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Annie Oakley

# **GIRL WITH A GUN**

**Courtney E. Webb**

**Stories about girls and their troubles  
...and the troubles they make.**

*The hands of the sisters of Death and Night,  
incessantly softly wash... this soil'd world.*

Walt Whitman

I feel like have known these sisters and their minions in my life from time to time. The characters in these stories have also spent some time with them and these are their stories.



## GIRL WITH A GUN

*You can't always get ahead but*

*you sometimes can get even.*

My next-door neighbor had everything. She lived in one of the best houses on the block, she had bleached blond hair at age thirteen, and she always wore it up high and 'teased' with a ton of hairspray. She wore real black eyeliner, cut-off jeans and big white men's shirts over that. She was cool. Her mother didn't work and spent time making cookies and pies so that when the 'girls' came over to Linda's house, there were always cookies and lemonade.

Her real name was Belinda, but she shortened it to Linda. She was one year older than me and had one brother who always played football. Not only was her house nicer, her parents drove bigger, newer cars and her mom had time to take her shopping for all the latest clothes. When Linda moved in next door, she blew the socks off everyone in the neighborhood and she became an instant hit. Everyone always wanted to hang out at Linda's.

I, on the other hand, had non-descript brown hair, not bleached and not ratted (what's that?); I don't think I owned a can of hairspray. My hair was mostly stick straight except for one little spot that likes to pop up into a weird curl all the time. My mom worked five days a week and when she wasn't doing that, she was shopping for fabric to make us all 'hand-made' clothes. Most of my clothes were either 'hand-made' or hand-me-down until I was almost twenty.

I lived next to Linda with my mom, dad and two obnoxious brothers. It didn't seem fair that Linda got so much attention from everyone; I lived there first! Anyway, like I said, my mother was usually either gone at work, playing bridge or hidden away in the sewing room. She could be counted on for saying things like, "That's nice," or "If you don't like them Cissy, why don't you stop playing with them?" That's my name, Cissy Caufield, named after one of my mother's friends. Who names a kid something like Cissy? Dumb.

Oh, and my dad. My dad was a big guy, very handsome at one time, lots of black hair and

shiny white teeth. He was a WWII veteran and loved nothing better than to tell a ton of stories about the war. He would ramble on about some story or other about the war or the military, have a sip of scotch, and continue. He was proud of the fact that he still had three service revolvers in the garage. There were always loaded, 'just in case.' He kept them locked in a steamer trunk, but I knew where the key was.

Did I mention the scotch? Yes scotch, and lots of it. My dad was a drunk. In addition to telling stories, he loved to get drunk. Yes drunk, not tipsy, but smashed, blotto, wacked, bombed, stewed to the gills, pie-eyed, blind drunk, stumbling drunk, very, very drunk.

My mother would spend time, when I got into one of my fits about Dad, to use her best calming voice to talk me down and tell me how we needed to be understanding of Dad; he's got problems, he needs our support, etcetera, etcetera, blah, blah and blah. She would get that pensive, screwed up look to her face and look a little bit like a suffering puppy and I would finally snap out of it and she would go back to her nice-nice face. Gag!

Time marched on and before long Linda, my brothers, and I, were all at the same high school. Linda still had the bleached blond hair, and I still had the weird hair but these days she was on a 'diet' specially constructed by her mother. She was trying out for the flag twirling team and had to 'slim down'. I never had to go on many diets as I had a stick figure already. I too tried out for a cheerleader position and worked at it very, very hard. However, Linda got picked for flag and I didn't get cheer. So now, in addition to seeing her next door all the time I also got to see her kicking up her heels and showing off her satin rump while twirling a flag at half-time. Lucky me.

Eventually, being the good-girl type, I joined the Key club and we all ran around doing service work. There was also a boy section to this service thing and the girls and guys would occasionally get together for projects. It was on one of these projects that I saw him. One year older than me, slim with a little muscle, black hair, blue eyes and very, very nice. Peter. Peter was the president of the boy's side of the Key club and he was gorgeous. Wow.

He would start talking and I would hang on every word like a dog waiting for a biscuit. He walked by and I almost drooled.

I am not sure if I ever really talked to Peter, other than in my head of course, but I was certainly working up to it. In addition to that, I had plans, many, many plans for me and Peter.

It was with thoughts such as these dancing in my head that I drove home from school one night to a big surprise. As I pulled round the cul-de-sac my headlights hit a car that was parked in front of Linda's house. Suddenly, two heads popped up from the back seat. I drove by and parked and the heads disappeared. As I was walking inside it hit me as to who

they were; it was Linda and Peter! I was shocked, stunned and disbelieving. Oh no - that - that...how could she! I saw him first!

Later days proved the grim and disappointing truth; Linda and Peter had become an 'item' on campus. My soul was dark and filled with dread whenever I had to drive by her house, afraid of what I might see again. Good God, this couldn't be happening. But, oh yes, it was.

Winter unwove into spring and the end of school approached with the end of year activities: dances, dinners and the like. Key Club decided to have a big end of the year dinner at a fancy restaurant in town. My mother dutifully created another 'hand-made' dress for me. I hinted around at one of the other guys in the group that I needed a date and he obligingly asked me to go. Jeff was a nice enough kid, cute and pretty smart without being movie star good looking or brilliant. He wasn't Peter, but as a member of the Key Club, he was still in the 'inner circle,' and I was still holding out hope.

The big day arrived and I got into my new dress, my hair looked presentable and I spent an hour on my makeup. Jeff was scheduled to pick me up and as I was getting ready to go a thought struck me: my dad. My dad was always about half in the bag by dinner and by the time Jeff and I got back, he would certainly be way gone and around the bend liquor wise. I had a hurried and feverish conversation with my mother and she promised to 'get him out of the house.' I said to her, "Can't he just go to the Club for a few hours? He's there all the time anyway." She made promises to make it happen and my ride picked me up without a hitch.

We got to the restaurant and immediately saw Linda and Peter by themselves in a booth. Peter summoned us over and we 'got' to sit with them. My dress at the time was a yellow, polka-dot affair that my mother thought was 'really cute.' I thought it looked really dumb but what choice did I have? Linda was sitting, regally, by Peter's side in a low-cut black cocktail dress, no doubt purchased for the occasion. My eyes bugged out a second while I took this in and for a moment considered covering myself with table napkins. However, this passed and we got to soup when I realized Linda was wearing a new necklace. Was that a diamond heart setting? I couldn't bear to ask. The last remnants of hope were drifting out the window with the beef vapors.

Two painful hours later, Jeff brought me home and we sat down in the living room to chitchat a bit with my mom. Things seemed to be going well and Jeff was starting to look better to me. Suddenly, the front door opened and in walked my dad.

Walked in is too generous a phrase; stumbled in is a better way to put it. He stumbled in with a shot glass in his hand. "Ello, everybody," he slurred. "Woos' 'is," he continued, pointing at my date.

I got a grip on myself and carefully said, "Jeff, this is my dad. Dad, Jeff."

"Glad 'met 'ya young man. Want a drink?"



"Dad, Jeff is sixteen years old, I don't think he is old enough to drink," I responded tersely.

"Oh, no," Dad continued, "Never too young to have a drink. Man's drink," he lurched a bit toward the increasingly nervous Jeff. "Scotch?" he queried hopefully.

