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DECEMBER

Fresh Ink

The Contest Issue

Future generations are not going to ask what political party were you in. They are going to ask, what did you do about it when you knew the glaciers were melting?

~!Martin Sheen

CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB

INLAND EMPIRE BRANCH

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The Board meets the 4th Saturday of each month from 9:00 to 9:50 a.m.; all members welcome. Starbucks at Barnes and Noble, Montclair Plaza, Montclair
All members are welcome

Fresh Ink:

*“Stuff on writing
and the stuff writers write.”*

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The Inland Empire California Writers Club publishes *Fresh Ink* monthly online. Submissions should be sent to:

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Submissions for *Fresh Ink* are open to all CWC members. Needs: Essays, Short Stories, Poetry, How-to.

The Editor is the final word on content and layout and acceptance of submissions. Deadline for all submissions is open as the editor works on the publication as items

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Meetings

The fourth Saturday of each month 10:15 a.m. to noon at the Borders Montclair 5055 S. Plaza Lane, Montclair, CA

Membership

There are two categories of membership for CWC: Active members have been published. Associate members have written work to present as samples for an evaluation. If publication is indicated soon, the writer qualifies. Either status entitles the member to a subscription to the state Bulletin as well as other privileges such as reduced rates at conferences.

Dues

All membership dues are \$45 a year, due July 1st; however, Active and Associate members pay a one-time fee of \$20. From mid-year (January) all new membership dues are \$22.50. The full year begins on July 1. All guests are welcome to the meetings of the Inland Empire Branch. First time guests of members are admitted free of charge. Thereafter, the guest fee is \$5 per meeting. If a visitor decides to join the branch, the guest fee will be applied to the first year's dues.

Pain reaches the heart with
electrical speed, but truth moves
to the heart as slowly as a
glacier.

~ Barbara Kingsolver



**C o v e r
Photo —**

The photo on this month's cover was taken by IECWC member Helen Carson. It is entitled—

Alaska

First Place:

Because of space constraints, the first place poem could not be printed in the format requested by the poet; it will appear in the March issue of Fresh Ink instead.

Second Place:

Primal Shadow

Stalking prey in grassy places
the horizontal shadows of
morning come,
not black, but darker,
verdant green.
This narrow pelt of some
nocturnal beast
stretches silent claws to-
ward the west,
drapes languid and
boneless on the land-
scape.
Growing restless as morn-
ing reaches
toward noon, tense, ab-
horring sun
to hunch high-backed,
paws kneading
in relative safety under
the trees.
As threat of day passes,
panting breathlessly,
to slink soft-footed east,
in the waning heat.

-LaVonda Krout

Third Place:

In the Shadows

Solitude climbs in and out
of stories that rise or fall.
Sadness comes from cloud
formations mimicking ex-
ploding.
Silence speaks loudly to
leaves and blades of grass
under foot.
Sunshine gives way to liquid
without mercy.

Moss grows on the north
side of loneliness.
Dreams become malnour-
ished by shadows and under-
sides of feet.
Streets blacken deeper
with rain and fatigue.
Another kind of blue looms
above a sea of white hori-
zons.

Music straightens out the
backbone.
Winds can let the skin take
cover with cover.
Sing your heart outside the
body and spread wings.
The Muse waits for the mind
to stop throwing stones.

-Margaret Ellis Hill

USING CHAPTER BREAKS

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I started teaching writing classes in 1994, and during that time I've compiled a list of frequently-asked questions—those that crop up over and over. One in particular has to do with chapter endings, and writers ask it regularly, whether they're working on novels or nonfiction books. It generally goes something like this:

"I know my chapters are too long, but I don't know how to break them up. When are you supposed to end a chapter?"

The bad news is that there is no single "best" way to end a chapter. The good news? There are several "best" ways. And you can use any of them, depending on how well they fit the book you're writing. Each of them has its own power, and I'll discuss each of them in just a few moments...

Do you feel the "tease" that came just before the space break above? Writing information is being offered, but you'll have to wait a bit before you find out what it is. There's a sense that something is coming, and you (hopefully) want to know more.

That's the feeling you're shooting for with chapter breaks. The key to using chapter breaks is to leave readers wanting more or to leave them with unanswered questions. In that sense, chapter breaks are indeed a "tease," a way to hook readers and keep them turning pages.

But chapter breaks also help you shape the material, making the overall reading experience clear and compelling. So let's look at a few ways you can use chapter breaks.

1. To Change Viewpoint—This is applicable to novels with multiple viewpoint characters or to nonfiction that focuses on various aspects of a story, involving several different people. The chapter ending signals a movement to something new. And this is particularly effective in fiction, where multiple viewpoints might become confusing for readers. So if your story is moving on to another focus, consider ending the current chapter and starting another.

2. To Change Location—If the people or characters in your story are moving to a new place (and therefore a new activity), starting a new chapter makes sense. Before moving readers to that place, give readers hints of what might be found there, what treasures or dangers might be lying in wait for the people/characters involved. That insures that readers will want to go there, too.

3. To Change Time—A chapter break can be used to move readers backward or forward in time. For example, you may want to show readers that time has passed without explaining everything that has happened in between. In that case, a chapter can jump readers forward, and the writer can simply indicate that time has passed and the story has now moved to the future. In the same way, the chapter break can move readers back in time, showing them a flashback—something that has occurred in the past, something that has relevance to the present-day story. Time movement is a good reason to use a chapter break, and you can do this in either fiction or nonfiction.

4. To Build Tension—This involves drawing readers into the middle of some significant action (a verbal or physical confrontation), then ending the chapter before the conflict is resolved. For example, if two people or characters are fighting, the action usually builds up as the fight grows more intense. By ending a chapter at that point, the conflict is unresolved. That builds tension and doubt...and readers keep reading.

5. To Underscore Significant Information—In any story, (fiction or nonfiction), the writing moves forward whenever new information is discovered. For example, A character in a mystery might discover a clue pointing to someone's guilt. Or a nonfiction person out scuba diving might find a gold coin that hints at a nearby shipwreck. Where will the information lead? End a chapter there and readers will turn the page to find out.

As you review the above points, you'll no doubt discover that chapter endings are much more than most people think. They don't simply end a section of your book. They're actually a writing technique that can bring more power to the various sections of the story. So keep this in mind and consider how you'll divide your book into chapters, and how each chapter break will add strength to the overall project.

Best of luck with all your writing.

Give your writing the professional edge before submitting it to agents and publishers. Mike Foley has helped hundreds of writers improve their work with focused critiques and edits of novels, nonfiction books, feature articles, short stories, and screenplays. Contact Mike for a quote:

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Mike Foley is editor of Dream Merchant Magazine and author of more than 700 published stories and articles. He also teaches fiction and nonfiction writing in the extension program at UC-Riverside. Since 1986, he has operated the Writer's Review critique service, helping hundreds of aspiring writers improve their fiction and nonfiction projects.

First Prize, Non-Fiction

You're Going to Hell By Frances Kakugawa

I was eight years old, walking home alone from school on a narrow three mile road, swinging my homemade school bag against my leg. I hardly noticed the heavy forest of mango and guava trees around me. I kept close to the edge, though cars seldom traveled this way. Lost in thought, I didn't notice the tall dark figure approaching from the opposite direction until he was a few yards away. His black coat flapped in the wind as he hurried toward me. Instinctively, I inched closer to the side to let the shadow pass.

It stopped. I could feel its eyes staring at me from beneath the wide brim of its hat. Its head moved from side to side and I heard it say, "Oh, my poor child, you are going to hell. Only Catholics go to heaven."

I stood there, feeling frightened and shamed. Nervously I rubbed an imaginary smudge of dirt off my dress. From the look on his face, I was not doing something right. My family was not doing something right. Right was being Catholic and we were Buddhists. Shaking his head, he hurried away, echoing his curse to my back, "You are going to hell, my child." I ran home as fast as I could. The priest was added to my box of secrets.

