



TIGERSHARK[®]

MAGAZINE

ISSUE #2

WINTER 2013

TIGERSHARK MAGAZINE ISSUE #2 WINTER 2013

Editorial

Welcome to the winter wonderland that is Tigershark issue 2... Within you shall experience all the delights of a festive family get-together, the horrors lurking in Lappland, a hint of what the future might hold and much, much more. I trust you will enjoy reading the issue just as much as we have enjoyed putting it together and that you will join us once again in 2014 for issue 3...

We are thinking of having our third issue be a romance/love (and a bit of hate) issue, out for February (i.e. Valentine's) — so if you think you can come up with stories and poetry on that theme, please send them our way by **January 15th 2014!**

Best, **DS Davidson**

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Contents

FICTION	
GENDER-SHOCK	4
<i>Andrew Darlington</i>	
BLACK FLAG, RED FLAME	15
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
ROBIN ROTTBREAST	16
<i>Neil K. Henderson</i>	
A CHEEKY RED	19
<i>Hettie Ashwin</i>	
THE BLUE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS	23
<i>Jennifer Hdlie Bowles</i>	
TRADITIONAL FAMILY CHRISTMAS	26
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
A CHRISTMAS ENCOUNTER	28
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
LLOIGOR'S WINTER FESTIVAL FEAST	31
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
POETRY	
NOVEMBER 11th	2
<i>DJ Tyrer</i>	
LOVE AND LOSS	2
<i>L. Wayne Russell</i>	
WINTER'S CHILL EMBRACE	3
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
NO THANKS — WE'VE GOT ONE ALREADY	3
<i>Neil K. Henderson</i>	
A SPARKLE IN THE RAIN	3
<i>L. Wayne Russell</i>	
JOURNEY TO PERSEPHONE'S BRIDAL CHAMBER	13
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
PERSEPHONE THE DESTROYER	14
<i>Frederick J. Mayer</i>	
CHRISTMAS DAYS OF FORTY DEGREES	22
<i>Phillip A. Ellis</i>	
SHE FIRST HELD ME UP	22
<i>Phillip A. Ellis</i>	
FOX IN MOONLIGHT	25
<i>Aeronwy Dafies</i>	
WINTERLUDE	25
<i>Andrew Darlington</i>	
WINTER 1967	25
<i>David Norris-Kay</i>	
ARTWORK / PHOTOGRAPHY	
<i>David Leverton</i>	

November 11th

by DJ Tyrer

A dreary day of thoughts
Of what might have been
But never can be, not now
Of so many hopes dashed
A nation squandered into dust

Remember the dead
Of so many wars and
Wonder why we never learn
Oh so many hopes dashed
Lives scattered into dust

A reminder of our fragility
A good friend just lost his father
Sudden and unexpected
Meet on Sunday as others
Remember losses of their own

I think of what has been lost
What I stand to lose
The past holds our hopes
The future I despise
And tears fill my eyes

Previously published in Bard #90, Atlantean Publishing

LOVE AND LOSS

by L. Wayne Russell

Your face stares at me in perfect plasticine pose
from the old silver photo frame, slightly rusted
around the edges, tear stains fading in slow retreat.

The loss of you sprouts a pain, that numbs my heart.
For years I have walked alone on dark streets, dreaming
that someday you would return, yet nothing has come to
be, and nothing ever will.

Days are meaningless without you by my side, I miss your
soft quivering voice, and the promising song, growing behind
the sparkle of your dark sultry eyes.

I miss how your raven hair plummeted all around me, when at
night I held you, we used to recite our favourite muses from the
masters, and create our own song as slowly we retreated into
the realm of sleep, holding each other until dawn.



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WINTER'S CHILL EMBRACE

by Aeronwy Dafies

Winter's chill embrace enfolds the land
In arms of embanked snow
Diamond eyes gaze down from canvas midnight
blue
Upon a world frosted white and silver
Unmarred in silent chill of night
Frozen purity of perfected ice
Amidst the mottled air of snowfall
As the world transforms into a pallid hue

NO THANKS — WE'VE GOT ONE ALREADY

(Centenary of *The War of the Worlds*)

by Neil K. Henderson

There's somebody Out There watching —
A squirming maggot mass.
But we've got bombs and laser beams —
There ain't no flies on us.

We can deal with asteroids,
We can deal with Mars,
And we can deal with human rights —
It's written in the stars.

We've got anthrax, we've got plague,
We've got the Big One, too.
You want to keep your eye on us —
You might learn something new.

First published in Handshake no.31A, August 1998

A Sparkle in the Rain

by L. Wayne Russell

Touch the nerve
beneath
paper thin skin
spawning
memories
swimming in strong
undertow dream
basking in translucent light.
Just another sparkle
in naked pools of
desire
cascading down into
free fall
transition.
Never let the cruel
temperamental rains
quench
life giving fires
burning within
the crystal palace
of your soul
immortal.



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GENDER-SHOCK

by Andrew Darlington

*They were gender deviants. How is a lawyer to defend them?
Normality is something up for renegotiation in this disturbing tale.
The difficulty in portraying a totally pansexual society is that gender
so pervades language it's problematic to eradicate it. This tale is constructed
by dispensing with every use of 'he', 'she', 'himself' or 'herself' with
every character purposefully gender non-specific — except for the
single case of the transgressor, who is on trial specifically for
that unforgivable deviation...*

The case was not going well, I must admit. As the lawyer responsible, I watch the crowds way below the view-station, surging along the wide radial avenues of the Palais de Justice in the vibrant hues of their chadors and robes. Down there, their talk burns angrily, malevolent and cruel, reaching me only as the muted rise and fall of distant music. But I recognise the tune. It was ancient, primal. That crowd was somehow carnivorous. Descending in their droves to witness the highly ritualised slaying of the unfortunate pervert whose future has been entrusted to me. Yes, they've got a lot of taste... all of it bad. Of course, the argument that the populace is entitled to witness, and participate in the full machinations of the law had always seemed so eminently reasonable. Until now, for the first time in a long eventful career, it seems hollow. Those ghoulish voyeurs were not content with network screen-images. They're not here to see justice done, but to savour each scandalous detail of the case's disturbingly strange sexual aspects.

What can I do? I sigh, then reluctantly return to face my client, detained elsewhere in the complex. This aerial view is merely a tantalising excuse for tarrying. The sound of footsteps from behind me should have alerted me, but they come too late. "Sentry Renate, reconsidering?"

I turn sharply from the ornate portal. The newcomer, Sheldon Mazoor is a groomed and dazzlingly competent lawyer, robed as I am. We'd served at law-school together, hence we wear the same long, richly embroidered gowns. The same fringed hair decorated with gold pendants. "No, not reconsidering," I concede, "a little disheartened perhaps."

"You've dropped on an impossible case to fight. Odds were stacked against you from the start. You have my sympathies on that score. As soon as the deviant gender aspects of the thing became public knowledge, prurience ran riot. But then, you can't help but be we aware of that."



“I know only too well, of course I do. But aren't there are other things at play, weren't we taught not to determine judgement on the grounds of personal prejudice? There are too many aspects of this case clouded by revulsion, I understand these feelings, yet there's something wrong too.”

“As disturbing as you may find it, regardless of the right or wrong, you can't argue the facts. What this represents is a grotesque reversion to something more primitive. It's as though some alien being has dropped into our midst, and taken over. And when the vote is cast, that's all they'll need.” As I move away, Sheldon takes my place at the view-station. Indicating the crowds. “They've already made up their minds. They know all they need to know. Verella Cade is warped. A sexual extremist. By imposing that perversion on a child... that is unforgivable. I don't see how you can possibly mount a defence. But I'll be intrigued to watch you as you do.”

“Yes, they'll sacrifice my client. But not for things Verella Cade did, but for the lifestyle Verella Cade lived.” “Isn't that the same thing? Society giveth, society taketh away. Society must protect itself. And it protects its interests by punishing dissenters in this long public torment. That's what we are witnessing now. The healthy rejection of the unclean.” The words were delivered with an air of finality that allowed no rebuke. “No lawyer is forced into taking a defence case, you know that, Sentries. You were offered it. You accepted it. If I were you I'd have quit while my reputation was still intact. Mud sticks, no matter what motives attracted the mud-slinging.”

I hesitate. Caught in something of a dilemma. “I must go. My client waits. If you'll excuse me?” Sheldon shrugs, a shadow passing over the face, fading along the swirl of inlaid stars arcing from the tail of each eye. A grit of irritation. As though expecting more. I pace swiftly across the mosaic floor to the large double doors. They glide open in admittance, then hiss smoothly closed behind me. Green. Low-level green light softening everything, fusing flesh and bodies into a pleasing uniformity. Brushing through webs of perfume and teasing strands of conversation. Beautiful people among elegant stonework. Crossing the central piazza past the pillared façade from where hidden flights of little steps climb higher and higher through nests of tiered galleries up to the dome. But my relief at escaping Sheldon's artful probing is not long-lived.

Verella Cade sits primly on a low bench, watching the play of a small fountain dancing from the sunken garden in the centre of the room. An obviously assumed concentration intended to exclude everything else. The level of deliberate preoccupation allowed me time to watch unobserved. And yes, despite the necessarily impartial approach my job, and the moral responsibility it dictated, I felt a little disturbed in my client's presence. That same faint unpleasant unease each time we meet. Cade wears a short tunic that accentuated the obviously female contours of her figure. The face, almost veiled by cascading hair, carried the same blatant, defiant sexuality. There was little evidence of security. Where could the prisoner escape to, dressed like that? Nowhere. Not without getting torn apart by the mob.

Cade made no obvious acknowledgement of my presence as I, too, sat down lightly on the bench. The words were directed at the fine play of water, not at me. “Our case

goes badly.” I nod dumbly, “I can only suggest, as I have done before, that you make a plea for special consideration.” “Say that I’m insane you mean?” “You know such terminology is inadmissible.” “You say that, but you also know exactly what is happening to me, don’t you? Despite what you say, they are labelling me with their terminology. Inventing an insanity for me. I appreciate your efforts on my behalf, I really do. But what you suggest is that I endorse their decision. Is that really the best you can offer? I’m not trying to make you feel uncomfortable. I’m not trying to make you feel anything at all. It has nothing at all to do with you, and everything to do with me and my son. The world has no right to interfere in that. So don’t tell me what to do. It’s my choice.”

“That’s your first mistake. Right there. A child is not a ‘possession’. A child is an individual with its own rights. Its own unique potential. It is not something to be moulded according to the whims and prejudices of a biological parent. People see that as a monstrous assumption on your part.”

“So I’m a monster? Let me be a monster. That’s all I ask. Just let me be...”, pretending to watch the fountain.

“Your right to be whatever you wish to be is not at issue. It is perpetrating that life-style on the child that is the crime.”

“The child? The child? You’re talking about Peter, my son, my son.”

Unconsciously I find myself flinching, acutely embarrassed at the blatant vulgarity, the blasphemous bluntness. This is not good. Not good at all.