Jeff was starting to look wildly around the room, trying to find the escape hatch. My mom was twisting a paper towel in her hands and I had, by this time, stood up.

"He doesn't need a drink, Dad; he's fine," I spat out.

"Oh, no," Dad responded, "Little drink. Be right back." He veered off course toward the kitchen.

The moment he was out of the room, Jeff leapt up and started to stammer, "Well, nice meeting you Mrs. Caufield, nice, nice house. Ah, thanks Cissy, I, I've got to go. So, see you at school, right?" And without completely running, he got himself to the door and out like a flash. I didn't even bother walking out to his car.

My dad came back in carrying two glasses with brown liquid. "Where'd 'e go?" He sagged down on the Barcalounger, his favorite chair.

"The young man left, Dan," was my mother's plaintive reply.

"Oh," my dad started to sip his drink again. "More 'fer me."

I could feel a curtain of rage sweep over my body. I tore out of the room and ran toward the garage.

My mother yelled, "Cissy, Cissy where are you going?"

I knew where I was going; I was going to the locked trunk. I found the key, wrenched the lid open and found the revolver, loaded as per usual. Running back into the living room, aiming with both hands, I pulled the trigger and shot my dad. Boy, was that sound loud. My mother shrieked.

I almost fell backwards from the recoil. A second later, my dad was touching a little red streak on the top of his head and there was a hole in the Barcalounger.

"You shot me," he said blankly.

Let me digress just a little; I never really meant to kill my dad, more like just make a point, if you know what I mean. I had taken riflery and small arms at summer camp at his insistence.

"Any daughter of mine," he had said pompously, "should know how to shoot like a man, and defend you." So, I did learn how to shoot like a man and was pretty good at it too. This was

just a little statement shot so to speak.

My mom was open-mouthed. I threw the gun down and ran to my room, slamming the door behind me as hard as I could. Throwing myself on my bed, I burst into tears.

The next day our house was pretty quiet. Dad and Mom were at the kitchen table when I came down for breakfast. My dad's head was hanging and he had that special kind of green look I knew so well. On purpose I banged down my cereal bowl. He jumped a little and winced, but didn't look up.

My mother was fiddling nervously with a fork when I sat down. I didn't say anything. She chirped brightly. "Cissy, your dad and I have had a long talk. Didn't we Dan?"

My dad moved his head a little.

"And, well, we have decided he is going to go get some help with his, his...problem. That's right, Dan, right?" Little head movement from my dad.

"Oh, and about those guns in the garage," my mother continued, "we have decided we are going to get rid of those too. Might be better for all of us," she finished brightly sounding a bit like we were planning a trip to Florida. I nodded glumly and finished my cereal in silence.

Actually, my mom was right about the guns. It probably would be better for all of us; next time I might not miss.

## INTERNET LOVE AFFAIR

He was everything. She was nothing.

No one had ever made her feel this way before - no one, not ever. Never. She loved him completely with everything within her. She loved him so much.

Her fingers flew over the keyboard. "William, my love, how are you today? I'm fine - this is Susan," she wrote. She started to tell him about her day, her work in the library. He was always so interested, unlike her family who couldn't care less about the library. They all thought her work was incredibly boring.

"You won't believe what happened today! Remember that funny little man that came into the library last week and looking for a copy of -" she typed and typed.

She told him the story of the little man, and the kids that came into the library who were supposed to be doing their homework. The kids who somehow, always tried to get her to figure out their papers for them, and give them ideas, and show them books and do their research and on and on and on. Anything but do the work for themselves. The old geezers who came into the library basically because they had nowhere else to go and wanted some place warm where they could use the bathroom and have company.

There were the alcoholics who were homeless and lived in the park and came for the same reason. They would read the newspapers in the middle of the day, looking very preoccupied, just like they were waiting for their stockbrokers to call and needed to sit down a minute.

She wrote about the frantic housewife-mothers dragging their raggedy broods down to reading circle to hopefully get them out of the house for a few minutes and buy themselves a little break, the college and high school students searching every nook and cranny for just that book that they had to have to finish the last bit on some paper, the ebb and flow of humanity that came and went and came and went.

She wrote and felt like she was talking to him, talking to a friend, a very good friend. And he listened. He listened as she told all the details of her daily life, her problems, her fights with her parents, her struggles with an insensitive management group that she worked for, her failed romances and lost loves, her dreams and aspirations. The wanting to get married and wanting to have children, to take those trips to Europe and other exciting places she hadn't yet been to and yearned to go.

He listened, and consoled, and was patient, and wrote back, and was kind, and understanding. He was loving, and, well, just everything a friend could be but never was. He was everything

a man could ever be and never was. He was handsome (he had sent her a picture) and tall and strong and beautiful and kind and wonderful and, oh my god, how much she loved I him. She wondered over and over where he had been her whole life.

Susan did have a friend, Emily. Emily was such a pragmatist and realist and just, well, really no fun when you looked at it that way.

"Have you met him yet?" "What are you waiting for?" "He sounds too good to be true to me," Emily queried.

Susan back pedaled and made excuses and said things like "We are going to get together; there just hasn't been time yet. We just met on the Internet two months ago. I wasn't even sure I was interested."

"Sure," Emily said doubtfully and shook her head.

Susan was having some second thoughts. Maybe she should just go and check out his address. They had never really exchanged addresses; somehow, they always seemed to have so much to say they hadn't gotten that far.

On her last email to William she had pushed ever so gently about getting his address and their getting together. "Darling," he wrote back, "I would love too, big business meeting coming up and I have to get prepared for that. We will get together soon, I promise."

She had sighed and pushed away from her desk feeling all warm and tingly from the "Darling," thing. Yes, he was a darling, it was true.

Susan was sitting at the reference desk and it was a Friday and things were winding down to closing. She sat drumming her fingers on the desk, indecision clouding her thoughts. It was five minutes to six and they were going to be closing pretty soon. She made up her mind and turned to her desk computer. "Let's see," she thought and did a reverse directory search.

"I know his full name," she thought to herself, "and I know what town he lives in." She began to hit the keys and enter the search. After a couple of false tries she was surprised to see the full name flash onto her screen. She sat staring at the name. It was too weird, seeing his name there in print on the screen. It made him somehow more real and somehow farther away. It was like she was looking at the name of a complete stranger from some ether world come here to visit.

The library chimes began to ring softly and the security guard was moving toward the front door. That was the 'all clear' sign for 'everybody out of the pool.' She grabbed a pencil and a pad of paper and wrote down the information furiously, cursing herself all the while for not trusting him.

Later on, she sat at home eating soup distractedly. Emily had called and asked her what she was doing and she gave some fuzzy, vague response about some work project and rang off. She thought Emily had a bit of a hurt tone in her voice, but she didn't care.

"Serves her right, she's the one that started this anyway," she thought savagely.

It was raining and late November when she put on a heavy coat, boots, gloves and grabbed her purse and keys. At the last minute she snatched a pair of binoculars out of the bottom of the hall closet.

"Shit," was all she could say to a confused Bubbles the cat as she ran out the door. She didn't want inertia and more indecision to slow her down now that she had gotten this far.

She drove slowly to his section of town, stopped to consult her town map several times. Finally, she got to the neighborhood, an older, middle class section with lots of red brick houses built after the war.

"Wow," she thought. "I love this section of town!" She could just hug herself for picking a guy with such good taste and so much like her own.

