

LOVE MATTERS

Volume 3 of the Crimson Cloak Anthologies.

A collection of Stories by [Nkosi Ife Bandele](#), [Marleen S Barr](#), [Eva Bell](#), [Brian Bossetta](#), [Janice Clark](#), [Kathy Collier](#), [Mark Conte](#), [Joe Giambrone](#), [J R Ingrisano](#),
[Anjana Pradeep](#), [Esma Race](#); [Patrick Shanahan](#)
With Poems by [Don Ford](#), [Peter J Streitz](#), and [Wesley Tallant](#)

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The Search illustrated by [Veronica Castle](#)

In Search of Another (poem) illustrated by the author

LOVE MATTERS

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Dedicated to the men and women everywhere who have suffered from this illness, or continue to do so. Please find out as much as you can about this disease, and do everything in your power to beat it. Please follow your doctor's advice!

Where a charge is made for this book, all profit will go to the [International Children's Heart Foundation](#)



A note on spelling: you will find either UK or US spellings employed according to usage in the country of origin of the author concerned.

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12 tips for better heart health: <http://www.webmd.com/heart/features/12-tips-for-better-heart-health>

To maintain a healthy heart, usual advice is to manage your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. This can be helped by leading an active life and eating healthily, which lead to lower blood sugar levels and a healthy weight. Above all, if you smoke

STOP NOW, this is a major heart attack risk! For more information visit
<http://heart.org/>

Heart attack warning signs:

Most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Recognising these signs can help you get timely help, which can be vital.

- *Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.*
- *Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.*
 - *Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort.*
 - *Other signs may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.*
- *Women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.*

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## **The Ignored and the Despised**

By [Nkosi Ife Bandele](#)

*Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom are dead, their places taken by a group of amazingly well-adjusted young men and women, almost as dark, but ferociously literate, well dressed and scrubbed, who are never laughed at, who are not likely ever to set foot in a cotton or tobacco field or in any but the most modern of kitchens. There are others who remain, in our odd idiom, "underprivileged"; some are bitter and these come to grief; some are unhappy, but, continually presented with the evidence of a better day soon to come, are speedily becoming less so. Most of them care nothing whatever about race. They want only their proper place in the sun and the right to be left alone, like any other citizen of the republic. We may all breathe more easily. Before, however, our joy at the demise of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom approaches the indecent, we better ask from whence they sprang, how they lived. Into what limbo have they vanished?*

—James Baldwin, *Many Thousands Gone*

The first thing I noticed about her was her hair. It was jet-black and shiny like a vinyl record. And it looked sort of plastic that way too. Still, she was dark and gorgeous, and I played it cool because I knew that she wouldn't be interested in a guy like me.

Now don't get me wrong, as I hardly think of myself as a "guy." On the contrary, I knew her type. Sitting there all smug! God, and she was wearing this ridiculous, cream-colored Chanel suit with white stockings and white pumps to go with that "do," flipped at the edges, taking the shape of a Viking's helmet. She looked like Mary Tyler Moore as Mary Richards on that old Dick Van Dyke show.

And she was wearing blue shadow!

\* \* \*

Her "French tutor in Paris," a clueless Belgian who bragged about her African safari vacation, and who was also an acquaintance of mine inasmuch as she came into the restaurant most nights and imposed conversation on me, (as I desperately tried to keep up with my tables), decided to hook us up because, I am sure, we were the only two Blacks with whom she had some measure of intimacy. I'm pretty sure that it was also because she had "Jungle Fever" and thought to live vicariously through her girl.

I had resolved to be cordial and then bolt, fearing the inevitable, but she struck me first regarding my day job as a would-be journalist.

"So, Soup, how do 'you feel' about working for a black newspaper?"

It all started that way. The Buppie was upset with the Crackers at the bar for questioning the legitimacy of the black press. She wanted me to enter the fray, in effect, to defend myself and to support her. She was visibly upset, still trembling, trying to control her middle-class black rage.

I shrugged and she curtly turned away. Then I felt bad because I knew that I had let her down.

Later that evening I tried to make easy and flirtatious small-talk with her. She was polite but when I asked for her number, she responded with irony and may have even shrugged a little herself.

"Why don't I call you?"

I felt like an idiot standing there, especially in front Jungle Fever and all those other grinning white bastards at the bar, smugly observing "black love in bloom." (Oh, were they proud!) And there I was feigning excitement, goofing around, misplacing my pen (of all times!), the bartender taking all day to hand me his, smiling at her the way that he did when he did, as he and all those other white dudes seemed

to feel that black women like her belonged to them. I had spoken too fast, and she'd told me in her mocking way to "slow my roll," which they found charming.

"Yeah, Soup, slow your roll," echoed the bartender, who was a jerk anyway.

I was hot, but anyway I put on a show, shuffling off, happy-go-lucky, though certain that she'd never call and really okay with it.

\* \* \*

She called one night a few months later because she was bored, she made a point of saying. We must have met in the fall, and I'm sure she called after the winter holidays. I remembered her right off, and she knew that I would, even though she asked me if I did. She was still burning about my not having backed her up with the white folks regarding black press, and she didn't seem to get that I was as offended by her presuming to discuss my affairs as I was with them for doing so.

"You left me hanging," she insisted.

"I didn't leave you hanging, but anyway, what did you expect?"

"For you to have my back!"

"To do what? Go all Jesse Jackson, 'I am somebody!?' I ain't got to prove that shit to nobody!"

"Still—"

She wasn't going to let it go, and for whatever reason, I didn't say what I really wanted to say: that I couldn't stand niggers like her, always had their heads up white people's asses, always trying to prove something to racist crackers who despised them no matter what. (No, I couldn't say that to her.)

\* \* \*

It seemed like we talked about being black a lot that first night, and it was okay, and I wondered if that was why she'd actually called. We talked about being black and Ivy-Leaguers. She was in her senior year at Yale, and my graduation from Columbia was a couple of years prior. Jungle Fever, who also gave introductory French language classes at Columbia, had told her about my student activist days and (not knowing of my infamy) she was impressed.

"Ain't nothing going on at this school!" she exclaimed regarding Yale.

She called a few times after that throughout the spring, each time invoking some variety of boredom. Though usually caught off guard, I enjoyed our conversations. Her voice was sweet and casually confident (as she knew she belonged), and she was real witty and well-spoken to the extent that I felt a bit intimidated by her, even caring about my language, resorting to appropriate words like "whom," which always seemed odd to me when spoken.

\* \* \*

Now did she even tell me that she was coming to New York that weekend, or did she just show up?

\* \* \*

In the early summer she called me one evening to inform me that she was at Jungle Fever's apartment in New York. (I presume that this was after she'd graduated, though it seems odd now that we'd never discussed her graduating or anything about her college life besides the regular moments of racism.)

"It's BeBe!"

"What's up?"

"I'm in New York."

"Where you at? I mean, where are you?"

"I'm staying with—"

Funny that she referred to herself as “BeBe,” the nickname that I’d given her. Her real name was Betsey, and what’s even worse, her friends called her “Buffy,” and I just couldn’t deal with that. Remember what Richard Pryor’s Wino says after hearing black Dracula’s name? “Dracula, what kinda name is that for a nigguh?”

BeBe stood for “Buffy the Buppie,” at least to me anyway.

\* \* \*

I had to wait tables at Stars the night she visited. Despite it being my third job (along with the restaurant and the newspaper gigs), I was still broke as a joke. She was coming by early in the evening, and I was afraid that I wouldn’t have made enough tips at that early hour to cover her, so I gathered all my spare change, including pennies, just in case, because there was no way that the owner, “Uncle Hal,” or manager, “Momma Lizzie,” would’ve cut me any slack. They liked to say we were family at the job, but when it came to business, they were all business!

\* \* \*

Fortunately for me, BeBe wasn’t a drinker.

She seemed so nervous. Her hand shook as she took sips of her beer. She tried to play it cool, but her oval eyes stayed wide.

“A jazz club in Harlem!”

She looked so soft and vulnerable sitting there. She wore a skirt and sandals, had long, well-defined, and silky-smooth legs, and absolutely exquisite feet. Evidently she’d gotten over her “do” because her hair was natural and curly, and she wore it pulled loosely back.

How could I not have noticed?

She was, like, the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen! Model fine! Egyptian princess fine! Those dark oval eyes! And she was built! A brickhouse! She was, like, a built Naomi Campbell! And my dumb ass had been real cool with her on the phone! I was thinking, A Robin Givens for sure!

\* \* \*

Even though I was working, I kept a close eye on her and checked in with her every so often. She seemed to enjoy the music and what I imagine must have been a bit of a spectacle to her, the old-timers carrying on with their two-steps, and struts, and fox trots, and stuff like that. We really didn’t have much time to talk, and after a short hour or so, she said that she had to go and meet some friends. Luckily I had earned enough on the floor to pay for her drink and her cab.

“Better not mess this one up,” warned Momma Lizzie.

“He will,” cackled Uncle Hal before slurping his Dewar’s and milk and eliciting validating nods from the other crotchety old fools at the bar.

\* \* \*

“I think it’s time you called me.”

I hadn’t called her once in that many months, and she noticed after her third or so call. I reminded her that she hadn’t given me her number, and she joked that she didn’t think it would mean that I would never ask for it again.

“Got your nose open, huh?” (BeBe had a cool way of teasing.)

“That’s you tellin’ it!” I shot back.

“What’s up for the summer?” she further asked.

“You!”

She turned silent after, so I pressed.

“We gonna happen or what?”

“Maybe.”

\* \* \*

BeBe's birthday fell on the weekend, and she had no qualms about being celebrated on both days. On Saturday she invited me to join her and a few of her girlfriends, including Jungle Fever, at a trendy, French restaurant in Soho. Usually I would have declined such an offer—trendy, French restaurant, Soho, a group of women (that included Jungle Fever), that insufferable “Happy, Happy Birthday” song, and all that other jazz—but I was so excited to see her that I didn't seriously consider any of it.

I doubt that I had ever been to Soho.

As soon as I sat, the waiter asked if I would like a drink. I asked him for a glass of red wine in my cryptic French, and responding fluently, he rolled off about half a dozen or so. I couldn't keep up and so I was busted, and the women noticed. I avoided their superior smiles.

“I'll have that first one you said,” I offered flatly.

BeBe was anxious to resume their conversation and I felt some relief. I don't recall what they were talking about, and I was only half-paying attention at that, so into BeBe that she blushed and then made funny big eyes in response to my staring.

“So, Soup, tell us a little about yourself.”

Her friend was being funny, acting like a parent.

I didn't know where to start.

“Oh, c'mon, now you know we have to check you out.”

“So few good brothers out there!”

Even though I understood that they were being nice and friendly, as well as paying me a kind of compliment, I was wary of being cast in stereotypical and moral terms.

“We're out there,” I protested wearily.

My response elicited incredulity all around except from Jungle Fever, who was clearly startled by the exuberant reaction of the young black women, her former pupil included.

“Educated?!”

“Working?!”

“With all they' teef?!”

“Not gay?!”

“Not living with they' mommas?!”

BeBe was proud of her zinger and winked at me afterwards.

They were having a good time clowning, and I did my best not to spoil it, which was particularly hard because Jungle Fever kept guffawing and looking at me in a way to suggest that she had just learned my secret.

I split the first chance I got!

BeBe followed me outside and pleaded with me to meet up with them to go dancing at a club later, first directly stating that I should do it for her and then suggesting with a wink (another one) that it would be worth my while. I insisted that I had some work to do. She asked about Sunday and I said that that was up to her, but made it clear that I preferred not to spend it with her friends.

“I left the day open for you and me.”

That was cool so I invited her to my apartment. However, she was taken aback when I gave her directions on how to get there on the "A" train as she assumed that I would escort her or perhaps pay for a cab, as I did before.

\* \* \*

I lived in a basement apartment in a Harlem area that I referred to as “the slums of Hamilton Heights.” It was a difficult place to find, sequestered between City College

and 141st. I was not being a jerk for telling BeBe to meet me there. But, really, what did she expect? I did realize, however, as soon as she called, that a non-native might get pretty lost in my specifically labyrinth area. (Not to mention my subterranean spot that flooded whenever it rained.)

I ran to meet her with my shoelaces untied.

I spotted BeBe just before another dude, who also noticed her uncertainty (I like to imagine), intercepted her.

"It's cool, blood, I got it."

Dude appealed to BeBe, who delighted in getting back at me by being overly gracious.

"My boyfriend's here now, but thank you. Thank you so, so much!"

As soon as the show ended, she proceeded to give me the silent treatment all the way to my place.

"But I'm your boyfriend," I teased.

I was excited, giddy even. Even though I wasn't one of those corny dudes vainly proud about being able to cook, I did take pride in having prepared a special birthday meal for BeBe on my relatively low budget. Unfortunately I overcooked the linguini, which recoiled into the shape of the meatballs by the time she arrived.

My girl, BeBe!

She did her best to endure, a frozen smile, that wonderful ironic expression of hers, but then suddenly—

"Have you ever been over a friend's house to eat, and the food just ain't no good? I mean, the macaroni soggy, the peas all mushed, and the chicken taste like wood!"

'Rapper's Delight,' you kiddin' me? She got me right then.

*The End*

## **[Some Enchanted Evening You Will Meet A Stranger](#)**

By **[Marleen S. Barr](#)**

Even though I had been husband hunting for twenty years (but who is counting), there is no time like the present to begin again. A Municipal Art Society lecture smacked of being a potentially happy husband hunting ground. The Society is located in a Madison Avenue Italianate palazzo. A sign saying "The Palace" adorns the palazzo's front façade. "The Palace" is the perfect place to meet Prince Charming--especially in my life which oozes with fairy tale, fantasy, and science fiction scenarios. Juxtaposed real world and fairy tale venue aside, I had nothing to lose by attending the free Society lecture.

"Five dollars please," said the woman posted at the door.

"Five dollars? I really thought that the lecture is free."

"No. Sorry."

"Then I guess I can't attend," I said as I looked crestfallen and made my way out. I had only five dollars in hand. If I spent it to attend the lecture, I would have to go to a cash machine to obtain subway fare. I stood rooted in mid palazzo courtyard. I could not make a decision between whether to spend the five dollars for the lecture or for the subway. I went so far as to say "enough already, make up your mind," out loud. I could not understand why such a trivial matter uncharacteristically caused me to fail to act. I didn't even care about the lecture. Art lectures are not my thing. I hunt husbands at an endless array of lectures, readings, and conferences. Even if this boring art lecture was located in a building clearly labeled "The Palace," the odds of

meeting a Prince Charming husband within were nine billion godzillion to one. After six minutes had elapsed, I gave myself exactly two more seconds to make a decision. As I was in the midst of shifting my recently five ounce less weight (I had cut down on fat free yogurt portions) to turn on my heel and depart, the ticket taker entered the courtyard.

"I'm so glad you're here. I didn't expect to find you. You looked so sad when I told you about the five dollar admission price. I believe you truly did think that the lecture was free. Please feel welcome to attend gratis. Come on in and join us." I could not believe that a Manhattan ticket seller was thinking of me, going out of her way to locate me, and inviting me to attend an event free of charge.

"Thanks so much. I've had the weirdest experience. It was like I lost control of my trajectory. I was standing here for all this time unable to decide whether to stay or to leave. I am usually very decisive. I never act like this."

"You must be fated to attend. Enjoy yourself."

As an unabashed reception lover, I happily made my way toward a cheese and grape laden table. I concentrated on the food, not the men in the room. I was surprised to hear an accented male voice addressing me.

"Excuse me. I forgot my glasses. Could you please help me to read my program?" The accented voice emanated from a very attractive man. I stopped in mid cheese and cracker chomp to shift my attention to him. He was Captain Picard attractive rather than Cary Grant attractive. Fine. I needed a change from Norris the cat/husband and his clone Hans the German. Partial baldness suited him. I liked his perfectly cut jacket and cool black tee shirt. His accented English and foreign allure intrigued me.

"I'm glad to help you. Your program says *this art lecture concerns the history of the pre-Raphaelite flying buttress and its influence on rococo terracotta renaissance façades.*"

"Very interesting. Thank you so much. You're so nice and helpful. What do you think of the lecture subject?"

"Sounds Byzantine to me. Art is not my main interest. But I sometimes go to lectures outside my field. Do you know about art?" I left out the part about how I attend lectures to meet men. Ditto for drowning myself in cheese and crackers when my efforts fail.

"Yes. A little. I'm a professional art historian. I teach art history at the City University of New York."

I was puzzled. Despite my international travel experience, I could not identify his foreign accent. He seemed to be some sort of European. I decided to use his national origin as a conversation catalyst.

"I'm trying to figure out where you come from? Are you European? I'm Sondra Lear, by the way."

"You are not the first person to be puzzled about my origins. I'm from Canada. I'm a French Canadian, a Quebecois." Quebecois were definitely off my radar screen. Because I went into mental overdrive while trying to compute how a Canadian - and a French one at that - could fit into my life, I let down my guard and spoke my natural language.

"Oy."

"Well, Sondra, I'm not confused about your origins. Although I chose not to become an American citizen, I've lived in America for thirty years. You're definitely a New York Jew."

"Correct. And you're a noncitizen, an alien. Your field is art. My field is aliens."

"Aliens? Are you a sociologist specializing in immigration?"



"No. I'm a feminist science fiction scholar. I know from aliens. I feel a special affinity for them." An alien husband would be especially perfect for me. Still, since I had yet to learn this man's name, it was a tad too soon for The Science Fiction Research Association Newsletter to resemble a supermarket tabloid and run this headline: "Sondra Lear Marries Alien."

"I have never met a feminist science fiction scholar. I like facts, not fiction. I'm intrigued. I would like to know more about your field."

"Before I describe my professional interests, why don't you tell me further details about yourself? Do you like to travel?"

"I have lived all over the world. South Africa was particularly exciting."

"You've been to South Africa? Me too. You're the first fellow traveler to South Africa I've spoken to in America. What did you like most about your stay?"

"The South African National Gallery in Cape Town."

"I've been there." Our shared South African connection was drawing us closer. His specific Cape Town reference made me trust his veracity. One could not be too careful when meeting men in Manhattan. A pathological rapist/killer would probably not know from the South African National Gallery. I had already imagined myself marrying this alien. It was definitely time to escalate the relationship. "What's your name?"

"The name is Le Pew. Pepe Le Pew."

"Pepe Le Pew? Are you a skunk? Have you ever been a skunk?" Echoing McCarthy era inquisition, although less than sexy, was unavoidable.

"Why do you ask?" I certainly couldn't tell him the truth: since I had married a former cat, it could be possible for me to marry a former skunk.

"Pepe Le Pew is a Warner Brothers cartoon skunk."

"So I've been told. I'm not that familiar with American popular culture. I was never interested in the cartoon character named Pepe Le Pew. Rest assured that I am not now nor have I ever been a skunk. I take two showers a day. I stand in front of the mirror for ten minutes whenever I leave my apartment - trips to the incinerator and the laundry room included. I'm a member of the proud French Le Pew family. The founder emigrated to Canada from Burgundy during the sixteenth century. Never having seen a Warner Brothers cartoon, my mother named me Pepe. There's nothing skunkish about me. I'm more akin to a metrosexual than to a skunk. Just out of curiosity, since you're a popular culture scholar, do you like my cartoon character namesake?"

"Yes. Pepe the skunk is very direct when he pursues the opposite sex. He's always horny and incessantly tries to seduce female skunks. If he met an attractive female skunk, what would he most likely say in French?"

"Something like *je desire avoir votre queue*. Sondra, je desire avoir votre cul."

"Your native speaker French sounds so much better than my graduate school foreign language requirement test failure French. Are you asking me out?"

"Oui. Absolument."

The generous ticket taker had altered my life. I was fated to marry Pepe Le Pew.

*The End*

**[Love, the Master Player](#)**

By **[Eva Bell](#)**

David Grant the American novelist had been awarded the Pulitzer posthumously. Thrice nominated, his glory had finally come too late for him. A few weeks before the announcement, he had passed away somewhere on the East Coast of Malaysia. He had preferred self-exile among an aboriginal “dream people,” who asked no questions or made no demands on him. They had built him a kampong on stilts and a very comfortable one at that, perfectly suitable for an aging American, amidst feathery casuarina groves and screw pines, with glimpses of the golden beach perennially pounded by the waves of a restless sea.

