



THE Legacy

WEIRD STORIES & DARK TALES

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PRESENTS

WEIRD STORIES
AND
DARK TALES

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Menagerie

by Jaime Pratt

It's cold here. Annoyingly cold. Not the sort of cold that numbs the limbs, or sinks to the bone, but the sort that chills the tip of the nose and the toes, settles on the skin and lingers with a frustrating persistence. I can't even shiver to warm myself up, because of the drugs. All I can do is stare up at the flickering fluorescent light and listen to the sounds he makes as he moves around the room.

Sometimes he speaks, though never to me. It's always a low mumble, talking to himself in the way that people do. That frightens me, because he isn't a person, not really. He's a shadow wearing a human suit, walking and talking in a world where others can't see the howling wasteland behind his green eyes. I didn't see it, either, which is why I'm lying here on this table with a needle in my arm. Oh God, please help me.

He shuffles his feet as he wanders around, ignoring me in favor of his collection. If I strain to roll my eyes, I can just make out one table, which is covered with delicate figurines of glass. He has a colorful zoo that he is constantly rearranging, as if their precise location on the table in relation to one another has a meaning, or would if he could just solve the puzzle. I've spent hours imagining the orgasmic satisfaction of smashing every single one to powder while he lies helpless on this table, watching. Perhaps I'd force the candy-colored remnants down his throat once I was done, or sprinkle some in his eyes and watch them bleed as he fought to blink it away. Perhaps I'd do both.

He's ignoring me. I wish he would just finish what he'd started, instead of leaving me here to think about what is to come. But, then, anticipation is always a bitch, right? Whatever he has in the I.V. bag is keeping me paralyzed, all but my restless eyes that refuse to close. My chest still rises and falls, and my heart beats steadily behind my ribcage. My life continues on, but he takes no note of me. Always with the fucking figurines. Has he forgotten I'm even here? What if he never remembers, and

I die of starvation, then rot right here on this table with those glass animals staring at me? What is it like to die that way, with your body wasting away as it devours its self in an effort to survive? Will I become hollow, like him?

I try holding my breath, willing myself to pass out or, please God, die. I'm fighting my own body, which demands the air that he breathes. The air that surrounds those hateful figures his fingers twitch and shift without ceasing. I deny it. A fire burns in my chest, but I refuse to give in and draw even one more lungful of the contaminated air. Die! Just give up and give out, damn you. Let this end finally, and give me peace. Still he ignores me, even though he must notice the new level of silence in the room. He knows better than I. I can no longer resist the urge to gasp, panting for breath. I wish that I could weep, but no tears rise to blur my vision and my voice is trapped by the drugs. My own body works with him to keep me here, watching and waiting.

What if this is hell? I've never believed in it before, but it's funny how quickly the skeptic learns to embrace faith when their life is on the line. Could he be the devil? I already feel as if this has been going on for an eternity, but how much longer will I be expected to stay like this? He's at the table again, and I watch him turn a violet monkey a quarter inch to the right. He should have turned it left, instead.

Second Runner-Up

Chomp, Slurp, Mash, Gnash

By Graham Sample

Chomp, slurp, mash, gnash
Goes the Marzaana like creature
Too horrible is she to describe
Not even in jib, glib, or pantomime
She wanders this World (and others) at the Magic 3 am

You say you have never seen nor or heard of this creature
Count yourself lucky
Like the dreaded Gorgons of old
One look freezes both heart and flesh with an icy stare
It does not take ice long to break

I have heard the scream,
for it is just a scream at most that one can release before....
I have heard the screams of many souls without their bodies or
homes
She drags them to her abode
Where she eats them with relish

How have I heard the screams? You ask
That is simple, I am the prisoner of this dreaded Valkyrie
4 score and 20 years ago did this monster of old
,or new, for she may be outside of that realm
steal me away from the world I once knew

There are worse fates,
of that I am sure,
I hear them night after night.
This fate is not in the least the worst
not the worst... it's not the worst