This courtroom is a gilded chamber of horrors. An arena surmounted by the dignified arbitrator. The desks of the opposing counsels face each other across the polished floorspace. Behind them the public galleries form rows of hushed expectant faces. Below them are the busy officials, stoic security, expert witnesses, and the solitary accused. The jury is everywhere in the city, pads ready to enter their verdict. The prosecuting counsel opened in full spate, stating the charges with a briskly emotionless efficiency. “Anthropologically, Verella Cade is a throwback to simpler, less sophisticated times. For the larger portion of history society was divided along strict gender lines by the necessity of hardship. Indeed, there are still tribes out there who persist in living that way, through unreconstructed choice. But think on this. The pre-collapse world was brought to the brink of destruction by such reasoning. When gender is conditioned inflexibly around two poles the natural human tendency to diversity is distorted out of shape. That’s what happened. Restricted and repressed desires become twisted into abhorrent behaviour, extreme behaviour, the kind of madness that led to the global conflicts and wars that brought us to the edge of extinction. We survive, we thrive now because we know better. We’ve evolved beyond that.”

A pause for dramatic effect. If this is all about power, then it’s unfair. All of this scrupulous morality assembled to crush one unhappy discontent. All this brutal



sophistry brought to bear on the weak, by the strong. Yet even in this human disaster story there's a kind of bleak unconsoling humour. A supple movement between laughter and horror in the incessant buzz of speculation. "Although that is not the issue at stake, we should not lose sight of those facts. Gender is not a fixed polarity, but a spectrum of gradual increment. Preference is an individual thing, a chosen orientation, or serial orientations. It is something only the mature adult must decide. Once the age of reason is attained, sure, do what you want, love whomsoever you choose, but let it be your choice. It must be decided by the individual, and not imposed on the young before they're mature enough to deal with it. It's not something to be forced inflexibly on a child, according to a set of social expectations and standards. The offence here is in causing acute traumatising disturbance to the child, resulting in loss of potential identities, stunting its emotional growth. That is the offence. Not the ideas. Not the chosen life-style. But the actions." The counsel bowed with the slightest nod in the general direction of the arbitrator, and sat down.

All the while I was taking it all in. Recording notes. These are the accusations I must answer to at the next session. The facts of the matter were relatively simple. They were not in dispute. The implications were labyrinthine. They were there to be teased out. Would tracing the sperm-sponsor be a worthwhile line of enquiry? Or might the results actually benefit the prosecution more? In fact, they may already have done the traces, and rejected the findings. There is no record of parental collusion, but this is a case riddled with privacy issues and tantalising unknowns. There could yet be new elements to emerge. Better perhaps to chase precedents? There were precedents. None of them offering a viable solution.

Observing. The accused was sitting impassive. If the audience were hoping to detect outward symptoms of guilt, nervousness or fidgeting, they'd be disappointed. The child – Peter, was there too, although barely recognisable from earlier images. More conventionally garbed. There was partitioning to segregate sensibilities. But, at one point, in a moment of intense silence as the session was drawing to a close, with the prosecuting counsels clearing documents from the desk and into voluminous robes, and Verella was being escorted out, their eyes met across the room, and something passed between them. It happened so quickly it was almost as though I'd imagined it. With the court adjourned for the remainder of the day, I replayed the moment in my memory. Later I re-ran court sequences, freezing it. Yes. Momentarily, their eyes met, Verella and Peter, and something else. A signal. A coded message. No-one else intercepted it or even knew it had happened. Caught up in proceedings no-one else realised. But me, I saw it. Something unmistakable.



Outside the Palais de Justice I watch skitters circling above the organically rounded contours of the city skyline. I wait impatiently for Sheldon to arrive. We are to share a skitter back to my suite. Watching the scene outside the hall is enough to set the pupils of your eyes dilating. How can so much life be so condensed? Yet my eyes take it in, roving for clues to the drama of the moment, and finding them everywhere in the glittering dramatic possibilities of shock and queasy titillation. A carnival of pity and

disgust, not a place concerned with the dispensing of sober justice. What the hell is going on here? You know the reasons – how could you help but know, but not the scale.

Then we glide above the mob, climbing, the city swimming. Facing each other as the beam guides us. For a long space of time we do not speak. As though testing out the air between us. An encouraging hand on my knee, but tactfully no higher: “Are you alright?” It occurs to me that, through all this, Sheldon was hitting on me. “Sure I’m alright.” There was an expectation that I’d lose. That I’d be in need of a supportive shoulder, someone to draw strength from, and that there might be exploitable advantage in supplying that comforting friendship. So I play it flirtatiously: “Have you ever been disappointed to discover the gender of a lover?” “I cherish the mind of the lover, not the physical attributes.” “Of course, that’s the standard acceptable response. That’s the condition to which we all aspire. But come on, we are human too, we have preferences. There must have been moments...?” “No. I take and give pleasure according to the person I happen to be with.” “And to think otherwise would be wrong?”

“We are what we are. That’s the entire point, Sentries Renate.”

In my suite I thumb the dimmer halfway up and decant drinks. We lounge together, but conversation stays focussed. “You want my opinion? You really want to know the way I see it? What Verella Cade is guilty of is hormonal confusion, but writ large. A wild chance, but one allowed enough space to channel instincts into practise.” “I appreciate your advice. I really do.” I drank deeply, contemplatively.

“You want my take on it?” Again I nodded. Hadn’t the wish for opinion already been agreed?

“Your client acted according to a kind of warped conscience. Not emotionally in control, but through strange instinct. I imagine Verella was convinced that the actions were for the best – that the fantastical femininity is merely a by-product of the action. Fabricated to justify the action. I make myself clear?” “You mean that Verella was not consciously committing a sexual indoctrination?” “Verella devoted time to the child. Conversation, affection, company. Those are acts of love, not necessarily of perversion.”

Sheldon is, of course, correct. My failure is the only realistic option. What Verella wants is impossible. It would not happen. The child would be taken and fostered. Cade would be punished. Re-educated. There could not be any other outcome. All I can do is present the argument. Articulate it as well as I can. Appeal for clemency, for a degree of understanding that I find difficult to fathom myself, a leniency. It was cut and dried. So why do I feel this disturbing degree of helpless anger?

Sheldon was preparing to leave. Biding time. “There is such a thing as evil. There is such a thing as perversion. Don’t let your sympathies aroused by this case lead you to seriously think otherwise. We look at one person caught up in the system. One... dare

I say, victim of the system? Is that the way you intend angling this thing? It's possible, it's certainly possible to construct a case along those lines. I look forward to hearing your argument. Mount your defence, certainly. That is what you are there to do. That is your legal function. But don't ever be seduced by the arguments you're making..."

No, no, of course not. Assurances come easily. We face each other in uncertain silence. A soft embrace, a kiss that is little more than formality. Then I was alone. Smiling to myself. Flattered, amused by the attentions. Aware of the possibilities. Not dismissing them entirely. Instead of relaxing I began skimming screens. Rehearsing and reacquainting, re-familiarising myself with the case. They'd lived unexceptional lives in an old private house by a neglected snake in the river. High walls, a hidden garden that slopes down to the water's edge. A vaguely genteel run-down area, bohemian I suppose, where privacy and a degree of eccentricity easily go unnoticed. It was only as the child – only as 'Peter' grew that their oddness attracted attention, and gossip. The files and reports, few at first, built into a dossier. Their walks together along towpaths skirting the river. The two of them, together. Excluding all others. Until the investigation became official. The child, the boy, Peter, was ten years old. In replays of snatched dialogue the child comes across remarkably self-contained and confident. And at the same time, a curio. Careful use of vocabulary, but there's no other way, 'His' hair cropped back. 'His' clothing, initially, of another era. Another time. Another world. Verella, by contrast, was initially evasive, defensive. Only becoming more assertive as it became obvious that the interrogators would not be placated. When there was nothing to gain by evasion, and little left to lose.

The images drew me in. Why is this strangeness permeating like lingering ghosts? Why is the idea so disturbing? Why do we fear it? Do we recognise something within its labyrinth of equations that echoes back from some deeper archetype? Surely not. We are rational beings, are we not? I fan out into wider realms. The prosecuting counsel had mentioned tribes 'out there' who still persist in living unreconstructed lives, through choice. I seek out references and possible avenues of defence, rejecting each in turn. Until eventually tiredness overwhelms me. And I sleep.



The alarm stabbed through my room, shocking me awake. Coming round blearily. Punching it up. A message from Sheldon. 'Verella Cade is gone. So is the child. They disappeared soon after midnight from their respective points of confinement... more details following.' Things happened fast, and they also happened gradually. I showered. Drank a tisane, washing thoughts around my head with each sip. How had this happened? Obvious, in a way. Security was light. Because everyone knows what Verella Cade looks like, it would not be difficult to escape notice by altering that appearance. It would only need a chador, and Cade could pass through the Palais de Justice and the wide radial avenues beyond without attracting a second glance. The child – Peter, was in care, not incarceration. Observed. But not impossible to avoid observation... for long enough.

I skitter across to the courtroom. People standing around in groups, talking furtively,

glancing at each other. Androgynous people, de-gendered by costume. And beneath the concealing robes, by the snip and reassign, tuck and remould of cosmetic surgical enhancement, implants and depilation into any gender or combination of genders. They must consider me conservative in being quite happy with my body the way it is, thank you. In their eyes, I must seem only a little more removed from Verella Cade, probably. In my chambers there were updates, searches initiated, procedures set in motion, nothing conclusive. Beginnings, not ends. I was too caught up in events to think too much about my own reactions. I thumbed up my files. Skimming through data. There were ideas playing around my head, without any logical connection. Recalling the way their eyes had met across the room. The way something had passed between them. They had planned for this eventuality. They had worked out contingency plans between them. The signal, the coded message, had been the trigger to set it in motion. Then I sat for a long while. Got up and paced the length of the room. Routine was disrupted. Everything on hold. Searches were underway. Until security turned up a result there was not much I could do. I went up to the view-station, looked out over the city. They were out there, somewhere. Where would they go? Did they have some back-up plan? But they'd escaped separately. What would be their first priority? The first move would be to meet up. No words had passed between them. It must have been something they both understood.

I quit the building. Coming outside the Palais de Justice, and into a different kind of tension. The scattering of people knew what had happened. They too were sitting around, awaiting confirmation of some result. I took my skitter gliding above the architectural curves, climbing above them. Unhooked the guide-beam with no particular idea of where I was going. Circling, with the city skyline swimming. The river meanders through the city's west end. I follow it down. It took little over twenty minutes to identify the loop. At first the house was made near-invisible by trees. I took it in lower. There was security at the gates. I set down on the overgrown lawn where it sloped down to the slow-swirling water. There was a guard outside the front door. We talk briefly. The house and grounds had been thoroughly searched, with no results. It was under constant surveillance. If the pervs were unwise enough to return here they'd be seized. No question about it. I nodded my agreement. Strolled sticky-footed down to the edge of the river, trailed my hand in the water. They must have done this many times. In their secretive enclosed world they must have played games across this grass, to this point by the water. This place is riddled with their memories and secret significances, of which I know nothing. Only image-glimpses from files. Where did they go from here?

I took the skitter up. Circled the house. Yes, they used to follow the tow-path. So I followed it too. Not many people take the path. It had become overgrown with briars, tall feathery grass and nettles. They came this way because they didn't want to be noticed. Because they didn't want to attract attention. I came in low, a metre from the swirl of tide. Elsewhere in the city, others would be drawing similar conclusions, splicing together enhanced spyfly footage. They would soon be redirecting their search in this direction. It was imperative I find them first... wasn't it? It dawned on me gradually that this was what I was doing. I wanted to find them. I eased velocity a little, eyes raking the tow-path. I buttoned a connection to Sheldon. No, no



developments. They'd turned nothing up yet. Good. Although I didn't admit that to Sheldon. "Will you do me a favour?" the words came spontaneously, "can you cover for me?" "I'll do anything you want me to, you know that." Grateful, I just asked to be updated as things happened. And swept the screen clear.

