InterText

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 5 SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 1993

"The True Story of the Gypsy's Wedding" by KYLE CASSIDY

ALSO INSIDE:
MARK SMITH
G.L. EIKENBERRY
AVIOTT JOHN

ISSN 1071-7676

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InterText

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 1993 VOLUME 3, NUMBER 5

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***InterText* Vol. 3, No. 5.** *InterText* (ISSN 1071-7676) is published electronically on a bi-monthly basis. Reproduction of this magazine is permitted as long as the magazine is not sold and the entire text of the issue remains intact. Copyright © 1993, Jason Snell. All stories copyright © 1993 by their respective authors. All further rights to stories belong to the authors. *InterText* is produced using Aldus PageMaker 5.0, Microsoft Word 5.1 and Adobe Illustrator 3.2 software on Apple Macintosh computers and is converted into PostScript format for distribution. PostScript is a registered trademark of Adobe Systems, Inc. For back issue information, see our back page. *InterText* is free, but if you enjoy reading it feel free to make a $5 donation to help with the costs that go into producing *InterText.* Send checks, payable to Jason Snell, to: 21645 Parrotts Ferry Road, Sonora, CA, USA, 95370.

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***InterText*'s next issue will be released November 15, 1993.**

FIRST TEXT

Jason Snell

ON–LINE FRIENDS & FREE PUBLICITY

A BRIEF BUT HEARTY HELLO TO you, as I begin this issue of *InterText* with a brief note before handing the column over to my assistant editor, Geoff Duncan.

Things have been busy around our neck of the woods (or, since I live in a city, my neck of the thick bushes). In addition to finishing up my internship at a nearby computer magazine (more about that next issue), getting started with my second and final year of graduate studies in Journalism, and finally getting *InterText* into the Library of Congress' magazine database (which explains the eight-digit ISSN you see in this issue), I managed to take some time to meet with my cross-continent electronic publishing counterpart, *Quanta's* Daniel K. Appelquist.

A few weeks ago, I ate a lunch with Dan as we talked about electronic publications. I have no doubt at all that we completely baffled our waiter, who kept overhearing us talk about FTP sites, LISTSERVs, and PostScript.

In addition to puzzling the waiter, Dan and I talked about our experiences working on these magazines of ours. Believe it or not, it was the first time we've had a chance to compare notes in person.

A couple reviewers of *InterText* and *Quanta* have taken apparent glee in noting that "the editors of the two magazines are friends," not realizing we've never really met. Despite that, we'd like to think that we're 'on-line' friends. Considering that people have even fallen in love via computer networks (I even met my first girlfriend on a computer bulletin board), having on-line friends doesn't seem like too unlikely a concept.

Anyway, my visit with Dan Appelquist ended up being a couple hours of fun, and I'm glad I managed to see him (albeit briefly) during his brief Labor Day visit, before he flew back to his home in Washington, D.C.

SINCE I MENTIONED "REVIEWERS OF *INTERTEXT* AND *Quanta,*" I suppose I should mention that *InterText* has received a little bit of free publicity recently. The September issue of *BYTE* magazine devoted a chunk of their magazine to electronic publishing, including a sidebar about on-line publications written by Kevin Savetz. Both myself and Geoff Duncan were quoted in the article, which was quite good despite the fact that it referred to me as a "respected journalist." Respected? Maybe by my mother. To me, I'm still just a potential journalism school dropout until I finish my Masters Thesis.[1]

Seeing the *BYTE* article was interesting to me because I got to see myself quoted in print, something I'm not used to—after all, I'm usually the one doing the quoting. Also, I discovered something about both myself: I'm not particularly quotable when I give interviews via electronic mail (which is how I was interviewed for the *BYTE* story). Geoff Duncan, on the other hand, is a veritable cornucopia of e-mail quotes—he has a couple big ones at the story's heart. That'll teach me to get my e-mail skills in shape.

In any event, the *BYTE* article has brought us a bunch of new subscribers, which is nice to see. And next issue, when I tell you more about my experience at my computer magazine internship, I'll hopefully be able to mention even *more* free publicity for the magazine. And as far as I'm concerned, the more readers *InterText* has, the better.

MY LIMITED SPACE THIS ISSUE IS QUICKLY RUNNING OUT. Now it's time to turn over the soapbox to Geoff—whom I've *still* never met in person—so he can give you some food for thought before you turn to the entertainment we've got in store for you. That entertainment includes a couple crazy and funny stories by frequent contributor Kyle Cassidy, another story from Texan Mark Smith, and two stories from outside the borders of the U.S., one from Canada, one from Austria. I hope you enjoy them.

[1] **The topic of my thesis article will likely be MUDs on the Internet. If you're a MUD user, send me some mail and maybe I'll interview *you.* And wouldn't *that* be exciting?**

SECOND TEXT

Geoff Duncan

THE INTERNET: NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

THERE'S A LOT OF TALK ABOUT HOW THE INTERNET will be changing in the next few years, about how the worlds of telephony and data processing will merge. Acronyms and buzzwords abound: NREN, NII, ISDN, CATV, broadband, megabit... the list goes on. The Clinton Administration has proposed an "information superhighway" to carry the United States into the twenty-first century. The telephone and cable industries are already scrambling to control the on-ramps and off-ramps of that highway—the cables leading to wall jacks and the cellular services that tie you in anywhere at any time. Interactive television has been brought into test markets and software companies are gearing up for the next round of information appliances: digital assistants, personal faxes, global locators, and intelligent agents. As you might expect, the Internet will not go untouched in this impending technological deluge. Some changes are

right around the corner; others will creep up on us in slower, more subtle ways. Either way, we've got to be prepared.

The Internet is a big place. Recent figures indicate over 32,000 networks connect to the Internet, allowing millions of people on-line access every day. And the Internet is growing rapidly, with traffic increasing by as much as 15 percent per month. If you think that such a fast-growing market of computer-users is attracting commercial attention, you'd be right. While the Internet's management is decentralized and its origins are in the realms of the government, research, academia, and non-profits, the "non-commercial" Internet is a thing of the past. For a price, the clarinet newsgroups bring UPI news to anyone with a Usenet feed. Media Mogul Rupert Murdoch just bought Delphi, a commercial network offering complete internet access. Corporations, organizations and software companies are increasingly providing services, information, and goods to customers and clients via the Internet, both for free and for profit. These services range from simple email addresses to on-line bulletins, technical support, and product sales. While electronic funds transfers aren't taking place over the Internet (and aren't likely anytime soon), the simple fact is that if you want to spend money over the Internet, you can. That means there's money to be made, and that means commercial use of the Internet is only going to increase.

What's going to happen when commercial interests swing their clout and capital into this new market? Imagine directed mailing: one day you log in and find a note: "Dear Internet baseball fan: Would you like to have the latest season statistics delivered to your electronic doorstep every day?" Or, "Dear Internet Windows User: Want to upgrade to the latest version of the world's most popular word-processor?" Dial the 800 number, do the credit card thing, and *presto!* it's in your email the next morning. Allow six to eight hours for delivery.

This is just the tip of the iceberg: imagine the possibilities. Home shopping newsgroups. First-run novels, uncut and commercial free. Libraries, research services, film, music, and restaurant reviews, interviews, user directories, weather reports, travel tips.... These items are easily within the scope of today's technology—in fact, *all* of these items are presently available on the Internet or on commercial networks such as CompuServe. Add to this a network providing high-speed connections to homes and businesses (*exactly* what cable and telephone companies are doing right now) and we have real films, real music, real books, magazines, and encyclopedias, live performances, participation in sports events, game shows, talk shows... you name it, you got it. And these companies will score shiny green Eco-points for using less paper, plastic, and packaging to get these products to you. So the commercial Internet is good for public relations, too.

You might ask what this has to do with a magazine called *InterText.* As commercial content providers get interested in the Internet, are non-commercial content providers—like *InterText* and *Quanta*—going to have trouble keeping up? If you're an Average Internet User, are you going to subscribe to a magazine like *InterText* or opt for the more-expensive-but-well-advertised Tom Clancy/Danielle Steele/Barbara Kingsolver/Stephen King novel? Why try *Quanta* when *Isaac Asimov's* and *Analog* are within reach?

The solutions aren't simple, but hopefully Internet publications will survive this onslaught of commercialism. While no electronic publication has the resources to compete directly with commercial interests, a *consortium* of electronic publishers, working together, could go a long way toward maintaining and expanding non-commercial electronic publication on the Internet. With a few exceptions, electronic publications do not compete directly with traditional publishers—we do not affect their writers, readership or subscriptions to any significant degree.

The beauty of the current system is that no one participates in an electronic publication unless they want to do so—our readers tend to find us, through the grapevine, Usenet, gopher, and other means. For the future, the trick is to make sure *InterText* and publications like it are not priced out of the market: readers like you must *still* able to find us, even when *Reader's Digest* and every Time-Life book series is available electronically. A consortium of electronic publishers—established before commercial interests sink their claws much deeper into the Internet—could do just that.

