

The Portal

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



The Shack By DiVitto Kelly

Mark Donnelly was returning to New Jersey for Thanksgiving break. His parents picked him up from the airport Wednesday afternoon and they headed home. He personally avoided driving past the house where his friends were killed the night after Thanksgiving two years ago, but his dad forgot.

"I'm sorry, I should have taken . . ." He glanced in the rearview mirror at his son who was sitting in the back seat.

Mark, now a college sophomore in Boston University, purposely turned his body facing the window in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, he recognized the landscape and knew exactly where he was. "It's okay." Mark turned up the volume on his Walkman trying to drown out any invasive thoughts.

They pulled into the driveway, greeted by his two older brothers who were throwing the football in the front yard, and their five-year-old Siberian husky Mark dubbed MacReady after the lead character from John Carpenter's *The Thing* movie. Mark grabbed his lone suitcase and duffle bag full of dirty clothes from the trunk and went inside.

"How's he doing?" asked the eldest brother, Will, gripping the football in his right hand.

"This isn't a good time of year for him," replied Dad.

The other brother, Brian, two years younger at twenty-three, chimed in as they walked into the house. "There's nothing he could have done."

Everyone clammed up as Mark reappeared from the laundry room. Mom had already fixed son number three a baloney and cheese sandwich, with chips and glass of sweetened iced tea.

"It's okay guys, you can talk; I'm not gonna melt." Mark gobbled up his midafternoon lunch, let out a hefty belch – forgetting he wasn't at college anymore, and trudged upstairs to unpack. Mom frowned. She always emphasized good manners for her sons.

"I hope we're not spending twenty thousand a year so you can be a slob!" "Twenty-five," said Dad, adding his two cents.

"Excuse me!"

Mark was mentally worn down from marathon studying for exams and just wanted to unwind. He closed his bedroom door, pulled the curtains together, and plopped down on the comfortable full-sized mattress. The one at college was paper thin and about as comfortable as a sheet of plywood. He quickly fell fast asleep. It didn't take long to start dreaming about the incident.

It was 1984, the day after Thanksgiving. Like most late Novembers in New Jersey, it was cold, damp, with an outside chance of snow. Rather than joining his preppy high school senior friends at the cookie cutter bar/restaurant in town, he opted – like most of the time, to drink at the shack with his other friends; the ones that preferred wearing concert t-shirts and torn Levis.

The shack was an ancient ten by ten unpainted wood structure – more like a mini house with open doorways and

peaked roof. It was located a hundred yards up the hill behind his best friend Rick's house. No one knew who built it, but it was cool place to drink beers, listen to music, and complain how much it sucked to live in a no-fun suburban town.

Mark was the oldest, but looked younger than his friends, who were all juniors in high school. He was still waiting for any form of facial growth to sprout. Mark routinely gathered up the beer funds from his friends before hitting the local liquor store. The employee behind the counter used to scrutinize his driver's license like a gemologist examining a finely cut diamond. The bearded man, late forties, was never one hundred percent certain he was of legal drinking age, but they became respectable owner/customer friends. At least they both agreed that all New York sports teams blew. Living in New Jersey was a lonely place for a pair of former Midwestern sports fans.

It was just past nine in the evening when Mark arrived at Rick's house. The gravel driveway lasted forever with pine trees lined up like soldiers on each side. The house, nothing special, was a modest rundown three/two with a musty basement that had all the charm of the fruit cellar in the film, *Psycho*. The only real selling point was the ten-plus acres of secluded forest, most of it in the back yard, heading up the twenty degree hill side. The next closest home was a half mile in every direction. Having privacy was usually a good thing.

As custom, Mark pulled up near the house and beeped his grating, high-pitched horn. Rick strolled out the basement entrance zipping up his jacket and got in. His mom had just left for the weekend to visit family in nearby Pennsylvania.

He pulled out a cigarette and was about to light it. "You should know better," said Mark, who had a strict rule of no smoking – of any kind, in his car. He hated it.

"Come on man," replied Rick, "we're best friends."

"No can do; you know how I despise cigarette smoke." Mark's dad was a

former smoker, finally quitting after he was diagnosed with throat cancer five years ago, now cured. Cancer has a sure-fire way of making anyone give up smoking.

Rick shook his head. "Sometimes I can't figure you out."

"Join the club," replied Mark who slid a cassette of the Who's *Quadrophenia* into the recently installed car stereo. "Out of my brain on a train now baby."

Mark backed up before veering off the driveway and headed up the ten-foot wide gravel trail in his tangerine orange 1974 Saab 99, appropriately nicknamed the pumpkin mobile. His friends knew Mark was a walking monster movie encyclopedia and loved Halloween, so anything orange was of no surprise. His favorite football team even donned orange and black.

Rick was an only child, living with his mom now divorced. As long as her son got good grades she didn't care what he did. Mark, on the other hand, had to live up to his two older brothers who went to borderline Ivy League schools and excelled in athletics.

Mark was slender, a bit goofy, quit witted, but solidly average at sports, although he did manage to win a medal in summer camp for wood carving and archery. His parents realized pestering their youngest son constantly wasn't going to work. Mark was a thoroughly entrenched B type personality, studying little yet still managing respectable grades. If he heard his parents utter, 'If you only applied yourself' one more time he was going to vomit.

Ever since his sophomore year in high school when he and his friends discovered beer, Mark, along with his cohorts Joe Coslett, twins Thomas and Peter Lewis, and Rick Brown savored many a weekend evening building fires in the designated party site in the woods and drinking.

The twins, along with Joe and Rick, started a band in ninth grade and had progressed greatly, although having a band named *The Screw Ups* didn't exactly conjure up long-term success. Thinking up band names when you're drunk is never a good idea. Occasionally, their drummer Steve, who

they recruited from a nearby town, would hang out, but he was a bit too energetic -- more like a cross between Animal from *The Muppets* and the Tasmanian Devil of Warner Brothers fame. He didn't exude a calming vibe.

The Lewis brothers, both lanky with curly black hair, shared the same laidback demeanor, cool and reserved. Both were aspiring guitar players, and quite good. Joe played bass, thumping out cool, melodic riffs. The guy could polish off a couple of six-packs in a heartbeat and still remain borderline sober. No wonder he started dropping acid and smoking weed to get a better buzz.

Partying after Thanksgiving was becoming a ritual. The brothers were already up at the shack, sprucing up the flat, circular grounds, rearranging bowling ball sized stones around the fire pit. They rummaged through the damp forest looking for wood for the fire, but this time, an older friend of Joe's, a suspected ex-con named Roscoe pulled up in his pickup truck filled with split logs.

"Nice bro," said Peter. "What'd cost you?"

"Us," Joe replied. "What'd it cost, us." Joe stood nearly six feet tall and sported frizzy blond hair and was a sure-fire class clown. There was a story he once answered every question on a science test with the word trout.

The five dug out their collective wallets and handed over whatever they could, fives and tens. "I was getting tired of the Daniel Boone crap, scrounging for firewood."

Roscoe plopped open up the tailgate. "Start stacking boys."

The temperature hovered around the mid-forties. Despite the recent downpours, there were still pockets of snow left over from last weeks' surprise blanketing. Mark and Rick took two cases of Budweiser and a six pack out from the trunk and placed the bottles in the patches of snow.

"At least we don't have to worry about warm beer," said Thomas, who brought along three cans of Pringles chips and a bag of Bugles. Occasionally

they'd even roast hot dogs. Everyone thought it was gross that Mark doused his with ketchup instead of mustard.

"Who's got the paper?" asked Mark, itching to start the fire.

"Rolling papers?" said Joe, as he sparked up a joint. Everyone looked at each other, figuring someone was supposed to be the go-to newspaper boy. No one was particularly eager to make the trek back down the hill to Rick's house for supplies.

"Time to put my Cub Scout skills to work," said Mark. He tore up the cardboard from the case of beer and tucked it strategically around the logs. In no time, the five were feeling warm, cracking open beers and getting toasted.

"Mr. College Boy – always the thinker," said Rick, who blew off the SAT test in October to go camping instead with the Lewis twins. As a junior, he had to get his ass in gear or it'd be community college for sure, and in an upper middle class town like theirs, attending anything with the word "community" in it was an educational taboo.

"You're going too dick weed," replied Mark, who knew his best friend would like nothing more than live outside the Garden State for nine months out of the calendar year. The two had even discussed attending the same university.

"How about you, twins," asked Mark, looking at the Lewis brothers, both juniors like Rick. "You guys are thinking of college, right?"

"Hell no," boasted Peter. "I'm gonna be a rock star!" He stood up and mimicked the Who's Pete Townshend, windmilling with a stripped four-foot tree branch Mark was whittling. "We don't get fooled again!"

His older brother rolled his eyes. "You did the windmill backwards dufus." "Since when did you give a damn about college?" asked Joe. "I didn't think it was possible, but you're lazier than me."

