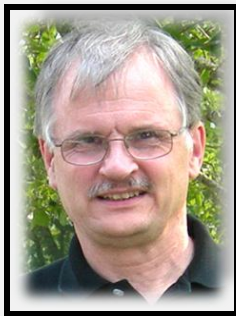


# The Portal

**A cool collection of short stories and poems.**



**Be it Resolved**  
By Rick Weber

“What’s your New Year’s resolution this year?”

“Not to make one.”

“That’s what you said last year.”

“...and the year before that, and the year before that. The same as lot of other folks do. Why make promises you can’t keep?”

“You should at least try.”

“Get fat, dumb, and happy during the Holidays, and atone for it all after New Year’s Day. No thank you. My level of hypocrisy doesn’t go that far. I can only sink so low.”

“How far is that?”

“What?”

“How far have you sunk?”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you want to change?”

“I am the way I am. I certainly don’t want to be like you setting all these great goals and not following up on any

of them. Tell me how have you changed in the past year?”

“Well, I, I, I....”

“And there you go. Nothing ventured. Nothing gained. What is your prognostication for this year? What are you going to follow through on? Are you going to really make an honest effort? My guess is no.”

“You didn’t give me a chance to finish.”

“Finish? Finish what? You never start.”

“That’s not true.”

“Oh? Please enlighten me. Name one thing that you started, let alone completed.”

“I have a plan every year.”

“Planning doesn’t count. Did you ever initiate any of your plans?”

“Well, I tried, but things came up.”

“What things? Don’t you mean excuses, lame, very lame excuses?”

“I had other priorities looming, which had to be done.”

“Priorities? What kept you in the way of keeping your promises?”

“Work. I had goals to meet for the year.”

“Management by objectives you set yourself the year before, a very low bar.”

“The bosses were pleased.”

“They were tolerant. What are your long range goals?”

“At work or outside of my job?”

“Both.”

“Well, those are two very different issues. Each has its own focus...”

“The discipline is the same for both. What have you set upon yourself to get things done? What effort have you made to stick to these rules? The answer is none.”

“I disagree. I exert a high degree of self-control in carrying out all of my activities.”

“I see very little in self-control in anything you do, which is why you don’t start and never finish what you have ‘planned’. Schmoozing the bosses will only get you so far, and that road is coming to an end. Outside of work, you’re a lost cause.”

“Again, not true. As you have seen, I have a very dynamic life outside the office...”

“Only, if you count being a bump on a log as dynamic.”

“I don’t like to make waves...”

“The pull of the moon makes waves. You’re impervious to anything that might get you going in any direction.”

“I don’t want to be led around by the nose. I want to find my way.”

“Find your way? Ask for directions!”

“Ask whom? You? Which way do I go, and where do I go?”

“What are your priorities? You said that they held you back in keeping your resolutions. Nothing I saw amounted to a ‘priority’ unless I missed something.”

“You weren’t looking at the whole picture. You don’t understand.”

“Understand what? ‘That a body in motion stays in motion,’ and ‘a body at rest stays at rest.’ You haven’t moved, and you’re certainly not moving me.”

“This is what I’m planning for the coming year...”

“Planning? We’ve cover that. A plan of action is not an action. What are you going to do? What’s it going to take to get you started?”

“That’s pretty bold talk coming from someone not resolving to do anything.”

“Me? I’m not the one lying to myself year after year after year. How about coming clean and telling yourself the truth?”

“The truth?”

“You know, the truth. Face the facts. You don’t want to change. You want to stay in your comfort zone. You don’t want to accept that this is the calm before the storm. If you don’t do something soon, it will be too late. You’re an asteroid going through space on a collision course with another asteroid, a planet, or a piece of space junk.”

“So, the ball is in my court?”

“It always has been.”

“What are you going to do to help?”

“You mean what do I have to offer?”

“Is there something substantive being put on the table? I can’t go it alone.”

“You never have been. We have always been pushing and pulling each other, but we haven’t gotten anywhere. We need to change. We need resolution.”

“What do we need to resolve?”

“Inertia. We have to change in order to improve. We’re in a rut together.”

“I see you’re finally facing reality yourself. I may have been in denial, but so were you, the all knowing one, by not making any resolutions, ever.”

“I guess the change has begun...”

A beeping noise started growing louder and louder. I shook my head and rolled over toward it. It was the alarm clock. I reached over, turned it off, sat up on the edge of the bed, and smelled coffee being brewed in the kitchen nearby. I had conversations like this before with myself, but never with this sense of urgency. I knew that this was the time.

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## Not Serene

By Rick Weber

The winds of December blew snow across the path in front of them. Above them loomed the snow-capped peak of Mount Index and below them was the placid surface of Lake Serene. To Chad Li, this was a whole new experience. It was hard for him to believe that this majestic and remote scene was less than a two hour drive from Seattle. The sight of Bridal Veil Falls alone was almost enough to take his breath away. As a software engineer from the Silicon Valley, he spent most of his time indoors writing code for the latest computer applications. In his free time, he would go to Hawaii for time on the beach where the Pacific waters were warm. This was before he met Rachel Hampton, a shy, reserved market analyst who worked at the same corporate facility he did.

Their chance meeting at a company softball game six months earlier had grown to a serious relationship. At the time, softball was

the only outside activity that Chad did and only because his co-workers in the product development unit needed another person to fill their roster. Matched up against the marketing division in the first round resulted in defeat for Chad’s team but not after he caught the eye of the woman with red hair and blue eyes playing first base. She tagged him out his first time at bat and proved to be a worthy competitor, better than some of the men on both teams. After the game both teams met for a few beers and Chad got up the nerve to ask her out. Of course, Rachel said yes.

It was close to Christmas and Rachel’s family asked them to come up to share the holiday with them. Rachel told Chad that her father was an “outdoorsy” soul and would show them the great northwest. Chad could not decline her family’s request because his own parents were in Tokyo until after New Year’s Day visiting his elderly grandparents. Chad acceded to Rachel’s request figuring that it was time for him to meet the family.

Ahead of them on the path was John Hampton, Rachel’s father, who spent a lot of time in the great outdoors; hunting, fishing, camping, and hiking. Both Rachel and Chad came up to Seattle the week before Christmas so that her parents could show them around. On the schedule was a weekend camping trip to Lake Serene. Although Chad did not have the necessary gear, John made sure that he was outfitted for the trek with a new parka, boots, backpack, and a sleeping bag before they set out.

In the morning they parked at one of the visitor centers and walked down an old service road to the beginning of the over six and a half mile trail to Lake Serene. After pitching their tents and setting up camp in an area not too far from the lake, John announced that they were in for a treat after lunch, a hike into a not well known part of the forest where there was a lot of wildlife to see in their native habitat. Chad was a bit sore from the hike to the campsite and was not looking forward to more

walking, at least not right now. The switchbacks on the trail had been hard on his slender but strong frame. After seeing the smile the announcement brought to Rachel’s face, he gave his tacit approval. They set out on a path off of the main trail going southwest of Lake Serene up the slopes to Mount Index.

Along the way among the maple and evergreen trees, John pointed out a coyote to them who scampered back into the forest after spotting them. A couple of hours into the hike, John pointed to a bald eagle soaring overhead. The sight was awesome, watching the eagle soaring with the peak of Mount Index as its backdrop. As John was commenting to them about the eagle, part of the pathway gave way under his feet and he was sent tumbling down the rocky slope. Rachel let out a scream as she watched her father plummet. Chad peered into the ravine and saw where John had stopped. “Stay here,” he commanded Rachel, “I’ll go and see what kind of shape he is in because you might have to go for help.” Rachel shouted out to her father but got no response.