Why bother? Because most electronic publications start when commercial publishers aren't responsive enough, fast enough, specific enough, or *interesting* enough to meet the needs of their readers. And if we don't watch out, commercial publishers will do the same thing to the Internet.

Now wouldn't that be exciting?

For more discussion of these issues and information about electronic publishing organizations, please e-mail **gaduncan@halcyon.com**.

THE TRUE STORY OF THE GYPSY'S WEDDING

BY KYLE CASSIDY

• Some stories are embellished each time they are told until they either become unbelievable or a kind of legend. Others are that way the very first time… •

HOBBY:

I HEAR THROUGH ROSS THAT YOU GOT A LETTER FROM that crazy fucking bastard Cambridge. That Bedlam's poet is so completely wacko he should be set on *fire.* A genuine *psychopathian,* if you don't mind me inventing my own adjectives. There are none which exist that even begin to describe him adequately. I once saw him eat seven hits of blotter with his Captain Crunch and then strip naked and go for a *walk in the park,* all the while gnawing on old tin cans and fruit rinds, blabbering about "Ninja Mind-Wave Energy." Now I don't know what he told you, but I'm sure that anything he said, especially concerning me, is so wildly exaggerated so as to be almost completely unrecognizable. His mind has gone to fish-bait. So, lest I be slandered, I wanted to tell you the real story of Cambridge's wedding.

Firstly, Derrik Cambridge isn't his real name. He made that up. His real name is Derrik Duck-That-Squats.

Also, you ought to know that *I* was married to Dominique first. Oh yes, for three months of hell in 1988. She divorced me when I first brought that maniac psychopath over (then moved in with him, which was really weird, because he was living with me). Things got a lot better then. Our sex life improved drastically. Those two lunatics were made for one another. I *wanted* them to get married. Cambridge was the one who wasn't ready, he thought he could just walk into a life of weirdness, filled with sick, deranged relatives and flower-print wallpaper, with hideously colored saprophytes clinging to his neck like cellophane polyps filled with hot, stinking, rotten fish entrails. He was unaware of the dangers up ahead; badness was at every turn. A real sick, weird badness, the texture of brains that have been bashed out with an aluminum softball bat and danced upon by little feet in Docksider shoes. That's the one thing about Cambridge: he never knew when the sickos were trying to kill him.

"You know where bottled water comes from, Cambridge? *Other people's taps.* Some guy in Hoboken filling up hundreds of empty 7-Up bottles and gluing new labels on them."

"THIS WHOLE THING'S GETTING TOO WEIRD," I SAID. "You look like a fucking waiter in some godawful Village bagel shop that sells sixty varieties of bottled water."

He paused at this and squinted at himself in the mirror, then peered over the tops of his wire-rimmed John Lennon specs. He said nothing. I continued:

"You know where bottled water comes from, Cambridge? Have you any idea?" He shrugged and pulled his black hair back into a speculative pony tail.

"Other people's taps," I said. "Some guy in Hoboken, or Queens, or—darn it, Cambridge—from Pickensville, Alabama for all we know, filling up hundreds of empty 7-Up bottles and gluing new labels on them. Probably fills up his bathtub and *submerges them,* and then he sells them to people who believe that since it's in a bottle, it must be better than what's coming from their tap. Out of sight, out of mind. I'll bet he doesn't even *wash his hands."*

"Hair up or down?" he asked.

"It's hopeless. You're doomed."

"Up?"

"You're an art deco waiter with a fake European accent."

"Down then."

"You're one of those painted dweebs from fucking Mötley Crüe. It's the tuxedo, guy. The tuxedo makes you ambiguous. You weren't built for tuxedos. Roger Moore looks great in a tuxedo; you look like some fucking carpet-monster-hair-bear-penguin."

"Hmmmmm..." he said noncommittally. Then, "I'm going to head on over to the church."

"Sure, you sick, crazy motherfucker, go, go to the church. It's full of Nazis and bats, and stoned Polynesian women with grotesque ovarian cysts who'll probably gouge your eyes out with sticks and fill the empty sockets with black lumps of coal. Churches are crazy, dangerous places. Have you considered taking a gun? Any sort of

weapon?" I reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a dangerous-looking K-Bar Bowie knife, which I proceeded to wave menacingly in the air. It was almost fourteen inches long, painted dull black and weighing about nine pounds. Any bozo could easily use it to crack open a coconut with one blunt and inarticulate blow.

"Government issue," I said. "Cuts through a human limb like a Ginsu through a ripe tomato. Here, strap this on in case things get crazy. Anyway, you'll need it to cut the cake."

"No, really," he said, swilling the last of his rancid Saint Pauli Girl and rising with a bizarre, awkward, semi-debonair swagger, "I think I'll be okay."

"Fine by me, pal," I said, setting down my glass of whiskey and bending to strap the knife to my own leg, "I'll be there to back you up if things get out of hand. You just give a war-whoop if those cannibalistic old ladies with the flowered hats start eyeing you lasciviously. It's mean down there, old boy. Organized social gatherings —ugh! It skeeves me to think of them. But you can count on me."

"I'll do that," he said, picking up his keys and lurching out of the room like Abe Lincoln. He stuck his head back in the door.

"Bring my luggage down with you, will you?" He stumbled out of the room in a marriage daze. I'd seen it before, on my own face even. It's not a pretty sight.

"Don't let them domesticate you!" I called after him.

THEN, WITH THE HOUSE RELATIVELY EMPTY AND QUIET, there were things to be done—crazy, evil things. I took the jar out from under my bed, where it had been sitting in a shoebox full of ice cubes all night, and went into Cambridge's room. His honeymoon luggage sat completely unguarded on the bed, waiting for me to load it into my ugly old Cadillac and drive it off to the church. Opening the nearest bag, I dumped in eleven South American Hissing Cockroaches—they were three inches long, looked like crazy sparrows in the air, and when frightened, hissed like a pierced dirigible. They were hissing like mad now, even though I had set them in the ice to keep them sedate. Several of them reared up like gophers as I slammed the lid down. The suitcase hissed frightfully for a full two minutes before the bugs nestled down in the clothes and got calm.

"Yes, you fierce, ugly brutes, the fun's just about to begin." I carried the suitcases to the door and somehow roused the dog from her hidden lair. She clacked along behind me on the hardwood floor like a bag of castanets in need of some toenail clippers. She sniffed the cases and my hands for signs of edibles.

"He doesn't believe me, Petunia, old girl. But you just wait. When he sees the life they've got picked out for him, he'll start clawing at the walls. I bet one of them's going to offer him a job in the mail room of some widget factory." Petunia banged her tail up against the wall and stared up at me with limp, woeful dog-eyes. I walked into the kitchen and she followed, scavenging for food like some monstrous four-footed vulture. I opened the fridge, which was empty save for a pizza crust and a plate of jalapeño chili that Cambridge had made the night before while tripping on animal tranquilizers.

Petunia looked up at me balefully. She was a two hundred-pound mongrel pit bull and Russian wolfhound with a mouth full of butcher knives and a photograph of the devil behind her eyes. She drooled worse than my great aunt Winny on Thanksgiving, and wagged her tail like Godzilla whenever she was happy. To open the fridge and produce nothing for her was tantamount to suicide. I split the booty evenly. She licked up about half a pound of the chili with the first swoop of her tongue, which resembled a slab of raw beef. There followed about ten seconds of absolute silence where she looked up at me quizzically, and then her eyes rolled back into her head like ping-pong balls. She started to quiver like a plate of Jell-O on a buckboard being driven across a frozen, furrowed field. I could see her legs going limp, her ears falling like wet washcloths down past her face. Then she howled in the excruciating manner of a dozen men being horribly castrated by fire and dull knives. She leapt blindly and savagely for my throat.

"Jesus Christ!" I shouted, flying onto the stove and diving through the window which connected the living room with the kitchen. The howl turned into a strangled whine and there was much thumping from the kitchen, reminiscent of a pressure cooker filled with live, crazed, cast-iron rats.

I savagely kicked the sofa where Kim the green-haired punk rocker had been sleeping with her guitar in an MTV-induced trance for the past seventy-two hours straight.

"Jesus Christ!" I shouted again. "Wake the fuck up! It's the end of the world! The fucking *Four Horsemen* are here! *Move!"* I grabbed her arm and started to drag her to the door.

"What is it?" she shouted, "What the hell's going on?"

"Somebody gave the dog amphetamines—Cambridge and that crazy pack of dope fiends he calls friends! She's gone start raving mad! She's chewing through the goddamn walls! We've got to get out of here!" There was some wheezing and a crashing sound from the kitchen, as though two drunken knights were settling a hundred-year-old border dispute with a pair of rusty ball peen hammers.