The senior poked the fire with a branch. "Everyone in my family went to college so you know I gotta go too. Hell,

I hear it every freaking day about the importance of an education; my mom's a teacher, remember?" He took a hefty gulp of beer and belched.

"God, if my mom heard that one I'd be grounded for a week. Sometimes I wish I had your parents."

"No you don't bro," said Thomas. "They might bug you, but at least they care. Ours could give a shit. As long as we're out of view, not spoiling one of their precious client dinner parties, everything's cool."

Mark was taken aback. Usually the conversation was light and fun. Tonight's was awkward and more truthful – not one cartoon character impersonation to be found.

Joe had already polished off four beers before anyone had reached two. "I say do what the hell you want to do."

The gang looked over at him. "What?"

"That was quite profound," said Mark.

"Thanks man – what's profound mean?" Mark was about to answer his friend when he heard a distant howl echoing high up the hill. Four of the five paid no attention to it, but Mark perked up, looking deep into the blackened woods.

"Did you hear that?" he asked. The crackling sound of the imposing fire seemed to drown everything else out. No one really paid attention.

"What's with the Mexican beer?" asked Joe. He and the rest of the guys swilled on nothing but the King of Beers.

"When we went on vacation to Mexico last year, my dad let me try Corona and it was tasty. I think he got a bit concerned how much I liked it. There were people at the hotel pool who actually put a slice of lime in it." He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small Ziploc bag of cut limes.

"Lime in beer? That is so stupid," said Joe.

"I though the water in Mexico was piss poor," said Peter.

"Maybe the brewing process kills off all the bad stuff," said Thomas, who

asked for a sip. He nodded his approval. "Not bad." Joe christened the evening with a Speedy Gonzales impression, the first of many to come.

Even though his friends occasionally indulged in drugs, Mark never felt pressured, nor was he ever pressured to join in the illegal festivities. Drinking beer was about as hard as it got. In fact, the one complement Mark cherished was when his friends said he was the only one could relate to them when they were tripping. Mark wore that as a badge of honor.

Two hours later with the alcohol settling in, Mark and Joe did their dead-on Black Knight vs. King Arthur scene from Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Joe always did a great job hobbling around on one leg.

"We'll call it a draw," said Mark, as he placed the whittled branch in between his leather belt. There was another howl, this one sounding deeper and closer than the previous one. All five turned towards the hill. They'd heard stray dogs before; maybe this one was a newcomer to the scene.

Joe stood up, staggering a little. He was halfway through his second six-pack. "Time to use the little boy's tree," he said in a slurred English accent. Rick went over to the wood pile and grabbed a couple more logs. The fire was roaring in no time.

Joe stumbled up the hill behind the shack and out of view. "I'm a new super hero – The Urinator! So you better not piss me off!" A chorus of boos rang out.

Joe walked about fifteen yards away before soaking his favorite pee tree. He was surprised it was still alive. He noticed rustling under an elevated pile of leaves. Joe zipped up and leaned in closer, figuring it might be a snake or something. Brushing them aside with a stick, he gazed upon a mauled deer, bleeding profusely from slashing wounds to the body and throat. The warm blood emanated steam.

"What the fu . . .?"

The werewolf pounced on the drunken teen from behind, ripping at his throat with its claws. Joe fell to the ground, his eyes frozen in stunned fear.

The wolf stood on its hind legs; it towered nearly eight feet tall. Joe was still semi-conscious as the creature dove into his chest, gnashing at his midsection.

"What, is Joe setting a pissing record?" asked Peter. "It'll be a flood coming down this way."

"Guy drinks like a freaking fish," said Thomas.

"How do you know how much a fish can drink?" asked Rick.

"I don't know -- they live in water so they must drink a lot," replied Peter.

"How the hell do I know – they're fish!"

"Shut up nipple heads," said Mark. "Maybe he passed out."

"After nine beers? No way," said Thomas. "Fourteen, maybe."

"Should we check on him?" asked Rick.

"I'm not his babysitter," said Peter, stuffing his face with potato chips. He called out. "Hey Joe, everything all right up there?" The wolf turned, its maw dripping with blood.

Mark and Rick sat in their folding chairs, soaking up the warmth of the fire. The temperature was dropping. Thomas shrugged at his brother and nodded. The two brothers got up and cut through the shack then followed the path uphill.

"Come on Joe, cut the crap," said Thomas.

Peter walked straight into a low-lying branch, getting whacked in the forehead. "Let's go jerk, my beer's getting lonely."

The two walked a little farther near their friend's official pit stop. "Holy shit, is that a dead deer?" asked Thomas. The moonlight cutting through the leafless trees shone on the bloody carcass.

Peter grabbed a small branch and raked away leaves to get a better view. "What the hell did this?" The brothers gave each other a pensive stare. Thomas looked farther up the path and saw Joe's lifeless body, the chest shredded open. He managed to utter the word 'God' before the creature hoisted up the teens from behind,

slamming their heads together, killing them instantly.

“What was that?” Mark called out, standing up. “Did one of them just say . . . God?”

“You know what I think?” said Rick. “I think they’re all playing a big joke on us – you know how idiotic they can get - they thrive on it.” Both sat back down, sipping their beers.

A sudden howl filled both teens with goose bumps. “That was too close,” said Mark, as he reached for the thick whittled branch he was methodically carving.

“That doesn’t sound like a dog,” said Rick, dropping his beer, panic in his voice. He got up, tripping over a log then started running down the hill to his house.

“Where are you going?” yelled Mark, who stood there dumbfounded. A sea of butterflies filled his gut. Something wasn’t right. He fumbled for his keys and ran over to his car about to get in when he heard a scream. It was Rick.

The wolf bit his friend on the neck then threw the boy to the ground. It headed up the hill towards the fire pit. Mark quietly opened the door to his car and crouched as low as he could. He was hyperventilating, terrified. Did his best friends just get killed? What the hell was happening?

He heard a deep, resonating growl, followed by heavy footsteps. It walked right by his car. Mark’s eyes got big, realizing he didn’t lock the door. He raised his trembling hand up, about to press the lock down when a stream of hot breath fogged up the driver’s side window. Mark peered up, barely making out the image. The creature dragged its paw across the window, wiping it away.

Their eyes met. Its’ eyes were burning red, hypnotic. Mark’s almost popped out of his head; he couldn’t blink. “This can’t be happening,” he thought.

It reached for the door handle. Mark sprang up and locked it just in time. The creature scratched and clawed at the metal exterior, but couldn’t get in. Mark started the car then laid on the tinny

horn. He put it in reverse, backing up into a large rock.

He faced the wolf creature dead on. It was tall, muscular yet sinewy, with steak knife claws dangling past its knees. The wolf snarled, baring its long, ragged teeth that were stained with blood.

“Oh my God,” Mark thought, his friends all dead . . . “And I’m next.”

The creature lunged forward just as Mark gunned the four cylinder automatic. The car knocked the creature right into a large pine tree. The wolf shook its head and beamed its eyes in anger. It lunged again only to be met with the orange battering ram.

“Peter Cushing certainly wouldn’t take things lying down and either am I,” Mark thought.

Mark devised a split-second plan. He made a K turn and positioned the car directly in front of the roaring fire twenty feet away. The wolf ran into the woods. “Shit!” yelled Mark, hoping to kill this nightmare. He waited in what seemed hours. Twenty minutes ticked by. Mark tried to take in deep breathes. One thing he knew was hyperventilating was a bad thing. Stay calm and let’s kill this son of a bitch.

He looked over at both door locks, double checking them for the umpteenth time. The car rumbled, but he noticed the gas gage was near empty. Thankfully, the heat worked well. The car even had heated seats – not too bad for an early seventies auto.

It started snowing. Mark placed the wipers on intermittent before adjusting the rearview mirror. The creature was there, staring straight through the back window. Those eyes, red as blood, bore right through the teen. It jumped up on top of the car. Mark instinctively floored the gas. He stopped short of the fire, the creature skidding off the slick roof and onto the ground.

He quickly backed up then gunned it again, ramming the wolf right in the gut. The thing went flying, directly into the fire. The flames were mid-high, sufficient enough to burn the creature. The wolf howled as it emerged from the pit, its body partially seared. Mark

backed up again then torpedoed directly at the creature, throwing it back into the pit again. This time, Mark shot forward, pinning the creature down underneath a ton of steel and rubber.

“Yeahhh,” screamed Mark. “Oh shit!” Mark panicked, thrusting the door open, running for safety. The creature struggled under the weight of the car, looking over at the teen with hate. Seconds later, the car exploded, throwing Mark back against the stacked logs, knocking him out.

The fiery debris engulfed Rick’s home and large chunks of the back yard. The volunteer fire department arrived just past four in the morning. One of the firefighters spotted the shivering teen, nearly unconscious from smoke inhalation. He quickly called for an ambulance.

