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Please note that the comic strips scattered throughout this edition
(and on the cover) are courtesy of Tony Rubino
(<http://www.rubinocreative.com/>).

WHO SAID THAT?

by Michael P Dooner

PERIOD/TIME: Contemporary.

SETTING: Irish Bar.

CHARACTERS:

JOE: He spreads the gossip/news to James.

SEAN: He tells Joe.

JAMES: Tells his wife Mary.

MARY: Extremely excited and thrilled over this “fresh news”.

TARA: Landlady of McGuire's Public House.

MICHELLE: The person who the whole scenario is about.

SETTING: *Bar scene; four people sat at the bar, JOE, SEAN, JAMES and MARY with TARA as the barmaid. Slight distance in seating arrangement between SEAN and JOE. Drinks in front of all of them. Tables scattered behind with empty glasses on them. Background noise of chatter/laughter/music throughout. (Exterior, coming from adjacent lounge). JAMES, MARY and TARA are miming/laughing/smiling with each other, talking inaudibly.*

JOE: There seems to be a good crowd in the lounge tonight Sean?

SEAN: Yeah it's Padraiq Riley's fiftieth birthday party.

JOE: Is it?...never liked him.

SEAN: Nar...neither did I...always gossiping that one.

JOE: I know...you never hear a good word out of him do ya? I did hear he was sacked there last week.

SEAN: Really...serves him right...how's your job going?

JOE: What's that?

SEAN: Got promotion yet?

JOE: In that factory...no bloody chance, heard a rumour the other day that they might be laying a few off.

SEAN: Really!

JOE: Yeah...trips to McGuire's here could be a thing of the past.

SEAN: Are you'll always have enough for a pint Joe.

JOE: You're lucky you don't have a wife or kids to support.
SEAN: (*Coughs*) Talking of kids, I heard something the other day.
JOE: What's that?
SEAN: Did you ever get them ears syringed?
JOE: Nar...not yet.
SEAN: I thought you were supposed to go to the doctor's ages ago.
JOE: Supposed ta...I'll go one day...don't worry about it.
SEAN: You should have been in the army; you could have put a claim in.
JOE: WHAT!
SEAN: Stop messing.
JOE: Tell us...what did you hear?
SEAN: I don't think you're gonna like it.
JOE: Like what?
SEAN: Remember your old flame Michelle Dawlings?
JOE: I should do, I went out with her for four years, haven't seen her for ages, it's funny I was just thinking about her the other day.
SEAN: She's in a spot of bother.
JOE: Is she?...why?...what's wrong?...what's happened?
SEAN: She's only gone and got herself pregnant, hasn't she?
JOE: PREGNANT?
SEAN: I heard she's been expecting now, for quite a while.
JOE: Who by?
SEAN: You're not going to like this either.
JOE: What's that?
SEAN: Rob put her in the family way.
JOE: Bob Mac Nay? That prat!
Silence. Both take a sip from pint.
JOE: So when's it due?
SEAN: In a couple of months, I think.
JOE: I wonder if it will be a boy or a girl?
SEAN: Dunno.
TARA walks over to the bell.
JOE: I suppose it will be delivered at St Mary's.
SEAN: Doubt it I heard she's off to live with her cousins.
TARA rings bell.
JOE: His cousins, why's that then?

TARA *proceeds to walk through to the lounge.*

SEAN: Family problems.

JOE *scratches head.*

JOE: WHAT?

SEAN: Brian and Helena aren't very happy about the whole thing.

JOE: Not surprising I know what they're like?

SEAN: I suppose it doesn't help...

TARA *enters and goes over to the till. Noise of till opening.*

SEAN: ...that they aren't married.

JOE: They're getting married as well...GOOD GOD.

Noise of till closing. TARA goes over to JAMES and MARY; all talking inaudibly.

JOE: So, where are they moving to?

SEAN: New York, I think.

JOE: York.

SEAN: I heard it's a great place.

JOE: WHAT'S THAT SEAN?

SEAN: A great place.

JOE: Is it?

Both take a sip from pint.

SEAN: It's a real shame you two broke up.

JOE: Y...e...a...h.

SEAN: You were such a great couple together...everyone said.

JOE: Did they?

SEAN: Even thought you'd marry her.

JOE: You're not the only one.

Both take a sip from pint.

SEAN: Remember the time....

JOE: NO, NO, don't go there.

SEAN: Sorry Joe.

JOE: I'm having another, do you want one?

SEAN: (*Looks at watch*) Can't...work in the morning.

JOE: Same here but I'm staying anyway.

SEAN: Will you be all right?...I'll have to go.

JOE: Yeah, yeah fine...I'll just have one more then head.

SEAN: I'd stay longer but I've to be up early in the morning for the drive to Cork.

JOE: No, no it's ok I'll be fine

SEAN: If you're sure.

SEAN stands up.

JOE: I'm sure.

SEAN finishes off his pint.

SEAN: I'll see ya later then mate.

JOE: Yeah see ya.

SEAN: It's a real shame that it never worked out between you two.

JOE: I know...maybe it just wasn't meant to be.

SEAN taps JOE on the back.

SEAN: Take it handy.

JOE: Yeah see ya.

SEAN exits. JOE stands up with pint in hand. TARA talking inaudibly with MARY. JAMES turns around.

JAMES: Are you heading Joe?

JOE: Nar not yet.

JAMES: Sean gone?

JOE: Yeah.

JAMES: You two were looking very pally there...any fresh news?

JOE: Oh, there's fresh news all right.

JAMES: Go on tell us then, I'm all ears.

JOE: Wish I was...it doesn't matter.

JAMES: Go on tell us.

JOE: I said it doesn't matter.

JAMES: I told you last week about...

JOE: Ok, ok...remember Michelle Dawlings.

JOE moves closer to JAMES.

JAMES: Of course...weren't you two engaged?

JOE takes a big drink from his glass.

JOE: We were until she called it of?

JAMES: Cos you went behind her back...with Yvonne...what's her name...

JOE: All right all right, it was only a one-night stand.

JAMES: And the rest...well what about her?

JOE: She's gone and got herself pregnant.

JAMES: Has she? So who's the unlucky man?

JOE: Watch it...its Bob Mac Nay.

JAMES: BOB THE BUTCHER!

JOE: Yeah...that waster.

JAMES: Getta away outta that...Bob...really...I always thought he was gay, I've never seen him with a girl in my life.

JOE: Neither have I.

JAMES: (*Laughing.*) Well it seems like Michelle got more meat than she ordered.

JOE: Seems like it.

JAMES: (*Laughing.*) Yeah, he'll have to be more careful with his prime sausage in future.

JOE: You're not helping.

JAMES: There'll be extra rashers in the house now when that babies born.

JOE: Very funny.

JAMES: (*Laughing.*) He's made a bit of a chop of himself though hasn't he?

JOE: I wish I could give him a chop, and you.

JAMES: That Bobs an olive short of a pizza.

JOE: I wouldn't trust him to look after a houseplant never mind a baby?

JAMES: That's for sure. I always thought he was like a baby's bottom.

JOE: What?

JAMES: Totally unreliable...

JAMES is laughing.

JOE: He's that ugly even the tide wouldn't take him out.

JAMES: (*Laughing.*) I know, it doesn't say much for you...**JOE gives JAMES an evil look...**he even looks like a butcher though doesn't he...**JAMES gets off stool and does an impersonation; bends knees shoulders back, stomach out.**

JAMES: ...I say I say...

MARY and TARA look around, but just ignore him; they continue their conversation inaudibly. JOE not impressed. JAMES goes back to stool grinning.

JOE: I say...you'd betta keep quiet about all this.

JAMES: I will I will...Michelle a fine bit of stuff though isn't she?...it's such a waste...so how's the family taken it then?

JOE: Not well. They're off to live in England with his cousins.

JAMES: England?

JOE: In York.

JAMES: York!

JOE: Yeah ... Brian and Helena lost their heads, went berserk once they heard the news.

JAMES: Really?

JOE: Yeah, that's why they have to go to England and get married.

JAMES: MARRIED!

JOE: SUSH...yeah, a church wedding in York.

JAMES: That'll be romantic then...hope she invites us all over for the craic when the big day comes.

JOE: I aint going.

JOE finishes off his pint.

JAMES: No I suppose not...you blew it big time with her though, didn't ya?

JOE: SHUT UP!

JAMES: You did...I'm only telling ya.

JOE: I don't want to hear it.

JAMES: I know you loved her, but you'll just have to get over it.

JOE: You're a great help.

JAMES: And all because of a one night stand...I bet you wish now she hadn't gone away that week end

JOE: It was your damn fault we ended up in Tiffanies that night.

JAMES: You didn't have to come...it wasn't me that told Michelle...remember...Angela Henson.

Silence.

JAMES: You blew it ya eejit...I wouldn't of minded of having a dart at Michelle me self.

JOE: YOU...YOU'D HAVE NO CHANCE...she didn't even like you anyway.

JAMES: Didn't know that.

JOE: Well you do now.

JAMES: What a bitch, the tart...wait till I see her.

JOE: Watch it you.

JAMES: Ooohh.

JOE: I'm of to the jacks...and then I'm having a cig.

JOE puts down pint and heads towards exit.

JAMES: Sad bollocks.

JOE: WHAT!

JAMES: Nothing.

JOE *exits*. JAMES *drinks alone for twenty seconds*. Thereafter TARA *exits to lounge*. MARY *turns to* JAMES.

MARY: Joe gone? What were you two gabbing about...and what the hell were you doing earlier.

JAMES: Forget that, you know your old school chum Michelle Dawlings.

MARY: Of course, what about here?

JAMES: She's pregnant.

MARY: NEVER, I don't believe yar.

JAMES: It's true, it's true, Joes just after telling me.

MARY: NO WAY!

JAMES: And you'll never guess who the father is?

MARY: Who is it, who is it? its not you is it?

JAMES: Don't be silly; it's your favourite butcher man.

MARY: Bob, the butcher?

JAMES: That's right, good old Bobby, the man who delivers more than the personal touch!

MARY: Well, that's great news isn't it?

JAMES: Ooh no, major family problems.

MARY: Family problems?

JAMES: Yeah, Brian and Helena went completely berserk, threw them out, told them to leave...and never come back.

MARY: Your making this up...this is more of your lies, isn't it?

JAMES: It's not it's not, it's true, trust me for once...and their going to England.

MARY: England?

JAMES: Yeah, she'll probably have an abortion over there; down south I think ...London, that's normally the place isn't it?

MARY: AN ABORTION!

JAMES: Yeah.

MARY: I'm telling ya if this is more of your bull shit...I know what your like after a few pints.

JAMES: It's true I'm telling ya.

MARY: He must be upset.

JAMES: He's in a bit of a state all right...better not say anything to him about it.

MARY: Not bloody surprising.

JAMES: Probably in the toilets crying as we speak.

MARY: I'd better go around and see her before she leaves then.

JAMES looks anxious and takes a big drink from his glass.

JAMES: No, no, best leave it...she's probably gone all ready.

MARY: You don't know that.

JAMES: (*Coughs.*) She's enough on her plate without you bothering her.

MARY: I dunno.

JAMES: Joe says they are getting married as well.

MARY: MARRIED!

JAMES: Yeah, everyone's invited.

MARY: My God.

MARY takes a big drink from her glass.

JAMES: And you'll never guess...I think they are going to ask you to be bridesmaid!

MARY: (*Astonished*) ME, BRIDESMAID!

JAMES: Yeah...Joe said.

MARY takes another big drink from her glass.

MARY: My God, bridesmaid, I've never been a bridesmaid before in my whole life...come on drink up, you're not wasting anymore money on drink...we'll have to go to Casey's Boutique in the morning.

JAMES: Where?

MARY: I'll have to buy a new dress for MY big day and hat.

JAMES: A new dress?

JAMES takes a big drink from his glass.

MARY: Of course...you want me to look my best don't ya?

JAMES: Now hold on, you haven't officially been asked yet and anyway you've hundreds of dresses.

MARY: I am not going to be shown up on my big day...and you're getting yourself a brand new suit as well.

JAMES: A NEW SUIT!

MARY: You are getting a new suit, I am getting a new dress, and that's that, I had better buy some more jewellery as well, come to think of it.

JAMES takes an even bigger drink from his glass.

MARY: ...and we will have to buy presents as well...

JAMES takes another big drink from his glass.

MARY: ...come on were going...

JAMES *drinking* MARY *pulls pint away from him and places it on counter.*

MARY: We're going home NOW!

JAMES: I'm off to the jacks I suddenly don't feel very well...I'll see you outside.

MARY: Don't be long in there...we have a very busy day tomorrow.

JAMES: Right.

JAMES *gets off stool.*

MARY: I'll be just a minute; I need to see Tara about something.

JAMES: Now don't you be saying anything to her about all this, not until were totally sure, you know what this place is like for gossip.

MARY: Yeah, yeah...I won't.

JAMES *exits.*

MARY: TARA! TARA! TARA!

TARA *enters from lounge carrying some glasses.*

TARA: What's all the shouting about?

