

The Write Place at the Write Time

Home

About Us

Announcements

Fiction

Poetry

"Our Stories" non-fiction

Writers' Craft Box

Submission Guidelines

Feedback and Questions

Artists' Gallery

Indie Bookstores

Literary Arts Patrons

Scrapbook of Nine Years

Archives

Inscribing Industry Blog

Come in...and be captivated...

Search



"Buffalo" by Patti Dietrick; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pattidietrick/>

About this image: "As we drove on the quiet backroads of Catalina Island, the road turned and climbed up to the hillside where the sight of this beautiful buffalo took my breath away..."—Patti Dietrick

Fiction

With gratitude, we dedicate this page to 2018 WPWT Arts Patron, Anita Solick Oswald. Anita is a writer of non-fiction and fiction, with a forthcoming collection entitled, West Side Girl due out later this year.

Welcome to Our Fiction Section!

Featured Stories:

"Pennsylvania Spring" by Terry Korth Fischer

"The Bay" by Melodie Corrigall

"The Counselor" by Michael Tidemann

Pennsylvania Spring

by Terry Korth Fischer

Squeaks announced Mother's approach. Her sturdy rubber-soled shoes sounded more like a solitary basketball practice than a struggle to cross the parquet flooring assisted only by the solid, metal legs of her walker. Her labored effort echoed from the empty closet as she passed. I followed her progress until, framed by the door, she stopped. Taking a stabilizing breath, she mouthed my name, "Miriam." She paused and three times restarted—first in a coarse whisper, and then each time stronger, until I heard her voice.

Mother had a hesitation before every action: the mental evaluation, a wait for confirmation, a noticeable need to place each object into a familiar classification. She transformed before me, jerking frail body upright, hands tight on the support bar and adjusting attitude from confusion to confidence. I saw Mother's upright was not what it had been, and on this day, slightly stooped. The conviction was an attitude she projected to shield

herself from judgment, the same bravado despised in her own mother and categorized as stubbornness in her mother-in-law.

Yesterday, the doctor said Mother was doing well and suggested that with supervision and when she felt ready, she forego the walker and move to using a cane.

I thought, *Ready, but not foolhardy.*

As if she'd heard my thoughts, Mother squinted through rheumy eyes. "What?" she said. Moving with determination, she took her customary rocker, and thrust the walker aside as if it was a despised enemy. The chair groaned when she sat, sucked ill-fitted teeth into place, and looked out the window.

A spring breeze drifted through the open casement, bringing with it the scent of pine branches newly tipped with delicate bud. Behind the house, oaks towered on a jagged ridge leading down to a cavernous ravine and a path swallowed in fragile vegetation. A robin called in the early morning. The air was pungent, thick with overnight dew, and I looked at the sky where forceful gray clouds foretold rain. I wondered why I'd come to this Pennsylvania spring.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked.

What could Mother say? It was a silly question. She never slept well—hadn't slept well since my father's passing. Instead, Mother moved through each day with heartbreak and loneliness. She cherished my visits but had spent too many years in angry solitude. The years forged a distance between us and she meant to hold me accountable.

When the knock sounded, we listened without comment. The noise took me back to the first night of my visit when Mother slowly rocked, looking into middle space, searching for something to say. She waited for me to entertain her—our lives so different it was awkward to make conversation. She moved her chair soberly back and forth, and I struggled to find topics of mutual interest. The knocking began. I thought perhaps a chair spring protesting, and asked her. Mother said she didn't know. It was an answer that dismissed the sound as unimportant and left me wondering if she'd heard the noise or the question.

I felt sure it was the rocker and if not, perhaps an animal playing in the gutter's downspout. The sound had a hollow thump and repeated at odd intervals. However, we were too tired to investigate, and I put Mother to bed. She confessed the knock had been going on since her return from rehab and no one knew what it was. "It will go away," she'd said, she didn't have the energy to care.

It was the third day of my visit when the physical therapist discovered the robin. The bird's persistent blows were too frequent to ignore. From outside the back room, the bird flew into an elongated glass window, thumping it firmly, and retreated to a tree branch for review. He insisted on announcing his presence, repeating the move with fortitude, and we were afraid he would knock himself silly. "What does he want?" the therapist had asked. In answer, Mother informed the therapist his services were no longer needed. I was there, after all, and she could exercise on her own.

On the fifth day, Mother gave up the walker for a durable cane. I didn't think she was ready and protested. "I need to adjust," she said. I had no argument that would change her mind and instead stipulated she keep a cell phone handy. She draped a cloth bag across her sagging chest and tucked the phone, insurance card and a twenty dollar bill in the folds. "Prepared for all events," Mother announced.

She ordered the retrieval of newspaper and mail at appropriate times and then complained loudly that the whole world was looking for a handout. Mother answered every phone call, thanked solicitors for their time, and regretfully, informed each she was widowed, on a fixed income, and unable to comply. We watched for the robin, agreeing his actions were perilous.

In the idle hours, I looked up American Robin on the internet wondering about our death-defying friend. Mother remembered that robins stayed close to the ground—this was uncharacteristic. We determined he was male and thought he would, undoubtedly, move on. At his relentless thuds, we called him "birdbrain" and "feather-head" and told jokes at his expense.

The edges of my thumbs grew tender from shuffling cards. A game of Scrabble lasted hours while Mother contemplated each play. Apologies, regrets, and what would she do when I was gone, punctuated meal times. During quiet hours of reading, we'd listen for the robin's taps. Occasionally, I'd check the ground below the window expecting to see his unconscious body, but my fears went unfounded, and the days drifted past.

Mother graduated to short strolls on the walk outside, cloth bag across her chest and determination on her brow. The exercise caused exhaustion and instilled a fear she would never heal. But she grew stronger each day while the robin's visits became less frequent.

The two days before I left, it rained, and the robin was absent. We thought he had finally come to his senses, agreeing he should know better, staunchly believing he was gone. Strangely, I felt lonely and abandoned. Mother was depressed all day.

He thumped the glass the next morning. I smiled. Like fantastic coffee or an exquisite meal, the taste of satisfaction filled me. Mother suggested we name him El Niño. He was unpredictable, she said, but her relief was as great as mine. That night we giggled like school girls, retelling favorite family anecdotes and recounting good times.

I came to realize "obstinate" was Mother and El Niño's watchword. Leaving caution and cast walkers aside, they would stagger onward, living each day regardless of peril and face the unknown with resolution.

