

Winter 2005


The Summerset Review



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The Sunnset Review



Editors' Notes

Starting with this issue, we've added a little tidbit to *The Sunnset Review*, something we are calling our Lit Pick of the Quarter. Yes, in addition to reading the submissions we receive, we make an effort to do our fair share of digging into current literary periodicals. We do this for more than just enjoyment; we do it for our own health. When completely taken by a piece, why not mention it and quote a short excerpt?

Our first Lit Pick of the Quarter is: "Besides the Body" — a short story by Sarah Clark, in Issue Fifteen (Spring 2004) of *Red Rock Review*:

"When I close my eyes I am taffeta, white and lace. I am skirts as full as June."

If you haven't noticed something unusual yet by looking at the Table of Contents and Contributors' Notes, we'll save you the trouble. All the stories this time were written by men. We spent several days in the bar while this issue was going into production, delving into the deepest crevices of our brains as we sat in dimly lit booths, analyzing our efforts over a few pints. Is it us, or is the situation entirely coincidental? How did we end up with only male authors this issue? We decided that, in response, we must dispatch a petition to all female writers: Come on, ladies! Send us your best! Let's see it, already! We dare you! We know you have great stories out there just waiting to be featured in our journal.

At any rate, we've lined up some wonderful pieces for you in our Winter 2005 issue, and hope you'll try them.

Mark Mazer starts us off by applying the "To thine own self be true" theme to the character of a young man in high school wanting to help and do what is right. His story, "Thou and Me," balances images of the Holocaust and slavery with the conditions he's encountered close to where he lives.

"Conjuration: A Fabliau," by Corey Mesler, is a refreshingly light story of a conjurer who makes a deal with a musician. The voice and characters in this little piece will put smiles on the faces of more than just those who have an appreciation for Memphis and knee-slappin' southern blues.

In "Getting It Together," by Terry Thomas, a house on the beach is for sale in New Zealand. As a conversation takes place on the phone inside, the land agent walks up the driveway with prospective buyers, and we can feel the home slowing fading away. But from whom?

Finally, reaching into the whimsy we have David McKinley Lowrey's "Pigs from the Moon," a story whose narrator has an addicting flair for giving us the play-by-play conversation with one Duncan Kilbride—a friend of all things moon.

We very much appreciate the nice words some of our readers have taken the time to write us. Among them, we've come to know that there is a bookbinder in Johannesburg (keep in mind we are based in New York), who binds our issues and keeps them on a shelf in his living room. Several readers with apparently strong organizational skills wrote that they mark their calendars on the four days of the year our issues are released. We are very grateful and fortunate to see that there are people who are clearly enjoying our magazine. What more can we ask for?

We also find that some of the stories here have spawned discussion in literary communities and events. If you have been involved with some of this, why not send a quick note to the author (or to us and we'll pass it on)? Writing is lonely work sometimes, and most authors would appreciate knowing their story raised a bit of local buzz.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who submitted material for consideration in this issue. Without you, this publication would not be possible.

The Sunmerset Review

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Having the biggest breasts in the entire sixth grade may be great if you're a girl but not if you're a boy, and it didn't matter that by freshman year I'd lost twenty pounds and grown fourteen inches, and by sophomore year was a basketball star and class president: Years of teasing, bullying and rejection had taken their toll.

Maybe that's why in the early spring of senior year I got upset when Jacobs, whose head resembled a silver dollar balancing on edge, told me about Miss Kohl's tutoring project. Because even though I wasn't a genius like Jacobs and the others she'd asked to volunteer, I'd at least *had* experience with black kids. Wasn't I the only white player on the Exquisites in the Roxbury summer basketball league? And didn't Miss Kohl's college reference say that I'd done a fabulous job in a potentially tense situation? I just didn't understand how my guidance counselor, Brookline High School's most sensitive soul, could fail to realize that I'd want to tutor.

I thanked Jacobs for his tip, marched to Miss Kohl's office, told her that I heard about the project, and asked why she'd left me out.

Miss Kohl had a way of sucking in her cheeks that made her look like a mouse. And when she tried to answer my question, though she didn't squeak, she might just as well have. Because in trying to avoid admitting that she'd recruited only the "smart" kids as tutors, she rattled off one lame excuse after another. But when she said that she thought I was only interested in

sports and I shot back, "It's not fair to pigeonhole me," she finally changed her tune and said, "You have a point, Phil." So, that Sunday afternoon at the high school steps I met Miss Kohl and a few kids with cars—including Jacobs who offered to drive me—and set out for "the ghetto."

We arrived in about thirty minutes, parked, and double-timed it down Blue Hill Avenue to a storefront window that had Roxbury Children's Center painted across in childish-looking white letters. Next door was a walk-up with a steep staircase which we climbed single file, and at the top we came to a large room where second-hand desks and chairs had been arranged neatly in clusters of two.

About half a dozen black kids who looked between eight and ten were horsing around, but as soon as they saw us they settled down and paired off with their tutors. Miss Kohl introduced me to Reverend Lane, a young white minister dressed in blue jeans, denim jacket and clerical collar, and told him that I was interested in the tutoring project. He looked up, said "Welcome, Phil Schnein," shook my hand, and then proceeded to ignore me as he told Miss Kohl about his voter registration work down south, and pointed to a catalog from the University of Mississippi displayed on a table with a sign next to it saying, "Ole Miss, the school for you." She laughed out loud because in those days Ole Miss was notorious for its segregation policy. I felt like a fifth wheel, so I went to the table and browsed through the 1962-63 college catalog, and after a while I overheard Reverend Lane say there weren't any kids waiting for tutors but he would ask around. Miss Kohl came over to me to explain, but I told her I had heard, and she said "Be patient," and then she joined Reverend Lane going from desk to desk to supervise.

I kept busy looking at the Ole Miss catalog until I heard footsteps coming up the long staircase and saw a short, chubby white lady with a face that was round like a cat's but without the pointy ears, with a boy who I figured was her son, chubby but taller, maybe twelve or thirteen, with freckled skin and a towering red cowlick not unlike Woody Woodpecker's. They were standing in the doorway looking bewildered, so I interrupted Reverend Lane and motioned in their direction. He greeted them and I went back to the table and pretended to read while eavesdropping on the conversation. The kid didn't say a word. He just stood still, like a scared deer, his arm interlocked tightly with his mother's as she explained, in a thick Yiddish accent that reminded me of my grandparents' voices, that she saw a flyer many months ago about tutoring and she kept putting it off, but finally decided to do something because her son, Stanley, was doing worse and worse at school.

Reverend Lane listened and then gave them a quick overview of the project, which I appreciated hearing because no one had bothered explaining things to me. But when he made a special point of saying that the center's mission was to serve the needs of Negro children, I practically dropped the Ole Miss catalog on the floor, because I fully expected him to act like the Mississippi segregationists and show Stanley and his mother the door. Whether he actually considered turning them down, I'll never know. The tone of his voice suggested to me that he was leaning in that direction, but to his credit he glanced over his shoulder, caught my eye, and waved me over.

After introducing us and announcing that I would be Stanley's tutor, Reverend Lane asked me to help set up some desks and chairs, but Mrs. Coopleman shook her head no and said that she'd like me to tutor Stanley at their house, which was just a few doors away, because they felt safer there. Reverend Lane said that it would be O.K. with him if it was O.K. with everybody else. I had no problem with the idea of going to their house, so Reverend Lane called Miss Kohl over to fill her in on what was happening, and she said that it was fine with her, and that it must have been by the grace of God that everything had worked out.

On the walk to the Cooplemans', Stanley never let go of his mother's arm and didn't talk, not even when I asked him about his favorite sport, and she explained that he's shy because she's afraid to let him go outside without her, and he hardly ever gets to talk to strangers. I glanced at the people passing by. They were black but looked safe enough to me and I thought how odd we

must have looked in their eyes, three whites practically trotting, with me being so tall and the Cooplemans round and small.

The house was a dilapidated two-family with grayish-green asphalt shingles, and several broken windows on the street level. Mrs. Coopleman wanted me to come in but I didn't want to risk keeping Jacobs waiting, so I told her that I'd be there the same time next Sunday. She said that I should ring the outside bell and they'd buzz me in, and then I should go upstairs to the second floor and knock four times—dah. . . ddada—like the song on *Dragnet*, otherwise they wouldn't open their door. I bent down close to Stanley's face and hummed "dah. . . dadada" and he laughed and we all said goodbye.



Back at the center, I touched base with Reverend Lane and Miss Kohl and hooked up with Jacobs who was just finishing his own tutoring session. We were both hungry and wanted to stop for lunch, and I told him about the G & G Deli near Morton Street where I used to go with my mother's father before he died, but Jacobs wanted real American food, so he drove towards the Howard Johnson's near the Jamaica Way and Peter, Paul and Mary were singing on the radio.

"Who's the white kid I saw you with?" Jacobs asked.

"Stanley," I said. "Lane ran out of Negroes, and all of a sudden this Jewish kid shows up. He's probably the last Jewish kid in Roxbury."

"Why waste your time with a Jew? The idea is to help Negroes. That's what the colleges want to see."

"I'm not tutoring to impress anyone," I said. "And besides, I'm going to UMass. They gave me a basketball scholarship."

"UMass," Jacobs said. "You're probably the first BHS class president too dumb to get into Harvard."

I felt like putting Jacobs through the windshield but I flashed on that time in fifth grade when I had to meet with Dr. Meyerowitz, the school psychologist. His office reeked so badly from his breath that I cut a silent fart in hope of deodorizing the atmosphere. (It didn't work.) Dr. Meyerowitz taught me to control my temper by counting to ten, something I did so many times in elementary school that the cumulative total must have been in the millions.

What triggered the counseling session was an incident in gym class. We boys were in the locker room drying off after our showers and the kid standing next to me, Lester "the Molester" Plotkin, tried to rationalize the fact that he had an erection by arguing that my tits were so big and my dick so small that I looked like a girl.

When it came to defending my tits, I didn't have a leg to stand on, but I felt that I had a reasonable case to make on behalf of my penis: "It only looks small," I said, "because my gut is so big."

Plotkin started shouting, "Small dick, small dick," and when the kids joined in, the mostly tile and metal locker room boomed with their chant. What could I do? Shout back, "Big gut, big gut"? The kids wouldn't have been able to hear my voice, and even if they did, would I have felt any better if they were chanting "big gut" instead? I decided that it was a time for action, not for words, so I grabbed Plotkin, stuffed him in a locker, slammed the door shut and kicked it and kicked it with such fury that the school had to call the fire department to pry the skinny shmuck out.

Dr. Meyerowitz' advice still worked. I counted to ten while reliving the story, and by the time I finished I'd calmed down enough to put part two of Dr. Meyerowitz' technique into practice—try to understand what's so bad in a person's life that makes him want you to feel as awful as he does. In Jacobs'

case, it was easy: He had a super-critical mother who dominated her family as well as the school committee which she chaired, and he had a big brother who was so successful that poor Jacobs, despite being brilliant and a good miler, hated himself, and couldn't help but want his friends to feel worthless too.

I didn't swear. I probably didn't even sound angry. I just told Jacobs that from now on I'd be riding my bike to Roxbury and that I wouldn't need him to drive me. "Then to hell with Howard Johnson's wonderful world of twenty-eight flavors," he said, speeding past the restaurant to take me straight home.