On the way down, Chad kept hollering out “John, John, John!” but heard nothing. As he got closer, Chad finally got a reply, “Chad, Chad, I’m over here. I think I broke a leg.” When Chad got to John lying on the ground, he saw John’s left leg twisted at an odd angle. Chad stood up and waved to Rachel who was barely visible up on the path and yelled up to her, “He’s hurt but I think we can make it up to you.” With that, Chad put John’s left arm around his neck and lifted him up taking the weight off of John’s left leg. Chad could see that John, a sixty year old mountain man with a mane of white hair, was in severe pain. One look into John’s green eyes told him so without asking. “Besides your leg, are you hurt anywhere else,” Chad asked. John could only shake his head no. “If I help you, do you think you can make it up the hill,” Chad continued. “Yes,” John groaned. “Okay, then we’ll do it one

step at a time,” Chad said. Before going up, Chad waved to Rachel and yelled, “We’re coming up but it’s going to be slow.” This time they heard Rachel yell back to them, “I’ll be here waiting for you!”

The journey up the mountainside was very slow and arduous to say the least. About every ten steps or so, they had to stop so that John could rest his good leg and Chad could get his breath. It took the two of them the better part of an hour to make it back up to the path where Rachel stood waiting. “It’s his left leg,” Chad gasped to her as he helped John down to sit on a large rock. As Rachel assessed John’s injury, Chad took a swig from a quart bottle of water from his pack. “You have a compound fracture,” Rachel calmly told her father. “Oh great,” John groaned, “Just what I needed.” “We were lucky to get you back up to the path,” Chad said to him, “but we are going to need help to get you out of here. There’s no cell phone reception here. So, I’ll see if I can at least get down to the main trail before dark. Hopefully, I’ll be able to get some help or at least a cell phone signal.” John once again could only nod. “Be careful,” Rachel said to Chad. “I will,” Chad replied as he turned to go down the path.

Retracing their route back to the lake proved to be difficult for Chad. The light snow which had been falling had stopped but the sky remained overcast with a light fog settling around the cascade. As darkness began to fall, Chad became lost. He decided before he became completely disoriented that he would go back to the spot where John and Rachel were waiting. Chad turned back on the path and then heard a loud roar from the woods behind him. Thinking that he may have spooked a bear, Chad looked back to his to see what may have made the sound. Just inside the trees, he spotted a large hairy shape covered in thick black hair. He heard a second roar come from the shape which was too large to be a bear. Being unarmed, Chad knew that his

only option was to run and hope that this creature would not pursue him. With that he hurried back up the path. In a short period of time, he finally made it back to Rachel and John. Out of breath and visibly shaken, Chad related the details of his encounter with the creature.

After hearing Chad out, John gave his comments in a painful tone, “It had to be a bear. If I heard something let out a roar behind me like you did, I would have been scared enough to think that it was ten foot tall, too. It may have been a female trying to protect her cubs. Did you see any little ones there?” “No,” Chad replied, “But you may be right. It had to be a bear but WOW! It scared the living daylight out of me.” “As it should have,” John said in a soft groan with Rachel watching in amazement. “It’ll be dark soon,” John added, “We have to get a fire going and build us a shelter if we’re going to make it through the night up here.”

As he sat on the big rock, John told Rachel and John to gather wood and brush to start a fire, as well as, evergreen limbs to make shelter for them to spend the night at the foot of Mount Index. With the fire started and Rachel tending to it, John gave Chad step by step instructions to build a lean-to of sorts for them to keep out of the weather for the night. With a nice fire going and their lodging built, they sat around the fire and dined on some granola bars and bottled water for supper. Even though John was in pain, he kept his spirits up by regaling Chad and Rachel with one good story.

“You know, Chad,” as John started his tale. “That thing you saw earlier may have not been a bear.” With that, both Chad and Rachel stared intently back at him. John continued, “The Pacific-Northwest has had the most sightings of “Sasquatch” or “Bigfoot”, as he is called, than anywhere else in the country.” Chad and Rachel then relaxed their expressions and grinned at John, who pressed on by telling them the legend. “The first sightings of him or things like him here go back to the mid-nineteenth century. They were

made by Indians to some of the first white men who moved here. They called these ape-like creatures, *skoocooms*. Some of the accounts have it that they possessed divine powers. Others said that they were evil. Whatever they were, the sightings kept on being reported for the past hundred and fifty years. A couple of times in the 1920’s some miners reported being kidnapped or attacked by them.

To be honest, I think that the miners had their incidents with the creatures after drinking too much whiskey that they smuggled in from Canada during Prohibition. In any case, the sightings continue to be reported to the present day. Chad, I hope you’re not looking to become famous or infamous from your encounter this afternoon.” Chad and Rachel both smiled and were amused by John’s story telling skills. John’s expression then turned serious as he said, “However, if what you saw was a bear, I think that it is in our best interest to take turns watching our little bivouac tonight in the event the bear comes looking for food.” With that John issued a watch schedule for the three of them for the night.

Chad stood the first watch which turned out to be quiet. A couple of hours later Rachel relieved him and Chad went into the shelter to get some sleep. Her turn started quietly but a short time into it, she heard a rustling in the bushes and saw the large hairy creature Chad had described earlier emerge. At first, she was stunned but was shaken from her trance when she smelled a strong putrid odor as she stood downwind from the creature. Rachel let out a scream. This roused John and Chad from their slumber causing them to come out of the shelter with John hopping on one leg. Before they could make it out to Rachel, the creature fled back into the woods. John, once again, told them that it was a bear which she had seen.

In pain and unable to sleep, John took his turn guarding the campsite early allowing Rachel to go back into

sleep in the shelter with Chad. Not long after, John heard the roar again coming toward them from outside the encampment. This time, John saw the creature as described by Chad, which ran at him. John reacted by pulling a burning log from the fire and waving at the creature, which had a vile odor about it. This time, Rachel and Chad came from the shelter each picking up a burning log and waving it at the creature in the same manner as John was doing. The creature was apelike with long dark hair similar to a yak. The creature scared by the flames fled back into the forest. They succeeded in fending off the creature, hopefully, for the night.

Rachel and Chad gathered around John, who said to them calmly, "It wasn't a bear." Then, Rachel asked, "Well Daddy, what was it?" Chad remained silent looking at John and Rachel as each spoke. John chuckled and shook his head before saying, "I think we just saw Bigfoot." Chad then asked him, "Are you sure?" John replied, "There are no other animals around these parts that fit the description of the thing we just saw. I don't know if it's man or beast. It certainly isn't a college kid pulling a prank on us. Nothing human could smell that bad." Suffice to say that there would be no sleep for any of them. They sat around the fire trying to explain what they had just seen.

It was now Chad's turn to play the skeptic. As an engineer, his schooling and professional career were rooted in logic. Everything was explainable. To Chad, the very thought of being visited by a mythical being was absurd. "If there no other indigenous animals fitting this description around here, could it have been some kind of exotic pet that someone let loose up here when they could no longer care for it," he offered. "That might be a possibility," John answered, "but the state enacted strict laws a few years ago banning private individuals from owning any type of exotic animal. It does allow for them to be on game reserves but there are none around

here. This area is nothing but federal and state forestlands." Chad could just shake his head trying to come up with a logical reason for their encounter.

"When was the last reported sighting of Bigfoot here, Daddy?" Rachel asked. "In this area alone," John replied, "There have been about a hundred in the past year. They're all over the internet. I tend to side with Chad. There has to be some sane, logical explanation for what we saw. I don't want to end up in the loony bin because I reported seeing Sasquatch." Both Chad and Rachel laughed at John's last comment. Their discussions, which went on for the rest of the night, were a search for reason not a philosophical debate.

As dawn peered through the darkness, no conclusions had been reached by the three hikers. As the path became illuminated, the discussion turned to making an action plan to get help. Chad once again volunteered to be the one to go. "I wish I could get up on top of that mountain," Chad said pointing to Mount Index. "Maybe, up there I could get a good cell signal." "The climb up there can get quite rough," John said, "Mount Index, like Everest, has its own North Face. When I was younger, I scaled it a couple of times. Those climbs ruled out any intentions I had about going to Nepal to conquer the Big One. You're better off going down-hill." Rachel added, "Daddy's right. I tried that climb myself once but I never made it." With that Chad did not question the merits of going downhill any further and set out to find help.

Before setting out, John gave Chad some last minute guidance about the trip down to the main trail giving him landmarks to look for as waypoints. The fog, which covered the slopes the day before, had lifted and the path was clear. Chad found the landmarks where John had said they would be and he became more confident that he would not get lost.

