelling to write time travel and historical fiction. A native of Arizona, she has a B.A. from the University of Arizona and an M.A. 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 anthology *A Mother's Wisdom*. This is her third year as an Arizona Author's finalist, which she won last year. She lives in Scottsdale with her husband, with whom she camps and hunts.



FEAR

By

Nancy Chaney

All fears are not created equal. How do we overcome the kind of mind-numbing fear that paralyzes both action and thought? This fear is different from acts of courage that allow time to implement the decision making process. It is also different from gnawing worry or anxiety. The fear I'm referring to is the terror that shuts down both brain and body.

Every day we make decisions—which may be based on anxiety more than fear. Can I pay my rent this month? How do I find a good doctor for my mom that takes her health plan? What will happen to my kids if I get a divorce? How do I escape an abusive relationship? How do I find help for my special-needs child?

That level of worry can put a hard knot in your gut and crush your heart so hard that it hurts to breathe. These fears, as visceral as they are, can be controlled by using the decision-making process. State a goal, gather information, make a list of solutions and predict possible outcomes for each solution, choose the best solution and act on it. Of course, there are many permutations – but acting in a proactive direction lessens anxiety.

A more debilitating form of fear that defies rational thought is one that cannot be resolved by carefully researching options. If a fear is so overwhelming that it paralyzes action and thought, a different skill set is needed.

I watched my ex-husband fight through that fear a few years ago. On Good Friday, the 13th, our family received that phone call every parent dreads. We immediately drove to Farmington, New Mexico, where my son, Dave, fought for

his life in the Farmington Hospital's Intensive Care Unit. A head-on accident on his way to Moab, Utah, with his roommate from college ended his Easter vacation before it started. An oncoming car that was bootlegging alcohol onto the reservation came across the centerline at 3 a.m. and nearly killed our son. Broken back, broken jaw, missing teeth, broken nose, broken ribs, traumatic brain injury, and a foot so mangled that it was touch-and-go whether or it had to be amputated. Over thirty tubes and wires connected him to machines the first time we walked into his hospital room.

His Dad, who flew in from a different city, got off the plane in this tiny airport that unloads on the tarmac instead of in a terminal. He was so numb with fear and shock that he had shut down and just stood still looking dazed. He couldn't find his way to the terminal. My daughter asked if she could go out and walk him inside. Once inside the terminal, he couldn't even identify his own luggage. And, this is the most academically brilliant man I know—a CPA and tax attorney. If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed fear could shut him down like that. My reaction to this kind of tragedy was to start problem solving, because this fear was for another person and not a fight for control over my own thoughts.

In the ensuing months, I functioned as a "nurse case manager." There were not enough hours in the day to organize over thirty doctors in three hospitals, subsequent rehabilitation, and get him back in college three-and-a-half months later. I arranged his living on his own near the university, making up classes, wearing a body cast, leg cast, and using a wheelchair. This quick return to college was completely his decision, so he could resume a normal life as quickly as possible. He finally graduated from the university and is currently a successful elementary school teacher in Texas. My problem solving occupied so much time, it forced me to focus and overcome the fears I had for my son.

Three times in my life, I have faced fear so overwhelming that it induced panic. The first

time I was just a kid.

My little sister and I were climbing on a granite-faced cliff behind our campground in Greer, Arizona. Our parents trusted us to be safe and not get lost. I was about ten-years-old and my sister eighteen months younger. Using finger-and-toe holds, I planned to take a short cut across the mountain by inching my way across the rock face. Gradually the crevasses gave out and I was stuck. I couldn't go forward or backward and I froze. Immediately, I yelled for my sister to start backing up and not follow me.

I clung to that rock face for a very long time. I desperately wanted to get myself out of this stupid mess. If my sister ran back to camp to get our parents, they would no longer trust us to be on our own and make smart decisions. That was the reasoning of a kid but I just did not want to face their disappointment. They would not be angry but if they lost their faith in me I

I ordered my brain
to operate my body.
I told my right hand
to squeeze as
tightly as possible.

would be crushed. Besides, I had no idea how my dad could extricate me from my tenuous hold with a twenty-five-foot drop below me and twenty feet of sheer rock above me. Our family of five camped in a small trailer with barely room for us three kids and it certainly did not carry rappelling ropes.

So, I concentrated on my dad. Even with minimum resources, I trusted he would know how to help if I failed. I just didn't want to need his rescue. I remembered stories of how he had saved strangers' lives at the risk of his own. I knew his love for me would do the same. That

day I learned how important it is to have people who believed in me and had high expectations of me. Just concentrating on that faith gave me the willpower I needed to solve my dilemma.

Moving backwards took forever, carefully feeling for the tiny holds I used to get this far. How did the niches I'd found earlier elude me this time? When I was safely off the cliff, my body shook uncontrollably on the hike back to camp. I never told anybody how close I came to falling—but my little sister knew.

At thirteen, I had to conquer fear again while hiking in the wilderness of Montana. I was born and raised in the wide-open Arizona desert. Those dense Montana forests masked all sense of direction. This time, the person I didn't want to lose faith in me was my Uncle Don. My aunt, uncle, and I were hiking from the Blackfoot River back to our car. As an impatient young teenager, I wanted to run ahead. I knew that people got lost in the woods by walking in circles but if I walked in a straight line I would run into the old logging road that led to our car. My uncle told me to line up three trees to make sure I hiked in a straight path. Sounded easy. I raced ahead, but after an hour doubts crept in. Had I lined up trees properly? Was that tree with the crooked limb the one I should have been using? Shouldn't I have reached the road long ago? Suddenly, I was swamped with terror. I wrapped my arms around the closest pine tree. It's like I needed something tangible, like rough bark and pinesap, to ground me and to calm me down. I didn't dare lose the faith my uncle invested in me. This aunt and uncle always invited one niece or nephew to live with them for a summer when we turned thirteen. It was a magical summer where we were away from home and treated like adults for the first time. Uncle Don had just taught me to float down the fast moving Blackfoot River safely. Weeks earlier, he taught me how to water ski, snorkel, shoot a spear gun, and drive a boat. If I messed up, I feared it would ruin the summer for my younger cousins—and there were at least eight more cousins behind me awaiting their treasured summer.

Maybe I had lined up a few wrong trees but I forced myself to walk more carefully and be more deliberate in choosing trees. It worked because I finally found that old road. I sat down immediately to give thanks. As if by magic, the pines smelled delicious, I breathed easier, and my heart lifted. In a few moments, I turned around on the tree stump where I sat. Up walked my aunt and uncle behind me. In later years, I wondered if they never let me out of their sight. My uncle was clever that way. By the end of summer, I felt pretty smug. I was strong. I could conquer anything that came my way by learning to rely on myself and by trusting my own judgment.

That's what I believed until I tried to climb to the top of the Golden Gate Bridge—the very top—up around those enormous airway beacon lights. Climbing to the top was not for the out-of-shape. The inside of the bridge looked like an old submarine, mostly metal with porthole shaped doorways, lots of rivets and a maze of walkways. The elevator was so tiny that three of us only fit with all of our body parts smashed into each other. My guides were a bridge painter, whom I did not know well until that elevator ride, and my best friend who worked for the Golden Gate Bridge Authority. The painter knew every weird story connected to the bridge. How a Boy Scout was lost inside the bridge on a field trip and gruesome stories about people who jumped or fell from the bridge and where their bodies landed.

That glorious day provided a crystal-clear view of San Francisco Bay with what looked like miniature boats and their wakes down below. Since we could see for miles, the scenery from the bridge connecting the two lights was breathtaking. It should have been enough but, for some reason, I felt compelled to go to the tiptop—next to one of the lights. As if fifteen feet more would make the experience more spectacular. The final ladder is constructed from metal tubes with open rungs. Powerful winds buffeted us, so the painter kept yelling, "Hang on real tight." Halfway up the ladder, I lost all feeling in

my hands and feet and my brain temporarily quit. It was that freezing fear I'd felt when younger, but worse. It made no sense. I told myself that as an adult I should have better coping skills. I clung to the ladder and tried to be rational. Surely, I was safe. If I let go, I should have fallen back onto the bridge ten feet below—except for that horrendous wind.

I stared at my hands gripping the ladder so hard my knuckles had turned white. But how do I make them move? How do I bring back feeling? I felt baffled.

I ordered my brain to operate my body. I told my right hand to squeeze as tightly as possible. I stared at the hand and told it to hold on with super-human strength. I turned my head to look at my left hand and told my fingers to slowly open and move up one rung. I then demanded my left hand to clasp the next rung as tightly as possible. What if my brain couldn't force my hands to hang on tight enough? I had no way to know. There was a scary disconnect between my brain and my appendages. My body bypassed the normal nerve impulses that guide movement.

My friends had climbed up before me and kept looking down, obviously wondering what was taking so long. I ignored them and moved slowly, as if I were forcing movement through thick syrup. Demand that a hand open. Demand that the fingers close tightly and squeeze as hard as they could. I asked my legs to function—one step at a time. Still no feeling or automatic response in either hands or feet.

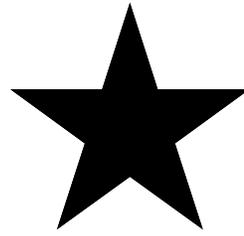
As I reached the top platform, I groped for the safety railing around the platform that supported the light. When I could stand upright, all fear went away and sensation immediately returned to my hands and feet. The trauma was so intense,

that fight to save myself haunted me for decades. The only reason I survived this experience was because I trusted myself to find a solution.

Living in cities, my friends and relatives often experience anxiety or worry, but may never encounter a fear so powerful, their bodies will not respond. I hope my stories about how I coped with such high stress situations might give them confidence and trigger their survival skills if necessary. I also secretly hope some of them will back off from being inveterate “helicopter parents” and allow their children the opportunity to save themselves. They need to give kids a chance to take risks, learn, and benefit from those risks.

Having the opportunity to conquer fear has allowed me to personally channel internal strength. I camp, hike, white-water raft, hunt, and even tried skydiving but when I'm in a tight spot where no sane person should be—I have no doubt I will find a way to get home safely. •

1ST PLACE POETRY



D. R. Wise fell in love with words and began writing poetry in second grade. She received her BFA from Miami University, Ohio, graduating with honors.

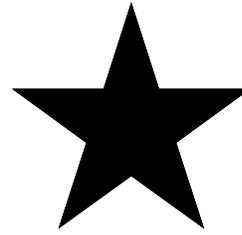
Propelled by a strong desire to communicate positive messages in an artful way, Wise illustrated and wrote, in rhyme, two books. The *Dreamzappers* and *The Fine Arts of Life* won the same three national awards in successive years: National Indie Excellence Awards (Winner), Pinnacle (Winner) and USA Book News Best Book Awards (Finalist). Wise also won two awards for poetry from the Society of Southwestern Artists.

Arizona Monsoon

Lightning launched through cobalt skies
Shot streams of brightness 'fore my eyes.
Zigzag jags of piercing light
Cracked through the spacious cloak of night.
The desert flora's dervish dance
Teased the cacti's stalwart stance
And mountains faded from my view
As whipping winds around me blew.
My ears were hammered with a slap,
Transmitted by a thunderclap
That rumbled in a baritone,
A monstrous shout then fading moan.
I weathered many times the show,
The echoes and the afterglow,
Till one, then two, the drops began.
Perhaps I should have gulped and ran.
Instead I let them leap and jump,
Releasing rain with each wet bump.
Then three, then four – they multiplied.
The heavens' vessel opened wide
And poured its liquid girth on me
While drenching all that I could see.
I stood amongst the sheets of rain
Until their strength began to wane
And morphed to thick and humid air
With moonlit puddles everywhere.
The sandy earth sucked in the swill
Till racing streams portrayed its fill.
I drew deep breaths that bathed my brain
In poignant wafts of after-rain,
Then smiled inside with head and heart
That I bore witness to the Art.

D. R. Wise

2nd PLACE POETRY



Dennis Schwesinger began life with aspirations of becoming an author and teaching English Literature at the college level. Somewhere in the midst of undergraduate studies he shifted interests and transferred into medical sciences, biophysics and mechanical engineering. The death of his three-year-old brother to congenital heart disease probably had something to do with that.

In those years, medical research swirled in a boom of creativity. Heart surgery, neonatology, and other matters of the heart possessed him. Success in research and engineering led him to program management and forty years of mostly university involvement.

Through those years he did, however, continue to write poetry. Today he has time to write more poetry and, since retiring has begun writing science fiction—fantasy. The Arizona Authors Association has given him mission.

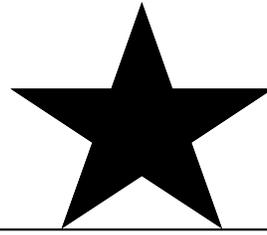
OLD MAN TO WIFE

I can't stop the course of skin and hair
But I can see the soul beneath grow bright
And I can't stop memory's flight away
But I remember when it remembered
And what it said to me.

I can't stop the flight of youthful bliss
But feel it clearly looking back
Like the ring held loosely on
By my arthritic joint.

Yet I am as firm as you and patient
As a drone in flight above
Fields of the flesh of heretofore
And we still abide.

3rd PLACE POETRY



Dennis Schwesinger began life with aspirations of becoming an author and teaching English Literature at the college level. Somewhere in the midst of undergraduate studies he shifted interests and transferred into medical sciences, biophysics and mechanical engineering. The death of his three-year-old brother to congenital heart disease probably had something to do with that. In those years, medical research swirled in a boom of creativity. Heart surgery, neonatology, and other matters of the heart possessed him. Success in research and engineering led him to program management and forty years of mostly university involvement.

Through those years he did, however, continue to write poetry. Today he has time to write more poetry and, since retiring has begun writing science fiction—fantasy. The Arizona Authors Association has given him mission.

MOTHER'S LOVE

Awareness is light against
A vast opposing blackness,
Insights made up of molecules
And atoms and bundles
Of minute particles stirred
Into ninety-nine point nine,
Nine parts empty space.
Consciousness congregates this
Soup in desperate grasps
At matters' shadows
Framed in vast vacuities,
A box, a shelf, a chair, another being,
A cognizance of sparse fragments.

Seabirds see and sense the
Titanic distance between atoms
Not unlike the interval
That separates the earth and sun
But what we perceive
We glean from
Shared illusion.

God is sum of all, her fancy
Moments within infinity.
We occur amid her dream
In which she fabricates
Boundless, endless cosmos
And intimate proximities—
A billion galaxies juxtaposed
Against a mother's love.

HONORABLE MENTION POETRY



Sandra Bremser has written stories since she lived as a girl on an apple orchard in southern Illinois. Following her move to Arizona in the 1960's, she published non-fiction and poetry. Currently she is working on an historical novel. Sandra earned her doctorate from Northern Arizona University. Her background teaching middle school and university students, as well as mentoring teachers, provided important experiences and insights.

Sandra is a member of the Arizona Historical Novel Society, Arizona Authors Association, and Valley of the Sun Romance Writers of America. She resides in the Phoenix area near her children and grandchildren.

Old Bones

Tombstones knuckle their way
Over knolls of freshly-mown grass,
Marching the past to the toes of my shoes.
Puritans, farmers, babies, and wives,
Soldiers from the Revolution
Lie here.

We like to think their lives
As simple and clean
As bleached bones in pine boxes.
Yet, we all play our songs on notes
From the same keyboard,
That of being born human.

Soul pain seeps up through soil and granite.
Witch trials and failed crops.
Tomahawks and British rifles.
The touch of a lover.
Betrayal. Crushed dreams.
The pulse of a gaping hole where once was
love.

But also blinding days of sun and joy.
Nights of promises kept.
Surmounting obstacles.
Outlasting enemies.
Overcoming fear.
Or not.

What good walking a cemetery?
Perspective can't fill the pulsing gap in my
chest.
And yet, my steps seem to beat cadence on a
drum of sod
Mustering healing salves and potions,
Calling up wisdom that
Hovers over old bones.

HONORABLE MENTION POETRY



James Sharp grew up in Ithaca, New York where he attended Ithaca College and minored in writing. He now lives in Montpelier, Vermont.

His poem "Branches" appeared in the Arizona journal *The Laughing Dog*, and *Secrets from the Fruit Factories* won third prize in the writer's choice category of the 2000 Arizona State Poetry Contest.

His chapbook *Beautiful to No End*, and his latest 2014 chapbook *Overwhelming Canvas*, may be ordered by e-mailing heaviersyrup@gmail.com.

So much for...

the glory of
desert sands

simply dirt -- dried wet --
it's holding together
in glossy plains and ridges
on parched riverbed

Streets without walkers
walkers without smiles
criss-cross atop aquifers,
which exhale water, inhale dry air,
crushed slowly from above
by city's sinking weight,
like a fat man
squeezing lifeguard's chest
as she tries to help him.

River without water
next to lush green lawn,
pool's chlorine stink
rainfall beading on oil-slick asphalt
running to concrete culvert,
from supermarket and its
'pure' water aisle.

Bring me Saguaro wine and I'll
dance with you,
for summer rains,
river floods, and
humility
dignity
we have lost

love,
down to

not sure what
between cracks
where past currents
show.

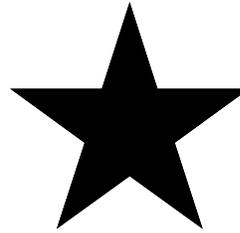
keep us isolated,
force us to
quench thirst on reserves
dwindling, unreplaced,
on a path traced
with best intentions,
desperately
wanting
to be saved.

streaming from my eyes,
I sit, conflicted: raze
and begin again, or trust this
to show its beauty as
stormwater,
reclaimed
decisively

drink and
forget desire
for control of
her company as it washes over:
celebrates each passing
moment,
freshens each thing
as it returns.

1st PLACE

UNPUBLISHED NOVEL



Jon M. Duff is the author of the seven-book Rickie Ciprian mystery series. Before retiring from Arizona State University, Jon was a successful textbook author with over twenty titles released by Prentice Hall, McGraw-Hill, Macmillan, and others.

He had tenures at Ohio State University and Purdue University before coming to Arizona State where he taught Graphic Information Technology in ASU's Polytechnic School.

Arizona Authors Association has previously recognized him in the published and unpublished fiction categories.

THE STANDING MAN

By

JON M. DUFF

Chapter 1

My fuel gauge pointed dangerously at empty as a gray, dilapidated rural gas station emerged from the shimmering heat of another hopelessly dry afternoon. I pulled into the dirt lot beside pumps from a bygone era and let the thick dust that swirled around my car settle before I opened the door. Each pump had a cracked little crown, any color long bleached by the torrid Florida sun, the plastic abraded by the same fine sand now attempting to slip past the cracks around my car's closed windows. I shut the engine down and braced myself for the unbearable heat awaiting me once I opened the door.

What began in the early spring as a spate of welcome and unusually warm weather, crackled and broke into the longest, most devastating drought in Florida's history. When citrus withers, golf courses close, and airplanes—usually filled with expectant vacationers—arrive mostly empty at Tampa, Orlando, and Miami, you know the economy is in the tank. Northbound lanes of I-75 were choked in a modern-day Okie exodus, deserters looking for anyplace not burnt to an absolute cinder. Rumor was that there had been a sprinkle last week somewhere in northern Georgia and parched Floridians were leaving in droves to see if it was really true. You could hike a troop of Girl Scouts down the middle of the southbound lanes of the once busy interstate and not worry they might get hit from behind.

Normally verdant from prodigious rainfall and by irrigating from an abundant water table, mile after mile of Florida's agricultural interior evaporated into a baked

landscape of rough brown burlap as all sources of water dried up. By September, trees had already dropped their leaves and now that Thanksgiving had come and gone without much to give thanks for, shriveled grapefruit and oranges bravely clung to bare branches like some mortician's sick idea of holiday ornaments. Clouds would build in the afternoon but nothing ever came of it. No rain. No drizzle. Not even enough humidity to make dew in the morning as overnight temperatures failed to budge downward. The forecast was for blistering heat with no end in sight—global warming on steroids.

Military desalinization facilities were moored offshore in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, and once connected to municipal treatment plants by thick rubber tendrils, provided only enough relief to keep metropolitan kitchen taps dribbling and showerheads dripping. Alternate-day watering restrictions gave way to a prohibition on any residential use other than cooking and showering. Backyard pools were dipped and drained, the chlorinated water normally used for frivolous recreation shunted to more important household uses, like brushing teeth and flushing toilets. Florida, and then the federal government, declared states of emergency as rioting broke out at water distribution centers.

I would have been pretty pissed-off had business not been booming. You see, I run Ciprian Investigations, a full-service Miami private detective agency. After more than a dozen years with the Miami Beach police, I couldn't take any more of the political bullshit and ass kissing and left a few years short of being vested in the state employees retirement system. Not smart financially, but I'd made out okay. My agency handles a little insurance work, surety investigations, and the normal divorce and estate cases. We sometimes get the occasional missing person or unsolved murder that the police have abandoned.

We were now in such demand that I had hired a receptionist to screen all incoming calls

and employed a young third investigator. Second in command at Ciprian Investigations is my wife, Roxy—though our positions are pretty fluid depending on the case. Often as not she's *Numero Uno*, and I have no problem letting her take the lead. We met at the MBPD, where we'd both been detectives, and had more or less left together to test Miami's PI waters. We were pretty confident in our prospects because as police officers we knew there was an endless supply of miscreants in South Florida, with more arriving every day—especially from South America. It wasn't as if we'd have to go out and drum up business.

Incessant heat had caused people to do things they might not have done in cooler, damper, less edgy circumstances. Wives, in record numbers, wanted their wayward husbands followed; husbands demanded errant wives or girlfriends be staked out. Between my wife and partner Roxy, our part-time gofer Jimmy Budzinski, the young intern-turned-minor-partner Tubby Doans, and myself—Rickie Ciprian—we kept three digital cameras with telephoto lenses busy snapping pictures of sweaty bodies entwined in the back seats of parked cars or doing gymnastics on top of cheap, wet motel sheets. It was a hell of a way to make a living.

The drought had brought me to this lonely gas station off Route 33, south and west of Orlando, where I pumped hi-test while dust swirled around my feet and the brutal sun caused the already dry skin on my cheeks to contract even further. I'm Cuban-American. I've lived my whole life in South Florida, thinking I knew heat—until now. My *guyabera* stuck to my back like wet toilet paper while sweaty boxers twisted around my crotch in a death grip. I could hear desiccated palmettos lining the usually wet irrigation ditch across the road sing a crisp, dry song. In concert, they sounded like the hinges of an old screen door in desperate need of oil.

The station's proprietor, a weathered old man who appeared not to have shaved since before the drought began and whose stubble

glowed white against his dark leathery skin, said as he approached, “Not many people out here since they drained the reservoir.”

He inspected me as I filled my tank, suspecting, I surmised, that I might pump and run. I gave him a reassuring smile.

I drive a white 1996 Impala, the big bathtub-bodied model once favored by police departments. It’s the kind of car that when you see it in your rearview mirror, sweat pops out on the back of your neck and you automatically glance down at your speedometer. I’d found the car in Tampa where an octogenarian had listed it in the *Sun City Gazette*: Low miles, original owner, white over white, fair price. Seems the Chevy salesman had convinced the little old lady that she needed the optional LT1 Corvette engine. When I’d inspected the car in front of her retirement apartment she’d complained that she couldn’t pull away from the curb without squealing the rear tires. Numerous tire marks in the immediate area attested to her twitchy right foot. I told her that wouldn’t be a problem and I’d be extra careful. The Impala’s tank held nearly twenty gallons, so with the numbers on the antique pump creeping slowly into view as if shy and reluctant, I was going to be there a while.

The car wasn’t exactly as I had purchased it. The year earlier I had been on the interstate up by Tallahassee, on my way to Tennessee on a case, and had been sideswiped by an overly enthusiastic and well-lubricated Florida State football fan blinded by his school’s recent and unaccustomed victory over the hated Florida Gators. The driver’s rich father rebuilt the Impala better than new to keep Junior’s name away from the insurance company and the local police. Last thing I’d heard was that, with his father’s encouragement, an unenthusiastic Junior had enlisted in the Marines to keep his name in the will.

I also own three vintage Studebakers that are constantly in various stages of repair or restoration. Driving cross-country in one of the forty-odd-year-old cars would be brutal—hence the use of the big comfortable GM sedan. I’d

recently returned from Cuba where several overzealous prison guards had taken a particular liking to the backs of my legs, testing the strength of cane poles against my hamstrings at every available opportunity. My hammies still screamed after periods of inactivity, like now.

I stretched my legs and continued to hold the trigger of the nozzle wide open, hoping to coax even a scintilla more gasoline through the line. It didn’t seem to have any effect.

“Jesus Christ!” I said, stumbling backward and almost dropping the binoculars.

A wad of tobacco bulged in the proprietor’s whiskered cheek and a line of dark juice stained the stubble below his mouth where spittle dripped when he spat. He looked at my car and tried to work up saliva but managed but a puny stream that made it only as far as his whiskered chin.

“Used to be,” he continued, switching the wad to the other cheek, “I’d have cars with boats lined up all the way down the highway there, gettin’ gas. ‘Specially on weekends. Did a little mechanic work and sold sandwiches.” He attempted another stream of tobacco juice with the same weak result. “You been the only car I seen all day. Once they decided the reservoir was done, I was pretty much done too.”

“That’s why I’m here,” I said, watching the numbers inch painfully on the pump.

“No water in it now,” the weathered man

announced in case I hadn't heard the news, shifting his position to better inspect my car.

"That's what I hear," I replied, easing the pressure on the handle as I heard the echo of gas in the filler neck. I wasn't confident in the aged pump's automatic shut-off, even if it had one, and didn't want to slosh gasoline down the Impala's repainted flank.

"You a cop?" he asked.

I released the trigger and the pump shut off with a groan. I pulled the nozzle out and spun the gas cap until it clicked. "Used to be," I said, putting the hose away. "But I'm private now." I pulled my wallet and handed him two twenties and a Ciprian Investigations card. He made change from a pocket in his soiled canvas pants and studied the card.

"Miami, huh?"

"That's right."

"Weird people in Miami," he said, as if Florida's largest city was in another solar system and not a hundred and twenty miles to the south.

"Some," I agreed. "But you got weird people pretty much everywhere."

He looked me over and nodded, then stuck the card in his shirt pocket where it took up residence with a pen, a tire gauge, and a wrinkled pouch of Red Man. "I bet you're up here 'cause of that body they found when the reservoir got drained."

I put the bills in my wallet and the silver in my pocket. "That would be the reason," I said.

"We call him the 'Standing Man,' " he said, attempting another ineffectual stream of tobacco juice toward the ground.

I considered the terse words the marina owner had said on the phone: *Rickie, can you come up here? A body was found in the reservoir and I need your opinion.* "Why do they call him the Standing Man?" I asked.

"Oh, you'll see," the gas station operator said and ambled back to the office to get out of

the heat. He took up residence behind a streaked and fly-specked window, removed his pouch of Red Man, and filled his cheek.

I did a quick squat to further stretch my legs, got in my car, started the engine, and directed the air conditioning vents at my face.

I drove off to see the Standing Man.

Chapter 2

The ugly gash of the Withlacoochee Reservoir carved an irregular shallow basin out of northern Polk County, about forty miles from Lakeview, centered, roughly, on the Withlacoochee River and nearly in the middle of the Florida peninsula. Thirty years before, when the reservoir serving the rapidly expanding Orlando area was first opened, it was touted as an alternative to the carefully manufactured attractions for which Central Florida was already well known. Visions of boating, water skiing, picnicking, hiking, and an expansive waterfowl habitat helped gain approval of the hundred million dollar project. Now, it was just a thousand-acre muddy scar without water, recreation, or habitat for anything other than the mosquitoes that seemed to flourish in the heat. I was positive a million mosquitoes could hatch in a puddle where a nearly empty water bottle had been recklessly discarded.

Cutting a reservoir out of soggy Florida scrubland was heralded at the time as an engineering feat of Herculean proportions. Still, any backwoods Cracker knew only an idiot would try such a fool thing. Hell, they'd said, you couldn't even dig a posthole in some places without the damned thing filling up with water. But hydrologists and geologists assured that the solution was finding geology that exposed postglacial deposits and the indigenous calcarenite, and the less porous rock from the Pleistocene period. It ended up that the Withlacoochee River cut just such a shallow defile down into the bedrock, making the table-flat land around it a perfect spot for the reservoir.

The result was a broad but shallow furrow

with enough soil and rock removed to fill sinkholes all over the state for the next century. I knew these tasty tidbits because Roxy had looked them up on the Internet and briefed me before I'd left on the trip. Otherwise, I'd have been as dumb as the next guy.

Still, the reservoir remained filled only as long as the river ran and Florida received its usual annual rainfall allotment of seventy-odd inches. Eight months of no appreciable rainfall had changed the equation. The river dried up and the water table retreated to a depth that challenged even the biggest drilling rigs. Once the reservoir started going down, it went down in a hurry as the big straw that was thirsty Orlando sucked it dry.

No one actually called the man-made lake the Withlacoochee Reservoir. A small crossroads known as Orange Blossom, once on the banks of the Withlacoochee River, was sacrificed in the excavation, so around the state it was universally called Lake Orange Blossom, tribute to the two-dozen inhabitants who were dislocated in the name of progress.

I actually had recent knowledge of the lake's operation, but before the drought, before the closing of the marina. Along with our investigations business we own a boatyard, left to Roxy and me by an elderly client whose heirs were either dead—not my fault—or in prison—something for which I take full credit. I'd delivered numerous recreational craft to Lake Orange Blossom and had actually toured its confines with my lovely wife one weekend on a rented luxury houseboat where our late night howling and thrashing had scared most of the sleeping waterfowl. What I saw as I pulled my car into the marina's parking lot was something entirely different.

The facility's empty docks hung like abandoned ladders from the shore to the sloping bottom, already dried and cracked at the edges like some scene of African desolation out of *National Geographic*. I had seen alligators with smoother skin. The marina buildings, once bustling with tourists, boaters, and locals out to see what was going on, stood deserted. Out in

the lake I could see a few stubs of denuded pine and cypress trees, once overwhelmed under the surface of the lake, but now lonely sentinels, bare arms raised in prayer.

I parked, exited my car into the heat, and walked past several dusty Polk County Sheriff's vehicles to enter the marina's office.

"Rickie," a deep baritone voice called out from across the dim room. A big, broad-chested man rose from a table where uniformed sheriffs sat drinking coffee from paper cups.

"Wheelan," I said, taking his proffered hand. "Things look a little different from when I was here the last time, delivering that load of bass boats."

The man who solidly gripped my hand was weathered, roughly cut from a block of muscle and bone, hair cut short in a flattop buzz reminiscent of teenagers in old black and white movies. His teeth gleamed white against his skin and his cheeks were shiny, as if he'd just jumped from a barber's chair.

Wheelan Donahue owned and managed the Orange Blossom Marina and had once served with me on the Miami Beach police. He'd done twenty and out, tribute to an admirable ability to put up with horseshit that I couldn't. He took his retirement, left Miami, and settled upstate. He was a tough but jovial man, traits that served him well once he left the force and started the marina. When he realized I had inherited the boat business, he'd made contact again and a steady stream of orders had ensued.

"Can't sell the place," Wheelan lamented, pumping my hand and slapping me on the shoulder. "Can't burn it down. Insurance company cancelled my policy, said they don't cover sure things. They figure one spark and the whole state will turn into a charcoal briquette."

"And now this," I said, referring to the reason he'd asked that I come out and help him.

Wheelan's eyes, normally a window to a happy soul, turned dark and sorrowful. "That's why I called you," he said. "I'm afraid this is

going to get really messy before it's over, I just know it. Maybe I rented the guy a boat. Maybe his family thinks a lawsuit will end all their problems. With the way things have been going, having to close the marina and all, I don't need another problem."

"The Sheriff's Department is investigating," I reminded him, pointing with my thumb over my shoulder at the officers.

