

Issue 23
December, 2021

Dead
On A
Doorstep



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A Note On The Text

Our December issue is one of two issues each year that we accept poetry and short prose from the entire United States and not just New England. Due to this, the issue tends to be a little longer than usual. This year the theme was an open topic.

Due to some requests, beginning in 2022, we will be changing this format to one issue that is open to all the United States (July) and one that is open to submissions internationally (December).

Enjoy!

Untitled
Sidney Tyler Lofton

There was a time when things didn't matter
Lazy days
Lost cow fields full of dung
That almost sickly sweet smell
Of southern summer
It smells like death
Death of a dream
The end of rock and roll

Rock and roll is death
But it breaths life
A fulfillment
A triumph
No matter how brief
And its attitude
A middle finger to
Fuck you it doesn't matter

It screams
It burns in you
And you die
A brilliant death
Burning so bright
Embrace it
Fuck it
Let it become you
Don't try
Become
God-sized
In an instant
You will

The people

They come and they go
Tradition
Is becoming bullshit
As I suppose it always has been
These twinkling lights
Remind me
Of simpler things
Forever lost
To faulty memories
And screaming inadequacies
And sometimes
I drift away
There is this place
I can't tell you too much
But it's there
Just around the corner
And over the edge of the cliff
It all runs together
And it doesn't matter
There's nothing I can say
That hasn't been said
And who am I to complain
I live in the U.S.A.
They killed Kennedy
And King
Lennon for good measure
Brain washed us all
With malls
And sales
Celebrity culture
Sunglasses and attitude
They raped rock and roll
As they do all things
It's just a toy
Break it
We can make another

And another
And another
Burying the voices and raising the shit
But what can you do?
Apparently not much
It's a steam roller
Assholes abound
And we riff this shit
And I say we because
I sometimes think that there's
More than one of us in here
But then I realize
That we're just human
And we all ache
Some just hide it
And some just explode
Bright lights
Neither bad or good
Just chaos
The natural state
Ride the wave
The conversations
Evaporate
Into
Into...
I feel lost
And it escapes me
Most days pass with nothingness
Just a dreadful thing
Sly smiles
Remind you of why you're alive
And what will kill you

Sleeping With Martyrdom

Rebecca Tollingworth

(<http://hawkingbishop.squarespace.com>)

She had her own alphabet,
each letter having the same
sound. It made it impossible for her to
for her to make sense to

anyone but herself. After she
buried all her calendars and
melted the hands of all her clocks,
she had a drink with God.

They were eating philosophy
while discussing what it really
means to be alive. "Papa's got
a job in the miracle factory,"

she said right before biting into
a piece of hope. God shot back

by adding, "and boy, does it
tire my psychiatrist." They both
laughed hysterically and decided
dinner was over. While God paid

for their meals, she composed love
on a napkin, and quickly crumpled
it up. She had the trinity; the Father,
the Son, and the Holy Ghost. She

slept with martyrdom and the
sex was great! After each orgy of
spirituality, she would crash back to
the floor of her reality and begin

pursuing her salvation. On her trek,
she tried hitchhiking to perfection,

and got lost along the way.

Nemesis Retribution

Icarus

(IG - @icarus_poem)

Nemesis,

Did you enjoy watching him fall to his knees,
As his downfall engulfed him like the inferno of hell itself?

Are you that envious of his light that you
must taint it with your malevolent whispers?

Why must you ring hope from his soul like
water from an odious dishrag?

He's nothing but a mere mortal trying to
spread his radiance, his presence, with
kindness and compassion.

Yet you hide in the shadow leeching his
sanity,

as he drowns in the maelstrom of his own
thoughts.

Has he not lost enough in this world? Why
must you torment him till the end?

To soothe your sense of pride, of justice?
Is that pride of yours so absolute that you are
too naive to see

that he has suffered enough?

Or must you continue on this path that you
have misnamed justice?

Every path has casualties, but do you not see
that his heart is the only collateral damage?

In the end of it all,

Your desire for justice holds no good motive,
Naught but blind vengeance.

I See Her
G. Edweird Cheese

She commands a room with the gentle grace of
regency.

A quite confidence reserved for queens and jet
fighter pilots.

She is beyond heavenly allurance.

The gods themselves dare not shine as bright.

She is a religion unto herself,
and I am but a heathen.

A pretender, perpetrating blasphemy.

Yet, her forgiveness flows like honey,
sweet and sympathetic.

Like a familiar flannel blanket,
she wraps me in warmth and I'm home.

The regrets of yesterday,
the worries of tomorrow
all melt in the radiance of her smile.

She is innocent of arrogance,
absolved of all self doubt.

She knows who she is and wears it proudly as a
flower pattern skirt.

The walls I built crumble under her gaze.

To her, I am translucent.

My armor turns to lace,
as thin as spider's silk,
and she easily tears it away with her laugh.

While I'm busy trying to think outside the box,
she burns it to ash with a flamethrower of wit.

With an insight so sharp,
I don't even realize I've been cut down to size.

She destroys the monster of my ego
with a humbling hand-grenade of humility.

She shines bright with an angelic illumination,
a brilliance that beams from deep within.

She becomes a beacon when the darkness falls,
a single shimmering point of splendor,
to guide me through the tyrannical tempests of
this world.

When the gales of doubt roar and rage,
and the thunder of fear crash and booms,
she is my sanctuary.

A perfect port of protection,
a safe harbor, a haven, a piece of heaven on Earth.
She is all this and infinitely more.

A million and one synonyms for beauty would
not suffice.

I am but a silent witness to her elegance.

As I gaze from afar,
I can only hope that one day,
she sees me, too.

Untitled
Rebecca Morin

I'll make a fool of all of them I swear,
The pain caused will drive me to prove them wrong,
The ugliness they see in me is appalling,
But my inner sadness has affected me too long.

Toxicity became a comfort zone,
Negative thoughts were drilled into my brain,
Trying your hardest still leaves room for flaws,
I didn't think blood could cause this much pain.

I sacrificed the entirety of my heart,
For people whispering my name in my absence.
People committed to misunderstand my every breath,
Unconditional love has always been absent.

Feeling neglected and secluded from the world,
Puts a target on your back just like mine.
They'll take turns shooting you while you're down,
Expecting perfection and for you to be fine.

They don't know that they replay in your head,
Or that your ears bleed when you think of their words.
Tears searing your cheeks like acid,
Maybe this is how you're supposed to learn?

Anything in you that stood tall is on the floor,
And you'll think all of your strengths are flaws.
Pretty soon you'll hate yourself in their image,
And confusion will re-open the wounds like claws.