About an hour into his hike, Chad heard rustling in the trees above him on the slope as he went down the path.

This time, there was no roar or putrid stench coming from the direction of the noise. He picked up his pace but the rustling of the branches seemed to be getting closer. Chad was too far from John and Rachel to run back to them this time. He was alone and had to make a stand. He picked up some dried brush near his feet and lit it with the lighter which he had. The dried shrubbery caught fire immediately as he turned to face the noise. "Does this creature come out during the day?" he asked himself. His heart pounded and sweat came from his forehead in the cold weather. He waited for the creature to reappear but the rustling in the trees had suddenly stopped. Chad figured that the time had come for the final encounter.

His thoughts of a confrontation were interrupted when he heard a mechanical shaking sound from over head. This was followed by a rustling sound in the trees going away from him. He looked up to see a King's County Sheriff's helicopter hovering above him. He waved the burning shrub up at the helicopter and saw a hand wave at him from an open door on the aircraft. Fear suddenly turned into relief as a harness was lowered down to him on a hoist. He stomped out the burning brush and put himself into the harness. As he was lifted up to the helicopter, Chad looked down into the trees but he could not see the creature.

Inside the helicopter, Chad told one of his rescuers about John and Rachel. The pilot retraced Chad's route up the path and after a short aerial search of the area, both of them were located. John was still seated on the big rock with Rachel beside him. One of the crew, a paramedic, was lowered down in the hoist to tend to John, who was conscious but in great pain. While the paramedic tended to John, Rachel was hoisted up to the helicopter and reunited with Chad. They embraced each other with Rachel saying, "My hero". Back on the ground, John asked the paramedic, "How did you know we were out here?"

The paramedic shouted into John's ear over the rotary engine's noise, "When the rangers saw that your car had been left on the lot overnight, they checked your campsite. After they saw that you were not there and the campsite had not been used overnight, the rangers called up a search party which included us. Now, we got to get you up into the bird." Shortly thereafter, John was hoisted up to the helicopter on a litter with the paramedic by his side.

Once inside the helicopter, John, Rachel, and Chad related their encounters with the creature to the crew. After hearing their accounts, the paramedic advised them, "You're not the first people we've met who saw Bigfoot. We fly up here all the time but had no luck ever seeing him ourselves." "I am glad that we're not the only ones you met who saw him. I thought you were going to put us all in straight-jackets if we told you," John said. Everyone laughed as the helicopter headed to the Harborview Medical Center where John would be treated. As the Medivac flight headed to Seattle, John said to Chad with a smile, "I guess this makes you a member of the family now."

While the mechanical bird flew to the southwest, the creature, hiding near its den among the trees on Mount Index, looked up at it and roared.



## The Idea

By Edward White/CP Bialois  
<http://cpbialois.wordpress.com/>

The day that would come to be known through the generations of the Potts family started like any other, with the sun shining brightly over head with only a handful of clouds dotting the sky. For all intents and purposes, it was the ideal day; even more so for the Pitts' two sons Jake and Allen.

School had let out for summer vacation a couple of days before and the boys were busy doing what young boys do best: Getting dirty and causing trouble. Out of the two, Jake was the oldest by two years and was often the one that kept his younger brother in line. It wasn't a difficult thing for him to do since Allen couldn't fight his way out of a wet paper bag, but catching water skeeters took a firm, and focused hand. One slip was all it took to miss and Jake hadn't missed yet.

Four tries resulted in four captures of the interesting bug to that point. They were in the masonry jar Jake had to his left, nestled against the thick roots of the large tree a foot above the water level. Each year, run off from the snow melt and spring rains often swelled the creek to three times its normal width for a couple of weeks. During that time the water had cut away a good portion of the dirt and rocks beneath a portion of the tree, leaving the long twisted roots exposed to the air and providing the perfect place for all sorts of critters to hide. On any given day, Jake and Allen would come home with frogs, snakes, crickets, or water skeeters. The latter one was Jake's favorite as there was

something about watching them hop across the water's surface that interested him beyond belief.

Despite being insects, the water skeeters had grown accustomed to his presence and hadn't come out of hiding for several minutes since his last capture. Being ten, Jake knew it was important for the hunter to remain quiet while waiting for his prey. It was only a matter of time before they came out again.

"Jake, can't we do somethin' else? I'm bored." Allen sat off to the side, letting his feet dip into the water. When his brother told him they were going hunting, Allen practically bolted towards the door, ignoring their mother's calls for him to put on his shoes. He didn't see the reason to wear then since they were only going to the creek and they'd get all mussed up. It'd only taken him one whipping with the belt to remember not to do anything to ruin his shoes. Now, after what felt like an eternity sitting there watching his older brother catch water skeeters, he was getting restless.

Jake tried to ignore his brother, but he knew the more he tried the more determined Allen would become. "And do what? I'm huntin'. Not sure what you's doin'."

"Being bored." Allen kicked at the water, sending large ripples everywhere.

Jake glared at him. "You stop that now, don't ruin my fun cause you ain't a mind of yer own."

"I do to!" Allen puckered his eight year old face into what he thought to be an intimidating expression. "I wanna do something else."

Letting out a groan, Jake shook his head and climbed to his feet. Leave it to his brother to bring a stop to his fun. "Fine. Now what'd ya wanna do?" He didn't know why he asked again since he knew he'd get the same answer from before.

"I'm bored, think of something."

For the briefest of moments, Jake thought about pushing Allen into the creek to show him a lesson. He quickly forgot the idea when the thought of

Allen running home to tell their mom and the whipping he'd get for spoiling his brother's clothes came to him. It looked like he didn't have a choice in the matter. "All right, let's see if we can't find something to do." Allen hooted in joy and jumped to his feet as Jake came near.

Any doubt as to who the older brother was left when the two were seen next to each other by someone. Jake wasn't only older, but he was nearly a full head taller with broad shoulders for his age. Aside from that, they looked every bit alike as you'd expect from brothers, although Allen tended to favor their mom more with the smooth, gentle features of their mom. Despite his gentle looks, he had a mean streak Jake didn't much care for and was grateful he was the bigger of the two.

The two remained still for a moment as they tried to figure out what to do next. It was an often occurrence with boys once their activities were interrupted. They were always willing to do something, but finding that something took time. After a moment, Jake's eyes settled on their outhouse and an idea came to him.

An avid reader of the comics at the general store, Jake loved the science fiction and horror ones more than the rest. There was something about them that was fun and allowed him to escape the mundane world of his pestering brother from time to time. It never bothered him that each book cost him a week's worth of wages his parents gave him to help out around the farm. The thirty-five cents was well spent in his eyes. His parents would later blame the comics for putting the idea in his head, but since none of them ever did anything he was thinking, he doubted he'd lose them for long.

Smiling, he turned to Allen. "Hey, Al. Want to help me with a science experiment?"

Allen frowned in thought when he looked at his brother. "What do ya mean, science experiment?"

Jake's smile widened. "It's simple. You've seen balloons, right?" Allen

nodded. "What if we held our breath and jumped off somethin' tall? We could float down. Want ta try it?"

Allen beamed at him and nodded. "We're both gonna try it?"

Jake paused for a second in thought. While the idea seemed like a good one to him, it just didn't sound logical enough for him to give it a try. Settling on a different way of expressing himself, he shrugged and rested an arm around his brother's shoulders. "I will, but I thought you'd like to go first. Just think, your name will be in the papers!"

"Yeah! I'll be famous!"

"Sure thing. Right up there with that Einstein fella."

"Who?"

Jake waved his question off. "Some guy we heard about on the radio the other day. Remember? After our show?"

Allen's eyes lit up as his smile doubled in size. While he couldn't remember the show or guy named Einstein, he had no problem imagining being on the radio with his heroes.

Seeing his brother was sold left Jake with the problem of convincing Allen to climb to the top of the outhouse. Happily, his brother did the work for him.

"Maybe they'll let me do it on the radio. Maybe even on television like the one Mr. Perkins has!" Allen stopped walking as another thought came to him. "Won't it hurt to be all black and white? How will I get my color back?"

Jake tried not to laugh in his brother's face. Allen was only eight, after all, and couldn't be expected to understand as much as he did. In big brother fashion, Jake smiled at him, offering his assurances. "They have to give your color back. It's yours, ain't it?"

