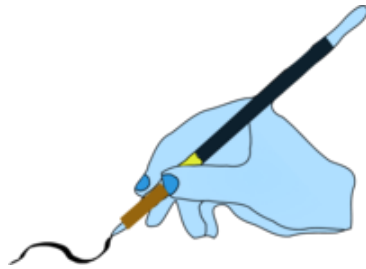


THE Legacy

The Legacy seeks submissions for its four annual issues.

Submission Deadlines

<i>Weird Stories & Dark Tales</i>	3rd Friday in October
<i>Beloved or Bloody Valentines</i>	1st Friday in February
Fall Edition online	2nd Friday in November
Spring Edition print	3rd Friday in March



Submission Guidelines

The Legacy accepts submissions from current WTAMU undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty and staff members of the University community.

All written submissions should be sent as a .doc; .docx or .rtf attachment to **legacy@wtamu.edu** with the following information given in the body of the email:

- Your full name.
- Your name as you wish it published.
- Your major and class standing (Freshman, Sophomore, Graduate student, etc.) if a student, or year of graduation if Alumni.
- Your department if faculty or staff.
- Contact Information: email and phone number
- Additionally, identify the genre of work you are submitting in the subject line.



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Serendipity

By A. H. Martinez

Why are you here?"

"I killed my wife."

"I defended a man who killed his wife. Got him acquitted."

"Do you remember his name?"

"No, I only remember why I'm here." "Me too."

"What was your name again?" "I don't know, what's yours?" "What's that noise?"

"Can you feel that?"

"The burning?"

"No, the stabbing. It's terrible" "You said you killed your wife?" "Yes."

"Do you hear those screams?" "Is that what that is?"

"Why are you here again?"

"You'll have to speak up; all I hear is crackling and crying."

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It Shouldn't Be

By Brent Klein

Marvin walked into the Center for Community Activities with his arms piled high with folders and documents. He shuffled past the reception desk and walked toward the office of the Deputy Director of Programs and Fun. Behind him, papers fell and wafted off the great stack in a twisting wake. He didn't mind dropping a few. He had everything in quadruplicate.

He went down the eggshell white hallway and past the water fountain and the sterile unisex bathrooms. He came to an intersection. On the left wall was a poster that read:

No Jesus. No Peace.

Know Jesus. Know Peace.

A sunrise was below the text. The sun was setting behind a little hill with a little cross on top of it. Marvin looked at it for a moment, then went right.

The Center for Community Activities was unscrupulously proud of its bureaucratic process. They were considered most efficiently regulated and nothing was done without the proper consideration and consent. Task forces were created to appoint joint-task forces. It was rumored that the position of Master Filer was only given to someone with ten years of professional service. As a result of this efficiency, Marvin was regularly expected to meet with the Deputy Director of Programs and Fun to discuss various

Left in Ashes

By Kyla Gayle Crossland

October concludes with fresh flowers, cuff links, jealous maids, and a diamond ring on her left hand. Husband carries wife over the threshold; the happily ever after ensues. Burnt dinners, financial woes, an abandoned uterus cast shadows on the white picketed yard. Midnight screams and silent regrets fill the holy unity. Inspecting his phone, probing her emails, distrust shatters what God once assembled. Gasoline disperses, and bridges burn. Negotiation and signatures divide material needs. February commences with lace lingerie, cologne, fanning new flames, and a diamond ring she left on the dresser.

A Daughter's Nostalgia

By Kaitlyn Johnson

It's the sight of a dirty garage
that reminds me of
cool early mornings,
greasy hands,
and tranquility.

It's the sound of Guns N' Roses
that reminds me of
rowdy jeep rides,
hot summers,
and adventure.

It's the feel of warm concrete
that reminds me of
sweet iced tea,
bicycle rides,
and contentment.

It's the taste of ice cream
that reminds me of
evening dinner dates,
action movies,
and camaraderie.

But most of all,
it's the scent of box dirt
that reminds me of
late night hugs,
quiet prayers,
and security.

aspects of the project he had submitted.

This hall, Marvin was sure, did not conform to the laws of physics. Once he turned the corner from the Sunset Poster, the hallway seemed to stretch on ad infinitum. The walls squeezed in as the perspective stretched on and on into a tiny dot in the distance. He felt as if he were stuck between two mirrors facing each other. The walls were efficient.

Marvin walked for miles passing more water fountains and unisex bathrooms at even committee designated intervals, until he stood in front of the Deputy Director of Programs and Fun's door.

He looked over his shoulder at the hall that stretched forever. A trail of papers, haphazardly strewn about, lay on the floor as if a great bureaucratic slug had oozed its way down that long stretch. Marvin nodded and thought it looked most efficient. His decision to make copies in quadruplicate, instead of the normal triplicate, had paid off today.

The door opened and in the doorway stood a severe woman in a neat black dress. A silver necklace lay tastefully on her chest. A little cross.

