Conjurings... To picture... To imagine...
To evoke... To call or bring to mind

Literary Magazine of Saint Louis College of Pharmacy

1996
Conjur\textsuperscript{Rx}ings

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of
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I Guess They Call it Fate

Like a lone star in an empty night, 
Her warmth fills my heart. 
Long walks through the park, 
Brighten my eyes with delight. 
Some people say... 
Day by Day 
Things happen for a reason. 
To find a miracle where you have never looked, 
Brings a smile to your face 
Even when you think about the chance you took. 
Two magnets can always seem to find each other.

Likewise people can be directed. 
Friends in the past, 
Make a relationship last. 
Always exciting, 
Always inviting. 
Seldom is there a time, 
That happiness can shut out the darkness. 
But this time is Golden. 
Never underestimate 
The thing Romantics call Fate.

--Triston Brownfield

Wondering

As the moonlight glitters 
in the warm night air, 
I wonder if you’re thinking of me— whether or not you care. 
One moment I’m full of hope, thinking that you do, 
but then I get a signal 
that maybe that’s not true. 
Perhaps you are just shy, or unsure of how you feel, 
but I’d like to say right now my love for you is real. 
You’re all I ever think about, 
I picture your great smile, the good times that we’ve had thus far last me quite a while.

But that part of me keeps hoping that you’ll someday feel the same, then you and I will be together and end this foolish game. 
I can just see us walking along, hand in hand and heart to heart. 
The feeling that even a moment is too long to be apart. 
Your laughter would be sunshine to drive away the rain. 
Your smile would end my sorrows and take away my pain. 
If my instincts tell me truth then I know you feel the same as I. 
But my heart can’t read your mind, and to this question you personally must reply.

--Christine Spaeth
Ring on Her Finger

For so many years I loved you-
loved you with all my heart.
I never dreamed I'd see the day
the two of us would part.

Then one day you said goodbye
and there I was alone-
not seeing your smiling face
or hearing your voice on the phone.

After this happened I was so down
but then I learned to cope.
I felt that I indeed could go on
and my heart filled with new hope.

Then suddenly I saw you on the street
your hand not holding mine.
Instead her hand was in its place
and you seemed to be doing fine.

You saw me and came over-
you asked me how I'd been
I told you I'd been doing well
while my heart screamed for you to hold me again.

You smiled at me and told me
the girl at your side you had married-
my heart felt like a brick
crushing the love I had carried. . .

Then you turned and walked away
yet I couldn't stop watching you
A part of me, that hopeful part
saying this just wasn't true.

Then I saw the ring on her finger
and reality set in.
I knew at the very moment
my life without you I must begin.

Now I'm moving on with life
a man I've found who loves me.
But little does he know that
my heart will belong to you eternally. . .

---

T.V. Guide

Living Single in The Real World,
I put myself in Jeopardy
To find that Single Guy
Who's the only one for me.

If he's Almost Perfect,
With 20/20 vision,
He'll practice Law
And Order the Cops back to prison.

We'll become Partners,
And he'll say I'm Mad About You.
Then maybe someday,
We'll be Married With Children, too.

We'll live in This Old House
On a street called Melrose Place.
And because Family Matters, he'll Coach
And win the little league pennant race.

If it takes 60 Minutes
Or even 48 Hours to do,
Step by Step we'll figure out
The Unsolved Mysteries that start our Family Feud(s).

After the Growing Pains and Home Improvement(s),
When our Full House is empty,
We'll look back and know we were Touched by an Angel
Who gave us such a wonderful family.

---Janet Huff
My Friend, the Fish

Yesterday was a bad hair day--
Nothing was going my way.
I woke up late for work;
my boss was a jerk.
I forgot to bring my lunch from home,
and the cafeteria served beef à la foam.
My car turned 19;
some thieves stripped it clean.
I made a stupid bet
without a safety net.
Now I have no house.
I lost it to the mouse.
My boss told me I was fired,
then he showed me the computer he’d hired.
I walked home without a thing;
then I heard a voice sing:
"I'll make you happy,
if you're feeling crappy!
Come on out and see,
Just what this could be.
I am here for you!
If you are feeling blue."
I walked over to the sound
and looked around and around.
I didn’t see a soul,
only a large fish in a bowl.
I picked it up and took it to my bench.
I set it down, then fed a finch.
I looked at the fish, and he looked at me.
Then the fish spoke suddenly.
He said, "Hello there friend,
This day I will mend.
Just believe in me,
and you will see!"
I thought it over and finally agreed,
after all this fish could be all that I need.
I said, "I will listen to your advise;
after all, you seem quite nice."
The fish said, "Great then here we go!"
Then he jumped up and started a little show.
He flew in the air and towards the skies!
Never had I seen such a sight with my eyes!
The fish was it, I couldn’t believe my luck;
That was when the fish fell and hit a truck.
He lay on the ground all lifeless and dead.
That truck hit him good in his little fish head.
I sat on the bench and looked at the fish;
then I thought, "Fish is my favorite dish!"
So that is how it came to be
That I was fed and not hungry.
So now even though I don’t have a home,
I have a nice necklace made of fish bone.
I have a wallet made of fish scale;
I made a knife out of his tail.
That fish gave me more than money could buy.
My little fish friend, what a swell guy!

--Eric Anspach

Untitled

I once thought I knew.
All the paths that I could take.
But now as I look around,
There seems to be a new trail.
Where does it go?
Where does it stop?
I would never know.

If I hadn’t the courage
To take the turn,
However it may burn.

New and exciting,
Every turn is something
Like you have never seen.
And without a crystal ball
You might have never seen it all!

So you best be sure
Your mind is open.
Cause once you pass the opportunity
You can never go back again.

--Triston Brownfield
Idaho Chris and the Great Beach Adventure

--Eric P. Anspach

I walked onto the sands for the first time. I smiled as the hot sand moved in between my toes. Looking up and down the beach, I was content. "There must be a million girls here," I thought. "I'll have no problem finding one now. Certainly one of these gorgeous women will find me attractive." I took another step onto the nude beach.

It was only two days ago that the idea had come to me as I sat in my apartment in Idaho. There are no women in Idaho. I'm convinced. They are all either married or are so ugly that asking one out would mean that your standards had hit rock bottom. I dated a girl once, but when we got serious, I found out she had a third nipple. That was when the relationship ended. Hey, call me a pig, but I'm a pig whose kids are not going to be triple-nipped freaks. No way, not even a chance. Anyways, I was sitting in my favorite easy chair contemplating how to find a decent woman with the correct number of, well, you know. My mind was churning. Over in Utah there's a lot of women. No, that wouldn't work. I wasn't a Mormon. I could move to New York. No, never mind. Those women had attitude. I could always go to Florida, except that's where my grandma lives. In fact, that's where a lot of people's grandmas live. Nothing in Florida but beaches and old people. Yup. Nothing but beaches and old people and beaches and, and NUDE BEACHES!!! That was it! The perfect plan! Go to a nude beach and check out the goods before I commit! How could it fail? I packed my bags immediately.

So, that's how I got where I am right now. On the nude beach, looking for women. I adjusted my strategically placed towels and cabana and moved off to find myself a good woman watching spot. It didn't take very long. I found a spot surrounded on all sides by women tanning. Man was this going to be great! I was so excited I had to re-adjust my cabana. I laid my towel out on the sand and propped open the cabana. I figured it would only take about two hours to find a good woman and be on my way back to Idaho, woman on my arm. I turned on the radio, slapped on the lotion, sat back, and waited for the magic to happen.

"Ouch!" I had fallen asleep and a volleyball had hit me. I picked up the ball and surveyed the surroundings for the volleyball game in progress. It didn't take me long to find it. I was only about twenty feet from the location. It was then that I saw her. The most beautiful two nipped girl I had ever seen. The best part was, she was coming back my way!

"Hi. Can I have the ball back?" she stated with beautiful clarity. Naturally, all I could do was stare. "Umm. The ball. Sir? Can I have the ball?"

"Oh yeah. Sure!" I said, snapping out of it. "Volleyball, huh. I'm pretty good at the ol' V-ball game," I lied.

"Really? My team could use another player. Want to join us?"

I just stared at her. This was the one. If she wasn't going to be mine, then I would go back to Idaho and marry a potato. "Sure," I stammered. "My name's Chris."

"My name's Susan. Let's go." She grabbed my hand and helped me up. Her touch was like heaven. I swear I saw her check me out. We jogged off to the volleyball game. I was introduced to the other players. I didn't care about them. Susan was my main interest.

"Here you go, Chris. Your serve."

It was some man who, but the looks of it, didn't eat his Wheaties. I took the ball. Oh, man. Now I'm going to look like a fool. I've never served a volleyball in my whole life. I tried to remember what I'd seen done on T.V. Thank God for ESPN-2. I thought as I tossed the ball into the air. As it came down, I brought my palm forward to hit it. "Yes!" I thought as the ball hit my hand. "No!" I thought as the ball hit Susan in the head. She immediately went down. I ran over to help her.

She just looked at me when I got there. I didn't think she was amused. That was when she started laughing. I helped her up. "God, I'm going to marry this bi-nipped woman." I thought.

Later in the evening I was staring at Susan across a candlelit table. I had asked her out not long after I helped her team lose their volleyball game. Much to my amazement, she said yes.

"So, anyway Susan. How long have you lived here in Florida?" I asked timidly.

"Oh, about seven years," she replied.

"Great! How do you like it?" If she said she didn't like it, then I was going to move her to Idaho. She must be mine.

"It's okay. I never really got too much into it."

