

T H E
oddtville press



W I N T E R 2 0 1 9

C O V E R A R T

One Thousand Tears

Janet O'Neil

Janet O'Neal has been working seriously in art since 1986. She began as a watercolor painter and has branched into an artist with a mastery that spans more than half a dozen genres. For the 2015 studio tour she classified herself as working in photography and mixed media. In reality the “mix” of her media includes printmaking, clay and resin sculpture, collage, photography, painting, recycled art, and combinations of all of the above. She felt a love and connection to color as a child, and this love continues to shine through in all of her art. A collection of her work is viewable at her website, janetoneal.com

the oddville press

Promoting today's geniuses and tomorrow's giants.

W W W . O D D V I L L E P R E S S . C O M

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D I S C L A I M E R

For some reason, since the nineteenth century, it has been perfectly normal in Western culture to write about murder, violence, cannibalism, drug-taking and other terrifying experiences without putting in a disclaimer. But ordinary, everyday experiences, such as being naked, using swear words or having sexual intercourse, are considered unsuitable for impressionable children. Odd though the Oddville Press has always been, we think it wise to adhere to convention in this case, so parental discretion is advised. The Oddville Press considers a wide variety of literary work. Nothing is included purely for its shock value, but sometimes, good art is a little shocking. This book is aimed at adults. This is not the same as “adult content”: it means content for actual grown-ups who are actually mature. If you aren’t an actual grown-up then please don’t read the Oddville Press, or at least, don’t complain to us if you do.

Thanks for reading,
The Management

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Praying to the Alter of Fruition

Cara Losier Chanoine

There is a certain strain
of magic
when the research for the night
is nearly done,
when I am making a couch
of the library armchair
with my bare feet cast
over one of its arms.

Like everyone else,
I burn to be brilliant.
Like everyone else,
I fear that I am mediocre.
These Romulus and Remus thoughts
are the backdrop of my labor:
each one trying to win the day,
fighting dirty for the right
to be the better brother.

Some women
want to bear children,
to watch their skin grow taut
around another nervous system.
Instead of that,
I swallow lines of text like seeds.
There is a nascent forest
in my brain,
scratching against the shell of my skull.

As the night wrings itself out,
I put down my pen.
Like everyone else,
I hope that the work has been thorough,
that the notes make sense in the morning,
that any of it
matters.

Cara Losier Chanoine is an English professor from New England, and the author of two poetry collections: *How a Bullet Behaves*, and *Bowetry: Found Poems from David Bowie Lyrics*. She likes glam rock and bad horror movies.



The Dark Isn't the Thing to Worry About

Jacob Hashimoto
(1 of 3)

On view at SITE Santa Fe from October 5, 2018 - March 24, 2019
Photo by Eric Swanson



The Dark Isn't the Thing to Worry About

Jacob Hashimoto
(2 of 3)



The Dark Isn't the Thing to Worry About

Jacob Hashimoto
(3 of 3)

Bio.

Jacob Hashimoto

Using sculpture, painting, and installation, Jacob Hashimoto creates complex worlds from a range of modular components: bamboo-and-paper kites, model boats, even astroturf-covered blocks. His accretive, layered compositions reference video games, virtual environments, and cosmology, while also remaining deeply rooted in art-historical traditions notably, landscape-based abstraction, modernism, and handcraft. Jacob Hashimoto was born in Greeley, Colorado in 1973 and is a graduate of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He lives and works in Queens, New York. Hashimoto has been featured in solo museum exhibitions at MOCA Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, MACRO - Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome, Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice, LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Schauwerk Sindelfingen in Germany, and the Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art in Finland. He has also had solo shows at Mary Boone Gallery in New York, Rhona Ho man Gallery in Chicago, Studio la Città in Verona, Galerie Forsblom in Helsinki, Anglim Gilbert Gallery in San Francisco, and Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai, among others. His work is in the collections of LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art, EMMA - Saastamoinen Foundation, Schauwerk Sindelfingen, The California Endowment, and numerous other public collections. Jacob's work can be seen at jacobhashimoto.com

Flora and Fauna

John Richmond

TWILIGHT WAS RAPIDLY GIVING WAY to an ever-creeping, soft blanket of early darkness when he finally turned off of Richmond and headed east on Cedar. Quickly, he stole a glance of himself in the rearview mirror. There, for a brief distracted moment, he saw himself, shaking his head- and smiling- in disbelief, acknowledging that he was on the verge of doing something that he promised himself that he would never- ever- do in his life. He was on his way to one of those inanely insane- stupid and boring- fundraisers.

Historically, as a matter of both course and principle, he *always*, “politely,” passed on these events, but this one was special. It was being held in the atrium of the satellite facility in Beachwood that had a central, open space filled with tropical plants. There was a winding passageway through it that ran from one side of the building to the other- east and west- and

it was like being in a rainforest. More so, as he imagined it, to experience this setting after dark, was something he could easily justify an exemption for coming to pretend he was participating in “the cause.”

He parked in the lot on the west side of the building, far enough away so as to make the walk part of the lead-up to his “journey” into a mysterious and possibly unfathomable “unknown.”

Approaching the door, he slowed for a moment in order to take one last look at the mixed deciduous trees- the maples, oaks and honey locusts- and standard decorative evergreens like hollies and rhododendrons that landscaped the six-story building.

Upon entering, his body was met by a wave of humidity as his eyes were drawn not by- or to- the patrons, assembled, but rather upward by shades of green toward the

increasing blackness of the night.

"Wow!" he said in a whisper, overwhelmed, now, by both the grandeur and the near-ominous intent they projected.

He made his way to the check-in table near the north elevators, where he was given a self-adhesive name-tag, a program sheet of the evening's activities and directions to the cash bar.

As he walked through the atrium, he realized that he recognized far more of the flora varieties than he did of the fauna kind in attendance. It was a good feeling, the kind that freed him to be able to appreciate the "permanent residents" of the building as opposed to those who were merely invited for the occasion.

At the bar, he ordered himself a bourbon and water, and ultimately left a hundred dollar donation toward the "purpose for the night."

Returning to the path that he deemed as "the jungle," he walked slowly- sipping occasionally- as he pictured himself alone with- and in- an unexplored wilderness; looking sideways, ahead- and especially upwards- at their height and magnificence; lost now, in myriad memories resurfacing from literature- "River of Darkness" and "The African Queen"- and cinema- "The Emerald Forest"- where he expected to encounter one of the "Invisible People," stepping out from the edge of the forest to confront him- maybe even threaten him- and demand from him an explanation as to why he was here, in this place.

Throughout this "passage," because his thoughts were of giant moths, snakes and other wild animals- jaguars in particular that would be starting to prowl- he continued to take little notice of the other guests around him, especially the chicly dressed brunette, standing over to the side, likewise admiring the flora.

No, it wasn't until he had passed her did

he hear the only clearly articulated human sound of the night.

"Excuse me," she called out, distinctly, yet softly enough for only him to hear.

He turned in the direction of the voice and saw her smile through what he sensed was clearly a pause before she was going to continue.

"We both know," she went on, "where this is going to go, so, let's not waste any time. My name is Deirdre- what's yours?"

Initially, he thought that it was a strange thing to say- almost cryptic- but looking at her looking at him- he understood perfectly.

"Charles," he said, and closed with his own smile.

He watched her eyes widen ever so slightly while- simultaneously- giving her head an almost imperceptible tiny twist.

"You know the Capital Grille over at Legacy Village?" she asked.

"I do," he answered.

"What do you say we head over and have a drink?"

"Sure," he answered smoothly and with perfect timing.

"All right, see you there" she replied, then lingered for a second or two before she added, "and, oh," now gesturing with her head back down the concourse, into the atrium, "they are spectacular at night, aren't they?"