"Oh yes, Marvin. Right on schedule. Very important, punctuality you know?" Her voice was hardly a whisper. There was something condescending in its softness and in those still eyes—eyes that seemed always lost in thought, never quite seeing what was right in front of them.

"Quickly, sit," she said. "We have only a few minutes to speak. I have many meetings today. Very

important, you know?”

Marvin sat. The Deputy Director of Programs and Fun sat behind her efficient desk. She folded her hands and smiled. Marvin looked into her eyes, but wasn't sure if she was looking back.

“Yes, well,” he said. “As you know, I have proposed a community advancement project. Since I am sitting here you know that I have been approved by the lower committees, the Circle of Decision, *both* Houses of Trust, and I have collected and completed all necessary paperwork to be contemplated by the Elder Board. In the interim of a decision from them, I have been instructed to detail the findings of my research and run scenarios considering the positive and negative outcomes if this project were to be approved. All of this is required by Section 1.a-3 of the Community Enrichment Protocol Manual. *Therefore,*” he said with an air of positively magnificent efficiency, “I have brought all the necessary paperwork to be considered and approved by you, Ms. Deputy Director of Programs and Fun.” He gestured toward the tower of papers and folders perched upon the desk.

The Deputy Director of Programs and Fun did not blink while Marvin spoke. She sat perfectly still. So still, Marvin wasn't sure if her chest was rising and falling with breath.

“Yes, of course. I remember your project well, Marvin.” She blinked and an anxiety that had been building in Marvin's chest loosened and released. “If you don't mind, please remind me of the specifics. As you must know, I am very busy. Very important *in-*

With murder, suicide so crown him King.

Another story done; its truth inside
My head. I close the book, hide dreams away.
The stories shape my world but life intrudes.
The next adventure time awaits. I go.



Songbird

By S. Shane Shelton

Relaxing on my lap my cat did see
A bird outside the window to the right.
A simple sparrow nestled in a tree.
A simple bird not wanting to take flight.
He sang his song and flapped his wings in bliss.
Rejoicing in the warmest breeze of spring.
Intent in stare. Releasing not a hiss.
Cat watched and flipped her tail around, sweet thing.
Jumped down, my cat, and left to paw the door.
I followed close behind and opened it.
She darted out. Across the yard, she tore.
And up the tree where happy bird did sit.
The yard now calm with no bird's song. It's still.
Thanks be to Kitty's newest little kill.

Confessions of a Bibliophile

By Rizzo Delaney

The ones who don't enjoy the books just can't
Understand its not blank page stained with black ink.
The weighty words can drag the action down
In Hollywood they blow the script apart.

I try explaining but they won't regard;
I fight and argue, still they listen not.
No other choice, I have to make them see
The magic of the worlds on bookstore shelves.

From Middle Earth to Shakespeare's stage, hop on
The train to Hogwarts. Take a Journey To
The Center of the Earth or back in time.
We storm the beaches, ride the waves, fly high.

A Keats to lead and Tennyson is Lord.
The Raven haunts my Edgar Allen Poe.
In poetry words are Moore than dwells the night
And through a Frost the golden sunlight rays.

A midnight Puck and still forever Tucks.
I dance with Darcy; sail the seven seas.
Around the table twelve of Arthur's men.
My friends await among the pages here.

The apples shot with arrows: Hunger Games.
A knife, a bowl, a faction. Should I choose?
I tremble; fearful pounds my heart and soul.
Tomorrow, Tara, dawns another day.

The Vampire feeds. The monster lives. A Time
To Kill A Mockingbird. The silent lambs.
The bumps of night as horrors show us fear.

deed."

"Yes ma'am," he said. "I wanted to take a small number of children to a local public park for a day of recreation and socialization."

She stared back with those blank sightless eyes, like a china doll, like a machine. "Yes of course. If I remember correctly, and I make no legal claim to without my notes-" (she paused and gave a quick grin as if she had made a joke. Marvin thought she had.) "-there was insufficient information supporting whether such an activity would have an overall net positive effect on a child's growing mind and body. As you must know Marvin, children are the future. Very important *indeed* that we do what is best for them."

"Yes ma'am," he said. "I believe you will find my current research to have been quite thorough. I think that there is a chance you may even be inclined to, after weighing all the information of course, recommend to expedite requests similar to this one in the future." Marvin glowed with pride. The Deputy Director of Programs and Fun gave a small cough and Marvin saw her eyes come into sharp focus. She looked dead into Marvin's eyes and gave a full toothy smile. Somehow, the air of condescension increased the more teeth she bared.

"Oh, Marvin. You must remember why we do all this. We are here for the children. They are so very *complicated* you know?"

Marvin sat back into the chair. He thought about his daughter in the backyard all those months ago. A pill bug crawled over her hand. She sat so still

and so quiet and looked upon all the magnificent delicacies of that creature in a state of perfect awe. He thought of her placing it on the pedal of a fresh dandelion, and watched as her face came closer and closer to the petals, so close that she could see the little balls of yellow pollen building up on its legs. He saw in her eyes, as she watched the bug crawl upon the flower, something poetic. He saw something so familiar, something so distinctly human, something that had once been in him and had long ago dried up. He saw a little cross on top of a hill, and someone pulling it down so that it could never be used again. He saw all the world as wonderful in those eyes. Everything new and beautiful and precious.