My parents weren't wild about the idea of my going to Roxbury in the first place, let alone riding my bike over there, because to them Roxbury meant Negroes and Negroes meant danger. But I argued that I rode my bike and played ball there twice a week the previous summer without having a single problem, and that now, for God's sake, I'd only be spending about an hour a week with a little Jewish boy in his home. Dad kept clearing his throat in that nervous way of his that drove me crazy, and Ma's lower lip kept twitching in that nervous way of hers that drove me almost as crazy. After about half a minute of silence—during which I decided that Dad looked like Pablo Picasso, and Ma like Anne Frank would have if she had survived and grown up—I said, "That's it, I'm doing it." And on my bike-ride to Stanley's the following Sunday, I remembered what I'd realized in the summer—how far apart Roxbury and Brookline seemed in people's minds but how close they were in reality.

I got to Stanley's without a hitch, locked my bike by the frame to the banister in the downstairs hallway, and went upstairs where I knocked like *Dragnet*. Even before Mrs. Coopleman closed the door behind me, she started yelling at Stanley to get his homework, and I heard a man—his father in another room—yelling in heavily accented English that Stanley was a lazy boy, good for nothing, that he knew the tutor was coming and should have had everything ready.

I don't mean to be disrespectful but the best way to describe Mr. Coopleman—and, his wife too, come to think of it—is that he looked like an oversized dwarf, but what struck me even more than his physical appearance was how he stared, because even when he stood a foot or two in front of me and looked right at me, it seemed as if he was gazing far away, and I remember thinking that he had a kind of double vision, as if what was immediately before his eyes was overshadowed by some distant scene visible only to him.

It was impossible to work with Stanley while his parents sat with us at the kitchen table criticizing him every time he read aloud, and I wished we could have had some privacy but I didn't know how to ask. So Stanley and I struggled, him feeling more embarrassed and harassed every minute, and defending himself from his parents' barbs by making short, guttural sounds that sounded like the muffled shrieks of a wounded elephant in a Tarzan movie. I felt like I was torturing him, and it was weird because the Cooplemans were yelling at him for being lazy, and there I was feeling guilty because I had tons of my own unfinished schoolwork piled on my desk back home.

Mrs. Coopleman must have had her fill of the chaos, because she called a halt to the lesson, cleared away Stanley's books and piled a bunch of Ring Dings and Yodels—those yummy little cream-filled, frosted chocolate cakes—on the table for Stanley and me to eat. I was free to have as many as I wanted—and did—but poor Stanley got yelled at for making a pig of himself. All of a sudden, Mr. Coopleman asked me what was wrong with his son, as if I was a psychiatrist or a real teacher or something, and since he'd put me on the spot I figured I'd just tell him what I thought, that Stanley could read O.K., but that he talked a little funny, as if his tongue was used to moving a certain way and had to learn new moves in order to be able to pronounce the English words, and that what he probably really needed was help with speaking, not reading, because he could read all right, it was just hard to understand him. I

said some kids where I went to school stuttered and got pulled from class a couple of times a week for speech therapy, and maybe Stanley could get that at his school. But Mrs. Coopleman said that Stanley's school was worse than the Franklin Park Zoo, that they had nothing like that, the teachers were scared and the kids fought and made noise, dangled each other by the legs from the windows. I said that's why my family moved to Brookline when I was starting school, because they wanted me to have a good education, and I guess that it was compared to what Stanley was getting.

I'd been there for about an hour and a half and thought that I should be getting along, but for the Cooplemans it was as if they hadn't talked to anybody in years, and Mrs. Coopleman started cooking hot dogs and while we were waiting she told Stanley to get his saxophone and he came back and started playing, and all of a sudden he became a real kid with a glowing smile and a bobbing head and a stomping foot, and his parents and I couldn't help but wiggle along with him. When Stanley finished, I told him he was great, and while he was beaming Mrs. Coopleman piped in that his music teacher thought so too but had moved to Milton and the lessons had stopped because Milton was too far away.



Things weren't as chaotic during my next visit because Mr. Coopleman wasn't home but at the bakery in Brookline where he worked. I was helping Stanley with his math homework when Mrs. Coopleman interrupted to serve us Yodels and Ring Dings. While Stanley and I made pigs of ourselves, she left the kitchen for a minute and came back with a big black book for me to see. It was a photo album that showed what life was like for Jews under the Nazis in Poland, and she turned the pages until she came to a picture of a gallows where the bodies of several Jews were hanging side-by-side.

"That's what they did to my brother," she said. "They dragged him out of the house and killed him just like that."

Then she rolled up her sleeve and showed me the number tattooed on her forearm. I had never actually seen one of those tattoos before, and I felt weird, as if she had exposed her breast and I didn't want to look but I also wanted to see.

"They killed him," she said, "and sent my father, mother and me to Auschwitz. I never saw them again." She paused for a moment, scanning the pages. "So tell me, why they did this to us?"

"I guess the Jews weren't strong enough to stop them," I said, "and nobody was willing to help." But it was as if I hadn't said anything, because she just looked through me and repeated, "Why they did this to us?" Stanley's eyes met mine as if to say, *I know how you feel, this is what I go through all the time.*

"Can I see the rest of the pictures?" I said, and Mrs. Coopleman turned the pages slowly until we came to the end of the book.

"Once my mother told me," I said, "that when she was a little Jewish girl in Russia there were pogroms, that some Russians hated us for being communists, others for supporting the tsar, some because we were rich, others because we were poor, some for acting like Russians, others for acting like Jews, and all of them blamed us for killing Jesus Christ, but my mother's point was that the Russians hated us because we were Jews, and to justify killing us any old reason would do."

When I left to go home, I found my bike frame chained to the banister where I'd left it, but the wheels were gone. I climbed the stairs two at a time, knocked the *Dragnet* knock, and told Mrs. Coopleman and Stanley what happened.

"It must have been Robert," Mrs. Coopleman said.

"A shvartzer," Stanley grunted.

"Colored," Mrs. Coopleman yelled at Stanley, "colored, not shvartzer." And then she turned to me. "A thief," she said. "He's stolen from us before in the hallway—a shovel, a shopping cart, and from grocery bags when we couldn't carry them upstairs all at once. He lived for a while downstairs with his sister and her baby, but he stole even from her, so she finally kicked him out."

I wanted to call the cops but Mrs. Coopleman said the cops come and ask questions but never do anything, and that she's always afraid after that Robert would take revenge.

There was nothing left for me to do but figure out how to get home. Since the Cooplemans didn't have a car, and Mrs. Coopleman said that cabs didn't pick up in Roxbury, I had to choose between having Dad get me and taking a bus. I knew that Dad would get lost and the thought of him driving in circles repeatedly clearing his throat was too much for me to bear, so I unlocked my bike, mounted it on my shoulder and headed to the nearby bus stop.

By the time I got to the house Dad was already back from his job at my uncle's drug store. I told my parents what happened. Dad said, "It's enough already, you should quit tutoring," but I said that the Cooplemans were at Auschwitz, that I was learning a lot and didn't want to stop. Out of the blue, Ma asked if they were Polish. I nodded yes and she said "Oy."

"Why oy?" I asked.

"Just oy," she said.

"What is this?" I said. "Polish Jews aren't good enough for you?"

Dad nipped the argument in the bud. "Lizenu," he said, "what if he goes Sunday nights? After I get home he can use the car. A car's safer than a bike or a bus." And so it was settled.

A few weeks later at the Cooplemans, Stanley greeted me alone in the hallway in front of his apartment's partially closed door, and whispered that Robert was downstairs visiting, and I immediately had the bright idea of leaving Stanley's saxophone in the downstairs hallway, while I hid upstairs out of sight but in hearing range, so I could catch Robert red-handed. Stanley snuck the saxophone out to me without alerting his mother, and as I waited midway down the staircase, I overheard him saying that he had checked for me outside because it wasn't like me to be late.

It didn't take long for Robert to take the bait and I watched him open the case to make sure that whatever was inside was worth stealing. He looked about my age, maybe a few years older. He was tall but not nearly as tall as me, and where I was mostly muscle, he was mostly lean. I figured he was quicker but not necessarily faster, and that on the basketball court he'd probably try to dart around me while I'd try to overpower him. In a fight, we'd be pretty evenly matched, because even though I was bigger Robert grew up on the streets. Suddenly I heard the clasps on the sax case click shut and saw Robert look around and then nonchalantly walk outside. I ran down the stairs and out to sidewalk after him.

"Hey, where are you going with that?" I yelled.

He stopped, turned, saw me, dropped the sax, and ran but I had a running start and grabbed him by the arm just as we reached the Roxbury Children's Center. He took a swing at me, so I wrestled him to the ground, and he tried to get up but I wouldn't let him, and he took another swing at me, so I punched him in the face a couple of times, fast but not too hard. Reverend Lane must have heard the commotion, because he raced out the door and pulled me off Robert.

"Stop it, stop it, what's all this about?"

"He stole Stanley's sax," I said, "and I was trying to get it back."

"What sax?" Reverend Lane said, now standing between Robert and me.

"Over there," I said, pointing up the street to where Stanley and Mrs. Coopleman had come out to get the case.

"Is that true?" Reverend Lane asked Robert.

"No," Robert said. "It was lyin' in the hallway and I figured it was trash so I took it."

"And I suppose you stole the wheels off my bike because they looked like trash too."

"I don't know about no bike."

"That's a lie and you know it."

"Do you have any proof?" Reverend Lane said to me.

"Proof about the bike, no, but I put the sax in the hallway and witnessed the whole thing."

"That's entrapment," Reverend Lane said. "It sounds like it's more your fault than his."

"I didn't steal anything. He did," I said.

"Didn't you hear what he said? He thought he was taking trash! Don't jump to conclusions just because he's a Negro."

"It's not because of his race," I said, "it's common sense."

"I'm not going to argue," Reverend Lane said. "I'll call Miss Kohl and tell her what happened. I'm sure she'll want to talk to you."

"Good," I said, "I want to talk to her too," and then I walked over to Stanley and his mother, said goodbye, and went home.



At school the next day, I received a note from Miss Kohl saying that she wanted to see me. I met her in her office and as soon as I sat down she told me that she'd heard what happened from Reverend Lane.

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He said that you tricked a Negro into stealing Stanley's saxophone because you suspected that he stole the wheels off your bike, took matters into your own hands and beat him up."

"That's not exactly the whole story," I said.

"What's your version, then?"

"A couple of weeks ago, someone stole the wheels off my bike in the Cooplemans' hall. Stanley and his mother were sure this guy, Robert, whose sister lives down-stairs, did it. They said he was a thief. Yesterday Robert was at his sister's so I put Stanley's saxophone in the downstairs hall and hid upstairs, waiting for Robert to take it which, of course, he did, and then I chased him down the street to get it back, and to let him know that he better not steal anything from me or the Cooplemans again. He took a swing at me, so I punched him twice in the face."

"Reverend Lane said that Robert denied taking your wheels and that he only took the sax because he thought it was going out with the trash."

"That's ridiculous," I said. "There was no trash in the hallway, no garbage cans, nothing. And why did he run away from me if he wasn't stealing? He could have stopped, said he thought no one wanted the sax, and handed it back."

"Maybe he ran because he assumed that a white person wouldn't believe him, that he'd inevitably be found guilty."

"Oh, come on," I said, "you're just making excuses for him. It's like I'm guilty for standing up for myself, and he's innocent because he's a Negro."