Wheelan's worries weren't assuaged. "They have a job to do, and that's fine. Right now they're waiting on an airboat. The bottom of the lake's so muddy you can't get anywhere with a truck, even an ATV. Plus, they won't be looking out for me or the marina."

He took my arm and steered me back out the door and around the corner. "The sheriffs are waiting to go down to the lake," Wheelan explained. Inspecting me, he said, "You look like a wet dishrag. You want a drink? I don't have any beer but I got some soft drinks in my truck."

"You got orange soda?" I asked.

He ran off and returned with a large and worn leather case, like an old train case, and two bottles of Nehi orange. There was a time that cold pop bottles would sweat in the Florida humidity like a soul-saving tent revival preacher. These bottles were cold, but dry.

We sat in the shade on two wooden chairs overlooking the drained lake, an elongated brown saucer that stretched out before me like a dirty dog dish. Across the lake I could see a sprinkling of houses, part of the economic boon the reservoir was to make. From inside, I could hear the murmurs of the deputies, talking, joking. I took a big swallow and felt the cold all the way to my stomach. Wheelan didn't look like the animated marina owner who had once happily bought my boats. He looked like a broken man.

"I understand there used to be a little town out there, before they dammed up the river," I said.

"Orange Blossom," Wheelan explained, rolling his bottle between his big hands. "You'll

see it when we get to the boat ramp. Sat on a minor county road, down next to the river."

"It's still there?" I asked.

"Weren't much of a town to start with. A store, gas station, a couple of shacks and a few dilapidated trailers. I heard it took all of twenty minutes for the townsfolk to gather their things and board the state busses for a ride down to De Soto County where new trailers were all set up for them. That was a few years before I got the state contract and built the marina."

"So, what?" I asked. "About twenty years ago?"

"About that."

I pulled on the orange drink, trying to do the math. "So the reservoir was here, what? A couple years before you built the marina?"

"That's about right."

"And there's a body out there," I added. When he'd called me, he'd said that there was something he needed help with. He'd mentioned that the help involved a body, but little else.

He looked a little sheepish like I'd caught him in a little lie. "That's what this is about, yes."

I leaned out but couldn't see the town from our vantage on the marina's gallery. Since it sat on the river, I figured it had to be roughly in the middle of the lake, but up- or downstream. "I can't believe you have any worries," I told him. "You don't have responsibility for everything that happens out here. Hell, it could have happened before you built this place."

Despite my assurances, Wheelan Donahue was worried about something. His shoulders took an uncharacteristic slant and his forehead was creased even more than normal. He hadn't been a perfect cop. Who had been? Building the marina had seemed like a financial stretch to me when I'd heard about it. But who was I to say anything? As far as I knew, Wheelan Donahue had been a clean cop. After all, I had a boatyard in Miami, a former dot-com whiz kid's luxu-catamaran tied up in Key Largo, and a

lodge out in the Everglades I'd been to only a couple times and would have a hard time finding on my own. No one ever accused me of being on the pad when I'd been a cop. You get lucky. You fall into things. Maybe Wheelan Donahue had gotten lucky. Maybe that was why he worried.

"Right now they're waiting on the airboat," he reminded me, breaking out of his funk. "The bottom of the lake's so muddy they couldn't get anywhere with a truck, even an ATV. They tried. Sheriff don't get too many dead bodies up here, so their first reaction might be to hang it wherever it might stick."

"You know him?" I asked. "The sheriff?"

"Edmonds," Wheelan said. "He knows every square inch of Polk, Lake, and Hernando Counties. Problem is he has no help and little experience with anything other than busting up meth labs and the theft rings that support them."

"And that's where I come in?"

Wheelan nodded. "I need someone to look out after my interests. If I'm in trouble, I want to know before I get served a subpoena." He paused, looked down at the bottle in his hands, and then looked at me again. "That is, if you want to help me."

"I just have one question, Wheelan. You know I have to ask it."

"What?"

"Do you know anything about this? Anything at all?"

His eyes flashed once, and then any anger disappeared. "Not one goddamned thing, Rickie," he said with such conviction that any question was removed in my mind.

"You sure you want to do this?" I asked, deciding to bring up the business end. "Things must be tough for you now with the lake closed down." I would do a friend a favor, for a while. But if this turned into a major case, I'd have trouble convincing Roxy that I should be donating my time.

"I incorporated when I started this place," he explained. "The company may take a bath, maybe even go bankrupt. But I'll be okay."

"So if someone sues the corporation, it's not like they can sue you, right?"

Wheelan explained what his lawyer had told him. "The corporation might get sued, that's right. But there aren't many assets, with what's owed the bank, and all. That doesn't keep someone from coming after me personally, especially if it can be shown that I actually rented the boat."

"Still," I said, "it might take a while to sort everything out."

"I've saved my money," Wheelan assured me. "So, if you're worried about getting paid..."

"I didn't say that. But as far as what I can do for you, let's see what develops. Maybe you won't need me."

"That would be nice, but I doubt it," Wheelan said.

"The Standing Man," I said.

Wheelan grimaced. "You heard what they're calling him."

"At the gas station up the road."

"Figures. That old coot doesn't miss a thing. You want to see the body?"

"If the boys in brown over there will let us," I said. Remembering how angry I used to get when civilians mucked up a crime scene, I wasn't about to do the same thing myself.

Wheelan laughed for the first time and lifted a pair of huge binoculars out of the leather case he'd brought from his truck. He said, "Ain't no crime scene tape out in the middle of the lake, but you'll need these."

Before he could hand me the binoculars the sheriff's deputies rumbled out of the store without a word, looking at us like they wanted to remember our faces in case we appeared in a lineup sometime. Carrying our drinks, Wheelan led me into the parking lot. One of the deputies hung back, a chaperone.

We took Wheelan's truck, windows down in the hot wind, to a place on the shore about two miles away where an airboat was being unloaded from a trailer. Out in the middle of the lake I could make out a few buildings that once comprised the Orange Blossom crossroads. The deputies got out and leaned against their cars.

"Here," Wheelan said, handing me the oversized binoculars. "You've got to see this."

Chapter 3

The distant shore of the lake looked about three feet away and jumped around in a psychotic frenzy as the heavy binoculars compressed the thousand yards to something I could reach out and touch—if only it would hold still.

"Whoa," I said, lowering the heavy equipment before I became permanently disoriented. The gray binoculars were about two feet long and weighed at least twenty pounds. The glass lenses on the far end were the diameter and thickness of good-sized beer mugs; the viewing end had rubber eyecups like a welder's goggles.

"You better go over there," Wheelan said, pointing to the truck that had brought the airboat. It was parked on a concrete ramp with its trailer tipped down at the beginnings of the lake's dry bottom. About four feet out in the cracked mud a sheriff's deputy and a small, officious man waited as the boat operator prepared to start the craft's motor. I knew airboats would go over water, logs, and just about anything else. But here, the middle of the lake was a miasma, not yet baked like the lake's edges—a jumble of cypress logs, stone outcroppings, and mud so thick it looked like chocolate pudding. I had serious doubts whether the craft could do the job.

A four-wheel-drive pickup stood mired to its axles about twenty feet farther out in the lake—testimony to a failed first attempt—and I could see intersecting fat tire tracks leading out and back to the shore where ATVs had made

their futile attempts. The next option would have been a helicopter, but then what? Lower a guy on a rope?

The boat operator started up his big automobile engine to which an eight-foot propeller was mounted inside a protective wire shroud. On second thought, I realized that the airboat had enough horsepower to go anywhere it wanted and that only the bulky shape of the craft kept it from becoming airborne.

"Use the mirror frame there to keep 'em steady," Wheelan advised. "Keep everything from moving around." He pointed to the truck's side-view mirror and the sturdy metal frame that supported it.

"Where did you get these things?" I asked, taking his advice. I had to lift up on my toes to see correctly, but at least the shoreline remained stationary, if flattened and blurry.

"Navy surplus," Wheelan explained. "They were mounted on a destroyer during World War Two. I use 'em to check registration numbers on boats out on the lake. Can do it right from my office and not have to take a boat out." He realized how his situation had changed. "Well, at least I used to."

He saw my difficulty in adjusting the binoculars. "Get the general focus with the big wheel in the center there," he suggested. "And then correct for your vision by turning the right eye cup."

I did as he instructed and the far shore jumped at me sharp and clear. "Wow, I can make out individual rocks on the far shore," I said, amazed.

"See if you can pick out the buildings in the middle of the lake."

I did and by playing the dance of the two adjustments, was able to bring ruined walls and collapsed roofs into sharp focus. "Got them," I said.

"What do you see?"

"Looks like an old store, with a wide gallery

across the front.”

“Look to the left then, maybe seventy-five yards out there, maybe a half-inch where you are.”

I carefully moved the lenses and almost missed my target as it whizzed past. Slower movement brought what I was after into my field of vision.

“Jesus Christ!” I said, stumbling backward and almost dropping the binoculars.

“I guess you saw the Standing Man,” Wheelan said solemnly.

What had filled my eyes was a corpse, erect, mostly skeletal. It was standing in the middle of Orange Blossom’s deserted main street as if daring long-evaporated traffic. The sacrificed town’s only inhabitant was a dead man with his arms secured behind him and his feet in a washtub, the top exposed above the silt of the lake bottom, the tub filled with what looked to me like concrete.

I guessed that left out an accident.

“How does he stand like that?” I asked, my composure partly reclaimed. With detached eyes, I methodically inspected the remains, not easy after the shock of what I’d first seen.

“Look down between his legs,” Wheelan said. I did and noticed a pole behind the washtub.

“Best I can figure,” Wheelan explained, “that’s the pole that held the stop sign in the middle of town. Place was too small to have a light. Before they flooded the valley, the transportation department took the signs down all along the road that led in and out of town, left the poles. When the poor guy got dumped overboard, luck had it he went down right in the middle of Orange Blossom’s main street and the pole skewered him.”

I raised my head and asked, “Skewered?”

“Yeah,” Wheelan said. “Like a shish-ka-bob. Pole went up through his rib cage and out between his collarbone and shoulder blade. Kept him standing up like that. Otherwise, he’d been collapsed. Might never have found him in the mud and debris, fish shit, and everything else.”

I returned my eyes to the Standing Man and saw what Wheelan had described. What were the chances that Florida would have a drought so severe that its largest reservoir would be drained? The killer or killers certainly hadn’t thought of that when they’d dumped some poor unfortunate soul over the side. And what were the odds that the body would be thrown overboard right into Orange Blossom, right into the middle of the street, and right on top of the solitary pole that had held the town’s only stop sign?

Then I had a sickening thought: What if the guy hadn’t been dead when they tossed him in?

The Polk County sheriff arrived just as the airboat restarted its motor out in the middle of the empty reservoir for the return trip, the Standing Man in a black body bag in the bottom of the boat’s hull with his feet and the tub of concrete separate and not zippered in.

I had watched the craft’s difficult outbound progress through Wheelan’s powerful binoculars, trading off so both of us could watch. The pilot had zigzagged across the muddy flats from one puddle to another, getting stuck twice, before reaching the corpse. After working about forty minutes, the deputy and the other man on board had unwired the dead man’s hands and brought the corpse onboard in a half-dozen pieces, its feet and ankles still buried in the tub of concrete. It was the best they could do. Any forensic value in the skeletal remains was probably destroyed getting everything, including the washtub, from the middle of the lake and into the bottom of

the boat.

I knew the new arrival was the sheriff himself because the man's uniform was spotless and the car he'd arrived in had recently been washed, a forbidden luxury in the current climate. He said a few words to his deputies then walked over to where we stood beside the truck that had brought the airboat.

The sheriff was a big man, well over six feet in height, and thick—not fat—with shoulders that had seen more than their share of lifting hundred-pound sacks of something or other. He didn't have the physique of a weight lifter—big but fragile. No, this law officer had thick, dense bones and strong rosy muscles developed from hard work. Sharp uniform, polished shoes, deep crow's feet beside the reflective Ray-Bans, a tag with just the name "Edmonds." No first name. No rank. I instantly liked him and the man hadn't even said a word.

"Would you like a look, sheriff?" Wheelan asked, handing him the bulky binoculars.

The sheriff took the binoculars and without the aid of the truck's side-view mirror, held the government surplus glasses rock-steady, pointed toward Orange Blossom and the laboring airboat making its way back to shore.

"Did they take pictures before messing up the crime scene," the sheriff asked without taking the binoculars from his eyes. He spoke to Wheelan or me, or maybe, to both of us.

I went ahead and answered. "The shorter fellow, the guy not in uniform, spent about twenty minutes with a camera, used a yardstick for measurement comparisons. Snapped on a macro lens for up-close shots. He took specimens and filled up about a dozen evidence bags and bottles. The remains broke apart when they tried to slip the guy off the signpost, though. My guess is that the tub of concrete had to weigh a couple hundred pounds."

The sheriff took the field glasses from his face. "Who the hell are you?" he asked.

Wheelan introduced me. "Sheriff Edmonds, this is Rickie Ciprian. Rickie and I used to be

with the Miami Beach police together."

"Shit," he said. "Not one but two ex-Miami cops, huh? Lucky me."

I extracted a business card and handed it to him. He glanced at it and said, "Investigations, huh? Just passing by, is that it Cip-ri-an? Visit an old buddy?" The sheriff drew out my last name into three distinct syllables. Not exactly correct, but I'd live with it. Wheelan explained my presence at the reservoir.

"Sheriff Edmonds, I asked Rickie to come up here and maybe see what this body has to do with boaters who used my marina."

"Boaters usually don't go swimming with their feet encased in concrete," the Sheriff ventured.

"True enough," Wheelan admitted. "But I've got to protect my interests here. Some guy's family comes back to me, says I rented the boat their old man went out on, or," Wheelan added, "got taken out on. My insurance company cancelled my umbrella policy when the marina had to close. I'm pretty exposed here, if someone decides to sue."

"And I'm just supposed to let your friend here stumble around in my investigation?"

"Sheriff," I interjected. "I have no intention of getting in the way of your investigation. But you know as well as I do that since the body was found on DNR land, the state will be in on this as soon as the medical examiner makes his report. The fact that the body's hands were bound and his feet were, in all probability, sunk in concrete against his will, builds a prima facie case for kidnapping, and that means the Feds will be involved before long."

Sheriff Edmonds turned, obviously uncomfortable. No one got to be a county sheriff without experiencing how the FBI could take over and ruin a case.

"I had a good look at the corpse," I told him. "The body could have been in the water anywhere from a year to twenty years. It'll be hard to tell. Maybe something went into the

water with him and when the lake dries out enough, a team can find it in the mud. Unless you can match him up with a missing person, my bet is you'll pass him off to the biggest dog in the hunt, and that normally means the feeb. And when that happens, it will be the last you hear of it. Maybe I'll get lucky. Maybe a missing person's report can be matched with the body. Hopefully, it won't have anything to do with Wheelan or his marina."

Sheriff Edmonds looked over to his group of deputies who were intent on the progress the airboat was making back to the shore. "You see that bunch of idiots over there," he said. "One of them is my sister's boy, never had a lick of sense in him. Another is a leftover from the previous sheriff. I don't even issue him a gun. The last one's the county dimwit, never graduated from eighth grade. If it weren't for my chief deputy out there on the boat, and the crime scene guy with him, I'd have no staff at all. So maybe I'm glad you're here to look into the case."

Edmonds didn't pass my card back, rather unbuttoned the front pocket of his uniform blouse and slipped it inside. I stood at the edge of a financial and ecological disaster with a county sheriff big enough to admit he was in over his head, and a friend, worried about something I couldn't immediately figure out.

We stood in silence as the airboat, engine roaring, stuttered across the mud flats until it advanced on the dried shallows where it screeched and crunched across the cracks until I could see the faces of the men on board.

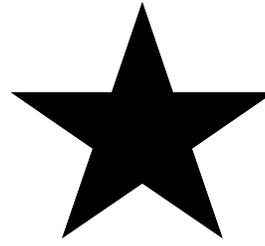
They all looked sick as hell. •••

*"I try to
create
sympathy
for my
characters,
then turn
the
monsters
loose."*

*- Stephen
King*

2nd PLACE

UNPUBLISHED NOVEL



A MURDER REMEMBERED

By

ARTHUR KERNS

CHAPTER ONE



Phoenix, Arizona—August 12, 1928

Arthur Kerns joined the FBI with a career in counterintelligence and counterterrorism. On retirement, he became a consultant with the Director of Central Intelligence and the Department of State, which took him to over sixty-five countries. His award-winning short stories have been published in a number of anthologies. His book reviews appear on the website for Washington Independent Review of Books. In March, 2013, Diversion Books released his debut thriller, *The Riviera Contract*, the first of a series. *The African Contract* was released in May, 2014. He is working on the third novel in the series, *The Yemen Contract*.

www.arthurkerns.com

Francisco studied the straight rows of cotton plants as he trudged along the narrow irrigation ditch. His boots kicked up dust from the path, flushing a flock of white-winged doves, their cries breaking the stillness of early morning. The clear water in the trench flowed at a steady rate down from the Arizona Canal. Lateral number 20, his employer called it. Cotton needed a lot of water during the summer months so it was important nothing stopped the flow to the roots of the green bushy plants. He knew from the leaf smell the plants gave off that they were getting the right amount.

At six o'clock, the morning still held a trace of the desert night's chill. Francisco enjoyed this time alone, especially on a Monday morning after a busy weekend attending church and feeding Sunday dinner to noisy children, grandchildren, and assorted relatives. By noon, the August sun would drop its heat on the flat land surrounding him, masking the brown mountains in the distance in mirages.

He looked toward the spot where the irrigation trough branched off the canal. A large object floated in from the canal and moved toward him. It appeared to be a dead animal. Sometimes coyotes or calves drowned in the Arizona Canal and ended up here. As he and the floating object approached each other, he realized it wasn't an animal. Francisco stopped and waited for it to come to him, afraid of

what the object would be.

The man's body, fully clothed in a tan suit, moved past. Francisco stared, trying to get a glimpse of the man's face. He prayed he didn't know him. He followed the body along and hastened to keep up. The body banged on either side of the planked lateral, but the face never turned skyward.

Francisco stopped. Breathing heavily, he tasted bile in his mouth and took a drink of water from his canteen. He looked over to his employer's ranch house, knowing he should know what had just come into his fields. Looking back, he watched the body disappear behind the cotton rows. He blessed himself with the sign of the cross and ran to tell his boss what he had seen.

* * *

Lloyd McGraff stropped his straight edged razor back and forth on the leather to get a fine edge on the blade. Already he had nicked his cheek and wanted to avoid doing the same to his throat. He didn't need another scar. The phone rang in the parlor. He wiped his face with a towel and asked himself what was so important that the duty sergeant had to call him this early in the morning.

"Captain. We got a murder out in Glendale."

The sergeant had a number of years under his belt on the Phoenix Police force, so McGraff knew the call was not routine.

"Details?"

"A county deputy sheriff and some canal tender pulled a body out of an irrigation lateral. The coroner from Glendale phoned and said you should come and take a look."

McGraff was the Phoenix Chief of Detectives. When sheriffs from the surrounding towns had a tricky or delicate investigation, they called his department for help. He knew the coroner. They fished together up north on a hard-to-find stream at the base of Crown King

Mountain.

McGraff saw he had left a bottle of bootleg whiskey on the dining room table from last night's poker game. Best he get it out of sight before his housekeeper saw it. "What else did he say?"

"The coroner called from the funeral home. When they took the clothes off the body they found a badge."

"What kind of badge?"

"Didn't say."

"Are we missing any officers?" McGraff asked.

"Won't know until roll call at eight."

"Tell the Chief, I'm going to Glendale."

* * *

The funeral home was a one-story building attached to the director's residence. Dusty salt cedar trees surrounded the structure providing shade from the sun and protection from winds blowing across the surrounding farmland. The coroner, Dr. George Marel, stepped down from the covered front porch, his limp a souvenir from the Battle of the Ardennes.

"Morning George. What do you have here?"

They shook hands and walked slowly to the house. The hour was past ten o'clock and the sun felt hot on McGraff's head.

"The fellow was in the water a couple of days. I'd say since late Friday, early Saturday morning. He was shot. I have the bullet. From a .308 caliber pistol, I reckon. You'd know better."

"What's this about a badge?"

"Yep. Gold badge. United States Department of Justice. Bureau of Investigation."

"Good God!"

McGraff hurried inside the funeral home, with Dr. Marel following. "Didn't want to

give that information out over the phone line what with all the ears listening.”

“Understand.” McGraff knew that telephone operators listened in on calls to the police station and calls on party lines provided juicy gossip for bored housewives. He himself had a couple of telephone operators as informants who kept him advised of Phoenix city hall political machinations.

They walked to the back room where Dr. Marel performed his autopsies. McGraff went to the table where the form of a large body lay under a white sheet. The smell inside an autopsy room was never pleasant, but today in the heat it was especially pungent. He hesitated before pulling back the cloth from the head.

“Damn,” McGraff said. After a moment, he replaced the sheet.

“Here’s the badge.” Dr. Marel handed him the gold shield. The badge number was 251. “It was pinned on the inside of his trouser waistband. No other identification found on him.”

“The fellow’s name is Special Agent Rod Starke.” McGraff turned the badge over in his hand, then handed it back. “What else can you tell me?”

“He was shot once, close range. Say about two, three inches away. Here I’ll show you.” Dr. Marel pulled back the sheet again and pointed to a bullet wound on the left side of the pale, bloated body. “It entered directly through the heart, traveled downward and to the right side of his back. I removed the bullet from under the skin near the second rib.”

McGraff nodded.

“No bruises or fractures. He died as a result of the bullet. Didn’t drown. No water in his lungs.”

“Did you find anything else on the body besides the badge?”

“He was fully clothed in a tan suit, shirt, tie, shoes.” Dr. Marel took him to another table

next to an open window where the clothing lay drying. “Bullet went through the suit jacket and shirt. We found an Elgin wristwatch which had stopped at one-fifteen and a car rental slip from Arizona Drive Yourself Company.”

“The shirt’s ripped down the front.” McGraff said.

“The deputy sheriff who pulled the body out of the lateral said he found it that way.”

McGraff held the trousers up. “Were the insides of the pockets all turned out like this?”

“Yep. Like someone emptied them.”

He laid the trousers on the table, looked for a few moments at Rod Starke lying on the table, then, head bowed, went out of the room.

Outside on the front porch, the two men sat on a bench and gazed at South Mountain. In the southeast a row of black and gray thunderheads piled low on the horizon. The monsoon storm would come early today.

“The federal people will be coming to town to investigate this murder,” McGraff said. “They’ll be asking a lot of questions.”

“So I suspect. I take it you know that fellow inside?”

“Yes, I do.” McGraff poured tobacco along the cigarette paper, licked alongside the edge, rolled it, then struck the wood match. It was good to be outside in the open air.

McGraff worked through what he knew. The shot came from close up. Must have been quick and unexpected. Killer or killers took him by surprise. Then he was dumped somewhere east of where he was found, probably close to Phoenix, and the current took him west to Glendale. Pockets cleaned out. His nickel-plated .25 caliber Colt automatic that he always carried missing. Robbery? Not likely. Government men didn’t get themselves robbed.

No, someone Rod Starke knew did him

in.

“Friend of yours?”

“A good friend.” McGraff took a deep drag, and then gave a slight cough. “He was a swell fellow.”

CHAPTER TWO

Washington, D.C.— August 11, 1980

Harrison Ballantyne approached the gated entrance to the J. Edgar Hoover Building, then paused and looked down Pennsylvania Avenue past a line of trees. The Capitol Building glowed in the yellow morning haze. He enjoyed Washington’s boulevards and monuments, yet he found the city one of the least romantic places he had lived. Everything seemed overwhelmed by distractions of power and position, by issues of life and death.

One week before, he had learned his most productive recruitment-in-place, a Soviet intelligence officer, had been thrown from the roof of the Hotel de Crillon in Paris. The French police found a single bullet hole in the head of his broken body that lay crumpled on the narrow street separating the hotel from the American Embassy. The Russians had a knack for leaving unambiguous messages.

At the turnstile, Ballantyne slipped his coded badge into the security machine and when the green light appeared, pushed through the turnstile, and headed for the bank of elevators. Arriving on the second floor, he stepped into a bright maze of hallways. Closed doors at irregular intervals lined the long stark corridors. Small plastic plaques were fastened to the walls next to the doors identifying each office space by the corridor letter and a number. He entered room C52.

“Blackie. We need to talk.” Ballantyne’s unit chief, Ed Lessor, sat behind a wide desk stacked with piles of crisp white memoranda. He motioned to take a seat. Lessor, a man with stringy red hair and skin older than his thirty-one years warranted, sported a moustache that

always looked like it was on crooked. It wasn’t. The man’s upper lip just drooped lower on one side.

“What’s up, boss?” Ballantyne felt strange calling someone “boss” who happened to be three years younger than he, but in Vietnam he had served under a much younger Marine Corps captain.

“Still in a funk about that dead Rusky?” Lessor said. “Hope you relaxed over the weekend. Wasn’t your fault. No one’s blaming you. The New York Office dropped the ball. Evidently, the Soviets were countersurveillance the last meeting New York had with him.”

“The case was on my desk. My ticket. My responsibility.”

“Yeah. Yeah. That also means it was on my desk, right?” Lessor spun around in his chair and looked out the window onto the inner courtyard of the FBI building. “You know what the brass is upset about this morning?” He swung his head back to Ballantyne. “Your agent spent three nights in that Paris hotel before getting himself killed. The hotel sent a bill to the embassy. The Ambassador handed it to our Legal Attaché and told him to pay it.” He turned and leaned his elbows on his desk. “Know how much three nights in a five-star Paris hotel costs, Blackie?” Ballantyne’s new agent-training officer had given him the nickname that followed him through his career.

“That’s all the front office is worried about?” Ballantyne asked.

“Your man ran up quite a tab.”

Ballantyne knew the legal attaché in Paris. J. Edgar Hoover had appointed him to the embassy decades ago. He had close high-level connections at headquarters and people answered his phone calls.

“Oh,” Lessor continued. “They’re also concerned that he was the second top-level asset we lost this year, which pisses off the CIA. But who cares about them? Those snobs across the river are lucky to get any information we give them.”

Ballantyne looked away. A good recruitment-in-place had been murdered and all certain higher-ups could think of was how it affected their careers. At least not all FBI agents thought that way. He suddenly wished he had been born to wealth. If so, he would walk out the door, buy a plane ticket and fly to the South of France.

Lessor banged his desktop. "Now here's some good news. You've got a sweetheart assignment. It appears . . ." Now he whispered, "Close that door, would you?"

Ballantyne got up and closed the door, thinking what nonsense. He knew, and Lessor knew that at Bureau Headquarters everyone knew what was happening. Usually before the person who it was happening to knew.

"Well, you're going to Arizona for a few days. Sort of recognition for you taking the fall for this mess. Taking our deputy director off the hook."

Ballantyne shook his head and gave an exaggerated sigh. "Ed, I wasn't taking the fall for that shithead. I did it to protect our agents in New York. You know the deputy's a screw-up."

Lessor stared at him for a few seconds. The brown eyes shifted left, then right. Ballantyne knew he had placed him in an awkward situation. Lessor owed his job to the deputy director, with whom he played golf every Saturday morning in Reston, Virginia.

Ballantyne enjoyed watching him squirm a few moments, then asked, "What about this assignment? I'm not aware of any breaking espionage cases in Phoenix."

Lessor leaned forward on his desk. "It's a break from the spy stuff. You're going for a few days, maybe a week, to provide a headquarters' presence on an old dog case." He leaned back and smiled waiting for a response and, getting none, continued, "Not just any old dog case. This is one you've probably heard of. Bureau agent by the name of Rod Starke was found floating in a canal in Phoenix."

"I must have been out of the country.

When did it happen?"

Lessor shook his head. "About fifty years ago. Case never solved. The Bureau's been working it off and on for years."

Ballantyne frowned. "Fifty years ago!"

"It goes back to the nineteen twenties, when Hoover was a young stud. When we were still called the Bureau of Investigation."

"What's this all about, Ed? The real story?"

"It's possible Rod Starke committed suicide," Lessor said. "The Bureau's always been uneasy about it all. Evidently, he catted around even though he had a wife." He offered a sly smile. "Single guys like you don't have to worry about being judged—"

"No. The whole story of why I'm going to Phoenix."

Lessor blew out a near whistle. "Okay, but this is between us. Our deputy director is buddies with Youngstrom, you know, the Assistant Director of the Criminal Division. They're in the same carpool. Something happened out in Phoenix that reopened the investigation. The case has been dormant for years." He played with his fingers a second, and then continued, "Whatever started it up again . . . well, I don't know. Anyway, Youngstrom asked our guy to help him out and send someone to Phoenix. Someone with a little finesse in dealing with the agents in the field office."

Ballantyne watched Lessor fidget in his seat.

"Youngstrom hates the Special Agent in Charge in Phoenix," Lessor said, lowering his voice. "He feels the SAC stole the job from him some years back. He wants to stick it to him by sending out a Bureau supervisor to look over the investigation."

"Great."

"It's win-win for you." Lessor smiled. "You get to spend some time out there in fresh

air, sleep in a nice hotel, and enjoy yourself at night." He winked.

Ballantyne rose from the chair. "Ed. This is August. Do you know how hot it is in Phoenix now?"

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." Lessor picked up a thick file and flipped through the pages. "Make sure your cases are in order before you go."

* * *

Ballantyne jogged up the car ramp from the basement of the Hoover Building to street level, turned right, and ran at a steady pace toward the Washington Mall. His faded gray running shirt smelled and he made a mental note to take his jogging gear home for a washing. When he approached the mall, he turned right onto the gravel path, and headed toward the Lincoln Memorial. It would be a four-mile run and by the time he completed one mile his body had adjusted, sweating out heat, and his pulse settled to a steady rate. The wet shirt clung to his body.

The FBI travel office had booked his flight to Phoenix for Wednesday, leaving today and all of Tuesday to prepare for his trip. There was a slight matter of getting a friend at the Department of Justice to sign off on the delicate memorandum explaining why the CIA had not been informed that the FBI had been running a top asset in Paris without their knowledge.

A few days in Arizona away from Washington might be the perfect time for him to mull things over. Plot some direction in his life. Did he want to stay with the Bureau or move on? This trip might be a blessing in disguise. Meanwhile, he had to handle some personal matters, like making sure his bills were paid, suspend his newspaper delivery, and maybe phone Jennifer. That would be a tough call. Nothing more unpleasant than the ending chapter of a romance. Time to tell her it was over.

The past weekend when they drove to

his Ocean City beach house he shared with friends, Jennifer had started in on him about his choice of companions: Richard drank too much, Harry told disgusting jokes, Betty was a slut, Martha was *déclassé*. The ride back to her Virginia home in Great Falls was agony.

Dinner last night at her parents had sealed the deal. Her father proceeded to make caustic comments about a news item on police officers getting caught driving while under the influence. The meal was delicious, so he ignored the jab and diplomatically tried to change the subject to sports. The father pressed on. "Did you see in the paper about those cops on the take? Our taxes at work."

Ballantyne was about to come back with a rebuttal, but the peach cobbler arrived, which he couldn't pass up. With the last mouthful of dessert, he turned to his host. "That last crack was one the dumbest things I've heard all night and believe me you've said some really stupid things."

Silence. Jennifer's father's mouth parted slightly as his eyes seemed to go cross-eyed in rage. Jennifer stared at Ballantyne from across the table and, for the first time, he realized she had been born with her father's eyes, both in color and hard shadows. When her mother looked at him, he caught a whiff of sadness in her eyes.

His run completed, Ballantyne undressed in the locker room. As he headed for the shower, he heard a familiar voice behind him.

"Blackie. I'll see you in the sauna."

It was Finbarr Costanza, a burly handsome man shuffling past in shower clogs, draped in a towel. Fifteen years his senior, Costanza had been his class counselor during training school. Now a headquarters Section Chief, he wasn't asking, but ordering Ballantyne to join him in the sauna. Ballantyne obeyed.

Costanza made it a point to be plugged into the FBI grapevine. Some said he was the Bureau's "rumor control." He was always good

for a little bit of gossip.