He thought of her climbing high in the sycamore, perching on a branch with the wind waving through her hair as she looked at the world in perfect curiosity. Her eyes told him that she was far away. He hoped she would stay there forever.

“Marvin?” The Deputy Director of Programs and Fun’s voice brought Marvin back to the present, and he looked at the terrible tower of efficiency sitting on the desk.

“Yes ma’am,” he said. “Complicated.”

Missing the Warning Signs

By Vanessa Garcia

I lost you the night I set you aside.
We parted worlds with no declared goodbyes.
Was it the unsought manners I didn’t have
Or the way I paid you no attention?

I wore you like an accessory, ignoring
The blaring signs that were warnings.
You didn’t speak much...not that I ever listened.
I can’t recall one word you spoke to me.

You didn’t smile often with me. Or at all.
But my laughter and bright smiles buried the
drawls.
Your silence and dismay should have worried me.
During those moments, I couldn’t care less.

The next morning, you disappeared from my side.
I searched the house; you were swept with the
tides.
No trace. No letter. We were islands away.
You had left me within a nights slumber.

I still can’t understand how I lost you so
Easily. Is that the way life goes?
A moment, you were all mine. But the next,
The next moment you were gone without a word.

She stood strong. Moving the lance forward it glowed
like a the eyes
of a god. She stood strong. Pressing inward she
fought for her soul
and spirit. She stood strong until it was done and she
freed her heart.

There were no more doors behind those eyes.
With her hair back, and exposed soul,
she felt her victory with every beat of her heart.



Charisma

By Grant Allard

I sing your praise, I sing your song,
"Oh Lord, Oh Lord, how long how long?"
Faces shining, glistening, listening
For answers for which these ears are itching.

"Come, my child, lay down your worries,"
A voice booms amid blinding light,
"Christ is love, father of glories!"
All heads nod affirmingly, what a sight!

"What's more, each beaten road leads to his door!
If life's not for more, what could it be for?"
His sweat drops on his sermon sheet,
Not bothering this exegete.

His scribbles jotted hurriedly
Were never read, which worries me.

Crowd Control

By Rizzo Delaney

"I cannot understand how a store of this
magnitude would fail to provide a working elevator. Or
at least the means to contact someone if one is stuck
inside!" Becky from Shoes complained.

"I told ya, they don't really put phones in elevators.
We pressed the damn button. They know we're in here.
This ain't no movie," Dave the stock boy said.

"Isn't any," she huffed. "What?"

"There is no such word as ain't, and you would not
combine it with no if it did exist. That would be a
double negative."

"Seriously? I'm trapped in hell with the grammar po-
lice." Dave rolled his eyes and continued nervously
strumming his fingers against the cords of his jeans.
Three hours in the semi-dark with a bunch of jerks who
were either panicking or grumbling. Man he needed a
smoke.

"Mommy, I'm hungry," one of the kids pulled at
Becky. She had a whole brood, all proper manners
and solemn eyes. Probably scared to death of a
mother like that, Dave thought.

"I already told you, Samuel, there is no food. We have
to wait for the firemen to come rescue us," Becky chided
impatiently.

"Fat chance," Store manager Steve piped up. Dave had
known him by sight for years, ever since he first start-
ed helping himself to the merchandise on the fourth
floor. Steve was a bit of a sleaze, good at looking the
other way during Dave's "shopping" trips. For a fee, of
course.

“They won’t call anybody for this.”

“Someone from maintenance will be along soon enough.”

MONOLITH

By Christopher Rigel

They all said I was crazy. Everybody. My family. All my friends, even the depressive ones. My coworkers. My therapist. Especially my therapist. The clerk who totally profiled me like I couldn’t possibly be the hunting type. The state-issued analyst. That fidgety social worker who kept looking at her watch like she had somewhere more important to be. That nice older couple from my yard sale who invited me to their church and said they’d pray for me and bought my couch anyway. I don’t guess I’d argue. In hindsight, yeah, maybe I wasn’t exactly all there to think killing myself for her would bring us closer together. But whatever.

She had this giant black bookcase in her apartment. A singing monument to herself. Vintage vinyl and oversized art books anchored the bottom, then her old psychology textbooks, knitting guides up from there, and her graphic novels, sketchbooks, journals. Every shelf packed tight. On top she’d organized a sort of shrine to her dead friends. Framed photos, kitschy trinkets, funeral programs, all manner of memorabilia no one understood but her. Mostly suicides. Maybe a motorcycle accident or drug overdose here and there. But mostly suicides.