MARY: You'll never guess what I've just heard.

TARA: James got promotion?

MARY: Nar nar no chance of that...Michelle's pregnant.

TARA *drops glasses.*

TARA: WHAT!

MARY: She is she is.

TARA: MY GOD!

MARY: And what's more, she's getting married

TARA: MARRIED!

MARY: Yeah...and you'll never guess who's going to be bridesmaid?

TARA: BRIDESMAID!

MARY: Yeah...well your looking at her

TARA: BRIDESMAID!

MARY: I certainly am.

TARA: YOU! THE COW!

MARY: I can't wait.

TARA: She always said that if she ever got married that I'd be her bridesmaid...I'll kill her!

MARY: It's great news isn't it?

TARA: Is it?...it's come as a bit of a shock...so who's the father?

MARY: Bob, Bob the butcher.

TARA: HEY!...that ejit? she told me she didn't even like him!

MARY: Yeah it's Bob all right.

TARA: That she would never be seen dead with him...and now she's PREGNANT and getting MARRIED to him.

MARY: Yeah, it is amazing, isn't it?

TARA: I'm her best friend.

MARY: Doesn't always count.

TARA: Obviously not...he's no Brad Pitt though is he?

MARY: No...not really...hey, we should arrange a surprise visit to see her in London.

TARA leans down and picks up glasses.

TARA: LONDON?

TARA drops glasses.

MARY: Yeah, she's moving to London, Brian and Helena haven't taken it well...you know they have always been a bit of a funny lot.

TARA: Yeah I know.

MARY: So have you seen or heard from Michelle recently?

TARA: No, not for ages.

MARY: (*Whispers*) Don't say anything Tara...

MARY leans forward.

MARY: ...but she's having an abortion as well over there.

TARA: AN ABORTION!

MARY: Sush Tara...everyone will hear ya...you know what this town is like for tittle-tattle.

TARA: God she has herself in a right mess, hasn't she?

MARY: That's for sure.

TARA: She's definitely been busy since the last time I saw her.

MARY: I know.

TARA: Maybe she's gone already, has she?

MARY: Not sure. Hey, listen do you think we should meet up with all the girls one evening and organise a trip over?

TARA: Could do I suppose.

MARY: Great, I'll ring Orla and Lilly over the weekend; can you ring Rebecca and Margaret?

TARA: Yeah ok.

MARY: It'll be a great night out, we'll have a laugh and sort things out, I'm really looking forward to going over there for a wedding, haven't been to one for ages...and me bridesmaid as well.

TARA: I know...I'm still in shock.

MARY starts to get of stool.

MARY: I had better go and get James he's probably collapsed in the jacks.

TARA: Okay then.

MARY starts to leave.

MARY: Don't worry Tara your day will come.

TARA: Thanks.

MARY: See ya.

TARA: Yeah...bye

MARY exits. Silence. TARA picks up the glasses and places them on the bar. She then slowly walks over to the tables, round them, shaking her head. She then picks up some glasses, and proceeds towards bar. MICHELLE enters staggering, dishevelled, slightly tipsy. TARA looks around and drops glasses

TARA: MY GOD MICHELLE...you look absolutely awful, sit down, sit down.

MICHELLE: Oh I don't feel well at all, my head's spinning and my stomachs in bits.

TARA: YOUR STOMACH, WHAT'S WRONG, WHAT'S WRONG?

MICHELLE: Don't shout Tara...I'm just coming back from Tiffanies

TARA: TIFFANIES! You shouldn't be out at a disco in your condition, what were you thinking?

MICHELLE: WHAT!

TARA: In your condition.

MICHELLE: What condition?

TARA: You should be more careful...look after yourself

MICHELLE: What for? I know I went a bit overboard tonight but I'm not that bad.

TARA: Michelle I don't know how to put this, but I've been hearing all kinds of things about you...and there not good.

MICHELLE: What things?...I think I will sit down.

MICHELLE sits down.

TARA: Well...I don't know how to put this.

MICHELLE: Put what?

TARA: The thing is...

MICHELLE: What bloody thing?

TARA: There's a rumour going around town that you're pregnant.

MICHELLE: Pregnant...me...who by?

TARA: Err...Bob.

MICHELLE: Bob Fitzgerald?

TARA: No no. I do not think you would be that lucky...no no Bob Mac Nay.

MICHELLE: WHAT...BOB THE BUTCHER...THAT UGLY MUTT.

TARA: And that you're getting married to him.

MICHELLE: MARRIED!...to Bob the Butcher...have you been drinking?

TARA: That you're moving to London?

MICHELLE: LONDON...I DON'T KNOW ANYONE IN LONDON.

TARA: YOU MUST DO COS YOU'RE HAVING AN ABORTION OVER THERE.

MICHELLE: AN ABORTION IN LONDON?...WHAT THE...

TARA: AND WORST OF ALL THAT BLOODY SCATTY MARE MARY JOYCE IS TO BE YOUR BRIDESMAID.

MICHELLE: MARY JOYCE MY BRIDESMAID! THAT'S AN EVEN WORSE SLUR THAN GETTING MARRIED TO BOB THE BUTCHER...I'VE JUST SEEN THAT SILLY COW WALKING DOWN THE HILL WITH I NEVER LIE JAMES...WHERE ON EARTH DID YOU HEAR ALL THIS? ITS ABSOLUTE BULLSHIT...LOOK, LOOK...DO I LOOK PREGNANT?

MICHELLE *points to stomach.*

TARA: NO...BUT

MICHELLE: I DON'T KNOW WHERE ALL THIS STARTED OR WHO ON EARTH SAID ALL THESE THINGS, BUT YOU LISTEN HERE TARA, REMEMBER MY PEN PAL ROB...YOU MET HIM BEFORE.

TARA: YEAH.

MICHELLE: THE ONE LIVING IN AMERICA.

TARA: YEAH.

MICHELLE: HE WAS OVER HERE A WHILE AGO WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND MICHELLE.

TARA: THAT'S RIGHT.

MICHELLE: WELL...SHE'S PREGANT AND HER PARENTS HAVEN'T TAKEN IT AT ALL WELL...SO I'M HEADING OVER COS THEY BOTH ASKED ME TOO.

TARA: OOOHH.

MICHELLE: I'M STAYING OVER THERE WITH MY COUSINS.

TARA: ARRRR.

MICHELLE: WHO SAID THAT?

TARA: I'M JUST TELLING YOU WHAT I HEARD.

MICHELLE: WELL YOU HEARD SHITE...THAT'S ALL THIS DAMN TOWN IS GOOD FOR.

TARA: I am off to the lounge I've work to do.

MICHELLE: That's fine by me...you do that.

TARA: I will.

TARA picks up glasses from the floor, walks over to the counter, and places them on counter and heads straight through to lounge. MICHELLE proceeds to exit.

MICHELLE: I only came in for a packet of crisps.

JOE enters.

JOE: *(Surprised/shocked)* MICHELLE!

MICHELLE: *(Surprised/shocked)* JOE!

Silence.

JOE: How's things?

TARA: Not great.

Silence.

JOE: *(Coughs/Nervously)* M...i...c...h...e...l...l...e.

MICHELLE: Y...e...a...h.

JOE: Can we talk?

The End.

Nascent Soldier

by Bruce Lader

M-16 a reflex in hands, he felt honored
under the unquestioned command of the DI
who ordered them to march through forest,
crawl in swamps . . . wherever Green Beret
training imprinted direction, he sensed
a cool nerve taking root, welcomed
the austere regimen and extreme fatigue.
Even the rapturous dream of navigating
the Bird of Prey, Super Hornet, and Aurora
came back, loomed closer. *Continue obeying,*
don't get hurt, he repeated, and parachuted,
a man-of-war beyond barriers of fear, his life
on the line to free the oppressed, defend
his country against an enemy he didn't know.

Sortie

by Bruce Lader

Blips of terror on reconnaissance radar
alerted the PFC; he determined position,
zeroed in with unflinching telescopic power.
The face and build looked familiar
though he wasn't certain he recognized
the helmeted student training a rifle on him,
resolved now, as *he* was, to execute orders,
complete school, bury debts. In the imperative
moment they'd have to decipher each other's
encoded shibboleth, identify themselves
in the violent purgatory they were conditioned
to win; or remain lost, detached forever,
blown to a furlough of sand in the schizoid
scrimmage over a fast killing at any cost.

Memo from Another Planet

by Bruce Lader

We monitored every thought, examined every move, teleported to your planet undetectable replicas of our being. They pinpointed the weapons stockpiled on orbiting satellites

and atomized them. It may concern you to know that the precision-guided munitions and torpedoes aboard every submarine and battleship in your oceans have also been neutralized, like the Swiss Navy.

You didn't get wind of the occurrence. No one on Earth did. It might also interest you to know that we disintegrated every nuclear warhead you tried to conceal

in subterranean silos; every armed forces tank, surface-to-air missile and the stealthiest seek-and-destroy vehicles your leaders and scientists could devise were obliterated simultaneously.

We accomplished these objectives in less than a nanosecond. Your quantum physicists have yet to discover the imperceptible laser we employed.

Don't bother to search for the weapons. They have been reduced to the nothingness of their source, along with all the factories that produced toxic material. We hope you aren't mortally offended. It was failsafe.

Knowing your military and political leaders will miss their beloved gadgets, we have archived every document detailing the etiquette of warfare.

We make no demands, regret any inconvenience and apologize if any boundaries were violated. Please don't be alarmed if we find it necessary to transmit you here with telepathy. It would be painless.

Argument to Save a Tree

by Bruce Lader

Leave that landmark alone,
it watches over our lives,
don't saw it down.

The backyard is part of your lot
by legal deed, but the tree
isn't trespassing.
It didn't intend to stand proudly
between your house and the lake
and impede a perfect view
of your motorboat.

Let the tree breathe.
Building a sundeck isn't the only
way you can work on a tan,
and observe the moon
sail tranquil obsidian water.
Any otter, loon, or swan
would tell you—if you'd listen—
that the moon wants to gaze
at the tree and muse in the light
of its eternal properties.

Don't spoil that shade,
home of eagles and warblers.
From windows of loss
a friend of redolent fir
will be a missing 17-pointer.

Neighbor standing for
a snapshot on a trophy
of plundered elephantine
hulk, sawdust spurts as you

slice generations of limbs
in a minute, tornado apart
centuries of girth.

You catch your breath
by a mountain of firewood,
savor a smoke.

Principle and Practice

by Bruce Lader

She had survived martial law Poland
married to an adulterer—the Solidarity leader,
imprisoned by *Milicja Obywatelska* during
her second pregnancy, left her the children
and zilch alimony in this unfamiliar society,
an immigrant without English, employment,
relatives, or friends. Letting go, forgiving,
she cleaned homes, lived with other cheaters,
excused them as well; devoted her transplanted
life to the languages of pysanki, photography,
pressed flower cards, designed wired-jewelry
pendants, sterling earrings of beaded pearl
and amber. Gardening the home of remarriage,
she wove longleaf pine needle baskets into
sculptures wedded with slices of walnut shell
stained and varnished. When the betrayals
dwindled to wisps of infidelity, she embroidered
cathedral quilt bedspreads of velvet appliqué
windowed in sunflowers, painted scenes
of nature, shared breakfast with the rising birds.

Ticking

by Ashok Niyogi

something tense
even as I brush by the fence
and return to overripe fruit
sheltered by yellow leaves
pounded into earth
by dromedaries
who erupted from Vesuvius
this cocooning is surreal
this sprouting of nascence
from gnarled stomachs
versifying through breathing
that is surprisingly hard
racing away
ever so slowly
through blood and sweat
wet

Twin Cross

by Ashok Niyogi

lampshades in an orange room
bougainvilleas on the mantelpiece
sepia sunlight
defined by dust
that went to sleep on shutters
before she woke up
with puffed rice in mustard oil
and battered onion rings
that toil a little less
than office boys
in earthy clothes which dry
on lines hung between
crows' feet
and the twin cross

she is stretched
from cross to cross

Mute

by Ashok Niyogi

just once
to upset the balance
hit a note perchance
that nightingales touch
before they want
commitment

this lark
is as pathetic as my walk
if I meet the man
who phoned
I will have to say "Hello"
so let me cross over
to the other sidewalk

which has no trees
no berries to squelch
no yellow flowers
downtrodden
like the million poems
I have written
for other men
with this broken pen

I am flabbergasted
with this disdain
this noiseless pain
that hurts

until it is dark

Relics From the Dresden Milk Maiden

by John Greiner

The night has frozen
our hands. The dawn
will not touch
our souls. The sunrise
will not wake us.

When the darkness
clears we will
not be here,
we will not wake.

In the night when
blindness is a joy
it is easy to listen
to the killing laughter,
our ears receptive,
we lay next to one another
accepting what little
space terror allows us,
knowing that hyenas
hold a special place in the
universe even when there
eyes are held tightly shut.

The sun rises on
far off shores. We
feel no warmth.
We knew that
this was coming,
and when it came
we were horrified
because we had
hoped for so much more,

or at least something
more than this.