The next afternoon, Mark was feeling better, taking a nap after lunch in the hospital bed. His family mulled around the room, still stunned by what happened, or what nearly could have happened. On the advice from their eldest son, the parents went home to rest up and dine on something other than inedible hospital food.

Mark woke up. He coughed and asked his brothers for a glass of water. “Some night,” said Will. “You doing okay?”

“I’ve been better. Where’s mom and dad?”

“They’ve been here since the crack of dawn,” said Brian. “We told them to go home; we’ll drive you back today – doctor said you’re good to go.” Mark nodded. “So what happened last night? One of your druggie friends decided to barbeque our illustrious town?”

Will interjected. “Chill out Brian.”

“They’re all dead,” glared Mark. “My friends -- they’re all dead because of that thing.”

“What thing,” asked Will.

Mark tried to sit up. Brian helped his brother prop up the wafer-thin pillows. “I know this sounds crazy, but it looked like . . . a werewolf – no, a wolf monster. It was tall, lanky – covered in scraggly fur, and it had sharp claws.”

“Oh jeeze,” replied Brian. “A werewolf? Who the hell is going to believe that?”

Will pulled up a seat and sat down close to his brother. “Are you sure? You know that sounds like one of your movies?”

“Look, all I know is Joe went to take a leak and never returned. Thomas and Peter went to look for them and disappeared. Rick and I heard a howl and he took off for his house when I heard him scream. I got in my car and . . .”

“What?” asked Brian, exasperated. “This is so unbelievably . . . unbelievable.”

“The creature!” said Mark. “I pinned the creature under my car when it exploded. Did anyone find the body?”

“I don’t think so,” said Will. “The police were here earlier, but you were still asleep. They’re supposed to stop by home tomorrow to ask questions.”

“Please don’t tell the police a werewolf story,” begged Brian, knowing their family would be the laughing stock of Chatham, New Jersey.

“I gotta show you guys, I swear I’m not making this up.” He swung his legs around and stepped down. “Damn this floor is cold. Where are my clothes?”

“Mom packed a few things in your backpack – over there by the door.” Brian helped his brother up. Mark took a pair of blue jeans and black turtleneck and changed in the bathroom.

“You don’t believe this crap, do you, Will?” asked Brian, not convinced at his younger brother’s wild imagination and penchant for horror films.

Will shook his head. “When’s the last time you heard a story this over the top? Never. Four people died up there so something happened. Mark came out of the bathroom neatly dressed. You ready?”

“Yeah,” Mark replied. “Let’s go.”

It was eight in the evening. The family finished dinner, the brothers helping to clear the table. Mom and dad ventured into the den to watch TV. Mark strolled in. “Is it okay if I go to the store with the brothers; I could use some ginger ale and ice cream.”

“You feel up to it?” asked Mom.

“He’s fine,” said Dad. “Pick up some chocolate chip for me while you’re at it.” Mark smiled, giving his parents a hug.

“Thanks.” Mark ran upstairs and rummaged through his desk drawer, looking for the silver thimbles he stole from his mother’s collection. She’d be pissed off for sure, but this was a matter of life and death; certainly mom would understand, right? Mark trampled downstairs and headed for the garage. Behind his broken Flexible Flyer was his old bow and arrow set, dusty, but still intact. Mark raced outside and hopped in his brother’s Chevy Caprice wagon.

“This is nuts, you know that, right?” said Brian, the ultimate skeptic looking at his older brother.

Will glanced back at his brother. “Armed and dangerous I see?” Mark offered up a weak smile. He was terrified at what he might find, but he had to prove what happened Friday night was no dream or some crazy made up story.

A slight mist fell as the brothers approached Rick’s house. A pair of wooden police barricades blocked the driveway. Brian got out and placed them to the side. The whole line of trees leading up to the house was torched as were most of the surrounding woods. The house was a charred mess; the only thing left standing was the chimney.

“Up here, right?” asked Will. Mark nodded. As they approached, Mark spotted what was left of his car, nothing more than a metal skeleton.

“Keep the doors locked,” said Mark. He took out a pair of pliers and the silver thimbles then appropriately clinched each to the tips of the arrows.

“What, no silver bullets?” said Brian.

“Piss off!”

“Cool it guys,” said Will, turning off the car.

“No, keep it running just in case,” said Mark, who stepped out of the car. The forest still has a haze of smoke, or was that the mist. It was a frightening scene – death all around. There were stakes that marked off where the bodies

were discovered. He took out a flashlight and walked over to his car.

“Come here, now!” Mark shined the flashlight on the driver’s side door. “Look, look!” The two brothers stepped out of the car and walked over. “See?” Four deep grooved claw marks ran just below the melted handle. Mark looked underneath the metal frame hoping to see remnants of the wolf creature but there was no sign of a body.

For the first time his brother Brian didn’t reply with an off-hand remark. He studied it closely then peered into the woods. “I hope you’re a good shot.”

The three brothers returned to the car and waited. Two hours later a light dusting of snow began to fall. “How long do you want to wait?” asked Will, who had hoped to get back in time to watch reruns of Star Trek.

“Maybe I should make a fire – that might get its attention,” suggested Mark. Will said there were old newspapers in the back seat. Mark turned. There, staring through the back window was the wolf, eyes blaring red.

The twenty-year-old screamed. The two brothers, jolted, shifted in their seat, but didn’t see anything. “It’s out there,” shouted Mark, who reached for his weapon.

“Are you sure?” asked Will.

Brian rolled his eyes. “Maybe it’s . . .” “The creature rammed its steak knife claws through the roof, nearly reaching Brian’s face. “Holy shit!”

Will laid on the horn, startling the creature. It ran off into the burned, charcoal gray forest. He and Brian stammered. “We’ll never doubt you again brother,” said Brian.

“What do we do?”

“First of all, I gotta get out of the car – it’s kinda hard to aim from the back seat of a station wagon.”

Mark stepped out with the bow and arrow in hand and walked towards the shack – somehow it managed to escape the roaring flames. He waved for Will to follow him. He turned on the high beams but it created a dusty-white haze.

“Turn the lights off,” Mark called out. Will went around back and opened the

back door. He clutched a baseball bat and handed Brian a football.

“What the hell am I supposed to do with this? Ask the wolf man to go deep?”

“I don’t know, throw a bullet at his head,” replied Will. “It’s either that or a lawn chair.”

“Quiet, both of you,” said Mark. “Just keep a look out.” He stood still, silent, gazing up the hill. He tried his best to remain calm, taking in deep breaths then exhaling, the vapor dissipating like cigarette smoke.

Will and Brian leaned against the car. The temperature was dropping and both were getting cold – and bored. “Mark, it’s after midnight, I missed Star Trek and the Twilight Zone -- how late are we going to stay?”

Mark was getting anxious too; wanting to end this now. “Where the hell are you – show yourself!”

His older brothers got back into the car. Mark was about to do the same when he heard the familiar howl, deep and menacing. Goosebumps ran through his body. Up the hill, thirty or forty yards away, he saw the eyes. “Oh God.”

The creature took off, stalking ahead towards the young man. It snarled then broke into a gallop. Mark bent down for his bow and arrow and aimed. His hands trembled. He lined up the target and let the first arrow fly. It ricocheted off a tree, missing completely. “Come on, come on.”

The wolf bore down, stalking on its hind legs. The howl sounded like a wind tunnel. Mark lined up another arrow, firing away. It struck the creature’s thigh, forcing it to slow down. He took out the second to the last arrow and aimed again. The wolf was no more than ten yards away. Mark yelled for his brothers, who quickly jumped out of the car.

“Oh my God,” stammered Brian. He instinctively heaved the football, hitting the wolf right in the gut, bouncing off harmlessly. Will raised the bat and stepped forward.

Mark took his eye off the creature for only a split second when it vanished.

“Where’d it go!” he cried out. “Get back into the car.”

Will and Brian quickly obliged, but as Mark approached the car, the wolf leapt onto the roof, bending the metal with its weight. He backed away, lining up the third arrow. The creature jumped to the ground just as Mark fired. It grazed the shoulder, but failed to penetrate the creature’s flesh. It howled, teeth gnashing wildly.

Will got out of the car and swung the bat, striking the creature in the side. The wolf flung around its gangly limb, striking the young man on the shoulder, sending him flying over the car. Brian jumped out of the car and dragged him inside, locking the doors. The creature then faced Mark who lined up the last arrow. If he missed, he and his brothers were gonners.

Mark approached the monster, pulling the bow back as far as he could. “Over here, you bastard!” The wolf snarled, saliva dripping from the mouth.

The arrow flew, striking the wolf with enough velocity to penetrate the creature’s chest. It moved forward a few more steps before slumping over on its back. It shook back and forth, contorting its elongated body. Suddenly, the body began to change, reverting back to a shorter, human shape. Slowly it took form. Mark picked up the baseball bat, raising it over his right shoulder ready to crush it when he couldn’t believe his eyes. “Oh God – no!”