In the sauna, squatting on the wooden bench, Costanza asked, "Who's that agent who always stands in front of the mirror with the hair dryer?"

"Don't know his name."

"Know what?" He gave Ballantyne a disgusted look. "I saw him blow drying his balls."

"What?"

"I can see blow drying your hair and maybe under your arms, but really, Blackie. Your balls?"

With that, Costanza closed his eyes and combed through his gray hair with his hands. Ballantyne knew he would have to wait to learn why he had been summoned.

"Now we have to wear towels in here," Costanza huffed. "Female agents climbing their way up the management ladder, using the gym, using the sauna."

Costanza didn't work out in the gym. In the afternoons, he simply sat in the sauna, then stretched out on the massage table and meditated before taking a shower.

"So's how's by you?" Costanza asked, in his thick Boston accent. The question referred more to Ballantyne's career, than his health. Costanza didn't wait for an answer. "The word is, you're going to Phoenix," he said, looking down at the thin layer of sweat beginning to form on his hairy chest. His father had been Italian and his mother Irish. The kids had gotten good looks from the father and Irish forenames from the mother.

"You heard? Are your people in the criminal division pissed I'm going out there?"

"No." He chuckled. "It'll broaden you a bit. Give you an idea how the real Bureau operates." Costanza was an old New York field office veteran who thought agents should work only bank robberies and hi-jacking cases.

"You didn't have a hand in this, did

you?" Ballantyne asked, getting up and dripping some water from a ladle onto the hot rocks.

"Not too much water. We'll get scalded," Costanza ordered. "No, I didn't have anything to do with it." His forehead creased, the way it did when something didn't quite meet his high standards, or when something was happening he didn't quite understand. "No. The word is . . . well, the case is an old one. An agent was murdered umpteen years ago. Rod Starke was his name. Case never solved. The Phoenix office came up with a new lead." He wiped his forehead. "You better be on your toes, young man. You'll be the Headquarters' presence, to make sure the case doesn't cause any embarrassment."

"What are you talking about?"

"I don't know. Keep your wits about you and enjoy the climate. It's a resort area." He rubbed his thinning hair with a hand towel. "Watch out for the SAC. I know him. An old fugitive chaser. Doesn't like headquarters's types. He'll resent you coming into his domain and looking over his shoulder."

The heavy wooden sauna door opened, and two female agents came in. They were wearing towels, draped very discreetly. Costanza grunted, got up, and, gave them a cheerful, "Nice and hot today." He worked hard at masking his feelings about female supervisors.

The two women smiled, sat, and reclined on the wooden benches, closing their eyes. Ballantyne pretended not to look, but tried to see if there were any openings in the folds of the towels. There were none, and he knew they knew there were none. He rose before his imagination got him into an embarrassing position and left for his second shower of the day.

CHAPTER THREE

Phoenix: August 13, 1980

The plane bounced with a thud on the Phoenix Sky Harbor runway, even harder than normal for a Boeing 727. When the plane hit the tarmac the second time, Blackie Ballantyne watched a

“Do you realize the
bureau’s been
investigating this
case for over fifty
years?”

suitcase fall from the first class overhead compartment, landing harmlessly in the aisle.

Exiting the plane, he walked through the jet bridge connecting the plane to the terminal and felt the outside heat leaking through the sides. Cool air greeted him as he walked into the greeting area.

Special Agent Judy Deveraux approached and introduced herself. A few inches shorter than he, Ballantyne guessed she stood five foot eleven. She wore a conservative blue suit, her jacket buttoned tight over ample breasts. Her black hair, pulled back from an unsmiling face, had a clean, shiny look. He saw no trace of a twinkle in her blue-gray eyes.

After a few words, she led him to the baggage pickup section where the morning business crowd stood three deep along the

stainless steel carousel. While waiting for his luggage to appear, he asked if they were going to his hotel. He wanted to check in and unpack.

“It’s early yet,” Deveraux said. “You’ve gained a few hours traveling west. We have a lot to discuss.”

So much for this being a fun trip. Ballantyne located his suitcases and followed her out to the parking area. He tried small talk, but she answered in yesses and noes. She tried a little too hard at being professional, but he gave her a plus for nice-looking calves. From behind a kiosk, a stocky man with brown curly hair pointed a camera in Ballantyne’s direction.

“Why is he taking my picture?” he asked.

Searching her purse for her car keys, she remarked casually, “Just a tourist.”

“In August?”

The man turned and walked briskly in the other direction. Ballantyne made a mental note of the stranger’s description. As they approached the car, he looked around the parking lot. No one looked suspicious. Was he goosey? Maybe he’d been out of the field too long.

As Deveraux drove, she appeared to relax and began pointing out Phoenix landmarks. At a stoplight, she radioed the FBI office that she had picked up the “Bureau Inspector” at the airport.

“I’m not an inspector, Deveraux, just a supervisor.” He detected a bit of rank-consciousness on her part—or was it nervousness?

The strong blue sky lacked the white haze he’d left in downtown Washington. In the far distance, mountains and buildings looked bright and distinct. They passed a dilapidated corral with two horses under a makeshift shed that had seen better days. The horses stood motionless, except for tails flicking at flies, heads down, almost touching the ground, their way of surviving the heat.

After a few blocks, Deveraux started

discussing the Rod Starke case. Ballantyne was more interested in hearing about Phoenix and the desert than discussing business, but he let her talk.

No longer tight lipped, she said, "It's really fascinating. Last Saturday night, August nine, the Phoenix police called our night clerk and told her that they had received a strange call on the Silent Witness line. That's the Phoenix Police Department's program to get citizens to call in anonymous tips on crime and criminals. It works pretty well."

Deveraux talked with enthusiastic gestures, sometimes with both hands off the steering wheel and in the air. He began watching where the car was headed rather than the scenery.

"In the report our night clerk prepared, the caller claimed he knew who killed the FBI agent in Phoenix back in 1929. He says that this guy, Gene Frost, is living in a trailer in Sunflower. That's a little hamlet northeast of Phoenix. He didn't know the address. Anyway, this Frost had been bragging to the caller about killing this agent a long, long time ago. Evidently, the caller sounded pretty old. He told the police that Frost was a white male, about five feet six or seven, and about seventy years of age."

"That makes sense," Ballantyne said. "Someone seventy-something today would be in their twenties back in '29."

Deveraux stopped for a traffic light, stared through the windshield, then continued, "The officer, Gomez, I think his name is, said the call was sort of unusual. He got the impression that the man on the phone might be Gene Frost . . . that maybe he was trying to clear his conscience after all these years."

The light changed to green and they turned north. He wondered how long she had been in the Bureau.

"Do you realize the bureau's been investigating this case for over fifty years?" She turned to him with eyes that repeated her

question.

Now it was his turn. "Yeah. I read through the files back at headquarters." Which was half true, having only skimmed through the pages of twenty-one volumes. The case had been either in an active status or a pending-inactive status for fifty years. FBI agents had recorded thousands of hours of investigation, but had arrived at no solution.

"I've read through some of the files since I was assigned to the case," she said, not in a bragging sense, but as if it were something that was expected of her.

"When were you assigned the case?" he asked.

"Sunday, the tenth."

She'd had the case for only three days. "What's been going on since then?" he asked.

"You better speak with the SAC. That's Mr. Flowers."

"Well then, where are we now on the case? Did we find Frost? Any other good leads developed?"

"We've worked some leads. We have a lot more to do." Her voice slowed and she glanced over. "I guess that's why you're here. To help us, right?"

"I suppose so." He looked out the side window.

They continued north through the city. Here, the architecture of the buildings tended to be modern-looking with tinted glass and green landscaping. Water sprayed onto flowering bushes, throwing off little rainbows.

"That's Squaw Peak on the right," Deveraux flipped her hand in the direction of the jagged rock mountain. "Me and my friends climb to the top on Sunday mornings."

Why do young people always start their sentences with "Me and so and so," Ballantyne asked himself. Don't they teach proper grammar anymore?

The Phoenix FBI office faced Central

Avenue and occupied two floors of the corporate U-Haul building. They went into the multilevel, open-air garage in the back and parked on the second level. Deveraux led him through the back door, past the glass enclosed duty office that Ballantyne supposed was where the dispatcher sat. She pointed him toward her squad area at the far end of the hallway. Gray metal government desks lined the walls of the open office space occupied by agents writing reports or talking on phones.

She led Ballantyne to the expansive corner office of the SAC. The name on the door read, R. RODNEY FLOWERS. The man who pushed himself up from behind the desk had a pale face and a full head of gray hair that looked too thick for a comb. With a trim body, he had a casual Western look. Flowers waved Ballantyne and Deveraux into his office, which had a view of sand-colored mountains and tall office buildings.

"Great view, eh?" Flowers said. "I've been here for three years and expect the Bureau to pull the rug from under me any day now. Transfer me to some hellhole, like headquarters." He smiled, but his eyes were unfriendly "How are your accommodations?"

Deveraux spoke up, "Boss, we came straight from the airport. I knew you'd want to see him right away."

Flowers motioned them to sit down. "I see Bureau supervisors still wear pin-striped suits." Ballantyne could see that he was being sized up. "We go sort of Western here," he said, pointing to his cowboy boots.

The office space seemed a contrast to the modern buildings outside the window. The walls were paneled in inexpensive dark wood, a continuation of the same 1960s paneling found in the rest of the FBI office. It had a "dated-modern look." Ballantyne caught an odor of wood and carpet, flavored with desert dust, as if the office had been closed up over the course of a hot summer. It needed a good airing.

Deveraux sat next to him, and he checked her crossed legs. Nicely contoured, in

textured hose, the top leg tapped the air ever so slightly to some nervous rhythm. She wore a tailored white blouse and he guessed her age at about twenty-six, around seven years younger than he.

As the three discussed the case, Ballantyne realized he had only a rudimentary grasp of the details. When questions came his way, he mumbled short, vague responses. After a while, it became apparent that Flowers wasn't all that well versed on the investigation either. Deveraux came to her boss's rescue setting out in sequence the history of the investigation. She seemed to have a handle on the general gist of the case but by her nervous voice, he soon got the distinct impression she was trying to impress them.

"So, the Bureau considers this an important enough case to send out one of their inspectors." Flowers had finally thrown the challenge across the desk.

"I've only been sent out to help, in sort of a liaison-type capacity. To help the decision-flow between headquarters and the field." Ballantyne realized he was gibbering and almost laughed out loud. He caught Deveraux raising an eyebrow.

"How long have you been at HQ?" Flowers continued, "You must be ready to move out to a field position and do some real work."

"Well, you know how it is with the career development program. You have to punch the right tickets."

Flowers stared. About fifty-years old, Ballantyne guessed and that he would be inclined to want to stay in Phoenix, raise his family, and retire. Why take any more transfers required on the Bureau's merry-go-round to promotion.

Flowers's phone buzzed and he reached for the receiver. "I have a call," he said gruffly, then to Deveraux, "Show Ballantyne around." He asked the caller to wait a second, then called to Ballantyne as the two headed out the door, "Staff meeting in a half-hour. Join us."

As they walked down to the lower level of the office to Deveraux's workspace, she said. "I suppose, Mr. Ballantyne, you'll want to start reviewing the files after the meeting." Without waiting for an answer, she added, "Afterward, I can drop you off at your hotel."

"Please call me Blackie."

* * *

Making small talk, five squad supervisors hovered outside Flowers's office. All wore suit coats and spoke in hushed tones. It was evident by the anxiety on their faces that the SAC, the boss of the Phoenix office, ran a tight ship and no one wanted to screw up at his conference. As Ballantyne approached, eyes flicked in his direction, making subtle appraisals of his rank. The SAC's secretary came from behind her desk and introduced him to the agents. After the third name, Ballantyne gave up trying to put names to faces. He could attend to that later.

He did make it a point to remember the secretary's name, Esther, a person to be reckoned with in any FBI field office. Two supervisors started the game of "do you know so-and-so," while they waited for Esther to tell them the SAC had completed his telephone call with Washington.

One of the supervisors, Frank Garrity, came up and told him Deveraux was on his squad. At the same time, Ralph Jensen, who headed up the white-collar crime squad took Ballantyne and Garrity over to a corner. "Well, it looks like a certain person," Jensen placed his finger on Garrity's chest, "is going to get a public grilling this morning." Jensen gave a smile accompanied by a little shake of his head. His dirty eyeglasses, taped together at the middle rim, kept slipping down his nose as he talked.

"What's this all about?" Garrity asked quickly.

"Well, a certain person," he said, waving his finger in Garrity's direction, "evidently failed

to set up a special program in the event of a nuclear problem, say a meltdown at a nuclear power site. The boss, I'm told, is pissed."

Esther opened Flowers's door and invited the group into the executive suite. Jensen followed the others into the office but Garrity held back, a slight look of panic crossing his face. Flowers was planning to blind-side him. At least Jensen warned him.

"Where the hell did Jensen hear about this? Does everyone know about it?" Garrity asked himself in a low voice, then turned to Ballantyne, flustered.

"At least you got a head's up."

"After you," Garrity motioned.

Ballantyne was the last to sit down. From the way each agent headed for their seats, arranged in a semi-circle in front of the SAC's desk, it was apparent that everyone had a claim to a particular chair, seniority claiming the nearest position to the boss. Flowers appeared to be reviewing his notes while his staff got situated. Looking up from his desk, he pointed his head in Ballantyne's direction and said, eyebrows raised, "We have the pleasure of having . . ." He now read from his notepad. "Mr. Harrison Ballantyne from Washington is visiting us for a few days."

A few forced smiles came from the assembled group.

"You're not inspecting us, are you, Mr. Ballantyne?" Eyebrows rose once again.

"No, sir."

"You are here to help us with a case?" He pronounced each word slowly and distinctly.

"I'm here to act as a liaison between HQ and the field." Ballantyne didn't like where this was going and wished that he had insisted Deveraux take him to the hotel.

"I see. Yes." Flowers looked around at his staff and smiled.

"Of course, it's understood that in order to perform my function properly, I'll have to get

into the guts of the case.” Finbarr Costanza back at headquarters was right when he advised him to watch himself with Flowers.

“But it’s understood that this is a Phoenix case,” continued Flowers, more to his staff than to Ballantyne. Without waiting for a response, he added some perfunctory comments that the services of the office were at his disposal.

The SAC turned his attention back to his supervisors. As he droned through a dry recitation of office matters, Ballantyne did a quick study of the staff. Jensen maintained his goofy grin. Garrity’s face, open and communicative a short time before, was now frozen. Only his eyes moved, darting from one person to another, always going back to Flowers. It was going to be interesting to watch the cork pop. The other supervisors busied themselves jotting in their notebooks.

Flowers’s face blotted as the meeting progressed. He moved around in his chair like a man with a bad case of hemorrhoids. Finally, he leaned forward. His eyes kept darting in Garrity’s direction as one who had become a big bull’s-eye. Flowers was preparing a performance. Fortunately, Garrity had had a glimpse of the script.

Tossing his notes on his desk, Flowers paused and then announced he had discovered a major management problem. He looked at Garrity. “This came up in a conversation with the Bureau.” The implication being that it was the topic of his recent telephone call. “All offices have been instructed to have a nuclear disaster plan in effect. Eh, that is, a program, I mean offices that have a nuclear plant or complex in their territory.” Flowers had lost the place in his script. “We don’t have one in this office. That is, a plan. Why not, Mr. Garrity?”

Garrity puffed his cheeks and slowly released a breath of air. As Ballantyne watched, a similar predicament came to mind during his days in the Marine Corps. Unexpectedly, his company commander had chosen him as an example to the other assembled officers as one who, if not incompetent, was at least derelict in

his duties. As a fresh lieutenant, he had stood there on the parade ground swallowing his sense of injustice, accepting the admonishment, because his mind wouldn’t focus. He recalled stammering a response to the captain and feeling very, very sweaty.

“Well, boss, as you know, we don’t have any active nuclear plants in Arizona. The Palo Verde facility, as far as I know, hasn’t come on line yet.” Garrity’s voice sounded controlled.

Flowers leaned back in his chair. “A plan is usually made for future contingencies . . . right?” The morning sun came through the window behind him and illuminated his gray hair, as he continued, “The Bureau mentioned that plans should be formulated as soon as possible. That’s why they had regional conferences on this very subject.” He knocked the desk with his knuckles.

Now appearing surprised, Garrity said, “Wasn’t that the conference you went to in San Francisco? When was it? Two, three months ago, Boss?” Garrity seemed more relaxed but looked warm with the thin sheen of perspiration forming on his forehead. Now he went in for the kill. “I think you said you were going to give me your notes from that conference to study.”

Ballantyne watched a couple of staff members cross their legs in different directions. Then Garrity pulled back. “I’m sure that we can take care of the plan without any problem. Boss, I could use your input . . . from your notes.”

Flowers nodded, tossed some papers about on his desk, looked up, and began talking about maintenance problems with office cars. Garrity sank back in his chair. There were a few nervous coughs from the supervisors. Ballantyne looked in Jensen’s direction and saw him give Garrity what looked like a nod of admiration. Garrity seemed to have saved face this time but Ballantyne wondered if this was a recurring scene. How dysfunctional was this group? He would try to avoid any more of these meetings.

Then Garrity was in Flowers's sights again. "This case. The case he's here for," he pointed a thumb in Ballantyne's direction, "What are you doing with it? The murdered agent? What's happening?"

"I assigned it to Judy Deveraux. This is her first office in the Bureau, sir, and, like you said at the last meeting, you wanted first office agents, especially female agents, to handle some quality work."

Flowers's flushed face turned sour. No one moved in the room. Then Ballantyne saw Jensen trying to get Garrity's attention, his lips forming into a grin, as he pushed his eyeglasses onto his nose with his right middle finger.

Deciding it would be interesting to test this son-of-a-bitch, Ballantyne decided to jump in. "I suppose there are additional agents working this case. After all, it is the investigation of a murdered agent."

Eyes glowering, Flowers sneered, "Listen, Mr. Bureau Supervisor, this office knows how to conduct investigations without headquarters's interference. We'll put as many agents on this case as we think are needed."

"I trust you will." Ballantyne flicked imaginary lint from his sleeve.

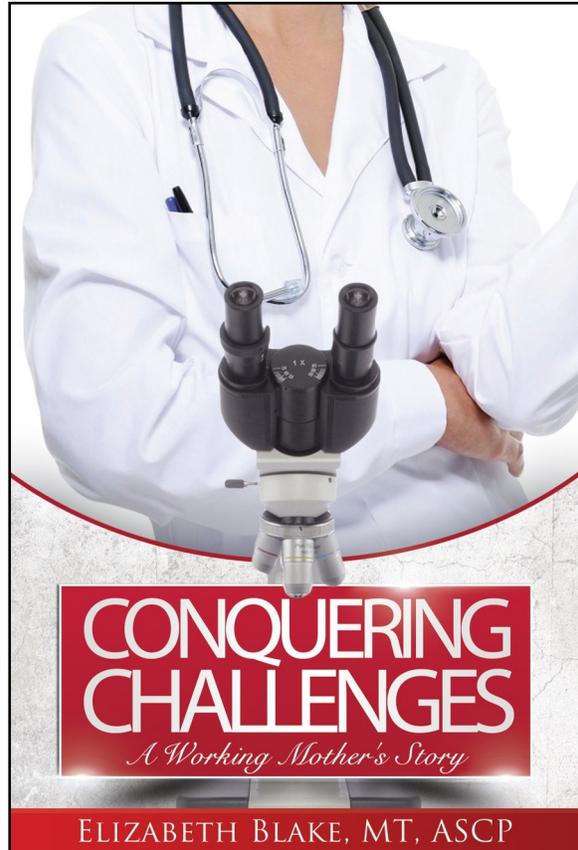
"You just do your liaison work."

"And I'll keep headquarters advised daily on developments of this important case." Ballantyne stared Flowers down and continued, "And maybe solve your fu—, your case."

Flowers slammed back hard in his seat, looked at the ceiling and roared. "Right. Some headquarters lackey solving a murder case." He glanced back at Ballantyne, then said, with disgust, "That's all for today."

Ballantyne stood. "It's been enlightening." •••

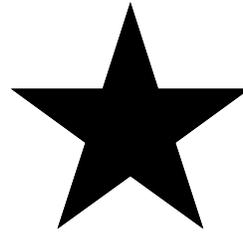
ADVERTISEMENT



From Minnesota to Hawaii and Arizona, Elizabeth Blake describes her years as a student and medical professional. Bursting with poignant, funny, and dramatic medical stories, this true account reveals a young woman's dedicated struggle to balance work with motherhood.

3rd PLACE

UNPUBLISHED NOVEL



The Beached Ones

by

Colleen M. Story

1

Like a sunrise come too soon, the lighthouse brought Daniel A. Shepard back to life. On and then off again, it pushed through the darkness behind his eyelids, illuminating dreams formerly shrouded in fog. Sensing solid ground underneath him, he opened his eyes.

Stars twinkled above, welcoming. The crystal beam beckoned like an eager playmate: *Come. See where you are.*

Daniel sat up and tapped his arms, legs, chest, and head. No burns. No broken bones. No blood. Just moments before it had been fire, heat, pain, and the crunch of his bones against the ground. The gas tank had exploded on cue, the force shooting him out of his seat. Flames licked his suit as the crowd's frenzied cheering changed to open-mouthed expressions of awe.

Like they thought he'd walk away from the stunt.

Still, it must have been a sight to see his body flying free, limbs splayed and lit with flame, the bike dropping alone to the ramp underneath him, rolling all the way to the edge of the arena to . . . what? Crash up against the railing and drop, tires spinning? He hadn't stayed conscious long enough to see.

Cautiously, he stood up. His body supported him, legs intact, feet solid in his favorite black and lime green high-tops. In the milky light of the moon, white-capped waves rolled into the shore, rising and falling like breath, the water beyond a vast open chasm.

Daniel blinked. He'd never seen the ocean before.

Pawing at his face, he expected to find blood but

Colleen M. Story is a northwestern writer of imaginative fiction as well as a musician and full-time freelance writer and editor. Her fantasy novel, *Rise of the Sidenah*, is forthcoming in late 2014 from Jupiter Gardens Press (under the pen name "C. Shay Ryander"). Her literary novel, *Loreena's Gift*—a first-place winner in the 2012 Arizona Authors literary contest—is forthcoming from Dzanc Books in Spring, 2016. She is the founder of writingandwellness.com, a robust informational blog and newsletter with author features and articles on topics like healthy writing, finding your voice, overcoming self-doubt, and believing in your dreams.

touched only dry skin. His palms, too, were unscathed. Hadn't they been burned?

The sea breeze lifted his hair off his forehead. By habit he removed the Kawasaki cap and ran his fingers to the nape of his neck. The strands touched the hood of his black fleece jacket. He had shaved it all off the day before, left himself bald as a baseball. Now it was back like he usually wore it. Soft waves arched over his ears and fell onto his forehead just enough to skim his eyebrows.

He brought his hands in front of him. The silver watch Gus had given him was missing, the one that gave the audible tick tock when he pressed his ear close to the crystal. He'd worn it ever since his brother Tony's funeral, when Gus had handed it over without a word and then walked out the back door, hands plunged deep into the pockets of his duster.

Had they taken it off before they buried him?

He pulled his sleeve back and angled his forearm toward the moonlight. No panther tattoo. Not even a scar. Just smooth skin, as if nothing had ever touched it.

Levi jeans had replaced his Motocross pants. A shot of adrenaline coated his ribs. He checked his pockets. At first he felt only flat cotton, but then, a lump on the left side. Digging in, he touched the familiar hard metal of the toy plane. Pulled it out. The moonlight flashed on the white paint in the middle of the back wheels, gray body stealth like smoke, the pilot a ghost under the long window. Daniel released the air he'd been holding in his lungs. How the jet had gone from his Motocross pants to his jeans, he didn't know. Tucking it back into his pocket, he looked around, half expecting to see Tony spying on him, wearing that quiet smile he always wore whenever he caught his older brother holding the gift he had given him.

The night spoke in waves, the sand whispering *hush*.

He took a few steps forward and then stopped, dizzy. Hands out, he sought to steady

himself. Over the din of the ocean's sighs a new sound reached his ears, a high-pitched tone that spiked and then dropped. It seemed to come from the direction of the shoreline, down and to the right. Daniel waited. The waves crested and crashed, and then it happened again, a distressed, wailing sound of something or someone in pain.

His sneakers sank in the sand, feet propelling him across the dune even as he wondered what he was doing. It could be a trap, the voice of a tortured soul luring him to the depths of an all-consuming darkness.

He patted the bulge in his pocket. The toy had to be a good sign. He hadn't found his little brother yet, but there was the plane, his new body, the absence of pain, and the beckoning beam of the lighthouse.

Here. Over here.

* * *

The cry sounded a third time, a long, searing whistle piercing the top of the ocean's breath. Daniel jogged forward, reached the crest of the dune, and looked down. Below stretched a long length of beach, the sand smoothed by the tide, emptied of any trace of human presence. To the right, where the moon glow drew away from the shore, loaf-shaped mounds lay marooned on the sand, grounded vessels cast aside as if by a storm. The length of sailboats, they were shipwrecks in the night, still as carcasses until something moved and Daniel turned his head.

A trick of the eye, misreading the shadows. Or so it seemed.

He slid down the ocean side of the dune, sand sucking at his shoes. On level ground, he approached the dark shapes with caution. They loomed larger with every step, great sea monsters without faces. Ten feet away, he hesitated. Licked the salt off his lips.

The lighthouse beam flashed by. In the glow Daniel saw torpedo-shaped bodies, twelve-to-sixteen feet long, aft-facing dorsal fins. Pilot whales. Tony had taped pictures of them on the walls of his room during his sea-creature phase, which was after the dinosaurs. He'd liked the pilot ones best

because they looked so much like dolphins, bulbous heads blunted in front, mouths angled up in permanent smiles.

Daniel searched the sky for an explanation, but found only stars.

Ribs tight, his breath shallow, he trudged past five, ten, twelve of them. Some exhaled out their blowholes, spraying droplets on the sand. One lifted its tail and then let it fall back down with a thud. More beyond. After fifteen, he stopped and sat down.

The nearest one turned its eye on him. Daniel sensed the dry crack in its throat, the crushing weight on its lungs.

“Why are you here?”

Crazy. Now he was talking to it.

“Where’s Tony?”

The eye looked back at him, unblinking. Daniel wondered if it was already dead. He waved his hand in front of its face, up and down, left to right. The eye moved. Startled, he pushed back. Hands deep in sand, he wondered if he were dreaming. The sky, the moon, the air all seemed like what he remembered. This didn’t look like heaven, or any place other than Earth.

A new sound drew his ear, something shuffling in the sand. On the other side of the big whale, a baby nestled close, its head near its mother’s. It was only a third her size, maybe five feet long, the smiling mouth deceptively cheerful, eyes moving back and forth as it tried to wriggle closer.

“Hey. What are you doing here?” Daniel crouched beside it and extended his hand. The baby’s eye moved to his arm.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” Tentatively, he touched its skin. Slick and rubbery, it was like raw egg over a soccer ball. He could almost sense the blood pulsing under the layers of blubber, the heart pumping much like his own.

The lighthouse beam swept by again. Daniel saw the baby’s mouth and one dark eye. It cried out, the sound scraping his spine. He shed his

jacket, scooped the animal up in his arms and ran.

This was a dream. Only in a dream could he carry an animal this size.

When the water reached his chest, he uncurled his arms and pushed the baby away. It turned around and swam back to shore. Flopping like a hooked fish, it called for its mother. The big whale whistled and lifted a flipper in answer. Daniel walked back up onto the beach. Water sloshed in his shoes. He scooped the whale into his arms again and carried it to the water.

Go. Live.

Three times he tried. Three times the baby returned.

Out of breath, Daniel stood on the shoreline. The dim glow of dawn cast a gray light on the mass suicide before him. The baby lay farther away from the mother now. It called to her in pitiful squeaks and whimpers. The mother uttered back short, weary whistles.

Daniel strode up the beach and walked around until he’d positioned himself behind the adult whale. Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes, scooped his hands underneath her, and lifted. He dug his toes into the sand, but it was like trying to lift a wall. Even in this dream world he didn’t have the strength. Spent, he sat back. Three times he pinched himself, but he didn’t wake up. He stood up and threw himself down, but all he got was a sharp pain in his shoulder.

The sky remained a normal sky. Orion stood tall in the east, the Big Dipper angling northwest. A gust of wind pushed the water through his skin. He shivered under his wet clothes. He could still get cold. He pressed a weary arm against his forehead. Could there be other people nearby? He could tell them about the coming carnage on the beach. Somebody would return with equipment and helicopters and marine biologists and news cameras. Arms crossed, head low, he walked inland, back the way he had come. He had nearly left them all behind when the baby cried out again, a piercing, wild sound like the scream of a child.

Daniel’s flesh lifted off his bones.

He ran flat out all the way back. In less than a minute he was at the baby's side. In the water, he swam next to it, trying to push it out, but the whale slipped past him, knocking him over with a powerful stroke of its tail.

Back on the shore, hands on his knees, Daniel caught his breath. The sun lay hidden beyond the horizon, but its rays had lightened the sky to a cement gray. Waves came in and out behind him, licked at his heels, the scent of salt and seaweed in his nostrils and on his skin. He stood up again and walked to the mother. With both hands he grabbed what he could of her tail, and with all his will, pulled.

Please. Just this one.

When he opened his eyes again he was walking backwards. The mother whale floated over the sand in front of him as if her massive body were on wheels. He moved until the water filled his shoes, and then the ocean took the giant burden from him. Spent, he waited, treading water, but he couldn't see her. Back on the shore, he picked up the baby and carried it, held it until he was again surrounded by water and his feet no longer touched ground. The baby wriggled and he pushed it forward as hard as he could.

The ocean engulfed it like a giant mouth. Water hit him in the chest, the wake of the baby's tail strike. It was too dark to track its course. He looked behind him but didn't see it near the shore. It had to be swimming to its mother. The waves played with him, tossing him up and down, pushing him back. He swam against them. Blinked water out of his eyes. He wanted to find them. *Needed* to find them.

There! Like geysers, the two spouts burst from the water. The mother's fin swept close enough to send echoes through Daniel's shirt. Next came the powerful tail, up into the sky and then down with a solid *whap*. Water covered Daniel's face. Three times the whales rose and fell, their spouts like twin fountains, until at last the ocean stilled again, and Daniel swam alone.

He went limp. Floating on his back, he let the water take him where it would. For a time, he rested in peace, the ocean like a warm bed

beneath him. Maybe he needed to die again, here, drifting alone until the hungry sharks came. Maybe then he could move on to the real heaven and be reunited with his brother.

Maybe then, he could finally look into his eyes and tell him how sorry he was.

2

Gravel poked into Daniel's cheek, the smell of grilled beef in his nostrils. Through his ribs he felt a deep rumbling as if something were coming, but he couldn't open his eyes. Inside his high-tops he could still feel his soaked socks, but when he wriggled his toes they were dry. One ear and one upper arm felt warm, as if he were lying in the sun, the other half of his body pressed against the cool ground. The vibration grew stronger. Somewhere in the distance, a train whistle moaned. On his earlobe, six sticky feet tickled his skin.

He fought to open his eyes, but couldn't escape the dream. A soft gray light surrounded him, like a sky during a gentle rain. He smiled, remembering Tony's "anti-rain" dance, the one he'd tried after a five-day stretch of it one spring. Donning a homemade headdress, a leather belt with taped-on crow feathers, he ventured into the steady downpour, took up a post in the middle of the muddy yard, raised his skinny white arms, and started to run in place. Daniel watched from the living room window, peering through the part that wasn't covered with brown spray paint. His little brother kept his eyes on the sky. Rain pelted his cheeks and chin as he turned in circles. His feet pummeled the ground, shooting out muddy splashes of slop that arched back to stain his jeans. After about five circles, he changed to a football shuffle. Rain bombed his feathers and soaked through his black hair. Seeing Daniel in the window, he gave a little wave, and then went back to running in place.