The Euclidean shapes that surround me would not be displeasing
if they weren't so perfectly... perfect
I have spent hours studying, recording, tapping, climbing them

They are almost too perfect to be from my world
Even the structures here haunt me
I am never left to pretend that I am anywhere but here

This waking horror
*pinch
It still does not work
Soon I shall wake, I must
I have done this before

It is all in my mind for I have never seen her shape
Just a shadow of an image that could be nothing other than
her...
It's the worst nightmares that never solidify
For in solidifying they would allow escape
But there is no escape *pinch

A vortex of miseries
I sleep to escape but that does not work
The haunting perfection of the Lovecraftian structures
The haunting ethereality of her.
The dreaded her

Would she be Grendel
And I Beowulf
That I could Tear her limb from limb
And end this Nordic nightmare
Be she Grendel, I am no Beowulf.

You are Wilkes and I am Sheldon
If only you were Baites
Then the credits would roll
This would all be over
And it would leave, only leave With (not in) a nightmare

So in a sleeping wakefulness
I shall remain

til death to us part
My death can not come swift enough
like fetters off a slave

One move at a time
is all I'm allowed, Unless I castle
This horribly perfect, dim castle
Shall I go queen side or king side
It makes no difference, you can't castle through check

Up, down, left, right, sideways, thatways
is how she moves
Never ending, on this infinite board of time
Going where she pleases
Doing as she please
Queen to e5#

So now it is you, who now are as I am
Connected by her, but beating her time
When I was, I do not know nor when you are
But, here is our Nothing and here is our vorpal blade
A Pyrrhic victory at best *pinch

She is out of time
or she pays it no mind
So here we are, two souls connected by time
connected by her
*pinch

So if you find this, I want you to know
You are not the first, nor was I the last
Thursday buried Friday
All the while, seven ate nine
This dance goes on
and so shall you... a Pyrrhic victory

One move at a time is all I'm allowed

I even went first

Pawn e4

But I never again shall castle in this castle

*pinch

- I stand afright as I read this etching

For I stand in no castle, I stand in a grave

With no stake nor Narsil to beat this monster away

I can hear the scream of which he spoke

*pinch

Damn

Ghost

By Michael Dane Wynne

I watch myself open my eyes. It doesn't do much good, judging from the look on my face. I remember seeing the blurred edges and liquid shapes that never added into a figure. I had felt like death. I remember wanting to lay down, to find some relief, but I am already on my back, not laid so much as tied down.

Have you ever had an out-of-body experience?

I don't struggle against the bonds—I don't have the will—but the thick, coarse, frayed rope takes its toll. My wrists show blood and chafing. My ankles probably do too, if so, not enough to bleed through the jeans. These wounds pale next to the gashes and whiplashes across my bare chest; I don't remember what I did to deserve them. I had to deserve them, right? Brutal things don't just happen, do they?

I hear myself start to moan. Even now, I find the noise pitiful, embarrassing. A lion's roar should have jumped from my chest to let him know who he had captive. Instead, something like an audible pout issues from the top of my throat, barely escaping a gate of broken teeth and swollen gums. I guess he knows exactly who he has. It's painful to see who we really are, even from beyond the grave.

A mirror may be the worst thing man ever made for himself.

The man, the one who brought me here, he's yelling. I can see now he's not in the same room. I couldn't tell at the time. He tells me to shut up, but I keep gasping.

I can't smell anything, thankfully. The wretch and vile stench of the room had burned my mouth like acid in open wounds. Now it is just a memory. Now everything is a memory.

Have you ever been a ghost?

The voice from the other room is telling me to shut up again. He sounds angry, more than angry. He sounds violent. He sounds disturbed. If I had listened, maybe I could have lasted longer. I could have survived and been saved.

I keep gasping. I keep moaning. We're all waiting for something.

I watch my eyes roll back and fall shut.

His open palm jerks across my face once, twice, several more times before I see myself rouse from the blackout. A shiny bright red pools around my head from the reopened cuts in my cheeks.