"We don't have much time. The flesh-eating brute is *wired,* and it's not going to be long before she figures out that the kitchen door's wide open and she has us backed

into a corner, tearing chunks of flesh from our bodies and spitting them onto the floor!" I started throwing random objects into a shopping bag. Kim wandered into the kitchen, scratching a morning mop of olive hair, while Petunia lay on her back sputtering like a diffused bomb, her paws twitching limply in the air. Kim came back into the living room a minute later using a soup spoon to eat freeze-dried coffee from the can.

"Dog looks okay to me," she said, "Though she's had some of Derrik's jalapeño chili… Probably nothing in her mouth but seared flesh and irreparably damaged nerve endings." She sat down on the sofa, munching. I stuck my head back into the kitchen. Petunia's eyes hung open on her head like watery fried eggs-glazed over and sightless. She was making pitiful whimpering noises.

"A minute ago it was raging like a cow moose with menstrual cramps," I called through the connecting window. "Seems to have calmed down now."

I threw some water on her.

"Uh-huh," grunted Kim, chewing a mouthful of coffee grounds. The suitcases, agitated by all the noise, hissed like a basket of distempered cobras.

"What's that noise?" she asked.

"Gas leak," I replied, "let's get the hell out of here before the place explodes in a foul-smelling fireball and blows charred scraps of our ragged bones and flesh onto the hoods of cars twenty miles down the river. Help me get the dog in the car."

"Get the dog in the car?"

I shrugged, "Who knows what wild, crazy silliness will happen? We may never come back. We may be captured by rodeo clowns and forced to sell our bodies on some lonely dude ranch in Waco, Texas, until we're too darned old and too stinking ugly to continue. Communist Space Aliens may beam us up into their ship and spirit us away." I opened the bottle of Jack Daniels and took a long swallow. "Who knows."

Kim shrugged and grabbed Petunia's back legs. I took hold of the two that were left—they were thick like a wrestler's wrists—and together we half-dragged, half-carried her slobbering inert form to the car, heaving her into the back seat like a hung-over side of beef. Kim held the bottle of Jack Daniels while I went back into the house and got the luggage and the shopping bag full of debris which I threw into the trunk. We roared off with the top down and Kim stoically hurling large, white hunks of cauliflower at road signs and pedestrians.

After a few minutes she pulled a Running Sores cassette from somewhere—her bra or another dimension—and shoved it into the tape deck. As degenerate noises invaded the air, Petunia began whining once more. Small children ran in fear. Kim leaned back and put her feet up on top of the windshield, wiggling her bare toes.

"Cambridge is up to his ears in vile fluids this time," I shouted over the music.

"Umph," grunted Kim.

"This is not good—this is way uncool. Some killing might have to be done," I said, accelerating around a blue mini-van filled with surfers.

"Umph," grunted Kim again without turning her head. She was starting to twitch on what I could tell was going to be a serious caffeine high. She must have eaten a quarter-pound of raw coffee. That's bad news, even for someone traditionally in a state of such arbitrary chemical imbalance as her.

The church was in a state of maximum consternation when we arrived. Men in black tuxedos were running about higgledy-piggledy, animated on the front lawn like epileptic penguins. Women in long white dresses and flowers were agitatedly discussing something at a fevered pitch.

"You'd better take this," I said to Kim, pulling an orange life preserver out of the shopping bag. "It looks pretty hairy up there."

She only grunted again, but her eyes were open now, wide like saucers and her feet were tapping like a double bass player doing a roll. I pulled another life preserver out and over my head, snapping and tying it in case an avalanche of raw sewage come down around us. *I,* for one, was going to be a floater, not a sinker.

People were running up and down the church steps like maggots over stale roadkill. Fat people, ugly people, the same crazy Philistines who are at every wedding. They come included in the price of tuxedo rental, I think. Then there were a lot of Cambridge's relatives from the reservation milling about. You could spot them easily because they all had long black hair and they were, every one, unimaginably intoxicated.

"What the hell's going on?" I asked one of the wedding clowns. She eyed my life jacket and I waited for her to say something stupid so that I could jump on her head or maybe slash one of her ears off with the K-Bar.

"Derrik's locked himself in the bathroom!" she wailed in response, casting her hands over her face in anguish. "He's got Dominique in there with him and he won't come out!"

Kim was shaking all over now, and although it was about a hundred and four degrees, her teeth were banging together faster than a fly's wings. She wasn't wearing her life preserver—she was just holding it by the strap and dragging it behind her.

"I knew this was going to happen," I said to Kim. "He couldn't take it." We stomped off into the church.

There were about thirty people clustered around the bathroom door, most of them men—though I recognized Dominique's mother from photographs. She was in hys-

terical tears. None of them were Indians, so I assumed they were all related to Dominique. Cambridge's relatives, I later discovered, were taking this opportunity to savagely devastate the unguarded sacramental wine stored in the basement.

"Derrik, *please come out!"* Dominique's mother choked. A tall man with graying temples and a belligerent attitude knocked sternly on the door.

"Derrik, this is serious now. Just let Dominique out and we can talk. Just let her out, Derrik. Don't make me angry."

"Don't frighten him," counseled a short, fat, Peter Lorre type. He dabbed his forehead nervously.

"I knew that Indian was bad news. Damn heathen savages," someone said.

"Everybody out of the way," I roared, coming up behind them, "I've just escaped from an institution and may kill again!" *Nobody* insults Cambridge's relatives. They all turned to look at us. Kim was rigid as a board, rhythmically pounding her head on the wall like a woodpecker.

"Who the hell are you?" demanded the authoritarian with the aforementioned graying temples.

"The United States Fucking Marines, you sorry aphids," I said, widening my eyes insanely and ripping the K-Bar from its sheath. There was a squawk and everybody jumped back about three feet. The guy with the temples pointed an accusing finger.

"You—"

"Shut up, you gnarled, ugly toad of a man!" screamed Kim, yanking the flowers out of a vase and tearing them apart with her teeth. She probably had enough spare nervous energy by then to rip a horse in half.

I banged on the door as hard as I could, shouting, "Cambridge, old buddy, hang on! We're here to rescue you! We're busting you out! I've got your R2 unit, I'm here with Ben Kenobi!" I shoved the knife between my teeth and raced down the hallway, grabbing Kim's hand. With the other one, she was swinging her life jacket around her head to keep the weirdoes at bay. Through the church and down the steps we shot like living arrows, scattering old people with menacing gestures and fearsome war whoops, around the side of the building, looking for a frosted window. I could hear the rumble of pursuers behind us; the savage, carnal cry of caterers, lousy insurance salesmen, and used-car dealers whose wives are ugly and know how to play bridge.

"There," said Kim, pointing.

"Give me a leg up." She cupped her hands together and I stepped in them. She lifted me to the window.

"Derrik!" I shouted. "Open the window!"

"I tried that," he coughed back. I could see the hazy outline of his face through the glass. "It's locked, or stuck, or painted shut or something. Get me the hell out of here!"

"Well then, back off, back off," I shouted and when I heard him scramble away, with four clean blows from the K-Bar I smashed the windowpane and brushed the chunks into the bathroom. They tinkled and cracked on the tile floor. A thick cloud of marijuana smoke boiled out.

"Come on," I said, "hurry."

"Those disgusting and foul-smelling Nazis are coming," groaned Kim through gritted teeth.

Dominique came out feet first in her long, white wedding gown, a half-empty bottle of Southern Comfort in each hand. Cambridge lowered her down.

We roared off with the top down and Kim stoically hurling large, white hunks of cauliflower at road signs and pedestrians.

"Here," I said, taking off my life jacket and throwing it around her neck, "You'll need this; the rancid treacle's really deep out here. You'll have to wear this to keep from drowning in it."

"Here," said Cambridge from the window. "Catch." He threw down Dominique's veil, which I caught, and her bouquet, which Kim leapt wildly to avoid. Cambridge jumped down.

"You were right: I couldn't take the banality. It's a nightmare in there. I was going nuts being surrounded by all those weirdoes."

Just then the crazy barbarians rounded the corner of the church not thirty feet away—macho-men in tuxedos trying to save Dominique from *us* crazy barbarians.

"There they are!" someone shouted.

"My car's out front," I said to Cambridge. "Keys're in it."

"We've got to get my Uncle, Belching Eagle," he said urgently, bobbing on his feet like a baseball player getting ready to steal third. His feet were bare and he had cut off the legs of his tux just above the knees. The jacket and the bow tie were gone.

"Well, where the hell is he?"

"Passed out in my car."

"Go then, go!" I brandished my knife at the macho-men and shouted: "Die, you shiteatingnazirepublican pig-fuckers! I'll crack your skulls open and stuff them with dry leaves! I'll feed your intestines to dogs!"

I put the veil on.

Kim gave a primal scream and charged them, swinging the life jacket. Cambridge and Dominique disappeared

around the back of the church. The vermin swarmed around us. Kim bellowed, rushing the Nazi-king and clocking him in the side of the head with the life jacket. It made a sound like a wet blanket falling a dozen stories onto a cardboard box full of peanut shells.