"YES! She would me mine. I smiled. "Say
Susan, what do you think of potatoes?" I said. This was going to be easy. Hook, line, and sinker. I'd have her.

"I like them . . ." This was good. I knew she'd be mine now! " . . . but my husband is allergic to them."

"Your who?" I stammered.

"My husband. He's at the bar right over there. Wave hi to him. He's a really nice guy."

I couldn't believe this. This guy lets this beautiful two-nipped girl go onto a nude beach and then lets her go out to dinner with a creep like me? She deserved better. I decided to go give the guy a piece of my mind.

"I'll be right back," I told Susan.

I got up from the table. With an intent look in my eye, I walked towards the man. I grabbed his shoulder, looked right into his eyes and said, "How dare you let this beautiful woman go out to dinner with me? I ought to destroy you here and now." It was then that the gentleman stood up. He was at least 7'3" and boy was he mad. I don't remember much after that point. Apparently I tried to run, but the guy grabbed my hair and stepped on me when I hit the floor. I awoke in a hospital the next morning, and later in the afternoon I took a flight back to Idaho.

I never saw Susan again. I sure learned a lot from that experience. Like women with two nipples are evil tools of the devil. Don't worry, though. It all worked out fine. Shortly after I got back, I met and married a nice Idaho russet. We're happy together and are getting along fine. I only wonder, if, on those sunny beach days in Florida, if Susan ever thinks about the man she lost to a potato.

A man;
A desert;
The sun;
A dying plant.
All components
of no relation . .
NO!
The man empties his water jug onto the weak; deprived;
biological specimen.
LIFE!
The man has done well restoring
life to the frail plant.
The man; moved by the scene reaches for more water;
realizing nothing is there to give
He has given all he can.
The plant wants more . . But . . there is nothing left to give.
The plant begins to shrivel and
the traveler begins to sob . .
This day the deadened flower will become a tombstone
for a traveler who wanted to
save and care for the
most
beautiful plant.
They die together.

Josh Bellamy
Lost Courage

Sweat trickled down strained features
Eyeballs popping, heart thundering in his ears
Every muscle painfully taunt, like a startled creature
The acid burned, bringing forth tears

One more rep! One more rep!

His legs quivered with the ground as he hovered lower
Mind focused, prodding for a scrap of courage
Sweat now poured like a warm shower
The load bent as he roared with sudden rage

Get it up! Get it up!

Limbs straining, the mass hovered with a new will
Veins snaked through his muscular shape
Courage flowed through them, still
Slowly ascending, joints cracked, his mouth gapped

Put it up! Put it up!

Weights slammed onto the rack
Then a second crash to the floor
Bones caved in, and shattered in his back
He was a body-builder no more

Give it up... Give it up

--Eric M. Emig

To To Too?

A cyclone; out of control
Ripping, tearing
Anything in its way
A disaster in a small town;
Big city;
A day...
A lifetime that is going perfect.
Destroyed
by one visit from the nasty cone.
The vortex of wind...
First, who is it; why does it...
Maybe-
It just wants to touch something
Yet everything it touches and wants to love

And it's all his fault...
So he retracts to the sky
as a
murderer after a
kill
To get an aerial shot of the rubbish
he has left behind.
He cries at the rubbish
and moves on
never to forget the one
he
tried to
LOVE.

--Josh Bellamy
Pedagogy and Lecture

Pedagogy
My heart upon my sleeve, there is pinned my soul
branded for life, shaped into a mold
The Letter compels me to conform, become a fool
I am stigmatized, the Letter mocks me a fool

A scarlet Letter for all to see
A blemish, it tarnishes me
I stand on the platform, my face, it burns red
I feel their glare and disgraced, lower my head

My scarlet letter, my bastard child
Scorned by peers, my phobia develops, my fears run wild
The Letter I can feel burn upon my young breast
I feel like dirt when compar’d to the rest

Complacent elders cast my mind away
I am marked for good, the Letter is to stay
My fate is seal’d: I am a failure
I cannot be any more, that is sure

My fate is seal’d
by a scarlet Letter
Labeled,
by a scarlet Letter

I am worthless,
because of a scarlet Letter
Cerebral demise,
from a scarlet Letter...

Lecture
A young boy was beaten today, because of his letters
What kind of world?
A young girl could not get into college because of her letters
What kind of world do we live in?
Money is given or denied to people in need based on their letters
What kind of world?
My intellectual capacity is judged upon letters
What kind of world do we live in?
The sight of certain letters makes me sick to my stomach
What kind of world?
Young children are taught to achieve certain letters at any cost
What kind of world do we live in?
What kind of world?
The Scarlet letter judges all
What have we done?

--Joe Lassiter
Dear Sarah,

Hi. It's been so long since I've seen or talked to you. I just thought I'd write and fill you in on what has been going on in my life since we graduated. Can you believe our ten-year high school reunion is this year? We're getting so old.

I've been living on my own for almost a year now. It seems much longer, though. I lost my job three weeks ago. I can only stay here in my run down shack of an apartment for a couple more weeks before I'll get kicked out. The heat hasn't been on for the past week, and you know how mid-west winters are. I can't afford to pay any of my bills. I've scraped up enough money for the water bill. I'm clean at least, even though the water is cold. The bank will probably come and repossess my car soon. It doesn't matter though; I don't have a job to drive it to.

Living on my own was easy at first. I saved up money when I lived with my parents after college. I stayed out late, partied all the time, and never really worried about anything. I had a good job. The pay was decent. Ten dollars an hour secretarial work. With my business degree, it wasn't exactly what I thought I'd be doing, but it was a law firm. It was a good company as far as people; my boss Mark was great. I found out what kind of financial trouble we were in about three months ago. They tried everything they could, but nothing proved to be enough. It turned out that the other partner, Ted, had embezzled money. It was a big scandal, even made it on the front page of the local newspaper.

The partner, Ted was married, but was keeping a mistress. He used the money he embezzled to put her up in a ritzy apartment uptown. It all went unnoticed for a while; he used his wife's inheritance money to cover up in the company's bank statements. Each month after his wife received her check, he would deposit the amount he had used back into the account. But, his wife figured it out and stopped the checks. That left no money to replace what he used, and eventually it got to the point where neither he nor the company could recover.

I was the mistress. Definitely not what you would have expected from me in high school, huh? So, there's no more partying, and there's no money to support my outrageous habits. This apartment I'm staying in now was only a cover, but now I'm really living here, and soon won't be able to unless I find a job. I no longer see Ted, either. He called a few times before my phone was turned off. He had said he'd help me find a new job since it was all his fault that I lost the other one. It was definitely not all his fault, though. I knew better than to have gotten involved with a married man. I suppose I should have accepted his help since I haven't had any luck finding a job on my own.

I think I hear a knock at the door, but I'm warm under my blanket. I'm comfortable just sitting here writing this letter and pouring out my problems to someone I haven't seen in ten years. Maybe whoever it is will just go away. It's probably just someone I owe money, the bank or my landlord, who knows? Well, they've been knocking for about five minutes, so I might as well go answer it and find out what they want.
January 18

I didn't get a chance to finish this letter yesterday. When I answered the door, there was an attractive middle-aged woman I'd never seen before. She said hello and asked if I was Jennifer Cline. She looked friendly enough, so I admitted I was, but that most people call me Jenny. She asked if she could come in. I was embarrassed for her to see the way I was living, so I lied and said my apartment was being remodeled, and then asked if there was just something I could help her with right there. She got a rather confused look on her face and said she really needed to talk to me. I thought maybe I was being rude, so I told her I could meet her somewhere in about an hour if it was okay with her. She said it was, and we agreed to meet at the local diner.

An hour gave me enough time to get cleaned up and that was about it. My hair is very low maintenance (very difference from high school), but my face lately, is not. I seem that I require more and more make-up to cover up for the lack of sleep. It was weird; I was going to meet some lady that just came to my door and said she needed to talk to me. I was so rude, worrying about what my apartment looked like I forget to ask her name.

The woman was already at the diner when I arrived, with a half-empty cup of coffee sitting in front of her. She'd obviously been there awhile waiting. As I approached her table, she looked up and gave me a consoling smile, but I wasn't sure why. I seated myself and apologized for my earlier rudeness of not asking her name. Again, she got the consoling look on her face and told me her name was Susan Kraft. She was Ted's wife. My heart began racing and my stomach started twisting in knots. I couldn't imagine what she could want from me besides possible my life. I just sat there and waited for her to talk.

She started by telling me she doesn't want trouble. She is just concerned about what is happening to me since Ted ruined my life. She has filed for divorce, and decided she's going to try and fix everything Ted messed up. She told me how she had gone to law school, but never practiced because of her inheritance money and because Ted was already a lawyer and making good money. So now, she's going to open up a new firm with my old boss, Mark, and thought I might like to be his secretary.

I felt so bad about taking the job because it was really my fault that their marriage broke up. However, she convinced me that there would be no hard feelings because, after all, I wasn't the first mistress he had. She is going to help me get back on my feet with my apartment (she knew I was lying about the remodeling) and even increase my salary.

Quite a change of events in one day. Of course, this still isn't what I had planned to do with my business degree, but once I get back on my feet, maybe I'll go back to school and become a lawyer or something.

Let me know what's been going on with you. I'll see you at the reunion.