You will never win with these evils,
They take all the light and leave you cold.
They'll make you question your existence,

And then hate you when you don't do what you're told.

If family means wanting to disappear,
Then I would rather be in the darkness alone.
I don't want to let them win by any means,
Or get the satisfaction of seeing me turn cold.

The Artist Dreamer
Sarah Kerendian

Mysterious roots. Invisible galaxy rivers
streaming thy dreams east to west, north
to south, through heavens golden
gateway. Though thy may fall through the
pit of paralyzing darkness. Veins on fire
through choices, voices, spiraling sorrow
death pain.

Insane thy became, zig zag mazed out
brain. Dreaming of endless snakes.
Medusa thy became. Slithery slide, watch
out, beware venomous mind,
body, tongue. Paralyzing you with an
everlasting, twisted love. Thy has
died, shed thy skin for thy love
has turned to ash.

Past memories, forever last. Awakened
to see it was all written in the stars, even
before thy ever dreamed.

**When Dogs Attack
Camo Salve**

When dogs attack
It's often comical
When a bent over ass
Fails and kills the mood
Heart racing, as knives
Bring blood stained debt
...a trial.

Fighting over a home
Where mistake is wrought
In dark lung ecstasy, addressing sleep and
breathing.

When dogs attack, who should present themselves,
but for mistakes in law.

...when dogs attack...
it is often comical.

A Smudge On Paper
Josef Desade
(www.josefdesade.com)

In every empty space a story unfolds,
Pen to paper, ink uncontrolled,
A lament to memory and faded photographs,
Fireflies and embraces that didn't last,
Etched in stone, the reaper signs his autograph,
Poetic words in epitaph,
Forgotten as the cruel winter places a kiss,
Reminders of that which we miss,
As the Ouroboros, mouth to tail,
Decay, a breath of life exhaled,
A saturated feather
Smudges on paper
Imprinted recollection
Permeating
Transmigration
A spark ignites,
Stars that burn so bright,
Disregarded and left to the silent night,
Withered blooms left to the grave,
An offering to faceless idols in which we pray,
Ink slowly fades and dries,
A new story unfolds, to be forgotten in time.

A Lifetime Alone
Porcelain Rose Depino

Do you truly know what it is like to be alone?
To sit in the middle of a crowd and no one looks
at you?

Have you told a joke and no one understood it?
Have you asked for help, but no one came?

Welcome my sad and nauseating reality
“Oh she’s crying for sympathy again”
Shut the fuck up

I hear your criticism behind your wandering eyes
I have come to terms my indefinite loneliness
Because with great intelligence, comes great
responsibility.

Have you ever been lied to?
Have you ever been continuously lied to?
By the same person? A string of people in a row?
How about your mother? Has she ever lied to
you?
Treated you like a pawn.

Earlier this year, I learned my whole childhood
was a lie
Just one lie covered by another
I never truly knew just how deep the well was
I assumed my teenage angst had lasted longer
than most
But my gut has been telling me the truth.

I learn things quicker than most
I am more observant
I feel too much...
Which always seems to get the best of me

And that's why you all take advantage of me.

My landlord takes advantage of me
My boss takes advantage of me
My co-workers take advantage of me
My parents take advantage of me
Even my "friends" take advantage of me
But you just watch it all happen and say nothing.

I have retreated into my own mind
And there is only one person I let inside
There is only one I trust
There is only one person that understands me
Because he is just as lonely as I am.

Pipa Thundercloud Jensen
I love you with the whole heart of my bottom
I love you with all of my guts
You do not have to be lonely alone
Because I want to spend a lifetime alone with you.

End Of The Road

Josh Davis

Opened eyes, ended dreams
Whispered lies remembered, it seems.
Why am I here? This place dark and cold,
I feel I've reached the end of the road.
Struggled life; juggled mind, Lord why me?
Why is it me, which only I see...?

Motion comes at a price,
to move one's life.
This isn't the end, my friend
You've yet to reach the end of the road...

Givin up on the life, I've wished for
ending the long, lost, waged war.
Why have I reached the end of the road?
I must shatter that familiar clay mold,
It's my life to change, so step away
Why is the sun frozen cold today?

Motion shouldn't be denied
Why admit defeat, you haven't yet died?
You may have lost the battle; not the war.
Open your eyes, you've been here before...

Two years ago
I was forced to run.
Outlaw am I, nothing more,
wanted man, for murder I never done.
Starvation and desperation. Run on 'til sore,
sun blazing, high upon my vengeful saddle.
Livin in hell; up a creek without a paddle,
dry mouth, my Colt becoming dry as well.
I remember none; no sign or tell,
Dessert long; unforgiving no end in sight.
Stop! At the end of the road, my only right...

Motion came but lost
Pay the price, no matter the cost.

Do what's right; if it lies inside,
why must you continue to hide...?

Remember who you are...?

Another dawn come and gone by,
I've grown cold and ruthless.
murdered with lies; not of my hand,
no victim of mine; shot to fill an emptiness.
So I ran. Surrounded; please understand;
friends had, forsaken me; left with the bag.
Does blood remain stained through time?
The man lay in dirt, I covered with his life.
I admit, I feel the guilt of widowing his wife,
but I am not gonna swing for this crime.
Slayer who ran, that cold blooded snake,
waiting to strike; like an earthquake. Venom lead;
so vile the poison take,
So on I run, slamming the door.
Outlaw am I, nothing more...

Motion comes at a price
To move one's life,
This isn't the end my friend
You have yet to reach the end of the road...

Barrel flash; blinded by the light,
murder one's mind, victim of stolen sight.
Close that door; leave it behind.
Tempt and challenge fate; so I may find
just what dwells inside of me.
Close my eyes, so that I may see,
Destiny East; my rising sun.
Agony West; the reason I turned to the gun.
Slam the door and forget the past,
or step in the grave which swallows fast.
Door is open; kicked from it's lonely hinge,
Suffer forever; the outlaw's Revenge...

Punishment due, like kissing a freight train.
Where'd that come from?
Lying under the stars, another painted pain,

when my time comes, no angles shall hum.
Freezin shakin night, burnin sweatin day,
Facing fate; as the devil stares my way.
Oh Lord, why had I run?
Train keeps a rollin, the next locomotion
I cannot answer this impossible question,
Forgotten by history, I'm telling this story,
outlaw am I, nothing more...

Motion shouldn't be ignored
Cast the fire, the sword is forged.
Driven by redemption, by the pain within
End of the road; let the revenge begin...