“Is that . . . ?” Will stopped. Brian gawked in stone silence. Mark dropped the bat and knelt down beside the lifeless body – a young man.

Mark stuttered. “Rick?” The teen moved his lips, but nothing came out. Mark inched closer. “What?”

“Mmmooore.”

“What’d he say?” asked Brian impatiently.

“I think he said . . . more?” Rick’s head slumped over. “I just killed my best friend.”

“He was already dead,” replied Will.

“More what?” asked Brian. The woods were suddenly filled with howls.

The three looked up the hill. A sea of red eyes lit up the ash-colored forest.

The wolves stampeded in their direction.

“Get in – now!” yelled Will. A split second later, the wolves surrounded the station wagon, lashing their claws up and down the pseudo wood-panel paint job. One of the creatures picked up the dead teen’s body and ran off into the woods. Will floored it in reverse then peeled down the gravel path and out onto the two-lane road. They sped away not looking back.

Mark awoke from his nap, groggy, but hungry. He opened his bedroom door and called out downstairs. There was no answer. Mark was hoping his family went to pick up pizzas. One thing he missed was good Jersey pizza. College food was the absolute pits. He felt rested, in a much better mood than . . .

“Midnight? Christ, I’ve been asleep for over eight hours.”

His room was stuffy. He went over to the bedroom window and opened it. He took in a deep breath. The brisk air felt good, like a splash of cold water on the face. Then he heard the howls. And they were close.





The Lawman of Tangia Part Two
By Edward White/CP Bialois
<http://cpbialois.wordpress.com/>

The morning light settled a little more than a couple of feet inside the cave. The ambient glow against the whitish gray rocks was enough to stir Luke from his sleep. Wiping the sleep from his eyes along with some of the dust that blew into the cave during the night, he shrugged his blanket off and pushed himself into a sitting position.

The electronic whiney of the cyber stallion drew his attention to the mechanical animal.

“Easy for you to say. You don’t need sleep.” Standing, Luke leaned backwards to stretch and was rewarded with a series of popping sounds as his spine realigned. From what he could figure, they were a handful of hours from New Austin where he’d be able to replenish his supplies and begin to look for Hudson Bailey.

Knowing his reputation of not coming back without his man was in danger, he couldn’t help wondering why couldn’t outlaws make it simple? Was it really so hard for them to stay in a damn town and brag about their exploits? Just once, he wouldn’t mind having to bring in one like that. Of course, the fact that by doing that meant the outlaw was either an idiot or damn good at what he did.

Realizing he was feeling sorry for himself, Luke set about wrapping up his blanket and bedroll before the thought of breakfast crossed his mind. As much as he enjoyed being on Tangia and his job, there were times he thought back to the old stories he used to watch about the Wild West. In them, there was rarely

any mention of the hero taking pity on anyone but the occasional woman or child they found in distress.

Oh well, if life was like those holidays things would be too easy around here. When he was finished tying his things into a bundle, he opened the compartment on the cyber stallion and set them inside before grabbing a can of beef rations and settled on a rock to eat before they got going.

Thinking back on his previous thoughts, he tried to think of any places Bailey could be hiding between there and New Austin. There was one place he could think of, but it was an hour or two out of the way. His cyber stallion would have enough fuel to keep it going for two more days and he had another can of rations and water so he began to think it wouldn’t be too much trouble to reach Canyon Pass before heading in to resupply.

He felt reassured at having a final chance to find his quarry before going to town. Things had a way of working out for anyone willing to take the chance. He just wished he had more faith than what he was sure came mostly from a can of meat.

When he finished, he kicked some dirt over the smoldering fire and led his cyber stallion out of the cave. The light and heat hit him with a force equivalent to walking into a wall and his breath left his lungs. It took him a few seconds to remember to breathe. It was something he’d never gotten used to doing before, but it was a common enough occurrence on Tangia that it shouldn’t have surprised him. Oh well, as long as he remembered before his lungs begged him to breathe he was happy.

Before they left the cave, the top of his cyber stallion’s saddle caught on the lip of the cave roof. Luckily it only took a second to work it free and he took his place in the saddle with the safety belt locked around him.

After a handful of miles along the trail to New Austin, Luke guided the cyber stallion east towards Canyon Pass. Originally home to a large river, the pass was carved from the same hard rock that formed over ninety-eight

percent of Tangia’s surface. How long before the river dried up, no one was able to accurately judge but most estimates put it at a million years, give or take a century or two. It was also one of the favorite hiding places for outlaws and any settlers caught away from the protective weather distorters of the towns. As powerful as the dust squalls were, they were too large to get into the canyon and didn’t reach further than a few hundred yards into it.

If there was any place on Tangia that offered continual shelter it was there. In all his years he’d often wondered why no one ever sheltered in the canyon’s safe confines. Given the wide bottom of the canyon, there were plenty of places to go in the event of rain. Never mind that it only rained once or twice a year. Luke shook his head. It wasn’t his job to worry about such things. All he needed to do was find Bailey and return him to the nearest town so justice could be carried out. Simple. Or was it?

As he neared Canyon Pass, Luke could feel a calmness in the air that set his hair to stand on end. The loud, piercing siren from the cyber stallion was the final indicator that they were in danger.

“Move! Move! Move!”

The cyber stallion didn’t need Luke’s instruction as it was programmed to do what it could to protect its rider. The sensors in its ears picked up on the rise of static electricity in the air and it immediately raced towards the canyon.

As if in an effort to display its superior ability to the real animal, the cyber stallion’s speed topped a hundred and ten miles per hour as Luke bent low to avoid being jerked backwards and possibly injuring himself in the process.

The shifting and bouncing of the cyber stallion rattled Luke’s teeth and made him debate if being caught in a dust squall would be so bad. It was the first time his cyber stallion had needed to react in such a way on something besides the smooth desert ground.

To his relief, she saw the opening of the canyon less than a mile ahead as a crack of thunder and a god-awful roar sounded behind them. He didn’t need to

look to know the dust squall had touched down. The constant crackle of the lightning grew in sound until Luke was sure he'd be swept away or electrocuted by it.

They were a dozen feet from the canyon's entrance when the ground behind them exploded from a lightning burst. The debris rained down on Luke and the cyber stallion. Pain shot through him as the pieces being thrown under the power of a hundred miles an hour wind struck the thin plating under his clothes. It seemed odd to him that he thought of what would've happened had he not purchased the cheap protective armor before leaving on his man hunt.

When they reached the canyon, the cyber stallion only slowed when they were out of reach of the dust squall and turned so its rider could see where they had come from.

Luke eyes widened at the swirling white and gray spiral with blue streaks of lightning a short distance away. It wasn't the first time he'd seen one that close, but it was the first time he was nearly caught in one.

"Well I'll be damned." Luke's vision began to turn blurry as he heard the cyber stallion give one of its plaintive whinnies.

Like a Dream

By Edward White/CP Bialois

The early morning dew was cold as it settled upon my face. It reminded me of the creek that snaked it's way through the trees next to my folks' home. It wasn't much, but during the humid summers along the base of the Appalachians, it was all a young boy needed. Those memories were like a wonderful dream, the same dream I had everyday since I joined the army. I'm not sure how long it took for me to be roused from my dream. The one thing I am certain of is that it felt less like a dream than the reality I awoke to. It was so peaceful that part of me hoped I was dead and it was heaven. Then who would help papa with the field work or

mama with the animals back home? The thought of them working in the fields without me was what finally tore me from my dream, racing back to the hell I'd left. It was during that time, the gray area between sleep and waking, that I realized everything around me was silent. The sound of gunfire and fighting that had rocked me to sleep in the early morning had ceased.

After what felt like an eternity I couldn't hold my eyes closed anymore. The desire to know the fate of my comrades overrode my fear or common sense and caused my eyes to open as if they had a mind of their own. The first sight that greeted me was of the green canopy of trees high above my head. Though I was sure it was early morning, there wasn't the usual covering of mist that embraced the ground. Nor did the sun's light pierce the ceiling of leaves as if it were midday. Had it really been that long since I first felt the cold dew on my face? I thought that was strange but I didn't dwell on it as I strained to listen for any movement in the underbrush. The familiar sounds of men were gone, replaced with the tranquil songs of the birds high above as they floated effortlessly through the air. I listened intently, but there was nothing there that bore me ill will. That wasn't right, men should be all around me.

I carefully raised myself into a sitting position, aside from some stiffness I felt fine, better than I had in years. A pleasant surprise but something I had expected to a degree. Try as I might I couldn't remember ever sleeping as soundly as I had done. To be sure I ran my hands over my wool coat and pants. I didn't know what I was looking for but I was relieved when all I found was a dampness brought on by the dew. Not one to appear ungrateful I cast my eyes skyward and said a quick prayer, it would do my folks good to know their little boy was safe.

