Rewrites

XXVIII
Rewrites welcomes poetry, fiction, art, and photography submissions from September 1st through January 15th at rewrites@atlantic.edu. Please note that only students, staff, faculty, and alumni of Atlantic Cape Community College are eligible for publication in the magazine. Please limit submissions to five per category.

Rewrites is a non-profit literary and art magazine published annually in the spring by the students of Atlantic Cape Community College. The editor and staff are solely responsible for the content and layout of the magazine, and reserve the right to edit any submitted copy. The ideas expressed in Rewrites do not necessarily reflect those of Atlantic Cape Community College.

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Hello, readers of Rewrites 2010!

I want to thank all of the students, alumni, staff, and faculty who submitted their wonderful poetry, short stories, and haiku along with amazing photography and artwork. All submissions were fascinating to view and to read, yet difficult to choose from. The staff and I reviewed over 200 submissions. If you are one of the individuals to have your work published in this year’s magazine, congratulations and keep up the good work! To the other submitters, please keep writing, doing artwork and photography to prepare to submit for 2011 and future magazines.

Potential submitters or future members of Rewrites do not have to be English or Art majors. All you need is a passion to write or to create artwork, take pictures, or put together a magazine. I encourage all to explore or reveal your hidden talents to share with us by joining Rewrites, submitting, or coming to one of our open mic events.

I am a Computer major who loves to take pictures as a hobby, but only writes when required to. Fall 2008 semester I started as the treasurer for the 2009 magazine, and now I am president. The experience of being a part of creating a magazine and running a club is a challenge with incredible results I will never forget.

I want to thank the awesome Rewrites staff and members for all of their help and contributions that made this magazine possible. Each brought their unique talents to the table.

Wendy Marchione
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*Cover art by Carole Dieterly*
Do You Know How To Use This Weapon? (The Pen)

John Guttschall

You are my weapon
of mass and self-destruction
Quill of feather quilt

You are my acidic tongue when
I am speechless
My larynx when I am voiceless

You are my manhood,
my member
for when I am impotent

You are my tool
by which I carve
castles out of language

You are my escape plan
A map of the prison wall
Up and over into existential non-existence

But you are so much everything
and more
Dear Moleskin,

Carole Dieterly

A book, with its clear white pages
Irreparably calls to one, a writer.
It begs, pleads with each breath involved in the turn of a page
To be used.
Used.
Written in.
Filled with words, pictures, ideas and idiotic conclusions.
It does not judge. A page is open, always.
It matters not if its writer is a novice or an expert.
A fool
A toddler
An eighty-year-old alcoholic chain smoker.
The writers mean nothing to the page of a book.
It only seeks out satisfaction. Life. Warmth.
Achieved solely with the comfort of a utensil caressing its smooth surface.
It judges not. It only asks to be clothed in writing.
Swiftly, frantically, before eventually inspiration runs out—}

Thompson Didn’t Wake Up to Fear and Loathing

Mark Stansbury

Gazing into a blank slate, my mind has this theory that some divine power will tell the story for me, as if Salinger wrote “For Esme—With Love and Squalor” without having to endure effort, just hoping the words would reveal themselves. Please come out, words, come out of your hiding place, for I am only here to see your majestic illumination when combined with nouns and verbs.

Someone had to write the evidence of the past, one Neanderthal had to carve the first drawing on the inside of a cave, but that dweller only had to draw pictures of bison. He did not have to eloquently describe how a tree grows, or how he felt about Jack London, he just painted pictures of slaughtering beasts.

I need to see the words dance into harmony, but they will not dance without choreography, for I must teach them to flutter with one another, but still I sit and continue to gape at the white drawing board, knowing that I have no chance to see the picture move without scratching the ink to the empty sheet. Why can’t my hand gently bring the articulate pen to the vacant composition? Is my hand withering into nothing like Langston’s portrayal of a raisin?

Maybe these adjectives and pronouns are apprehensive of me, so they isolate themselves in ghettos and only bare themselves with other expressions. My incarcerated mind is peering at the outside world and the prison guards are the condescending words in which I seek. They jeer at me because they have what I need, freedom. The words need to liberate me from this mental purgatory, and only then I will perceive visions of fulfillment, but until these universal terms extricate me from myself, I primarily see a reoccurring depression of hell in an impenetrable piece of loose-leaf.
Words, carried on the soul’s breath.  
Cast them not lightly to the wind,  
for neither sincerest regret nor stallion’s might  
will return them easily to the lips.

Words may unite or divide.  
Guard well the tendencies of the razor tongue,  
for nothing uttered does not touch another,  
resonance the bridge between heaven and hell.

Words may offend or enthrall.  
Protect above all that which moves the heart,  
for men are willed easily to action,  
their passions wrung for blood or water.

Words may confuse or bring clarity.  
Mind well that which entrusts purpose,  
for the spirit glides naturally towards faith,  
abiding in devotion, hopeful of truth.

---

Monochromatic sky and earth converge  
Naked trees  
Twisted leaf scrapes the sidewalk  
Winter’s language is brown and grey

---

Lisa Apel-Gendron
Jason Perna

Got Color?
My Word
Dancing with the Dead
Carole Dieterly

We enjoyed hide and seek
Around the gravestones
Squatting above the dead
For a game
Great playfulness for
The fresh green grass
Was better than
Our dirt mounds
We picked dried flowers
And pictures and toys
Ran our fingers
Through the granite indents
And wondered what the stones said.
We enjoyed the mud pies
Made by rain
Pooling over the new dirt
Of the fresh dead

One Moment in Time
Kathy Fritz

Embraced in a tapestry of winter colors;
briefly, gently my landscape evolves
melting under the rising sun.
Come spring, the cadenced step of man
Must become that of a child;
An intimation of heavy footfalls,
Gone the swaggered panache,
Out is the misprized insensate boot plod!

Come spring, as if by magic, by wondrous philter,
Tatterdemalion cover surrenders to a planned comity,
Harking to the knell, the decided invitation
Fomented by sapient time;
Obeisant to sempiternal gods.

Come spring, the quondam moods,
A mélange of midnight’s dark interspersed with
Early morning blue/grays; panoply against inevitable change;
Asper hints of seasonal admonition, coming redress,
Chthonic powers of the Great Mother.

Come spring, the cadenced step of man...
Nay, the naïf fawn, seems to dissever youthful Abandonment from her first walk.
She floats, just above the newly flowered field,
Mindful of swollen earth beneath her elfin feet.

Come spring...
Pillow thy stride, my beloved creature;
For Mother Nature is pregnant.
Bonfire air
Sandy feet
Marshmallows giggles
Dancing flames
in ocean filled eyes

The personified door behind me waves to me and tries to gain my attention by crying out its need for Water Displacement, 40th attempt. I fall into the musty hammock which drowns me in its tyrannical spider web cloth fibers. Below my balcony view reveals the zinc wearers passing by as I desperately try to tune out their conversational drones by cringing my eyelids and releasing, hoping that they have somehow vanished into nearby states such as Pennsylvania or Ohio.

My mind drifts over the roofs of neighboring houses as I calmly relive my spirited nights of summer, coffee mugs half full of Franzia stand like inebriated soldiers around my bare feet. The brisk air is a constant reminder of early autumn, where the friends of summer are exiled to their far off universities, but the zinc wearers still linger until their feet freeze in their obnoxious orange crocks.

I blush, almost an Irish drunken glow as I come to the closure of another, practically pornographic Tucker Max memoir. I place my old Phillies ticket stub to mark my place as I close the tattered piece of trashy yet hilarious literature.

I gaze downward, lying there is a rusted beach chair and an exhausted yard sale long board with Natural Ice cans crushed around it. Just above is a drenched plaid sofa with stains containing unidentified substances, but the feng shui of the porch lives within the coffee table made out of milk crates and a creased boogie board.

My reflection of the heated solstice is among these warped columns, the creaking boards, and the unstable railings. The enduring Mind v. Body issue has dissipated because both my mind and body are at peace within the knitted threads of this malodorous hammock.
Still Waiting on the Penguins

Kenneth D. Dieterly

It takes a special kind of weather to make you just want to be outside. Everyone has felt it at least once: perfect sun, perfect temperature, and perfect humidity. One summer, on a day I will never forget, was none of these. In fact, it was about as bad as it gets in relation to weather that day. The day lives on even now in infamy.