The man is short, shorter than he looked from my vantage on the bed. Anyone is tall with an axe in hand. He is quiet, too. I'd never met him before.

I wondered then, I wonder now: what did I do to deserve this?

As he grabbed the axe from the top, close to the blade, I stared into his manic smile. As he reared back and held the thick wooden handle high above his head, I stared into that smile. And as he put all of his muscle and weight into a blow that broke my shin in two places, I grimaced, shut my mouth, and stared.

I will always remember that dirty grin.

I don't remember it hurting; I didn't feel anything. The body can handle more than the brain, I think, but now the man looks indignant. He wants to see my pain. He swings the handle of the axe again and breaks another limb. I'm somewhere between the conscious and the deep, awake but not aware, knowing but not feeling, and this takes the smile clean off his face.

He screams and strikes harder. Again.

He stops.

He walks to a corner and takes the axe right-side up. When he turns back, he smiles again, smiles in the way that guilty pleasures provoke, and walks to the bedside. The blade raises in the air parallel to my shoulders, then begins to drop, and for the first time I—not the body on the bed, but the soul in the air—close my eyes.

Have you ever watched yourself die?

Schhk

By J. Adam Gibbs

Schhk. Schhk. Schhk. *Mesmerizing. Almost Zen.*

Schhk. Schhk. Schhk.

♪Because you know just what to say, and you know just what to do-oo.♪

If it weren't for the cheesy 80s music, maybe I could at least run through that tricky aria in the third movement in my head. Always screw that up.

Schhk. Schhk. Schhk. *“Did you hear? Kamiko passed her bar and found a job at Diaz, Rosenberg, and Associates. Six figures! Mrs. Takahashi must be so proud.”*

Schhk. Schhk. Schhk. *“Hey, Jerry, can I take my break after I finish chopping lettuce?”*

Bet Kamiko Takahashi doesn't have to beg permission from arrogant misogynists and racists wearing paper hats and nametags just to go pee.

“Already told Billy Ray he could go once Tina gets back from her smoke break, Sugar.”

Schhk. Schhk. Schhk. *Two more hours to closing. Must master that Stravinsky Concerto before I go to bed. How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Schhk. Schhk. Schhk.*

♪Tell me how to win your heart for I haven't got a clue-oo ♪

Three more months. A Violin Performance MEA doesn't mean much, but at least it's a foot in the door.

“And we need double the Caesars but just half the Houses this time.”

“Sure.”

Come on, Jerry, we both know these are gonna sit in the freezer case a few days and rot. All bacon cheeseburgers and banana milkshakes. Only reason salad's on the menu's so they can pretend they don't owe all of their profits to clogging arteries and causing diabetes. Schhk. Schhk. Schhk. Making me prep extra Caesars. Knows it takes longer. More time to meander by and steal a peek down my blouse as I bend over the prep table de-veining the Romaine. Peru.

“Oh, and did you hear that after Susan Sato finished her engineering degree BP hired her? Ninety thousand starting salary, guess the spill didn't hurt them too much □ but then her mother never got to hear her play Paganini in an eighth grade talent show so maybe it all evens out. I swear you'll be the death of me.”

Schhk. Schhk. Schhhheeeaaaahhh!

“shshshshsh...Uh, Jerry, uhhhhffwwwhhh...I think...I better take that break now.”

“Awww sheeit, Jerry, you gotta call an amb'lance, Ching-Chong jus' done chopped her fuggin' faynger off!”

##

♪Oh, what a feeling when we're dancing on the...♪

Come on! Is blaring this crap going to make an emergency room any more tolerable?

“We were able to reattach the index finger, but having caught it just below the knuckle, you suffered some irreparable nerve

damage.”

“You mean?”

“After rehab you should regain full function of the proximal interphalangeal joint, but the distal won’t ever be the same.”

“In English?”

“You’ll be slicing lettuce in no time, but I don’t see the Metropolitan Philharmonic in your future.”