The sense of security I felt a moment earlier quickly left me as I stood and looked around for my rifle. Being that I had joined the army a few months previous, my papa had bought me a Henry rifle as a present. He said it was

far better than the musket rifles they gave us enlisted men and I quickly learned he'd been right, much to my relief. Since then I'd grown quite attached to it as it had saved my life on more than one occasion, but at that moment I couldn't find it. I remembered having it in my hands after a canon ball had exploded off to my right side but it was nowhere to be found. As if that wasn't strange enough there weren't any sign of my regiment or the battle we'd been fighting against Johnny Reb. Even stranger was that there wasn't any sign that we'd been there aside from myself.

That was strange indeed and I don't mind saying it unsettled me rather quick. I thought that maybe I had wandered off in a daze during the fight. I didn't remember doing so but that didn't mean it hadn't happened except for the fact that I recognized a tree off to my left. Not more than forty paces from where I stood was the same tree the Colonel had stood next to just before we were attacked. I'm as sure now as I was then that they wouldn't have gone off and left me there like that but that was sure as hell what it seemed they had done. I didn't think of it at the time but there was really no place for them to go.

Still, I couldn't lose heart... even without my Henry rifle and my regiment I was far from helpless. This was my home, well not exactly as I was from a bit further up north, but I knew the layout of the land decent enough that I couldn't have gotten lost even if I tried. I took comfort from that as I set out what I believed was north, I knew there was a town just over the top of the hill I was on. I believe the hill's name was High Knob, it's the smaller of the two hills we were to defend against the Confederates. Being near the top of the mountain I figured it wouldn't take long to see the town of Gettysburg. How I'd mistaken west for north was the least of my worries as I happened upon the Devil's Den. It's well named if you want my opinion. The terrain was in such ill humor that you'd think you were in the pit of hell itself. If there's a more

inhospitable place in the world I don't want to see it.

As I entered the rocky area I felt a wave of sorrow and anger come over me. I couldn't imagine what would've brought this on so I tried to push it far from my mind. The Confederates had to move through here to reach us, so I knew there would be Sessesh and maybe even some of my fellow soldiers there but for as long as I looked I couldn't find any. I had to stop so I leaned against a large boulder that jutted from the ground and scratched my head in thought. Something was going on there that I didn't understand and things only got worse. I tell you I couldn't have been there longer than a few minutes when I heard a rustle in the bushes behind me. I leaped back behind the boulder just as a Confederate soldier stumbled out from the brush. Damn if I hadn't nearly messed my drawers, he'd made enough noise to wake the dead!

It took only a minute before I noticed he wore a bandage across his eyes. The damn fool was lost and blind! I had myself a prisoner! Wouldn't mama and papa be happy to hear that their little boy was a war hero? I stepped out from my hiding place and grabbed the Sessesh, he wanted to fight at first but he quickly calmed down when he realized there was nothing he could do.

"Son," I said, "you're damn sure lucky that I happened upon you. Another few steps and you would've broken your fool neck."

He just looked at me like he could really see me and replied, "Be a might better 'n being led by a damn Yankee." Despite his tone and him being from the South and all, he wasn't a bad fellow. I didn't even have the heart to tie his hands as I guided him through the forest. I hoped to find the Emmitsburg Road and any Federal soldiers I could. They couldn't have all disappeared into thin air. Someone had to have seen where they'd gone, I was sure of it.

I led him by the arm since there seemed no point in causing the poor fellow to trip over a root or some other entanglement. We soon came upon a

clearing that was as peaceful as death. I figured it must've been a field of some sort but it gave me such a queer feeling. Like something had crawled under my skin and taken up residence there. I ain't lying when I say I wanted to keep going but my prisoner, the damned fool he was, wanted to rest. Grudgingly, I took a seat next to him but I couldn't relax, no sir. I had to keep alert for someone might try 'n sneak up on us.

To make myself feel better I told him about my Henry rifle and how I'd lost it just before I found him. When I mentioned it he just snorted, can you believe that? He snorted and laughed at me! When I asked him why he said, "That damned Yankee rifle could be loaded on Sunday and shoot all week and it was better off lost." I was much to hurt to talk for a while after that, but damn if I had it I would've shown him a thing or tow, you bet your life I would've. Yes sir.

Without anything to say to one another we sat and listened to the birds as they flew from tree to tree singing their song for a short time. Presently, we struck up a conversation and I found my prisoner to have much the same interests that I do. We talked about the deer and bear we'd hunted and about the best fishing holes around. He told me about a little place near where he lived that was so full of Trout they practically jumped from the water and into your lap! I told him I'd like to see it sometime and I bet I could out fish him. That brought out a laugh as we sat there. I never thought I'd enjoy the company of a Rebel before.

It struck me strange how he suddenly fell silent. We'd just been laughing ourselves senseless when he suddenly stopped and leaned back against a small stump at the edge of the field. I asked him what was wrong. I ain't ashamed to say that his answer depressed me. Hell, I even felt partly to blame for it and I don't even know what I dun! He must've sensed my change in mood as well for he told me what was bothering him.

"Know what I'd like to see Yankee?" I expected it to be something insane like

the Union Army in tatters of old Abe Lincoln pushing up daisies. But being a good host I asked him what that was. "To see my wife and daughter again."

His answer struck me dumb, so I just sat watching him for the longest time. Finally I managed to say what I thought would be best. "The war won't go on forever. I'm sure you'll be able to see them any day now--"

"You damn idiot! I want to see them again. I swear to think we could lose the war to group of jackass brained idjits like ya'll. I suppose you couldn't figure out how to pour piss from a boot with the directions written on the heel could ya?"

I don't mind saying that I was a bit irritated with the man after that. Here I was, just trying to help him and he goes off half-cocked! But being a Christian man I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. I did feel awfully bad about not understanding him before. But that was no call to insult me like that and I told him so. I won't tell you what he said, being it wasn't nowhere near polite enough to bear repeating.

At the tail end of his ranting and raving he held out a small silver locket for me. "Been in my family for generations, it's gonna be my baby girls when she's old enough." The smile on his face was so sincere that I couldn't help but take it to have a look. "Open it, they're all inside." I glanced at him then back to the locket, it's silver coating shone bright in the afternoon sunlight.

Carefully I pushed on the small clasp on it's side and opened it. Inside were a picture of the prettiest young girl I ever did see along with another woman that I took to be his wife. I handed it back to him and told him I thought they were beautiful and if I could I'd give him one of my eyes so he could see them again. Knowing that wasn't possible he nodded his thanks as he tucked it back under his shirt.

I watched him for a few minutes, it was a good thing we'd stopped talking or I might not have been able to speak because of how bad I felt for him. He was just a bit younger than my papa with gray hairs and a thick set of

whiskers. I didn't feel like the big hero anymore after I got a good look at him but I bet he still would've whooped my tail if he'd be given the chance. With that thought in mind I motioned towards his bandaged eyes, only then I realized he couldn't see me, and asked how he'd gotten hurt.

"Canon hit a tree near me, the splinters were in there before I knew what hit me." He began to fidget with his hands, I figured he liked to whittle. Only problem was I had no intention of giving him a knife. As pleasant company that I am I was sure I'd wind up dead.

Suddenly I had a thought, one of them inspiring ones that you hear about in the Bible. If he'd been hurt by something as simple as wood splinters then why couldn't he see? I mean they hurt like the dickens but it was easy to pull them out. He was a tough old bird, I'll give him that. He hadn't complained about any pain since I found him. Hell, he'd spent more time complaining about me than anything else. So I had an idea, maybe I could help him if I could look at his eyes. At first he was against it saying Yankee doctors couldn't pour piss out of a boot with directions written on the heel but since I'd heard that one already it didn't bother me. After a few minutes I convinced him to let me have a look and that was all.

He grudgingly accepted though he kept his hands close to mine at all times. I figure it's safe to say he didn't trust me, well the feeling was mutual. But I still wanted to help him if I could. I slowly unwrapped the bandage covering his eyes and was surprised that there wasn't nay blood on it. At that moment I knew it would be easier than I had thought so I finished unwrapping the bandage but what I saw... Oh Lord... There was nothing there! I mean nothing, not a single thing! Behind his bandage there was nothing but two black holes where his eyes should've been.

I fell away from him terrified and I must've screamed for I heard something that sounded like it came from me but I'd never heard it before. I landed on my back and stared into the

sky unable to think. My prisoner was saying something but I couldn't make it out, his voice was drowned out by the loud beating of my heart. I could hear it... wait... no I couldn't. He must've killed me! That son of a bitch Rebel must've shot me and now I was dead! Slowly I raised my self to try to look at my body and I lost my breath. A large boulder stuck up through my stomach! I tried to twist away and I did without any pain or effort. I was on my knees looking at the rock I'd just been impaled on. But there wasn't any blood or even a mark on it or me! I could even feel and hear my heart beating in my chest. What the devil was going on? I wanted to see my papa and mama again. I wanted to go home, that's all I wanted, just to go home.