"I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is that you made up your mind about Robert based on what the Cooplemans said, but you didn't have any real proof. For all you knew the Cooplemans could have been wrong. That's why, if you think somebody has done something wrong to you—whatever their race happens to be—you should call the police, not take matters into your own hands."

"But the Cooplemans said that the police never do anything, that's why Robert keeps stealing."

"Maybe the police don't do anything because the Cooplemans can't back up their claims."

"Maybe they can't back up their claims because Robert always gets rid of the evidence, and that makes the Cooplemans look like liars."

"We're going around in circles, Phil."

"You don't understand. Unless you have the strength and guts to stop them, some people will get away with as much as they can. I learned that from being fat, and from what Hitler did to the Cooplemans, and from what the Russians did to my mother."

"There's a difference between an uncomfortable situation and one that's life threatening."

"But if you let bullies get away with the little stuff, they think it's O.K. and then it's just a matter of time before they move on to bigger stuff."

"But you can't go around beating people up over every little thing."

Miss Kohl paused and then said, "Phillip, I can't in good conscience let you keep tutoring. You're like a time bomb waiting to go off."

"Let's put it this way," I said, "I'm a land mine and if no one steps on me the mine won't explode."

"That's what I'm afraid of. And someone's bound to rub you the wrong way. I can't take chances. It's not just you and the Cooplemans. It's my reputation, the school's, the town's, the Roxbury Children's Center. . . There's too much at stake. I'm going to have to drop you from the project."

"You mean like I'm cut from the team?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Thanks coach! I'll call the Cooplemans and tell them I can't see Stanley any more."

"That would be the right thing to do. And when you talk to them try to make sure that they don't feel you're rejecting them, or that they're any way at fault. Tell them that your guidance counselor thinks, well. . . that it's not safe for you to go to Roxbury anymore, that given the problem with Robert, she's afraid things might get out of control."

"O.K.," I said.

"Can I trust you to do that?"

"I'll let him them know, I promise."

I called the Coopleman's that night and basically told them what Miss Kohl told me to say. Stanley was disappointed but neither he nor his mother put up a big fuss. They knew the decision was out of my hands. But I felt bad, like I was abandoning them or something, so I gave them my phone number and said that if they're ever in danger or anything like that to call me, because even though I wouldn't be seeing them every week, I wanted them to know that in an emergency, I'd always be around. Then I went downstairs to talk to Ma and Dad, but I didn't want to worry them with the gory details, so I just explained that I wasn't going to tutor anymore because I wanted to have more time with my friends before we all graduated and went our separate ways, and Dad cleared his throat a few times and said, "Thank God."



One evening a few weeks later, Mrs. Coopleman called to tell me that Robert had just beaten up Stanley and stolen his money. As usual, I didn't want to get Ma and Dad excited, so I lied and said that it was the Coopelmans, and that Stanley missed me and they wondered if I could come over for dinner. My parents said O.K. but begged me not to make a habit of it, so I took the car and gunned it all the way to Roxbury where I buzzed and then knocked like *Dragnet*. Mrs. Coopleman let me in and I stood beside her at the kitchen table where she was washing the dried blood from Stanley's face while he held an icepack to his head and tongued his newly chipped front tooth. She explained that Stanley had been arguing with her lately because he's thirteen and she never let him go outside without her, so she gave in, sent him to the store for some groceries and that Robert saw him and pulled him into an alley.

I could see that Stanley wasn't too badly injured but there was no way that I was going to let Robert get away with what he did, especially because I felt that he had attacked Stanley to get back at me. I asked where I could find Robert but neither Stanley nor Mrs. Coopleman knew where he lived, so I went downstairs and banged on his sister's door. She answered without opening and I said that I wanted Robert's address, and she said that she forgot it and I said that I'd give her a minute to remember. Meanwhile I went around to the back, found a broken window, pulled out some of the glass, reached in and turned the lock, then climbed in and found her standing there, a heavy girl probably in her early twenties with her arms wrapped around her waist to keep her unbuttoned housecoat in place.

"I won't hurt you," I said, "just tell me Robert's address."

She shook her head no.

"Where's your address book?" I asked. "You must have an address book."

She nodded at a little table.

"What's his last name?" I said, leafing through the pages, and again she wouldn't tell me, but it didn't matter because I found a page of crossed-out phone numbers and addresses for Robert, and I quickly memorized the uncrossed-out address at the bottom of the list.

"Don't warn him," I said, "because you'll be helping a jerk. Your brother just beat Stanley up." Then I took out my wallet and gave her my emergency twenty-dollar bill.

"Here," I said, "for the window. Why doesn't the landlord fix them anyway?"

"Because they keep gettin' broken," she said, "and Mr. Goldblatt's sick of payin'."

I ran back upstairs to get directions from Mrs. Coopleman but she told me not to go, that she called in a panic when she couldn't reach her husband, but could see now that Stanley was O.K..

I said that I wasn't going after Robert just for Stanley, but for him and everybody else that Robert's hurt or would hurt in the future, and that I had some unfinished personal business with him having to do with a bike and a saxophone.

"It's not worth it," she said, "I don't want no one to get hurt," but I said, "It's worth it to me."

Mrs. Coopleman was stubborn and still wouldn't give me directions and I had to ask around outside to find out how to go. Robert's street was close by and his house was easy to locate because he was sitting on the front stoop with a couple of his buddies. I decided that the main thing I had going for me was the element of surprise, so I quickly pulled the car over, jumped out, ran to the stairs right up to Robert, grabbed him by his shirt, pulled him to his feet, kned him in the proverbial groin, spun him around and kicked his rear end so hard that he seemed to sail like a football against the front door. Then I grabbed the front of his shirt again, yanked him to his feet and said, "I hope you learn fast because next time, if there is a next time with anyone, you hear me, anyone, you'll be gummin' your food for the rest of your life." I shoved him hard against the door, turned and headed downstairs. Robert's friends hadn't moved. I guess they didn't feel that he was worth getting hurt over. As I passed them, I said that my fight's with Robert, not with them and they nodded and didn't say a word.

On the way back to the Coopleman's, I felt no remorse, guilt or anxiety, just a great feeling of satisfaction. I knew that Robert wouldn't tell the police—a kind of honor among thieves sort of thing, I figured—and I knew from now on that he'd leave Stanley alone, because Robert knew that I was crazy enough to follow through on my threat.

I buzzed and knocked and Mrs. Coopleman and Stanley greeted me at the door. She asked if I was O.K. and I told her I was fine and she said, "Come, have something to eat," led me into the kitchen, grabbed—you guessed it—a bunch of Yodels and Ring Dings and lay them on the table. Why a baker's family only had mass-produced pastry in the house I never found out, but I figured that Mr. Coopleman, like Dad, didn't own the business and couldn't help himself to the merchandise.

"So tell me," she said, as Stanley and I sat down, "Did you hurt him?"

"Not really," I said. "A quick tutoring session on what happens to bullies when they pick on Jews."

"I think maybe you're a little meshugge," Mrs. Coopleman said. "You never know with the colored, in their pocket maybe there's a gun or a knife."

"Only a bisel meshugge?" I said, and began eating a Yodel.

"Oy," she said, "so now you fight, and talk Yiddish too."

Stanley laughed, moved his chair closer to mine and started tearing the cellophane off a Ring Ding. He was having trouble because you had to bite a hole in the cellophane in order to open it and he was favoring his broken tooth. I quickly peeled the aluminum wrapper off another Yodel, traded Stanley for his Ring Ding and ate it while he was stuck trying to figure out a new way of biting. I grabbed his Yodel, opened my mouth wide, stuffed it with the chocolate cylinder, closed, chewed, swallowed and winked. Stanley laughed again and then Mrs. Coopleman unwrapped a Yodel, broke it in half and gave him a piece small enough to chew without biting.

"I don't think Robert will bother any of you again," I said, "but if he does or if you hear that he's giving his sister a hard time, call me and I'll give him a refresher course at no extra charge."

"We have only a month left," Mrs. Coopleman said, "God willing, there won't be a next time."

"What do you mean?"

"We're moving to Brookline, Westbourne Terrace."

"That's my street," I said.

"We know," Mrs. Coopleman said. "Our friends the Pearlsteins told us. A few weeks ago when you couldn't come anymore, we mentioned your name, and their Rivka said you're in the same class, but that you're a big shot and probably don't know her."

"I can't believe she said that," I said. "She's not a close friend, but I know her. I even know that her parents were in a concentration camp."

"We move into their first floor apartment on the first of July."

"It's such a coincidence," I said, "that it's hard to believe. We should all celebrate Independence Day together."



At home later that night, I didn't tell my parents about the fight, but I did tell them that the Cooplemans would be moving to our street.

"Just don't invite them over for dinner," Ma said, getting comfortable on the couch.

"I already asked them for July 4th."

"Don't make jokes," Ma said.

"I'm not."

"I can't forget how they treated us when we moved from Zaslav to Warsaw."

Dad reached into his bag of cliché. "It's not right to condemn every Polish Jew for the actions of a few."

"Dad," I said, "you made a rhyme."

He smirked and shrugged.

"Rhyme, shmyme," Ma said. "Look, I'm happy for the Cooplemans personally if they get out of Roxbury. But in Brookline for me, it will be as if they don't exist."

"What's new?" Dad said. "For you, even your sister, nieces and nephews don't exist."

Ma slapped the armrest and I could see particles of dust floating in the lamplight. "Don't start with me, Zalman. Sarah converted and had her children baptized. For that there's a price to pay."

"Maybe to God," Dad said, "but why to you? You're not even religious."

Listening to Ma and Dad have a "talk" was usually a good way to learn family history, but I had to skip it this time because I had something pressing to do.

The tradition at BHS was for the senior class president, not the valedictorian, to give the commencement address, and I had put off writing it for weeks. True, I was nervous about not being smart enough to do a good job, but there was a bigger reason why I procrastinated: My disagreement with Miss Kohl convinced me that the powers-that-be would give me a hard time about speaking my mind; on the other hand, I didn't want to leave out what I felt

had to be said. So with the deadline looming, I decided to write two speeches, one to use with the faculty advisor and the other for the graduation ceremony.

The advisor turned out to be Mr. Grasso, a new teacher in his first year. I had heard about Mr. Grasso and seen him around, but never had a class with him. He was neat as a pin, wore stylish clothes that were totally different from the disheveled polyester of the typical male teacher at BHS, smelled of cologne (Jade East, he told me), and there was a rumor that he had recently left the seminary.

I rehearsed the "non-controversial" version of my speech with him a few times and he made some helpful suggestions about grammar, especially my run-on sentences, but I told him that I talked that way and that I could only write the way I talk, otherwise I felt like a phony.

"To thine own self be true," he said in a deep dramatic tone.

And I replied, "And it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not be false to any man."

"You like the passage?" he asked.

"Sophomore English—it seemed to me like good advice."

"To me too."

Other than that, he didn't say anything either critical or complimentary about my speech, so I figured it left him kind of flat, but at the end of the last rehearsal he surprised me with Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, a gift which Mr. Grasso inscribed as follows:

Buber believes that the way to achieve an intimate relationship with God is through an intimate interrelationship with one's fellow man, and I think, Phil, that you're basically trying to express that same sentiment in your speech, and for me it's a personal blessing and a reaffirmation of human dignity.