Step in front of a runaway train,
Just to feel alive again.
So am I the slayer of my own dreams?
The end of the road, I've reached it seems
Is that rain or is that a lonely train,
coming down the line?
I see no warming sunshine.
So I must bury the past and let it all go.
Soothing light; cast that shadow;
but that's not salvation.
Just my own sins, now coming back,
I'll take them all, stayin on the track.
Lonesome whistle sound, felt alive again
But I woke just in time before killed by sin...

End of the road; so I'm turning back.
Made me who I am, the slayer who ran,
So now watch the world Fade to Black.
I've come to accept fate, and kill the man,
who gave me reason to leave my home.
I've got no friends, I'll fight all on my own,
but infamy is a fame no one wants. Shown.
Don't you see, I've been framed?
Grown wild & cold; but my fire still yet burns
once so docile and tamed.
Wrath; pain caused I brought back to you.
Hear that knock? Go on answer the door!
Outlaw am I. Nothing more...

Motion comes into action
Long waited for, finally return the reaction,
30 minutes 'til noon; end of the road is here
Why did you let your world turn so cold...?

Crowd runs to clear
For they know high noon is near.
Could care less if it's wrong or right,
now cleared is my once blurry sight.
Are you ready for the end?
Because I've come to kill you, my friend.
Time burning slow, ready to fire,
My hate is fueled by a strong desire.
Sun blazing over head;
Cant wait to fly some lead.
We both wipe some sweat,
Wondering to ourselves, is it over yet?
High noon is near; I shake away the fear,
and stare at a face, I once could trust.
To end your life; I know that I must...

DRAW!

Motion has come and gone
Sun rises, to begin the new dawn.
A new day begins, and is finally here.
End of the road; there's no reason to fear...

Untitled
Sidney Tyler Lofton

What to say
This lust conquers
And one day will give way
This isn't a love poem.

No, this is a plea!
A dedication!

Give me the mercy of a torrid death
tween your thighs.

A lover's death
wrapped in sweat and rhythm
a symphony to the god of fuck.

A sacrifice on your altar.

I could shout
a thousand
obscene odes
to paper the inside of your skull
and you still wouldn't know.

Poems of beauty and adoration
Poems of passion and lust

Could never convey
the ache.

Out California Way
Josh Davis

California;
Well she'll take your dreams,
Plaster them up on big screens.
That's what you'll get if you go out that way.
They talk of gold in them hills;
Well they have no gold.
Only broken dreams, traded
for that well lit sign.
But that's not gold in her hills,
Just a sign that could use
A new coat of paint.
And her hills, they have no gold...

No gold for man to behold.

Go now and trade your souls,
for light never warm;
and venture out California way.
You may venture and you will search,
but friends, out California way,
You will find no gold;
Only a light never warm,
like promises of gold.
But her hills are so cold,
Cold like her stone.
Out California way,
Her hills are cold.

Death & Its Beauty

Chad Dickens

"But how is it that you know there's a life after this one?"

"One slip on a step can allow you to take a trip to God's kingdom." The old man coughs into his handkerchief.

"Are you speaking from personal experience?"

"I haven't lived a day on this earth that I remember. Before I was given the truth. It'll warp your mind..." Trailing off the old man's eyes became distant. "The beauty of death is one long begotten on me. However I know why I'm here, and as long as I'm here I will fulfill my life's duty."

"I do love our talks, however in the essence of time can you just spill the beans. What's the truth?" Said Dakota, never one for patience.

"You will hear it soon enough son. But first let me tell you. The anticipation for the next moment will always bring you away from the present. That's the whole point I'm getting at. Feel your surroundings with every step. Take the moment in for if you are too eager it may just be your last. I would know all too well." The old man's face grew harder as he peered past Dakota's eyes seemingly into his soul. "Sixty-seven years ago I was a four year old living in Denver Colorado. My uncle was in town and he had decided to take me for a ride around the city in his 18 wheeler. The weather in Denver is substantially colder at night and ice had formed on the steps leading out of the cab. After about forty-five minutes of driving we had arrived back at my grandmothers house where my parent's were waiting. With the excitement brewing to tell my folks about our trip I forgot what has been time and time again proven to me since. My first step out of the cab was a blunder, had only I listened to my uncle who told me to wait on him to help me out. My foot slipped back on the rung, hooked it, and my body flung like a whip! Crack! My skull had split, the blood was instant. And before I knew it I was watching myself. My mother sprinted from the porch, followed by my uncle around the front of the cab. Then I was hurtling to somewhere else."

Dakota's face drew an inquisitive look so the old man continued. "I had died, and gone to the realm above. First I landed upon a hillside, it all felt very familiar. Fragrance from the wild flowers sprawling upon the rolling hills as far as the eye could see, filled the air. Three celestial beings, of brilliant white light that trailed into every hue imaginable and some you even have no reference for. Descended from the golden sky above. They sang, and as they sang their continuous vibrato. From the depths of my consciousness came

their words. "You have come back much too early." They said in unison. The entity to my right was obviously mournful. The entity to my left seemed as though he wanted to punish me for crimes I've yet committed. And the one still hovering over the two right in front of me. He seemed much more important than the other two. At that moment a council was held. It seemed as though they could at any second tune me out of the conversation and telepathically talk amongst each other. They eventually looked back to me the entity on my right, we can call her my spirit mother. Burst into what I can only say is hysteria. She was like a mother mourning her child's death. Something I'm sure was happening simultaneously on earth. As above so below they say. You would think I wouldn't have the nerve but I chimed in. "What's happening to me?" The Godhead then spoke directly to me. "You have died but, it isn't your time. We decide when the dead survive." Feeling a tinge of regret I said "But I have never felt more alive." In response my spirit mother broke. Pure saturation of her aura poured over me. In that moment I felt more love than I have felt accumulatively since. The Godhead spoke again "You will be in one of the most trepidatious times to come. But you will give much light to those that need it during the Passover of the seasons." At that moment the image of the earth appeared. And in a matter of moments it seemed as though blood had soaked the page from underneath. Spreading it's viscous hue into every nation starting from the far east. I grew eager my soul had remembered something deep within it. "I will become a warrior I will protect those in need and smite those that subjugate." This time my spirit mother sang out "You under no circumstances will take another soul that is the reason you are in this reality. You must learn empathy. That will be the sword you carry for in this lifetime you will have fulfilled your mission." I was in shock it all came rushing back. Endless lifetimes, learning endless lessons. Slowly fulfilling a karmic debt that I procured before my soul was even introduced to this realm. In fact my soul has been in many realms. Getting higher and lower depending upon my actions and whether or not my life duty was fulfilled. I know now that this life is only a simulacrum. A simulation tailored to the souls that inhabit it. Seemingly becoming an original as the souls in it change it's face and it's culture. Your life is only a myriad of lives before it. A fractal from it's original. You live these many lives in order to eventually ascend or be cast into the abyss, tartarus, deletion. Dakota I want you to realize that every culmination of events brought you here right now. And that every word I just spoke to you is the truth as I see it. You and I, we are only here to learn. Pain adds texture, despair adds urgency and a million years in heaven won't teach you what a day within the material can teach you. You just need to know how to interpret the data. Being uncomfortable spurs evolution and evolution of the soul is our primary goal. Any questions?"

