

The Portal

A cool collection of short stories and poems.



Midnight Eclipse

By Edward White/CP Bialois

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The soft grass felt good under his feet, each time he wiggled his toes the blades of grass tickled the soft inner portion of his ties. He let out a deep breath, nothing tasted or felt as good as good old mother earth. He wasn't sure why but he felt that he'd been away for a long time and that this time nothing could make him leave it. He quickly shook his head to clear out any of those thoughts, he was home and he intended to stay. He closed his eyes and raised his face towards the sun. How warm and pleasant the sun felt on his skin as it's warmth penetrated through him until it filled his heart and soul. This was the way to live, there

could be no doubt about it. In the distance he heard thunder but he didn't pay it any attention as it was miles away and this was his special day. It was his first day back from... where? Strange he couldn't remember where he had returned from. Why was that?

"Doctor Jones." A strange voice filled the air. Something about it was oddly familiar.

He opened his eyes and glanced around, no one else was near him. It had to be his imagination, why would anyone be here except him? They were gone... weren't they?

"Doctor Jones. It is 0700."

Where the hell was it coming from? "Who are you? You can't be here." *But why can't they be here?* He asked himself. As sudden as the arrival of that strange voice the world around him changed, the sun was gone and a cold rain began to fall. He looked around frantically searching for the cause of the change. "No, it's been so long." His voice was weak and sounded more like a whimper than it's usual tone as he watched the world around him faded into a bright white light.

When he opened his eyes they settled on a smooth grayish surface of the bottom of a bunk. Slowly he rubbed his eyes and sat up, his legs touched the cold floor. "Doctor Jones, forgive my intrusion but you are needed in the botanical garden."

That voice, that cold unfeeling voice he heard in his dream. Damn that voice and it's creator. "I'll be right there BOB." He rubbed his eyes once more and looked around him. The plain white and gray walls of his quarters stared back as did the haunting eyes of Miss November from the calendar's welcoming perch on the wall to his left.

"Very well Doctor Jones."

Thomas Jones stood and stretched as he walked to the cabin door. As he approached it BOB signaled him. "Doctor Jones my sensors indicate that you are not dressed. Should you not put on proper attire?"

He looked down at himself, a white t-shirt and a pair of white boxers. Not appropriate dress for any circumstance

that he could think of, but then who would mind? "I think this is proper all things considered."

"Very well Doctor Jones." BOB's autonomous voice seemed to echo in the room. In fact it echoed everywhere on the moonbase. Such was the result of having only one in the station's population.

Thomas reached out and pressed a button next to the door and it slid open with a swishing sound. The soft hum of the automated oxygen recyclotron filled the air. Although it was barely above a whisper it had the distinct advantage of being the only sound aside from his footfalls. Long ago he noticed the combination of the two held a type of rhythm and he often found himself humming along with it. It was a far cry from the sounds of the Rolling Stones or Third Eye Blind but hell he wasn't in the position to argue. With no new music or other entertainment available he had to make due with the few songs that were in BOB's database.

The doors to the botanical garden opened with a push of a button, the sweet smell of the roses and jasmine filled his lungs. He held onto their smell until he thought his lungs would explode. When he let out the breath he couldn't help but smile. This was where he belonged, this was his world and he knew he'd never find happiness anywhere else. He looked around at the plants, everything was as he had left it. "Any change BOB?"

"No Doctor Jones. Subject F and Subject S have shown increased metabolic rates. Unusual but not entirely unexpected."

Unusual was right, Thomas thought as he stepped across the path and activated the terminal. The screen flashed as power coursed through it, the black dissolved and was replaced with graphics then a series of numerical equations before stopping on the comparison readouts of the two subjects. He read through the statistical analysis and programmed in the correct change to the automated system. When he was finished he turned around, that was why he had

demanded a swivel chair for his laboratory, he liked to swivel. The memory caused him to laugh as he stood and walked over to the specimens. The plants doubled in size in less than a day, that was promising. Now he just had to ensure he could use the same technique in the hydroponics lab.

"BOB, run a spectrum analysis on subject F and S and cross reference with Specimen A, B, C, and D,"

"Yes Doctor Jones." There was a brief pause as the enormous computer brain of BOB followed his instructions and worked through thousands of simulations to justify the results of the test. "Complete, Doctor Jones."

Thomas nodded then hesitated for a moment. He wasn't sure if he really wanted to know the answer, maybe it would be easier if he didn't bother. His food supply would last another month, two if he rationed it. Then instead of starving to death he'd walk out of an airlock and instantly freeze, quick and painless. Too bad that wasn't his style, he was too cowardly to take his own life no matter how simple it sounded. "Are the findings consistent?"

"Yes Doctor Jones."

"Alright, prepare the hydroponics specimens for integration with the botanical extract serum." He looked at his watch, "Set integration for twenty minutes from... mark."

"Yes Doctor Jones, integration will begin in nineteen minutes fifty-eight seconds...nineteen minutes fifty-seven seconds... nineteen minutes fifty-six seconds..."

"BOB, continue silent countdown."

"Yes, Doctor Jones."

Thomas nodded with a sigh, listening to a countdown was not something he needed to hear not then and not ever. Satisfied that everything was ready and his task for the day was completed Thomas headed for the door. He'd check back in about an hour, and every hour after that as he had for the past ten months but for now he needed recreation.

Under any other circumstances it would've been entertaining, how many

times had he dreamed of just goofing off every day, of not having any responsibilities. He was living the dream that so many people had wished for and he would've given it all away just to have one of them again. With that thought in mind he took it upon himself to learn the mechanical skills he needed to maintain the moonbase but in truth it was only to keep busy. The base had been so well constructed that it wouldn't need any maintenance for at least sixty years, and even then BOB would be able to handle anything that needed to be done.

Still, it was a nice distraction at times to have something to do. Casually, he made his way to the command center and sat in the center chair, the "captain's chair" in most sci-fi shows. "What would you like to play today Doctor Jones?" BOB's voice filled the room with it's steady tones.

He sat quietly for a moment, "I don't feel like a game today, how about a movie?" The main window in front of him shimmered as an electron based screen materialized out of it and a selection of movies were listed. Thomas couldn't help but smile, he was in his own utopia. His eyes scrolled down the screen until they settled on one. "Ever seen *Dracula*, BOB?"

"I have no need to watch movies Doctor Jones, however, yes I have viewed it as it is in my database."

"Cheater."

"Which one would you like to see Doctor Jones?"

The name *Dracula* was highlighted, followed by a series of dates and actors appeared in a subcategory. An interesting selection, some of the greatest actors of the twentieth century were in them. "1979 version BOB. It had a wonderful shot of the sun at the end."

"We'll be facing the sun in fourteen hours Doctor Jones."

Thomas shook his head, he missed the warmth of the sun. A pity it had saw fit to destroy the human race, but then he was never one to dwell on the negative side of things. At least not for too long. "I prefer technicolor."