(No, I didn't memorize it. I have the book right here with me, even after all these years.) I never really got into Buber but Mr. Grasso's words touched me, because it was the first time anybody treated me as if I had a brain and the feeling that I got from being recognized that way is something I've wanted to hold onto.



On graduation night, anxious but somewhat reassured by Mr. Grasso's gift, I delivered the speech. The first part was about getting to know Roxbury through basketball and tutoring—the shabby conditions, poverty, bad schools, unemployment, lousy jobs—and I argued that it was the moral duty of us people in the suburbs who had been blessed with so much, to give something back. When I promised to devote my life to helping mankind the audience loved it, and everybody clapped as if John F. Kennedy had given the speech himself.

But then I explained that I learned something else in Roxbury: That the few Jews who still lived there were being beaten and robbed and that the people who should know better—police, ministers, teachers—were turning a blind eye to what was going on, and were basically saying to the Negroes that because your ancestors were slaves and your lives aren't easy, you can do or have whatever you want, and were saying to the Jews, either put up with it or get out of town, because if you fight for yourselves you're racists. And I said that the situation reminded me of Howard Johnson's ice cream counter, where they had twenty-eight flavors and picked a favorite each month, and

the current favorite was chocolate and if you didn't go along you were called names and kicked out of the store.

When I finished my speech there was a smattering of applause, or maybe I just imagined it as I headed back to my seat, and as I sat down Dr. England, the headmaster, stepped up to the podium. He usually wore a brown suit and tie which, with his jowls and droopy eyes, made me think he resembled a bloodhound, but that evening he was dressed in black, was unusually pale and reminded me of an undertaker, or maybe the corpse itself. He was supposed to introduce the guest speaker, but first felt compelled to put some distance between himself, the school, and my comments: "I'm afraid this evening," he said, "that for at least one of our graduates, obtaining a BHS diploma doesn't certify the possession of an entirely open mind." The audience clapped, but not thunderously, and soon the guest speaker, a tweedier-than-thou type who was the director of admissions at a local college with a predominantly Jewish student body, got some applause and more than a few laughs when he said, "When it comes to ice cream your class president may have good taste, but his comments about race were tasteless to me."

I knew they were accusing me of being a racist but I felt they were wrong, because I wasn't prejudging blacks; I was criticizing whites for judging the two races by different standards and for attaching a higher value to helping blacks than to helping Jews. But there was no chance for rebuttal. My speech was over and done. I could only wait for the ceremony to end, and hope that Mr. Grasso wouldn't get into trouble.

After the guest speaker finished his address—for better or for worse, I can't remember what he said—the class lined up and each of us was called to the podium to receive a diploma and shake the dignitaries' hands. When my turn came, I expected to be booed, but the audience remained silent and Dr. England and the others treated me as if nothing had happened. And then the BHS band played the overture from *Der Meistersinger* by Wagner, Hitler's favorite composer, and the six hundred or so graduates marched behind me from the chair-covered infield of Cypress Playground across Greenough Street to the partially enclosed area of The Quadrangle, where the line spontaneously dispersed into a crowd of kids, relatives and teachers hugging, kissing and congratulating one another, and it struck me that I was a leader no more, just another kid searching for his parents, and at that moment I literally collided with Jacobs and his mother and she, "Madame School Committee" herself, called me a bigot. I told Jacobs that I'd been going to his house for four years and that this was the first time his mother stooped so low as to speak to me, and Jacobs raised his eyebrows as if he was about to say, *What can I say, you're both idiots*, but before he had the chance his mother said that my speech was disgusting and that I was no better than a Nazi. Then I recognized the unmistakable voice of Mrs. Coopleman: "I'm sorry Mrs. but if you think he's a Nazi, then you don't know what it is to be a Jew," and in a matter of seconds, fortunately I suppose, Rivka Pearlstein, her parents, Stanley, and Mr. Coopleman came between the two women and prevented a scene.

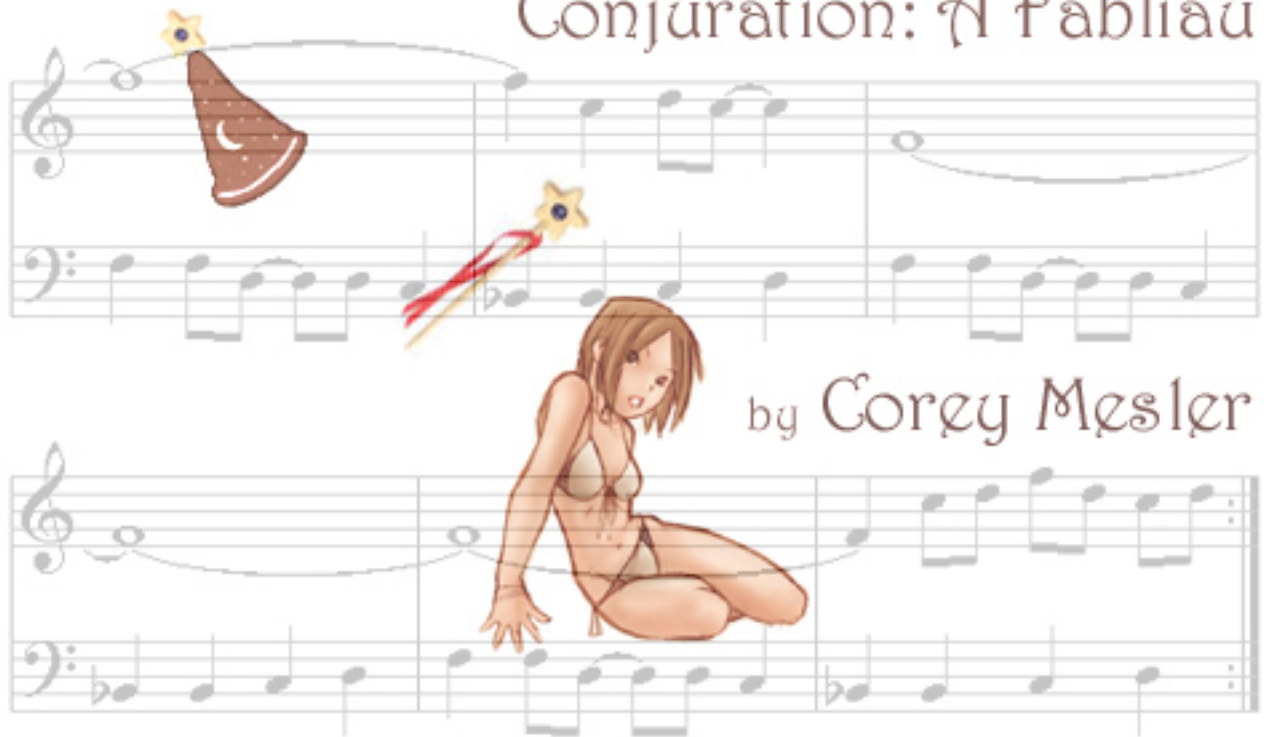
"Saved by the bell," Rivka said, upbeat like the BHS cheerleader she was, and then she explained that they'd invited the Cooplemans to the ceremony so they could get a taste of what was in store for Stanley in Brookline, but a race war wasn't exactly what they were expecting, and Mrs. Coopleman smiled, shook her head "nah" and grabbed me around the waist—a very long stretch upwards for her—and while she hugged me and wished me mazel tov, I glanced at Mr. Coopleman observing, as always, with that million-miles-away look in his eyes, and Stanley glowing in the same joyous way as that day in his kitchen when I first heard him playing the sax.



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The Somerset Review

Conjuration: A Fabliau



"A song is anything that can walk by itself."

- Bob Dylan

In the days when magic was plentiful and sacred (rather than the vice versa we know today), there lived near Beale Street in Memphis a man of extraordinary powers, name of Beauregard Rawhead. He was, as a conjureman, quite remarkable, but he wanted to be something else. He wanted to be a songwriter.

He had seen W.C. Handy as a youth and he had been thunderstruck. Suddenly it was as if all his magic was nullified. He wanted to conjure something as powerful, as universal as "St. Louis Blues," or "Mister Crump."

And as he grew older, and his fame as a powerful magician grew, the need to produce just one memorable song grew, too, until it was an authoritative obsession. So, when the bluesman, Tiny Red, came to see Beauregard about some business, he saw the chance for a right proper tit-for-tat.



Tiny Red was from Arkansas by way of New Orleans by way of the Orient,

which is to say Tiny was a grabbag of musical inventiveness. You know him best for "Silver Dollar Pantleg Blues" and "A Frothing of Delight" and for inventing the phrase, "Your world." But, in his day, Tiny was as hot as they come, as big as Big Bill. In his own tiny way, of course.

Tiny came to Memphis that fateful fall to scout some talent for a travelin' gig he was offered on the European continent. Most specifically, he needed a second guitar and he heard tell of a Memphis bar rat name of Pete Holder played like the murmur of dreaming brooks. This was the word that he got.

He spent about a month on Beale scouting talent but he wasn't having any luck finding the elusive Mr. Holder. Some said they had just seen him, some said no, he was in California. Some nights he was told he had just missed him. He's working at BingoBango, he was told. When he got there he hadn't played since last week.

Tiny hadn't come to see Beauregard Rawhead for no guitar player, no, naturally he came to see the conjureman for an affair of the heart. Seems Tiny had a major heartdeep crush on a dancer at one of the clubs, a woman with a rear like a Buick 6, comely like a pine bridge. Named Callie.

Tiny came, like so many before him, for a philter. He disbelieved in his own charm, in his personal ability to woo so fine a female, so he sought a charm outside of normal human makeup. A love potion.



Tiny knocked tentatively on Beauregard's tin-plated door, anxious for thaumaturgy.

"Who?" Beau growled.

"Tiny Red Montgomery," Tiny swallowed. "From Arkansas."

"Don't know ye," the answer.

"I need some help, sir."

"All God's children do."

"I was told you were the man to see bout this," Tiny said, a little bolder.

"Who said that?"

"Squiggly Robbins, for one. Bob Dabolina. Skincat Resin. All told."

"You music man?" Beau asked with a twinkle.

"That's right."

"Bluesman."

"Yea. Yessir."

"You are welcome."

Tiny ducked entering the cramped quarters, dark as time. There was a jumble of material everywhere, tables piled with books and manuscripts, papers on top of an old upright piano, every surface obscured by knickknacks and gewgaws, objects seemingly floating in the air. One stooped, sidestepped, bent and shuffled to see the munificent wizard of Beale, who sat grinning in a burnished chair, a smile like a keyboard.

"Sit, sit," the old man gestured vaguely.

Tiny carefully pushed aside some papers and settled on an upturned crate.

The magician fixed him with a milky eye.

"You know W.C. Handy?" he asked quickly.

Tiny hesitated. Know his music or know the man, he wondered. He had actually met the great man once in Montgomery, Alabama, in a dark club, shook his hand, even. This seemed like some kind of test.

"I play his supernal music in my act," he brought out, finally.

"Ahhh," Beau said. "I believe we can do some transacting."



The deal Beauregard Rawhead laid out for the bluesman was simple but onerous. In exchange for a love potion he would conjure, Beau would be taught how to write a song.

Tiny rubbed his hand across his face, leaned back, leaned forward again. He blew out a bit of sour wind.

"I dunno," he began.

"No deal then."

"Mr. Rawhead, writin songs. I dunno, it can't be taught."

"You learned."

"No sir, I was born writin songs."

