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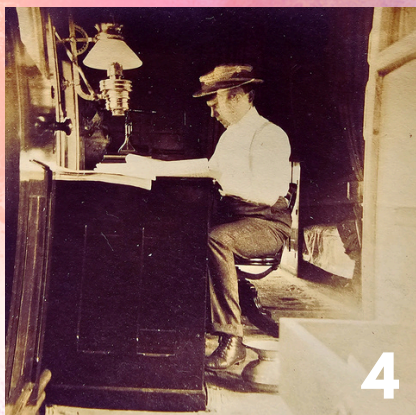


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Do the Crawfish Know How Cold It Is?

By Meggie Ess (Img 1)

The second time I almost killed my brother in front of my godfather it was on a warm Wisconsin day in August 1994.

At least once a summer, for many years, my parents would pack us kids and one of the iterations of good puppies we had into the conversion van and journey eight hours from Pittsburgh to the northwest Chicago suburbs. My grandparents' home had always been too tiny for their four children. Even after the addition of a large open room that held the dinner table and den, it was still too small. As empty nesters, my grandparents had enough space, but our visits provoked a full family reunion. On these occasions, the house swelled like stretchy pants on Thanksgiving.

My Grandpa Bill, my brother's namesake, would make way too much food and my Grandma Marilyn served it up as we crowded around the small circular table to eat, drink, laugh, and argue about politics if my Aunt Dianne happened to be there. When I was younger, I often fell asleep at that table in my dad's lap, ear to chest, lulled to sleep by his booming voice unsuccessfully trying to convince my Aunt how wrong she was about everything. Grandma's pleas for peace and decorum around the children would usher me, carried in my dad's strong arms, to the fold-out couch in the playroom. I imagine the verbal battles harried after I was fully asleep.

In the morning, my bleary-eyed father would pack us all up again to drive three hours north to our family's large but rudimentary log cabin in Clay Banks, Wisconsin, an intersection masquerading as a town. On *this* occasion of my brother's near-death experience, my godfather John with his wife, son, and brother, UFD, aka Uncle Fucking Dave vacationed with us too.

"Let's go shoot stuff!" UFD taunted his younger brother John through a gritted but genuine show-all-of-your-teeth sort of smile. In one facial expression he was able to perfectly demonstrate that

he was about to embark on some nickname-affirming behavior in the next few hours. I hoped none of my stuffed animals that he always playfully stole and held just out of reach would be involved. How could I have known I would be the one engaging in assholery?

At 12, I was the eldest nonadult and was allowed to carry a small unloaded rifle as the five of us — John, UFD, my dad, me, and my bother (heh, sorry Bill) — traipsed through the hip-high grass in the older section of my extended family's vacation farm. I don't know what I was thinking moments before I took aim. Sometimes, even now, my thoughts come without warning. They float like a ghostly spider on a traveling web, landing on my overactive brain and grasping it in spite of chaotic thunderstorm gusts. The difference is that apparently, now I hide it well.

Once the barrel was aimed squarely at the skinny seven year old's back, I sang his name in that tauntingly sinister way that only big sisters have mastered, "Hey Billy!!!!" He turned around and my godfather, John, immediately grabbed the end of the rifle and pointed it at the ground. His hazel eyes momentarily flashed the deep burgundy of disappointment as he scolded me for aiming a deadly weapon at someone I didn't intend to kill. The look and his words shot through me like the bullets I swore weren't in the gun I was holding.

"I don't care if you say it's not loaded, you have to always assume it is! I thought you knew better and could be trusted!"

I looked down at the ground but not before I saw the looks on the faces of my dad's two best friends. I had let them down. Apparently, I had been able to convince them that I was smarter than this, otherwise they wouldn't have given me a gun. Now they knew how dumb I really was. My cover was blown. I'd have to learn to hide it better.