"Yes Doctor Jones." On the screen the movie began in the grainy texture of primitive films but his mind was elsewhere. The command center had been designed to be the center of the moonbase, from there the functions of the base's systems could be controlled. It had been hoped that within the next ten years it would've expanded into a colony. But then the Solar Cataclysm happened, an enormous solar flare engulfed the planet Earth and superheated the atmosphere. The moonbase was spared by its position on the far side of the moon. With Earth and its moon as a shield the station was spared from the worst of the radiation, or so they thought at the time.

NASA had thought it best to have a skeleton crew on the base to test out it's botanical, hydroponic, and atmospheric capabilities. Ironic thing was that the rest of the crew had suffered radiation poisoning and had died days after the solar cataclysm. Why he had been spared could be attributed more to dumb luck than anything else. Thomas had been in the shielded under carriage of the moonbase tending to the botanical garden. Had they not been a week behind schedule and had a solar greenhouse constructed he would've been among the first to die. "Small favors." He thought then, now he looked at it as more of a curse than a favor.

At least he wasn't alone, technically anyway. He had BOB. The moonbases computer was designed to interact with each of the personnel as one of their own. BOB was a breakthrough in computer programming. Bridging Organizational Battology, in simpler terms BOB was an endless dictionary of useless information and conversation. At the time Thomas had laughed at the name and wondered if the programmer had a degree in full-of-shitness. Now he looked at BOB as his one and only friend.

"The atmospheric conditions have improved Doctor Jones. It appears the radiation levels on earth have dropped to normal."

“A lot of good that’ll do us.” Thomas remained quiet as the movie continued to play. He had held out hope that someone else had survived but if they had the chances they could communicate with him were astronomical. “Nice choice of words Doc” He mumbled to himself on considering his thoughts. He then turned his attention to the readouts on the main control panel. He was a botanist, but he did understand the basics of those readings. “Any signs of life?”

“Yes. Abundant in the rural areas.” He wasn’t surprised, at least not totally. A lot of the animals would’ve been inside shelter and may in fact been strong enough to avoid any radiation sickness, at least for the moment. Thomas Jones always wanted to be an astronaut, it had always been his dream to travel through the stars and to see what other worlds awaited them. Now he just wanted to watch the movie. “Save your readings, we’ll analyze them later. I have plenty of time.”

“Yes Doctor Jones.”



**The Coyote
By Jamie White**

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Sunlight shone in through the window, lighting up Suzanna Hawk’s face as she slowly woke up. She stretched her arms out, a yawn escaping her lips. It had been a long night with a lot of travel. She was part of a traveling circus making its way through the west. As she looked outside the window of her small train car, she noticed the other members of her troupe busily preparing for the night’s show. They had finally arrived in Abilene, Kansas, the next stop on their tour. She loved traveling with the show. Although her act never changed, she still never knew exactly what her day was going to be like from one day to the next. There were always new places to explore and people to meet. Even the best planned acts would have last minute changes that made it fun for her to sit in the audience and watch, no matter how many times she’d seen the performers. She’d been with the show for almost six years now. She had left her home on the Sioux reservation when she was only sixteen years old to join the show and she’d never looked back. She loved everything about it; the travel, the applause, the people.

Suzanna dressed and headed outside to help with the daily chores. There were tents to set up, animals to tend and rehearsals. Her act in particular needed to be carefully planned out. She was known as the Woman Who Can’t Be Killed. The visiting crowd was told she had a spirit guide that protected her from being harmed, even when she was shot several times. Firing the gun was the

job of her husband, Alan Strongbow. He was very meticulous about his job. He always checked the blanks closely before putting them in his breast pocket the day of the performance. The gun was always loaded with the blanks after another check just before he went on stage to make sure no real bullets could get in by mistake.

“Morning,” Suzanna said, walking up to her husband and kissing him on the cheek.

“Morning. I was afraid you were gonna sleep the day away. There’s much work to get done before the show tonight.”

“I know. I’m sorry about that. . . . I don’t know what got into me. I was so tired after the show last night I could hardly keep my eyes open. What should I do first?”

“Elisabeth could use some help getting the horses fed and groomed. Why don’t you start with that? She’s the first act anyway.”

Suzanna nodded and walked off to help the horseback rider prepare the animals. For hours, the troupe tended the animals and made last minute preparations to make sure all the tents were ready for the locals before squeezing in a little rehearsal time. Finally, it was time for the show. Suzanna watched the acts from the stands as she always did before joining her husband backstage. As she stepped up to the curtain, sneaking a peak at the audience, she felt the usual rush of adrenaline that hit her right before a performance. It was one thing to sit in the audience and take in the show. It was another thing entirely to look at them from the stage. It made the crowd seem much larger than it really was.

“And now. . . . The moment you’ve been waiting for. Please give a warm welcome to Miss Suzanna Hawk, the woman who can’t be killed!” The audience exploded into applause with her husband’s grand introduction.

She stepped out onto the stage, bowing briefly before taking her place on the stage. The lights dimmed and the audience fell into a deafening

silence. Her husband stood several feet away from her, readying his weapon, taking aim at her chest. The gun was fired, all six rounds seemed to strike their target. Despite her swaying she never fell. With their act successfully over she and her husband bowed to the cheering crowd.

As with any other night they took a few moments to talk to some of the townspeople before cleaning up. They knew they were going to be there for another day, so there was no packing to do, at least. They finished their chores quickly and before she knew it she and her husband were heading for their train car to get some sleep. Well... she was about to get some sleep anyway. Her husband was too worked up to sleep that night.

Night after night, they did their act and the townsfolk showered his wife with praise and admiration, barely giving credit to the gunman. He felt he should be getting as much adulation, if not more, than her. More pay, as well. Sure, he just fired a blank at her but all she did was pretend to fall back a little. As far as he was concerned they had equal jobs and he was tired of her getting more spoils. He even came up with the mysterious story for their act...all she had done was tell him about some legends among her people. Like many Indian tribes, her people believed in spirit guides and totems. He didn't. As far as he was concerned, those stories were just make believe, silly superstitions that meant nothing.

He lay awake for hours, filled with the resentment that had been building for weeks now. The few times he had brought it up to her (that night included) she had brushed his concerns off. After all, the money all went to the same place. She couldn't understand why he was so worried about it. She didn't understand that as the man, he was supposed to be the one with the status and the power. He didn't know what to do about it, but he was tired of always having to play second fiddle. He also was a bit bored of the whole magical spirits nonsense. He knew better than to believe that stuff and was tired of

listening to Suzanna and some of the others speak as though they were real. At least it brought the money in. It never ceased to amaze him what people were willing to spend money on.

The next morning, Suzanna was up and dressed early, ready to help with the daily chores. The early night had done wonders for her and she was full of energy that day. Alan was already out there, cleaning his pistol.

"Mornin'," she said, wrapping her arms around him in a hug.

"Mornin'," he replied in a cold tone, pulling back to continue his task.