Dakota blinked in bewilderment. "Uhh yeah what happened next?"

The old man laughed "Just like you to get back to the story. Well, simply enough I felt as though I was tugged back into my body within an instant. My grandmother who was feverishly speaking in tongues while pressing her hands firmly on my wound gasped as

she saw my eyes open. I was in utter shock myself. But soon came rushing in my earthly senses, my intellect became that of a child's again. And I looked her in the face and with a smile upon my bloody face I asked when dinner was. No trip to the hospital was necessary. I sprang to my feet without so much as a headache."

Dakota looked around. "Is that why you have so many books?" Again the old man laughed. "It's exactly why I have so many books. But as I said before an experience like mine will warp your mind. You will find yourself longing for death but, knowing that your mission isn't fully over with. You know that death is only temporary and that if you ended this life you'd only be on the waiting list for the next. No if I want the everlasting tranquility of the higher realms I must stay. And I must impart light. I only beg for more souls to accept it.

Dakota thought deeply and replied, "I believe you."

As Dakota's spoke those words he noticed a split starting to form on the crown of the old man's head. Blood exploded from the wound as the man skull caved inward. Dakota sprang to his feet clamoring to make sense of what was happening. The old man lifted his hand to hold Dakota's. The veins in his hands started to disappear as he took his last breath, and smiled. "Thank you." Is all he managed to croak before his eye's went blank.

Hell Is Here

Rebecca Morin

Hell isn't a destination. It's not fire. The devil doesn't torture you. It's not in the depths below.

Sometimes it's reality. The ache in your chest and the pain behind your eyes. The confusion on what to do next. The fear of who to trust. The things you do out of anger and the regret you feel in your bones when you realize it was wrong. The silence of a loved one. The absence of an oxygen machine. The adrenaline making you unable to see. The blood pumping through your veins while you're still. All of the eye openers and epiphanies. Realizing you can't make it up to them. The trauma that scarred you and becoming it. The look in their eyes when you disappoint them. The tremble in their voice when you finally snap. The empty apologies. The blame put on you for things you aren't guilty of. Realizing that maybe they're right. The memories that turn you cold. The stab at your heart when you remember they're not coming back. No longer having access to your home. The reflection in the mirror when all of the above IS your reality.

I've seen devils and demons. I've ran from them my whole life. I've watched them take hold of my loved ones. I've watched them kill them. I transformed into darkness instead of pushing it away. I've felt weak for letting it happen and I've had that shoved in my face. I've been told to kill myself and join my family. I've been told that the wrong sister died and actually believed it. I've sat in hell and let the burn become my comfort zone. I've ran away from heavenly things out of fear. Avoided things filled with light. Picked toxic over peace so that I'm not someone else's monster. I've begged for help and felt ignored. Ignored help and fell to my knees. I've been so strong that people think I'm fine, and when I'm not, I've been told that I had to suck it up. "You're the strongest person I know", but the mascara on my pillow case doesn't agree. My swollen eyes would tell you different. My night terrors would scream for mercy if they could. I've sung myself out of deathly thoughts and screamed in efforts to get rid of my rage.

Do not glorify the strength of the cursed. Do not praise those who look

fearless, for they are not. Do not wish to be hard, or have a boulder mentality.

We may be alive in spite of life's attempts at destroying us, but suffering becoming who you are is a different punishment. Cemetery minds with suicide thoughts in a survivors vessel is hell enough for me. There is no quitting, or time at rest, only more battles. Armor becomes weaker but you gradually care less. Defending yourself is no longer something taught but something that moves you without your permission. It takes over every atom inside every limb, and every organ. You fight even while you already feel dead and then they still think you are the one who should be in chains. The monster. The villain. The thing they fear. The threat that makes them fight harder and makes them more cruel. Everything you do to stay afloat will make the path harder, when all you wanted to do was lay in the grass and talk to the moon. Give praise to the stars for sticking by you. Breathe air that isn't full of tension, and hear the absence of spoken trauma.

Do not glorify the strength behind the armor. Condemn the creatures that attempted to destroy it.

Greed & Its Many Soldiers

Chad Dickens

The first god ever born to the psyche of man was dominion. Us early men worshiped it for it's ability to supply sustainability. Yet it seems, the line between prosper and greed is a thin one. And as most false religions have faith as their primary driving force the priests and Popes that preached this faith new in their hearts what was actually being done. They're jobs weren't to preach the good word as much as it was to shepherd us sheep to the slaughterhouse.

This god Dominion doesn't want your life, rather he'll settle with your dedication throughout it. He wants your mind, he needs your dedication. He's structured this world to hold up a soft veil of piety all the while raping the pockets of the weak. This world we live in has one god. The god we helped create.

True piety may come once in a blue moon. We try as people to hold desperately to these words left by these many teachers. Throughout the millennia we wait. Like a team without a captain. We praise with conviction, anyone we think will restore this balance. We fall victim time and again as unholy men parade around and do behind closed doors the acts of atrocities they preach against in view of public eye. Men throwing those under them to the wolves of time. All the while using the greed in us all to do the worst of their bidding.

Greed is a formidable metaphysical weapon. That can and will crumble entire societies unto the utter destruction of this plane. The Gnostic's called this god the Demiurge. Through his guidance we humans have constructed an almost impenetrable wall to the thresholds of the mind and soul. We call it culture, we call it society, we call it economics.

We humans seemingly never had a chance. It's sad, yet there is hope. We confuse criticism with introspection. For when we bash others for their

inabilities we oftentimes are really ashamed that we too have these same
inabilities.

As technology grows we must make sure it's cohesive to the evolution of our hearts. The industries paving this technocratic future have the opposite in mind. For they too understand the game at hand. And have pledged their greed, like faith, to this god Dominion. Greed is the currency of this system.

The greedier it is the higher the numbers. We've associated these high numbers with happiness and quality of life. This whole system is driven by it's captors. The players of this game know that it is through the greed in us all that they rule.