"Die, you scum-suckers!" I shouted and ran at them. They quivered momentarily and then fled like the maniac pansy-cowards they were, splintering into a dozen different directions and fleeing for their very lives, yelping like dazed and wounded hyenas with rock salt in their haunches. I screamed incomprehensible obscenities and raced off after them with Kim five steps ahead of me screaming: "Cannibals! You'll drown in your own blood!" We routed them like Custer's army, until they had mostly shinnied up trees or squirmed beneath cars where Kim would set their ugly, protruding feet on fire with an old Zippo and a can of lighter fluid. When we reappeared around the front of the church, several of Cambridge's relatives were lying asleep on the lawn, lazily dressed in buckskin tuxedos and feathered headdresses. Carnage and mayhem were everywhere. Squirrels and turtles ran amok. The air seemed to be filled with a maelstrom of burning leaves and shrapnel. Derrik and Dominique were sitting in the back seat of the car. He had Petunia's massive head in his hands and kept trying to push her out of the car shouting "Kill! Kill!" But all she would do was lay there and drool like a diarrhetic rhinoceros with inflamed salivary glands. Several of the remaining macho-men surrounded the car and Dominique was busily heaving coffee cups and chunks of cauliflower at their pea-shaped heads while crazily waving a sharpened stick in her left hand. Kim and I jumped into the car, almost causing serious bodily harm to Derrik's Uncle, Belching Eagle, who was lying comatose across the front seat.

"Scurvied ruffians!" I bellowed, throwing the car in gear and scattering them like chickens, Kim firing off a barrage of viscous and accurate snot-hockers as we passed. Down the lane we raced and vanished over a hill. Dominique's veil flew off my head in the wind and sailed upward and upward into the air, as though it were made of helium, waving its arms like a crazy, lazy, friendly space octopus saying good-bye as it climbed home through the atmosphere. In the rearview mirror, just as we reached the top of the hill, I could see the losers shaking their fists at us.

AND THAT, HOBBY MY FRIEND, IS THE TRUE STORY OF the gypsy's wedding. About thirty miles down the road we stopped at a bar where Belching Eagle was forced back into consciousness by way of five or six gallons of ice water, and being a medicine man, he married Dominique and Cambridge in a very cosmic and perhaps even legally binding manner, then suddenly relapsed into his state of alcohol-caused catatonia. We left him there, propped up on a bar stool.

"Where to now?" asked Dominique frivolously. She kissed me hard on the mouth. Her tongue slid down my throat and into my stomach like a raw oyster. She put her arms around our waists—Derrik's and mine—hugging us close.

"Swaziland," I said.

"The Caribbean," said Cambridge.

"The Caribbean," I assented. "Sounds good." He went to get some clothes from the luggage in the trunk, but I stopped him, making hasty assurances that he looked just fine. Now that we were all in the same boat, I had to think of a way to get rid of half a pound of South American Hissing Cockroaches as unobtrusively as possible.

"I'm not going," said Kim. I looked at her. "I can't go anywhere, I don't *want* to go anywhere."

"There will be wacky times, and wild orgies in *the big bed,"* I suggested gleefully.

"We'll beat stray tourists with rocks and sticks until they bleed from many orifices, and we'll inject small animals into our bodies…" added Derrik, climbing into the front seat without opening the door.

"Good company," offered Dominique, now sandwiched in between us. Still, Kim shook her head, twisting her lips into a wry pucker that drifted off to one side of her face. Derrik snapped a picture of her with his Nikon and we left Petunia with her.

"Go back to our house and burn it down," I said, getting in the car. "As a favor to me." Kim nodded serenely and patted Petunia on the wet snout. The dog moaned, or farted, or something, and lifted its head in a forlorn ignorance.

THE THREE OF US STAYED TOGETHER FOR ABOUT FOUR years down there; it's hard to tell time when the water's so blue, you know? But finally the jungle rot and the perpetual hangovers from Cambridge's bad coconut rum caused me to head back to civilization.

The last I ever saw of Cambridge and Dominique was about two years later: they had bought a boat and were running bananas or mangos or something from Honduras or Nicaragua or some place and living in a tin shack with a family of Rastafarians on a little island off San Paulette. They had the one kid then, named Zongo or Jungle Boy or Tarzan or something. She'd just finished her book and he was trying to raise capital for a mosquito farm, I think.

You just ruminate on this, Hobby: Cambridge baked his brain in the sun down there. Whatever he told you about the wedding probably wasn't true. I've told it like it was.

Yours, *Et Cetera,*
HOMER

BREAD BASKET

BY KYLE CASSIDY

• Here at InterText*, we pride ourselves in putting out issues on a regular basis. We swear that this story has absolutely nothing to do with us. Honest. •*

ASIDE FROM THE VOLUMINOUS YEARBOOK, WHICH approaches biblical proportions in both size and mythology, the literary magazine *Bread Basket* is the only publication which comes out of the University of Indiana at Weehawken. We don't have a newspaper or anything, only the literary magazine. They've got an office on the fourth floor of the Student Union. The school is big, but the office is small and cluttered with junk. The staff is huge. It seems that everybody with a weird haircut is on the ed-board of that rag, but this year for some reason they haven't done anything, not a thing, and it's almost graduation.

Editorship of *Bread Basket* at one time was the greatest privilege the student body could bestow upon any sub-mortal undergraduate grunt; now it's more or less a sinecure. My former roommate and mentor Alex Sutpin was the editor for an unprecedented two years. That was a while ago—he's dead now. (Alex was killed in a gruesome combine accident, but that's another story.) Myself, I've never even really been on the staff. They were always too cool for me. Recently though, they seem to have fallen upon stereotypically hard and unproductive times.

"Have you guys read my story yet?" I say as I push my way into the junk-filled office. Taft is standing on the sofa wearing a toga and little round purple sunglasses. His feet are bare and he has two amazingly grotesque birthmarks on his left calf.

"Huh?"

"Has anyone read my story yet?"

"What issue did you submit it for?" asks a dazed young woman with aviator shades and a bandanna tied around her head. All in all there are about seven people in the office. Aside from Taft and this vapid woman, two guys are sitting on the sofa at Taft's feet. One of them is leering down stupidly at two open cans of Joe's Beer he has perched on a mud-brown cardboard lunch tray which is in his lap, the other one I can't see through Taft's immensely hairy legs. Another woman is hunched over the typewriter, not typing, wearing what looks like a wet suit and a diving mask. There is some abstract person in the corner staring up into the shade of the floor lamp.

"November. I gave it to you guys in *November."*

"Oh," she says.

"Come on, get in the picture," said Taft. "We're taking a picture."

"Huh?" I'm carrying a book bag and thinking that if this keeps up, I'm going to end up working on my dad's farm for the rest of my life and that I'll never get out of this crappy state unless I can get an education. I've been here five semesters and I still don't feel too smart.

"Get in the picture. We're taking pictures for the yearbook." The girl in the aviators stares senselessly at me with her mouth hanging open, like I have duck shit on my face or something.

"Yearbook picture?"

"Yeah," says Taft, "we're taking a whole four page layout for the yearbook of us just writing poems and working on the magazine."

"You're taking a fucking *yearbook* picture? Jesus Christ, it's *May* and you haven't put out a single issue. You're supposed to do *nine."*

" 'sat the printers," says Taft, striking a melodramatic Grecian pose. There is no photographer in the room, and they all look stoned and lifeless.

"What's at the printers? There's nothing at the printers. Have any of you even looked at my story yet?"

"What was it called?" asks the woman at the typewriter. I can see now that she is wearing flippers.

"What do you mean, *'What was it called?'* It's the only damned submission you've got and you *lost* it?"

"We didn't lose it," says the first woman, the one with the aviators. She seems to have suddenly woken up, and now her mouth closes like a bug trap. "We just haven't got around to reading it yet."

Across from the sofa is a floor-to-ceiling bookcase filled with books that nobody's read. The woman at the typewriter pulls a half-pint flask of whiskey from the machine's guts. She takes a swig of it and then shoves it back inside.

"It's *May* and you haven't put out a single issue. You're supposed to do *nine!"*

"Keeping in shape?" says the guy with the two beer cans on the tray. He doesn't look up at me. He's wearing a red Bob's Guns T-shirt and an absurdly tall straw cowboy hat. He's got dreadlocks protruding from beneath his hat, which is pretty risque in Indiana, let me

tell you. I recognize him vaguely—his name is Vance or Lance or something. There is a drop of spit dangling from his lower lip.

"What?"

He doesn't answer me.

"Are you *going* to read it?"

"Oh yeah. Sure." This is the woman in the aviators again. She's wearing a faded, dark blue UIW sweatshirt. "It's really warm outside, isn't it? Did you come from outside?"

"Yes I came from outside. It is warm." I don't know why I am answering her.

"You look like you're really keeping in shape," says the guy with the beer cans. He still hasn't looked at me. I'm wearing a Charlie Daniels T-shirt with this blue flannel thing over top of it to hide my sagging gut. It crosses my mind that I look like a fat slob and that I should lose some weight.