I don’t think we ever had a single conversation that didn’t end in lamenting nostalgia for one of them. And then I’d lose her again. Everything triggered something. Somebody used to drink his coffee the same way as some guy in the smoking lounge at our favorite café. Or one of them used to love whatever 80s movie we were watching and they’d quote all the good lines to each other. Especially the romantic lines. Art shows were the worst. They were all, each and every last one of them artists. I’d lose her every time to something.

Deeper she dug into the soil of her mind. Sinking into a room with no doors. The only hint the world had of the beauty inside rested in her eyes.

That beauty manifests itself in her dreams. Like a world within her eyes she flew on the luminescent blues and greens to cross the ocean of her soul. Riding a horse of crystal water reflecting her spirit, she rode through doors of time and space. From the deserts of suffering burns, to her innermost caverns filled with the jagged stalagmites of a frozen heart, she blew a path below her with a visage of power smoldering behind that chestnut hair.

Driving ever closer toward the dark lair of a twisted past, her hair soaked in anticipation, flashes of fear ignited from her eyes. Her blood pressure rises. Tunnel vision ruins her sight as her heart thumps heavily against her chest. Her mouth dries as her soul shivers. She draws closer toward the center of her nightmares. Her grail singing out from the pulsing pit she knew rested behind the final doors.

With a lance of light and mirrored steel she struck at the bulging doors. In the wave of demons that poured out she stood strong and tied back her hair. They pressed against every fiber of her being. They threatened her.

The Walls She Built

By Jeff Schiller

Crinkling butterflies of plastic wings flutter in her heart
during marathon dreams of sprinting through un-
locked doors
slamming closed behind her and shaking her soul.
The cool breath of breeze brushes back her dark
brown hair
chilling the heat of lust boiling in the blue of her fam-
ished eyes.
A sliver of consciousness spies nearby careful not to
wake her.

The grail of these dreams hums a strawberry melody.
Heard only by her.
the wet silken notes thread gently through the air and
tug at her heart.
In this magical world, where she can unleash the
strength in her eyes
and tear down those protective walls she built with-
out doors,
she can finally attack the shadows crawling out like
tendrils of hair.
The vicious attack of a quicksilver Valkyrie on a quest
for her mercurial soul.

Her body and mind were abused, but the scars were
painted on her soul.
Abandoned then forgotten—Discovered only by those
who wanted to harm her.
She tried to conceal her beauty, hiding the sadness
and fear behind her hair.
The pain continued. The abuse never stopped. She
tried to numb her heart.

Nothing made any sense without her attention. We
spoke the same language. Imagine that, right? Feeling like
an alien abandoned on some desolate planet all through
childhood, adolescence, well into adulthood. But not an
alien at all. No, just a freak for no good reason besides
popular opinion in a cruel town where cruel kids never ful-
ly develop empathy. But then to find another, my god.
That's what it was like. It was like finding God.

Or it was at first. At least until the realization set in
that, yeah, God totally loves me unconditionally, all my
faults and flaws, and we can exist as one. But then I ask
for too much, pray too much, talk to her too much, and
she stops listening. And then she starts talking. Someone
else used to gently caress her cheek and tuck her hair be-
hind her ear as he made a move to kiss her just like I did.
And I'd lose her again.

I pawned what I could. Set up shop outside my
place and sold what I could to the weekend bargain hunt-
ers. Donated most of my clothes. Saved some valuables to
give to friends. One of them offered to pay me for my lap-
top, but I knew he didn't have the money for it. And I'd al-
ready made enough to afford the shotgun, which was way
more expensive than I'd anticipated. But whatever. Then I
quit my job, ditched my duplex and spent my last two
weeks on Earth with her. She wasn't working at the time,
so we'd stay up late making art or discussing social poli-
tics or listening to AM jazz broadcasts on the roof. We'd
wake up late and get coffee and smoke cigarettes in the
sunlight and brainstorm bigger projects to unite all the
lonely souls like we used to be. But then someone would
drive by in the car that used to belong to the would-be Ro-
meo to her would-have-been Juliette. And I'd lose her
again.

She has a new boyfriend. They seem to get along
okay. He makes her evening tea just the way she likes it.
But then he holds out his lighter for her cigarette in a
familiar way. And she talks about me.

Exhibit A: The Romeo Killer's Journal

By Stephanie Milam

Friday, October 13, 1961- *The look on Laura's face says everything I need to hear! White blonde curls taper her pale cheek—and the curvature of her lips—so somber. The most ghastly blue eyes reassure me I'm doing the right thing. I am myself with this beauty. Revealing my true self has always been burdensome—but with Laura, oh with Laura, it is so natural. So intimate.*

Tuesday, September 19, 1961- I met her today. The one I must make mine...Laura. She served me the blackest coffee I've ever tasted. So bitter. The way I like it. She had this exquisite bouffant hair. It was 1:37 p.m. when she touched my hand. Soft porcelain skin—like a mannequin at Macy's. She wants me too.

Monday, October 4, 1961-I've visited my love every day. She smiles when refilling my coffee mug. At 3:16 p.m. today she asked if I wanted a slice of pie. Cherry pie. She moistened her voluptuous red lips. She wanted something more—I love when she wants me. We mustn't rush this. I declined...much too sweet for my taste. But she was paradoxical. So light. So vibrant.