Once a week, on Wednesday afternoons, the Catholic children were released an hour early to attend Catechism. It was taught by a priest who came in from Pahoā. I would watch them in envy as they filed out of the room. They were happy leaving school an hour early. I wished I were Catholic so I could join them. Some of them goaded us saying, "Too bad you're not Catholic, you can't get free time off."

We had a Buddhist shrine at home and my mother regularly burnt incense and prayed her Buddhist sutras. These familiar rituals were repeated in Sunday School which I attended until I was eighteen.

When I was fifteen, the entire Buddhist community joined in the excitement caused by the visit of the Buddhist Abbot from Japan. Rites were performed to initiate children into Buddhism. I didn't attend these rites. My father, who walked miles to the beach to fish for food simply said, "Going to church is like going to the beach. There are many ways to find the beach. Wait until you're grown up to choose the way you like most." My father attended church only for weddings and funerals. Otherwise, the ocean was all the church he seemed to need.

Today, there are Catholics, Buddhists and Protestants in my family. My own beliefs seem to track on multiple paths.

Still, I was impressionable then, and vulnerable. The declaration from the priest that afternoon continued to echo behind me for a long time. It became a voice of authority in religious matters, above the teachings of my parents. I felt safer to be Catholic, whatever that was. Besides, I didn't want to go to hell.

Even from my box of secrets, the matter would nag me in ways I was barely aware of until the day a neighbor made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

I spent many hours after school and on weekends, cleaning and boxing tomatoes for the market. Mr. Uyeki was a part-time farmer and my siblings and I helped him at harvest time.

One Christmas, Mr. Uyeki asked me to name something I wanted. "You work very hard so I buy you anything you want." I thought of the hours spent cleaning tomatoes, dipping rags in pails of water with maggots floating in them and scrubbing my hands after work to get rid of the smell of wet rags and rotten tomatoes. Yes, I had earned Mr. Uyeki's gift.

"A necklace" I said, without hesitation. "I want a cross on a chain."

Mr. Uyeki was a staunch Buddhist and I was surprised when he didn't question my wish. He bought a cross on a gold chain just as I had asked, and gave it to me.

I showed the necklace to a Catholic classmate. She looked at it and quipped, "It won't protect you unless it gets blessed by the priest." I handed the cross over to her with instructions to be sure it got blessed properly. When she returned it a few days later, did it shine a little brighter? I was certain it did. Perhaps now my journey to hell could somehow be avoided. I put it safely in the bottom of my chest of drawers for safekeeping. Unlike Catholic children who wore their crosses around their necks, I kept mine hidden. It didn't make me a Catholic but it made me feel safe.

During my senior year in high school, I taught Sunday School whenever the Buddhist minister was unable to make the trip to Kapoho. I didn't use any prescribed Buddhist texts for my sermons. I found them boring, stale stories told and retold by every minister I ever heard. Instead, I chose stories I found in "Our Romance," and "Good Housekeeping," and "Readers' Digest." I ended each story with a Buddhist lesson. I rewrote endings when necessary, to fashion characters into acts of kindness and compassion. "This is being Buddhist," was the moral of each story. My cross stayed in the drawer.

I was eighteen now, and leaving Kapoho for the first time, stepping into a world I was completely unprepared for. After graduation, I began my freshman year in college, working as a live-in maid for a family of five. I got room and board and \$25 a month.

I lived in a house that had electricity and indoor plumbing. I had my own room and bed. In Kapoho, we had outhouses and chopsticks. Here, I'm expected to set a table for breakfast and dinner using flatware settings with names and functions I could barely guess. Each evening I would have to stand for a moment at the dining room table, conjuring an image of what went where. The parade of plates and glasses and silverware seemed endless.

The routines were familiar enough: preparing lunches and dinners, doing laundry, dressing the children and making the beds. I did that in Kapoho. But the methods and devices had me completely mystified. There were just too many gaps in my experience; ones that Kapoho simply did not fill. I knew from the start that my life would become a living hell if I did not master them.

I recall Mrs. Evans making a pot of stew and asking me to set the table. I did so, with soup spoons. At home, "Hawaiian stew" was more soup than meat and vegetables, poured over scoops of rice. Spoons did nicely there, but not here.

Mrs. Evans took pains not to humiliate me for my ignorance.

"Oh Frannie," she'd say, "You must not have heard me; we're having stew tonight." She'd replace the spoons with forks, without a trace of finding fault.

"What?" I thought, watching her ladle the thick gravied meat onto the plates. "This is called stew? Where's the rice?" As to rice, I continued to bring Kapoho into the Evan's kitchen. When first asked to do rice, I calculated what a family of six would need by Kapoho standards. At home, they would fill my family's bowls and bellies for a single meal. When I saw Mrs. Evans serve a few spoonfuls on our plates, I started to catch on that our staple was their side dish. On that occasion, I learned to use leftovers for rice pudding that lasted a week.

(Continued on page 4)

You're Going to Hell (Continued from page 3)

I may as well have been in the devil's workshop. Modern appliances escaped me completely. I was baby-sitting one evening while the parents went to a movie. The girls knocked a lamp over and I stood petrified, watching the thing spark and sputter as it hit the floor. I looked at the snake-like cord running menacingly into the wall and was afraid of being electrocuted. I called the theater and left a message. Their names were flashed on the screen. Mrs. Evans called home and instructed me to unplug the lamp. She thanked me for calling her.

I had started my work, feeling I was being knocked down a peg or two. It was a shock to learn what a bumpkin I really was. To make matters worse, I was a Japanese domestic serving a Haole family. I reminded myself, though it didn't help much, "You need to do this to get a college education. Forget this shame of being a maid and pretend you're in prison for the next four years. Four years of hell will be over before you know it."

Mrs. Evans helped me the best she could under the circumstances. During the interview she had made it clear. "You are part of our family. The children are not to call you a maid." Every day, one child was designated "Child of the Day." She had the privilege of sitting with me on the front seat of the car when we were all transported to and from our schools. The "Child of the Day" got to sit with me in the kitchen while the rest of the family ate in the dining room. It was a privilege for them, but for me, it was a magical transformation from being just a maid to becoming the Maid-of-Honor.

I carried my clothes in paper bags when I went home on certain weekends. A week before my first exams, Mrs. Evans bought me a leather overnight bag. "We're celebrating your first finals," she said.

When my family home became inhabitable after the first lava flow, Mrs. Evans brought out a complete set of fine China saying, "Frannie, I've had this set for so long and they've been cluttering our cupboards for years. I hope your family will help me get this off my hands." My mother had fine China for the first time.

My monthly \$25 wage was hidden under a dish by the kitchen door. The children were not to know I was a hired member of the family.

How vividly I recall the night I spilled gravy in front of a guest during a formal sit-down dinner. She immediately used her napkin to sop up the spill. I took her soiled napkin back to the kitchen to replace it. I rummaged through the drawer for a matching napkin and found myself in a dilemma. All the napkins were being used. I stood there panic-stricken when Mrs. Evans came through the swinging door with her napkin in hand.

"Frannie," she said, "I know we're out of napkins." I watched her shake her napkin out and carefully refold it. "A word of advice," she said, "Never use your own napkin; keep it clean for occasions like this." She winked at me and said, "Here, give this to Mrs. Johnson." She followed me out with a pitcher of water.

I was learning fast. On Christmas Eve, a car came up the driveway. A woman got out carrying a Christmas gift. "Damn," Mrs. Evans whispered, "I didn't expect anything from the Carlsons." I took a poinsettia plant off the kitchen counter, rearranged the red bow around the pot and handed it to her. The expression on her face told me I was catching on. She took the flowers and greeted the visitor.

I grinned when I heard her say, "Hi! I was just about to drive over to your place. Merry Christmas!" She later returned to the kitchen with the Carlson's gift. She chuckled, "The secret in life, Frannie, is always keep a spare."

One summer the children's cousin from California came out to spend part of the summer. Ruthie was Catholic. Her parents were divorced and she came with a bundle of problems. One day she confided, "There are two people who love me in this world. You and me. After I leave, there'll be only me."

I considered her background for a moment and replied, "No, there's one more person who loves you all the time." Her face rearranged itself as if she were trying to fit in a missing piece in a puzzle.