"Are you alright?," she asked. He seemed a bit off this morning. She wondered if he was still stewing over their argument the night before. It was a familiar one and one she was tired of. She just didn't know how to fix it. It wasn't her fault if people wanted to talk to her more and give her a bigger piece of the profits.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said. "Just got a lot to get done. Why don't you head on over to the stable and get those horses ready again? They took to you real good yesterday."

Suzanna nodded and walked over to the stables, still not sure that the trouble wasn't over. She figured if she gave him some time to stew on his own, it would all blow over eventually.

Later that night, Alan stood behind the curtain, doing his usual pre-show routine. This time, however, He had an odd sense of dread about him. He wasn't sure where it came from. Maybe he was still feeling a bit worked up from their argument the night before. Whatever the reason, he never wanted to walk onto that stage less than he did that night. Ever the showman, though, he put on the big smile and let the fake enthusiasm enter his voice.

"Evenin' folks!," he greeted the crowd. "It's time again for the act you've been hearin' about. Please give a warm welcome to Miss Suzanna Hawk..."

Suzanna walked out onto the stage and took her normal place. Alan turned to her, pistol in hand. Just as they did every night, the audience became deadly silent, their anticipation and

nervousness filling the air. Alan pointed the gun at Suzanna, preparing to fire, anticipating her fake stumble. As he pulled the trigger, his eyes widened in surprise. Instead of Suzanna's face, he saw a coyote staring back at him. Its eyes flashed and he saw a snarl form as Suzanna fell back. The imagine lasted only an instant and he shook it off. Must've been his imagination. He blinked, wondering what on earth could've cause him to see that..

As always, Suzanna straightened up, turning to the crowd with a wide smile on her face. To Alan's surprise, she was holding a wooden bullet in her hand. The audience went wild, jumping to their feet and cheering loudly. Suzanna looked down at the wooden plug and back over at Alan, confusion crossing her features. How did she manage to catch it in her hand? Quickly composing herself, she turned to the audience to take her bow, a wide smile crossing her features that never quite reached her eyes. She had had the strangest feeling come over her. Like she'd been outside of her body looking in for a moment. Several feet away, Alan had a similar look on his face... although he seemed a little more spooked than she did. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the transparent figure of a coyote disappear behind the curtain.

They never spoke of that night and Alan comments about phony spirits and magical mumbo jumbo came to an end. It was sort of an unspoken agreement between them, He wasn't entirely sure what had happened that night under the big top, but he figured it was best not to take his chances.

Enjoy a sneak peak from DiVitto Kelly's upcoming horror/humor novel, *Seal Cove*. Enjoy!



The sun was desperately peaking over the horizon, making its best effort to be seen. William Coslett, a retired constable in his late sixties from Toronto, called out to a pair of lobster boats sputtering along the calm surf. Scaling along the craggy coastline near the lighthouse, the slightly overweight man nearly slipped on a patch of damp seaweed.

"Save a couple for me," he called out. The fishermen gave a quick honk from their horn. The fog hung in the air around the man; a slight mist cascading down. He walked through a small pocket of cold air that made him shiver. "I should've brought my coffee," he thought, glancing up at the gray skies.

"Hell, I'd fish during a monsoon," muttered the recent retiree, who with his wife Margaret moved to Seal Cove three years ago. Coslett especially wanted to retire to a calmer, more tranquil "back to nature" kind of place -- he was done with city life. Nova Scotia fit the bill perfectly, having the dubious words "Canada's Ocean Playground" embossed on its license plate since the early 1970's.

A few more steps and he'd be at his favorite fishing spot; twenty-fifty yards to the right of the lighthouse, next to a large, weathered flat dull gray rock nearly eight feet wide. Even with the wide-ranging volatile tides of the Cove, he could pronounce himself safe from incoming water. Most of the time he brought a folding chair, but today he wore a new pair of knee-high waterproof black boots.

If any rain was in the forecast, he made sure to wear his preferred navy blue rain coat. Coslett carried his

liquorish red fishing pole, complete with matte black Shimano spinning reel with forty pound test line, bright yellow bait bucket, and a high-end olive-green and tan tackle box that boasted three tiers of compartments on each side when opened. For the last two months, he'd been on a 'no fried foods' diet at the strong urging – more like pestering, of his ever-caring wife. A struggle at first, the retired man was now nine pounds lighter, although his craving for fried onion rings was still firmly imbedded in his taste buds.

The rod and reel was a birthday gift from his wife four years ago, who still couldn't comprehend what her husband of thirty-eight years liked about fishing. He told her on many occasions it was the best present he'd ever received, even more than the original set of floor mats and polished wood stick shift knob she bought on eBay for his classic 1970 pale yellow Triumph Spitfire Mark III convertible, a midlife crisis purchase when he turned sixty.

Their marriage nearly lasted mere hours when he was caught fishing off an old wooden dock on their honeymoon night in Key West. Coslett woke up just past midnight, walked outside their honeymoon suite and spotted a man fishing on the resort dock. He tiptoed outside the room and started a conversation with the elderly divorced man, who lent the new groom a fishing pole. The two fished and drank beer until near four in the morning. The bride woke up from the laughter outside. Finding him missing, she pulled back the curtain and spotted him holding up a fish, grinning from ear to ear. The new Mrs. Coslett threw open the sliding glass door and stormed down the T-shaped dock.

Trying to calm his bride, he took her hands and best explained (with a slight slur) his passion for fishing by quoting former United States President Herbert Hoover who once said, "Fishing is much more than fish. It is the great occasion when we may return to the fine simplicity of our forefathers."

The freshly married man stood proud of the words he had just spoken

then burped. He gazed into his wife's eyes and said, "That . . . is why I fisshhh."

Mrs. Coslett blushed a pinkish hue, paused, and blurted out, "Bullshit!"

"Huh?" he replied, not expecting such a verbal punch in the face.

"Fishing . . . what a waste of time," she barked. "And why on Earth would you quote a horrible U.S. President like Hoover. For Christ's sake, at least quote Reagan." There was no more fishing for the rest of their honeymoon.

The bait bucket was teeming with shiners, caught yesterday with his cast net. He loved catching (and eating) sea bass, but on occasion, he enjoyed the battle of landing a medium sized shark or two. His proudest moment was the time he reeled in an eight-foot Bluefin tuna on a shared fishing trip with friends. After taking a sea of pictures at the dock, he sold the fish for a boatload of cash; it was the first time his wife ever appreciated fishing.

Observing the ocean water brushing up against the shoreline, he noticed a gooey highlighter green slime mixed in with the kelp and sea foam. He'd never seen that before. A couple of dozen dead fish littered the rough beach exterior, laying down a healthy stink.

"That's not a good sign," Coslett said to himself, then peering out to sea. The caw of a half dozen seagulls hovering in the stiff breeze made him look skyward. Like most of the time, the weather in the Cove was always a crapshoot, a potpourri of precipitation on any given day. Nova Scotia had earned the title of stormiest province by the *Climate of Canada* publication, but at least this particular morning, the waters were calm and the usual brisk winds nonexistent.