Jenny
The Freezer Exploits of John and Skippy
--Eric P. Anspach

"Hey John."
"Yeah, Skippy."
"Do you think they'll ever let us out of this freezer?"
"I don't know. How long have we been in here?"
"I don't know. The hands on my watch froze solid about three hours ago."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"What, Skippy?"
"If they don't let us out of here, will we freeze to death?"
"Probably."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"Yeah, Skippy."
"Wanna play 'What am I?' again?"
"No."
"How come?"
"You mean besides the fact that it's colder than a polar bear's nose?"
"Uh huh. Let's play. It might take our mind off of things."
"No, Skippy. I guess what you are every time."
"Do not."
"Skippy, being a popsicle every time does not a good game make."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"What is it now, Skippy?"
"I think it's getting warmer in here."
"I can't tell what I think. I lost all sense of feeling about two hours ago."
"We could cuddle up together and keep warm."
"I don't want to."
"Why not?"
"I can't move, can you?"
"No."
"Well then we can't cuddle."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"Dammit, Skippy. The more we talk the colder I get."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"Skippy?"
"I just had a thought."
"And what is that?"
"What if the world were to suddenly ice over?"
"Yeah. So what?"
"I bet we'd be the best adapted of just about anyone."
"Skippy."
"Yeah John."
"That was the stupidest thing you've said since we've been in here."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"What, Skippy?"
"Nothing."
"Oh."
TIME PASSES
"Hey John."
"Yeah, Skippy?"
"Do you hear footsteps at the door?"
"Yeah. I think we're about to be let out."
"John."
"Yeah Skippy."
"I sure had fun in here with you."
"Yeah. I guess I had fun too."
"John."
"Yeah, Skip."
"You're my best friend."
"Thanks, Skippy. You too."
THE DOOR OPENS.
"OKAY BOYS. YOU CAN COME OUT NOW."
"No thanks. John and I are going to stay in here a little longer. He's my best friend."
"No! Wai ...."
"HAVE IT YOUR WAY."
THE DOOR CLOSES
"Hey John."
"....."
"John? Are you okay?? Why don't you answer me?"
"Dammit, Skippy! Don't you realize what you just did? We were on the path to warmth! He would've let us out of here and we could be cuddling up to a nice fire! As it is, I'm stuck in here for God only knows how long. And to top it off, I'm stuck in here with you!"
"I'm sorry John. I thought we could stay in here and become even better friends."
"Skippy."
"Yeah John."
"When I thaw out, I'm going to kill you."
"Oh."
And Here's to You, Mrs. Robinson

--E.A., T.B., S.E., K.F., M.F., J.H., & S.S.

As Mrs. Robinson sat in the restaurant reading the morning paper, she felt at ease. She smoked a cigarette, looking through the obituaries to see if anyone had died that she knew. She finished her coffee, and thanked the waitress for the good meal she had just finished. The check was placed at her table, and she was ready to pay it, when she heard a scream at the front of the restaurant. Not knowing what was about to happen, she stood up just in time to see the manager lose his life. She immediately sat down and started to pray in her mind. She was so scared, she was almost in shock. She started to sweat, even though it was a cold day. She did not know whether she would make it out alive.

There was a crazy man in the front of the restaurant, dressed all in black and sporting a huge machine gun. As he approached the various booths in the restaurant, he picked random people to execute. Mrs. Robinson was sitting towards the back, all alone. This only left the crazy man with one person to choose from. Or, would he possibly skip over her because there was no one else to choose from? This was strange--only moments ago she had been sitting peacefully with only old friends on her mind. She never imagined she would have to see this kind of mutilation in such a small suburban town. How ironic that she had been reading the obituaries to see if there was anyone she knew. Soon, her obituary would be read by those people she was looking for.

The crazy man was getting closer to her, and the anxiety and tension she was feeling was overwhelming. What would he do when he reached her table? Surely the police and paramedics would be on their way. Wouldn't he want to get away now so he would not be caught?

All these thoughts and questions were racing through her mind almost faster than she could decipher them. Maybe she could hide under the table, and he would never see her. Just as that thought crossed her mind, the man spotted her.

The man shouted out loud, "Who owns that blue Mustang out front?"

Mrs. Robinson, already trembling from fear, almost wet herself when she heard the man ask about her car. "Who owns it?" the man asked again.

She did not know what to do. She could not say anything. She thought that if she did not say anything, then the guy would forget about her car. "If someone doesn't 'fess up as to who that car belongs to, I will fill this waitress with lead."

Mrs. Robinson thought about what she should do. She had no desire to get herself involved in something like this. She, a shy, recently retired school teacher, always lived the quiet, simple life. That is how she wanted it. She was always the polite kind, always willing to help out. But in situations that might cause her harm, she was always hesitant. And this was definitely one of those situations. She always taught her children in school, and her own children, the Golden Rule, but why was this happening to her now? Why should she come forward and tell this man she owned the car and save the waitress's life?

Mrs. Robinson raised her hand, too afraid to speak. The crazy man saw her, dropped the waitress, and walked over to her booth. As Mrs. Robinson laid her keys on the table for the man, a gentleman stood up from his table and said, "I own the car." Mrs. Robinson was confused, and so was the gunman.

"What?" he shouted. "What about this bitch with the keys?" "It's my car," said the man again. He seemed so calm and collected. What was he doing? It was then that Mrs. Robinson noticed the shining badge beneath his vest. Thank goodness, a cop, she thought to herself. He will know what to
do. The cop was working his way towards the gunman.

"Stay right there!" shouted the gunman. "I need to talk to you! You killed my brother!" Suddenly Mrs. Robinson understood. So this was her brother-in-law, Jeb, that she had heard so much about. Her ex-husband told her that he had a brother in jail. That is, he told her when he was not busy beating her.

"I did not kill anyone's brother," the cop stated.

"Shut up man! Just shut up!" screamed the gunman, now crying with passion.

Mrs. Robinson realized that the brother he was talking about was her own ex-husband who she had indeed killed last year after the most severe beating she'd ever received. She never regretted it until now. How did he find her car? Could she let this man die for her doings? No, she thought. Mrs. Robinson stood up. "Look, he's just trying to be a gentleman. He sees how scared I am. Knights on white horses often rescue little old ladies as well as beautiful maidens. You must be Jeb."

"Yea, I'm Jeb, but who the hell are you?"

"Your sister-in-law, Mary Sue."

"Jack's killer?"

"No. I mean, I guess legally I did it, but it was an accident." Mary Sue was shaking so badly she couldn't get her cigarette it. As Jeb flicked his lighter for her, the "cop" came closer.

Jeb spun around. "Stay where you are mister. What are you, her lover? In on the job? I'll avenge my brother with both of you!"

"Jeb, don't be silly. He's 30 and I'm 65. Look I loved Jack. I didn't mean to kill him. Let me explain it to you." Mary Sue was desperately trying to think of how she could possibly dream up a story to satisfy Jeb concerning her dreadful second marriage. Four years of hell were hard to make sound pleasant!

After minutes that seemed like days, a story no one could believe came out of Mrs. Robinson's mouth. Jeb just stood there and laughed for he knew she was lying. So did the cop.

The cop went for his gun when Jeb turned his back. But it was a set up. Jeb spun around and put six rounds in the cop's leg before he was able to draw. The leg just dangled lifeless and covered with blood. Jeb laughed and with a huge smile on his face put another round right between the cop's eyes. At this point Mrs. Robinson knew she had no hope. She had to think fast. The sharp steak knife gleamed at the table. Jeb stepped closer and closer to Mrs. Robinson. He slapped her viciously and said she was going to feel all the pain of death. Three slaps later Mrs. Robinson grabbed her half full coffee cup and threw it in Jeb's eyes. Hopeing he was scalded and blinded, she reached for the steak knife and tried to stab Jeb, but he soon recovered enough from his confusion to send a bullet through her skull. She slumped over the table and the paper she had been reading. Drip by drip the page of obituaries turned red with death as Mrs. Robinson's day had come!
Dear Lord,  
Bless he who is so dear to me;  
While at home on land or out at sea.  
Watch over him in every way,  
Protecting him from the evils of each new day.

A promise to his country he has made;  
Far from home he has often stayed.  
Bring peace to this country for evermore,  
Keep him from the pains of war.

His plans and dreams for the future  
will take him far—  
And Lord, let him know  
he is my shining star.

--Stephanie Norton

written February 22, 1993, for a friend  
who serving aboard the fleet ballistic missile submarine,  
U.S.S. George Bancroft, for the United States Navy.

As I saw the sun smiling through the leaves,  
the shadows on earth playing hide and seek;  

As I walked through the woods in reign,  
all my tears were but in vain;  

As I smiled, laughed, and talked to you--  
of everything, something, or nothing new;  

I was happy knowing you were at my side,  
having a friend where my sorrows could hide.

--Savina Singh
The End

A pillar of particlals, protruded the sky
People watched, with an unblinking eye
The sun became black, obscured from sight
At every angle, came artificial might
The heat was intense, searing flesh to the bone
This was the end, none had known
Great winds, swept across the land
Blowing stick figures into bits of sand
Scattering dust, far and wide
Life was there and gone, like the coming of a tide

--Eric M. Emig

Death

The irony is unbelievable.
For some, its inconceivable,
the fact that life will cease.
Contrary to popular belief,
we are not immortal.
Mortality is true reality
the thought of fatality.
This may drive men insane,
but it will never change,
no matter how hard you try.
I am sorry, friend, you will die.

--Shawn Eldridge
A MODEST PROPOSAL
For preventing the orphans in the United States
from being a burden to their country
and for making them beneficial to the public
(With apologies to Jonathan Swift: A Modest Proposal)

It can be noticed in almost every evening's
newscast that there is a growing number of children
whose parents can no longer care for them. These
children are then shuttled from foster home to foster
home, and sometimes to group homes when there are
not enough adults available to take in an extra child or
two. Often, these children, who from a young age
were neglected by their parents, have been raised
without moral values. They are the blot on an
otherwise beautiful society.