Dominion may have been our first god as humans. But the greed in us all is what fuels his existence. Stifling that greed, identifying where it abounds, and restructuring ourselves. Is where we'll be successful in our efforts to forge a
new era.

Hog Wild

E.W. Farnsworth

(Amazon – E.W. Farnsworth)

Eddie Ratchet was on the run again, avoiding people he had irked during his latest billion-dollar business deal. As in former, similar escapes, he was touring places no private detective would consider searching with his billionaire friend Jillian Gompers. They had both cleared their calendars for the next six months and vanished without trace. Now riding in tandem on their Harley-Davidson special-build motorcycles in their leathers and aviator glasses, they looked like extras for the remake of *Easy Rider* as they pulled off the highway into Green River, Wyoming,

“Eddie, I am puzzled. What did you mean by ‘order matters’ when you described the natural beauty of Wyoming?” She was filling her tank on one side of the divide as he filled his on the other.

Eddie pushed his sunglasses up and into his wind-blown hair and looked into her dazzling sapphire eyes. “I meant things come wrapped in layers. You cannot always see what contains value on a first or even a second pass. You have to let the order of your discoveries come as they will. Our getting to know each other is a case in point. When we first met, all we could see in each other was wealth waiting to be transformed into more of the same. With time, we became intimate, and our knowledge of each other has deepened, particularly when we went on the lam.”

“So, maybe you can tell me why we are visiting Green River, of all places. I never heard of the place. It has natural beauty, I must admit But I know the way your mind works. You cannot be thinking that tubing or hiking is the aim of your quest.”

“Keep that thought, Jillian. I am going to pay for our gas. Do you want some beef jerky or tinned rattlesnake?”

“Whatever. Where are we staying tonight?”

Eddie did not answer till he had paid for the gas and emerged from the service building with two beef jerky rods. He handed her one of those. “We’re going to stay at My Place in Rock Springs.”

“Do you really have your own place in Wyoming?”

“No. The name of the hotel is My Place. You’ll like it. They’ve got wi-fi and the usual amenities.”

She pulled on her helmet and fastened her chin strap. “Lead on!” He watched her straddle her bike as he started his motor. The familiar Harley sounds filled the air. He pulled out and she followed the thirteen miles to Rock Springs where they pulled in front of My Place.

Eddie saw that his companion was not impressed. They dismounted and walked into the lobby where they signed the register as Mr. and Mrs. Howard Jones. The hotel manager gave Eddie the keys to his room and said the enclosure for bikes was in a separate building to the rear of the main hotel. After checking out the room, Eddie and Jillian parked their Harleys in the separate building and locked the exterior door.

“Not every hotel has a Harley pen.”

“For all its faults, that was an important feature. We are going to sample the other important feature in a few minutes—a thirty-jet sudsy hot-tub for two.”

“If we could bathe with chilled champagne, it would almost seem like home.”

Eddie smiled. Room Service delivered champagne in an ice bucket, toast points and foie gras. They settled into their hot tub after their long day’s ride. Eddie said, “I am becoming bow legged.”

“Me too. We rode through some gorgeous country today.”

“Tourism is the region’s specialty. Did you see any industry at all?”

“If you mean factories belching smoke or fenced areas for processing livestock, no.”

“So on first inspection, the impression is of a virgin landscape lying open for exploration.”

“All right. I will bite. Under the surface, what do you see?”

“Opportunity. The kind we live for.”

“I will drink to that, partner!” She touched her fluted champagne glass to his and drank. Then she ate a toast point with pâté. He did the same. “Are you going to tell me what kind of opportunity you’re considering?”

“Mahogany harvesting.”

“You must be joking. Mahogany trees do not grow out here.”

“No. But I am not talking about trees.”

She sipped more champagne. “Will you crack the code for me? You know I am easily bored.”

“What do you know about fracking?”

“I know you drive significant heat down into the earth, and hydrocarbons come back up and get processed. I saw no such fracking enterprises in the country we passed through today.”

“Again, opportunity! People have no idea how lucrative the deposits below the surface are. In the fracking lingo, the greater the density of hydrocarbons, the richer the deposit, and the richest of all are called the mahogany deposits.”

“I get it. Just as mahogany trees are found in the rain forests in clumps, so the densest hydrocarbons are found surrounded by less lucrative areas that are not as profitable to mine.”

“Good girl. For that you get more champagne.” He replenished both their glasses and continued grazing on the liver. She had maneuvered so now she was leaning her back against his chest as the jets sprayed the soapy water into a whippy white froth of bubbles.

“So, it was no accident our coming to Green River during our escape.”

“Green River has the most numerous and richest mahogany deposits in the country. My analysts have samples to prove it. And they have provided the detailed maps for land purchases.”

“Please let me jump ahead a bit. This area is a tourist haven. Will it remain so after the fracking begins in earnest?”

“You have a lot to learn about fracking. In fact, modern extraction techniques are clean and unobtrusive. As you harvest, you leave a small footprint, and once done in one place, you cover your mine to appear as it did before your operation. Then you go to the next place and repeat the process, all the while taking your extract to market via shipping vehicles.”

“I had envisioned fields full of dinosaur derricks and pumps.”

“It’s nothing like that. And, as for waterways underground, a number of methods seal the cavity for the heat infusions. That way, the aquifers are not polluted.”

“It’s genius!”

“No. It’s science. Everything was worked out through e-ARPA grants in the ‘Noughts. I have been pre-positioning paint-ready apparatuses at key mahogany sites so we can begin to make money right away.”

“When you say, money, what do you mean?”

“Low billions, for starters.”

“I like that idea a lot. You make it sound so easy. What are the barriers to entry to this market?”

“As always, regulators are the biggest impediment. You know, the EPA.”

“What trumps the regulators?”

“Local politicians who want to become rich. Large landowners. Industrial developers. Tax authorities.”

“I must assume you have a strategy.”

“Yes, I do. But first things first.”

“What is the first thing, then?”

“It is you, you scrumptious thing. Then tomorrow we’ll go visit a few of my paint-ready projects. Finally, we’ll make a pitch to the local Green River chamber of commerce and a group of business-friendly politicians.”

“Are we going under our real names?”

“That would be most unwise, Mrs. Jones.”

“I agree. But how will you manage the press?”

“In my saddlebags, I brought the press releases. The politicians will be too busy getting their own pictures taken to bother with us. In fact, the main presenter is a congressman bucking for senator. He will be carrying the ball with materials I sent him two weeks ago.”