You have to hide it because you don't want to be spotted, like a crawfish scurrying from the space the stone in my hand had just occupied. My brother and I played in the crick three blocks from

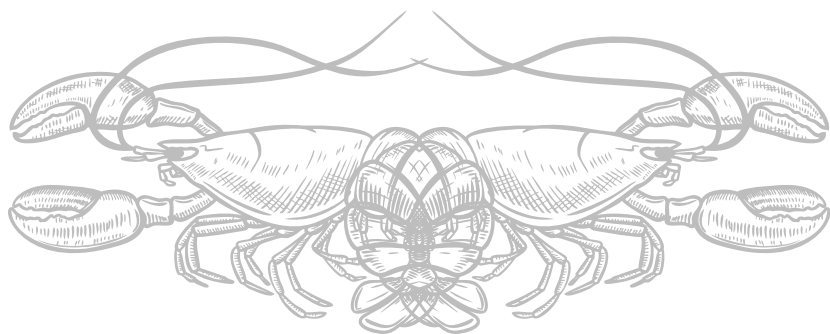
our house, spending long summer hours, "green in judgment and cold in blood," scaring freshwater shrimp and unsuccessfully avoiding stinging nettle.

Salad Days don't last forever. On a cloudy day in 1995, an older neighborhood boy attempted to get a little too nature documentary with me. *The Bad Touch* by the Bloodhound Gang wasn't out yet but I knew what he wanted to do. I backed away, ever-politely stammering, "Uhhhh, no thank you!" and ran down the steep wooded hill on the side of Montour Street. I found my brother, ankle-deep in clear water and dragged him all the way home. He cried because I made him leave. I wanted to cry, too. The crick was my favorite place in the world and it was ruined as long as that boy lived and breathed in my neighborhood. I could not risk going back there and feeling shame again.

The next day, Billy asked if we could go to the crick. I knew if I was mean about it, he might tell mom, so I made an excuse about wanting to play at home. I got good at hiding behind rocks that summer. He asked me every sunny day until school started and I denied him each time. Once it got chilly, I no longer had to pretend that I was too cool for the creek and he had to pretend I didn't break his heart.

The first time I almost killed my brother in front of my godfather, I was seven years old.

(This story is continued on WoodShedWriters.com)



Hummingbird

By Holly T. (Img 2)

Holding Mom's frigid, clenched hand, I sang the lyrics of "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again" from *The Phantom of the Opera* as she sat hunched over in her wheelchair. Dried up drool and bits of food formed a smattering mosaic on her chin, continuing down to her pink turtleneck. "Passing bells and sculpted angels, cold and monumental..." I sang softly to her under the din of the monotone narrator of the hummingbird documentary playing on the large TV in the living room area of the memory care floor of Mom's senior living facility. The nurses' aides had positioned her wheelchair so that she was facing the window, not the TV. As I was seated facing both her and the TV, I was able to see the close-up shot of a hummingbird suspended in midair, its beating wings fluttering so fast they appeared to be blurred. "A hummingbird's heart beats more than 1200 beats per minute," the narrator stated matter-of-factly. Not one of the residents perked up in response to this fact. Their heads drooped and nodded in various stages of sleep. Other than the narrator's baritone voice, the only other sounds in the room were the squeaks of the sneakers worn by the med techs and aides as they hustled between patients, ensuring that their charges were drinking Ensure and given their prescribed medication.

It had been a few days since Mom had been able to keep down any pureed food, and feeding her Ensure through a straw was futile. She took a few sips, then bit down on the straw. She turned her head away and hunched down further to her side in her wheelchair. She then spit out the Ensure a few seconds or minutes later, as her dying body rejected anything life-sustaining. During the week prior to this visit, Mom had lost the ability to swallow. As I sat holding her hand and looking at her, hoping for a sign of life or glimmer of recognition, the brown

liquid slipped from her lips, snaked down her chin and dripped onto her pink turtleneck, creating a painter's smock design. Her eyes were half open and half closed. It occurred to me that Mom herself was half open, half closed: half in, half out. I stopped singing. I reached into my purse and dug out my small pack of tissues, and tried, but failed, to wipe the brown stains away. I didn't bother to wipe away the tears staining my cheeks.

Flashes of memories of the way Mom used to be streaked across my mind as I stood up to leave. "I have to go now and pick up your grandsons, but I'll be back this afternoon. OK, Mom? I love you." I held her fisted hand in mine one more time, noticing that it was suddenly simmering hot. I thought I had noticed a slight upward movement of her eyebrows and an almost imperceptible motion of her lips. I wondered, was she attempting to mouth the words, "I love you too?" Her breathing was labored as her eyes closed completely. Her bony, angular shoulders began moving rhythmically up and down. She had passed out. As I punched the key code to enter the elevator room and exit the floor, I caught the eye of the floor nurse who headed toward my mother with wipes. She nodded goodbye to me, her eyes watery, her lips pursed. She began wiping Mom's chin. I looked back for a second at Mom. I could see the back of her head dangling downward. From behind, Mom resembled a rag doll that had been thrown onto a chair. I noticed the passing glances of the aides and med techs as I turned toward the elevator. They looked down or away as soon as my glance met theirs. As the elevator slowly made its descent, I squeezed my eyes shut, allowing the tears to spurt out.