Friday, October 6, 1961-I sat in my diner booth for four hours today. Laura said nothing. I upset her in some way. I followed her home. East of town on Ranch Road she turned left into a neon lit trailer park. She pulled a key from under a mat. She went inside Trailer B. At 10:46 p.m. she retreated to the back of the trailer—her bedroom I think. I watched the way she undressed. So meticulous. Apron first. Then dress. She enjoyed our relationship. That was a

I'll Let the World Burn

By Nessa Locke

I'll let the world burn down around your grave.
May God put spark to earth, consume the lot,
Destroying every soul, mine left to save.

Your gentle smile and kiss are what I crave
But since you're frozen in this tiny plot,
I'll let the world burn down around your grave.

Let not the other mothers call me brave.
I'd trade them in a heartbeat. I'd be caught
Destroying every soul, mine left to save.

But fury turns my spirit to a slave.
To keep myself from feeling so distraught,
I'll let the world burn down around your grave.

The cosmic order seems to misbehave
Does death choose victims due to afterthought?
Destroying every soul, mine left to save?

So on your headstone, child, I will engrave
Your name so it will never be forgot.
I'll let the world burn down around your grave,
Destroying every soul, mine left to save.

Insignificant Dream

By Nessa Locke

I'm watching them. I'm fifty feet of ghost.
The rats are running 'round the little maze.
They're stocking up on things they want the most,
and adding to this frantic shopping craze.

Her thing is more important than his thing.
All birthdays will outrank all football games.
They push and shove, and I see everything.
It is on their behalf I am ashamed.

Now I'm a little ghost. I slip between.
The customers can't see me filling carts.
And I've no aspiration to be seen.
As long as I'm clocked in, I'll play my part.

These people never look into my eyes.
I'm just a ghost, they'll never recognize.

show for me—only for me. At 11:13 pm she shut off the lights. I drove away with the sweetest of memories of my love.

Saturday, October 7, 1961-Laura still is ignoring me. Some other waitress poured my coffee this morning. It was not the same. There was no smile. There was no touch. There was no...connection. I must get my Laura back—I must. I'm not sure how I will do it yet. I'm not sure if she will listen, but she *will* become mine again. My Laura. My viciously beautiful waitress who even wears grease with grace. So perfect.

Wednesday, October 11, 1961-I went to Laura's tonight. I entered Trailer B as quietly as I could. She heard the creaking of the door. When she stepped out of the bathroom she asked why I was at her house. Doesn't she recognize the distance between us? Doesn't she want to smile at me again? Pour my coffee? Touch me? I stepped closer, but she told me to stop. Stop? Why would I stop? I *love* her. She is mine. I took one more step. She reached for a knife to the left of her. No. I will not allow her to end our love. I will not allow her to make that mistake. I lunged forward. I cupped my hands around her throat until the last gasp of air escaped her throat. I swear, for a minute I saw her smile. I saw *my* Laura. I carried her limp body to my car. It was good to see her relax again. I drove home, and showed her my place. She has taken a liking to my bed, I must say.

Thursday, October 12, 1961-They mentioned my love in the newspaper. Said something about her missing? Foul play is suspected? Nonsense. My darling Laura is resting. Asleep in her lover's bed. I admired how well the blue and purple necklace I gave her complimented her pale skin. So lovely. I'm not sure I did the right thing expressing my true feelings to Laura. I love her so dearly. I never wish to see her

go. So perplexing. I've never been so open to anyone as I am with Laura. I saw her. I made her mine. I refused to let her go—that is true love. Natural love.



Temporary Immortality

By Brent Klein

The incantation took 4 weeks. When I'd uttered the last syllable, my body succumbed to the most unbearable pain. Spasms wrenched my muscles into contorted knots. My teeth gnawed into my cheeks until blood flowed freely down my throat only to be wretched again and again as my stomach filled with the coppery fluid. This went for days.

When the pain subsided I slept a deep, dreamless sleep. The clamoring of a dump brought me back from the abyss and after a gorging of grapefruit and mineral water, I placed an ad in the paper:

-- Temporary Immortality. Not a scam.

\$10,000. Serious Buyers Only. --

I received a particularly scathing call from some religious nut, then Jack called.

"I saw your ad." Not even a hello.

"Interested?" I asked.

"Does it work?"



Campus Sunset

By Rachel Hodges

That I protect you so devoutly?
I was so sad,
At the start of these rhymes,
But now I remember,
All those beautiful times.
You are my darling,
And I'll keep you forever.
laughs you thought you could run?!
This love will never sever!
You are mine!
Try to run if you must!
I'll break both your legs,
Until you again deserve trust...
Sleep well my darling,
I'll be by you in sleep.
Don't bother to resist,
Your already in too deep.



“I can show you.”

“Bring what you need to 13th and Rusk. Ask for Jack.” A click, then the dial tone hummed his good-bye.