Just as I started to cry I heard a new voice that called to me. When I looked up I saw ten men, some wearing gray, or a drab olive green, while others wearing the same blue uniform I was. Each was wounded somehow but the was no blood. That was when I heard the voice again.

"What?" I asked.

The man nearest me, a Union officer, a captain I think, motioned for me to join them. "We're here to help you."

"But... How are you going to do that?" I looked over and saw my prisoner being helped to his feet. The bandage had been replaced over his eyes.

The officer smiled at me, his moustache swayed slightly in the soft breeze of the afternoon. "We're looking for stragglers. We're here to take you home." He offered his hand to me. At first I didn't want to take it but I did anyway though I'm not sure why. The Captain's hand felt warm and strong, I was so happy to feel the flesh of another being I think I actually smiled when I got to my feet. Over the man's shoulder I saw a beast that shone brightly in the sunlight. The sight of it caused me to shrink back but the captain's grip was firm. "Don't worry," he said, "it can't hurt you where we're going."

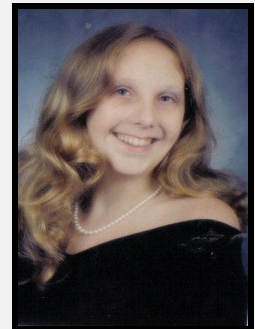
I nodded, "Home."

The captain smiled at me, "That's right." Without another word he turned and followed the others down a trail I hadn't noticed before.

I started to follow and found my friend waiting for me, it didn't feel right to call him my prisoner anymore. He held out his hand and I took it to help guide him. As we followed the rest of the soldiers he offered his final words to me. "See you in Hell Billy Yank."

I smiled, "See you in hell Johnny Reb."

As we disappeared down the trail I heard the voices of others behind us. They were the living. The last words I heard from a living person was one who said he was a park ranger as he talked about the ghosts of a Union soldier and his Rebel prisoner that made their way through the woods every day and night. I thought it strange that I had never seen those ghosts he spoke of, until now.



The haunted House Part Three By Jamie White

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

Author Note: This is the third part of a continuing story.

The next day, Cheyenne watched with a satisfied smirk as her fiancée's father checked the place over room-by-room. He'd been working for the city as a building inspector almost as long as Steve had been alive. If he couldn't convince his stubborn son the place was fine, no one could.

A couple of hours passed as Steven had his dad double and triple check. She could see by the look on their prospective landlord's face that he was none too happy about it. She tilted her head, studying the guy as her future Father-in-Law insisted that everything was in order. There was something in the man's eyes that called to her. He may have been keeping a straight posture and speaking with authority, but Cheyenne could see the doubt and worry in the man's eyes. If she were as cynical as her soon-to-be husband, she might have been suspicious at the desperation she sensed.

Instead of making her doubt her attraction to the house, that only cemented her determination to make this their home. Every bone in her body told her she was supposed to move in here, and she wasn't going to rest until she'd convinced Steve of it.

"Kid, I don't what you were expecting me to find, but I ain't finding it. If you ask me to check even one more time, I'm gonna start charging you, and I ain't giving you a break 'cause you're family."

Steve's eyes flashed with a hint of annoyance, but he relented. "Thanks for coming by, Dad. We'll see you next week?"

"You got it." He shook his son's hand and walked over to Cheyenne, giving her a kiss on the cheek while taking care not to get too close with his sweaty and dirty work clothes. "See ya." He turned and faced the landlord, shaking his hand. "Sorry about taking so long. I'll just be on my way now."

Jonathon shook his head. "Don't worry about it."

The older man waved and walked out the door, leaving the trio to talk in private. Once he'd left, Steve smiled at their prospective landlord with a trace of embarrassment in his voice that only Cheyenne could detect. She'd known him for five years now, and they'd spent so much time together, sometimes even he could read her mind, and he didn't believe in any of that new age stuff. "Thanks for humoring me. I'm a little protective when it comes to Chey."

"I understand. So, are you interested?"

Steve glanced over at Cheyenne. She locked eyes with him and practically willed him to say 'yes' with the force of her thoughts alone. Any other answer was going to get him into a lot of trouble, and find him familiarizing himself with the lumpy couch they were trying to get rid of.

To her relief, she didn't have to follow through on any potential threats. Her fiancée shrugged and nodded his agreement. "Why not?"

Cheyenne tried to hide the squeal threatening to escape her throat, and the urge to jump up and down like a child. After several years of living in places so dumpsy she was surprised the structures hadn't been permanently condemned, they were finally going to live somewhere relatively nice.

The trio spent the next few minutes talking about the details. Once they'd gone over everything, the landlord handed them a lease to look over. She was sure he was going to tell the man they'd be back with it after getting it checked out, but to her surprise, he turned to her. "Do you have a pen with you?"

"I should." She fought to keep her tone neutral as she spoke, opening up her purse. She dug through the bag a minute before finally coming up with a pen. She handed it to Steve and watched as he walked over to the kitchen counter to sign. He stepped back from the paper and handed her the pen. A rush of excitement coursed through her veins as she signed the document. No matter how much of a worry wart he was, there was no turning back now.

As soon as they pulled out of the driveway and started on their way home, Steve's face went white and he began tapping the steering wheel. "I don't know what got into me. How on earth did I just sign a lease without having someone check it out first?"

Cheyenne giggled. "I guess I'm becoming a bad influence on you. I would've signed that thing the other day when we toured the place."

"That's you. Remember, not all of us believe that there's some deeper plan to everything. Someone of us think that every now and then, you just get crap luck. I really should've had someone read that thing first."

Cheyenne sighed. "Will you stop worrying? You are way too young to start giving yourself an ulcer. You were convinced there had to be something seriously wrong with that place, and you were wrong. Just admit it: someone up there was looking out for us."

"If you say so." He signaled for a turn, and veered the car to the right. "I think I shouldn't have skipped breakfast earlier. Maybe the hunger kept me from thinking straight. What do you say we go grab something to eat?"

Cheyenne couldn't help but laugh. There was something so endearing about his worry wart nature and cynicism. He looked cute with his tan features scrunched up in a frown. "Sure thing. Tell you what: you pick where we go. Anywhere at all."

"Now I know something's gotta be wrong with me. I could swear you just said we could go anywhere I wanted for lunch."

Cheyenne rolled her eyes and let out an annoyed grunt. "I did. Seriously, pick a place." She knew she was probably going to regret that statement, but she figured even the nastiest burger place had to have a salad or something on the menu.

"Remember, you gave me the go-ahead." He grinned as he made a left.

A few minutes later, they pulled up to his favorite burger joint. She suppressed a frown as she pictured the heart attack waiting to happen he'd surely be chowing down on in a minute. If it wasn't dripping with grease, he wanted nothing to do with it. Even thinking about it made her want to gag, but she said nothing as they got out of the car and walked inside the restaurant.

The pair ordered their food and within minutes, they were carrying two trays as they searched the room for a table. Cheyenne nodded to one near the window and he followed. As they sat

and began eating their food, she tried not to look at the greasy monstrosity that sat in front of Steve.

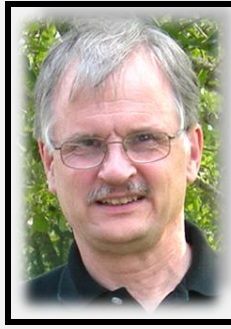
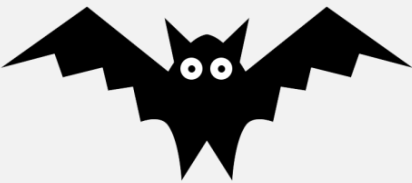
Cheyenne opened the lid to her salad and poured the vinaigrette she'd chosen over the top of it, careful not to pour too much. "So, when did he say we could move in?" Cheyenne had missed the end of the conversation when she'd gotten a phone call. She'd tried to ignore it, but she knew who it would be and her best friend wouldn't stop until she'd gotten in touch with her. It was the way she'd always been, and Cheyenne saw no reason to get angry over it—she just accepted the girl's quirk.

A couple of children at the next table began arguing over a toy they'd brought with them as Steve took a sip of his drink. "He said we should be ready to move in by next week."

"Thank God," she replied as she picked at the salad. "Can you believe we're actually going to live somewhere decent for once? It'll be nice not to have to worry about the whole place falling apart."

"Tell me about it."

As the two settled into silence and began to eat, Steve thought about how fast the whole thing had gone down. The guy had been more than willing to close the deal quickly, and Steve couldn't help but worry that there was something they didn't quite know about their new home.



203 North Amity Street By Rick Weber

I used to roam the streets of Charm City, not for idle play, but as part of my job. I was a sworn member of the Baltimore Police Department. Decades ago I started out my career on the west side of the city. This part of town was known for its high murder rate, availability of hard drugs, and its poverty. Those traits have not changed over the years. For me it was the best learning ground a rookie cop could have, but there were other things to be taken in from this environment.