He smiled, warmly. "Yes, *they are* truly exceptional."

With that, she opened her handbag, took out her car keys and headed to the exit.

He watched her take one last look around the tropical rainforest from which she had apparently emerged, and then disappear into the dark.

A small, understanding smile broke across his face, managing to slip past the usual safeguards which were entrusted with the task of

keeping betraying displays at bay. On reaching the door, he looked back down and then up through the flora behind him and said to

himself in a low voice, “I guess the animals do come out at night,” then exited and walked to his car- and the night beyond.

John Richmond has “wandered” parts of North America for a good portion of his life. These “wanderings” have taken him from a city on the Great Lakes to a small fishing village (population 200), before heading to Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina and then on to a bigger city on the Great Lakes- Chicago- then, eventually, New York City. Since then, John Richmond has made his way to a small upstate New York town and has sequestered himself in his office where he divides his time between writing and discussing the state of the world with his coonhound buddy- Roma. Recently, he has appeared in *Rumble Fish Quarterly*, *Indian Review* (India), *Adelaide Magazine* (New York/Lisboa), *Pudding Magazine*, *Birmingham Arts Journal* (2), *Ygdrasil* (Canada) (2), *Oddball Magazine*, *Lipstick Party Magazine*, *Hackwriters* (U.K.), *Quail Bell Magazine*, *StepAway Magazine* (U.K.), *The Potomac* (2), *Peacock Journal*, *Embodied Effigies* (2), *Streetcake Magazine* (U.K.), *Former People Journal* (2), *The Other Story*, *Nazar-Look* (Romania) (2), *Lavender Wolves*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *Fuck Fiction*, *The Greensilk Journal*, *The Corner Club Press*, *Danse Macabre du Jour*, *The Tower Journal*, *Stone Path Review*, *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, *Rogue Particles Magazine*, *From the Depths*, *Flash Frontier* (N. Z.), *riverbabble* (2), *The Writing Disorder*, *Lalitamba*, *Poetic Diversity*, *Marco Polo Arts Magazine*, *ken*again* (2), *Black & White*, *SNReview*, *Voices de Luna*, *The Round*, *Syndic Literary Journal*, *Slow Trains*, and *Forge Journal*.



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The Particle Collector

Michelle Bickford

If you often pause to wonder what the future might hold for us, then the art of Michelle Bickford presents some possibilities. By being exposed to the marvels of space-age engineering and Mid-Century Modern architecture, Michelle's art conjures up images of a bygone era that never fully came to fruition. From paint to frame, Michelle tells a story that comes from the heart. No matter how large or small, each piece is meticulously crafted to further tell her tale. Michelle's work can be found at michellebickford.com

I Don't Know How Long I've Been in This Car Cemetery

T.S. Hidalgo

New York is like a cage, isn't it?
I sing, here, from far away,
to the city that never sleeps,
to the beard of Whitman full of butterflies,
to the roar of the big city in anarchic polychrome,
to no million dead.
I find myself a clown's nose.
And scrap.
How many perspectives of the skyline have I done so far?
As many as there are towers,
of the world's invisible hand, perhaps?
I hear a conversation, about the price of ice.
You (Madam Death) and I are on an embankment.

TS Hidalgo (45) holds a BBA (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), an MBA (IE Business School), a MA in Creative Writing (Hotel Kafka) and a Certificate in Management and the Arts (New York University). His works have been published in magazines in the USA, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Germany, UK, France, Spain, Turkey, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, India, Singapore and Australia.



A Thousand Tears

Janet O'Neal

The Loneliness Contest

Mark Jacobs

IT WAS NOT THE VELOCITY of Cricket's vehicle, it was the intention of the deer that caused the collision. Four Sixty was a four-lane highway. Outside Briery, the antlered buck lurked in the median where the grass was high. Cricket was driving maybe a little fast. She had just attended her first class at BCCC. She was pumped. Spanish words sparked in her mind, leapt from her lips. *Yo quiero cantar*. Hell yes, she wanted to sing. It was an August evening in Broadhope County with all the aspects of natural beauty as familiar to her as sight itself. Then, *Be a bullet*, the deer willed itself.

It smashed into the driver's side door of Cricket's Jetta. The old car did a good job taking the hit. It shuddered but withstood. Cricket gripped the wheel. She took her foot off the accelerator.

The force of impact caused the animal to flop onto the windshield, which crinkled and broke. The deer then bounced off the glass onto the road. In the mirror she saw it stumble to its feet and limp into the woods. Mission accomplished.

She pulled over and stopped. Her hands were shaking. There was copper in her throat. *Shit*. She'd bet a hundred bucks Everett never made the car insurance payment. The easiest thing in the world was for State Farm to tell her they weren't covering the accident, she was too far behind. In the shortest instant she ever

lived, Cricket Calhoun's hopes and aspirations exploded in an invisible fireball of disappointment.

"You okay?"

A man was at the window. He was small and hairy. She had seen a bear cub up a tree once, its arms wrapped around the trunk. Fat butt, low center of gravity, awkward as a crooked smile. This guy looked like that bear except he was generally gold in color whereas the bear had been notably black.

"I was behind you, saw it happen. How about I open your door and we get you out?"

But he couldn't. The accident had messed up the locking mechanism. Cricket moved over into the passenger seat and exited on that side. Standing on the berm, she felt weak in the legs but reached into the back seat for her mandolin case. She opened the case. The instrument was fine.

"You fixing to play some music?"

She had forgotten he was there. "Maybe," she told him.

When it came to defiance Cricket took a back seat to nobody.

"My name is Dawson Bliss," he informed her.

He waited for hers, which she did not give.

"You're shaken up," he said, as though it were up to him to make the diagnosis.

She put the mandolin strap around her neck, prepared to be the Man of Constant Sorrow.

Her spunk impressed Dawson Bliss. Here she was, sun going down in the softest of summer skies, glowing with a color of its own, rose and purple steeping together. The woods on either side of the highway were full of creatures that didn't give a damn, they were laughing into their animal sleeves at your hard luck. The evening breeze blew like your mother's breath on your arms, your face, your memory.

"Nice night," he said.

"You mean a nice night to have a deer smash your car and be broke and you can't go back to class and finish your first semester which you just started tonight and you have to pay the student loan back anyway?"

Dawson nodded slowly, not agreeing with her just registering his comprehension. "I'd love to hear you sing."

That was all it took for her to put the mandolin back in its case. She pulled her phone from her pocket, looked at the screen.

"Battery dead?"

She nodded. "Dead as ten doornails."

"I don't have a phone. But I'll drive you home." He pointed to her car. "You can't drive that thing. Where do you live?"

"I don't want to go home."

She hadn't known she did not want to go home and fight with Everett about money, about everything, until she said it.

The only thing – right now at least – she liked about Dawson Bliss was how fast he adapted.

"Let's go to my house," he suggested. "It's not far. I live in the country, out past Buffalo Creek. I'll make you a cup of tea, and you can figure out what you want to do next."

Why she said yes: it would take a book to

figure that one out, and she had no patience for writing any books.

He drove a decrepit Ford Ranger with a bench seat and a manual transmission. An old man's truck, though he couldn't be thirty, which was also Cricket's age. There was a peace sign on the shifter knob, a little green and gold flag with Arabic squiggles hanging from the rear-view mirror. The back of the truck was heaped with junk, the kind of stuff you saw at flea markets that nobody wanted but somebody might. The weirdest thing she observed, however, was on the floor of the cab where she had to put her feet. It was a stuffed raccoon. In a cage. Its inert hostile eyes spooked her. She gripped her mandolin case tightly.

"Don't worry about Dixie," he assured her, putting on his blinker and easing into the roadway. "He's been dead a good eighteen months."

"You drive around with a stuffed raccoon named Dixie?"