"Who?" she asked. "When I leave here, I'll be all alone. No one loves me except you and me."

"God," I said. "God loves you all the time, especially when you're feeling sad and alone." The moment I said "God," I thought of the cross.

The next day, I took the cross out of my dresser and handed it to her. "Ruthie," I said. "This cross is to remind you that God is always with you and He loves you."

She was delighted, caressed the cross, put it around her neck and said, "Now there are three people who love me." She never took the cross off during the rest her visit. It was always visible and remained her constant companion. She was eight years old, and I was eighteen.

As I watched her leave at the airport, the cross glinted across the tarmac. I saw in her lightened steps that she had a friend now who would be with her as a loving companion instead of uncertain shadows. The cross had finally come to rest in the right hands. As for me, I walk with a lighter step, knowing it isn't where the road will take me, it's who I meet along the way.

Splash!

From Lola De Maci:

A publishing note: My story, "Wings of Spring," will be published in *The Ultimate Bird Lover*. It will be in bookstores nationally by February 1, 2010. I love that story because I love birds. They make me happy. I can't wait to get my copy of the book so I can read what other bird lovers have to say about our feathered friends.

Choose the Light Second Place, Non Fiction

By Carolyn Johnson

It seems that I begin every day with a kind of quiet renewed energy. Everything is fresh. Even before I open my eyes and get out of bed, I usually feel a sense of opportunity. My dreams have successfully swept away the fragments of loose memory floating around in my subconscious, and my mind is in a rare state of calm.

There are the usual rituals: Fresh water and food for my dog, coffee for me, and therapeutic herbs for my dog and for myself. Then inevitably some time at the computer to see what has taken place in the world while I was asleep (haven't taken a newspaper in years, and don't care for TV news, so this has become my window into the world). Then a little time in my day planner to center and focus.

Perhaps this is where the turning away from the fresh morning light begins. From the bright white, clean slate of my mind, to the beginning of the cluttered, unruly, dark energy that slowly seeps into my very being as the day progresses. I don't consciously want this to occur, it just seems like the forces of pessimism and self-pity are hovering, waiting for me to reflect on a negative emotion and pounce.

But first, there is the walk to look forward to. My dog is very good about not letting me forget. Not less than 10 minutes, and sometimes half-hour or so. It all depends on what types of smells we encounter, and how many "pee-mails" she needs to read and answer. And God help the cat that accidentally crosses our path.

But even the walk can be a mixed blessing. Sometimes it refreshes, with a glorious sunrise, or a random hummingbird crossing our path. But sometimes it distresses me, with reminders of loss and letdown.

What reminders, you might ask? If you were along on our walk, you would definitely not notice them. Don't believe me? Okay, I'll give you an example: that tree over there. Yes, that one. The one where we saw an opossum at 4 AM one summer morning. He stood stiff as a board, even as the dog barked just inches away like her life (and perhaps her next meal) depended on it. It was fascinating behavior. And from the opossum's perspective, it worked, since the dog was on a leash and we actually walked away and left him alone.

Yes, "we." No, not "we" as in my dog and I. "We" . . . the three of us: our dog, me, and my late husband. And so the veil of despair descends, and the shadows begin to form. Reminders are everywhere, once you begin actually seeing them. Some are subtle (like driving by the IHOP where he ate his last earthly meal) and some blatant (I really must put his tools away and the boxes they belong in, rather than leave them just as he left them on his workbench in the garage).

First thing, upon arising, my awareness level must be low. I see books on shelves. I'm barely aware of the pictures on the wall. I feel the worn carpet under my feet. I can even go to the grocery store, and just see merchandise neatly stacked on shelves. Why would anyone have a panic attack over any of these mundane things?

As the day wears on, however, the meanings of these things return. Books on shelves become passages I read aloud to him when his eyesight was failing. Pictures on the wall remind me of the life we had together that was cut all too short (although, I must admit, out of self-preservation I've taken down most of "our" pictures and replaced them with pictures that are meaningful mainly to me). The worn carpet reminds me of how I was willing to wait, and wait, and wait, to buy new carpet, so that "we" could renovate the garage, and add concrete and block walls, and buy motorcycles, and . . . well, you get the idea.

The grocery store is probably one of the worst places for me. It is where I had my first bonafide panic attack. I had to consciously hold on to the cart, and breathe deeply several times. As the "plum" in my throat rose to threaten tears, I bit my tongue to redirect my thoughts with some more "immediate" pain.

"No," I thought to myself. "Today I don't need to buy noodle bowls. I don't eat them. They were his favorite, and he's not here to eat them anymore." And I don't need to study the holistic health isle for yet another remedy. Nor do I need to buy any type of tobacco product. Strange that those two products (tobacco and holistic herbs) – which pulled in two opposite directions of the health equation – should occur to me at almost the same moment. By the time I get back home with the groceries and put them away, I'm ready for a nap.

At first, sleep is the ally. You can drift off into your own private world, where anything is possible. But it can also become the enemy, when you dream that your husband is still asleep by your side, and wake to find an empty bed.

There is no "easy" way to become a widow, but I must admit that he sheltered me from as much pain as possible. Death was quick for him. His heart just stopped. No lingering, no days and weeks in a hospital bed. Just here one moment, and gone the next. In fact, just before the attack, he was with good friends, and had just started to laugh at a joke as his heart gave out. As fate would have it, I was somewhere else, and was spared the immediate horror of his final moments. Just the way he would have wanted it.

The days and weeks immediately after his passing consisted of a numb haze. I realized then, as I realize now, that I was actually in a profound state of shock. I did things that needed to be done. I ate. I slept. I talked to people. I responded to requests. I even began making plans, with a distant nonchalance – as if they were in reality for someone else. I believe the phrase "going through the motions" would apply here.

I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with being numb. Far from it. Actually, I found that numb was working for me. It allowed me to function, somewhat, without having to deal with the anguish and despair that lurked just beyond the corners of my mind. Numb and I became friends. And if numb ever began to waver, I could always rely on alcohol to shore up and enhance the numbness.

I must have done a pretty good job of "masking" my pain. I went back to work within a couple weeks, and I never broke down on the job. In fact, my façade may have been just a little too good. When I was explaining my "lapses" in cognition, enthusiasm, and productivity to one manager, he actually told me that I did not "appear" to be in grief (to this day I still have no idea what grief is supposed to look like). After all, when his wife lost her Mother, she cried for days in visible anguish. I took this to mean that grief without tears doesn't count. Oh well, my mistake. If I ever lose a husband of 28 years again, I will be sure to keep that in mind.

Once the total fog in my brain began to lift slightly, the numbness began to be replaced by a sense of confusion – almost bewilderment. Since my husband had passed away at the tender age of 49, the thought of "why?" and "what did I do to deserve this?" were foremost in my mind. Then, as I began talking with others, I "heard myself" say "well, I'm not in charge of these things. It wasn't my choice. That was his fate and his destiny. He was actually reconciled to an early death. And although we were deeply connected, his life is now over. Now I must go on alone. That is my path now."

I need to remind myself, from time to time, that it's not "all about me." God, in his infinite wisdom, will allow the universe to unfold as it is supposed to unfold. It just is what it is. Death is an inevitable part of life, and I must find peace with that fact at some point. And I don't control everything. The only

(Continued on page 6)

Keep It Real

Third Place, Non Fiction By Pamela Bowen

When my husband took up photography as a hobby, he spent money on lighting equipment: strobes, speed lights, beauty dishes, and soft boxes. All of these devices are aimed at controlling shadows. After shooting a session with a good-looking family we know, he posted some pictures on an online discussion board. The comments of his peers included: "Nice family, but the portraits are flat."

Recently, I saw an exhibit of the photography of Richard Avedon at the San Diego Museum of Art. These portraits were far from flat because Avedon had accentuated facial flaws rather than softening them out. The puffy bags under Gertrude Stein's eyes were palpable. The creases in the faces of Prince Edward and Wallis Simpson showed the trying life they had led together. Avedon's subjects stepped out of the frame as real people because the shadows were left intact.