In a city which was beginning to make itself a tourist destination one lesser touted attraction was near the area I patrolled, 203 North Amity Street. I remembered the first time I drove a radio car down that street to see this structure. A narrow, one way thoroughfare with boarded up row houses on the west side and a public housing project on the east, it was not the place that would draw any savvy visitor.

It was late on a cool autumn evening with no one outside. As I drove slowly down the block I looked at the project on my left and eyed the decay to the structure, some from vandalism and some from benign neglect. I came to the end of it noticing a brick arch as I approached my target location which abutted the public housing building. I stopped the car and got out. I looked at this place, a small two and a half story brick home with several signs posted on it. Among the phrases on them one stuck in my mind, "In this house lived Edgar Allan Poe."

I was shocked to see that the home of probably America's greatest writer was part of a public housing project called aptly the Poe Homes by the city. I thought more would have been done to give it more honor, but irony was part of the game. I was told, I forget by whom, that Poe's house was typical of how poor people lived in his time. The information may not have been accurate, but I was left with the impression that some things, or in this case some places, did not change. It was all in perspective.

The Poe House, as it is called, was kept up in a respectful fashion. Given the locale that was a miracle in itself. It was a museum but only was open on Saturday afternoons between noon and four. I never had the opportunity to enter this historic site. The times I was around it I was on police business with more pressing matters to handle, and the museum was closed. The first time I saw it taking in its surroundings, I could only say, "Wow!"

Accounts have it that Mr. Poe only lived here from 1833 to 1835 before moving to Richmond, Virginia. Legend has it that he authored a few of works while in residence here. Myth seems to overshadow fact when it comes to Edgar Allan Poe. He spent his life living in a number of places on the East Coast. Besides Baltimore and Richmond, he lived in New York and Philadelphia.

He was born to be a nomad. His parents were traveling actors. His mother died when he was three, and his father abandoned him and his two siblings. Foster care brought him to live in Richmond and even for a while in England. Some time at the University of Virginia, a tour in the army, and a short stint at West Point, all happened before he moved into 203 North Amity Street.

The house was rented by his aunt, Maria Clemm in 1832. Her mother, Elizabeth Cairnes Poe and her daughter, Virginia Clemm also resided there. The rent reportedly came from a military pension her late husband, David Poe Sr. Poe's grandfather, received

from his service during the Revolutionary War.

Poe married Virginia Clemm before leaving for Richmond. Among the works Poe may have penned here is *MS. Found in a Bottle* which launched his publishing career. Poe did come back to Baltimore at times. He did make it back in October of 1849.

This is certain, but what took place still remains unclear. He was found incoherent on the street in a section of the city now called Fells Point and taken to Washington Medical College, later known as Church Home and Hospital, where he died.

Word was that he was drinking in a bar now called *The Horse You Came In On Saloon* just before he ended up in the hospital. Poe is buried in a church yard located on the southeast corner of W. Fayette and N. Greene streets not far from his old house, but the story of this building continued.

During most of the intervening time, it is unknown. Until 1941, it was a private residence. In the 1930's it was scheduled to be razed when the Poe Homes housing project was being built. Fate intervened and control was ultimately given to the Edgar Allan Poe Society. In 1972, it was added to the list of National Historic Landmarks. With help from the city, it became a museum.

In 2011, Baltimore city fathers announced that they could no longer absorb the \$80,000.00 annual funding for the museum. It remained open until September 2012 when its reserve funds ran out and has been closed ever since. Shortly after its closing, the steps to the museum were stolen and its exterior was defaced with graffiti.

Efforts are underway to reopen this historic landmark on October 4, 2013. This will coincide with 164th anniversary of his death on October 7th, not to mention Halloween, which is associated with him. Will this reopening happen? I don't know, but it would be cruel for anyone to quote *The Raven* by saying, "Never more."



**Squirreleone – Mob Rodent
By DiVitto Kelly**

Squirreleone ruled the forest with an iron paw. For years, the mob rodent ran things his way at Brando State Park located in Bayonne, New Jersey. When picnickers left, he sent his minions to pick out the best of the scraps. He took his hefty cut while the other varmints divvied up the rest. His favorite motto was 'Cracking skulls, cracking nuts, and he did it with pinpoint precision.

Every Monday morning, there was a line of forest animals that had to answer to Squirreleone. It was time to pay up . . . always. The pack rat had a mean streak a mile wide, keeping all the animals on edge.

Unfortunately, things weren't going so hot for a certain bowl-shaped reptile. Mr. Turtle, first in line, knocked on the

makeshift twig door and entered. "Ah my friend, welcome to my humble abode," said Squirreleone. He gazed upon the sad creature suffering from an acute case of financial blues.

"Well, it's . . ." Turtle didn't even get a chance to finish.

"Do you know why you're here?" asked Squirreleone, who was quite aware of Turtle's gambling problems. "You owe me a lot of dough, and now you're in worse debt. What are we gonna do to rectify the situation?"

"I promise to pay you back, honestly," cried Turtle. "You see, I had an inside scoop this inebriated man on a bike was gonna hit a tree, but he swerved at the last second and . . ."

"Still gambling on humans doing stupid things," replied Squirreleone, leaning back in his chair, kicking up his feet on his favorite painted turtle shell desk. Turtle bowed his head in shame, unable to reply. He knew he was in deep doo doo.

"You gotta get this situation under control my friend or I'll be shopping for a new desk, you get my drift?"

Turtle nodded meekly before trudging out of Squirreleone's office, conveniently located at the base of an old, rotted out cypress tree.

"How'd it go?" asked Cat, a multicolored, borderline feral orange tabby with a nicked ear and scraggly fur. He ran away months ago from an abusive family. The twin three-year-old boys were constantly pulling on his tail and hadn't grasped the notion he was not a stuffed animal.

"Not so good," answered Turtle. "He gave me an offer I better not refuse if you know what I mean." The sight of his cousin's shell, now a desk for the terrifying squirrel made him choke up. But if Turtle didn't get his act together, he'd be next.

Squirreleone got up from his desk and greeted the tabby. "Ah Cat, how we doing on this fine, sunny morning? You look good." No animal ever felt comfortable even when they were being complimented by the notorious bushy tailed mobster.

“Things are grooving okay,” he answered. “Nabbed two hotdogs late yesterday – both even had toppings. Here’s your cut, fifty percent like always. Cat handed over a slightly charred hotdog with dried relish nestled in a partial bun.

“I believe it was three, and where’s the sauerkraut? Don’t duck with me feline.” He dug his paw deep into the glass bowl half filled with acorns and smashed them with his fist.

Cat gulped as he watched the squirrel stuff his cheeks. “Well, it’s like this . . . uh I had to pay off a friend who uh --”

“Robbing Peter to pay Paul,” said the rodent, shaking his head. “Vintage stupidity from a true subspecies.” Cat started to plead his case when . . .

“Enough of your pathetic meowing,” bellowed Squirreleone, baring his crooked teeth. He slammed the door, locking it then reached for the petite wood bat resting next to his desk, a birthday gift from the beaver trio.

“Look, I can get you another . . .”

“Sorry Cat, but it’s time to take your beating like a man. Next time you won’t duck with me.” Major whackings ensued. The other animals winced as they heard Cat meowing out in pain.

“Next!” yelled the four-legged racketeer. He threw open the door and the feline limped outside, disheveled and bruised. “And get me more acorns!”

Everyone in line was silent as Cat crawled by. He headed towards a densely oak tree wooded area adjacent to the public restrooms and disappeared. A family of moles sporting sunglasses shivered in fright. A chipmunk almost broke out into tears. A pair of frogs gulped at each other before hopping into Squirreleone’s house of beatings.

The squirrel sauntered around his desk and picked up a club from his garter snakeskin golf bag. “You two ever play golf? Good game, but it can be a tad frustrating, you know what I mean?”

The two frogs were in charge of removing pesky flies and mosquitos from the crime bosses’ vicinity. A horse

fly big as a popcorn kernel suddenly appeared through the open window, descending upon the desk. Squirreleone, his back to the insect, perked up, hearing the buzzing wings. He quickly spun around and crushed it with the driver. The guts splattered on Mr. Frog.

“I employ both of you to rid my ‘space’ of these pests, do I not?” The two frogs nodded yes. Underneath her smooth wet skin, Mrs. Frog was seething. In fact many of the animals were sick and tired of the mistreatment exhibited by the mob boss rodent. If only . . .

“I cannot conduct my business properly when I’m hearing that annoying buzz sound, especially from flies. I really, really hate those bastards. And if I can’t focus on my job running this magnificent forest, heads are gonna roll, capeesh?”

“Mr. Squirreleone, both my wife and I are doing the best we can,” said Mr. Frog, a veteran fly catcher with years of experience but now saddled with a gimpy knee. “It’s just that . . . sometimes we could use a little help – it’s a big forest out there.”

“Help?” answered the squirrel. “I don’t need help, do I? One squirrel – me, is able to run this whole establishment!”