"Naw," Beau said and he grinned like a warden.

Tiny knew he was gonna agree to this, he just wanted the disclaimers up front.

"I can try it, sir. I can sure try it."

"Thas all I'm asking, " Beauregard said, standing up.

Tiny rose too. The two men shook hands. They agreed to start that very evening.



The sunset in Memphis was red like the blood of Abraham, the river sucking up that color like a lamia, like a mother dog. There was an eeriness in the air, a tone underneath the everyday, like a buzz in the distance, like cicadas from another world.

Tiny showed up on time, as the day was giving way to night. The old conjureman was eager to get started; he had cleared a space around his piano, like one might clear the ground to build a fire, or make a sacrifice.

Under his arm Tiny carried a sheaf of papers in a beatup folder, his songs. He spread those out on the piano keys and Beauregard glanced at them perfunctorily.

"Don' need these," he said.

Tiny stared at him a second.

"Mr. Rawhead, lemme get started. You need to learn the musical notation.

This the language of the music, the alphabet. Can't build no song without this."

"Don't want to build no song. Wan to. . ." and he stopped, seemingly to change his tack. "Awright. I see. Teach me this," he said, tapping the sheets.

They spent most of that evening going over basic notes and melodies, Tiny using the out-of-tune piano to demonstrate the sound beneath the symbol.

It was two in the morning when he put his long arms above his head and stretched himself with a crackling of bones.

"That's about it for tonight, I guess."

"Don't know how to write no song, yet," said the old man petulantly.

"Takes some time, sir."

"Awright, awright."



A week passed this way. Small advances, stubborn setbacks. The two men at loggerheads, butting them.

After two weeks the men were more cordial, whiskey between them, good talk. They spoke of love, sex, the river. A bond formed like electricity and the lessons took on a new compeerage.



And progress was made in the manufacture of a song.

Who woulda believed it? Beau began to see the warp and woof of music, began to comprehend its sortilege, its special fluidity. Music spoke to him in his dreams and waking he spoke back. He began to hum around the house, tunes coming in like broken radio waves, indistinct at first, scattered. Gradually, a cohesion commenced like his newfound fraternity with Tiny, some kind of coming together.

Secretly at first, he began to cobble together a few lines, a phrase or two with accompanying melody. A song was perceived through the dim, a strain appearing in the murk. Beauregard, in private seclusion, was writing a song, unsure about revealing it to his master, the man who gave him music.

For his part Tiny suspected the old man was onto something. A new lilt to his conversation emerged, a new lightness to his banter. And in his muddy eyes blue stars danced sometimes, tiny shots like sparks off an anvil. Magic commencing.



The party to celebrate the partnership of Tiny Red and his new guitar player (it was Andy Love due to the mysterious fact that Pete Holder never materialized) was held at the Club BingoBango on a mild Friday night in October. Word spread that there was to be an all-night jam and a number of the great and near-great and never-to-be-great attended. At one sweat-retted point in the proceedings, there on the same modest stage sat in

Mississippi Red, Alexander Jimspake, Styx Quetzlcoatl, Big Bill Broonzy, The Lonely Dog, Robert Jung, Jimmy the Snake, Ed Alexander, Pudding Puddinski the chanteuse, Roman Rebus, John Kills-Her (the Native American harp player), Squeaky Joint, Tuff Green, the Shawcross Brothers, Skeets Cameron and the Duchess herself. It was a callathump, a shivaree. A bombast. And it was the first time, historically speaking, that the word "bluesfest" had been used. It was coined that night. Write it down.

Long after midnight, the conversation a murmur of ghosts and drinking men, the air fuliginous, Beaureguard Rawhead slipped in almost unremarked through the back door. On the stage, Styx and Peep-eye Harper were weaving a sleepy rondo, which sounded a little like "Back'em up Blues in D." Everyone was sorta half there and half woolgathering.

Beaureguard slid up to the stage, and took a seat at the 88s, and looked at them with a kind of wonder and amusement. The two musicians hesitated and the crowd sort of hummed and burred and there was a few seconds of dusty silence.

Beaureguard touched the first key with his left-hand pointer and some other keys followed and before anyone could quite assemble their thoughts, he started singing softly, almost to himself at first. The words were incomprehensible initially, then took form and poured forth, Beaureguard finding a voice as thick as annihilation, as sinuous as ice. Tiny rose slowly from his seat in the middle of the dim and din and hung there like a suspended orb. It was a minor miracle. It was better than he thought possible. The conjureman had a voice, a reason to sing.

And it was on that night that the now standard number, "Saprophytic Blues" was born.

Beaureguard went on to have a minor singing and songwriting career, nothing matching the magic of that firstborn number (though The Latin Students had a minor hit with one of his songs, "They Bribe the Lazy Quadling," in the early fifties). His soul was at peace, however.



The other side of the bargain was, surprisingly, not as successfully achieved.

"What good am I who cannot make the smallest world over?" Beaureguard cried out to his dark gods.

It wasn't that he gave Tiny Red a faulty philter, a no-motion potion. The elixir worked, oh yes.

Tiny took the small crystal bottle home with him and sprinkled it on his hairbrush as instructed. He lit the brush and it burned as expected with a steady purple flame that had a tiny red center like the back of a black widow. But he never again saw Callie Pigeon, the woman he had so set his heart upon winning.

He went to the strip club to see her perform and was told she had disappeared. Poof, like a thought.

His heart ached and he knew an emptiness hitherto undiscovered, and he spent some lonely nights wandering Beale, in a trance-like funk.

He forgave the old conjureman, attaching no blame to the failure of the contract. He was sad but not bitter.

"I failed you, boy. I need to make it up to you," Beaureguard said, hangdogedly.

"It's O.K., Beau. I'm O.K."

"Man needs love, Tiny."

"It'll come."

"Let's go get us some Zombi Killers, drink ourselves outta the blues. What say?"

"I don't know, Beau. I don't feel right out on the street anymore. Something's wrong."

"What wrong?"

"Weirdness. Collywobbles. Somebody following me."

"Who do that?"

Tiny Red looked up at his friend. Tiny's eyes were deep sad, red-rimmed.

"Old woman. I look up. She everywhere I go. I dunno, she's O.K., I guess. Kinda pretty. But, I don't need nobody following me, you follow?"

"Right."

The two men sat in stony silence for a few moments, the love between them like a cat. The air was tinny, faraway music somewhere.

"I get rid of that woman," Beauguard spoke. "I make you a better potion. Maybe Callie Pigeon, Brother, she gone. She no more. I make 'nother potion—you meet whole new woman. You watch. You see."



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Through the window, the couch, the pull-out bed, where they'd sat with vodka martinis, so much at home, so hand in hand, watching spindrift fly off the surf, the black-backed gulls riding the wind and the sun's reluctant fall from the sky.

Reflected in the high glass, Ninety Mile Beach curved south to Ahipara then west, around the bay, to Reef Point. To the north, a distant Motupia Island and, beyond that, Cape Reinga, at the top of New Zealand. He remembered her saying, "We've become a part of the seascape, Barney." And in celebration of that, hadn't they made love on that couch in broad view of ocean and sunset and gulls . . . without a goddamn care?

But the pleasure he had taken in the place had gone with her, and protecting the house from the elements—washing salt off the windows, treating the inevitable rust—had become mechanical, so that he cleaned and scraped and painted like a man paid to do it, which he wasn't.

Climbing the ladder with hose and brush, the weight of his fifty years hung like dead flesh from his bones. Resting a moment, he looked down onto Della's garden, her domain: the long green rectangle of kikuyu she had laboured over was now ragged, uneven, and needed a cut. Three seedling pohutakawas boxed in shade-cloth to shield them from the wind, the Norfolk Pine, a few succulents, were all asking for water. "Not much to look at yet,"

she'd said. But outside the fence, a wilderness, new sand dunes rising through the marram grass like a pod of humpback whales.

A beautiful place whose reflection created within him a well of melancholy. The sand on which they built their house seemed determined to change its shape. The patterns on its surface altered with every breath of wind. Go away, turn your back—as she had a month ago—and return to a transformation. He didn't want that to happen to Della.

And, while stretching up to reach one corner of the window, he heard the telephone ring inside the house.

It would be the land agent, he thought, and did he really need to climb down from the ladder to take a call from Corin Smith? He knew already what she would tell him: that the people she'd brought to view the house that morning decided not to buy; the husband certainly, whom he had taken aside to the garage workshop while Corin showed the bedrooms and the stunning view. It had been a comment cleverly dropped, he thought, into their manly conversation on water supplies and septic tanks, about the wind that regularly came off the ocean at one hundred miles an hour. He smiled, remembering the man's expression, how quickly it shriveled, becoming indifferent, all interest suspended in the face of a hurricane.

He continued washing the glass and allowed the telephone to ring. It was more important to keep the place tidy for Della's return, if only he could persuade her, if only he knew where she was. The letter he had from her lawyer mentioned divorce but hadn't told him where she was living, only that she wanted her half of the property's value, as was her right, and that they were looking forward to hearing if he would pay her off in cash or whether he needed to sell the house.

But the bloody thing rang and rang as if it was never going to stop and, in the end, he knew it would not unless he answered it. He climbed down the ladder, turned off the hose and went inside. When he picked up the telephone, a familiar voice said, "Hello Barney," and his heart did a jig.

"Della?" he said.

"Who did you think?"

"I thought it might be Corin Smith."

"Isn't Corin a girl's name?"

"The land agent. She brought people here this morning."

"Has she got nice tits, Barney? Don't tell me you didn't notice."

"She's trying to sell our house."

"I heard they'll do anything to persuade you to lower the price. You were giving her one on the couch, weren't you? Is that why it took you so long to answer the phone?"

"Don't say that, Della. She's not even here. If you want to know, I was up the ladder washing the windows. You know how they get this time of year."

"Our million dollar view?"

He didn't answer her, but made a sound like a sigh into the phone.

"And how are things down at the pub, Barney? How's the girlfriend? Pippa Subritsky? Now there's a name to have tattooed on your arse. Have you had that done yet, Barney? Has she moved in yet?"

"I don't go to the pub anymore. If you want to know, I haven't had a drink since you left. I haven't seen Pippa Subritsky, or any of them."

"Why is it I can't believe a word you tell me?"

"I've never told you a lie, Della."

"That's a lie, for a start."

A feeling of helplessness came over him. She was drinking; it was in her voice. She wasn't drunk, but she was drinking; she needed a drink to pick up the phone and talk to him. And there wasn't anything in the house for him, not even a can of beer. That would be hard for her to believe. Booze had been on the top of their shopping list, mostly for him of course, he couldn't deny that, but she always swallowed her share and it somehow bound them together. Now she was somewhere else, drinking, and he was here with nothing to oil his argument—he had poured all of it down the drain the day he came home from work and found the note that told him she was gone.

"Where are you, Della?"

"I'm stopping with Maggie until I get sorted." She giggled—a sure sign she'd had a drink or two. "I'm getting a lot of told-you-so's. My daughter's giving me a hard time. What was I thinking marrying a wanker like you? Stuff like that. She has a new flat she shares with two other girls, they're nice enough but I'm out of place, too old to fit in, if you know what I mean. I think I embarrass them. I'm sharing a bed with her, with Maggie. I think she'd rather I was somewhere else so she can share the bed with someone else."

"What's your number there?"