Shiners were leaping out from the water, being chased by something bigger no doubt he thought. "Now that's a good sign," he said out loud; that means there's fish out there." He inhaled a fresh salty breeze and exhaled it with bravado; he was content. Coslett always appreciated nature – in any form, but especially the

ocean. Just then, a gull dropped a big poop on the toe of his new boots.

“Damn you gull bastards,” he shouted as he shook his right foot in the shallow surf.

“I’d STILL rather be here fishing!” he exclaimed, but with less enthusiasm than before. He was convinced eating healthy – salads, fruit, and pasta were making him cranky. Coslett tried convincing his wife that heftier people were happier; he even tried using Santa Claus as an example.

He failed yet again, his forever blunt wife Margaret simply stated, “The guy works one day out of the year and those elves do most of the work; he can afford to be fat. You can’t and won’t!”

The mist was turning into a steady light drizzle now. The man debated about returning home for a split-second, but then remembered his wife would have a scroll-full of chores waiting for him. Although he loved his wife dearly, fishing was always a great excuse for not being at home. He glanced at a couple of plump harbor seals to his right on the rocky shore that snorted at him.

“Both of you could stand to lose a few pounds too,” he said, laughing ever so briefly. The seals continued their blank stare at the man. “Tough crowd, guys.”

Seeing pelicans flying above made Coslett think about the time he had accidentally hooked one a decade ago. He was fishing off an old cement pier in Clarks Harbor, just east of Yarmouth, when he casted his line out towards the flying bird. At first, he didn’t see the splash of his bait hitting the water. Next thing he knew, the fishing line was streaming from his reel; he’d hooked the fowl in midair. He reeled in the pelican towards the dock and had a fellow fisherman wearing gloves remove the hook. Coslett told the story at least a hundred times since, joking it was the first time he’d ever gotten a birdie.

Staring for a few moments, he stepped backwards a few feet, keeping an eye on the two seals. Despite the drizzle, the man reached for a pack of

cigarettes, another vice his wife wanted him to quit, but couldn’t. Coslett searched his coat pocket for a match, but didn’t find one. He remembered he kept a lighter in his tackle box, hidden somewhere amongst the hooks, sinkers, rusty pliers, and disposable camera.

The lighthouse stood tall along the coastline. He looked up, admiring all the improvements the Keating’s had put into it. Coslett donated five hundred dollars for building materials when work escalated over the summer. On a few occasions, he’d asked Michael to use the bathroom, especially after downing a few beers after hours of summer afternoon fishing. He didn’t know them too well, but enjoyed teaching their kids the art of fishing, and to Coslett, fishing was an art.

As the man turned away from the direction of the lighthouse, he stumbles over something along the fog-heavy shoreline. He landed flat on his protruding gut, mostly concealed by his raincoat. The bait bucket spilled over, shiners now flipping and flopping on the ragged shoreline.

“Ow,” uttered Coslett lying motionless on the shoreline. “Maybe I should have slept in this morning.” He got to his knees, both stiff in the early morning cool. He spat out a damp piece of kelp then noticed his open bait bucket. The man helplessly watched as the baitfish danced into the creeping waves and darted away. “Oh for the freaking poop.”

The man positioned each arm out in a push up position and gradually stood up from the wet beach surface. Thankfully he landed on a flattened patch of beach, void of barnacles or jagged rocks. He righted himself up, brushing the sand and seaweed from his clothes and wiped the moisture from his wire-rimmed glasses. Then he took notice of the peculiar shape on the waters’ edge.

The puzzled fisherman took off his hat and scratched his head, trying to size up the shape, but the fog still hovered around shore, making things difficult to see. The man had tripped

over something dark and rubbery. Tires maybe? He guessed, knowing Nova Scotia produced a hell of a lot of tires, mostly Michelins. The retired man knelt down to one knee, but quickly postulated it to be some sort of tail, but to what, a large seal, a log, maybe a whale? He stood up and counted off each step: one, two, three . . . all the way past eighteen feet in length.

“Jeeze Louise,” he uttered. Just then, a slight breeze helped push back the fog, unveiling something he’d never seen before. His jaw dropped in amazement.

“Well I’ll be a seal’s ass,” said the astonished fisherman before a chill ran through his body. The two seals barked loudly and waddled into the water, sputtering away into the ocean. He backed away, not sure if the thing was alive or dead. He stood upon his favorite rock and simply stared, absorbing the moment. Coslett thought about calling his wife, but he never brought his cellphone when he fished. No way he’d ever be interrupted.

Coslett stepped down off the flat rock. “Here’s something you don’t see every day. You look like some sort of supersized tadpole.”

The shape lay motionless and appeared dead. Seaweed draped the body as gentle waves brushed lightly against its bulbous flesh. The four rubbery legs seemed out of proportion to support such a creature. Blunt gray nails protruded from each of the five-toed feet. Still mystified, the man slowly reached out with his hand to touch it. As he did, his fingertips pushed into a slimy clear coat covering the skin.

“Oh how totally gross,” he said in disgust, washing the substance off in the water. “My God, I sound like my teen granddaughter for Christ’s sake.”

The olive gray body, with a mixture of dark green and burnt umber, was smooth and round; built like a huge manatee and prehistoric looking. The man gradually approached the head area, which made up a quarter of the creatures’ body. Along the back ridge were thin streaks of muddy yellow and subtle hints of red. The closed eyes

were the size of Frisbees. In the center of the bulbous head were two ten-inch slanted nostrils located just above the mouth; he didn't hear any breathing. The creature was easily bigger than the man's treasured English convertible roadster for sure.

Coslett stood directly in front of the object now, about six feet away. It almost appeared to be smiling. "Now that's a big mouth," he said with a chuckle. "You'd give my wife a run for her money." The man noticed the two harbor seals poking their heads above the waterline, keeping a watchful eye on the beached creature.

The fisherman bent down, opened his tackle box, and reached for the disposable waterproof camera tucked neatly away under a pair of brown work gloves, stained with fish blood. He grabbed the lighter too, but dropped the pack of cigarettes into the water. "Ah screw it; I need to quit anyway."

He stood up and wiped off the cheap camera lens. "Just in case I catch the big one," he often exclaimed. "And boy is this thing the big one."

His wife Margaret believed about ten percent of his fish tales, and that figure would certainly drop after describing his latest fish story, but with a photo as proof? Coslett closed the tackle box, took a few steps back, and positioned the camera, wiping the mist away from his glasses again and turning the bill of his hat backwards. Excited, he accidentally took a picture of his boots.

"Rats!" he said. "Well, I still have seventeen more pictures to go." Looking down, he forwarded the film with his thumb and peered through the plastic viewfinder, ready to line up the shot.

"Say cheese," he said. He clicked it once, looked down and then prepared to take another photo.