"I'm going home."

"Naw," says Taft, jumping down from the sofa. "Stay here. Get in the picture. You're an integral part of this magazine. Here, get in the picture."

"Integral part? What the hell are you talking about? There's not even a goddamn *camera* in here."

"Not important," says the woman at the typewriter.

"You haven't put out a single issue of this magazine."

"Not important," she says again with a loud, choking hiccough. I notice that the guy in the corner has his whole head shoved up inside the lamp shade.

"…bright," he says languidly.

"We're advertising on the radio now," says the woman in the aviators; she's not talking to me. "For submissions. We've got commercials on WKBS now."

"The last meeting was really packed," says the guy with the beer cans without looking up.

"We're giving Iowa a run for their money," she says.

"Iowa?" says Taft.

"The University of Iowa."

"Hey, let's all go out and watch the harvest," pipes up the woman at the typewriter, feeling suddenly farmish. Her voice is nasal because of the diving mask. "We could write a group-experience poem about it."

"They don't harvest in *May,"* says the guy on the sofa that I couldn't see before, who now reminds me of an albino Bela Lugosi. "They don't even *plant* in May. How long have you been living in Indiana?"

"I need a beach," she says.

"Hey," I say, waving good-bye. "You guys have got it all under control without me. I'm going home."

"Really nice out," says Vance or Lance or whatever.

"Yeah. You guys don't need me hanging around here."

"Sure you don't want to be in the picture?"

DOWNSTAIRS I RUN INTO THIS GUY WHO I WENT TO HIGH school with named Two-By-Four-Tom. We called him this because during the Fourth of July parade when we were both eight, he rode his bicycle full-tilt into the back of a parked truck filled with lumber. Must have been going twenty miles an hour. There's this crazy rectangular scar smack in the middle of his forehead the exact size and shape of a two-by-four end. He's married now and is working on his masters in psychotherapy at UIW. He tells me that his younger brother just got his law degree at Columbia. He's practicing in the city now, in Indianapolis, at Rabinowitz, Rabinowitz, Rabinowitz, Schwartz and Mussolini or something.

"It's really nice out," he says as I'm about to go, and I notice that there's something wrong with his eyes—they're too green. I wonder if he's wearing contact lenses.

"Yeah," I say.

"Hey," he asks, all manly suave and tanned. "Are you still writing? Have you submitted anything to the literary magazine here? *Bread Basket?* It's a really nice one, I hear; giving Iowa a run for its money."

"No," I say. "I haven't submitted anything. I'm not really writing anymore."

"It's a shame," he says. "This is a good place to get published. I met a couple of people on the staff. They really look like good writers. You should submit to them."

"Maybe," I say and go outside. The weather is very nice.

KYLE CASSIDY cassidy@rowan.edu

Rides his motorcycle out into a field and plays with his PowerBook instead of pulling all his hair out. He has a collection of hammers the envy of people the world over.

SUE AND FRANK

BY MARK SMITH

• Some people keep on smiling, even as their dreams are shattered. Other people never quite pick up the pieces. Finding your way between those two extremes might be the toughest choice of all. •

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU LOST YOUR WEDDING ring?" said Sue Davidson to her husband Frank. Their car idled beside the arrivals curb at terminal B of Newark Airport. Two minutes before, Frank had emerged from the sliding doors, tossed his tidy suit bag into the back seat of their Accord, piled into the front and announced without so much as a prologue that he had lost his wedding ring somewhere in Washington, D.C. sometime during the last four days. Now he sat looking across at his wife, the thin angular lines of his red face heightened by the crisp folds of his London Fog raincoat. The bustle and excitement of travel which he brought into the car was at odds with Susan's mood.

"Yeah, it was the damnedest thing. Right in the middle of my big meeting with Thompson, I looked down and it was gone." He held his left hand up, fingers outstretched in a number five gesture. Sure enough, there was no ring, though Sue fancied she could make out the indentation in the skin of his finger as though he had just now taken it off.

"I can't believe it!" she said.

"Well, you don't have to look like that. I didn't mean to lose it." Frank had adopted the managerial tone he had acquired through years of supervising large office staffs.

"It's just that, well, I just can't believe you didn't notice something."

"Honey, do you, ah, think we could get going? I'm kind of tired and I'd like a shower before bed."

Sue jammed the gear shift into drive and lurched away from the curb. Instinctively, Frank glanced over his left shoulder to check the traffic. Fine, thought Sue, he goes away for four days on a business trip—which seemed to be getting more frequent all the time—and now he was going to shower for thirty minutes and then pile into bed with a report or some fat, slick trade magazine. No doubt about it, an hour after they got home he'd be snoring away. Never mind what she might want once in a while.

"Strange as it sounds," he said, "I didn't notice it until I was in that meeting with Thompson. I said 'Jesus, I've lost my wedding ring!' and she said—"

"She?" said Sue.

"Yeah. Thompson. Janet Thompson from our Washington office. I'm sure I've told you about her before."

"Oh, well," she muttered. "I guess you did." Big fluffy snowflakes had started to fall, turning to water the instant they hit the windshield just in time to be swept away by the wipers. Sue felt her mind become clouded and jumbled. Her emotions swarmed and crowded together like an angry, volatile mob. Certainly she felt no jealousy about Frank's meeting with this Thompson. (Was it some new business convention to refer to female colleagues by their last names? It sounded so efficient and powerful.) He worked with women every day. No, what really galled her was the thought of this other woman, well-dressed, confident, successful, knowing something intimate about their marriage while Sue whistled away in her fool's paradise. She could imagine the show of sympathy and concern this hard-nosed, corporate-climbing career woman had displayed while to herself she laughed at the pathetic wife, off somewhere blissfully ignorant, powerless, forgotten.

What really galled her was the thought of this other woman, well-dressed, confident, successful, knowing something intimate about their marriage while Sue whistled away in her fool's paradise.

Frank kept on blathering: "She said, 'Well, you have to find it, that's all there is to it.' "

"How kind of her," said Sue.

"I thought so," said Frank.

"So we got the check right away and—"

"What, were you at lunch?"

"Dinner," said Frank. "And I went straight back to my room and searched high and low. I even went back to the bar where I had stopped for a cocktail that evening, and also the hotel restaurant. Nada. Of course, my room had been cleaned by then. I figured that if housekeeping had gotten hold of it, good luck ever seeing that ring again."

Good old Frank. When his pal Stan got caught cheating the IRS and went to that country club prison upstate, Frank had been really pissed. But when it came to hired help, they weren't to be trusted. To hear Frank, you'd think the blue collar of the world were just waiting to steal the dirt out from under your fingernails, though there'd be slim pickings from Frank in that department.

"So that's it?" said Sue as they pulled onto the northbound turnpike. The snow was coming down harder and cars had begun to slow down. The landscape had begun to take on a steely gray aspect, and the mirror-like slickness of the pavement reflected the red tail lights of thousands of commuters headed home.

"What else can I say, honey? You know how much that ring meant to me. I wouldn't have lost it for the world."

He had dropped the managerial tone now and fallen back on his old standby Mr. Charm voice that he had always used to such advantage, especially with Sue. Frank could charm piss out of a snake when he wanted to.

"But you did lose it. I just can't believe it."

"What do you want me to do?" said Frank. "I'm sorry, okay? I lost the ring. I didn't want to lose it. It just happened. I'll get another, I promise."

Case closed. Debit recorded in the unrecoverable loss column. Dead letter file. Sue opened her mouth, then closed it again. What more could she say?

"Good thing we'll be home before the snow gets bad," said Frank with forced cheerfulness. "I hate to drive in the snow."

"You're not driving, Frank. I am," said Sue flatly. They rode in silence the rest of the way home.

LATELY, SUE HAD ACQUIRED THE HABIT OF WAKING IN the middle of the night and wandering around the house poking into this and that, doing nothing in particular. She told herself that she delighted in the pleasant perversity of being awake when the rest of the world slept, but the truth was she felt more comfortable and secure in the wee hours. Sue found herself increasingly overwhelmed with the small things in life. She felt that she literally had to hold on for dear life as the Earth careened through space. When the world was quiet and still and asleep, at those times and those times alone, Sue felt like she was in control of something, that the progress of time was slowed down to a speed she could manage.

Also, the big modern house that Frank had insisted on buying over her objections seemed cold to the point of being alien during the day. (She would have preferred something more Victorian that she could decorate with baskets of potpourri, stencilled wall paper and lots of duck decoys and antiques.) But at night the house seemed softer and more comfortable.

She poured a glass of red wine and wandered into the study and looked until she found the photo album that had the pictures of her wedding. She took this into the living room, set her wine on the glass coffee table and burrowed down into the deep cushions of their sectional sofa.