"I'm not going to tell you that, Barney. These kids don't need a drunk calling up in the middle of the night."

"I'm not drinking, Della. I told you, I'm finished with it."

She didn't answer. He heard glass against glass. Someone talking in the background, a female voice, a door closing.

"Why don't you come back?" he said.

"And what? Share you with the Subritski bitch? I don't share, Barney."

"But nothing happened, nothing at all, and never would. We were drunk, that's all there was to it."

"How do you know nothing happened then?" The hard edge on her voice came down the line like a slap. "What do you take me for? I saw you, the both of you, together, in bed."

"Della, please. I'm no good without you. The place doesn't mean anything."

"Then hurry up and sell it."

Barney sat down. This wasn't going the way he'd hoped it might. He could sense the wall she had built around herself: Della's bricks, her daughter's cement. He had imagined, when the opportunity came, he would be able to talk her 'round. They'd had arguments before, not as serious as this, although he did have a scar on his forehead from a two-litre tub of ice cream she'd thrown at him one night when he came home drunk. Even then, with blood on his face, he managed to open the bottle, make her a drink, and put in an olive on a stick. She loved an olive in her gin. He preferred a slice of lemon and drank two to her one. After a couple, they ended up on the couch: friends again, lovers, sharing the same glass. But how could he do that on the phone? She was there and he was here. She had a drink and he didn't. He couldn't remember this ever happening. How could he climb that wall?

"Did you get the letter from my lawyer, Barney?"

"It was the saddest letter I ever received."

"Sad? You think so? We've had them before, both of us, letters like that."

"You don't ever get used to them, Della."

"I remember reading somewhere once, that second marriages are more likely to work because people don't make the same mistake twice." She laughed. "What a load of old bollocks. Are you going to answer the letter, Barney?"

"The house is on the market. I told you, there were people here this morning. They seemed interested."

"Why don't you take out a loan and pay me off?"

"You know I can't do that. You know exactly how much I've got. I don't earn enough to pay off another loan."

"I don't much like living with Maggie."

"Then come back. We'll work it out. You could walk back into your old job as if you'd never been away."

"I can't live with you, Barney. When you're drunk, you fall into bed with anyone. Every time you touch me, I'll be thinking that's what you did to Pippa Subritsky."

"Fuck Pippa Subritsky. You're not listening, are you?"

She didn't respond and he imagined her taking a sip from her drink. "What are you drinking, Della? What is it you've got there?"

"I bought a bottle of Chardonnay. I'm working my way through it."

He imagined her lifting the glass, the sharp bite of the wine.

Then she said, "That's what you did, though. Isn't it?"

"What?"

"You fucked Pippa Subritski."

"I didn't touch her."

"Barney, those are the same words that came out of your mouth when I caught you in bed with her."

"People can change."

"I'm not interested in that, Barney. All you have to do is sell the house. Get rid of it so we can both get on with our lives. How come it's taking so long? I don't believe you're trying. You're not trying are you, Barney?"

"I don't know what else I can do."

How to go down on his knees on the telephone? He thought about becoming tearful but didn't think he could carry it off without at least a couple of gins inside him. There was a fluttering in his chest, the beginnings of panic; he wondered what she might say if he told her he wasn't well. "I've got pains in my chest, Della."

"Don't bullshit me, Barney. I'll tell you what I want you to do."

"What's that?"

"I want you to tell me what really happened. It's important to me. What went on between you and her? I want the details. How was it for her? How was it for you? And for once in your life tell me the truth."

"I told you the truth already, Della."

The truth was he couldn't remember what happened. But it was no good

telling Della that. It was as if he wasn't allowed even one mistake and he couldn't make up his mind if that was a fault in her or in him. Nothing could change it now; nothing like this had ever happened before. Della *had* found them in bed together. He couldn't deny that.

There had been a party in the pub: Jimmy Dane's birthday, or Pippa's, he wasn't sure which, but Della hadn't wanted to go. "It'll be the same old chit chat." He remembered her saying that. "You go," she'd said. "Have fun. Have one for me. Give me a call, I'll pick you up." She drove him down and dropped him at the door. All his friends said she was one in a million.

And there they had been, the same faces he saw most every day: Jacko, Toddy, Beverly, Harris Pokai, arms open to welcome him as if they hadn't seen him in a year—lovely people, warm and generous. And portly O'Hagen had pulled him a handle paid for by Jimmy who was down at the back end of the bar by the pool tables, he and Pippa a part of the furniture. He remembered giving them a thank-you wave and receiving one in return: Jimmy, long-legged and skinny with a pointy beard, and Pippa with more shape to her and always too much eye shadow, both in denim with high-heeled boots and cowboy hats and yellow hair that hung to their shoulders. Twins almost. And all night long they'd be back and forth to the jukebox, playing Waylon Jennings or Patsy Cline, then up to the bar and back to the table to drink some more and sing along, with Pippa strumming air guitar, pretending she was in the band—fall-down drunks, the both of them.

O'Hagen told Della where to look; how, after closing up, he had seen the three of them weaving up the road towards Pippa and Jimmy's house, where Della found the front door open, the stink of dissolution and Jimmy Dane unconscious in the lavatory.

The single memory he did have of the latter part of that night was being woken in a strange bedroom, a strange bed, by Della's hot breath, her snarling indignation, the crash of her fist on the side of his head. And there was Pippa beside him, still asleep under a paisley duvet: eye shadow ravaged, the sulphurous hair like a nest of snakes on her pillow.

"I don't want to talk about it," Barney said.

Della blew her nose. "You broke my heart that night, you bastard."

And what could he say in answer to that? Could he say he hadn't? No, he could not. When someone tells you her heart is broken and you're the cause of it, you must be accountable.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I want you back, Della. What more can I say?"

"For a start you could take responsibility for what you did, and shut the fuck up telling me lies."

He moved the phone from one ear to the other. Whatever the distance, he could hear the wine flow out of the bottle into the glass. He wanted a drink. He needed a drink.

When she spoke again, it was softly. "As soon as you get off your arse and sell the house, I'm buying a one-way ticket to Melbourne. I'm going to start living again, while I still have some energy."

"Melbourne?"

"Yes. Melbourne, Australia."

"I know where Melbourne is." He held out his free hand, watched it shake while she began telling him her plans.

It became clear very quickly she had given this move across the Tasman considerable thought. She described how wonderful it was over there and then she told him how she had been reacquainted with an old friend. "Quite by chance," she said, and laughed. "Someone from years ago. Long before

we met." An old friend, name of Bruce, who lives in Melbourne—a man she never mentioned in the entire ten years they had lived together. But she and Bruce were corresponding now. He was going to help her get onto her feet in Australia . . . her old friend Bruce was.

He listened while she set out everything she planned to do in her wonderful future without him. From time to time, she paused to take an audible sip from her glass. And here he was with nothing drinkable in the house. He didn't want to hear about Bruce and Melbourne any more than he wanted to talk about Pippa Subritski. He didn't want anything to do with the conversation Della was drawing him into. He stood up and dropped the phone, left it swinging on its chord. He walked away from the stream of words and went outside.

It didn't seem to count for anything that he hadn't had a drink since she'd left. She had always been the one suggesting they cut it out or down and here she was soaking up a bottle of wine on her own. He wondered, was it only the drinking that had kept them together? Were they only any good together when they were drunk? They were drunk when they met, tipsy at least, easing themselves out of previous relationships, consoling each other with gin after gin until friends poured them into a taxi and sent them away to a quiet motel where they fucked until they were sober. How was it he could remember that? All the details. Every little thing they'd said and done.

He felt angry now, but not with her and not because of her new-found friend. Barney had an idea she may have invented Bruce, just to get back at him. If anything, he was mad at himself for allowing this to happen and not knowing how to fix it.

He looked up at the house; he could burn it and who would know he had done it? She would, of course. They built it together. She would know, and all their work would have been for nothing, their life here wasted. She would not return to a cinder. Was this how they differed? Was this what it all came down to? He would happily live with her in a cardboard box. He looked at the ladder, propped against the window, the window she had wanted, and wondered why he was bothering to clean it when she wasn't there to look through it. For a moment, he hated her, but the moment passed.

He thought he might go into town, buy some booze, get smashed. Why not? Who would care? He was heading for the garage and the car, and then, the way things happen, Corin Smith arrived for the second time that day and there was nowhere to hide.

She came in a crimson Fairmont—skinny tyres and fancy hubs, an explosion of dust, a red dress. The trim body emerged from the car with a flourish, on her face the wide-eyed look of someone on speed.

"Giddyay, Barney," she said. "People are going to start talking if we keep on meeting like this."

She did a stretching exercise with her arms as if she was stiff from driving half way around the world to see him. He stared at her and she winked at him.

"I've brought some folk to look at the house. Mr and Mrs . . ." She paused, shut her eyes, and touched her forehead with a crimson fingernail. "Achener."

She opened the car doors and broadened her smile while the Acheners alighted, dragging themselves slowly onto their feet. They were pear-shaped people, foreign-looking. Mr Achener squinted at the house as if he'd been led to believe it was larger than it was. Mrs Achener wrapped her arms around herself. "Is it always this windy here?"

"It's not for sale," Barney said.

The visitors looked at each other in turn, then directly at him. All three of them frowned. They looked at the real estate sign attached to the fence. Mr

Achener squinted at the house again. "How come?"

"Because I don't like you," Barney said.

"But you signed an agreement," Corin said.

"You can put the agreement where it hurts," Barney said. He leaned over the fence and ripped away the sign, tore it in half and threw it on the ground. "You'd hate living here," he said to Mrs Achener.

He turned and strode back inside the house. Through the kitchen window he watched them form a closed group, like triplets joined at the head, no doubt discussing his insanity. Moments later they climbed back in the car. He heard the engine roar, heard the wheels spin and the rattle of gravel against the fence.

The phone was as he'd left it, except it wasn't swinging now. He picked it up, held it against his ear. For a moment, he listened to her breathing, and then he said, "Are you still there?"

"I'm here," she said. "Where'd you go?"

"I went outside. I was thinking. I was trying to remember."

"What?" she said. She sounded drunk now. She never could handle wine.

"I remembered something, something about that night."

"Tell me."

"I don't know if I should."

"First you do and then you don't. I think you need a drink."

"I remembered something about Pippa Subritski."

He paused, waiting for a reply. For a moment the phone was silent, then she suddenly said, "You're pathetic, Barney. Are you going to tell me or not?"