These unguided youth, lacking the basic moral
values of society, come to an eventual ruin, either by
drugs or incurable diseases. If neither of these fates
befall the youth, they generally find their lives
terminated by other unguided youth such as
themselves.

There appears to be no general consensus as to
how guide these youth to better, more productive lives
that will benefit the society in which they live.
Therefore, I would like to offer a proposal that would
be beneficial to these unguided youth, and the society
to which they belong.

It is well known that there is a water shortage
in the deserts in the Western United States and in the
State of California. Because of this shortage, the land
is not productive for the nation. There are many
theories on ways to make this land productive. If this
was possible, food could be grown in these previously
uncultivated areas, providing sustenance for the entire
nation. The prevailing theory at this point in time is
to bring ice from the Arctic regions of the world to the
desert and allow it to melt there, thereby irrigating the
land and making it suitable for production of food.

It is also well known, and has previously been
mentioned, that the parentless youth in the United
States of America are the cause of much turmoil in the
Nation. These youth need guidance and strict
supervision. They are in need of character building.

It has been shown that hard labor will provide these
things. That is the basis of this proposal.

I would propose that the youth of our nation
be sent to the Arctic regions of our world to cut ice
cubes for irrigation of the American deserts. As it is,
the youth are in need of reformation. I believe that a
stay in the Arctic ice cube-cutting camps would do
just that for these youth. I propose that they be sent
as soon as they are discovered to have no parental
care. Therefore, there would be less time for the seeds
of destruction to be sown in their lives.

These youth, after a stay in the camps until
their mid-twenties, will have reformed into mature,
responsible adults that would be productive once
reintroduced into society. This somewhat lengthy stay
in the Arctic region would prevent our society from
having to deal with the youth's troublesome and
rebellious teenage years. Stuck in the Arctic region,
there would be less opportunity for these youth to
stumble into the paths of misfortune.

Upon their return to our Nation's society, these
young adults would now live productive lives, after
having moral values cultivated in them. They would
understand the value of hard work, and would have an
appreciation for the society to which they would now
be welcomed members of.

This proposal, offered after great
contemplation, seems to be of benefit to all parties
involved. I only wish you would take it upon your
consideration.

-JV
One day Ricky and Rusty Raccoon were strolling through the woods looking for some food. Ricky and Rusty were brother raccoons. They lived just outside a small rural town called Vegeville by a very swampy lake. Their parents had left them at home all alone for a week while they were on vacation in Rockwood State Park, the ideal vacation resort for all raccoons living in the northern Illinois area.

Ricky and Rusty were strange raccoons. They were looking for nuts to eat. Raccoons do not usually eat nuts, but these two loved them.

"Look," said Rusty, as he pointed to a tree.

"Yes," said Ricky. "A perfect place. I'll run back home and get the bucket."

Ricky scampered back to their house while Rusty began gathering the delicious delicacies that were scattered about the ground that excited the two so much.

Ricky entered the hollow log they called home. He searched around his and Rusty's room for the bucket. After a while of searching, he found it under Rusty's bed of sticks along with their nutcracker. He laid the nutcracker on the kitchen table as he sped off with the bucket back to the tree.

"Here," said Ricky, out of breath as he arrived at the tree.

The two quickly finished gathering their nuts into the bucket. It wasn't long before they had the entire thing filed to the rim. They then got up and began to lug the bucket of goodies back to their house. The bucket was so full it took the brothers what seemed like forever to them to get it back to their home.

"I can't wait to eat these," they said together as they entered the hollow log they called home.

"Quick," said Rusty, "get the nutcracker!"

"Right," said Ricky.

"Uh..."

"What's wrong?"

"It's gone!"

"What do you mean?"

"The nutcracker. I laid it right here on the table!" exclaimed Ricky.

"Did you lock the door on your way back?" asked Rusty.

"No, I forgot. I was in such a hurry to get back to the nuts. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry," comforted Rusty. "We'll find it before mom and dad get home. See, look on the floor."

There were green footprints on the floor shaped like rabbits feet.

"It's paint," declared Rusty. "And it's pretty fresh. Somebody stole our nutcracker! Let's go to all the rabbit's we know and find out who the thief is."

"Right."

The two brothers journeyed off toward the hills where the rabbits live on the other side of the woods. The couple's first stop was at Raphael Rabbit's. He was working in his carrot garden as the boys approached him.

"Raphael!" hollered Ricky.

"Yeah?" replied Raphael as he turned his plump, furry body around.

"Do you mind if we ask you a few questions?" asked Ricky.

"No, go right ahead, boys."

"Where were you and what were you doing around 2:30 this afternoon?" interrogated Raphael.

"Well, gosh, boys...I...I have been in my garden ever since 11 this morning. Why, what's wrong?"

"Somebody stole our nutcracker. It's dark brown with the initials R+R on it. Will you tell us if you see it?" asked Rusty.

"Well, sure, but I didn't take it," Raphael retorted forcefully.

"Ok, thanks," the two called back as they left.

"I think he took it," said Ricky. "He's always been like that...you know, taking things and lying about it. Remember Dad's whisker trimmer?"

"Now, come on Ricky, let's not jump to conclusions. We need some physical evidence," explained Rusty.

"You're right."

Next the two came to Peter Rabbit's. He was a very hyper rabbit. He was inside his
hole when the boys arrived.
"Peter!" Ricky yelled down the hole.
"AH! Who...who is it!" Peter shakily asked.
"It's me and Rusty!"
"Oh, come in. You scared me," said Peter as he wiped the sweat from his pink, shaking ears. "What do you boys need?"
"Well, you know our nutcracker..."
"I didn't take it!" exclaimed Peter. "Now, you coons go find some garbage to mess with and leave poor ol' Peter alone," as he shoved them out.
"Well," said Ricky. "He's a likely suspect."
Next the raccoons journeyed to Jack Rabbit's. He was a wise rabbit at one time before age overcame him. He had terrible vision and was often forgetful.
"Hi Jack," said Rusty.
"Uh...oh, hi Peter and Raphael, what's up?"
"Mr. Jack," said Rusty. "It's us, Rusty and Ricky Raccoon...you know."
"Oh, yes. You looked like the other rabbits. How is the family these days?"
"Just fine. Mr. Jack, were you in our house at about 2:30 this afternoon?" asked Ricky.
"No, but I was there at 10:30 this morning looking for your hammer. See, I am redoing my floor here and I needed to pound some boards back into place. So, since nobody around here had a hammer, I simply borrowed yours...I hope you don't mind.
I also painted the floor right before I left. Uh, by the way, could you look up there on my clock and tell me what time it is?"
"Yeah," said Ricky. "Your clock says 2:45."
"Thank you," Jack said. "My it gets dark early these days."
Rusty had a surprised look on his face.
"Excuse me, Jack," he said as he pulled Ricky aside. "Ricky, this is our thief."
"What? Jack? He stole our nutcracker? You are nuts. What makes you think he would do something like that, and then deny to us that he did it?"
"Well, he wouldn't...not on purpose anyway. His clock is four hours behind. It is not 2:45 now, it is about 6:45. He said he went to our house at 10:30. Four hours from then is 2:30, the time we were gathering our nuts. Right before he left for our log, he said he painted his floor. I bet he used the color green. And, since he has bad eyesight, he may have mistaken our nutcracker for a hammer."
"Wow," said an astounded Ricky. "How did you figure that out?"
"Elementary, my dear Ricky, elementary."
"But wait," said Ricky. "We should ask him if we could see our hammer, ask him where he got it, and what color he painted his floor."
"Mr. Jack?" asked Rusty. "Did you, by any chance, paint your floor green?"
"Well, yes I did...would you like to see it?"

"No, I was just curious. Um...where did you find our hammer at?"
"Why, it was right on the table," he said.
"AHA! You picked up our nutcracker. Could we have it back and maybe run our hammer over to you tomorrow morning?" asked Rusty.
"Well, sure," said Jack as he handed Rusty the nutcracker. "No wonder it didn't pound the nails into the boards very good."
"Alrighty then, thanks Mr. Jack. We will see you tomorrow," said the brothers.
"Yep. Bye now, boys."
"Well Ricky, we did it," said Rusty. "We found our nutcracker."
"Yeah, we should become professional detectives," Ricky said, as they walked off into the distance back to their home in the woods.
June 1995

As the sun set, a group of teenagers were walking towards the swimming hole located deep in the woods. Their shadows danced in the dim sunlight and were cast down the hill. The swimming hole was a common place for the local kids to go in the heat of the summer and throughout the school year. They usually went there to cool off, fish or even ice skate if the weather was cold enough in the winter. Since it was somewhat deep, the kids were usually very careful not to get stuck in the current leading to the river, and stayed close to the shore.

Daniel Russo really wanted to become friends with the “in-crowd” and had to prove he was acceptable. On the last day of school, the group dared Daniel to swim the swift-moving part of the stream which led to the river. Even though Daniel could swim, he wasn’t very good at it and was hesitant to go along with the plan. He decided his popularity outweighed any consequences and jumped into the icy waters which beckoned him. Daniel tried to dog paddle his way to the other side, but the current became too strong for him to fight against. He tried to touch bottom but that only succeeded in pushing him under because it was too deep. He tried to scream for help, but his mouth filled up with water and was muffled by the surge of the water. He soon grew too tired to fight, and his body went limp from exhaustion. Daniel was pulled under by the current, left to spend eternity in a watery grave as the teenagers looked on with no remorse.