In an art class once, I was told to draw a pine cone without drawing any outlines, only by shading. I could only draw shadows or the absence of shadows. Frustrated, I left the sketch unfinished. Thinking only in shadow baffled me then, but now I think the shadows make the thing what it is. A circle cannot look like a ball without shading; a photographer's subject cannot look real without shadows.

A writing coach once advised, "If your characters are flat or boring, take time to reveal something of their 'dark side.' This will make them seem more real." Shadows, then, must be the key to our reality, and removing, masking, or fuzzing out the shadows creates a flat, sanitized outline of a person stripped of dimension and complexity. Making a subject look "pretty" can make it look fake. Ask a senior how she likes her re-touched graduation portrait, and she will say, "I look gorgeous, but it doesn't look like me." Removing the shadow removes the real.

Teaching English to teenagers, I often encounter my students' desire to simplify literature:

"Who is the bad guy in *Frankenstein*, Victor or the monster?"

"Why **does** the Mariner shoot the albatross?"

"How can Tess stay with Alec after what he did to her?"

They want easy, either/or answers to these questions. They want to shine plenty of light on these subjects so the shadows flee and the two-dimensional truth emerges. But these stories are too real to be simplified. The shadows remain to make the tales complex, thorny, and disturbing---like life. Young readers, still trying to hone their good-vs-evil radar, have trouble accepting ambiguity and ambivalence. "All of the above" is not a satisfying answer to them; they want to choose "A" or "B."

Perhaps predictably, those students whose lives have been "darker" have a more mature view of life and can understand complex human emotions and moral dilemmas. Some very insightful responses to poetry came from my student Ricardo, a refugee from the inner city whose family was fractured by incarceration and death. Ricardo "got it" no matter how puzzling the poem because he accepted the art for what it was and didn't need to chase away the shadows. He understood that the shadows **are** the art.

William Blake's "Lamb" and "Tiger" are staples of the English curriculum. "The Lamb" is well-loved because the students like the nursery rhythm and the simple questions and answers:

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(Choose the Light, Continued from page 5)

things that I can control, to some extent, are my own thoughts and my own actions.

Some days are better than others, of course. Some days I can go about my daily activities and only think about the life we "should" have had about a dozen times or so. Other days that's about all I can think about. So I find I must take a new approach, because he was the one who died. Not me. I'm still here, damn it, and it makes absolutely no sense to waste this life that God has given me in a state of perpetual numbness. Every day is a gift, and if his death didn't teach me that (at least), then I am a poor student, and his loss is only magnified.

So, now, as the days and weeks continue to roll by, I find I must "re-invent" my life. Not with the same, precise, methodical, "in control of everything" certainty as before, but with a new more open and accepting approach. Life is about learning and growth and opportunity, and I must embrace change. Change as an ally can be empowering. Change as an enemy can be more devastating than any weapon ever created by mankind.

I must entertain new thoughts and ideas and people and places and experiences, until I reassemble a new, autonomous consciousness. I am no longer married. I am now, for all intents and purposes, on my own. That is probably the hardest part of all. But it also brings an incredible freedom.

That is not to say that I am not connected with other people. In fact, since his passing, I have made many new friends and established new relationships. I have taken up new activities, joined groups, and even "reconnected" with friends from my past. It's just different when you are no longer in a formal "pair-bond" as before. Other people view a widow, or a girlfriend for that matter, much differently than they do a married woman. That is also part of the learning process, and each new day brings new opportunities.

So, in the early morning hours, as my day begins to take shape, I must concentrate first on choosing my attitude, and then finding activities and thoughts to support it. I have already learned that the powers of negativity will envelop me, unless I prepare my defenses. In essence, I must choose the light over the darkness, and act accordingly.

I find that I can reinforce a positive attitude with the right music. Usually Bach. "Begin with Bach" I sometimes say to myself. I would say it to my dog, but I find that she has little to no appreciation for baroque music.

I will also write "Today I am grateful for . . ." on the daily notes page of my day planner, and fill in the sentence as the day progresses. Sometimes it is something simple like "I am grateful for my early morning walk." Sometimes it is a bit more profound, such as "I am grateful for the thought process that Sarah stimulated over lunch." But whatever it is, it channels my thoughts and feelings towards appreciating what I have, and the journey that I am on in life, as opposed to what I have lost.

Grief is a process, and I am fairly certain that I will never "recover" to my original state. Truth be told, I would not want to go back in time, even if I could. Navigating the shoals of life is hard enough going forward. Going back over previous mistakes and trying to correct them is much more difficult than simply learning from them, and moving forward. I will use them as navigational aids, and keep moving.

Which brings us to today, as I begin my Monday morning yet again, and find that a new week beckons. I know that there will be new lessons, some joy, some sorrow, and perhaps if I am very lucky, some love. But whatever the week may hold, first I must choose the light.

THE SIGHT

FIRST PLACE, FICTION BY SUSAN LANNING

The weathered roof of the Ohio farmhouse creaked as it settled under the July sun. Asa Prine stood alone before the kitchen sink, her face lined in worry – small, thin, tough after seventy some years of a burdened life, staring at the beans in the kettle she and her granddaughter Ruby had snapped. Then the angry words. Didn't the girl know what trouble she brought on herself with that boy? At eighteen Ruby followed her own mind. But she couldn't see what lay ahead.

It was the girl's soft heart that caused it. And that boy's need. And neither of them willing to listen to an old withered woman. Too young, too innocent, too full of hope to heed any warning from her.

July heat didn't stay the chill that started down low in her legs and rose, moving up into her spine, radiating spindly fingers of cold into her core. Trouble lay ahead like a giant toad, squatting in the path, its dim eyes half closed and waiting. She had the sight, had the curse of seeing. She could see it now, feel it, nearly touch the vile thing. Yet she couldn't turn it away, couldn't move it from the path.

Booter Houk was that trouble. A sad boy with affliction in his face every time you looked at him. A boy beaten and trounced by his old man till he couldn't lift his head to see the sun. And him wanting her Ruby, needing her so bad it broke your heart.

He was a mortal danger to that girl. He'd get her hurt sure as night fell. That pa of his was mostly animal by now and vicious at that. Him trying to run her off the farm. Their dead goats were proof of it. And Booter taking on the shame for what his pa did. Just give that man a seed of reason and he'd hurt you. All Ruby did was care for Booter. Reason enough in Earl Houk's eyes.

"You don't know what it's like, Granny. We love each other."

The boy's eyes on her, adoring, trusting, hanging on her for his way out.

Asa with awful knowledge in her voice. "You'll get her hurt, boy. You want that? Your pa'll see to it. He ain't gonna let it be. You seen what he done to our goats. Hung 'em from the rafters, slit their bellies open. Next it'll be our barn. He won't quit till he runs us out. Or worse."

"Granny, don't!" Ruby with eyes filled and mouth quivering. "Don't do this to Booter. We'll go away where his pa can't find us. We don't have to stay here. You'll come with us."

Asa looking away. "Can't go, girl. This is my place. I won't leave it."

Nothing to say that could change them. Too young to see. But Asa saw. She could look into the beyond and see things coming – like a wagon pulled by horses carrying a cargo of fate, hurtling toward her. Wasn't always for her. Sometimes for others. Her knowing what that cargo was would scare folks, keep them at a distance. 'Witch' had been tossed her way and worse. Not a gift of sight but a plague, seeing and not able to stop its coming.

Asa jerked away from the cold that threatened to engulf her. She moved to the stove, turned on gas and lit a match. A spurt of heat rose as it ignited and she welcomed it into her lungs. From the drawer at the bottom, she pulled out the lid to the kettle, settled the pot on the burner, added salt and some pork lard and left it to cook.

Time to begin the canning soon. Beans were at their peak in July. No real tomatoes yet but the cabbages swelled so big you couldn't get by them in the garden and the corn was at its sweetest now. She let her gaze drift out the small kitchen window to the long rows of vegetables at the back of the house like a cross patch quilt across her land. Afternoon sun glistened off leaf and stalk. Not much of a place, this, but it was hers. And, by the breath of God, she meant to stay.