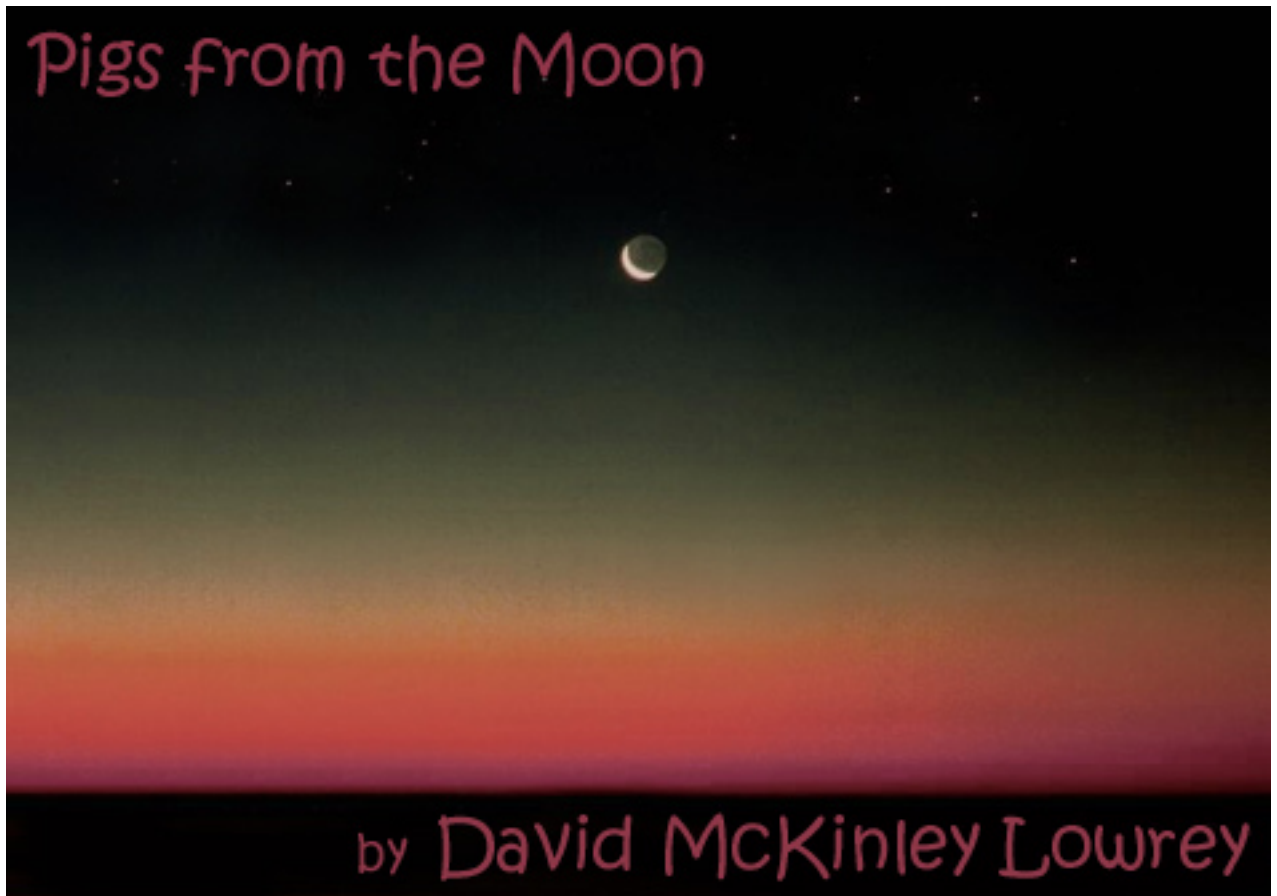
"Pippa's not a woman, Della. She's a man." He looked out the window. The pall of dust from Corin Smith's leaving hung in the air between house and sea.

And Della laughed. She laughed like the mad woman she became when she was drunk—long and loud and shrill—and, after a time, he smiled, caught up in the laughter himself, then joined in with her until tears were running down his cheeks the way he knew they'd be running down hers.



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The Sunmerset Review



I have a friend named Duncan Kilbride. Duncan is a pig. He is not a farm pig. He is the kind of pig that women like. What is more, he is a Pig from the Moon. That means women really like him. Duncan is a little crazy. He says that all real guys are pigs. Guys that are not real are not pigs. This means that no unreal guys, especially those in science fiction stories, are pigs. They are just pseudopigs.

People think Duncan is crazy because he was in a car accident. After his accident, Duncan became a philosopher with a pension. When I asked Duncan how he knew he was a philosopher, he said he had a nameplate on his desk that said, PHILOSOPHER.

"Oh," I said. "Where do you get a job as a philosopher?" Duncan told me it is called advertising. "I also started smoking," he said, "because my father told me to."

I told you he is a little crazy.

Duncan rolls his own because he can smoke for a whole month on what three packs of cigarettes cost. "I refuse to surrender to the Marxist-Fascist conspiracy that fixes the price of tobacco in this country," he says. He got me to roll my own too. It feels good not to be controlled by the Marxist-Fascists.

Duncan says he is a racist. He is not ashamed of being a racist pig.

Everyone is racist, he says. Some people just hide it better than others do. Besides, Christine told him it was all right to be a racist pig. Christine tells him a lot of things. When I asked him where Christine lived, he said, "She lives on the moon." By the way, Christine rolls her own too.

Duncan eats only vegetables. He says being a philosopher vegetarian makes him very attractive to women. His favorite vegetable is kohlrabi. Kohlrabi is a member of the cabbage family and one of the oddest-looking vegetables there is. Just above the ground, the kohlrabi stem swells into a round ball-shaped knob, giving it the appearance of some sort of satellite with leaves. Duncan sometimes calls them sputniks.

"Do men on the moon eat kohlrabis?" I asked.

"You mean all men or just the men who are pigs?"

"Well, the pigs. Do pig men on the moon eat kohlrabis?"

Duncan says they do not because they are already attractive to women. It is in their genes. On earth, for pigs that do not have moon genes, kohlrabis help. Sometimes piglets on the moon eat kohlrabis as a pig supplement.

"Christine says men on the moon are very sexy."

"Would you ask Christine something for me?" I asked.

"What?"

"Would you ask her if there are any other vegetarian philosopher pigs that eat kohlrabis and roll their own beside you and me?"

"Sure."

"When will you see her again?"

"I'm seeing her right now."

"Well, can you ask her?"

"Not now, she's talking with the moon people."

"What are they talking about?"

"Comedy."

"They like comedy?"

"Yes," Duncan said.

"Who's their favorite comedian?"

"William Shatner."



Duncan wanted to go visit his parents, who are also pigs. He said his parents lived in Pensacola, Florida, and when he asked me if I wanted to go with him, I said yes.

On the day we left, Duncan drove over to pick me up. I went to put my suitcase in the trunk of Duncan's car, but there was no room. The trunk was full of kohlrabis, tobacco, and rolling papers.

Not long after we drove onto the turnpike, a State Trooper pulled us over. "What's that you're smoking?" the Trooper asked. Duncan told him that he rolled his own. The State Trooper did not smile. It was easy to see that the Trooper was one hundred percent heterosexual. He wanted to see what

Duncan had in the trunk.

Duncan opened the trunk for him. "What the hell are all of these?" the Trooper asked.

Duncan told him that they were kohlrabis and that he rolled his own. Obviously, the Trooper was not very smart.

"What do you do with these plants?" the Trooper asked. Duncan said he ate them. The Trooper wanted to know if he was trying to be funny. Duncan said no.

"What's your story?" the Trooper asked me.

"I roll my own," I said.

After the Trooper let us go with a warning, we pulled into a tollbooth on the turnpike. A young black woman held out her hand for money. Her badge said she worked for the State of Florida. She also had about twenty gold ribbons in her hair that she braided like Rastaman curls, and they matched her three front teeth, which were capped in gold. Duncan asked her if she rolled her own. "You betcha, Mon," she said.



Later, we stopped at a coffee stand for Duncan's favorite drink, cappuccino. We sat at a table that had an umbrella. There were three women sitting at the table next to us, and they talked about how they hated painting houses.

Duncan lit a roll-your-own and watched a woman go by. She turned and smiled at Duncan when she heard the lighter click.

She was tall, and wore a purple dress that had bunches of white grapes all over it. I guess she could tell that Duncan was a philosopher vegetarian pig that rolled his own. Duncan watched her carefully. He looked to make sure there was nothing wrong with the back of her dress. Duncan turned to me and said, "A woman like that will not be able to resist two pigs having cappuccino."

The woman waited at the coffee stand. After the man served her, she looked over to our table, waved to Duncan, and came to sit with us. She had straight blonde hair and the whitest teeth I had ever seen. The wind blew her hair back, and when she sat down, the bottom of her dress flapped all around her.

Duncan rolled a cigarette, lit it, and clicked his lighter shut. He offered the cigarette to the woman.

"Thank you," she said. She took the cigarette. "I'm Judy. Some people call me Judy Blue Eyes."

Duncan took a long drag from his cigarette and said, "A pleasure to meet you, Sweet Judy Blue Eyes."

Her face turned a little red. She sipped her coffee and said, "I see you roll your own."

"You bet," said Duncan.

"I like a man who rolls his own." She put her hand over Duncan's hand. Duncan reached into his grocery bag on the ground. "Kohlrabi?" he asked.

Sweet Judy Blue Eyes smiled at Duncan and took a kohlrabi from him, stroking its green leaves. "What is it?"

"It's a vegetable from the moon," said Duncan. "The moon people love

kohlrabis."

Sweet Judy Blue Eyes looked a little confused. "I didn't know they had vegetables on the moon."

"Sure. And pigs. Big philosopher vegetarian pigs that roll their own." Duncan thumped his chest like Tarzan. "Like me."

"They are racists too," I said.

"He's right," said Duncan. "Everyone's a racist pig."

"Why do you think everyone is a racist pig?" she asked.

"'Why?' is a question that only God can answer." I had trouble understanding what Duncan said because he had a mouthful of kohlrabi.

"So we're all racist pigs?" she asked.

Duncan said, "Well, just men who are better than ninety percent heterosexual. Women, and men below ninety percent heterosexual are racist piglets," he said.

"Piglets? Why piglets?"

"Because they're more sensitive," I said.

Sweet Judy Blue Eyes laughed. "I see." She put her hand on my arm and spoke softly to me. "So you're either a racist pig or a racist piglet, and there is no reason why?"

"Yes," Duncan said. "Except for William Shatner."

Duncan said that the moon people used William Shatner's genes a lot. They wanted to be just like him.

"Why on Earth do they use his genes?"

"I don't know why," Duncan said. "But he rolls his own."



We started driving again toward Pensacola. In the afternoon, we got to Tallahassee and drove by the Florida State Capitol. It was an old building with a dome roof. Lots of people were walking on the sidewalk. Some were getting ready to cross the street.

Suddenly, Duncan hit the brakes of his car and pointed.

"Look," he said. "There are three over there."

"Three what?" I asked.

"Three Pigs from the Moon."

I looked through the car window at the corner of the street. There were three young men standing there, and none of them had a shirt on.

Duncan told me to watch them while he drove by. All of the Pigs from the Moon had wavy, light brown hair, big ears, chests with large muscles, and smooth, hairless skin. One of them leaned against a lamppost. The other two Moon Pigs were on their knees, searching for something on the ground.

"How do you know they are Pigs from the Moon?" I asked Duncan.

"Well, they have a certain look. When you get to be a Pig from the Moon, you know these things. And for sure when you talk to them you can tell."

"What do you mean?"

"Pigs from the Moon don't talk, they shout like personalized license plates."

I thought Duncan was making a joke. "License plates don't shout," I said.

"That's not what I mean. When the Pigs from the Moon shout, their speech is like the words that you read on personalized license plates. The moon people can't get the genes that control speech to work right."

"You speak just fine."

"That's because I'm only part Pig from the Moon. I'm what you call a hybrid, half Earth Pig, half Moon Pig. The moon people don't make us anymore. Too hard to control."

Duncan parked the car. We got out and walked over to the Pigs from the Moon. When we got close, I could see what they were doing on their knees. Two of them were picking up loose tobacco on the sidewalk. The third Moon Pig stood with his back against a lamppost, trying to roll a cigarette. He was having some problems.