On the day I departed, Mother stoically braved the walkway, cell phone secure and handy in the bag. Tears threatened in her glistening eyes. I asked if she was in a hurry to drive. She returned my look with an expression I recognized as her mother's mixed with the stubbornness that would have done her mother-in-law proud. She made me promise not to grow old.

I said, "I don't know how to stop time."

"Miriam, I'll miss Julie's wedding," she argued, "and the Church dinner is Saturday." She positioned the lifeline bag close to her body and leaned crookedly on her cane. She wouldn't meet my eye. I'm sure she meant, *I'll miss you and why don't you live closer?* I saw salty tears teeter on her lower lid.

"Yes," I said, "that's what happens when the world goes on."

She raised her head, and the old mischief was evident between moist lashes.

My mother's eyes are expressive, and in them, I saw pain, gratitude, and pride. Her expression confirmed her progress toward indomitable recovery. I had no doubt, she'd be behind the wheel as soon as I was gone.

At a bird chirp, we turned to find El Niño hopping across the lawn. When he flew off, we stared after, not sure how to say goodbye.

"We've seen the last of him." Mother said, shifting on her cane, a wince passing across her face.

"He has responsibilities," I said.

"I'll be glad to have peace."

"And, a return to normal."

"At my age, nothing will ever be normal," she said, and I looked at her, saddened.

Pennsylvania spring: lawns greening, buds unwrapping, life popping anew. It all made her appear frail and innocent. I wanted to take her in my arms. I wanted her to be young.

"You're just like your father," she scolded.

I said, "I know."

Clicking the seatbelt in place, I started the car. Mother stood back, as straight as her aging back and fractured hip would allow. I pulled out slowly, the drive slightly blurred and my throat tight. In comparing me to my father, she'd said, "I love you."

And, I wondered...

In my response, did she hear the same?

Bio: Terry Korth Fischer lives in Texas where she is a part time IT Coordinator and enjoys technology, travel, and playing in her church hand bell choir. She regularly leads writing workshops, and is a principal in the Short & Helpful Online Writer Workshops Series. Terry's short stories can be found in: *The Write Place at the Write Time*, *Spies & Heroes*, and numerous anthologies. An active member of SinC, Pennwriters, Inc., and Clear Lake Area Writers, she is at work on a memoir and a short story collection.

The Bay

by Melodie Corrigall

My mission may be futile. Perhaps I imagined the sighting. But the poignant call and the loon's hesitant plunge persuaded me that I had, after all these years, found my grandmother. And this time I will not be diverted. This time I will honor my promise.

It was by chance that I came to this crucial moment. A week after my grandson proclaimed that everybody broke their promises I was consigned to bed with a nasty case of the flu. Drugged and dazed, I was visited by an ethereal stream of broken promises. Everything from the promise to stop nagging my husband about the mound of books by the bed, the promise to my doctor to quit smoking, the promise to an acquaintance to get together soon and the promise to my boss to clean up the pile of files under my desk.

All trivial promises, except for the smoking one (but I had cut down), and then in my stupor, what was, at the time, a heartfelt promise suddenly rose out of the water like Arthur's sword: the thirty-year-plus promise to keep an eye out for my grandmother. And aching and sniffing, I couldn't chase that promise from my mind.

Just six weeks after that night, I am back—for the first time in twenty years—floating across the bay where that promise was made many years prior. My grandmother and I were in a small rowboat, drifting across the inlet. Then, at eight years of age, I had expected to live forever with my grandmother by my side. Today I am alone, well aware that I have only finite time left, and savoring what will probably be my final visit to the Bay.

That long ago afternoon, drifting along, I had blurted out that I would watch out for my grandmother. But when the moment came I had only done so for a brief time. In my defense, I was hampered by not knowing where she would turn up. In her new guise, she could have appeared anywhere and anytime: the day she departed or five years later.

And I hadn't anyone to turn to for advice. No one among my family or school friends understood how it worked. As my grandmother had advised

me, only those in charge knew the score but we couldn't contact them. So here I am, years later, focusing on the pursuit.

My uncle is selling the cabin—although the family had promised my grandfather they would never let the place out of the family—and I was enticed to spend one last week here. It is now almost three weeks. By the second week, my husband Peter had begun sending frantic messages: what was I up to?

I had said I would be back in a few days, but then alarmingly I had what might have been a sighting, and mindful of my promise, I wanted to ensure if it were I would respond.

Yesterday, hearing the urgency of Peter's voice, I sent what is to be my last message: *Phone running short of juice. Batteries dead and there is no electricity to charge it. I am fine, enjoying a few weeks of peace.* Then I turned the phone off and hid it in the cooler outside.

Peter won't understand what I'm up to. In the first blush of romance, after his initial questions about my family and childhood, he lost interest. And if he ever suspected what my grandmother and I had been up to, he would have been appalled. Nevertheless, I am determined to stay a couple of more days and then if there isn't another sighting, or even another call, I will go home.

As a child, I visited my grandparents' place every summer. The cabin, once clean and functional, warmed by the wood fire, was their last home together, secret and sequestered in the dense forest. The only access is by water.

During the day, my grandfather would busy himself: digging the well, building the ice house, fishing for trout in the creek, or collecting water from the brook across the bay. For a treat, if the river were calm, my grandmother and I would venture out in the bay in my small wooden rowboat. It was on these outings that my grandmother had spoken of different worlds, strange happenings, and alien possibilities.

One day she told me about a young girl who recalled, in detail, another life

and remembered another language. All the following winter I had thought about that girl and longed to be back with Nana and hear more stories.

I never told my parents about our talks about ghosts and reincarnation. They'd have dismissed such speculation, as another reason to criticize Nana who my mother insisted was "only a step-grandmother."

That last summer we were together, rocking along in the boat, I had asked Nana when she died what she'd come back as.

"I doubt you have a choice," she'd said.

"I'll watch for you, I promise."

Time passed, instead of visiting my grandparents I went to camp. Then I got my first summer job, my grandfather died, my trips to the cabin stopped and, consigned to a care home, Nana left.

I knew she could be anywhere, in any guise, and for a brief period I was determined to find her. And maybe now I have.

That first day—was it her? The loon, a black and white slip, had lifted up, called, and dipped down. Sitting still as death, I watched for it to break the water again but it didn't resurface. I tried to call but my voice was thin, sliding like silver across the calm water, "Nana is that you? I'm here." I waited but the glass surface did not break.