It was a hot south Jersey day. Locals know the one, humid enough to drown you with a deep breath, hot enough to cook an egg on the street, then melt your shoes, and the sun could burn you through the roof of your house. Basically, it was an extra bad day for everyone, but it was about to get worse in Corbin City. Out of nowhere, the sky went black with a layer of clouds trying out for the next eclipse, to replace the moon. It might as well've been night again. Everyone that wasn’t driven inside by the heat made a hasty retreat just as the first roll of thunder shattered the sky.

One, two, three huge blasts of lightning crashed in visible range, even more in hearing range. If only we were lucky enough to only have to deal with the lightning. The first drop of rain hit a bit harder than you would expect. The second hit just as hard, as did the third and all others after. Once the storm picked up, it was realized that there was no rain at all. It was hailing, and not little hail either. The stones falling from the heavens were as matchbox cars in size and weight. A dish placed outside allowed for safe collection of enough cubes to confirm. Full hailstones, the size of children’s toys rained down hard and fast enough to make one think Alaska was run through a chipper/shredder and blown all over us. We all were waiting for penguins to fall from the sky to compliment the mounting ice.

Lightning and ice fell at a frightening pace, like the apocalypse was getting in a practice run over Corbin City. Almost as if the world’s light switch was flipped on, the hail died. Not sputtered to a slower amount until a stop, it just stopped altogether in one giant pause and eject of tape. The thunder waned shortly thereafter, leaving a light cloud cover for the rest of the day, the kind that let the sun through anyway. Just as instantly as it came up, the storm scattered in its own instant. We were still waiting on the penguins.

Preliminary examination showed no real damage by the storm, as surprising as it may seem. All vehicles and windows survived without injury, not even a dent in a car hood. It was unbelievable, but facts are facts regardless of belief in them. In all my years, I have never been through a storm of its equal. I have seen foot high snow, hurricanes, and yet I will never see another storm to match the instant fury of that hail. If I’m lucky, I will never see its superior either.
**Storm (for Gizmo)**

Robert Geise

Tornado is to hurricane as
hurricane is to what unnamed storm
that she suffered
as her children fell and burned
in a backdraft of oxygen
and combustion
that seared pain,
agony for those few moments
before the wave of endorphins
relaxed their breathing
and ended their green lives
painless, thankfully?
Because as awful as a child’s death,
as awful as a mother’s grief can be,
there are things so much worse.
She knows this,
and while the storm blows through
after many years, decades,
raindrops still hit her cheek,
a reminder of hosed water diffused,
spraying off the bones of a blackened house
and wetting her face,
or the parts not already soaked with her tears.

---

**The Other Side of the Mountain**

Lisa Apel-Gendron

We’ve climbed since I can remember
Your hand gently ushering me
Up the steep inclines
Through childhood
Around the sharp turns
Through teen years
Over weathered boulders
Through college
Across energetic streams
Through career challenges
Finding our way on a narrow trail
Finally reaching the pinnacle

It was so clear there
We could see a hundred miles in all directions
Nothing clouded the view
Parent and child both adults now
Enjoying a shared consciousness
This is where time needed to stand still
This is when nothing should ever change

No, no
I don’t want to go down the mountain
I don’t want to see what’s there
Let’s stay here and just rest a while
Let’s enjoy this moment forever

He said, “No, we must move on
This is Nature’s way”
Lending his hand, he guided me on the first step down
“You will be fine on this journey, but not just yet
Each must climb down the mountain when the time comes”
I.

Dad goes to visit Grandfather in the hospital—but he is barely coherent anymore. The catheter bag is almost all blood. He is swollen. When he breathes, it sounds like more breath leaves than is taken in—the soul leeches from the body in the last days—

“I’m ready to go now,” Grandfather whispers.

Dad mistakes his meaning; encourages, “You’re ready to go home?” But only Mom understands. Mom says, she has seen the signs before, she says: the dye cast in the catheter bag; the hands shaking like Death’s childish rattles; seen the signs with her own mother. She remembers her mother, covered with infestations at the end; and her toddler son and infant daughter with her out there in that land beyond the Susquehanna; Mom, with her hair like straw in a manger, telling her own Mom, who had fluffy white hair of clouds, “I have to go. I can’t stay here anymore, not with the children.”

The woman with hair like the clouds smiling, then, and said, “I saw my childhood friends today.”

One imagines then: Mom clutching onto her son’s hand while cradling the screaming infant in her arms, pushing the kids back just as she was pressed close. The woman with the hair like straw (“we have to go now”), her own mother in clouds—

“I’m ready to go now too.”

II.

Grandfather seems to lie in unpleasant dreams.

He lies not in death, and not in life, which is the misfortune; for, as Epicurus notes, *when one is, death is not; when death is, one is not*. He is the cognate of death and life now. He breathes as if through a pall now in breathless
darkness, ashen like a figure from a Munch or Bacon painting, sunken mouth rapt in silent “O” that cannot be summoned, it cannot be articulated (the scream). And with the shaking, the rattling of the limbs: the workmen at work inside (Death’s diligent workmen). You want to get close to smell him, to smell what death smells like, but don’t remember what he smelt like before, and do not know if this is him or death now; or just the hospital. Do any of us know what it smells like anymore? There was a time we might have been born and slept and died in one bed; might have smelled death naturally every year; now we are born in one wing of one hospital and return to another, a separate room to die in—a foreign, narrow space. Like a baby, lying in the nursery bed again, wrapped in the white cotton cloth, making that hollow moan. But it is not Death that looks us in the face at this moment: it is life. It is as Michelangelo notes: “If we have been pleased in life then we should not be displeased in death.” It is life we look in the face. That is what we are scared of; scared to confront.

The worst must be if life had meaning only to oneself.

The worst, you think, would be that all of this should go on.

III.

You and Mom go over to the Home to clean out the kitchenette and the bathroom and the closet and bureau. Dad wishes to go through the personal artifacts himself: to sit in the room in the Home with the half-finished projects and puzzles; to go over the year that was. It was, after all, only one year. “He had a nice year,” mom reflects. “He had Christmas Eve and Christmas and Easter and all the holidays with us. And all those Sunday breakfasts with Dad.” And Dad or Mom or both (with sometimes you) were over there every day to see him.

Now, the unwashed dishes in the sink; Mom throws them all away. You’re upset about the waste, but at the same time cannot conceive keeping them (washing them and keeping them); the dishes in the cabinets might be given to Goodwill. The fridge is stacked with Ensure, and these cases are set aside. (“Food Bank?”) For the rest, the stale juices and not-yet-spoiled milk (milk had not even had time to spoil), rinsed down the drain; containers recycled. (Like us; like we are.) It reminds you that Caius is a man, all men are mortal, therefore we’re all going to die and any meal could be your last, and you begin taking a mental inventory of your own refrigerator at home; what will they say when they find your eye drops in the refrigerator, because you like to keep them cool for when your eyes are red and weary—to pour into arid lachrymal ducts the chilled, ersatz tears. Is that weird? Will they think it odd that you have a bottle of eyedrops sitting next to the tube of tomato paste—or that you purchase your tomato paste in a tube?

What next?—the bathroom. Everything is thrown away, but when you find the unused L’Oréal for Men softsoap, you think you could use that, and Mom tells you, you can have it, but you can’t bring yourself to take it, so it goes with the unopened toilet tissue and unopened kleenex in a white crate, the crate where Grandfather used to throw his dirty clothes. Maybe someone else will salvage them, the toiletries; you would rather someone else, take comfort in assuming someone will take them and we will not be wasted. Can’t imagine using the softsoap; would feel like washing yourself off with it (Emily’s Presentiment). The only artifact not placed into the white crate or the trashbags are two pairs of eyeglasses discovered in a drawer. “Dad can decide what to do.”

The two archaeologists move on to the closet and the bureau. Mom picks out an outfit to drop off at the funeral home: khaki pants, his dress shirt, belt. “I don’t even know—does he need underwear?” (The mortician’s assistant will later say: “You were right to bring underthings. We need those too.”) You survey the closet. “Put the clothes and the hangers in the bags.” You note the Lands’ End tags and think the clothes all very smart and that they should get fine homes. These will go to Goodwill; someone will buy them and wear them. (Feel It on your hands as you touch the clothes, but know that that’s impossible. (He didn’t even die here, not in this room.)) The hallucinatory olfaction takes over, and you think you can smell It, everywhere, even
Grief Work

Elinor Mattern

You have to feel this sorrow
that leaves like a heavy winged heron.