Literary groups all over the world were discussing the works of the late David Grant – his inimitable style, his extensive vocabulary. His novels were structured against human passion, greed, betrayal – powerful portraits of tyrants with pea-size consciences, who straddled the world, making life difficult for lesser mortals. David Grant had won several literary awards such as the National Book Critics Award and the PEN/Faulkner prize. But the Pulitzer had for some reason eluded him this far.

“This book is different,” said one critic. “It is almost human – a tenderness without being maudlin, a passion without being pernicious and an ending which makes me wish I was the protagonist.”

“Yes, it’s extraordinary. Perhaps his environment has made all the difference. Did you say he spent the last few years in Malaysia? A land of colourful sarongs, with the drums a frenzy of rhythm at night and the musk a balm that cools!” said another.

“David cut himself off completely from the mainstream,” said John Hancock, his Publisher. He refused to communicate with anyone, even his wife. I was beginning to feel that he’d never write another book. And then, out of the blue, this wonderful story!”

The slim Asian girl in the back row, dabbed her moist eyes, then unobtrusively left the hall. The book had been well received and that was her reward. Now she had one last errand before she flew home to Malaysia.

A taxi took her to the University campus at Princeton. On an impulse, she sat on a bench and took out her packet of sandwiches. And as she nibbled, her thoughts flew back to that evening, six long years ago.

Peggy Lin had been a cub reporter for a newspaper published at Singapore. Hers was an arranged marriage to a businessman supposedly wealthy. But he was a drunkard and a brute and two years of continuous emotional and physical abuse had left her a mental wreck.

She had fled to the less developed East Coast of Malaysia with just the clothes on her back and a few dollars in her pocket, hoping he’d never find her.

David Grant had watched the girl for three days in succession, staring down from a rock into the raging sea.

“Bloody idiot,” he thought, “Doesn’t have the guts to do it. Probably trying to scare somebody or crave sympathy from an indifferent lover.”

He turned back to his own dismal thoughts. He couldn’t write anymore. It was more than just a writer’s block. Inspiration had dried up and there were lapses of memory sometimes. He had written merely twenty pages in the last year, when ordinarily he would have turned out at least two hundred. He had never before defaulted on a deadline and now his publisher was probably sick with worry.

He looked up in time to see the lithe figure plummet off the rock in a neat somersault.

“Oh my God!” he cried, fear giving his feet wings. He jumped into the water and was beside her in a flash. Grabbing her by the arm, he pulled her out of the water and swam towards the shore.

“Silly girl!” he cursed, “What you need is a merciless spanking.”

He laid her supine on the sand and gave her chest a thump or two. She coughed, bringing out the water which she had swallowed, then slowly took a deep breath. He was about to let fly a volley of his choice expletives when she opened her eyes and began to whimper.

“Leave me alone. Why didn’t you let me die?”

He waited until she was breathing normally. “You don’t seem to be from these parts.”

“I don’t have a home,” she said, her voice choking. “It took me all of three days to summon enough courage to jump into the sea and here you come, the Good Samaritan doing your act of charity for the day!”

She burst into sobs.

“Get a hold of yourself, Girl. You don’t want the whole village swooping down on you. On second thoughts, you better come home with me,” he said brusquely. “You can take your own time, planning what you want to do next.”

It was a spacious kampong with many rooms and a cosy warm interior. Rattan furniture strewn over with bulky cushions and a colourful mat for a carpet, made it look inviting.

“A writer!” she thought, as she took in the table with its bulk of papers and a portable typewriter. He settled in his armchair and drew on his pipe, as he surveyed her from under his bushy eyebrows.

“Perhaps on the wrong side of twenty,” he thought. “I wonder what has driven her to such desperation.”

Then he saw the old scars on her arms and legs. The salt water had made some of them stand out like angry caterpillars.

“She needs help,” he thought, but didn’t probe.

He shouted to the tribal woman who came in to cook and clean for him.

“Make a bed for the girl in one of the rooms. She’s come on a long visit.”

The visit of Peggy Lin lasted for six years until David’s death. She needed a roof above her head and a refuge from her violent husband. But by the time news reached her of his untimely death, she realized that David Grant needed her more than he cared to admit. Her youthful presence brought about a kind of rejuvenation in him. Once again he sat at his typewriter and began to pound the keys page by page.

There was much laughter and many lively discussions; he revealed glimpses of the world he had left behind. She was intelligent, of quick comprehension and proved to be a stimulating companion. She knew his moods and would talk or withdraw according to the situation. Sometimes she would type while he dictated and occasionally even took the liberty of offering suggestions. There were times when he listened graciously and times when he bellowed like a raging bull at her audacity.

And then one day, David Grant’s world came crashing down. The typewriter was pushed away and long spells of silence ensued. Often he couldn’t remember her name and called her Maggie. He scolded or sulked and wandered off when she was not looking. Peggy tended him lovingly. She coaxed food down his throat and nursed him like a child. The home-help spread the rumour that the American had gone mad. The villagers consulted their spirits and made their offerings of tapioca and fish. They brought him various medicines and poultices. But David’s mental state deteriorated.

“Let’s take him to a hospital in town,” they begged.

“No. They’ll put him in a mental asylum and never let him come home. I’ll take care of him. He is like my father,” Peggy said.

Two desperate letters arrived from Maggie.

“I forgot to tell you that I’ve taken an advance from the Publisher on your behalf. He wants to see the manuscript, David. You better hurry up. Six years and the people have almost forgotten you.

“Your name will be mud if you don’t send the novel. He’s threatening to take legal action. What’s keeping you so long? Have you shackled up with some local woman?”

Peggy read the letters with dismay.

“What can I do to help David? Must I reveal to the world that he’s lost his mind? Why doesn’t the wretched woman give back the advance?”

That night, Peggy read through the pages David had written. It was an excellent beginning, but only half complete.

“If only I knew the ending,” she thought, “I could have made an attempt to complete it. David saved my life. I’ve got to do something to save his reputation.”

During the next few days, all she could think of was a convincing conclusion to his story. Even as she went about her chores, her mind was in overdrive. After almost a month of rumination, she thought she had the perfect ending.

Peggy read through his work several times, until she was confident of his style and language. Then she set about transcribing the rest of it on paper. She could work uninterrupted only when David was asleep.

It took her several months to type it all out – a backbreaking job done mostly at night. When it was complete, she read it aloud, hoping against hope that he’d respond. His lucid intervals were getting shorter each day. Then suddenly he shouted, “Bravo! Finished.”

She would never know if he understood what she had done.

David died in his sleep one night and Peggy was inconsolable. He was a surrogate father, a very loving friend! He was irreplaceable. Now she would have to go back into the land of the living and carry on from where she had left off.

The news of the Pulitzer for David’s book was the most exciting thing. The fraud had not been discovered. Love, the master player, had turned her labour to success.

The prize would make Maggie, his wife, a rich woman. What a pity that it had come too late for David. Peggy had flown down to the States to hand over David’s ashes and to tell her about the last years of his life. As she walked towards Maggie’s house, the door opened and Maggie Grant stepped out holding Jonathan Hancock’s hand. The publisher and the author’s wife seemed so happy and preoccupied with each other, that they didn’t even notice Peggy walking towards them.

“Ah! The mean two-timing woman!” Peggy thought, “Now at last I know why David had chosen to live in distant Malaysia. She is not worthy to receive his ashes. My trip has been a waste of time. But at least I’ve stumbled on the reason for David’s isolation. Perhaps he’ll find rest only if his ashes are interred in his adopted country. And with it, our secret will be buried forever.”

There were tears in her eyes as Peggy hastened away.

*The End*

**[Trail of Smoke](#)**

By **[Brian Bossetta](#)**

His knee stiffened from the cold as he squatted to pick up the cracked, blood-splattered twig. He rolled it in his plump fingers, smelling the blood to gauge its freshness.

He collected the cool air back into his lungs and glanced down the thin trail disappearing into the undergrowth.

"Musta gone in through there," he determined, placing the butt of his rifle on the ground using it as crutch.

For a moment he lost himself in the sepia colored woods. He wiped his chapped lips with his hand then stomped his heavy boot on the ground to get the blood rushing back into his leg, which had gone numb from squatting.

He came to a clearing where the opening in the treed canopy allowed the sun to warm him. With his knee throbbing, he sat against the trunk of a large oak, which arched over the edge of the clearing.

Once sitting, he knew it would be difficult to get back up again, but to rest against this tree with the sun directly on him was more than worth the effort of standing he knew would tire him later.

He rested his rifle across the thighs of his outstretched legs and leaned the back of his head on the knobby bark of the oak's trunk. He rubbed his hands together and finally feeling warm from the friction, took a short cigar from his pocket and sniffed the fine Dominican Republic tobacco with a hint of cedar from the humid air still on it.

With the feeling now back in his fingers, he struck a match along the bark, shielding the flame with his cupped hands as it began to take, and sucked in the first taste of tobacco.

As he watched the smoke escaping into the trees, his mind drifted back to the Western Front and the wicked cold of the densely forested Ardennes. He was running for cover when the bullet smashed into his knee shattering the cap and ripping the cartilage and tendons.

There was no sun that day, Christmas Eve, 1944 — and smokes were scarce too — and that winter much harsher, longer, and more unforgiving than any since.

But now, the aroma and warmth of the cigar amid the chill of the Mississippi woods brought him back to the present moment where he could be one in spirit with all his fallen comrades with whom he used to smoke.

He had been hunting since early morning and was now exhausted and sore. The bark, massaging his back and shoulders as he rested against the oak, induced sleep.

He knew he should keep on the trail, especially with evening settling in, but the heaviness of his lids began to shut out all thought except the buck jumping when he shot him and his anger at himself for not killing the deer cleanly and quickly.

There were two things he had vowed to stop doing when he became too old to do them safely and responsibly: drive and hunt. Now, sitting against the tree fighting off sleep, he wrestled with the thought that he might've pushed it too far.

When he first saw the buck moving behind the thicket, he crouched down against an embankment and rested his Remington .270 in the prone position, his elbows like a tripod in the soft red clay, his left arm wrapped tightly through the sling, and centered the deer squarely in his scope. He held his breath and steadied the rifle and waited patiently for the deer to move into a clearing for an open shot and easy kill.

When he finally exhaled and squeezed the trigger in one movement, he saw through the aperture, before the report reverberated through the woods, that his shot was off and, although an ultimately fatal wound, the deer would likely suffer and he might have to track him well into the night. "I should've found him by now," he said aloud, almost in resignation that it was a lost cause. But he knew it was too late to turn

back. He owed the deer the dignity of not allowing him to rot in the woods to become an unearned feast for coyotes and carrion for vultures and crows.

He closed his eyes and pictured the deer the moment right before he pulled the trigger: his massive antlers spread out on his head like branches, stretching out his neck to nibble on a berry, his thin front legs bicycling in the air, then coming down gracefully, and then his hooves kicking up the ground with excitement for the taste.

"Perhaps I should've let him be," he thought, feeling sad for the buck, remembering what it was like to be wounded and dying alone. He reached into his pocket and rubbed the rock-like chip from the antlers that had cracked off when the buck crashed into a tree after jumping from shock when the bullet ripped through him. "Damn it," he said.

He felt a kinship with the wounded deer bleeding to death in the forest. His eyes began to water — was it the cold? — and his knee began to tighten and throb again as he remembered when the bullet shattered it.

*Somewhere in the forest, beneath the brush, he lay bleeding. His breath was shallow and the pain shot down his leg and up his side numbing his shoulder and neck.*

*Night was falling and he found himself alone and unaware of his surroundings. He only knew that he couldn't move for fear of being captured.*

*He could only remember running from the mortars raining down, then the burning, then hitting the ground as though his legs had been knocked away, and then crawling into the thickness of the trees for cover.*

*The wound had made the night even more frigid and wrapping his arms around his chest did nothing to alleviate the biting frost. His entire left side was numb and he thought that he wouldn't see the morning.*

*Unable to fight any longer against the brutally cold night and coming death, he accepted and embraced the "Is"-ness of the situation and tried to breath as evenly and as peacefully as he could. He only desired a cigarette.*

*Throughout the night he thought of how quickly his life had led up to this point, and knowing that fatigue would eventually win out he wondered where sleep would carry him.*

He woke from the crick in his neck and noticed his cigar, hard and unraveling, on the ground next to him. The stinging was now gone and there was only the usual numbness which came after sleep.

The sun was going down and it was the still time when one could mistake dusk for dawn. He didn't feel like moving, but decided he must if there was any chance of finding the deer before dark.

Colder now with the sun dropping, he wanted to be back in his truck where he could turn on the heater and light up a fresh smoke. He felt his hunger stirring and thought of the leftover stew back at the house. He reached into his pocket and broke off a piece of a candy bar. He was at least a good hour from his truck and with night beginning to close in he realized he needed to pick up his pace.

"I shouldn't have slept," he thought, taking in the darkening trees. "But it was so peaceful."

The thought of the deer dying in the woods at his hand, decaying without honor, and him sleeping under a flannel blanket with a full stomach, pushed him forward, and he knew he must continue on even if it meant spending the night in the woods. "It

wouldn't be the first time," he said aloud, forcing the knee to bend as he walked underneath the branch bending over the trail.

He came to another small clearing where there was more light. He stood in silence to appreciate how the forest awakens at night as he listened to the sounds of all the creatures arising from their day slumber.

He had passed the point of turning back and now realized that he would be spending the night on the icy ground with only the stars and the looming shadows of the trees above him. A pair of wood ducks whizzed overhead, startling him and bringing the scary sensation that comes with being in the woods at night.

"I've been in scarier woods than this," he said out loud to bring comfort, repeating it more loudly to hear the echo and wondering if the deer could hear him.

Farther up the trail the mud had been disturbed and he knew that the deer had rested there. He took out the small flashlight from his pocket and aimed the stream of light on the frozen strands of clotted blood.

His aging joints, the cold, and his hunger were starting to get the better of him and he knew he needed sleep. "Here's as good a place as any," he said. He scraped together some pine needles and leaves for a bed and gathered some palmetto fronds for covering.

The bed of flora was comfortable enough but the palmetto did nothing to protect him from the rapidly plummeting temperature. He was an old man who had outlived his wife and only daughter. Though he missed them both terribly, he was grateful there was no one left to worry about his absence.

When he closed his eyes he tried to dream about his wife and daughter, but memories of them gave way to the war and the morning when he woke after the bullet nearly tore off his leg.

*When he opened his eyes he saw an angel hovering.*

*"So beautiful," he thought, as the angel kneeled next to him and placed a cigarette in his mouth.*

*"Smoke?"*

*As he inhaled and tasted the smoke traveling on his breath he realized he was alive and that it was real.*

*"Took quite a shot," said the angel.*

*He looked down at his leg and saw his ripped and blood soaked pants.*

*"I can't walk," he said between puffs.*

*The angel gave him water. It felt good on his lips but felt better when it ran down his chin and neck. Smoking, he forgot the knee and the blood and the angel and saw only the sky and the edges of the mountains and the shadows of the clouds around them.*

*Then — the sky and the earth exploded.*

*The angel was strong and lifted him on his shoulders so easily and suddenly the ground was moving underneath like railroad tracks when looking down from the window of a train.*

*The ground zoomed by faster and faster until he felt like he was flying. Enemy troops appeared from every direction and the dirt below sprayed upwards from the shelling.*

*As they moved across the terrain he thought he would soon die but he knew that it was out of his hands.*

*He looked down and noticed the angel's feet — bare and porcelain white despite all the dirt and mud — and even though the angel was running so quickly the feet seemed to be hardly moving at all.*

*He closed his eyes and felt the warmth that only peace can bring.*

The rabbit bobbed his head in a staccato rhythm as it gnawed the grass. It scurried forward using only its oversized feet and its movement rustled the leaves causing its eyes to dart quickly in every direction.

When the rabbit heard him waking he bounded into the brush and out of sight. He pushed the palmetto fronds away and tried to stretch out the stiffness of his limbs. His mouth was dry as glue and he tried to moisten it with saliva.

He worked his way into a standing position and cleared his head. He picked up the trail and began moving. He didn't expect to find the dried splotches of blood so quickly and he wondered if the cold might have kept the venison fresh. His hunger ached like regret and he dwelled on a venison roast with mashed potatoes, hot French bread to mop up the gravy, and a hearty merlot to wash it all down.

The tracks had now hardened in the mud, and seeing that they turned off just ahead and noticing the small tree on the edge of the trail snapped over, he knew the deer had stumbled over it, and for the first time since he had wounded the buck he thought he might be getting close.

So far the trail had been mostly easy to follow, but the tracking had worn him down and the trail had now turned thick and hard to negotiate.

He stopped to catch his breath and thought back to when it was all so effortless and he would trek through the woods until the sun disappeared and there was never the stinging nor the fear nor the sadness in the remembering of those with whom he used to smoke.

He craved another cigar and remembered the cigarette the angel had given him when he first woke, and the bare feet and how beautiful they were and how fast he carried him and how the doctor didn't believe his story later in the hospital.

*"You're quite a lucky man," the doctor standing over him said. "This leg healed up better than it should've. Looks like you're gonna keep it."*

*"What happened?"*

*"Well, according to you, you flew away from a whole Nazi division on the wings of an angel. And as crazy as it sounds I tend to believe you because I know you sure as hell didn't run on that leg."*

*"We did fly," he said, looking down at his leg, which was locked in a brace.*

*The doctor smiled. "Just relax and try to get some rest."*

*He watched the doctor leave and as he felt the morphine coursing through his veins he knew it was all real, and the warm peace came back over him and he knew that he would never have to explain it to anyone else again. Then — the crashing brought him out of his memory as his heart jumped in his chest. The deer had stood up from the brush he was hiding under and wobbled to stillness.*

He dropped to his knee and shouldered his rifle. He tried to catch his breath as the deer began limping towards him tearing away the vines that had become tangled in his rack.

Patches of dried blood stained his shoulder and his front leg was lame. He swayed once to each side and fell forward with his glorious set of antlers hitting the earth last.



The carcass sank heavily into the old bones of his shoulders as he carried the buck through the forest.

He looked down at his dirty boots moving so slowly and his breath belched out with every step. He thought of his cold night in the woods as he felt the heat from the deer around his neck and shoulders. "Thank you for your warmth, my friend."

He felt his deep hunger and recalled all the tasty venison roasts he had enjoyed and the tannic wines on his throat chasing down the chunks. "And for your food."

He pushed on through the woods fighting the pain in his knee that was now moving up his leg and into his stomach and chest. "Forgive me."

*...he lay on the pillow of leaves somewhere on the floor of the forest with the deer's body over him.*

*He had forgotten the hunger and the pain and saw the shadowed treetops blending into the sky and the clouds drifting without purpose above him.*

*Night's shroud was falling over the woods and he wondered where the new morning would find him.*

*Now there was a light snow, but he no longer felt the stinging.*

*Sleep came over him and he saw the smoke from his comrades circled like halos around the crowns of the snow-dusted trees...*

*The End*

## **[The Courtship of Gladys Pierson](#)**

by **[Janice Clark](#)**

Ramifications of reality occasionally intrude on the most determined flights of fancy. For Gladys Pierson, the moment of truth arrived in the middle of her Thursday evening painting class, just as she was daubing a bit more cadmium yellow on what was supposed to be a sunflower.

Gladys had always been a romantic. She had always deeply believed that some wonderful day her Prince Charming would appear to sweep her off her feet and carry her away to a blissful happy ever after. This belief had been reinforced by her parents, who encouraged her to maintain high standards and wait for the 'right man.' While she waited, she had kept herself busy with work, volunteering, and various hobbies, including this latest attempt to commit art.

Now she paused, brush in the air, as she listened to the chatter of her classmates, mostly ladies in their fifties or older. She usually ignored the background noise at classes like this, but at some level she still realized that the talk of gardening and husbands and children had gradually changed to talk of grandchildren. Soon they would stop their work entirely to show each other pictures of adorable little tots. Understanding hit her like a blow to the stomach, and she almost dropped the brush.

Life is passing me by, she thought. I'm forty-five years old, Prince Charming isn't coming, and I want a baby!