Usually loons call at night, their poignant laugh haunting the evening, so the appearance and call in the morning was perhaps a sign.

When Nana first told me about people coming back, I'd asked her if we could come back as animals.

"Maybe—it depends on how good you were."

"So if you were very good you could come back as a princess but if you were bad you would come back as a frog."

"I don't know. A frog seems a bit of a drop."

"What do you want to come back as?"

“I don’t imagine you can choose. But if I could I’d rather be an animal, like a squirrel or a deer. Or a bird, they don’t live long but they can fly.”

“Whatever you are, try to tell me it’s you. I promise to watch out for you.”

And I will. I am determined to wait for the loon to reappear. I should have been more steadfast when Nana first left. This time I’ll honor my promise. This time I won’t disappoint.

Thinking back to my grandson and his lament about broken promises, in future I’m resolved to be more diligent about fulfilling mine, especially those to loved ones. And I’ll ask my grandson to make a special promise that he’ll fulfill after I’m gone—because promises, like memories, keep love alive.

Bio: Melodie Corrigan is an eclectic Canadian writer whose work has most recently appeared in *Foliage Oak*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Bethlehem Writers Roundtable*, *Corner Bar Magazine*, *Literally Stories*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Subtle Fiction*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Emerald Bolts* and *The Write Place at the Write Time*.

www.melodiecorrigan.com

Editor's Note: The following story is not intended as a commentary on any controversial issues, and does not comment upon views of the publication, but rather, is shown here as a portrayal of second chances, a man's rebirth, and redemption found through helping others.

The Counselor

by Michael Tidemann

Benny Johnson woke to a bright, crusty dawn. Past the jumble of downtown buildings scattered like a baby’s blocks, a yellow, sun-fueled, gaseous hue bled into the grungy sky. The constant drone of traffic told him he was still downtown, still locked in the city’s greasy grasp, stomach gnawing and growling like a lion’s. The putrid tang of fortified wine filled his swollen tongue clear to his throat.

He rolled over, shedding his bed of cardboard and newspapers, as a robin chortled a morning song, mocking his decrepit state, his fall from grace, his

very existence. Today, he told himself. *Today* is the day I'll try to stay off the sauce. Maybe find a job. Even if it's loading trucks. Even if it's for just today.

Then the putrid funk of him rose into his nose, the same aroma he had smelled on others as well as himself. The same odor as winos throughout the city and the state and the country and the world.

"Hmm..." Benny started moving to get away from the smell. The graffiti-splashed alley glimmered and faded, depending on how long the artwork had been there. And some of it was really artwork, colors blended and fused like a masterpiece at the MET—some even better, if his artistic judgment meant anything.

Something black and hanging from a dumpster caught his eye. He lifted the lid and pulled out a complete suit, still in a plastic bag. He sniffed the suit through the plastic and drew in the fresh dry cleaning smell. A faded sign, FILBERT'S DRYCLEANING EMPLOYEE ENTRANCE told him someone had failed to pick up his dry cleaning for several months—who knows, maybe years?—and a cache of expensive clothes had been tossed into the dumpster and oblivion. A further search turned up another suit, two dress shirts, and a couple of ties. Benny continued his scavenger stroll, finding a pair of socks and shoes that pinched toes. Not everything fit perfectly on his average build, but it was great luck that any of it fit at all. Had the lot been too small or far too large, none of it would've been of use. He carefully folded his find into his backpack and continued down the alley.

He may have had a wardrobe fit for a trial lawyer, but that same funk chased after him all the way to a large, grassy space where the *pish pish* of sprinklers gave him an idea. He stripped and stepped into the sprinkler's midst and splashed water over himself. Cold, bracing, and soapless, but it would do—for today, at least.

After he put on the fresh clothes and checked himself in the mirrored glint of a window backed by a darkened hallway, Benny smelled the greasy aroma of food. He cut a dry path around the sprinkler and came to a large, green dumpster. He hoisted the lid and peered inside. Wilted lettuce, bread crust, and many unknowns greeted him. He reached in for a barely munched hero sandwich and tasted it. Ham, turkey, salami, and cheese. He finished the sandwich and found another completely untouched but for a

film of cottage cheese.

“Mr. Johnson?”

Benny jerked toward the previously darkened window, now alight and framing the visage of a blonde in her early thirties. “Why didn’t you come in the front door, Mr. Johnson? This is the long way to your office.”

Benny looked behind, above, and below, checking to see what alternative universe he had entered. Mr. Johnson? It couldn't be him, couldn't be, so it had to be some ultra-weird coincidence involving someone with the same last name. For a moment, he thought maybe he'd consumed something worse than alcohol and all this was a hallucination. Whatever it was, it couldn't be good. Good didn't happen to him. “Sorry.” He meant to get away, not wanting to get roped into anything the person she was mistaking him for was supposed to do.

“No bother.” The woman’s smile was full, vivacious. It had been so long since he'd really noticed a woman, noticed anything beyond the misery of his daily life. “Let’s get you settled into your office before the kids start coming in. It looks like you have a full slate of referrals through the day. And oh, I’m sorry...” The woman extended her hand. “I’m Laura Shoenauer, the substitute principal while Mrs. Henricksen is on maternity leave.” Laura smiled and blushed as she secreted her opinion to Benny. “She’s so lucky.” The woman was decided that he was who she was looking for. Confusion and shock prevented his words from coming out to correct her.

Laura ushered him along and part-curious, part-cognizant of a need to glimpse aspects of the world he'd shut out, even if this was only a day's charade, Benny fell into step behind Laura in the darkened hallway.

“Here’s your office, Mr. Johnson,” said Laura, waving at a metal door with a printed sign, MR. RALPH JOHNSON, COUNSELOR in the plastic name holder. “And here’s your office key along with the keys to the front and back doors and the men’s faculty restroom.” Laura’s smile turned up into impossibly endless blue eyes. “I like your beard, by the way. It’s so...so masculine.” Then she glanced at his backpack slung over his shoulder. “The kids should relate to your carrying a backpack too—instead of a stuffy, old briefcase.” She glanced over her shoulder at him as she strolled away, heels clicking her thoughts in Morse code.