Imagine. Imagine. How far would they have walked? There would be a turn-around point. I was wrenched out of introspection by the sudden low passes of three security skitters above me. Their high-speed passage made ripples in the air that left me gently rocking. They were closing in too. Ahead there's a derelict overgrown former-industrial site. The river disappears under a tunnel-section. They can't have gone further than this. I slow, glide in lower... and yes. As I go in clipping tree-tops they break and run. Two figures. Adult and child. Both in disguising robes, but unmistakably the fugitives. As I glide gradually down, way above me there are shapes cutting across the sky. And below me Cade and Peter are holding hands, running away from me, but they're unaccustomed to wearing robes, the child trips, tangled in briars and flows of material. Verella pauses to help, and I set down a metre ahead of them. With the hood shoved back I beckon, "Hurry, get in".

I can see Verella's face clearly now. There's uncertainty, indecision... fear too. Like a trapped animal. Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. A triangulation of skitters scream in low above us. It forces the decision. The fugitives accept my invitation. They clamber in. I lift off in a zig-zag trajectory with the hood not fully resealed. The alert pulsing. Skitters circling above. I hadn't thought this thing through. I hadn't thought ahead. This is working on instinct. And instinct determines concealment. Low over the water. Too low for safety. Lapping and dipping at the wave-tips. In towards the dark tunnel-mouth. The sky cuts out abruptly. The slight hum amplified. Flashes of reflected tiles, bursts of weed and down-hanging slime. Darting creatures, bright yellow eyes, leaping from narrow ledges into black circles of water. I could illuminate, but that might attract attention. Instead I reduce speed to zero and hover in darkness. Looking back there's a small circle of light where we came in. There's a buzz of passage as a security skitter blips past. Then nothing. A cloying sickly smell seeps in, catching my throat like a finger, a deep-stagnant smell, like something died here, and is rotting. After a long pause I ease forward again. The tunnelled section extends further than I'd anticipated, but eventually there's light ahead. We emerge not knowing what to expect. But there's no sign of pursuit. We're well-beyond the outer perimeter of the city. I accelerate, and don't deviate until we're well-clear.

Verella eases her cowl back in a gesture of obvious relief. "Thank you. I'm in your debt. Surprised, and confused as well. But grateful, above all else." "You shouldn't have done this. You shouldn't have run. My remit is to help you. I was doing everything within my power to do that. Now, if I am going to help you at all, you leave no alternative but subterfuge." "Who are you attempting to fool? You saw them in court. You saw the faces. The gawping faces, watching as though we're some kind of sideshow freaks. They've decided already. You know damn well what the verdict would be. How many million pads would be pressed all over the city, how many thumbs-down? You know damn well how it would have been. We had no choice. No choice at all."



“I apologise Verella Cade, for my perceived legal inadequacy. I was conducting a very difficult case in the only way I knew. I was doing my best for you under unique conditions that you were hardly helping to normalise. Now you’ve forced the issue.” Following the quivering silver of the river west there’s a hundred kilometres of nothing but forest. The waterway overflows, losing its clear definition in vast marshy everglades. The occasional pre-collapse archaeological cluster of ruins, scarcely distinguishable from undulations of landscape. Surprisingly, the plans had been there in my head all the time, even though I hadn’t been consciously aware of them. The prosecuting counsel had mentioned tribes ‘out there’ who still persist in living unreconstructed lives. I’d already sought them, made references and location notes. They lived hard communal lives. But they would not question the life-style Verella and Peter had chosen. And yet, and yet... Verella may have chosen. Peter had not been allowed the choice. His orientation had been decided for him. He was the victim. But the damage was already done, it was too far advanced for correction. Any attempted adjustment now would only do more harm and prove even more traumatic for him. Him? Unconsciously I was now using the same blatant vulgarity, the same blasphemous bluntness she’d used. ‘He’. ‘She’. No, I had done what I felt I had to do. But I’d be glad once it was over, and I was safely back in the sanity of the city.

We set down outside a small rural community encircled by a stockade. A single cross of streets, a dozen renovated cottages, a few others waiting to be worked into occupancy, a patch-work of agricultural plots hacked out of the wilderness. There might be sporadic trade between here and the city, but there was no extradition treaty with them. They come out to welcome us. Although their lives are run along gender lines, they seem oddly contented with it. I wait long enough to check that the fugitives would be accepted. They would. Then it was time for me to get back. I’m wary of tarrying. Come sundown the skitter will switch to reserve-cell, and although that should be adequate, I’d rather not risk putting it to the test “Again, thank you. It seems inadequate, but I’m forever in your debt.’ ‘What I did was done as a lawyer to a client. Nothing more.”

Cade looked me full in the face. “Despite what you’ve done for us, you still find me disgusting. Say it.” “My personal prejudices are of no consequence.” “But they are Sentries Renate, they are.”

She paused. The ‘she’ comes more easily now. It was her choice, after all. There’s a playful expression on her face. She leans forward in a conspiratorial way. “Will you tell me one more thing, something I’m curious to know?” “What is that? Ask away” “So tell me, serious lawyer-person, when I thank you, to which gender am I giving thanks...?”

I open my mouth on the brink of confiding. But at the last moment, bite it back, “no, it would be impolite of me to be so specific”. Maybe I’ll save that revelation for Sheldon.



JOURNEY TO PERSEPHONE'S BRIDAL CHAMBER

by Frederick J. Mayer

"The path that leads to Persephone is wide and well trodden by the dying. Beneath it another track, rough and unused, 'hallowed, bemired, yet best', leads to Aphrodite's 'lovely grove'. This indicates Aphrodite's connection with the underworld and the dark side of Love, which is Death... Persephone of the Underworld can appear in the guise of Aphrodite: Aphrodite of the Heavens, remembered as the Goddess of Dawn, in Her turn is Persephone."

— LADY OF THE BEASTS

Dark, Dark, candle's light true
and not so very new,
black and white among shades of grey,
I'm damned if I love you
and so too you to me.

My desire and strange fire
you upon ashen throne,
amidst crimson flowing hair
softly cold frightened moan,
flames dance as shadows
in flowering bud eyes fair.

Erebus where light's inner hue lies
Persephone lovely,
lovely pansy eyes,
oh, your pliant body
sensuous stem,
snapdragon lips sigh
growing unknown passions within
red poppy bud breasts rise,
upon jeweled bone I hold you in awe.

What's worst, here, I can't reach your love,
or where I can't touch you
there of Shades' seeds, above?
Here magical blooms that
need no sunlight, black
orchids, nightshade, more...
hellebore, pearl mushroom, henbane,
pomegranate your fruit,
mine, but through gloomy eyes,
there's my pain.

"I, Demeter's daughter,
downgoing, 'Kathodos',
finding here darkness'
caring, life,
uprising, 'Anodos',
uplift inside strange fire."

Seed filled, red juice dripping
eaten by maiden, womb...
She took me from myself now,
I'm related to things
beyond, realms of souls
not egos... climax of tomb.

*"I am Persephone
and I have come to be
your Queen.
Each of you
has left your earthly
body
and now reside in the realm
of the dead
If you come to Me,
I will initiate
you into
your new world."*

— LOST GODDESSES OF EARLY GREECE

Persephone,
my royalty,
of the fair crimson hair
weaving within there
the red poppy.
Eyes of sunken jewels, reflection
of souls, glowing in the dark
showing protection.
Inside lotus petal soft skin;
here everything begins
there are no longer sins,
growing, resurrection.

Hear my heart pound
I'm going underground,
Tell me, oh please, tell me
I, man, what's my inner light
Holy Persephone?!
I can't forget why I love you so,
I need you now,
you are the prettiest star,
I stand before you with dripping pomegranate
red hands
here for you
for your Love, oh how
I offer caressing black ewe.

*"She painted the forehead
with a broad swatch
of the red juice
and slowly pronounced:
'You have waxed into the fullness of life
And waned into darkness,
May you be renewed in tranquility
And wisdom'."*

Oh, Persephone,
taunt instinctual wisdom
so of your body,
your bridal chamber
awaits, calling me
to rest what it is
of my destiny
dreams real are of Her
audacity, sublimity...
my hands hold
death/decay scepter
huge pine cone
life-seed carrier,
it is so hard,
to really Be.



“For months Persephone
received and renewed the dead
without ever resting or even
growing weary.”

Where do I go
when the sky above me
is in dark flame
and the ground below me
is a coal fire?
I was born
of my Mother
I was born
of my Father
by a flowing river that gave my reflection
now I can see
sight of flowing river that gives no projection,
Persephone
you give... daughter
of Demeter who cares less for those
of her domain once below
as of hers above...
and for your love...

“‘I was privily admitted to the bridal chamber.’
‘I have flown out of the sorrowful weary Wheel
I have passed with eager feet to the Circle desired
I have sunk beneath the bosom of ‘Persephone’,
Queen of the Underworld.’”

— MODERN GREEK FOLKLORE

Author's notes

*Winter is when Persephone stays in the Underground and when
She accepts those to Her bridal chamber.*

*Today, there are still those who hedge their bets on the nature of
the afterlife by placing poetry to Persephone (or “Despoina”,
same Goddess) in hopes the lines please Her and She will accept
them into Her bridal chamber for “consummation”.*

*Persephone is one of the few Greek goddesses that appeared in
pre-Hellenic myths, in Greek mythology’s “Golden Age” (Zeus
and company), continued afterwards in such ways as prayers in
Orphic mystery school texts to even being around now.*

PERSEPHONE THE DESTROYER

by Frederick J. Mayer

Velvet underworld
pomegranate red bed
flows witness Persephone,
Amniotic waters
Eros and Thanos
join to form such ecstasy.

Persephone’s grove,
there flower-strewn body
dwells in blood shafts of setting sun,
abyss’s procrustean ritual,
Under black poplars,
from Hades vestibule,
she calls, “Happy and blessed one,
thou shalt be god instead of mortal”. *

The sins of the flesh
do not matter to her,
of them she need not pretend,
She believes the death
of the tomb to the womb,
shadows’ darkness is her friend.

Necropolis’ flesh
ride her erotic bat,
destruction of resurrection
naked fire fear, asphodel grows here.
Orphic music plays,
narcissus darkly near,
faith afraid, hot sensation,
goddess of the blessed dead sees you clear.

Author's notes

** Quote taken from Orphic mystery school text;
part of a prayer to “Holy Persephone”.*

*Winter is when Persephone resides in the Underworld and holds
court for the lucky few, but Her arrival back to the surface
destroys Winter.*



BLACK FLAG, RED FLAME by DJ Tyrer

Glass crashed and orange and red flames danced into life behind the sparkling cascade of shards as another firebomb was thrown. All along the street, shops were ablaze and the homes above them, their inhabitants fleeing in terror before the red flames that licked towards the dark night sky. The street thronged with rioters, a mass of anarchists and opportunists taking advantage of the chaos to loot and steal. At one end, seemingly impotent, a gaggle of police dressed in black protective overalls cowered behind Perspex shields, fearful of the barrage of missiles, being hurled their way. Amidst the throng despoiling the street, a lone flag of plain black was held aloft, like a rallying point, a rectangular void against the red flames illuminating the scene.