Allen nodded his agreement and understanding while following Jake to the outhouse.

The building wasn't too old, maybe twelve years old at most, or so Jake thought. It didn't really matter how old it was, they still used it and made any repairs when needed so that was that. Set on a foundation of cinder blocks

and packed earth so nothing that's supposed to get underneath. The mound of packed earth slanted upwards, covering the lower third of the outhouse. The theory behind it was to keep the outhouse as warm and insulated as possible during the summer months. At that moment, the packed earth gave the two an edge in climbing to the building's roof.

While neither of them were tall enough to reach it on their own, Jake offered to help Allen up by giving him a boost. While the idea seemed to be a good one, the pair ran into some problems as Allen's foot slipped on their first attempt and he grabbed a hold of Jake as he slid down, resulting in the two of them tumbling onto the ground in a heap of legs and bodies. Their second attempt proved to be the best as Allen pulled himself onto the roof and looked down.

Until then, climbing onto the top of the outhouse seemed like a great idea, but now as he looked down he wished Jake was there in his place.

"Well? Are you going to jump or not?" Jake kept glancing towards the house and back again. He knew that their mom would come running out the second she saw her baby on the roof and they'd both get it then. As easy as it would be for him to lie and tell her it was all Allen's idea if she did see them, he knew it wouldn't be any use. He was responsible for them both and anything that happened to one should happen to them both.

As he did any other time he heard the condescending tone in his brother's voice, Allen steeled himself to jump. After a few practice breaths, he drew one in until he felt like he would explode and took a step forward.

Jake had never been a cruel child. In fact, he'd always gone out of his way not to laugh at another's misstep or situation. It was something he never had to be taught and he tried to do right by it as often as he could. That wasn't one of those times.

The second he saw Allen step from the top of the outhouse, he couldn't contain himself. In a matter of a single

second, Allen went from holding his breath to trying to flap his arms like a bird. The sight reminded him of all the cartoons he'd seen during the Saturday Matinee in the town's theater. Jake couldn't believe his brother actually managed to get off three flapping attempts before hitting the ground with a scream.

Allen's arm was twisted at a wrong angle from his impact on the ground. The sight brought back memories of Jake promising their parents at the previous new years that he wouldn't get his brother into trouble came to him. The oddity of the thought combined with what he just saw caused him to burst into laughter. Even as their mom ran from the house to help her injured baby, tears continued to pour from Jake's eyes. So much for resolutions.



## Night of the Clippies (Part One) By DiVitto Kelly

The late October night sky was clear, full of stars with a gentle push of wind coming from the east. Margaret Cobb, thoroughly entrenched in her sixties and sporting all the vivacious curves of a fire hydrant, strode outside carrying a huge laundry basket full of bed sheets. According to Margie, a nickname used only by her closest friends, the night air always seemed to make them smell fresher.

Her late husband, Ralph, died eleven years ago, but she barely missed a beat with the chores and tribulations of owning a thirty-acre farm;

one she'd worked on every day for the last forty years. She was the type of person who'd trim her toenails with a pair of garden shears, was rough as a pair of work boots, straightforward, yet always generous.

The goats were always the last to get cozy at bedtime. Everything else on four legs or webbed feet had succumbed to a hard day of doing nothing in particular, all sound asleep in the faded red barn. Margaret took in a deep breath, savoring the upper New York state air of St Lawrence County, crisp and clean. She hated the Big Apple.

The night sky suddenly exploded into a meteor shower, a burst of tiny flaming lights. Shooting stars maybe? Margaret paid little attention. She was barely impressed by that "borealis thing" as she referred to it when she'd spotted nature's lightshow on a family trip to Alaska.

The cotton haired woman draped the white nylon clothesline with queen-size bedroom sheets first, colored in subtle flamingo pink with wide celery green stripes. They were a Christmas gift from her LL Bean loving daughter, Jennifer, who lived with her snooty husband and three children in the affluent town of Basking Ridge, New Jersey.

There was a peculiar buzz in the air. Couldn't be June bugs, Margaret postulated; those annoying insects wouldn't be making a guest appearance for at least seven or eight months. She glared at the night sky, trying to pinpoint where the sound was coming from. Margaret's dog Slop, a German Sheppard/English Sheep Dog mix, managed to barrel through the doggie door and sat at attention next to her. She patted the dog's head with her thoroughly callused hands. The chunkified pooch perked up at the high-pitched sound, offering up a deep, resonating growl before darting back inside.

"Ain't nothin but dang horseflies or some supersonic mosquitoes, probably imported from China." She'd read about

those soap bar-sized wasps that could kill a man, livestock too.

The buzz seemed to be getting closer. Margaret clipped one corner of the fitted sheet with two clothespins then reached down for a couple more. Digging around, one suddenly nipped her on the middle finger.

"You damn little SOB." She raised her hand staring right at the clothespin. It seemed to be pinching harder. Surprised, the rugged woman pried it off but noticed blood at the tip of her finger. "You ain't got teeth, do ya?" She paused, guessing it must have been a stupid accident, that's all.

Margaret wiped the blood on her worn jeans. She was about to clip another to the fitted sheet when she noticed something odd about one of the spring-type wooden clothespins, the only kind Margaret ever used. It seemed to have relocated on its own. She always clipped them two inches from the edge of each sheet. Anything less and a stiff breeze could blow 'em right off. The hell she was gonna wash the same sheets twice in one day.

Margaret rumbled back inside to answer the phone -- wrong number. When she returned, the hearty woman noticed more clothespins lined up on the coated wire. In fact, the whole twenty-five foot stretch of clothesline was filled with them, standing at attention almost like slender wood soldiers.

"What the dag frick is going on here?" yelled Margaret. She stood still, wondering if she was having a senior moment. Maybe she'd already clipped them on. That was a crock. Margaret was feisty, quick-witted, and sharp as a tack. No, something abnormal was going on. Maybe it was one of those stupid ass teens from down the street. After all, it was mischief night, the official night before Halloween where kids enjoyed draping toilet paper on neighbor's trees, egging cars, and blowing up mailboxes with M-80s.

"All right you bunch of zit faces, the gig's up," she said loud and clear. "I gotta axe and I ain't afraid to use it."

A lone clothespin targeted Margaret. Suddenly, she felt an excruciating pinch on the back of her neck.

“Ouch! You son of a bitch!” She reached around and clutched the perpetrator. “What the . . .” She took out her Bic lighter and examined the culprit more closely. There was blood around its . . . “Mouth?” It started to pulsate and glow.

Spooked, she quickly dropped it like it was a white-hot briquette. Armed with only a pair of worn moccasins, she stomped on it, repeatedly. How the hell does a clothespin bite? She was perplexed -- unless it was some sort of bizarre government experiment gone array, which she thought could be plausible.

Margaret heard the buzzing again. This time it sounded like a turbine engine. She felt a weird sensation wiggling under her foot. She stepped aside and peered down. The illuminated little object suddenly torpedoed upward, biting Margaret right square on the nose.

“Get the hell off me,” she cried in a nasal voice. She pried the clothespin off and threw it towards the woods. The strange buzzing stopped. The forest, usually bursting with the symphony of nature, was deathly silent. Margaret stood still like one of the pine trees in her yard, almost forgetting to breathe. The tip of her finger throbbled. A trickle of blood dropped from her injured nose.

All at once, they ravaged the woman, biting her all over her stumpy body. They attacked like a ferocious school of piranhas, relentless to the core. They darted in and out, biting Margaret repeatedly, now bloodied and wounded. She tried fending them off, but her motions were too slow. Decades of manual labor made her limbs sluggish and achy. She fell to the ground onto the worn grass. She couldn’t stop them, not now, nor for the next half hour. The clothespins began pulsating into a highlighter green glow as they absorbed her blood. In a flash, the cluster of clothespins vanished.

The next morning, Bob Fielding, all-purpose electrician and horseshoe

tossing champion of Red Orchard, NY; he’d won the MacinToss competition four straight years in a row, arrived at Margaret’s farmhouse. Usually she’d be out there to greet him on the front porch with a spare cup of Joe. Occasionally on good weather afternoons, the two would get together at the Rotten Core Pub, on the outskirts of town, consuming adult beverages and dining on burgers the size of shuffleboard disks.