Passing thoughts of the way Mom used to present herself crossed my mind. I had an image of her greeting us at the door of her patio home, her eyes wide open and sparkling with glee as her grandsons ran up to her to give her hugs. She would

smile and laugh as she kissed the tops of their heads, remarking about how much they had grown since the last time she'd seen them, even if it had only been two weeks earlier. Then Mom would turn to give my husband a hug. I was next, the smell of her perfume embracing me first. Her hair was always perfectly coiffed and her makeup was flawless. Her clothes were ironed and stain-free, and her jewelry matched her outfit. Her home was warm, spotless, and smelled like freshly picked flowers from her side garden. She kept a CD player stereo system in the foyer area, and an Andrew Lloyd Webber song usually greeted us when we entered. It saddened me to know that the bubbly, spirited, effervescent Mom of my sons' early childhood would have never wanted to morph into the quiet, disheveled, wraith-like being she had become. Now she was fluttering in and out of this world. Her wings were beating at a slower rate by the minute, and would soon fan out into silence.

Letting Go

By Gene L. (Img 3)

How would you like to give up your son for someone else to raise for 26 months? Especially during his teen years?

"I would not," said the educational consultant. "Your son is spiraling out of control. It is like water going down a bathtub drain. At first you cannot see the water going down until the very end. He is out to destroy everything in his path including himself. His anger is a blast furnace."

I was at my wits end. For two years my son was on a path of destruction. At fourteen years old, he had stopped going to school. He would be gone for days and nights while I desperately searched for him. His drug and alcohol use were escalating.

In the early stages of my divorce from his mother he was approachable and would open up.

“What do you expect of me? My world has been turned upside down.”

I will never forget how insightful that statement was coming from my young son. But after that one time, he closed himself off and was never again willing to bare his soul. I tried everything to save him. The courts, counselors, treatment centers, all of which failed. There was no way to save him from himself. I had never before experienced this much pain, sadness or grief. It was a living hell, but like everything else in life, if anything was going to change, I would have to be my own advocate as well as his. I stumbled upon a book titled *TEENS IN TURMOIL* that introduced me to cases like my son's, as well as to therapeutic boarding schools. The rub would be that boarding school required a commitment of twenty-six months. The cost was \$3,600.00 per month.

“How am I going to get him to embrace this let alone get him there?” I asked.

“You won't be able to. We will need to enlist two people from our staff to escort him to the school. It will not be a lockdown facility. He can walk away at any time.”

“So what will keep him there?”

“Your son's willingness to be helped!”

“All this seems so extreme and desperate.”

“Let me ask you this: if your son had cancer, would you not go to great lengths to save him? So it goes with addiction.”

So the ball was in play. I was to find and bait Jake into coming home in the middle of the night. I was to wake him and introduce him to the two people who would be escorting him to the school. The escorts did not want him to think he was being shanghaied. I was then instructed to leave the house and come home after thirty minutes.

I could not visit my son for the first forty days. I could not receive letters or send letters to him for the same period.

His first allowable home visit would be after eighty months. I was desperate and in my soul I felt he was in a safe place with others like him who could share their stories.

I cannot describe how it felt to come back to my home and go to my son's room. I flung myself onto his bed and sobbed. Did I do the right thing?

In Lieu of Trust, Please Send Martinis

By John Al (Img 4)

This note was inevitable, as is my outcome. Turns out your mother wasn't just paranoid. She never had proof, but she always knew. Heed her warnings and cherish her guidance. I suppose this note of resignation is the smoking gun she silently accused me of concealing all these years.

You won't find a family tree, but my branches will protect you, my little
acorn.

You won't find pictures of me in the albums, but I took your photos.

Be patient with your mother. You'll always be her son, but for now you're only a reminder while she spars with her grief. Your instinct will be to show her this, especially once the investigations begin. My poor boy it will be best for everyone you've ever loved to destroy this upon reaching the final word. Perhaps consider it your first mission. Your life will soon be spilling over with secrets and choices anyway. Like father, like son.