"I named him that because he whistled. Anybody said, 'You ain't just whistling Dixie,' I had evidence to the contrary."

"I get it, you're some kind of freak. Stop. Let me out."

"No problem." He pulled over immediately. "You hang a white rag on your aerial, somebody will stop and give you a lift. You know that, right?"

As she put a hand on the door handle he told her, "Apples and oranges."

"Say what?"

"A freak is one thing, an eccentric is another."

She opened the door. Closed it again. "Never mind, let's go."

He shrugged. "Suit yourself."

In the fifteen minutes it took him to drive home she learned he had built the house

himself and she should not expect much. It was small, he warned her, the ceilings just six feet high, to save on the cost of construction materials, him being short of stature and money both. Also, he was a bachelor. There were no guarantees in life, but if he ever married, the odds were good his wife would also be short.

"Unlike yourself," he said.

Cricket was every statuesque inch of five eight. She had been tall since the seventh grade. She was ash blonde and had been called beautiful although that was a stretch, any more. Her tits still stood up the way God intended, but how long could that last?

Off a badly banked gravel road. Down a dirt drive through woods composed of no-account trees. In the evening's last light, the house looked like a fairy tale cottage.

"It's a gingerbread house," she said.

"You're not the first one to say that."

They stepped down from the truck. Cricket could not resist wondering if maybe the tree toads making their evening racket were also miniatures. Anyhow they had full-sized voices. A spotted hound on a chain lunged to welcome home his master while expressing full-throated curiosity about his master's guest.

"That's James Madison," said Dawson. "A seriously underrated Founding Father. You can call him James if you want, but never Jimmy."

Cricket felt relieved. Apples and oranges. Odd was not bad, it was only odd.

She liked the porch, which had an old-timey feel. Inside, the house was indeed pretty small, with low ceilings. Most of the furniture was small, too, although the chair to which Dawson pointed her was of average size. He went into the kitchen and heated water for tea. All the time she waited a question was building up inside her. The pressure was more than she

could bear, and as he handed her a china cup of green tea she asked the question. It came out more in-your-face than she wanted it to.

"Who are you?"

"I put honey in your tea, hope that's okay. Trash and treasure. I buy stuff. Then I sell it. It's a living, but just barely."

"You talk like you went to college."

He waved at the bookshelves that covered every wall. The shelves were full. Next to his small comfortable chair was a stack of books ten high, a leaning tower of learning.

"I'm an autodidact."

"What's that?"

"It's a person who uses big words when little words will do. There's a landline, if you want to call somebody. About the car, I mean."

She dialed Everett's number.

"You pay the car insurance?"

"Course I did."

"Good. 'Cuz a deer just trashed the Jetta."

"Goddamn it, Cricket. Didn't you see the fuckin' thing coming at you?"

"I'm fine, thanks for asking."

"Sorry. You're okay, I guess."

"Where are you?"

"Me and Tony Joe are working on his boat. The engine, I mean. It'll start any time now, that's a promise. Your sister gonna pick you up?"

She hung up. "My husband," she told Dawson, "I can always tell when he's lying. He never made the car insurance payment."

A cautious nod. "What was it you wanted to study?"

"Spanish. I had this idea of being a translator. They'd send me to Spain, or Mexico, some exciting place. On my days off I would learn Spanish dances. I had a picture in my mind of stunning red shoes. Anyway I just figured something out."

He looked at her with respectful

anticipation. She wondered if the dead raccoon was really named Dixie.

"You can marry a guy," she said thoughtfully, "and live with him as man and wife, and still be the loneliest woman in Virginia."

He seemed to weigh her words, and it struck her that he had to be lonely, too, living out in the woods with a dog named after a President.

"I keep thinking about the deer," she said.

"What?"

"What do you mean, 'what'?"

"What is it you keep thinking?"

"If I'd gone by that spot ten seconds earlier, I'd still have a life."

"I'll be back in a second," he told her.

He went down the narrow hallway, which was crammed with boxes of his stock-in-trade. In other words, junk. He rummaged through the boxes for a while until he found what he was after.

"Try these on," he said, handing her a pair of red shoes.

They were not the shoes of her Spanish imagination, but they had high heels and extravagant toes, and they fit except the toes pinched a little. He handed her the mandolin case, which she had left by the door, coming in.

So it was weird, singing "Man of Constant Sorrow" in borrowed red shoes in the undersized house of a man who looked like a bear cub the hour after your dreams had died, so what? She put everything she had into the song, which was quite a bit given her mood of desolation, her foreknowledge of failure. When she finished she began crying before he could clap.

"It's over," she said, trying to get control of herself.

"What's over?"

"Everything."

"I know a guy, might be able to fix your

car. He works out of his mamma's garage. Harry works cheap, no overhead. Want me to call him?"

"It don't matter."

"You sit here a while, finish your tea. I'll be outside on the porch. When you figure out what you want to do, let me know."

After he was gone she realized he had a preacher's voice, but not a Bible preacher. Rather, Dawson Bliss's melodic bass told a hopeful story with which she was not familiar. If she had hunted a week she would not have found a man in Broadhope County less like Everett. She drank the tea quickly.

She went out to the porch and told him, "I want to stay up all night."

"We can do that."

"Good," she said. And, "Thank you."

"One thing, though. No matter what happens, you can't break my heart."

She promised she wouldn't. It was a thoughtless vow on her part, tossed off in a moment of elation she had no right to. It was her way of saying *To hell with it all*. Also, in the moment of shock between the collision and the deer's disappearance she had discovered she was leaving Everett. That could be considered a cause for celebration.

Dawson let the dog off the chain, and they spent twenty minutes playing with it, working the creature up into a happy frenzy. Somehow it was full-on night, and in the cleared gap where the house stood the stars were diamonds in the rings on a million invisible fingers.

"I ought to be feeling a lot worse than I'm actually feeling," she admitted.

"I guess that's the way it works, sometimes."

"It'll hit me, though, won't it?"

He said one of his curious things then.

"Like the proverbial freight train, I suspect."

She told him, "Sometimes I get the idea

you're laughing at me because I'm dumb."

"I don't think you're dumb."

"Uneducated, then. In other words, an ignorant Broadhope girl don't know how to tie her own shoes. I was aiming to fix that problem, until the frigging buck went after me."

"You can write a song about it. Call it 'Bad Luck Deer.'"

"I don't write songs."

"You've got talent. But you know that."

"I used to play the bluegrass festivals. Had me a band, Cricket and the Night Bugs. We were pretty good, I guess."

"What happened?"

"Everett, that's my husband, didn't like the way the men in the audience looked at me. After the show they were always coming on to me."

"He was jealous."

"Don't hardly seem possible, any more. He don't give a damn about me lately, but beware the guy that smiles my way."

"He's a dog in the manger."

The only manger Cricket knew about was the one in which Jesus lay in Bethlehem. Nothing about a dog in the Nativity story as she knew it. She shook her head, frowning in the dark.

"Let me cook something for you," she said.

He sat in his chair reading a book about flags while she fried eggs and sausage and made toast. They ate sitting on the front porch, which felt less cramped, to both of them, than inside.

"This is mighty tasty," he said.

"I'm guessing you never been married."

"That is an accurate postulation."

"What's a postulation?"

"It's a word set aside in the dictionary for the use of autodidacts."

"See, you are laughing at me."

"I'm laughing at myself for pretending all the reading I've done counts for something."

"Well it does, Dawson, it truly does."

She didn't mean to condescend, but that was how he took it. He stalked off a ways into the woods, hurt and prideful, never mind the mosquitoes of August. She went inside and washed the dishes. When he came back, he showed her what he called his investments, seating her on the sofa and bringing them out one by one from a room that in any other house would be the spare bedroom.