Fielding stepped out of his truck carrying his toolbox and a jelly donut securely planted in his mouth. He walked up to the white trimmed painted screen door and knocked. Last year, his New Year’s resolution of giving up donuts lasted a good seventy-two hours. There’s always next year, he thought.

“Margaret, you home?” Fielding called out, wiping the powdered sugar on his khaki pants. Of course she was; her red Ford F150 was parked in the driveway. No answer. He knocked again, calling out her name a bit louder. Slop came racing from the kitchen to the screen door, his nails tating on the hard oak wood surface. The dog began shifting back and forth nervously, barking up a storm.

“It’s okay Slop, it’s okay. Where’s the boss?” The dog made a sudden rush and thrust the screen door open, running around the house to the back yard. Fielding placed his beat up Sears Craftsman toolbox down on the front step and followed. He spotted the dog near the clothesline, sitting anxiously by Margaret’s lifeless body.

“Oh Christ, no,” said Fielding, a good friend of Margie’s going on twenty-three years. He rushed over, figuring it was a heart attack -- probably popped an artery yelling at some trespassers -- that or the pounds of succulent pork products she consumed on a weekly basis that finally done her in. Then he saw the blood.

“What in God’s name?” Fielding wiped his hand across his suddenly dry mouth in horror. There were dozens of flesh wounds on her back, maybe

hundreds of them. Fielding stood up and surveyed the woods. He trembled.

“Cops -- gotta call the cops.” The cell phone reception was genuinely horrendous where Margaret’s neck of the woods, but he tried anyway. The phone rang. A female voice answered, fading in and out with a snap, crackle, pop.

“Red Orchard Police, may I --” Fielding cut her off.

“Camille, it’s me Bob Fielding. Is Sheriff Hillman there? I gotta get a hold of him, pronto. Margaret Cobb’s been attacked -- murdered!”

“Mean Margaret, dead?” replied Camille, no real friend to the surly woman. “When, where?”

“I just found her body, face down at her house in the back yard. Something attacked her -- there’s blood all over the place.”

“Stay right there Bob, I’ll call the sheriff right away; he’s down at the Devil’s Donut right now. Supposedly a fight broke out between customers, probably bikers again.”

“Just tell him to get here ASAP!” Fielding hung up. He tried to avoid looking at Margaret’s dead body, but couldn’t. Stuff like this never happen in Red Orchard. An impulsive wave of fear suddenly blanketed the portly electrician. Maybe there’s a maniac killer on the prowl hiding in the dark woods. He raced back to his car and locked the doors.

He glanced at his watch again. “Come on, where are you!” Nineteen minutes later, the sheriff showed up, lights flashing.

Sheriff Hillman, still in solid shape for a man turning sixty-four, pulled up next to Fielding’s pickup and got out of his car. Fielding did too, still in shock, his legs weak and rubbery. “Hi Sheriff.”

“Mike to you, we’re friends remember?”

“I know, I know, sorry -- just doing the respect thing.” Bob took in a deep breath.

The sheriff zipped up his jacket; it was always chillier up in the hills.

“Where is she?”

“She’s in the back yard, by the clothesline. I still can’t believe it.”

“You said Margaret was murdered? How do you know?” Sheriff Hillman turned away from Fielding and laid eyes on the body.

“Holy Grail.” The sheriff moved closer, inspecting not only the body, but also the surrounding grounds. “You didn’t touch anything, did you?”

“No, nothing, I swear.” Fielding took off his bright red baseball cap, wiping his brow. He pinned his rug-thick peppered gray hair as he put it back on. “What the hell could have done this?”

“It might have been some animal, but I don’t recognize this type of bite wound, not at all. Hold on.” The sheriff took out a pen and brushed aside a piece of Margaret’s tattered flannel shirt.

“Is that a clothespin? The two looked at each other, puzzled. “Lend me a hand.”

Hillman and Fielding carefully turned the body over only to reveal Margaret’s half-eaten face. A handful more were still feasting on her bulbous midsection before rocketing away. Fielding fainted on cue; the sheriff not too far behind.

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At a secluded lake miles from the nearest anything, two men, retirees from Queens, New York, gently paddled along in their matte red Old Town fiberglass canoe. The pristine lake, still as ice, reflected the autumn leaves like a joyous fall postcard. From above, the roundish body of water almost made out the shape of a GMC Pacer. The two were former postal employees and childhood friends, having survived thirty years of banal mail delivery and the elements of the big city: rain, sleet, snow, heat, and abusive city folks. Both men and their wives enjoyed spending occasional long weekend retreats upstate, thriving on the peace and tranquility of Red Orchard before moving there permanently last year when both men finally called it quits. Not a hostile city slicker in sight.

The sun penetrating through the late afternoon clouds made temperatures near ideal. Occasionally they’d hit a cool spot where the temperature seemed to drop ten degrees. It made them shiver. The two took a break, coasting gently on the steel blue water as they devoured matching baloney sandwiches, complete with yellow mustard and yellow American cheese, just like in grade school. Thirsty, one of the men popped open a couple of chilled Wailing Wenches; a dark amber ale brewed locally in nearby Syracuse – definitely NOT like grade school.

“Man this is good stuff,” said Tom Bain, a year older than his heavier friend Rick Swain, slender and in respectable shape. “And to think you wanted to bring Pepsi.”

“You know I’m not real keen on drinking while fishing; I get buzzed and end up hooking my finger or something stupid. Remember last time?”

“It’s a prerequisite to fish and drink, and not necessarily in that order,” answered Tom. “Why the hell else would be out here?”

“We like to fish, don’t we?” asked Rich.

“Of course we do, but when I’m catching nothing, which is most of the time lately, I like to kick back and enjoy a cervesa, as they say in Spanish.”

Tom tipped his hat, smiling. He baited his hook with a half cut night crawler and cast his line out. The red and white bobber splashed down on the water like the Apollo 13 spacecraft, creating a mild ripple.

Rich did the same but managed to target a fallen protruding branch. He’d read in Field and Stream how big mouth bass like to hang out in the sunken debris. Now he was snagged.

“Shit.” He slammed down his son’s economy model Zebco 404 rod and reel set – his high-end Shimano spinning reel was all screwed up, courtesy of his three-year-old grandson. Exasperated, Tom handed his friend the bottle. Rich took a sniff, savoring the fine scent like a vintage bottle of wine then took a healthy gulp. “Thank God for beer.”

“Ale,” corrected Tom. “We’re drinking ale.”

“What difference does it make, as long as it’s got the big A, right? A is for alcohol. And this stuff’s got almost eight percent, jeeze Louise I’m gonna be a drunken mess!”

“You sound like Sesame Street for God’s sake . . . A is for alcohol. And B is for bite! I think I’ve got one!”

There was a buzzing sound emanating from the trees.

“Hold on; you hear that?” asked Rick, who gave up trying to salvage his new Red Devil fishing lure by cutting the line, thoroughly entangled on the partially submerged branch. His friend was too preoccupied with his pending catch.

“Man o man this feels like a large mouth,” said Tom, hoping the eight pound test would hold up. “Look at my pole for Christ sake, it’s bending like a U!”

Bob rested his paddle across the canoe and looked deep into the encompassing woods. He’d heard many a sound on his numerous vacations to upstate Red Orchard, but this was different, almost like a whining blender.

Bob continued to battle the fish, now close to the canoe. “He’s gone under the boat. Quick, hand me the net -- quickly before it breaks my line!”

Rick reached behind his seat cushion and picked up the short handled aluminum, green lined net. “Here.”

Bob wanted to be the one to haul the mighty fresh-water beast aboard their vessel. The fish fought like crazy, twisting and twirling in the brisk water, creating a foamy chilled froth.

“I got you, you son a rat!” Bob hoisted the great fish in the net, proud as a peacock. That’s when he noticed the sound.

“What’s that noise?” He paused for a quick second. “Whatever.” The sun momentarily dissipated behind the clouds. Rick felt a queasy feeling in his gut.