They said nothing and walked away quietly in a daze.

“Not a word to anyone, understand?” snapped the oldest of the group.

“Maybe, maybe he got out further down and went home?” questioned one.

“No, we all saw him go under and no one tried to-“

“I said not a word and I mean it! Don’t ever talk about this again! Not even among us!”

No one was aware of the dark eyes watching them from across the shadow, a witness to the entire dramatic episode, hidden by the shadows of the woods.

September 1995

Robby woke up to the sound of her alarm. “Well,” she thought, “time for my first day of school.”

Early in the summer, Robby came to live with her uncle and his family. She had lived with her grandmother since the age of four, but after six years her grandmother became too old to be taking care of such a young girl. The county thought it would be better for Robby to grow up in a family setting and awarded custody to her uncle. This way she would be exposed to a loving family atmosphere and grow up with children close to her own age.

“Some atmosphere,” Robby thought. She knew her aunt and two cousins resented her presence. Only her uncle put forth the effort to make her feel welcome, but she knew it was a forced action on his part. She couldn’t help but feel unwanted, especially after overhearing her aunt’s conversation to a friend on the phone.

“I promised Jennifer her own room after the baby was older,” her aunt whispered, “but now that little charity case is with us and she has to share a room again. Plus, we’re now on a tighter budget than before. It’s bad enough having three children to clothe and feed, but four is even worse. We’re the ones suffering because my wonderful sister-in-law is nowhere to be found. She’s probably out selling herself and getting high, just like her loser ex-husband, and we have to put our life on hold to take care of her mistake.”

That was weeks ago. Robby had tried to get on her aunt’s good side by doing more chores
and helping out around the house, but it seemed that the more she tried to do, the more her aunt had to complain about. Her cousins did not like her either because of the incident regarding the gypsy boy, Daniel, who drowned this past summer in the paralyzing waters of the stream.

Daniel's family came to Salem in a traveling carnival. They lived in a trailer in the woods on the outskirts of town. When the carnival left, they stayed behind to make new lives for themselves. It was the fateful evening last June which shattered their dreams for the rest of the lives.

Daniel had been missing for two days before his mother reported him missing. He had had a history of sleeping in the woods while the carnival was in town. His mother thought maybe he needed some time to himself so she disregarded his not coming home after school was let out. It was not until two days had passed, without any word from Daniel, before she contacted the missing persons' office. The police decided to drag the swimming hole since the trailer was located so close to it. They were worried about the strong current, though, which could have pulled his body into the river, where it would never be found.

It took thirty-six hours for the divers to find Daniel. He had been pulled underneath a maze of roots by the current and was wedged against a sheet of bedrock. It required four men to remove his body from the tangled mess and pull him to shore. Daniel's waterlogged body was purple and bloated. His arms and legs were three times their original size. A black slime poured from his nose and mouth, as a yellowish discharge flowed out of his empty eye sockets. There were nicks and scratches all over his naked body where hungry fish had helped themselves and a hermit crab crawled out of an opening where his ear had once been.

Daniel's mother and father were both present when he was carried from the water. His mother nearly collapsed when she saw the almost unrecognizable corpse of her first and only son. The police thought Daniel's death was a suicide, given his history of depression, and considered the case closed, until Robby, driven by guilt, came forward with the truth.

Robby told the police how she had followed her two cousins, Jennifer and Scott, a few of their friends, and Daniel down to the swimming hole after school was let out that day. She did not want her cousins to know she was spying on them, so she hid on the other side and watched from the woods. She went on to explain how the group stood and talked for a while and then Daniel jumped into the water. She specified the fact that he jumped in willingly and was not forced in by the group.

After hearing Robby's testimonial, the investigator proceeded to question each one of the teenagers to find out if there was any truth to the tale. Each teenager told his perspective of what happened that day, and they all seemed to have the same recollection as Robby, plus or minus a few details. Although the teenagers were not accused of involuntary manslaughter, they were charged with the withholding of important evidence and sentenced to 500 hours of community service to be completed before the summer was over. Scott who had just turned fifteen, and Kyle, also fifteen, were both too young to appear in court. Instead, they were instructed by the chief of police to adhere to the strict curfew rules throughout the summer, and if they were caught doing anything wrong, they too would need to perform some kind of service to the community. Robby, however, was not reprimanded, but instead complemented. It was the chief of police who acknowledged the fact that for a ten-year-old to disclose this kind of information was an act of bravery, although he wished she would have come forward sooner.

Her cousins were severely punished at home, and Robby too was disciplined, but not to the extent that Scott and Jennifer were. Since then, Jennifer and Scott had barely spoken to her, and her aunt only spoke to her if she wanted her to do something. This was another reason why
Robby had been trying to hard to get on everyone's good side again.

A honking bus brought Robby back to reality. "I can't miss the bus on my first day of school," she thought. She ran out the door towards the corner where the bus was waiting and caught a glimpse of Jennifer and her boyfriend, Brian, pulling out of Brian's driveway in his new, red convertible on their way to high school.

When the bus arrived at Brownhaven Elementary, Robby recognized a few people from her neighborhood, but she only knew a couple by name. As she stepped off of the bus, an older student brushed by her and knocked her books onto the ground right into a puddle of water. Her lunch box fell underneath the bus as it started to pull away from the curb, and she lunged for it. It was too late. Her lunch was ruined, her books were wet, and she had skinned her knee on the curb.

"What a way to start the first day," she moaned, though she held back the tears.

Robby found her classroom just as the tardy bell rang. Her teacher was Miss Whitmore, who was supposed to be the nicest teacher in the whole school. Robby went to her assigned seat and put what she could salvage from her lunch box in her desk. Miss Whitmore took attendance and welcomed the new fifth graders. She then proceeded to talk about the class schedule and upcoming events which would take place throughout the school year. Robby wasn't very enthusiastic about any of the activities except for the Halloween festival. This year it was to be a Halloween carnival.

Robby wanted more than anything for her teacher to like her so she volunteered to help out with a booth for the class. She did not quite know a there for it yet, but she told Miss Whitmore she had an idea and it was a surprise.

October 17, 1995

Robby still had not thought of an idea for the carnival booth. She had tossed a few ideas around in her head, but nothing had been good enough to impress her teacher. She decided to walk home from school and ponder on a few suggestions from her classmates. As she rounded the corner, she saw an old woman pushing a rickety cart down the middle of the sidewalk. Robby hid behind a big oak tree to avoid being seen by the woman as she watched her.

The woman was dressed in a long faded skirt and an old torn-up sweater. She had on a pair of worn-out Army boots that looked three sizes too big. Her hair was gray and matter, and her cheeks were rosy from the wind. Her wrinkles told a story of sorrow and grief and her eyes were dark and solemn.

Robby strained to recognize her but she was too far away. As she moved closer to the woman, she stepped on a fallen branch laying on the grass and the leaves made a crackling sound. The old woman turned around quickly at the sound. It was then that Robby recognized her. It was Isabella Russo, Daniel's mother!

Robby ran quickly into her house and locked the door, terrified at the thought of the old woman being right outside of the house, knowing where she lived. She peeked through a slit in the curtains and saw her standing at the end of the driveway with a smirk on her face. She reached into the cart and pulled out a brightly wrapped object and set it on the grass beside her. She looked at Robby. The woman's eyes now danced like fire, and she gave Robby a toothless smile. She pointed to Robby with a wrinkled finger, turned the squeaky cart around, and continued to the next block. When Mrs. Russo was long gone, Robby ran outside to see what the old woman had left. She looked around to see if anyone was watching, then scooped up the object and made a mad dash to her room.

Robby locked her door and went to her bed. As she slowly unwrapped the object, she accidentally pricked her finger on the sharp object inside. When she opened it up entirely, she saw the shiny, razor-sharp edge of the pendulum. Robby knew what it was the moment she saw it
and then realized she had the idea for the carnival—a fortune telling booth.

Minutes passed, and Jennifer arrived home from school. Scott was with her, along with Brian and a few of their friends. They stomped their way up the stairs to Jennifer and Robby's room to get some CDs but when Jennifer opened the door, they all stood there in awe. Robby was seated in a folding chair in the middle of the room. She had on a brilliantly colored scarf around her head and was wearing Jennifer's favorite gold hoop earrings. It also looked like she had gotten into Jennifer's make-up. Jennifer was about to go ballistic when a flash of light caught her eye. She stared at the object in front of her. She had never seen a pendulum before.

The pendulum hung from a thin wire which was about seven inches long. The wire was in turn attached to the end of a metal rod which resembled a straw. The rod was fixed to a solid block of wood about ten inches high and two inches thick. When put together, the whole ensemble resembled the finished product of a game of hangman. The pendulum itself was made out of steel and shaped like an arrowhead. The wire was attached to the flat edge of the pendulum, while the tip was pointing straight down towards the table. It was smooth to the touch and the edges were as sharp as razors.

The pendulum sat in the middle of the table on top of a dark cloth. The cloth had a lot of mystical pictures and symbols written on it. The pendulum was placed in the center of the cloth inside a big circle. Located around the circle were eight words, strategically placed so that when the pendulum swung back and forth, it could only point at one word. The words were, in order around the circle, DEATH, LIFE, BAD LUCK, SUCCESS, SUFFERING, GOOD LUCK, INDESCRIBABLE HORRORS, and BIRTH.

Jennifer looked at Robby dumbfounded. "What's that?" she asked. She was just about to touch it when she noticed the spots of dried blood on the edge of the blade. She let out a squeal and quickly drew her hand away.