Being in all other respects a practical woman, Gladys carefully and methodically cleaned her brushes and put her painting supplies away. To the instructor she said, "I don't think this is working for me, but thank you for your patience. I'll just leave my materials with you—perhaps someone else can make better use of them." Then she went home to think.

Friday afternoon Gladys stopped at Len's Market to do her weekly shopping, as usual. Charley, her favorite clerk, had been pushing a broom through the baking goods aisle, but hurried forward as she approached the checkout lines. "I can get you on number two, Miss Gladys."

As he rang up her cans and boxes, Charley asked, "How's the painting class coming?"

Gladys sighed. "I gave it up. It just wasn't working out. In fact, nothing's working out." She sighed again. "Charley, you're always so cheerful. What's your secret?"

Charley's smiling face grew serious for a moment. "I have my moments, Miss Gladys. Especially since my wife, Emily, passed on two years ago. But I try to look for the good, and give life a chance." His smile returned. "You're usually smiling, yourself. I always had you figured for a happy lady. Is something worrying you?"

"Oh, it's nothing, really. Just that I'm not getting any younger and... and I get lonely, sometimes." She squared her shoulders, lifted her chin, and managed a ghost of a smile. "Anyway, I'm going to do something about it. I have a beauty shop appointment tomorrow for a new hairdo and a complete makeover, and then I'm going shopping for some new clothes, and..." She lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. "I've signed up for a dating service. I've decided that 'Mr. Right' isn't going to show up on his own, so I'm going looking for him."

Charley raised one eyebrow slightly. "Well, Miss Gladys, I hope all that works out for you. But maybe your 'Mr. Right' hasn't come forward because you've always seemed so contented and self-sufficient, and he didn't know you were available."

A week later, on Saturday morning, Charley was stocking the canned vegetable shelves when Gladys came by. "Morning, Miss Gladys. I missed seeing you last night. My, you look like you stepped off the cover of one of those glamour magazines."

"Thank you, Charley. I don't know about this 'new look.' It doesn't feel right, somehow. Maybe I just have to get used to it."

"Maybe. Or maybe you need to do what feels right to you. How's the dating business going?"

"Terrible. My date last night was supposed to take me to dinner, but he just bought me a beer and then... Well, I'm glad I came in my own car. Maybe my 'new look' sends the wrong messages. I've been getting a lot of attention from the men at work, too, and they're all married."

Charley shook his head. "Some men just don't know how to treat a lady. You want to talk about it? I was just going on break. I'll buy you a cup of coffee at Sally's across the street."

Several cups of coffee and a sweet roll later, Gladys glanced at her watch. "Oh, my goodness! I've kept you talking for over an hour. I hope you won't get in trouble with your boss for taking such a long break."

Charley chuckled. "That's not a problem. I own the store."

"But it's called Len's Market."

"That's right. Len was my grandpa. He passed the store on to Pop, and when Pop retired I took over."

Gladys smiled in relief. "Oh, that's all right then. I've so much enjoyed talking with you. But I do need to get home and get my chores done. And then..." She grimaced. "Another date tonight. Hope he's better than the last one. I've half a mind to call it off."

“Tell you what, Miss Gladys. There’s someone I’d like you to meet. I think you’ll like him, and I can guarantee he won’t ply you with alcohol or anything like that. My church is having a potluck picnic at the city park tomorrow. You don’t even have to bring anything; I’ll bring extra. You show up about one o’clock, and wear something comfortable. This fellow doesn’t care about fancy clothes.”

Sunday afternoon, Gladys nervously approached the covered picnic area, where a large group of people were milling about. She recognized and greeted a few casual acquaintances, but she didn’t see Charley. The table was nearly buried in food, but she found a space for her oatmeal raisin cookies.

She heard footsteps behind her. “Gladys?”

She turned around. Charley was there, grinning. “Gladys, I’d like you to meet my best buddy, Larry.”

He wasn’t tall, dark and handsome. He was short and blond, with a chubby face. He smiled at her, and her heart melted. Was this the one she had waited for all her life?

“Hi, Miz Gladys,” said Larry, who looked to be about four years old. “Grandpa says you’re the prettiest and nicest lady in the whole town. Would you come push me on the swings?”

*The End*

## **ISLAND OF FEAR**

By **Kathy Collier**

The island slept as a calm breeze bellowed the curtains in the Lanier bedroom. Time: 12:03 a.m., Santa Rosa Island, Navarre, Florida. The ground shook violently and jolted the islanders from their beds.

“What happened?” Moira gasped, instantly awake.

Jude snatched his cell phone from the side table and grasped Moira’s hand, and pulled her down the stairs. He grabbed the keys hanging on a hook near the door. They stood barefoot in their pajamas gazing at the home they had barely escaped.

The ground shook underneath their feet for a second time in minutes. Moira and Jude swayed with the force of the earth’s movement. It stopped—again. The abrupt silence was like a weight of thick air—almost tangible. Then the screams pierced the quiet; the cries of children, the human moans, and the dogs’ bark resonated into the darkness. Moira’s ears rang from the sound of shattering glass and cracking stucco.

Moira froze. She couldn’t make herself move. Her eyes locked on their house.

“We have to get off this island,” Jude said, gripping her shoulders. His voice was firm but gentle. “Moira, honey, we have to go.”

She recognized the familiar voice, but he sounded light years away. Lately she had experienced this feeling of unreality when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. This time the delusion was even stronger. Like the cancer, she had never experienced an earthquake.

Jude spun her around and placed both hands on each side of her face to tilt her head up toward him. He had her attention now. “Moira, get in the Jeep,” he said slowly, emphasizing each word.

She turned and walked toward it. Thank goodness the vehicle was intact. He stretched over her and snapped the seatbelt in place, when she jumped. “Our pets, we

can't leave our pets." She looked toward their broken townhome and unbuckled the seatbelt.

"Moira, NO."

She leapt from the jeep and ran for the now jammed front door. The one they had barely escaped from before the building shifted. "We are not leaving without our pets."

Just then, the sound of Jude's cell phone startled them both. "Hello. Yes, son. We're fine. Don't come this way. We will see you soon."

"What, what? How are the kids?" Moira's thought of her son and family snapped her from her dazed state. Her blood pulsed in her head, and her heart beat erratically with the realization her family could be in danger.

"They're fine. They felt the quake in Pace, but there's no damage to their home. We have to go, Moira."

Snowman and Tootsie, their cat and dog, stood near the glass window, staring helplessly. "Okay, we have five minutes and then we leave with or without them if we can't get to them. Wait here, I'll check the garage," Jude said.

Moira followed him around the back to the garage. The front had buckled, and they weren't able to get through the doors. In back, the door sat ajar. They entered into total darkness.

"Crap." Jude tripped over fallen objects that had obviously moved during the quake.

"You okay?"

"I thought I told you to wait up front?"

"I can help," Moira said. She knew where the flashlights were and found her way to their location. After she rummaged for a minute, she found a police-sized flashlight that illuminated the dark room.

"I always said you were a bat," Jude joked.

"Yep." She didn't mind his joking for once. She searched the bin for another light and tossed it to him. She could hear their dog whining at the door. Moira pushed her way through the objects scattered over the floor. At the door, she found it unlocked when she turned the knob, but the door wouldn't budge. With all her weight, she threw her body into the door. It moved along with cracking sounds of shifting wood.

"Don't, Moira," Jude shouted.

Too late, she threw her body into the door again. This time it opened a couple feet. Tootsie ran through the opening and into Moira's arms. Snowman shimmied through the small opening and rubbed against her knee as she squatted to catch him.

Jude picked him up and placed him in a soft kennel while Moira retrieved the leash from a nail near the door and hooked it to Tootsie.

\* \* \*

The engine roared to life and they pulled onto Gulf Boulevard. The jeep dodged and weaved between and around pedestrians blocking the road to the sound of honking horns and angry shouts. Pandemonium had begun. The sirens shrieked across the island and echoed from the mainland across the bay. Only the lights from the vehicles and those people with flashlights lit up the night. Moira glanced across the bay and noticed the lack of familiar landscapes. All she saw were headlights like eyes staring out of the dark. She looked toward the Gulf and saw huge waves rolling ashore as the moon glistened on the whitecaps.

Jude turned the jeep onto the road that crossed the bay. Within minutes he and Moira would be free of the island only to enter the sole escape route north towards I-10 or Highway 90.

The ground trembled. Moira and Jude watched the bridge that crossed the bay sway. The cars atop were sliding around like tin cans. The tremor stopped, and part of the bridge collapsed as they watched in horror the cars tumble into the water along with huge chunks of concrete.

“What do we do now?” Moira stammered, her voice quivering with fear.

“We have to take the kayaks and paddle to the mainland.”

“Then what?” she asked.

“A tsunami could be headed this way. We’re wasting time. Let’s go.” Jude jerked the steering wheel and maneuvered the jeep back towards their home.

They each knew the protocol for hurricanes and tropical weather, and understood the dangers of living on an island. They weren’t sure what the time span was for earthquakes generating possible tsunamis or even where the epicenter was located. Their biggest concern was getting off the island.

All around them people were running in and out of their homes, trying to rescue things of value, or gathering emergency supplies. “Looks like people are reverting to their Neanderthal mode of action,” Jude said, nodding toward a group of people hauling away a stash of goods from a home.

Moira nodded.

Back home again, they pulled their kayaks from the garage that threatened to buckle at any moment. While Jude searched for the life jackets in the back of the garage, Moira snuck into the house for her purse and flip-flops they always kept by the door. She knew they would need their shoes, if they would be footing it on the other side of the bay. She also knew they would need their credit cards and some cash.

Seeing her slip through the door, Jude screamed, “Get out of there. It’s not stable!”

Moira kept going. She found her purse in the foyer and also grabbed Jude’s wallet still sitting in a dish on top of the table. Then she rushed back to the door, where Jude stood waiting.

“Moira, do you have a death wish? You’re going to give me a heart attack. Please, stay close to me. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost you.”

Safe again outside, Jude froze. “Where are the kayaks?” Several yards away, Moira and Jude spotted two people with kayaks above their heads. Jude dropped the life jackets and darted after the thieves.

Moira retrieved the jackets and held tight to the leash and kennel. With her hands full, she walked fast to catch up to Jude. The flashlight lay on the ground as Jude struggled with one of the thieves. Moira seized it and did something she didn’t know she had in her. She cracked the flashlight with unyielding strength across the man’s head.

“Ouch! Damn, woman.” The man ceased fighting with her husband. With one hand, he rubbed the fast-growing knot that swelled on his scalp.

Moira recognized the voice. “Joe? Joe Black? Is that you?” She turned toward the other dark figure. “Renee?” She flashed the light towards the woman who stood motionless near the other kayak. Their neighbors for the past ten years were the thieves in the night.

“Yes, Moira. It’s us,” Renee said. “We didn’t know you guys were still here. Last we checked the jeep was gone and we figured you had escaped. We thought you wouldn’t mind if we took the kayaks.”

Rubbing his head, Joe stood up with Jude’s help. “Sorry, man, we didn’t know. We would never ... ours are buried in our garage. The roof caved in on them.”

“No, no. We would have done the same,” Jude said. “They’re double kayaks. We’ll share. We have to move before someone else happens along with the same idea.”

“Thanks, Jude. We will never forget you for this. Good luck, man.” Joe shook hands with Jude. Renee hugged Moira, and the couple left with one kayak held over their heads.

As Renee and Joe moved hastily to the shore, Moira felt the soreness in her breast throb. Her strength waned as she helped carry the kayak with the animals inside. She had noticed the physical changes in her body over the past year. She tired easily and couldn’t understand why. She thought maybe it was a normal part of the aging process. After much coaxing from Jude, she’d gone to see a doctor.

Jude’s voice brought her back to the present moment. “Moira, are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Keep moving.” She knew Jude worried about her. The boat could have weighed a thousand pounds at that moment, but she was determined not to let go. She would pull her weight.

They paddled out into the darkness with only the one flashlight and the glow of the moon to guide them to the other side. They caught glimpses of flashlights in the water and heard splashing.

“Watch for people, and steer clear so we don’t get swamped,” Jude whispered.

Without incident, they arrived to the other side. The distance was only a half-mile wide.

“Jude, what do we do now?” Moira asked as they clambered out of the kayak.

“Shh, follow me. He grabbed the kennel and pulled Moira along beside him. In a hushed voice he said, “We have to walk for a while.”

His cell phone startled Moira with that familiar ringtone that shouted the word, “Daddy.”

“Hello,” Jude said. The glow of the cell phone highlighted his features, accentuating his long nose, structured cheekbones, and full lips. His brown eyes looked like eerie white orbs from the light of his cell phone. His stark white hair glimmered in the moonlight. “We’re off the island. We’ll try to find a ride. We’ll talk to you soon, son.” Jude pressed END and shoved the phone into his shirt pocket. The sirens still blared, horns honked, and people continued screaming into the night.

“What are we doing, Jude?” Moira pulled Tootsie along, her short legs scurrying as fast as they could. Jude had a firm squeeze on Moira’s other hand, and he carried their cat of thirteen years.

They entered a neighborhood called Holley by the Sea, which was right across Highway 98 from the bay. Winded, Moira asked, “Why are we going into the neighborhood? Shouldn’t we get on Highway 87 and keep going north? Maybe someone will recognize us and give us a ride.”

Moira desperately wanted to stop. Her head pounded, her ears rang, and her heart beat against the wall of her chest like a drum thrumming an offbeat cadence, Pa rum pum pum, pa rum pum pum pum pum and continued to intensify as Jude pulled her towards a house. She didn’t complain. All the sounds of the night were more frightening to her than the sound of her heart. She wondered how her neighbors fared. Where they would go and what they would do to escape?

Jude knocked on the door of a home with a black Honda SUV parked in the driveway. No one answered. He scanned the darkness to see if neighbors were home, but everyone had evacuated, leaving the neighborhood with an eerie, forsaken emptiness. Jude broke the glass on the door and stepped into the house.

“Jude, what are you doing?” Moira whispered. Too frightened to move, she waited outside.

He returned with a set of keys in his hand, and headed straight for the Honda SUV.

Moira scurried after him. “Jude, you can’t do this.”

“We’re getting out of here. You can’t walk thirty-five miles to our son’s house.”

“We can’t steal these people’s vehicle.”

“Yes we can. When it’s an emergency. Now get in.”

She placed the animals inside and slid into the passenger seat. “My husband, the car thief,” she huffed.

“I don’t think anyone cares at this point, Moira. It’s an emergency.”

Moira’s heart continued to pound the same erratic rhythm that hadn’t let up ever since the first earthquake had struck without warning. She didn’t know Florida had earthquakes. At least not since she and Jude had lived there for the past thirty years. Not wanting to alarm Jude, she didn’t mention her heart.

They traveled through the back of the neighborhood to enter Highway 87 further north. They eased into the traffic and started moving at about fifteen mph.

Jude turned on the radio. Beep, beep, and beep— “This is an emergency alert for all coastal areas inland along the Gulf Coast from Louisiana to Apalachicola, Florida. Prepare for a tsunami headed toward these coastal areas. An earthquake with the magnitude of 6.8 struck Santa Rosa Island near Pensacola. Another quake also registered 200 miles south of Pensacola along the fault line. Expect several aftershocks. Repeat...”

Moira wondered if they would be able to get far enough away. She decided to lay her head against the back of the seat. She wrapped her slender fingers across the top of her husband’s large hand. He grabbed her hand and put it to his lips and gently kissed her skin. No words were uttered. From the glow of the dash, Moira saw the muscles twitch in Jude’s cheek as he glanced back in the rearview mirror.

Too frightened, she didn’t look back.

Jude turned off the radio. He honked at the cars in front of him. A chain reaction of horns blasted into the night, as the cars tried to nudge the others to move a little faster.

If she could just rest, maybe her heartbeat would slow. After a few minutes of silence and the soft glow of the dash lighting, Moira dozed.

\* \* \*

The radio startled her. She awoke to a dull ache in her jaw and neck that extended to her right shoulder and radiated down her arm. She thought maybe it was from carrying the kayak; maybe she’d pulled a muscle. She rubbed her neck and shoulder, hoping for relief.

Now on Highway 90 they moved along at a quicker pace, but still not fast enough. The gas gauge flashed red. Moira realized why the owners had left the SUV behind.

She looked at her husband, and as they made eye contact her vision blurred. She noticed the fear in his eyes.

“Moira, Moira, honey, are you okay?”

Moira stared at him without a sound or response. Her heart just stopped. No pain, no irregular beats. Nothing.

“Moira!” Jude cried. “Hang in there, baby. We’ll be to a hospital soon.”

The tsunami rolled ashore, killing thousands in its wake. There was no ground high enough around Florida, only bay after bay as the wave pushed the water inland

more than thirty miles. Evacuation time was so limited that loss of life was inevitable. Moira would be numbered among the thousands of deceased.

The sun crept quietly over the horizon, like any other normal day. Jude walked out of the hospital with his son. "She was the love of my life." He hesitated. "Thirty years. We were married thirty years. What will I do?" He glanced up at the bluest sky and wondered how this could possibly be after the night they had just endured.

"I know, Dad."

*The End*

## MAGIC

By Mark Conte

It was a blue 1989 Mustang, and it was sitting crazily on top of the cement-dividing strip, the motor still running, though the hood was pushed up almost to the windshield. The door was ajar and Norman could see a young woman sitting in the driver's seat. He pulled to the side of the road and got out of his car. She put her hands in front of her face saying, "Oh God, Oh God."

"Are you all right?" he said.

"Nobody stopped," she said. "They kept going past me. I was yelling to them, please stop, but they just went right by me."

"Can you move?" he said. "Here, take my hand."

She took his hand and tried to ease out of the car.

"Oh God," she said. "It hurts. It hurts bad." A trickle of blood appeared from her nostrils.

"Don't move," he said. "Just stay like that until I get an ambulance." He let go of her hand, but she reached out quickly and took it again.

"Don't leave me," she said. "Please don't leave me alone."

He looked at her a moment, then said, "Okay. It's going to be okay. I'll be right here with you." He began waving frantically with his other arm as the cars sped by. An airport limo pulled up beside him.

"Call an ambulance," Norman said. "Get a police car too."

"I'll call the dispatcher on my radio," the limo driver said.

"Hurry," Norman said. "I don't know how badly she's hurt."

"Oh God, I'm bleeding," she said.

"It's going to be okay," Norman said.

The limo driver yelled into the microphone, "Hurry, goddamn it. There's a woman bleeding here."

"Don't leave me," she said. "Please don't leave me."

"I won't leave you," Norman said.

He took out his handkerchief and wiped the blood away from her nose and mouth. He noticed then that she had blond hair, lighter perhaps than his daughter's, but just as long. He pushed her hair away from her face and suddenly realized the motor was still on. He reached in the car and turned off the ignition. The car jerked backward a moment, then settled on the dividing strip again.

"You're going to be okay," he said. "The ambulance is coming now. Can you hear it?"

"Please," she said. "Don't let me die."



“I have to go back to work,” the limo driver said and pulled off into traffic. Norman waved him on. He could see the flashing red and blue lights of the police car and the ambulance behind it. She began to cry now, big sobs that made her chest heave. He was afraid she would hurt herself more, so he put his arm around her shoulders and said, “Just lean back and relax. It’s all right. I’m right here with you.”

“I’m scared,” she said. “I’m scared to death.” She began shivering. He reached down to button her coat and noticed one of her shoes was off.

“Where’s your other shoe?” he said.

“I don’t know. Isn’t it on?”

The ambulance braked to a quick stop. One of the men pushed Norman aside. The stretcher was out and on the ground before he even realized it was there, and they were taking her out of the car. She looked back at him calling, “My cello, please. I can’t leave without my cello. It’s two hundred years old.”

He looked in the car and saw the cello in the back seat. He put it in the ambulance with her. The medic pushed him gently away from the ambulance.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “You can’t go in there.”

“Of course,” Norman said. “I understand.”

He stood on the side of the road and watched the ambulance drive off in a confusion of lights and sounds. He thought he could still hear her crying, though he could barely hear the sirens now. He got into his car and drove to the Philadelphia Yellow Cab Company where he was the superintendent.