The house was small and cute, with little neat flowerbeds around the front. There was a huge walnut tree in the front yard and Susan couldn't help getting caught in the fantasy of moving into this darling little house and living here with William. She sighed a happy sigh. She did love him so much. What a perfect guy! She felt like a creep for being out here.

"Anyway," she thought, "I will show you Susan Smith that you are wrong about this guy. Wrong, all wrong!"

She parked the car past the house and got out quietly and closed the door. If William discovered her out here spying on him she would die of embarrassment. She tiptoed back to the front of the house in the rain.

She could see that the lights were on brightly in the house and that the front curtains weren't even closed yet. "See, Susan Smith, the guy obviously has nothing to hide. He leaves his curtains wide open for the whole world to see!"

She tippy-toed over to the house across the street, which was dark and hid next to a large tree. She didn't really need to binoculars because she could see so well. And then, he walked by the front window.

Her heart stopped, she recognized him immediately from his photo. He was exactly like the picture, tall, blond with a broad chest and wide shoulders. Her heart stopped and she felt her knees start to get weak. She stared at him transfixed. She could have just stood there on the grass, in the dark, drinking him in forever.

There was a car door slam somewhere and the back door to the house opened. Susan's mouth opened as a young woman came into the lighted living room carrying two bags of groceries. Wha-what? Her mind felt stunned and confused. Wh-who...a sister? A friend? She was feeling light-headed and her mouth was dry.

The young woman, also blond, with long, straight hair approached William and kissed him on the mouth. Susan was starting to feel like she was seeing stars, when the woman put the bags down on a table and turned. Susan gasped and almost called out. The woman was pregnant! And, it was looking like she was very pregnant. Susan started to feel cold all over, her knees buckled and she felt herself sink straight down into the grass.

She realized that gasping sound was coming from her and the tears rolling down her cheeks were mixing with the raindrops. She felt numb as though the world around her had turned to gray and then stopped revolving. It was as though everything, everything around her had stopped and was frozen in time.

She didn't know how long she was out there. She realized finally, that her knees were incredibly cold and wet and the rest of her was starting to get wet in spite of the raincoat. The curtains to the house were now, mercifully closed.

She slowly got up, tears still coming down and got into her car. She started the engine and cranked on the heat and just sat there sobbing, her head hanging over the steering wheel. Eventually, she drove herself home and went to bed where she pretty much stayed for the next two days.

Sunday night she sort of came to and opened her computer. She could see several messages waiting for her in her inbox. They were from William. She slowly erased the messages one by one and then went and erased all the messages she had saved from him. Then she added a blocker to his email address to block his further messages. Then she closed the computer and went to watch TV.

It was a very quiet Susan who came to work on Monday. Emily looked at her curiously and was about to say something when Susan held up a finger and said, "Don't".

"But," Emily stammered.

"No," said Susan, "I don't want to talk about it," and walked away.

Later, at lunch, Susan and Emily were having sandwiches.

Emily, always the nag couldn't stand the silence and finally said, "Well, can't you tell me anything?" with an exasperated tone.

Susan took a bite of sandwich, chewed, swallowed and said, "Yeah, I can." She sipped some Pepsi.

Emily looked expectantly at her.

"No more internet dating," replied Susan and continued to finish her sandwich.

Emily stared at her friend with her mouth open. If she had expected some more discourse on this topic, she wasn't getting any. Finally she sighed and joined her friend in finishing lunch.

## Number Two Girl

Looking down,  
I noticed the shoes.  
Very sparkly with lots  
of rhinestones,  
four inch leather heels.  
"Little early in the day isn't  
it?" I think.  
My eyes travel up, nice legs,  
good outfit.  
Pretty face? Not exactly, just nice.

About 35 years old;  
she's going up in the hotel elevator  
with a man twice her age.  
She's not his wife,  
she has settled in life.  
She's the number two girl.  
He pays the bills, she gets nice things.  
He gets to feel younger for a while,  
'til he goes home to his wife.  
She'll go back to her apartment,  
and wait, until the next time.

## BARBIE

*Surprising what a little alcohol can do!*

She blew into town, big white trench coat, knee high boots, blond hair pulled up into a pony - tail in the back. All smiles and dimples, she flashed those whites at every turn. Her face was a little too narrow to be a model, a little pushed in at the teeth level. But the men were stunned, fascinated, mesmerized. To a one, they were drawn to her like the usual moths to a flame. She would laugh and toss her head, she knew, she so knew.

Our group? Well a motley assortment of down-in-the mouth, surly, hard-bitten, not end-of-the-road-but-you-can-see-it from-here types. We were teachers, teaching on the outskirts of civilization. Where? Asia. The last call of the wild and wicked, them that the rest of the world has cast aside, losers and wannabes, washed up on the shores of life, trying to make a living while playing and drinking as hard as was humanly possible while still attempting to show up to work the next day.

We had had, variously in our group: a schizophrenic, a child molester, a second story man (breaking and entering,) a kleptomaniac, various assortments of alcoholics in differing stages of their own personal happiness, run-away children, and then, the likes of me. Just call me Skippy B Jones, that will suffice. I was a runaway too - but runaway from an ex-husband and surly, teenage 'child'. I came to Asia to teach and 'find myself'. I did teach alright but what I found was a bunch of weirdo's.



Anyway, I digress. Back to Barbie, she blew in from the Mid-west, fresh degree clutched in her fist, ready for the world. She had absolutely everything a girl could possibly need, except of course, a 'Him'. She began interviewing for the job almost as soon as she was able to break out her four-inch heels and tight waist-cinching belt. Two swains elbowed out the competition right away and then they were in the running with each other. This was all very fun to watch and Barbie had the time of her life as the tightly controlled competition unfolded. One day, one guy was on top, then the other guy, then the first guy. And so it went for several breathtaking weeks.

Finally - I guess she had had enough of the fun and wanted to move on to the really good stuff - she made her decision and picked Jeff. The collective sighs of sexual fulfillment could probably be heard all over campus night after night. Thankfully I don't live on campus so I just got to watch the happy faces, and winking, going on the next day. Sigh - true love.

Unfortunately into all this happy sunshine, a little rain was bound to fall - and it did. His name was Elvin.

Elvin, not Elvis or Alvin, Elvin. Although I didn't have much sympathy for this guy, even I had to admit it must have been painful to be correcting people your whole life about your name. What kind of parents names their kid something like Elvin? Jesus.

Anyway, Elvin was a lizard - a reptile - a lowly creature. He was a serpent most foul, something that crept out of the darkness. I would have run him in through the heart myself but I didn't have anything sharp in silver. I was considering bringing garlic to work and leaving it on my desk just as a precaution. Elvin was mean, he was low, and he talked about people behind their backs. He was a gossip, he carried tales, he was critical, obsessive, compulsive, driven to do the dirty unto his fellow man. He tattled to the boss, he was a friend to no one and cared only about himself. Unfortunately (for the rest of us) he had been crippled in a bad auto accident and the matronly types in the office felt sorry for him and constantly 'forgave' his little peculiarities (back stabbing.) You couldn't pound Elvin like he deserved because a) he was a cripple and b) he had sufficiently sucked up to the boss that they were now 'best friends.'

It was probably inevitable that Ms. Barbie with all her bouncing happiness with her new 'beau' friend was going to rankle Mr. Mean and there was going to be some kind of impasse. There was.