"This picture will probably end up on Field and Stream! No, scratch that, the Drudge Report!"

Suddenly, he had an idea. The man unhooked the line on his fishing pole and carefully placed the barb on

the creature's mouth, laying it on the protruding lower lip.

"This is so totally awesome," he said with a bit of valley girl flair, now sounding exactly like his teen granddaughter. He was already dreaming of mega television interviews, making the cover of well-known magazines, and of course a guest spot on the fishing channel. "And to think I was going to back home and probably have to scrub the toilet and change the litter box." The tide was coming in, touching his bait bucket and tackle box; he was oblivious.

"I'll say I caught this behemoth and landed it right here, I'm one hell of a genius!" he exclaimed as he lined up the next shot. He peered through the tiny viewfinder again, stepping back a bit more to get the whole shape and fishing pole into the picture.

"Nice, now work with me," he said, giddy as a school kid. Coslett moved in a little closer to capture the essence of the creature's face.

"Now give me a charming smile you big galoot."

First the eyes opened then the mouth, like an automatic garage-door. A deep exhaling sound exuded its reeking breath. The man kept peering through the viewer not exactly sure what he was seeing. He slowly raised his head above the box camera, taking a picture, but then dropping it in the oncoming tide. He glared at the smooth glasslike teeth lining the upper and lower jaw, a graying pink color painted the inside of the cavernous maw. Strands of goo stretched out like a spider web as the mouth opened wider. The two observing seals quickly dropped below the surface and torpedoed their way towards deeper water.

"Oh shh . . ." The creature lassoed its blackish tongue around the helpless fisherman, dragging him and his fishing pole - snapping it in two, into its open mouth. In one gulp, the screaming man vanished from view. The creature shook its head back and forth as it attempting to swallow the prey whole.

The creature thrashed its globular tail, creating a froth along the shoreline.

One of the fisherman's hands flailed away just outside the closing jaws. Like a bear trap, the creature bit down, biting off three of the man's fingers. They popped off, perfectly severed, falling into the clumps of seaweed and rocks being stroked by the incoming surf. A few curious seagulls cawed at each other as the creature became stationary again, closing its eyes. A stream of blood washed down outside a corner of the mouth where the creature quickly flicked out its tongue, slurping it up.

One brazen gull, not too impressed with the newly discovered creature, picked up one of the fingers and flew off. Another gull landed on the creature's back, its feet sinking into the gooey-filmed skin, but then swiftly flew away. The rising tide crept in, reaching the tackle box and bait bucket until both were floating. The creature remained stationary, tilting its head to the left before letting out a deep, resonating belch.



**The First Two Weeks of
Naval Boot Camp**

By Marjorie Ann Clark

As the Miami to Orlando overnight Am Track bumped and ground to a screeching halt, just long enough to let me and a few other naïve unfortunates off from its continued journey northward, I felt very abandoned and alone in the train station, border lining on a full-fledged, worry fueled, mind numbing panic that I desperately tried not to show to the other few folks who were waiting with me to be transported to our next destination.

I was very surprised when a white unmarked van pulled up at one of the station's glass door exits and honked its horn. I was expecting a big yellow bus or maybe even a green bus on loan from a penitentiary, more in keeping with my presently frazzled mood of no sleep and uncertain expectations. Without a word, we got inside. No one had to tell us to buckle up, stay in our seats, and remain absolutely silent. My only thought at this point was, "Where are we going?"

No one gave me an answer. Instead, the van sped along on back asphalt roads, winding its way through the streets of Orlando, pulling up to a gatehouse with a young man in a blue denim shirt, blue canvas "bell bottoms" with white leggings and black shoes and a sailor hat, carrying by his side a long pistol. He hastily viewed the driver's ID, and we sped off again to an uneven grass covered path, to a brightly lit, one story yellow concrete block structure. Here the few of us got out and were forced to separate, never to see or hear from each other again, severing a newly formed tenuous strand of would be friendship.

Hastily herded with others from other vehicles and directions, I came to a long, open hallway in the yellow building and was ordered to line up along the wall in a straight line, not slouching, and definitely no touching the wall in the process. I was wondering why the long line, and, when do I get to sleep? At last I was ushered to a classroom and a desk, where the ones in charge passed around beige

cotton drawstring bags filled with toiletries and laundry soap, which I and the others in their seats were obliged to dump the contents on their desks and make an abrupt inventory. With that completed, we quickly returned out items into the bags provided, and proceeded to get into another line, deeper into the building.

This particular line ended at a station of three open toilet stalls, a small refrigerator on each side of the room, a dour faced lady in a khaki uniform, and two attendants passing out tightly screwed clear plastic cups. Our job was to keep drinking water until your bladder just had to let loose in one of the open stalls' toilets under the watchful eye of the woman in khaki. After having to get back into the line after drinking from the tap water fountain three or four times, I experienced both immense physical relief and emotional embarrassment when I finally filled my cup, and gave it to one of the attendants before I was again ordered to join yet another group of young women, mostly high school age, with a few in their twenties and early thirties, who were equally in the dark as I was about what would happen next.

It was now around 2 AM, I guessed, when we were given instructions to climb the outer steps of Barracks 8 to the second floor after a brisk and disorganized march. We then were given two gym shorts, one pair of sweat pants, a sweatshirt, two T shirts, a few white cotton pairs of socks, a ball cap, and shower shoes. Everyone had brought their gym shoes with them or wore them upon arrival, like I did. Our next task was to return all possessions home in a postal box, including the clothes we had when we got there. After a quick undressing and donning our sports apparel, we were officially "Newbies" at Naval boot camp, subject to furtive whispers and pointing from other companies that were further along in their training. Stripped of anything or anyone that reminded us of our respective pasts, we quickly learned to rely on each other to get

things accomplished. Yes, taking a shower or dressing in front of relative strangers was hard, learning to make a bed with your bunkmate, washing everyone's gym laundry, folding a sea bag properly in twenty minutes, doing pushups on my toes, those things were also quite a challenge. Added to all that, I contracted bronchitis while I was there, which didn't really go away until weeks later. However, I would not have changed a thing, because in my mind's eye, what happened was meant to happen all along.



**The Flare
By Rick Weber**

It had been almost two years since that day in May of 2050 when the world went black. The earth was plunged into darkness after it experienced the brightest moment ever. Solar Cycle 27 would go down as the most climactic time in history and it was all the result of a solar flare. Scientists had been monitoring the sun's activities but nothing could have prepared them to predict what happened on that day. Flare Day, as it would become known, began normally enough for the world when solar monitoring stations detected a sudden violent explosion on a sunspot they were monitoring. The explosion sent a solar storm to earth at

about twenty million miles an hour. It took almost five hours for the Flare to reach the earth from the sun, not enough time to implement the emergency procedures which were in place. When it struck, the light intensity on earth increased dramatically. The Northern Lights could be seen as far south as Caracas while the Southern Lights were viewed as far north as Lima. When the storm touched the earth's atmosphere, it was all over. Not many lives were lost but the world, as we knew it, changed forever.