He was an hour late for work. Ed had checked the previous day’s closeout for him and the cashier had the money bundled and ready for the Brink’s truck, so he made out the Daily Superintendent’s Report, filled out the forms for the new men, then went to the coffee machine.

He thought of her again. He wondered how badly she was hurt, wondered what her name was, if her family knew she was in the hospital. He thought he should find out how she was, maybe get her name, and call her parents. He felt somehow responsible for her, obligated in some way. He then realized that her family had probably been contacted and were, no doubt, all there at the hospital with her, so he forgot about the matter and went back to work.

The next day he was having lunch at H. A. Winston and read about the accident in the Daily News. He went to a pay phone and called the hospital. They said she was off the critical list but was still listed as serious.

“Can she have visitors?” he said.

“Just for short periods,” the nurse said.

After work, he drove down the expressway to the University Hospital. There was a man on the corner selling small bunches of flowers. He picked out one and went into the hospital.

She was still being fed intravenously. Her eyes were closed and her hair looked darker than it did the day before. He laid the flowers on the night table and tried to ease out of the room quietly, but he bumped against the bedside chair and she stirred. Her eyes opened sleepily. She looked at the ceiling, then turned and saw him. She held out her hand to him. He sat on the chair and took her hand. She closed her eyes and went back to sleep in minutes.

She did not wake up again, and when he heard the soft chimes signaling the end of visiting hours, he put her hand gently on the bed and got up to leave. It was then he noticed the cast covering her left leg to her hip, and there was a bandage under her left breast that showed through her gown. In the corner of the room, the cello was propped up against the wall.

The next day she was awake when he walked into her room and he was embarrassed at coming to see her.

“Thank you for the flowers,” she said.

“An old vendor sells them on the corner,” he said, as if to explain his bringing them.

“They said you saved my life.”

“No, not me,” he said. “They did in here.”

“No,” she said. “You did. No one else would even stop.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Sometimes people are too much in a hurry to get involved.” He looked in the corner. “How’s the two hundred year old cello?”

“Just a couple of scratches,” she said. “The orchestra sent it a get well card. Excuse me. The Philadelphia Orchestra!” she said in mock haughtiness.

She reached in the nightstand and took out his handkerchief.

“Look,” she said. “I had it washed this morning.” She handed him the handkerchief. She looked so proud he had to smile.

“Do your parents know you are in the hospital?”

“My father is dead. My mother lives in Birmingham and she is flying up here tonight.”

“How old are you?” he said.

“I’ll be twenty-one in two weeks.”

“I have a daughter that’s sixteen.”

“What’s her name?” she said.

“Beth.”

“My name is Paula,” she said.

“Hello Paula. I’m Norman Bache.”

Two doctors came into the room to examine her and he had to leave. The next day she told him that her mother had come to the hospital after he had left and was really upset about the accident.

“She wanted me to go back to Birmingham with her,” she said. “She has this thing where she thinks I am still nine years old.”

“And, of course, you think you are thirty-five,” he said.

She giggled then, “Not quite,” she said. “But turning twenty-one scares me. I don’t know if I am ready to be an adult. Besides, I am beginning to feel like an old lady in this bed all day long.”

He asked if she read poetry. She said she did sometimes, but not much. He gave her a book of poems by James Dickey and said it might help with the boredom of being in the hospital. That was Thursday. On Friday they transferred 25 men to the new Garage on 26th street and he didn’t get to the hospital until after visiting hours. He talked the nurse into letting him visit for ten minutes.

She was sitting up when he went into her room and her face opened up in a greeting smile. She was no longer on intravenous and her face had more color in it.

“I’ve been reading the book of poems,” she said.

“Did you like it?” he said.

“I like one of the poems a lot,” she said. “Buckdancer’s Choice.” She picked up the book and turned the pages. “It brought back a lot of memories. My father died like that. It took a long time. My mother took it badly. She used to pass out in the waiting room. She still can’t stand hospitals.”

“How old were you?”

“Eleven. I used to sit in the chair next to his bed and listen to him fighting for his breath. I wanted to give him my breath. I used to think I could put my mouth on his and give him my life.” She smiled then. “I guess it was a childish fantasy.”

On Saturday he brought her *New Poems* by Pablo Neruda and he read her two of the poems from the book. She asked him to read the second poem again, then just the last stanza.

“...And if I take to the open road.  
The same forgotten aroma  
Of uninhabited roses comes back,  
Some fragrance I lost  
As some lose their shadow:  
And deprived of its love, I stand  
Stock still, stark naked, in the middle of the street.”

“Sometimes I feel like that,” she said. “As if I’ve lost my shadow and everyone can see it’s not there.”

“It’s still there,” he said. “You’ve just forgotten how to reach back and touch it.”

“How long have you been married?” she said.

“Seventeen years,” he said, then he remembered he wasn’t married anymore. “It would have been seventeen years this August,” he said. “But we were divorced two years ago.”

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“In our case, it was the best solution, but that doesn’t mean the three of us are any happier apart, especially my daughter. It’s awfully hard to explain to her, and sometimes I think she is angry with me.”

“I lived with a guy for three months,” she said. “It was right after I moved up here from Birmingham, and we missed each other so much, we thought we were in love, so he moved up here with me. After a while, we realized that neither of us was ready for that, but it was still hard breaking up.”

“Did you love him?”

“It’s hard to tell after you break up, which was a whole two months ago. I guess you would say no because it didn’t last, but it still hurts just as bad.”

“It doesn’t always hurt.”

“It’s hard for me to believe that,” she said. She looked down at her hands. “It’s funny the things that bring it back to you. You see a book of matches and you remember how you were always running out of matches. You pass by a restaurant and you remember all the times you had dinner there, and every song they play on the radio, every song becomes your song.”

“Yes,” he said. “There is a period of adjustment.”

On Sunday, he drove to Allentown to see his daughter. He called the hospital from a pay phone on his way back. Paula said she was fine and that she had written a poem. He asked her to read it to him. She said she couldn’t because it was too corny, but he persisted until she gave in, though he had to promise not to laugh.

“I call it yellow dreams,” she said.

“The yellow dreams that fall  
like leaves too ripe to cling,  
gather in little piles  
about our roots  
and burn with the wind.”

The poem stunned him. He had expected a singsong greeting card verse.

“Hey, that’s pretty good,” he said.

“Do you really think so?” she said.

“I think you should write more poetry.”

“No,” she said. “I’m a one-time poet,” then she laughed at the title she had given herself. “That’s me,” she said. “A one shot deal.”

On Monday he drove to the garage by way of Roosevelt Boulevard. It was September and the trees were beginning to turn. The heat had gone from the city, and the smell of autumn was in the air. Children in knee socks and windbreakers were walking to school and street crossing guards with bright orange jackets stood on every corner of every school zone directing traffic.

Just then he remembered that the next day was Paula’s birthday, so he stopped at a card shop and bought Paula the biggest birthday card he had ever seen, two feet by three feet, and sent it to her by special delivery. She called him at the office the next day and told him she had a special surprise for him.

The surprise was Fettuccine Alfredo ordered from Casa Vecchia, a small Italian restaurant just down the street from the hospital. She showed him how to roll the fettuccine on his fork with the tablespoon as guide.

“You’re Italian,” he said.

“Yes,” she said. “On my father’s side. “Look,” she said, showing him her name on her hospital wristband. “Bellestrade. Paula Bellestrade. It means beautiful street.”

The following week she began walking on crutches. He thought it was important that she do it herself, but when she fell, he picked her up and carried her to her room. She began to cry then, small whimpering sounds that almost broke his heart.

“I’ll never be normal,” she said.

“Nonsense,” he said. “Your leg will heal and the cast will come off.”

“No,” she said. “They were all in here this morning. They took off the old cast and poked their fingers all over my knee saying, Does this hurt? Did that hurt? When they put on another cast, they told me I would have a slight limp when I walked. I asked them if I would be able to run and they didn’t answer.”

Friday she called and told Norman she was being released that afternoon. He met her downstairs by the front desk. She was taller than he thought she was and practically beautiful in her “Street make-up” as she called it. He took her home and helped her up the flight of stairs to her apartment.

He did not see her for two weeks, and if he had had her phone number, he would have called her after the first week. He was reluctant to just go up to her apartment on a pretext, but she called that afternoon to tell him she had mastered the art of walking on crutches. He asked if she had gone out. She said, no, she didn’t feel that brave yet. He told her to be dressed by seven o’clock because he was taking her to see the play Evita. She said she would be ready at six.

It was late October and she wore a knitted scarf and beret set that made her look French, and used a cane she borrowed from her landlady.

England was at war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands and there were a handful of demonstrators outside the theater protesting an Argentine presence in Philadelphia. Earlier in the day, English planes had sunk an Argentine troop ship, killing hundreds of Argentine soldiers, the first real bloodshed of the war, and news of the sinking was the headline of the day.

During the second act, a woman dressed as a peasant burst on the stage from the wings and said,

“My Lady, the British have sunk the General Belgrano. Five hundred of our countrymen are dead.”

A small child in the rear of the stage began to sing the Argentine national anthem, and one by one, the other cast members joined in the singing, until the whole cast was out on the stage singing the Argentine national anthem. The improvisation stopped the show and earned the cast a standing ovation.

When the theater let out, there were rows of policemen on each side of the theater exits with clubs and riot helmets in anticipation of some sort of clash, but the crowd drifted quietly to the parking lots and restaurants, which made the policemen seem out of place.

They drove to Paula's apartment and when they reached there, Paula found it more difficult going up the stairs, so Norman carried her up the last flight of stairs.

"I feel like Cinderella," she said. "Do you like Chantefleur, Blanc De Blanc?" she said walking into the kitchen. She poured the wine into delicate glasses with stems and brought them to the living room. He raised his glass and said,

"To your marvelous recovery. You look beautiful."

"I wish I could believe that," she said.

She turned on the radio and the sound of music made her quiet for a moment.

"Favorite song?" he said

"Memories," she said.

"We all have them," he said.

"It's really my fault that we broke up," she said.

"What terrible thing did you do?"

"I have this romantic idea of how love should be. I mean, I think it should be magic, like if you are kissing each other and your hat falls off your head, or your scarf drops to the ground, you don't even notice."

"And if you do notice," he said. "You don't care."

"God yes," she said.

"And what's his name wasn't like that?" he said

"Dennis," she said, making a frown. "Jesus, if the phone rang while we were making love, he would reach over and answer it."

"Well, I'm fairly certain you will have a lot more chances at magic, though I'm not quite sure of how perfect it will be."

"I don't want perfect," she said. "I want magic."

Norman looked at his watch and rose from his chair.

"Oh God," she said. "I must be a rotten date, talking all about my problems all night."

"Nonsense," he said. "I had a great time. We saw a great play and had a philosophical discussion on love like two old buddies."

"You're a good friend, Norman. I don't know what I would have done if you weren't here these past few months."

"Well," he said. "If I had met you twenty years ago, I'd have been the most romantic boyfriend a girl ever had."

"You wouldn't have liked me," she said. "I was a fat baby."

He walked to the door.

"If it's any comfort," he said. "The first love isn't always magic. Sometimes it takes a while to get it right."

She put her arms around him and hugged him.

"Thank you," she said.

He turned and walked to the stairs.

"Norman," she said. "I wish I had met you twenty years ago too."

He took her to the Philadelphia Art Museum the next week, and then to the Academy of the Arts. Saturdays they would go to the University Book Store and pick out books for each other.

December came and on the first Monday, fourteen inches of snow fell on Philadelphia and he was so busy getting the cabs out on the street and the service trucks for the cabs that broke down or got stuck that he did not think of calling her until two-thirty.

“How is it outside?” she said.

“It’s still snowing,” he said. “I just looked out the window and my car is completely covered.”

“Isn’t it great?” she said. “It’s my first snow. I wish I could go outside and roll around in it.”

“And build a fort?” he said.

“No,” she said. “Snowballs to knock your hat off your head.”

When he drove to her apartment, he had to park on Delancy Street and walk down Nineteenth Street with his arms full of groceries. The houses on Spruce Street almost twinkled from the whiteness of the snow, and children were pushing each other up the street on sleds, shouting and laughing with red faces and bright plaid scarves.

Paula took the groceries and he shook the snow from his coat and hat. Norman made Steaks Diane. Paula made Caesar salad. They ate hungrily and drank Chantefleur. Later, they sat in the living room and read *Candide*. Near the ending of the play, they were close together on the floor reading with emotion.

*Candide- “Will you marry me?”*

*Cunegonde- “It’s too late. I’m not young. I’m not good. I’m not pure.”*

*Candide- “And I’m not young, and not worth much. What we wanted we will not have. The way we did love, we will not love again. Come now, let us take what we have and love as we are.”*

Paula put down the book and sighed.

“Oh Norman,” she said touching her heart. “What a romantic you are.”

“I guess so,” he said. “I’m sorry.”

“No apology needed,” she said. “It’s beautiful. That would bring out the woman in any woman.”

“Assuming she’s a romantic female,” he said.

“Yes,” she laughed.

“Anyway,” he said. “I doubt that you would need any bringing out.”

“God no,” she said. “Not at all.” She ran her fingers through her hair.

“Will you excuse me?” she said.

Norman began to feel awkward sitting there alone on the floor, so he rose and reached for his coat.

Paula came out of the bedroom wearing her silk lounging pajamas.

“Are you leaving?”

“Yes,” he said. “It’s three-thirty.”

She kissed him goodbye at the door.

“Be careful,” she said.

Friday the office was a whirlwind of confusion with phones ringing constantly, cabs stuck in snow or ice, and irate customers shouting about the taxi they ordered that was late or never came. Just before lunch he called Paula. She said she had company and could he call back? He said he would.

The general manager came down from the main office and they had lunch at the Red Lion Diner. Norman and Tom had been good friends for twelve years. He felt he could talk to Tom, and he did need someone to talk to because he was suddenly uncertain about his life and the decisions he seemed to be making on impulse. He was thirty-seven years old, on the doorstep of middle age, he told Tom, and she was twenty-one, for God's sake. What did Tom think of that?

"Thirty-seven," Tom said. "I'm goddamn' sixty four. They're going to retire me next year. Kick me out on my ass and put me in a rocking chair. How do you like them apples? Thirty-two years I gave them and what good does it do me? Thirty-seven? I wish to hell I was thirty-seven." He leaned across the table. "I'll tell you what to do, Kid. Listen to the beat in here," he said pointing to his heart. "You don't want to end up an old man like me with nothing to look forward to but an old man's home."

After work, he drove to Paula's apartment complex. She was standing at the top of the stairs when he reached her floor and was smiling excitedly.

"Guess what?" she said. "Dennis flew in from Birmingham this morning. Mom told him about the accident and he was really upset. He said it was all his fault because he had left me alone. You should have seen him!" She did a little dance on her good leg. "He practically begged me to go back to him. Can you imagine? Begged me."

He was set back a moment, not quite sure of what to say.

"What did you tell him?" he said finally.

"I told him I didn't know if I wanted to do that. I can't believe I said that. I said I wanted to think about it for a while because I didn't want to make another mistake. You should have seen him. He was crazy. He said he wouldn't leave without me. I mean, it was all turned around. Can you believe that?"

"Yes, I can," he said. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," she said. "I have to take this all in and get my head straight."

"Then you're going back to Birmingham?"

"No, not to Birmingham, but I think I will give it another try. I mean, I've been dreaming about this for months."

"Yes, I suppose so," he said.

"Dennis said we have to give it a second chance, and I think that's probably true." She walked up to him and hugged him. "I know you're worried about me, afraid I'll get hurt again, but you've made me strong. I know who I am now. I wasn't sure of that before."

"Is that what you want?" he said.

"Desperately," she said.

"Okay then," he said kissing her forehead. "I wish you luck and happiness."

"I'll be okay, Norman."

He let her go and started to turn to the door, but she held on to him.

"I owe you my life," she said.

"Nonsense," he said. "You owe your life to your healthy body and the good doctors at the hospital."

It had stopped snowing, but the wind was still blowing gusts of snow off the rooftops, carrying bits of paper through the air, sticking them on windshields like parking citations. The trees were gray from the winter freeze and icicles hung from their branches. He stopped for a moment to look at the children playing in the snow, then he got in his car and drove off,

Friday he took the long way to work, through Pennypack Park, watching the joggers making their way through old Indian trails, snorting puffs of steam from their nostrils. The snow had gone, but the air was bitter, still he kept his car window open so that he could smell the winter.

When he walked into his office, he just wanted to sit and relax for a few minutes, but two policemen were waiting for him at the door and he knew there would be no more daydreaming today. The policemen only came to his door when one of the men was robbed. Cab drivers were often robbed. They were an easy mark. They carried anywhere from seventy-five to three hundred dollars. They sat in the driver's seat with their back to the passenger and they were directed where to go, any dark street would do. There would be a knife or a gun in the back of the driver's head and a demand for all the money, which he wisely gave up. The robber then got out of the cab and disappeared into the dark night.

He answered the policemen's questions and then talked to the driver and asked him if he was okay.

"Just a little shaky," the driver said. Norman then told the driver to take the day off and spend them with his wife and children.

Three weeks had gone by and the men at the office had stopped asking about Paula. Eleven o'clock the phone rang and Elaine said, "Norman, line one."

"Hi," Paula said. "Merry Christmas." She sounded breathless.

"Hi," he said. "How are you doing?"

"Fine," she said. "I've been exercising with Jane Fonda, trying to take the ten pounds off my butt I gained in the hospital."

"Don't be silly," he said. "You look great."

"Thank you sir," she said. "I need all the compliments I can get."

"How is Dennis getting along in Philadelphia?"

"He's okay. I told him all about you. I said you were my savior. He asked me if I genuflected every time I saw you. I think he's jealous."

"My God," Norman said. "He's twenty-four years old."

"He was never jealous before."

"Maybe it's a good sign, I mean that he cares."

"Well, I'd better let you get back to work," she said. "I just wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas. I really miss you, Norman."

"I miss you too," he said.

January came and he did his after Christmas shopping at Wanamaker's where he had shopped for sixteen years. He picked up his daughter that Saturday and took her to see the Villanova play Georgetown at the Palestra. The rest of the week was rather normal. He made out the Superintendent's Report every day, bundled the money for the Brink's truck, held hearings for the men on probation status, and had lunch with his secretary on Thursday. However, he couldn't decide what to have for lunch, settling for the same salad Elaine had ordered, and when they were finished lunch, he almost walked out without paying the cashier.

"Jesus, Norman, what are you, in love or something?" Elaine said.

When he returned to the office, he went to the restroom to wash his hands. He looked in the mirror reluctantly. He saw several gray hairs over his left ear. It was odd that he had aged this much in the last two years.

At four-twenty the phone rang. He picked it up expecting to hear Tom's voice.

"Hi," Paula said. "It's me."

"Hi," he said.

"I'm at the Academy. We just did a matinee. The house was packed."



“Schubert?” he said.

“No, Mozart,” she said. “Can you come down and pick me up?”

“I’ll be there in fifteen minutes,” he said.

He drove down the Expressway to the Vine Street exit, circled City Hall and parked his car at the stage door exit. When he got out of his car, he saw Paula coming out of the stage door with her cello. It began to snow again, big, soft flakes that fell on the both of them. He walked up to her and took the cello.

“How did you get here?” he said.

“I took a bus,” she said.

“Where’s Dennis?” he said.

“Gone, gone, gone,” she said.

“He left?”

“It was mutual. He said that I wasn’t the same, that I was a different person. He was right. I’m not the same person. Used to be he could always convince me he was right about anything. I have my own mind now.”

“Good for you,” he said.

“All we talked about was you.”

“You talked about me?” he said.

“He started making all kinds of accusations.”

“What kind of accusations?” he said.

“About your motives, about what he thought you were really like.”

“I’m sure that wasn’t flattering,” he said.

“He accused me of being in love with someone else,” she said.

“With who?” he said.

“You. He said I was in love with you.”

“How could he say that?” he said.

“I’ve been thinking about that a lot lately, and I guess it’s true,” she said.

He turned and looked at her a moment, then he opened the car door and put the cello in the back seat of his car. When he turned back to her, she was standing there in front of him, waiting.