Ten minutes later, he stood stock still like a soldier, sent God a salute, and ran back inside. Dropping the headdress on the TV tray, he

stepped out of his mud-covered sneakers and ran across the brown carpet to join Daniel at the window.

“Did it work?”

The vibration was unmistakable now. The ground shifted under Daniel’s bones. The train whistle moaned, crying out for him to move. For the third time, he tried to open his eyes. The light around him brightened a little, but he still couldn’t see anything. His hand contracted, dirt under his fingers. Near his pinkie, something hard, like steel. The vibration rattled his teeth. He had to wake up.

He bent his knees and they obeyed, approaching his chest. His shoes dragged the dirt. He needed to lift his body, but the effort seemed Herculean. Wheels clacked on the track, coming, coming, and then a ding-ringing of bells somewhere nearby. Wooden arms lowered to meet one another. Red lights flashed side to side.

Open your eyes.

The tracks yawed and swayed, the air a series of clacks and ticks and *whams*. The whistle shrieked, slicing into Daniel’s head and down to the base of his neck. He slammed his hands over his ears, and then his eyelids finally lifted.

The black monster came on like a charging bull, not more than twenty feet away and quickly closing the gap. Scrambling to his knees, Daniel saw the steel where his fingers had been. The track bobbed in sync with the ties already bearing the machine’s weight. The whistle screamed at him again. He grabbed his cap and stumbled backwards, down the incline and away from the crossing. In his rush, he lost his balance and fell, rolling twice before coming to rest on level ground.

The train rumbled by. Clacking wheels scolded him for failing to get in the clear long before. Daniel looked up at the bright midday sky. Relieved that his hand was still attached to his body, he wondered how he had gotten here, how he had moved from the ocean to the gritty gravel incline, his body dropped nearly atop a set of train tracks in . . . wherever this was.

On his feet, he dusted off his jeans, placed his cap on his head and looked around. In front of him rested a tank trailer of some sort, a number of others parked nearby awaiting transport. He checked his pocket for the toy plane. Finding the familiar bulge still there, he walked around and between the trailers, emerging from the gravel parking lot within twenty steps to find himself at the edge of a quiet road that disappeared beyond a small hill in the distance.

The smell of beef wafted from the one-story building on the other side of the street. He walked toward it. It looked as if it had once been a ranch-style house, but now was a café, painted barn red with white trim. A narrow sidewalk around it lay bent and broken from old frost heaves. An antique farm plow sat on the front lawn, two cars and a rusted truck parked in front of it. Near the road, a white post dangled a red sign on two chains. Daniel craned his neck to see. *The Old Biddy*, it read.

The front door squeaked when he pulled it open. An elderly couple drank coffee in a booth by the wall, newspapers like partitions between them. At a center table, a large man cut into his steak, thick biceps framing his ribs. Beyond, the sounds of cooking, meat sizzling on a grill. Daniel looked to his right and jumped, startled. A monster ceramic rooster stood just inside the door, its sharp beak poised over his head.

The waitress, a portly woman with a sunflower apron, walked out in rubber-soled shoes. Years of skin drooped from her arms, flopping back and forth as she approached. Daniel waited, but she gazed right past him out the glass door, looked left and right, and then raised her eyebrows and retraced her steps to the kitchen.

“Ma’am?” he called.

She didn’t respond.

“Ma’am? May I have a seat?”

The woman disappeared around the corner.

“She can’t hear you, son.”

Hairs stood up on the back of Daniel's neck. He hadn't heard that voice in years.

"Don't just stand there with your feet all over the floor. Sit down."

Daniel took a step inside. "Gus?"

"Who do you think it is, the tooth fairy?"

The customers ignored him, even when he drew close, as if he were no more than a breath of air. At the last booth on the left, he paused. The man's back was to him. Bony shoulder blades protruded from under a flannel shirt. Silver hair hung in waves long enough to cover the collar. Holding his breath, Daniel moved until he had gone far enough to look back on the man's face.

"What, I put on too much mascara?"

He had the same salt-and-pepper moustache. Hazel eyes danced under thick eyebrows, his Adam's apple like a turkey goblet over the neck of his undershirt. By all accounts, it was the same man who had lived next door to them in Butte, Montana, until a year after Tony's death.

"Will you stop it? I ain't no pin-up girl. And take off that damn cap."

Daniel obeyed. The cap in his hands, his gaze returned to the man's face, taking in the tanned, leathery skin, the half-bare scalp spattered with age spots. "You died," he said.

"So did you." Gus glared at him, and then gestured to the bench. "Sit down."

Daniel sat. The booth exhaled a noisy hiss.

"You hungry?"

He looked real. Sounded real. Swallowing a gulp of coffee, he drew his lips in between his teeth, three to four times like he always did, in what Daniel and Tony used to call the "fish kiss."

"You're gonna have to help yourself. They won't bring it to you."

Daniel's gaze shifted as the waitress passed them by. "Are we in heaven?"

"Go get what you want. Take it when she's not looking."

It was automatic for him to obey the man's commands. In the kitchen, he saw a single burger sizzling on the grill, the buns in a wrapper on the right, half a tomato on the cutting board. Working fast, he put the sandwich together, grabbed a bag of Lays chips off the shelf, and hurried back to the table. He heard footsteps and ducked his head. Safe in the booth, he couldn't help but look back.

The waitress stared at the empty grill, eyebrows furrowed.

Gus chuckled. "Never gets old."

Daniel covered the meat in ketchup and took a bite. When he looked up, Gus was watching him, eleven lines dark between his eyebrows.

"Been a long time since I've been in Iowa." He redirected his gaze out the window.

"Iowa?"

"Not much different from our neck of the woods, though a little warmer."

"Real Iowa? On Earth, Iowa?"

"Sure."

Daniel chewed and stared at Gus's shirt, the silver snaps, the crisp collar. A pack of cigarettes bulged from the left breast pocket. Gus was here, sitting across from him. His throat tightened over the meat.

"Tried for a job here once. Small town church. Big windows. Warm office in back. They liked the other guy better, I guess." He twisted the coffee cup back and forth.

"That before you came to our drafty building?"

Gus smiled. "Even with all the thermostats on high that damn place would have kept meat cold."

Daniel thought back to the ladies in the congregation with the homemade blankets around their shoulders, the children spreading

them over two to three laps at a time.

"You didn't go after I left."

"Didn't like the new guy. Spent more time on his hair than his sermons."

Gus patted his half-bald head. "Wouldn't have helped me."

Daniel looked at him. It was a joke, but he couldn't laugh. Even the man's bald head was a wonder, here in the chicken café somewhere in Iowa after he'd been dead for four years.

"That blonde woman always trying to sell me hair tonic. God almighty. What was her name?"

"Dorothy."

"That's right." He gave a short whistle. "Hell of a woman, that one. A human peacock."

"Especially when Mike was around."

Gus chuckled. "Ol' Mike Nalley. She would have ruined his marriage if she'd gotten half the chance. You went to work for him, didn't you?"

Daniel nodded. "Until his son came into the business."

"Dorin?" Gus wrinkled his nose. "Nah."

"He didn't go to college. I guess Mike figured he had no choice."

"That kid wasn't mechanical."

"Couldn't change a flat tire." Daniel took another bite of the burger. It was like old times, like the meals they had so often shared when Gus would pick him up after school. Except this time, they wouldn't be getting Tony in another thirty minutes.

"Ms. O'Brien?" Gus asked.

"Passed. About six months after you."

"Oh." He took another sip of the coffee. "You were still helping her?"

"Sure."

Gus nodded. Swallowed. "Who got the chickens?"

"Don't know. Somebody. They were gone."

"Hm." Something else sizzled on the grill, the smell of new meat cooking. "Lot quieter I imagine."

Daniel smiled. Ms. O'Brien's noisy rooster had always been the subject of inside jokes. So many evenings they'd dreamt up new ways to kill it, only to have the thing crow them awake much too early the next morning.

Gus looked down at his cup. "Your mother?"

"Same. Last I knew."

"You weren't living with her."

Daniel shook his head, wondering how the old man knew that.

"That help your relationship any?"

"Helped me."

Gus cleared his throat and shifted his weight from one hip to the other. Scratched at a spot on the table. Daniel glanced at him and then took another bite of his burger. He had to force himself to chew and swallow. Eating was suddenly anything but automatic. The light above the table flickered off and then on again.

The front door opened, and a young couple came in. The mother held a toddler in her arms. The child squirmed and demanded to be let down. The waitress breezed by, fluttering Daniel's napkin. He raised his hand to ask for a glass of water, and then remembered, and let it fall back into his lap.

Outside, a light breeze played with the grasses at the edge of the property. Sun glinted off the metal roof of the empty building beside them. The narrow road beyond lay quiet, devoid of traffic, as if everything outside the chicken-covered walls had come to a stop.

"So." Gus leaned forward and trained his gaze on him. "What the hell happened?"

Daniel pushed the plate away and dusted the crumbs off his fingertips. The old man knew. About the jump. Adrenaline sliced across his ribs.

Suicides didn't go to heaven, Gus had always preached.

"I thought you were coming along all right. You were working with that, uh, that group there . . ." Gus spun his finger in the air.

"Motocross."

"Yeah. You were pretty good."

Daniel felt the urge to touch him, to reach out and see if his flesh were real. He hadn't sensed his presence after his death. Hadn't sensed anything at all.

"You were doing what you'd always talked about." He searched Daniel's face. "What were you thinking?"

Daniel scratched his head. He was fourteen-years-old again, apologizing for having wrecked Gus's ATV. Only this felt worse. This he couldn't fix with a wrench, some grease, and a few parts from the junkyard. How was he to know the old man would be here? "I wanted to find Tony. Do you know where he is?"

Gus sat back. "That boy don't hold anything against you."

"You've talked to him?"

"I ain't seen him."

"Then how would you know?"

"Because I know, goddamn it. I know that boy. I thought you did, too."

Daniel pressed his thumb and forefinger between his eyes. It couldn't start all over again. It couldn't be as if nothing had changed. "I need to see him. I need to talk to him."

"What for? So you can make some grand apology? What good would that do?"

Daniel looked at him. "It was my fault."

"So you throw your whole life away? Crimony."

"I wanted to see him!"

Gus glared at him and then pushed his empty cup aside. It slid across the table. Stopped near the salt and peppershakers.

Daniel got up and crossed to the pot by the opposite wall. Took a clean cup from the stack nearby. His hand shook as he poured, but he didn't spill. The tobacco-colored liquid swirled and then settled, a mini whirlpool of bubbles in the center. Setting the pot back on the burner, he waited. His eyes burned. A stack of napkins rested against the corner of the station. He pressed one hard to his lids. The images were coming, and he didn't want to see them now, the pieces of shattered glass on the pavement, the boy's helmet resting alone against the curb, the chrome bumper of the Ford Explorer as it pulled away into the night.

Footsteps behind him forced him to move.

The waitress reached past his arm, poured two cups, and then returned to the family's table. Behind him, the toddler sat quietly, now. His hair stood straight up at his crown as he colored the paper placemat, his nose almost touching the crayon.

**How many
times did one
have to die?**

Daniel walked back to the booth. He tripped on the way and spilled some of the hot liquid on his finger. He thought again of a glass of ice water, but he was already sitting down. He pushed the cup across the table. Gus said nothing, his gaze directed out the window.

"I don't know where he is," he said finally. "It's not like we all gather in some happy living room and share fruit punch and scones."

"Is he okay? Do you know that much?"

Gus wiped the tip of his nose with the back of his finger. "It's a big world, whatever side you're on. And right now, you and I." He pointed back and forth. "We're sort of in the middle."

"What are we doing here?"

Gus took hold of the coffee cup. He seemed to consider taking a drink, and then reached for the napkin instead, pulling it out from underneath the silverware. Holding it flat against his palm, he dabbed at his forehead and then his upper lip. "Feel like a piece of pie?"

Daniel blinked.

The old man pulled himself out of the booth and walked, small steps that required little flexion in his knees. Daniel craned his neck to watch, afraid his friend would vanish when he wasn't looking. When Gus opened the refrigerator and leaned down to peer inside, Daniel sighed and rested his head against the cushion. After everything, Tony wasn't here. Wasn't even close. Over the din of the voices around him, he heard the toddler whine again.

"But *why* don't they have a brown?"

Gus returned holding a small plate, a piece of pumpkin pie in the middle topped with a hefty dollop of whipped cream. "Get you some," he said.

Daniel didn't feel like pie. Back in the kitchen, the grill was still hot, though nothing was on it, the white countertop clear and clean. He felt the urge to soil it, to grab a bottle of ketchup and empty the contents in sweeping arcs. His gaze settled on the refrigerator. Inside, whole pies sat crust-to-crust, the pumpkin missing a piece. He grabbed the plate next to it and returned to the table.

Gus's eyes widened. "You gonna eat that whole thing?"

The fork was a weapon. The crust broke, revealing a mass of blueberries.

"Need ice cream with that."

"I don't."

Gus grunted. "That's right. You're the one who don't like ice cream."

His fork scraped against the bottom of the glass plate. The door opened and another older couple entered, taking a booth on the other

side.

"Why can't they see us?"

Gus wiped whipped cream off his upper lip. "You got a bubble around you. They don't see you, but they sorta sense you, so they steer clear."

Daniel watched them pick up their menus, their faces stone still if they were reading a final will and testament. He wanted to yell at them, see the startled looks on their faces. "We're really back on Earth? This isn't some in-between place?"

"Back on Earth. For ten days."

The pie bled blue blood through the flesh of the top crust. Daniel dragged the fork back and forth, raking wider wounds. "I don't get it. This isn't heaven?"

"I told you. This is Iowa."

"Then what am I doing here?" His voice was louder, his face hot. He had the urge to throw the pie plate as hard as he could against the wall. "Are they sending me somewhere else?"

Gus looked from the pie plate to Daniel's face. His cheeks flushed red. "What did you think, boy?" He leaned forward. "You'd blow up your bike and arrive in some golden city where they float on diamond Harleys and wear white wings? You think you'd find Tony sitting around on his heels doing nothing but waiting for you?" He threw the napkin down. "After everything I taught you, you wimped out and quit." He pointed a bony finger at Daniel's face. "You decided that. All on your own. So don't be complaining to me about where you are now."

Daniel let the fork fall. It clattered onto the table.

Gus sucked in his lips again, his eyes glassy. He shoved his plate into Daniel's larger one, unseating what was left of the pumpkin pie. "I'm going to the john."

Alone in the booth, Daniel felt his shoulders sink back down to their regular place. Sweat prickled the back of his neck. The waitress closed the cash register near the front of the café.

Biceps stuffed his wallet in his back pocket and walked out. Daniel watched as he made his way down the sidewalk to the right and climbed into the pickup truck. The engine started with a familiar crank and whir. Too familiar. Back on Earth. The burger churned in his belly. Maybe he should have stepped in front of the train. Maybe that was the other pathway to where he'd really wanted to go. Or was it the whales? Maybe he should have left them be, walked into the ocean until the water sucked away his last breath.

How many times did one have to die?

The old man sat back down in the booth. His gaze fell onto the spilled pumpkin pie. Scooping the last of it off the table with his fingers, he plopped it into his mouth, sucked off what remained, and then wiped his hands on his napkin. After he'd swallowed, he took a deep breath and exhaled.

"Just listen to me, all right?" His voice was calmer now. "Say the word, and you go back in the soup. If that's what you really want. No explosions necessary. Oblivion, just like that." He raised a finger. "And don't ask, because I don't know what it's like. But . . ." He raised an eyebrow. "Tony won't be there."

Daniel frowned. "How do you know?"

"Oblivion. It's nowhere. Nothingness. You think that's where Tony went?"

Daniel looked away. He couldn't imagine it, but—

"Just trust me, will you? I've been here a bit longer than you have."

The pie filling tasted thick on the roof of his mouth. Daniel longed for a drink of water.

"I hope you'll take door two." Gus ducked his head, trying to catch Daniel's eye. "Take these ten days, get across this fine country, and meet me in San Francisco. I'll have the sailboat."

Daniel looked up. Something new danced across Gus's face, as if he had just stepped into the sun.

"Thirty-seven foot catamaran. Soars like a

pelican over the water. I'm offering you a ride. I want you to take it."

Daniel leaned forward. "A ride where?"

"To where you should have gone in the first place."

He was afraid to ask the question, but his tongue moved of its own accord. "How come I didn't go there this time?"

The glow left Gus's cheeks. He scratched his head and looked out the window. "It doesn't work like that."

Daniel lowered his gaze. "It was my life," he mumbled.

Gus ran his tongue over his front teeth. "You took the pie out too soon. You got raw places in you that aren't cooked." He picked up his fork and licked off the last of the pumpkin.

Daniel pushed the blueberry pie over to him. Sighed. "Fine. So this ten days."

"Time to get to the coast."

"I was by the ocean, before. You can't send me back?"

"I didn't do that."

"Then who...?"

Gus scooped out a bite. "You can eat as much as you want, you know. Won't ever show up on you." Blueberry filling dripped onto the table.

"Who brought me here? Was that you?"

"I'm not Socrates, boy. I don't know all the answers. I'm here." He chewed, his lips turning blue. "You're here. It's another chance."

Daniel stared at the gap left in the pie. "Is this some sort of test? A trial or something?"

Gus swallowed. "Needs ice cream." He wiped his mouth, gulped his coffee and leaned out, peering into the back of the restaurant. "You got ten days, son. Burn it into your brain. Sunset. September twenty-first. San Francisco Bay."

Daniel sighed. "Why not Maine? North Carolina?"

Gus scanned the other side of the restaurant. "You don't sail into the sunrise, shithead, you go off into the sunset. John Wayne style. Got it? Besides, that's where the catamaran is."

Daniel looked out the window.

"It's your only way out." Gus downed the rest of his coffee, and then waved his hand back and forth. "Look. You threw a wrench in the works. I could get all up in your ass about it, but you've closed a door. There's no going back, now. I've managed to open up a new one, but only by a crack. You gotta push through the rest of the way."

Daniel hung his head. The lecture was working, the old guilt creeping back into his chest. "Tony?"

Gus pulled a cigarette out of his pocket. The lighter with the cross on it flamed yellow as he held it to the white paper. "You gotta get over to where he is. Then . . .?" He shrugged.

A door opened in the back. They both turned toward the sound. Footsteps marked the linoleum floor, and then a wisp of a girl with red hair walked by. She carried a motorcycle helmet under her arm. Daniel sat up straighter as she moved to the left and disappeared into the third booth on the other side.

"Did you see Loretta?" he asked.

The burning cigarette hovered an inch from Gus's lips. His face stilled, and then he inhaled again, expanding his lungs as he drew the drug into his body. Smoke came out of his nose in puffs. When it had all dissipated he tapped the ashes onto the empty plate.

Daniel remembered the two of them only in fleeting images, Loretta pressed up against Gus's ribs in their old Dodge Ram, a lime green scarf over her walnut-colored hair. She'd disappeared one day. Died in an accident, Gus had said, but there never was a funeral.

"Get to San Francisco. Just focus on that."

"It's the only way?"

Gus narrowed his eyes. "If you're thinking about escaping again, I'll have your hide."

Daniel closed his mouth.

"This wasn't easy for me, getting here. Now, can you do this, or not?"

Daniel looked at him. Looked out the window at Iowa. The narrow road stretched away into the distance, past the white building and up a slight hill to the west. A gray-and-white cat meandered over the gravel shoulder, seemingly unconcerned with any potential traffic.

"Mommy, look!"

Daniel turned his head. The toddler held up his colored placemat. His mother nodded and expressed her admiration. The toddler smiled and pointed out his work. "See, I made the dog purple." He laughed. "And the man's face is green, like the grass, because there was no peach. See? He's got a green face."

"That's nice, honey."

The toddler watched her as she took a sip of her tea. His hands came down, the placemat settling back onto the table.

It's green because he's actually an alien, Danny, but nobody knows it, because he wears his mother's makeup everyday. See, he steals into the bathroom after she's gone and puts it on before she sees him. Everyone thinks he's a normal boy, but he's not. One day, he's going to show them all. One day, he's not going to wear any makeup. Then won't they be surprised!

Daniel turned back to the old man. "Ten days. San Francisco."

Gus nodded, took a last inhale, dropped the cigarette in his empty coffee cup and slid out of the booth.

"Where are you going?"

The old man dropped a ten on the table. "September twenty-first. Bay marina."

Daniel stared at the bill. "Will she even see that?"

"After we leave. Imagine when she spots

the ashes." He grinned. "No smoking in here."

Daniel looked from the cup to Gus's face and then across the restaurant where the waitress was giving the wispy girl a menu and a glass of water. When he looked back, Gus was already halfway toward the front door.

"Wait." Grabbing his cap, he hurried after him. "Where are you going?"

The hinges squeaked, the oversized rooster eyeing Gus's exit. "That one, over there." He pointed to the girl with the helmet. "Go with her. She'll get you there. I'll be waiting for you."

"But—"

Gus put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm counting on you, now. Don't be late." He smiled. "You don't want to miss a ride in Loretta. She's a beauty."

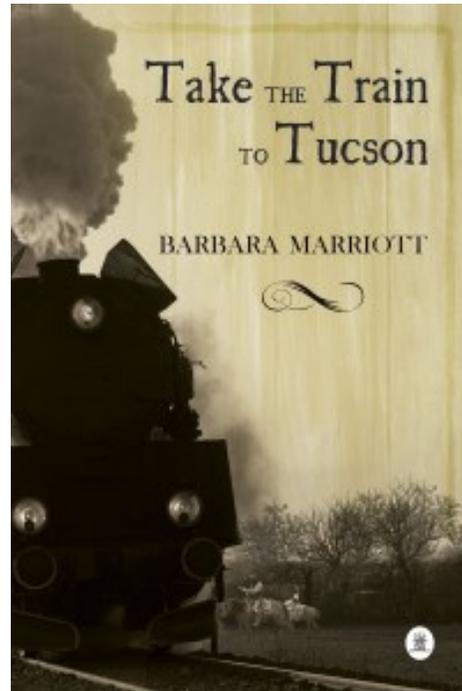
He'd named the boat after her. Daniel could see it, the black letters painted on the stark white body of the craft.

Gus's gaze shifted to the girl, and then back to Daniel's face. "It's only ten days, so suck it up." He grabbed Daniel's arm just above the wrist. Squeezed. "Don't let me down, all right?" He slapped him twice on the cheek and then walked out the door.

"Wait!" Daniel caught it on the backswing and pushed through, stepping onto the sidewalk.

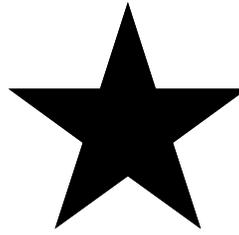
Iowa opened up in front of him, the sun blazing on his face. ●●●

ADVERTISEMENT



It is 1894 and Leonarda Stanton Worthington is beginning the year in trouble. It all starts when she takes the train to Tucson to join her father, and gets involved with train robbers and a cream cake. Before she can get sand in her shoes, or poked by a cactus, she is caught up in murder and kidnapping by a band of ruthless western outlaws. Too much for Leo's feisty spirit? NEVER. She is determined to catch the culprits and bring them to justice before the local Sheriff, the Pinkerton Agents, and her father can solve the case. Join Leo as she stirs up old Tucson and follows her journalistic nose as far north as Oracle. Nothing is sacred to Leo, not the Suffragette movement, a lost mine legend, or the financial status of her neighbors. Now that Leo's in town things in the Arizona Territory are heating up, and it's not only the temperature.

1st PLACE SHORT STORY



Cockroach



Char Everett makes her home in the southern part of Michigan. She is an Elementary school teacher by day and adjunct IT instructor at a local community college by night.

Curling up on the couch with her two labs to write is treasured time. Char likes to believe she gets her love for writing from her late father, Chuck, saying that, “He didn’t have the opportunity to pursue his love of writing in life but no father could have had a more inspiring kind heart, more encouraging soul, or patiently played Barbies for so long! This one’s for you, Daddy.”

The silence was deafening. Was that possible? How could it be that silence was deafening? I listened all the harder. I dared to breathe the smallest of breath afraid that it would stir the dust and force a sneeze. I listened to the silence, which was even worse than the noise. With the noise, I could chance to suck in the gritty air around me and not fear it would give my hiding place away. The silence would give me away. Slowly I lowered my face to rest in a puddle of my own tears, causing a terrible need to scratch the itch it left burning my face but I didn’t move. I closed my eyes, wanting nothing but to sleep a dreamless sleep. If my dreams were laced with the horrors and terrors that I had witnessed, I might wake screaming and my screams would never stop until silenced by the killers that sought me by name. “Keza (KAY-zuh)!” I could hear them, “Keza Iranzi!”

* * *

My heart ached with such heaviness that if I had not been lying prone, I would never have been able to place one foot in front of the other. I concentrated on my breathing, in out, in out. I whispered prayers with silent lips. “Our Father, who art in heaven . . .” Yet my mind constantly wondered if they were in heaven now. It was such a shattering heartbreak picturing that they might have suffered at the hands of their friends. I tried to summon images of happier days with my parents.

Mama was a wonderful storyteller. She would sit at my bedside to tell me stories on those hot, sticky, sleepless nights nudging me into peaceful sleep with happy dreams. My favorite story she had told me many times. “Kwita Izina,” she would begin and I would settle in, listening as if I had never heard it before, “is our traditional naming ceremony. Everyone was excited to come and celebrate our beautiful little one.” She would smile at me with deep brown eyes. “Neighbors and friends, aunts and uncles, and many little children from the village all came with their own ideas of names for our little one. Dah tah cradled you in his strong arms and

waited patiently, as all from the youngest to the oldest gave their suggestions. At last the room grew silent. Dah tah and I looked at each other and in his soft, kind voice he called out 'Keza Iranzi!' And everyone clapped and smiled."

I always asked the same question.

"What does it mean, Mama?"

"Your name means 'Beautiful' my little one. Beautiful one that God knows," and she would smile upon me with such a great love that the leap into her arms was a warm, safe haven.

"Keza Iranzi! I know you are still not found! I will find you dirty cockroach! I will find you and you will be with your mother and father!"

My mind snapped back to the voice so close, so near, as ice flowed to the pit of my stomach. Was it below me? Would this to be the day they found me? I was a Tutsi child of barely nine but as my legs quivered and my heart thudded in my ears, I knew that my young age made no difference to the killers. They would drag me into the streets of my little village in Rwanda as they had my mother and father but death would not come swiftly. Guns were an expense that would have allowed for a quick death. Instead, neighbors killed neighbors and friends killed friends with clubs and machetes. What had happened to turn neighbors that had once been my parents' friends into such evil people?

My school days had done very little to prepare me for the hatred Hutus had for Tutsis. I had not understood why I was made to stand awkwardly in front of my classmates reminding them every morning that I was Tutsi. I hated that I was somehow different from my Hutu friends. Friends who studied what I studied, ate what I ate, lived the deep rich culture I lived but they did not have to stand in front of classmates and state the word Hutu as if it were something to be ashamed of. In my small world nestled in the "land of a thousand hills" near the beautiful shores of Lake Kivu, most of the people of my village worried more about

feeding their children, raising their goats, and working at their gardens. There had been those occasions that made me question if I were, in fact, dirty and different. Boys glaring with cold icy eyes only daring to throw the pebbles at my back after I had passed by. Muttering old men with nothing better to do than cast wicked stares as I walked down the dusty roads from school. The scariest part of all, though, was that there were many, many more Hutus in Rwanda than there were Tutsi.

One day, so quickly like an evil black snake, wickedness crept into my village. Hutus began to hunt in the streets and what they hunted was unimaginable. Hutus went from Tutsi home to Tutsi home and drug their friends and neighbors out screaming. My father and mother had watched through the window and down the street. They had whispered quietly while they held each other and I sat on my bed watching them through the doorway, shivering with cold even in the heat of the day. It was beyond my comprehension, the blood curdling screaming that abruptly ended while others became whimpers that I desperately tried to keep from echoing in my mind. Fear was icy in my heart. My father would protect us. I waited.

If mama and dah tah had not finally turned to me, I would have sprung like a child's rubber ball smashed against a wooden wall. My mother's eyes were red from crying but she set her face with a smile for me. She sat next to me on my bed and wrapped her arms closely around me. She kissed my head and breathed her soft breath on me, "Oh, my little Keza, I love you my beautiful one. I love you and God knows you." She caressed my face and kissed my fingers one by one. I gulped for air as sick terror began to swell a tight grip around my chest making it hard to breathe.

"My sweet Keza, my special one, listen closely to me." As my father spoke, he pressed his small rosary beads into my hand. "A great evil is coming. You must go quickly to your teacher's home. You must ask her to hide you. Tell her that your mama and dah tah have sent you and that we beg her to secrete you away."

I felt my world shifting, tears spilled over onto my cheeks. "My little one, do not cry," he held my face in his large gentle hands and wiped away the tears with his warm thumbs. "Go quickly. There is no more time. Hold your mama and me in your heart for always and we will hold you in our hearts for always, too." I wasn't even aware of his dragging me towards the single window in my bedroom, only of my mother's lost embrace leaving me cold again. He lifted me to the window while I twisted in his arms trying to see his face. Trying to see my mother's face. This wasn't happening. I would wake up. This was only a nightmare. I couldn't move to push away from the window feeling as if my limbs were being sucked down by heavy sands on the beach of Lake Kivu.

My father's voice echoed from far away even as he pushed me out of the small opening. "Now hurry, go quickly. Fall to the dirt. Crawl very fast to the fence and slide under. Creep like the silent baboon spider into the forest. Go, my dear one. Go to your teacher's and wait in her gardens until you see her alone."

Then, with no time left to think of what to say to my father or mother, he lowered me until my bare feet hit the dirt.

"My heart to you," my mother whispered softly. "Do not look back, Keza," I heard her murmur as I dropped to the dirt but I did look back as I crawled through the gardens. They were gone. My heart shattered like glass. I should have looked back sooner. I should go back and hold them tightly one more time or beg to stay with them. But then I heard horrific screams. Screams echoed down the streets and at the doorways of homes scattered about in our village. I began to crawl, the screams pushing me to dig my nails into the dirt, my feet pushing me ahead. I rolled from under the garden fence into the dense cover of forest and lay there breathing hard, the beauty around me in sharp contrast to the dark evil close by. My hand hurt and I looked down at the small black rosary I still clutched fiercely. Sliding it over my head, I kissed it and tucked it quickly under my

shirt before disappearing into the wood.

* * *

Time became a distortion. What hour was it? How far had I crawled? Was it night or was it day? I heard a shushed crack from behind me as if someone with great stealth were stalking me as their prey. A small mound of dirt and leaves that had been tossed into a garden corner became my hiding place. Silently I inched closer to the tiny sanctuary. Edging in backwards with my eyes alert I began digging myself under the mucky pile wanting to escape the overwhelming sights and sounds I had lived these past hours. Shoving the wet muck into my nostrils I could further disguise the unbearable stench that hung thickly in the air. Mercifully sleep drifted over my exhausted body as I shivered in the dampness.

As the day turned to twilight, I awoke with a start causing the leaves piled atop my head to rustle, thus hurling panicked dread to my belly. For a fraction of a second I wondered where I was. If only I had been hallucinating or dreaming up the biggest nightmare my young age could imagine. I tried to calm myself while listening. The light that filtered through the leaves grew dimmer and I tentatively reached my fingers up to begin brushing the leaves that blocked my sight. Not even the birds made a sound this horror filled eve, as if they'd taken flight from our little village.

Cautiously, crawling from my hidden burrow, I suddenly froze as my eyes were drawn to the man who knelt in the not so distant dusty street. His hysterical sobbing begged his tormentors for his life to be taken. Not quite able to understand what I was seeing, I vomited when I realized that his hands lay in the dirt beside him sliced from his body with the machete now stuck in the sands before him. I stumbled and fell to my knees crawling through the dirt and brush trying to escape what would be burned into my memories for a lifetime.