You won't find my name on any of the utilities, but I made all of your winters
warm.

You won't find the company I work for and neither will Google, but you'll
know who those untraceable bearer bonds are from.

I hear your movements & murmurs downstairs one final time while authoring this before yielding to our future. Yours a familiar presence, mine appropriately undetected. Perhaps your soon to be percolating hormones will compel you to discover the upstairs window that opens without a sound and from both the inside and the outside. Like father, like son.

You won't find my signature at Ellis Island like I told you, but they can't get to you here now.

You won't find me when you look up at the parents' section from the soccer field, but I showed you the great Johan Cruyff and the importance of a strong left foot.

Some days you'll lie about me to make yourself look cool to those desperate to be impressed. Some days you'll lie about me to make yourself look broken to appease your own pain. Some days you'll tell a woman you miss me dearly. Some days you'll tell another woman you never knew me. Someday you'll stop lying to them and then to yourself. Someday you'll trust me again.

You won't find a crime scene, nor will the authorities, but this letter will grant you closure.

You won't find volunteers to be pall bearer, but you'll have no body to carry.

You won't find a will, but you remember my friend Hansi, right? She'll be in touch.

Please understand I never intended such a fate for you. Sired before being reluctantly hired. But also understand the difference between us and the normal family you'll no doubt fetishize is more than just barbecues and road trips. That yearning you're so sure of is nothing more than lingering questions nestling themselves into the bosom of your insecurities. The ability to answer them means only that you've become older, not wiser.

You won't find an apology, but you will one day see why you aren't owed one.

You won't find love, but you will have safety in its place.
You won't find your pound of flesh, but you have an absent father to blame for
your mistakes.

You will never find your father, but you'll always have his eyes. Like father, like
son.

Advice? You won't find any of that either. But now you know what not to do.

Excerpted from *Signs and Wonders*

By Susan I. (Img 5)

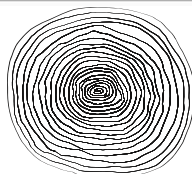
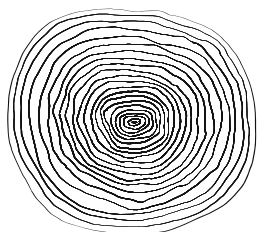
Linda studied the toppled fountain on the ground in front of her. Its concrete pedestal crumbled, and its small cistern broken, allowing it to meld into the ground. She thought back to that mini-series she had seen as a teenager, in the days when PBS was the only source for programming that was British or artsy. The voice of James Earl Jones echoed... "The world is full of signs and wonders," he told the woman whose daughter had left college to join a cult. That's all Linda really remembered of it. The world is full of signs and wonders... and here was one of the signs in front of her... on her daughter's college campus. Her own daughter, not the miniseries character, at that same vulnerable time in her life. Hopefully there was no cult on the horizon, unless it was one of sensible students who did nothing but study and make good choices. Yeah right. Maybe I should start that one, thought Linda. I could market it at all the test prep centers.

She returned to the fountain... \$67K a year should at least provide enough money for a university groundskeeper or a golf cart with a couple of work study kids to haul the broken fountain away. This was neglect, obviously, but was it willful or just apathetic? Either way it bothered her. It had been overlooked, and now it was here, giving life to James Earl Jones in her head.

Linda looked at her watch, the one that Nico had given her for Mother's Day five years ago. She rarely wore it, having given up

watches in favor of her phone, but she hoped Nico would notice it. Anything to bring her back, back to a time when everything was all right. She was examining the watch when she felt the intensity of someone's gaze on her back. She turned and saw Nico, thinner than she had been at spring break. Her hair was also longer and darker or was it just unwashed. "So, it's not just the fountain," thought Linda. Nico was pushing a housing cart overflowing with random bags and boxes. Linda popped the trunk and moved toward the cart. Nico pushed it past her, bumping it against the edge of the car. Linda instinctively recoiled, allowing a squeak to escape from her throat. Nico ignored her and unloaded the contents of the cart into the trunk. Plastic bags tore, clothing tumbled onto the asphalt, and boxes collapsed from the weight of heavier things placed on top of them. Linda tried to make herself useful by packing some of the things in the back seat. She had nearly finished arranging the space behind the passenger seat when the car shook. Raising her eyebrow, Linda backed herself out of the car to see what was going on.