♪ dancing on the ceiling ♪

##

Life ruined, and she thinks this merits a five course celebratory feast.

“Give it some time, hon, things always work out for the best.”

“But”

“You know you always had such potential. Maybe now you’ll stop wasting it. ”

“You never”

“It took blowing out his knee to get your brother to give up on football and go to Med School. I always thought you’d wind up with an MBA.”

...

“Maybe some dinner music would cheer us up. See what’s on the radio.”

Yeah. Pop music. That's exactly what I need. Never going to be able to play anything beautiful ever again, let's listen to cliché lyrics sung over the same three chords.

♪ There's only you in my life, the only thing that's bright
...♪

“Oh, I love this one, honey, turn it up.”

Knife on the counter, back turned to me. Schhk!

“grrrrgggllllhhh.”

“Mommy? Mommy? Oh God! Mommy?”

♪ And I'll give it all to you, my love, my love ♪

What have I? How could I? How can I?

♪ my endless ♪

cccshshsh

♪[David Oistrakh's recording of Sibelius Violin Concerto]♪

Bye

Schhk. Schhk.

Schhk.

A Not Too Weird Story, Really: Or, Commitmentphobia From The Eyes of A Not So Young Dude Who Is Really Afraid of Commitment and Doesn't Want to, like, commit to ANYTHING

By Ryan "Flat Top" Archer

It's her breath, really – breathing on my neck post coitis; she's giggling in my ear and trying to give me the reach around and I'm not going to have it. It's too much. I know, first of all, that her warm breath being breathed on my neck is fostering some mean neck germs and that neck germs are no joke, viz., as of right now there are 100 million little dudes just breeding and colonizing under my lobe. I don't like thinking that way; not when she loves me so.

And she really does, love me.

Now let us deconstruct that word, love. And let us think about me and her now, spooning, her mouth whispering and moistening my ears. She grips me tight. Around the waist. And while she is laughing I have my eyes pulled shut. Trying to block it out. Trying to block her out. My sight and my soul the same with their nose's to the ceiling. Pretension. And the germs. THE GERMS. Multiplying. Roman. Would someone who loves you do that: giggle an army onto your lobe? My God.

And I know that the germs are getting together and plotting their raid on my immune system. That there is a general of the germs is a fact. He is training his germs so that they can better attack my lungs. They are lined up, high stepping, mindless, from her mouth to my lobe, down my cheek and into my mouth. Will have to call in sick, I'm sure.

And it is great when we are together. My favorite part of us is when I get to pick her up in my car. I pull up to the door and honk (she hates that) and then I skip out really fast so that she doesn't think that I am actually out there honking like some misogynistic Camero car honker – and the best part is when she opens the door and we first look at each other and smile: her

smile always wide, lips parted just so. And that moment when we go back to the car, hand in hand, is perfect.

It is after when I really fall apart.

At dinner she orders and is polite and makes all the right jokes, is just loose enough. She doesn't want to come inside, but, maybe, she can for just a second, maybe, if I am going to be a gentleman. And then after a ride in my whip and supper and just me acting like a gentleman in every since, she breaths a germ army onto my lobe post coitis. And everything past is now past as they grow and spread to my, no doubt, future sickness. And she is giggling. And trying to give me the reach around.

And what about neck hickeys? "Whoops, haha, I gave you a hickey."

Whoopsnothingthatwasonpurpose.

And so the germs are the real problem here. Marching down my neck. Germ Nazis. Don't even do what they're told cause they just have a mind of their own, the germs do. And she is naked and laughing and playing with my pubic hair. "I like you a lot," moistly whispered in my ear. I am small spoon. Curling up.

But the general germ is now riding a smoky steed: it (the steed) shoots daggers of steam from its wet nose. No doubt the general has seen *Braveheart*. He holds up a spear and rides up and down the line. General germ talks about rights and the taking of them. He talks about life and the taking of it. His horse bucks and it doesn't seem to phase him or his speech. The other germs raise their weapons with dominant hands or clank against their shields with blunt weapons. It is war, general germ says. And who, out of all you germs, who is coming with me? Yells and the sound of weapons. Hooraaaw!