Ms. Barbie had hooked up with a good-looking, not too bright lad, also from the Mid-west, who had graduated from a big-name religious university. Now, although Jeff was big with Jesus, apparently not so much as to preclude him from doing the nasty with Ms. B on a

regular basis. I surmised this given their all too happy mood, all too often. The impasse occurred on a hot, sticky summer night at the local watering hole on the occasion of someone's birthday. (Why is it always someone's birthday?)

The gang was all there and needless to say, everyone used the excuse of the hot, Asian night to drink more than they usually did, which was usually a lot. The place was crowded, the AC wasn't working for some reason, smoke was hanging in the air, the music was blaring, all the right elements. I was fighting my way through the crush to try and manage a spot at the bar to beg for another tonic, something cold with a lot of ice.

Somehow, somebody decided that what we really needed that night was a wet T-shirt contest. What I needed was two aspirins, but whatever. From nowhere, a young lady appeared on top of the bar in a very small, white and very wet T-shirt. The applause, calls and whistles were deafening. Did I mention this was Asia and discretion and decorum are usually the watchwords here?

I don't know if I mentioned the fact that Ms. B, in addition to having very white teeth and very blond hair, also sported a pair of grade A, Mid-westerner hooters that surely made either her mama or daddy very proud. Those things were large, probably at least a C cup size and stood up on their own like flags at parade rest. Hers beat mine and mine are pretty good, but she's younger, OK?

This night Barbie was wearing white slacks and a black pullover top with multiple silver and gold and shiny black sequins all over the front. What I didn't know was there was no bra under all that sequin stuff on account of Barbie not really needing one to hold the girls up.

Barbie was with Jeff and I noticed she was getting pretty drunk. In addition, who would be a third to their own private dance party but Elvin himself, their new best friend? I squinted at this odd combination and shook my head. Something about this picture was not right and I had a funny feeling.

Forcing the snotty waitress to give me another tonic and take my money, I started inching my way back to our group. I could see Barbie, Jeff and Elvin in some kind of heated discussion. It looked like Elvin was talking at the same time he was pouring some lethal looking clear liquid into shot glasses. They were all pretty drunk, but I thought Barbie really looked gone.

I pushed back to the table where my I-want-to-be-your-boyfriend-but-I-don't-have-the-guts-and-would-you-just-get-drunk-so-this-would-all-be-easier-on-me guy was standing. We started to try and have a conversation again when his mouth fell open and I realized he was gaping at the bar. "What..." I turned around and then I too was gaping.

On top of the bar, swinging the black sequin top in one hand and bending at the knees in high heels and white slacks, sans top was Barbie. She had a huge grin on her face, the girls were standing up large and proud all on their own and she was swinging to the music and the cat-calls having the time. Below her, gaping too, was Jeff and next to him, about to laugh his ass right off, Elvin.

I shook my head again; I just knew somehow, something like this was going to happen. I couldn't watch anymore. I tugged at my 'guy's' sleeve and jerked my thumb to leave. He gulped his beer and reluctantly followed me out, almost getting whiplash from trying to get one last look. As we left, the last I saw of Jeff was his futile attempts to grab at the shirt and Barbie, jumping up, trying to get her off the bar.

Next day at breakfast, there was no Barbie and just a very, very quite Jeff. By lunchtime she had emerged wearing a very large sweat shirt and sweat pants. The hair was pulled back and no makeup adorned the face. Her head was down and she didn't have one thing to say. I sighed hard as Elvin sailed into view with a very happy "Gottcha!" look on his face and a wide grin. I hate that guy. Maybe Jeff will find that silver stake we all need.

## WHERE DID I PUT MY PEN?

*What does divine retribution look like?*

Eve was walking through the garden one day and was really enjoying the warm weather, the sunny day and the light breeze playing around her shoulders. The air was fresh and clean and she could feel the soft, springy moss underneath her feet. Some large orange flowers scented the air and dropped some petals, seemingly, in her path. The smell was, well, heavenly. Eve was thoroughly enjoying the dappled sunlight amongst the ferns and how they brushed her skin lightly as she passed.

Life was so wonderful here in this garden. She had everything: wonderful food, delicious clean water to drink and of course, her Adam. The one she loved more than life itself. She loved Adam with every fiber of her being.

Recently though, they had had a little tiff, nothing really. They had been passing by the Tree of Knowledge and she noticed how very delicious those red apples looked. She was about to pick one when he practically shouted at her and knocked her hand down.

"No, no, Eve, you know we are not supposed to eat those. God told us."

She looked at him hurt. He had never spoken like that to her before. "It is just one little apple," she replied her head down. He shook his head furiously and dragged her away down the path.

"I don't want to talk about this anymore," he had said angrily. She nodded her head with compliance but she could not stop herself from stealing another peek behind herself at the tree.

Today, Adam was off by himself and said he wanted to try something he called 'fishing.' It all sounded extremely boring to her so she begged off and he didn't argue with her. Somehow, without even knowing how it happened, she found herself in that corner of the garden again. Again, those beautiful, beautiful apples.

Her mouth almost watered. A little voice kept saying to her, "Don't do it Eve, don't do it." She shook her head angrily and the golden curls bounced on her shoulders. "It can't possibly hurt anything," she argued with herself. It was just one apple and this tree had so many. What difference would it make? Adam would never know.

She looked around just to be sure he wasn't hiding somewhere and stole closer to the tree. A feeling of dread stole over her and she began to shiver, actually feeling cold for the first time. She looked at her arms and saw goose bumps there. "Oh, this is just silly," she chided herself. "It's just an apple!"

Defiantly she stepped closer to the tree and reached up and plucked one huge, juicy red apple. Oh, it smelled so good. She opened her mouth and took a big bite and the juice ran out of her mouth and over her chin. Immediately she thought, "Oh, if Adam could just taste this!"

At that very moment strange things started to happen. The little breeze died and the air started to become much colder. Eve shivered and rubbed her free hand up and down her arm. The sunlight faded and it started to get dark in the middle of the day. Clouds started to form overhead. Big, black ugly clouds, unlike anything she had ever seen before. Then, suddenly, in the distance she could hear a low rumbling, like when the rocks tumbled together but much, much louder. The sound started to become very, very loud and she was frightened. Dropping the apple, she put both hands over her ears but the sound just kept growing in volume. It almost sounded like many, many voices all shouting and crying. She started running away from the tree, she was terrified. Then she stopped, and in the far distance, in the sky she could see a figure like a huge big bird coming toward her very rapidly.

She stopped and stared and finally realized it was one of God's angels, that big one, Gabriel. He had those really big wings. He wasn't like the other angels who were small and sort of fluffy and soft, the ones she liked. He scared her. She realized he was flying straight toward her and then her mouth dropped open. "Oh my God," she was shocked and stunned. The angel was holding Adam under one very strong arm.

Eve stood there staring as these figures loomed toward her. Abruptly, with a wrenching jerk, she was pulled up into the air by the angel and was flying with the two of them, traveling very fast, out of the garden.

Eve looked down and saw the edge of the garden start to disappear. In its place the ground started to become dark and hard and filled with rocks and boulders of all sizes. Little if anything grew that was not grubby and small. And it was very, very cold and Eve was shivering uncontrollably. They traveled for what seemed to be hours.

When she was exhausted beyond words, the angel finally started to move down to the earth and lighted upon a small mountain. She and Adam were released and both tumbled to the ground. "What...." Eve started to say.