“I have a house in Huntingdon Valley,” he said. “It’s a lot different from apartment living. Do you think you would like living in the suburbs?”

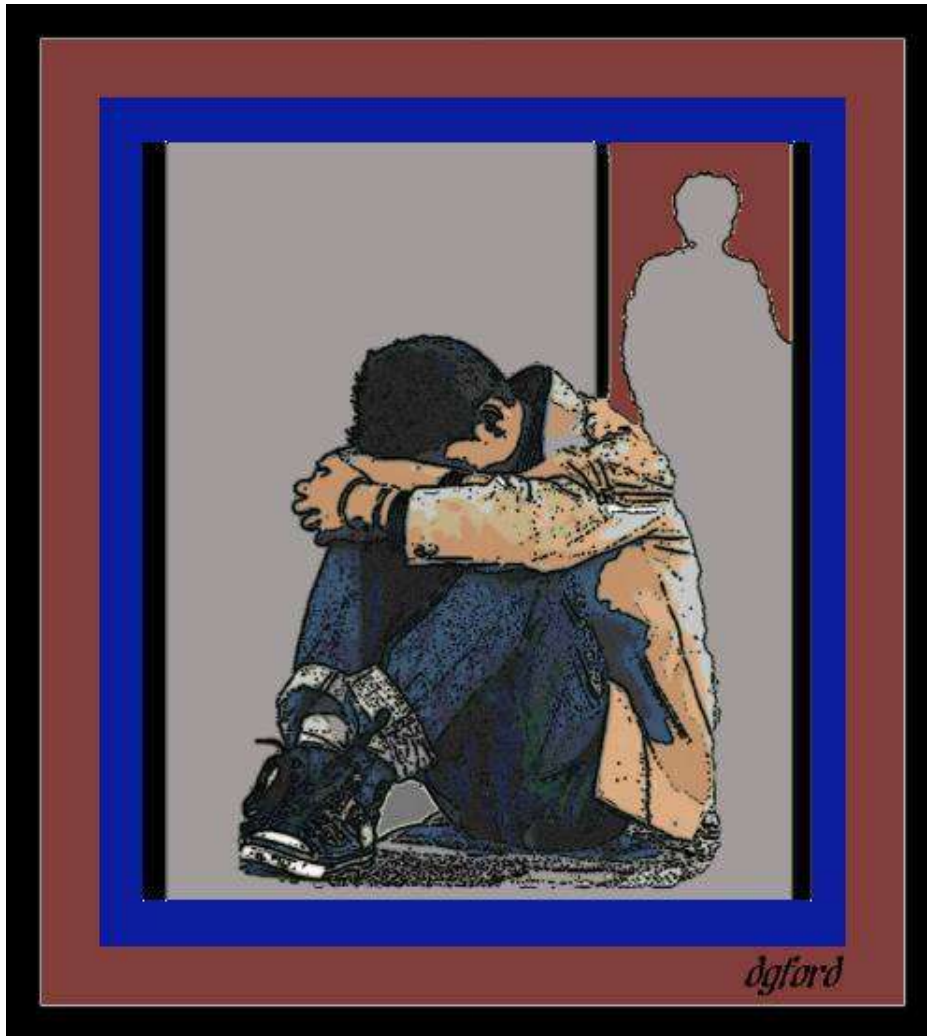
“Norman,” she said. “I would love it,” and reached up to kiss him, knocking off his hat as she did, sending it tumbling down Broad Street. An old bum, crossing the street at the Spruce Street intersection, bent over and picked it up. He dusted off the snow and put it on his head. It was a perfect fit.

“Magic,” he said.

*The End*

## **[In Search of Another](#)**

By **[Don Ford](#)**



*That person on the street is someone's relative.*

*In Search of Another is dedicated to both the caring and the homeless.*

In his place on a quiet block  
There lived a very simple man.  
His walk like steps to music,  
He always had a Master plan.

He thought of others constantly,  
And how each lived their life.  
His kindness never overlooked,  
As he helped a hundred souls in strife.

So many tired and all alone –  
On corners and in alleys.  
He never asked them questions,  
But saw the answer in their eyes.

They captured his attention sure  
And sparks were shooting everywhere.  
Looking closely in each face,  
This man came only here to share.

He'd give in words of comfort,  
Hum some melodies or tunes.  
In simple words of wisdom;  
In honesty he spoke the truth.

He'd tell some jokes and stories  
To lift their ravaged bodies.  
From the pains of their addictions,  
He brought his simple remedies.

But most just pass these people by.  
Who cares their lives are brokenness.  
This is their bare existence then  
Draped in filth and ugliness.

Some will look the other way  
Or cross the street in silence.  
Why would we pity – share our means;  
Why would we even turn a glance?

They sit and while away their days.  
Avoiding contact just seems right  
It's also not polite to stare,  
Let shadow folks pass in the night.

Again our quiet hero comes –  
Wrapped in the things he shares.  
Unfolding all his goods to them,  
Who sit in squalor and despair.

But then one day the kind man died,  
And hundreds died as well.  
No one to understand their pains;  
No one to sit with tales to tell.

This story doesn't have to end,  
If others will get up,  
And leave the comfort of their block –  
To visit, share, and lift a cup.

*I wrote this poem on my way to the coffee shop. I literally stopped my car along the side of the road to pen these lines.*

*When an inspiration hits me, I have to capture it before it leaves my thoughts, and while it is fresh and still warm.*

\*\*\*

## Chris

By J Giambrone

She said "Okay."

"Yeah?"

She was 19, light blue wolf eyes, bangs cut across her forehead and medium length light brown hair. She stood 5'10" and slender, with a childlike oval face. She wore broken-in jeans most of the time and a similar denim jacket.

I'd met her in physics lab. We worked at the same table, part of an experiment group. I had previously seen her strolling around the small urban campus, but I had never enough nerve to approach her, or the right combination of words.

There were only about a dozen hot females at that entire engineering school, and she was one of them. But I was debilitatingly shy.

I didn't understand why she'd agreed to get some food with me until later. Our campus featured a bar and grill next door to the cafeteria, and the drinking age was 19 back then. Over cheeseburgers and glasses of domestic light beer we first learned about each other.

I was entranced. Things seldom went so smoothly for me, and this was the kind of unexpected development that I dreaded: small talk.

Her voice rolled with round, deep tones for a girl. Her wit was sharp, and she was extremely self-actualized.

"What are you majoring in?"

"Computer science," I said. "And you?"

"Civil engineering."

"Building bridges and stuff like that?" I was stunned, as nearly everyone I knew was either going for electrical engineering or comp-sci. I'd never met a civil engineer.

"You should take the materials lab," she said, and her face lit up. "There's this giant machine that rips things apart, like concrete, steel, wood. Stress tests."

"Oh wow."

"You'd definitely like it."

"What's it look like, the machine?"

She described it, but I couldn't picture it from what she said.

I did ask her why she agreed to come with me.

She smiled, and without humor she said, "I liked your belt buckle."

My novelty silver buckle from the boardwalk, from a stand adjacent to where I'd worked last summer, the silver text on red said: Sex, Drugs & Rock and Roll. That seemed to intrigue her, although it was partially worn in jest. I didn't really do drugs, and I sure wasn't getting much sex. It was just a saying.

My appearance featured hair down past my shoulders, and so that may have helped sell the rock image. I played guitar, but I was far from a bad boy, and so maybe she saw right through me.

Chris or Chrissy, short for Christina; I learned more about her over the next few months. Her family was Swedish. She drove a red Saab sedan that had a stick shift transmission, which she preferred. She claimed manual transmissions saved gas.

I had never driven one before, and she taught me how to drive it. A good teacher, she didn't mind if I ground the gears a bit or stalled it at a red light. She was just happy to be helpful and useful. In that regard, she was special, atypical, a keeper. What a smile she had, very girl next door. Her attitude remained patient, analytical yet decisive. Her unforgettable bright blue eyes seemed lifted from a Scandinavian wolf.

Chris' part-time job was cleaning out horse stables. In exchange they let her ride some of the horses. She trained them too, held private lessons for richer kids, which earned her good extra money.

A new world to me, when I approached the big stable in tow Chris warned me not to go inside, because of the stink. She was correct on that one. I poked my head in to be sure.

Watching her train an Arabian as it trotted around in a circle jolted me. She cracked a whip in the air to scare the horse. This was all very strange to me, and I felt detached for the rest of the day.

Chris exuded so much confidence and competence. She'd been kicked once, she said, and she showed me a permanent mark on her leg. Now she was deadly serious about it.

"Never ever get behind a horse," she warned me. "They could kill you. You ever see how much they weigh?" The impact left its mark on her, psychologically, and she was an even better trainer for it, she said.

I was her new pet now, and I followed her wherever she wanted to go, with open eyes, ecstatic just to be near her.

Chris' best friend, an older girl, smoker, tough girl, approved of me, surprisingly, after an initial meeting. Things turned interesting fast. The friend must have coached her from the shadows.

In the front seat of Chris' Saab, on a frigid ten degree December night, we parked just down the block from her house. Fogged up windows and lots of sloppy kissing. There, out of the dim halogen-lit night, my zipper was attacked, and I received a treat that I will not ever forget.

The following week something similar happened, this time inside her parents' house. The two of us remained on the couch in the living room after her parents trotted off to bed. I didn't ask for, nor expect, anything of the sort.

But she was aflame with headstrong recklessness, and, I suppose, the power to do whatever she wanted. I actually tried to stop her, seeing how her father was asleep down the hallway with the bedroom door open. I'd just met her parents hours before, and here we were, his daughter's head bobbing rapidly up and down in my lap. She was unstoppable sometimes, and now I was living the vida loca.

But Chris liked to drink hard alcohol and quite a lot of it. Southern Comfort to be exact, we drank and drank every single time we met with perfect consistency. I may have driven the long haul home in the red zone, several times. It was preordained that our first stop was some liquor store, even the war theater ones in downtown Newark. It didn't help that my alcoholic friend hung about; he fancied her too.

On our big weekend ski trip, in the mountains of Pennsylvania, what I thought would be a magical romantic triumph turned sloshed. In the hotel's dining suite, in public, we could barely stay seated in our chairs. We stumbled back down the hallways to our room, and I asked her why we drank so much?

A picture congealed. Chris had some kind of psychological hypersensitivity. Getting near her panties was an unscalable wall, because she physically cringed and contorted. I tried to pleasure her, literally, but she was so ticklish and tender that she spasmed away repeatedly. She couldn't let me get near.

We fumbled on the bed like Sid and Nancy, but her sexual terror was so entrenched that it was simply not going to happen. She resumed drinking more Southern Comfort or berry brandy, and then she threw up.

The next morning Chris was always fine, fit, energized. Prior to obliterating herself with firewater she was young and crisp. We skied. We played tennis. We

worked out in the weight room, and we discussed our ambitions and our plans for the upcoming year. It was like our insane bedroom encounter had never happened. We never spoke of it.

Chris and I saw each other at the campus quite a bit. I lived in the dormitory that semester, a barren cinderblock prison fortress. School was busy, and I realized how little I liked programming computers, with the endless series of bugs that somehow crept into my code.

Valentine's Day rolled around, and Chrissy appeared at my dorm's door with champagne and chocolates.

After an hour and a half it seemed it was never going to happen, but she had made a conscious choice that tonight was the night. Her night. As always I was completely taken by surprise. She liked to be the one in the driver's seat. She had, however, forgotten the additional latex ingredient. There were no condoms to be found at that time of night on campus.

Chris insisted on sealing the deal, and the idea was for me to pull out at the last moment. The game was on. It seemed like hours for her to relax enough to allow me inside. She definitely had some kind of psychological block, and I couldn't know the cause.

But we did it, finally. It hurt her, and perhaps that fear of pain was what had caused her overreactions. This Valentine's encounter was our one and only copulation, but unforgettable nonetheless.

I did not pull out as planned. It was quite impossible at that moment, or so I rationalized it. That may be what soured things between us, but she never mentioned a word, and I was never even certain if she actually knew.

After Valentine's, instead of bringing us closer together the idea of sex had the opposite effect. Asked again, Chris responded with pain, how it was too off-putting. She snapped at me on the way back from the tennis courts outside the dormitory, like I had intentionally hurt her, which was certainly not the case. This fit with her alcohol obsession to dull the nerves. It also constrained me, locked me inside an uncertain place.

From that point on we were together, but the feelings were less extreme. It was more like going through the obligatory motions when we strolled the campus or studied. I certainly wanted to repeat the Valentine's Day scenario, with technical improvements. Condoms were secured but never used. This primal denial drove me toward obsession over Chris. I thought of her constantly. I couldn't think of anything else.

I loved her, and I told her so.

Her response sounded vague, non-committal. Words indecipherable. The moment passed, like vapors.

Deluding myself, I waited patiently for some sign of improvement in our relationship. The entire culture was based on these affairs working themselves out, romantic moments that suddenly blossomed, happy endings.

Summer of '86 came fast, and both of us headed to the seashore, only to different beaches in different towns. I saw her less and less. With her summer life three towns up the coast she didn't call, didn't come by. It seemed like a shipwreck. I was lost in limbo with a strong suspicion that I'd been discarded.

One night another girl came into the story, the girlfriend of some lowlife stoner acquaintance. I was living my own scatterbrained summer at my parents' shore house. Her name was Debbie. Her short blonde curls smelled exactly like grape juice as she

rode atop me one night, cheating on her boyfriend, and me betraying Chris. It was quite a different experience than Valentine's in every imaginable way.

The animal side ascended, and it just happened, a one night indiscretion. I was weak. I had no longing for Debbie, whom I'm not sure I even liked. It was just the opportunity for sex. We sweat and rolled and that damned grape stench will remain always imprinted in my mind.

Then the guilt set in.

No word from Chrissy for a couple of more weeks. This was sort of a test to see if she'd call. Did I even have anything to feel guilty over? It was July, and our one major sexual encounter had come and gone on February 14th. The reality and my fantasy existed on different planes.

Eventually I drove up to Asbury. Chris said that she would meet me in one of the casinos, where she was working. A loud gaudy painted horse carousel twirled.

Mulling over my plight, I stepped forward, and I saw her in a crowd. She stood in a group with her best friend and several other summer friends, smiling, happy. Always in her faded blue denim getup, Chris was consistent and predictable. As in a play, I stepped forward to face her. She hugged me lightly, nothing special, part of her warm demeanor. Her slender body felt immaculate just then. I remembered how perfect she felt in my arms, physically. Her back gently curving beneath my palms. Her slender frame retreated a step. She gazed inquisitively back at me.

I felt the pangs. "Can we talk about something?" I said.

"Okay." She followed me across the casino to a darker, quieter spot.

"I just want to say I miss you. You haven't come down to see me at all."

"I'm just busy working," she said. It was then my fantasy perception began to align with the reality. No one is that busy in the summer, at the beach, with no classes.

Chris' soft, now tanned oval face retained its childhood innocence, although I knew her a bit more intimately than that. I knew she wasn't always working, and I lived close enough to visit if she had the slightest inclination to come see me.

"I um." The moment built, watching her standing there before me. Perhaps all that Catholic middle-school confession and religious propaganda had left hooks inside me. I considered whether or not to confess, right up to the end.

"I slept with another girl. It was just one time. I don't even know what happened."

The shock wave hit her, like one of those event horizons. Perhaps it didn't mean all that much. Perhaps I didn't. Maybe it wounded her pride. She probably thought herself in a class above all that ugliness. I'd not seen Chris jolt and snap-to like that before. Of course her eyes were the last thing I can recall seeing.

"That's it." She turned and marched off back to her people across the casino floor.

"Wait. Chris. No. It was nothing ..."

Whenever you have to say it was nothing, then it was something. I'd entered a new uncomfortable place, one that I never thought I'd inhabit. Like I was dyed in invisible ink that could only be viewed under certain lighting conditions, this new reality weighed heavily on me. I wasn't sure who I was anymore, what type of personality, all the usual psychobabble and guilt trip stuff. The loss of what I believed I had with Chris really hammered me.

I did see Chrissy one last time, a couple of months later. I don't know how I found out where she was working, at some engineering firm as an intern or something. I parked in the lot, and I waited for her in sight of her red Saab. At lunch time she emerged, which was her usual routine.

She spotted me sitting in my own car. She actually smiled. Wearing a light aqua summer dress, dressed for business, as she strolled toward my driver side window, Chris looked even more stunning than I had remembered.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m just so sorry,” I said.

She paused with uncomfortable recognition.

And I broke down. I wanted her back more than anything else in the world.

“Tell me what I can do?” I couldn’t even see straight, and the world became confused and blurry. I apologized repeatedly, trying to come up with some combination of words to hit undo.

There was nothing. Nothing to put something broken back together again. I made a fool of myself, essentially, stalking her at work, begging in tears for forgiveness, dredging up my betrayal and what could have been. She nervously retreated from my car.

“Don’t come here.”

I think of Chrissy now and then, usually focusing on the good parts of the story. I have no idea whatever became of her, but she was strong, confident, attractive and capable. I hope she’s doing well.

Such is love.

*The End*

## [First Love](#)

By [JR Ingrisano](#)

Is first love innocent or just naïve? Or are those just two words for the same thing? You trust. You believe. The word “forever” doesn’t sound stupid, and you use it a lot. You identify with that one, special love song. You don’t fuck; you make love. Even if it is awkward and fumbly - and it’s always awkward and fumbly - it’s also beautiful, romantic; mostly because you don’t know any better. Every touch, kiss, lick, and brush of lips on a breast is a heart-speeding adventure, pure joy. Forever. You don’t think of new and exotic and bizarre ways to satisfy each other, because just touching and kissing and discovering how boy parts fit warmly against, around, and inside girl parts is new and exotic enough.

That was Sam and me, right out of high school.

Imagine life without a setback, without a scar, without a regret. Dreams made sense. The world was nice, not dangerous or threatening. It was waiting for us, waiting to serve us. We’d curl up on her parents’ couch in the den in the dark late at night, well into the early hours of the morning. We’d make out and make love, sometimes lip licking kissing was more than enough, with one ear listening for the sound of parental footsteps on the landing, one over-the-shoulder eye alert for a darkening shadow in the doorway. Mostly, though, we’d just talk and touch, and hold each other. We had no idea.

We didn’t even drink all that much or smoke happy weed. We didn’t need it. We were children in love. We talked of running away, yes, sailing away, together. Rocking gently on a boat.

*The End*



## [The Edge of a Cliff](#)

By [Anjana Pradeep](#)

She stood there, at the edge of a cliff.

Green was all she saw. Miles and miles of continuous canopy, like it was all just one big tree. For days she stood there, waiting for a sign. A sign from the universe to tell her it was a mistake.

*What if there is no after life?*

*What if there is no heaven?*

*Or even worse, what if there is a heaven!*

*Will he still love her after all that she put him through?*

*Maybe he found someone better in heaven ...* she chuckled at her own silly thought.

He would never do that to her.

On this day two years ago, she stood in front of a tall shelf filled with old books as her mind secretly missed the big libraries in the city. "Twelfth night, or what you will, by Shakespeare" were the golden letters on brown leather that gave her butterflies in her stomach. The old man that owned this book died recently, and now his son had taken over. She went to the counter to pay for the book and there he was in all his glory. He smiled at her, his blue eyes as deep as the ocean. Little did she know that he would be the one to make her walls come down.

But now, robbed of all the joys in life, she stood there, at the edge of a cliff. Waiting for a sign. A sign to tell her this was a mistake.

*He must be waiting for me in heaven.* Her mind wandered again.

It was 2 am in the morning. She was throwing things at him, yelling at him for coming home late and drunk.

"It was an office party and I just couldn't refuse. I am sorry honey. I swear I tried to reach here as soon as I could," he mumbled.

"Yes, 2 am is very early! Did you forget that all our friends were coming over? Did you even for a minute consider the embarrassment you were putting me through by not showing up at *our* anniversary dinner?!" she burst into tears. "This is not the first time! Why do you keep doing this to me? I can't take this anymore. I think we need to go our separate ways."

"But honey ..." he started.

"For God's sake just leave me alone!" she screamed, overcome with anger and despair.

He took his keys and walked towards the door. "I am sure you'll change your mind in the morning" he said.

He never came back.