We were a planet totally dependent on electricity and that single solar flare plunged us into darkness taking out the entire power grid of the world which was driven by nuclear reactors. Some parts of the globe were less affected than others especially if they were the areas covered by nightfall when the Flare struck as they were away from a direct hit by the solar particles. The Flare neutralized the cores of all of the world's nuclear power plants and anything requiring an atomic reaction, including nuclear bombs. Well, at least one good thing came of it.

Scientists could not measure the strength of the Flare since their instruments were damaged beyond repair as a result of the cosmic event. They guessed that it was a type X70 solar flare but no one knew for sure. The only thing they did say with some certainty was that it was larger than the solar flare of 1859. For all practical purposes we were back in 1859, starting over, in a world without a power grid.

Rebuilding began but not in a place which you would associate with a renaissance; Charleston, West Virginia. Why Charleston people asked?

Charleston was located in the heart of the American coal region. The world was once again dependent on fossil fuel for energy and the Charleston region had several coal fired power plants in mothballs which were not affected by the Flare.

Among the gentry in Charleston was Clay Morrow, a high school math and science teacher. What made Clay

stand out was his total lack of dependence on calculators, computers, or even an abacus to do any mathematical equation. He had as his mentor, Alvin Curtis, his old high school math teacher, who pushed Clay only to rely on his own handwritten calculations and his mind for answers. Clay had been an outstanding student and had Mr. Curtis all four years in high school who taught him advanced placement (AP) algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus and even physics. Clay's mind functioned with the speed and accuracy of the most modern computers of the day.

Mr. Curtis had retired the year Clay began his first year as a teacher and thus Clay had never worked with him as a colleague. Mr. Curtis moved away from Charleston to a remote cabin in the Monongahela National Forest. Mr. Curtis was lifelong bachelor, who had led a solitary, non-pretentious life. As such, it was no surprise when he relocated to a place with few people.

The day after the solar flare struck while the town, the nation, and the world were in darkness without communication, the mayor himself came by Clay's house, the boyhood home left to him by his late parents. Clay was an only child who still had not yet met the love of his life. His, too, was a life of solitude. Clay did not know the mayor and likewise the mayor did not know him. The knock at the door would be the start of an arduous journey for Clay but he did not know it at the time.

"Clay, I'm Bill Needam," he said with his hand out stretched. As he reached out to shake his, Clay said, "I know who you are Mr. Mayor. What brings you here?"

Mayor Needam just smiled in a polite sort of way which made Clay a little uneasy but without any posturing he answered Clay's question. "We have a lot on our plate down at City Hall. We are looking for all the qualified help we can get to get the town back up and running again. You teach all of the AP math classes at George Washington High School and have

gotten a lot of recognition and awards. You also pound it into your students' heads the necessity of having good math skills. You also show it by example. You even do a lot of the complex problems in your head or so my administrative assistant, Nellie Livingstone, says."

Nellie Livingstone had been one of Clay's first students and found her to be among the brightest he ever taught but what could he as a high school teacher do to solve the problems at city hall, let alone the world he asked himself.

"Clay," the mayor continued. "We're down to scratch. We have to get the town up and running again. Someone in Washington realized that we still had the old power plants and with the coal mines nearby knew we could get back up and running before anyplace else in the country. We need someone who can do all of the calculations with just a pencil and paper. We found out that most of the engineers here cannot do them without some sort of electronic gadget because they let their calculation skills die. The reason I am here is tell you myself that we cannot recover here without you and that computer mind of yours."

Without hesitation, Clay agreed to the mayor's request and went with him to the Charleston Civic Center which had been converted into a command post not just for the city but also for the state. The mayor introduced Clay to the governor who simply asked, "What can you do?" With that, Clay answered the governor with his own question. "Where do you want me to begin?"

For the next six months, Clay worked with the engineers to get the exact figures they needed to get the old power stations up and running. He also worked with coal companies to get them the data they required to start up the mining equipment to feed the electric generators. It was a long six months away from the classroom and the students he wanted to serve.

When the first six months were up and the first of the old coal fired power plants came up on line. The governor petitioned the Kanawha County Board

of Education to assign Clay to the reconstruction effort on extended basis. Clay had no choice but to stay on working eighty to one hundred hour weeks without overtime. He was somewhat depressed and sought consolation but from whom?

While he was walking home one night after working late, Clay found his answer; Mr. Curtis. But, how would Clay reach out to him? The man had no phone or internet even before the solar flare hit. In fact, at the moment the entire world was without these services. Mr. Curtis had been a strong supporter of Clay's during high school and even helped him get a scholarship to attend West Virginia University. Right now, Clay was facing burn out just because people could no longer add, subtract, multiply, or divide without electronic assistance.

After the first power station was up and running, the federal government moved into the area to capitalize on this new power source of yore. Electric transmission lines everywhere were burned up during the Flare. As a result, the infrastructure was gone and also needed to be rebuilt. This had not happened yet. The government had to be where the electricity was even if it were only in a remote locale far from DC in Charleston. This did not mean that Clay's job was finished many places and institutions needed people with his skills. Clay worked on getting the other power plants on line and as Charleston became the light on an otherwise dark nation, Clay found himself being sent to other places when the local engineers in Charleston could once again use their electronic devices to do their jobs.

Clay became enamored over time with his celebrity status and the perks that went along with it. His house was among the first ones in town to get electricity restored after the Flare. People began to recognize him on the street. Even those who were older and not his students called him Mr. Morrow. As he traveled about West Virginia and the eastern part of the country, his new

reputation followed him as if he were Albert Einstein.

Yet, he was still troubled. His soul ached but he did not know for what. He would like to get back to teaching but he was not as excited about it as he was six months after the Flare.

He stopped by the high school once a week just to check in with the principal. During one of these visits, he asked his boss if anyone had heard from Mr. Curtis. To his astonishment, the principal told Clay that he still received an occasional snail mail letter from Alvin as the principal referred to Clay's mentor. Without being asked, the principal wrote down Mr. Curtis's address and gave it to Clay telling him that he should drop Alvin a line.

The next week Clay traveled to Elkins about 140 miles northeast of Charleston to help engineers to get a substation operating. The work went smoothly taking less time than expected. With the town now out of the dark after a two year blackout, Clay was again regaled as a hero. After an impromptu ceremony at city hall in which Clay was given the key to the city, he found that he had some free time before he was due at his next stop, Harrisonburg, Virginia. As he drove east on US Route 33, he pulled out from his coat pocket the slip of paper the principal had given him with Mr. Curtis's address on it. He saw that it was near the town of Bowden about ten miles outside of Elkins. Clay pulled over and looked at the local roadmap. He was only a couple of miles away from Mr. Curtis's home. Clay decided to travel there unannounced since Mr. Curtis had no telephone service. With that, he pulled on to a side road south of Bowden, whose lights were now lit by the Elkins substation.