"It's a pendulum," Robby replied. "Fortune tellers use them to predict the future and tell fortunes. They are said to be fairly accurate. Grandma had one in her attic and she taught me how to use it. My friends and I used to play with it when we were littler. I never saw one this big before. It cut my hand as I was unwrapping it; that's why there's blood on it." Robby help up a bandaged finger and smiled.

By then the other kids had moved further into the bedroom and had crowded around Robby. She recognized all of them from that day at the swimming hole.

"How does it work?" Kyle asked.

"Robby explained, "Well, first, it must be set up exactly the way you see it here. Then the person wanting their fortune told must sit across from the fortune teller and hold her hands. Not unlike an Ouija board, the energy from the two people will cause the pendulum to move back and forth and focus on one of the eight words located on the circle. The fortune teller then gets a vision and will tell you your fortune based on thoughts generated from the word.

"Can we do this now? Will it work?" Jennifer asked.

"Sure," Robby replied. "Do you want to go first?"

"I guess."

"Okay, put your hands in mind and we'll begin."

Jennifer willingly grasped Robby's hands as she sat down. Robby noticed her skin was cold and clammy. She tried to ignore this and focused her attention to the pendulum. After what seemed like an eternity, the pendulum began to swing slowly back and forth as if it was being gently coax by an unfelt breeze. It then picked up on a steady rhythmic motion and swung around and around in a perfect circle. The pendulum then broke into the back and forth sync again and started to swing between INDESCRIBABLE HORRORS and LIFE.
Jennifer's eyes widened and her breathing became shallow as the pendulum slowed down and pointed to LIFE.

Robby was relieved that Jennifer had gotten a good reading and replied, "You will live a very fulfilling life. You will receive everything in life you deserve and die a satisfied woman."

Jennifer smiled brightly and got up from her chair. The others too had wanted to have their fortunes read, but Jennifer's mother came into the room just as they were drawing straws.

"What in the world are you children doing in here? You were all so quiet I didn't even know you were up here. Kyle and Brian, your mothers just called and they want you home for dinner. The others should run home too. It's starting to get dark out, and you don't want to get caught in the rain."

She then noticed the pendulum sitting on the table. "What on earth is that thing? she said in amazement.

Robby though fast. "It's my pendulum for the Halloween carnival at school. It's used for telling fortunes. I found it outside, and since it didn't have anyone's name on it, I thought I could use it for school." Robby didn't dare tell her aunt about her strange encounter with Mrs. Russo.

"Well, I suppose it's all right, but don't play with it in the house." Her aunt stood there a minute then said, "Robby, why don't you put that thing away and help me set the table for dinner?"

The whole next week Robby prepared for her debut at the Halloween carnival. She informed Miss Whitmore about her idea, and she seemed all for it. She appointed a few students to form a committee which would help in building the booth and performing odd jobs during the carnival. Miss Whitmore designated Robby as the fortune teller and allowed her to assign a partner who would help promote her booth. The kids worked and worked everyday after school, and finally the booth was ready for the big event.

October 31, 1995

Robby had practiced all morning telling fortunes. She wanted to make sure she knew what she was doing. When she arrived at the carnival, there was already a line in front of her booth. She kissed her uncle on the cheek, and went inside to begin. She was a little nervous at first, but then she quickly got the hang of it again.

After a few hours had passed, she began to notice that the readings were getting stranger, and she thought it was because she was getting tired. She decided to take a break and check out some of the other booths. From what Robby saw on her way in, her booth was by far the best in the whole carnival. She could tell not only from the looks of things, but also from the amount of tickets she had collected from her overflowing coffee can.

When she arrived back at her booth, a line had formed in front of the tent. There was a group of high school boys standing our front trying to get one of them to go in. Robby played cool and asked one of them if he would like his fortune told. A tall boy she recognized as one of Jennifer's friends stepped forward.

"Jennifer tells me you're a pretty good little fortune teller. Let's see what the future has in store for me."

"Sure, come on in."

They walked in and sat down.

"First of all, I need to know your name," Robby told him.

He replied, "You're the fortune teller; you tell me."

Robby heard snickering outside of the tent. She did remember someone calling him by name. She thought fast, "Gardenar. Your name is Gardenar."

He looked stunned. "How'd you know that?"

Robby smiled and said smugly, "I'm the fortune teller, aren't I?"
She extended her hands and Gardenar grasped them firmly. They were warm and wet. Robby began to concentrate on the pendulum. It began to swing fast but then slowed down to a steady back and forth motion until it stopped on DEATH.

Gardenar's eyes enlarged and he held his breath. What the hell is this?” he screamed. He stood up quickly, knocking over the chair, and ran out of the tent leaving Robby there dumbfounded.

Robby tried to stop him. Something was terribly wrong. She had gotten a horrible vision of Gardenar dying just before the pendulum stopped. She had to warn him. The pendulum had been giving weird readings this morning too as she practiced on her family, but she thought it was just the position she was sitting in. Suddenly a loud scream filled the gymnasium. From inside the dark tent, she picked up only two words, “Gardenar” and “shot.”

Just then, her uncle popped his head in the tent and said, “Robby, we're going to take Jennifer's friend to the hospital. He's been seriously injured. I asked Miss Whitmore to stay with you until we get back. We'll pick you up after the carnival is over.

Robby watched him run out of the gym to his car when she remembered her family's readings. She started to run after him, but it was too late. As the station wagon was leaving the parking lot, a gasoline truck came out of nowhere and struck the vehicle causing a huge explosion. Robby knew they had all been killed. No one could have survived it. Just when she felt she was starting to belong, they were taken away from her. She had to find Mrs. Russo and find out what was going on.

She ran as fast as her legs would carry her until she reached the trailer. As she started to walk in, she heard a noise behind her. She turned around only to catch a glimpse of the fire still burning from the explosion. But then something blocked her view! There, standing in front of her, was Daniel. He looked like he did the day he was pulled out of the water almost four months before. Robby turned the knob as fast as she could and stumbled inside of the trailer. It wasn't empty though. Mrs. Russo was sitting on a chair at the far end of the trailer.

“I knew you would come. How did you like my present?” she snickered. “I bet you thought you had the power to determine the future, didn't you? Until it backfired in your face just like it was supposed to.” She stopped smiling and looked at Daniel who had now entered the trailer. “Bring me the pendulum this instant.”

Robby just stood there. She couldn't move. She didn't know whether to run and hide or stay and face the music. The thought of going outside into total darkness with Daniel running around scared her. All she could do was stand there and stare in awe of what she was witnessing. Mrs Russo did not say anything more. The last thing she did was clap her hands twice, and Daniel appeared with the pendulum. Robby huddled in the corner.

“Come here dear, and see how it's done.” With that, she pricked her finger on the edge of the blade and the blood ran down over Robby's.

The blood! If Robby wouldn't have cut herself on the blade, the pendulum would have never worked for her. She knew she had to stop Mrs. Russo.

When she mustered up enough courage to steal the pendulum away from Mrs. Russo, the ghost of Daniel stopped her and threw her against the wall. She hit her head and was out for a minute. When she came to, Daniel and his mother were hand in hand and the pendulum was swinging back and forth from BIRTH to LIFE. She was trying to bring Daniel back to life by using all of the power Robby had given it through the death of her family.

Robby lunged forward with all of her might and knocked the table over before the pendulum had a chance to stop. Right before her very eyes, the roof of the trailer was torn off by an extreme force, knocking both Mrs. Russo and
Robby to the ground. Daniel was raised above them and then was sucked up through the roof of the trailer and carried away. Mrs. Russo laid on the floor in a twisted unmoving heap as a stream of glistening blood poured from her mouth. Robby knew she was dead.

Robby picked up the pendulum and started to walk back to her aunt and uncle’s house. When she neared the driveway, a young girl stopped her and said, “Aren’t you the girl who was telling fortunes at the carnival?”

Robby replied, “Yes, why?”

“I never got the chance to see you. Could you tell my fortune please? I don’t have any more tickets, but I’ll pay you for it.”

Robby smiled, “No need for that, this one’s on me. Sit down and give me your hands.”

Robby wiped the dried blood off of the pendulum with her shirt. Then she pricked her finger and the blood ran down the blade. “Oh shoot, I cut my finger.” Robby said.

Robby took the girl’s hands and the pendulum started to swing back and forth and then suddenly stopped on DEATH.

Robby smiled to herself.

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FRESHMAN

I diffused into this world, a new kind of life
I came with only hope, but received only strife
I could've been your friend but you scorned and mocked me
I could've helped you, but all you did was knock me
Hatred in class expressed in every form
Why do you hate me? Because I'm not the norm?
I try to blend in, to escape your piercing eye
But your hate it always finds me, and I wish to die.
Now, the pain, I bury it deep inside
because, I know from hate, you can never hide
Treat with kindness, love one another
you've raped me of my trust my "brother"

I've given you my cheek but you've slapped it with your hate
it has been hard for me to accept and live out that fate
When I look back on high school, the best years of my life,
they will be bitter memories, a yearbook of strife

--Joe Lassiter
**Arranged Marriage**

--Savina Singh

**Scene:** A young and tired Indian woman sits in a judge's chambers. The judge, Judge Jesse Phillips, interviews Sonia Sethi.

**Judge:** Tell me where you come from and a little about your background, young lady.

**Sonia:** (looks at her with sweetness and begins) Ma'am, my name, as you know, was Sonia Sethi. I was born in a small village in northern India. I came from a family with lots of money. My father was an influential and well-respected businessman. I miss him very much. I have no mother. She died after giving birth to my younger brother who will be 18 this year. I miss him. I lived in a household of relatives and grandparents and sometimes a busy father, but no mother. The people that raised me till the age of 17 were my two close servants. One would be maybe 46 years of age and the other 22. I miss them also.