The angel stopped her with one upheld finger. "You have disobeyed the word of God and now you are thrown out of the Garden of Eden forever."

"But, but..." Eve was trying to say something but he wouldn't let her talk.

"You have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge and it is forbidden and you knew that!" He raised an accusatory finger and pointed it at her. Adam was just looking at her, amazement on his face. Her face started to turn an angry red and she dropped her head in shame. "How could she tell him?" was all she could think.

"Now," the angel said with finality, "you two shall toil all the days of your lives and suffer with pain and so shall you have to make your way in the world."

"Is there nothing we can do?" begged Adam imploringly.

"Pray for forgiveness," replied the angel. Then with a gigantic flap of wings, he sprung up and flew away.

Chrissie was a little girl, only six years old and it was early morning in front of her parent's suburban home. She had been out riding bicycles with her mother for early morning 'exercise' and her mother had already gone inside the house. It was probably no later than seven am. As she was pushing her bike up the gravel path, an old grey sedan, beat up and raggedy sped by the house. Suddenly, the car stopped and backed up.

A man, dressed all in grey, like his car, was inside and opened the car door. He called out to her and told her he needed directions because he was lost. She tried talking to him but he couldn't hear her that well and wanted her to get closer. There was a map on the large bench seat of his car. He patted the seat and told her she could look at the map here and help him.

She got into the car and looked at the map. Something didn't feel right. She looked outside and saw her little terrier dog looking at her. Suddenly, she jumped from the seat and called back over her shoulder, "I'll go ask my mother." Instantly, the driver gunned the engine and

the car sped away. She ran inside the house to find a petrified father, brothers and mother all standing at the window frozen in fear. Her mother immediately started crying and carrying on like she did and her father finally moved and called the police.

She could hear her father and brothers talking later about how it was the police were "Had already been looking for him." Later, she was thinking about what happened and was curious about the sound of thunder that she heard off in the distance when she got out of the car. It didn't seem like it was going to rain. But there it was. Also, she could have sworn she heard the flapping of bird wings. Oh well, she went off to school and forgot about it.

Years later, Chrissie was working in the high rise building in the good section of town. She had a desk that faced the street and had very large pane glass windows that looked over the busy street downtown. She was very satisfied with her life; she had done well for herself. At 36 years of age she was a supervisor, making pretty good money and in charge of six employees that mostly called her Ma'am. She liked that, had a little ring to it. She had her bachelor's degree, was thinking about getting a Masters and liked her car, her apartment and her social life. Things were buzzing along.

Except for one thing, him. He was a co-worker, supervisor actually, who worked on her same floor. She had gotten to know him months ago and had gradually over time started to have feelings for him. He was not her type, not tall, blond with green-blue eyes like she usually went for. He was short, was muscular and really built. She had felt herself getting sucked further and further down the rabbit hole with him when one day, out of the blue, she found out quite by accident that he had a long term girlfriend.

She couldn't believe it; she was hurt, shocked, stunned and finally, angry. She immediately called her best girlfriend and starting crying and they both agreed she should have nothing else to do with him. This verdict was confirmed by her mother, her aunt, and an old therapist. The die was cast, the dog was hung, the thing was over, forever and completely. He was a cheater and two-timer and she didn't need the likes of him in her life.

She spent the next several months avoiding him as much as possible and for him, he figured out pretty quickly what was going on and stopped talking to her too. It was pretty easy as they worked on different floors and did not have many projects together. At night she stayed home and listened to music and cried. That went on for three months. She finally stopped crying and found she could look at him without it hurting anymore. For his part, Max, seemed to pick up the pieces of their 'affair' and move on too. He was smiling again and seemed to be his old self, enjoying life.

That week, she had the most incredible bad luck. That loser Nathan, a former employee, kept calling her over and over again trying to get his job back. Nathan, quite the ladies man,

was glib and cute and charming with all the ladies and a complete loser when it came to ever getting any work done or anything accomplished at the shop. After months and months of talking and counseling him and trying to get him to get with it, she recommended that the management let him go and they did.

Whew, what a relief! After having to clean up his messes after him and explain to people over and over again why Nathan didn't call, Nathan didn't do this, Nathan didn't do that, yak, yak, yak, and yak. Cripes she was so sick of it.

Unfortunately, he still had her private office phone number and kept calling her and other admin people there. He would tell them how sorry he was, and couldn't he get another chance and he had a wife and three kids and it was a really tough job market and on, and on, and on, and on.

This day, she had finally just lost her temper and yelled at him, "Nathan, I can't help you!"

There was a long silence and he finally said quietly, "I guess you did do all you could do."

For once he was making some sense. "Yes, I did," she replied. "I am really sorry Nathan."

He seemed genuinely touched. "I am really sorry Chrissie, I have been a real jerk." She couldn't agree more, but she didn't say anything. His tone got a little more cheerful. "Well I guess I'll be going out with the guys today, today is when we practice paintball war."

Chrissie knew that Nathan had a bunch of guns and went out on weekends to do target practice on a regular basis. "Well," she blew out her breath, "that sounds like a good idea Nathan. Get out and get a little fresh air."

"Yeah," was all he said. "Be seeing you Chrissie." Then he abruptly hung up the phone. She stared at the phone a minute then hung up.

"Whatever, asshole," she told to herself. "Now where in the hell is my pen?" she thought angrily to herself. She had been looking for it all over the place while Nathan had her tied up on the telephone. Something caught her eye on the floor. "There you are you little bugger," she exclaimed and bent down to pick it up off the floor.

There was a loud 'bang' and the tremendous sound of shattering glass. She felt something fly by the top of her head. She stayed down a second and waited to hear anything else. There was screaming in the building. She touched the top of her head and her fingers came back red. "Damn that Nathan," she thought furiously.

The shock of realizing that she had just been shot was a bit too much and Chrissie must have passed out for a moment. She found herself on the carpet looking up deep into Max's



dark brown eyes. "Hello, handsome," was all she could say. He grabbed her and held her and she let herself be held.

"Damn it I love this guy," she remembered saying to herself. Somewhere in the background she could have sworn that she heard the low rumble of thunder and the clapping of wings. "I don't remember the weather calling for rain," was all she could think of.

The crowd gathered inside the building and outside on the sidewalk and sound of police sirens could be heard in the background. Chrissie could care less.

## **Getting What You Want**

*It's hard asking for what you want*

She pursed her lips together with a hard determined look. Barbie was carefully spooning scrambled eggs onto her breakfast plate. Her careful determination with the eggs was a studied contrast to her would-be casual attire.

She was wearing an Ed Hardy, very tight, very short stretch skirt. The skirt, in bright canary yellow, clearly sported the 'island' look for this Saturday. The skirt was topped by a low cut, black stretchy spaghetti strap top that clearly showed off her very ample bosom.

Scrambled eggs, toast, and juice in hand, Barbie settled down at the cafeteria table across from her one time beau, Jeffrey. Jeff and Barbie had been a very, very hot item on campus until just recently, when, to her horror, Jeff had announced to her that he intended to leave the school to go pursue a 'mission.' (Jeff was big with Jesus.) Barbie and Jeff were both English teachers at an overseas foreign language school.

The days that followed this revelation were filled with tears, crying, tantrums, recriminations, upset, shock and eventually, bitter acceptance on her part. This 'acceptance' was accompanied by a lot of grim determination on the part of Barbie 'not to be involved' and fierce setting of the jaw.