Nico tried to close the trunk of the car again. No luck. Linda wasn't surprised. Loose blankets and books fought for space amongst the broken boxes and muddy boots. Nico flung the trunk down again. It bounced back up, vibrating like a cartoon character who'd been hit by a shovel. As Nico pushed and pulled at her possessions, Linda felt a tremor rise from the tips of her fingers through her hands to her wrist. She could see the problem immediately. She jumped into action, imposing order on the trunk before gently sealing it. "Baby steps," she whispered, almost inaudibly.



The Price of Eggs

By Stephanie D. (Img 6)

Sheila stood in line with the rest of the parents, awaiting the bell that would signal the start of the long Easter weekend. While a few of the younger moms seemed excited to pick up their kids, the older moms were not. These wise ones knew that hippity hop of the Easter Bunny appeared calm when compared to the jumping gyrations of elementary school kids “hopped-up” on plastic eggs filled with candy.

But Sheila had a plan – a plan filled with a series of excursions strategically designed to exhaust her energized bunnies.

Stop No. 1: The Senator’s Egg-stravaganza.

While some constituents complained that their Senator was never at home, Sheila relished his absence at holiday time. That’s when the Senator would distract from his MIA status by paying a local company to set up giant balloons, commemorating the oh-so-commercial holiday season: ghoulish ghosts in October, saintly Santas in December, and enormous Easter Eggs in the Spring.

And with the Senator away, Sheila’s children could play. As they scurried out of the car, they squealed with glee, as they ran serpentine through the over-sized ovals. Sheila put her head on the steering wheel, closed her eyes, and took a deep breath to prepare for the journey ahead.

But wait – what’s that buzzing noise? Damn, it was that robotic, rumba mower. Sheila hated that menacing machine, but her kids normally welcomed their mechanized friend. However, today the little monster was about to turn a gigantic egg into scrambled roadkill.



Now it was Sheila who was shrieking and running, as she tried to divert the mower off course. But she was too late. The robot had already knocked down and mounted the egg, which then exploded, sending pieces of polyester eggshells all over her children. While the kids screamed hysterically, Sheila wrestled the still-growling beast away from his prey and hit the kill switch. Unable to console her kids, Sheila did what any desperate mother would do: she promised them ice cream.

Stop No. 2. They Scream, I scream.

The ice cream did temporarily stop the kids' screaming, but soon the sugar started to kick back in. So, Sheila rounded up her kids, with dreams of their next adventure: the selection of eggs for coloring later that night. But while the kids continued to scream for more ice cream, Sheila's scream even louder when she saw the price of eggs: "What the fuck, are these eggs filled with gold?" Nearby parents nodded knowingly, but one of her blissfully ignorant children reached for a dozen. Sheila shrieked, "Don't touch them!"

The child, understandably, responded with tears. Sheila, thankfully, hatched a new plan. "Let's go to the Dollar Store to buy some colorful eggs and shiny stickers!" The kids cheered and ran for the door.

Stop No. 3. The Not-So Dollar Store.

As Sheila well knew, the items at the Dollar Store were no longer a dollar. What started as a 25-cent Covid commission was now a permanent fixture. To some, 25-cents may not seem like a lot, but with three kids, each grabbing packages of eggs and stickers, the register receipt now exceeded the price of a dozen of real eggs. Oh well, at least the kids were happy, and Sheila could skip the boiling and coloring of eggs. Despite the claims to the contrary, those "washable" dyes still dotted her rug. Of course, now her walls would probably be stuck with stickers, but they *should* be easier to get off.

But as she drove home, Sheila's temporary relief gave way to a growing anger. Why were the eggs so damn expensive? And why was the Dollar Store still more than a Dollar?

Unlike her husband, Joe, Sheila had never been very political. But last fall, after a lot of Joe's nagging, Sara voted for Joe's chosen candidate, now *their* Senator. Joe loved the Senator's "business" experience, which the Senator bragged would help him bring inflation "under control." But if that was true, why were prices even higher?

Just then, a train whistle jolted Sheila back from her political stupor. She hit the brakes and waited for the train to pass. Then she crossed the tracks and headed for home.

Stop 4. Back to Coop.

(This story is continued on WoodShedWriters.com)

Kingdom of Isolation

By Diane F. (Img 7)

We are in the bathtub again.