You think it’s gone. You forget
how migrating things return. So

this time you have to feel the weight of it
hunching on your shoulders,

fishy breath in your face when you wake,

when you sit on the train after dark.

You choke on fine bones

and no one knows how to save you
but you.

though you wouldn’t even know what it smelled like. You leave a hat with the insignia of his naval engineering station, and two tee-shirts advertising businesses in his hometown, in the closet for Dad to decide on; along with a box marked “memorabilia” to be later salvaged.

In the bedroom, you empty the bureau drawers and linger a moment in feeling the winter socks, stashed away in the bottom drawer. They are woolen and so warm, and you think them very happy socks, and imagine that Grandfather must’ve been happy wearing such socks. Underneath the sleepwear, you find his only tie. “Oh, it’s nice—red,” Mom says. “That will look nice.” She arranges it with the outfit on the bed. “I think that’s it for now.”

For Grandfather, death is over now: the torments that just were, are no longer. The family must now decide on prayer cards (they’re all so stupid) and on things like what he should wear, what to keep and what to throw out, or donate. Death is the end of decisions, you realize. Their friend saw Dad at the coffeeshop and thought he looked very fragile, and Mom cries because “He is—he is very fragile.” You decide to call your sister out in L.A. to see if she will fly home. She vents about her job in the recording industry and about her boss and her new apartment. “I’m sorry,” you say, “I just called to see if you were coming out for the funeral. It’s Saturday.”

But she has not decided.
I Drink the Dead...

Carole Dieterly

I drink the dead
I knew not at first
The wonderful succulence
The dead can bring.

There was a beauty to it
A fabulous sort of love and longing
Incorporated into a sense of utter belonging.
The dead.
Gruesome to some
Perfect to me.
  The absolute silence involved.
  The quiet I long to enjoy and endure
  Offered only in the complacent stoic nature
  Of the quiet granite.
The cold rocks
The abandoned dying trees which shade but only the dead.

I watch the untended grass hills
  Rise with each day
  Consuming, hiding the marble pillars.

I reach for the faucet
  And pour the product of days of rain
And years of decay,
  Into my glass.
I cannot help what I am.
A cannibal to the core.
I cannot resist what I crave.
  For the dead again call—
Come!
**Hollow Man**

Hollow man, walking along the sands  
A human shell of void and demise  
Whose eyes hold no passage to a soul  
That once existed within the shell.

Hollow man, hollow inside with hands  
That attempt to grasp old emotions  
And memories of long ago that fly  
Wistfully around him as if taunting-  
Taunting that they can never belong to him.

Hollow man, drowning and dying in himself  
As cell by cell starts to dissipate into air  
Once the time is set and the day draws near  
Hollow man shall walk no more and disappear.

**Broken**

Here walks a broken man  
Down his broken road  
And his dusty dreams of sand  
While broken lullabies drift by  
Through the air, touching the sky  
Just like the broken man wishes  
As cellophane stars fall from the sky  
And onto his broken road that lies ahead  
They glisten for a minute and die  
Like the broken man wishes he could be.
Okay that’s enough,  
Living under your shadow is way too tough,  
How come every time I make a decision,  
It can only come with your precision,  
Am I really growing up, am I becoming an adult,  
Am I allowed to judge my own actions now, or is this some kind of cult,  
You won’t face reality until it shoots you in the chest,  
I’m a bird, whose wings have become strong enough, let me leave the nest,  
We’ve had this conversation like a thousand times,  
I’ve heard your opinion and you’ve heard mine,  
You always tell me I wouldn’t know what to do,  
But I think the one who’s lost for real, is you.

Aura seraphim  
Tranquility in the night  
A fool’s dream  
A wingless flight  
Wait not for dawn  
She is with night  
Blind as summer  
Easy like fright  
Dear aura seraphim  
Play tonight.
Good Morning!

Lauren Mesanko

I drink my coffee with hazelnut,
Not vanilla, Irish creme, or regular.
I drink it with hazelnut because I saw you drink it with hazelnut.
Every morning you never failed to have that freshly brewed cup.
The smell took over everything.
The percolating sound of the coffee maker awoke me to the day awaiting to begin.
I would walk into the kitchen and there you’d be, drinking your coffee, donut in hand, reading the Asbury Park Press.
“Good morning,” you’d shout, with a huge smile!

It’s these things I remember you by, not what I criticized you for.
And now, I drink my coffee with hazelnut.

The Cut

Jason Perna

Moral Sword, tip touching heaven,
sun perched on razor’s edge,
softened iron grip, supple form,
breathing towards stillness,
quiet mind, abiding in nothing,
smallest finger flinching, virtuous decent,
space divided, returning to Earth,
blade of compassion,
Slicing through suffering.
Cutting ego,
cutting pride,
cutting delusion,
cutting attachment,
cutting bigotry,
cutting malice.

I am cut.
Dragonfly Over Atlantic City
Elinor Mattern

Flying Rat
Carole Dieterly

One Good ‘Tern’ Deserves Another
Chris Borkowski
Halloween Tree
Lisa Apel-Gendron

The Oceans Like That
Elinor Mattern
Transformation

Natalie Buettner

Log in Water

Kathy Fritz
Of Crimean and Common Sense

Carole Dieterly

Barn Cat

Carole Dieterly

Tranquility

Wendy Marchione
Hope

Stephanie Vannello

Hope is the winged thing
As simple and beautiful
Like a star on a string
Dangling and dancing
Before numerous eyes
And hungry hands
Wanting to reach out
And grab the hope—
Devouring it
Swallowing it
And taking it into their heart.
Hope is a simple and small thing
So glorious, so radiant
It’s an angel in the night
A shooting star taking flight
And satisfying all who need hope.

Love by the Moonlight

Mary Yoa

Hope

Love by the Moonlight

Mary Yoa

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As simple and beautiful
Like a star on a string
Dangling and dancing
Before numerous eyes
And hungry hands
Wanting to reach out
And grab the hope—
Devouring it
Swallowing it
And taking it into their heart.
Hope is a simple and small thing
So glorious, so radiant
It’s an angel in the night
A shooting star taking flight
And satisfying all who need hope.
Oh Beautiful

Oh beautiful
Man who loved me
Despite my white hair
He longs for my freeing company
With the taste of my red lips
His heart bleeding an ocean of red
Even though my blue eyes pale against the stars

He took a bullet for me
I address him lovingly
My purple heart

Of Course I Do, Baby

I solemnly swear
to lie about where I was,
who I was with,
and what we did.

If you ask me the sex
of the person I
was last with,
don’t worry because they
will always be opposite of the sex you are.
At least that is what I will tell you.

When I actually take you out
to the party,
I promise to refill your cup
but do not wonder what is taking so long.
You can bet your bottom dollar
I was drunkenly making out
with her.
Just do not believe your friends.

Of course I have to tell you
that I was not checking her out,
or thinking about her
while I am lying, lying in your bed.

Don’t you want to trust me?
Then you should probably
stop trusting your instincts.
The Haunting Letters of Love

Stephanie Vannello

Of all 26 letters
And 5 billion words
Why does your name appear?

Of all punctuations
Fragments and sentences
How is it you come to me?

Maybe it’s memory
Or a haunting
Remembrance
Like a nightmare of seraphs

Or could it possibly be
The thought of you
Is in too deeply

Wishing for every word
To start with your initials
Or every word is your name

Wondering why you
Can’t come back
And if you could
Then would you love me
Like you did?

Who Will Hold My Dog Tags?

Mark Stansbury

I've never been on an airplane before that day. When I imagined my first flight, I thought I would be able to just ring a bell for a flight attendant to serve me my Cherry 7-Up and a complimentary single serving packet of unsalted mixed nuts. Welp, maybe some other time.

The guy sitting across from me is Sergeant First Class James Simmons III. His folks were only 18 or so when they got hitched. The year was 1967, James Simmons Sr. (Sergeant's grandfather) hated the Grateful Dead, but young Jimmy Jr. (Sergeant’s father) did his best hiding his records between the wall and the bed stand, right next to his “oregano” filled paper bag. On this particular day, he received the letter, the letter that said something like

“Welcome to the US F***in’ Army, shave that long brown hair and pack up your shit into a duffle bag, because we ship out at oh six hundred.