Bob was still in fishing bliss, his beaming smile almost hurting his face.

“This sucker’s gotta be close to twenty-two inches.”

Thousands of clothespins jettison from the myriad of tree branches. They attacked the two men like flying barracudas. The feisty bass disappeared right before Bob’s eyes as they shredded it to pieces. “Hey, my fish!”

That’s when the two felt the painful bites. The sky above the canoe darkened as the swarm of clothespins attacked the two men. Rick tried to curl up in a ball, pushing his head between his knees for protection, but he was too doughy and exposed. They chomped at the easy target, blood now pouring from the multiple small wounds. He wailed in pain as they tore him to pieces.

Bob brandished the chewed up aluminum net like a weekend tennis player, swatting at anything, occasionally hitting the target. Dozens went for his bearded face, drawing blood quickly around his ears and eyes. He frantically waved the net but soon tired. He tried to reposition himself in the unstable canoe but lost his balance, spilling into the lake. Bob raised his tattered arms, desperately trying to swim freestyle to shore. More clothespins zeroed in on his broad back like seagulls descending upon a floating dead whale. He tired quickly, his body slowly sinking below the surface. In a matter of seconds, he was out of view in the murky water.

Rick was dead too, still balled up on the floor of the canoe. Blood mixed with the thin layer of omnipresent lake water, turning it a light red hue. The canoe floated aimlessly towards a half sunken sturdy log where it finally nestled in between outreaching branches like arms hugging a child.

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Near dinnertime and halfway out the door, Camille heard the phone ring. For a split second she thought of brushing it off, but she was a professional. Besides, her replacement was pulling into the parking lot. She trekked back inside, grabbing the phone on the forth ring.

“Red Orchard Police, how can I help you?”

‘Uh, hi.” The young man’s voice was nervous and squeaky. He’d never called the police for anything, ever.

“Yes, may I help you?” Camille’s stomach grumbled in hunger for the umpteenth time. God she hated dieting.

“Um, my friend and I are biking out here near Taylor Lake and we see a canoe all by itself on the water; kinda strange. There’s an empty car in the parking lot; it might belong to them, but there’s no one here.”

“Thank you, I’ll have the sheriff stop by and take a look. And your name sir?” The man abruptly hung up. He and his friend had just finished up a fat joint and were closing in on the munchies/paranoid stage; they weren’t about to divulge any more information.

Camille radioed the boss who’d just finished up a couple of slices of pizza and a Coke at Pepe Roni’s Italian restaurant. “What can I do for ya? The sheriff grimaced as he noticed a quarter-size sauce stain on his new jacket. He quickly wiped it off. “No problem,” he replied with a mouthful of pepperoni and onion pizza. I’m on my way.”

Hillman, three miles away on the hilly back road, got there just as the sun was dissipating. He pulled into the parking lot, noticing the lone vehicle. The sheriff took out a thick yellow nylon rope from the trunk and followed the recycled plastic walkway that lead to the lake. The canoe had drifted free of the branches, now floating fifteen feet from the end of the protruding dock. The sheriff was in no mood to get wet, having just gotten over a nasty cold. Hell, after reading about people contracting flesh-eating viruses from lakes, he wasn’t about to take any chances either.

Hillman trekked back off the dock and found a thick branch. He broke it in half over his knee and tied the smaller piece to the rope as a weight. He sauntered back to the end of the dock but stopped momentarily, hearing a strange humming sound emitting from the forest. The sheriff’s first toss

clanked off the bow, gently moving the canoe into deeper water. “Rats.” The sheriff tried again, this time it landed just inside the bow of the craft.

“All right now.” He carefully reeled in the nylon rope, towing in the canoe. He heard buzzing again, this time only louder. The canoe was almost within reach. He spotted a couple of seat cushions, a fishing pole, cooler, and dark tinted water on the floor. Then a man’s body appeared, curled up -- mangled and bloodied.

“Oh God, not another.” The sheriff pulled the boat ashore through the tall grass and mud then paused, surveying the horrific scene. It was getting dark now. The buzzing sound grew louder. He grabbed the flashlight from his belt and shined it at the trees. Unnoticed, a clothespin, stained red, wriggled on the dead man’s lip, tearing off a small morsel before scurrying away.

Hillman marched back to his car and called the station. “Camille? Oh, hi Rosie, I guess she finally went home.”

“Yeah, she just left to pick up a Baconador from Wendy’s.”

“So much for her diet. Look, this has been a horrible day and it just got worse. I need the medical examiner out here at Taylor Lake pronto; there’s been another murder.”

The sheriff hung up and ran the license plate of the SUV. He followed it up, eventually contacting the spouse. Hillman learned two people were out there fishing.

He called back. “Rosie, contact Deputy Walters and tell him to bring his scuba equipment. We may have another dead body somewhere in the lake.”

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That night, the Donovan parents finally gave their children Brian and Maggie, age eleven and nine, permission to set up their very own tent, a Christmas gift from last year, and camp out in the back yard. It was fenced in so they felt at ease. The two children, dressed in sweatpants and sweatshirts, relocated their stuffed animal collection, books, and a

Coleman lantern into the four-man bright red tent. Maggie snuggled into her rosy pink Hello Kitty sleeping bag with her three-foot stuffed animal dolphin, reading Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Brian snuck a box of salty Goldfish snacks and buried his head into The Zombie Handbook, his new favorite book – Goosebumps was so yesterday. He brought along an oversized bright yellow and blue beach towel for added warmth.

The parents came outside near ten PM to check on the kids. “So far, so good,” both Brian and Maggie reported, signaling with a big ‘thumbs up.’

“We’ll leave the back door open if you need anything, okay?” said Mom. The children nodded and continued with their backyard adventure. They nosed and read, but then the yawns started coming, one after the other.

Brian’s glowing Timex watch beeped. The time had reached midnight, both children finally sound asleep. Mrs. Donovan, a light sleeper to begin with, noticed a faint buzzing noise hovering just outside their partially open second floor bedroom window. Annoyed and in a sleepy stupor, she zombied over and shut it.

There were muffled tapping sounds all along the tent, slight at first but persistent. Maggie, still hugging her dolphin and inheritor of mom’s light sleeping habits, awoke. She could see the peculiar movements all around the tent, like someone poking their index finger haphazardly along the thin fabric. She heard the buzzing, deep at first before revving higher. Without her knowing, a clothespin managed to squeeze through a small crevasse near the zipper door. Her brother Brian had popped out to use the bathroom and didn’t quite zip up the screen all the way.

Maggie called for her brother, but he didn’t respond. Brian, like dad, slept like granite. The jabbing continued, all around the tent. Maggie burrowed deep inside her sleeping bag. Then she felt something nipping outside at her toes. It was moving, inching its way towards her. A spider, maybe? The clicking

sound was getting closer to her head; she could sense it. Maggie continued to huddle under and didn’t move a muscle for what seemed like forever. She finally stuck her head out slowly like a shelled up turtle. Her dark brown eyes peeked out.

The clothespin darted straight for her. It bit down hard on her wavy brown hair just above her ear. Maggie screamed. Brian finally woke up. “What’s the problem -- I was sound asleep!” Then he noticed his sister crying.

Maggie was fighting with something. And her screams seemed to excite whatever was outside trying to get in. “What the heck is happening?” he exclaimed.

The clothespin ripped out a lock of hair. Maggie was bleeding. “Sis!” The thing suddenly lunged at Brian. He lifted up his forearm to block the flying object, but it bit him just below the elbow. He cried out in pain. That’s when mom opened the back door.

She heard only the screams, not noticing the whining turbine noise in the sky. The clothespins flocked towards Mrs. Donavon when Brian called out. “Mommy, get in, hurry!”

She ran into the tent and zipped it up. Mom saw the blood running down her daughter’s head. Brian was able to fight off the attacking object, somehow smothering it in the beach towel.

“You’re bleeding too? What’s going on?”

“I don’t know, but I trapped it – whatever it is.” The object was glowing, fighting to escape.

“What’s going on?” called Dad, raising his voice. He saw the bizarre cloud of buzzing entities attacking the tent. “Oh my God, stay still, I’ll be right back.”