We sleep not brushing
the dirt from our eyes,
but wishing for
far off sand to be kicked up
into the faces of those
who forever close their ears
to the splintering siren's laughter.

Once we too had waited
for the dawn
to set the day ablaze.

Unbreakable Bond

by Stacey Lynn Ryan

Lay your head down, little girl, the world breathes for you today,
Clear your head of all the things you feel your heart still needs to
say.

If this place seems dark right now, full of pain and void of charm,
Remember that the Earth waits to cradle you in its arms.
Know that those we love can never really leave,
It's only the pain of distance that sometimes can deceive.
Spirits live on, in our hearts, in our dreams,
Our time apart never lasts as long as it seems.
Angels float up above, over every city, every town,
Moving about the sky, sending silent words of comfort down.
Lean on those around you, they reach out caring hands,
To wipe away your tears, give you a firmer place to stand.
Still tears may escape and that is okay,
Tears heal the cuts, tears wash away.
Memories race through the mind like a slide show true and clear,
There's no need to push them away, instead just hold them dear.
A father's love is eternal, it goes on for all time,
Nothing can break it, there is no height it cannot climb.
God's gift- each girl gets a daddy of her own,
To be with her in at least one way until that girl is grown.
So remember when you lose your faith from cuts that are so deep,
God would never make a promise he didn't intend to keep.
He will live among you on the face of every friend,
And signs from Heaven that God graciously sends.
Never have I known someone like you, with so much strength and
grace,
It's evident that you only could have gotten it from one place.
The many qualities which made him so admired,
Radiate off you and we feel inspired.
You've done so much by now just standing up tall,
But we wait with outstretched arms to catch you if you fall.
A circle around you to reminisce, laugh or cry,

Share the experience and stay by your side.
The world is at your mercy and stands still just for you,
Simply call out his name and the answer will ring true.

The Reminder

by Stacey Lynn Ryan

Like a crow perched upon a branch in evening light,
Death waits in the shadows of this very night
Watchful eyes looking for a victim to seize,
Work to do, destinies to please.

Like a shadow on the only sunlit walk,
Death is a solemn subject of talk.
This one and that one taken away,
Leaving grieving lovers to pray.

Like after a summer the promise of Fall,
Death roams around these suspecting halls.
Searching each old face for a sign it's their turn,
Hoping they're ready, hoping they've learned.

What do you think of death, this unknown force
Is it forgiving and gentle, does it show some remorse?
Is it a stealer of heart, body, hands,
Or is it a giver of new life, a second chance?

Like others, do you consider giving yourself away,
Letting go of years ahead, refusing to stay.
Days seem too long and nights are too dark,
After-life feels better than your own life, so stark.

Do you force death to take away others,
With a gun or a stab or refusing to be a mother
Do you hand over your own child, yet to be born
For a cause so unworthy, to a force so forlorn.

Like a nightmare on the dark night that a child is alone,
Death wanders around, letting out its gruesome groans
Do you feel it following you, biting at your heels
As you wonder if others know how you feel

Do you think of death as you close your eyes,
Does death make you afraid, does he make you cry
Do you worry he will come too soon to you or one you know
Do you worry he will come for you before you have time to grow

Is death conscientious, gracious, does death care
About the lives it takes; is this feared death even fair?
Does death give us a warning when it's our time
Or does it surprise those undeserving, still in their prime?

When you are judged, when death looks into your soul
Will you scream out your goodness, your passions, your goals?
Will you plead for life or accept your fate
Will you take death with love or fight back with hate

In your last moments here on earth
Will you be surrounded by those who gave your life its worth
Will you say each goodbye uniquely and true
So that those who love you can be content with you

Will your heart keep beating in the last seconds of life
Will you imagine the face of your husband or wife
Will you smile at each moment that good life gave to you
Will you open your eyes wide and enjoy the last view?

When the crow, the shadow, the chance, the new season,
Finds its way to you, will you have time to reason
Or should you be ready now with each loved one in tact
And in your head planned out, how you will react.

I hope you can smile when it's your time
And think of death as a blessing instead of a crime
Jumping at your heels, reminding you each day
To give thanks to the Lord each night when you pray.

Counting down your seconds so you know you must make use
Of the time that you are given and be careful of abuse.
Laugh at jokes that are funny and make memories whenever you
can
Remember every face, each woman, every man.

Give each day a fair chance to matter, wake up and visualize,
Savor each moment and life can't pass you by
Be ready for death if you should have to make the choice,
And when the crow calls in the night, don't ignore his voice.

Dreaming in Color

by Stacey Lynn Ryan

Champagne pink and teardrop blue
Time's gone by and I still don't have you
Seconds crawl and my heart races
You slip away, leave no traces

Tick tock ticked-off time
Fluent lies and rehearsed lines
Dirt around the edges but one rose growing up
Blood-red and withered, unfaithful, corrupt

Plucked from the ground like my heart from my chest
Slipped to the one that you like the best
Jealousy placed kindly into graceful hands
Like bombs going off in some foreign land

Midnight black and sorrow gray
Forgotten promises and forlorn day
The world can see, you can't just hide
Still assuming you'll always have me by your side.

Crack, shiver, break, punch, heal, cry
You've clearly hurt me too many times
Break, Over, off, done,
It wouldn't be this way if I were The One.

Go to her, run along, leave me at this place
Empty-handed, blinded, remembering your face
Roses red, hearts red too
Silent screams and me turned blue.

Poison from the lips, knives, spears
Heartache, sorrow, pissed off, fears
Let go or stay, let the arrow point to one
Ask me to remain or tell me that it's done

Not who I dreamt of, not who I thought
Distrust, betrayal, the wrong people sought
Grind up the roses, let us be still
Calm and unnerved, cries less than shrill

Cut at the stem, end it all here
Petal by petal, tear for tear
Fertile ground and warming sun
Take us back to just begun

Clumsy grace and fragile strength
Deliver us, sweep us away from this place
Red for affection, yellow just friends
Green for beginnings and dark brown for ends.

Nature's Dance

by Robert M. Hensel

I sit ashore this moonlit beach.
Where water, and sand, come to meet.
As waves crash against the sandy ground,
together they will dance to nature's sound.
One step two steps, onto the shore.
Then comes back to dance some more.
This rhythmic view, I've come to glance.
The life that's found in Nature's dance.

Dreams: the Illusions of Night

by Matthew Ward

You're leaving yourself wide open, you know,
When confiding in the changing,
Rearranging catacombs of seclusion —
The illusions one calls the dreams.
'Tis the ultimate buzz litmus.

"He's warped, he's mad,
I think it's sad how ones
Like him exist within
The dim shelters.
Why tell us the uncensored truth?
The sleuth seems to delight
In disrobing his soul to us
Like we're the Confessional:

'Ho-loong-hes-et-bin?'

"He stares through mahogany-stained
Lattice, and WE absolve.
Should we?
It is obscene, but I say:

*'Okay, dream but dream alone —
As the feeling here is estrangement'.*

"He comes again — we'll listen
Just to be polite, so do not slight
His speech — trust me."

I

We'd have dreams all the time,
I'd climb the walls in blue-green rage —
Then turn the page and read:
The falling dream, of freefall cling:
I'd cry and sing the NO!
With voiceless yell
Into mine own Hell.

Didn't the oldest woman say
How we'd pay
With death in our sleep
If we actually hit bottom?
(No straps this chime) —
In mime; and wind whistling
The fluffy clouds aside
As I pass through them like
The post-innocence years.
I'll start with one set in the future
Where guns give way to laser —
Nurturing demise in an instant with
Blasts of migraine silver aura
(Take one out).
The shades recall the box
In the time of Max,
And of Jim with his message,
Or Sam and her twitch —
Pale yet ingrained with tan,
And purely an American shade.
I'm chased by spies in a building tall
Through corridors and halls
That seem to go on forever and ever;
I'd be clever in avoiding the men
Firing at the feet and legs —
Only the dregs of my pace
Slow me rapidly down.
Like playing Elastics I hop and roll
Away from the shots,
Around corners and up ways.
On red-speckled Persian hall-runners
I ran past
Decor bells and Romanised digits, and
50s lamps — one by one — hanging out
To hit on me.
Their garb is not clear
But defined it is in black
With yellow and red vertical

Stripes jeering the shoulders
To bolder, nether regions.
In boots they come
With naked force,
Some six or ten —
All tell fast men
Who steer the test
As much as they are the faceless.
Adrenalin in full-on flow,
I fall from graze,
And take corners thought
Impossible before.
The only salvation to reach for
Is a light
And I follow quickly
For I am ahead
Of the backlit fiends
And slickly enter it
Like it is Eden.
But a balcony and
A Gold Coast day
Are all there is to see.
This cannot be true!
All this muscle-tearing for naught?
Curtains — rich in translucent white —
Flow with the gale.
And the wolves shooting
Follow me still.
And I run, taking a right foot —
Putting it on the rail of the iron fence
And dive off head-first
To the city below.
This is the end —
It's a pity I cannot fly,
then I think "Why not?"
And soar into the rays
Of the sun mixed with blue with the help
Of jets on my ankles

(I am a 21st century Mercury!)
And I control it totally.
It's a glide that needs no effort.

II

Yes, sometimes they *are* surreal
And often less than the ideal
Outcome — with haste
I am chased by invisible foes
In dimly-lit scenarios.
I had this really weird dream last night,
You see: I was in a paddock
In the late afternoon — a field (that's right)
And a storm crept in from afar
With wooden fences high and square
And the dew had since dried to grey.
The grass grew tall
And stared at the clouds
Heavy with twilight rain.
The wind blew in wisps, at first,
Then through gusts it spoke
With loud howls picking my breath
Like a cat does
To a young boy's thoughts.
Listen, now: it's late afternoon —
Well, about 3ish — and it's
Ready to storm in the hour.
The air smells of pollen, of
Moist grass on heat.
Birds have stopped caroling,
And the barbed wire in surrounding
Clasp keeps out and in —
Some broken with fatigue,
Most held together with rust.
The sky is shrouded — clouded
Limewater mix testing science rote.
As far as I can see is green

Then fence
In gauze-repetition in the image
Of some infinite rural honeycomb.
Now, the hue is either grey or green,
And the green is somewhat blackened
With moisture: cool but not muggy.
*("We need the rain anyway —
It's about time, but as long as
They get it where they really need it,
You know: out west on the properties
They cannot win, can they? It's either
drought
Or it's flood — why in the hell would
ANYONE in their right minds go out there?")*

But the slippery, sticky blades
Cover my legs to the waist.
The calm feeling.
Then running
From dogs at my back.
They are invisible,
Growling in putrid harassment.
And I *must* run
In Cuthbert flurry!
Which I do — knees banging
The stressed chest
With mechanised perfection.
Why, then, the lethargy?
Suddenly, deep holes
Swallow and jar my legs,
Speed cut in half.
Barking, dripping canines
Swooping justifiably
Upon cowering Sabines.
Heart inhalation.
The dogs try to stay with me
And seem free
To ankle-tap
But toy to their own perverse

Amusement.
Though, as sure as they were there,
Now I have lost them in the lawn,
And I take advantage
By creeping in sprint along
The ground, again treading
In craters that near-fracture my ankles.
Oh yes! — the wind (my friend)
Has changed direction!
A feeble try to stop breathing
Lest they hear me.
They are in assembled confusion.
The mongrels with yellow eyes
Bay to the sky who obliges
By turning the breeze back toward me.
And we're on once more.
At last! — over one fence,
Jagging the height
And onto one side —
Jabbing an elbow
Into the ribs.
Getting up in steeplechase panic
 (*Keep going!*)
But I lay down!
The clouds are a single black mass
With curled-through cream.
She spits and I sleep!
The dogs encircle their prey
From a distance with winning grins
And praying stances — all choreographed
Sequences from vaudeville.
Dripping jet-jowled fielders move in.
Set the table.

III

The shrinks say how much water dreams
Sometimes incline to sex

Or sexual wanting and release.
Swimming and drowning in fluids
In routines the Druids
Would be proud
Are always allowed
In the night cinema.
Come close and listen to this one
Once more; I could go on
Forever about it and I
Know you won't be slow in telling me
Your amazement.
A friend and I are dropped
Into an ocean somewhere — I
Know not the position
Or location
But the sea is tepid
To cool
And you'll appreciate
The womb-like flotation tank
I am entombed in.
Around in the distance are islands
Of the type that live in the Pacific,
Where the French just love to
Blow the life out of life
With non-existent bombs —
Ones so harmless
They had to be tested as far
Away from France as possible.
On the isles are trees —
Thick with vegetation.
And around them are beaches
In golden ring-like tiaras.
Now contrary to the posters
The weather is rather gloomy,
Overcast and grey
And the day is some 3/4 over.
The sea is graphite
And laps gently, yet rapidly, on the sand

In a motion unpredictable
Yet pleasurable.
We're thrown into this Deep
Like those two in 'The Time Tunnel'
(Without the skivvies).
Down we go under
And hold our breaths.
No sound but bubbles
Running past my ears to the surface.
At the surface I hear the gentle wind.
I look around for the nearest land,
About a year away
And start to move to it.
My friend keeps up.
I challenge him to shore:
The body rises up like a hovercraft —
I swim SO fast,
A cushion of foam on my chest and legs — my
Friend ceases to be.
As the shore approaches, I run at it
At an angle, along its length and stare
Steadily at four large objects half-buried in the sand,
The swell pounding and whipping them.
They are black and covered in weeds —
Green and white fettuccine — that falls
Back and forth with the tidal strength.
Then they rise (to my alarm!):
Four huge stallions,
Their bodies dripping in frothy surf,
Eyes glassy and looking at me.
Their muscles rigid
And they only give a shudder to expel
The excess water.
I am taken with their size
And expect them to run —
They do not.