Ralph. So that was his new name. His first thought was to run to Laura Schoenauer and tell her this was some mistake, that he wasn't Ralph Johnson but Benny Johnson, a wino for the past twenty years who had been lucky enough to score a new set of clothes, a free shower, sub sandwiches from the school dumpster, and to be greeted at the back door of a school by a stunning, blonde, blue-eyed, substitute high school principal.

But wait. He could fake it for a day, couldn't he? It was beyond strange about the name, but more so that the role happened to coincide with something that wasn't altogether foreign to him. His past seemed like another life altogether, but it just might have its uses to go along with this until the real man for the job showed up. And what would he do then? Run? Hide? He'd been running and hiding all his life—he'd face the consequences when they came, if they came, but until then...

He'd been running and hiding ever since Jean had died. He and Jean had gotten together young. He was twenty-one and she was nineteen when she walked into his study with a pink piece of paper. He'd been burning barrels of midnight oil studying for his abnormal psych exam. Jean stood there, a warped smile on her lips, a cross between joy, fear and terror in her eyes. "I guess I'll just have to get rid of it, huh?"

They'd talked about this very thing before on at least a philosophical level. If she ever got pregnant, she would get an abortion. After all, Jean reasoned, it wasn't that much of a procedure anyway, was it? People could go into the clinic and voila—an hour later they were out on the street, free again.

And so that's what they did. They took the five-hour bus ride to the nearest available abortion clinic where Jean sat through an hour-long video directed, produced, and starring actors sympathetic to the right-to-life state Republicans who had made the film mandatory before abortions would be permitted. Jean's mind had been made up before the video. But when she saw the young couple—and they were exactly her and Benny's age, weren't they?—when she saw that young couple decide to keep their baby and at the end waltz through a field of sunflowers, baby in the girl's arms as the credits rolled across the screen, Jean started to change her mind.

"Are you sure you want to terminate this pregnancy after seeing that film?" the man asked. And of course he had to be a man. A middle-aged man with kind, brown, puppy-dog eyes asking the biggest rhetorical question she had ever faced.

"Sure," she answered, not sure at all but not wanting to disrupt the career of her boyfriend who sat in the waiting room, wringing his hands as he wondered how many hours he would have to pump gas at the local service station or flip burgers in a restaurant to keep their noses above the drowning swells of poverty.

"You're sure?" The man asked again.

The girl to her left broke into tears. "I can't do this," she cried, and ran from the room, the lights just now coming on as the final credits rolled.

"I'm sure." Jean answered. And she was—at that moment.

Then the girl to her right broke. "It's a baby," she pleaded. "How could you?!" And she fled the room after the other girl.

That left her and the man and no one else. A man paid—no doubt handsomely—by the very organization that had jammed the law through that said she had to sit through the film and listen to his harangue before she underwent the knife or whatever it was. "I'm sure!" she yelled, half-standing as she said it, ready to hit him in the face if he dared ask again.

"All right," the man said, an abortion-prevention counselor who, to her mind, was likely no counselor at all but maybe some whacko religious hack who prowled the local shopping malls on his days off, searching for girls just like her to impregnate then talk out of having abortions. "All right," he said again, as his allotted ninety minutes were up and she was free to undergo the procedure.

All she could think of as she undressed and put on the hospital gown and let them lay her on the operating table as the anesthesiologist finally made her not care what happened, was how she wanted to keep her baby. They were in love after all, the pregnancy wasn't a result of some dire circumstance. How she longed for her and Benny to walk through those same sunflower fields, babe in her arms. And what would she name him? Or her? she wondered as the life was taken out of her. Would he—or she—be smart?

Attractive? Kind? Caring? By the time she wondered how proud she would feel when her child had graduated from college and been married and had children, its life had been erased.

But then Jean never told Benny that story—not all at once anyway. It came out in dribbles, like a hole in a leaking bag of sadness that led to her huge void of nothing. Gone were her smiles, giddiness, and laughter. Instead all he saw from her was a constant, deep sadness that never left her eyes, and when he wasn't around, hours of tears, the only trace the redness of her eyes.

Pressured by her Methodist Bible-thumping parents to no longer live in sin, they married. It was a cheap, brief ceremony without the frills of an upper-middle-class wedding, their honeymoon a night in a cheap motel where they kissed each other good night then fell asleep without making love.

Benny finished his master's then his PhD in psychology as Jean kept getting sadder and sadder. Had she opened up to him, had she bared her soul, he could have helped her. After all, he was the expert, wasn't he? But she didn't.

She declined to accompany him on his first job interview—therapist at a prestigious clinic. And wasn't that something? So he flew to Pasadena and flew through his interview and was hired. When he told her he had the job, her only response was, "That's nice. Now you should make it through life okay." The silence before the click had been prolonged, the unsaid flaring then fading like her whole life in one brief span of seconds.

Benny wondered at her response as the circles of dryland irrigation faded into the checkerboard of row crop farming from 30,000 feet above, the twinkling blue and yellow lights of farms and towns and cities peopling the earth. Why wasn't she happier? Why wasn't she more excited? Why didn't she, already nearly an accomplished artist herself, want to jump at the chance to pack her canvas and brushes and oils and hurry out to the Golden State where she could paint boats and seagulls and tossing aqua waves whenever she wanted?

The first thing he did after the plane landed was pull out his bulky cell

phone and call her. The phone rang ten times then the answering machine picked up. *Hello, this is the Johnsons. We're not home right now, so please leave a message.* And then the beep—ten of them. Then he tried her cell. *Hi, this is Jean. You know what to do.* Six more beeps.

“Well I’ll be damned.” He tried his folks who lived an hour away, but they weren’t home either. So he tried his best friend.

“Hey Jer? This is Benny. I’m here at the airport and Jean isn’t picking up. Can you come get me?”

“Sure, bud. Hey, you get the job?”

“Sure did. Eighty grand to start.”

“Crap. You’ll be rollin’ in the dough. Hey. Let me throw on a jacket and I’ll be right there.”

Benny studied the milling concourse crowds, people coming and going, all strangers so they let their true feelings show—fear, anger, grief. His only feelings were excitement and joy.

Jer met him at the luggage claim a half hour later. “Eighty grand! Isn’t that something?”

Benny could hardly believe it himself as they drove toward his and Jean’s apartment. Their black cat, Jinx was in the hallway when they got there, meowing up a storm. “Jinxy.” Benny picked up the cat and held her in his arms, wishing she were Jean.