It's funny; when I came to the States, I wasn't able to do anything on my own. I was spoiled in India. I couldn't cook, clean, or even wash and brush my hair.

Oh, yes, I did finish up to the thirteenth standard in schooling. Top division.

**Judge:** Sonia, I would like to know how you met Raj. Was it love?

**Sonia:** (smiles) Ma'am, I never even knew what love in a marriage meant. The marriage was arranged through a family friend. Raj was a nice looking Indian doctor living in the States with his parents. He came to India to meet me, when I was 17 years old. My father and grandparents immediately became fond of him. My father later on that night, took me aside and told me if I was a good and true daughter, I was to marry Raj. That conversation was overheard by Raj. The next day, while Raj and I went for a walk, he told me that he liked me, but if I didn't like him, he would tell my father some reason not to marry me. At that time, I felt some respect for this man, and I ended up marrying him the next week in India.

The first couple of weeks in the States scared me to death. I didn't know anybody. I was thousands of miles away from my family, and I was scared. We went to Disney World for our honeymoon, which was taken three weeks after we were married. It was the stupidest place I have ever been to. Sorry. But compared to what I know now--it's not a place to romance a woman, but maybe a girl. I shouldn't say that; I was 17 at the time.

**Judge:** Sonia, did you ever love him as a husband?

**Sonia:** (answers in a bitter tone) I don't think I was able to learn how to love him. His parents caused much distance between us. As soon as we came back from our honeymoon, his parents asked him if we had sex or not. Of course we hadn't. I was scared. I was trying
India; we don't discuss private matters. Well, after his parents found out, they left us alone one night at the house. Raj bought a movie to help me understand. At first, I was disgusted. But I was a wife, and I knew I had to do my wifely duties to satisfy my husband.

Sonia blushes and then apologizes for being so descriptive. The Judge smiles at her and tells her not to feel ashamed.

Judge: Sonia, let us talk about your baby girl.

Sonia: (smiles, but hesitates) Ma'am, would you like me to tell you about my first child?

Judge: (is surprised; she is obviously not aware of a first child) Go ahead, Sonia.

Sonia: (shows sadness as she speaks) The first time I was pregnant was four months after being married. Raj was happy and so were his parents. Of course, they wanted a boy. By my seventh month of pregnancy, I was having problems and started bleeding. It was a little girl. Still born. Raj's parents didn't seem too upset. They told me I was over-emotional about a "dead baby girl."

After that, I decided to become as independent as I could. With disagreements with Raj's parents, I still learned how to drive and received a private allowance. I was pregnant again a year later. Things got better once I was pregnant again. But then during my sixth month the family found out the baby was a girl. Even though they said it was my fault, I was happy inside. By my seventh month I couldn't take it anymore. I ran. Never went back. I wanted my baby alive this time. I know I have disgraced my father and the beliefs I was brought up with. But I was young, and I couldn't take the abuse anymore. I wanted to kill myself. So, I left. I had my baby in San Diego, California. A beautiful little girl. I named her Rani, meaning a queen.

Judge: How did you survive?

Sonia: I had taken my allowance and wedding jewelry with me. I must have had over 75,000 dollars. I was young, but not stupid with money. Remember I'm from a business family. But when it was time to pawn my jewelry off, I found a store that knew Indian jewels. I knew I would get the best price. I knew my jewelry well myself. The man that I spoke to was Indian. He was just recently widowed, and he was 30 at the time. He let me pawn the jewelry with no questions asked. Then he asked me if I'd like to work for him. I knew my material. I needed a job, but I had never worked before. I said I would work, but I had to tell him about my situation.

I don't lie, Ma'am. I have been taught not to lie. I would not lie to you. I have been taught to always respect my elders. And I still do.

Judge looks at her with an acknowledging and understanding face. Sonia starts to fidget and then becomes calm again.
Judge: Sonia, why are you here?

Sonia: (starts to smile again) I fell in love. Paul, my boss and best friend now, taught me how to trust and love. I never heard from Raj again. I guess he never tried to find me or our daughter. I miss my father and brother. Since I left Raj, I haven’t had the courage to speak to them.

I wanted to marry again. This time, because I knew what was marriage. I contacted Raj after 15 months. That is why I’m here. I want to live.

But Raj now claims he wants my child. No, I won’t give him Rani. He never wanted his baby girl nor did he want me. His parents wanted me and used me. Please Ma’am, help me.

Judge: (looks at Sonia. Sonia has tears running down her cheek.) That’s all for now.

Sonia leaves.

Judge: (looks out the window and sees her reflection. Out loud she says to herself, to her own reflection in the window) I was her.

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The Death of the Willow

The willow shadows a dreary dawn,
Shedding tears of dew upon wilted hands,
A rasping morning wind bellows;
And cries to the falling stars.

Desperate ears believe not what they hear
Hungry mouths know all they say.
Crying eyes shed only silent tears;
While wonderous creatures await mornings light.

The willow recalls despair if past nights,
Silent walks healed life’s blind eyes.
Word of death left the heart to bleed.
The willows leaves stitched wounds of hate.
While branches led to paths of fate.

The willow laughed;
The willow cries;
It joined the souls of passing pride.
It stalked the bad;
And assumed all good.

The willow healed life without being known,
And drifted from its forever home.
It left its home without good-bye--
Forever lost, and then shall die.

—Stephanie Norton
Amaco Blues Aren’t That Bad

--Triston Brownfield

The crackle of the leaves under my feet shot needles down my spine as I passed through the dark tunnel. It seemed like an hour had passed since I escaped the grips of death. Two thugs in the dark had just put their sights on my forehead. An innocent man caught in the web of corruption. What had originally started as a charity lottery, turned out to be a maze where life was the final prize. My whole life had changed. In a matter of hours I was on the run.

It all started when my friend Jake said he had put my name in a charity lottery at some night club just for fun. After a few minutes of catching up with each other, Jake said he had to get going. It was just nice to see Jake; we went way back. Jake brought me through some rough times in high school, and he was a good friend; gosh it was unfortunate that we drifted apart. After leaving that day, I didn’t see or hear from Jake for awhile. Then two weeks later the phone rang in a panicked tone. The phone call was weird; it was Jake, or at least I thought it was. He seemed distant, not himself at all. “The prize is yours,” is how he began the conversation, and then he paused. I was baffled. What the hell is he talking about I thought. Then I remembered that stupid lottery. Big deal I thought. What really freaked me out was what he next said: “Do you know where the abandoned warehouse is on Third St.” I wasn’t sure what was going on, but I managed to chirp a yes out. No sooner did I finish saying yes, Jake whispered, “be there at 10:00 p.m. sharp tomorrow night,” and he hung up. I thought this was some kind of joke, and I let it go.

That night I had hard time sleeping. I felt a mysterious aura, which I thought came from the six soft tacos I had eaten for dinner. I popped a few TUMS in my mouth and tried to get some sleep. Nothing worked; the numbers on the clock seemed to wave at me in laughter. The last time I remembered looking at the clock, it said 3:43 A.M., and I had two hours of sleep left. The next thing I knew it was 9:30. Shit, I’m late. Late for what, I thought. My dream was so vivid I nearly placed myself in it. As I looked down to my dirty Amaco shirt on the floor, my memory was renewed. Luckily one shirt and one pair of pants lay only slightly soiled on the closet floor. What a beautiful Amaco blue it was, I joked to myself as I flashed in front of the mirror. A quick swipe of deodorant and a set of fingers through my hair and I was on my way. That old de-ja-vu feeling was skipping through my mind. My body was tired, and it fought every movement I attempted. Flashbacks of my dream played on a screen in the back of my mind. At every stoplight another scene began. I tried to piece the pictures together, but it didn’t work. One thing was consistent: I was either late or running from something or someone. I kind of laughed as I pulled into work.

The day went like any other day, and I was tired as usual. A night of vegging out in front of the TV sure sounded nice. As I walked into my apartment, the answering machine blinked 100 times a second. Damn, I must be important, I joked to myself. I hit the play button, and there were fifteen damn hangups. I walked away with my ego crushed, feeling all pissed off. As I went in the bathroom, the answering machine played the last message: “Don’t Forget Tonight at 10:00,” Jake whispered into the phone. That’s it, I thought. I called Jake, but his phone had been disconnected. I tried his mom’s house, and no one there had seen him since Christmas last year.

The hours raced by, and 10:00 was approaching. I decided to go to the warehouse because it was probably some stupid joke. Jake always had something up his sleeve. The warehouse was dark and musty. I was actually kind of scared. Rats scattered across the floor as I tiptoed through the joint. I heard footsteps behind me so I waited where I was. Good, it was Jake. Jake was real nervous. He said, “we gotta make this quick. I got in some trouble with some big boys, and you won the lottery, or at least that’s what I told them,” Jake said as if he had just seen his own grave. I asked how I could help, and he simply dropped a bag on the floor and ran.

At this point I was scared to death. What was going on? I yelled Jake’s name, but there was no reply. He was gone. I picked up the bag and ran. I ran faster than I have ever run before. Why was I running? I didn’t even know how I was drawn into this mess. I didn’t even know what was in the bag. I thought it might be money, but it was a big bag, and
it was pretty darn heavy. I dipped into a quiet little alley that was fairly lit up to check things out. As I loosened the drawstring on the black canvas bag, my heart raced rapidly and my palms sweated profusely. I almost fell over when I saw the contents of the bag. It was money alright, but I had never seen so much money in my entire life. I spread the money around in the bag to see if it was all money; boy it was. Towards the bottom of the bag I found a note from Jake.