Pigeons in the parking lot

by Vincent Spada

There's little to say
There's always little to say
Things aren't what you expect

It's never a pot of gold,
or ten good turns,
or anything. Not anything

No gusts of perfect wind
No moonlight walks
Forget it. Keep dreaming

This isn't a lie
This is the truth
There's just nothing to say

It's only the usual
in heavy doses
If that's bad, well, too bad

It's nothing
The same thing, right there
See it, and know it, for sure

A junk of a car,
a supermarket dying,
and pigeons in the parking lot

That's all
Maybe almost invisible
But either way, it doesn't matter

Between the sheets

by Vincent Spada

So there she was
between the sheets
and on the other side
an empty spot
just waiting

55 known ways

by Vincent Spada

There are 55 known ways
to screw something up
No, wait
56

Pumpkin

by Vincent Spada

If only
the whole world
could fit inside of a pumpkin

Neon Scar

by Doug Johnson

He thought they could ease into life gently
She was glad it was night at the County fair

The secret was safe with him ordering cotton candy
The neon scar reflected in her mind while she listened

to their screams of terror.
Their screams of delight

She smiled at the Giant Ferris wheel—
with the burned out W

The single white tube above the sno cone stand
blanched her face in the blue ice

Smiling volunteer made change and offered her a
pink ribbon.

Suffocating and spinning she clutches his hand
Their squeals of laughter sting her ears. *I have to go.*

I know.

He pats her arm and throws away the cotton candy

Lava's Solid Lullaby

by Doug Johnson

They were last to clutch the mist
Petals snoring disturbed for this

Breezes nod in the dream
Blooms rock gently in agreement

Rubbing eyes, they blink in the grey
Last night's ashes kiss their cheeks

Today will warm
Now—they sleep with shoes on



W.O. Douglas Trail basalt outcrop May 12, 2007; Image by Doug Johnson

Comida rápida

by Omar Bravo

Hierve el sésamo
saltan en el wök, crepitan
pequeños fragmentos de jengibre
y ajo

humean las cacerolas sobre la estufa grasienta
hay frijoles de soja
y hongos
cocinándose

grandes, calientes nubes de vapor
llegan al cielo raso al destapar las cazuelas

hay sangre y vísceras y plumas
en el zinc de acero inoxidable

en el fondo del contenedor de la basura
silenciosa
parece mirarme con sus ojillos tristes
la cabeza de un pato
a veces la de un pez

aquí, en la cocina,
ocultos a la vista
de apresurados comensales
todo crepita y arde
violentamente
sobre el fuego

yo oigo las voces
sin embargo
escucho los tímidos titubeos frente al mostrador
las preguntas pueriles
algo semejante a una tierna indecisión

que a veces me hace sonreír
y otras simplemente me enfurece

piden mongolian beef
sopa want ton
arroz hervido
y vegetales

a veces solo piden un té

yo los complazco
gustosamente
como hicieran
los cocineros imperiales
en la provincia de Hunan
hace ochocientos años

carne de osos
manatíes
y leopardos
para el rey y los suyos

flautas de bambú
laúdes
y campanillas de bronce
durante el banquete interminable

eran las bodas de Kim Shuang
el príncipe de los ojos de jade
y el festejo hubo de prolongarse cuatro lunas

sólo uno de los cocineros
perdió su cabeza
aquella vez

yo pienso en todo ello
y sonrío al darme cuenta de mi estremecimiento

luego intento enjugar con una jerga
el sudor de mi frente

es el año del cerdo
—me han dicho—

la caja registradora
no ha dejado de sonar

Hiroshima

by Omar Bravo

esta es la flor incandescente de la ira de dios
su singular fragancia de carne chamuscada
su impávida corola
los pétalos de su cegadora luz
su delectable nombre:

Hiroshima

este es el día de los ciento veinte mil cuerpos

no hubo testigos para los ríos de sangre
no hubo gritos:
porque súbitamente los ojos fueron polvo
las gargantas
los corazones todos
en un mismo latir se consumieron

fue luego el cuerpo sólo una mancha gris
de aceite en la banqueta

nadie pudo imaginar la forma del horror
en esa oscuridad
o su sustancia
el rostro de lo que súbitamente
pierde rostro en medio de las llamas

nadie pudo

esa mañana florecieron los capullos de uranio
en la ciudad

dios en los cielos
desde un B-29 sonreía

Kentaro

by Omar Bravo

Sentados a la sombra de un gran oyamel de hojas aceradas
en una de las bancas del Carson Park
Kentaro ha referido para mí, esta mañana, la historia de Buda

“...y un elefante blanco descendió desde el cielo
y entró por su costado mientras la reina dormía:
en la trompa transportaba la hermosa flor de loto
de cuyo néctar Buda, el príncipe, sería engendrado...”

luego nos tumbamos sobre el pasto
y terminamos nuestros dátiles secos en silencio

hemos venido aquí muy brevemente
—interrumpió Kentaro suspirando—
hemos venido a este mundo que sufre y clama
solamente un segundo
sólo un segundo sobre la tierra

luego cerró sus diminutos ojos
y cruzando las delicadas, blancas manos orientales
a la altura del pecho
sin mirarme
dijo un mantra

Asato mā sad gamaya
Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
Mṛtyormā amṛtam gamaya
Aum śānti śānti śāntiḥ

luego continuó:

hoy, al despertarme, he pedido ser un bodhisattva
y ayudar a los otros en la búsqueda
de la revelación

la luz, a través de la fronda de los viejísimos árboles
dibujaba en móvil, frágil claroscuro
las diminutas hojas en el césped del Carson Park

en la avenida
el semáforo cambiaba del verde al amarillo
y luego al rojo
en un par de segundos

Yo recordé, esa mañana,
las palabras que había dicho el poeta azteca
alguna vez:

"No para siempre en la tierra: sólo un poco aquí
aunque sea jade se quiebra
aunque sea oro se rompe
aunque sea plumaje de Quetzal se desgarrar
no para siempre en la tierra: sólo un poco aquí"

y pude compartirlas con Kentaro.

Deseo que puedas ser un "bodhisattva"
—agregué finalmente—

ya era momento de regresar a trabajar.

Auswisscht Song

by Omar Bravo

El pan está ya listo
blanco y humeante
sobre la mesa.
Mil panderos ondean en el aire:
llueve
torrencialmente
sobre la casa tibia de los Zaied.

Comemos el pan como mendrugos secos
pues algo nos corta la saliva
algo por dentro nos enjuta.

Hermano y Hermana
yo
Jacob Zaied
regresamos a casa
después del tiempo que estuvimos muertos
o presos
es lo mismo
Madre se cansó de creer en nuestra vuelta
y envejeció como una letanía
mirando hacia fuera
esperando siempre
soñando surgir flores de lirio
sobre los pedruscos
del camino

Fueron años duros
dice Padre
con sus ojos blandos
y calla
Crujen las hojas en el patio
bajo tanta memoria derramada
como pesadas piedras

Madre sonr e
y alimenta el fog n
Se est  bien en casa
un denso crepitar nos arrulla
mientras la leche se derrama de la olla:
es como irse despertando suavemente
oyendo
lejos
los  ltimos compases del c ntico de Job
afuera
el viento bate los sic moros
y las nubes se enredan
en sus ramas.
Los hermanos Zaied regresamos a casa
para encender las luces del Shabat.
Venimos
a curarnos las heridas
a lavarnos la sangre
a calmarnos el horror
a dormir como peque os ciervos
en el monte:
venimos
a morirnos alg n d a
bien
decentemente
con Padre y Madre elevando sus rezos
como palomas blancas
y ungiendo de aceite
nuestras frentes.
Todo vuelve al sitio del origen
y hemos venido a esta tierra a n sin patria
a levantar los despojos
a esperar que Adonai
haga el Shalom con nosotros.
Comemos
una a una
las uvas  cidas que Padre cosech ;
afuera

las cigarras encienden el aire
y se devela
despacio
un manto de estrellas.
Padre hace la oración
agradece las pobres dádivas del huerto
dice
“Bendito eres tú Adonai
nuestro dios
rey del universo
creador de los frutos de la tierra.
Bendito seas
creador de los mundos”
La vida es una prueba
dice Padre.
La vida es una prueba
dice Madre
mientras nos besa los cabellos
y enciende las velas
Cae la noche sobre el antiguo valle
de Canaán
arden tímidamente algunas brasas
balan en las cercanías los corderos.
Yo elevo una plegaria
canto un salmo
recito unas palabras del Talmud
y mi pecho se inflama
Los Hermanos Zaied regresamos a casa.
Esta noche
arden los pabilos de la Menorah
y se consume el aceite:
se eleva hacia los cielos
como en los hornos terribles
un olor de grasa
chamuscada.

Horses

by Lo Galluccio

My friend Thomas says he doesn't think that horses have a place in the American psyche. Hmm... well, I don't quite know what to say. "Dogs," he says, "I like dogs." "You go to Revere Beach and you see a bunch of men running around with their dogs." "Women, girls," I say, "I think we like horses." And Thomas agrees. "Well, you've got a point there." "My sister, my cousins... yup, they love horses...I always thought, well, they'll grow out of it." And I offer, "Maybe horses are a bit more, uh, majestic than dogs?" "I mean they can be dangerous but there is that combination of beauty and speed, utility and pleasure...I mean, you know?" He still shakes his head. "Well, you can't keep a horse at home." "I mean, they're not domestic." "Well, no I guess not," I offer. "Unless you own a ranch."

Secretly, I'm thinking, "Is he kidding me?" How can you even compare the sleekest greyhound to a wild Palomino? The most loyal black lab to a mustang colt? I don't get it. Doesn't he realize that the whole nation was in agony over Barbaro's injured hind leg and his having to be euthanized after winning two rounds of the Derby? Is this really a gender issue? No, for God's sake there are plenty of men who would die for their steeds...But this shouldn't be a battle of horses vs. dogs...dogs are cool with me; it's a matter of the horses. Horses as mythic, as thoroughbreds, as laborers, as something larger than that....

We've gotten together for a writing session and my bid was to write an essay on horses. My question was, really, what place do horses have in the American psyche and are they a sacred animal to us like say, cows or elephants in India? Well, Thomas likes inside things, and not outside things, I guess. But it's interesting that a creature I

consider so quintessentially American, he considers so superfluous to the landscape....

From Patti Smith's CD *Horses*, "Land:"

“When suddenly Johnny gets the feeling he’s being
surrounded by horses, horses, horses, horses,
horses coming in all directions white shining
silver studs with their nose in flames,
He saw horses, horses, horses, horses, horses,
horses, horses, horses,
Do you know how to pony like bony maroney
Do you know how to twist, well it goes like this, it
goes like this...”

The mesmerizing poet-saint of rock and roll. This album – and I hear the word Arabian roll through my mind like a wave – became etched in my aura before I made my first solo CD, *Being Visited* with multiple voices and poetry cutting in and out of band tracks. Johnny’s horses stayed with me for a long time after hearing this song. Later I would arrange the well-known spiritual “All the Pretty Horses” on my second CD, “Spell on You.” In the break I sang:

“Will you have all the pretty little horses, the horses, the horses all the Palominos, the mustang chargers, will you have all the seahorses at the bottom of the ocean?”

(It’s a song about a white child who’s mammy chides it for not sleeping, and sings that when he wakes he will have “all the pretty horses” whereas the black child lying in the field will not....a bitter lullaby from slavery times. The horses symbolize the wealth of white people...I just took it out a bit farther to encompass how high and low, sky and ocean, the horses could take a child’s imagination, our imaginations....)

* * *

Where did the first horses come from? In fact horses evolved on the North American continent for over 50 million years and the wild ones with the conquistadors...long before we were here (barring the tenure of the Native Americans) and eventually they became like our uneasy immigrants, sleek or shoddy, but some fit the backsides of Irish cops on their beats in cities, some leapt through fire in circuses, some of them were bought and bred as thoroughbreds for track racing, and then the 100's of 1000's served in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, with soldiers upon them, whipped and gasping for air. They are surrounded like ourselves in dream, in ether, in heroics, and in sweat and motion, on any given day. They are, I think, our supreme objects and occasionally our mirrors, both.