He turned the key in the lock as Jer carried in his bag. “Geez, I gotta take a whiz. Mind if I use your can?”

“No problem.” Benny scanned the room. “Jean?” Only a hollow, vacant echo answered.

Jer went in ahead of him, eager to reach the bathroom after the drive.

Benny checked the other rooms and wondered if Jean had run out on an errand.

“Oh my God!”

“Jer?”

Jer slammed the bathroom door, face white. “Don’t go in there.”

Benny heard all except Jer’s first word. Jer stood in the way to keep him from entering the bathroom, but Benny fought past him.

In the pink tub of water Jean lay naked, brown hair spooled in a halo around her head. A long, red slit traced each of her wrists, her blue eyes staring stark and wondrous at the next world she had entered.

Benny never did go to Pasadena. He didn’t even call. After Jean’s funeral he went straight to the closest bar and paid \$4 a shot for JDs on the rocks until they 86ed him and then he bought a fifth at the liquor store next door. He didn’t stop drinking for twenty years.

“I’m thinking of killing myself.”

The statement pierced his chest. He had to do something, say something. Why would he have been put there that day, through a one-in-a-million mistake, if not to help?

A slight, frightened boy the other kids undoubtedly teased mercilessly peered at him from across the desk. Besides being undersized, even for a high school sophomore, Carl’s acne raged like a hundred volcanoes ready to explode. He had kind, sincere eyes and that, otherwise endearing, was probably what made the worst kids even more aggressive.

“That’s a pretty serious thing to say. What leads you to contemplate that?”

Carl looked at the blank wall as though he wanted to crawl through it. “The other kids. They...”

Carl didn’t have to continue. Benny already knew his story. Carl had been a straight-A student all the way through grade school and junior high. And

this year, his first year of high school, his grades had plummeted. He was going through hell and it had taken a toll. Benny leaned slightly over his desk, just enough to show his interest yet giving Carl his space. “Carl?”

Carl turned to him, a depleted look in his eyes.

“You’re going through a real pile of crap right now, aren’t you?”

Carl’s lips muttered up his answer. “Yes.”

“The other kids give you grief every time you turn around, don’t they?”

“Yes.”

“And you feel like you’re the only person in the world who’s treated the way you are, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Carl peeped.

“Well you’re not. Thousands of kids—millions—feel exactly the same way you do. And they have the same feelings you do right now, Carl.”

“They do?”

“Absolutely. And it’s temporary. Kids go through this for a number of different reasons that never justify it. It’s not unique to this time and not unique to you. There are so many others out there. You’re not alone, Carl.”

Carl’s eyes flitted side to side. “So where are they? The others, I mean.”

“They’re all around you. They’re standing in the corners tired of being targeted, sitting alone at lunch tables wishing for decent kids like themselves, feeling the same way you do.”

Carl looked at him as though he had reached past his eyes and unlocked something he couldn’t communicate but needed to get out.

“Make friends with them, Carl. Find them by trying new activities of interest to you in and outside of school. Keep getting yourself out there and search until you find good, trustworthy people that are into the things that

are important to you. Tell them how you feel. And when they tell you how they feel, *listen*.”

Carl’s tears came, a flood. “I can do that, can’t I?”

“Yes, you can, Carl. You have the power in you to change your life and the lives of others. Remember—they’re searching for you as much as you’re searching for them.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I know so. Real friends aren’t easy to come by, so they’ll appreciate you when you find each other.” Benny stood and came around his desk. “Stand up.”

Carl slowly rose from his chair, deep sighs of relief coming up from the core of his body.

Benny threw his arms around Carl in a big bear hug. “I care, Carl. I care,” he whispered, imagining for the briefest moment that it was Jean he was holding in his arms.

The cool kiss of dawn pried open his eyes. Judging from the light, he figured it was just before 5.

Benny chuckled to himself as he thought of the kids he’d seen the day before—eight of them after Carl. The teacher referrals said the others were low performers, or had behavior problems, or were lacking motivation. But he just saw them as kids—all the same except for the barriers adults had placed in their paths to keep them from succeeding.

Benny also realized yesterday was the first full day he had gone without a drink since Jean had taken her life twenty years before.

He bolted up and looked around. He had pitched his shelter half in a state park, far enough away from the campground to remain undetected. Last night he had gone to bed figuring his foray into the school would be but for a day. But he knew the kids needed him. And because they needed him, he

needed them. He figured he could walk to the school in less than an hour.

He bathed in a crackling cold stream then put on the same suit—different shirt—and rolled up his camp with his backpack and laid it in an animal burrow in a side hill. He guessed the badger or cougar or bear or whatever it was would just have to find a new home.

He made it to the school a half-hour early, time enough to gloss his appointments. Twelve today with an afternoon faculty in-service.

A light rap drew his eyes to his door where the hall light framed Laura Schoenauer's smile. "Good morning, Mr. Johnson."

Benny returned her smile. He liked this woman. And it wasn't just because she was attractive. She cared about kids, just like he did. Then he guessed that was why they were both there. Benny stood and motioned for Laura to sit in the chair on the other side of his desk. "Have a seat, if you have a minute."

"I have three or four even," Laura said eagerly as she took the chair, her smile perking through. "I saw Carl Tillman in the hallway yesterday."

"Oh?" Benny wondered where her conversation was leading.

"He was smiling."

"Yeah?"

Laura tilted her head at him. "What on earth did you say to him? I haven't seen Carl smile for the longest time."

Benny shrugged. "I just gave him some words of encouragement."

"Well, whatever those words were, they worked. I guess he even asked the cross-country coach about joining the team."

Benny hoisted an eyebrow, surprised himself. "I guess that's pretty good, huh?"

"That's fantastic. Oh, by the way," Laura handed him a spiral-bound book

she'd carried in, "we'll be going over standards and benchmarks at this afternoon's in-service. I thought you might like a little light reading before the meeting."

Benny hefted the half-pound document as Laura handed it to him. It was a good inch thick.

"And your first appointment today is a real case."

Benny cast an appraising glance at her. He hated when people were quick to judge others. Especially kids. "Oh?"

Laura stabbed her finger at the list on Benny's desk. "Jose Martinez. One of the biggest trouble-makers in the school besides his buddy, Eric Brewer. I wish we could just get rid of students who behave that way towards us and their classmates."

Benny looked at Jose's name then back at Laura as he tried to determine what was going on. There was always more to the other side of a story. "I'll see what I can do."