We can hear him screaming threats and slamming our belongings against the walls, but he leaves us alone.

He never bothers us in the bathtub. It's our only safe space.

My brain is in overdrive – think, think. Do we have a way out tonight? But I already know the answer is "No." We would have to pass him to exit the house, and the fully loaded Glock is still strapped to his back. We are stuck. I try not to obsess on the feeling of hopelessness and instead refocus on the kiddos.

Finn is so scared – visibly shaking with fear. He always gets the bulk of his father's anger. He is always too much of one trait

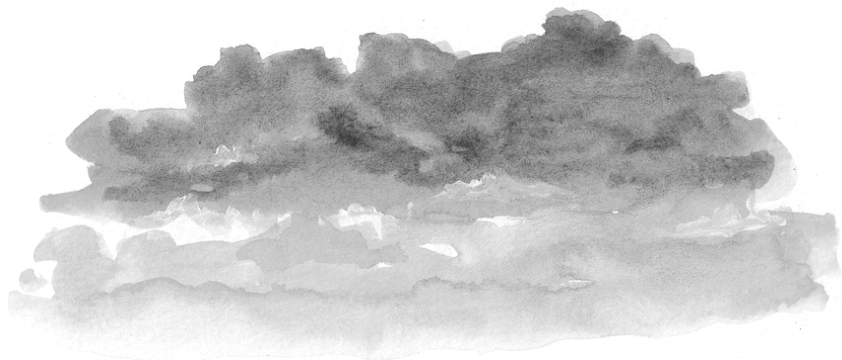
and not enough of the other – too weak and too pathetic but never strong or brave enough. His father will never understand him because their hearts are so different. I try my best to protect Finn from the harsh words but it's becoming more difficult every day.

Then there is Remi. Sweet Remi Mae. She is only 3 years old, but I know she is soaking up the chaos like a sponge. She looks at me with wide eyes wincing with every loud noise.

I try to become louder than the commotion. I grab my phone and start playing our Disney playlist on the edge of the bathtub. The song, "Let It Go," begins to fill the room. "A kingdom of isolation and it looks like I'm the queen" – how appropriate but I am not the queen. I am the mother who is barely surviving at this point living in a home that looks like a kingdom to others but feels like hell to us.

Another loud thud and both kiddos cling closer. I start to sing in my worst and silliest voice. This always makes them smile. I remind them – "This is the way the song is supposed to sound but Elsa cannot hit all of the high notes like your mama." I get a little giggle from Finn and a side eye from Remi. I fill the tub with more water and bubbles trying to drown out the sounds from the hallway. I add more toys to the water – we have an entire basket of distractions in the shapes of our favorite Disney characters. We try our best to pretend.

"Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know" – I am beginning to think Elsa knows the truth behind our façade. If only the rest of the world knew and could see our pain. Maybe we would be able to get help to escape. Instead, we are trapped inside our own brains. The only three humans who know the truth. We cling to each other for safety.



Love Undefined

By J. Sydney Brown (Img 8)

I want to be right and live my life Christ like...
No more excuses I gotta get right...
How do you describe the depth of the sky? or the height
of the ocean?
How do you describe the height of sorrow? or the depth
of benevolent emotion...
Can you imagine life with no conscience or no signs of
truth.
In the end I have nothing; neither nail nor tooth.
My bondage in sin holds me back...
maybe, maybe not, fiction, or fact
Selective amnesia to the world and my friends,
Stick to the rules they don't break and they don't bend

If something has no limit, does that mean there is an
endless supply?
If her presence is addictive, is her companionship an
endless high?
Or is she a figment of my imagination...
Maybe the product of an insatiable infatuation?
She can do bad all by herself,
So am I detrimental to her health?
What can I offer outside of sexual bliss
If I give it my all, why do I still feel like I'm
facing the wind and taking a piss?

The People on the Hill

By Blair (Img 9)

They had long ago accepted into their minds' DNA that such things were possible in the prairies and deserts, unknown except by the necessary few until they were revealed in the news and became the stuff of history to be learned and forgotten. It had been weeks since the news had come and, as was usual with the threat of impending foul weather or a present disaster of any stripe, had been dissected and turned inside out and speculated upon by experts and amateurs and victims for hours and days until there was nothing left but sludge with sparkles.