He was revelling in the violence, the adrenaline rush as he smashed and struck and stole, his iPod providing a soundtrack of hatred to his actions, the latest Laughing Man single proving singularly apt. His first target had been to trash a Tesco Express, smashing windows, toppling displays and spray painting hollow denunciations of capitalism on the walls, before nabbing himself some snacks to keep him going for round two, which had involved taking what he could from some small music store – he had managed to snag a few posters and t-shirts with the visage of his idol on them, which pleased him no end.

Now, he was helping to set a bank branch on fire, chanting slogans against the bankers and the government that were ruining the world in ways he couldn't comprehend and couldn't care less about. Just as long as he could destroy and fight and take what he wanted, he had little care for the issues involved.

With a roar, the upper floor of one of the buildings in the terrace fell, releasing a cloud of dust and soot and sending flames spitting high. That set up a cheer and reinvigorated the crowd.

Their bloodlust rising, the crowd surged towards the police with him trailing in their wake. At the head of the crowd, leading the charge against the phalanx of shields, albeit moving without passion, were two figures in the dark hoodies that appeared to be the uniform of the horde. Separating one of their prey from the pack, they fell upon the hapless policeman, tearing away his helmet, shield and protective vest before rending, slashing and stabbing in a frenzy of liberated violence.

Following the crowd, he took hold of a brick from the collapsing building; it was still warm from the fire, its red surface scorched with black. Pulling his arm back, he let it fly to shatter against the shieldwall, before running forward to hurl himself against it in turn, thrashing wildly with his hands and feet.

A truncheon swung down and smashed into his skull, causing stars to sparkle into existence before his eyes like the shards of glass spilling onto the street. With a sickening lurch, he fell to the hard road surface. A second blow struck him and his vision began to fade as a pattern of red coiled out onto the black tarmac beneath his face. As his vision faded to darkness and he ceased to sense anything more, he heard the Laughing Man's mocking voice over his headphones as he concluded his rap with the refrain: "The joke's on you..."



Also available in Black & Red by DJ Tyrer (an ebook and booklet from Atlantean Publishing).



ROBIN ROTTBREAST

by Neil K. Henderson

The sight of a seasonal robin redbreast in the garden always puts me in mind of my Old Mythological Grandpappy - crouching there at his post in the gathering gloom, peering out intently from the watchman's hut secreted in the bushes near his front gate, sniffing the air and rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

"I can feel Christmas coming on," he would announce, his eyes all twinkly with emotion. "I'm in a right bad temper."

Just like the robin - which is also a creature of temperamental ferocity, despite its traditional connection with the season of goodwill and peacefulness. My Old Mythological Grandpappy explained it to me once, as he sat there in his hut with his home-made skewering spike at the ready.

"It's in the genetic wherewithal," he began to say, starting at the sound of footsteps on the pavement over the road, then relaxing once more as they retreated into the distance.

"You see, robins as we know them are descended from the archetypal haggis hawks of antiquity. They were ferocious wee buggers, and no mistake."

Well, you'd have to be pretty aggressive, if you were only the size of a robin and your survival depended on killing a beast as big as a haggis. Those creatures were a lot more full-bodied in the wild than the things you see in the shops today. Of course, the modern-day butcher's facsimile is nothing like a real haggis, anyway. They're made to measure now, to suit the housewife's requirements. But be that as it may, natural selection favoured the fiercest, most single-mindedly determined and ruthless haggis hawks - and the familiar colouring of the modern robin originally evolved to add force to this haggis-hunting fearsomeness. Indeed, such was their ability to strike terror into the haggis flocks that often the mere sight of a red breast was enough to make a haggis drop down dead with fright, before the haggis hawk had even begun to disembowel it with its razor-sharp beak.

But therein lay the problem. So successful were the haggis hawks at hunting down their prey that - considering the decimation already caused by humans, who pursued haggises for their own purposes - they proved too much for the delicate balance of nature, and unwittingly assisted in hastening the extinction of their own primary food source. Something of the intense searching behaviour of the old haggis hawks can still be seen in today's robins - especially as depicted on greetings cards where a solitary redbreast is shown perched upon a branch or a village signpost, gazing forlornly towards distant snow-capped hills in the vain hope of sighting the long vanished haggis herds of yesteryear. The famous *Robin At Bay* from the painting by Landscaper is a good example. What a sad spectacle of once proud birdlife. But that's progress.



Once again, it was evolution that had to do all the dirty work. Those haggis hawks that survived to breed were faster, more streamlined versions of their outmoded forebears, able to catch and eat a full haggis-weight of worms in a day, to make up for the shortfall in livestock. That meant strong competition for available resources - and so the present fierce territorial nature of robins came to the fore, with the haggis-frightening red breast serving to warn off rivals for control of the worm-patch. Something like the red glow of the brazier at my Old Mythological Grandpappy's guard hut serving to warn off unwelcome well-wishers.

As is often the case, when it suits human convenience, the work which evolution started can be given a helping hand by means of selective breeding. The territorial ferocity of the first post-haggis robins did not go unnoticed, and it occurred to our ancestors that specially bred 'Rottweiler robins' could be used to protect their property from the onslaughts of interlopers. These have since proved tremendously popular here in Glasgow, particularly when some outbreak of 'Festivity' is threatened. Again, popular greetings cards often depict the robin in this capacity, perched upon a snow-bound doorstep boot-scraper with a hard glint in its eye, ready to peck the lights out of any would-be Hogmanay first-footers or other undesirable merry-makers hell-bent on soiling the unblemished midwinter misery of solitary Scottish householders with their uninvited personal attendance. (The doorstep boot-scraper may seem like a quaint Dickensian anachronism, but in fact such devices are ideal for tripping up overenthusiastic callers, so that your security robin can catch them unawares and really get stuck in.)

My Old Mythological Grandpappy, it has to be admitted, is far too canny with his bawbees to pay for a trained guard robin of his own, but performs the function admirably for himself, squatting as he does in his little watching hut, armed with a nasty piece of sharp metal tied to a clothes pole. Wish him Merry Christmas or a Happy New Year at your peril, visitor, then depart ye for the nearest casualty ward with a pained expression and a punctured lung, gizzard or diaphragm.

You may be wondering how it is that these robins, and even superannuated haggis hawks, constantly turn up on Christmas cards and seasonal postage stamps, year after year after year. The reason is that the Royal Mail themselves often employ casual robins over the Festive Period to protect overflowing pillar boxes from potential thieves. These boxes are painted a bright red colour to keep the robins' aggression focussed in the appropriate area. The obvious drawback with this scheme is that postmen still have to open the boxes to get the letters out for sorting. This is why Royal Mail operatives have taken to wearing even brighter orange waterproofs, designed to distract the guard robin by presenting a bigger and bolder chest signal which compels it to give up its claim on the box while it is in the process of being emptied. Careful selective breeding ensures that the robin immediately reclaims its territory once the orange-clad delivery man gets back in his van. (An interesting by-product of painting the mailboxes red, incidentally, is that the intense territorial warning given out prevents wild robins from nesting in them in the springtime.)



At this point, it might be worth including a word or two about Santas - since they are even more powerfully enreddened about the chest area and beyond than either robins or postmen, and they are also noticeably prevalent at the Christmas Card time of year. But the Santa has one distinctive feature the postman does not - a big white beard. This prominent expanse of whiteness is confusing to wild robins, giving them the impression of *unnatural breast inversion*, since the true robin's breast has the white area *below* the red - not *above* it, as in the case of beards. That is why Santa can enter the average house on Christmas Eve, unmolested by common garden robins. 'Rottweiler' robins, of course, are genetically engineered to ignore any form of breast inversion and attack the foe regardless - using the visually stimulating whiskers to their own advantage. There is nothing an uninvited Santa hates more than robins getting up to mischief in his beard. Especially if it has to go back to the hire shop after use. This Santa-savaging tendency of the Rottweiler redbreasts does mean, however, that the Royal Mail daren't employ white-bearded posties to empty mailboxes.

It is interesting to note that the Santas themselves use their red breasts and white beards for the self-same territorial warning-off display purpose as do robins. Otherwise, congested Santa populations in built-up areas could lead to 'Santa rage' breaking out among a disenchanting public, with all the damaging effects of spontaneous lynchings. If you pay a visit to the car park behind any row of big city centre stores near Christmas-time, you may be lucky enough to witness the ritual *gut barging* behaviour of a pair of Sumo Santas slogging it out belly-to-belly for their place in the commercial pecking order. But I digress.

Santa antics notwithstanding, as my Old Mythological Grandpappy often declares to anyone who may be listening: the Christmas period simply wouldn't be the same without that cheerful, cocksure little birdy there to defend the private individual against inane jolly-makers out to spread the curse of 'fun'. Were it not for the unstinting bloodlust of our determined feathered companion, many elderly or emotionally infirm peace-lovers, unable to get to grips with home-made early warning systems or 'humane' deterrents, would probably find this time of year simply too much of a strain to endure. It would all end in tears - or at least with having to face charges of maiming, manslaughter or possibly unlawful dismemberment at a time when they should traditionally be in bed with a good book.

“God bless the humble robin,” says my Old Mythological Grandpappy with a sweeping gesture of his knuckle-dustered hand, taking in the razor wire atop the hedge, the minefield in the lawn, the shotgun tripwire across the pathway, and the electrified doorstep boot-scraper.

“It is a kindred spirit at a time of tribulation and uncertainty...”

A period of silence descends upon the garden, while the old man wipes a reflective dewdrop from his nose. At last, he looks up at me through crinkly-cornered eyes.

“By the way,” he says, “don't come round to my house again, or I'll stab you!”



A CHEEKY RED

by Hettie Ashwin

“Disgusting”.

It was a word he never expected. But now it seemed to fit. He found it comforting to be described in such vociferous terms. It gave him permission to decline all that life had to offer.

“No thank you, my cup runneth over.” Charles snorted to himself at that, the effort racked his chest until great heaving gasps gave way to spittle and phlegm. He rolled over in the garden and the sun glinted through the bushy leaves, winking and dancing on his closed eye lids, teasing him, cajoling him to join the world, but his world existed between a wine bladder and oblivion. Charles Audubon kept the world at a distance; it was less painful, less painful for all concerned. His philanthropy towards others wasn't his only delusion. An unfailing belief that others were responsible for his current decline, kept the fire of anger burning in his belly. A fire fueled by cheap wine, and paranoia. Yet, in small lucid moments, moments when his world was clear, bright and full of frizzante, he felt he might just step into his old shoes, the shoes of a successful wine critic, and they'd carry him to a new day. Those were Champagne days.

Charles had awoken to a Champagne day after a lost week in hospital. They had attended to his bodily needs, nourishing his blood, giving life to his bones, and the metamorphosis of Charles began. The day seemed extraordinarily bright, the staff cheery and smiling, and the mood latched onto Charles as he dangled his thin legs over the side of the bed.

“Merry Christmas,” someone said, and Charles looked up startled into the real world. This would be his new beginning. What better auspice than Christmas. He watched the bustle of the ward and knew he wanted to join life. He hadn't felt this good in ages, every fibre in his being was alive, tingling, like the first taste after a long drought. He took in his surroundings, the crisp

white of the sheets, the pale tint of the yellowing walls and the frothy, fresh and clean with a hint of floral character, of the nurse's uniforms. It would be a three and a half star day, Charles decided. A day of remarkably good value.