“I suppose I should ask how much this little venture will cost me?”

“Jillian, it is the normal deal for me. Each contributor puts in one billion in cash and expects to receive back two billion within six months unless he or she decides to roll over the sum indefinitely.”

“I set aside the billion expecting to be pitched. How many others are in the inner circle?”

“There are ten total entities, including three banks, four individuals and three oil and gas companies.”

“So ten billion dollars are the seed funds?”

“That’s right. Once the regulators have been squared, the seed money flows, the hydrocarbons flow and the returns flow.”

“Will we be broaching that second bottle of champagne now?”

“Only if we can forego dinner.”

“I can think of a much better way to spend the night than at a banquet table.”

He kissed her on the neck and felt her push back against him. He dexterously opened the second bottle of champagne and filled their glasses. They had spent a long day on the road, but Eddie Ratchet knew Jillian Gompers well enough to perform explorations of mahogany zones she never thought she possessed.

*

The next day went as Eddie had planned it. After breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Jones rode their Harleys into the Wyoming range land to examine the paint-ready projects. The

infrastructure for the turnkey projects was almost invisible in the vast, flat countryside. Eddie explained how fleets of trucks had been arranged with ten-year contracts. Eddie explained how he had purchased a hotel in Rock Springs to house the oil and gas men who would run the projects.

Jillian was a quick study, and she was full of questions about the fracking enterprise. She was also a shrewd businessperson. By the time they returned to My Place, she had become an instant expert as well as a partner. At dinner, she was able to hold her own in conversations though the fact that she was an heiress was far more interesting to the local women than her business acumen.

Eddie had been correct about the press, who gravitated to the politicians. Not a single picture was taken of the Jones couple, who receded into the background while they listened to the chatter. Eddie judged their departure should cause no disruption when the food had been consumed, the liquor was flowing and the congressman champion had made his big pitch.

Back at My Place in the hot tub, Eddie and Jillian recapped their adventure over champagne, toast points and foie gras.

“I like your pet congressman, Eddie. He presents a suave demeanor and knows how to deliver a rousing speech.”

“His wife, like you, is a savvy heiress, and she is ambitious too. I overheard one of the guests mention something about a strategy for the White House. I would not be surprised if this business venture pans out.”

“I take it she is one of the personal contributors to our enterprise?”

“Yes, but her participation is through a blind trust to keep her distanced from any untoward events.”

“Such as?”

“Anything can happen. Militant environmentalists might go on a shooting spree.”

“That would be unfortunate, but it would not terminate the project.”

“Still, everything about politics must be factored into the equation. Two couples at tonight’s dinner fancied themselves keepers of the pristine landscape for tourism. They know the fracking will change the territory forever, and they are frightened about what the competition will mean for their financial survival.”

“The women you refer to are the ones wearing the turquoise jewelry tonight, weren’t they?”

“Yes, and a side benefit of the fracking is the chance to find veins of turquoise.”

“I love turquoise.”

“And the blue-green would complement your peaches-and-cream complexion.”

“I think so too. So tell me about our plans for tomorrow.”

“We will sleep in late. Then we will ride out to visit Turquoise Pool in Yellowstone. I expect we will arrive back here very late. The day after tomorrow, we will meet the congressman for lunch. Then our time in Wyoming will be limited as we will be planning our next moves in neighboring states.”

“So our mahogany zones lie outside Green River?”

“Let’s say, we have many options for expansion. In fact, the entire American Southwest is our province.”

Now she was facing him and wanting to be kissed. He thought she was becoming confident his plan would work out well. That suited him fine as she seemed to surrender more of her intimacy than on the prior night.

In their leathers and back in their saddles by ten o’clock the next morning, Eddie and Jillian rode through the breathtaking views on the way to Yellowstone where they saw the Turquoise Pool before retracting their way back to Rock Springs. They were exhausted, but not too much for love making. Afterward, their pillow talk took an odd direction.

“How long has it been, Eddie?”

“Not long enough, Jillian. I feel as if we are only just getting to know one another.”

“Have you ever thought about getting married again?”

“Actually, no. Have you?”

“Not really. Marriage does not offer me anything I don’t already have as a single person.”

“Why did you raise the issue?”

“I suppose it was inevitable for one of us to do so. Intimacy brings ideas like love and togetherness.”

“Yes, and children and families and heartbreak and divorce.”

“Don’t get me started.”

“Likewise. Let’s enjoy each other’s company while we may.”

They thought for a while separately until they were ready to come back together again with a different style of desire, more appetitive and primal. Before they knew it, morning rays were peering through their blinds. So they returned to the hot tub till eleven o’clock when they dressed for their lunch date at the Cowboy Crepes and Café.

At the back of the restaurant sat the congressman, alone and trying to be invisible. He relaxed when the Joneses sat to block the view from the entrance.

“My wife and I have received death threats since the meeting the night before last.”

“Do you think they are serious?” Eddie asked.

“I have come here with my bodyguard just in case. He is the cowboy sitting by the front entrance.”

“Doesn’t the danger come with the territory?” Jillian said, clearly disgusted by the man’s apparent cowardice.

“The stakes of our venture have increased. As the front man, I deserve a larger share of the profits than we agreed to.”

“What are you thinking you deserve?”

“The project already has my wife’s trust fund’s participation as you know. Without me as the pitch man, it would go nowhere. I believe that in-kind contribution is equivalent to at least another billion-dollars’ worth.”

Jillian was apparently not amused by this development. “Are you saying you are shaking us down for one billion dollars?” She turned to Eddie and said, “Maybe we need a new pitch man.”

The congressman’s eyes went wide, and he sat up straight in his chair. “If that’s the way you are going to play this, I quit. I don’t need death threats, and I certainly don’t need to have my contribution discounted.”

Eddie nodded. “Well, I need information before you depart. Is the large bone rib eye as good as people say it is?”

The congressman seemed startled to field the curve-ball question. “Yes, it is excellent but large enough for two.” The politician stood and made his way to the door where his bodyguard preceded him into the street.

Eddie and Jillian ordered one large bone rib eye steak and ate in silence. They finished their steak and were contemplating dessert when the congressman’s wife entered the restaurant and walked straight back to their table.

Eddie stood and offered the woman a chair.

“I am at a loss where to begin,” she said. “My husband is such a wuss sometimes. If only he had half my father’s guts and determination, he might be worthy of my plans for him. Anyhow, I am here to ask how we can keep our deal together—all of it, if that is possible.”

“We will need a new front man to take your husband’s place,” Jillian said as she looked the congressman’s wife directly in the eyes.