An old mantel clock he said was French from the eighteenth century, wherever that was. A map of the Thirteen Colonies on dry parchment. A double-barreled pistol with exaggerated hammers and an ivory handle.

"Once in a while you really do find treasure in all the trash. I'll take this stuff to an antiques dealer I know in Richmond."

"What about eBay?"

"I don't use a computer. My constitution is delicate, I'm afraid of catching a virus."

"I'll go with you," she said. "To Richmond, I mean."

The look of pain he gave her was also a look of accusation.

"What, you don't believe I'll go?"

"Beautiful tall woman with a mandolin and a voice like clover honey shows up and cooks breakfast for a hobbit one night. It's the stuff of tragicomedy. You ever hear of pheromones?"

"No."

"They're these very little animals inside people, they have to do with sexual attraction. They're what draws one person to another."

"So?"

"Yours are assassinating mine. I don't stand a chance."

"You want me to feel bad for you because you're short, Dawson?"

That one hit him like a claw hammer on

the tenderest part of the head.

"I quit rationalizing my height and station in society a long time ago."

"I'm tall and dumb. You're short and smart. Who wins that one?"

He was standing, holding the valuable old pistol. He put it to his temple and held it there. But of course it wasn't loaded, he didn't even have any ammunition for that kind of antique weapon in the house.

"You want me to leave?" she said. "You can drop me at my sister's."

"Okay," he said, "let's go."

But by the time they reached the end of his long driveway and he turned back onto the gravel road they had somehow come to the mutual decision that they would go someplace else. Which turned out to be the falls on the Powhatamie River. It was not a huge river, nothing grand like the James, and the falls did not rise above ten or twelve feet at their tallest. But it was a scenic spot, especially now, on a mild night in late summer when the sky was clear and misery hung over you like a relative you couldn't stand being in the same room with.

They sat on the bank for a few minutes. Then they took off their shoes and waded in the pool at the base of the cataract. The water was cool. Cricket told Dawson she was leaving her husband.

"Where you plan on living?"

"I'll start out at my sister's. That'll work for a while."

"And after that?"

"Maybe I'll go to Spain. I'll sing me some bluegrass in the streets, and they'll throw money in my hat."

She tossed that out knowing it would wound him. She had been known to be high-handed, especially when she was younger and

the power of her beauty was fresh and needed testing. Now, there was no call for it, and no excuse.

They got out of the pool and dried their feet on the grass of the bank and put on their shoes and walked to the truck in a silence that was neither that of friends or enemies. Cricket wished she felt something that wasn't impending devastation.

"It's like. . . it's like the deer is still after me."

"It's not," Dawson said.

"Like you would know."

"Where does your sister live?"

"We ain't been up all night yet. You tired?"

"No."

"Me, neither. Let's drive to Richmond."

"Now?"

"We'll go get your stuff, and we'll be there when the antiques place opens up. You can tell the guy, is it a guy?"

"It's a woman."

"Well you can tell her. . . something about me."

"Tell her what?"

Pheromones, that was what you called the little animals she knew were not really animals. She understood they were real, like heartache and antlered bucks and car insurance payments that didn't get made.

They were at the truck, which in the starlight looked like a tank in a war you never imagined would come to pass. In the distance a train went by, blowing its whistle at the far edge of their hearing. It was, she realized, the proverbial freight train, and the sound tugged at her heart with an emotion that did not reduce to a single word, a single feeling. *Now I know*, she thought, but not what.

"What's this woman's name?" she asked Dawson. "The one that runs the antiques store."

"Honora," he said.

"Well, you can tell Honora you saved me."

"From what?"

"From being lonely. You saved me, and now we're getting to know each other."

He thought for a moment without responding. He was trying it out in his mind. Because he was a man with so many words, it would take time to select the right ones.

When he was ready, he went to the passenger side door. He opened it and picked up the cage with the stuffed raccoon. He tossed it into the back of the truck.

"Go ahead and get in," he said.

She got in. She promised herself she would not be high-handed a second time. As Dawson started the engine she waited with frank interest for him to tell her what was on his unusual mind.

Mark Jacobs has published more than 130 stories in magazines including *The Atlantic*, *Playboy*, *The Baffler*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Oddville Press*. He has stories forthcoming in several magazines including *The Hudson Review*. His five books include *A Handful of Kings*, published by Simon and Shuster, and *Stone Cowboy*, by Soho Press. Stories of Jacobs' have won The Iowa Review Fiction Prize and the Kafka Award. His website can be found at markjacobsauthor.com.



Some Days I Hold Up the Sky

Hollie Savage

No More Forever

Lou Marin

Like a warrior home from his last battle,
I piled dented shield and dulled sword
in an old dusty and locked room,
where only memories and loneliness rattle.
“I will fight no more, forever,” upon my lips.

I piled dented shield and dulled sword;
to love no more was once my master plan.
Scars upon my heart would heal in time.
There were no more dragons to slay,
no more maidens to steal across the land.

in an old dusty and locked room,
“I will love no more, forever,” upon my lips.
I lay alone in the dark shadow of a lover’s moon
destined to remain a lonely, unbeaten warrior .
Oft offered heart slowly hardened, calcified.

Where only memories and loneliness rattle;
“Maybe it will stop beating, and none too soon.
I will know pain no more, forever,” upon my lips.
One day into my life a young beauty wandered,
peering, through the long unused keyhole.

“I will fight no more, forever,” upon my lips,
that lead into my carefully secured soul.
Slowly, as awakened from a dream, I pondered,
“I wonder if this is the end of forever,” upon my lips.
I lifted door bars and disengaged rusted latches.

I piled dented shield and dulled sword,
slowly, carefully widening the oak-hewn door
that had been my heart’s savior and salvation.
Could this be one of Cupid’s unexpected matches;
“I will love you forever,” upon our lips.

(continued on following page)

Gone To North Dakota

He's gone to North Dakota,
Wiped the dust off his feet,
 headed out west
To the cold badlands
 he remembers
From his boyhood.

He's gone to North Dakota,
His heart is following his feet,
Shadow lengthening to the west,
Soul shaped by the badlands,
 Embers he remembers,
 Dreams of boyhood.

Lou Marin was born and raised in the western hills of Maine, then spent 20 plus years wandering the country and world in the United States Air Force. He is a photographer, published poet and short story writer who now also pens faith based devotionals. He lives in Rumford, Maine. His five poetry anthologies, published by *Publish America* and entitled, *Awash With Words*, *Old Waves*, *New Beaches*, *Whisper of Waves*, and *Sea To Shining Sea, Version 1 and 2*, are available in print and online.



Glamour Beast

Michelle Bickford

A Reasonably Proficient Assistant Thwarter

Dr. Sohom Das

OF COURSE, Fire-man knew he shouldn't even be thinking about a one-night stand at a funeral. Especially this one. But every time Miss-Stretch's grey eyes flitted over towards him, he felt a tiny firework explode in his chest.

Fire-man looked around the gargantuan church. Above the gothic wooden beams, and painted cherubs, the ceiling seemed to expand the harder he looked. An infinite darkness, like a chunk of space, hidden up there. He thought he saw a glimmer of a star, and it reminded him of an acid trip he had taken in the park with his friends on the last day of school. Long ago, before he dedicated his life to protect the innocent.

The view in front of him was blocked by an unruly afro. He tapped Shrink-O on the shoulder, who without even needing to be asked, nodded and shrunk down a few inches.

The coffin had 'Let's do the impossible' carved into the side, in elegant calligraphy. A ginormous statue of Jesus, with his arms piously outstretched, loomed above it. Fire-man wondered whether Jesus would find it offensive, to see himself portrayed dying on a crucifix if he was looking down, and if he existed. Jesus looked solemn, as if He himself was paying His respects to Captain Righteous.