"Well, good luck. You'll need it." Laura rose from her chair, lingering at the doorway as her fingers caressed the frame as she looked over her shoulder. "Would it be okay if I called you 'Ralph' when we're alone like this?"

"Ralph?"

Laura cupped her hand around her laugh, echoing it to herself. "Your first name, silly."

"Oh sure, Ms. Schoenauer."

"Please, call me *Laura*."

"Okay...Laura."

She winked and curled her fingers at him in a goodbye wave. "Bye."

Laura Schoenauer's heels clicking down the hallway drew his errant thoughts away from Jose Martinez and standards and benchmarks and

every other thought that had been in his head before she had entered his office that morning. Was it his imagination, or was she flirting with him?

Jose Martinez was there ten minutes later, the chain on his wallet long enough to strangle someone. The tattoo on his neck said hardcore. Jose came in and kicked the chair out from Benny's desk and plopped into it and crossed his arms defiantly. "So what kinda shit we talkin' about?"

From that introduction, Benny could see why Laura found Jose a problem. He would have too if he'd still been living a sheltered existence, unaware of how tough life could be. His academic studies would have done nothing to prepare him for Jose. But he wondered if the kid was just exhibiting the attitudes that had helped him survive. Benny wanted to see if he couldn't find a way to connect. "I don't know. What do *you* want to talk about?"

"What *I* wanna talk about?"

"Yeah."

Jose's smile curled up inside itself. "How 'bout booze an' weed an' pussy?"

"I guess that's as good a place to start as any."

Twenty minutes later, Jose was hanging on Benny's every word. When Benny quit talking, Jose's eyes lifted gravely. "No shit? Your old lady was dead when you come home an' you lived on the streets twenty years?"

Benny nodded slowly. His hunch was right. There was empathy under the tough bravado. Jose was the only person who had ever heard his whole story. Then Jose was probably the only person in the building who could have understood it.

"Man..." Jose sat on the edge of his chair, hands clasped, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, man. I'm real sorry."

"If someone like me can pull himself up by his bootstraps, don't you think you can too, Jose?"

Benny's question perked up Jose's ears like a racehorse hearing the bell.

“What is it you want to do with your life, Jose?”

Jose stared at him, the walls between them crumbling beneath shared tragedies. “Well, I think it’d be real dope to be a lawyer and change the way shit goes down.”

“Well, that will require some study now, won’t it? Courses like English and government.”

“Man, I hate them courses.”

“You want to understand the system so you know how to change it, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“Well then that’s what you need to do.”

“I don’ know. That sound real hard.”

“Life’s hard, Jose. I know that. You know that. Trouble is, none of those mother fu#\$ers out there in the hallway know that.”

“Jose’s smile brimmed. “Did you just say *mother fu#\$ers*, Mr. Johnson?”

“Damn straight.” Benny stood up from his desk and came around and knuckle-bumped Jose. “So you know where the shit is at now, man.”

Something glimmered in Jose’s eyes. Something he’d never understood before but did now.

Benny put his hand on Jose’s shoulder. “Come talk to me whenever you want. About anything you want. Even girls.”

“Okay, man. Okay. Cool.” Jose nodded to himself. “I’ll do that.”

Benny could tell right away no one wanted to be at the in-service—even Laura. After Laura introduced him as the new school counselor and

everyone shared introductions, the faculty engaged in side conversations, locked arms already showing they were closed to hearing any new ideas or following new mandates. After Laura discussed a PowerPoint on standards and benchmarks, Gil Haus, the history teacher, shook his head slowly.

“Yes, Mr. Haus?”

“If our students are doing so great in English, then why can’t they write a decent essay question?”

Sharon Leitz, the English instructor, looked aghast at Haus. “Gee, why don’t they know a damn thing about the Civil War when we discuss *Red Badge of Courage*?” And then the riot began.

Laura had everything to shout them down. “Listen! Could everyone listen! Could we please have a little order in here?” She turned to Benny who had been holding up his hand for a good minute. “Yes, Mr. Johnson?” she asked, tone lightening.

Benny hoisted his pants cuffs from the tops of his shoes and stood. “How about if we taught basic competency skills across the curriculum—history teachers could assess a writing component, writing teachers could assess a history component, that sort of thing.” He could hear the issues more clearly as an outsider. Why not try to make use of that to help while he was there?

Gil Haus was livid. “I’m a history teacher, not an English teacher. It’s not part of my job.”

Benny shrugged. “Well what is our job? It’s teaching kids, isn’t it? Encouraging and guiding and molding them? And how is our arguing accomplishing that?” Part of him felt like an imposter, but another part, where he cared genuinely, felt invested. Motivated for the first time since he could remember, he parlayed the astonishment of his coming back to life into a passion for the place.

Stunned silence.

“We’re so preoccupied by our own personal standards and benchmarks that we’re failing to see the whole picture. I’d suggest shared rubrics across the

curriculum. Ten percent of assessment, say, could be based on rubrics from other disciplines. That way, stellar student achievement would require students to demonstrate not just a grasp of basic concepts but a direct application to their daily lives.”

“So does that mean I have to teach public speaking?” asked Daryl Rusche, the CAD instructor.

“Do engineers have to give presentations? Do they have to speak to groups in response to RFPs?” Benny challenged.

“Well...yes,” Rusche acknowledged.

“Then would you agree that quite often it’s not the best engineering firm that gets the professional services contract but the one that gives the best presentation?”

Rusche’s eyes paled over. The silence in the room was deafening.

Laura cleared her throat to break the silence. She stepped from the overhead projector to the center of the room and looked down, searching for words. “I think Mr. Johnson has presented some very important points.” Her gaze shifted to him with newfound awe. “Some very penetrating and fascinating points, in fact. I think what we need is a retreat to develop some shared rubrics we can all agree upon.”

Light assenting murmurs sifted through the room.

Laura nodded at him. “Thank you, Mr. Johnson.”

After the in-service, Benny went to his office and logged on to his computer and downloaded and completed an application to renew his professional license.

A week later, a half-dozen students were at his door when he got to work. The first in line was Jose Martinez. And he had books in his hand.

Between bells Benny saw Carl Tillman talking to a girl by his locker. She

was a little mousy and seemed shy with enormous glasses, but give her an updated pair of glasses or remove them altogether and she would have been downright cute. Benny knew that this would happen if Carl talked to her long enough. He clasped Carl's shoulder as he passed. "You go, tiger."