Today, Barbie was sitting across from Jeff quietly cocking her head back and forth to denote that she was listening to what he had to say. He was babbling on and on about his plans for his 'mission' and how excited he was about it. What she was really doing was controlling her feelings. She restrained the impulse to reach across the table with a fork and impale his hand on the table *Godfather* style. Jeff did have that silly smile on his face, which was the only indicator that he had any dim awareness of the true nature of the situation.

Barbie hated Jeff for doing this to her. She loved him, plus, she was used to getting her own way and did not like anyone treating her like this. How dare he? Didn't he know who she was? She had been Miss Houston for crying out loud! Her picture had been in all the papers and some magazines and everything! Jeez!

She had wheedled, she had coaxed, she had screamed and she even hit him once. No matter - he would not change his mind.

"He was off to do some fakackta, bullshit missionary work," Barbie thought to herself. The only missionary work Barbie did was in the sack and that was the only kind she cared about.

Barbie was trying to keep the scowl off her face, she knew it developed wrinkles. She allowed herself a mouth pucker, that couldn't hurt too badly. She'd put some crème on her upper lip later. Jeffrey kept babbling on about this new venture, just like it mattered. She could scream! She smiled the small, tight smile and eventually just tuned him out.

Several weeks later Benjamin, the black writer/co-teacher, sensing Barbie's predicament decided to make his move.

They had always spent time together as a group, hanging out.

"Why not?" Ben thought to himself. Jeff was a total jerk to throw this one away, he reasoned.

Benjamin was stealthy, he moved in like a hammerhead shark. Barbie had a way of sitting, bent over so that the twins would show and then bringing one arm up against them so they pushed up ever farther. Ben was happily enjoying the view. She would be his in two weeks. He smiled broadly to himself.

Time passed, Barbie transferred her affections from Jeff to Ben - sort of. She was getting laid on a regular basis, which was, of course, important. However, she still wasn't happy.

For his part Jeff was drinking more than he should, and couldn't figure out what to say to Barbie. Certainly, he couldn't ask her to wait for him? Not a girl like Barbie? He might be gone a year!

The older woman was sitting at the lunch table one day, smiling at him. Cindy.

Jeff liked her; she 'looked good' for her age. He had even thought about... Anyway, no - the age difference right? He considered one more time.

She smiled her most charming smile as he sat down. He had a funny feeling about this; she didn't usually sit with him or his group. She started to talk to him...about relationships.

She told him she had been in love once when she was his age. It was a safe relationship where both parties did what they were 'supposed' to do. Neither one took any real risks and neither one could ask for what they really wanted. As a result, the man went away, the communication completely broke down and the relationship fell apart. She told him she carried a flame for this guy for 30 years and never really got over it.

Jeff was shocked. "Why is she telling me all this stuff," he thought? It was so personal he was embarrassed.

Cindy read his mind: "Call me an interfering old bat," she told him, again smiling.

She got closer to Jeff and almost whispered "You know what you need to do Jeff, take a chance, be brave. Ask for what you want." She grabbed her tray and left.

Jeff sat still a long time staring into space. He didn't know if he could do it. Barbie was already so mad at him. Finally, he swallowed hard and shook himself. He picked up his tray.

"Well, I guess I'm off to see Barbie," he thought to himself and walked to the trash bins.

## **\$5,000 Won**

*You never know*

She spotted the \$5,000 won bill on the floor and picked it up.

She looked at it once and put it in her pocket. She felt a little guilty. Hadn't the preacher just given a talk to them about donations of 'found money,' meaning giving more to the church when unexpected windfalls came along?

She decided he was right and she would donate the money to some worthy cause when she found one. She was at the mega-crowded train station waiting to catch the express. She got a coffee and sandwich and ate three sandwich sections. She was about to throw the rest into a large trash can when she noticed the bum picking through the trash and eating out of what was clearly a found Burger King bag. She handed the bum her bag with the remaining sandwich and then, deciding not to wait, reached into her pocket, grabbed the \$5,000 won bill, handed it to him and ran for the train.

Song stared at the money in shock. Mostly people would hand him change and maybe a \$1,000 won note, but \$5,000. Never! He was dumbfounded by his good fortune. He slowly finished the remaining sandwich the crazy tourist had given him and stared at the money, chewing slowly.

His first thought was about how much Soju this could buy him, enough for the rest of the week. He got outside the station and headed for his favorite liquor store, the one where most of his friends hung out.

He was about to spend the whole amount and share with his buddies out back, but something stopped him, something nagging at the back of his mind. He picked out two bottles of Soju - one for today and one for tomorrow - and carefully handed the five bill to the clerk. The clerk gave him a suspicious look for having such a large bill.

"Someone gave it to me," Song defended himself.

The clerk shrugged with a "Yeah, sure," kind of look. Song placed the bottles in his backpack and wrapped them with his extra shirt so they wouldn't break and headed out.

Song arrived at his mother's tiny house and knocked on the door. There was a pause and some shuffling inside and the door opened, and a tiny Korean woman stood there staring at him, unsmiling.

They exchanged a few words and he finally told her that he had something for her then handed her the \$3,000 won. Still unsmiling she took the money and looked down at it, not inviting him in. He looked like he wanted to say something but after a moment he just bowed to her, turned and left.

Mrs. Kim stood at the door a long while gripping the money in one fist and staring at the spot where her son had been. At last, shaking her head, she closed the door and considered the \$3,000. She decided it couldn't be as a result of theft because there wasn't enough.

Finally, she shuffled back to her tiny kitchen, grabbed her purse and stuffed the money into her little coin purse, got her metal basket and called to Chimchi, her miniature white poodle.

Chimchi and Mrs. Kim made their way down to the local market where she could get a very small order of rice, some leeks and a tiny section of chicken. She got her purchases into her basket and made her way home to make her favorite chicken and rice 'guk' or soup.

Several hours later, the bubbling concoction was filling the tiny abode with its aroma and Mrs. Kim got out two clean bowls, one for her and one for Chimchi. She carefully ladled the guk into the two bowls and set them down. Both she and Chimchi ate furiously for a while until the bowls were completely clean. Mrs. Kim leaned back with a contented burp and rubbed her stomach.

She got up and ambled into the living room section of the house and turned on her tiny TV and began watching one of her favorite Korean soap operas. However, something kept nagging at the back of her mind, bothering her, when she finally remembered what it was.

Calling Chimchi, she got another bowl and ladled some still hot soup into it, covered it with an ancient piece of tinfoil, and placed it on a serving tray. The tray was one of the few niceties still remaining from her 40-year marriage to Song's father.

Holding the tray, she went down the steps daintily, careful not to spill anything and she and Chimchi walked next door.

Mrs. Kim knocked on the front door out of politeness. When there was no answer, she worked her way back to the side door she knew would be open. The house was dark and cold. Mrs. Kim knew that the resident, Min-Su, her friend, could not afford to pay the bill.

She walked to the bedroom and found Min-Su in bed asleep. While only about 45 years old, Min-Su looked much older; the disease that wracked her body was taking its toll on her face.

Mrs. Kim sat down on the bed and gently shook her friend.

Min-Su started awake and stared at her friend for a moment then smiled with recognition.

"My friend," she said softly.

"I have brought you something Min," replied Mrs. Kim

Min started to protest weakly but Mrs. Kim shushed her softly.