Take the 1961 movie "The Misfits." It's the last movie Gable and Monroe ever made. The title fits both the humans and the horses of the story as they both are cast outside of society, wild misfits unable to settle into a satisfying pattern of existence, predatory and preyed upon. It's Monroe – at the end of her marriage to Arthur Miller, drinking and hooked on pills, arriving late to the set frequently – who convinces the band of over-the-hill cowboys to free the mustangs they rustle up for the slaughterhouses for a living. One NY Times reviewer claimed that it was the only scene in the film that worked, the climax, the scuffle in the Nevada desert when Monroe hysterically "kicks up a ruckus" that pulls down their horse-trapping scheme. She is the woman in love with the wild horses; she's the beautiful wounded tramp who's fading fast, but who still knows a creature who should be protected from a cheap death.

* * *

What really kicked off the idea of this essay was one day last week when two female friends of mine transmitted via internet media, episodes about horses which piqued my interest again. Both women loved horses, only one was publicizing a candle-light vigil in New York City for a carriage-horse named Smoothie who'd died after running himself into a tree. Rebecca is a fellow vocal artist and

friend from New York. She's also a political activist who loves animals and identifies with them.

“PROTESTERS DEMAND BAN ON CARRIAGE HORSES”
the myspace blog reads, Special to amNewYork, September 21st
2007.

“Many in the crowd stood holding candles and sheets of paper with numbers representing the identification codes of horses removed from the carriage business over the past two years, for reasons as diverse as age, injury or infirmity. Lower East Side musician Rebecca Moore stood holding a candle next to the number 3001.”

“They're not machines,” she said as others began lighting candles, “and to expect the horses to be in such a stressful situation all day, with noise, traffic and heat, is insane.”

The piece ends with the quote:

“Horses don't belong on the streets in the 21st Century. Smoothie didn't have to die.”

Three or four comments in support of ending this exploitation of horses follow and Rebecca appends several petitions to the City government to end the horse and buggy industry. She doesn't mess around. An empathic artist, I know Rebecca sees something special and beautiful in many creatures and must have bonded mystically with Smoothie, even Smoothie's ghost. She's just like that. And an artist knows how fast they can be seen as valuable entertainment commodities one minute and disposed of in the infirmary the next. It's a hazardous life.

In contrast, the other e-mail came from my old grade-school friend Liz Homans' husband who wrote that his wife's riding horse Caspian “knocked her down, stepped on her back with full weight, flipped her, and stepped on her right arm and left leg with less than full weight.” What followed, was a detailed medical description and diagnosis of Liz' condition. She's a pediatrician who's loved and

ridden horses since she was a young girl. Jeff wrote at the end of the email that Liz faced a “protracted and painful recovery.” Later he would joke that of course Liz forgave Caspian but that he was on thin ice and joked that if anything else happened, he might be on his way to the glue factory. Never was there any speculation as to why Caspian might have behaved that way in his stall toward his owner that day. It should be noted that Liz and I had had no contact in more than five years but that in the 5th or 6th grade Liz developed a rare virus that put her in a coma for several months. Upon recovery through a tracheotomy maneuver and luck, she went on to medical school as a partial penance to the doctors who saved her life. She and her husband, both doctors, live in Arizona and she rides horses for pleasure.

In 2005, I was asked to review a book by the famous female poet Lyn Lifshin, a prolific poet on the independent poetry scene with over 100 titles to her credit who had penned a book about a horse named, Ruffian. It was called, “The Licorice Daughter: My Year with Ruffian” on Texas Review Press. An incredibly intense book, Lifshin bonds with this star filly and tracks her development almost from birth until she becomes a formidable racer. Lifshin writes that at a young age, she is, “a horse that seems to dance on water.” Or, a dream-like apparition as in, “Some nights I think of Her...lying quietly all night/as if she knew, for the moment,/her body was her friend/A star on her forehead/A star inside her blood/Herons in the distance/gulls. Her star/color of the floating lily/....By Saratoga, Lifshin writes, “She danced to the gate quivering with eagerness, huge and glistening/as if she’d do this as an old mare too/...” And too the hint she’d run herself to death, stagger/to the finish line on three legs”/ I wrote in my review that the fate of the super filly was prophesied before it ended, like Giselle’s possession by the willies, like ballet, almost phonetic in its precision. And Lifshin remembers that, “On Ruffian’s last day, like today, sparrows were flying through the eaves at Belmont.”

There was almost a mother-daughter bond between the two, or fan-celebrity, something that certainly transcended the ordinary.

Like Monroe in the Misfits, or Patti Smith's rock and roll chanting, Rebecca's moon-lit vigil for Smoothie...Lifshin went out of her way to express a large and sustained love for horses and for this particular horse, Ruffian. Something in the blood; something riveting and deep. For all these women, horses seem to have an extremely important place in the psyche, whether as martyred beasts of burden or mythic avengers, or magic thoroughbreds that win and die tragic but brave deaths. However, just because all these horse-lovers are women, doesn't mean that all horse lovers are women.

Take the recent case of Barbaro the race horse who fell in the Belmont Stakes when his jockey Prado was riding him. He'd won the Preakness and the Triple Crown three weeks before. The owners decided that they had to give this particular horse, a powerful colt, every chance to live, despite an injury that usually spelled death to a race horse. Most of America was caught up in the saga of whether Barbaro would actually overcome this huge obstacle, the splintering of his right rear leg. Eventually he was euthanized by his owners who spent huge amounts of money trying to keep the colt alive. A horse is usually in too much pain from losing one of its legs. We know this even from that movie title about marathon dancing made in the 1930's, "They shoot horses, don't they?"

So, what does this amount to? Was it a silly question to begin with? Have we come to terms with how we treat our horses when they race and get hurt, when they hurt us, when they become destructive, when we love them too much? Are they sacred to us? Or do we expect them, like most of us in America, to be part of that crazy game of survival of the fittest, of having to prove their prowess and smarts and worth? And isn't that the societal question we all face right now about America as a competitive society? When we ask "Is racing animals cruelty?" aren't we sort of asking the same question Michael Moore's asking about the health insurance industry being profit driven in his latest film, *Sicko*? Because yes, horses like Barbaro and Ruffian might be born to run, but what about the others who are bred to race and lose anyway? Who are we to know?

But maybe that's just the way the wheel is turning and maybe it's progress from horses being sold as dog food or used in wars.

So, yes, I think horses are to Americans something like what elephants are to Indians. We are proud to have them on our land and we are proud of their beauty and their speed and power. They symbolize something grand and deeply identifiable to us. To take ownership of a horse is a great responsibility, greater than that of a dog or cat. There is something wild and spectacular and gentle and generous about riding a horse and bonding with him/her. Sometimes they kick back. Our humanity is part of the responsibility we take on.

That's really all I know.

The War Tattoo

(1995)

by Catherina Hollifield

I darted glances at the bent frame of the angry seventy-two year old man shuffling by my side to the ultrasound exam room. His snow white hair and wrinkles gave the appearance of great age, but he vibrated with a barely suppressed fury that seemed more appropriate for someone much younger.

My hectic schedule had caused me to be an hour behind for his appointment, but his anger seemed out of proportion to my being late.

Others might tremble in the face of such wrath, but I'd faced down other tough characters during my career. I unleashed the considerable charm I'd inherited from my father, determined to draw this guy from his ugly mood if only for a moment. But, my preliminary instructions for the exam, which usually brought a smile to most patients, fell flat.

I inquired about his work prior to retirement. He gave minimal answers. Even my cheerful inquiry of "What do you do when you're not hanging out in hospitals having tests done?" brought a curt reply of "nothing."

Silence hung in the darkened exam room like an oppressive fog. On edge and uncomfortable, I found it difficult to breathe.

He rejected my attempts to draw him out, but inexplicably, I felt an intense need to connect with him. I refused to relinquish verbal contact, so when a faded marking on his arm caught my attention, I changed tactics. "There's always an interesting story behind a tattoo. Can I ask how you got that?"

He turned his bleak, lifeless eyes towards me. “I got that when I was young and foolish during World War II,” he explained in a dull voice. Instinctively, I understood the silent words he telegraphed, ‘when I was young and still alive!’

The implied message discomfited me, but I pressed for details anyway. “What did you do during the war?”

His nostrils flared as he exhaled deeply. The quiet noise punctured the leaden silence in the room. “I was a lieutenant in the infantry,” he said, his low voice rough with emotion.

I suddenly realized I’d reached the limits of decency in questioning the old man, so I squeezed his arm. “If this is too difficult, we don’t have to talk about it.”

Another deep sigh punched me in the chest. He whispered, “I know...but I’d like to tell you.”

With flashes of controlled emotion, he told me about his job as a group leader in the first wave of the invasion on D-day. Their landing craft took fire. Most of his men died instantly. The gentleman’s voice shook with regret. “I was so much older than those boys,” he said. “None of them knew combat. I couldn’t help them.”

“How old were you?”

“Twenty-three,” he mumbled.

“You were just a youngster. You shouldn’t blame yourself.”

He ignored my comment. “I was ancient compared with those seventeen, eighteen, nineteen year olds. It was such a waste...such a huge waste...” His voice trailed off. In the semi-darkness of the exam room, I saw faces of young men long dead reflected in his eyes.

I felt like a heel for bringing up long suppressed memories, yet somehow the old man seemed more alive. I vowed to listen as long as he wished to talk; I didn’t care if it made me even later than I already was for my next appointment.

“They assigned me a new group of men. We went inland to take more ground.”

Details were sketchy and hesitantly presented, but I didn’t press for more than he wished to give. Deep down, I recognized this was a subject he rarely spoke about.

He shook his head and stared intently at my face. “I don’t know why I survived. No family, no sweetheart. Those guys who died lost everything. I had nothing to lose.”

The bitter emotion strangling his voice touched me to the core. With the utter conviction of someone who’s never faced death before, I uttered the senseless platitude, “There must have been a reason for you to survive.”

A sardonic chuckle startled me. “Well, it’s been over fifty years, and I’ve never figured it out. If you were to ask me when the war ended, I’d tell you it ended two weeks ago. I never got over what I saw or the bad things I did.

“My life became better after a Colonel chose me as his aide. No responsibility for anyone but myself. I was in danger at the front lines gathering information, but always got out safely even though artillery fire destroyed my jeep once. Luckily, I had sense enough to run when a series of explosions hit the road ahead of me. I exited the vehicle seconds before it blew up.”

“Oh my God!” I grabbed the old man’s arm.

“You know,” he continued, “I married a couple of times after the war, but the marriages didn’t last. Never had children. Couldn’t hold a steady job either.” His face dropped. “Why am I still here?”

By this time, I had completed his test. He fell silent, but this time, the quiet felt less oppressive.

I left the room to finish my paperwork and came back to walk Mr. Martin to the exit. He ambled along in companionable silence, a real change from his attitude just a short time ago. When we reached the door, he said goodbye and turned to leave.

I called him back. “Sir, can I shake your hand?”

He searched my face with narrowed, suspicious eyes. “I guess so, but why?” he demanded as he stuck out his hand.

“I just want to thank you for all you’ve done.”

He blinked rapidly and whispered, “Thank you.” His firm grip belayed the emotions I saw warring on his face. He turned and left without another word.

With tears in my eyes, I watched an amazing metamorphosis. As Mr. Martin walked away, his slumped shoulders unfurled like a flag catching a sudden stiff breeze. Even the shuffling gait of the old man became more sure and confident. In my mind’s eye, I saw the ghost of a young man, ripe with potential, before the demons of war had ravaged his soul.

Inside, I was saluting.

Joe Bugle

by Ward Jones

I'm a professional killer. Not the kind who kills stray dogs that crap on your lawn or ants that crawl in your kitchen. I'm the real thing. You're wonderin' how I sleep at night? My wife, who complains about my snoring, knows I don't have a problem in that department. Don't believe me? I'll explain. For one thing, I'm never around when it happens, not like the guys you read about in the Godfather books. What's more, I'm not Italian. The Bugles came from Ireland after one of the famines they have over there; the name might've been O'Bugle for all I know. Never taken the time to look it up, which you could do if you got on the Internet and had nothing to do but sit on your ass all day. Even if I did, what good's that gonna do me. Think I'll find a rich uncle? A loaded aunt? Fat chance. Like my old man, they were all nickel and dimers, even before the Depression, and would take any job they could find: dig a ditch; pick the fruit, clean the stalls of a horse barn, which my old man did in Kentucky for three years before he went to jail. Only thing I inherited was his strength. First time I killed a guy, before I knew what I was doin', I used my hands, strangled an eye doctor for a woman after this Romeo dumped her for another patient, somebody younger, I figured, and in less than a minute he was dead, slumped to the floor like a side of beef. Not a pretty sight but I got a family to feed. My wife's is from Kansas City, has been since they built the first railroad, she claims. Most of them live with us, and it seems like the whole trainload, her parents, her two good-for-nothing brothers, along with our own kids have dragged nothing but trouble into my life. Junior and Junior Two won't stay in school no matter how many times I tan their hides. Our youngest, Abigail, has a speech defect, something the doctors say can't be fixed. She'll have a hell of a time finding a husband when the time comes, and if she does you can be damn sure he'll move straight into my house. They live with me because I'm the only one making any real money. The two brothers dick around with a band. Paulie plays the piano,

knows five or six songs he can play without having to search for the right keys. Jackson, the so-called singer, slurs his words because he's drunk after four o'clock in the afternoon, and I don't mean half drunk, I mean drunk drunk. How he stays on his feet I haven't figured out. They made a CD, sold a few, but most are in a cardboard box in the attic. Six days out of seven they're in that dive on Eighth Street. During their breaks, they're playin' pool or tryin' to pick up nurses from Saint Xavier, two blocks away. I shouldn't complain. At least there not suckin' me dry with medical bills. Babs's father has a heart condition. The pills he takes for the bad ticker costs me a bundle, even with Medicare, probably because he can't figure out the stuff you have to do to qualify. Same thing for her mother who just had her eightieth birthday. A while ago she traded her walker in for a wheelchair. I had to buy a van with an elevator on the side to haul her bony ass around town, and not just to her doctor appointments; she wants to go with Babs to the mall or the beauty parlor. Don't ask me why.