Had it been ten years already? Of course, she had gained some weight. How could she not? Sitting around the house all day. Oh, well she kept busy enough between volunteering at the library, church activities, and with her friends. But there was no real need to work. Frank had discouraged it, in fact, not because he didn't feel it was proper but because it screwed up their income tax bracket or something.

She never had thought she would be a housewife. She always dreaded the thought of that. When she met Frank she had just gone back to school to work on a masters in psychology, but she never finished. Before that, she worked at a number of odd jobs that never seemed to amount to anything.

She found herself wishing idly for children, but the day for that had also come and gone. She married Frank when she was in her early thirties. There was still time then, and they talked about it often, but the time never seemed to be right and year had followed year and here she was in her early forties. Technically, she could still consider the possibility, but in truth, the idea had stopped appealing to her the way it once did. If things seemed too complicated without kids, what would it be like with? Anyway, she didn't want to be sixty with a child in high school.

As she stared one by one at the pictures, a thought began to present itself. Not a new thought to her, but expressed with more clarity and force than before: *it wasn't supposed to be this way.* She had agreed to a different set of conditions ten years before. She had signed onto a different agenda. Frank was a business major who was going to make enough to keep them fed and clothed and spend the rest of his time playing bass with a rock and roll band that he and his friends kept trying to start. That dream lasted exactly one month and one gig and then fell to pieces when Interworld had called and recruited him straight from college.

"Still up?" said Frank from the hall door. He stood in his pajamas and robe, well-dressed even in the middle of the night. He squinted into the lighted room, his eyes adjusting to the light.

"Up again," Sue answered. She took a sip of the wine. The crystal was cold against her lips, but the wine felt round and warm as it rolled across her tongue. She expected Frank would turn and go back to bed, but instead he crossed the white pile carpet and settled beside her on the sofa. Why did he seem to be growing thinner over the years as she grew more plump? The question mystified more than annoyed her.

"I'm sorry about the ring," he said.

"Oh, it's okay. I made too much of it."

"No you didn't. It was stupid of me."

"Let's not talk about it anymore," she said. After a moment she said, "Frank?"

"Hmmm?"

"Let's get in the car and drive."

He looked surprised. "Where do you want to go?"

"Nowhere in particular. Everywhere. Don't you remember when we used to talk about driving across the country? Let's do it now. We could go down south. I've never been down there. It's slower and calmer there. We won't take any interstates, just country roads. We'll stop at every general store and main street diner we come to. We'll buzz into each town, buy postcards and buzz out. We'll stay in tacky tourist courts and stop at the historical markers. We'll go to McDonald's and buy two coffees, fill up the thermos and then get refills for the road."

Sue became animated as she talked, but Frank just forced a thin half smile and said, "You're kidding, right?"

"No," said Sue, shaking her head. "I'm not."

"But, honey. I have a job. I couldn't just walk out. I have appointments. I have at least ten clients coming in this week. I'd love to take a vacation. Really. How about next summer? I'll put in a leave request now. But not on the spur of the moment."

Sue nodded and took another sip from her wine. For no good reason, she felt a sudden and overwhelming urge to ask her husband if he had slept with anyone else since they were married. She fought down the urge. Partly because she had made a promise to herself years before that she would never ask. Partly because she knew the answer would depress her no matter what it was. But mostly she realized that to even want to ask the question at all meant that some profound circumstance had changed in a way that made the answer irrelevant.

She nodded again and said, "Yeah, maybe in the summer. It's too cold now anyway."

THE NEXT MORNING, AFTER SUE HAD DROPPED FRANK at the station to join the other commuters who stood hunched in their long, thick clothes on the platform, their breath turning into tiny clouds in the frozen air, she went home and packed an overnight bag.

She made a pot of coffee and took it to the kitchen table. She gathered up paper and a pen and sat at the table under a heart carved in the high-backed, Dutch-style bench, the most old-fashioned furnishing in the house and her favorite place to sit. She drank coffee and wrote a note to Frank. She wrote that she was leaving and taking the car. He'd get along without it and seldom drove it anyway. She also wrote that she would probably be back, though as she did, she wondered if this were true.

She reread the note. It didn't express her feelings, but it would do. She had a second cup of coffee and wondered vaguely where she would spend the night. She didn't have much cash, but plenty of credit cards and that would hold her for a while.

Finally, she got up and rinsed her cup and put it in the drainer. She put the note on the countertop and gathered up all her bulky winter clothes that she liked so much because they were comforting and because they hid her figure. She took her old sleeping bag, too. She hadn't used it in years, but you never know when you might need a sleeping bag.

As she pulled the front door to, she saw that the mailman had been by already. Compulsively, she took the mail from the box and looked to see if anything had come for her. There was a Land's End catalog, another from Victoria's Secret (Frank had even stopped enjoying those), a bill from New Jersey Bell, an fat envelope of coupons, and a small, oddly bulky envelope from the hotel where Frank had stayed in Washington.

She didn't have to open the envelope to know what was inside. She could even feel the outline of the ring through the paper. She stood for several minutes holding the envelope, letting the significance of it flood over her. She considered her choices. The fact of the envelope and her absolute control of it filled her with an excitement that seemed out of proportion to its importance.

Finally, she jammed the envelope into the pocket of her coat. She stuffed the rest of the mail back into the mailbox and turned to lock the front door. She walked carefully down the front steps and out to the car. The snow continued to fall, and she noticed where her earlier footsteps had already been filled in by a new carpet of flakes. Pretty soon they would be invisible, as though she had never walked there at all.

She threw her things in a messy heap in the back seat and set out for the highway. She felt good as she thought about the ring in her pocket and the security it gave her — like a tiny golden life raft.

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EDDIE'S BLUES

BY G.L. EIKENBERRY

• Like the endless tides, life goes in cycles: sometimes up, sometimes down. Even as you watch the waters pull away, leaving you beached on land, remember: give it time. The tide will rise. •

TIME WAS, THE EYES INSIDE HIS HEAD SHOWED HIM the harbor for what it had been in the city's early days.

But now he looks down from Point Pleasant's overlook and sees nothing that doesn't register on physical retinas. Layer after layer of rejections and missed chances just keep on piling up, feeding on each other, wearing down the romance, the visions—back *then* when different things mattered—when a man could walk the docks freely, his head held high, seeking not a mindless job just to pay the rent and keep a body in burgers and smokes, but a berth on a good ship—an adventure.

Now there's nothing but the container pier, almost dead; the autoport and refineries, their promises of prosperity long tarnished; sleek office towers and a wild jumble of stone, brick, and wood frame buildings: just Halifax—the sharp-edged, paint peeling, corrosive twentieth century edition. No tall ships, no romance, no dockyard throngs—*no chance*. The make-believe waterfront is practically reserved for tourists, the few working docks practically reserved for machines.

"Some Maritimer you are," she preached. "Use the time like a gift—do all the things you couldn't find the time for before they laid you off."

What's happening to him? Six years now in Halifax with plenty of highs and even more lows. Then, when he first arrived, crammed full of history, books and dreams, he was popular with the ladies—young, blond, chiseled features, tall, sleek, hard prairie farmhand muscles. It had been easy. He took a few courses, and worked when he felt like it, changing jobs like he changed socks: when it suited him. Maybe there were tough times back then too, but they easily succumbed to the magic—going down to wash away the lows with his private view of the harbor—flying back across 230 years to the era that had drawn him to the old seaport.

Now the city sulking below him drains the once-was city from his veins—feeds an intense pressure throbbing out against his temples—mocks his used-up luck, his still unrealized possibilities.

Then it was 230 years of maritime history that drew him to the edge of the continent. Now it's 28 years of personal history that mocks, goads, beckons from a different edge. If he had a boat he'd make for open water and offer himself up to the first seething Atlantic gale snarling across the Coast Guard's weather radar.

But all he's got is a bicycle. Blue, kind of battered but dependable—he picked it up from Dan, trading a stereo he almost never used anyway. It gets him around, but it doesn't get him the sea.

He pumps the old Peugeot up the hill to be alone—to watch the city bleed into the harbor. To reach back. To think.

What he thinks about is making do with what he's got. What he thinks about is purging the boat he'll never own from his mind and pedaling away from all the hassles and all the promises that never have and never will pan out. He thinks about the rent that isn't paid, won't be paid, can't be paid, about grinding that screw of a slumlord underneath the tires, about spinning down along the shore.

He thinks about the job roster down at the Halifax Longshoremen's Association—the one that rarely offers work to Eddie Plett. He thinks about feeding that list into the bicycle's chain, shredding it into freedom. Away. Eastward.

At first he worked at simplifying, purifying his life, but what's the point? He gave up drinking, except for the odd beer. It doesn't help. He's down to half a pack of smokes a day, but that doesn't make much difference either, except maybe for a few extra cents a week for burgers and chips.

Most of his so-called friends seem to be too busy for him these days. Oh, sure, Christi hasn't quite given up on him yet, but even her patience seems to be wearing thin. He has always considered her something of a kindred spirit—not like all the good-time Susies that fade into the shadows when things begin to go a little sour—but, the other night she called him a self-indulgent jerk.