So but then after coitis she breaths on my neck and says that she loves me.

Deranged: A Love Story

By Brett Strobel

My heart was pounding. I had been planning this day for months, but I still couldn't shake my nerves. As I walked in the church, one of the ushers asked, "Are you here for the bride or the groom?"

"The bride," I replied. I chose a seat on the edge about halfway down the aisle. No one recognized me. I had shaved my beard, cut my hair, and dyed it blonde. Someone may have come up and asked who I am, but I had planned for that. I had timed everything out perfectly, and the procession started just a few minutes after I took my seat. Once the doors opened, and the bride came out, dressed in white, a symbol of her feigned purity, my soul began to rage at the sight of her, but I had to keep calm; I could not give away my identity. She didn't even glance in my direction; her mind on what she thought would be the happiest day of her life.

As the ceremony continued, I began to think about my reasoning so that when the opportunity arose, I would not hesitate. I thought about the moment I met her. She seemed so beautiful, so innocent at the time. Then she was mine; I was overjoyed! Her love made me feel like my life actually mattered. She had told me about the last one: how terribly he treated her, never leaving her alone, continuously begging for her to come back. It was his entire fault; it had to be. No one as sweet as her could have caused such turmoil.

Then came the day that my fairy tale life was destroyed. She lied about why she was leaving me, and even falsely used the name of God to make me believe her. So I waited until God would allow us to be together again. However, I began to notice something odd about the way she would act around me. When I finally asked her why, she grew angry, as I was beginning to discover her lie. She sent a "friend" to try to get me to leave her alone. Eventually, I decided that she just had a brief moment of insanity, and let her cool off. Later, she wrote me a note, apologizing and saying that she could never forget about me,

and that she couldn't be with anyone now because she was not ready for marriage. Once again, I foolishly believed her.

I later found out she was engaged. Everything made sense now! Now I was the ex in turmoil, and he was the "hero" protecting her from me. She had gotten away with it before, but never again. It would be too simple to punish her directly; I wanted to destroy her, and my opportunity was here!

When the pastor asked if anyone had any reason that the two should not be wed, I stood up and said, "I do." Everyone looked on in suspense, wondering why I objected, but I paid them no attention. My focus was on the couple in front of me. "My reason is simple," I said walking down the aisle. I pulled out the hammer I had hidden in my pocket, charged the groom, and bashed his head repeatedly, deforming his face and sending blood everywhere. When the mangled corpse fell to the ground, I turned to the bride, her white dress stained with crimson blood. She was on her knees, crying in her hands. I pulled the gun I had hidden in my other pocket, loaded a single bullet, and set it down next to her. No one stopped me as I left; I guess they were too shocked to move. Hearing the gunshot and screams behind me, I knew my job was done.

Will they catch me? Most likely. After all, I can't run forever. Will I burn? I don't know, but if I do, at least I can take solace in knowing her damnation will last longer than mine.

The Funeral Home

By Jasie Sargent

My name is Daniel Hallbrook. I work at my family's business in town; which happens to be a funeral home.

My father is a mortician and my mother is a beautician for the dead. She says there is joy in making the deceased look as if they could "sit right up and talk to you." I shudder to think of this possibility.

Today is Halloween. Our small town gets right into the Halloween spirit by dressing up. Everyone thinks it's hilarious when my mother dresses as the grim reaper and walks the sidewalk in front of our funeral home saying, "Come to meet your doom!"

As I walk to work from school I pass a clever Charlie Chaplin costume, and to my horror Mrs. Bailey (an elderly woman who is schizophrenic) was dressed as a Playboy Bunny. People were gawking at her but she smiled warmly as if it were just a normal day.