"Don't stop, go, hurry," I whispered

over and over. I knew I hadn't much further to go to reach the home of my teacher, Miss Alphonsine. I wanted desperately for this day to end and for the horrors that I had seen to come to a close. I would remember nothing of what I was yet to see after rolling under the goat fence and into the yard of my best friend, Oda. My memories finally, mercifully, could take no more. I couldn't grasp that the blood spattered and pooled in the yard and a crumpled body that lay protectively over Oda and her small baby sister were the last that I would ever see of my friend. Only yesterday her small wee sister had taken her first baby steps. I retched and clawed at the dirt and with the blood of my best friend under my fingernails, my mind screaming at the pain and suffering of my Tutsi sister, I dragged myself on.

It was late into night by the time I reached the edge of the forest near my teacher's home. My mind was fuzzy from exhaustion, fear, hunger and, if there was such a thing, a shattered soul. I lay in the dirt of the garden under a sky that looked back at me with thousands of twinkling happy stars. I could still hear faraway screams and cruel laughter that carried an evil edge. How could the horror still be going on? Had no one come to their senses?

I heard the click of a door and silently stared into the darkness straining to see whose silhouette filled the entry. I could see the outline of a person in the light of the entrance but not make out a familiar face. Like a silent shadow I crawled closer to Miss Alphonsine's home listening for voices to tell me who might be there. Stillness met me, and then, "Is someone there?" I heard a soft whisper. "Is someone out there? Please don't be afraid, tell me who is out there."

What I was doing was a risk. My teacher was, after all, a Hutu. Dah tah had sent me here and I had nowhere else to go. I summoned my courage and sent my whisper back to the teacher that I loved and that I knew had always loved her students more than anything. Surely she would not turn me away. "Miss Alphonsine," I whispered so quietly the very

sound was swallowed in the dust that I lay in. "Miss Alphonsine," I tried again, still so softly I was certain she would turn and go back inside.

Miss Alphonsine moved quietly into the darkness. She moved slowly, the whites of her eyes giving her position away as she glanced from side to side. She sang softly into the darkness. "Oh, little Firefinch flitting through the night, do not wait till morning to sit upon my sill, follow this whispered song this very starry night." Her sing song voice spoke to me as she moved within inches of my fingertips. As she paused repeating her gentle song, I dared to reach my fingers to touch her bare foot. Miss Alphonsine did not so much as glance down. With only the slightest of pauses in her song, she turned and walked slowly towards her home. Entering her home she left the door slightly ajar, turned the house lights off, and disappeared into the blackness.

* * *

I made my way quietly to the doorstep of the tiny home still on my hands and knees. Creeping into the dimness, I left the door ajar in case my fate lay back in the cover of the woods. Keeping low, I inched my way into her kitchen, able to make out her shape in the moonlight.

"Keza?" Miss Alphonsine whispered.

"Yes maam," I murmured back looking up from my crouched position.

"Shhh," she warned softly, "we will talk further in, Keza. Follow me and be silent like a shadow."

Miss Alphonsine walked quickly through her home with me so close behind I was worried I might stumble into her. She moved toward a tall bookcase at the end of the hallway and sat on the floor motioning for me to join her. "Keza, why have you come here? Why have you been out in the streets?" her voice of alarm unfamiliar to me.

"Dah tah sent me to ask you to hide me. There are men in the street with machetes," I answered in a choked whisper. "There were people, they were angry and yelling. People

were screaming, bleeding,” I tried to block the visions I had seen as I had clawed my way to her doorstep. I’d seen people suffering slow deaths with no hands or legs. I’d seen a young boy killed by another almost as young as he. It was insanity. “I need to help my mama and dah tah. They were frightened. Can you help us, Miss Alphonsine?” I started to cry.

She looked down at me with a deep sadness in her eyes. “My little Keza, your father has sent you here for me to hide you, not for me to hide them. Your parents are surely safe somewhere, too.”

I looked at her with hopeful eyes already knowing that she was telling me what I wanted to hear.

“I will help you, Keza, but you must be very quiet. I will show you a secret place your dah tah and my dah tah made in my home. I will show you where to hide but you must be very quiet and never make a sound no matter what you hear. It will be dangerous for you, Keza, and it will be dangerous for me, too.” And here I looked into her eyes. The sorrow in them told me that the killers might punish Miss Alphonsine or maybe even kill her for hiding me. I had not thought that I would be bringing danger to her home.

“So do not make a sound. Do you understand?”

I nodded my head solemnly for I could not force words from my dry throat. Miss Alphonsine began removing the books from the bottom shelf of the bookcase, stacking them at her side and then pushing the back of the shelf that concealed a hidden dark entryway. She whispered, “Crawl through the opening here and you will find a very small room just big enough to sit down in. Feel with your hands behind the bookcase and you will find wooden steps. It is a ladder hammered to the back of the bookcase that if you climb to the top you will be in a small space above my kitchen but under the roof. It is like a secret roof space. You must stay there and not move around, not cough or sneeze or make a single noise. If you hear someone be

even more silent. I will put bread or a vegetable behind the bookcase as often as I can but only come down for it when you have listened to be sure no one is near. I will put a bucket there for you too so that you will have a toilet. Do you understand everything I have said, Keza?

“Yes,” was all that barely escaped from my lips as there was such fear in me that I had never known. I was here and safe but were my parents? Miss Alphonsine would be in great danger hiding me and there were still the distant screams and swearing in the dark streets.

Miss Alphonsine bent over slightly and hugged my shaking shoulders. She looked at me with her dark, kind face and spoke softly. Her words not what I expected, “I’m glad you came, Keza.”

* * *

My eyes opened slowly. Had I finally slept? I lay flat on the floor above Miss Alphonsine’s kitchen with my head resting on my arms and my toes stretched out behind me. I listened very hard for some noise or sound. I was met with only the lethal silence. I bent my knee and stretched out my foot, wiggling my toes. Lowering one leg, I stretched the other. With the speed and silence of a snail, I inch-by-inch raised my head, tipping it left and right. I moved one arm to reach out in front of me wiggling my fingers that were visible in the faint light that seeped through the slatted roof. By our village standards this three room house made of sun-dried brick was much nicer than many of the mud and straw homes that were built along the street. The roof barely twelve inches above me was made of clay tiles. My hiding place was in between this roof and the ceiling of the kitchen down below. There was not enough room for me to sit up in this small space. After climbing up the slatted pieces of wood behind the bookcase, I had slid my body across the floor, pulling myself along by my dirt-caked fingers and pushing my way with my aching toes. It was a good hiding place, small but safe and well concealed.

My stomach rumbled slightly and I wondered if Miss Alphonsine had left something for me to eat. Immediately, I felt dreadfully rotten for even thinking about food. How were my parents? Had they found a place to hide? When would I see them? How could I find out if they were safe? Maybe Miss Alphonsine would be able to learn something and she might even bring them here to lie on the floor of this hiding place. I was afraid to know this would never be.

I felt a sharp pinch on my chest and realized that I was still wearing my father's rosary beads around my neck. With great care and incredibly slow movements I removed the rosary beads and brought it to the floor in front of my face. Laying it with great care, I spread it out in a small circle. I began to recite the prayers on each of the beads as my mama had taught me when I was just a little girl. By carefully moving my finger to rest next to each bead, I repeated the prayers, keeping track of where I was on the circle of tiny black beads while listening to the quiet below.

After making my way around the rosary a second time, I felt that I had listened to the quiet long enough and it was safe to climb down to where Miss Alphonsine had promised to leave me a toilet. Leaving my rosary to lie in its spot, I began to inch my way backwards until my toes were hanging over the edge that would drop off to the small space behind the bookcase. I continued to push my way backwards, bending my knees up until I could drop at my waist and feel for the laddered steps. With labored slow movements, the muscles in my legs cramped from the exaggerated unhurriedness as I made my way down the ladder to the floor below. There I found what Miss Alphonsine had left for me some time during my sleep. A small empty bucket was pushed off to one corner. My bathroom. At the opposite end of the two-foot by one-foot space was a cup of water, two soft rolls, and two bananas. There was one other item that was an unexpected treasure. A book.

I sat behind the bookcase with my

knees drawn to my chest that whole long first day until I could no longer see in the dimness, reading the story of a little girl and a secret garden. She had pulled the weeds and watered the flowers in it until it was once again a beautiful sanctuary. I had listened to Miss Alphonsine make her way around her home after the school day, humming softly. As the night began to settle in, I climbed step by soundless step back up to the hidden spot. Inching forward until I came to my dah tah's rosary beads and there closed my eyes, listening, always listening.

* * *

Day led to night. Night led to day and then to a week. Week led to weeks. My silent routine was always the same. I would rest my head on a small blanket that my teacher had left for me one morning. I would point to each bead as I repeated my prayers over and over; never picking up the rosary from its resting place for fear it would make a rattled sound giving me away.

I would lower myself slowly down the ladder, eat my fruit, bread, and sometimes bit of chicken or sweet potato. I would sit and read whatever book was there, taking it up into my hiding place at night until the day the story was finished and only then leaving it to lay where I had found it on the floor. I was always excited to see what new story would be left for me. Sometimes it would be a book of history and sometimes it would be a book of faraway lands. My favorites were those with happy endings where I could get lost in the pages for even a little while. My nights would end with whispered prayers again circling my rosary beads until I slipped into sleep but never total peace. When the yells and the shouts, or the calling of names of people that were still being sought, including my own, would not wake me, the horrifying dreams that held such genuine terror, would.

* * *

My eyes blinked fiercely in the bright sunlight and with my arm I shaded them as I stepped

from the doorway of my refuge into a world I no longer knew. The killings were not completely over but the French troops had arrived and Miss Alphonsine had told me that my safety now lay with them and no longer with her.

“You will be safe there, Keza. Here you can only hide. There you will begin your new life. Soon, very soon, you and I will walk down this road and at the end will be your protection. I will always be here for you, Keza. I’m honored that your mama and dah tah sent you to me. I love you.”

After lowering myself to stand behind the bookcase, I had crawled from my hiding place and replaced the books one by one, finished all too soon. It was my turn to protect Miss Alphonsine, who had already placed herself in such grave danger, from the ruthless evil just outside her door.

I had made my decision the night before when she had told me of the French soldiers. After she left for school in the early morn, I would walk this last mile to my safety or my death, alone. Opening the door slightly, I peeked from the crack, hidden and still safe. My heart pounded wildly in my chest but I swallowed and set my chin as firmly as a brave warrior. The French soldiers barely a mile away fiercely protected a refugee camp. Slowly, I stepped from the doorway. One foot in front of the other, gripping my dah tah’s rosary in my fist, I moved forward. As I walked, I saw people on the street and they were definitely Hutus. Though I did not know the number at the time, almost one million Tutsis had been killed this past three months of my hiding. One ominous pair of deep brown eyes flecked with gold looked at me with anger, clutching a machete caked with the blood of another. I knew this man! I met his cold stare with one of my own, not knowing I had such courage. “I know who you are,” I whispered with my lips that had been silent so long. He looked surprised for the briefest of moments. Did he hear me? I raised my head a little higher and, feeling the sweat begin to slide down the back of my neck, I

continued walking. The man with the ominous eyes moved towards me with menace but I would not end my glare of defiance as I thought of my mother’s warm breath on my face and my father’s gentle hands under my chin. His steps faltered. With reluctance I broke my stare from his as I walked past him and it was with an even greater fear that I kept moving, not knowing if he followed me.

A sudden sharp pain shot through my hand from my fierce clutch of the crucifix. Placing it around my neck, I felt strengthened with resolution. It took me fifteen minutes that were like hours of sand sifting through an hourglass dropping with exaggerated thunderous poundings, one by one. I feared my heart would stop and I would fall at the feet of the murderers or that it would beat so loudly they would realize my brave façade that seemed to hold them at bay, false, and pounce. Finally, I could see the barricade ahead. A soldier saw me coming and stood from his position behind the gate, watching me while looking back and forth surveying for my safety.

“Cockroach!” I heard from so very close behind me. “Dirty cockroach, where have you been hiding?” An angry voice spit out with so much venomous hatred a child should never know but this child had seen and heard and smelled for close to ninety days from her tiny, hidden sanctuary. I continued, my eyes now meeting with kind blue eyes that coaxed me forward.

He raised his rifle and his fierce curse gave me heart. “Back off from the child,” he bellowed, then said to me so gentle and warm I could almost feel him leading me by the hand, “Keep walking, don’t look back.”

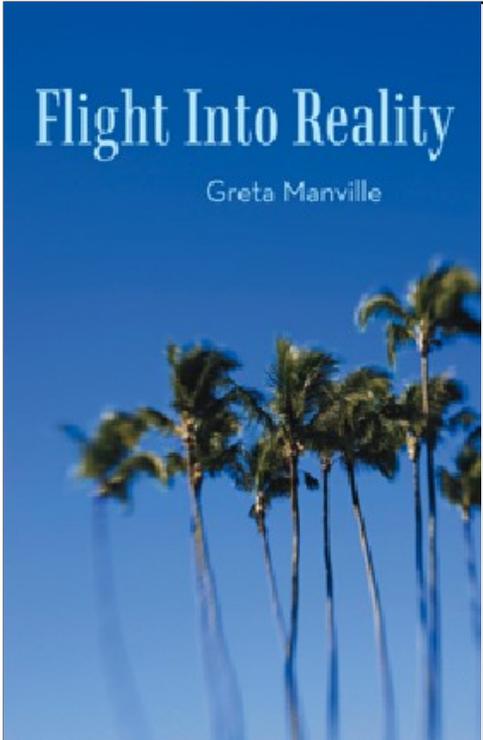
“Don’t look back.” My mother’s last words to me. I straightened myself a little taller and stepped across the barricade. “My name is Keza Iranzi and I am a Tutsi.”

The soldier looked down on me and smiled a wide smile, and then taking my hand he led me to safety and the beginning of my life. •

ADVERTISEMENT

*“I have been
successful
probably because
I have always
realized that I
knew nothing
about writing and
have merely tried
to tell an
interesting story
entertainingly.”*

*- Edgar Rice
Burroughs*



Flight Into Reality

Greta Manville

Flight Into Reality

By Greta Manville

Two demented horror fiction writers confined to a Caribbean island asylum, Garrick and Mara, witness a murder. Though aided by Mara's daughter, their report to authorities is dismissed. And there is another problem—someone wants them dead.

Softcover ISBN978147595703-7

or E-Book

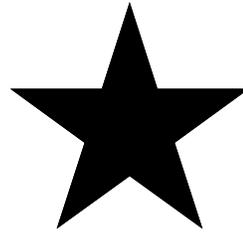
www.iuniverse.com

www.gretamanville.com

2nd PLACE SHORT STORY



Russ Azbill is a native Arizonan who spent his entire life in the southwestern desert of the United States. He is deeply interested in American Southwest motorsports, history, aviation, and space exploration. Russell 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. Since its release, Russ has written three screenplays and a second novel. His second novel is scheduled for publication before the end of the year.



DEVIL'S PARDON

By **Russell Azbill**

"The prisoner will stand so the judge can pronounce his verdict," called out the bailiff.

A hush fell across the dusty room as all in attendance waited eagerly for the verdict.

Failing to notice a response from his client, the defense attorney poked the defendant in the ribs, urging him to stand.

Feeling the attorney had provided him a poor defense, Billy Coates snorted in disdain and gave the attorney a harsh, piercing glance as he stood and faced the judge.

"As the duly authorized circuit judge for the Arizona Territory, I hereby declare the defendant, William Jessie Coates, guilty of the willful murder of bank clerk Jonathan Wilkes during the July 6, 1873, bank robbery in this here town. It is so ordered that Mister Coates will hang from the neck until dead at noon tomorrow. May God have mercy on your soul. This court is adjourned!"

As the judge banged his gavel, raucous applause sounded as the defendant was quickly led out of the courthouse. With head held high, the ragged outlaw walked defiantly across the street towards the jail as the town's sheriff and a deputy tightly held each of his arms. Seeing his defense attorney standing nearby, he spat in the man's direction, hitting him squarely in his face.

"Now Billy, why'd you go and do that for? That man did the best he could for ya. You know you're guilty of the killing and everyone else in the room knew it too. There was no way you were going to walk free," stated Sheriff Jim Johnson.

Billy turned and glared at the sheriff as he thought about spitting in his face as well.

“Don’t even think it, Billy. If you do, you’ll be on your knees praying for the hangman’s noose before the night’s passed. That I promise you,” threatened the sheriff.

The angry man thought better of his impulsive whim and instead turned his attention towards the sheriff’s office rapidly approaching in front of him. After all, the sheriff had been anything but gentle during his recent apprehension and he would accomplish nothing by provoking the lawman further.

The trial had taken the better part of the day and soon nightfall would be upon the small desert community. Entering the sheriff’s office, Deputy Buck Curtis walked to the corner of the office and lit an oil lamp hanging from a hook. The lamp slowly illuminated the small, uncluttered office, sending shadows flickering across the walls.

“Lock him up, Buck,” ordered Sheriff Jim.

After having secured the prisoner in a backroom jail cell, Deputy Curtis returned to the front office. “That Billy Coates sure is a mean one and he sure riled up the townsfolk today. Do you think any of them will try to force their way in here to lynch him?”

Sheriff Johnson paused as he considered the possibility. “I don’t think so, but you best stay alert. John Wilkes was well liked around here and I’m sure there’s someone who would like to get their hands on Billy before the hangman does. Tell you what, you take the first watch and I’ll relieve you around midnight. Right now, I’m going down the street to the diner to get something to eat. I’ll bring back something for you and the prisoner.”

As the sheriff exited the office, Billy called out from his cell, “Hey Deputy! How ‘bout some grub? You wouldn’t want a man to die hungry, now would you?”

“You just shut up and behave yourself in there! The sheriff will be back in a few minutes with your dinner. You know you’re lucky Jim’s the sheriff and not me. For if I was,

you’d not be getting any supper. I can tell you that!”

“I’ll see you in hell some day, deputy!”

Deputy Curtis shook his head at the man’s ill-fated attempt to irritate him. “You don’t even believe in hell! I heard you say that to the preacher who called on you yesterday.”

Laughing, Billy abandoned his taunting and lay down on his bunk, eagerly awaiting his promised dinner.

Time passed quickly and about an hour later Sheriff Johnson walked into the office carrying two plates of food. Handing the steaming plates to his deputy, the sheriff said, “Old Billy got lucky. Tonight’s special at the diner was steak and potatoes. I brought one back for each of you.”

“Much obliged, sheriff. I’ll see to it Billy gets his share.”

“Now make sure you stay alert. Like I said, I’ll be in around midnight to take over for you. Until then, I’m gonna go home and get me some sleep. We’re both gonna have a long day tomorrow.”

“Don’t you worry none, sheriff. Billy will be right here when you comes in at midnight.”

“I’m counting on you, Buck. Don’t let me down.”

A hot breeze blew through the door as the sheriff left for home. Buck swiftly closed the door, trying to keep out as much dust as possible. Dusting himself off, Buck walked to where the two plates of food lay on the sheriff’s desk. He picked up a plate and started towards the jail cells. He paused briefly at the entryway to the cells, then turned around and tossed Billy’s steak on top of his own. “No use wasting a perfectly good steak on that one,” the deputy mumbled to himself.

Turning, dinner plate in hand, the deputy walked to Billy’s jail cell. “Here’s your dinner.”

Billy rose from his bunk and accepted

the plate of food. "Hey, where's my steak! I heard the sheriff brought me a steak! This here's just potatoes and a bread roll!"

"Well, you heard wrong, and that's all you'll be getting. So eat it or not, it don't matter none to me," said the deputy, closing the door to the backroom behind him. He walked across the room to where the stove stood and poured a cup of coffee. It would be a long night. He just hoped the prisoner would keep quiet and the townsfolk would stay peaceably away from the jail.

Outside, several townsfolk worked diligently to construct the gallows before the noon deadline for the execution. The constant sound of hammering filled the night air and it was well past ten o'clock before Billy Coates had fallen into an unrestful sleep.

Just before midnight, a knock sounded on the front door of the sheriff's office. The sharp sound startled the deputy who had just dozed off. Springing to his feet, revolver in hand, he went to the door and asked, "Who's there?"

A smartly dressed individual stood just beyond the door. "I'm Father McNulty. I'm here to give the prisoner his last rites," the stranger lied.

"I didn't know Billy wanted to see a priest?" asked the deputy, through the locked door.

"He did not call for me, but I have come to offer him redemption nonetheless."

Opening the door, Buck said, "Well I don't see where it would hurt none. A man's soul is a precious thing and even a scoundrel like Billy is worth saving."

The man who entered the dimly lit office was not dressed as the deputy expected. This man was dressed more like a Mississippi

River gambler rather than a man of the cloth. "Now just you wait a minute. You don't look like no priest to me."

The dark man said nothing as he turned to face the deputy. Instead, he raised his right hand and with a simple wave the deputy was placed into a trance. The mysterious man motioned to the desk where the deputy had been sitting moments before. With glazed eyes, Deputy Buck Curtis dutifully walked to the desk, took a seat, and then fell fast asleep as the dark man closed the front door to the office.

Showing no emotion, the man opened the door leading to the jail cells, entered, and stood silently watching as Billy Coates continued to sleep. A sinister smile crept across his lips as he rattled the cell door keys across the iron bars in an attempt to awaken the condemned man.

Disappointed by Billy's lack of response, the mysterious man called out. "Wake up, Billy!"

There was no response from the disheveled man lying atop the soiled mattress.

Opening the cell door, the dark man entered the jail cell, and then closed the door behind him. Poking the sleeping outlaw, the dark stranger said forcefully, "Billy, wake up. This is not the time to rest."

"Leave me alone. Can't a condemned man get some sleep before his hanging?" replied the gruff cowboy, not opening his eyes.

"Open your eyes, Billy!" the man said sharply.

Reluctantly, Billy Coates opened one eye and looked angrily at the man standing over him. The stranger was dressed in fine, black clothing from top to bottom. He held before him an ebony walking stick with a solid gold handle, an indication of great wealth. His jet-black hair was slicked back, revealing a strong, chiseled jawline and dark, piercing eyes. An air of confidence surrounded the man and Billy mistakenly assumed he was a preacher.

"Go away, preacher man! I have no use for you!"

The dark stranger laughed wickedly as he looked condescendingly at the man lying before him.

"I assure you, I am no preacher."

Now fully awake, Billy sat up and looked across his cell to where the mysterious man stood.

"If you're no preacher, then who the hell are you? You a lawyer? I already had me one lawyer who was no damn good! Did the deputy let you in?"

"I am a business man," the man said, ignoring Billy's inquiries. "I assure you, we have much to discuss."

Billy stood, looking the stranger straight in the eye. "Who are you exactly?"

"I am your best friend. The only one who can get you out of this mess you have put yourself in."

Billy laughed. "You say you're my best friend. Why I've never seen you before in my life! What is it you really want?"

"I want to talk business. It is as simple as that."

"Business? You want to talk business with me? What little money I had was taken from me when the posse caught me. I have no money. There ain't no business to discuss!"

"Oh, I assure you I have no interest in money and there is much for us to discuss regarding your future."

"Hasn't anyone told you I'm being hanged at noon?"

"First, let me assure you that they won't have the gallows finished until well past noon. Your execution will likely take place around five o'clock."

Billy looked quizzically at the strange man trying his patience. "Noon or five o'clock, what does it matter?"

"In fact, it doesn't. But how would you like to escape your death entirely?"

"Like that's gonna happen," Billy replied, cynically.

"Let us discuss what you want and need. As I see it, you would like to avoid your execution and walk away a free man. Am I wrong?"

"No, you're not wrong! But, I already tried the bars. There's no escaping this here jail cell. Wait, are you offering to break me out of here?"

"In a manner, yes, but not the way you are envisioning."

"Then what?"

"It would be in your best interest to enter into a contract with me," the dark man lied.

"A contract? What sort of contract?"

"One where you get what you want and I get what I want."

Billy paused as the little voice in the back of his head screamed not to listen to the stranger. But Billy was desperate and if this man could help him escape, he would certainly listen to him. "If you can truly get me out of here, let's talk."

"In addition to aiding in your escape, I alone can offer you immortality. I offer you an endless life without illness, a life with absolutely no fear of dying, regardless of your or other people's actions," the man said quietly.

"That's a heap of bullshit!"

"I assure you, it is not. This I can provide you for a price."

"Ah, here it comes . . ."

"In exchange for services rendered, at the end of our contract I will take possession of your soul. I assure you, this is a most generous offer on my part, especially when you consider there is a very good chance I will take possession of your soul anyway upon your

death. After all, you did murder an innocent man.”

“Hey! I’m telling you that guy’s death was an accident! I only wanted the money! I didn’t mean to kill him!” Billy shouted, his patience growing thinner.

“And yet, in the end, you did kill him. And now you must pay for your crime with your life. That is, unless you accept my offer.”

“You never said who you are. Are you the devil?”

The dark man said nothing as a diminutive smile formed on his face.

“You’re so full of crap! There’s no devil or God either, for that matter!”

“Then what could you possibly lose by accepting my offer? Remember, I am offering you your freedom, and without it you will die a painful death in a few hours.”

“So you can save me from hanging?”

“Accept my offer and you will not die today, tomorrow, or ever. That I promise you.”

Billy hesitated again as the little voice in the back of his head screamed its warning even louder.

“You really have no other option. My offer is your salvation. The question is do you want to live or die painfully? The choice is yours.”

Billy paced the jail cell as he tried to think what the man actually wanted of him. Surely not his soul, for there was no such thing. Perhaps the man was simply crazy? That would certainly explain a lot. But could the man deliver the freedom he promised? Having no other options for escape before him, Billy decided to accept the strange man’s offer. He turned towards the man, saying, “I don’t know what your game is, mister. But if you can get me out of here, then we have a deal.”

As his words of commitment filled the air, Billy suddenly had a sinking feeling of regret for having said them. He quickly pushed the

feeling aside, for his freedom was all that mattered to him at that moment.

The dark man responded quickly, swiftly pulling a prewritten document from his vest pocket. Pulling back the mattress, he laid the document down upon the wooden bedframe.

“The terms of the contract are clear. From this moment forward, you will not die. During the duration of the contract, you will not age and cannot die of natural or unnatural causes for any reason. You will be free to live your life as you wish. The contract does have an escape clause. Under the terms of the contract, you may choose to end your life at any time. Once your life has ended, then I will take possession of your soul. Do you freely agree to the terms of this contract?”

“Just to be clear, if I sign this here document, you’ll set me free?”

“That is what we agreed.”

“Then we have a deal, pardner!” Billy exclaimed, grabbing the man’s hand and shaking it vigorously. Accepting a pen, Billy quickly signed the contract.

The man smiled as he grabbed Billy by the wrist. “To seal this contract, I will need a drop of your blood.”

Before Billy could react, the man took his free hand and, using his fingernails, slit Billy’s palm. The dark man held Billy’s hand over the outstretched document. Billy watched in disbelief as drops of blood dripped from his wounded hand down upon the document. The blood sizzled as it struck the document, sending a shiver of fear racing down Billy’s spine.

His business now complete, the dark one smiled at his victim. “Now the way I see it, you have two options, one certainly more entertaining than the other.”

“What are you saying?” asked Billy, as he wrapped a cloth around his bleeding hand.

“You could remain in your cell and get some sleep. When they come for you tomorrow, you could let them hang you, and

then get the pleasure of watching the astonished looks on their faces when you don't die."

"I don't much like that option," Billy said, coldly.

"Your other option is to walk right out of here and ride away into the night."

"I like that one."

The dark man smiled and with a wave of his hand, the jail cell door opened.

Smiling, Billy darted out of the cell as the dark man followed behind him. Seeing the deputy sleeping, Billy quietly went about the room gathering both a revolver and a rifle.

"A horse. I need a horse," Billy whispered.

"I have a saddled horse waiting for you outside," replied the dark man.

"Quiet!" whispered Billy. "Do you want to wake the deputy?"

"There is no need to whisper. The deputy will not awaken until you are gone."

As Billy rushed towards the door and his freedom, the dark man called out, "You're not leaving yet, are you?"

Billy stopped and turned towards him. "Why not?"

"Are you going to let the deputy get away with eating your steak, the one the sheriff brought you?"

"That's right, he did eat my steak!"

"Well?" the man asked, pointing towards the sleeping deputy.

Enraged by the deputy's earlier action, Billy lifted the butt of his rifle and savagely struck the sleeping deputy's head, crushing his skull.

"Tell me, do you feel better now?" the sinister man asked.

Smiling, Billy replied, "Yes. Yes, I do!"

"I think it best you be going now. The sheriff will be arriving shortly. He might object to you being out of your jail cell."

Billy headed for the door but stopped momentarily and looked back at the mysterious man standing quietly in the corner. "How did you know the deputy ate my steak?"

"Does it matter? Really Billy, you should leave," the man replied, stoically.

Saying nothing more, Billy headed out the door and into the night. As the dark man had promised, there was a saddled horse waiting for him just outside the door. He mounted the horse and began racing towards the edge of town just as the sheriff rounded the corner. Seeing Billy escaping, he immediately drew his revolver and fired three shots in Billy's direction.

The report of the sheriff's gun filled the still, night air. The men working on the gallows looked up just as Billy sped past them, his horse running at full speed and kicking up clouds of dust.

The sheriff's aim had been true and two of his bullets had struck Billy square in his back, almost toppling him from his sprinting steed. Intense pain erupted as the bullets tore through his flesh before exiting his body through his ribcage. Billy bit his lip while he struggled to remain conscious as the pain increased. He reached and clutched his chest and brought back a slick, bloody hand as a result. He was losing blood fast and Billy knew he would not be able to stay atop his horse for long.

He remembered there was an abandoned mine located just outside of town. He quickly steered his horse in that direction as blood continued to seep from his wounds.

Back in the town, the sheriff had found the body of his murdered deputy and was busy forming a posse to track down the fleeing lawbreaker. Deputy Curtis had always been a fair-minded individual and as a result was well liked within the community. The sheriff had no trouble finding several men intent on avenging

the young deputy's death. Five minutes behind the fleeing Billy Coates, the posse headed off at full speed into the night.

As Billy approached the abandoned mine, he began to feel better. Although his shirt was still soaked with blood, his body no longer bled. His left arm, which had become almost useless, now moved freely. Within seconds, he felt fine. He smiled, knowing the dark man had kept his end of the bargain. Perhaps he really was immortal and could not be killed?

The thunder of the approaching posse was getting louder and Billy knew he stood little chance of maintaining his freedom by taking on several men at once. Billy quickly dismounted. Taking his horse by the reins, he led the animal inside the mine's entrance, hoping the posse would pass without noticing him.

But it was not to be, because the dust kicked up by Billy's horse still lingered in the air and guided the posse straight to his location. Seeing that his hiding place had been discovered, Billy moved further down the tunnel and away from the entrance. If he had to fight an entire posse, he intended to do it one or two men at a time.

Hidden behind some rocks, Billy aimed and fired his rifle. His shot struck a posse member in his shoulder, knocking him from his horse. As a result of the sudden, loud report, Billy's horse bolted from the tunnel and disappeared into the night. Billy cursed at the fleeing animal, knowing he now had no choice other than to fight the posse.

The remaining posse members quickly dismounted and moved towards the opening of the mineshaft. Sheriff Jim, rifle in hand, led the charge towards the open mineshaft as Billy continued firing from within it. It was clear to the sheriff that Billy held the advantage. With a full moon shining above them, they were clearly visible to Billy while he remained hidden within the darkness of the tunnel.

Another shot sounded from within the mineshaft and a bullet struck dangerously close to the sheriff's ear as he dove for cover behind

a boulder. The sheriff noted that the flash from Billy's muzzle was coming from different parts of the tunnel, meaning Billy was changing locations from shot to shot, making the outlaw's apprehension all the more difficult. The sheriff was surprised by Billy's mobility because he was sure at least one of his earlier shots had found its mark. He knew that Billy should be far too injured to be putting up such a fierce fight. It was clear to the sheriff that if everything remained the same, the posse would pay dearly for the apprehension of Billy Coates.