"You don't know what it's like," from Ruby. "We love each other."

So long ago, but Asa knew – remembered.

Times had been hard back in West Virginia where she'd come from. Granthum folks weren't accepting of much. Homely when she was young, the men had passed her by so that she lived alone with an ailing mother up on Cornwall's Pass. She was just past thirty when her mother died, leaving her the house and her few earthly possessions.

Then one day along came Ralph Prine, a dazzling man with brilliant eyes and empty pockets that won over the heart of old maid

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(Keep it Real, Continued from page 6)

"Dost thou know who made thee?" "Little lamb, I'll tell thee."

Blake called the poem a "song of innocence" because it has no shadows, no doubts, even keeping clear of any reference to the Crucifixion when Christ (who "became a little child," and "called himself a lamb") is mentioned.

However, the "song of experience," "The Tiger" though its fiery imagery appeals to adolescents, causes trouble. The poem is full of questions, but no answers. Images of beauty and fear are yoked together ("burning bright," "fearful symmetry"), and students don't know how to take the tiger. Ending the poem with a knotty metaphysical question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" disturbs young readers so much that some retreat into the annoying response, "This poem's dumb."

Readers like Ricardo, on the other hand, think "The Tiger" is much "cooler" than "The Lamb." They can bear with the paradox of beauty and fierceness. They can even espouse the idea that the same creator who made the "wooly bright" lamb also forged the brain of the fiery tiger. A world view that accepts the shadows as a necessary part of creation enables readers to fathom difficult art.

I don't pretend to know the cosmic purpose of darkness or evil in the universe. But I do think that shadow is what gives human art its realism and relevance. The photograph, the drawing, and the poem all rely on the shadow to make their subjects three-dimensional, whole, and accessible to the human viewer's soul.

Lost Cause

Second Place, Fiction
By Jill Hedgecock

The barren canopy of an oak tree stretched over the animal shelter like a tattered umbrella. The cement building looked more like a prison than a refuge for homeless pets. The dreary setting failed to lessen Sarah's anticipation. One lucky pooch would accompany her home today, sleep by her side, and know that for the rest of its days it would be loved.

The hinges creaked as the heavy wooden door swung open. Sarah had envisioned dozens of strays housed beyond the thick windowless entrance. Instead, she found herself inside a small reception room.

A dozen people in a single file line clutched checkbooks and paperwork. The procession ended at a window where an employee peered through from a small room that was a reminiscent of an old-fashioned office of a ticket master. A set of double doors lay straight ahead. A sign indicated that adoptable dogs were located inside and to the right.

Sarah wrinkled her nose the moment she entered the kennels. The air smelled like a mixture of bleach and dog feces. A cacophony of barks and yips accosted her eardrums.

An empty cement walkway separated two rows of cages. The five-by-five foot enclosure on her right held only a makeshift dog bed. The stretched canvas surface supported by a frame of PVC piping resembled an old army cot.

The next kennel matched the first except this one had two raised beds that were smaller and closer to the ground. An exuberant Chihuahua mix yipped and circled near the gate. His roommate, some sort of toy poodle mix, nipped at the Chihuahua's heels and leaked urine in tiny dribbles. Sarah moved on.

The hallway door swung open. Dogs erupted in a volley of energetic barking. A twenty-something woman rushed in carrying a thick white binder and a cinch-type leash. The looped end dangling by the woman's side looked like a noose.

"Hello, hello," she yelled.

At least that's what Sarah thought she'd said. Thirty or so dogs barked, howled, and whined in utter chaos. The uproar was deafening.

The woman lifted the binder high above her head and let it drop. The white object smacked to the cement with a loud bang. Magically, the dogs quieted.

"Works every time." The woman's voice echoed in the silence. "I'm Jordan, a volunteer here. Did you lose your dog?"

Jordan bent to retrieve the binder. When she straightened, the woman stood a foot shorter than Sarah. A tight ponytail held her wavy yellow hair in check. Sarah ran her fingers through her own short dark strands. She'd trade an entire paycheck for that gorgeous blonde hair.

"I'm Sarah." She extended her hand. "I'm looking to adopt."

"Wonderful." Jordan gave Sarah's fingers a quick squeeze. "A few things you need to know. Not all dogs are available. We hold the strays for seven days, in case their owners come to claim them. See this card?" She pointed to a five-by-seven index card attached to a cage. "The letter A indicates the animal is available. If you flip the card over and 'owner surrender' is written on the back, the prior owner filled out a history. Don't take those as gospel though. Usually, you can only believe half of the information. If the form says the dog is house-broken or the dog is good with kids, there's a 50-50 chance it really is."

"Why do they lie?" Sarah said.

"Guilt, mostly," Jordan said. "They want to give the dog the best possible chance to find a new home."

Sarah didn't blame them. If she were ever faced with the unthinkable decision of giving up a pet, she'd be tempted to do the same thing.

Jordan shot a series of questions at Sarah: Whether she had a fenced yard, if the animal would be allowed in the house, if she had any experience training a dog. Sarah's answers of yes, yes and a little, seemed to please Jordan.

Sarah read over the white index card of the cage before her. The neutered male pit bull mix, named Charley, weighed 55 pounds. The large red dog lying on the floor inside the cage raised his massive head and grunted disinterest.

"What's that?" Sarah asked pointing to four tiny numbers separated by a dash scrawled in the bottom right corner of the card: 04-02.

"That's their last day." Jordan frowned. "I wouldn't advise choosing a dog on that basis though. Dogs with more time often won't find a home either."

Sarah felt like she'd been sucker-punched. These four digits were quite literally "expiration dates." Today's date was 04-01. This poor dog was scheduled to die tomorrow. As much as Sarah wished she could save them all, she could only take one home.

"Would you consider a pit bull?" Jordan said.

Sarah shook her head. "I'm looking for something smaller." Then, remembering the piddling poodle, Sarah added. "Not tiny though."

"That narrows your choices." Jordan drummed her fingers on her lips. "We have a couple of small lab mixes."

Weren't labs high-strung? That breed didn't fit Sarah's idea of a cuddly pet either.

"Do you having anything furry? And calm?"

"Not sure. Look around while I check the binder. There are a few dogs in the sick bay that aren't on display."

Sarah moved from kennel to kennel while Jordan rifled through papers. So many pit bulls. She paused in front of kennels that housed a few smaller labs.

They seemed so hyperactive. She couldn't help but examine their expiration dates. All had a week or more of time.

Sarah reached the end of the row. The cage on her right appeared empty, but on second glance, she noticed a dark form crouched under the raised bed.

The coal black dog with dark eyes blended so completely with the shadows that the animal might as well have been invisible.

The white index card indicated the occupant was a border collie mix. No name, no date of birth, neutered male, 35 lbs, approximate age: 1 year. A red letter "A" was scrawled on his card, as were the numbers: 04-01. His expiration date was today.

"Nothing suitable in quarantine," Jordan said and closed the binder. She glanced up and noticed the kennel where Sarah lingered. "Oh, you don't want that one."

"What's wrong with him?" Sarah asked.

"For starters," she said, "he has food issues. He won't eat or drink if anyone stands nearby. He is afraid of men and he has a loud, obnoxious bark."

The cowering creature poked his head out from under the bed. His face was framed in silky black fur. He was the right size too. This animal fit

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Shadows Over Yanoun

Third Place, Fiction

By Michael J. Cooper

On a scarlet Friday evening, the synagogue at Shilo is bursting at the seams. The men of the West Bank Jewish settlement pack the benches – a sea of white shirts and bobbing rows of crocheted skullcaps.

I'm visiting my cousin, who is nearing the end of his career as a forensic scientist in the National Israel Police Force. He has lived for years at Shilo with his wife, and they have raised their children here – four daughters and a son, the youngest, about to be Bar Mitzvah. I sit next to my cousin with the music and energy of the service washing over me, but troubled by two images in my head – a stark split screen – this sunlit Friday evening among the settlers, and the days I had just spent a few miles from here – in the West Bank city of Ramallah, volunteering as a doctor for Palestinian children. The two realities could just as well be separated by an ocean, so unreconciled. As it is, they're separated by a tall concrete wall alternating with miles of electrified fence and razor wire.