Deep down, Fire-man knew he should be at least partially offended that he wasn't asked to do the eulogy. After all, he had worked

beside Captain Righteous (or perhaps behind him) on a daily basis. But the Commissioner had asked Heal-ix to do it, which wasn't unreasonable. The three of them had founded the Clan of Heroes together, a decade ago. A tiresome, cliché-riddled monologue that Captain Righteous would relay to Fire-man every few weeks, with such enthusiasm, it was as if it was the first time he had ever told it.

But the truth, a truth Fire-man had only allowed to partially crystallise in his head, was that he didn't want to write a series of compliments and heroic accolades about Captain Righteous. And he certainly didn't want to regale his peers with a plethora of valiant anecdotes. He couldn't muster the flattery and flamboyance required.

The entire crowd stood up in unison, lurching Fire-man's focus back to the present. He followed suit. Heal-ix shuffled slowly to the stage. Now that's a properly sombre look, Fire-man thought. It put his own to shame.

Heal-ix dropped the hood of his dark green costume and unsheathed a large dagger from his belt. Dramatically, he sliced across his hand and held it up. Blood splattered on to the church's grey stone floor. Gasps rippled through the vastness.

"I bleed for my brother, Captain Righteous," he boomed to a splattering of applause. Fire-man suppressed a flash of rage. What a

cheap trick. Completely pointless. He also felt it somewhat rude, perhaps even sacrilegious, and certainly unhygienic, to intentionally bleed onto a church floor. “Utter crap”. His mouth unintentionally betrayed his thoughts. A woman, covered in long black feathers, whose name Fire-man couldn’t remember, turned around. She seemed unaware that the googly bird eyes sewn into her costumes’ cap negated the stern look she gave him. Fire-man dabbed at his eyes and said “Utter crap... that we’ve lost him”. She nodded sombrelly.

The wound on Heal-ix’s hand healed instantly. Obviously. He looked across at the crowd, a bit too melodramatically for Fire-man’s liking. One solitary tear trickled down his cheek and joined the blood on the floor. Then, after a pause, a bit too long for Fire-man’s liking, he spoke. “I have healed from countless injuries during my career fighting evil, but I will never heal from this, my deepest wound, the loss of my beloved friend, the indestructible Captain Righteous.”

Fire-man imagined running over to Heal-ix, shouting “He’s clearly not indestructible!” and then punching him in the face. Any injury he caused Heal-ix would be fleeting, of course, but the fantasy was comforting, nevertheless. So much so, that it played in a loop in his mind. Distracting him from the buzzing words of the eulogy.

He looked across the church, over at Miss-Stretch and was delighted to have caught her eye, again, just as she looked down, blushing. They played a cat and mouse game with their gazes for a while, until an urgent thought struck him. He glanced around, as nonchalantly as he could manage. He exhaled deeply, relieved that Psy-trix was nowhere to be seen. He knew her moral code was to never read minds unless in the fight against evil and injustice. But all the same...

Amidst the dulcet drone of Heal-ix’s eulogy, a few words jumped out at Fire-man.

“Of course, Icy-Kill panicked after I had destroyed his freeze-ray. Before he flew away, he threw the little girl down Hunter’s Well, knowing with my valiant nature that I would rescue her. I did so, very bravely, saving her life. I remember holding her tightly, yet categorically in no way inappropriately, and she was shivering and shaking. I looked over at Captain Righteous who had just jumped out of the helicopter, mere moments too late to save her, though it didn’t matter, because I just did. That little girl looked up at me and said ‘Thank you. I owe you my life’ and I replied ‘You’re Hunter’s well-come’.” The audience tittered.

What? Fire-man thought. Captain Righteous said he had rescued her, He held her in his arms and made that lame quip.

“Utter crap,” Fire-man whispered, this time imperceptibly.

“Little did we know that the father of that little girl was none other than the Commissioner.” Heal-ix gestured over to an obese balding man, who nodded back. “And with his financial backing, within a year we started the Clan of Heroes.”

A painfully slow hour later, Fire-man was milling around the church, endlessly recycling stock funeral condolence phrases. He tried to casually network with the full heroes. Captain Righteous’ death was the perfect catalyst for conversation, after all. He struggled with the balance of doing this, but not overtly neglecting the side-kicks. His own kind.

Whispered tones in a corner piqued his interest. He overheard that the Beige Panther had now been arrested. Fire-man had caught wind of the odd rumour of tax evasion. But

he didn't think it was a criminal matter. Hadn't the man been an accountant before he earned his stripes? Fire-man gasped as he suddenly remembered. Hadn't Psy-trix worked with him to bring down Evil Weevil? Surely, the fight against evil and injustice wouldn't include... No, it couldn't have been. Not her own kind.

The feathered lady waddled over, just as one of the women in the corner was describing the police raid on the Beige Panther's lair to the other. Despite his efforts, Fire-man couldn't quite distill the whispered conspiratorial words over the soporific ramblings of the bird woman, whose name he still could not for the life of him recall. Then he felt the ground shudder. He sighed and braced himself for the unavoidable.

Thumping footsteps approached him from behind. Fire-man spun around and mustered the best respectfully sombre smile that he could manage. "Unbreaka-bull, I'm glad you could make it."

"Why you no costume?" Unbreaka-bull half spoke, half growled.

Even without the huge horns on his costume, Unbreaka-bull was a looming figure. Almost seven feet tall, with muscles that seemed to ripple, even when stationary.

"I thought a black suit might be more respectful than bright orange."

Unbreaka-bull's face suddenly contorted. Fire-man clenched all over, thinking he had somehow offended the man-beast. It was only when he saw the accompanying snot bubble, that he realised Unbreaka-bull was actually crying. His huge horns undulated rhythmically. "Me sad he dead."

"Well, he will be sorely missed. It just goes to show how precious-"

"Me would have saved him. Me shield him from falling beam."

"Well, with all due respect, you weren't

there," Fire-man said as he fiddled with his tie. He always found himself edging backwards when speaking to Unbreaka-bull. The man-beast had limited concept of personal space. "It was intense. Trying to rescue so many people from a collapsing skyscraper. It wasn't easy to-"

Unbreaka-bull let out a long gurgling yell, probably more crying. "Brave, brave man. Indestructible Captain Righteous. Dead!"

"Well, he's not technically indestructible. I suppose... I should probably, you know, mingle with some of the other-"

"You no blame self, Fire-man. You only sidekick, not Clan of Heroes."

Fire-man cleared this throat and shuffled back further. "Well, I'd like to think that I'm an affiliate member."

"No blame self," Unbreaka-bull said, slapping Fire-man on his shoulder, sending him stumbling.

Heal-ix strode over holding the lid of a thermos flask, steaming with coffee. He shook hands with Fire-man and nodded solemnly. His daggers tinkled against his frankly too tight dark green chain mail trousers. "I'm sorry for your loss, Fire-man."

"Thank you. He was a good man. By the way, sorry to be a stickler for the rules, but the church did specify no food or drink is allow-"

"No! He was a great man. I can't believe the legend who founded the Clan, the only man to ever defeat Magnatron in hand-to-hand combat, died so pitifully in an earthquake."

Fire-man nodded. "Just goes to show how precious-"

"A bloody earthquake!" yelled Heal-ix, dropping head down and raising his arms, seeming to unintentionally imitate the huge statue of Jesus looming behind him. A splash of coffee leapt onto Fire-man's shoe.

Unbreaka-bull let out another bizarre sound, presumably of grief, not unlike what

Fire-man imagined an a bovine mating call might sound like.

Heal-ix shook his head and looked up. "I'm sorry Fire-man, I need to keep it together. For your sake."

"Actually, I'm doing okay. I mean, it just goes to show how—"

"Poor, lowly sidekick. Your boss now dead. Your hero."

"Lowly?"

"I said lonely."

"You said lowly."