Last month, I did a guy in Chicago and I'm still waitin' for the second half of the twenty thousand. They'll pay, they always do, but they like to string me along. They got no idea how much time I put into it. Same with every other job. At the front end, there's a ton of work, you gotta prepare, make a careful plan, which can take weeks, and then you gotta make sure it goes the way it's supposed to go. You can't do anything half ass, not like in the movies where you walk up to some guy on the street and whack him, then hop in a car and haul ass to Mexico. You wantta keep your butt from being strapped in a chair where they stick a needle in your arm, you better make sure it looks right. Think that's easy? You do you're livin' on the friggin' moon. Take the last one, a guy they wanted me to snuff in Chicago. He owed some people a lot of money, the guy on the phone said, which to be honest I like to hear. I don't get my rocks off by takin' a guy down for no reason. Anyway, I had to follow this joker around for a solid week. I couldn't figure out where to do him. He had a state-of-the-art alarm system at his lake view mansion. No big surprise in a neighborhood like that where all those rich people put in every kind of sensor there is so they can show the guy next door they've got more to protect than they have. Mister Big Shot that I'm tryin' to draw a bead on drove a BMW 640 six days a week to his law firm. A car like that would've left my

rental in the dust if he'd seen it for ten seconds, so I had to stay way the hell behind him. Because of that I lost him more than once. Had to hit the gas and swerve around cars, felt like I was drivin' at the Indy 500 just to catch up to the bastard. After a week I figured it had to be in the garage. His building looked brand new, even had the smell. First five floors was parkin'. And what was sittin' in those spaces? Not a pickup in any one of them, I swear to God. Had to put a suit on to make it look like I belonged in a place like that. The days I was there it was warm, muggier'n hell, one of those smog things in the middle of summer. And here I am on my back, looking at everything, holding the stuff I normally use. Shit load of good it did me. Everything was hidden. Tappin' into that alarm system was like tryin' to break into Fort Knox with a wire cutter. I gave up. Came back a day later. Usin' as little pressure as I could, I pushed the plastic onto the tailpipe, stuff was like Play Dough and I won't go into how hard it was to get that shit. This ain't Iraq where you can buy it on every street corner. Anyway, there I am, on my back, tryin' to get it in place, all the while keepin' one eye out for the chink who kept circlin' around in his little golf cart. First time that flashin' light swept across my legs I about peed in my pants. But I kept goin', tryin' to shape it around a rod beneath the driver's seat, but it's hard to get to. I'm blinkin' the sweat outa my eyes when, from out of the blue, I think about my blood pressure medicine. I'd forgotten to take it. Why I didn't have a heart attack I'll never know, cause my ticker was about to jump out of my chest. You'd think I'd be used to it after thirty years, but you don't *get* used to it, you keep thinkin' about that needle in your arm, what it's going to feel like when they strap you in. That's when you *really* shit in your pants.

I need some time off. Go someplace, away from Babs and the old folks who've turned our house into a nursing home. Wouldn't miss the worthless brothers either, or the kids who are driving me crazy. I'd leave my cell phone. I've had enough phone calls, all those jobs, all those years. And for what? For Babs who sits in front of the television and paints her toenails. For her parents who barely say a word? For two brothers who never lift a finger unless they're hoistin' a brew?

I have an account at First Federal Babs doesn't know about. Not a lot but enough to last a couple of weeks. Be easy to tell her I was gonna be out of town for a while. I could do that, fly to Miami, stay in a nice hotel, one with a big pool where I'd plunk my ass down in a lounge chair, have one of those blue things with a little umbrella. Just relax, watch the babes in their bikinis stroll around the pool. Might even pack my Viagra. You never know.

Burnt Sugar Cake

by Edward Musto

Jenny was going to kill her.

And she deserved it, Wanda thought, as she threw back the covers and hurried out of bed. Jenny had taken time out of her busy schedule to help her out with a favor and Wanda, on the receiving end of this woman's munificence, hadn't even shown up on time. Jenny had asked Wanda to be at her place at eleven. It was now eleven-thirty.

Never had Wanda imagined she would be living the life of a suburban matron. Yet here she was—a car pool mom, complete with mortgage, septic tank and refrigerator art. Wanda tried fitting in. She joined the women's club, got a part-time job at the local pharmacy, and was active in the PTA. And now this. A bake sale. It was, in fact, for the PTA that she permitted herself to be conned into providing something for its annual fund-raiser.

At first, she thought of backing out of her promise, but she didn't want the criticism she knew she would incur by doing so. She thought of purchasing an assortment of cakes and cookies from the local bakery and donating it. But it was a small town and she felt her neighbors would frown on her not having put forth an effort. Luckily, her friend Jenny sensed what was wrong and offered to help.

Often her feelings about Jenny were ambivalent. As much as she liked her, she couldn't help being slightly resentful of what her friend had accomplished as wife, mother and homemaker. It wasn't jealousy, she told herself, just a healthy competitiveness that every so often she took too far.

Wanda stared at the bottle of wine she planned to bring. Next to it was a small phial of medicine she had lifted from work. Even now she wasn't convinced she would do it—or even could.

She threw on some clothes, ran a brush through her hair, performed the abridged version of her morning wash-up, then hurried downstairs and out the back door. The bottle of wine, plus the medicine phial, she had with her.

It was a chilly morning. The sun was playing hide-and-seek with a sky full of gray clouds. It rained heavily the night before and the grass was still wet. She hoped Jenny had a pot of coffee going.

Though the women lived next door to one another, there was a great expanse of lawn between their houses. In the early days a corral fence separated one property from the other. Gradually, though, as the years passed and the women became close friends, the fence was taken down. This made it nice for their children, who now had a huge yard in which to play. It also allowed for quick and friendly traffic between the two homes. They even ordered the man who did their landscaping to seed with the same kind of grass. It was impossible to tell where one yard ended and the other began.

Well, almost. As a homemaker, Jenny was in a class all by herself. She was a perfectionist, right down to the smallest details. Even the patio on which Wanda stood reflected this flawlessness. The furniture was of good quality and well cared for. Potted plants adorned a low wall of terra cotta that ran the perimeter of the patio. Mostly she prized Jenny's having successfully trained her children not to leave their toys where someone could trip over them.

By contrast, Wanda's housekeeping was a morass of half-measures. She looked across the way at her own patio. The wooden chairs needed painting. Cushions on the chaise lounge were dirty and torn. The boys' hockey equipment was scattered about the lawn.

An inspection of the interiors presented the same dissimilarity. Wanda's kitchen was strewn with dirty dishes, laundry to be done and bags of unpacked groceries. Her living room was cluttered with newspapers and magazines, videotapes and TV trays still holding the containers from last night's dinner. Upstairs the beds were unmade and needed changing.

Several months before Wanda had passed a remark about how someday she would have her cellar turned into a family room. Both their houses had been built in the early part of the century, containing an attic and dirt cellar, neither of which was useful for much of anything except storage. But it was Jenny who took action, clearing the basement and hiring a contractor. The man gave her an excellent price and promised good, solid construction. It was more involved than Wanda thought. Over the dirt they would lay pebbles, steel mesh and three inches of concrete.

When she asked Donald about doing some renovating, he was adamant they could not afford it. She wished she had married better. Perhaps she would, she thought, fingering the medicine phial in her pocket. And perhaps it would be a lot sooner than even she dared hope.

As she approached the back door, she wondered if it was Jenny who was the competitive one. Maybe she felt inferior to Wanda and this latent covetousness manifested itself in a persnickety approach to household drudgery. But she was kidding herself. Wanda was the one who felt inferior. She didn't take her housewifery duties as deadly serious as Jenny. And it was for that devotion that Jenny was richly rewarded. She had the better husband, the better home, the better life.

Hoping that Jenny wouldn't be angry she was so late, Wanda gave a quick knock on the door and turned the knob as she offered a cheery good morning.

Jenny smiled and said hello. She was nicely dressed, as always, standing in her immaculate kitchen, holding a mixing bowl and beating its contents. There was an aloofness to her manner, though, and Wanda mistook this for anger.

Immediately she apologized for being so tardy. She had no excuse, she said, just that she had overslept. Figuring that was sufficient, she shrugged her shoulders playfully then scanned the room for signs of morning coffee. There were none. Jenny immediately noticed the bottle Wanda was carrying.

"Did you bring *wine*?"

"Mm-hmm."

"A little early, isn't it?"

"Nonsense!" said Wanda. "The Galloping Gourmet always had wine when he concocted *his* epicurean yummys. Why shouldn't *we*?"

"I need a clear head when I'm working."

"One glass isn't going to *kill* you."

"Thanks, anyway."

Wanda was not unprepared for that. For that reason she had decided to keep the poison separate from the wine till it was poured in a drink Jenny specifically wanted.

"How about some coffee then?" asked Wanda. "That's it. I'll put on some coffee for us."

"Don't you want to know what kind of cake you're baking here?" Jenny asked. "Burnt sugar cake."

And then, in more detail than Wanda cared to know, Jenny told her how she beat the egg whites until stiff, then added sugar "two tablespoons at a time." Having set this concoction aside, she then creamed butter and beat in the remaining sugar. Wanda stifled a yawn as Jenny went on to recount the mixing and sifting of salt, flour and baking powder, followed by the folding in of egg whites.

"Those squinty-eyed biddies at the church are never going to believe I made this myself."

"Admit you got the recipe from a cookbook," Jenny suggested. "There's no crime in that. Say being a good cook is just a matter of following directions."

The water was boiling. Wanda took the kettle off the stove and placed two mugs on the table. One of them claimed Jenny was "the world's best mother."

"You take yours black, right?" Wanda had taken out the medicine vial again and was about to pour its contents into Jenny's cup.

"None for me, thanks."

"What?" This threw her.

"I don't think I'll have any," Jenny said.

"How come?"

"Too much caffeine."

"I went to so much trouble, though," she said, "boiling the water, adding the coffee, stirring. Sure you don't want some? One cup isn't going to *kill* you."

"Maybe later. Don't you want to know where the burnt sugar comes in?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Take a small heavy pan and melt a half-cup of sugar in it," Jenny explained. "Cook it slowly till it's almost black. This you add to a half-cup of hot coffee. Stir till it's all dissolved."

"So you *did* make coffee!"

"Only the amount the recipe called for," she replied. "What you now have is a *syrup* and you use this syrup instead of the milk you see there in the list of ingredients."

Wanda's thoughts were interrupted by the waft of cake batter coming from the bowl as Jenny methodically mixed it with the spatula. When she was a little girl Wanda was always at her mother's side whenever she baked, though she picked up none of her culinary talents. That had always perplexed Jenny, but it made perfect sense to Wanda. Just because she liked confections didn't mean she was enterprising enough to make them. She'd always had a sweet tooth, though, and always for cakes and cookies in the process of being mixed. Cookie dough was preferable to cookies, batter preferable to cake. She was constantly asking her mother if she could lick the spoon or scrape the bowl. On more than one occasion, when her mother's back was turned, she would run her finger across the surface of the mixture, sweep streams of batter into her mouth, then wipe her lips clean with the inside of her sleeve.

Jenny asked why Wanda had overslept and got a perfunctory explanation of the previous night's events; there was the PTA meeting which went long, an impromptu visit to her sister, and car trouble on the way home.

"You, too?"

"What do you mean?"

"Bob had car trouble last night as well."

"I hope he fared better with the Triple-A than I did," Wanda said. "I had to wait hours."

"Nope. Bob did, too."

Wanda hoped she had sounded casual enough. It was a stupid error on her part, using the same excuse Bob had. Adroitly she hurried onto another subject.

"You're wonderful to do this for me," Wanda said sweetly. "No one else would give up an entire morning to bake a cake she won't even get credit for making."

"Glad to do it."

"Hey, can I have a taste of that?"

"Absolutely not."

"Please? Pretty please? Pretty please with burnt sugar on it? Even my mother let me have the egg beaters before she rinsed 'em off."