"Some Maritimer you are," she preached, "You've got to learn to think of these stretches of unemployment as a blessing. Use the time like a gift—do all the things you couldn't find the time for before they laid you off. What about that dory you're always planning to build?"

Yeah, sure, build it with what? Out of dreams? Treat the time like a gift? After fourteen months anything he

ever wanted to do has either been done or costs too much. So what's the point? Why stick around?

It's late. The past is all used up and the future is crowding in. The chill he feels goes deeper than the chill that precedes the sunset.

He waits for the moon, but nothing changes.

That's it, then. The decision is made. It sits on the knot in his throat, waiting for him to do something about it.

He wheels down the hill and up out of the park. Christi'll get on his case about running away from his problems. She might even try to talk him out of it.

Her apartment is up on the north end, a fifteen minute spin on the Peugeot. It's a bright moon. Wispy clouds break across its face on a surging, leaping nor'west wind—the kind of wind that, back when the only waves he knew were waves of wheat, used to carry his thoughts east—way beyond the limitations of reality.

He's already off and away by the time he rolls up in front of Christi's place. It's a nice place. She's got a four room flat. She's got furniture. She's got a job.

Before he even realizes it he's up the stairs and at Christi's door. She said he could save his rent—stay there with here until he got back on his feet, but they both know it wouldn't work.

He's already gone—the freedom—the release pumping through his veins. But he knocks on her door anyway—just to let her know.

The face she wears when she answers the door says she won't be trying to change his mind tonight. She won't even notice the good feeling building in his chest, percolating up, slipping out through the small crack of his smile. Somebody's in there with her. A guy. Necktie, suit, the works. Looking right at home. Mr. Right.

"Oh, hi, Eddie. You must be looking for that book of spells and incantations I was telling you about. Last week. *You know*, at Ginger's. I can let you borrow it, but you have to promise to be careful. It's my cousin's—it's really old—ancient. Wait here. I'll get it for you."

So maybe he is a self-indulgent jerk, but he doesn't need a telegram to figure out what's going on. He may be broke, but he's not stupid. But what the hell, why make a fuss? No point in making things awkward in front of Mr. Right. Mr. Desk Job. Mr. Paycheck Every Friday. But what damned book?

Returning with a crumbly, leather-covered book, smelling of musty old streamer trunks and attics, the face she wears says it all. "Just take the book," it says. It's a face that reminds him that, even when things go right there can still be knots in the throat—knives in the gut. She's finally got a shot at the things the guys she usually hangs out with can't give her. So who can blame her? If opportunity walks up and kicks you in the ass you can't ignore it.

He leaves. He can't to take off for good without going home to pick up a couple of things first, but he can't go there 'til the slumlord's lackey of a superintendent heads off to his graveyard shift job.

So he goes down the street to the cafe—the same place he used to go to with Christi. Killing time. Drinking tea. Flipping through the old book — she just wouldn't let him get away without it.

She's finally got a shot at the things the guys she usually hangs out with can't give her. Who can blame her?

The pages fall open to a place marked with one of Christi's fabric scrap bookmarks. A spell to turn a run of bad luck.

That's Christi, all right. Always ready with the free advice.

Another tea, the book, the spell—and the guy on Christi's davenport. Mr. Right? Mr. Just-What-the-Checkbook-Ordered? A run of bad luck turned around? Read the spell. Nothing too complicated. What's the harm in pulling up a few weeds?

EDDIE SLIPS UP THE FIRE ESCAPE AND IN THROUGH THE door on the roof. His Queen Street bedsitting room stays dark, just in case the super is running a little late.

The exhilaration of the decision to split is fading now. Everything's closing in again—all the jobs somebody else got, the rent he hasn't paid for almost three months, Christi, the guy on her sofa, the jobs, the bills, the guy, Christi—a run of bad luck.

A run of bad luck—real bad—shattering—splintering, stabbing with sharp edges: past, present, future. Eddie gets up and lights a small, dark candle.

Eddie opens up Christi's cousin's book.

Grass blown by an east wind. Grass blown by a west wind. Grass blown by a north wind. Weave it into an amulet. Steep it in rain borne on a south wind. Steep it under a full moon up on the roof for good measure. Well, almost full, anyway—what the hell. Mumble a little Latin or something. Everybody does it, right? Cast a quick spell to change a run of bad luck, right?

How stupid can you get?

Is he taking off or isn't he?

It's 3:37 a.m. A good time to break away.

Away. Down along the waterfront.

Away. Up to Brunswick Street. Along the city's spine, gliding out onto the bridge, out across the harbor. Out through Dartmouth. Lawrencetown. Wheels spinning.

Seaforth. The Chezzetcooks. Spinning hard. Musquodoboit Harbor. Thrusting, surging…

SUNLIGHT IS JUST BEGINNING TO SPILL OVER THE horizon, seeping in off the Atlantic.

The early morning wind blows over him, blows back to the city, the harbor that was, the tall ships from far-off lands—aromatic with the romance of the seven seas, with the rum, the tea, the salty, pungent, acrid, back-of-the-throat smell of the spice merchant's clipper.

Eddie Plett, pushing eastward, cresting yet another wave, pulling against the pitch of the wheel, peering through the viscous mists of another morning, drinking deeply of the wind, the spray, the snap of the sails, marvels at the luck of a farm boy like him—securing so choice a commission…

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COSMICALLY CONNECTED

BY AVIOTT JOHN

• Ever dreamed about immortality? Maybe if you saw what changes the future held, you'd change your tune. •

"THERE WAS ONLY PASSION IN THE BEGINNING," said the Old One slowly, pouring himself another round of gin. He added Saturn Ice and held up the glass admiringly, savoring the greens and golden yellows that flashed from the cold crystal and swirled like mists through the gin, glowing in the dying light as though breathing life into the potent liquid.

"And then what happened?" asked Little One. He loved listening to the Old One, Little One did, steeping himself in tales of other times on other worlds, wonderful times, wonderful worlds. Little One knew nothing of physical passion, which was a relic of those other times. Only the oldest survivors of civilization, widely-travelled oldsters like the Old One, could talk about these things from personal experience.

"The funny thing about physical passion is that it breeds its own kind of cosmic dynamics." The Old One sipped slowly, relishing the gin as he dreamt of other fountains at which he had drunk in his varied youth. He smiled faintly as he dreamt. Little One looked at the Old One with amused tolerance. Soon old age would take its toll of his spent shell and he would be gone. This particular formation of flesh and blood, living cells and human fiber, would cease to exist. After that Little One would only be able to communicate with the Old One by thought, and that was never as satisfying as the reality of flesh and blood. To think the Old One's thoughts in his own brain could and never would be as satisfying as listening to the sound of his reminiscing voice and seeing the twinkle of past happiness shine through his eyes.

"What do you mean, cosmic dynamics?"

"Don't look for exact meaning. You won't find any. If you try to grasp it, you will be disappointed."

"Why use these words, then? Why say something when you have nothing to say? And why be silent when you have something to say?"

"The master says, 'Tell me, what is the sound of one hand clapping?' And when you knew the answer, you heard the sound. Of course there was no answer, and that was the answer."

"You don't understand," said the Old One, banging his glass down on the tabletop in sudden annoyance. The table was a state-of-the-art force-field, a multicolored surface which absorbed all the impact of the Old One's movement. The glass would have shattered on any ordinary table. "You don't understand. We used to have other ways of communicating in those days."

"I know all about that," said Little One with a superior smile. "I've read in the history books that in the old days, your Stone Age, your predecessors used to communicate with harsh guttural cries."

"No. At the time I'm talking about we used to communicate without words, without using sound at all."

"What! You used to communicate without words?"

"Yes, of course." The Old One's thick, gray eyebrows rose to twin peaks. "We did it all the time."

"How could you communicate intellectual ideas without words? You're surely talking about writing. You used to set your thoughts down in cumbersome fashion on white planar surfaces using complicated, liquid-filled marking instruments and button-controlled hammer mechanisms."

"We had better ways than that and certain things are more worthwhile than abstract intellectual ideas," smiled the Old One. It was his turn to look superior. He took pity at Little One's perplexity. Little One thought he was clever. He thought wisdom lay in what he had learned in the history books. That knowing about pens, typewriters, word processors and other outdated writing implements increased his power. "Yes, we had better ways than that," the Old One repeated. "We used to communicate through our other three senses; touch, taste and smell."

Little One tinkled in amusement, humoring the older man. After all, he was two hundred years his senior, and one had to make allowances for that.

"Can you show me how?" he asked indulgently.

The Old One's hand shot out and smacked the open end of Little One's communicator, causing it to swell and turn blue.

"Like this, for instance," said the Old One pleasantly. "But there were other ways, which needed special circumstances."

"What kind of special circumstances?"

"Oh, um, privacy, for example."

"Privacy? Great Galactic Gonads! Why did you need privacy for communication?"