"Sorry. I meant lowly."

"Wait. What?"

"Poor you."

"He wasn't technically my boss, as such. We were more like colleagues. To be honest, it was often me who—"

"It must have been a pleasure, an honour, to work for a man with such an aptitude for quips."

"I suppose."

"Tell me Fire-man, he must have made a humorous statement when he first told you about the earthquake."

"Actually, it was me who told him. I'd been scanning the police radio when I heard—"

"But what did he say? Bet it was hilarious."

"I think he said: 'Let's go shake things up.'"

Heal-ix jerked his head backwards, dropped his thermos lid of coffee and howled with laughter. Unbreaka-bull followed suit, making an odd grunting noise. Another huge bubble of snot grew into an unfeasibly large size and then popped, some splashing on to Fire-man's tie. "He funny."

Heal-ix composed himself, and looked off into the distance solemnly. Fire-man followed his gaze, somewhat confused. "You know," Heal-ix said, "I've healed from countless injuries during my career fighting evil. But I will never heal from this, my deepest wound."

Fire-man was annoyed that Heal-ix hadn't even registered the spilt coffee on the floor, let alone attempted to clean it up. "Yes, er, you already said that in your speech."

"By the way," Heal-ix said, pulling out a card from his tight dark green chain mail trousers, "I thought you would want to see this. Evil Coli sends his commiserations."

"Who he?" asked Unbreaka-bull.

"Evil Coli? He's a super villain. Used to be Magnatron's sidekick. Just earned his stripes."

More confusion than usual crept into Unbreaka-bull's gormless face.

"You must know him. Gives his enemies food poisoning. Purple costume. Glasses. Lovely message inside the card."

Fire-man opened it up.

"Don't get me wrong," Heal-ix added, "I will not rest until he, and his evil scum colleagues are destroyed. And he is a sworn enemy of the Clan of Heroes. But still, nice gesture."

Fire-man couldn't ignore the spilt coffee any longer. He sighed, mumbled an apology, then walked off to try to find a mop. He saw Heal-ix's thermos flask on a chair behind a pillar. He peered around and then blew on it, purloining a wave of heat from it and giggled. He felt Jesus' glare on him, though tried to ignore it.

"Is that an appropriate use of your powers?"

Fire-man yelped and spun around. "I wasn't... I didn't... Oh, Miss-Stretch. It's you. How do you do?"

She grinned. "Well, hello you."

In slumber, Fire-man had found it remarkably easy to avoid it. The memory. The next morning, he woke up to a sore jaw and an

unfamiliar dishevelled, scrawny cat, eying him suspiciously. It took him a few moments to realise where he was, and why he had been smiling in his sleep.

He leaned over to the small dresser but his cigarettes were just out of reach. An elongated arm shot past him, grabbed the pack and dropped it in his lap. He turned round and pecked Miss-Stretch on her lips. He marvelled at how pretty, how pure, she was. Porcelain-like, unblemished skin, and a tiny mole on her nose. She reminded him of his old English teacher, who would make him blush every time she asked him a question.

"Last night was... amazing," he said, pulling out a cigarette. "That thing you did, changing the shape of your... Wow!"

Miss-Stretch giggled, sat up, and helped herself to a cigarette. "You were great too," she said, her voice as sultry and as enticing as her eyes. "You made the earth move." A finger stretched up to her mouth as she winced. "Sorry, I didn't mean... That was insensitive... The earthquake."

Fire-man smiled. "Its okay. To be honest..." His mouth stayed open for a few moments. He shut it, looked back at the cat and took a few drags. "I know Captain Righteous is this legendary hero, but he was also..." He shrugged. "...flawed."

She leaned towards him and raised an eyebrow.

"He had some annoying habits."

"Oh, do tell."

"Don't get me wrong. His contributions in the fight against evil—"

"—and injustice. Yeah, I get it. Tell me the juicy stuff, Fire-man."

He drummed his fingers against the side of the bed for a few moments. "Between me and you, he was a bit of a jerk, Miss-Stretch. He was patronising. He was actually really stupid.

He would come up with these ridiculously complicated plans that I always had to talk him out of. I'd have to come up with an alternative and somehow convince him it was his own idea. And he always got the credit."

Fire-man sighed and rubbed his face. He stubbed out his cigarette and grabbed another one. "His quips that everybody seems to adore. Imagine having to listen to that crap day after day after day."

"His catchphrase was a bit dorky I guess."

"Exactly," Fire-man stuck out his chest and jutted his chin forward. "Let's do the impossible. If you are doing the impossible, every mission, then maybe you don't understand what the word means."

Miss-Stretch giggled.

She put out her cigarette and snuggled up to him. Her hair smelled of lavender and her body felt delightfully warm. She placed a hand on his chest. Her cat idled up between them, chaperoning their intimacy.

"Don't take this the wrong way," she said. Her voice was so soft, Fire-man felt that nothing she could say could ever really offend him. "But your uniform is pretty dorky too."

"I know," Fire-man said, slapping his forehead. "It's horrific. But Captain Righteous designed it. I desperately tried to change it. I even made some prototype alternatives but he insisted. He said it represented fire."

"It makes you look like a carrot."

"And not exactly ideal for sneaking up on villains."

Miss-Stretch nuzzled in closer. Fire-man sniffed her hair. The cat ostensibly yawned, though Fire-man couldn't help feel it was displaying its huge razor teeth.

"To be honest, I even hate my name. It's confusing. I don't work for the emergency services. I pleaded with Captain Righteous. I begged him to be called the Extinguisher, but

he's not a man you can reason with."

"That's so sweet."

"That he was unreasonable?"

"That you're confiding in me."

Fire-man smiled, and slowly sucked his belly in. "Anyway, what you got planned for today?"

"Not much, why?"

He leant towards her and admired her long luscious eyelashes. "Maybe we could hang out. Stay in bed."

"That would be great," she said. "My friend's coming over to return a dress she borrowed but I could get rid of her quickly."

Fire-man nestled in closer to her and pushed his hand towards her legs, under the duvet.

"Although Psy-trix is a talker. Might take a while."

Fire-man bolted up. "Psy-trix is coming here?"

"Yeah, she's due any minute. Why?"

Fire-man tumbled out of bed and frantically picked up yesterday's outfit. In a frenzy of fingers, he buttoned up his shirt unevenly. "Sorry, I've just remembered. I've left the window on, I mean, the oven open."

"From before the funeral?"

"Erm, yeah."

"From yesterday morning?"

He grabbed his jacket. "Look, I would really like to see you again." He pecked her on the mouth. The cat hissed at him.

"Last night was amazing!" he shouted over his shoulder as he bolted out of the door.

The next few days were wonderful for Fire-man. It gnawed at him, yet he still managed to avoid it. His blossoming romance with Miss-Stretch was a pleasant distraction.

He gently probed her about her friendship with Psy-trix and was unnerved when Miss-Stretch described her as "a little over-protective." What did that mean? Hours after that conversation, he woke up in a cold sweat, after dreaming that it was him, not the Beige Panther, in shackles, behind bars.

But he couldn't evade it forever. That's the thing with memories. You can't escape what is already inside you. And it wasn't accompanied by guilt or, if he was being really honest, even regret. It was more curiosity. Why that particular day? Those particular comments?

Captain Righteous had made hundreds of quips over the years. Thousands. But standing there, in that shuddering skyscraper, with the world seemingly collapsing around them, his words reverberated in Fire-man's head, playing in a loop.

The chaos. The piercing screams. The huge cracks snaking across the walls. The businessman in a tasteless purple suit, covered in blood. Who Fire-man had lifted out from under a pile of rubble, who didn't even acknowledge him, yet yelled thanks to Captain Righteous as he scurried away. The clouds of smoke and dust. The hysterical woman hobbling on one high heel with her make up running.