The road to Mr. Curtis's house was graded and unpaved. Funny, Clay thought to himself that anyplace in the mid-21st century would not have paved roads as he pressed on.

He arrived to a place on the road where a lone mailbox stood with the name Curtis painted in neat block letters on it. Clay turned off the road on

to a dirt lane which went back into the woods. He drove slowly along the lane which went uphill a half mile to a simple one story log structure where the path ended. There was a dim light coming through one of the house's windows. "This must be the place," Clay whispered to himself. With that, he got out of his truck and walked up to the front door.

Clay knocked and then heard someone stirring inside. The door opened and there before him was Mr. Curtis who surveyed him with a cold scan and then looked at him straight in the eye. "I've been expecting you, Mr. Morrow," his mentor said in a flat tone. Clay was taken aback by his reception because he expected something warmer from the man who nurtured him in school. "Come on in," Mr. Curtis beckoned him the same spiritless voice.

Clay entered the cabin to see that it had a great room serving as living room, dining room, and kitchen with only one small light on in the kitchen to illuminate the entire area. The décor was stark; a table, two chairs, and an old wooden roll top desk. Mr. Curtis was showing his age with a mane of now white hair and a shuffle in his step.

"I see you got your lights back on," Clay remarked in order to lift the mood. "I guess that I have you to thank for this?" Mr. Curtis replied in the form of a rhetorical question. "Have a seat," Mr. Curtis continued pointing to a chair next to the table. As he sat down, Clay was unsettled and wondered why his mentor was acting so strangely toward him.

"What brings you here?" Mr. Curtis asked Clay in the same monotone.

"Well," Clay started. "I've been working with the governor and even the federal government to help get the power plants back up and running. I've been all over the East Coast doing the calculations for the engineers..."

Before he could continue, Mr. Curtis held up a hand and interrupted Clay. "I have heard of your adventures. Word travels even without electricity. You have become somewhat of a celebrity.

People come to you in search of answers.”

“You don’t understand,” Clay offered. “The governor and the mayor came to me. They needed help and I was able to give it to them. My work helped put the lights back on in a lot of places a lot sooner than they could have without it.”

“Is that so,” the old man mused. “Then can you tell me what have you gotten in return?” The question rattled Clay.

“You don’t understand. I haven’t received a thing. I’m working long hours without overtime on my teacher’s pay. I still live in the same house I grew up in. I’m still driving my father’s old truck. I’m still wearing the same clothes I bought five years ago. What do you mean by asking what I got in return?”

This prompted Mr. Curtis to pelt Clay with rapid fire questions in an edgier voice. “Since you acquire your new status, have you had to wait in any food lines? How long was the electricity off at your house? Did you go long without water service? Have you asked about when you will go back to teaching? Do you remember your students’ names? What does the world owe you? Where do you think you will be when this crisis is over?”

Clay recalled that he was among the first in his neighborhood to get his lights back on along with his water service. He never had to wait in a food line. It had been two years since he taught a class. His students had moved on and he did not remember any of their names. It was the first time since the Flare that Clay’s motivation had been called into question and he did not know how to answer the old man.

“I think I better get going. I have to get to Harrisonburg.” Clay told Mr. Curtis in a shaky voice as he made his way to the door. “Take care of yourself,” the old man said to him sternly and added. “My door is always open to you.” Clay did not know how to interpret his mentor’s last remarks or for that matter any of the things Mr. Curtis said to him during their brief

encounter. He got back into his truck and headed back to the main road which would take him to Harrisonburg.

Clay’s work with the governor would continue on for another year. Along the way, he was given a permanent position on a state commission involving education. Speaking engagements, television interviews, and even job offers also came his way. He even began a serious relationship with a woman he met on the governor’s staff. He maintained high levels in his mathematical proficiency but never returned to teach in the classroom.

He never reached out again to contact Mr. Curtis. Clay thought that his mentor had just gotten old and lost touch with the real world. Clay watched the lights come back on all over the country and thought that life was good.

One evening as he walked on the state capitol parking lot to a new luxury car he recently bought, Clay looked up at the sky. In the twilight, he could see storm clouds forming overhead. Clay heard thunder in the distance and he knew that it was only a few minutes before it would start pouring. He had just finished testifying before the legislature on school funding. Clay looked at his shiny new vehicle and hoped that he could get it home without getting any rain spots on it.

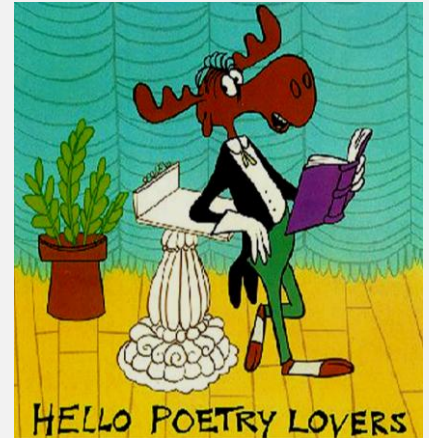
As he reached for the door handle, he never heard it coming. There was no sound only a bright flash of lightning. Clay fell to the ground and he was no more.

The media only reported his death by saying that he was a member of the governor’s staff. No official press releases came from the governor’s mansion. No reporters asked the state’s chief executive for any comment about Clay’s untimely death at a press conference the following morning. His girlfriend cried at his funeral which was attended by only a small number of people. Among them were the high school principal, a few distant relatives, some old students, and his old mentor.

Mr. Curtis gave a moving eulogy which ended with him recalling his last meeting with Clay at his cabin in the

woods. He described Clay’s departure driving down the rough lane in his truck to the highway never to be seen by him again. The old man added that Clay’s path began with the Flare and ended with a flash of light. Mr. Curtis wondered if any of the mourners had gotten his message as they filed past the coffin at the cemetery.

Portal Poetry Corner



Here are the winners of the Poetry Contest held at SR in April. Congratulations!

**Life
By Hannah Elizabeth Lewis**

Childhood and youth and adult flying by
Laughing, sneezing, coughing and
occasional cry
Up hills and through glades and rivers
and streams
Spinning and turning and running
around

Balanced on hands, on toes and on heels
 Looking, not knowing, aspiring and trying
 Not able nor willing to retrace the past steps
 A Giselle, a Sparrow, a Lion, a Giraffe
 Meeting the sparsity of water on earth
 On a leaf, in a bucket, a cup or a pond
 Bending to drink a sip or a cup
 Will there be sufficient to fill an empty spot!

Congestion
By Suzzette Dawes

Watching the traffic
 As the vehicles stop and go;
 Some like tortoises, others like crazy Rabbits
 Jumping everywhere; fast, cutting in and out
 Until the next stop then go.

Waiting in a Dunkin Donuts
 College kids were ordering at the counter,
 I drift to another time when I used to ride
 My bicycle from our home on Fifth Street
 To BCC (now known as BC).