On my way downtown, I stopped by the pet store. A white kitten would do just the trick.

I arrived and entered the innocuous, unlabeled high rise, and was directed to the 12th floor by the secretary. The elevator doors opened and there was Jack and his partner.

“Thank you for coming,” said Jack

“You got the money?”

“You got the proof?” said his partner.

I pulled the kitten out of my satchel.

“To the roof.” I said.

They smiled nervous grins and stepped in. Twenty stories later we walked through an AC maintenance hut and out to the roof.

“Ok far enough,” said Jack, “show us what you’ve got.”

I removed my satchel and retrieved the slick leather rollup, loosened the knot and unraveled it on the tarmac. Inside was a small phial filled with milky white fluid. It glowed dimly from the cool light of the moon.

I looked up at the two men. Their eyes were filled with lust, mouths glistened, interests piqued.

“Gentlemen, what I show you now will be, per-

haps, shocking.”

I removed the kitten once again, uncorked the elixir, and carefully dabbed a few drops into its mouth. It spat and mewed, struggled for freedom, then relaxed, eyes dilated. I set it on the tarmac and looked back at the men.

“The elixir suspends death temporarily. Under its effects, you cannot die for a short time, no matter the trauma.”

I reached into the satchel and removed the butcher’s knife, raised it sharply above the kitten, and plunged down. There was a wet chucking sound, then a metallic chink as the blade pierced the tarmac. The kitten was skewered in place.

“Come and see,” I said and rose out of the way.

They hurried over and crouched, mouths opened, the look of lust, it seemed, more fierce. The kitten looked them over, eyes dilated, and mewed sweetly.

“My god Jack,” said his partner, “there’s no blood.”

“Pull it out. See that it is not a trick.” I said.

Jack wrapped his fingers around the hilt and in one quick motion removed the knife. The kitten stuck to the blade, then slid off landing softly on its feet, waddled off and curled up for a nap.

“Sold!” yelled Jack. He removed an envelope from his jacket pocket and flung it in my direction. He picked up the elixir from the leather roll up,

Untitled

By Cierra Lewis

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
You said that you loved me,
But that can't possibly be true.
You see, my darling,
I follow where ever you go.
Don't worry, my dearest,
I just like to know.
But I watched you smile
At the girl you work with.
She looked like a good girl,
But I know those are just a myth.
So I cut her up in tiny pieces,
And I fed her to friends down the street.
Oh my lovely, did you know,
I'm just so terribly sweet.
Then there are our neighbors,
Who you wave to morning and night.
Well, I can't say what happened to them,
But I hope they enjoy their flight.
Oh so many people
try to steal you from me.
Aren't you glad, my sunshine,



Urban Country Beauty

By Rachel Hodges

drained half and handed it to his partner. Jack reeled in disgust.

“God that’s awful,” he said. “Ok, stab me.”

“With pleasure,” said his partner and plunged the knife deep into his chest.

“Nothing!” Jack cried, “I feel nothing!” He pulled the knife from his sternum and jabbed it into his partner’s gut, twisting violently.

“You can’t feel that?” Jack asked.

“No nothing. My God!”

They continued to jab and laugh. I looked over at the kitten, its once white fur now stained and matted, a pool of blood moving ever outward in a shimmering pool. Jack saw it too.

“Wait a minute,” the joy gone from his voice.

“Temporarily,” I said.

The Hag

By Chris Tackett

. . . Chill

Deep in the middle of a cold, cold night, little Adrian could not go to sleep. No matter what he tried, be it huddling his tiny limbs together, wrapping himself in the blanket like a mummy, or curling up in a fetal position, he could not get warm. The coldness had come suddenly, and kept him from sleeping ever since it came. Tiredly, he turned to the corner of his room, and in the shadows, he saw her.

Staring at him from across the room was a hideous old hag, with skin like swamp water, stringy mud-colored hair raggedly covering big soulless eyes, a jutting nose, and chin to match. From underneath the rags she wore, her long, scraggly, wart-covered hand pointed a long-nailed finger at him. She remained still and continued to stare at the shivering boy.

She vanished in a cloud of black mist.

Adrian blinked.

She was right at the side of his bed. "It's cold, Adrian," she wheezed. Then, she tossed a thick blanket over him. "Thought you'd need this."

Snuggling up in the new blanket, Adrian smiled as he drifted off into sleep. "Thanks, Grandma..." he mumbled, before falling asleep.

The hag smiled. Then she disappeared.

After dinner the kids will retreat to their rooms to play before bed. Nana will retire. If she is feeling up to it, Bonnie will sit on the couch and watch TV with Tom for an hour or two. But usually, she's so tired after cleaning the kitchen that she just heads off to bed, leaving Tom and me. He will probably doze off around 11 or so and be there until Bonnie comes to retrieve him and grimace disapprovingly at whatever he is watching at such a late hour. Tom may be middle-aged, but that old dog has still got a little bounce in his step, if you know what I am saying.