Mr. Donavon didn’t know if it would work but he scrambled to get the fire extinguisher tucked under the kitchen sink. He grabbed the thick, hand-knit wool blanket resting on the living room sofa to use as a shield.

“Stay put until I get there!” he yelled, trying to be heard over the deafening noise. He counted to himself – one,

two, three. He sprayed the fire extinguisher in the air as he sprinted over. The cold, cloudlike mist temporarily confused the clothespins; a few even dropped from the air. The family burst out from the tent and huddled under the blanket. They scurried back into the house and locked the door.

Dad raced upstairs and downstairs, making sure every window was closed shut. Mom took the children to the bathroom to clean up their wounds.

“I think we’re okay, Jen,” said Will. He picked up the phone and called the sheriff’s office. “What are those things?” Will glanced at the time – nearing half past midnight.

Brian went into the laundry room and found an empty peanut butter jar. He managed to force the thing into the container. He sealed it shut and gazed at the snapping wooden object, the pulsating animated glow now fading.

Maggie turned on her fish shaped toy flashlight that she’d won at the town carnival two months ago. “It looks like one of mom’s clippies.”

“This is really crazy, but cool,” added Brian, forgetting about the minor wound on his arm already.

“Red Orchard Police, Deputy Thomas Garvey speaking.”

“Hello deputy? This is Will Donovan at 1607 Fletcher Street. Sorry I’m calling so late, but our children were just attacked by something in our backyard.”

‘Attacked? By what -- a raccoon, feral cat?’

“They’re clippies Dad,” said Maggie as she tugged at her dad’s favorite white and blue striped terry cloth robe. He looked like a young Hugh Hefner -- the only thing missing was a pipe and surrounding Playboy bunnies.

“Not quite,” replied Mr. Donavon. The kids chimed in loud and clear.

“They’re clippies – those things on the clothesline!” Brian held up a glass jar containing the lone specimen, pushing it near Dad’s face.

“I’m sorry deputy; they’re clippies.” Dad turned to his kids, not believing what he was saying.

“Could you please spell that for me,” asked the patient deputy.

“Uh, hold on for moment. “Kids, do I spell that with a YS or IES?”

The children looked at each other. “IES?”

“C-l-i-p-p-i-e-s. They kinda – well actually, they look like . . . clothespins.”

“You’re saying your children were attacked by clothespins, am I right?”

“Uh, yes.”

“Killer clothespins?”

“Apparently so,” replied Mr. Donavon. “Look, I know this is about as strange as it gets, but --“

“Mr. Donavan, prior to becoming a deputy I worked the nightshift at Walmart so I know strange, but killer clothespins? That’s off the charts. Give me fifteen-- twenty minutes; stay safe and don’t hang up any laundry, promise?”

“We promise.” Dad hung up the phone.

“So?” asked his wife.

“He’ll be over in about twenty minutes, but I’m fairly certain he thinks we’re all loony toons.”

The deputy hung up the phone and tipped his hat to Rosie. “I’m off to the Donovan house – got a killer clothespin situation, be right back.”

Rosie offered up a puzzled look then smiled, batting her awning-like natural eyelashes. “Be safe, my hero.” The heavy set deputy giggled as he left the building. He had a crush on her and was always so close to asking her out on a date, but continually chickened out again and again -- one of these days he thought.

The deputy got in his car and followed Cottonmouth Road, a nightmarish stretch of pavement with more twists and turns than a rollercoaster. Flashes of light made the deputy shield his eyes with his hand. “Man that was --”

He suddenly slammed on the brakes, coming to an abrupt halt. His hat toppled off his head, hitting the windshield. He almost hit it.

Garvey gathered his wits and turned on the hazard lights before stepping out of the Ford Explorer with his flashlight.

The screeching tire smoke mixed with the high beams, creating an eerie, smelly fog. He’d seen this before, a dead deer lying square on the double yellow lines. There was a lot of blood, probably a truck that clobbered the poor animal. He knew people that if the deer wasn’t dead too long, and it was nice and cold out (it preserve the meat), they’d take that sucker home and have a venison feast. As the deputy walked closer, he noticed movement, twitching was more like it all along the carcass. He pinpointed the beam on the midsection and inched closer, crouching down on one knee. No way.

“Oh this is messed up.” Hundreds of glowing clippies chewed on the carcass, each digging into the fresh meat. The deputy simply stared in disbelief at the feeding frenzy.

All at once, the clippies stopped munching. The deputy continued to stand there like a statue, still pointing his flashlight at the deer. One particular clippie gnawing on the deer’s snout creaked its little wood frame and shot straight at the human, grazing the right side of the deputy’s face. Garvey felt a warm sensation. He raised the tip of his fingers and touched blood. Stunned, he dropped the flashlight and ran for the car.

All at once, the clippies jettison from the dead animal and began their assault. Garvey waved his arms frantically trying to escape the swarm. He fell to his knees, trying desperately to crawl back to the car. More whistled through the dense, charcoal gray sky, a whirlwind of darting flying objects. He screamed as they pecked at his hands and lower legs. A few managed to dig under his official Red Orchard Police jacket. One latched onto his ear, left unprotected by his hat. A handful snapped at his blubbery love handles, left exposed by the undersized jacket. With every ounce of strength, the deputy finally pulled himself up, opened the door, and tumbled inside the car.

“Holy mother of Christ!” He quickly shut the door and started the car. He felt a gnawing sensation on the back of his neck. More were still attached to the

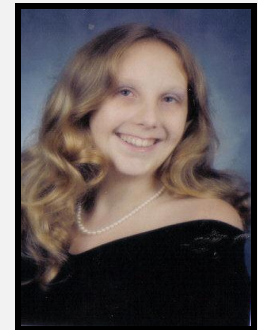
jacket like sand spurs to beach sandals; all in a frenzied search of human flesh. Before speeding away, he stripped off his jacket and tossed it out the window. Garvey barehanded the ones snacking on his neck, rolled down the window and tossed them out too before speeding off.

The deputy pulled up the Donavon’s driveway and jammed on the brakes, getting as close as possible to the front door. He paused for a moment, trying to regroup after the startling assault. His police issued attire protected a good portion of his portly body. Most of the wounds were on his hands, neck and ears. His gut would’ve been fine if it weren’t for the jacket being one size too small. The deputy glanced up at the star-filled sky, pronouncing it safe, hopefully. Garvey staggered to the front door still trying to catch his breath and rang the bell multiple times.

A man dressed in old jeans and a sweatshirt answered the door. “Mr. Donavon?”

“Yes.”

“You’re not crazy after all.” The deputy stepped inside before collapsing on the carpeted floor.



**Clutter (Chapter One)  
By Jamie White**

<http://www.jamiebmusings.webs.com>

December 31, 2013. 12:00 PM  
One hanger after another was pushed aside as Justine Martin tried to figure out what to wear to the party later on that night. It was the last place she wanted to be; family functions weren’t

the most exciting way to spend an evening. Still, it was tradition so she figured she could stick it out for a few hours. It was much easier than the alternative.

She couldn't even imagine trying to back out. The last time she'd mentioned not being able to go to one of Annette Martin's holiday parties, the look on her mother's face stopped her cold before she could get the whole sentence out. She'd backed out of the refusal as gracefully as possible and put a fake smile on her face as she'd enthused about how nice it was going to be to get together.

*I'm pathetic; that's all there is to it.* She frowned as she came across one of her favorite dresses and raised an eyebrow at it. My mother would hate this dress. With a sigh, she pushed aside the hanger and moved on to the next one, her thoughts focused on the lecture that would be sure to follow had she dared to wear it. She glanced over at the window, watching for a moment as the snow fell in light flurries. It's too cold for that one, anyway.

One of those radio countdown shows played in the background as she continued going over her options. Justine rolled her eyes as she realized how sad the past year in music had been. So far, she'd been listening for an hour and only heard a couple of songs that didn't make her want to cringe.

*Why do I even listen to these things anyway? Oh, yeah--it's tradition.* It was a stupid thing, really, to do things just because it was expected of her, but she continued to do it. Justine's eyes lit up as she came across the perfect dress to wear. It was a long, green frock one of her relatives had bought her years ago for the holidays. She ran her hand along the velvety material, deciding it would be warm enough.