She stood there at the edge of a cliff. Holding the paper that had the report of the accident. The autopsy showed he was drunk and hence everyone blamed him for his own death; some people went to the extent of saying that people like him deserved to die. What do they know? If only she had listened to him. If only she had swallowed her pride for a second. He would have been here, holding her in his arms.

A cold wind brushed her grief-stricken face. She was scared to go, but there was no sign that said she was wrong.

"It's the right thing to do. It's the only thing to do. I can't live without him. I know he is waiting for me." She let the wind carry her down.

The bright light was almost blinding. It was impossible to see. She felt his presence next to her. She opened her eyes. He smiled at her, his blue eyes as deep as the ocean.

*The End*

## [The Search](#)

By [Esma Race](#)

Illustration by [Veronica Castle](#)



“I’m sorry, Mum.” I spoke in the silence, whilst tracing my mother’s face with my forefinger through the glass of her photograph - “but I have decided to find Dad.”

I knew I would not receive any answer, at least not on my side of the Pearly Gates. My father had left my mum and me when I was only four years old, so my memories were extremely sketchy to say the least. However, I can clearly remember being lifted up in his arms, and looking into his bright blue eyes as he said: “I love you very much, Kathryn.”

I have been playing this memory over in my mind for the last sixteen years, and holding on to the hope that one day he would turn up again. Mother did not talk about him and she had destroyed all photos of him. It wasn’t until her death six months ago that I realised that my original surname was Lorimer, and not Connolly, which was what my mother had changed it to after Dad had left her.

Now, knowing his correct name was Michael Lorimer gave me real hope of tracing him. With all the other things in my life calm and organised, I now felt I could concentrate on my search.

I began by trawling social media and the internet in general, all to no avail. I then decided to email or phone everybody I could find with the surname of “Lorimer”. To my great joy I received a reply from an elderly lady called Eleanor Driver, who claimed to have known a Joe Lorimer, who she believed to have been my dad Michael’s father. She had no idea where my dad would be now, but she did remember that he had done an apprenticeship as an electrician. With this new

information, I started a new search for electricians within the area, and slowly worked outwards from a ten mile radius, to a twenty mile one, and so on. It took me exactly 12 months after my mother's demise to find Michael Lorimer, an electrician who was the right age. Was it my dad? I would have to contact him, but could I pluck up the courage to call him? What should I say ...? *Hi, Dad, this is Kathryn, where have you been for the last sixteen years?* Instead, what I did say was: "Hello, is that Mr Michael Lorimer?" And when he replied, "It is," I said: "I think you are my dad, I'm Kathryn." After a moment of silence, which made me afraid, he said: "Thank God!"

That was the beginning of me getting to know my father. We emailed each other all the time and spoke on the phone almost every day. I learned from him that it was not he who had been unfaithful to her, but the other way round, and when the affair had come to an end my mother tried to get Dad back, but he was having none of it. By then he had met Janet, and she was pregnant. So, yes, wow! I had a half-brother called Jacob. I spoke to him too, and found him easy to talk to, and he could not wait to meet me.

Dad said that he had written to me many times, but all the cards and letters had been returned by my mother. He said that he would fetch some of them for me to look at when he came to visit. We arranged the visit on a Saturday in May; Dad would come up by train and I would meet him at the station. I was very excited, and couldn't wait.

The day was warm and sunny, and I dressed in cream linen trousers and a matching top; there was no need for a coat, so I took a small leather bag, which I wore across my chest.

As I walked through the village towards the train station, where I was to meet my dad, I thought how lucky I was. I owned the house that I had inherited from my mother; I had a steady job, which I enjoyed, as a receptionist at the local Cottage Hospital. Not to mention, last but not least, the rather gorgeous Sean, my regular boyfriend, who worked on his father's farm "Weaver's End", which lay to the west of the village.

Oh yes, everything was quite perfect. What could possibly go wrong? Well, I was about to find out.

As I approached the bridge which spanned the River Dower, I could see at once that something was amiss. The railing on the left side of the bridge was broken, and two Special Constables were peering over the side into the river below. They appeared to be panicking.

I began to run. "What's the matter?" I called out, but then I could see what the matter was: there was a person struggling to keep afloat in the water below the broken bridge.

"Are you not going in?" I said to the constable closest to me. It was a woman.

"I haven't been trained for this situation," she said, and looked over at her companion, a spotty-faced young man, who said to me: "I am going to do a risk assessment."

This was all too much for me. I kicked off my shoes, shouting to them to ring 999, and flung myself into the water.

This move was not quite as foolish as you may think, I was familiar with both the bridge and the river; as teenagers, we village children had leapt from the bridge and swum in the river on hot summer days. Also I had a Lifesaving Certificate which I had earned from the swimming baths in town when I was at college.

Now, I came to the surface and looked around for the person I had seen struggling to stay afloat in the water. To my horror, they appeared to have lost

consciousness, and were face-down in the water. I grabbed them and struck out strongly towards the bank. With the help of the two Special Constables I heaved the person onto dry land.

If I had expected the constables to do CPR I was to be disappointed. They looked so helpless that I began to work on the man myself, and only stopped when the paramedics arrived to take over.

Then reality struck me. I was late for the train, I was soaking wet, the bag containing my phone was soaking. I had no way of ringing my dad. So I began to run towards the station in the hope that he would have waited for me: but the platform was quite empty. I was in despair, and sat down shivering on the bench outside the station. That is where Sean found me ten minutes later.

He was driving past in the farm's pick-up. He wrapped me up in an old blanket, which smelled of dogs, sheep and other things, the origin of which I'd rather not know; and he drove me home. Once there, he ran me a hot bath, gave me a brandy, and whilst I sat in the hot, fragrant, bubbly water he found me a pair of warm pyjamas and a fluffy housecoat to wear.

When I went back downstairs, I opened my laptop and found Dad's mobile number, but the only response was "number unobtainable". So I sent him an email, and that was bounced back as "undelivered".

I started to cry then. "He doesn't want to see me now," I sobbed to Sean.

"I am sure that isn't true," said Sean. "Wait till the morning and try again." Then he added: "I need to get the pick-up back to the farm now, but I can come back in the car."

"No, no, it's OK," I said quickly. "You have been fantastic, but I'm really shattered now. I'm going to get some sleep. It's work tomorrow."

I didn't go to bed right away though. Instead I sat down and wrote my dad a letter explaining why I had not been at the station to meet him that afternoon. Feeling better when the letter was finished, I finally went to bed, and fell fast asleep.

I posted the letter to my Father next morning, stopping off at the Post Office on my way to work.

Once behind my desk at the Cottage Hospital reception, I settled back in my chair and switched on my monitor.

Then, I gasped, as I read what was logged on the screen. It read *To be discharged at 10 a.m.: Mr Michael Lorimer, into the care of his son, Mr Jacob Lorimer.*

I leaped to my feet: it was already 10-05. I ran towards the main entrance and burst through the double doors. I looked across the car park and saw two men walking slowly towards the rows of cars.

"Dad!" I shouted, at the top of my voice; then: "Michael!"

They both turned round and stared at me, as realisation dawned on them.

"Kathryn!" my dad said, as I flung myself into his arms. "I'm so sorry I didn't wait for you at the station," he apologised: "I caught an earlier train, went for a walk, and nearly drowned. I leaned over the bridge and it gave way, and I ended up in the water."

It took me a few seconds to process this information. Then I looked from one to the other and said: "I saved you!"

Dad held me tight.

"I love you, Kathryn," he said.

"I love you too, Dad," I said.

Then I hugged Jacob close and said: "I really love having a brother!"

"I will have to make up for all your missed birthday presents," Dad said.

I thought of my ruined linen suit, leather bag and mobile phone.  
“I’ll make a list!” I said.

*The End*

## **Mr Ghost Man**

**By Patrick M Shanahan**

It was late summer and the children were restless for one last exciting adventure before school started the following week. Five-year-old Ashley listened intently as the older kids discussed daring plans to top off the summer vacation.

“We could soap the school windows,” volunteered one.

“How about egging the principal’s house?” another suggested.

These ideas were dismissed when the consequences of those actions were discussed. All agreed that it would be an extremely long school year with the teachers punishing the whole school unless the guilty parties confessed.

The group of seven sat in silence for a while, when the unthinkable was proposed: sneak up on Haunted Hill and get the Ghost Man to chase them. Most of the children had never seen the old man and some believed him to be only a mythical character created from folklore. Since Ghost Man never did business in the nearby town and picked up his mail infrequently, and only late at night, sightings of him were as rare as seeing Big Foot.

Silence greeted the idea, as each had private visions of the haunted house that sat on top of a high hill just outside of town. Ashley turned over tales of the mysterious place in her mind. On top of “Haunted Hill” stood a huge three story mansion that was well over one hundred years old and badly in need of paint and repair. Some of the porch railings were missing and all of the first floor windows were boarded up.

The story passed down among the children was that Mr. Ghost Man’s mother died many years ago in the house after a brief illness. The old widow’s dying request was to see her only child once again before she died, but the son was a seaman away on a long voyage and didn’t return in time. When he finally came home his mother was long dead and he turned into a bitter hermit, avoiding contact with the outside world as much as possible. Rumor stated that his bitterness stemmed from the fact that no one even bothered trying to contact him about his mother’s illness and subsequent passing.

On occasion, strange organ music would permeate the night air from the dimly lit parlor where rumor stated the old woman had died, causing many to believe that she returned at these times looking for her long lost son.

The children discussed the plan and finally agreed that they would bring bags of crab apples and bombard the house until the Ghost Man came out and chased them.

An hour later they were sneaking up “Haunted Hill” with each holding a bag of crimson apples. Frequent stops were made and finally close to the old house they lay in the tall grass listening, but all they heard was Stoner’s dog barking and whining. Overgrown evergreens and bushes hid the entire first floor from view leaving only the two top floors in sight. It was the closest any of them had ever been to the house and it looked even eerier up close. Huddling twenty feet from the shrubs, the children spoke in whispered tones.

“We’ll dash for the bushes, spread out, and when I give the signal, open fire,” the leader instructed.

Ashley dared closer than anyone and observed the heavy basement door with the faded old black Dodge parked close by. When the Ghost Man came after them it would have to be through that door since the rest of the entrances were boarded over.

The signal was given and the apples flew. Ashley stood with the bag of apples at her feet and one in her hand, but she never threw it. Apples flew like missiles and bounced off the old house littering the ground, but the Ghost Man didn't appear. Pretty soon the children began yelling, "Hey Mr. Ghost Man ... we brought you a present. We're not afraid of you Mr. creepy Ghost Man ... come out and scare us."

Standing bravely in the open, they continued shouting and began throwing small stones since they exhausted their supply of apples, all except Ashley, who was still behind the bush clutching her first apple. The other six were only feet from the house and never saw the tall bearded figure, dressed in an old sailor coat and black sea hat, as he called out from behind them, "Looking for me?"

None of the children even turned to see the Ghost Man. Instead they ran to the side yard and disappeared into the tall brush, all except Ashley who dropped her apple and ran a short distance before stepping into a hole, turning her ankle. As she lay on the ground the man stood over her. She tried to scream but no sound came out. The old man squatted down as Ashley started to get up. When she was on her feet she tried to run but again fell to the ground crying out in pain, "Oww".

She looked at the bearded figure and pleaded, "Please don't hurt me, Mr. Ghost man."

"What makes you think I'm going to hurt you? Why do you kids want to harm me? This property is posted 'no trespassing', can't you read?"

"No, I'm only five. I'll learn next year, but I can almost tell time," she offered.

He pulled out a worn pocket watch. "Okay, what time is it?"

Ashley stared intently at the watch. "I think it's a quarter past twelve thirty," she said.

The Ghost Man mocked a smile, "I guess your older friends can't read or tell time either ... 'cause it's about time you brats stop harassing me."

Ashley looked at the ground feeling ashamed and didn't reply.

"Why do you kids bother me? I don't bother nobody, so why don't you leave me be? See those windows? ... broken years ago. Maybe your folks were involved, who knows," he said. "They ransacked the house too; some of my most cherished possessions were stolen. You kids been taunting me for years, I just wanna know why?"

"Honest, Mr. Ghost Man, I don't know why."

"Why do you call me Ghost Man? I have a name, you know."

Ashley decided to tell the story of "Haunted Hill" as she knew it and was never interrupted as she repeated just what tradition told.

"Let's have a look at that," the Ghost Man said as he rolled up her pant leg and gently probed her swelling ankle. "I'm not a doctor but I was a corpsman in the Navy. It looks like a simple sprain. You're lucky, young lady. I'll get some ice and then put an elastic bandage on it. You should be as good as new in a couple of days."

He carried Ashley the short distance to the basement door where he sat her on the steps while he went inside and filled a small towel with ice cubes. After twenty minutes of icing, he bandaged her ankle. Ashley stood and took several short steps, testing the support. "It feels good, sir, thank you."

"You like chocolate chip cookies?"

Ashley grinned her reply. The old man disappeared inside the basement leaving the door wide open revealing a large work shop with numerous wooden toys in various stages of construction visible.

Several minutes later, as Ashley ate home-made cookies and the old man smoked his pipe, she remarked, "The toys are beautiful."

"Hmm. You're the first visitor I've had in thirty-six years, and you came here to hurt me. I wish folks would just stay away. I don't need anyone, not anymore."

"That's not true," protested Ashley. "Everybody needs friends."

"What for? Nobody around here even knows my name. Even at the post office I'm only a box number."

"I'll be your friend. I'd like to know your name."

"Why?"

"Because you're nice and not like the big kids say."

He slumped his shoulders and spoke, "Elkison, Charles Elkison. Sounds funny, I haven't heard my name in many years."

"My name is Ashley Shaw." She hesitated for a moment. "Why do you live like this? I mean you're a nice man and you should have friends."

A strange look came over his face. "This earth is a mean place, girlie, people just use each other for their own means. I know, I've been all over the world."

The sound of crunching gravel bounced off the old house as they both watched a city police car pull into the yard. Mrs. Shaw rushed from the car and ran to Ashley, hugging her tightly. "Ash, are you alright, did this man hurt you?"

"No, mother, Mr. Elkison is a nice person."

The police officer spun the old sailor around and cuffed his hands behind his back. "I didn't do nothing wrong," he protested. "These kids ..."

"Shut up, grandpa. No, you didn't do anything wrong, just kidnapped a five year old kid"

Ashley pulled away from her mother, "Mr. Elkison fixed my ankle ... see." She pointed at her bandaged ankle and then explained the circumstances of the whole affair. The policeman uncuffed Mr. Elkison. "Just watch your step, old timer."

Mrs. Shaw thanked the police officer and tried to apologize to Mr. Elkison.

He simply turned his back and started to walk through the basement door until Ashley's voice stopped him.

"Wait, Mr. Elkison, please, don't go away." Ignoring her, he walked into the basement slamming the door behind him. As the police car drove away Mrs. Shaw knocked hard on the door until it opened.

"What?"

"You are a mean old man; look what you've done." She turned to face Ashley who was wiping tears away from her eyes.

Mr. Elkison swung the door wide open, looking past Mrs. Shaw at the little girl. "I'm sorry," he relented, "... come in."

Ashley and her mother visited the old recluse for nearly two hours during which time he played the ancient pipe organ that sat in a far corner of the basement.

"Mother loved the music," he explained. "And I guess I hope she is still listening when I play."

"It's very beautiful music, sir," Mrs. Shaw exclaimed.

Ashley looked at the toys in various stages of construction. "Mr. Elkison, do you make toys for a living?"

He picked up a wooden bi-plane, looked at it, and then spoke. "I make toys in my spare time for underprivileged children. My Father started the tradition and when I

came back from the sea, the stuff was still here so I just kept it up. Christmas was always such a big thing for us.” He opened a drawer, producing a photo album, and as he flipped the pages explained, “This place used to be called Christmas Hill. Mother loved Christmas and always decorated the house, inside and out, as you can see.”

Picture after picture of the house in its Christmas decor filled the album. A sad look came over the old sailor’s face as he looked at one picture. “This is me with mother when I was about four. See that bronze mantel clock behind us? Father brought it from Sweden and it had a hidden compartment that only he and Santa Claus knew about. Every year he would put my Christmas list in the secret compartment and like magic, on Christmas morning some of the toys on the list would appear.”

Mrs. Shaw looked at him. “What a wonderful story, do you still have the clock?”

He shook his head no, “Vandals broke in years ago and took it.” He stared into space. “I’d give just about anything to have it back, but by now it’s probably destroyed.”

As they walked home that afternoon, Ashley questioned her mother, “Do you think the music that Mr. Elkison plays is what scares everybody?”

“Yes, Ash,” Mrs. Shaw replied, “I’m sure of it.”

That night as Ashley’s mother lay in bed her mind retraced the years and the story that she grew up with about “Haunted Hill.” Older boys had vandalized the empty house while the old man was at sea and the leader drew a treasure map to the location of the stolen goods. That took place over thirty years earlier and the boy who drew the map had long since moved away. As legend had it, the loot was still hidden, and guarded by the ghost of the old woman. After visiting with the old recluse, Carol Shaw decided that a debt was owed to him, and that night she made herself a promise: either she’d return the lost clock or find out what happened to it.

It proved to be a difficult task. Not finding those involved, but rather getting them to talk about it. Somehow rumor had attached a curse to the stolen property and even as adults the perpetrators wanted nothing to do with it. Carol set a goal of Christmas Eve to retrieve the stolen goods and to return them to Mr. Elkison. Although not involved himself, her brother knew the thieves and with a great deal of prompting got one to meet with Mrs. Shaw.

“First, Mr. Smith, thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I would really like to put this matter to rest and I hope you will be kind enough to point me in the right direction. What can you tell me about what may have happened to Mr. Elkison’s property?”

“That’s his name? All I ever heard was Mr. Ghost Man.”

“Please, help me. Do you know anything about a map?”

He reached into his pocket and produced a yellowed “treasure map”. “Ralph Sims was our leader and he gave each of us this.” He handed the map to Carol. “This is all I know. Ralph moved away a long time ago and nobody knows what happened to him.”

Carol Shaw read the clues out loud:

*“This tree only shines at night  
When it’s four o’clock the way is seen  
Three giant steps and you’re almost there  
Go all the way East until the sky meets the ground  
Pull the handle and the treasure is yours.*

“Do you have any idea what any of this means?”



The man shook his head, “No, Ralph was a bit peculiar. He used to dress in black baggy clothes and wore a cape, like he was a dragon fighter, so it could mean anything. I’ll say this, that treasure is still around somewhere, but I doubt if it will ever be found, unless by accident. And if it is found, there’s that old woman’s ghost,” he warned.

“One more thing, Mr. Smith, did you boys have a club house or something like that, maybe a secret place?”

“Ralph lived on a farm with his gram. That whole place was kinda spooky. But no, we didn’t have a place other than the school yard.”

Nobody else involved would even talk about the deed so the clues Carol Shaw had would be all she had to work with. It was late September by this time and only three months away from Christmas. Carol turned her attention to the schoolyard and questioned the caretaker.

“Ma’am, I’ve been here a lot of years and I don’t ever remember seeing any wooden poles with lights on them. I think you’re right about the wood pole, but it’s not here.”

Her last hope was the farm Ralph Sims grew up on, but his family had moved away years before and the new owners had no idea about any light poles that may have been on the property. Carol spent countless hours walking the entire farm trying to fit the clues together, but always came up empty. Eventually word reached the townsfolk what she was doing, everyone, except Charles Elkison. Many of the people feared the myth and secretly hoped she’d stop her quest, but one old farmer, hearing of the search, paid her a visit.

“I remember that house. When I was a boy, each Christmas they decorated the grounds and most everybody for miles around would walk to the base of the hill and admire it. Everyone called the place Christmas Hill.”

“You remember that?”

“Of course, I may be old but I remember a lot about this town.”

“What about the Sims’ farm? Ever go out there?”

“Sure, Grandpa Sims was my Godfather. I spent a lot of time there when I was a boy.” The old man stroked his chin. “What’d you need to know?”

“Would you go out there with me? I’m hoping with your help we may shine a bit of light on this mystery.”

Later that afternoon they stood in the yard of the Sims’ farm. “It’s something here,” Carol said. “I can feel it. We’re close, but ...”