Squirreleone was unfriendly and unpredictable to say the least. He could circle around trees like they were on fire, his climbing skills unsurpassed. The rest of the animals reacted in slow motion as he’d zoomed past, smacking them upside their heads. Squirreleone was tenacious, treacherous, terrifying, and simply plain nuts. All the animals knew squirrels were kooky, but Squirreleone was in a league by himself.

Some say it the result of consuming a large cup of beer left on a picnic table a few autumns ago. The loaded squirrel thought he was of the flying variety and attempted to glide down from a soaring pine tree. Instead, the rodent dropped like a stone, sheering through branches and pine needles before landing on a sizzling park grill. This explained the

three blackened grill marks on each of his sides. The animals privately joked that he resembled an acorn-eating Adidas sneaker.

Mrs. Frog cleared the little frog in her throat and spoke up. “But what exactly do you do?”

Her husband cringed, “Uh no.”

Squirreleone’s tail puffed out like a dust cleaner. “What did you say Froggy dear?” He tossed the broken club to the ground and picked up another, a one-iron.

“Lee Trevino, a famous professional golfer once said only God could hit a one-iron. Do you want to know what it’s like to be hit by a one-iron?” Mr. Frog’s facial expression quickly oozed anger. No whacked-out varmint was going to harm his wife.

Mrs. Frog, a sassy amphibian in her own right, sneered, refusing to budge. She’d never forgiven the mob rodent for breaking her husband’s hind leg, limiting his ability to leap from lily pad to lily pad. Mrs. Frog glared her big round eyes at the squirrel.

“You know what I see? I see a rodent who sits on his furry-ass tail, busting balls, ordering us animals around. Well guess what? We’re not gonna take it!”

The animals circled the base of the tree, pressing their collective ears against the deaden bark. “Momma Frog is throwing down some serious smack,” boasted Chipmunk with a big cheeky smile as she peered through the window.

For the last year, the anger amongst the park animals had been percolating ever since Squirreleone rubbed out forest favorite Bennie the Bunny as he happily hopped down a certain trail last fall -- he didn’t even sense the falling tree. The trio of conspiring beavers chomped away on a Maple tree and had no problem playing the part of henchmen for the mob squirrel.

Mr. Frog threw back his chair. “You’ve done your worst to me, but I’m still standing.” Both frogs stood up, eyes wide open, webbed feet clenched, and ready to duck someone up.

They circled Squirreleone's desk, pushing it aside. The mob squirrel yelled out for his henchmen. The door popped open and the three beavers appeared then fell flat on their furry faces, dead. A sea of quills impaled the backs of each animal – in brutal execution style. Inside stepped Porcupine, intense, and full of hate. He'd been on the receiving end a few beatings.

Squirreleone stood in astonishment. "How dare you animals turn on me!"

"You see my non friend, things are about to change," said Mr. Frog. "You're reign of terror is over." Squirreleone reached up with the golf club, about to strike down Mrs. Frog when it was shot out of his paw by a quill.

Porcupine squinted his eyes at the squirrel like it was the OK Corral. "Go ahead, make my day."

Squirreleone stammered. "Maybe we can work things out – the three of us, okay?" Just then, more animals poured into the hit squirrel's office. The rodent backed up. "Like I said, maybe we can ALL work this out."

"I'm afraid it's too late for that," said Mr. Frog, licking his lips. "Cracking skulls and cracking nuts."

One week later . . .

Squirreleone stood on his hind legs with a grinning face, his adorable paws reaching outward. He was sporting a little doll hat and dress made of felt. The former mob rodent sat alone, atop a saucer-sized circular wood base with fake grass glued all around.

"Look Mommy," said an eight-year-old girl, spunky with dark brown hair and wearing a pink Hello Kitty sweater. "That squirrel, he looks so cute."

Mr. and Mrs. Frog heard the conversation through the open window of the Brando State Park gift shop, buzzing with business.

Mrs. Frog turned to her husband. "He certainly does."



Enjoy Some Halloween Poems!

It's Halloween By Jack Prelutsky

It's Halloween! It's Halloween!
The moon is full and bright
And we shall see what can't be seen
On any other night.
Skeletons and ghosts and ghouls,
Grinning goblins fighting duels,
Werewolves rising from their tombs,
Witches on their magic brooms.
In masks and gowns
we haunt the street
And knock on doors
for trick or treat.
Tonight we are the king and queen,
For oh tonight it's Halloween!

Spirits of the Dead

by Edgar Allan Poe

Thy soul shall find itself alone
'Mid dark thoughts of the grey
tomb-stone;
Not one, of all the crowd, to pry
Into thine hour of secrecy.

Be silent in that solitude,
Which is not loneliness — for then
The spirits of the dead, who stood
In life before thee, are again
In death around thee, and their will
Shall overshadow thee; be still.

The night, though clear, shall frown,
And the stars shall not look down
From their high thrones in the Heaven
With light like hope to mortals given,
But their red orbs, without beam,
To thy weariness shall seem
As a burning and a fever
Which would cling to thee for ever.

Now are thoughts thou shalt not banish,
Now are visions ne'er to vanish;
From thy spirit shall they pass
No more, like dew-drop from
the grass.

The breeze, the breath of God,
is still,
And the mist upon the hill
Shadowy, shadowy, yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token.
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!

Mr. Macklin's Jack O'Lantern

By David McCord

Mr. Macklin takes his knife
And carves the yellow pumpkin
face:
Three holes bring eyes and
nose to life,
The mouth has thirteen teeth in
place.
Then Mr. Macklin just for fun
Transfers the corn-cob pipe
from his
Wry mouth to Jack's, and
everyone
Dies laughing! O what fun it is
Till Mr. Macklin draws the
shade
And lights the candle in Jack's
skull.
Then all the inside dark is made
As spooky and as horrible
As Halloween, and creepy
crawl
The shadows on the tool-house
floor,
With Jack's face dancing on the
wall.
*O Mr. Macklin! where's the
door?*

Bats

By Paisley Rekdal

unveil themselves in dark.
They hang, each a jagged,
silken sleeve, from moonlit
rafters bright
as polished knives. They swim
the muddled air and keen
like supersonic babies, the
sound

we imagine empty wombs
might make
in women who can't fill them up.
A clasp, a scratch, a sigh.
They drink fruit dry.
And wheel, against feverish
light flung hard
upon their faces,
in circles that nauseate.
Imagine one at breast or neck,
Patterning a name in dribblets of
iodine

that spatter your skin stars.
They flutter, shake like mystics.
They materialize. Revelatory
as a stranger's underthings
found tossed
upon the marital bed, you
tremble
even at the thought. Asleep,
you tear your fingers
and search the sheets all night.

Black Wing

By Tom Waits

From the album, Bone Machine

Take an eye for an eye
Take a tooth for a tooth
Just like they say in the Bible
Never leave a trace or forget a face
Of any man at the table
When the moon is a cold chiseled
dagger
Sharp enough to draw blood from a
stone
He rides through your dreams on a
coach
And horses and the fence posts
In the midnight look like bones

Well they've stopped trying to hold him
With mortar, stone and chain
He broke out of every prison
Boots mount the staircase
The door is flung back open
He's not there for he has risen
He's not there for he has risen

Well he once killed a man with a guitar
string
He's been seen at the table with kings
Well he once saved a baby from
drowning
There are those who say beneath his
coat there are wings
Some say they fear him
Others admire him
Because he steals his promise
One look in his eye
Everyone denies
Ever having met him
Ever having met him

He can turn himself into a stranger
Well they broke a lot of canes on his

hide
he was born away in a cornfield
A fever beats in his head like a drum
inside
Some say they fear him
Others admire him
Because he steals his promise
One look in his eye
Everyone denies
Ever having met him
Ever having met him



The Ghost of a Flower
Anonymous

"You're what?" asked the common or
garden spook
Of a stranger at midnight's hour.
And the shade replied with a graceful
glide,
"Why, I'm the ghost of a flower."

"The ghost of a flower?" said the old-
time spook;
"That's a brand-new one on me;
I never supposed a flower had a ghost,
Though I've seen the shade of a tree."

Jack-O-Lantern

Anonymous

Jack-o-lantern, Jack-o-lantern,
You are such a funny sight.
As you sit there by the window,
Looking out into the night.
You were once a sturdy pumpkin,
growing on a curly vine.
Now you are a Jack-o-lantern,
See your night lights shine.

Join the Writer’s Portal today!

Beginning in the month of August, meetings will be held the second Monday (6-7:30pm) and fourth Thursday of every month (1-2:30) in the second floor conference room.

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

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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!

*The writer’s group meets the second Monday of every month from 6:00pm – 7:30pm and the fourth Thursday of every month from 1:00pm – 2:30pm. Thanks!

Remaining 2013 schedule

Oct 14: 6pm-7:30pm

Oct. 31: 1pm-2:30pm

Nov. 18: 6pm-7:30pm

Dec. 9: 6pm-7:30pm



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