As Justine pulled the hanger off the rack and relieved it of the dress, she once again congratulated herself on her choice before dumping it on the bed. Now, she just had to find something to wear with it. She turned her attention to her dresser and the small wooden

music box sitting on its surface. A simple stone sat in the center, giving it its only distinctive feature.

Gentle notes mixed with the horrors on the radio as Justine opened the music box and peered inside. *I really should organize this thing one of these days...* Chains and bracelets of different colors lay tangled within the box with the odd earring or ring scattered about. Somewhere in there was a simple gold one with a little ruby attached that she thought would look nice—if she could manage to find it. As she dug through the mess, Justine cursed her lack of organizational skills with every colorful adjective she could think of. Part way through her search her hand brushed a folded-up sheet of paper. *What the...* Justine tightened her grip on the paper and pulled it from the depths of her jewelry box. *What's a note doing in here?* She unfolded the sheet and her eyes widened in surprise as she read the hastily-scrawled heading: Resolutions 2013.

*What do you know? I thought I lost that back in January.* Before she could read more than a line or two her cell phone rang, startling her. She glanced over at the screen and sighed when she realized it was her boss calling. She'd been working with a local photographer for the past couple of months. She was tempted to let the call go to voice mail, but Todd Miller was a demanding and stubborn man--he wouldn't stop calling until he'd gotten her on the line personally.

She pressed the "talk" button and tried to smile as she answered so she wouldn't sound too irritated. "Hello?"

"Justine, did you get those props I asked you about last week?"

He must've asked her that question a dozen times since he'd first issued the assignment, and she fought to keep her tone as pleasant as she could despite his lack of confidence. "Sure did. They'll be delivered to the studio first thing on Tuesday." She applied a slight emphasis to the word to try and drive home the fact she was currently on vacation and technically off the clock. Of course, to him there was no

such thing as being "off the clock," there was only discipline and hard work. Not that she considered that a bad thing. If she was honest with herself, she had to admit she needed a bit more discipline in her life. The lost note was proof of that, not to mention the mess she still had to dig through if she planned to finish getting ready at some point before the official countdown to the New Year started.

"Good. See that it is— we don't want to keep these clients waiting." Silence followed his words and, had he not ended calls abruptly before, she might have thought the call got dropped. "Happy New Year to you, too," she muttered as she tossed the phone on her bed.

Justine spent the next ten minutes digging through her jewelry until she found the chain she'd been looking for. She closed the box and set it on her dresser with care, arranging the delicate object in such a way that she couldn't possibly lose it before she started dressing later.

Her task complete, Justine padded through the narrow hallway and took a seat on her favorite chair. It was a dark brown papasan chair that she'd found at a discount store last month. She kept it in a corner near the window where she could stare out at the night sky whenever she felt the need to disconnect from the world and technology. The spot had a perfect view, and she couldn't begin to count the number of evenings she'd fallen asleep in that thing.

Justine settled back against the chair and curled up against the soft fabric before unfolding the note once more. She was just about to read it again when her ringtone sounded. She figured it couldn't be her boss again, so she just let it go to voice mail. It'd been so long since she'd written her list that she couldn't wait another minute to find out what she'd hoped to accomplish that year. A part of her wondered if she was a bit of a masochist though. If she couldn't even remember what she'd written, it wasn't such a huge leap to assume she hadn't accomplished a

thing all year—reading the proof could only serve to depress her.

Still, Justine couldn't resist the pull and glanced back down at the sheet again. She burst out laughing as she read over item one: Organize my jewelry box and keep it that way. "Well, that was a big, fat failure." She was about to move down to item two when a thought stopped her. Did it have to be a failure? She glanced at her watch. It was only 12:30 in the afternoon. It wasn't like that was an impossible task, and she might feel better about her other failures if she managed to check one off.

Her mind made up, Justine stood and walked back to her bedroom, leaving the paper behind on her living room chair. She made her way to the dresser and picked up the music box, dumping its contents out on the bed. "Here we go..."



**\*From the album War by U2**

All is quiet on New Year's Day  
A world in white gets underway  
I want to be with you  
Be with you night and day  
Nothing changes on New Year's Day  
On New Year's Day

I will be with you again  
I will be with you again

Under a blood red sky  
A crowd has gathered in black and white  
Arms entwined, the chosen few  
The newspapers says, says  
Say it's true it's true...  
And we can break through  
Though torn in two

We can be one

I...I will begin again  
I...I will begin again

Oh...  
Maybe the time is right  
Oh...maybe tonight...

I will be with you again  
I will be with you again

And so we're told this is the golden age  
And gold is the reason for the wars we wage  
Though I want to be with you  
Be with you night and day  
Nothing changes  
On New Year's Day  
On New Year's Day

**My New Year's Day Resolution  
By Robert Fisher**

I will not throw the cat out the window  
Or put a frog in my sister's bed  
I will not tie my brother's shoelaces together  
Nor jump from the roof of Dad's shed  
I shall remember my aunt's next birthday  
And tidy my room once a week  
I'll not moan at Mum's cooking (Ugh! fish fingers again!)  
Nor give her any more of my cheek.  
I will not pick my nose if I can help it  
I shall fold up my clothes, comb my hair,  
I will say please and thank you (even when I don't mean it)  
And never spit or shout or even swear.  
I shall write each day in my diary  
Try my hardest to be helpful at school  
I shall help old ladies cross roads (even if they don't want to)  
And when others are rude I'll stay cool.  
I'll go to bed with the owls and be up with the larks  
And close every door behind me  
I shall squeeze from the bottom of every toothpaste tube  
And stay where trouble can't find me.  
I shall start again, turn over a new leaf,

leave my bad old ways forever  
shall I start them this year, or next year  
shall I sometime, or .....?

**New Year Resolutions**

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Here comes the New Year  
And its time to make resolutions  
For I promise to be sincere  
And bring in me a revolution

In class I'll talk less  
In studies I'll surely progress  
All my lies I'll confess  
I'll go to play with egress

To my friends I'll be kind  
Have my character refined  
To a helper of mankind  
With a sound mind

I'll follow my teacher's advice  
Regularly I'll exercise  
My mother I'll idolize  
Beyond doubt I'll civilize

These are my resolutions  
To bring in me an evolution  
To follow them I'll try my best  
Until then I'll not rest

Source: New Year Resolutions, New Years Poem  
<http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/new-year-resolutions#ixzz2pk1IK39f>  
Family Friend Poems

**Recalled to Life  
By Kristen Elise**

I choose not to remain entombed in this coffin,  
Embalmed for an afterlife I cannot live in,  
Preserved for a visual spectacle after my death,

The ghost of your memory my only ally,  
And your name carved in gravestone ablaze in my eye

Lead me to call you, whispering under  
my breath.  
I hold to days bygone, like a treasure to  
hoard,  
A rover in time who can never move  
forward,  
Held frozen in place as the traffickers  
promenade by.

An apathy transferred to every  
tomorrow  
Does little to vanquish the ongoing  
sorrow.  
I dreamed you'd appear to me, but that  
dream's destined to die.

I cannot go on in a mannequin stature,  
Tragically fragile and one day might  
shatter,  
A figurine programmed to smile,  
although my heart breaks.

I resolve to not be a victim of hours,  
Comparing my joy to the seasonal  
flowers,  
Persistently withering, hopelessly,  
yielding to aches.

My love will not vanish, though I pass  
through the years  
With an infinite fight to supplant all my  
tears,  
In hopes that the future will give me a  
reason to be.

I trust that we'll meet again, but I'm not  
certain,  
The days yet to come are all veiled by a  
curtain,  
And so I must venture on earth here  
until I'm set free.

**Beginning in January 2014**, meetings  
will be held the second Monday (6-  
7:30pm) of every month in the second  
floor conference room.

**Upcoming dates:** Jan. 13, Feb. 10,  
Mar. 10, April 14, May 12, June 9, July  
14, Aug. 11, Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10,  
Dec. 8.

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7300 Pines Blvd.  
Pembroke Pines, FL. 33024.  
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