P.S. Don’t try and get out, this is goddamn draft. It’s like quicksand; you have to fight your way out.”

Jimmy thought this had to be a prank or a mistake because the letter was addressed to “James Simmons Junior,” but nobody has called him by his legal name since his mother yelled at him for knocking over his pop’s radio. Without even taking in the bullshit that was just chucked at him, he high-tailed his ass over to his girlfriend’s place, he hauled that son of a bitch pick-up over there so fast, he practically burnt the clutch in three and a quarter miles. He’d been going steady with Sharon Wallace for about 2 years, but he wanted to make this steady romance eternal.

That day, Jimmy and Sharon drove from Magic Valley, Idaho to Las Vegas without saying a word to anyone. They got married at one of those cheap places where an apostle of Elvis plays the priest and says stuff like “Do you take this pretty mama to be your wife?” They spent their wedding night together at a cockroach motel in North Vegas, which was probably the last recorded time in history where the two
Brits, then it’s the Germans, then it’s those commi-guerilla bastards that got Simmons’ father, but now it’s those assholes in the desert.

It must have been 110°F on the day it happened. A group of opposing forces bombed a village about 20 miles away from base. SFC. Simmons lead the forces in with caution, we heard a little girl crying within 30 yards of where we were searching, she couldn’t have been more than 6 years old. Simmons saw her trapped in a shack that was burning down, without hesitation, he ran in to save her. As he marched in, an opposing officer jumped out and shot Simmons dead. My only response was to cap off my M16 rounds on that son of a bitch that killed Simmons.

I never thought I would kill anything or anyone in my life, but I stood there witnessing two deaths that I did not want to witness. Me and the guys carried Simmons back to the Humvee and I had to take off two sets of dog tags from around his neck, one for him and one for his pop. When we went back to base, I tried to hold back the beads from exiling my warn eyes as I handed the tags to Master Sergeant Jack Finch, but all he said was “Hold on to em’ private, you’re gonna return em’ yourself.”

Later that day, Simmons and I left to go back to the states. I am supposed to give these tags to Simmons’ mother, which means this won’t be the first time that she has had to go through this whole army death routine. Everyone told me that I was lucky, because I get to go home, but I would give anything to avoid that expression on Mrs. Simmons’ face when she hears that her son is gone as well. I wonder what was going through the first guy’s mind when he had to tell Mrs. Simmons that her husband was dead. Now Simmons and I are on the same heated plane that we flew in on, the only difference is that now he can’t sit across from me and I am the one fiddling with the dog tags. The flag was raised to half-staff on the flagpoles that day, was it for Sergeant First Class Simmons? I don’t know. The only thing I do know is since we started this goddamn war, I’ve gotten too used to the flag being raised only half-staff.
Pip has a reputation as a big talker. I kept this in mind as I walked to the old Mafioso-owned bar on 7th street, called Pete's Pub. The streets were almost completely dark at this time of night; there was only a small amount of illumination that shined from the lampposts on the street corners and neon signs with lurid images. The air smelled of dried blood and stagnant piss, a smell I unfortunately or fortunately had gotten used to. My hand reached out for the door.

I had received a call precisely at 1am that seemed rather hostile, but in my line of work hostility usually meant more money in the end, so I welcomed it. This call was rather amusing and pleasant for me, it could be compared to when a mother hears her daughter is pregnant, except more screaming. The familiar voice on the other line was mafia-capo Lou (I’ll call him Lou for my own protection) who sometimes hired me to find people, the kind of people that when you do find them, they disappear kind of people. His voice was crass and smokey, but once again sounded pleasant to my ears. He told me about all sorts of unimportant things, like his pesky ulcer, his daughter’s infidelity, his wife’s tit size, a slew of foul and evil things (interrupted by curse words, used like commas) that took place in the world of my beloved capo Lou. This all sounded delightful, besides from the cursing. No man gets in my good-book that curses, but Lou was an exception to the rule. Lou was my most affluent customer at the time and I couldn’t afford to lose his business. So I welcomed his cursing with open arms, but under my breathe I cursed a few words of my own. After all that talking, I finally received and deciphered the tangled mix of curses and directions from Lou. All I knew was, something bad happened on the corner of Simpson and Atlantic and that Lou wanted me to get to the bottom of it. The usually ugly search and destroy, maybe destroy, if I have to. Oh, that and the direction to Pete’s Pub, where Pip was waiting for me. He had apparently seen the whole thing, the whole

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For Alyssa and Electra

Lisa Apel-Gendron

A society huddles in fear  
Yes, we’re making great strides, the experts say  
Yet how many never get to see the next day?

A society frets in anticipation  
Insidious monster cells tucked neatly inside  
Growing precisely where they can hide

A society mobilizes in concern  
Walking, running, racing for the cure  
Surely everyone’s motives are pure

A society weeps in frustration  
Daughters, mothers, fathers and sons lost  
Families bearing the ultimate cost

A society wonders in bewilderment  
Is cancer too profitable to suspend?  
Is it true it will never end?

A society wails in anger  
Seeking the resolution, the remedy, the key  
The culmination too distant to see

A society begs in supplication  
Find the solution  
Uncover the cure  
End the hellishness  
We are weary  
This war has persisted far too long

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Except From “Lovely Sinclair and the Sharpshooter”

Matthew Turner

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I walked in. The music stopped, so to speak. All I see are eyes and hands. Eyes and the reactions the hands make. All their hands wanted to touch me and all their eyes were on me, because I was a stranger to these eyes, but it didn’t matter, it didn’t matter one bit. Their eyes would have been on me whether this crime organization controlled half the city or not. Their eyes would have all been on me whether it was this pub or some high class snobby joint or any other shit-hole dive. I looked goddamn dazzling tonight, in my favorite black heels and matching black jacket that draped over my petite body and all my perfect little curves. My beautiful shimmering red hair, parted on the side, with one delicate strand on the opposite side that hung very elegantly in front of my face. My legs were covered down to my knees, but there was a tiny triangular split in the jacket from where the last of five big black buttons was. It gave the illusion that under this jacket, I wasn’t wearing a damn thing. I heard whistles and saw lips. Then more disturbingly I heard Pip’s voice shout out from the back of the bar.

“Hey Lovey, pleased you could make it! Hey boys look what Lou sent us!”

There were uproars of laughter and more whistles. Pip was very good at that, but it never worked on me. Whatever seemingly interesting charm this man had, to me he was nothing more than a slug, physically and mentally. The man oozed like a slug, from his mouth, from his big sweaty pores, and his ever shrinking brain. I’ve met very few less attractive men than Pip and I’ve met a lot of foul men.

“Hey Lovey, long time no see. How’ve you been recently?”

“Let’s get this straight, right now. Lou sent me because this is important and I don’t have any time to waste blabbering nonsense with you school girls. Now from the look of that dried blood on your face I’m assuming you saw something important. So what did you see Pip?”

“You’re right Lovey, don’t take it the wrong way. It’s just my personality is all, I know this is important, trust me, I know that more than anyone. What’d I see you say? I saw this mother f***ing freak is what I saw. He was the meanest son of a—”

“No you pig, specifics, give me specifics, and watch your filthy f***ing language talking to me!”

Laughter bounced around in the tiny pub, apparently something I said was funny, but I didn’t seem to get it. I looked around in disgust at all the old men in the pub, they went on and on whispering stuff to Pip like: watch out for them redheads Pip, what a little firecracker, and she’s got a hard on for you Pip.

“Excuse me, Lovey. So the guy, the guy was wearing this black suit, but that’s not what I noticed first. I noticed how the guy walked. He had this cocky, I’m the toughest son of a bitch alive, sort of strut. After I saw that I think to myself, look at this tiny shit coming toward us, walking like that, he doesn’t know what sort of f***ing neighborhood he’s—”

“So the guy had funny eyes. What am I supposed to do with that Pip? Go down the street and look for every guy with funny eyes?”