"I didn't use an electric mixer."

"How about the spatula?" asked Wanda. "You're almost done with that."

Jenny graciously offered the spatula to Wanda, who guiltily went to work on it. There was a strong flavor of burnt sugar, but what she liked most was the texture of the batter in her mouth. Jenny looked at Wanda, whose eyes were shut. She was making small noises of satisfaction then went on to reiterate her penchant for things like cake batter, cookie dough, even pancake mix. "I'll tell you a story," she said.

"If it's the one about the birthday cake you had when you were ten years old, I've heard it."

She'd been eleven, actually. Wanda didn't bother correcting her. The story for which she held such affection began when her mother asked her what kind of cake she wanted for her birthday. Expecting her daughter to say chocolate or vanilla or perhaps even strawberry short cake, she was surprised when Wanda declared it didn't matter. "Just as long as you don't bake it," Wanda had said. And though it was against her better judgment, her mother made up the batter then handed little Wanda the bowl. She ate the whole thing.

"Besides, it has a very unpleasant ending," Jenny said.

Wanda looked at her quizzically.

"The tummy ache," Jenny said. "Pain all night long. Punishment for the crime of over-indulgence."

"Got anything to wash this down with?"

"There's some cranberry juice in the fridge."

Wanda got a tumbler from one of the cupboards and poured herself a glass. To her delight Jenny asked her to pour her a glass too. She took the empty juice bottle and went into the pantry to throw it away. She had one of the glasses with her and into this she poured the contents of the medicine phial. Returning to the kitchen, she filled it with juice and gingerly placed it before Jenny, who was quietly sitting at the table.

"Something wrong?"

"Bob's having an affair."

"Now what makes you think that?" asked Wanda, hoping she sounded skeptical.

Jenny explained the signs had been there for some time. There were errands that took hours, late nights at the office, mysterious trips with associates she'd never heard him speak of before. Romance visited them rarely. At first Jenny thought her husband's distance was due to stress or some other difficulty. Finally, though,

there was an incontrovertible piece of evidence for which she could provide no innocent explanation. One day, while readying the clothes for the laundry, she came across lipstick smeared onto one of his shirt-collars. Scarcely Pink—the new shade. And again Wanda hoped she exuded a calm she did not feel. She hoped Jenny didn't remember that was the same brand she'd bought a couple of weeks ago when they went shopping.

Her eyes tearing up, Jenny looked up at Wanda. "It's so hard to know what to do when you're faced with a situation like this," she said. "What would you do if Donald began seeing another woman?"

"I'd kill him."

Wanda made sure she laughed in such a way as to inspire Jenny to do the same. That failed to happen, though, and Jenny persisted.

"Yes, naturally that was my first thought," she said. "But that's the act of a woman who hasn't thought things through."

"Of course murder is always done by someone not in their right mind. Let's drink to that, shall we?" Wanda handed Jenny her drink.

"No, that isn't what I meant." Jenny's tone was one of surety. "I meant she hadn't thought things through because if she had, she would realize it's not the husband you kill in a situation like that. It's the mistress."

"Oh?"

"Think about it," Jenny explained. "You kill your husband, and what have you got? Not a thing. All of a sudden there's no money coming in, and this is not a small item if you don't work outside the home. There would be no father for the children, either, and if the *wife* in you doesn't care about this, the *mother* in you must. And, let's face it, much against your better judgment, you probably still love him. But if you kill the mistress, you get to have your cake batter and eat it, too!"

Wanda's thoughts drifted to those clandestine meetings with Jenny's husband. She felt guilty about having caused her friend's unhappiness, but she couldn't help herself.

"Forbidden fruit," Jenny was saying. "You can't keep your hands off, can you?"

"What do you mean?" Wanda asked, startled.

"You've been at the batter again."

It was true. Absentmindedly Wanda had been skimming the spatula along the side of the bowl and sampling gobs of cake batter. Contritely she put down the spatula and offered to redeem herself by helping out like she was supposed to do. In a moment Jenny had her greasing and flouring the baking pan.

"No more sampling now," Jenny said. "The batter has to set for a minute."

But when Jenny began putting away the shortening and the flour, Wanda seized the opportunity to grab and swallow two fingers of batter.

"What did I do with my drink?"

"Right where you left it," Wanda said helpfully. She watched as Jenny picked up the glass and put it to her lips. Wanda would miss her sunny disposition. The idea Jenny had even contemplated murder of any sort amused her. "Do you really think you're capable of murder?" she asked. That had been a mistake on Wanda's part because immediately Jenny put the glass back down on the table without having drunk from it.

"To protect my family I would do anything."

She even has the better motive, Wanda thought. The killing Wanda was about to commit was for purely selfish reasons.

"How would *you* do it?" Jenny asked.

"With poison."

"Ugly way to go."

Wanda shuddered. How true that was. How true that would be. She imagined the broken end of a bottle grinding its way out of her belly from the inside. *How could she do this to her best friend?*

She felt queasy. There was heaviness in her chest that made her warm. She needed this to be over. Then she'd be free of the weight of this unbearable anticipation. Jenny was holding the glass, but still hadn't had so much as a sip from it. *Would she ever?*

"Watching someone die that way," Jenny said. "That would be the most difficult part."

"No, it isn't," Wanda replied. "It's figuring out how to get the poison *into* your intended victim."

Her remark had come out more sharp than sardonic, but Jenny only giggled.

"That's a cinch," Jenny said, sipping at her cranberry juice. "All you do is slip the poison into something you know that person can't resist!"

Whatever Jenny was saying was lost on Wanda, who was now experiencing overpowering thirst and severe abdominal pain.

"Am I almost done?"

"Very nearly."

"I don't feel very well."

"Think it's all that batter you ate?" Jenny asked, raising her glass in a toast. "I do."

She smiled then drained her glass.

The Twins

by Ellie Comeau

They were twins. Identical. No one could tell them apart, not even their parents. Neither had a distinguishing mole or birthmark anywhere, not even a freckle. When they were babies, the mother tied a different color of ribbon around their ankles to help her know which twin was which. As they grew, the ribbons gone, identifying them was more difficult. They had identical cowlicks and the shape of their teeth exactly the same. Their speech inflections were alike as was their laughter. Everything about them was indistinguishable. They enjoyed being twins and played it to the hilt. When they were in school, even though they were in different classes, they wrote identical answers to test questions and received the same grades. Sometimes, they would switch identities in their classes. After all, no one could tell them apart, so why not? They liked having a little fun every once in a while.

But, they had a major problem. They were born Jewish, before World War II, in Germany. Their parents were worried. Rumors of Jewish annihilation were evident. Jewish business's were being burned or destroyed. Many Jews were baptized as Christians in order to avoid being hurt or worse killed. But, there were clues that ethnic cleansing was the plan with construction of concentration camps in Germany and Poland.

The parents were panicked. They wanted to save their children. They heard that England would accept Jewish children, finding homes for them. So, they desperately tried to get those important papers that would ensure their children's safety even though it meant never seeing them again. However, there was a glitch in the plan, making it impossible for their beloved children to leave Germany.

And then it happened. One night, the gestapo banged on their door and told the family to get ready. They were going on a trip.

They had ten minutes. The whole village met outside their homes and were forced to march toward the train station. One hundred persons were pushed into each cattle car and began the week long trip to only God knew where. They were cramped for space. The twins had to sit on their parent's laps. There was a bucket in the corner of the car for waste. Food consisted of dry bread and a little water. One night while stopped at a station, they got some watery soup. Many elders and those with medical problems died on this journey.

Finally, they arrived at their destination, Auschwitz. There, at the gate was Josef Mengele ordering people to the left or right. Those, who went left were saved, at least for the time being, for work detail. Those, who were ordered right went to the showers and then ovens. Dr. Mengele saw the twins who were thirteen years old and sent them to his special hospital, a place called The Zoo. He was fascinated by twins, his specialty in medicine being genetics and was amazed at the likeness of his new set.

They were treated fairly well at first. They were given good food and had clean comfortable beds to sleep on. They were even provided toys and books. And, not seen by adults housed in other barracks, the children had a place to play outside.

Mengele was seeking perfection in the Aryan children in order to promote the master race. The twins, having been born with blue eyes, were spared having their eyes injected with dye to make them blue. Other children, born with brown eyes, suffered excruciating pain and varying degrees of blindness due to this procedure. However, the twins were exposed to other atrocities. Blood samples were taken daily and blood from others injected into them. They had surgical procedures without anesthesia that left them close to death. They were battered and broken and terribly violated by war's end, but somehow they managed to survive. What helped them was thinking of the other. Because they had identical thoughts, their ability to communicate with each other without speech, and offer hope and love probably saved their lives.

After the liberation, and receiving care that helped them heal the evil they endured, they learned their parents died as well as their aunts, uncles and cousins. They were now alone in the world and

grateful they had each other. They enrolled in school, finished their education, and after saving money from the jobs they had, they booked passage to America, enrolled in college and eventually became teachers. Their physical scars healed with time, but it was questionable if their emotional ones did as well. They never left each other's side. They went everywhere and did everything together. They never married, but if you asked, they would tell you they were happy.

And so they aged and got old. Their outside activities were now limited due to the infirmities of aging, but they were able to take care of their daily needs such as paying bills and purchasing food. And early, every Saturday morning, the twins, dressed in identical clothing, could be seen walking arm and arm down the street, rain or shine, sleet or snow, going to temple for early morning shabbat services to pray for forgiveness, to remember their losses, to ask for guidance and to thank God for life and each other. Only now, one thing was different. They were not so identical any longer. The numbers branded on their left arms at Auschwitz, were not the same.

¿Qué se siente matar?

by Omar Bravo

— ¿Que se siente matar, eh meño?

— ¿Qué dices?

— Sí, ¿qué se siente matar?—, volvió a soltarle.

No hace falta ser demasiado inteligente, un genio digamos, para saber, así nada más, por mero sentido común, se tenga poco o mucho, que una pregunta de este tipo puede tomar desprevenido a cualquiera. Está claro también que palabras como esas, fuertes de tan directas y lejanas quizá de tan poco probables, no se pueden decir despreocupadamente, como si se hablase de alguna nimiedad. A menos que se trate, claro, de una película o una historia violenta. No es el caso.

Lo cierto es que el meño se quedó mucho rato en silencio, digiriendo su propia saliva, pensando, haciendo acaso allá muy dentro de sí mismo, al otro meño, al que nadie veía o escuchaba, la misma pregunta.

Estaba oscureciendo. Algo, como cebolla muy fresca, o papas, no importa para el caso, aunque alguna cosa sería sin embargo, chirriaba en el aceite. El foco de la pequeña cocina, débil y grasiento, estaba encendido. Quieto, debajo de la mesa, el perro. Ella de espaldas siempre, las manos al sartén, el pelo untado por el sudor a las sienes, espantándose los moscos, la jerga al hombro, insistió.

— ¿No sabes meño, eh?—.

— Pérame— dijo él, y se quitó la camisa. “¿Qué se siente matar, eh?”, repitió el meño para sí, sus ojos descorriendo las pequeñas cortinas sobre el lavaplatos mugroso, sus ojos brincándose la ventana estrellada, atravesando el zacatal del patio, esquivando cacharros,

saltando luego el irregular cerco de troncos, sus ojos yéndose lejos, muy lejos, por la federal quince, hacia otra noche, otro patio, otra casa, otra cocina, subiendo de pronto las escaleras alfombradas, haciendo ruido apenas, flotando casi, hasta llegar a una habitación, abrir la puerta, y luego, recostado sobre la cama, toparse con el cuerpo agonizante, la sangre tibia aún, fluyendo, rápidamente, desde el centro del pecho. Y el meño ahí, el otro que sus ojos veían o su memoria, retrocediendo, apuntando todavía, su mano temblorosa, el revólver.

—¿Tons?, ¿me vas a decir o no?—, chilló ella. Y haciendo a un lado la pistola que el meño se encontraba puliendo, puso dos platos, con un guiso impreciso, sobre la mesa.

Empezaron a comer en silencio. Esa noche cualquiera, la luna altísima, las luces encendidas en los otros remolques, los coches pasando en la distancia, se escuchaba tan sólo el sonido metálico de un pequeño abanico que no les daba abasto. El perro se le pegó a las pantorrillas y empezó a gemir muy despacito sacando la lengua.

Entonces, como si sobre el plato pudiera, de pronto, escogerse una respuesta de entre muchas posibles, al azar tal vez, u ordenar los pensamientos, revueltos de súbito, el meño separaba las papas, el arroz, los pedacitos de carne.

—¡Chingado meño, no juegues con la comida!— dijo ella.

Y él, levantándose, caminando hasta el umbral de la puerta, o flotando diríase, detenido un instante junto a la tela metálica, mirando hacia fuera, nada en particular, o posiblemente con los ojos cerrados, se limitó a dar un largo suspiro.

—Se siente miedo—, dijo por fin. —Se siente muchísimo miedo—. Y se salió hasta el patio, y encendió un cigarrillo, y ya no comió nada.