“I believe I can get one of our senators to play ball.”

Eddie said, “Prove it by bringing him to dinner at the restaurant of your choosing.”

“I will bring him to this restaurant at seven o’clock this evening. Be here then wearing what you are wearing now. Dinner is on me.” She stood and reached out her hand. Both the Joneses shook it. Then the woman walked confidently out of the restaurant leaving Eddie and Jillian in disbelief.

“Eddie, we need some serious hot tub time to discuss what has happened. Besides, I want to go into our dinner meeting with a roseate glow looking as if I had been shagging all afternoon.”

Eddie did not have to be asked twice to spend the afternoon preparing for the make-or-break meeting. He had been through this kind of drill for other multi-billion-dollar deals. After securing their Harleys in the special garage, the entrepreneurs retired to the hot tub with a chilled bottle of champagne. As Eddie phrased it, “Our aim is to clear all the registers of our minds so we can be open to all the possibilities.”

Thirty minutes before their departure, Jillian had her eureka! “Eddie, all we are facing is the exchange of a senator for a congressman. I’d say that was trading up, wouldn’t you?”

“That’s one way of looking at the situation. Let’s go in wide awake and ready to go in any direction.”

Back at the restaurant, the Joneses sat across the table from the senator and the congressman’s wife. All four were dressed in riding leathers and looking as if they had all spent the afternoon doing the same strenuous exercises. After the introductions and the first single malt scotch whisky, the congressman’s wife took the lead.

“Senator, we are here to discuss an idea that will make boatloads of money for investors, billions of future tax dollars and thousands of jobs for Wyoming, and build a platform for your run for the White House.” She hesitated while the great man digested her opener. She raised her scotch and toasted, “To the future!” They all drank waiting for her next move. She surprised the others by opening a laptop computer and turning it so the others could see her display of two images of Earth, one the idyllic blue, green and

white picture from space and the other the crated black-and-white nightmare vision of a future planet without atmosphere or water.

“We all naturally think the picture on the right will last millions of years, but the trends suggest the horrific picture on the left can be attained in the next hundred years. We have no viable plan to continue as we are, and the trend will make the lifeless ruin a certainty without action.”

The senator’s face screwed up in a frown. “I had no idea you were such an environmental activist, Marcie.”

“Senator, what if I could show you the way to redouble our pace of development while simultaneously delivering the dream of an Earth worth living for?”

“That sounds like a winning platform to me,” Jillian said brightly.

The senator’s face reflected quick calculations. He looked at the display again. “Tell me how this would work.”

The congressman’s wife spent the next half hour pitching Eddie’s idea for the fracking project. When she had finished, the senator was nodding his head. The Joneses were riveted on the senator’s reaction.

“Well, Marcie, you’ve sold me, but you know I don’t have the wealth to be an investor in this project.”

“Harold, you don’t have to contribute a penny to the project. All you have to do is sell it. Will you do that?”

“Yes. That was the easiest decision I have made all week. Let’s have some of the house’s famous long bone rib eye steak to celebrate.”

The dinner discussion segued to the marvelous natural sights in the state. The senator and his wife were inveterate bikers who had explored every small settlement connecting to voters. The couple were known for keeping their word and sticking to their decisions against all opposition. Less well known was the intimate relationship between Marcie and Harold. Eddie pierced through the surface professional façade to the close bond that lay beneath the surface.

When the long bones had been laid bare and the red wine consumed, the dessert of chocolate mousse and the snifter of brandy followed. Now the ladies went to freshen up while Harold leaned forward to confide in Eddie.

“Let’s cut the crap, Eddie Ratchet. I know how you operate, and I am impressed with the results you have miraculously achieved at every juncture. As long as you remain in the fracking business, things will go as planned. I need to know whether I can count on you to remain involved for the next election cycle. If I can have your word that you will not bail and leave us stranded, I will be the pitch man for your purposes. All bets are off, though, if you move on.”

The two men shook hands just as the women returned.

“What kind of cabal have you two been scheming while we were gone?” Marcie said.

Eddie said, “I was just affirming my faith in our project and my willingness to work as a financial consultant to the senator’s presidential campaign. And what did you ladies discuss that you did not want to let us hear about?”

Marcie smiled and said, “Jillian and I were just comparing notes on how to plan the perfect divorce. After all, she finagled her ex out of the entire Gompers family fortune. I simply had to know how she did it.”

“I hope you will keep our identities secret until we have left Wyoming,” Eddie said.

“You can both count on our absolute discretion,” the senator said. “Given our deal, I am going to assign security staff to safeguard your biking expeditions while you remain in the state. Here is my private business card with my personal cellphone number. If you need anything special during your stay, just call me.”

That night, Eddie and Jillian shared pillow talk till the wee hours.

“All right, Eddie. What were you and Harold really shaking hands about when we returned from the ladies’?”

“The senator wanted to be sure I would remain with the project through the next election cycle. Essentially, I agreed to stick with it for the next five years. Having my assurance, he agreed to be our pitch man for that interval.”

“What was all the cant about your being his campaign’s financial consultant?”

“Let’s call it a deal sweetener.”

“Be careful. Campaign finance is tricky business.”

“I expect we are going to hear more on that score from Marcie soon—for her husband’s senatorial campaign.”

“What?”

“We have to give Marcie’s husband a bone. What better than a rise up the political ladder. Of course, the senator’s presidential bid will fail, and the congressman’s senatorial bid will likewise fail. Their consolation prizes will be wealth from our project. Marcie knows what will likely happen in the political sphere, but she wins no matter what.”

“She is certainly intent on fleecing her husband for every cent he owns when she divorces him.”

“She won’t let him know about the divorce till she has made all the arrangements to get all his money.”

“She is a savvy lady, but she is working from a fortune a little smaller than mine. Say, are we going to tour Arizona now that we have the senator’s protection?”

“Protection is a two-edged sword, Jillian. We will have to plan our escape from Wyoming carefully. Meanwhile, we must watch our backs. Our having dinner with the senator will have been reported to the man’s enemies.”

“Why are we always having to provide our own security?”

“Do you really want to trust any other party to give you the security you deserve?”

“I guess not. So, what’s next?”

Eddie rolled over towards her and began pleasuring her. This continued, with variations, until morning. The next day, they continued plotting and scheming. Marcie called to arrange tea that afternoon.