"Can I help you roll your smoke?" Duncan asked.

The Pig from the Moon looked around to see if anyone was watching, then turned to Duncan and tossed his tobacco and papers to him. Duncan winked at me and rolled a cigarette with one hand. He tossed the makings back to the Pig from the Moon. He lit the roll-your-own with his Zippo lighter.

Duncan blew smoke into the air and said, "So, Pig from the Moon, do you like it here on Earth?"

The Pig from the Moon looked at Duncan for a long time. Then he shouted, "UKNOW THATIBE MOONPIG?"

"Sure. Been here long?"

"MENOWAY. MEHERE 1NIGHT. THEM2 MOONPIG YESWAY. THEYDO HANGLOOSE HANGTEN INDIXIE LONGTIME."

"By the way, I'm Duncan Kilbride." Duncan held out his hand.

"SAYWHO?"

Duncan took a step towards the Moon Pig, and shouted into the Moon Pig's ear, "MYNAME DUNKIN KILBRIDE."

The Moon Pig nodded and shook Duncan's hand. "OHYEAH. HOWUDO. IBIGBILL. IHEAR BOUTU.

My ears hurt from listening to this Pig from the Moon. His friends, the other two Moon Pigs, got up from the ground and tried to roll cigarettes, but they kept dropping the tobacco on the sidewalk.

It was easy to see that the Moon Pigs did not know much about rolling their own.

The Moon Pig who had his back on the lamppost coughed, and then shouted to Duncan, "WENEED KORABIS. UGOTANY?"

Duncan asked me to go to the front seat of his car and get his sack of kohlrabis. Before I went, a man and a woman wearing sunglasses walked past the Moon Pigs. The man wore a suit with a pink tie, and the woman wore a red dress and shoes that had spikes on the heels. All three of the Moon Pigs checked to see that nothing was wrong with the back of the woman's red dress.

When I got back, Duncan was talking with Big Bill about philosophy. Big Bill

said, "NEECHUH ALRIGHT. PIGSBE SUPIMEN. THUSRAP ZARA THRUSTA."

Duncan dropped his cigarette to the ground and stubbed it out with his foot. He took the sack from me.

"Kohlrabi?"

"UNICE." said Big Bill. He crunched on the kohlrabi.

Duncan gave kohlrabi to the other Pigs from the Moon and said goodbye. When we got back into the car, Duncan asked me what I thought of them.

"They can't really roll their own, can they?" I asked.

Duncan looked over at the Moon Pigs by the lamppost. Big Bill stood with his mouth open. He drooled. When women walked by, he waved at them and flexed his biceps. One Moon Pig was still on his knees picking up tobacco. The other had given up and was pounding the sidewalk, yelling "GIVEME MYBACCA."

"No," Duncan said, "They can't roll their own. That's what bothers me about them. It bothers Christine too."



That night, when we got to his parent's house, Duncan took me to a pond behind the kohlrabi field to watch the moon rise. He showed me his favorite spot to sit, a rotting oak log. Frogs croaked all around us. The moon was very big in the sky.

"She'll come soon," Duncan whispered into my ear.

"Who?"

He pointed at the moon. "Christine."

Suddenly, above the pond in the meadow beyond it, there was a woman who glowed. As she approached us, I saw that she had black hair that ran all the way down her back. Her complexion was dark, like an Indian. Next to Judy Blue Eyes, she was the prettiest woman I had ever seen.

Christine walked across the pond without getting wet. She went to Duncan, they hugged, and then she kissed him on the mouth. She turned to me and said, "So this is your friend. You're right, I like him."

I could feel my face turning red. Christine's eyes shined when she spoke, and the glow of her body lit the space between us.

I could not think of anything to say. Finally, I said, "How's the invasion going?"

Christine smiled. "Duncan told you?"

"Yes. We also met some Pigs from the Moon."

Christine made a face, sort of like she smelled something bad. "So far we have sent only a few prototypes," she said. "They've been something of a disappointment. That's why I am here tonight."

"Because you're disappointed?"

"No," Duncan said. "She's come for me. It's time for me to go engineer the Pigs on the Moon. The moon people need my help."

"I'll miss you." I said.

"Don't worry, I'll come back and visit you, just like Christine visited me,"

Duncan said.

And, just after Duncan gave me a hug, the moon people came and got him.



Although Duncan lives on the moon now, he still comes to visit me all the time. He says that the moon is fun, but he misses Earth, and when he does, he comes to visit me.

"Moon people like me a lot," Duncan says, "Because philosopher vegetarian pigs that roll their own fit right in."

Duncan says he likes the moon better than Earth, not only because he gets to stay with Christine, but also because the moon people have all the kohlrabi you can eat. He says I can come live on the moon one day when the time is right, but until then, I should practice.

"What do I need to practice?" I ask.

"Practice being a pig."

"How do I do that?"

Duncan smiles and says, "Roll your own, eat kohlrabi, and drink cappuccino by the light of the moon."



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The Summerset Review



Contributors' Notes

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Corey Mesler

is the owner of one of the oldest (1875) independent bookstores in the United States - [Burke's Book Store](#), in Memphis, Tennessee. He has published poetry and fiction in *Rattle*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Quick Fiction*, *Thema*, *Mars Hill Review*, *Poet Lore* and others. A short story of his was chosen for the 2002 edition of *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best*. He has also been a book reviewer for *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*. *Talk*, his first novel, appeared in 2002. His latest two poetry chapbooks are *Chin-Chin in Eden* (2003) and *Dark on Purpose* (2004). Most importantly, he is Toby and Chloe's dad and Cheryl's husband.

Terry Thomas

has published work in a number of print journals in New Zealand. He has twice been a winner in the *Sunday Star Times* Short Story Contest. He has stories in *Fiction Warehouse*, *Southern Ocean Review* and *Storyglossia 9*. He is currently working on a novel and a collection of stories linked, in some way, to Ninety Mile Beach in the Far North of New Zealand, where he lives with his wife, two grandchildren, and a small black horse of the biting variety named Cody. He can be contacted at terry.thomas@paradise.net.nz.



Guidelines for Submissions

Writers are invited to submit literary short stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. We enjoy seeing lighter stories, and we prefer essays that are insightful without being instructional. We are currently not accepting poetry or book reviews.

To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, writers are asked to read *The Somerset Review* or consult our [Recommended Reading](#) list. We also suggest that contributors be familiar with the writing found in quality literary publications. Here are some [examples](#) that have inspired us in both content and the manner in which they have handled submissions, based on first-hand experience.

Email submissions to editor@somersetreview.org. Please be sure to state whether your piece is fiction or an essay. It is preferable that the submission be an attachment in standard manuscript MS Word format. If you are sending a piece in plain text, please be sure to clearly designate paragraphs, alignment, and italics.

You may submit in hard-copy by sending the submission to: 25 Somerset Drive, Smithtown, NY 11787. Be sure to include a SASE (and proper postage and envelope if the manuscript is to be returned). We cannot claim responsibility for lost materials; do not send originals.

All submissions receive replies as quickly as possible. If we have not responded within three months, please hassle us. We usually comment on material that got further along in the review process. On pieces we accept, we usually suggest minor editorial changes and always confer with the author.

All submitted work is assumed to be original. Book excerpts will be considered if you believe the work stands alone. Reprints will be considered if the work has not appeared elsewhere within the last two years. Simultaneous submissions are accepted. We read year-round.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even so, a brief note accompanying the submission is preferred. We are not sure what we want to read in this note, but would appreciate the extra effort, rather than a blank email with an attachment. We are always interested in knowing how you've heard of us, and what you like (or dislike) about us.

Authors retain all rights to their work, and will see drafts of accepted pieces for review prior to release. Unfortunately, contributors cannot be paid at this time.

We nominate stories appearing in *The Somerset Review* annually for the *Pushcart Prize*, *New Stories from the South*, and other anthologies and awards.

Author	Title	Source
Aciman, Andre	Cat's Cradle	From the November 3 rd issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1997
Altschul, Andrew Foster	From A to Z	From Issue #1 of <i>Swink</i> , 2004
Anderson, Dale Gregory	The Girl in the Tree	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2003
Ashton, Edward	Night Swimmer	Online at <i>The Blue Penny Quarterly</i> , Spring/Summer, 1995
Baggott, Julianna	Five	From <i>Other Voices</i> #28, 1998
Bardi, Abby	My Wild Life	From <i>Quarterly West</i> #41, 1995
Baxter, Charles	Snow	From the collection <i>A Relative Stranger</i> , published in 1990
Borders, Lisa	Temporary Help	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Bananafish</i> , 1998
Broyard, Bliss	Mr. Sweetly Indecent	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 1997
Burns, Carole	Honour's Daughter	From <i>Other Voices</i> #31, 1999
Cain, Chelsea	Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl	From the Spring issue of <i>Grand Tour</i> , 1997
Cheever, John	The Stories of John Cheever	A collection published in 1980
Christopher, Nicholas	Veronica	A novel published in 1996
Clark, Susan	Besides the Body	From the Spring issue of <i>Red Rock Review</i> , 2004
Crane, Elizabeth	When the Messenger Is Hot	A collection published in 2003
Crowe, Thomas Rain	Firsts	Online at <i>Oyster Boy Review</i> in January, 1997
Dancoff, Judith	Vermeer's Light	From <i>Alaska Quarterly Review's</i> Intimate Voices issue, 1997
Dormanen, Sue	Finishing First	From the Summer issue of <i>Lynx Eye</i> , 1998.
Doyle, Larry	Life Without Leann	From an issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> in Fall, 1990
Kennedy, Thomas E.	Kansas City	From Vol 62 No. 4 of <i>New Letters</i> , 1996
McInerney, Jay	Model Behavior	A novel published in 1998
Millhauser, Steven	Enchanted Night	A novella published in 1999
Moses, Jennifer	Circling	From the Spring issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 1995
Murakami, Haruki	South of the Border, West of the Sun	A novel published in 1998
Offill, Jenny	Last Things	A novel published in 1999
Orlean, Susan	The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup	A collection of essays published in 2001
Robison, Mary	Why Did I Ever?	A novel published in 2001
Salinger, J.D.	For Esme - With Love and Squalor	From the collection <i>Nine Stories</i> published in 1953
Tilghman, Christopher	The Way People Run	From the September 9 th issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1991

The Summerset Review

Sample Literary Journals

[Alaska Quarterly Review](#)

[Black Warrior Review](#)

[Gettysburg Review](#)

[Hayden's Ferry Review](#)

[Other Voices](#)

[New Orleans Review](#)

[Puerto del Sol](#)

[South Dakota Review](#)

[StoryQuarterly](#)

[Quarterly West](#)

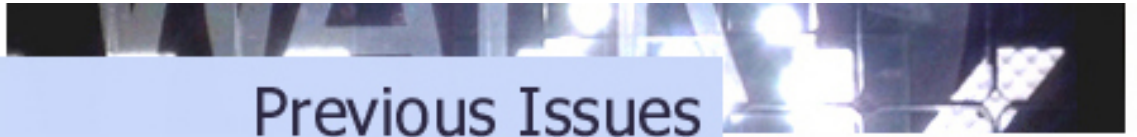
[West Branch](#)

Sample Literary Review Sources on the Web

[Laura Hird](#)

[NewPages](#)

The Somerset Review



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Julie Ann Castro, Bill Glose, Graham Jeffery, William Starr Moake,
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