Charles collected his belongings, his mood buoyed by the donation of new trousers and shirt, and after signing himself out, stepped into reality with a flourish. He felt the five dollar note in his pocket, its pleasing feel of plastic comforting his doubts. With every step in the direction of his estranged family his plan grew, and he recalled a critique he had written as a wine connoisseur of a select Riesling. It starts life mean and unyielding, only to flower with age. Past experience shows us that it should develop superbly. He was that Riesling, a Great Southern Wine. He began to walk in the direction of town.

Empirical knowledge led Charles to believe in fate. And fate brought his haltering steps to the first drive-thru bottle shop. Knowing he would be better received bearing gifts, he reasoned his five dollars might buy a small token. But his knowledge of the grape left him floundering in indecision. With twenty dollars or even fifty he might just manage a worthy drop, but five would be an insult. The sun's rays glinted through the Cabernet Sauvignons, promising an end to the drought in Charles's belly, and Charles struggled to keep control. He knew the dirty end of town; the wine boxes, the cheap reds and the ubiquitous sherry, and they were his companions, his friends in times of need, but not now he muttered, not on a Champagne day.

The woman behind the counter eyed Charles suspiciously, as he walked around the gaudy shelving, tarted up for the so called 'Christmas Spirit'. He felt the prick of her unforgiving nature on the back of his neck while he contemplated his choice. Reasoning was tempered with the austere times and so a cask of Chateau Chardonnay at four ninety nine was finally purchased. The shop assistant, with winking earrings in the shape of Santa, took his money and gave the perfunctory "Have a merry Christmas" as she handed over his docket, although she couldn't care less Charles thought, as he watched her earrings.

Charles knew the way home. He had tramped the road many times after his marriage broke down. He'd stand outside the house he had provided, watch the people he had loved through the windows, and know they didn't deserve him. Lorna, his wife was full bodied with witty undertones. She was a classic and he longed to taste her again. They were a blending of the best at the beginning. Ideally suited to each other. But as his vintage matured and mellowed she soured and at the end she left a bitter taste in his mouth. He walked the path through Queen's gardens and stopped at the swings for a rest. The white plastic bag cut into his hand as he remembered his children squealing with delight at being pushed, screaming with feigned horror shouting, higher, higher. They were Brut Cuvee days. Rare and treasured. Grant was in the summer of '78, he was in a very good year. Full of promise Charles thought. He could be anything he wanted to be. But he broke his parent's heart. He disappeared into depression and smashed anything that might have been good. Charles blamed Lorna for Grant's death, Lorna turned the blame to Charles and Grant became the trigger for hate. Then there was Andrew. He was cut too soon. He was sour and bitter and needed constant boosting to be anything decent. He took the flavour of his mother, 'mores the pity' Charles spat at Lorna on more than one occasion. But his favorite was Jane. Jane was best of the bunch. All the lineage of the best the parent crop had to offer. Yet there was an undertone of something you couldn't quite put your finger on. Maybe the summer was too long and the sun too strong. But there seemed to be a guilty back taste. Never-the-less she was to be savored.

Charles shifted the plastic bag to his other hand, its weight a constant reminder of his plan. He exited the cool shade of the botanical gardens and steeled himself for his family.

His house, a place he once called home, was on a quiet tree lined street. Number sixteen had manicured lawns, two garages and a sprinkling of Christmas tinsel on the door. Charles took a deep breath and shifted the weight once more. He toyed with the idea of drinking the Chardonnay, for courage, for lost times, for forgiveness, to forget, and then the door opened.



“Charles?”

Her voice sent a shiver down his spine. The way she said his name. He could stand just about anything, except pity. A man has his pride. He stood there, on the bottom step wondering if he should just walk inside or wait to be asked.

“Mum?”

Jane came to the door, and Charles thought for a fleeting moment she didn't recognize him. He saw the look of surprise on her face, then the slight tinge of astringency and knew he was less than adequate. He held up his paltry offering, and immediately felt embarrassed. They looked at one another, yet didn't see. Didn't see the pain, the longing, the hurt, the anger. Then in a blinding flash Charles realized Jane didn't know him. She just saw an old man. Charles saw his one redeeming memory of being a father slip away. He stood rooted to the spot, and lowered his offering to his side.

“Lorna, who is it?”

A voice called from inside and Charles hoped it might be Andrew. But the man who entered the portico was a stranger. And that stranger slipped his arm around Lorna's waist, is an action so natural, so familiar, it crushed Charles mood as much as a corked wine ruins an expected vintage medal winner.

The great Charles Audubon, wine critique and connoisseur felt his palate shrivel and his Champagne day turned to vinegar. His gift cut into his fingers, reminding him of a friendship that was undemanding and understanding. He had great expectations for this moment. Opening with a subdued bouquet that would be complex and reminiscent of summer days and slowly evolving into a day of great depth and harmonious finesse. Now it was all gone. Stripped of anything worth saving.

Charles shuffled about and pulled his wine cask to his chest, holding onto the only tangible feeling he could rely on. No words could escape, no emotions would be shared, as he turned back down the path to the front gate. He wanted to turn, to look, just once at his life, but pride, and dignity prevented his neck from turning. How could they ever understand a Champagne day?

He made his way back to the gardens and sat down under a Banyan tree. The great aerial roots enveloped him and closeted him from the day. The Chardonnay felt cool, an attractive balance between ripe and savory. The palate had good structure and weight and finished long, dry and understated. Charles looked up in the lower branches and saw his father standing over him. He was a memorable vintage. He had a grip on you and was not one to forget. Frank Audubon was forceful and a once in a lifetime season. Never to be forgotten. He scowled at Charles, and Charles shivered at the disapproving eye. He had tried to make his parents proud, but as they looked down on him, he looked up through the bottom of a glass, and the view was distorted. Then the breeze rustled the leaves, and his father was gone, to be replaced by Lorna. She was Charles's first love, before he succumbed to the charms of a lustful Pinot Noir. Lorna was his cheeky red. A corker of a vintage. Young, feisty, full of body and a bit on the wild side. He reached out to hold her, but she was too illusive, too subtle.

He drank greedily, trying to numb his feelings, and the wine burned all the way down to his anger and guilt, never quite quenching the fire in his belly.

As he lay in the shade memories taunted him, anger fuel his motivation and he decided to confront his humiliation. He heaved his body up and retraced his steps, stopping to drink his courage at frequent intervals. He turned the corner into Merrill Drive and staggering to a letterbox fell down. The ground was hot on his cheek and his hand hurt, as he lay under the shrubbery. He felt for his only friend and suckled as a baby might on its mother's milk. The warm glow spread through his body, as he closed his eyes.

"Absolutely disgusting" he heard someone say, and he knew the only comfort he had these days was the warm piss running down his leg.



Christmas Days of Forty Degrees

by Phillip A. Ellis

When I remember, and dwell again within
the past, and bring it back before me,
I still find it hard to comprehend
Christmas Days of forty degrees.

Cicadas drilling weary holes
with ceaseless noise, the heavy heat,
the metal sky so blue no clouds
dared to break it, so deep the colour,

the frayed quarrels, the torpid food,
forgotten presents, and stultifying shows
upon the box: we ticked the lot,
and something draws me away, grateful.

I hope those days will stay and fade,
and fall away to worn out tropes
of fretful misery, bloated gutsing,
to dream of happier days, later.

SHE FIRST HELD ME UP

by Phillip A. Ellis

She first held me up to the light,
when the sun was heavy and beating with heat,
when I did not understand that Christmas
was of another continent, mediated by snow.
I did not go to the books to know
what it was that the Christmas tree stood for,
nor did I question the presents
that my father refused to allow us to open.

I have never forgotten this;
it is awake in my heart,
and it does not sleep now,
and I dwell on it as I write it
into the ears of others, knowing
that this world is a predestinarian one.



The Blue Christmas Lights

by Jennifer Hollie Bowles

The phosphorescent lights needled her eyes. Stephanie walked as quickly as she could past the store-aisles, but thousands of plastic ornaments, electronics, what-nots, and items professing happiness-in-a-box still assaulted her senses. The expectations of Christmas—just like the promises of weddings—life reduced to the pomp of one goddamn day.

She hurried past whining children, bitching wives, and lethargic husbands. Her left eye twitched with a twinge of lucidity as she thought about her family, her home drowning in dense clutter, the quixotic melodrama of her mother and father.

Stephanie stopped short when she spotted a pudgy boy-brat poking an action figure. His fingers looked like boils. She couldn't take her eyes off of them. She thought they were going to burst. A young woman wearing a Santa hat ran into her. *Bitch, best move out the way*, the woman said.

Stephanie remembered she had come to the store for blue Christmas lights. Always blue Christmas lights. That's what Todd wanted because that's what his mom and grandma always put up during Christmas. He said they looked so calm and peaceful.



Stephanie sat at the antique dining table that had been Todd's grandma's. She looked at the ten people around her and wondered who they were and why they acted as if they knew her.

Her brother-in-law squeezed her shoulder and ran his hand along her lower back, thanking her for cooking the fine Christmas Eve meal. Her tiny paper-thin skinned 80-year-old aunt with too much rouge and perfume winked at her. Her mother stared at her despondently. Stephanie wondered how she looked to her own three children.

Stephanie packed her suitcase that night. Her eyes filled with waterfalls, but she didn't cry. She nailed shingles to her heart and remembered the day she had promised to love and fuck Todd until they died. She put the suitcase in her car and drove around the neighbourhood. Her ears filled with the vibratory rush of her own heartbeat. She drove back home.

Stephanie pulled out the multi-coloured Christmas lights that were hidden like an evil secret in the back of the trunk. She walked into the house and placed the lights into a big glass vase. She carried the vase of lights up the stairs to their bedroom, each stair-lip one slip away from making her spill.

She remembered how the blue Christmas lights framed Todd's simple face.



Todd awoke and saw the multi-coloured lights casting weird little shadows on the beige wall. He got up and fingered the lights glowing in the vase, which had grown hot in the night. Todd walked down the stairs, plopped onto the couch, and turned on the TV.

“What's for breakfast, honey?”

He heard spoons crashing into granite, but Stephanie didn't answer him.

“Honey, are you okay in there?”

He heard grains pouring, drawers slamming shut, and a jagged sort of murmuring.

“Honey?”

Liquid splashed and glass shattered, followed by the sound of flesh and bone against refrigerator.

Todd entered the kitchen. He slipped and fell on a thin layer of sugar when he saw Stephanie sitting in a mixing bowl, murdering fruitcake.



Suicide Santa

by David Leverton

FOX IN MOONLIGHT

by Aeronwy Dafies

Across the field I spy it
Dark silhouette upon white snow
Easily visible beneath full moon
Almost as bright as winter sun
Eyes flash in the moonlight
As it returns my gaze
Steady and unfearful
Inquisitive as I
Slowly it pads away
Unconcerned
Until it vanishes into the shadowed hedge
Invisible
Save for one last flash of eyes
Gone now
Just a trail of paw prints
Come morning
Imprinted in virgin snow
A frozen memory

WINTERLUDE

/ FROM NOVEMBER TO MARCH
by Andrew Darlington

winter-green and winter-grey
for all the things you never say,
winter-silver and winter-gold
for all the secrets left untold,
winter-snow and winter-frost
counting all the thing we've lost,
winter-love and winter-pain
washed away in freezing rain
from winter-love to winter-fears
from winter-kisses to winter-tears
winter-months and winter-days
as time together slips away,
winter-weeks and winter-hours
as love we share turns slowly sour,
winter-sun and winter-skies
as all our truth turns into lies,
winter-dark and winter-light,
will love return? you say, it might...