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“If you saw his eyes you’d know what I mean. You
wouldn’t be busting jokes if you saw him when the brains hit the pavement. He had dark hair too. It wasn’t greased back, but it looked like the guy just woke up out of bed or something. It wasn’t greased, but it was greasy. He looked like a loser, you know, but at the same time he looked kind of sharp and mysterious. I mean if you saw this guy on the street Lovey, you would say to yourself: this guy did all that?

“Dark messy hair, black suit, rather skinny, mysterious type, and what was his weapon of choice?”

I reached into the front of my jacket and pulled out a leather bound note pad that I write these fun little hunting facts in. I write all the main details down and I don’t stop until the conversation is over.

“He reached into his jacket to pull out his gun and he muttered something, something about a girl. I forget the name, it’s not important—”

“You aren’t the judge of that.” I said, cutting him off again.

“Uh, I think it started with an s, could have been Samantha or Savannah. He said something like: this is for Savannah. Or maybe it was: say goodnight to Savannah. It was real quiet, like he didn’t care if we heard it. It sounded like the freak was talking to himself.”

“Savannah, hmm, pretty name.”

“Yeah it is.” Pip said, making a goofy smile.

“Which is prettier, mine or hers?”

“Jeez, I don’t know Lovey.”

“Well you said it was pretty. So which is it?”

“Lovey is a prettier name, plus it’s more exotic sounding. I like that.”

I smiled and looked down to hide it. Then I cleared my throat like a school teacher who wanted the attention of her class and looked back into Pip’s eyes.

“So the gun?” I said, refreshing his memory.

“Yeah, like I said. He reached into his jacket, so immediately I go on edge, all the guys did. Then all of a sudden he pulled out a cigarette. So me and the guys start laughing. Joey pointed at me with his finger shaped as a gun and pretended to shoot me. We all laugh again, you know. Then I look back over and he’s standing there like an idiot, the damn lighter won’t light, it just keeps flickering. So we all laugh again, but I don’t take my eyes of the guy. There’s just something funny about him I thought. So then the bastard looks up at me and winked. I look back at the guys to see if they saw it and out of nowhere I see what the inside of Frank’s head looks like.”

“Just like that, that fast huh?”


“What happened after that?”

“All sorts of death happened after that, just that and those eyes. Right after I see Frank and Joey get popped open like a smashed pumpkin, I fall down. My damn knees gave out from under me, nothing like that has ever happened to me before. So I fall, thank God, I fall, right behind a mailbox. You know the metal one on Atlantic? The thing saved my life. Did you see all the bullet holes in that mailbox?”

“No I didn’t. That’s my next stop though.”

“If my ears heard right, it sounded like our sharpshooter had a pistol. But that doesn’t add up, from the damage I saw it had to be two pistols, at least, or a goddamn machine gun, who knows.”

“So you don’t know.”

“No clue Lovey, after I fell behind that mailbox I didn’t see the guy again. All I heard were the shots and all I saw were the bodies of our guys dropping, Swiss cheeosed.”

“How many did he kill?”

“Frank, Joey, the Pollock, and suicide Sal.”

“He killed four of you girl scouts out of five, very impressive. What’s with that guy’s name?”

“Suicide Sal?” Pip said, with a huge idiotic grin.

“Yes, him.”

“Ha-ha, the guy was a regular downer. When I first met Sal, I heard from a friend that he once survived a shotgun blast to the head, did it himself of course. After that Joey told me that he once hooked tubing into his car to snuff himself that way and his daughter came home from school early and saw it. She asked him why it smelt funny, ha-ha. We would never call him that to his face of course. He was too much of a loose cannon for that kind of joke. I mean, the
name says it all. Sal wanted to die for years and tonight the grim reaper himself, that sharpshooter, put the guy out of his misery. Two shots square in the head.”

This type of joke was too distasteful for me, with that and the general rancid stink of Pip in my nostrils I figured it was time to go. I mean his friend just died and he’s treating it like a joke. I can tell it really was his friend by the glistening in his eyes when I asked the question about the name, but still. I’m used to death, don’t get me wrong, but even the dead should get some sliver of respect. I don’t care whether it’s a ten gun salute or a mention in the paper. Some things should be left sacred. Even people like suicide Sal deserve that.

“Clean yourself up Pip, you look like a Hitchcock movie.”

---

**The Bus People**

Noel Kurtz

Bitter cold wind chills my bones.
I can’t believe I’m here.
Staring intensely to the left and waiting.
The smell of cigarettes and alcohol burn my nose.
I am so cold.
A toothless lady smiles at me.
I timidly say “hello.”
Finally my silver chariot arrives and I thank heavens she is here.
I climb her stairs and fumble with change.
I am new to this.
I sit alone, not wanting to touch anything.
I know the heat is on, but I still can’t feel it.
I am so cold.
**As I Sweep Into Shades of Gray**

Mark Stansbury

The room is placid, like the immediate aftermath of a San Francisco earthquake. The people are gone. Two hundred pizzas made, two hundred fed. The rush that deeply exposed our vulnerability is approaching its demise. We rolled. We prepped. We cooked. The crime scene left on the ground shows signs of a hard day’s work. “Los Pizzeros,” as the dishwashers like to call us, are cleaning up the exhausted area.

Pablo wipes down the dough station while he speaks of Norma Talmadge’s performance in “The Dove” as Dmitry talks of Palahniuk and the political corruption of his homeland. We rinse. We wipe. We dry. As time passes, all is left to do is to sweep. One station reveals a heap of softened gracious flour as if “Little Boy” was filled with white powder and our Pizza station was Hiroshima. The opposite side shows the oven as a graveyard, the steam of the burning semolina shows images of the fog rising off of the cadavers as the ashes left from cremated ingredients fall to the floor. I sweep from both sides as the white meets the black in the center of the quarters. Has some sort of divine being brought these opposing forces together? Is this some sort of good vs. evil, yin vs. yang, Young Goodman Brown imagery of eternal battle or could it be the harmonious ebony and ivory piano keys acting as elements to come together to create a culinary miracle such as the margarita? I don’t know.

This concept of mysticism goes on and on for months and months, and as I continue to speculate, time will take its toll. Dmitry and Pablo will exile back to the lands of different tongues and the summer boys will all go home, but yet I come back day after day to sweep at the end of the measure. Time passes and the lone winter approaches, I roll, I prep, I cook. “El pizzero,” just one of me now, I solely stand as I sweep into shades of gray.

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**Social Mis-course**

Jason Perna

“Feed the Homeless,” we decree with self-admiration, unaware, indifferent to the virtues of hungriness. Trade that crisp, painful grumble to gorge on contentment, so much for the high of starvation’s uncertainty.

Let’s train them to drool at Pavlov’s bell, rip them from their boxes and shove them into ours. A bit of lost freedom for the promise of fraternity, come sit at our table and be force-fed with certainty.

Espousing equality for our brothers’ bellies, ignorant to the cravings in our brothers’ hearts. Their desires assumed, supplied by delusion, we’ll coerce them with “liberty and justice for all.”

Stuffing them plump while feigning benevolence, resolute minds set peacefully upon pillows. Abide here among us in our ethical charade, Come sit at our table, one more for monotony!
“POP!”
The bag explodes like a hand-grenade.
A charge, of fresh chips clutches their nostrils.
Inside their mouth, salt pricks their tongue.
The chips crack under pressure, and surrender.

The Vending Machine Militia
Jacquelyn Loder

They remain in a solid line
Impatiently waiting their turn.

A desperate human shuffles to the machine
Starving and in need of a snack.

“Stand-up straight D4!”
“Smooth your crinkles Private!”

Their packaging: Alluring.
Their contents: Tempting.
Faded quarters are popped in the slot.
They clunked against the metal.

The message board scrolls green.
Accepted: $1.50...
Pick letter, then number.

An index finger stretches out;
C9 is elected.
The spindles turn,
And the spirals curl against the wrappers.
The troops march forward.

A parachute strapped to his back;
He dives off the shelf.
A hideous landing scatters his insides.

“That was despicable, maggot!”
“My great grandmother is better then you!”
The top-secret door says push
It swings open and the snack is seized.
The Great Ice Cream Dilemma

William Archer

Sometimes simple choices
Aren’t as easy as they seem,
For Fred the choice was difficult
When selecting his ice cream.

See, Fred’s a little paranoid,
Too afraid of the unknown,
He is scared even of choices,
Like what flavor for his cone.