"You have to eat," she replied and started to spoon soup into Min's mouth.

Min ate and when she had all she could take in, she collapsed backwards into her pillow, her eyes closed.

Mrs. Kim patted her on the arm and whispered, "I'll come back tomorrow, be well." Min's eyes didn't open and Mrs. Kim let herself out of the house.

As she and Chimchi were making their way home she thought to herself, "I guess that good-for-nothing son of mine is good for something once in a while!"

Chimchi barked once and followed her home.

## BARBIE GETS EVEN

*Sometimes things work out in odd ways*

Barbie glared at the back of his head, her mouth in a tight frown and her arms crossed tightly across her chest, pushing her voluminous breasts further upstairs than usual. She stared at him, tapping the toe of her black-patent leather high, high heel shoe on the floor angrily. The gold lame of the heel glinted sharply in the sun.

The object of her affection appeared oblivious to Barbie and her steamed-up mood. He continued talking casually to the young lady in front of him, lounging as he did, against the counter top, clearly enjoying the girl's company. The animated conversation was sprinkled with laughter as the young lady kept tossing her full head of long, black hair around. She was gyrating as she spoke, batting her lashes, and flashing the big smile frequently, showing a lot of very white teeth.

This give and take continued and Barbie kept tapping her toe in a more and more furious fashion, as it was now clear she was getting ignored. Boy! Did she hate that!!!!

"Damn it!" she thought. "Didn't he know who I am? Had he forgotten? Hadn't she put out for him? Now true, she had gotten a small promotion and a large bonus, neither of which she



probably deserved, but, so what? She worked hard for that degree, all that school work. Jeez! That was worth something wasn't it? Plus all those hours in the gym keeping her figure perfect - Wow!"

Finally, disgust registering on her face, she twirled on her expensive, black glossy shoes and stomped away. Her long, blond hair was now swinging too - just not in exactly the same way as the girl who was still flirting with the professor.

The professor, sensing some movement behind him, glanced backwards and caught a glimpse of Barbie's rather large posterior moving away from him.

"Hum," he thought, "wonder what's wrong with her?" He turned back to his companion, smiling and kept talking.

Barbie stomped back to her dorm room and slammed the door behind her and kicked off her shoes very hard. They flew across the room and hit two different walls. She threw herself down on the bed and fumed.

"Men!" she thought, grinding her teeth. "OK, so he is married, again, so what? Bastards!"

Barbie's little fit had been witnessed by a couple of the middle-aged matrons who ran the school. They looked at each other and smiling, they both shook their heads. Living at The English Now! School in Southeast Asia was like living in a small town or a fish bowl, take your pick. I, another teacher at the school, had also seen the 'little fit' and had seen the reactions of the matrons. There were no secrets in this place; and the fact that the professor, an extremely handsome, well built man in his mid-forties, a know womanizer, was banging Barbie on the side, was a well know 'secret' at the school. His wife, conveniently located in another country, with the house, the mortgage and the kids, was not on the scene to observe all this. The professor seemed extremely unconcerned.

I was older, wiser, more educated and smarter than Barbie, and was miffed at her recent 'successes' at the school. Successes for which I had been passed over, through no fault of my own that I could see, other than not being 25 years old and blond that is.

I also found the professor to be quite tantalizing; however, I was too filled up with Catholic guilt to do anything about it. So, I fumed instead and felt like justice had not been done.

Anyway, life chugged along at the school as it usually does and a couple of weeks later I had cause to observe Barbie, Princess of Everything, in the lunch room sitting with her old beau, Jeff and his good friend, Rick. They were yukking it up and seemed to be having a pretty good time.

"Jeez," I thought, "do some people get all the breaks? Wow!"

However, I did have a moment of pause, wasn't she sleeping with Rick after she broke up with Jeff? They seemed to have resolved their differences or something.

I grabbed my tray and said goodbye to my really good, extremely overweight male friend who was telling me about the latest medication he was on for the results of the stroke. I excused myself gently and ran for it. I can't stand being around this much happiness, it sort of turns my stomach.

Anyway, I was leaving for vacation for a week, and needed to tidy up last minute details.

Leaving the school on the bus later that day, I had chance to observe the Princess of Everything in a photo shoot with one of the Asian administrators. They were no doubt commemorating her recent promotion. Gak! Let me hold my mouth before I just chuck up.

Maybe it wasn't the photo shoot so much as it was the very, very superior way in which The Princess was now talking to the 'little people' in staff meetings. It was a small promotion, yet, it was getting really difficult to talk to her now in that high, high place she was currently occupying.

Anyway, I flew off to vacation and spent a whirlwind week of frantic activities with friends, relatives and shopping, shopping, shopping. All that good stuff you can never get over here was now resting comfortably in my bags. It was exhausting but fun. On the seventh day, I was back sitting at the airport waiting for my connecting flight.

As I sat reading my book, my reverie was disturbed by a familiar voice and I looked up to see a co-teacher talking at me, waiting for the same flight. She sat down and spent the next thirty minutes telling about shopping in Hong Kong and how disappointed she had been by the whole experience. Yak, yak, yak.

"Wow, tough with some people huh?" I thought to myself.

"And then I thought my taxi driver was never going to show up and guess what happened?" she queried at me brightly.

"What?" was my intelligent response.

"Can you believe, at 5am in the morning, a taxi shows up and Barbie, Jeff and Rick spill out and they had all been out drinking all night together? So I just went ahead and took their taxi to the airport!" she concluded happily.

"Ah, lucky that," I replied goggling at the information that this three had been out drinking until 5am together. "Gee, chummy, huh?" I thought.

The week passed uneventfully and I observed the Princess around campus. If she was feeling any guilt about the weekend threesome party, it wasn't showing on her face. She seemed to be keeping a little distance from the professor, but he would still come into our office and hover around her area a bit and she would talk and laugh with him like old times.

"Hum" I scratched my head, "I don't know what is up with those two."

The bomb hit that Friday. As bombs go, I would classify it as a mega-ton variety. I have seen office bombs before and this one was right up there with the best of them.

First there was a lot of whispering and I heard the Asian girls talking fanatically to each other and finally one of them said in English "Is she really here?" Another girl nodded her head vigorously and they both looked a little scared.

I poked my head out the office door and saw what looked to be a mini-convention going on down at the Asian office. I saw the looks on the faces and no one was happy.

I heard some raised voices, then a single woman, dark haired, middle-aged but pretty, separated herself from the group and clearly said, "Where is she?"

There was more whispers and low conversations and shaking of heads.

Again she said, quite clearly, "I don't care!" in a loud voice and started heading our direction. There was a look of fierce determination on her face and fire in her eye.

"Uh oh," I thought to myself, "This can't be good." Being very nosey, I just stood in the hallway and watched.

The Princess was at her desk, wearing headphones, hard at work on her computer. Probably on another important project she had been handpicked for. She seemed oblivious.

The middle-aged Asian woman swept into the office trailing a cluster of worried, concerned groupies behind her. They appeared to have been trying to persuade her to some course of

action or other and it was falling on deaf ears. The woman had a picture clutched in her hand and kept waving it in the air.

I couldn't quite see what the picture was. The woman entered the teacher's office and looked around and spied Barbie, her blond head bobbing to unheard rock and roll. The woman marched right over to her desk, then grabbing one of her arms, yanked Barbie straight up from the chair.