Captain Righteous' earlier words penetrated all of it, and looped inside Fire-man's mind, incessantly, preposterously, nauseatingly. Let's shake things up. As the chaos grew and the disaster thrived, those words also grew. Louder and louder.

A small fire blazed, on a desk with some computers on it, throwing out occasional sparks. Fire-man ran over and blew on it. It died down gradually, but faster, he was fairly sure, than if any mere mortal had done the same. He looked across the corridor at Captain Righteous who was leaning into a smoky

lift shaft, looking up and signalling for a woman to jump down. She yelled as she plummeted, her red hair shimmering through the air. Captain Righteous caught her with one hand. He yelled out: "Thanks for dropping by." He didn't speak the words into the woman's ear, which was merely inches away from his mouth. He shouted them across the whole floor for everybody to hear. As the woman sprinted to the stairwell she was laughing, actually laughing. As was the rotund security guard who grabbed her hand and guided her away.

Let's shake things up.
Thanks for dropping by.
Let's shake things up.
Thanks for dropping by.

The words swirled around inside Fire-man. Combining. Synergising. Infuriating. Captain Righteous' face. Chiselled jaw and perfectly shaped goatee. The red-head's laughing face. The rotund security guard.

It wasn't a wish. There was no active intention. It was more like a premonition. At that exact moment, a huge steel beam shuddered above Captain Righteous who hadn't noticed it. Basking in his own heroism.

Fire-man froze. It wasn't panic. He had, after all, diffused Magnatron's bomb down that mineshaft with his toes, whilst simultaneously restraining A-Stitch-in-Slime. He'd untied that little boy from the train track, with barely milliseconds to spare, with a broken rib. These were far more stressful scenarios. No, this was different.

He didn't will the beam to fall and crush that over-rated, over-hyped, remarkably stupid, idiotic-quipping, forever-exaggerating, super-sized-ego-possessing, glory-seeking, narcissistic, let's do the impossible-saying, supposedly indestructible man. No. Fire-man

was merely curious to see what would happen if he let nature take his course. Instead of, once again, intervening and saving this imbecile's life.

With dinner prepared, Fire-man cleaned his tiny flat, indulging in the mutual deceit common in new relationships, of being more tidy and organised than one actually was. As he was making the bed, he couldn't help but grin at the thought of him and Miss-Stretch lying in it later.

His phone buzzed. It was a blocked number. "Hello?"

"Fire-man. It's the Commissioner here."

Fire-man almost dropped the phone. He held it away and took a deep breath. "Yes, hello sir. Thank you for calling" he said, realising he sounded too perky. He coughed. "I mean, obviously, it's a shame we're speaking under such circumstances."

"Quite. Sorry I didn't speak to you at the funeral last week. There were a lot of big wigs around. Lots of business to discuss. I'm sure you'll understand."

"Yes sir, of course. I probably wouldn't have made much sense. I was so upset," Fire-man lied.

"Lovely service by the way. Heal-ix's speech was so touching, I wept. I'm not ashamed to admit it."

"Sure, me too." Fire-man strode over to a large mirror. "I was hoping to discuss my future prospects."

"Of course, Fire-man. Poor you. Hopeless and lonely. With your mentor fallen. We need to find you a new superior."

"Well actually sir, I've thwarted dozens of super villains, I was thinking maybe I could..." He coughed again.

"Yes?"

"Go it alone."

"I don't follow."

"You know, be a full Hero." His reflection winced as he said the words. A painful silence followed. Then a roar of laughter cackled down the phone. Fire-man pictured the commissioner jerking his head backwards and dropping a thermos lid of coffee.

Another silence ensued. Even longer and decidedly more painful.

"Oh. You're being serious."

"I learned a lot from Captain Righteous, you know. I really believe..."

"Look, kid, I like you. I do. And don't take this the wrong way, but you're not a thwarters. You're an assistant thwarters, and a reasonably proficient one, I hear. But your power, putting out fires slowly, I've got to tell you, you're lucky to make sidekick. If you could control fire... that would be something!"

"I do do other stuff."

"Like what?"

"Captain Righteous had a terrible sense of

direction. Awful."

Silence again.

"When we had to get to an emergency mission, I had to guide us."

"Map reading? That's your supplementary power?"

"Well, sometimes we desperately needed to get somewhere in a hurry. It can be tricky, and-"

"Look kid, I'm gonna do you a favour. I'm gonna pretend that the last 30 seconds of this conversation never happened."

"Thanks?"

"We need to hook you up with another Hero. Unbreaka-bull is looking for a sidekick."

Fire-man walked over to the mirror, and leant on it, with his head resting on his reflection's. "Sir, I will go with literally anybody else but him."

"Hmm, let me see."

Fire-man heard paper rustling down the other end of the phone.

"How about Psy-trix?"

Dr Das has just turned 40, and lives in London with his young family. He is a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, working in prisons and criminal courts rehabilitating mentally ill offenders. He is admittedly relatively new to authoring fiction, but is fortunate to have already had some competition success and a few other stories accepted for publication including for *Chantwood Magazine*, *Scribble Magazine*, *Literally Stories*, and *Dark Fire*. Two of his stories have been printed in anthologies (for *Chantwood Magazine* and Michael Terence Publishing). He also dabbles in stand-up comedy. You can find more of Dr Das's work at sdas-author.com

Unsettled and Untitled

Francis Bede

Umbelliferous, pentarchy and foie
The type of words, which elevate
Obscurity into stardom;
For I, whose sculpture is chipped
By the years of frustration
Its toll by ego overdone.
The world is simple, profound
In all the tableau's of wisdom and
This revelation has none greater;
Otherwise I have an alternative
Pretend to be counter insurgent
And win the war of self-aggrandisement;
Glory to be, an introverted experience
In the midst of my heart, the wanting to be,
Who writes lonely beside a dripping tap
For the rhythm
If nothing else.

Francis Bede is an Australian who lives in Tasmania.



Transformation and the Essence of the Spirit

Janet O'Neal

In Praise

Carol Hamilton

“for whenever men are right they are not young”
e.e. cummings

the bare sky is birthing itself
pale peach washing to just air
and on to pale and almost blue
there is no predicting what a show
the window will present today
happy the wait in sacred ignorance

Carol Hamilton has recent and upcoming publications in *Commonweal*, *Bluestem*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *Pour Vida*, *Adirondack Review*, *The Maynard*, *Sanskrit Literary Magazine*, *U.S. I Worksheet*, *Broad River Review*, *Homestead Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Poem*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Haight Ashbury Poetry Journal*, *The Aurean*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Pigeonholes Review* and others. She has published 17 books: children’s novels, legends and poetry, most recently, *SUCH DEATHS* from Virtual Arts Cooperative Press Purple Flag Series. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma.

The Curious Legend of the Grade Z Ghost

Jim Snowden

HEMET, CA, September 14th, 1993, San Bernardino Post-Democrat, Page C4

Since 1969, ghost hunters and self-styled paranormal investigators have come to the base of a bluff a few miles outside of Hemet to see the Galban Lights, floating lights in the desert that are ostensibly the only earthly sign of Benito Galban, a railroad worker killed during the theft of a Ming vase in 1924. The phenomenon of the floating lights has been known in Hemet since the 1930s, but it wasn't until Grade Z movie director Howard Zeleznick—or Howard Zez, as he called himself—used his knack for self-promotion to bring it to national attention.

According to recently retired San Bernardino County Sheriff Clayton Frawley “It gets pretty crazy where that’s concerned sometimes. Once I pulled up on a VW Camper that I thought might be in distress, and there was this woman kneeling in front of a bluff, moaning and wailing. I thought she was on drugs, but when I asked her what she was doing, she said she was feeling the vibrations of the tortured spirit of Benito Galban, who died right there. I thought she’d be heartbroken when I told her she had the wrong bluff, but she just stopped writhing and vibrating, said, ‘oh’, asked for directions, and drove off.”