A Monologue for Theater

by Hugh Fox

I'm so careful with, like, candles, jasmine and wintergreen and I have my nails done every week, it was so scary when my husband died and I decided to move to Boston to be close to my daughter, Margaret, who has two kids, Rebecca, four, and Alexander, just born, and I went through all my clothes and old pictures and....I'm picky, I want my pecan rolls just right, and my French onion soup, obsessively careful about my bed and the colors in my bedroom, I was in the Atacama desert with my husband once for three months, Chile, way up in the mountains, a high-altitude desert, and I'd go out at night, this little *pensión* we were staying in, he was an archaeologist, and there were all these claims about the outlandish antiquity of axe-heads and arrowheads and things in that area, and I'd go out and look up at the sky, and, I'm from Chicago, you can see a few stars I suppose, but in the Atacama desert the whole sky was dotted with stars, not a square inch, millimeter without a star in it, it was so bright I could practically read a newspaper with the light, and I'd think, if I went to any place on the earth it would be the same, how many trillions of stars, suns, galaxies are there, and here we are with our knee sox and barbecues, amethyst, beryl and diamond rings and watches, I'm an ant, a bee, a termite....I never look up at night....I mean, it can't be infinite, I mean what's it contained inside of, and it can't be eternal, but how could it or anything else begin from nothingness.....I never look up at night....

CONTRIBUTORS

Omar Bravo was born in a small town in the north of México called Bacobampo in May of 1979. When he was 17, he moved to the Hermosillo city and studied Hispanic literature and acting. He has published a short story, *Plaquette* called "El Tercer Cajon" (*The Third Suitcase*), and his poems and short stories have been published in literary magazines in his country. Omar wrote a script for a children's play called "While You Are Sleeping, Don Quijote" (*Mientras Duermes, Don Quijote*), and two of his poems have won a literary prize.

Ellie Comeau has been a passionate writer since she learned to write poems, essays, short stories, journals, and a book. She is a retired registered nurse and also a self-employed licensed drug and alcoholism counselor. She has two adult sons, one married with a 15 month old daughter, and another son who will be married in June. She has been widowed many years. Her other passion is oil painting, and her specialty is portraits, and she has sold many. She belongs to two writing groups which have encouraged and supported her, and a book club that causes her to read books that she might pass by. She has lived in Massachusetts her whole life, and currently resides in Saugus.

Michael P Dooner's full-length play *In Good Company* came third in an International Playwriting Competition 2006 with *Writers' Digest*. *In Good Company* will also come to stage in Ireland next year. He co-wrote *Shadows and Dust* which was staged in Ireland in 2006.

Hugh Fox was born in Chicago in 1932, polio at age five, first human being to receive a new vaccine being developed there. It worked, but although he could walk again, his parents still immersed him in the arts, then tried to push him into Medicine (his father an ex-violinist M.D.)...he rebelled, got a Ph.D. in American Literature from the U. of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, married a

Peruvian and started visiting all the ruins of the ancient Indians throughout the Americas, began to see things that no one else had seen before. 100 books published. His latest book, *Rediscovering America*, will be out in January, from World Audience.

Lo Galluccio currently resides in Cambridge, MA, after an eight year residency on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Her poetry chapbook "Hot Rain" came out on Singing Bone Press in 2003 and she's read at St. Mark's Poetry Project, Tapestry of Voices at Borders in Boston, The Mad Poet's Café in Warwick Rhode Island, among many other venues. Recently her poetry was featured on www.strangeroad.com and reviewed by www.litkicks.com. She's served as the Poetry Editor of the Alewife newspaper for several years and frequently reviews books for Ibbetson St. Press; among her favorites, Blood Cocoon by Hugh Fox and Licorice Daughter by Lyn Lifshin. A short memoir piece called, "The Ganesha Factor" was published by Heat City Literary Review in 2005. Galluccio was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for her poem Millennium in 2006 and in 2007 by Abramelin magazine for her poem, What I really Want. Lo's work as a vocal artist includes two solo CDs, "Being Visited" on the now defunct Knitting Factory label and "Spell on You." In 2008 a book-length prose-poem called "Sarasota VII" will be published by Cervena Barva Press. Lo holds a B.A. from Harvard College and also studied at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. www.myspace.com/lolagalluccio.

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Catherina Hollifield joined an online writing class called Y2K in April 2001, and eventually enrolled in and took lessons from the Long Ridge Writer's Group. She had a short story called *Taking the Long Way Home* published early in 2007 in a quilting anthology called

American Patchwork by Sonja Hakala, published by St. Martin's Press. She is currently writing a novel with my writing partner, Joe Bognanni under the pen name of J.K. Ingersoll.

Robert M. Hensel was born with a birth defect known as spina bifida. A disability that has not stopped him from achieving success in his life. Robert serves as an Advocate for the disabled, an on going effort to to better the rights of all Americans with disabilities. He is an International poet-writer, with well over 900 publications Published worldwide. In 2000, Robert was nominated as one of the best poets of the 20th Cen. Recently, he was nominated for the pushcart prize. Robert is also a Guinness & Ripley's World Record Holder for the longest non stop wheelie in a wheelchair, covering a total distance of 6.178 miles. The reason for his record was to help raise money for wheelchair ramps throughout the community. Robert's journey doesn't stop there by any means. In Oct 2006, Robert was asked to carry the torch for the 2006 Asian games. It is said that he was the only one chosen out of thousands of other Celebrities throughout the United States to carry out such an honor. Robert can be found all over the internet. Contact Any Celebrity & Famous Birthdays, just to name a few. Those interested in viewing Mr. Hensel & his record in the 2004 Guinness Book, can get their hands on it through any public library.

Doug Johnson is editor of Cave Moon Press a non-profit literary press bridging local and global issues through literary arts. In exploring William Blake's ideas of blending poetry and image he stumbled upon photography as an integral part of the poem. 'Lace Bullet' (appearing on the cover of *The audience Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2) was taken for a poem written in tribute to Naomi Shihab-Nye. The photo is taken in Doug's house after a conversation with his son about bullets, Iraqi children and the juxtaposition of innocence and objects of violence. Doug is published as a poet and appeared recently in Skive magazine with a short story. Doug lives in Yakima Washington and teaches English in the high school where Raymond Carver graduated. The sense of compressed place informs his photography, poems and stories. As a doctoral student in educational psychology Doug has also published articles in

Educational Law as well as Psychological education of Hispanics. Cave Moon Press has produced its inaugural title about Federal Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, "Dear Mr. Douglas: Letters and Poems discovering the life of W.O. Douglas" in an effort to promote justice all the way from Harvard to Yakima. His hobbies include riding Harley Davidson motorcycles, riding his bicycle and learning languages. He is married to an angel and has three kids. Photography and writing are scribbled in the margins.

Ward Jones is a full-time writer and has published short-stories in *The Dead Mule* and *EWG Presents*.

Bruce Lader is the author of the full-length book, *Discovering Mortality* (March Street Press, 2005). His poems have appeared in *The New York Quarterly*, *Poetry*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Poet Lore*, and other journals. His article, "Bringing the Oceano Dunes to Life," with photography by Robert Werling, was published in the environmental magazine, *Trilogy*. A former writer-in-residence at the Wurlitzer Colony, and recipient of an honorarium from the College of Creative Studies at UC-Santa Barbara, he is the founding director of Bridges Tutoring, an organization educating students from diverse cultures.

Edward Musto is the author of *Genevieve*, *Blood Dues*, *Porter Peace*, *Boston Proper*, *The Game of Love*, and *The Ninth Circle*, all of which have been produced in New York. He has also penned the "evening of murder" series, the first of which, *An Evening of Murder and the Like*, received an Edgar Award nomination from the Mystery Writers of America as Best Play. The most recent in the series, *Mass. Murder*, premiered last month. Recipient of an Edward Albee fellowship, Edward is a member of Charles Maryan's Playwrights/Directors Workshop and The Dramatists Guild.

Ashok Niyogi is an Economics graduate from Presidency College, Calcutta. He made a career as an International Trader and has lived

and worked in the Soviet Union, Europe and South East Asia in the '80s and '90s. At 52, he has been retired for some years and has been cashew farming, writing and traveling. He divides time between California, where his daughters live, Delhi and the Indian Himalayas. He is increasingly involved in his personal spiritual quest and has undertaken serious study of scripture. He has published a book of poems, TENTATIVELY, [iUniverse, Lincoln, NE – 1995] and has been extensively published in print and on-line magazines in the USA, UK, Australia and Canada. Numerous chap books of his poems have been brought out by SCARS Publications, UC-Davis, Slow Trains and others. Ashok writes about life.

Anthony Rubino, Jr. was born in New Jersey, a first-generation, Italian-American, Roman-Catholic. Needless to say he developed a sense of humor at an early age ... and then felt guilty about it. Combining, confusion, art, humor and TV he found his calling in the careful study of drivel. Never a stickler for math, Tony wrote, "[Life Lessons from Your Dog](#)" as the fifth installment of his Life-Lessons book trilogy, which includes "[Life Lessons from Your Cat](#)," "[Life Lessons from Elvis](#)," "[Life Lessons from the Bradys](#)," and "[Life Lessons from Melrose Place](#)." Before that he displayed his steely work ethic by penning, "[1001 Reasons to Procrastinate](#)." And his fear of discomfort through eternal damnation is reflected in his recent tome, "[The Get Into Heaven Deck: Or Your Money Back](#)." Along the way Tony has contributed his articles and cartoons to publications such as: MAD Magazine, Cracked, National Lampoon, the Chicago Tribune, and Opium Magazine. He is currently under contract with [Creators Syndicate](#) where he is developing a daily cartoon strip. His other cartoon syndication credits include national distribution by King Features and Tribune Media Services. Tony's designs, comics and words can also be found on greeting cards and other product lines such as calendars, posters, and apparel sold in stores and catalogs worldwide. When not working on his writing and art in New York City he spends his time not working on his writing and art in New York City.

Vincent Spada is 31 years old and a professional writer. He lives and works in Massachusetts, where he was born. His poems have been

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M. Stefan Strozjier lives in New York City. He is the founder and artistic director of [La Muse Venale Acting Troupe](#). His plays, *Guns, Shackles & Winter Coats*, *The Whales*, *The Tragedy of Abraham Lincoln*, and *The Green Game*, were performed in lengthy runs, off-off and Off-Broadway, in the Midtown International Theatre Festival and other festivals. He has directed five plays and one musical, and produced fifteen. His novels, short stories, poems, essays, plays, etceteras, are on his Web site: www.mstefanstrozier.org. He has been published in literary journals (online and in print), magazines, and newspapers. He is the founder, CEO, and editor-in-chief of [World Audience Publishers](#).

Christopher Taylor is from Liverpool, England. After completing a degree in Industrial Design from the University of Central Lancashire, he set up a design consultancy where he is co-director. Chris also works as a freelance designer / illustrator and creates digital artwork for a local gallery. He has designed multiple book covers (and the spines and back covers) for World Audience.

Matthew Ward is the managing editor of *audience* and he lives in Newcastle, Australia. He started writing seriously in 1993. In 1994, he had poetry published in OPUS (Newcastle University's magazine), Newcastle Herald, Writer's World, and JIGs (Journal of Interdisciplinary & Gender Studies). He has written serious articles for literary newsletters and satirical ones, and the now defunct www.theLiberals.org. His short stories have appeared in OPUS. In 2004, his story 'Jake With A Snarly Smile On His Chops' was published as a novella by Independence Jones (Australia). In 2006, he wrote two IT-related e-books. It was also in 2006 that his book of short stories, ['Her Mouth Looked Like a Cat's Bum'](#), was

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- 2) Advertisement plan no. 2: 4”(w) x 6”(h) = \$30.00
- 3) Advertisement plan no. 3: 3”(w) x 4”(h) = \$20.00

Contact: World Audience, Inc.

Attn: Mike Strozier

303 Park Avenue South, #1440

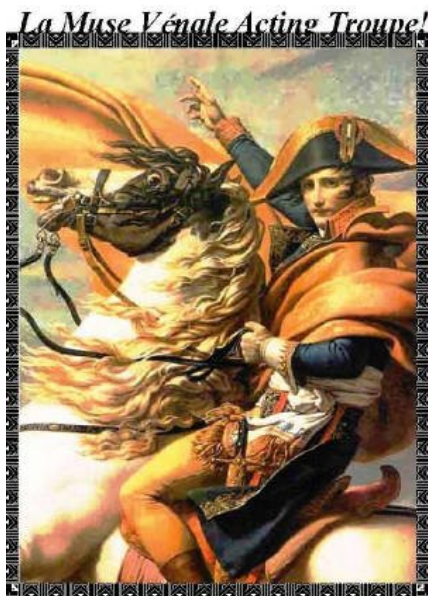
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Please make your check out to: World Audience, Inc. Or, you may pay through PayPal on our Web site: www.worldaudience.org, to the email address: info@worldaudience.org. Please send us an email for further information: info@worldaudience.org. Thank you.



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