The service ends and the crowd streams out of the synagogue into the shadows of a broad stone-lined patio. Again, I feel myself bridging two realities; now it's the past that presents itself at the edge of the crowd. I see a hulking figure – the ghost of Natan Yellin-Mor, the Jewish terrorist turned peace activist. Before 1948, Yellin-Mor had been a leader of Lehi, (from the Hebrew acronym for 'Fighters for the Freedom of Israel). The group attacked British and Palestinian targets, and was responsible for scores of assassinations, including Jews that Lehi regarded as traitors. But once the State of Israel was established, Yellin-Mor came to see that the Palestinians' connection to the land was as strong as his own. By the end of his life in 1980, he had become an outspoken champion for negotiations with the PLO and for territorial compromise.

I head over to him. "We need to talk."

"So, talk." His voice is low and intimidating, his Hebrew heavy with a Russian accent.

"Not here. Meet me Sunday afternoon at Gva'ot Olam."

"Why not tomorrow?" he asks.

"I'm doing another clinic in Ramallah tomorrow."

Yellin-Mor looks around at the settlers crowding the patio and shakes his head. "Going back and forth between here and Ramallah will give you whiplash."

"That, and an interesting perspective," I say and walk away.

Shilo is a communal settlement established on land conquered during the 1967 War. As one of about 150 official West Bank settlements, Shilo is actually considered illegal by the UN Security Council as a violation of international law, which prohibits populating land seized in war. Israel disagrees, claiming the settlements as a trip-wire against future Arab aggression. Successive Israeli governments have supported these settlements with low-cost homes, subsidized loans, municipal services, and a network of settler-only roads that transect the West Bank providing quick access to Israel's core areas. On the other hand, the settlements are off-limits to Arab residents, forcing them onto circuitous routes between enclaves where travel is further hampered by check-points, the separation wall, and unannounced closures.

Apart from government-sanctioned settlements, there are more than 100 outposts that even the Israeli government and courts consider "illegal". Israel committed to dismantle them under terms of the 2003 "Road Map", but none have been dismantled and additional illegal outposts continue to spread throughout the West Bank. One such settlement is Gva'ot Olam, occupying a ridge overlooking the Arab farming village of Yanoun. This is where I arranged to meet Natan Yellin-Mor.

With Yanoun at my back, I make my way up a dirt road thinking about yesterday's clinic in Ramallah. As a pediatric cardiologist working with a non-governmental agency, I had seen about sixty children. There are no certified pediatric cardiologists in the Palestinian Authority and these areas are off-limits to Israeli doctors, so without examination by foreign specialists, children with heart defects would go undiagnosed. They would also go untreated. Because without the child having a clear diagnosis, their family can't get permission to travel beyond the separation wall for surgical care, in Israel or beyond.

The clinics, then, serve a vital need for these children – and for me, a chance to glimpse my idealized notion of a Zionism with regard for the other – their story and their children, and, ultimately, with regard for our children.

I round a bend in the road and see Natan Yellin-Mor, dressed in suit and tie, sitting on a boulder on the hillside below the settlement of Gva'ot Olam.

"What kept you?" he asks, looking up from a newspaper spread flat on a briefcase resting on his knees, his curly brown hair slicked back, glasses shining in the afternoon sun. "I was beginning to think you weren't going to show up."

I point back down the dirt road. "I left my car at the bottom of the hill."

"Why?"

"They get jumpy when a strange car approaches the settlement. They're always on the lookout for government bureaucrats or journalists." I notice his briefcase, a real antique in pebbled brown leather with his initials, "N" and "Y" shining in embossed gold on the worn leather.

"Nice briefcase," I say.

"Thanks." He smiles, a little sadly I think. "My wife gave it to me when I was elected to the Knesset in '49."

"I know. Fighters List. You had three seats. Why did you only serve one term?"

"You don't know?" he asks slyly. "I only went to the Knesset so I wouldn't go to jail for assassinating Count Bernadotte."

"Was that before or after you assassinated Lord Moyne?"

"After." He frowns. Being reminded of his role in high-profile assassinations seems to lower his spirits.

But that, after all, was the reason he was here. Yellin-Mor was Israel's most prominent right wing ultra-nationalist to make the journey to peace activist. Others – Uri Avneri, Ezer Weizmann – made similar journeys, but Natan's was the more dramatic. And besides, he was more intimidating.

"Remind me why I'm here," he says.

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(Lost Cause, Continued from page 8)

her criteria. When Sarah crouched down, the dog wiggled out further.

The animal's soft brown eyes stared right through her. Could he sense all those feelings of loss and loneliness that Sarah had endured these last few months as she had watched cancer debilitate her father? His eyes seemed to say, "you've found what you came here for. If you'll just let me love you, everything's going to be okay." A clunk, clunk noise under the dog bed indicated he'd punctuated his imploring look with a tail wag.

"Oh," Jordan added. "He's got another quirk. This dog holds his tail high and only waves the tip. I call it a rattlesnake wag. The average person doesn't think this is a warning to back off, but it is. Personally, I don't think this dog should be adopted out."

"Why is he on display then?" Sarah said.

"Our head volunteer adores this dog," Jordan said. "To be fair, he is very sweet to women, but you'd be better off with Bruno across the aisle."

The card indicated Bruno was three years old, but his front feet danced with the enthusiasm of a puppy. This muscular chocolate-colored dog also weighed over 75 pounds.

She turned back to look at the black pooch with the knowing eyes. His mouth had opened in a lazy pant to reveal a pink tongue dotted with dark patches. So what if he didn't like men? Sarah lived alone. A loud bark might deter intruders.

"Hey there," Sarah whispered.

The dog belly-crawled toward the gate. He had the long snout and lean, tapered body typical of a border collie. He wasn't a purebred though, not with those squat folded-over ears and splotchy tongue.

The mutt stuck his nose against the wire separation. Sarah presented the back of her hand. He inhaled her scent like an addict snorting coke. His tail thumped the ground, then he was up on his feet dancing a jig. Sarah's eyes gravitated to his expiration date once more. She could be his last hope.

"I want this one," Sarah said.

Jordan glanced from Bruno to Sarah, before they settled on the black fur ball. Her lips puckered in disapproval.

"Not so fast." She sighed. "Let's take him outside for a meet-and-greet. There's an employee walking a terrier out in yard now. After you hear this black dog's bark and see how he behaves around men, you might change your mind."

The volunteer opened the kennel door. She lassooed the timid black dog with the leash like a skilled wrangler. Sarah followed Jordan and the border collie mix down a corridor. They exited the building into a fenced area.

A tall, lanky man dressed in a khaki shirt with a blue badge on the sleeve stood at the far end of the enclosure. A leashed, white Jack Russell terrier hopped pogo-stick style at his side. The dog continued to bounce like a Super Ball® until it spotted the new arrival. The two animals locked eyes.

Sarah's potential new pet froze. The fur between his shoulders rose to sharp points. A growl rumbled in his throat, then an unearthly noise bellowed from his vocal chords at the volume of music at a high school dance. Jordan had been right. A person had to experience this bark to believe it.

Sarah stepped in front of the furry black beast to block his view. The moment the terrier disappeared from his sight, the horrid bark stopped.

"Can you take that dog in and flip the Do Not Enter sign on the door?" Jordan called to the uniformed man. "I'd like to let this one loose."

Jordan guided her charge to the opposite corner while the man exited with the Jack Russell. The black dog erupted in another round of baying, this time focusing his displeasure toward the man. Jordan gave Sarah an I-told-you-so look.

"Hush," Sarah said to the dog. To her amazement, the command silenced the animal.

"Do you think you can stand that bark?" Jordan said.

"Well, I did get him to stop," Sarah said, avoiding a direct answer.

"Okay then," Jordan said, "let's see how you two get along."

Jordan removed the leash. The black pooch came straight to Sarah. When she crouched next to him, his tongue flicked across her cheek.