The man looked again at the clue. *This tree only shines at night.* “Of course, there was a yard light on a pole over there,” he said as he walked several feet, stopped, and read the next clue. “Now, *when it’s four o’clock the way is seen.*” He looked at his watch as he found a long stick, stuck it in the ground, and held it straight up. “It’s ten after four. See, look at the shadow.”

Carol couldn’t hold her excitement. “It points right at the barn.” They raced into the old building. “*Three giant steps* must mean three stories, but this is only a barn and a loft,” said Carol.

The aging man grinned. “Some of us kids built a little club house up there, I’d forgotten about that but I’ll bet that’s what he means.”

They looked at the map and another clue. *Go all the way East until the sky meets the ground.* They looked at each other. “That’s it,” the old man said, “all the way to the back in the corner where the roof meets the floor.”

In a matter of moments they crouched in the corner looking for some sort of handle.

*Pull the handle and the treasure is yours.*

Eventually they found a bent-over rusty spike and pried it up. They were both speechless as they looked down at the moldy and rotted booty, but their attention was mostly centered on the discolored brass clock.

The next day Carol Shaw took the clock to a shop specializing in antiques. The woman handled the old clock carefully and after removing the time piece from the frame exclaimed, "I'm afraid the works are damaged beyond repair. Oxidation has welded the entire movement into nothing more than a heavy paper weight."

For emphasis she banged the clock on the counter and pointed at the pile of rust that lay there.

"Can it be replaced?" Carol wondered.

"Yes, but the face will be the problem. I wouldn't even begin to know where to look for a new one." She gently pried the rusted face from the clock and held it up. "Hmm, it looks solid enough, maybe we can send it to a shop that builds custom clocks and see if they can restore it. There's still enough paint and numerals left to show how it should look."

Carol picked up the case. "I'll bet this brass will clean up like new. Please see if you can have the face restored and fitted with a new movement."

Nearly two months later, on Christmas Eve, Carol Shaw and her daughter Ashley knocked on the basement door of the old house. Ashley held a brightly wrapped box trimmed with Christmas bows. When the heavy door opened Charles Elkison looked surprised. "What's this all about?" he wondered.

Ashley handed him the package. "Merry Christmas, Mr. Elkison." The old man took the package and stepped aside indicating for them to come in. He tried to hand the gift back to Mrs. Shaw but Ashley insisted that he open it. "It's really a special present. Mother said Santa left it at our house by mistake, so we brought it to you. Open it."

Mr. Elkison put the package on the table, looked at his visitors, slowly shaking his head, and then carefully unwrapped the box. "I haven't gotten a present in a long time," he said as he looked at Ashley.

When he took the refurbished clock and held it up, his eyes misted. "It's just like the one we had when I was a boy."

Mrs. Shaw spoke gently, "This is the one your family had."

With that the old man turned the clock over and pried the bottom plate off, revealing a small piece of tightly rolled yellowed paper. He carefully unfolded it, but most of it crumbled in his hands. He managed to turn over a large piece with writing and laid it on the table, carefully smoothing it with his hand. In a faded but legible child's writing it proclaimed "Charles' Christmas List."

He turned to mother and daughter, speaking in a soft voice that he hadn't used in years, "Thank you, this means a great deal to me."

That day Charles Elkison made it plain that his only wish now was to be left in peace, and after that day, he was. He never had another visitor and he was never again harassed by any children.

Many years later, after his death, the beneficiary of his estate, Children In Need, sold the property to a married couple with a large family who renovated the house and raised nine children there.

After the will was probated an attorney visited the now married Ashley and told the story of Charles Elkison. "He wanted you to have this," he said as he handed her the antique mantel clock, "and hoped someday you'd find the same joy that it brought to his family so many years ago. I think you should know about this man. He was an

inventor. He held patents on many candy wrapping machines that are still in use today. Mr. Elkison was very wealthy but he gave most of it away to charity.” The lawyer walked to the door and turned, “He was a good man, just a bit different, that’s all.”

The following week before Christmas, Ashley told her young son about the “Christmas Clock”.

“A long time ago a little boy named Charles would put his Christmas list to Santa in this secret place.”

She gently pried open the bottom plate showing the boy the hidden spot. Together they prepared the child’s first Christmas list and rolled it up as tight as a pencil. “Now, only Santa Claus knows about this,” Ashley stated as she tucked the note into the clock and reattached the plate, “and if you’re real good, maybe he’ll bring you some of the things on your list.” Ashley looked up toward the ceiling and whispered softly, “Thank you Mr. Elkison.”

*The End*

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## **FEAR**

By **Peter Jacob Streitz**

I fear I can’t see her  
I fear  
she doesn’t know I’m watching her  
I fear  
seeing and not understanding  
I fear believing I understand  
But misreading her  
I fear  
my desires hurting her  
I fear  
my lusts abandoning her  
I fear  
her smile, her beauty  
Being an impenetrable barrier  
Or blinders  
to me her and her me  
I fear  
diminishing her  
with strengths and weaknesses  
I fear  
blaspheming something so giving—  
with greed  
I fear  
wilfully disconnecting—  
with a sanctity on earth  
I fear  
she doesn’t know the depth

or sincerity of my fear  
I fear  
her not stamping—  
my earthly passport  
for an eternal life  
With her  
I fear my fears  
never truly witnessing her  
In my arms

\*\*\*

## **GENEROSITY**

By **Peter Jacob Streit**

GENEROSITY  
Of spirit  
Rivals love  
Generosity  
Of spirit  
Is immediate giving  
To strangers  
And the world  
Generosity  
Of spirit  
Is a flow  
So personal  
It embarrasses  
The recipient  
Or stuns them  
Silly  
Mesmerizes, maybe  
It's both seeing  
And feeling  
An existing chi  
Of the giver's  
Generosity  
Of spirit  
Being a comfort zone  
So huge  
It embraces  
Cats and kitties  
Of all makes  
Models  
And sizes  
Generosity  
Of spirit  
Melts hot  
With a coolness

So sublime  
It alters the forces  
of nature  
With a humanism  
So unique  
And individual  
It can't be exchanged  
Or replicated  
Or bound  
To a gospel  
Or political party  
Or the rationalization  
Of private wants  
And needs  
Generosity  
Of spirit  
Is a gift  
To the witness  
Free  
Of charge.

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## Crackers

By [Wesley Tallant](#)

She came to stay at Momma's house,  
No one knows from where.  
With big sad eyes and drooping tail,  
She needed love and care.

Mom gave her food and watched her eat,  
Then shooed her on her way;  
But the little dog had others plans,  
It was here that she would stay.

With four short legs, a body long,  
Her head was way too small.  
Perky ears and pointed snout,  
She came to be loved by all.

Black and tan was on her coat,  
A tail all tipped in white.  
A canine mutt for all to see,  
She was a funny sight.

A name was chosen to fit the dog,  
That wasn't quite the same,  
As she was different from other dogs,

So Crackers was her name.

She loved to have her belly scratched,  
And if you hit the spot,  
She would grin and let you know,  
And shake her leg a lot.

A window ledge beside the door,  
That over looked the drive,  
Was where that she would let Mom know,  
That someone had arrived.

She came and stayed for several years,  
And played from day to day;  
And through it all she had a ball,  
And usually got her way.

There was one more within the house,  
And Kevin was his name.  
He loved that Crackers more than most,  
On the floor they rolled in game.

To attend a dinner they had gone,  
And left her all alone.  
While they were gone the angels came,  
And took dear Crackers home.

If there's a place for dogs in heaven,  
Up in the sky so high,  
From a window ledge by the Pearly gate,  
She'll announce that you've arrived.

###

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*We hope you have enjoyed this anthology of stories. You can find out more about  
all the contributors and their other books below.*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

[Nkosi Ife Bandele](#)



Nkosi Ife Bandele has written screenplays and has two novels completed. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children. He is an adjunct literature professor at the New School's Eugene Lang College.

His first novel, *The Ape is Dead!*, will be published by Crimson Cloak Publishing: *The Ignored and the Despised* is an excerpt from it.

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An excerpt from his novel *The Ape is Dead!* is featured on the cover of Hobart Magazine, [http://www.hobartpulp.com/preview/web\\_features/huff-and-puff](http://www.hobartpulp.com/preview/web_features/huff-and-puff) . Excerpts also appear in *Crescendo City* and *great weather for MEDIA's "It's Animal but Merciful."*

Excerpts from unpublished novel *Scott Free* are featured in *Moonshot* magazine's issue #5 "ritornello" and currently in Akashic Books' THURSDAZE flash fiction series, <http://www.akashicbooks.com/if-you-leave-a-twenty-and-a-crackhead-alone-in-your-room-its-your-own-damn-fault-by-eshu-bandele/> .

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[Marleen S. Barr](#)



Marleen S. Barr is known for her pioneering work in feminist science fiction and teaches English at the City University of New York. She has won the Science Fiction Research Association Pilgrim Award for lifetime achievement in science fiction criticism.

<http://www.amazon.com/Marleen-Barr/e/B00LYWYSNI>

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By Marleen S. Barr:

*Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*, and *Genre Fission: A New Discourse Practice for Cultural Studies*. Barr has edited many anthologies and co-edited the science fiction issue of PMLA. She is the author of the novels *Oy Pioneer!* and *Oy Feminist Planets: A Fake Memoir*.



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## [Eva Bell](#)



A gynaecologist by profession but a writer and communicator at heart, Eva had to wait till she finally got off duty at 60 to seriously put pen to paper.

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In addition to a wealth of short stories for children and adults, she has written the following works:

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*When Shadows Flee*

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[Brian Bossetta](#)



Brian Bossetta is an actor, known for *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *Faith of My Fathers* (2005) and *The Sunchaser* (1996). He was born in New Orleans, where he fell in love with books at an early age. Inspired by the city's literary lore and tradition, he began writing short stories and poetry.

After graduating from Loyola University, he moved to New York where he worked in theatre as both a playwright and actor.

An avid runner, Brian enjoys playing the guitar and sharing literary ideas and talking books with his wife, Caroline, who is also a writer. They live in New York.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0098137/bio>

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Also by Brian Bossetta:

*The Piano Keys*

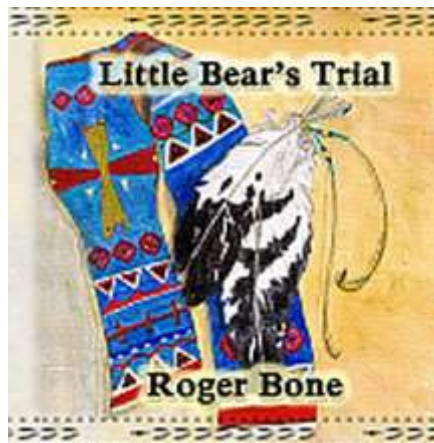
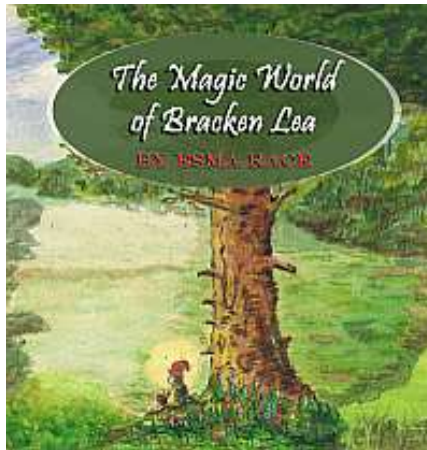
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### **Veronica Castle**

Veronica Castle lives in the High Pennines of northern England. She is the illustrator of *The Magic World of Bracken Lea* by [Esma Race](#), and *Little Bear's Trial* by Roger Bone, from Crimson Cloak Publishing.



*Links to more information:*

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**[Janice Lewis Clark](#)**



Janice Clark lives in the Pacific Northwest, where the morning fog drifting over the coastal hills could easily conceal dragons or any number of magical creatures. She and her brother share a home on partially wooded acreage, frequented by a variety of birds, deer, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, the neighbor's free-range chickens, and several cats who hunt the area. She does not currently own (or is not owned by) a cat or any other four-footed being. Frequently-resident grandchildren and a large garden are sufficient to occupy any time not taken up by writing.

<http://www.janiceclark.net>

<http://www.teawiththeblackdragon.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/PrincessButtermilkBiscuit>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/JanClark>

<http://www.amazon.com/Janice-Lewis-Clark/e/B001K86P3C/>

### **The Hall of Doors series:**

*Book one, **The Mountains of the Moon**: Sammy's worried. Her cat has disappeared again. No one knows where Princess Buttermilk Biscuit goes on full-moon nights. Will she come back this time?*

*When Sammy follows her cat up a moonbeam to a world of mist and moonlight, she meets Selena, who lives in a beautiful fairy-tale castle. Sammy is fascinated by the Hall of Doors with its magical portals to other worlds. But the dreamlike adventure turns into a nightmare when Sammy is faced with the hardest decision of her life. Will she have the courage to make the right choice?*

*Book two, **The Door in the Sky***

*Book three, **The Mirror Door***

*Book four, **The Secret Door***

*Book five, **The Water Door***

***Fairy Gold** This is a "prequel" to the story of Teeka, Angelina's daughter, in the **Apprentice Healer** series. The first chapter of **To Heal a Broken Planet** is included. Publication of that novel, and its sequel, **Into the Unknown**, is pending.*

### **A Brave Doll**

Other free materials on the website include "extra scenes" for the first three Hall of Doors books and an assortment of short material.

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[Kathy Collier](#)



Author Kathy S. Collier has taken creative writing courses, and a course for writing short stories. She is presently working on her first novel.

Kathy has worked as a proofreader for author Mark R. Conte in 2013-14, and an editor for an independent publisher in 2014. She lives on the Emerald Coast in the Florida Panhandle.

<http://crimsoncloakpublishing.com/kathy-collier.html>

<http://www.kscollier1.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://www.twitter.com/KSCollier1>

<http://www.kscollier-author.com/#!>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/KSCollier>

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### [Mark Conte](#)



Mark Randolph Conte has published fiction, poetry, articles, interviews and Guest Columns in 67 publications including Yankee, Crazy Horse, Potomac Review,

Washington Post, Miami Herald, Philadelphia Daily News, Tallahassee Democrat, New York Arts Journal, Northwest Florida Daily News, Southern Poetry Review, Poetry International, Poet, Devil's Millhopper, Apalachee Quarterly, Snake Nation, Poem, and others. He was Director of the Florida State University Poet Series, and was appointed Master Poet for the Poet in the Schools program by the Florida Arts Council and Assistant Director of the Center for Participant Education.

He is a member of the Authors' Guild & Academy of American Poets. He won honorable mention in the PEN American awards in short fiction in 1979, first prize in poetry in the Barbwire Theater awards and the Packard Poetry Award.

[www.markrconte.com](http://www.markrconte.com)

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/fictionguy>

<http://www.amazon.com/Mark-Randolph-Conte/e/B003U4ULJ8/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Mark-Conte-Author/384349038434670>

On Twitter: [@proseman](https://twitter.com/proseman)

*Walking on Water*, Cross Cultural Press

*In the Arms of Strangers*, Gaius press

*Of Flesh and Stone*, Aberdeen Press

*The Ghost*, Solstice

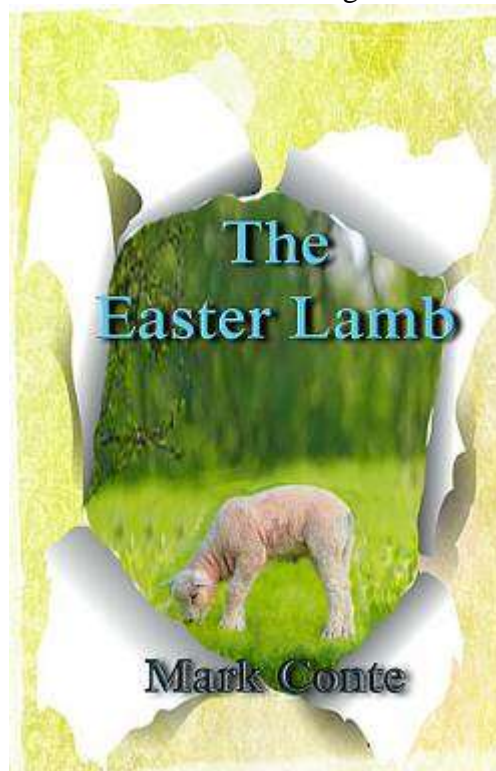
Anthologies:

*Florida in Poetry*, Pineapple Press, 1995

*In The West of Ireland*, Enright House, 1992

*A Friend of the family*

*The Easter Lamb*, from Crimson Cloak Publishing.



*In the Vianello family a lamb is bought on Good Friday, fattened up all day Friday and Saturday, and slaughtered Saturday night to be cooked for Easter dinner. But this year, the three Vianello boys, Dante, Johnny and Carlo, along with the Irish*



*girl next door, become fond of the lamb, which they have named Delilah, and devise a daring plan to rescue it from this fate. An amusing and inspiring family story for all ages.*

Five Star Review from *Reader's Favorite*: “an inspiring story of love and kindness ... heartwarming”

Four-out-of-Four Star Review from *Online Book Club*: “... light-hearted with abundant humor ... I loved both the story and its characters...”

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### [Don Ford](#)



A Native American writer and an Environmentalist caring for the natural world of water, land, air, and all living things, Don has published works throughout the U. S. and Europe, Portugal and Cyprus in particular, with connections in 62 other countries. From 2006 to 2011, he was the Forum Moderator for both the Humor Forum and the Spiritual Forum for Readers Digest Magazine. He was also the named Storyteller for the New York State Parks and Recreation Dept. at the New York State Fair Aug./Sept. 2011.

<https://www.facebook.com/donford2013>

<http://tinyurl.com/14al233>

<http://www.awritercomestocall.webs.com>

<http://www.amazon.com/Don-Ford/e/B006S7AQ2G>

[http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=44086905&trk=hb\\_tab\\_pro\\_top](http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=44086905&trk=hb_tab_pro_top)

<https://twitter.com/DonGreywolfFord?refsrc=email>

<https://www.facebook.com/awritercomestocall>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/dgford>

*Cave Land: No decent self-respecting modern homo sapiens should miss getting this Stone Age parody. This book rocks, or at least has its own share of rocks in it.*

*A Story Runs Through It*

*Adventure Road*

*Clay Pond and Other Fish Tales*

*Royal Ferdinand and Other Tales*

*Return to the Forest*

*Chilly, the Very Warm-Blooded Polar Bear*

*Raising Hope*

*Plight of the Butterfly* - We have all heard stories about butterflies and read poems about the same. This book is presented to raise awareness of the serious Plight that butterflies are in today, especially the Monarch butterfly. Their numbers are dwindling, and more research is desperately needed to find out how to curb this tragedy, before it reaches a point of no return. Enjoy the stories, full color pictures, and poems presented here.

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## [J Giambrone](#)



Joe Giambrone wrote his first novella, a sci-fi tale, in the nineteen eighties, and has been producing screenplays and novels ever since. He lives in Redding, California, a small city with rednecks and country music, where he and his wife keep a backyard full of various types of chickens and quail.

<http://jgiambrone.wordpress.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/joe.giambrone.7>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/joegiambrone>

He is the author of

*Transfixion,*

*Hell of a Deal: A Supernatural Satire.* Synopsis: *Al Smith built a Hollywood movie empire, but Al's also reached the end of his lifespan. Fortunately, Al is visited by one very eager pharmaceutical salesman, a young man peddling a "Fountain of Youth" nano-tech drug.*



*In exchange for this experimental medicine, Al agrees to the pharmaceutical salesman's movie deal. Smith awakens with his clock reset, transformed into a young man once again. Only, in this younger form he doesn't actually exist. Smith becomes completely reliant on the pharmaceutical salesman - now a movie director - to secure his identity as his own son.*

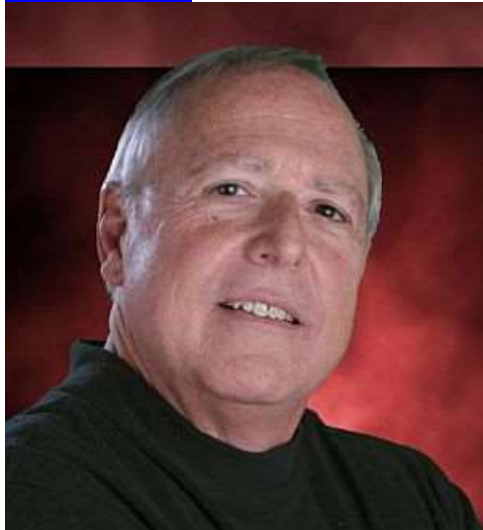
*Glitches in the youth treatment terrify Al, and he cannot be certain if brain damage has set in, or if he's now entered the realm of the supernatural. Unfortunately for Al, and for the rest of us, it's the latter.*

Currently working on **DEMIGODS**, a superhero story. The novel is based on his screenplay of the same name and should be out in 2016.