As I arrive to the right building I opened the door and immediately went to the greeting desk. Just as I sit down mom walks in with her Grim Reaper get up. She spots me immediately. "I am the Grim Reaper; you have met your doom!" She takes the mask off and lays it behind the desk.

"Daniel I have a chore for you." She says cheerily. I grumble loudly to show my distaste.

"I need you to prepare the Montgomery girl for viewing before you close. Ok?" she asks.

"Fine." I say.

The night comes too quick and before I know it, my parents leave. I pick up mother's cosmetic bag and walk to the Montgomery girl's viewing room. I lift the lid of the casket, and see a young girl; possibly my age. I open the bag, and begin to take out numerous cosmetics. I grab a brush and begin to dust the dead girl with powder. I take some rouge from the bag and prepare to brush her cheeks with it when her eyes pop open and look right at me.

I stumble backwards. I am too shocked to utter a sound. Her eyes are black as night. She moves out of her casket and suddenly takes an awkward stance. Her black eyes move around nervously and she approaches me. I turn to run, but she grabs me with her hands. She bores into me with her stare. I quiver under her gaze and hear myself whimper. She throws me aside, and stalks away in the direction of Dad's autopsy room.

Careful to keep quiet I watch her from a distance. On a table beside a body is a large container filled with blood. I see her go to it and smell around it. She eyes the corpse beside her and smiles wickedly. I feel sickened as I watch her pull off every single one of the corpse's fingers and toes. Then, to my horror, she dips a big toe into the container of blood and eats it in one bite. She continues until every finger and toe is devoured. I decide to leave before she has time to notice me. Again I turn to leave and feel her cold hand grasp me once again. I scream and kick and fight her but to no avail. She drags me to a table. She comes beside and picks up a scalpel. I'm crying by now and begging her to let me go. She shows me a smile full of white teeth stained with crimson. She smiles as she raises the scalpel and begins to bring it down to my stomach. I cry out expecting to feel it penetrate my skin but gasp at the scalpel as it bends when it meets my skin. I look up to the dead girl with large fearful eyes. She is laughing menacingly and then quiets suddenly. She bends down to my ear and whispers, "Happy Halloween Daniel." At that moment the lights are turned on and my parents jump out and yell, "Happy Halloween, Daniel!"

Mosquitoes

By Chris Hudson

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: March 3, 2012. Entry 502

Final entry. Estimated lab population of *Culex tarsalis* and *Anopheles freeborni* mosquito populations at 1 million. They have further been divided into 20 containers, each with a synthetic host filled with Strain 1 contaminated blood. Over the next two weeks I will travel to strategic points across the U.S. and release them. Total population exposure through primary or secondary affects expected within 1 year. Thank God, I am finally safe. I don't have to worry anymore.

Final note:

Emailed the CDC and thanked them for their funding.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: January 15, 2012. Entry 480

Success at last. The key was to build genetically a secondary proboscis which, through an internal siphon process, transfers a portion of the stomach's contents into the host as host's blood is being sucked through the primary proboscis. The change is possible due to a mutation in 1/20,000 mosquito eggs. Through gene sequencing that mutation is now the norm in both lab version of *Culex tarsalis* and *Anopheles freeborni*.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: November 6, 2011. Entry 402

The CDC is putting extreme pressure on me, and considering cutting my funding if I do not soon provide a mosquito capable of carrying and dispersing vaccines. They see my work as a breakthrough, and I am so close. The implications truly are limitless. Governmental application of my work truly could end treatable diseases in third world countries. There must be a way to engineer the simultaneous transmission of fluid to and from the host.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: August 2, 2011. Entry 366

Final obstacle to viable transmission of Strain 1 through *Anopheles freeborni* and *Culex tarsalis* is the regurgitation of stomach fluids into host. No hope yet in sight. There is no benefit to carrying Strain 1 if it can't be transmitted to the population.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: June 16, 2011. Entry 200