The house will be quiet except the slow rhythm of the ticking grandfather clock. The day is over but soon a new day will start. And we will all still be here. My family and me.



trigued. I can tell. You don't sit face to face with someone day after day, week after week, without noticing their little facial ticks and mannerisms.

12:30 PM. "You need to take care a'yo baby. You his daddy. You need to man up and start ackin like it. Your honor, I called, I texted, I sent him a message on the Facebook. And he wouldn't respond. So I know he was with his otha baby momma."

3:30 PM.

"H"

"There's one 'H'"

"I'd like to buy a vowel. 'O'."

"There's three 'O's"

"I'd like to solve. Country Roads Take Me Home."

"That's right!"

5:30 PM. The whole family is back together again. Although I like my time with Nana. It's this time of the day that I really enjoy. Bonnie is in the other room making dinner. Tom sits in his recliner and channel surfs through evening sitcoms. The kids sit on the floor in front of me. Lucy plays with her plastic ponies while Joey does his homework. Nana sits on the couch and watches whatever Tom's fingers come to a stop on. Soon, the family will leave for a moment and return with big plates full of food that I am sure is very delicious. (On the weekend, Bonnie watches a lot of cooking shows. So she is either an excellent cook, or a terrible one. I guess that could go either way.)

Resilient Devotion

By Stephanie Milam

The thunder clapped a little louder this morning. There was something about the way the gray sky opened up and poured its confessions onto my doormat—it made me think of the last time I saw you. Snapshots of you leaving are scratchy and appear more like a vintage movie reel than memory. Your tall, shadowy figure departed from the two-story colonial stained with our residual memories. Lightening illuminated the red and blue lights of the county sheriff's car as he drove you away, and Daddy's weathered hands restrained my bruised body.

"Audrey Lane, come down here," I heard Momma holler. "You needa eat something—I made ya mashed potatoes."

When you left, the therapist said I was a victim of your blow and indignation, but the only thing I suffered from was the loss of your affection. She said what I needed was someone around to protect me from the nightmarish reality these walls reminded me of. I fought it, but Momma insisted on moving in. I figured she'd need some company since Daddy passed away not too long after you left. I walked downstairs to find Momma in the kitchen standing over my old gas stove.

"You didn't have to cook," I muttered. "I'm not gonna eat—I can't until Johnny comes back."

Momma rolled her eyes in my direction. The wrinkles in the corners of her mouth grimaced as she mashed the potatoes by hand. Everyone has a fire burning in their souls, even if it only shows when they pound a vegetable in the kitchen or when their

daughter insists on waiting for a love that'll never return. I tried to tell the therapist that we are all guilty of a little displeasure and resentment. She scoffed and made a face much like Momma's and reminded me I was a victim.

"You can't just mope around this house waitin' for a no good wretched man to come walkin' through that door," Momma barked. "You *will* eat these potatoes and you'll get yourself cleaned up too."

Momma had taken a large step towards me and her dominance echoed throughout the house. Flashes of your shadow emerging from the hallway that night played in my head. I felt the fury of your fingertips grasping my shoulders as you shook my body. "Who is he?" You yelled, forcing the stench of whiskey up my nose. But I never did love anybody but you. I always told you I meant my vows. Forever and ever, Amen—remember that old Randy Travis song they played at our wedding reception? We danced, and I told you that if you were my Johnny, I'd be your June—I forgot to ask you to avoid all the substance abuse, but because you were mine, I walked the line. I stayed up all hours of the night waiting on you. When your heaving body made a mess on my bathroom floor, I got on my hands and knees and scrubbed until the tile looked new.

Momma snapped me out of my daydream of our memories when she slammed the screen door. I thought about you so deeply, I didn't even see her leaving. I hurried to the door, only stopping to admire the wooden frame where we carved our initials in a heart. I ran my fingers over the splintering "J+A", and noticed how rough this symbol of love felt on my smooth skin. I looked out the door and noticed Momma sitting on the porch swing.

"I'm sorry, Momma," I said. "I'll eat the pota-

"It's my turn!" Lucy says in protest.

"Nuh-uh! You had your turn yesterday. We watched your show yesterday. I wanna watch cartoons this morning," Joey rebuts.

See? This is the game I spoke about earlier. This happens pretty much every morning. They try to get dressed and watch simultaneously. So while one runs into the other room to don some article of clothing, the one left quickly changes the channel. And vice versa. It's a gambit.

"But if I don't watch it today, I won't know what happens," Lucy argues. Lucy, I think you hit the nail right on the head. If indeed you don't watch, the result is exactly that you won't know what has happened. Good job, little one.

"Alright, you two. That's enough. Turn the TV off. I have to run by the cleaners before I drop you two off so we need to leave earlier than usual. Go get your shoes on and get a coat. It supposed to be cold all day today." Bonnie says, ushering them out of the room.

I hear a couple loud thuds and then the house is quiet again. The clock ticks loudly and the cat comes in for a snooze and then leaves again.