WINTER 1967

by David Norris-Kay

Sound of wind
Through hollow stem,
Is reminiscent
Of Summer's laughter
Taken away slowly
By seasons of time:

Before the face of stone
was cold:
before insects crawled
beneath their suffering -

Bringing sleep
To aimless life.

My window frames
A world of flailing snow;
Of dead bees
And fading memories
Of warmer lands,

Where I looked out
On interstellar spaces,
Knowing Earth was lost

In that soft blackness,

But hope is in the haze
Of Winter's grace,
And, sure as a rebirth of green -

We shall be found,
And our exile
will
be
ended.



TRADITIONAL FAMILY CHRISTMAS

by Aeronwy Dafies

A traditional family Christmas. That was what John had told her they should have. It was their first Christmas together and she much would've preferred they spend it together. Alone. But, no, he wanted to have their parents to come stay with them. About the best she could say about the situation was that they both were only children, so they only had their parents and his grandmother to contend with. Only! She could take her in-laws, but had really wished she could keep her parents out of it. She had been looking forward to a Christmas without her parents to ruin it. But, no, he'd insisted...

Needless to say, John expected her to handle it all. He was hardly a reconstructed modern man at the best of times – she quite liked that about him much of the time – but, with the approach of the festive season, he'd made it clear that he expected her to do all the hard work. Not that he'd put it quite like that, but it was what he'd meant. He'd trim the tree and put the decorations up – oh, and buy the drinks, of course – but all the preparations, cleaning, shopping, cooking and the like were left to her. It was awful: she had a sudden insight into how it felt to dig your own grave.

Of course, the whole thing had been a fiasco. A fiasco for her, anyway. Everything he'd done had gone right: he had laid in a fine selection of wines and spirits that had earned him a hearty pat-on-the-back from her father; the tree had looked absolutely marvellous and the house had been perfectly decorated inside and out. He'd been able to sit back and gloat the entire holiday. But, everything she'd done had seemed to go wrong: no matter how hard she cleaned, her mother had found fault – and dust; half of the food on her list had been out of stock and she'd managed to burn or ruin that which she had bought.

Her parents had been as critical as they ever were, finding fault with everything she did, even the things she thought she'd got right. She could've taken that – she was used to it, even if it hurt – but, his parents had joined in and his grandmother had been especially cruel in her assessment of her failings. Her mother had even insinuated that, somehow, she was to blame for the distinct lack of promised snow.

Finally, she had snapped, able to take no more. She'd thrown the rock-hard Christmas pudding straight at his head and run screaming from the room like a suicidal banshee. He'd dodged the flying pudding and she'd heard the sound of their brand-new plasma screen crashing to the floor accompanied by his horrified cry that his new toy had been broken so soon.

Outside, it was snowing – a traditional white Christmas, after all – but, she wouldn't have been able to clearly see the road, anyway, her eyes filled with tears. Speeding along a lane overarched with skeletal-limbed trees, she nearly went into the ditch on the first bend she took, then plunged into it on the second. The airbag deployed and

she was fine, even if she had a shrewd suspicion that the car was a write-off. It was the worst possible end to the worst possible day. It couldn't have been worse had she tried; in fact, it might have gone better *had* she attempted to ruin the day on purpose. She just sat there and sobbed into the deflated sack hanging over the steering wheel. She let the cold seep into her bones, savouring the numbness that followed and took away the pain. Drifting into the chill embrace of sleep, she left behind the memories of another disastrous holiday.

Back in the house, mutual in-laws rolled their eyes at her outbursts and swapped opinions as to her shortcomings as they sipped sherry and ate the mince pies her mother had brought. Sometime late on Boxing Day, John would wonder about her extended sulk and whether he ought to go look for her. By then, she was dead, ruining another get together...



A CHRISTMAS ENCOUNTER by DJ Tyrer

Spending Christmas in Lapland, the home of Father Christmas, had seemed like a good idea when we sitting in a semi in Norwich. The kids had been thrilled when Sarah suggested it to them. Snow and reindeer, the whole dream. Perhaps the chaos of our departure was a warning – icy fog had brought Heathrow to almost a standstill and we had to queue for hours. But, eventually, we were in the air and on our way.

Our destination was a small log cabin on the edge of a forest, one of several clustered about a service building at the end of a long track. The hamlet was dark, except for a light in the main building. I went inside and found a night porter. Luckily, he spoke a bit of English and was able to explain that we were the only guests. The weather seemed to have delayed or deterred other visitors. He led us to our cabin and helped us inside with out luggage.

The building was not too large, just big enough for Sarah, Lucy, John and I. Despite exhaustion from the flight and drive, the kids were still in the grip of their delight. Sarah and I were not as enthused. Two bedrooms, a lounge, kitchenette and tiny bathroom. At least it keep the cold and snow out. There was a large fireplace in which we soon had a blazing fire blazing, the mantle of which would make a perfect place to hang stockings. (We had two suitcases just full of gifts for Lucy and John.)

The night porter brought us over a ‘welcome pack’ of essentials and explained that we could get extras in the resort’s shop when it opened in the morning or from the town down the road if we needed more variety. Without a full kitchen, it all tended to make a full Christmas dinner seem a little unlikely. Things could have been better.

We settled down for an evening meal consisting of beans on toast, the simplest option, and tried the TV, but the weather must have interfered with it – or, maybe it was the Northern Lights – and all we got was a snowstorm on the screen to match that which the night porter had said was headed our way. I put a Christmas CD on instead; better than nothing. The kids headed for bed and Sarah and I followed soon after.

Lying there, listening to Sarah’s soft breathing beside me and the intermittent gusting of the wind outside, I tried to sleep, but a niggling headache stopped me from quite dropping off. Just outside the tiny window, I could hear the crunch of footsteps on the freshly-fallen snow; I assumed it was the night porter making some last minute check on behalf of his only charges, there being nobody else around for miles, and eventually drifted off to sleep. Crunches accompanied in my dreams but didn’t wake me.

The next morning, I was rather surprised when I set out to buy some food, to discover a trail of bare footprints pressed into the snow, circling the cabin. What sort of idiot would go for a barefoot walk in the snow? I mentioned it to the woman in the store, but she didn’t seem to understand much English and just shrugged. I made a mental note to ask the night porter if it had been him, although he didn’t seem the type.



Christmastime is supposed to be a family time, but being cramped together, with no entertainment nor escape, meant that it was not as pleasant as tradition dictated. Still, we managed to get through it finally putting the kids to bed, despite their excitement, and having a little time for Sarah and I and a bottle of sherry. (We were doing Santa's job for him, so we had his drink.) We were just drifting off a little before the fire, which was dying down towards its embers, when I again heard the crunch of footfalls in the snow outside.

I went to the window, but it was too small to see much through it, so I crossed instead to the front door and opened it instead, stepping out onto the little veranda. Still, I could see nothing through the thick, chill fog that hid the trees from view, just a few dark, bony limbs protruding through it. Then, I saw movement, a barely perceptible stirring of the fog. Slowly, a tall silhouette resolved itself and drew nearer. As it grew closer, I could see the figure a little more clearly: it was very tall with a broad head and no neck to speak of; it also seemed naked and very hairy. Whatever it was, it wasn't human.

I quickly shut the door, locked it, drew the bolt – suddenly, it didn't seem terribly secure. A few more locks would have been nice – a steel door and concrete walls better still! The crunching was louder now as it reached the door. The handle turned as it tried to open the door. It knew how to open doors. *It knew how to open doors...* I was glad I had locked the door. Sarah stirred.

“What is it?” she asked, half asleep.

“There's *something* at the door!”

“What?” she was confused.

“*Something* – whatever it is, it's not human; it's not an animal, either... it's a monster or an alien, or... something...” I was terrified.

The door shook, but held, for which I thanked God. It crunched away. I could smell something, a sort of pungent smell, and I was cold, now that the fire had died – but the shiver that ran down my spine had little to do with the chill air that fogged our breath. It was like some horrible nightmare – but, I couldn't wake up; it was real.

It was making its way around the cabin. Suddenly, I saw an ugly, inhuman face pressed up against the tiny window. Breath from flared nostrils fogged the windowpane, obscuring it so that just the eyes, bright yellow eyes like a cat's, stared in. There was something wrong, menacing about those eyes. I couldn't meet its gaze, looked away and tried not to wet myself like a scared child.

Then, it was gone. It was almost as if it had vanished; one moment it was there, then the eyes were gone and the frosted breath disappeared to reveal just darkness and fog beyond. I couldn't hear anything – it was on the veranda – then, the crunch resumed.

“Daddy,” a voice suddenly said, making me jump, “I heard someone outside – is it Santa?” It was Lucy. John was standing just behind her, they were both half asleep.



“It’s *not* Santa!” I snapped. My tone must have cut through their tiredness, for they both jumped and Lucy began to cry.

“What is it?” John asked, eyes wide, as we all heard a scraping sound from the rear of the building. Sarah was trying to comfort the kids, but was sobbing on the verge of hysteria as she tried.

“Daddy, is it a bad man?” wailed Lucy.

“It’s a monster!” I snapped – I was very nearly hysterical myself.

It was climbing onto the roof. The chimney! It suddenly struck me that it could come down the chimney – just like Father Christmas! Or, more like the Big Bad Wolf... With the fire out, there was nothing to stop it.

I ran to the fireplace, chucked firelighters and lighter fuel into it, tossed into it some kindling and wood, and began throwing lighted matches onto the pile, desperately willing it to light, praying for it to catch. God must’ve been listening as it blazed into life with a thick cloud of smoke. I thanked my lucky stars and just hoped it was enough to deny it entry.

I heard a slipping-sliding sound and the fall of snow from the rooftop. It must have dropped off. I heard it crunch its way around the building again and a sort of snuffling-grunting sound. The door handle turned again and we all shrieked in fright as the door shook, but it held firm. It continued to circumnavigate the cabin for some time, but it didn’t try to get in again.

Eventually, I guess it got bored and gave up. It must be nocturnal. Anyway, after a long while, the crunching faded and we all breathed a sigh of relief, huddled together in a corner. Once we were certain that it was gone, once the sun was up – not that it gave much light through winter cloud and fog – we threw everything into our suitcases and then tossed them into the back of the taxi which I had ordered, presents unopened. The woman in the store had just been opening up when I went in and looked at me as if I was a lunatic – I was dishevelled, exhausted and still absolutely terrified. I’d managed – with only a little shouting – to get her to call a cab for us. Once it was outside, we were ready to go. I had no desire to stay around and find out more – it was a hell of a way to spend Christmas Day as it was!

Afterwards, I did a little research and uncovered a little of the dark underside of the Yuletide season and the frozen north: of shamans dressed in the freshly-skinned hide of a reindeer turned inside-out to create a bloody-red coat; of creatures akin to Bigfoot that had been known to enter remote cabins down chimneys and attack their inhabitants; of the forgotten truths that fairytales can conceal. I’m still not certain what it was that we encountered, but I know it meant us harm. Maybe they are natural creatures, pushed back into the uninhabitable wastes by rapacious humanity, fighting back the only way they can, or just surviving like a tiger driven to take human prey. But, I can’t help feeling that there was something inimical about it, something innately evil, something that meant us harm for no other reason than it could.