Well, Fred approached the storefront,
Saw that the menu was a-clutter,
With so many different flavors,
That his heart began to flutter.

His breath became more labored,
Sweat dripped down from his brow,
“What kind would you like, sir?”
Oh, he needed to choose now.

But if he went for chocolate,
It could maybe come to pass,
That a squirrel would think his scoop a walnut
And then Fred, it would harrass.

So vanilla seemed more reasonable,
Vanilla seemed more safe,
But a child may think it a snowball,
And throw it in Fred’s face.

So strawberry he considered,
On that flavor he now honed,
But a clown may think it his lost nose,
And steal it from Fred’s cone.
Have We Met?

I can teleport from Africa to L.A. in the blink of an eye, while you were reading that I found my happy place on the beaches of this crumbling city, please try to keep up. Are you following because now we are in Florida, it’s hot sticky and miserable. Do you know who I am? I can travel anywhere I want as fast as I want. It doesn’t matter if I have never been there before, I’ll make it up as I go along, after all that is my job. I thrive on music, pictures, and of course reading, so please feed me. By the way now we are fighting on a battle field, bullets zipping past us, so keep your head down. Now I am sitting quietly in my living room, the fire is blazing to keep me warm on this cool winter day. Books cover the floor as I sip my hot chocolate. All that I ask from you is that you use me, that is why I am here, I give you the ability to be anything or do anything. I am your imagination, and I think it’s high time we had a chat.

Memoirs of a Suessist

I am too silly Suessian? I am Sally Suessastic?
Well that critic is too jolly drastic.
Wally woo it’s been done, that I’m a who hack.
Well tell me silly Dr. Suess wasn’t smoking who crack.
The Wah Weavers down in Weaville are way woo whack,
Cuz’ they think originality is what I lolly lu lack.
Well the Woo Whats and Pah Plankers all su smell,
They read my rhymes and croo cry and yew yell.

“Why the Helter took Hanukkah” was a story I sue stole,
And “Fox in a Fedora” should be in a who hole.
The Whats down in Whatville should be sadly sue sad,
Cuz the guy who made them is badly boo bad.

Why can’t I roo write like a normal poo person,
I try to write roo rhymes, but my rhymes woo worsen.
“Wally I was, was just a sue scam.” Said silly sue Sam, Sam I am.
“Object A and Object B were poorly poo done”
sue said Thing 2 down to Thing 1.

Maybe I’ll write a new novel, a poo poem, or a foo fiction,
But when I too talk I alliterate my doo diction.
I will roo write it after the doo doctor gives me my shoo shots,
After I stop seeing Wu Willies in the icky ink blots.
tale of flying reindeer and talking snowmen, I began to ponder the significance of what my mother had told me. “If only God has true power,” I thought, “then how can Santa fly around the world and fit into chimneys?” Maybe Santa Claus derives his power from God. I considered this, but it did not stack up. After all, there is no mention of God in the Christmas tradition, and Santa Claus does not follow any of the routines typical of Christian prophets. So then I thought, “Maybe Santa is a witch!” Satan Clause, perhaps. That was unlikely. My mother barely let me celebrate Halloween.

At first I explored the contradictions between my beliefs in God and Santa, but then I started to question Santa’s very existence. I began to wonder how it was physically possible for Santa Claus to make it around the world in a single night. I also could not understand why many unfortunate “nice” children went without presents; why I had not seen flying reindeer anywhere else; and why some children my age did not believe Santa exists. My wonder grew into the recognition that Santa Claus might not exist in the first place. In any case, it was either Santa or God, and at least at the time, God seemed much more believable. All the signs appeared to point in one direction—my parents had lied to me—but I distrusted this hypothesis even more as my parents had always been a reliable source of information. I decided to confront my mother about the matter.

It was a December afternoon. Dinner was on the stove, and the aroma filled the house with a short-lived sense of well-being. My mother was unpacking some Christmas lights while she waited for the stove timer to sound. I approached her. I asked her right out, in an eager tone of voice, “Does Santa Claus exist?” My mother looked a little confused at the question.

“Of course he does,” she responded. “The kids at school haven’t been telling you different, have they?” She delivered this question with a snap, as if Santa’s existence was less important than my schoolmates’ belief in him.

I shook my head no. “I’ve been thinking and—well, I just don’t see how he exists. You said—”

The stove timer went off. “Hold on, honey.” My mother got up and approached the kitchen. The soothing stovetop
Everybody knew grandpa was crazy. “This whole god-dammed world is one giant f***ing Chinese finger-trap,” he would say, with a wild look in his eyes. He used to drink a six-pack a day, every day, until the day he attacked the mailman. Poor son-of-a-bitch didn’t even see it coming. One second he was strolling down the sidewalk, the next he was hit in the back of the head by a bottle of Coors. “That’ll teach ‘im,” grandpa said. “That’ll teach ‘im.”

That night, when the police came, I didn’t try to argue. “A giant f***ing Chinese finger-trap,” grandpa said, laughing, as they dragged him out the door. The judge sent him to a men-tal institution. When I came to visit, my grandpa didn’t have much to say. He just looked me in the eye and said, “Boy, it’s time I taught you an important lesson.” Then he started throwing punches. He still had some strength left in those old arms of his. He busted up my lip and my eye before the guards took him down. They struggled to force him into a straightjacket. He looked me in the eye and smiled, and then he stopped fighting, fell to the floor, and was motionless. I’d never seen him look so content. “A giant f***ing finger-trap,” he said, smiling. Then grandpa died.

I’d often wondered what my grandpa was thinking those last couple of months. Whatever it was, he had seemed freer. Years after he died, I was eating lunch in a café when a kid started crying and screaming. “Mommy, I can’t get it off,” he said, fighting to pull his fingers from the trap. “Just don’t struggle, honey,” his mother replied.
She heard the grumbled growl. Like a dragon discontented and seeking whom it may grasp and gobble down. What a fear it caused. Her calloused gruff hands wiped their sweat down her trouser leg. Concern evident. Ever present, consuming her coarse throat, making it dry as cotton. She moved slowly, steadily, bag grasped over a hunched shoulder. Her body squeezed inward as if to shrink and shy away from the monstrous shrieking. She gulped against a swollen tongue, sucking liquid from an impossible void for sustenance to no avail.

She approached

Closer, closer, still closer she drew, body a shudder with spasms. Chest beating, pulsing, spitting blood under the skin of her cheeks, causing flushes of red beneath the black wrinkled brow. Still closer.

The bag slipped from the shoulder, its plastic squeaking, squirming as if alive. The dragon grumbled louder, its gaping mouth open. Its gory breath spilling out in gasping waves that sent the girl into further torment from its gruesome sounds.

The bag was hurled into the dragon’s mouth an unworthy sacrifice as the monster rumbled with rancid rectification and from the corner of its black jaws withdrew a small mammal seeking its escape.

The girl left her ounces of courage, reigning now only cowardice as taking flight ran to a readied place of calm. She paused.

Staring back at the dragon’s mouth, its trash infested dwelling and felt a sudden splash of hilarity for containing such anguished fear.

But then it growled.

She flew away as fast as fumbling sandals could take a blundering four-year-old, afraid of the dumpster outside of her own front stoop.

The Chair

Rachel Dieterly

An object of comfort
Near a warm fire
Gently rocking
The calming voices of family
A cat weaving through my legs
A means to apprehend in a room cold
Damp dark
Filled with unsteadying silences
A rat scratching under foot
A tool to feed
In a room on the sun
Safe and still
The sound of drums and splatter
A hand tickling airborne feet
A chair
Formed in cold and heat
Full of memories, hearing screams and coo
In end
Termites and rust.

Taking Out the Trash: and Fighting the Dragon

Carole Dieterly

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A slight error in the process of biology made Benjamin a mutant and stole from him the promise of a normal life. Unlike his forefathers, he would be denied the simple luxuries of exploring over and over again a miniscule, poorly-furnished cage, stalking phantom prey and hidden stimulation, and frightening small children with a stern look and a lazy growl.

Most tigers are born orange, but Ben’s fur was a dark, almost-purple shade of blue. His parents, an intolerant bunch, were thrown into despair as deep as the color of their son’s fur, and, refusing to take responsibility for the fact that they provided him with the offending genes, promptly shunned him. On the other hand, the zookeeper, a mustachioed man flirting with bankruptcy, saw in Ben not a doomed failure of a tiger, but a fantastic commercial enterprise.