10:00 AM. Nana is up. And she has the news channel blaring. I like Nana. Her daily routine never falters and I spend most of the day with her so we have come to know each other pretty well. News in the mornings. Courtroom shows at lunch, and game shows in the afternoon. And all at deafening volumes.

"This story is just developing, a local man finds..." I hear. Nana's face is stoic. But she is in-

this morning, the big story is BranCo Industries which climbed a whopping 57 points," I hear.

Tom plops down in the recliner and puts his feet up.

"Honey, do we have any frozen waffles left?" he says.

"No, the kids ate the last one yesterday," Bonnie replies from the other room.

"Well, then what am I gonna eat for breakfast?" Tom shouted back.

"I dunno. There's cereal. Or you can grab something on the way to the office. I'm giving the kids money to get something at school," she replied.

Tom groans in bitter disapproval, turns off the financial news, and walks out to the other room.

7:03 AM. Cartoons! Joey and little Lucy have got to get their cartoon fix on each morning. Not to mention the little game of Dueling Remotes they play before school. Lucy, who is much younger than her brother, explains to her brother that she prefers the show *Princess Ponies*. As it was explained to him, a group of vibrantly colored horses run around and solve problems that only ponies who are also princesses would have. The Case of the Missing Tiara or something to that effect. Joey, the big brother, argues back that he wants to watch *Underwater Underwear*. It's a tongue-in-cheek comedy where sea creatures crack jokes that would make adults shift in their seats but goes right over the heads of small children. I'm often surprised but some of the jokes I hear and am amazed at what they are getting away with. Well done, show creators.

toes, just come back inside please."

"Is that whatcha think this is 'bout?" Momma's eyes grew watery, and her strong lips quivered when she spoke. "You coulda died, Audrey—that man coulda killed my baby."

Since you left, she's only referred to you as "that man." I remember when we'd have family dinners, and Daddy called you "son," and Momma made you an extra pan of cherry cobbler to take home because it was your favorite. Back then, you weren't "that man", you were my family, Daddy's family, and Momma's. Now, it seems like you are the stock photo in a store bought frame; you mean something to someone, but most are ready to toss you in Tuesday's garbage.

"I'm fine, really," I reassured Momma. "It was just the alcohol. My Johnny would never hurt me—we love each other." I smiled with the satisfaction of knowing the truth. Love isn't violent or aggressive—especially our love, Johnny.

"You ain't even close to fine baby," She said. "You hold on to all these mem'ries of a man who don't exist anymore. The judge locked him up—he ain't comin' back."

But I knew you still existed. I knew my lover's soul was somewhere hidden in that addict's body. At the court hearing, the prosecutor called it "domestic battery" and "felony strangulation"—I tried to tell them you were a good man. I told them to send you to one of those rehab places to get you some help; instead the judge gave you ten years in the roughest prison in all of Georgia. I cried, oh I cried. First you left, and now you wouldn't be back in our bed for a decade.

"I know you're thinkin' 'bout him," Momma

whispered. "I know ya love him, but people don't change; there ain't no way to heal the kinda wounds he has."

I felt an overwhelming stinging in my eyes as I tried to fight back the tears. Maybe Momma's right. I mean that night wasn't the first time, it was just the first time Daddy dropped by for a visit while you felt the fire. Daddy said he heard the shattering of a whiskey bottle against the wall so he let himself in. When he heard my screams, he called for help, and with his bare hands he cupped your throat and held you against the wall until the sheriff showed up.

I stood up and headed back towards the screen door.

"Where you goin'" Momma asked. "You mad at me?"

I smiled, softly. "No, I think I'm gonna draw a bath." I saw her face relax as I spoke. "Maybe later, you could make some of that cobbler you're famous for?"

"What kind?" Momma asked me.

"Cherry—it was always Johnny's favorite."

Regular Programming

By S. Shane Shelton

5:00 AM. Bonnie is up. She is executing her morning workout routine.

"Alright ladies, let's work those glutes! 1 and 2 and 3 and 4. Come on. Don't stop. If it's not ahurtin', you're not aworkin'," I hear.

"Geez," Bonnie says. "Would you look at the set on her? Freakish. Her plastic surgeon deserves a prize for overachievement."

"Now, let's switch to the other side. 5 and 6 and 7 and 8. Come on, you can do it."

Bonnie grunts and her breath quickens. Sweat just begins to gather on her forehead.

She's always the first one up and this morning was no exception. She usually gets up before the children, eats her oat bran, does her morning workout, and then jumps in the shower. I think she likes beating everyone to the shower because the water is the hottest before the whole family starts to draw from the collective. This is only a theory. My hypothesis, if you will. In truth, the shower timing might just be coincidence. I'll continue to speculate.

6:23 AM. Here comes a very sleeping looking Tom. He is nursing that coffee like it's the first drink he's had in 100 years. He was a little bit later than unusual. He must be hitting the snooze button again. For awhile, he beat that habit.

He turns on the financial channel.

"The DOW is up today, as is the Nasdaq. But