Through genetic protein alterations, both species of mosquito have become viable options. Newest tests indicate 300% greater probability of survival in inclement conditions than non-mutated members. *Culex tarsalis* proves especially resistant to cold while *Anopheles freeborni* withstands heat up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: April 20, 2011. Entry 188

Today brought elimination of one species due to lack of predictability in mating cycles. 2 species still in consideration. Both exhibit short lifespans, of under 12 days from egg, larva, pupa to adult. Both species begin laying eggs between 8-9 days into life, and each can lay between 500 and 1500 eggs in lifetime.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: December 19, 2010. Entry 78

3 species still in consideration. All three species mutated under radiation tests to allow life and rapid increase in Strain 1 population within stomach.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: September 2, 2010. Entry 12

Trials moved back for funding considerations. Received grant from government for theorizing the use of mosquitos as a devise to transmit antibiotics and vaccines in Africa. I will use

their money at no risk, but inevitably, whatever the conclusion, report at the end of my experiment that such transmission is impossible.

Typically, it has been a myth that strain 1 can be transmitted by mosquito. Strain 1 does not live on proboscis in large enough numbers to transmit. Strain 1 also dies in digestion, unlike common mosquito born bacteria such as malaria, yellow fever, dengue, and the encephalitis virus.

23 species of North American mosquito utilized in first trial. 12 species show potential in decrease in potency of digestive enzymes to allow incubation of Strain 1.

Dr. Hennessy's log, experiment 3.2.6: June 20, 2010. Entry 1

It has been three weeks since I learned of my infection. Schedule date for commencing trial 1 is July 2, 2010. HIV/AIDS virus to hereafter be identified as strain 1. 99% transmission to North America expected. God willing, my wife will never know I caught it any differently than she did.

The Static

By Trenton K. Roberson

When the rain had begun she was not surprised. She watched as others ran to their cars or held jackets and newspapers over their heads. She walked slowly down the sidewalk, dry under her umbrella. The forecast had been for clear skies and sunshine, and as she listened to the patter of rain on the umbrella, she imagined that she had wished the rainstorm into existence.

Up ahead, a few blocks away, she noticed another person under an umbrella, making his way toward her. The sight of another umbrella made her feel uneasy. As they neared one another, she could see that the stranger was a man, well dressed and older than her, but still quite young. As they passed by one another their eyes met briefly and she felt a static current course through her entire body; raising the tiny hairs on the back of her neck. Her mind reeling, she gave in to a powerful sense of *déjà-vu*.

Not again, she thought, please not again. Just walk away.

After a dozen or so careful steps, she couldn't stop herself any longer. She slowed and looked over her shoulder and immediately felt the electricity again. He was standing half a block away staring directly at her.

Upon noticing her, he turned once more and started down a side road. She stood in the drizzle and stared at the place the man had stood.

He was watching me, she thought.

She began to follow him then. She had to. Reaching the side road where she'd watched him go, she felt a tremble that had not been brought on by the coldness of the rain. He was nowhere to be seen.

Then she saw the snatch of a black umbrella down a side street and she quickened her pace. He was rounding another corner. He was only just ahead of her. She was practically running.

It would be easier to just forget, she thought. I can still go back.

As she made the corner, she saw him at once. He was no longer holding up his umbrella, and noticing that it had stopped raining, she took hers down as well. The sun had come out from behind the clouds, casting bright rays which reflected off the rain-slick street. After her eyes adjusted to the sudden brightness, she realized that he was looking directly at her once again, standing on the street corner.

“Stop,” she said quietly.

He smiled.

She began to run. The static came over her as she neared him, growing stronger with each step. She could feel it in the air and inside herself surrounding her and drowning her. He took a step backward as her world narrowed—edges of whiteness encroaching upon her vision.

“No,” she screamed, but it was hoarse and she couldn’t hear her own voice over the noise in her head.

The car’s driver barely had time to hammer down the brakes before the stranger had stepped into its speeding path. She tried to scream again, but she couldn’t manage. She stopped running, breathing as if she had been going for miles, and let herself crumple against the brick wall of a building. The static has stopped as abruptly as it started. The feeling was gone.