But Billy was not the first desperado the sheriff had gone up against and he was more than prepared to up the ante in this gunfight. Ordering the others to keep Billy pinned down, the sheriff made his way back to his horse where he removed two sticks of dynamite from his saddle bags. Inserting fuses into the two sticks, he cautiously made his way to the side of the tunnel's entrance. While bullets flew by him in both directions, the sheriff lit the fuse of the first dynamite stick and threw it into the tunnel. Before the blast could take place, the sheriff lit the second fuse and tossed that stick into the mine as well.

The resulting explosions shook the earth as the tunnel's opening collapsed, forever sealing Billy Coates inside. Once the smoke and dust had settled, Sheriff Jim walked to where the opening to the mine had been. Seeing there was no way that Billy could have escaped the blast, the sheriff turned to his posse and declared, "It looks like that solves our problem. Billy couldn't have survived that. We can all return home in peace, knowing that Billy won't be tormenting anyone again. Good job, men."

As posse remounted their steeds and headed back towards town, Sheriff Jim looked back over his shoulder towards Billy's tomb. He was disgusted that outlaws like Billy Coates continued to roam the prairie, preying upon the good folk. As he continued on his way, the sheriff had a warm and satisfying feeling flowing through his veins, knowing he had brought his deputy's killer to justice and that Billy Coates would never again prey upon another human

being.

Inside the mine, Billy had survived the explosion and the resulting collapse of the tunnel. His legs lay trapped beneath a layer of granite rock. At first, it had been difficult for Billy to breathe and the pain from his legs had been unbearable. But, as the air began to clear, Billy's breathing returned to normal and his legs healed to the point where the pain was nonexistent.

Reaching out, Billy tried to remove the rubble from his legs, but found the rocks were too heavy for him to move. He cursed as he tried time and time again to move the rocks with no success.

Billy turned his head and saw a dim flicker of light moving his way from further back in the tunnel. He wondered who might have been in the back of an abandoned mineshaft in the middle of the night. Whoever it was, he hoped the man would free him from his predicament.

Within a few minutes, the light had reached him. Billy looked up and saw the dark man holding a lantern and looking down upon him. Billy smiled, knowing he would now be rescued.

"Man, it's so good to see you! I don't know what you did to me, but what you promised really works. It's impossible to kill me. Come on and help me get these rocks off my legs."

The dark man did not respond to Billy's request, but instead stood silently looking down upon him.

"I said, help me get these rocks off me!" Billy said angrily. "You promised I would live forever. Look here, I have places to see and all kinds of things I want to do and I can't very well do them with these rocks holding me down. Now hold up your end of the deal and get these damn rocks off me!"

The dark man calmly took a seat on a rock near where Billy lay trapped. He smiled as

he said calmly, "No, I don't think I will free you."

"But you have to, that's part of the deal!" Billy shouted. "It's just like when you opened the cell door for me, so I could escape. Now move these rocks so I can get out of here!"

"I opened the jail cell for you as a courtesy. It was not part of our agreement."

"But you promised I would live forever!"

"That is true, and you will."

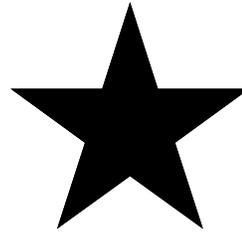
"But I can't live forever trapped under these rocks!"

Smiling slyly, the dark man leaned forward. "Why of course you can, why would you not? That is our deal. Did I not promise you immortality? Of course, if you find your current situation unsatisfactory, you can always exercise the death clause of your contract. Take your time and think about it, if you like. You have all the time in the world to decide." •

*"Half my life
is an act of
revision."*

- John Irving

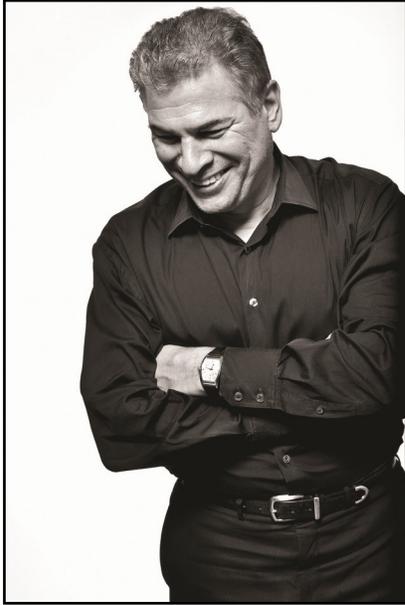
3rd PLACE SHORT STORY



CATCHER IN THE RHINE

By

VINCENT PARRY



Vince Parry has authored features for *Musician* and *Nightlife Magazine*, and has worked as a creative director in some of the most prominent advertising agencies in the industry. Vince graduated with an MA in English and writing from Indiana University. His love of classic American novels inspired *Catcher in the Rhine*, which is part of a larger collection entitled *The Old Man and the Seafood, and Other Selections From the American Songbook*. Vince lives in New York City with his wife, Carolyn Parry. *Catcher in the Rhine* is his first published short story.

If you care to take a five-minute break from LinkedIn or American Idol or your goddamn 401K and learn a little about me, you'll probably want to hear where I was born, and why I'm on probation, and why she got a restraining order, and all that James Patterson kind of crap but I really don't feel like talking about it. In the first place, my half-assed attorney advised me not to and, in the second place, my parents would just use it as another chance to lecture me about disappointing them by not becoming a doctor. Like I'd just love to lance boils and smell like Vicks and touch sick people's hairy white skin for a living. All that Clooney lifesaving they do on ER is just Hollywood prostitute stuff, if you really want to know.

What I do want to talk about is coming back to CIA last Christmas. Not the government intelligent agency that's obsessed about creeping into everyone's home with crazy gadgets and listening devices. I mean The Culinary Institute of America, the private school that's obsessed with crazy rules about sautéing and chiffonade cuts and how many minutes a goddamn hard-boiled egg should take to set. Like everybody's supposed to have a heart attack if their soufflés don't rise.

The reason I came back was to say goodbye to old Mr. Homolini, my baking instructor, and to see if I could meet old Sally Hughes one more time before she left for her wine sabbatical in Germany. Her old man is the Dean of the Wine and Beverage program at CIA. I was crazy about her, old Sally. I really was. I mean really crazy. I should be institutionalized, or so my mother says. You're gonna learn after a while to take me seriously about this stuff. I'm not only an unreliable narrator, I'm just plain unreliable. Take that part about old Mr. Homolini being my baking instructor. He wasn't. He was my technique instructor. I just

kill myself sometimes horsing around like this.

Anyway, I stopped by old Mr. Homolini's house to let him know that I had been tossed out of CIA. Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you that I flunked out. The place has like a million phonies and morons who act like cooking is some kind of religion. I'm serious. The Catholic Church would take one look at the CIA's rules and go, "Come on, guys. Loosen up a bit." They have like a billion regulations about stuff like heat and where stuff goes at your station and washing your hands and salt. No kidding. My textbook had an entire chapter about salt. They're always talking about salt. If you asked them a goddam question about the weather, they'd say something about salt.

A lot of students think Mr. Homolini is a flit on account of the exaggerated way he waves a wooden spoon, and the blue kerchief he keeps tied around his neck, and how he say words like "scrumptious" and "divine." His name doesn't do him any favors, if you want to know the truth. But he's OK in my book. He seems to really care.

"Holden. Come in, my boy," he says, ushering me into the house. "The weather has been just brutal. I spread some salt down to melt the ice." See what I mean? People are always talking about goddam salt.

And then he did something completely perverted. He kissed me on both cheeks.

"Hey, what the hell is going on," I said, and pushed him away.

"Why, I'm just happy to see you, dear boy. It's how we do it in Napoli." But I wasn't gonna stand for his sick behavior. Then he reaches for my shoulders.

"Let me take your coat, young man." I shrugged off his creepy advances.

"Hey, keep your hands off of me. I'm only staying long enough to say goodbye." Mr. Homolini got the message. He stared at me with his perverted Napolitano eyes.

"Goodbye? Why, dear boy, what

happened?"

"I flunked out," I said, backing away into the living room in case he made for my body again. "They won't let me come back."

Old Mr. Homolini put on a good show. He really looked disappointed. He really did. "Oh my," he said.

We sat down in opposing armchairs, with a coffee table between us just in case.

"You simply wouldn't play by the rules, son," he said.

"Rules are for phonies and morons," I told old Mr. Homolini.

"But you were—if I may say so, my boy—a little over-sensitive." He was always telling me that I was over-sensitive. People were always saying I was over-sensitive. It made me want to scream and smash windows and break down in public, crying. He continued his crumbly lecture.

"You wouldn't even wear the proper cooking attire. You kept showing up in that bizarre red hunting cap, asking everyone you met where the ducks go in the winter."

"Where do they go? The ducks?" I knew it was corny to repeat the word 'ducks,' but I did it anyway. I was always repeating things.

"Dear boy," old Homolini said. "They go to the same place in winter as in every season: first to the brining bath, then to the oven, and then to the duck press." I know. I never could get that straight. I'm not too bright, I guess. I say this because it distracts people from the fact that I'm crazy and makes them want to hug me instead, and because it makes me look even smarter to put myself down for not being smart. Wait, now I'm confused. I'm always getting confused.

"Son, you kept calling everyone a moron and getting into fights."

"But they are morons," I said.

"Holden, you can't be serious? Everyone?"

"Yes. The place is full of morons. You're a moron."

"Hey. Let's not go down that road."

"You're a crummy, lousy moron."

"Knock it off, Holden. I'm warning you."

"You're a corny moron and a lousy cook. You can't even bone a fish cleanly." Boy was he getting hot. "Your vomity sauces are lumpy and have too much salt!" I was really giving it back to him about the goddam salt.

"That's enough, young man," he said getting to his feet.

"Your grilling technique is a joke," I shouted. "Your knives are dull. Your veal stock smells like socks." And then he smacked me to the ground. He didn't knock me out, though, because I remember watching him go into his kitchen, grab a 12-inch All-Clad skillet—the one that he taught me had five alternating layers of steel and aluminum to better conduct even heat—and then knock me out.

When I came to, I was propped up on the couch with a note and a \$20 bill pinned to my coat. The note was from old Mr. Homolini and it said the money was for cab fare. That old Mr. Homolini. He really did like me, even if it was in a flitty kind of way.

I called old Sally Hughes to see if she was still on campus, but her roommate said she had gone back to New York. So, I caught a cab to the station and took the train into the city. I texted her to meet me under the national debt counter in Union Square and maybe we could have a drink. She texted back that she was still mad at me for our last date but that she'd think about it. She was always getting mad at me and thinking about it. And I always think that if anyone does something once, then they always do it. Yeah, I always do that.

She had wanted to go see one of those stupid wizard movies, you know, like *Harry Potter and the Wet Dream* or something. She said that Daniel Radcliffe, the guy who played Harry, was one of the up-and-coming stars of our generation. I nearly puked my Good & Plenty, which was sort of good but really plenty. The package was the size of a mailbox and cost

a thousand dollars.

"First of all," I said. "We don't have a generation. People are always acting like they're part of some generation. Like it's some club that lets us share the same iTunes playlists and situation comedies on TV and gives everyone a reason not to blow their brains out at the phoniness of it all." The people around us told me to keep it down. People are always telling me to keep it down. See, I did it again. I'm always doing that.

"Our generation? What, did someone pass out jackets or create a secret handshake or something?" I said. Some little kid behind me started kicking my seat and asking his mom to make me shut up.

"And, second, the only reason old Radcliffe is in this movie is because he looks like the little creep on the book covers."

"Holden, please be quiet," old Sally said.

"Maybe it's his magic wand you really want, Sally? His big magic wand. Is that what you want, old Sally?"

The little kid's mom leaned forward and said to me "That's enough young man. There are children present." But I wasn't gonna let old Sally off the hook that easily.

"Well guess what, old Sally? Radcliffe is a flit. That's right, he likes to do it with boys." And I turned to the kid's mom and said, "and you're gonna turn your moronic kid into a flit if you keep taking him to flitty movies like this one." And then the kid's mom knocked me out.

So, yeah, the date didn't go too well. But good old Sally texted me back, saying she would meet me for a drink anyway at the Old Town Bar before heading to the airport and off to German wine country. What a swell sport that old Sally was. The Old Town Bar was a bit of a dump but, since it was historical and all, people always came to it. I could always get drinks there even though I'm underage. You see I look older than I am. I'm six-foot two and have streaks of gray hair at my temples. I really do. Also, I wear my pants up around my nipples and

use a cane. But the real secret is to order an adult drink, like a Tom Collins or a Singapore Sling, so they don't suspect that you're a kid.

The Old Town bar has these big wooden booths, so I settled in and waited for old Sally. There were all sorts of things carved into the arms and walls. People's initials, dates that were probably for anniversaries or birthdays, and in the middle of it all, someone had carved a big Fuck You. This is the problem. This is exactly the problem. You're sitting there just minding your own business, waiting for old Sally and having an adult drink, and someone has to ruin everything by having their Fuck You pop up right in your face. It always happens. And this time I'm serious. It really always happens. I was so angry that I took out the penknife that hung on my key chain, and right next to the Fuck You, I carved in bigger and wider letters, FUCK YOU TOO!

"Holden! What on Earth are you doing?" It was old Sally. She looked great. Her long, blonde hair was arranged in two braids just like the girl on those German beer labels. Boy, she was really keen on this Germany thing. She kills me.

"Hey, old Sally," I said. "Boy you look great. You look German great." I added the German part because I wanted to get on her good side, if you really want to know.

"Holden, why are you defacing this landmark of a bar?"

"Oh, me? No. No. I was just trying to erase the Fuck Yous. Can you believe that people carve Fuck You into things?" I was just making stuff up because she seemed kind of upset. "I mean, everywhere you look it's Fuck You! Fuck You! Fuck You!"

"Hey, buddy," the bartender shouted. "What the hell is your problem? Miss, is this guy bothering you?"

"No, sorry," old Sally said. "We're fine. It was just a misunderstanding."

Good old Sally. Good old German-haired Sally. She killed me. She slid into the booth

opposite me.

"Oh, Holden. I'm so excited to be going off to Germany. It's such an opportunity."

People are always talking about opportunities and fulfilling their potential and achieving their dreams. It makes me puke. But I played along with old Sally and nodded and smiled.

"My dad says that German wines are an undiscovered treasure here in America. I could have a career in advocating for them one day."

Advocating. Oh, boy. She was really off the deep end, poor thing. Her dad had really screwed her up.

"The vineyards border the Rhine in steep slopes that rise like ridges."

"That sounds dangerous," I said. "You could fall and hurt yourself. You could slip and fall down the ridges right into the thrashing Rhine." I was trying to show her how she needs someone like me around to protect her from this craziness.

"Oh, don't be silly," she said, laughing a little. "It's beautiful. There's the Rheingau. The Mittelrhein. The Rheinhessen. The Nahe."

"Ah, the Nahe," I said, continuing to nod. I was trying to sound like I gave a damn.

"Really? That's such an obscure area. Are you interested in German wines?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Which ones?"

"Oh, most of them."

"Rieslings?"

"Sure. Sure." I had no idea what I was talking about.

"Do you prefer trocken or halbtrocken?" Boy, she was really testing me. "Spatelese? Auslese? Kabinett?"

"Well," I said, trying to think of something to impress her. "I stopped drinking kabinett when I discovered it was Hitler's favorite."

"Really? I didn't know that." She gave me a curious look, so maybe she was buying it.

"Yeah it was in this new history book that came out," I said, really driving it home. "The *Rise and Fall of Kabinett*, I think. Or maybe *Mein Kabinett*. I'll send you the link." I think she got a bang out of that, so I went for it big time.

"I want to come with you," I told her.

"Oh, Holden. You're really sweet."

"I'm serious. I don't want to stay in New York without you."

"But what about your studies? What about CIA?"

"Oh, that's no good. I flunked out." She looked at me like I just pooped in her soda, which I would never do. Not to old Sally, anyway.

"What? That's terrible, Holden. I'm so mad at you. You are always screwing up your future." She was always getting mad at me, old Sally.

"My future? What future? I'm supposed to stay here in New York with the billboards about morons who will literally do any stupid thing for some watery beer? And the perverts in Times Square dressed up like cartoon characters so that tourists will take a goddam picture of their kids with them for five bucks?"

"Oh, Holden. You're always focusing on the negative."

Hey, was she trying to steal my 'always' thing? People were always trying to steal my things.

"The negative? The negative?" I shouted. "Tell me, what's so *positive* about alternate side of the street parking, and Hello Kitty smartphone covers, and magazines with nothing but beautiful phonies on the covers, and hipsters with scruffy facial hair, and bike lanes, and frozen yogurt shops on every goddam block?"

"You're gonna have to settle down, buddy, or I'm throwing you outta here." It was the

bartender again. He was a hipster with big arms like ham hocks and scruffy facial hair. That's probably why he got mad at what I said. About the facial hair, I mean.

"Ok. Ok. Sorry," I said, and took a long, hard pull on my Mai Tai.

"Holden. You'll be fine," old Sally said. "You just need to apply yourself. Don't you like anything? Anything at all?"

I thought for a moment. "I like the idea of going with you," I said. "I could learn German and wear lederhosen and make schnitzel and sauerkraut for you when you come home each night from your studies."

"Holden, don't be silly."

"I'm not kidding. I could get a job. Maybe a job in the vineyards so we can share Riesling stories at the end of the day. And when you or any of those busty blonde German *frauleins* slipped and fell in the vineyards, I could catch you and prevent you from falling to your death in the river. I could be the catcher in the Rhine!"

"Holden. Stop it. You're not making sense," she said.

"*Ich bin ein Catcher*," I shouted and rose to my feet. I did this last part to show her how serious I was. "*Ich bin ein Catcher in the Rhine!*"

Old Sally got up, too. "Holden, I have to go. I don't want this to turn into the movie theater thing again." And she tried to push past me toward the door, but I grabbed her shoulders with both hands and tried to shake some sense into her.

"Listen to me!" I said. "I could buy a Volkswagen and start wearing Hugo Boss and learn to march like a storm trooper. I could get a guitar and sing *Edelweiss* like in *The Sound of Music* and you could twirl in the mountain fields in your peasant skirt."

"That was Austria," she said, trying to squirm out of my grip. "Stop. You're hurting me."

I let go of her shoulders, grabbed her face between my hands and kissed her hard on both

cheeks. "See, I'll fit right in. I know how to kiss like Europeans do. Mr. Homolini taught me." She screamed. I guess she didn't know about how Europeans kiss.

"Take your filthy hands off her, buddy." It was the bartender. He had come up behind me and had something in his hammy hipster hand.

"Mind your own business, moron," I said. But that gave Sally the chance to slip away and she ran for the door. I was losing her. I was desperate to find something to bring her to her senses.

"Who you calling a moron, you stupid freak?" the bartender yelled at me.

Boy, some people don't know how to mind their own business. And then it hit me: that 'opportunity and applying yourself and achieving your potential' puke.

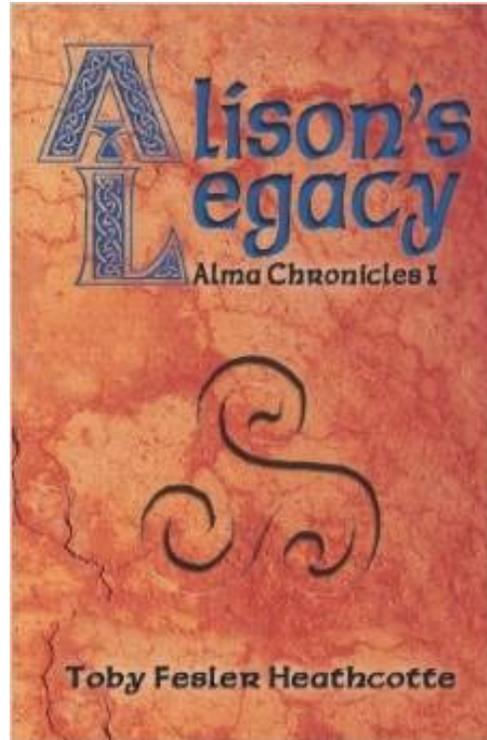
I called after old Sally. "We can vote for Angela Merkel and prosper and get rich and join the rest of the Germans in looking down our noses at the Greeks."

"He's crazy," she screamed as she flew through the exit.

I would have followed her but the bartender zapped me with a Taser. He didn't knock me out, though, because I watched him call the police while I shimmied on the floor. I'm pretty sure I wet myself, if you want to know the truth.

That's all I'm willing to talk about. OK, if you twist my arm, I could tell you about how sore my dad was when he bailed me out. And maybe if you bought me a drink, I'd reveal how many hours of community service I have to perform but you've really gotta make up your mind quickly. My shift as an usher at the movie theater is about to start and I got a lot of little kids to warn about that phony Potter flit. •

ADVERTISEMENT



In this first of the **Alma Chronicles** series, souls bound together in a circle of love, passion, betrayal, and murder, reincarnate lifetime after lifetime from the ancient Celtic world through twenty-first century America. A Scottish immigrant in eighteenth-century England, Alison struggles for acceptance as an independent innkeeper. Such scandalous behavior for a lone and pregnant woman could result in exile to the streets of London. The Jacobite Rebellion brings an English lieutenant to the inn door, and Alison falls in love. A diviner reveals that he is no other than the Celtic lover to whom Alison owes a centuries-old karmic debt. "Deeply engaging, superlatively written, uniquely scripted, metaphysical novel showcasing a courageous and independent woman of yesteryear ...will resonate with modern readers." *Midwest Book Review* Five Stars "An intriguing story... rife with political intrigue, danger." *In the Library Reviews*

HONORABLE MENTION

SHORT STORY



Barbara Renner was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A retired teacher, Barbara has taught a variety of subjects from middle school through post secondary.

She currently is an adjunct instructor at Phoenix College and serves on two business education association executive boards.

Barbara is pursuing her career as an author by writing picture books for children, blogging, and submitting articles to newsletters, journals, and magazines.

Her most recent publications are "Lonnie the Loon Finds His Home" and "Lonnie the Loon Learns to Fly."

THE REVIVAL

BY

BARBARA RENNER

A hundred people clapped and swayed as they sang "Catch on Fire," their voices shouting the words "burning with the Holy Ghost." Pastor Jacob's message of salvation mesmerized young and old women, men, and children, and they all asked for forgiveness through song. With a final "Hallelujah" they filed from the tent, their holy pastor hugging each mother and placing his hands on the children's heads. Adah stood outside the door holding a bucket. As the worshipers left, they dropped dollars, fives, twenties, and hundreds in the silver container, grateful for their soul cleansing.

Pastor Jacob's towering frame commanded the countrymen's attention, yet his relaxed demeanor and handsome features softened the hearts of his female followers. He knew about the magic this combination created and used it to his advantage. Jacob's traveling revival reaped thousands of dollars from sinners who willingly gave their hard-earned money as guaranteed passage to heaven.

Jacob Bain had been saving souls for half of his forty years. His sermons resonated with power, just like his father's, a well-loved preacher in East Texas. Jacob's father and mother lived meager lives and were happy without a lot of money or fame. Instead, they found their wealth from the many souls they touched with their ministry. Jacob yearned for more out of life than living in a two-bedroom manse beside a modest church but preaching the gospel was all he knew. When a traveling revival came to his town the day after he turned twenty-five, he listened as the elderly, the youngsters, and everyone in between chanted "Ye Must Be Born Again." He knew his destiny was to save souls as a revival preacher.

Adah Dubois, blonde, petite, and well dressed, handled all the revival's finances for Jacob. The dumb blonde

demeanor she portrayed was just a scam. She was a savvy bookkeeper who creatively cooked the books to hide the majority of their income. Adah was thirty when she met Jacob at one of his first revivals in a small Louisiana town. The tent pulsed with worshipers singing "Praise Him! Praise Him!" Indeed, she was more than willing to praise him, Jacob, the deliverer. Impressed by Jacob's charisma and zeal, she hung around as the last lady lingered by the door, fanning herself from the humid heat and gospel swaying. The final song of the night was "I Surrender All," one that Jacob knew would touch the women's hearts, and the men's wallets. Adah's eyes were focused on the silver bucket that sat on a chair beside Jacob. Jacob hugged, the ladies swooned, and the men filled the bucket. Adah wanted to be part of Jacob's life.

"Your sermon stirs my soul, Pastor Jacob. Would you mind if I accompany you to your next revival? I believe I have something to offer you that will enhance your ministry."

"I appreciate all God's beautiful creatures, Adah. I would be delighted to have you join me on the rest of my tour through Louisiana."

Adah displayed many talents that inspired Jacob, but her most endearing gift in what would become a valuable partnership was her ability to keep track of and invest money. Unsure of Adah's upbringing, Jacob valued her handling of wealth. He had come a long way from his parents' one-room church. Even though his two-hundred-man tent was modest, Jacob had a sophisticated sound system and a formidable organ. He and Adah slept in the finest motels in the small towns that welcomed his entourage of mercy.

The tent revival traveled from Louisiana to Mississippi spreading the gospel and saving souls. Certain parishioners were convinced that their cancers had been cured just by the touch of Pastor Jacob's strong hands.

After a passionate sermon and rousing hymns in northern Mississippi, a young woman

with long red hair approached Jacob and rubbed her hands down his sleeve. "I adored your sermon tonight, Pastor Jacob. I felt the holy spirit throughout my entire body." She blinked her long eyelashes and leaned in closer to him. "My name is Rebecca."

"So nice to meet you, Rebecca. I'm glad you were moved by the Lord's love."

"Believe me, Pastor Jacob, I was." Rebecca stood on her toes and kissed Jacob on the cheek. "See you next week."

As Rebecca swung her hips away from Jacob, he turned to Adah, "Let's make sure she has a front row seat next week."

"Ever the flirt, huh, Jacob. We need to move on. We've been in Mississippi for over three months." Adah stuffed the money into the bank bag. "Let's pack up and drive to Arkansas." In order for Adah's creative financing to work, she knew they couldn't stay in one state for very long. The more the tent revival moved from one small town to another, the more money their silver bucket accumulated.

* * *

Evenings in Arkansas brought humidity, heat, and bugs, but that didn't stop the Holy Spirit from raging through the worshipers' bones under the revival tent. They sang the chorus to "Livin' He Loved Me" over and over so they knew in their hearts that they were all saved. Pastor Jacob stood in the front and raised his arms with a final benediction, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Amen!"

As Pastor Jacob said his blessings and goodbyes to all the saved souls, Rebecca hurried out and surprised him with a full body hug and slow, sensual kiss on his neck. Jacob was surprised, but didn't pull away. "Rebecca, what are you doing in Arkansas?"

"I love your sermons so much, Jacob, that I have decided to follow you wherever you go. In fact, I believe I have something you can't live without."

Jacob nodded, hugging Rebecca a little

closer.

“You see, as a teenager, I took voice lessons and have been singing praises to our Lord as a soloist in my church. I want more than anything to lead your congregation to the Almighty Spirit in song. Let me audition for you, Pastor Jacob, with a private performance.”

Jacob agreed, so they set a time for later in the evening. He could hardly wait to savor the young lady’s sincere praises in song.

Jacob wasn’t disappointed. Moved by Rebecca’s bountiful voice, he knew she would be able to penetrate the very souls of his followers.

Rebecca Murphy was only twenty-three, but she was a fireball of energy that emerged with her powerful voice. Her red hair would have been half way down her back if the natural curls had been tamed and straightened. But she allowed the curls to frame her face with fiery ringlets, much like the sizzling sound of her voice.

* * *

Pastor Jacob, Adah, and Rebecca took their revival through all the little towns in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. Jacob’s mighty sermons stirred the spirits of his followers, Adah’s silver bucket overflowed with heartfelt donations, and Rebecca’s powerful hymns brought more and more worshipers to the revivals. The three of them shared their fortune, their beds, and their secrets.

Towering on the stage with his impressive demeanor, Pastor Jacob had Rebecca lead the congregation in “Amazing Grace,” a favorite with the females in the congregation. It wasn’t unusual for several women to linger around Jacob long after the revival had ended. Jacob thoroughly enjoyed the attention from the southern belles who worshiped his every word. He had even hired a few more women to take care of the many details that a popular traveling tent revival demanded.

Adah and Rebecca realized the revival’s

payroll was getting too large, especially with all the young women who wanted to help Pastor Jacob spread the gospel. Maybe it was jealousy, possibly fear of competition, and no doubt greed but the blonde and redhead grew tired of sharing the wealth and attention of Pastor Jacob Bain, the man who attracted beautiful ladies like children flocking to follow Jesus. In fact, many of Jacob’s admirers were children, preteens and teenagers, who needed not only a father figure in their lives but also the kind attention Jacob bestowed. Jacob welcomed all who wanted to help his ministry, especially the young women with special talents.

The chilly autumn evenings in Tennessee can bite to the bone, even when singing praises and clapping to “I Know Not What the Future Hath.” On these cold nights, Jacob would often invite his helpers to a local restaurant in town for dinner and then afterward to his motel suite, where they would look up Bible verses for the next service. Adah decided to share her suspicions with Rebecca.

“I’m not comfortable with the generosity Jacob shows his lady helpers at night. Do you get the feeling that he’s doing more than preparing for the next service? I remember when we first started following his revival, he gave us his undivided attention. Now he barely talks to us while you sing to attract the people from town, and I shelter the coffers from the government. In addition, he’s lavishly spending the profits on meals and God only know what else.”

Rebecca agreed, “We’ve been cast aside like a broken piece of bread. I say we watch him more carefully to see just what is really going on between him and his sweet young followers in his motel room.”

Following a rousing and sweaty evening in the tent of soul saving and miracles, the congregation completed their chorus of “All Things Bright and Beautiful” and paraded out the tent door. Rebecca hurried out with the bountiful silver bucket, while Adah ran back to the motel to wait and watch for Jacob. What she witnessed that evening made her shiver as

if the devil had stolen her soul. Jacob had invited several of his teenage helpers, many of whom were under eighteen-years-old, to his room, and they were all sitting on his bed while Jacob stroked and petted each little girl. Adah burst into the room, video camera in hand, and confronted him.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?”

Jacob wasn't surprised. “I'm comforting these little lost lambs. I am doing nothing other than warming their souls with my touch. How dare you accuse me of anything more? You and Rebecca are my soul mates; my fortress.”

* * *

The local police arrested Jacob for child molestation. He insisted that he was leading these poor sweet orphans to Jesus and through his power of healing and their souls would be saved. The jury didn't buy his story, so the courts convicted him to five years in prison.

Devastated but not defeated, Jacob resigned himself to continue his ministry in prison to bring the word of the Lord to the murderers and rapists who surrounded him. He even convinced the prison guards to broadcast Sunday church services on the prison television sets for the inmates to watch.

Three years into his sentence, he heard a familiar sweet voice singing the hymn “Deep in the Shadows of the Past.” Hundreds of voices joined the soloist and the rousing emotion of song stirred his soul to find the TV that was broadcasting the Sunday service. Glowing from the wide screen was an image he remembered fondly of the curly-haired beauty whose powerful voice once drew thousands of worshipers to his tent revival. Rebecca was swaying to the melody, her arms outstretched, welcoming all to join her song. When the hymn ended, the camera spanned the immense church, zooming in on the petite features of a blonde beauty he had longed for. Adah also outstretched her arms, high above her head, “Praise be to God Almighty. Ask Jesus into your heart and live for eternity.”

“Thank you, thank you, for joining us during this Sunday's worship service at the Silver Chalice Unity Church. Our services are broadcast all over the United States so the Word of God can spread to all of His people. Remember, you can mail your tithes to Pastor Adah Dubois at the Silver Chalice Unity Church, Jackson, Mississippi. Let's finish our worship by singing 'Revive Us Again'.”

The congregation stood and clapped their hands as Rebecca's powerful voice resounded down the prison halls. •

*“A reader lives a
thousand lives
before he dies...
The man who
never reads
lives only one.”*

George R.R.