Carl beamed a smile over his shoulder. "Good morning, Mr. Johnson."

Benny chuckled to himself as he passed down the hallway.

"Oh, Mr. Johnson." Laura came bounding down the hall, almost in a run—something she didn't normally dare do because she always scolded the students for it. She stood before him breathless, eyes shining, skin glowing. "I was wondering, Mr. Johnson, Ralph," she whispered under her breath. "Would you be interested in heading up our across-the-curriculum committee?"

"Sure," he agreed, without knowing exactly what all that would entail. Then it was his idea, wasn't it? "So when's the first meeting?"

"Wednesday afternoon after our usual early dismissal."

"Alright." He stood there and looked into Laura's glacial blue eyes and realized how incredibly beautiful she was. Not a hair out of place. She was absolutely perfect. "I, I'd really like that."

"I was wondering, Mr. Johnson..." Her eyes darted side to side as students wove around them.

"Yes, Ms. Schoenauer?"

"I was wondering if we could have dinner tomorrow night. At my place." She looked off at the students, their lockers, at nothing as though her hand were caught in a cookie jar. Then her head snapped up toward him. "To go over the rubrics, of course."

Her reason for their meeting was so facile, so obvious, he had to hold back a chuckle. It wouldn't be easy to be close to someone after so long, after what had happened, but he had to take some of the advice he was dishing out and take a chance. "Certainly, Ms. Schoenauer," he said, saying her name as though it were a rare jewel. "Just name the time and place."

Laura Schoenauer's apartment was upscale but not posh—exactly the sort of apartment where Benny expected an up-and-coming substitute principal would live. Benny figured even he could swing an apartment there on his \$36,000 salary.

He buzzed the intercom and she answered seconds later. “Is that you, Ralph?” He had to think a moment as the lie caught in his throat. “Uh, yeah.” The buzzer rang and he entered the door and took the elevator to the eleventh floor and found her apartment by the aroma of her cooking. *Do you like hot curry?* she had asked. He loved it. For the past twenty years, it had been his favorite meal he had dug from the restaurant dumpsters along Lake Street.

Laura met him at the door, hair down and slung over her left shoulder like a perfect, glistening waterfall. He wanted to bury his face in it just to inhale it. To inhale all of her. “You're early,” she said, making an excuse for the apron she removed to reveal a casual aqua top that matched her eyes and skinny jeans. “Grab a seat in the living room. I have a snack tray set up.”

Benny smiled at her, a smile that faded when he saw the meat and cheese tray with a bottle of wine and two glasses beside it. The glasses were close but not quite touching. A signal of how close she wanted them to sit?

“I hope you like my curry recipe. I had all I could do to talk it out of this quaint little chef in Singapore when I was there on a Fulbright a couple years ago. Have you ever been to Singapore?” Laura asked, her words and face peeking at him from around the kitchen doorway.

Benny stood there, afraid to even get close to the wine.

Laura angled her gaze at him. “Is something wrong, Ralph?”

He wanted to grab the wine bottle and drain it without a pause. He closed his eyes slowly, wishing Laura and her apartment and the kids and the job he had stolen would all go away and he could be on the street again. He was repulsed by that faltering step backward in his mind. “I, uh, I don't drink.” He opened his eyes. “Alcohol, I mean.” A sheen of sweat broke across his

forehead and a slight shaking started somewhere deep inside his gut and went all the way to his hands and feet.

“I’m sorry.” Laura looked to the wine bottle then him. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, sure.” He couldn’t look back at the wine. Or the meat and cheese tray. Or Laura. He felt ashamed.

“Yes?” Laura stood inches away, her aqua top almost brushing against him, her darting eyes searching his.

“I...think maybe I should go.”

Laura’s eyes shimmered in the kitchen light fighting to invade the darkened living room where a single candle glowed to the sound of soft jazz.

“I’m not who you think I am, Laura.”

“Well none of us are,” she said, a sudden edge to her voice. “We all have barriers. We’re all afraid to show our true feelings, Ralph. Why—”

“I’m not Ralph.”

Her eyes froze in their sockets. “What?”

“I’m not Ralph Johnson.”

Laura coughed up a laugh. “Well who *are* you then?”

“My name is Benjamin Johnson. I’ve been a skid row wino for the past twenty years. I found a couple suits in an alley in a drycleaner’s dumpster. I took a freezing cold shower in the school sprinkler system and put on my suit and had just finished a couple hero sandwiches from the dumpster behind the school when you first called me ‘Mr. Johnson.’ The only reason I’ve been able to get this far is because I actually—”

Laura’s mouth gaped as her face paled and she stood away from him. “Get the hell out of my apartment before I call the police.”

“I’m sorry. I was planning on setting this all straight, I just...”

“And don’t you *dare* set foot on school property or I *will* have you arrested.”

“I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry,” he said as he closed the door behind him.

He retrieved his backpack from the cave and returned to the city—the place where he knew how best to survive. He asked about the HELP WANTED sign in a greasy spoon diner window and was flipping burgers and pouring coffee ten minutes later.

After a full month of sobriety, he had his first paycheck in his hand in twenty years. He found a room with shared kitchenette and bath three blocks from the diner and settled into his new life.

“So his name wasn’t even Ralph Johnson.” Dr. Stoeckman gazed across his desk at her, measuring the full impact of what she had said.

“No. It was Benjamin or whatever.” Laura’s ramrod-straight back was so rigid it didn’t touch the back of her chair.

A light knock and his office door opened. “Dr. Stoeckman?” His administrative assistant entered and held up a manila envelope. “I hate to bother you, Dr. Stoeckman. This came for Mr. Johnson from the state Department of Human Services. Would you like me to open it?”

A light flashed in Dr. Stoeckman’s eyes. “Sure.”

“Thank you,” said his assistant, closing the door.

“Opening the U.S. mail? Isn’t that a little *illegal*?” Laura asked.

“How about impersonating a school counselor. Isn’t *that* illegal?”

A knock again and the door opened. “Dr. Stoeckman? I think you should see this,” she said, handing him the opened envelope.

Dr. Stoeckman sighed and leveled his gaze at Laura as he slid a sheet from the envelope and peered down at it. “Well, what have we here? A professional license issued by the state Department of Human Services to a Benjamin Johnson, PhD.”