"Look. Little One. Do you know anything about philosophy?"

"Oh, that stuff!" Little One's communicator imploded in distaste. "An ancient educational tape did whisper something in my ear about philosophy. Why?"

"There were many kinds of philosophy, you know, and hundreds of different philosophers."

Little One was almost asleep with boredom. "Tell me more," he yawned.

"There were hundreds of different philosophers; Bacon, Locke, Spinoza, Radhakrishnan. There were dozens of schools of philosophy, the Greek, the Roman, the Judeo-Christian, the Hindu, the Buddhist and its Japanese offshoot, Zen."

The Old One, afire with enthusiasm for the past, paid no attention to Little One's gentle snore. He was speaking for himself, reliving other kinds of encounters, others ways of communication which were unfortunately now extinct.

"It's especially Zen I want to talk to you about, because this philosophy is particularly unconfined by those times. The language of Zen is modern even today, and I'm sure you'll have no problem grasping the ideas it tried to express. And through Zen, you'll be able to come to an understanding of the euphoria of communication by nonverbal means."

Little One was snoring loudly now, but the Old One did not wish to stop. He reached over and hit the button of his companion's passive voice recorder, knowing that the conversation would be automatically played back when the Little One awoke.

"Yes, communication by nonverbal means. It was wonderful, simply wonderful and it was impossible to express this wonder in words. For that you had to bypass words, conventional communication, and convey ideas in the mental shorthand of Zen." With a snap of his fingers, the Old One made an aural asterisk for Little One's passive recorder, so that he could insert a question here when he awoke.

"You have probably never heard of koans. A koan is a Zen mechanism whereby you try to associate ideas that are essentially non-associable. But you are asked to try; and in trying you realize the absurdity of trying, and learn to accept. Let me begin with an example. The most well-known of all koans was the following: The master says, clapping his hands, 'This is the sound of two hands clapping. Now tell me, what is the sound of one hand clapping?'

"And when you knew the answer, you heard the sound. Of course there was no answer, and that was the answer; and there was no sound, and it was that no-sound that you had to learn to hear, the sound of silence. And when you heard the sound of one hand clapping and accepted it, you were on the path, the Tao of Zen. No, it's wrong to say you were on the path. Rather, you yourself became the Tao of Zen, even as you, Little One, are the Tao of the twenty-fifth century. Do you see?"

The old one asked the question and inserted another aural asterisk here with a snap of his fingers.

"There was another famous example used by Zen to dislocate conventional ideas. This is told in the form of the following story. One day a would-be disciple went to the master and said: 'Teach me. I want to learn everything you know.' The master invited him to a cup of tea. He set a cup in front of the disciple and began to pour. The cup filled, overflowed, filled the tray and spilled over on the floor. Still the master poured. 'Master, master, my cup is full,' said the disciple finally. 'You are like this cup,' said the master. 'How can I fill you until you empty yourself?' "

The Old One stretched on his airbed.

"So you see, Little One, life was full of imperfections in those days, but it was these very imperfections that made everything so enjoyable. And often you had to drain yourself like the Zen master's cup, because until you were empty, you were not ready for another filling."

So saying, the Old One drained his glass and poured himself another gin. He was getting quite fuddled now, and the aching power of lost memories made him want to cry. There was a lump in his throat and he had difficulty swallowing, so he did not add Saturn Ice to the drink. He drank the gin pure, something his doctor had warned him never to do.

The power of nostalgia to transport him back to the happiness of his youth! Not that he hadn't been happy in later life. Of course he had. He had progressively left pieces of his body behind, to be replaced by more durable components. By the middle of the twenty-fourth century, he, like many others of his generation, was a completely new man, so new that the term "generation gap" ceased to have any meaning. Many of the Old One's parts were no different from that of the average twenty year-old. But there was one thing that the replacement people could not duplicate. The imprints that ancient sensations had left on his brain. These imprints were like the footprints of extinct animals immortalized and petrified in volcanic soil. And they were mind-numbingly beautiful.

He threw all caution overboard and poured himself a fifth glass of gin, three beyond his quota. Three hundred and seventy-eight years was a good old age. Or was it three hundred and eighty-eight? What did it matter? Time to go, in any case. Make a graceful exit. There was no point in hanging around slinging old-fashioned gins with the callous likes of Little One. Nowadays there was no difference between the sexes, so Little One knew nothing about old-fashioned sex. Twenty-fifth century intercourse was essentially a matter of exchanging views, and reproduction was a task for the qualified technician.

In his time, intercourse had meant something special; communication had been deep, ecstatic and wordless. He thought back to some times which had been special to him. He thought of her again, something he had not done for nearly a century. For some reason, at the instant when he thought of her, he stopped speaking to Little One. Deep inside of him, in his ultimate core, this was an experience that still demanded absolute privacy. Why, after all these years? He struggled to explain it, but could not. That too, was part of the Tao of Zen.

He was quite dizzy now, and thoughts swirled in and out of his gin-fogged brain like the mists that rose from the tray of multi-colored Saturn Ice on the force-field table beside his designer-molded air bed. Her image rose from the mists, as clearly defined in the fog as the last time he saw her, a century ago. She stood slim and erect and smiled at him. The Old One's heart swelled almost to bursting at her beauty. She would always be like that for him. Even now, wherever in the galaxy she was, and whatever outward form she had chosen, she would still be for him as he had last seen her.

Ah, beauty! The Old One sighed and slowly shook his head in the fading light. Who could define it? Each age has its own standards, and standards change with the ages. But this is what he had tried to tell her. That she had an ageless quality that would always remain the same. Her beauty was not bound by time. He remembered trying to explain that to her. And she had laughed.

"Wait till you see me a half-century from now."

And here he was, more than a century later. His body was feeble with age, but the memory of her was as powerful and clear as his longing for her beauty. What was this longing for her beauty? Was this simply a thing of firm flesh, pert breasts, slim calves and fine muscle tone? Of course that was a part of it. But the other part was something that you did not try to define. In the language of the Zen master, it was the sound of one hand clapping. And she brought forth that sound in the Old One. This was what he had tried to explain to her. That he loved her firm body, her beautiful face and her not-so-golden pubics. But even without all these charms, she would still bring forth in him that sound of Zen.

It was then the audacious thought arose in his brain. He would ask the question that may be asked only once in each lifetime.

"Do you see, Nina?" he said softly to her in the darkness. He thought there was an answering reply, but it was merely the sound of Little One snoring.

It was then the audacious thought arose in his brain. Of course he would do it. He would ask the Master of the Universe the question that may be asked only once in each lifetime. As soon as the Old One's mind was made up, the fog lifted from his brain and all his razor sharp perception flooded back to him. He absently tossed down the rest of the gin and then turned his eyes toward the nebula of Xanthus.

The old one pressed the button near his heart that activated the crucial transmitter, the single-use-only, one-way communication machine, and let his thoughts roll. His thoughts turned to her without his knowing why. And then he heard the voice close to his ear. It was a voice he had never heard before, but he instantly knew who it was. The Master of the Universe.

"You called?" asked the deep, friendly voice. "Are you sure about this? Do you want to take your Terminal Trip now?"

"Yes, yes."

"Are you sure?" the voice repeated. "You have some more time if you wish."

"I'm certain. I'm certain."

The Master of the Universe was nothing if not thorough.

"Would you mind stating your reasons for wishing to take this Terminal Trip?"

"Yes," said the Old One. Suddenly the last missing vestiges of Zen clarity came flooding into his mind and the meaning of *everything* became clear. "I mean no, I wouldn't mind stating my reasons for wishing to take the Terminal Trip. You see, Master of the Universe, I've been living for the past 150 years now in a world where the need for tactile communication has been eliminated and sex is nonexistent. The conditions of human life have been improved immeasurably, but I'm still used to, and long for, the old ways, imperfect though they were. I've had a good life, on the whole, and I have no complaints. From my point of view, you've done an excellent job."

"Thank you," said the Master of the Universe, deeply touched by the simple praise. It was not often that he was complimented by Terminal Trippers. More often than not, he was treated like a sort of galactic gondolier who merely ferried bodies to their final destinations.

"But now, I've had enough," the Old One continued. "I feel so empty and used up, and there's nothing left for me to do here. You probably can't tell me what the destination is, so I won't ask. But I want to go on, so please arrange my Terminal Trip at your earliest convenience."

There was a brief silence. "Very well. We will leave at the rise of the third moon."

The voice of the Master of the Universe was grave to suit the occasion, but inwardly he chuckled; for the Master knew something that the Old One did not, could not, know.

Just seconds earlier the Master had received another Terminal Trip request from a distant section of the Universe. And he knew with his superior knowledge that although her outward form had changed drastically with age, she would still bring forth in the Old One that feeling of overflowing in his heart that is the cup that spills over until it can hold no more.

Furthermore, he wished them well, because he also knew that where they were both going, they would have more than enough privacy to listen together to the ultimate sound in the universe.

The sound of one hand clapping.

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