It’s not you, she told herself. Don’t look. Don’t even look. It’s not your fault.

But somehow she knew it was. She remembered the first one; the first time she felt the static. He had looked at her, desperately she thought, before he jumped. And then there was the woman. She had been so calm.

“Damn you,” she whispered, “damn you, damn you.” There were screams and she could sense people begin to panic and rush toward where the man had been.

Her tears were quickly masked by the rain, which began again, inexplicably. She slumped herself against the wall for some time, and no one paid attention to her at all. She was more alone than she had ever been in her entire life.

The Neighbor

By Tori Smith

Audrey Larkin had just moved into a quiet neighborhood with her two cats Frank and George, a television from the 1980's, and a red couch. Audrey's husband, Dan, had just passed away from cancer two months before she moved to her new home. Audrey had decided to move the day after Dan's funeral because she couldn't stand to sleep in the home she shared with him.

During her first day to the neighborhood, Audrey took a walk down to the end of the street to clear her head and try to focus her mind on anything but Dan. Before she was past her driveway, a small woman who smelled like her Grandmother, called out to her from and said, "Hello! You must be my new neighbor!" Audrey, who wasn't eager to talk, shook her and replied, "Yes, I am." The woman, who had no children or husband, used guilt to ply Audrey into coming in for coffee. Audrey wanted to keep walking, but she couldn't be rude to her new neighbor.

"Please make yourself at home," cried Miss Eaton who had shuffled into the faded kitchen to make the coffee as soon as they had passed into the front door. Audrey figured she should make the best of the situation and began to look around. The house was built in the 1970's when green, yellow, and orange were the colors and shag carpet and wood paneling was hideously overused. There were no pictures on the walls of family members, but rather a dozen pictures of cats in various costumes and outdoor scenes. Audrey liked cats, but not this much. Audrey then went to a room directly across from the living room that had an odd colored light streaming out from under the door. Just as she was about to open the door, Miss Eaton was suddenly next to her, and screeched, "Don't go in there! Where are your manners, girl?" Audrey was in shock, but managed to say, "I'm so sorry! I was curious about the light that was streaming from under the door." Miss Eaton, whose face was in a thousand wrinkles, simply replied that she was sorry to scare her, but told her, "No one, but herself was allowed to go into that room."

Audrey was exhausted of Miss Eaton, so she hurriedly drank her bitter coffee and stale cookies and then excused herself. Miss Eaton gave her a orange Tupperware full of stale cookies and told her goodbye. Audrey then rushed home, locked her doors, and called her mother to tell her what experience she had with Miss Eaton.

The next day, Audrey braved her street again, but went in the opposite direction of Miss Eaton's house. Audrey walked down the sidewalk to the end of the cul-de-sac where she encountered another one of her neighbors, Mr. Hutchinson, who called out a friendly welcome to her. Audrey, who was wary of meeting another neighbor, smiled and replied, "Hi, I'm Audrey. Nice to meet you." Mr. Hutchinson, who was in his mid-sixties, saw his beautiful new neighbor and eagerly took his chance to talk to her. Mrs. Hutchinson, the neighborhood gossip, saw Audrey and immediately invited her to dinner so she could learn more about Audrey before any of her fellow biddies. Audrey, who was too kind for her own good, obliged her noisy, friendly neighbors and joined them for dinner.

After she walked into their living room and sat down on their itchy couch, Mrs. Hutchinson began to ask inquiring questions about her love life, her old house, her job, and anything else she thought was interesting. Audrey tried to deflect these questions by asking about Mrs. Eaton. "Mrs. Eaton, how do you know her?" asked Mrs. Hutchinson. Audrey replied, "Well, I met her yesterday and she was a little odd." Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson looked at each other and Mrs. Hutchinson said, "Honey, she's been dead for over a year now." Audrey then said, "Well, then who did I meet?"

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