Martin

*A Dance with
Dragons*

HONORABLE MENTION

SHORT STORY



Garth Nielsen has spent his life writing about the intangible spiritual connection that binds native people to the land and all that is upon it. His heart and soul are in the Southwest and the desert. His stories reflect the deep and abiding love he has for this land and for all of his relations upon it. Garth recently published a book, *Odyssey of a Spiritual Nomad*, available through Amazon.com. His next book, *Petroglyphs*, will be out sometime next year.

THE SUMMONS

By

GARTH NIELSEN

The tracks led upward into the foothills and it appeared that they would follow the obvious course straight into the wide and angular canyon, which was now half in shadowy blues and half in brilliant sunlight. Loud cracks of thunder shook the earth and the wind began to pick up. The mesquite and palo verde trees jerked and bent in its furious force.

The man pushed on, planning to make camp in the shelter of some small cave or overhang before the full force of the storm overtook him. The ground became more littered with stones. The soft, padded tracks became more difficult to follow and the sun began to slant more rapidly. It would soon disappear entirely. With a rending roar, the thunder echoed across the eastern sky, now a dark, blue-gray color. The wind eased some. As yet, no rain pelted the ground to wash the tracks away. Perhaps the storm would stay to the east and behind him to the south. The far, pointed mountains there were totally obscured by the storm.

No rains came and the winds departed. Once more, the calm and the sun held the desert. The shadows in the canyons deepened to a night black and inched slowly up the mountains.

The man sat by his small, smoldering fire, thinking of the tracks he had followed for several days. The desert had been hot, the sun like the burning eye of the Creator. Tomorrow he would walk into the canyon before him, perhaps climbing up to the cooler reaches.

The vision of the now hidden split in the mountain appeared once more in his mind. Two days in the past, it had been but a blue slash across the buff-and-dun colored mountains. Yesterday, after the sun had passed its zenith,

he could look far into the interior of the mountain. Today, the immensity of the gash and the solemn stillness waited in awesome wonder. The faint smell of water blew down out of the blackness before him where he sat, mixed with the aroma of pine and oak trees. Coyote wailed and cried somewhere unseen.

The man watched the sun disappear behind the far gray mountains. Clouds of the same color hung overhead. As the darkness approached, a dull sunset touched the landscape. Little spots of sun shone momentarily on a hill or mountainside and then faded out. When the sun was completely gone, the clouds and the mountains retained an afterglow, which caused everything to be rimmed with light. A gold mist floated in the far canyons on the other side of the wide valley.

Stars began to twinkle, one by one, piercing the sky like gems dropped on a blue cloth. The man sat against the stone, his legs drawn up, his arms wrapped around them, with his chin on his knees. He wondered if he was the last person on earth and if this would be the last night the world would ever know.

The moon rose slowly, large and yellow, through the torn clouds. To him, this was an ensign of hope, telling him he was not alone. This would not be the last night on earth. The moon's radiance flooded the hills and valleys. The cries of the night were all about him.

The sun's light seeped into the night sky, faintly at first, but it deepened in intensity to a blood-red crimson. The dawn dusk brightened slowly to expose huge, mountainous, cotton clouds forming and growing over the southern mountains. Perhaps the rain would come today.

The man covered the ashes of the night's fire with sand. With a broken branch, he smoothed the area he had rested in. The first winds would eliminate any trace of his passing.

He turned his eyes to the waiting silence of the gaping canyon. The trees began half way up and were printed blue-black against the tan rocks and earth. He began to walk into

the waiting stillness, not knowing what he would find. The tracks had now disappeared in the stones, broken twigs and bent grass. All telltale marks had been erased by the wind of the day before. He would walk and climb, guided by his senses.

Seven nights in the past, he had been awaked by the sounds of faint bells and a weeping of a woman from far out on the desert. He lay on his narrow bed and listened, unable to tell from which direction the sounds came. They grew neither fainter nor stronger. The silence of the night had muffled the sounds somewhat. At first he had thought they were sounds from his dream wanderings.

Standing to clear the sleep from his mind, he walked to the door of his low clinging home and listened, staring out into the blackness of the night. The stars shone so brightly that the mesquite cast shadows of a deeper black into the black desert. Again, from out of the night, came the soft, barely perceptible sounds of far away bells and a woman in deep distress, wailing from her soul. Coyote had heard as well, for he made no sounds in the night.

The man stood and listened until the dawning of the day, when the sounds ceased. To the north, over the far mountains, a column of cloud stood, rising from the massed thunderheads. As he watched, it slowly curled and twisted, growing larger, nearly filling that part of the sky.

All morning he walked, looking for signs of who or what had stirred him from his sleep. When the sun was half way to its highest point, he found the tracks, unrecognizable in their form. They seemed as disturbed animal tracks, partially weathered by the wind, but, of what animal?

On this eighth day, he stood in the entrance into the earth. The saguaros climbed around him up the sides of the canyon. No shadows curled in this place. All about him was exposed to the intense light of the day; all was laid bare and folded back. The trickle of water

springing from far up the mountains, sank into the sand at a small, moist mound, and disappeared. The man placed his fingers to the damp earth and then to his tongue. The water tasted sweet.

With audible prayers for guidance, he placed a carved stick, tied with hawk feathers, deep in the earth. The feathers fluttered in the light breeze. Rising to gaze once more into the split in the earth, between the small stones of the spewed talus, he saw the tracks begin once more.

He stopped half way into the canyon, not so much for rest but to view the land behind him. Far away, near the base of the far mountains, a faint haze hung and disappeared in the heated air. His small home was there. His old mother would be sitting in the shade, moving as the sun moved, going about her daily chores. Her face came to him. She would be gazing in this direction, no doubt.

A stir in the brush brought his attention back to this place. Far above, against the blue sky, Grandfather Eagle looked down and screamed his long, trailing cry. A cactus wren clung to a low growing limb, cleaned its beak and cocked its head, looking at him. He had now climbed to where the oak trees were giving way to pines and manzanita.

The unrecognizable tracks somewhere in the rocks became recognizable – the naked prints of a human foot. How had he mistaken them, he wondered? Who was this person? The prints were obviously those of a woman.

As the sun began to set, he sat upon a rock at the head of the canyon, and the pines unburdened upon the air their load of fragrance. He thought about this journey. Somehow this time mirrored his life and origins. His thoughts took him late into the night. He listened attentively to his thoughts, recalling his childhood, his efforts to be accepted as a member with standing among his people. He had sought answers from the wise ones for the whole of his life, this life given to him by the Creator. He was totally absorbed in these

thoughts and the calm of the canyon.

Sitting thus, he mused, “The wise ones have taught me to listen and to open myself to the knowledge of all there is to know of life in this desert. They have taught me how to live within the Creator’s will. As much as I have learned, I will always learn more. When the heat of summer comes and our people depart for the cooler elevations in the foothills and the desert shrivels one’s words to a whisper, the voice of the Creator can be heard in the voice of the desert.”

And so the man sat and listened silently to the mountain and to the desert far below him. The desert and the mountain spoke with the voice of life, of continually becoming.

With the dawn, he began to walk again and the tracks, now easy to follow, took on the unrecognizable form they had had on the desert floor. When the sun had reached its highest point, he followed the tracks across the ridge and once more rested. He lay upon his back, gazing up into the sky and watched the clouds, which moved across the vast expanse of blue. The breeze blew softly and stirred the branches of the tall pines. Little birds darted occasionally from bush to tree. The insects buzzed and the ants crawled. All was still about him. So also was everything in movement. An unfathomable mystery. What he saw and was a part of was the Great Mystery.

He walked once more through the manzanita. The tracks began to fade upon the light sand resting upon living rock. He now questioned whether they were human prints after all. What woman would wander alone in these mountains? He now questioned his judgment. There had been tracks—of that he was sure. For days now, he had followed them—across the desert, into the canyon, and up into the mountains. But what made them? Tracks are made by the passing of some creature—human or animal—something from here, from within the creation of the Great Mystery.

He turned and looked behind him. His

own marks upon the soil were fresh and clear. With the first wind or rain, they would be gone. No trace of his passing would be marked after one phasing of the moon. He stopped and looked about him, his thoughts racing like the wind. This place of mountains and wind, heat and cold—it has a feeling of peace. It conceals and reveals meanings and is haunted by the Great Mystery.

He glanced up through the swaying pines.

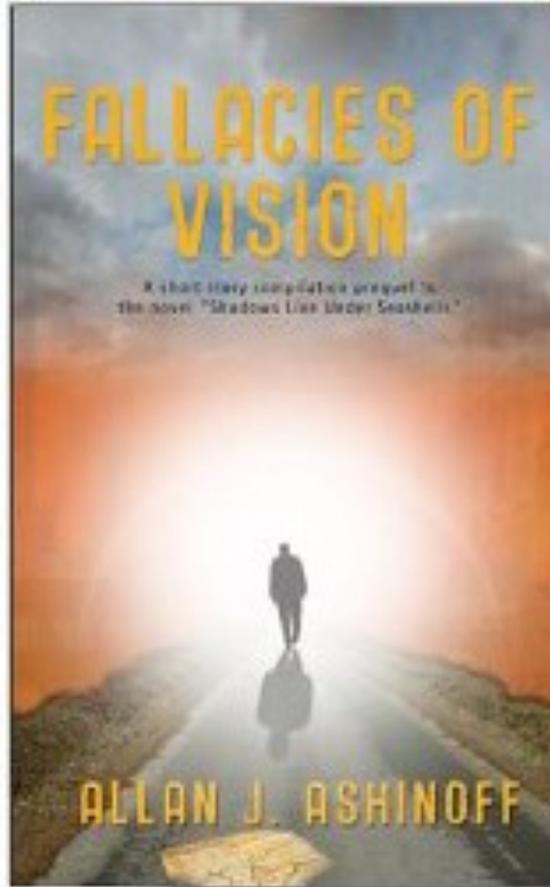
He said to himself, “I have become obsessed with following what may simply be the tracks of Coyote. I have been seeking and my seeking shows in my confusion and fatigue.”

The man had walked for many days and had entered the Earth Mother. The rhythm of her body became one with his own.

“Coyote made the tracks I have been following,” he whispered. “He it was who disguised them as human and animal. He and the Earth Mother worked together in this mystery. She, it was, who called me from my bed in the still of the night. And it was Coyote who led me to this lesson.”

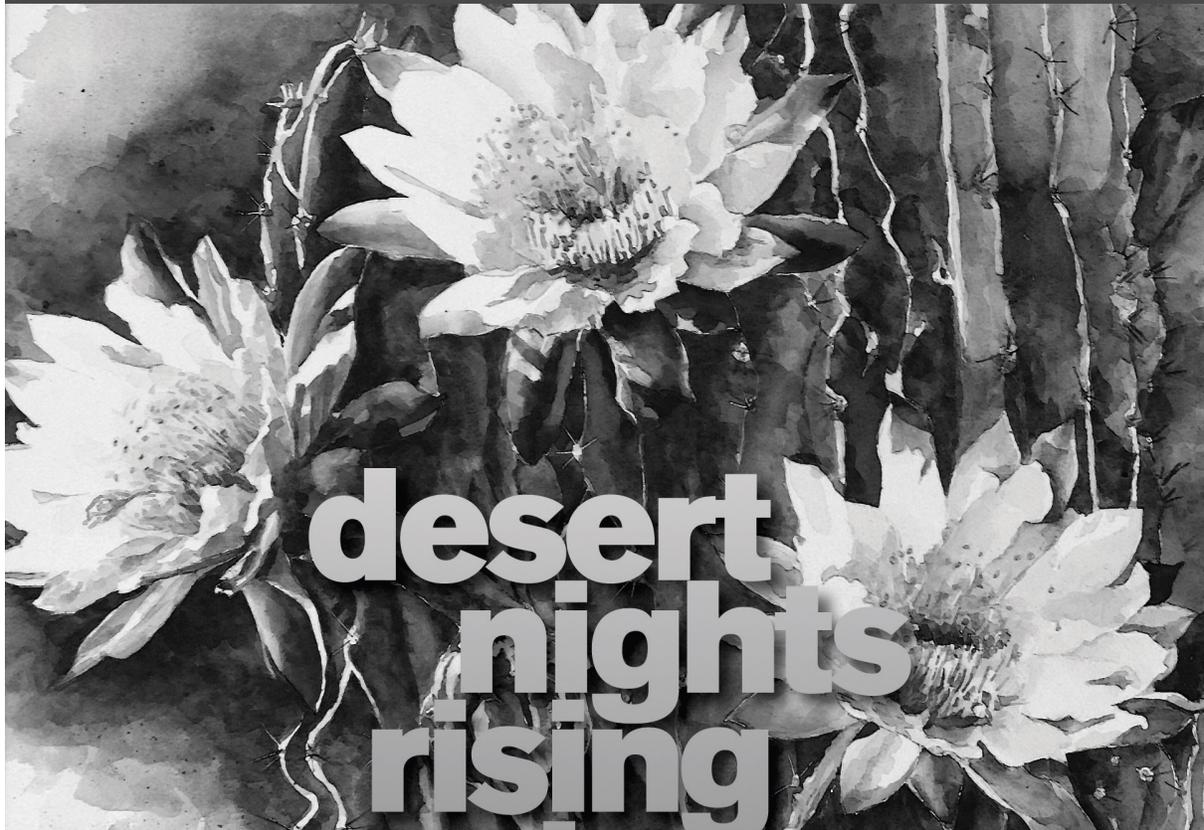
Shielding his eyes to the sun, the man turned and began retracing his path. He felt an almost imperceptible shudder from the Earth Mother and the throbbing of her heart in the mountain. Pausing, he looked once more at the ridge where he had sat and gazed at the expanse of the heavens and the undulating ripples of the desert floor. The Great Mystery had reminded him of his purpose as a two-legged creature, something the four-legged and the wingeds never forgot—the fine line of balance between spirit and body. This was the lesson of the cloud nation, the placement of the trees on the mountains, the movement of the ant nation and the sounds of the insects. All that he could see was as it should be. All was in place. Grandfather Eagle screamed once more his long whistling cry. •

ADVERTISEMENT



Fallacies of Vision is a collection of short stories that are based on contemporary quotes and events. The intention of these stories is to present how quotes, incremental events, and impassioned choices made by the American people could be delivering the United States into a global society similar to that written about in my novel *Shadows Live Under Seashells*.

WRITERS CONFERENCE • FEBRUARY 19-21, 2015



desert nights rising stars

3 Days of Readings, Discussions, Panels, Craft Talks & Book Signings

- Adam Johnson • Gail Tsukiyama • Matt Bell • Xu Xi • Bill Konigsberg
- Melissa Pritchard • Barry Lyga • Rigoberto Gonzales • Dexter Booth
- Alan Dean Foster • George Witte • and many more

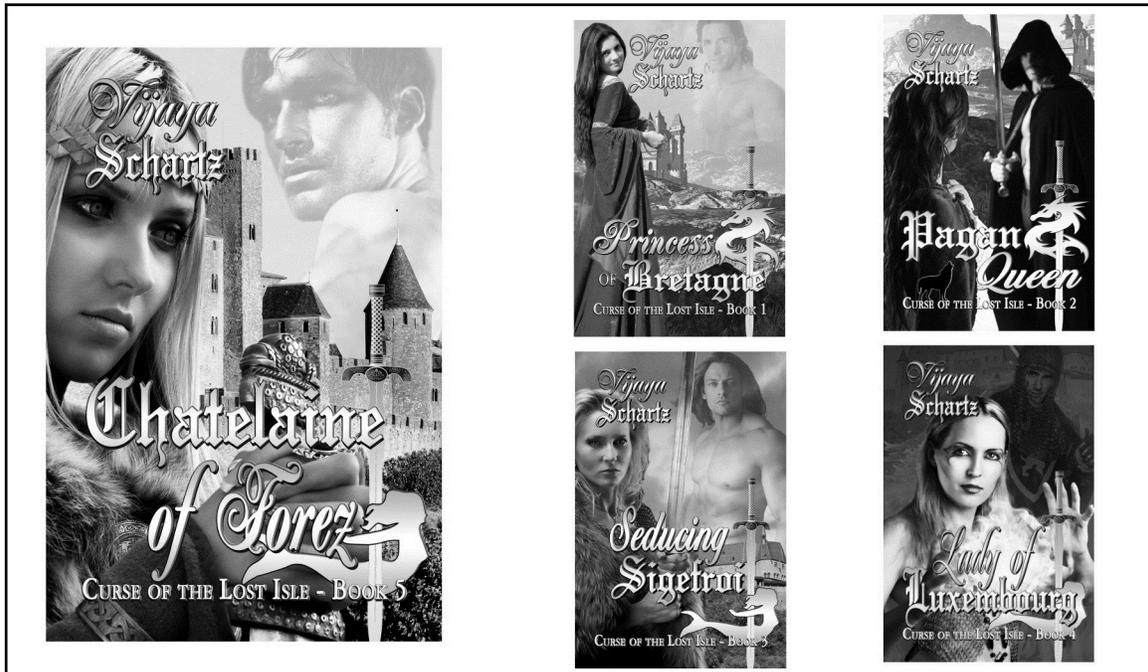
ASU VIRGINIA G. PIPER CENTER
for CREATIVE WRITING

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

A unit of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

piper.asu.edu/conference

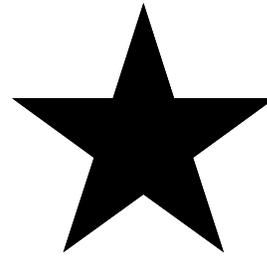
ADVERTISEMENT



“In general...there’s no point in writing hopeless novels. We all know we’re going to die; what’s important is the kind of men and women we are in the face of this.”

-Anne Lamott

PUBLISHED
1st PLACE FICTION



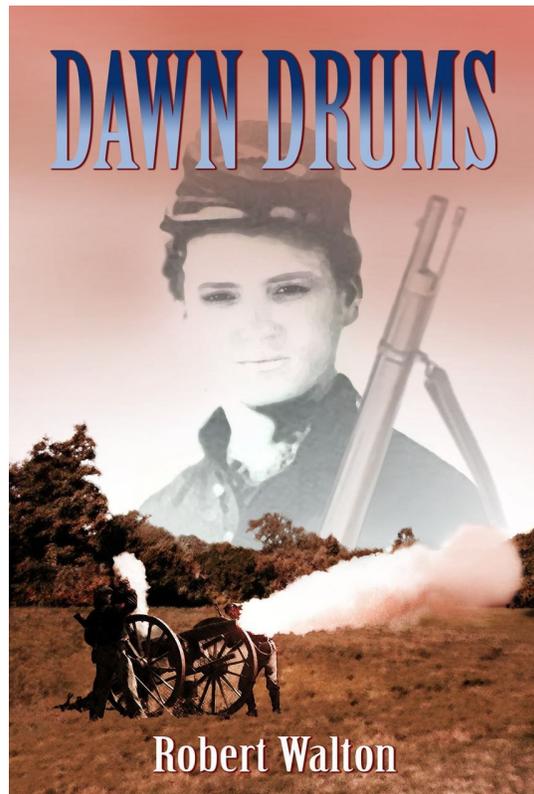
Robert Walton is a retired middle school teacher with thirty-six years of service. He's a life-long rock-climber and mountaineer. His writing about climbing has been published in the Sierra Club's "Ascent" and dramatized on NPR. Most recently, his story "The Dark Monster" won the Kids Book Review competition for July and was published on the KBR site. He and his wife Phyllis have made their home in King City, California for forty-two years.



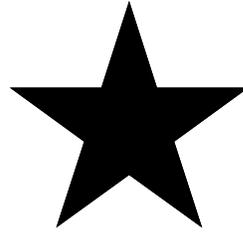
May of 1864 was perhaps the Civil War's most terrible month. **Dawn Drums** begins at this crucial time and its action coincides closely with the sesquicentennial of the events it depicts.

Told by the voices of Abraham Lincoln, Clara Barton, Almira Martin, General Grant, and an assorted host of other Civil War participants, including a small group of black "contrabands", **Dawn Drums** offers an utterly unique and riveting view of the Civil War's last year.

Dawn Drums will enable readers to clearly understand the appalling war that divided a nation. Despite the Civil Wars horror and savagery, the main characters of this truly gripping, historical novel emerge as heroes who, even today, remain inspirational and noble.



PUBLISHED
2nd PLACE FICTION

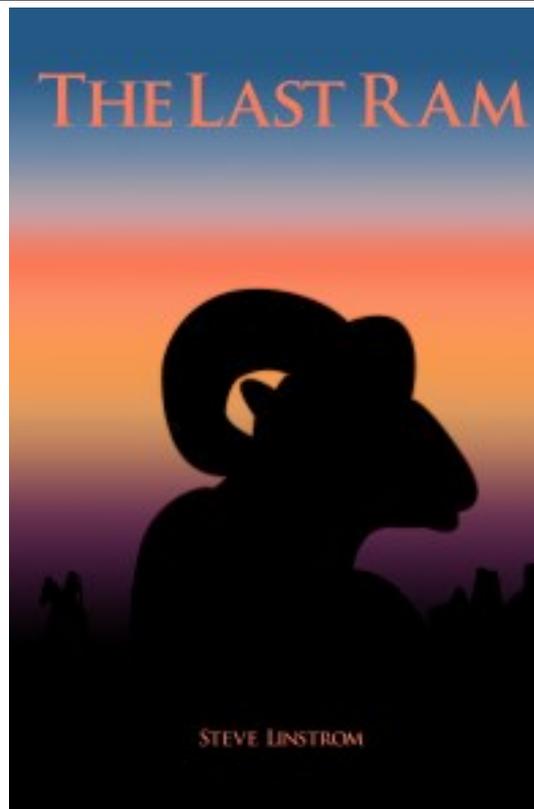


Steve Linstrom grew up in western South Dakota and now lives and writes in Minnesota where he grows Marquette grapes and several varieties of hops. He received an MA in English from Minnesota State University Mankato and his debut novel *The Last Ram* was published by North Star Press in June 2013. His second novel *Murder Trial of the Last Lakota Warrior* was published in June of 2014.

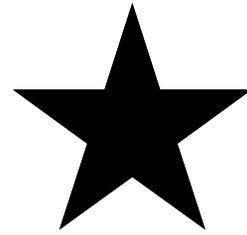
He was a finalist in the unpublished short story category in the 2009 and 2010 Arizona Literary Contests.

It's 1903 in the Badlands and Evan Warner, a store owner's son, spies an elusive Audubon Sheep that was thought to be extinct. Even better, his best friend David, an adopted Lakota boy, is returning from two years at the Pierceson Indian School. Evan can't wait to track the sheep through the Badlands with David just like when they were younger. As hunters from across the globe pour into the small town of Interior to pursue the last of the species, Evan learns that becoming a man isn't all about bravado and that people and friendships grow and change. The end of the ram could have lasting repercussions for the boys and the West.

The Last Ram was a quarterfinalist in the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Contest in the General Fiction category in 2010 and in the Young Adult category in 2011.



PUBLISHED
3rd PLACE FICTION



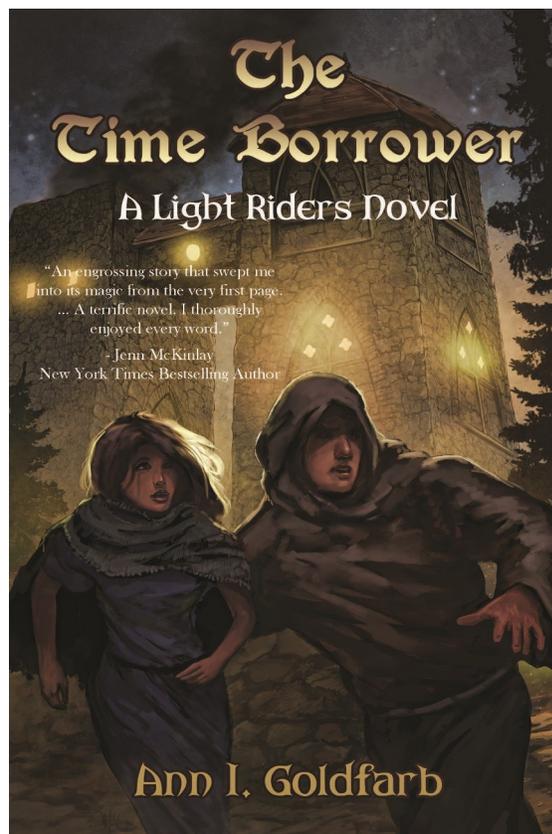
The Time Borrower is a 55,000 word YA mystery-suspense novel.

1296 was not a good year for The Monastery at East Lothian, Scotland. Unexplained murders...sinister plots...and a 21st century time traveler named Linna Sullivan who thinks she's fallen in love with a green-eyed monk. The only thing for certain is that she may be the next victim of a ruthless murderer.

Worse yet, an ex-boyfriend has followed her back into time, complicating the dangerous power struggle that has taken over the monastery. Most frightening of all is the battle that Linna faces when she must choose between the life she has known and the one that keeps pulling her into another century.

Will she live long enough to make the right decision?

New York native **Ann Goldfarb** spent most of her life in education, first as a classroom teacher and later as a middle school principal and professional staff developer. Writing has always been an integral part of her world. For the past decade, she has written non-fiction for Madavor Media/Jones Publishing, but her real passion is writing mystery-suspense-adventure for young adult audiences. She has seven published novels. Time travel, the vehicle she embraces, is her hook into historical fiction.



PUBLISHED

HONORABLE MENTION FICTION



Virginia Sievers shares a quote from Joss Whedon. “I write to give myself strength. I write to be the characters I am not. I write to explore all of the things I am afraid of.” All of the above were true for Virginia as she wrote, “*Waiting: a Collective*”. For her, it was a journey toward understanding and strength.

Virginia lives in Arizona and Minnesota and she loves every day of her life as she reads, writes, and works in her gardens. She holds degrees from the University of Minnesota.

Waiting—A Collective

Amanda, Marty, Agnes, Ann and Matthew, and Rose wait for their appointments in a busy doctor’s office. They are people we know; our friends, our parents, our co-workers. They are people who are old. As they confront keen issues, waiting affords time for reflection and observation and, sometimes, for action.

Waiting is a small Collective that belongs to a large Collective; the elderly who are worthy of admiration and reverence as they come to terms with issues of aging.

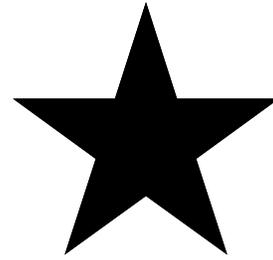
The first narrative in the Collective, “Waiting”, in its original form was awarded *First Prize for Short Story* in the 2012 Arizona Literary Contest.

Waiting
A Collective



Virginia Sievers
Award Winning Author

PUBLISHED
1st PLACE NONFICTION

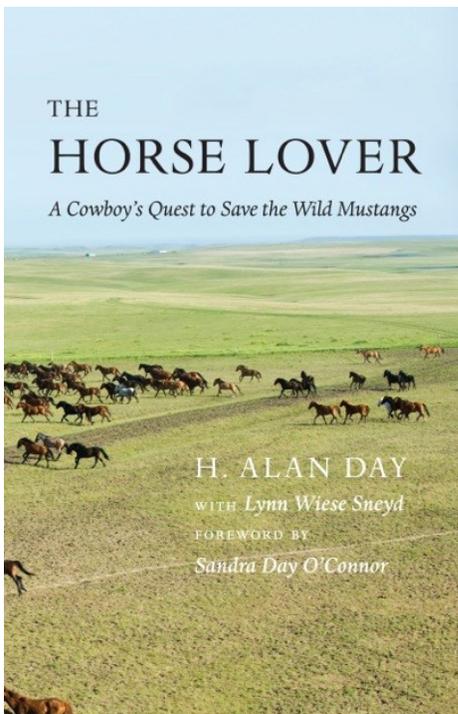


If it's possible to say someone can be born a cowboy, then **Alan Day** was born one. He was the third generation to grow up on the 200,00-acre Lazy B cattle ranch straddling the high deserts of southern Arizona and New Mexico. After graduating from the University of Arizona, Alan returned to manage Lazy B for the next 40 years, during which time he received awards for his dedication to land stewardship. Alan and his sister, Sandra Day O'Conner, co-authored New York Times bestselling memoir *Lazy B: Growing up on a Cattle Ranch in the American Southwest*.



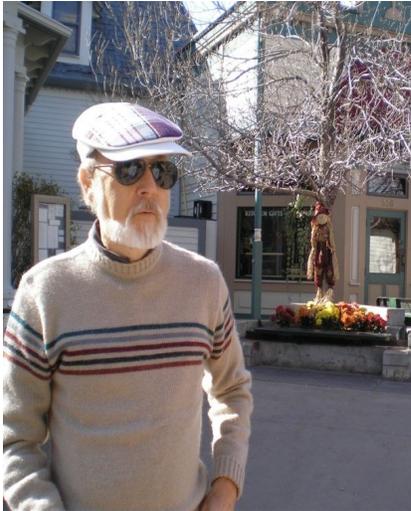
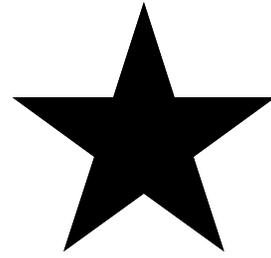
Lynn Wiese Sneyd is professional writer and owner of LWS Literary Services in Tucson. She coordinates national, regional and local publicity campaigns for authors, crafts query letters and book proposals, ghostwrites, and edits.

She is the author of *Holistic Parenting* and the co-author of *Healthy Solutions*, which received the Arizona Book Award for best health and wellness book. Lynn's articles, essays and poetry have appeared in various publications around the country. Most recently she co-authored *The Horse Lover: A Cowboy's Quest to Save the Wild Mustangs* (University of Nebraska Press) with H. Alan Day.

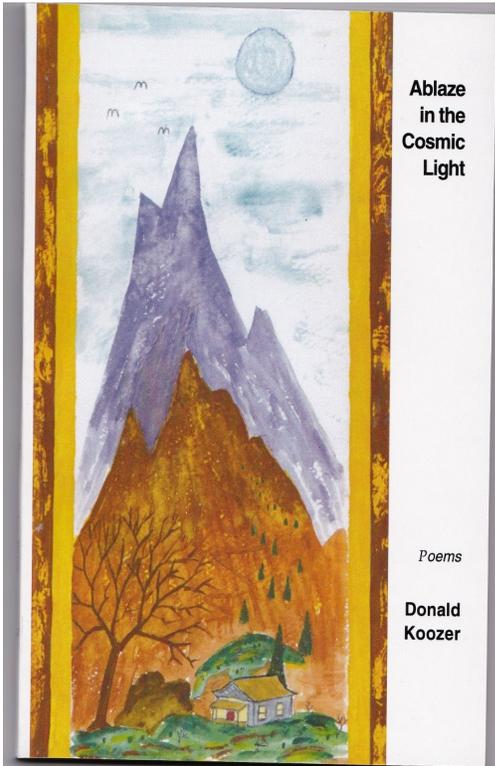


He already owned and managed two ranches and needed a third about as much as he needed a permanent migraine: that's what Alan Day said every time his friend pestered him about an old ranch in South Dakota. But he quickly owned 35,000 pristine grassy acres. Then he established a sanctuary for unadoptable wild horses previously warehoused by the BLM. After Day successfully lobbied Congress, those acres became Mustang Meadows Ranch, the first government-sponsored wild horse sanctuary established in the United States. **The Horse Lover** is Day's personal history of the sanctuary's vast enterprise, with its surprises and pleasures and its plentiful dangers, frustrations, and heartbreak. Day's deep connection with the animals in his care is clear from the outset, as is his maverick philosophy of horse-whispering, with which he trained 1,500 wild horses. **The Horse Lover** weaves together Day's recollections of his cowboying adventures astride some of his best horses, all of which taught him lessons about loyalty, perseverance, and hope. This heartfelt memoir reveals the Herculean task of balancing the requirements of the government with the needs of wild horses.