The congressman and his wife, in leathers, sat across from the Joneses over Lapsang Souchong tea and crumpets with whipped butter and marmalade. The congressman wanted to hear from Eddie about the plan to make him a senator. He also wanted to be sure Eddie was going to advise him with his campaign financing. While Marcie rolled her eyes at every turn in the conversation, Eddie and Congressman Colin Fentress made their agreements. Pleased with everything he heard, the congressman offered his own security force to guarantee Eddie and Jillian's safety. Eddie demurred, but he observed the congressman did not take offense.

Colin and Marcie finally rode west into the late afternoon light while Eddie and Jillian rode east toward the rising purple darkness. As the night fell and billions of stars appeared, Eddie noticed they were being followed at a discreet, constant distance by two bikers who remained with them until they returned to My Place.

In the hot tub again, Jillian asked about the paint-ready installations in neighboring states.

“Visiting the other states' sites would be redundant. They are identical in every detail.”

“So, have we done what we came to do?”

“Yes, Jillian, we have accomplished our tasks. Are you ready to move on?”

“I want to visit the Donner Pass in California.”

“Are you having a St. Jude moment?”

“Meaning, I suppose, that I am thinking about lost causes?”

“Are you?”

She rolled over and looked him in the eyes. “I feel okay about everything so far.”

“Well, let's plan to make a run for the border starting tomorrow morning.”

The next morning, a threatening note appeared under their hotel room door: “We know who you are, and we know who you work with. Leave Wyoming immediately, or face the consequences. [Signed] Your Enemies.”

“Jillian, we are leaving just in time though I hate to give the bastards any satisfaction. If our senatorial security detail sticks with us on the I-80 till we reach the border, we should be fine. The highway will take us to the high country of the Sierra Nevada and through Donner Crossing.”

Eddie and Jillian checked out of My Place and headed west. At the Utah border, the two Wyoming security men peeled off. The pair did not encounter any signs of being followed as they traversed Utah and Nevada. They rode through the majestic mountain landscape of California, through the pass, and then down towards San Francisco.

They stayed four days at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square with the rooftop pool and the view. Eddie arranged for routine motorcycle maintenance on both Harleys at the famous Mission Street Harley-Davidson dealership. They took the time to explore Fisherman’s Wharf, Alcatraz and Sausalito.

On the morning of the fourth day, a threatening note came under their hotel room door: “You can run, but you cannot hide. [Signed] Your Enemies.” So, Eddie and Jillian picked up their Harleys and checked out of the hotel. They rode south down the coast on the Pacific Highway, then east on Interstate 8 and Interstate 40. Their plan was to travel all the way back to the East Coast on the 40, and that might have worked out if their enemies had not interfered.

A Harley-Davidson touring bike is no match for an eighteen wheeler barreling up the highway from behind. Eddie and Jillian swerved off on the nearest exit as the big rig passed, barely. Instead of continuing on I-40, the pair switched to back roads, like the old Route 66, most of which had been abandoned for general traffic on account of the encroaching interstate highway system. The advantages of the change were the slower pace and local scenery of the ride as well as avoidance of the threats. The disadvantages included the absence of roadside amenities/

Eddie found a gun shop in which he bought two Smith Wesson 38 revolvers with several boxes of cartridges, a cleaning kit and gun oil. He asked the gun shop owner where he might do some target practice. The man laughed and gestured as if he could feel free to shoot anywhere at all. So, Eddie and Jillian stopped a little farther down the road and filed a road sign with additional bullet holes. This precaution seemed prescient in retrospect.

The eighteen wheeler came up behind them as if it had materialized from nowhere. Eddie did not hesitate but aimed at the vehicle's front tires and emptied his gun. The huge truck buckled and jackknifed, sliding off the "Mother Road" as Route 66 was called in Arkansas into a corn field. The bikers did not stop but pressed straight on till they booked a room at a motel.

Jillian, fresh from her shower, said, "You surely do know how to show a girl a good time, Eddie!"

He smiled. "We were lucky today. Our avowed enemies are certainly persistent. I don't think they will find us tonight, but we should keep our weapons at our bedside tables, ready to fire, just in case. I cleaned and oiled them while you were in the shower."

"That was good of you. Who do you think has the resources to pursue us across the country as they have?"

Eddie knit his brow but did not answer her question. Instead, he ordered a pizza. When the delivery arrived, Eddie saw through the peep hole the man was aiming a high-caliber gun at the door. He signaled for Jillian to hit the floor. Through the peep hole, he saw the man throw the pizza box aside so he could apply his shoulder to the door.

Just as the man's body was about to collide, Eddie opened the door wide so the man flew in off-balance onto the floor, giving Eddie the edge. So Eddie kicked the man's gun away and then kicked the man in the teeth so he passed out. Eddie ripped the wire from a lamp to secure the man's hands behind his back. When the man regained

consciousness, Eddie wanted answers. After a time, he discovered the man, Josh Werner, had been hired by Colin Fentress.

“Well, Mr. Werner, this is your lucky day. If you persist in your quest, your next attempt will mark the end of your miserable life. Do you understand me? I am going to take your .357 Magnum as surety.”

Eddie and Jillian wasted no time departing the motel and hastening out of Arkansas. They regained Interstate 40 and rode without incident all the way to Wilmington, North Carolina, where they sold their two bikes to Carolina Coast Harley-Davidson. They bought two bus tickets to New York City hoping to see the countryside through the windows. Exhausted from their cross-country trek, they slept fitfully all the way to the Big Apple.

As they passed through the Washington, DC, area, Marcie Fentress called Eddie’s cellphone to announce her husband the congressman had been slain by a crazy militant.

“Are you all right?”

“I am as well as might be expected. I just wanted to let you know the project will go forward. I won’t have to get a divorce now. Where are you?”

Eddie said, “We are passing through the Washington, DC, area.”

“That seems so far away. When will you be in Wyoming again?”

“It’s hard to tell. I’ll be sure to give you a heads-up before I visit. Out of curiosity, does the name Josh Werner mean anything to you?”

“Josh works for my deceased husband. Why do you ask?”

“We ran into him while we were passing through Arkansas. That’s all. Goodbye.”

Jillian, who had heard everything since Eddie put the call on speaker, said, “Do you think the bitch knew why you were asking about Werner?”

“It doesn’t matter now. In fact, it hardly matters whether she or her husband hired the man to kill us. Marcie will only get her 100% return on the billion she has invested by keeping to the program. No one leaves that kind of money on the table. So why not go back to sleep?”

As their bus nosed forward through the heavy Beltway traffic, Eddie Ratchet dozed and dreamed of going hog wild through Wyoming with Jillian, a seeming million miles away.

Thank You!

Thank you to this month's contributors,

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January – Editor Choice Yearly Recap

February – TBA

March – Open Topic