"I'm sorry about this buddy, but I had no other choice I'm in over my head. Be careful. They know who you are, and they know you have the money; you have got to get out of town fast. Use the money. It's yours, but remember they are after you as much as they are after me. These guys play hardball, and they play for keeps. Hopefully things will work out, and this will be our last good bye, but if we aren't careful, we might meet again, only in a morgue."

My hands trembled with fear. What did I do to deserve this? I like my minimum wage job at Amaco. My life seemed under new ownership. Where would I go? Who could I turn to?

My first instinct was to go home and pack everything important and anything I might need to survive. As I ran into the foyer of my apartment complex, something appeared different. I slowed down as I climbed the stairwell. I heard crashes and glass breaking on the third floor. Someone had beaten me home. They were already on my tail. I turned and ran out of the building still toting the 100 pound bag.

I ran by the Greyhound bus station and peeked through the stained glass window. The lobby was dead, so I decided to go inside. I went to ticket window and asked when the next bus left and where it was headed. The small lady behind the glass smiled and said, "the next bus leaves in 5 minutes, and it is headed to the windy city."

"I'll take a ticket," I replied. Twenty three dollars wasn't bad for a 5 hour trip. I paid for the ticket with the last of my money. The stash was all I had left. I walked over by the storage lockers and reached in the bag and took a few large handful of the twenty dollar bills. I filled all of my pockets with greenbacks and then placed the bag in locker #23, and put my quarter in the slot and took my key. I didn't know what I would do in Chicago, but at least I was getting out of this town for awhile. Once I boarded the bus, I felt a great deal of relief. The big Greyhound rolled out at about 11:30 p.m. that night. The night was long for all of the passengers on the bus, all four of us. I sat towards the back so I could keep an eye on the situation. I still felt like someone was watching me even on the bus. I had been to Chicago only one other time in my life, so I didn't know where to go when the bus stopped.

I went into the station for a cup of coffee and some directions. As I sat down and took a look at the little map the clerk gave me, I began to daydream and gaze around the station. The place must have been 200 years old; it smelled just like the dusty seats of the bus. Everywhere I looked there where mirrors on the wall, so it looked like the station was completely full when in actuality there were only ten people including me inside the building. Someone darted into the bathroom behind me. I swore it was Jake. I sat and waited until a man in a real expensive suit asked if I was from around here with a big grin on his face. I said no and walked away as fast as I could without running. From out of nowhere 10 guys in long black trench coats filed into the station. I thought I was dead until a policeman walked in. Once the cop showed up, the men disappeared mysteriously. I bolted for the door to the street not knowing which way to go.

I quickly flagged a cab and told him to drive anywhere as long he drove fast. Omar agreed, and we were on our way. Omar had a big smile, almost too big. The taxi sped away rapidly at first, but soon we slowed and entered a dead end alley. "Where the hell are you going?" I screamed.

Omar just said in an foreign accent, "Someone needs to speak with you."

I jumped out of the cab and ran out into the street. Out of nowhere two thugs in pinstriped suits started chasing me. "How did they find me?" "Where is Jake?" "What should I do?" All raced through my mind. Alley after alley and street after street they followed me, gaining all the time. I finally ditched them for a few minutes when I leaped into a small drainage pipe that crossed under an old street. No
sooner did I catch my breath, they found me. I was defenseless up against these armed and dangerous thugs. Near exhaustion I sprinted down the street with my last bit of energy.

Outside a run down Tai restaurant a man grabbed me by the arm. After following the figure into the restaurant, I realized it was Jake. He pointed towards the kitchen and motioned me to walk towards the bright light coming from the kitchen. I knew a good friend wouldn't abandon me like that. Until I felt the cold chill of a 9mm in my back. Jake looked like a mad man; he had gone over the edge. Jake kind of chuckled as he told me how he tricked the thugs into thinking that I was the real player and he was just the hired man. It was getting clear Jake was going to kill me and try to get away with the money before anyone found out about it. "Where's the bag?" he demanded.

I played stupid and said, "I don't know". "Bullshit," he screamed as he hit me across the face.

At that moment a large commotion entered the empty restaurant. Jake got real nervous. It was that damned Omar again. With one shot Jake put the end to his taxi days. Time was counting down. I figured I was going to die anyway, so I was going to go down fighting. Like an old McGyver show. I surveyed the surroundings. With one quick motion I took a pan of grease sitting on the counter and threw it in Jake's face. In his struggle he started firing the gun. I reached for a large stainless steel wok just in time to deflect a bullet away from me. My hands stung from holding the wok, but I still managed to duck out of sight under the sink in the dishroom. Jake was beginning to regain some composure when a bullet came through the front window finding Jake's skull as its final resting point. The restaurant was soon full of FBI, CIA, and DEA officers. "What was going on?" I thought as I remained still as a mouse in the dishroom. As the authorities combed the restaurant, I finally emerged with my hands up saying, "Don't shoot. I am an innocent man."

"Mr. Leno, you are safe now," said a polite man in a pinstriped suit.

"How did he know my name?" I thought. Before long they clued me in on how they had been watching Jake for quite sometime for his drug dealing and gambling, and how they had to be fast since the mob was really after Jake as well. What comes around goes around, at least for Jake. It seemed a little sad to give back the money in the locker, but it is amazing how many pockets an Amaco uniform has!!!
As the man walked along the lake of fire, he was almost burned by the rising flames. He did not comprehend his present surroundings, because death was such a new experience. He was lost, in a new world that was lifeless. The only light was emanating from the fiery lake below. The temperature from the lake began to escalate. He never had experienced the intense heat that now encompassed him. The lake was boiling so rapidly that the water was splashing up around the man's feet, burning him. The man had no present thoughts, he appeared to be walking along a pre-determined path. The man stared at his flesh, and noticed it was slowly peeling back from it's original position, as blood began pouring from every part of his body. As the blood flowed, the ground opened up around the pool of blood, and engulfed the blood, drinking every last drop. The man noticed this and began to scream. He did not know why he was screaming, was it from the excruciating pain, or was it because no one was there to help him.

The man began to think back to how he ended up in a situation such as this. He never believed in, or even thought of, any type of afterlife or superior being. He was born in a small country town. As a boy, he led a normal boy's life, and grew up understanding the difference between right and wrong. His parents were strict, but caring. The family did not attend church; they saw no need to involve themselves in such craziness. They were inherently good people, with very few vices. His dad had a drink or two at the local tavern on the weekends, but that was no big deal to him. Even as a college student, he was fairly calm, rarely giving in to temptation. He graduated with honors and started a very good business. He was at the pinnacle of his career. The business was doing great, and he could not have been in better health. But just as everything seemed to be so good in life, the part of life that no one wants to deal with occurs; death.

He was coming home from work. His car began to make a strange noise. He began to wonder if he would make it home. No sooner had this thought crossed his mind, when his car died. He called a towing service on his cellular phone, and they said it would be about thirty minutes. Ten minutes later, someone in a filthy truck pulled in behind his stalled car. The person stepped out of the truck and asked if help was needed. The man said that a tow was on the way, and that he was fine, but the person stayed. Before the man realized it, he was thrown into the truck, and driven to a distant field where no one would find him. The man endured several hours of unyielding torture, and in the end, died from loss of blood.

What most people think is the end, this man now realized, was a whole new beginning. What beginning this was, he did not know, but he had no choice in the matter. Control had been ripped from his grasp. He was just a pawn, playing part of a game he did not know the name of. Was this lake of fire his personal hell, or was this just a strange dream world that all dead people inhabit? Any kind of answers to all his questions were quickly dismissed as pain and agony once again filled his mind.

The pain was in a cycle. At the moment the first form of torture would stop, the next form would take over. He just wanted the pain to stop. He did not understand why this cycle would not somehow end. There was no end in sight. He began to wonder what he did to deserve this anguish. At that moment, his whole world changed. His pain stopped and pleasure filled his mind. He was walking along a new path.
There were beautiful women all around him. Every one of the women praised him and wanted sex from him. Anything he wanted in this new world, he could have. He thought that this must be heaven, and at that moment his world changed back into the lake of fire. This time the lake was so hot he could see no flesh, only charred bone. The man began to become very confused. What was heaven? What was hell? Was everything he had heard about during his life wrong? Maybe heaven and hell are just a myth, and there is no clear distinction between the two.

The man’s world changed back to a pleasurable experience again, and one of the women walked up to him and wanted to have sex with him. He began to move towards her, but noticed her eyes were red. He backed away from her, and she screamed at him and turned around. He noticed she had a tail. She turned back around to look at him and her face seemed to change into a serpent’s head. The pleasure in his mind stopped, as she began to feed on him, as if he was just a mouse. Then his mind turned back to the lake of fire, man just wanted the pain to end. He looked down into the lake of fire, and to his amazement, he noticed that there were people down there. He could not understand why and he began to walk the same pre-determined path. The pain was still unbearable, and the someone would jump into a lake of fire and experience even more pain. Then he noticed that the people were no longer in anguish. He was so tired of going through the same cycle of pain, that he threw himself into the lake of fire. His world changed immediately.

He was seated at a table with many other people. There was a piece of paper in front of him. The paper had a statement on it which read: "your test is over, proceed to your eternity." The man looked to his right, and noticed a door. He walked through the door, and never experienced pain again.