We survived – and, for that I’m grateful. You may not be so lucky...



LLOIGOR'S WINTER FESTIVAL FEAST

by Frederick J. Mayer

*“To loose all burden of old woes
Whose blooms are grown of ancient sin
And death the sap that wells and flows...”*
— THE STAR TREADER
Clark Ashton Smith

Did you know cannibals eat more than just their own kind?

“Strange how I got to this point,” pondered the ageing, consumptively physiqued Professor Injukyoski, Kie-te, of Japanese-Korean American descent as he savoured succinctly the dimly lit esoterical environs of the BAR NANA situated within the Itaewon-dong and their special home concocted coffee brew. In another age, this den of a bar would be serving laudanum.

The atmosphere of Nana this wintry night was of the kind which could illicit phantasms, especially at the moment as small amber gallery directional lamps, a few backlights, highlighted the works of famed Koonude's naked women (and trans-genders) found in fabled situations and Joseph Gordon's so-called (not his label) ‘Outsider Art’; they were placed in every conceivable spot and position. The creators were having an artists' reception there soon, entitled: ‘The Naked and The Dead’.

“It is said I was indirectly the cause of the depraved devastating act of wanton destruction recently on Jejudo and now that unfathomable wicked wind born (exact same as the uncharacteristic air disturbance that manifested on that mysterious isle) debacle of despicable loss of life and property in San Francisco, for what? Merely my arcane canine-like carved jade amulet?” The despondent Prof. finished off his bean spawn beverage and thought, “And, it is darkly murmured among shadowy legend believers that I am afflicted with some ‘curse’ which has made me a ‘Sin Eater’”.

“How did you ever learn to play so intricately well our ancient tunes?” gasped an incredulous yet quite charmed South Korean woman listening to Karl Zann Vine’s devotional recital on his sacred Native American flute that sent its notes throughout the cavernously deep Ewha (‘Pear Tree Flowers’) Women's University subway station stop. Karl was, by now, used to such acclamation from passer-bys to soon astonished Koreans.

It seems Native American music, pointedly that of some North American tribes, had very strikingly similar tones and ‘feel’ to them when it came to wind instruments. An unquestioned multi-media talented Artist, Karl was at present an English instructor at



the prestigious all women Christian university; one of the oldest (many of the original grey stone edifices on campus still bore the original clinging, creeping ivy) in Korea. He adored performing for himself his wooden instrument and discovered that the unwonted acoustics of the quite deep bottom layers of the station were ideally acute and resonantly perfect for the much more outré atonal and Asian minor cords unique to his work, which Vine would choose to produce on less crowded late night time periods.

The consummate ladies' man, the suave, urbane, full salt-and-peppered mustachio linguist Karl, with subtle ease, could always charm young limber and alluring women. Yet, in some ways, this distant relative of shroud laden, legendary violinist Erich Zann, earned his nickname 'Zaney'; a part came from Koreans' mis-pronouncing his full name, partially it arose from his, at times, fantastically wild virtuoso offerings and partially from his honestly sincere belief (often portrayed in his impressionistic exquisite oil paintings somewhere) that 'the' Jesus was really a space alien.

"There's something not quite right," quietly mused Dr. Koh, Rei-am to his identical twin sister Ms. Koh, Rei-mi, Esq. as they sped along subway line #6 toward the Itaewon district. Rei-mi queried in a sotto tone, "Are you still bothering yourself about that narrative?" Dr. Koh and his blood-mate were basically of the ruling elite of Jeju Island. The duo were tawny, sinewy strong from years of Tantric yoga practice and part of the eon old line of the Tcho-Koreans. Nowadays, after generations born on the island, the people were as 'Korean' as any other said people, just as Americans of several native birthings and ethnic connections, i.e. 'Italian-Americans', were as close to their hereditary roots as each individual chose to make it.; the Koh Reis made their lineage and cultural knowledge as 'living' as when the first Tcho Tcho people emigration to the cloaked in mysterious origins 'Tamla' (currently called 'Jeju')... More precisely, three legendary brothers, Koh Eulla, Yang Eulla and Bu Eulla, future bloodline that was to become the Tamlaen People emerged from the 'hole' within the earth at Samseonghyeol. Eventually, their gene pool flowed with that of the Tcho Tcho People led by Queen Zee Rei. Later, these people, by then one, merged, interbred with the mainland stock that was to become today's 'Koreans') arrived under the auspice of the fabled Grand Shaman-Queen Zee Rei.

"Yes... Dave Sandwin, Jr... "It was only a rhetorical question"... "the grandson of the original 'Dave', who perpetuated his recapitulation of the presumptive first hand account, claims that the Sandwins for a few generations had a 'compact' with Cthulhu, Deep Ones, Ithaqua...and Lloigor! A group business arrangement that involved servitude in perpetuity for some in the family's future line, hinting at a perverse immortality; unbelievably ludicrous. And, when this grand-uncle broke such pact, all of the cosmic entities in it, in some form or another, sought this particular relative in retribution, retaliatory action...only our revered Lloigor succeeded. A personal human sacrifice to him, perhaps, but can you conjure-up Lloigor in such a cabal? Doesn't this seem as paradoxically peculiar, weird, at least, really odd to your sense of logic, dear sister? The only substance of it that rings true is the given description of the 'Feaster from the Stars': 'Who can draw the body from the earth piecemeal'."



“Amazing...”, brother and sister locked onto each others eyes, scatological brownish like fluid excrement with a blooming black lotus rising from its depths. Rei-am had on his ever-present, special prescription mirror aviator glasses while Rei-mi had an actual ‘double eyelid’ operation as it is still popularly known, though, Asian women in actuality do not physically possess such pieces of flesh. However, it is referred to in that manner, especially by young fashion conscious Far Eastern females who desire enviously that ‘Western look’. Ms. Koh had it performed for a more practical reason. It was to enhance her ‘professional’ appearance in her role as an internationally respected diplomat/leading national politician, currently, head of the elected Jeju delegation to the South Korean Assembly.

“For someone,” Rei-mi in her eloquent vocalization, “who was personally ordained by our High Lama, then our great grandmother, to continue the position and, thus, extensively trained, exposed to secretory knowledge of our ancestral Tcho Tcho people at our most sacred locations, then refused to accept the role, not to mention, being a world renown keen minded Quantum physicist educated outside of Korea, you sure are querulous to some ‘stories’, so protective my love...you should have become a ‘holy one’, great grand mama always said you had the ‘Gift’, unlike most males of our mixed bred humankind line.”

Dr. Koh tacitly shrugged and matter-of-factly stated, “You know full well I believe it’s in the highly advanced hard sciences that we’ll find the ‘key’ to freeing Lloigor and Zhar, not some, now hazy at best, ritualistic mumbo jumbo idiocy.” The subway conveyance kept a-rollin’.

“Oh well,” the sister ended her expostulation. Following it with, “Speaking of ‘business arrangements’,” it was a stoical Rei-mi speaking to her idiosyncratic sibling, “Through certain subterranean channels of communication everything has been set for our honourable yet sometimes hedonistic acquaintance’s (Prof. Injukyoski) father in the largest Japanese port city of Osaka to procure a lucrative deal with the Deep Ones by way of establishing an Esoteric Order of Dagon there. Though, we had to use all possible persuasive tacts of persuasional offerings to close it; they are a pertinacious bunch when it comes to women.”

Spread across Rei-am’s mouth was a sardonic yet ever widening wry grin, “Ah, the wonders of pharyngula!”

“This shall be my finest meal of ‘Hanchi-mul-hoe’ (‘Seasoned Raw Cuttle fish’),” proudly the biology professor and gourmand extraordinaire said to himself as he quickly made his way home up on the tallest hill across from the Itaewon throughfare with his steaming aromatic exclusively brewed coffee from Bar Nana, “This indigenous savory meal of Jejudo with some of my own touches of fresh succulent taste sensations added to the thinly sliced cousin to the octopus and squid, traditionally seasoned with the combination of vinegar, red chilli peppers sauce and soybean paste mixture in a just so water base...Hmmm, perfection with a melt-in-your-mouth texture; a true culinary offering of gratitude to the Koh Reis and their invaluable help to my father's jewellery business.”

As Injukyoski neared the hilltop, there squatted the only sanctified ‘official’ mosque in all of megatropolis Seoul. As he was about to pass it, the professor had to pause, wondering, “It was here, just a few months ago, Iranian born ‘Koonude’ uncovered an Arabian version of the AL AZIF while he laboriously was conducting intrinsically extensive restoration to the holy Islamic sanctuary’s abysmal basement area, which was more akin to the hole of a typical Asian ‘toilet’ of old. Dr. Koh graciously translated the tome’s text into a modern Arabic language. The mosque’s guardians promptly, unceremoniously, placed it precisely back into the putrid muck and mire and permanently sealed the bowels of the sacred spot, along with the then still breathing Koonude.”

Before continuing on to his destination, Kie-te glanced at his near finished cigarette’s burning glow that was a similar hue of the polluted twilight air of Seoul, “Curious, my favourite here in Korea is the quite popular brand ‘Mild Seven’ that has an English language name while made, interestingly enough, in Japan... seven (7), a near universally cultural number for luck... luck, fate, what have you; what is ‘luck’, ‘destiny’, a seven letter word (the Prof. smiled at the thought), is it all outmoded superstition or ‘idiocy’, as my friend Dr. Koh contends?” The smoke dropped to the ground and crushed under Injukyoski’s shoe leather sole.

“Yes, the rising, falling, flailing, disgorged bellowing winds, not to mention, purely wing and flatulant movements,” Dr. Koh softly lamented the infernal devastation that befell the Montgomery street part of San Francisco’s financial district as he sipped the Bar Nana beverage (the sub-heading of that well-established local Itaewon watering hole is ‘A Japanese Bar’ and ‘Nana’ is 7 in Japanese; so selected by its co-owners, Choo Jin Hee and Yoo Jin Suk, to help bring it luck), and then quietly added with a smirk, ‘Ironically, the famed/infamous Allen Ginsberg poem/book HOWL was composed near-by.’

Rei-mi smirked, “How very intellectual of you brother. But, refocusing on the professor’s question...Yes, we are historically well acquainted with those ‘winds’ creators and, no, it was neither Lloigor nor Ithaqua, as you put forth in your earlier supposition, when we supped upon this wondrously sumptuous meal of yours.”

“Then?” “Then,” carried on Rei-am, if on cue, “Our GUMI-GAN-OK CHAEK says the Ancient Ones associated with ‘Winds’ each have their own discernable, palpable issuing air patterns, fingerprints so to speak. And, according to our sacred book’s codex, the Jejudo and San Francisco signature signs belong to the vile, disgustingly raving ‘Hounds’ (Both Rei-am and Rei-mi, simultaneously yet unconsciously, tenderly touched their cracked jade talismans that never left the flesh of their physical bodies)...which means for you Prof. Injukyoski is those creatures are not done yet; there’s you.”

“I heard and saw the music of all things...
Then, with prismatic notes, voice of light,
And sounds and hues inseperable for wings,
The music-vision faded and was gone.”
— *THE PAGEANT OF MUSIC, C.A. Smith*



“Welcome to the annual outdoors ‘Ssamzie Alternative Music Festival’ the fast rising in popularity, multi-cultural ‘Yarikuri’ (Japanese, somewhat Korean, word for a type of ‘Strange’) band with their special guest, the impressively talented ‘Zaney’ (a name Karl detested).