PUBLISHED
2nd PLACE NONFICTION



Donald Koozer was born and raised in northern Oklahoma. His poems, short stories, and essays have been published in a variety of literary magazines. He is the author of a previous book of poetry, *The Road*, published by Bellowing Ark Press. His poetry is rooted in the beauty and the mystery of the natural world. The tools of his poetic vision are the images of Nature and the symbols hidden deep in the unconscious--pine trees, falling snow, windmills with broken blades, solitary country farm houses, the winter sun. He has lived in Arizona for the past thirty years with his wife, author Donis Casey.

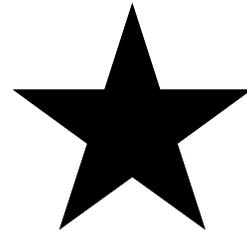


In an era of cookie cutter poets who are thematically homogenous and morally ambiguous, Donald Koozer is a maverick who harkens back to Donne and the Metaphysicals. Since the Romantic revolution, there have been few main-stream poets who have made spirituality—not religion, but the knowings that underlie the great faiths—their subject. Koozer writes without affectation about coming to terms with aging, cultural decay, of moments of gnosis. Rooted in observations of the natural world, these poems are spiritual without being religious; inspirational without being preachy and the observations offered are worth serious consideration.

—David Ross, Editor

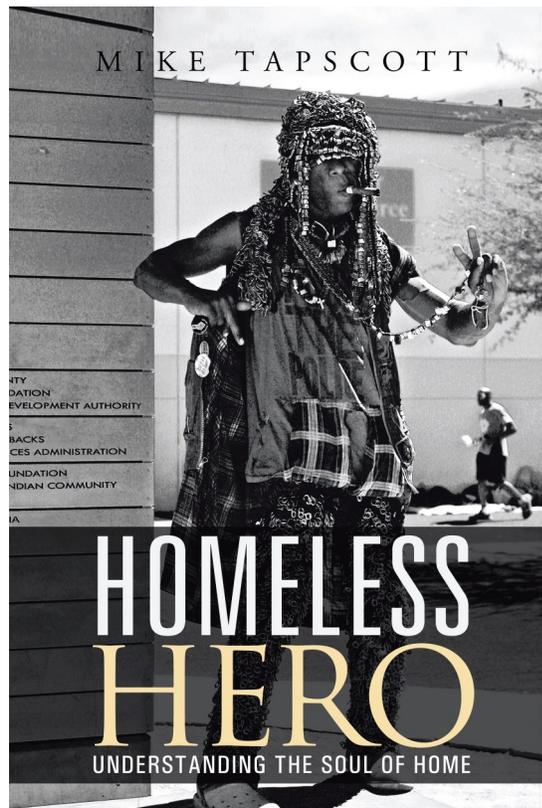
City Primeval

PUBLISHED
3rd PLACE NONFICTION



Something of a Renaissance Man but more a Jack of All Trades, **Mike Tapscott** has been a student and/or teacher of many things: from Ballroom to Ballet, Fitness Coach to Life-Coach, and Writer to Ranch-hand. After recently working several years with homeless individuals in Phoenix, he now heads up the Massage Therapy Program at Gateway Community College's Maricopa Skill Center while working on the next great American Novel or at least another good read. Tapscott's main interest—and area of study—is the importance of emotional intelligence and the cultivation of joy.

Homeless Hero:
Understanding the Soul of Home by Mike Tapscott is a vibrantly vivid and personally accessible case study, experiment, adventure, and multi-layered examination of American society that will expand your understanding of homelessness and more importantly your own humanity.



PUBLISHED NONFICTION
HONORABLE MENTION



Lisa Greene Sharp, a third generation rancher, grew up on her family's cattle ranch in Southern Arizona. Marriage and career took her to California and New Mexico, but the love of land and open space stayed with her. She returned to the ranch in 1993 and lived there until it was sold in 1998. An avid traveler, now author, she now divides her time between Arizona and Taos, New Mexico. She is currently working on an Historical Fiction and another memoir.

www.lisagsharp.com

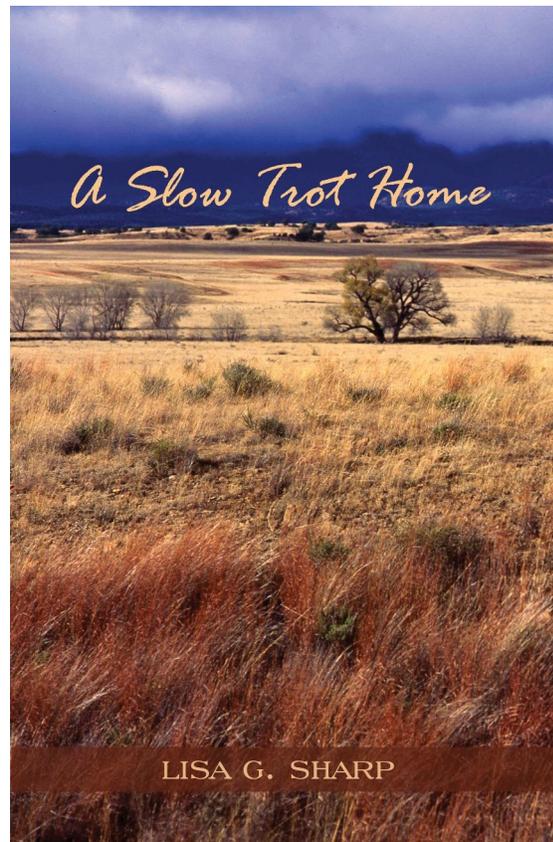
1958 was the year life came into focus for Lisa Sharp. Her mother, newly divorced, began the move from California to the San Rafael Cattle Company, a 22,000-acre cattle ranch south of Patagonia, Arizona. Leaving the city life behind, Lisa and her family traded paved roads, dependable electricity, and telephones for wide open spaces, prairie grass, horses, and cattle.

Most eight-year-olds would have been homesick. When she first walked into the ranch corrals, "I became a part of that world as easily as that first shoot of spring grass. . . . I was home."

A Slow Trot Home stitches together vignettes about the author's mother, ranching, cowboys, and a love of the land that is passed down through generations. With poignant reflections on ranch living along the US/Mexico border, Lisa resurrects an era that, for so many of us, endures only as a memory.

"This is a beautiful memoir. The photos alone offer a fascinating glimpse into the past, but Sharp's deft storytelling brings the people and animals into full color. She shows us a blended culture as well as the strong individuals that were so important to living on the edge and striving to make it work. . . ."

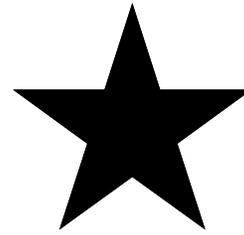
—Amy Hale Auker, author of *Rightful Place*, winner of 2012 WILLA, Creative Nonfiction



PUBLISHED

1st PLACE

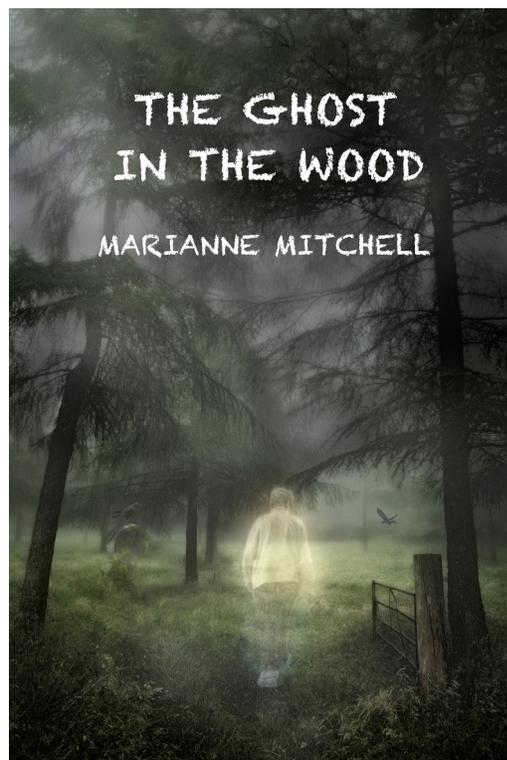
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



Marianne Mitchell is the author of twelve books for young readers and over three hundred stories and articles in children's magazines such as *Highlights for Children* and *Highlights High Five*. She writes in multiple genres, including folktales, mysteries, historical fiction and adventure. As an Arizona native, Marianne often uses the West as a setting for her novels. *Finding Zola* is a mystery set near Tucson. A second mystery, *Firebug*, is set among the red rocks of Sedona, Arizona. ***The Ghost in the Wood*** is her most recent book, set in Colorado. She currently lives in Oro Valley, Arizona and you may often find her at the Oro Valley library where she volunteers with her therapy dog, Misty, for the Read to a Dog Program. She also leads a workshop at the library for adults learning how to write for children.

THE GHOST IN THE WOOD

Twelve-year-old Zeke is not thrilled when his dad announces they're moving into an old cabin in the Colorado Mountains. He's sure life will be boring stuck out in the woods. But he's so wrong. When Zeke handles pieces of lightning-struck wood, he releases the ghost of a boy who was killed in a tree house fifty years before. Now the ghost is demanding attention, causing harm to Zeke's family and looking for justice. It's up to Zeke to solve the mystery behind the boy's death and give the ghost peace.



PUBLISHED

2nd PLACE

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

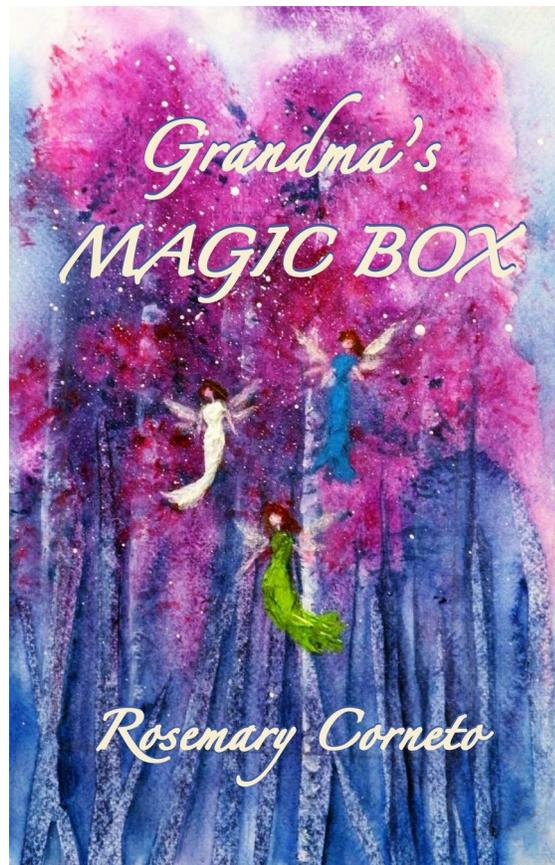


Rosemary Corneto is an artist in many avenues. Originally Rosemary was in business, having a burning desire to do more with her life. After raising a family Rosemary finally had the time to do what her creative side wanted.

She started working in art in the 80's. She's accomplished in every medium possible, but enjoys most: sculptures, watercolor, oil and acrylics. Rosemary is a juried artist and has received many awards for her work. She began writing her book, which encompassed 11 years.

Grandma's Magic Box is an enchanting tale that pulls you in and warms your heart.

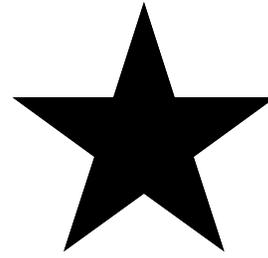
Corneto weaves a wonderful, mystical, magical story that transports the reader across oceans and through time. The author's vivid imagination comes alive with each page in this charming book.



PUBLISHED

3rd PLACE

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



Albert Monreal Quihuis is a native of Arizona, served in the United States Air Force, a graduate of Arizona State University and the proud father of four children.

Albert wanted to honor his parents and their tradition of making tamales so he wrote his first children book. It was then that he realized that his passion in life was inspire and motivate children to learn about their culture, traditions and be proud of their heritage.

He created the "Sofia and Pepe's Adventure Series" and currently he is working on several historical novels.

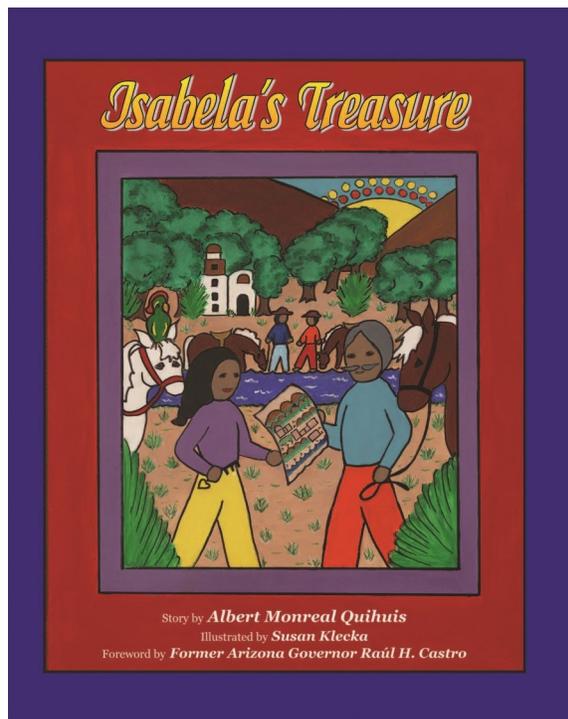
Albert enjoys reading to students and giving presentations to educators.

ISABELA'S TREASURE

"Sofia, there is a legend that has been passed down for generations that someone worthy and true, would find The Lost Treasure of Isabela!" "What? The lost treasure of Isabela?" asked Sofia, "Oh, Pepe can find lost treasure," says Pepe the parrot with excitement.

Come and join Sofia's and Pepe's Adventure as they ride out on horseback along the Santa Cruz River looking for **Isabela's Treasure** at the old mission, the lost mine, and the presidio. Along the way she discovers the real treasure of being proud of her family heritage and appreciating the sacrifices of her ancestors to give her a better life... as this land changed from being New Spain, to Mexico and to the United States.

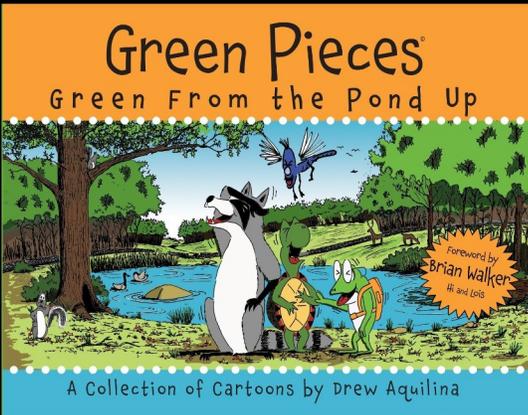
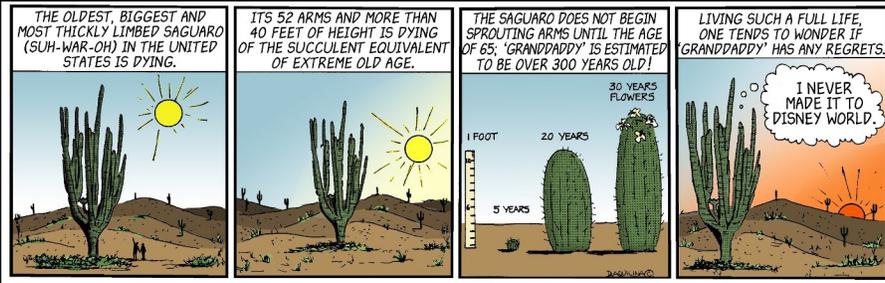
This is another of the Sofia and Pepe Adventure series which teaches children about traditions, culture, and history as they learn through Sofia's and Pepe's adventures.



Green pieces© Cartoons

~ Naturally, the World's greenest and most environmentally friendly humor™

Who knew being Green could be so hilarious?



CARTOONS * BOOKS**

**AUTHOR / CARTOONIST / EXPERT FOR SCHOOL *
HOSPITAL * CORPORATE * YOUTH GROUP
PRESENTATIONS / DEMONSTRATIONS**



480-219-4559

greenpiecestoons@gmail.com

www.greenpiecesbooks.com

www.greenpiecescartoons.com

7904 E. Chaparral Rd., #A110-496, Scottsdale, AZ 85250



Come Join Us!

Since 1978, the Arizona Authors Association has served as an information and referral center for the community, helping and supporting authors statewide. Our online Events Calendar lists upcoming book festivals, conferences, workshops, meetings, and other writing-related events. We publicize events by all Arizona writers' organizations who sponsor them.

Benefits of membership include:

Published Authors Directory

Discounts on Writer's Conferences

Networking

Personal Webpage

Literary Contest

Workshops and Seminars

Banquet and Awards

Newsletter

Literary Magazine

Book Festivals and Book Signings

Online forum

2015 Arizona Literary Contest

Prizes in All Categories: \$100 first prize, \$50 second prize, \$25 third prize

And Publication in the Arizona Literary Magazine

First Prize Published Fiction & Nonfiction - Listing on authorsandexperts.com (\$300 value)

First Prize Children's Literature - Listing on SchoolBookings.com (\$300 value)

First & Second Prize Winners in Poetry, Essay, Short Story - Nomination for a Pushcart Prize (priceless)

Unpublished Categories may pay for critiques.

Rules and Submission Guidelines:

1. Winners in unpublished categories automatically consign first serial rights to Arizona Authors Association, that is, the right to publish in Arizona Literary Magazine first.
2. Winning entries will be published or featured in next year's Arizona Literary Magazine.
3. Entries will be accepted starting January 1, 2015 and postmarked no later than July 1, 2015.
4. Unpublished categories: Three copies of each entry. No author name anywhere other than on the entry form.
5. Published categories: Two copies of each entry.
6. Only 2014 and 2015 publishing dates are accepted. All published books must include ISBN, copyright dates, and publisher information on the publisher's page.
7. Published ebooks must be submitted in printed and bound form like a galley or advance reader copy.
8. Except for poems, all unpublished manuscripts must be double spaced with 12 point font and one-inch margins, stapled or paper clipped. Page numbers and titles on header on all pages.
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.
11. Manuscripts will not be returned except with paid critiques. Published books will be donated.
12. All finalists will be notified before the awards are given.
13. Judges reserve the right to switch the category for an entry, to cancel a category if the number of entries is insufficient, or to declare no winner if the level of entries is not up to publishing standards.
14. Any entry not conforming to the guidelines will be disqualified without notifying the author. There will be no refund for disqualified entries.

Deadline: July 1, 2015 Go to AZ Authors.com and click on Literary Contest for up-to-date information.



Enjoy Award Winning Literature

Order Your Copy Today!

The 2014 ALM Winning Contest Entries:

Poems, Essays, Short Stories, Novels, Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's Literature

Non-published and Published

ORDER ON AMAZON.COM

\$10.00

ARIZONA LITERARY MAZAZINE 2015

#RICHER Press
An Imprint of Richer Life, LLC

Teamwork
Work performed by **combined effort** or **organized cooperation** working together or **to achieve better results**

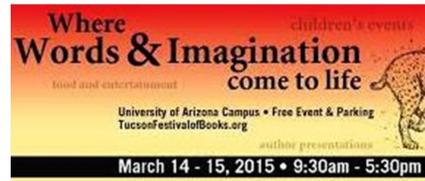
Bestsellers

TEAMWORK
BOOKS
BY
AUTHORS



Shaping Thoughts and
Changing Lives
for the Better™

Visit the
#RICHER Press
AUTHOR TEAM
Booth at the
Tucson Festival of Books



www.richerlifellc.com

Donate Now to the 2014 Feed the Hungry Fund

Entire Program
Open to the Public

Announcing the 3rd Annual

HARVEST BOOK READING



HARVEST BOOK READING
Feeding Our Community's Literary Passion
While Helping to Feed the Hungry

HarvestBookReading.org

Saturday, November 8, 2014

1 PM Eastern/12 Noon Central/11AM Mountain/ 10 PM Pacific Times

@ www.blogtalkradio.com/richerlife

Participate Online or Listen to 'Live' 2-hour Broadcast by Phone Toll Free (855) 345 4714

HARVEST BOOK COMPETITION open to ALL PUBLISHED AUTHORS
You must submit your entries by SEPTEMBER 1, 2014

Everyone Welcome to Register to Win Free Copies of Winning Books

Register Today - Winning Drawing Made During Broadcast - Must Be Present To Win

Go to www.harvestbookreading.org

to Register and Donate to the
2014 St. Mary's Gift Fund

Sponsored By MANASPIRITS
a 501 (c) 3 Non-Profit Organization
All Donations are Tax Deductible

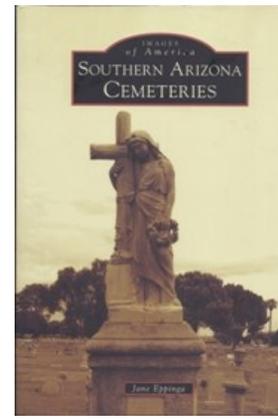
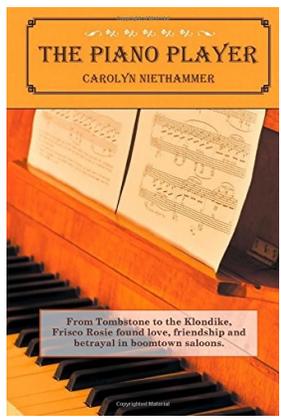
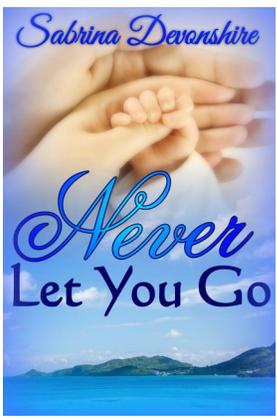
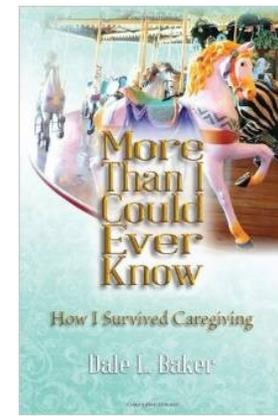
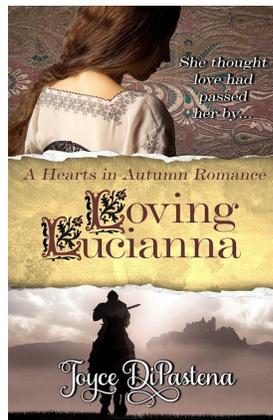
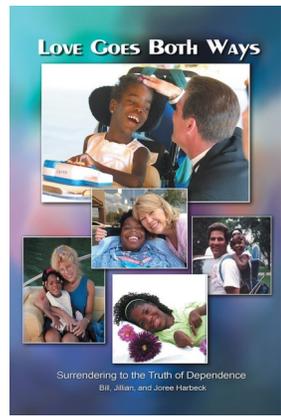
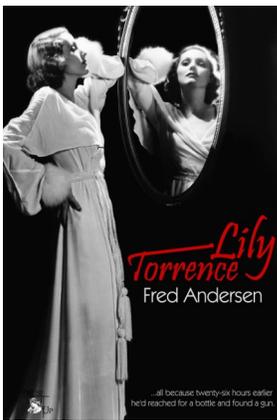
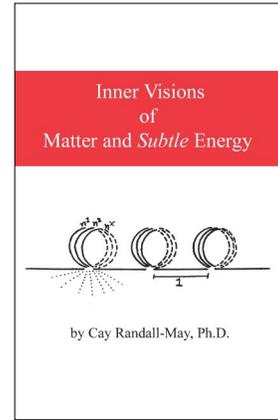
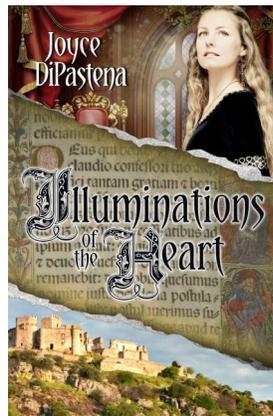
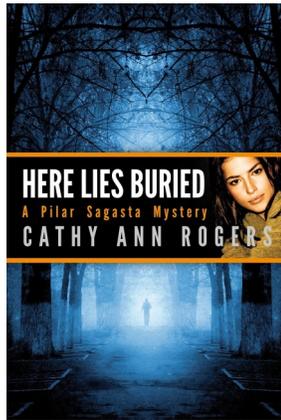
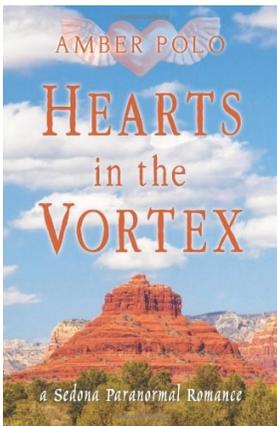


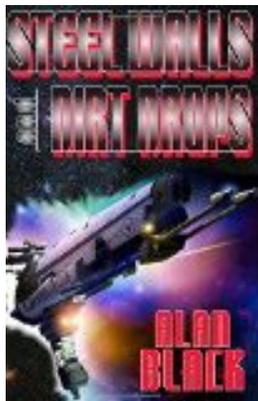
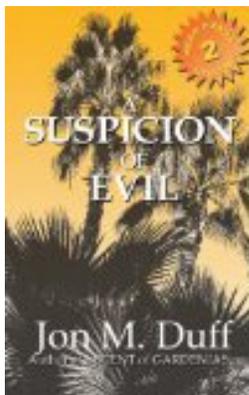
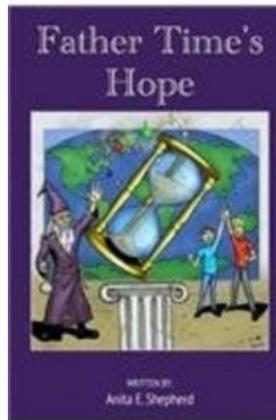
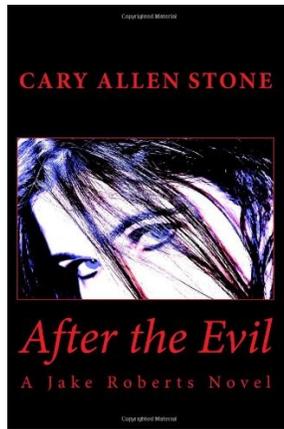
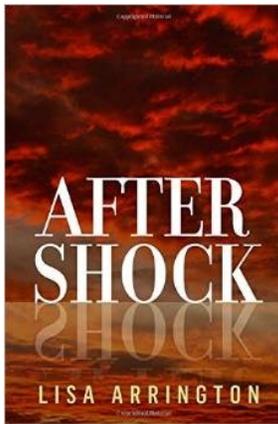
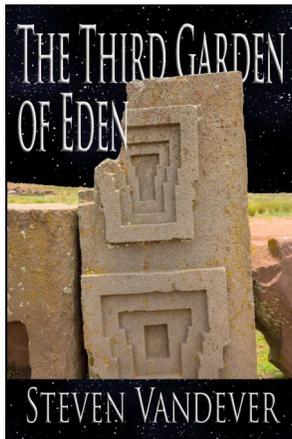
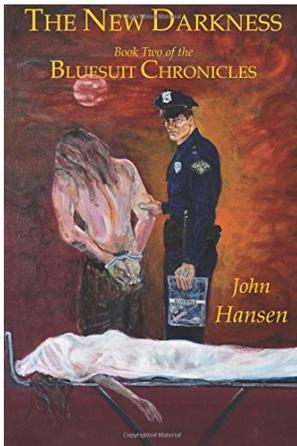
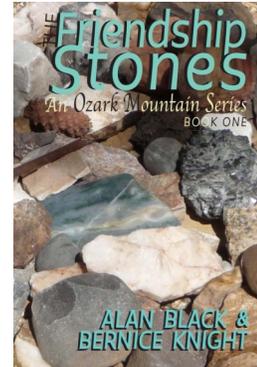
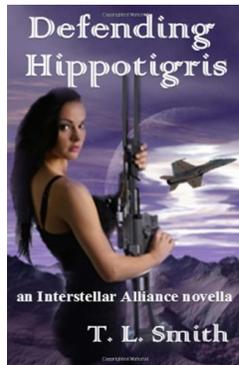
Register as Guest Author and
Get Your Name and Book
Listed in Official
2014 Program Listing
with a DONATION

ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION

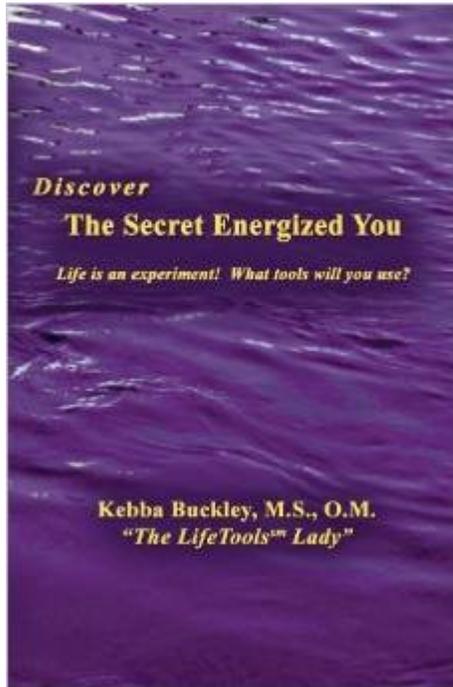
2014

PUBLISHED AUTHORS

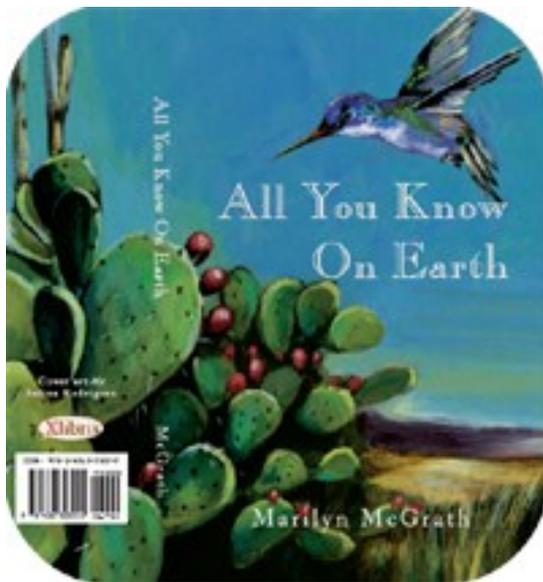




ADVERTISEMENTS



End your fatigue now! Life is an experiment! What tools will you use? Kebba Buckley's book, ***Discover The Secret Energized You*** offers a lifetime of easy-to-use tips and techniques, for reclaiming the energy you once had, or for reaching the vitality you always wished you had. With a stress- and pain-management practice for over 20 years, Kebba offers solutions to the biggest question her clients have: How can I get more energy? Structured to be read like a magazine, this is one of the new browsing books for busy and impatient people. Readers can start at the beginning or simply flip through for topics that catch their interest at the moment. Every section can stand alone. Psychology, yogic philosophy, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), AMA medicine and Chinese medicine all contribute to the can-do LifeTools(sm) in this book. As a minister, Kebba also offers strategies for the spiritual reader, in the Chapter, Rise Higher. Buy it for all your friends!



In 1910 Doctor Cal Wyatt, fresh from Harvard and Johns Hopkins University, travels west to take a position at the Arizona Territorial Insane Asylum. Eager and persuasive, he convinces the superintendent of the institution to let him test Freud's new talking therapy on a female inmate who appears to have a simple case of amnesia. These sessions take place during an era of rapid progress and change in Phoenix. Automobiles are becoming a common sight. Suffragettes march in the streets for women's rights. Pancho Villa causes problems across the border. And the newly-constructed Roosevelt Dam creates a proud sense of man's control over nature. But all of these events are irrelevant inside the iron fence of the asylum – a place where time moves at each inmate's own peculiar pace, where the past and present overlap, and where imagination is sometimes more important than the truth.