A tennis ball lay across the penned area. Sarah wandered over to the toy. The dog followed at her heels.

"Hey pup," Sarah said. "Want to play?"

Sarah lobbed it about ten feet. The dog watched the yellow toy but did not give chase. He sat down next to Sarah and leaned against her. Sarah reached down and scratched behind his ears. His fur was as soft as a rabbit's.

"That's too bad," Jordan said. "Dogs that like to fetch are easy to exercise."

The black dog gazed up at Sarah and showed no interest in the ball that had rolled to rest at the far end of the yard. Sarah frowned. She had envisioned adopting a playful dog. Maybe if she didn't throw the ball quite so far, this guy would go after it. Once again, her potential new pet trotted along behind her as she crossed the yard to retrieve the toy.

Sarah stuck the ball next to the dog's nose and tossed it about two feet away. This time he lunged after it, returning in a flash to drop the toy at her feet.

The pooch tilted his head and stared up at Sarah with brown soulful eyes.

"I hate to admit it," Jordan said. "This dog really likes you. But I would feel better if you were a more experienced pet owner. That lab named Bruno is a victim of mortgage fall out. He's trained and well socialized. We don't even know this black dog's history. He was found by the side of the highway. No tags, no collar."

Sarah could relate. She felt abandoned, too. Her father had died last week. She'd been too overwhelmed to mourn her loss yet. When that weather front of grief did arrive, Sarah wanted a dog at her side to help her cope. They both needed companionship. The imprint of warmth where the dog's body touched hers confirmed that this dog liked to snuggle. He was the right pet for Sarah.

"I want this one," Sarah said.

The black pooch danced in a circle as though he'd understood her words. The door at the end of the courtyard swung outward and the uniformed man poked his head through the opening.

"Jordan," he called. "Bruno's original owners just showed up to take him back."

Jordan's relief was palpable. A Cheshire cat grin spread across her face.

"This one's found a home, too," she said.

"Really?" the man said. "With that horrible bark? Isn't that the one that hides under his bed all day? I thought he was a lost cause."

A lost cause? This sweet, beautiful animal? Sarah squatted and hugged him close.

"Anyway, that's great news," the man added. "Only those two, right?"

"Yes," Jordan said. "We get a happy ending today."

Now Sarah understood why Jordan had been pushing Bruno so hard. His expiration date was today, too. Maybe Jordan had been so negative about this

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(Shadows over Yanoun, Continued from page 9)

“You see the Arab village down there? That’s Yanoun.”

Natan squints through his glasses. “It looks abandoned.”

“It is, almost. Most of the residents have fled.”

“Why?”

“Because of the settlers.” I nod toward the ridge above us. “For the last few years, they’ve been harassing the residents of Yanoun.”

“What do you mean – harassing?”

I pause, trying to catalogue the abuses in my mind. “Well, the settlers took over that field beyond the village. Then, when farmers from Yanoun tried to get back to it they were pushed, punched, and threatened with guns. You see that tractor by the field? It belonged to a family of the village. The settlers slashed the tires, poured dirt in the engine, and set it on fire. And can you see that burnt-out generator among the olive trees, behind the stone wall? That was Yanoun’s source of electricity. You can’t see it from here, but Yanoun’s drinking water is pumped from a well into a small reservoir behind that wall. Settlers come down to do their laundry and wash their dogs there – in the villagers’ drinking water.”

Natan stares down at the village. Wildflowers and tall weeds grow among the stone houses. “It looks like all the windows are broken.”

“Rocks. Kids from Gva’ot Olam throw stones at the houses. Sometimes they climb up on the rooftops, shouting and dancing around, drumming with their boots.”

“Doesn’t the army stop them?”

“Almost never.”

“So, you’re telling me that these crazies run amok and the Israeli government looks the other way?”

“The government is part of the problem. For years they’ve promoted the settler movement with loans to anyone willing to move into the West Bank. So the settlements continue to expand. The “illegal” outposts are an unofficial extension of this policy, and the hilltop youth are its vanguard...”

“What do you mean, youth?”

“Most of them are – fourteen-fifteen years old – sometimes younger. And they’re not just active in remote hilltops of the West Bank. They conduct violent activities within Israel.”

“Such as?”

“Last October they tried to kill Zeev Sternhell, a 70-year-old Holocaust survivor, professor, and peace activist. The pipe-bomb exploded on his door-step wounding him in the leg. He won the 2008 Israel Prize for political science, but the settlers don’t like his politics. They left fliers at the scene offering a million shekels to anyone who kills peace activists like Sternhell. A month later, when Israeli security forces dared enforce a Supreme Court eviction order against settlers occupying the home of Palestinians in Hebron, hilltop youth went on a rampage – beating Palestinians, throwing rocks, and breaking windows.”

He turns and looks at me. “And, what are Israelis doing about this?”

“Most are silent. Others object.”

“Do you object?”

“I express my opinion.”

“But you’re an American Jew, and I know that many Israelis believe that you aren’t entitled to an opinion.” Natan smiles. “Especially if they think that you have the wrong opinion.”

“I think our opinion should matter – we’re helping to pay for this. US taxpayers send about \$3 billion a year to Israel – that’s \$8 million a day. What happens here is done in our name – as Americans and as Jews. And we’re supposed to accept a policy driven by a few hundred obnoxious 15-year olds?”

Natan stands up and straightens his jacket. “You still haven’t told me why I’m here.”

“I want you to talk to the leader of the hilltop youth. I want you to convince him to stop.”

Natan laughs. “You don’t understand these people at all, do you? They’ll never stop. Don’t forget, I used to think like them. I used to be them...”

Natan pauses. “Oh, that’s why I’m here.”

I point toward the crest of the hill where a cloud of dust rises against the sky. “That’s probably him now. His name is Avri Ran, leader of the hilltop youth.”

The Jeep charges down the hill, dust rising.

“OK. I’ll talk to him.”

The Jeep skids to a stop on the dirt road and the driver jumps out. He’s alone, bearded, lean, tan, and armed. His M-16 assault rifle points in our direction. Beneath a large gray knit skullcap his hair is short, and his long beard grays as it extends past the open collar of his shirt.

“What do you want here?” he challenges.

“Are you Avri Ran?” I ask.

He takes off his dark glasses and sticks them in his shirt pocket. “Journalists?”

“No.”

He stands about ten feet away, the M-16 still pointing at us. “Are you with ISM? Ta’ayoush? Yesh Din?”

“No,” I reply recognizing the names of international and Israeli peace groups.

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 10)

black dog because she’d grown fond of Bruno and wanted to save the lab. Sarah picked up the ball, then stood.

“I’ll start the adoption paperwork,” Jordan said to Sarah. “Do you have a name picked out yet?”

A name? Probably the only thing he’d been called recently was Lost Cause. Poor guy. He needed a proper title.

Her new pet had settled by her feet, waiting for the toy to be tossed. His dark form blended with her shadow. Blackie? No. Too boring.

Sarah stepped aside to get a better look at him. She thought about the way he’d followed her ever since the leash had been removed. She thought about the way he had crouched in the shadows of his kennel. Her father used to say that the length of a person’s shadow was a measure of their soul. This dog’s dark image yawned across the grass, twice the width of his girth. Judging by the extent of light he deflected, this dog was an old soul indeed. There really was only one suitable name.

“Shadow,” Sarah said. “His name is Shadow.”

(The Sight, Continued from page 7)

Asa. Lord, had she fallen for that one. Forty if he was a day but so full of life and sass she couldn't resist him, her alone in that cottage up on the pass and drying up for want of human contact. She'd seen the trouble in him. Felt it in his laugh and his touch. But the dazzle blinded her and she ignored it. Ruby doing the same thing now, letting the boy's need keep her from seeing clear.

Then when the small amount of savings from Asa's mother was used up, Ralph took himself off – as he'd probably done many times before. She'd seen it coming, smelled the trouble in the air, tasted the sour heat of it. And couldn't stop it, didn't know how to turn it aside. But Ralph had left her with one thing of value. A child. A girl. Her Nella.