What Sheriff Frawley didn't know, and what few people in Hemet do, is that the

entire Benito Galban story was a practical joke that went sideways into being a legend.

Today, Dr. Jamie Alvarez uses lasers to study the secrets of subatomic particles, but in 1968, he was an undergraduate student studying optics at Cal-Tech who worked with his high school friend Larry as a production assistant for low budget films, “They always needed an extra hand to haul equipment. There was usually at least some downtime that allowed me to study, and some of the actresses were cute.”

In September 1968, Jamie signed up to work as crew on Howard Zeleznick's embarrassing final epic, *Dope Dealers From Outer Space*. “I'd never worked for Howard before, and even if he hadn't died in May of '69, I doubt I would've ever worked for him again. He fought with everybody: actors, lighting people, camera people, passersby. Everything was always someone else's fault. We all thought he was a [expletive].”

“So after a tough day of shooting, me, Larry, and one of the actors, Frankie DeWolf, came up with a plan to get Howard. See, not only had I heard about the weird lights outside of Hemet, but my optics professor had taken me and some other students out there and demonstrated how cars driving by on Highway 79 combined with a local atmospheric inversion layer to create the effect. So the

way it would go, Frankie would tell Howard about this weird story I told him. Then Howard would come to me. I'd pretend to be reluctant, just to make him insist on hearing it, then tell him a story that was handed down to me from my grandfather about Benito Galban, a young man working on the railroads as a brakeman in hopes of one day saving up enough money to marry his sweetheart, Rosa of Santa Rosa. Needing some quick cash and weak of character, Benito threw in with some thieves who planned to boost a Ming vase off a train, but as the train passed southwest of Hemet, the thieves betrayed Benito, shooting him and throwing him off the train. His ghost still haunts the spot where he came to rest, where he still waves his lantern in search of those who wronged him. My roommate Paul helped me rehearse it. CalTech is known for its tradition of elaborate practical jokes, and if anyone hears you're pulling one, you can get them to help you.

"The day soon came. Larry got the DP to convince Howard to film on the right bluff. Then while we were setting up, Frankie brought Howard to me, and I told him the tale. He bought it. I couldn't believe Howard was so easy. He actually made Ginny Taylor shoot 30 takes of her falling into a pit just so he'd have an excuse to stay out on location past sunset. We all got overtime!

"Anyway, after we schlepped all the gear back down to the vans, we walked around the bluff to the right spot, which does lie where some old railroad tracks used to run. It was maybe 10:30, and getting chilly out, and we stood out there, waiting. Then up came the lights, seemingly floating over the old railroad bed, just for a few seconds but clear as day. Howard cried out 'Benito!', then they vanished. About a minute later, they came up again, this time a little to the side. Howard

rushed toward them, but again, they vanished on him. I broke a rib trying not to laugh as Howard was having this religious experience. Even after Paul stopped driving back and forth along the road section at 11pm, late night travelers or truck drivers would drive the route, and up the lights would come again and Howard would go bananas. We didn't leave until damn near four in the morning. Howard kept going on about how this proves death isn't the end and Jesus is looking out for all of us and how important it is to be 'washed in the blood of the Lamb.' When Larry and I got back in our car, shut the doors and were sure we were out of earshot, we laughed. We laughed all the way back to Pasadena, pausing only long enough to do imitations of Howard so we could laugh even harder."

"We had no idea," Alvarez said, "that Howard was going to run to all the newspapers and magazines to tell the story. Fortunately, he didn't know my name, so he kept me out of it. But he started running people up there to see the lights whenever he wasn't busy on Dope Dealers. If he hadn't died first, Howard might've started a new career as a cult leader. Anyway, we never told him. We just didn't have the heart."

When asked how he feels about the longevity of the legend, Alvarez sighs, "I don't know, man. My grandmother to her dying day believed in devils and demons and stuff. She'd pray over everything just to keep them at bay. Howard wasn't much different. A lot of people aren't. I'm sure you're going to check out what I say, but when you print this and people read it, they'll go right on believing the legend anyway, because they prefer the world in which the legend is true to the one where it was something made up to get back at a [expletive for a human head made of dung]."

Alvarez's story does check out, according

to Frankie DeWolf, Larry Sturdivant, Howard Zeleznick's stepdaughter Molly Snipes, and Paul Douglas. And there never was a Benito Galban in any employment records for any of the railroad companies that operated in Southern California in the 1920s, nor was there any

murder or theft of a Ming vase mentioned in any contemporary police file or newspaper. And yet, people come here, 24 years after Howard Zeleznick's death, and believe that the light in the dark is a young man betrayed, still pining for Rosa of Santa Rosa.

Jim Snowden is an actor and writer from Bellevue, WA. His other stories about Howard Zez and his cohorts have appeared in *Elsewhere Lit*, *Constellations #7*, *Across the Margin*, *New Reader Magazine*, and *Page & Spine*. He is also the author of two novels, *Dismantle the Sun* and *Summer of Long Knives*, and a play, *Dr. Kritzinger's 12 O'Clock*.

The Planet dan

dan raphael

Which of my body parts will break off into what animal today
an ant or an elk the size of my kneecap
my head keeps reverting to the plant kingdom
even thin hair can be a canopy, skull bark, eye fruit

Its saturday so the light sleeps late but cant quell
our meat needs that hear & amplify the seismic bass,
the arch of the foot an ear with different audio principles—
bones instead of canals, muscles only elephants & whales
can hear, taking mere hours to circumnavigate the planet
inside my skin by tightening my orbit, flexing occasionally
to shake off the cosmic debris of constant travel:
ive shed one tectonic layer but wonder about lost stability

When a life energy is trapped in a time-space
this conjunction of barely related maths sprouts
with various mistranslations, coincidental homonyms
mistaken for meaning, when a literal translation
wont get you food or a bathroom
growing toward light instead of velocity,
eschewing nitrogen, taking time at its word

The dark side of my chest
a desert without evaporation
im balancing drainage with accumulation
filtering with exposure
days i dont recognize myself in the telescope

For three decades dan raphael's been active in the Northwest as poet, performer, editor and reading host. *Anything*, his 21st book, will come out this summer from Unlikely Books in New Orleans. Current poems appear in *Caliban*, *The Opitiate*, *Otoliths*, *Mad Swirl* and *Stealing Light*.

Fact or Fiction

Serena Jayne

I'm the unreliable narrator
Of my life's story
An off-putting protagonist
Hyper-flawed
Eaten alive by internal conflict
A superfluous character
The antagonist of your tale
Desperate for a plot twist
I repeat my mistakes
Follow a doomed story arc
I long to be the hero
A trusted sidekick
The love interest
But I settle
for whatever space
I can claim on the page

Serena Jayne received her MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University. She's worked as a research scientist, a fish stick slinger, a chat wrangler, and a race horse narc. When she isn't trolling art museums for works that move her, she enjoys writing in multiple fiction genres. While her first love is all things paranormal, the mundane world provides plenty of story ideas.



Tiki Party for Two

Michelle Bickford

Belle of the Graveyard

John Grey

Through sun-gilded fence spikes,
an eye appears — deep, mysterious —
like the far corner pocket on a pool table —
an invisible hand gathers the clouds together,
willows probe at the ground beneath —
a small face, deep in trees and tombstone,
smiles at me like a silver drop of dew trapped in a curled leaf —
in a place like this,
she is mere coincidence —
for her skin is pale enough for veins
but not for death —
in fact, I was death
until she showed up.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in the *Homestead Review*, *Harpur Palate* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in the *Roanoke Review*, the *Hawaii Review* and *North Dakota Quarterly*.