“Tigers these days,” he said to his agent in between puffs of his cheap cigar, “they’re too scary. Used to get lots of kids ‘round here, and lots of kids means lots of parents, and lots of parents means lots of money. But the little shits nowadays piss their pants when they see anything with a little teeth. Now… a blue tiger, that’s something special. It’s not as intense as an orange tiger, you know? They’ll think he’s, think he’s cute or something, want to get a photo of them petting the tiger—you know... shit with some merchandising potential.” His agent nodded in understanding, and revised the press release into a more palatable piece of communication.

Several weeks later, the tiger exhibit at the zoo was reopened with the previous “no petting” restriction removed. As expected, children were less bothered by a hungry, four-legged death engine when it was cast in a calming blue. To make the spectacle more kid-friendly, Ben’s usual diet was replaced with a vegetarian alternative, which cut costs, simplified cleanup, and eliminated the violence aspect many parents found unacceptable.

Another curious aspect of Ben’s genetic mutation was the development of an abnormal intelligence, several standard deviations above the mental capabilities of most tiger kind. Within a short time he had fluency in the English language (without the vocal equipment to speak it) and reading skills far beyond those of his usual visitors. When Ben wasn’t being bombarded with a hailstorm of children’s hands, he spent his time studying the classics of literature. The zookeeper noticed this new hobby, and his agent transmuted clouds of crude observations and cigar smoke into an advertisement for, “Ben, the Reading Blue Bengal!” From time to time they would even decorate Ben with ridiculous reading glasses, as well as a Snuggie, the blanket with sleeves, though that was always swiftly shredded by the fragment of a feral hunter still residing within.

Ben lived a dull, peaceful life as an animal celebrity. His tiger instincts joined him in bondage, and he expected to die a resigned beast, though he at least strove to depart with the dignity of having been well read. He clung to this path until he happened upon Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, and read that, “anyone compelled to choose will find greater security in being feared than in being loved.” This declaration took Ben aback. Inherited thoughts and feeling soared to Ben’s conscious. Though he may not have been born with his ancestor’s rich orange coat or average intelligence, he was absolutely endowed with a taste for the hunt and the hunted, along with the body required to feed those primal hungers.

“God damn it,” Ben roared, “I am a tiger, not a teddy bear! No longer shall I be smothered by the sticky fingers of simpletons! It is in my nature to hunt, and hunt, I shall! For too long my complacency has atrophied the glorious animal within, but today, that lack of ambition will be viciously usurped! The world is mine!” This proclamation echoed into eternity.

That day, Ben was tranquilized and euthanized after devouring fifteen of the visitors.
Once Upon a Midnight Dreary: the Lion Attacked

Carole Dieterly

What do you do when a lion escapes? We always talked about it, did drills, but never expected it to happen. How could we? Isn’t our security good enough to prevent that? Sure, things have escaped in the past. The flamingo, a tamarin, and on that one occasion a wolf named Moka got off his leash during a nature show and tried to lick a kid to death. But a lion?

Let me establish some background: There are two lions. Both are male, topping five hundred pounds after a big meal. They stand as tall as men with manes that put those big rolls of hay to shame. They eat half their body weight (if they could get so much) in days, and their skulls can fit a bear’s with extra room to spare. The cage these cats are in is over an acre large with pools, trees, toys, their own super rock, and the works. The fence itself is twenty feet straight up until it angles another two feet inward at a 45° angle (in case they decide to climb it). The top two feet is covered in electric wire, and then it is lined in barbed wire just because we could. If the cats could get out of that, God blessed them with wings! When not in the outdoor cage, the two are led into a concrete bunker with double gates, steel bars, and more locks than we have keys for. Just a precaution, you see. Did I mention the two extra gates and trenches surrounding the exhibit? Well, include that to the portfolio of the “impossible-to-escape” lion fortress.

Now, this all took place some two weeks after I got back to work. Not to bore you with details: but I was chomped on by a crocodile while weed-whacking his enclosure. So, still nursing a still bite wound to my leg, I had decided to take an easy day. I signed up for the night shift, which entailed taking care of one of our sick wolves. Namely, Moka, the deadly licking fiend. He’s a good pup usually. Came down with a bout of pneumonia so we have him laid up in the office with myself. Now, don’t think I’m crazy yet, I hand raised that little guy from infancy. Sure he’s bred wild but on heavy sedatives and being leash trained . . . you get it.

I was sitting on the floor with him, poor guy was moping. Those big eyes staring at you like a lost bassett hound. Of course my heart melted like a four year old and there I was, wolf on my lap, humming a little get well sort of show tune—Anyway . . . the lion.

Well, as I sat there I started hearing some panicky noises coming from our lemurs outside. Now, in relation to the nice, comfy, air conditioned office I am in, the lemurs are about ten minutes walk away in the pitch black, 80-90°F night. Heaven forbid it be anything serious because I do not want to go out there.

After a few minutes they begin to relax, so I relax, the wolf relaxes, and I hear the beastly guttural scream from the parrots. Now I’m getting concerned. Maybe a snake got in. The lemurs and parrots are close together along the walk way. Maybe a fast snake could be scaring them.

Now it’s the camels. Maybe five minutes away. That’s too fast for a snake to travel.

I’m standing now. The wolf I slide off my leg to his mat in the corner. I stick a radio in my belt loop, not that anyone is around beside me. Then I grab one of the big flashlights, like the kind you flash in a guy’s eyes and they go blind for half an hour. I open the door and head into the darkness.

The heat is the first thing to hit me. It’s a thick smack right on my face, choking my lungs with humidity. I consider turning back, but now it’s the guard dogs yapping and running like shadows in the black of night. I hope it’s a snake. Just a big old lousy black snake. So, in the dark, I soldier forward, scared for my life and cursing the heat.

I come across a sight I never expected, wanted to see, was prepared for, what else could I say? The camel was down, flopped on its side in the dirt of its enclosure. Its back feet were kicking, but it made no sound. Bent over its head was a fuzzy tan mass that I at once assumed must be some part of the camel also. Until it began to stand, moving independently of the downed camel. Its big head turned, glaring two gold eyes and a stark red muzzle.

Oh sweet Jesus.
The lion.
Right about now the sounds of the zoo are filtering into my senses. The parrots are going crazy, the dogs are racing around, snarling and growling, the other camel is hidden in the barn and there’s that lion, beginning to pace towards me.

Now I’m told when a lion has you in its sights, you should not run. You should yell, kick, scream, and slowly move back to safety. So I do that instead. I scream so loud, all the animals around are getting riled up. My throat does dry so I beat against the bushes and reads. The tall bamboo stalks bend to and fro. I flash my spot light and make my radio squeal. The lion paws forward toward me still. His mouth is hanging open and I see the evidence of the dead camel in his teeth. Suddenly I don’t think that my tactic is working. I think about running, but then I remember how that helped me when the crocodile got me.

I wonder, what are the odds of being devoured by a lion just weeks after being nearly killed by a croc?
Isn’t this lion’s name O.J.?
The croc was Charlie Manson. Who named these animals?
The lion runs towards me, so I turn and run the opposite way, thinking over my options of a bloody good hiding spot. I look back to see how close he is and find him struggling to squeeze beneath the lowest bar of the camel fence. That gives me a little time. My best course of action is to head for the employee shack I just came from, the one with the sick wolf and about fourteen phones to call six dozen other employees, and the cops. Did I mention a shot gun? Yeah, there is a big gun in there two just for such occasions. Do I feel bad about maybe shooting a cat that I have taken care of his entire life? Sure. But in the “what to do when the lion escapes” handbook, OJ’s getting put down anyway. And if it saves my life . . .

Holy crap, where’s the other lion?
I’m wasting time thinking when I could be running. In actuality I am thinking very little. I’m limping a bit which slows me down but I still get to the shack in little over two minutes. I hit the front door full force, not even slowing to a stop to jostle the doorknob open. When it doesn’t give and I reach to jiggle the handle I realize something very important. I never unlocked the door. If it closes, it automatically locks. Got to love security!