Oh I remember driving west of University Boulevard
 When it was just two lanes and the area was dense
 With trees and lush vegetation that I feared to step near.
 I remember looking for flora for my plant taxonomy class
 When I came down during my second semester from university;
 Downtown Fort Lauderdale was one big party

That would spill onto the beach that was only littered
 With small building so it had plenty of access.

Now the waterfront access is limited due to all the buildings
 And you can't even see the stars at night
 As they are outshone by all the city lights
 Of the skyscrapers clothing Fort Lauderdale's sky.

So I am watching the traffic
 Worsening. It's just stop and crawl now
 As the herd from work spills from the offices
 And drives on the road, rushing back home
 Causing congestion.

Families
by Sheila Klein

Some families swallow bullshit
 with their morning cereal
 believe that more can make them happy,
 that material things are more important than people, not mine.
 We appreciate the simple pleasures in life--
 being able to step off the side of the bed
 in the morning
 and walk to the bathroom
 on our own two feet,
 being able to wipe our own asses,
 being able to sit down at table
 and rise up again without help,
 have a good meal with friends,
 being able to chew it
 with our own teeth,
 seeing faces on the street clearly,
 even if we have to wear glasses,
 showing every wrinkle
 and crevasse on our faces,
 knowing we earned them
 with deep smiles and frowns,
 listening with happy and sad tears
 to the joys and sorrows of those we love,
 being able to remember those we love,

including everyone, old and young,
 straight and gay,
 white, yellow, black and red,
 no matter what language they speak
 or where they come from
 or what kind of food they eat.
 Our family is thankful for the connection
 to the one family including us all.

Civilized and Wild
By Donna Ragland-Greene

Morning unfolds in suburbia,
 surely no surprises
 are in store,
 morning follows morning follows
 morning,
 a never ending stretch of sameness,
 and yet,

I leash the dog to walk the block,
 treading the same path each day,
 passing the mundane concrete and tile,
 neatly cut yards
 screaming of unnatural order,
 green squares of
 artificial maintenance
 and mind numbing
 conformity,
 and yet,

crossing a nondescript yard
 my eye catches a flash of red.
 The double take is rewarded with
 a welcome jolt,
 the sight of a fox
 lounging on the grass
 behind a fence,
 eyeing us warily, as we do him,

what a wonder,
a thing of the wild here in suburbia.

My neighborhood transforms from
bland to glorious!
In that instant I imagine
we are deep in the woods,
he and I locked in a different realm.
Eye to eye
beast to beast,
nothing but our instincts to guide us.

I marvel at his calm consideration
of my dog and I passing his turf.
He will allow us to pass,
knowing his skills at survival
far surpass ours.

We are the weak creatures
dependent on comforts,
weaned from the struggle,
soft, spoiled and safe.

The conceit of superiority
an illusion of our making
aided by years of
artificial means.

Knowing in an instant,
a blink of calamity
can bring us crashing down,
resources depleted,
health and happiness off the cliff.

Helpless creatures
exposed for what we truly are,
echoes of our former selves,
far removed from
the memory of the wild,
and yet,

We walk on,
agreeing to play the roles
civilized and wild,
each on opposite sides of the fence,
artificial boundaries
lasting who knows
how much longer.

SOLOIST
By Jane Ellen Glasser

Like an ornament
at the apex of a clay roof

a single bird will perch,
lord of the highest view.

This morning it's a dove
dissolving against the soft
grey of an overcast sky.
Better than high branches

or high wires, here he is
a soloist, rooster of the skies,
loosening his six-note aria
on the empty street below.

From my open window
in an adjacent building,
I sit watching, listening
to his abandoned heart,

thinking, this is the way
a poem writes itself,
note by solitary note
on the prevailing air.

Traveling by Comet
By Octavio E. Salcedo

I'm hanging by the tail of a comet,
Roaming over a vast endless space,
I forget worries, wounds and goals,
My mind is a blank *tabula rasa*, empty,
Ready to receive, digest and process
The future's exciting good news:
I see tilted in your favor new
Metaphysical laws of chance,
You are becoming a bold hero
Shining light over arcane mysteries,
Reducing them to a binary combination
Of a simple unassuming zero
And a *grandee* eloquent one- call
him *UNO*-
No more ancient sickness of mind and
body
As God is ready to lend you her ears.

Come ride with me as my imagination
Breaks barriers and goes beyond
astrophysics.
Yes, war, hunger and pestilence have
ended
It was a nightmare of a distant past;
All the earth's riches are now
exhausted,
It was a moronic mirage -fool's gold-

There is a wealth of raising spiritual
stocks
Ready to be taken or exchanged for a
song,
It is called the maximum *du
jour* special,
You said a few nice words about your
fellow
Travelers and you can corner the
market.
Observe those collapsing black holes,
The ones made by envy and hate,
And the implosive meteor showers,
Resulting from annoying each other,
Are fast disappearing in the firmament.
She didn't give us wings to soar in the
air
But gray matter to scale the heavens.
She gave us pain and suffering
As a challenge to test our mettle.
She gave us illusions to dream
And also reality to live a full life of
action.

Come on; let's continue to defy
The laws of gravity and ordinary living,
Let's communicate in telepathic trance
With our twin souls in the Universe,
Let's ride over intergalactic canvas
Of nebulous matter, pristine abode
Of distant star nymphs – epicene
keepers
Of the warm invigorating spring-
Who are cordially inviting us to drink
This clear ambrosia of eternal
knowledge.
Let's follow the constellations' paths,
Let's begin a new life, a new day
Under a glowing sidereal sunrise
Of several platitudinous suns,
Let's ride the waves of pulsars and
asteroids
Sparkling like Christmas lights in the
ethereal sky,
Let's hang tight by the tail of the comet
and continue to dream and hope.

**Writer's Group meetings are
held the second Monday of
every month in the second floor
conference room from 6:00 –
7:30pm.**

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

From picture books to novels, stop by and discuss your ideas. Submit your short story or poem to be published in the monthly Portal to Michael DiVitto Kelly at mkelly@broward.org.

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FEEDBACK CORNER

We want to hear from you! Let us know what you think of our stories. Feel free to email Michael Kelly, head of the writer's group at mkelly@broward.org or call (954) 201-8870.

*Please specify the story and writer.
Thanks!



News Flash! Portal writer Emiliano Moreno has a new book available on Amazon.com titled, *Cadeus*.

Cadeus Chadwick is a lonely, tortured soul cursed by an old gypsy woman during the late eighteenth century. Forever young, he is doomed to walk the earth for eternity unable to eat, feel or taste. Any female whom he kisses or that kisses him will wither and die in his arms.

Join Cadeus on his centuries-long quest for a way to end his malediction. From dinner with the devil at midnight to theories about parallel universes and alternate realities, nothing is too absurd or beyond the scope of reason for this desperate young man

Check out our website
at www.thewritersportal.yolasite.com
to view back issues and
more. Enjoy!