Eventually, Karl with his blessed Lakota flute came onto the glaring miasma colour-awashed stage. The mainly youthful Korean audience was smitten in wide wonder with what erupted from the ensemble, however, it was Vine’s quietly strong, other-worldly enkindled ameliorated solo presentation that mystically enchanted the crowd, now standing, swaying, softly stamping their feet to stay warm amid now swirling snow and frosting winds, as well as, in sync with the music; it was “fluted music of the spheres”. The late night chilling air was icily hug about them, a womb, airy spectral membrane wolfed and warped so strangely, tightening about their collective heart muscle till nearly still, seemingly void of breath inside the shivering not from the cold bodies... Karl left the stage platform with the concert attendees disrobed, collapsed and with an eyried euphony, weakly pleading, gulping for even the frigid natural atmosphere about them again.

They say the piper must be paid and there are piping sounds among the mad winds; Klarkash-ton, Orpheus and satyrs knew, now so does Vine...there are seas of blood lapping against the insides of brains and bodily veins.

A pores wide open for releasing cool body produced fluids to the not un-naturally tall form of the artist Vine made its way down winding vert metal steps in various floral designs to the ‘Green Room’ set aside for that night’s performers. Exhausted artistic fingers liberated a can of Korea’s version of Gatorade, ‘Pocari Sweat’, from a near-at-hand ice bucket and he finished-off the nutritious liquid in a matter of seconds. Just as smooth and quick, remembering how ‘this’ began for him, “Down in the lowest level of the Ewha Women’s University station, playing some inspired extemporaneous material, and for some unknown reason focused on this quite old rendering of the Tcho’s legendary Grand Queen Zee Rei that had been recently revealed to me; the Queen was performing on this ancient pre-Korean woodwind instrument, as she sat provokingly before a stone ‘devil pole’ phallic representational vision of Lloigor, invoking his presence in his dragonish shape.”

It was then, Zhar with ‘her’ psychic abilities felt melodically summoned, an incantation of sorts, and she was soon residing in Vine’s skull. “I wish I knew...I moved... tying up a peacefully aware nude female student at Ewha in rough, boa-like hemp rope in a style women display as ‘professional actresses’ within Japanese S&M films, but to a dead tree trunk hewn/primally sculpted into a crude imagery of Zhar that could be found outside the campus’ noted folk museum (though no ‘expert’ knew of its origins, original purpose(s), or if it was of anybody or particular thing)...

The young woman’s extensive ebony hued hair seemed to writhe upon a gentle silent invisible cold breeze that wrapped it securely around the top of the pole, ‘spirit post’... I tantalizingly played vibrantly, a mesmeric resonance that pervaded exhilaratingly, omnipotent... Karl had left, the ropes fell setting the student free from the bondage, except for her glimmering from the University’s ‘streetlights’ hair.



There she was found, physically unharmed, unmolested, unmarked, alive and breathing normally...not to mention, utterly rapturously insane.

“Hear ye Him that howls
serpent-fanged amid the bowels
of nether earth; He whose
ceaseless roaring ever fills the
timeless skies of hidden Leng.”

— *NECRONOMICON 2*

“This is your solution?” Rei-mi had a well deserved reputation of having polished tombstone cold eyes, when she was so inclined to use, that could hypnotize even the most deadly of “snakes” to do her bidding, dance for her, were now on the Professor as she unwaveringly replied, “Yes. Old man you are dead. The Hounds will, sooner or later, kill you, especially if that pack is lead by the vore Dame Bitch Y'knu-rk.”

As if synchronized, Rei-am continued, “Add the fact that you are a ‘Sin Eater’, which means you have all those sins of others before you an intrinsical part of your Soul, so you need a specific type of meal on you/consume you completely if you are to die with your Soul cleansed and only yours without any residue of those additional multitude of sins. Those multi-dimensional travelling ‘canines’ will disembowel you, toss your vitals to the winds, dismember you, in other words, totally rip you to threads, yet not swallow a morsel of you in the process. However, we know just the personage to help us achieve your freedom from such a fate.”

The early morning of the following day experienced the flight of a private jet Jeju bound. With the golden rays of the sun piercing the aircraft’s diminutive left side windows reflected upon the mirror shades of Dr. Koh as he casually drank his Suk Cha tea, “Ah, we go to the ‘Island of the gods’,” he quoted from the tourist pamphlet provided by the isle's P.R. folk, “The honeymooners’ paradise internationally renown for its ‘Winds, Rocks and Women’,” the doctor saluted with his plastic cup to no one in particular. On board were Dr. Koh Rei-am, Ms. Koh Rei-mi, Esq., Professor Injukyoski, Kie-te and Karl Zann Vine.

Karl was quietly engaged in reading a short story. “What are you reading?” Rei-mi asked. “Something called ‘The Seven Geases’.” “What’s a ‘geas’?” “I’m not really sure.” The Prof. was engrossed in reading an ‘official’ book of legends that existed in Rei-am’s homeland, at that moment, the folk myth of GRANDMOTHER SEOLMUNDAE AND THE FIVE HUNDRED STONE GENERALS:

“...By accident, she fell into a gigantic pot while making the pot of soup to feed her sons (numbering 500). She died and dissolved into the soup. After a while, the sons returned back home and hurriedly ate the soup up without even knowing that their mother had melted away in the soup.”

He closed the volume there as the plane began its turbulent descent. “So, this is my ‘condemned man’s’ last meal?” mused Prof. Inyukyoski. “I’d rather consider it your



Christ's 'Last Supper'," kindly retorted the twin's mother, a reputed chef of highly cultivated cuisine and caterer. Karl remained silent as he dived into the repast of living indigenous 'flying squid' sushi casserole 'simmered in combination with seaweed, Obunjagi and renal of the kidneys lightly blanched in a broth of pork intestines and bones'.

Brother and sister were engaged in their own kind of repartee, bantering, "This is going to entail your pretentious scientific approach?" playfully sneered Rei-mi as she popped out with her index fingers' nails two slimy squid eyeballs and moist nerves still attached; one for herself and one for him... his she flicked over directly into his proper awaiting open orifice with tongue extending in a perverted serpentine manner. Upon its disappearance, Rei-am, dead serious, "When the star bodies, like Arcturus, are aligned above the horizon just right along with certain abstract tonal vibrations attuned precisely to a stage/angle of the night in the earth rotation, et. al.; yes, I do my dear sarcastic sister." They were all hunkered down around the traditional Korean eating-ones-meal table enamelled with a dark, rich, blood red stain to it.

"Going down, down, way down the rabbit's rectum," Ms. Koh exemplar of exhalation of lunar lupus lunacy as she shimmied and glistened under the stars and moon humming a favourite Korean children's tune about tokkei to her spoken words just before the foursome entered one of the 360 oreums that dotted the island realm. "I do wish you wouldn't refer to it as such," Dr. Koh disconcertedly whispered discountenance to his sister. "Isn't it just basically a hole?" "A secondary parasitic cone actually." "A hole by any other name. Just depends upon the rabbit's gender...besides, tonight is the 'Night of the Tokkei Moon' and its winter festival activities; the magical rabbit in the lunarscape who pounds, produces special glutinous rice cakes that when eaten gives immortality." "Yes 'Alice'."

Karl carried in a suede hare pelt pouch an aeons old form of piri (flute instrument) he was to play that starry night and was the first to switch on his spelunker's high power luminous ray. The Professor couldn't help but be amused at the Koh Reis' antics at such a time and followed suit in shinning his, nicknamed "troglodyte light", into the pitch black depth just ahead.

"A few months ago, our 'Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes' became an 'official' inscriptional addition to the World's Heritage List," Dr. Koh's caustically calm tone informed Injukyoski, who was a step or two behind him. "I find that honour somewhat strange as barely 10% of the tubes have been explored by outsiders; some 'experts' declare one of them is the 'longest in the world' even though they have no clue where it ends. The substratum of Jejudo is riddled with them. Yet, glorious aren't they Kie-te?" The Prof. only saw, inside the beams of their headlamps, images, to him, of huge maws open and waiting in patient predatory anticipation with mammoth pointed teeth that hadn't had their accumulated tartar removed for centuries.

Rei-am led the intrepid band mainly because he knew the route so well and his feral dark adapting eyes could visually penetrate the jet shadows (gained from the primogenitor Tcho side of the family) better than any large hunting feline's orbs of

night ever could. Karl Zann instinctively had commenced his piri's notes of a primeval age and preternatural clime. Rei-mi in a protective presence, brought up the rear. Brother Koh paused, his eyes possessing an impish glint, perhaps, from the reflective artificial glow about them, turned toward Injukoski, "You realize, my friend, that when my sister and I claimed 'we know just the personage to help us...', we were not referring to Mr. Vine nor even to the entity he has an odd connection, Zhar?"

Shot windows of the souls like unwanted pits, but with cyclone ferocity and obliterated upon impact with a cavern wall much like a smashed obscenely over-bloated with blood female mosquito... "I saw"... pigeons from 'Hell' pecking at the sloshy tiny nuggets that remain as those who feast on human vomit... undulating tendrils, claw nailed digits, bizarre tentacles, fingerpainted the wet refulgent crimson of others into murals of ages ago caves and grotesque cranium grottos... It came bursting to piping beats and/of ulcerous hearts and organs; andante beautifully elegant musical scores entwined with mutated, diseased helix-like melodic pumps, loving embraces of inspirational shrieks...

Regurgitations, ichorian droolings flowed upon the floor, sucks, heavings and blowing... powerful rushes of wind from farting egresses... I saw, heard, felt"... metabolic mastications, releasings, scourges along jagged, serrated fangs, some not of stone, and seemingly corporeal existence of pressured air that was bound in tubular intestinal shapes as if held tight by a larger-than-life reddish gold antediluvian 'Arab' cock-ring... pulsating hard... sung divine holy choir voices and actually flung tormented sounds of ebullition... "I saw"... it relentlessly built, fed, bled... then, the mightily extreme ejaculatory expulsion, explosion and an echoing burp.

The Jeju twins were nearly literally planted into the fertile soil of Paeknokdam, while Vine's vitals and various other parts of his sparse remains were sowed about the crater. Later, of what could be gathered, Karl (nothing was ever wasted by the Koh Rei clan) would be given proper honours, which included being a part of Mother Koh Rei's marvellous version of what many in the worldwide epicurean set consider to be one of the isle's unsurpassed sophisticated dishes, 'Galchi Hobak-guk' (pumpkin and vegetable stew con carne). Of Professor Injukoski Kie-te, all that remained were some clothes he wore at his last meal... Lloigor had gratifyingly accepted the Tcho-Koreans' sacrosanct offering mass or meal. A new day in 'The Land of the Morning Calm' began and seemed to corporeally breathe as a just birthed baby who had been sated as a suckling; a Soul was freed upon the consummation of a winter festival feast.

** The locations and place names mentioned do exist, however, the characters and situations are of the author's imagination. Except, GRANDMOTHER SEOLMUNDAE AND THE FIVE HUNDRED GENERALS has been a famous Jeju-do-Korean folk myth for longer than anyone can remember and it has been quoted exactly within this story as it is translated into the English language by South Koreans for retelling.*



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