Asa sucked in air. She never cried anymore. The tears had been washed out of her at Ralph's leaving. From then on her eyes stayed dry. But she'd known a personal joy in that other life. Rolling her sleeves up, she'd gotten to work and earned them a living.

And yet, trouble was never far behind. You could give folks remedies for their ailments and mean well by it. Still, if someone got worse, the blame was always yours. Never think different. And if your visions came true it was the same. It was always you that caused someone else's misfortune.

In the end they scorned her. Even the preacher. Called her the devil's follower. Told Nella she was Satan's spawn. Forced them to leave Granthum and Cornwall's Pass. No way to stop it, to turn the trouble aside, keep it from trampling her and Nella.

Asa had headed North with a handful of money and one bag of belongings in the rusted-out truck of hers. Then she'd reached the big river. The river cliffs here weren't worth much to folks – no good for farming or raising stock. So Asa had gotten the land cheap. She'd set her tendrils into it, locked them around the roots of the trees and beneath the stones of the farmhouse so deep they'd never be dug out. She was here to stay.

At the cupboard she got out cup and tea leaves, took them to the stove for hot water, then settled at the table. Trouble, that giant toad. It reared its warty head soon after they'd come here. Nella, her one joy, was also her pain. The child was lost up here. Folks treated her badly, treated them both badly, like trespassers, freaks. Poor Nella, all alone, deep inside her own mind. Then getting herself with child so young.

Asa bit her lip, squinting her dry eyes. No tears. But Nella's tears had flowed. That cheating, lowdown boy that mounted her and left her full of him, then snuck off in the night like a snake who'd planted his poisonous fangs in her. They'd done their best after that. Nella had even forced the boy to pay some, to give her daughter Ruby better than she'd gotten.

It was the payment. That was the culprit. Brought out the anger in that boy, turned him ugly. Asa slapped her hands against her eyes. God's death! She'd seen it, seen the trouble again, that hunk of warty, putrid flesh squatting in the road, waiting for its time. She'd seen it and had no power to stop it. Had to sit helpless while her beautiful Nella died in a car crash. No accident, that, Asa knew.

Ruby was left with only an old woman to raise her. But they'd done all right except for the neighbor Earl Houk. A vicious man who'd run off his wife and beat his boy for caring. Ruby, her soft heart aching for the boy, yearning to be of comfort, and him lost without her.

Now, once again, the evil thing was back, sitting on its haunches, watching. This time the farm was the target. And her Ruby.

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In the dark Asa sat stiff and straight on the porch staring out into the night. Crickets setting up their mating noise, a hoot owl off in the woods beyond the garden, frogs singing down by the river.

Ruby was asleep in her room. She'd come home crying enough to crush her heart. Earl Houk'd found them and beaten the boy so bad he couldn't get off the ground and Ruby had run.

"I ain't through with you yet." The man yelling at her back. "You'll pay for turning my own agin me!"

Asa listened to the girl's story, took in all the pain and sickness of it, held her till the sobbing was spent and she slept. Trouble was coming their way. She could smell the filthy stink of it. All her life she'd been helpless. To see it and not have power to stop it, to let it swallow her up – Ralph, Nella, and now Ruby. Her whole life violated by that creature squatting in her path.

But no more. She'd reached the limit of what she could bear. No more would she stand feeble while trouble moved in on its squat haunches. No more watch the vile toad, breathe the stench of sorrow and pain and do nothing.

She stayed still on the porch, listening for the sound. In the distance she heard it, the truck coming up the road, heard the motor die, then the quiet of a door shut in stealth. Crickets stilled. The owl gave a cry and flew off into the woods. Asa sat forward, eyes piercing the night, and her hands moved smoothly into position on the one other gift Ralph had left her. The thirty aught six Winchester bolt-action rifle.

Next Meeting of CWC Inland Empire

Chris Erskine, speaker for the CWC Inland Empire meeting on January 23, 2010, is an editor and columnist at the *Los Angeles Times*. His columns, *Man of the House* and *Fan of the House*, are distributed to 600 papers worldwide. In *The Times*, they appear Thursdays in Sports and Saturdays in the Home section. In 2002, his column on family life inspired the NBC sitcom “Hidden Hills, on the adult side of living in the suburbs. He is also the author of “Surviving Suburbia,” a collection of his columns from *The Times*. It reached the *LA Times* bestseller list in 2003. His most recent book, “Man of the House,” a collection of essays on life in suburban America, was published in 2006. He is also a popular host and speaker at charity events around Southern California.

Without any apparent success or encouragement, he also coaches youth soccer and baseball, and has done so for more than a dozen years.

Before coming to Los Angeles, he worked at papers in Miami and New Orleans. He and his wife Cathy live 20 miles outside Los Angeles with their four children...two dogs, a cat, a rabbit, a green tree frog, termites, a possum and an assortment of other wildlife too frightening to mention.

The meeting is at 10:10 AM at Borders, Montclair on January 23, 2010; Chris Erskine speaks at 11:00 AM.



(Shadows over Yanoun, Continued from page 11)

He seems to relax, though the gun doesn't move. “Then, why are you here?”
“I'd like you to meet Natan Yellin-Mor.”

He keeps his intense blue eyes fixed on me. “What for?”

“We're interested to know what you're doing here.” I wave a hand in the direction of the hilltop settlement.

“What are we doing here? We're staking out a claim on a small measure of our sweet land. Gva'ot Olam is the largest organic farm in Israel. I built it using only my personal funds. I have only a watch-tower and no fences. Because fences are for the weak, for those willing to give up what's outside the fence, and I give up nothing. All the bounty of the biblical Land of Israel is ours and I claim it and make it blossom.”

“And you do all this with the hilltop youth?” I ask.

Avri looks up at the settlement. “In the beginning I was completely alone on the hilltops. Slowly a group of youngsters formed around me – teenagers who had not found their place. We went to another hilltop and another and another. The moment a community was formed, I would move to another hilltop. The hilltop youth are my children. The local Arabs with the support of leftists, trespass on my land. All the Land of Israel belongs to me – from where I am now able to be, all the way to where I am currently unable to be. If I could, I would make my next outpost in Jordan.”

“What about the Arabs?” I manage to ask.

“It has nothing to do with the Arabs. I don't hate Arabs. I am simply indifferent to them. The Arabs revere me. They are wary of me. Have I set out regulations? Certainly. There is not one Arab in the region who dares to work contrary to my rules. What does this say? This says that there is a Jew in town, a son of Abraham, our father. That the ancient Jews have returned to the Land of Israel. A Jew must be respected. An Arab, when he sees a Jew, needs to lower his head a little bit.”

Natan Yellin-Mor had heard enough.

“Listen to me now, my friend. You say that you are indifferent to the Arabs but you treat them like animals. With you there is no compromise and no peace, only endless war. You are a constant provocation. You would have your recovering drug-addicts and misguided Yeshiva boys arrive by plane from New York in the morning and take land from Palestinians in the afternoon – take land from people who were born here and have lived here for generations. You befoul their water, you beat and insult them...”

“But this is my land,” Avri cuts in, “They must recognize my claim.”

“Yes. And most Arabs have come to recognize our claim, that is, to the pre-1967 State of Israel. This was our success – the building up of an Israel that the Arabs couldn't ignore and would have to accept and bargain with. It was pragmatic, and it worked. But conquest and occupation can't be sustained. For years we were unwavering and brave in building up Israel. Now we must be unwavering and brave in building peace. I came to understand this. Now you must understand this. We created a solution to the problem of a stateless people. Now we have a state, and you are the problem.” Natan places his index finger in the center of Avri's chest for emphasis. “The cat and mouse game of settlement building will soon come to an end and the Israeli Government will have to choose – settlements or peace, and they'll choose peace.”

Avri makes no reply. The color is gone from his face. He goes back to the Jeep and heads back up the hill.

I watch the Jeep until I can't see it anymore – lost in the sun that sets over the illegal hilltop settlement of Gva'ot Olam. The shadows spread over the hillside behind me and over the quiet desolation of Yanoun.