“PhD?”

“Apparently he was masking as a mental health professional too. This,” Dr. Stoeckman said, waving the document in his hand, “is going to put Mr. Benjamin Johnson exactly where he belongs—behind bars.” He studied the document. “Part of this whole mess is probably my fault. I should have come here to meet him when he first started. Then I would have realized he wasn’t the man I had hired. I was so tied up in meetings with the state school lobbyist though. I just wonder whatever happened to Ralph Johnson,” Dr. Stoeckman said, looking out his window.

Laura felt as though a truck had run over her when she got home that night. Had it been less than twenty-four hours since Ralph—or Ben—Johnson had been in her apartment? A fake, a fraud, maybe even a serial killer for all she knew? The open wine bottle still sat on the living room coffee table, the two glasses still there, nearly touching. The dried up meat and cheese already curled up. She shivered as she thought how close she had come to giving herself to him—offering herself up as a sacrifice.

She tossed the meat and cheese in the garbage and poured the wine down the sink, hating Benjamin Johnson with all her soul. The phone interrupted her thoughts and she tossed the bottle in the recycling along with the thought that she never wanted to ever see Benjamin Johnson again.

“Ms. Schoenauer, Dick Stoeckman. I’m glad I caught you.”

“It’s not like I have a social life anyway,” she said, slamming the recycling container lid shut.

An extended silence. “I just got off the phone with the state social services director.”

“Oh?” She glanced at the curry still in the glass-covered casserole dish on

top of the stove. “Do they have Benjamin Johnson in custody yet?”

“*Dr. Johnson.*”

“What?”

“Apparently he has a PhD in psychology from Berkeley.”

“Are you *kidding*?”

“DHS never kids. They verified it.”

Laura twisted the phone cord through his fingers. “Why did he take a school counselor position? With a PhD?”

“I have no idea. All I do know is we were getting one hell of a deal at \$36,000 a year.”

“So why the story about his being on the street for twenty years?”

“That’s quite possibly true. Apparently he first obtained his professional license in 1997 and it lapsed when he failed to renew it.”

“My God.” She looked at the recycling container, the meat and cheese in the trash, the curry on the stove, her head swimming. “Why didn’t he tell me?”

“Did you give him the opportunity?”

“No.”

“Well there you have it.”

A dry, cold wind ran through her body as though she didn’t exist. “So what are you doing to do?”

“I’ve had a constant stream of students coming to my office all day. They’re demanding to know what happened to Mr. Johnson.” A pause as he mulled his answer. “I’m going to find Benjamin Johnson, PhD, and offer him a position as school counselor at Lakeland High School. He was effective, he cared about the kids, he did a great job. He never should have kept up the

misunderstanding, should have contradicted you the first day by saying he was someone else, but then he wouldn't have been given an opportunity to show what he could do or to get his life together.”

Her heart fell to the pit of her stomach then bounced back to the base of her throat. “Do you think you can find him?”

“I’m sure we can.”

“I’m sorry.” She scrunched the phone cord between her fingers. “I should have given him the chance to explain himself.”

“Your reaction, given what you knew at the time, was quite appropriate, Ms. Schoenauer. I’m sure Mr. *Benjamin Johnson* even found it appropriate. Goodbye.”

“Bye...” she said, voice trailing. She hung up the phone and thought of Benjamin Johnson. Her mind drifted back to the night before. Twenty years on the street. Twenty years. What terrible thing had happened to him for that to happen? And where was he now?

She got her pepper spray from the kitchen drawer and put on her coat and headed out for the most dangerous part of the city.

“You missed a spot there.”

Harry looked over the mop handle. “You never was this picky before when we was together on the street.”

“I have a job now. And so do you. And we’d better do our jobs if we want to keep them.”

Harry grumbled and finished mopping the floor and rolled the mop bucket into the back room to empty it.

Benny topped off everyone’s coffee at the counter then took an order from a young couple in a corner booth. They were apparently in love, the way they held hands against the cold seeping through the plate glass windows. On

the other side of the window snow drifted slowly like notes written to the jazz station Benny had playing on the radio. No one had noticed when he switched it from the oldies channel so he decided to leave it.

The bell above the door tinkled and a woman came in. Snowflakes dusted her black wool coat as she took another empty booth beside the window.

Benny grabbed a menu, glass of water, coffee pot, and cup and went to her. He set the cup on the table and filled it.

“Thank you,” she said without looking at him.

“I didn’t even need to ask. You had *I need coffee* written all over you. By the way, I’d recommend the grilled cheese and chili.” She still had her head down under her hood. It took a moment to settle in and peel off her gloves before she glanced up.

“Oh my God, it’s you.”

Benny finally looked at the woman. Laura. He tried to swallow but couldn’t.

“We’ve scoured this city for months searching for you. Where have you been? What have you been doing?”

The coffee pot in his hand suddenly felt as though it weighed a ton. “I’ve upgraded my living accommodations, you might say. And I’ve been working, catching up with the news of the world, not drinking...that sort of thing.”

“Dr. Stoeckman wants you back. The school wants you back.”

“The school actually wants me back after knowing everything?”

Her eyes peered up fervently at him. “So do the kids. So do I.”

Benny set the coffee pot down on the table and sat across from her. The snow was heavy now, silver-dollar flakes gliding past the window. All unique, pressing them together into a much-smaller world. He reached across the table for her hand.

“Dr. Conrad, the patient is reviving.”

Dr. Nelson Conrad rushed to the patient’s side, the nurse checking the patient’s vitals. “Nearly four months in a coma. Remarkable. You are one lucky man, Mr. Johnson. We never thought you would survive that car accident.”

Ralph Johnson opened his eyes and tried to determine his surroundings and wondered what he missed, what would be waiting for him, and where he would be tomorrow.

Bio: Michael Tidemann lives between Estherville, Iowa and Elk City, Oregon, the latter the setting for much of his work. His fiction has appeared in *Black Hills Monthly Magazine*, *The Longneck*, *Struggle*, and *The Write Place at the Write Time*. His column, *Writers and Writing*, now appears in 80 newspapers in the Upper Midwest. He is currently working on a novel set in Elk City and the South, spanning more than four centuries.

His author page is [amazon.com/author/michaeltidemann](https://www.amazon.com/author/michaeltidemann)

© 2018 *The Write Place at the Write Time*

This online magazine and all the content contained therein is copyrighted.