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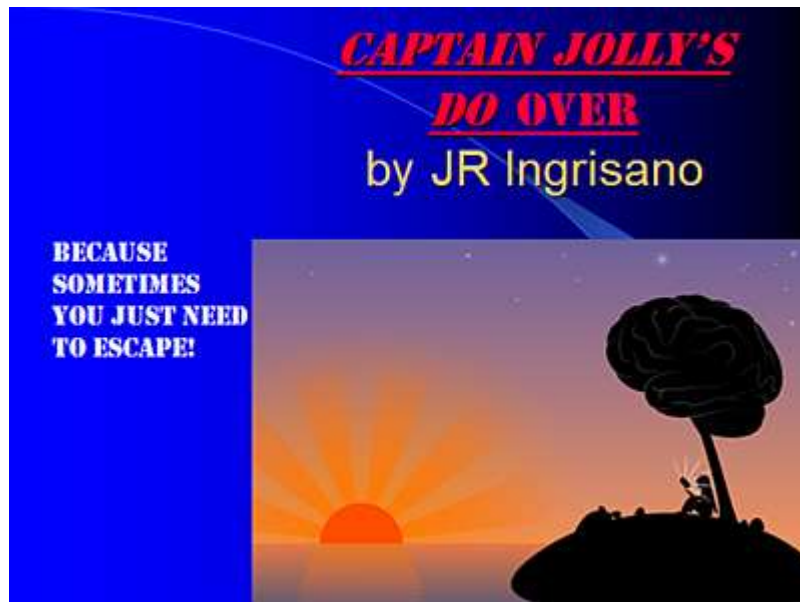
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[J R Ingrisano](#)



J R Ingrisano always wanted to be a writer, beginning his first never-completed novel at the age of 14. After paying for the cost of marriage, divorce and raising three kids by writing business articles and training programs for clients, he finally returned to his first love: writing stories about life, relationships, freedom ... Watch for his new novel, *Captain Jolly's Do-Over*, out soon.

“*First Love*” is an excerpt from JR Ingrisano’s novel, ***Captain Jolly’s Do Over***, scheduled for release in 2015 from Crimson Cloak Publishing. For more about Captain Jolly, who escaped to the Caribbean to heal and became a free-booting expatriate, visit John’s website.



<https://jringrisano.wordpress.com/>  
<http://www.DailyConnections.net/>  
<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/JRINGRISANO>

Also by J R Ingrisano:

*Alicia in Ruins*, a contemporary adult novel of hope and justice, about how one girl with an indomitable spirit survives and escapes from the horrors of modern day sex trafficking. To be published by Crimson Cloak Publishing.

*In God's Pocket: Spiritual Ramblings from a Reformed Heathen* (Custom Communications, 2012), a second collection of meditations taken from "Daily Thoughts" published on author's faith-based website, [www.DailyConnections.net](http://www.DailyConnections.net). (Also available on Kindle.)

*The Day My Father Died Was One of the Best Days of my Life* (self-printing, 2010), a chapbook memoir about the personal miracle of reconciliation between the author and his father.

*The Back to Basics Book of Money! A Couple's Guide to Financial Peace!* (BookSurge, 2009), a how-to book and workbook on money management for couples and others.

*A Perfect Day: Thoughts on Faith & Forgiveness* (Custom Communications, 2008) a collection of meditations, taken from "Daily Thoughts" published on author's faith-based website, [www.DailyConnections.net](http://www.DailyConnections.net)

*The Back to Basics Book of Selling: A Guide to a Successful Sales Career* (R & R Newkirk/Custom Communications, 1985, 2008); a step-by-step, how-to book on sales techniques and selling success.

Short stories in Wilderness House Literary Review and Eskimo Pie online magazine.

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By MATIC

Based in London, Marianna is a creative graphic designer who focuses on retouching and illustration: Artistic Abstract and Fantasy a speciality. After studying art at university she was a high school teacher from 2010 to 2012, and has had several exhibitions of her work. She has taught photoshop, retouching, and photography workshops.

<http://www.bymatic.eu>

<https://www.facebook.com/byMaticArt>

<http://crimsoncloakpublishing.com/marianna.html>

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### [Anjana Pradeep](#)



Born in Dubai in July 1994, Anjana Pradeep grew up in Kerala, India, where she did most of her schooling. She is currently a final year engineering student.

Blog: <https://anjanapdeep.wordpress.com>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AnjanaTheAuthor>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/Anjana94>

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### [Esma Race](#)



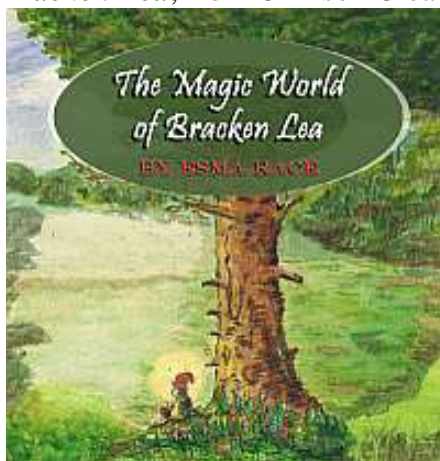
Esma Race was born and raised in the small Cheshire village of Weaverham. She has a great love for the natural world, and has always been able to sense the nature spirits which feature in her Bracken Lea stories. She is very interested in natural healing, and is a practising reflexologist in the North of England, where she now lives with Geoff, her husband of 45 years. She is a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother and enjoys reading, walking, travelling, gardening, and English history.

She is the author of:

*The Traveller* (short story),

*A Trio of Friends* (on Smashwords),

*The Magic World of Bracken Lea*, from Crimson Cloak Publishing.



*"Discovering the Magic World of Bracken Lea was a treat"*

*--Long and Short Reviewer*

*"... adorable ... After two stories I was hooked."*

*--OnlineBookClub Reviewer*

<http://www.esmarace.co.uk>

<https://www.facebook.com/esmarace>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/esmarace>

[https://twitter.com/Esma\\_Race](https://twitter.com/Esma_Race)

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8020628.Esma\\_Race](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8020628.Esma_Race)

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/esmarace>

<http://www.amazon.com/Esma-Race/e/B00GX99ZQM/>

#### Synopsis of *The Magic World of Bracken Lea*:

*A series of ten short stories featuring the Fairy Folk of Bracken Lea Wood: a tale of Nature Spirits for humans of all ages.*

*Welcome to the magic world of GLODWYN the Gnome. His friends include other gnomes, flower fairies, a Twisted Tree, Astrid the Fairy Queen, and the birds and animals who also live in the wood.*

*Glodwyn the gnome is a bit of a rebel. He lives and works in the ancient woodland. He is unusual amongst the Fairy Folk in enjoying the company of humans. His good-natured interest in their world seen through the eyes of his unknowing "friend", Walter the Stacker Truck Driver at the local factory, leads him to interfere in their affairs, with interesting results both for the Fairy Folk and humans. With his help, the Fairy Folk rescue a little boy from drowning, save the life of an injured cat and later that of a confused old lady who collapses in the Wood.*

*The Fairy Folk raise the alarm when a baby's mother is taken ill, and later prevent disaster at the baby's Christening, when a bad fairy threatens the child's happiness. They help a Leprechaun find his way home, and get a lost engagement ring back to its owner. Both unwitting humans and Fairy Folk work together to save nearby woodland from development. From arranging a litter-pick in the woods to finding a new wand for the Fairy Queen, it is a busy life for the Fairy Folk.*

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### [Patrick M Shanahan](#)



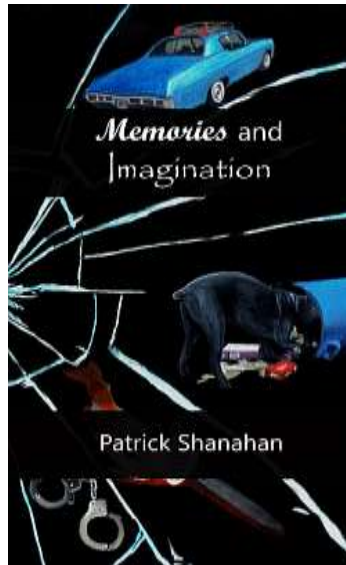
The second oldest of thirteen children born to Irish Catholic parents, Patrick grew up in Chicago. His works include human interest pieces, children's stories, short stories and three full length novels. His favorite genre is crime fiction. His articles and short stories have appeared in various newsletters, newspapers, and national magazines for the past eight years.

<http://www.paperbkwriter.wix.com/patrick-shanahan>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/PATRICKshanahan>

By Patrick Shanahan:

***Memories and Imagination**, Shanahan's fourth book, is a collection of fast-paced tales that includes cold case detective dramas full of unexpected (though plausible) twists and turns alongside warm-hearted stories about lost love found, as well as playful snapshots of daily life, reminiscences, and chance encounters. An entertaining mixture of intriguing stories, from cold case enquiries to snapshots of daily life, reminiscences and chance encounters: there is something for everyone in this thoughtful book. From Crimson Cloak Publishing.*



*Terror on Home Soil*  
*The Justice Club*

Author of numerous human interest stories in DRG owned national magazines. Currently writing columns for Moberly Monitor Index, Moberly, Missouri and The Home Press Macon, Missouri. Interviewed and written over 100 military veterans' stories appearing in Loc Haven Nursing Home (Macon, Mo.) annual Veterans' Salute.

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### [Peter Jacob Streitz](#)



Peter Jacob Streitz came from a single parent home in rural up-state New York. Got a full basketball scholarship to college, but left within a week's time to return to his village where he manned the doughnut fryer at the local bakery from 2AM to 6AM before assuming his gofer duties at 7AM to 3PM for the production-line ladies at the Quackenbush Nutcracker Factory. In the dead of winter he discovered an opening at Boston University's School of Education and graduated with the only diploma ever given for Alternative Education. He then worked for a collection agency, repossessing "sticks" from deadbeats in Roxbury and South Boston before working for a greeting card company and ending his business career as a corporate



executive for a number of now defunct computer companies. Since retiring from the American industrial complex he's been writing prose and poetry in San Francisco.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Peter-Jacob-Streitz/1408439919483611>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/PeterJacobStreitz>

The poem *Generosity of Spirit* is taken from his book of poetry *Hellfires Shake the Blues*, out now from Crimson Cloak Publishing.



*Ranging from his ode to the much-maligned urban pigeon (Winged Rats) to a haunting Holocaust scenario with a repeated chorus gradually diminishing like a decimated people, Peter Streitz's clever poetry will give you pause. Savour it.*

His novel “*Past Oz*” will be published by Crimson Cloak Publishing.

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### [Wesley Tallant](#)



The son of a WW II disabled veteran, Wesley Tallant is himself an ex-Navy veteran of the Viet Nam era. He has a wife of 41 years and three grown boys, and lives in Blossom, Texas. Retired after 24 years with the Paris Texas Fire Department, he now writes full time. He is the author of “*Mr Sparks, the Firehouse Dog*”, a children’s short story in Volume 1 of the Crimson Cloak Anthologies, as well as the following books from **Crimson Cloak Publishing**.

<http://wttallant.wix.com/wesleytallant>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Wesley-Tallants-Author-Page/484791544922209?fref=ts>

<https://www.linkedin.com/pub/wesley-tallant/55/2a8/704>

<http://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/wesleytallant>

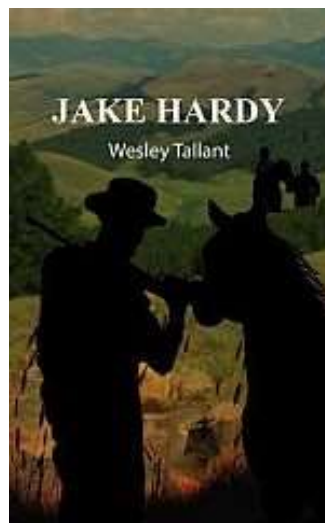
*The Wishing Elf (children's)*



*Little Big Toe (children's)*

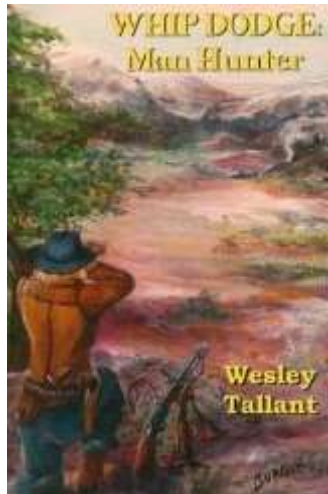


*Jake Hardy*

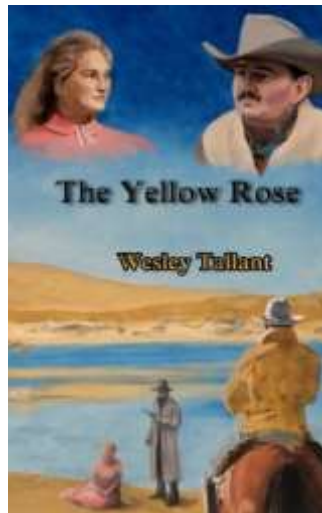


*Whip Dodge: Man Hunter*





*The Yellow Rose*, + synopsis:



*In 1886, Bexar County rancher Mike Callahan goes for his yearly pilgrimage to honor the father he lost in the battle of the Alamo. While he is there on the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of the Alamo, his wife Rose is kidnapped. He leads a posse of men, including the county sheriff, in an attempt to rescue her. He is killed but questions soon arise as to who shot him. Intrigue and family betrayal follow Rose as she and her foreman, Dusty Hayes, strive to keep the ranch that Mike named after her, running.*

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[International Children's Heart Foundation](#)



Profits from sales of this book will go to this charity (<http://www.babyheart.org/>). The mission of the International Children's Heart Foundation (ICHF) is to bring the skills, technology and knowledge to cure and care for children with congenital heart

disease in developing nations. ICHF does this regardless of country of origin, race, religion or gender. Their goal is to make the need for ICHF obsolete. They work toward this goal through medical mission trips, where they operate on children and educate local healthcare professionals.



One percent of the world's population is born with heart disease, making it the most common birth defect. Many congenital heart defects can be repaired with just one surgical intervention, while others require staged repairs. Fortunately for children with heart disease in the United States and other developed countries, there are hundreds of medical centers with trained specialists to care for them.

However, for children in developing nations, the outlook isn't as bright...



In these countries, congenital heart defects often go undiagnosed until the child begins turning blue and having difficulty eating. This is when the nightmare begins for the child and his or her parents. Local doctors will tell them there is no one who can help in their country and advise them to send their child to the United Kingdom, the United States or another developed country with trained doctors. Unfortunately,

such a trip often costs more money than many of these parents will see in their lifetimes.



Imagine the anguish of parents in underdeveloped or remote regions who have no one to work a miracle on their suffering child. Imagine having no alternative to watching your child waste away and die.

Although a simple procedure performed by skilled surgeons could save hundreds of children, the challenge is to get those skilled doctors to those children in time to save them.



The International Children's Heart Foundation strives to correct this unfortunate situation by providing direct care to as many children as possible in the short term, sending medications, surgical supplies and diagnostic equipment to medical facilities in developing countries, and training surgeons and medical staff so they ultimately can provide care for their own people.



The passion for the work is demonstrated through the commitment of the ICHF staff and volunteer medical teams. These dedicated professionals execute dozens of medical missions each year and perform surgeries on approximately 20 children per two-week trip.

Cash donations are always welcome: <http://www.babyheart.org/donate/>

For donations of funds or equipment: <http://www.babyheart.org/giving/>

Or Volunteer: <http://www.babyheart.org/volunteer/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/International-Childrens-Heart-Foundation/277999957440>

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Knit a Heart

Heart Bag

Make just “Because”, for a friend, or why not make to sell for our [charity](#)? Insert lacy handkerchief with a few drops of lavender or rose aromatherapy oil in it, to cheer someone up. Or fill with sweets or other small items. Large version would make lovely bags for bridesmaids to carry, smaller versions would make charming Christmas tree decorations, lavender bags, or chunky keyrings (smallest). Or make single heart shapes to attach to items as decoration ...

7” tall using aran/chunky wool, 5” tall using dk, 3” tall in 4-ply or equivalent: tension/gauge is not critical; you can make these in whatever yarn you like.

The yarn used for these examples: [Gawmless End Jacobs](#) genuine 5-ply worsted spun Guernsey wool (3mm needles), Jacob double-knitting (4mm needles) and Gritstone Cuddle aran (6.5mm needles).



Make 2 (front and back) or back with felt.

Cast on 2 sts

Work 2 rows in stocking stitch (right side knit, reverse side purl).

K1 m1 (pick up yarn from between stitches and knit into the back of it), then knit into the front and back of the next stitch: You now have 4 stitches.

*P one row (purl all reverse side rows)

K1, M1 k to last stitch, M1, K1

Repeat from * until you have 16 stitches.

Begin pattern (you can knit the whole thing plain if you like)

*K1 M1 p1 TWIST NEXT 2 STITCHES to form “mock cables” (knit 2nd stitch from left needle, do not pull off needle but knit first stitch on that needle and pull both off together), pl. Knit 6 stitches, pl Twist next 2 stitches, p1 M1 K1

Next and all following reverse rows: purl all purl stitches and knit the knit stitches (the reverse side of the front-side purl stitches).

Next row

K1 M1 K1 p1 K2 p1 K6 pl K2 pl K1 M1 K1

Repeat from *, increasing 1 st at each side and keeping pattern correct as set, until you have 22 stitches, then proceed without increasing at the edges, for another five rows.

Next, work across in pattern but only halfway (work only 3 of the central 6 knit stitches) then turn.

Next row (wrong side): p2tog, p1, k1, p2, k1, p2, p2tog

Work right side rows straight across, keeping mock cable pattern correct.

Next row p2tog, k1,p2,k1,p1,p2tog

Next wrong side row: p2tog, p2, k1, p2tog: five stitches left. Cast off.

Rejoin yarn on right side at middle of work and work across in pattern.

Next row p2tog p2, k1,p2,k1,p1,p2tog

Right side rows as for other side

Next Row p2tog p1, k1,p2,k1,p2tog

Next wrong side row: p2tog, k2,p2,p2tog. Cast off remaining 5 stitches, leaving long tail of yarn for sewing up.



Tab (optional):

Cast on 5 stitches and work 6 rows in stocking (stockinette) stitch.

Next row K1 k2tog Yarn Over (move working yarn to front of work so that when you make the next stitch you acquire an extra “stitch” to replace the decreased one – purl this as a normal stitch on the next row and you have formed a buttonhole), k2.

Next row purl.

Next row k2tog k1 k2tog

Next row purl

K3sts together, cut yarn & pull through to fasten off.

Stitch to middle of one side of bag, attach button to other half. Sew two halves together leaving top open from outside edge of 5-stitch cast off.

Attach crocheted chain or ribbon of appropriate length for handle/strap.



You can make smaller sizes without the tab, just thread ribbon or crocheted chain through both sides of heart in the middle and tie in a bow at the front: the two sides of the bag will be drawn closed when the bag is suspended.



Key:

Ss = stocking (stockinette) stitch

St = stitch

K = Knit

P = Purl

M = Make a stitch i.e. increase by picking up the yarn between stitches and knitting into the back of it.

P2tog = purl two stitches together in order to decrease 1 st



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We hope you have enjoyed this book. To find out about other Crimson Cloak anthologies, please visit the Crimson Cloak Publishing website.

<http://www.crimsoncloakpublishing.com/>

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