I fish for the keys hooked to my belt and look back at the same time to see a thumping form coming at me in the darkness. The dogs are after it; I hear the struggle but see nothing in the shadows. A dog howls, you know that kind of sound they make when they get a bad kick. There’s growling and snarling. I stab at the door with my key and finely fall inside with the lion mounting the porch behind me. I slam the door in his face with my boot and sit there a moment with my feet against it. He’s scratching and growling; I hear his teeth on the door knob and see the fur of his paws beneath the door. The door will hold, I tell myself. It’s meant for situations like this.
The wolf is up on his paws. His hair is all fluffed out, lip up over his jaws and gums snarling at the door and lion behind it. He’s awful tough for a poor lame thing. I help by pushing a large metal cabinet in front of the door as you would see in some movie. Trouble being I hit the door knob with it and nearly tore it off the wall. Now it almost helped him get in. Thankfully it held enough. He is still outside.

I grab the phone off the hook and know the first call I should make is to animal control, but somehow I find that I’m dialing the zoo director. Maybe he should know the lion nearly killed me. The conversation was a little like this:
“Chris! Chris, it’s OJ, man, he’s out— No, I’m stuck in the shack he—No I’m not going to bloody calm down the cat took down one of the camel. No I don’t know which one, what does it matter? No, he’s—Shut up, Moka!”
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We round the corner and there OJ is, hiding behind the carcass of Carly the camel. His ears a flat back, he piers up, eyes glowing in the spot lights. He moves to rush us, but his back legs wobble and at once I know I got him good. Our doc, Youji, shoots him in the back twice with another set of knock out darts. But after a two hour standoff of getting nowhere, we realize he isn't going down.

Well, at this juncture I'll let you guess how the stand-off ended. You can think we got him into a tarp, rolled the sucker up like a big cat taco and got him back into his pen. Or you can think he went back to his cage on his own and lived a long happy life with his pal King George. And lastly you can believe that we shot that cat.

But, common people. Do you think OJ lived in the end?

The next night, Moka and me sat up, singing old show tunes as he and me recovered from our independent ordeals. I silently swear off future interactions with crocs and lions. Maybe Africa just isn't the country for me.

drop out buffalo. The door is cracked enough for me to see the cat's big head. So I shove the pipe out and stuck him right in nose. He retaliates by throwing a claw at me. It missed and hit the door. I curse, something I usually avoid (ha-ha), and retreat, raising the shot gun up and fix it on the door waiting for him to burst in like zombie in a horror flick. I hear him pace back and forth on the deck and then the silent pads of him retreating.

None of the guard dogs return.

The zoo erupts again as all the animals go on alarm. I can track him through which animal is screaming next. Some screams I understand are the last things the critter is going to say.

I don't know how long it's been, but I just keep staring at that door, holding Moka back. I might have peed my pants when the lion came after me. I'll think about that later when he's dead, skinned, and hanging on the front gate for zoo-goers to wave at in awe. I might have peed my pants when suddenly a set of hands hit my shoulders from behind. I turn around, gun in my hands, thankfully on safety still or else I may have blown out my friend Harry's guts. He shutters and steps back to avoid the barrel of the gun as Chris takes the gun away.

“Your bleeding, did he get you?” I'm asked.

I look at myself. Am I bleeding?
“Where's he at?” Chris demands.

“Somewhere by the camels I think.” I reply.

Everyone nods. There's about twenty of them filing in: two county sheriffs, Chris, Harry, Guy, Wes, Brian, John, Bill, Paula, Diane, Dwayne, Adam, Joe, Youji, Amy, and Jen. How many is that? Seventeen? Including me, eighteen and hey, the wolf has to count for two, pneumonia or not the fierce sucker.

We head out into the darkness after flipping on what flood lights the zoo has. It's little light in an already bleak situation. We stay in a large group, feeling safety in numbers is the best method. Not a couple hundred yards from the shack I find the dart I shot him with on the ground. I wonder if it was on him long enough to actually do anything, but by the growl I hear up the access road I'm guessing not.
Lisa Apel-Gendron wants to be a writer or photographer when she grows up. But in the meantime, she adores her work at the College’s Cape May County Campus, where she’s been coordinating operations and teaching for twelve years. She’s learned that when you have a job you love, it’s not work.

William Archer is an executive of the exponentially expanding “Work of Triforce Productions,” enjoys writing and performing poetry, drama, and short stories. Look out for him and the rest of the Trolley Troupe in the spring and summer of 2010.

John P. Arthur likes to read, listen to music, write, and play music. He grew up in New Jersey, still lives in New Jersey, and probably always will live in New Jersey. He likes it there. His band is called The Deafening Colors.

Michael Blackwell says, “I’m easy to understand because I’m not really that deep, however the mountains I attempt to climb in life are always steep. I’m a person who refuses to settle for ‘It’s OK,’ or ‘I guess that works for me,’ because an ordinary person is something I refuse and just cannot be. Though all my days may not be merry, I try to be myself, but at the same time extraordinary!!! Reach and you will achieve. I promise. God Bless.”

Zachary Blaesi is a student in his third semester at ACCC. After graduation, he plans to transfer to Rutgers University and major in philosophy.

Chris Borkowski earned an associate’s degree in studio art from ACCC. Presently, he is attending Stockton College and pursuing a bachelor’s degrees in Environmental Studies and Photography.
Natalie A. Buettner was born in Malvern Pennsylvania. She is an aspiring art student interested in photography, food, and culture!

Bud Cole
From English Ode to American Etheree, Ballade to Blank Verse, Sestina to Sonnet, and, especially haiku, Bud loves to read and write poetry!

Carole Dieterly was raised in a small South Jersey town. She smiles in the face of danger, and screams at the sight of the dastardly daddy-longlegs. Her writings are often animal related as they pertain most to her personal experiences. A vet tech and volunteer for local horse stables she has little time to kill!

Kenneth Dieterly says, “Many people claim to be naturally better at writing than others. Those people are usually punks. All I claim is that I am good at it, no more and no less. If people wish to honor that by putting me in Rewrites, I thank you greatly for the chance and may just submit again.”

Rachel A. Dieterly is a 23-year-old mad scientist, Bible reading, Church going individual who just so happens to like writing unusual stories and poems.

Kathy Fritz is an Atlantic City native, Holy Spirit High School and ACCC graduate of Computer Systems Support. She has worked since 1992 for ACCC, and currently works in the CMCC library.

Robert A. Geise is a poet and writer as well as educator who lives in Corbin City with his family. His poetry can be found online at www.eloquentwithrage.com.

John Albert Guttschall was a private detective for hire, posing as a mediocre writer living in Pleasantville, New Jersey. He wanted to be Amadeus. Current whereabouts: unknown.

Noel C Kurtz is a divorced, single mom with three amazing kids, two dogs, and a rat. She graduated from ACCC with honors in 2008 AS General Studies. Member of Sigma Kappa Delta, and Student Nurses Club, and SGA Representative, she will graduate in the Spring 2010 with her AAS in Nursing. Her poems and prose have been published in Rewrites since 2006.

Jason Perna is a husband, father, and spiritual warrior, drifting among fallen cherry blossoms, on the path that remains hidden beneath the leaves.

Laurie Schiffelbein has spent years moving around the country, first as an active duty Coast Guardsman, later as a military spouse. She is surprised and grateful to be able to call herself a professional artist. After a final move to Cape May, she attended ACCC where she earned a Studio Art degree and a passion for watercolor painting. Even though she was lucky enough to live in some of our country’s most beautiful settings, including Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and NY’s Hamptons, it took the breathtaking sunsets of Cape May to drive her to an easel!

Mark Stansbury: “Pearl Jam, Langston Hughes, and clowns named Bobo, invisible ink, swatches, and ho ho ho. Flannels, Seinfeld, and has green eyes. Digs love, life, and pumpkin pies. Not made out of wax, likes Mel Brooks and Apple Jacks. I hope you enjoyed my little itsy bitsy whirl; if you got lost, start back at ‘pearl.’”

Stephanie Vannello has written numerous types of stories and poetry since she was a child. She can translate Shakespeare and loves to read works by many authors including JK Rowling and Edgar Allen Poe. Stephanie also does artwork and photography in her spare time.
Mary Yoa: “A teacher who can arouse a feeling for one single good poem, accomplishes more than he who fills our memory with rows on rows of natural objects, classified with name and form,” (-Goethe) which is why Mary remains a perpetual student of life.