They drifted to a hillside overlooking the City on the bay and gave Ian, the only permanent resident there, wide berth, knowing that he preferred to be alone and lorn. At first, they held their peace, some, passing the time with binoculars and telescopes and nothing new to report. Several days were spent sharing some minutiae from their lives with the occasional foray into current events until they could think of something to say that had not already been done to death. There was no point in speaking about their reasons for being on that hill.

They moved from no sense to nonsense.

"It's all held up with two-by-fours."

"What?"

"Charlie said that once when we were on Mount Tam looking back at the City. I could almost see it."

Ian shrugged. He'd known it all along.

"It's not what they said. It's what they didn't say."

"What?"

“That anyone who didn’t want to stay for it could leave.”

After an interval, the bridges and tunnels into the City were closed. Anyone with business there could accomplish it remotely. Then, communication with the City ceased – land lines, cell phones, wifi.

Then, the thrumming began.

Ian perked up, his countenance full not of expectation, but foreknowledge.

The lights went out throughout the City and the binoculars and telescopes returned to their duty on the hill. A cacophony of indiscernible shouts arose, quieted, arose. There were splashes.

It was agreed but unspoken among them that they had allowed too much to go unnoticed in increments large and small over a very long time.

“Ah ha. Ahem,” from Ian, for he understood that in their singular obsession, they had ceased to notice that they were filthy – some, emaciated, all, pungent.

The sky behind the City brightened slightly. The *thrum* continued in counterpoint to voluptuous shrieks.

A ring of light appeared halfway up the skyline and pressed down and upward toward an invisible point in the sky.

Ian stood up.

“Kumbay...”

“Shut up, Frank.”

They followed Ian’s example, rising to their feet.

Ian turned and sneered.

They sat, unconsciously putting greater distance between them.

The pulsing thrums grew louder and held.

Sensing the gulf between them was too great, they scooted together again and only then, noticed what Ian had: they smelled.

“Aha,” from Ian, his eyes on the closest bridge.

Again, they rose.

When Ian walked determinedly toward the bridge, they followed.

“Should we hope that it works?” from one of their number to no one in particular.

“It won’t matter,” from Ian to them.

“Why not?”

“Because if it works there, it will work here. And if it doesn’t work there, maybe yours is the better topography.”

“Why are you talking to us all of a sudden?”

“I’m not.”

“Who are you talking to, then?”

“Myself,” Ian replied wryly.

Ashore

By Jeremy C. (Img 10)

Remembering
the day the ship finally
came into port.

Wicked cold -
so windy too, that
morning -
needed an overcoat,
a scarf.

The only clouds in the
blue
blue sky the
wispy, feathery ones
joy-riding the jet
Stream.

Leaned against the
taffrail
along the stern gallery
-
watching all the
passengers
queue up
to disembark.

I should join them -
I should make my way
down,
I think.
Soon enough, once the
crowd
thins out, no reason
to crowd in amongst all
that humanity, I think.
Sure, it's not a race,
I think, and
I stand and I stand
and think.

A way's off, I see
the city jabbing at the
sky -
asserting itself with
a hundred skyscrapers
all billowing steam like
smoke,
like dragon's breath.

It seems far,
and full of promises,
and alien.
The decks gently roll
beneath my feet,
barely noticed after so
many weeks at sea.

A steward passes me, and
I smell
the coffee on his tray,
which smells so
different
close to shore, where
the
salt air is never up
and the world feels
so small.

I should disembark -
I should do it,
should go ashore,
I think.

What adventure waits, I
wonder,
amongst the
concrete-steel
towers and the thronging
sidewalks, subways and
throughways?

What fortunes
wait to be won?
What love stories
wait to be written?

Abstracted,
absent, absorbed in
notions and fantasies,
thoughts aswirl -

I hardly noticed as the
ship gently pushed away
from
the pier.

And I hardly cared
when I realized I'd
missed
my last chance to ever
reach the shore.



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WOOD SHED writers

The Wood Shed Writers are a collective of writers from many professions and generations, united by a shared passion for creative expression. Based in the Greater Pittsburgh Area, they've gathered weekly for years to share their work, offer feedback, and build a space rooted in trust, craft, and laughter.

What began as a private circle of storytelling has grown into something more: a long-held dream to bring their voices to the public. Thus, The Wood Shed Writers publication was born. This quarterly collection is offered with one simple intention: your enjoyment.

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