The woman was screaming and yelling something incomprehensible and kept shoving the picture in Barbie's face. Barbie was completely stunned and confused. Finally, the Asian woman slowed down a little and held the picture right in front of Barbie's face. The slow light of dawn stole over Barbie and recognition lit in her eyes. Her mouth formed a small O shape.

The Asian woman saw it too. Then without warning, her arm swung back and then forward, like in slow motion, and she slapped Barbie hard on the side of the face. So hard, I was worried about some teeth falling out. Barbie said nothing but put her hand up to a very red cheek and just stood there. The woman stood there too and stared at her a long minute. Then she turned on her heel and stomped out.

As she stormed past me, without looking either way, I was able to see what the picture was. It was clearly Barbie and what looked to be the professor at some bar and her arm was wrapped around his neck as she was giving him a big smooch.

The Asian woman halted abruptly in front of the Asian office, her purse swinging wildly at her side. She reached inside of it and pulled out a group of white papers, stapled together. The professor was still at his desk, just like none of this had anything to do with him. I got a little closer and saw the woman stomp up to him and without another word, hit him in the face with the papers. The papers fluttered innocently down on his desk as he, too, clutched a reddening cheek. The woman turned and stomped out of the office to a waiting taxi and left.

Everyone looked stunned and then finally, in typical Asian fashion, they all went back to work just like nothing had taken place.

Later, I saw Barbie packing up her computer and escaping to her dorm room. The American teachers were all too amazed to say anything.

Weeks later it was announced that Barbie had found another position elsewhere, and regretting her decision very much to leave us, had to make her adieus. She left shortly

thereafter with no cards, no party, no fanfare, no nothing. Just packed bags and a waiting taxi and she was gone.

I hate to say "I told you so" or "flash in the pan" or "she got what she deserved" or any of those really over worked phrases; but, I had to admit, I was walking around the old campus with a song in my heart and a much, much lighter step. It really was a very beautiful day.

## THE HOTEL

*Can we buy what we want?*

He was the most exciting man I had ever met. Ever. In my life. He was young, handsome, smart, and vibrant, a mover and a shaker. He was a guy destined to be on his way up: sexy, charming, intense, and compassionate. He was everything and promised more.

He was also taken, long since, by another woman I had never met. He started coming on to me and I started falling. When I learned the truth I cried and cried. His was like a rapidly moving train that slowed and paused briefly at my stop. Then, resuming its journey picked up speed and traveled rapidly away from me, pulling my heart with it.

It hurt in every way I could think of. I stayed away from him for months. I got time to observe the people around him. Women loved him and swooned over him. Men were jealous and hated him. Friends told me to stay away but he was like a deep ache that wouldn't heal.

Finally, I couldn't stand it. I wanted him more than I had ever wanted anyone. I thought about it a long time. Finally, taking my future in my hands, and before I lost my nerve, I went to a hotel downtown and rented a room for two nights and got two keys.

Next day, a Friday, I had one key in my pocket with the hotel card. I kept fingering them over and over, my hands sweaty. I walked by his office several times and finally the regular crew cleared out for lunch. I had written on the back of the card "Tonight, 8 pm."

I slid by his desk and dropped the key and the card in front of him. He stared at it a long moment, turned it over, reading the message. Then, he simply nodded his head. He never even looked up.

Now I was at the hotel, lying on the bed, waiting. I fingered my black stockings. That texture did feel pretty good. I rolled my feet back and forth admiring the new silver platform heels. Silver was his favorite. I had sprayed Chanel perfume down my chest. The slinky black dress was Victoria Secret. I had gotten one of their super plunge, push-up bra numbers too. I jumped up and checked my hair again in the mirror. I put on more lip-gloss, then immediately rubbed it off with the back of my hand. Jesus! I sat back down again.

I was breathless. I could cry. This was so wrong. I knew that. I was ashamed of myself. I couldn't help it. He was my drug.

Then, I heard the key fit in the lock and turn. My heart pounded. The door opened, "Oh God," I thought, "He's here." My hands were sweaty, I felt sick. I couldn't stand it. He walked through the doorway and smiled at me.

That one moment made it all worthwhile. He was here; I could breathe.

## CONVERSATION WITH THE MUSE

### *New Year's Eve - Time to Reflect*

"Hey, how 's it going?" she asked me.

"I'm ok," I said, "I'm a little surprised to see you here." I was on the second floor balcony, away from the party. It was a large, half-moon shape and I must not have seen her come out.

"I was in the neighborhood," she replied. She had a bit of a pout on her face. "You sent me away for a long time you know."

"Yes, I know," I responded reluctantly. "I've been busy."

"You're always busy, always have an excuse!" She spat.

"I'm been trying, I have been doing much more writing this year," I pleaded.

"Yes, I will admit, that's true. That is probably why I'm here at all. I thought you were calling me back again."

"Well, I have been," I stated with a little more confidence.

"But, oh so many years with nothing, nothing." She moaned at me.

"I had things to do!" I was pleading again. "They expect so much from me!"

"And you could have said no, you know that."

"Well," my voice trailed off. "Aren't you a little cold out here in that flimsy dress, it's New Year's Eve you know?" Her long dress was a flimsy, jade green color. Little sparks seemed to fly off it when she moved.

She stared at me. "Don't change the subject. Look at what has happened to your brother. He sent his muse away and now he can't find it anymore. Look at him; what a mess!"

"Do you think that is what is wrong with him?" I queried.

"Hum," she replied, "in part, yes. Certainly, in part."

"Oh," I murmured.

"You," she pointed at me, "you are afraid," she said, "you're afraid and can't admit it. Just say you're afraid!"

"I, I, well, well..." I stammered.

"It's no shame; it's okay to be afraid. Everyone gets afraid from time to time. But, the thing is you can't let it stop you, you have to keep going." She spoke imperially with a wave. Gold sparks seemed to trail off her hand.

"You're right," I replied weakly.

She turned and walked away a little, then turned back. It was chilly out here. The cold white balcony surface was framed by the curved black wrought-iron railing. She trailed a finger over its surface; I could hear the music from inside faintly. Was her brown hair getting curly? It reminded me of one of those Greek statues.

"Take those criticisms and stop acting like a baby, you never were any good at grammar, you know that!"

I just nodded glumly.

"And besides, when are you going to paint again?"

"Well, this place I am living in doesn't have much room..."

"Excuses!" she yelled. "You always seem to have room for another pair of shoes!"

There really was nothing to say.

"What did Hemingway say?" she demanded.

"A writer's job is to write," I quoted.



"So, are you going to argue with the Big Guy, The Old Man in the Sea?"

"Ah, no," was my only reply.

"Well then, the job of the writer is to write, the job of the writer is to write," she repeated it like a mantra. "I hope the next time I see you there will be a better report."

"I, ah, I, ah..." I couldn't think of much to say.

"Remember," she said, "don't forget me and I won't forget you." Her voice was getting fainter.

"I won't forget," I promised, "I won't forget." I willed it to be true.

The muse faded away to a few sparks and I was left alone.

"Better get back into that party," I thought to myself.

FINIS

Courtney Webb is a fourth generation Californian who loves a good story. Currently working in South Korea as an English teacher, she wrote her first poem at age nine when a relative gave her a small green book of rhyming words. She enjoys travel and learning about other cultures.



This book has been edited by Julia Belle Webb.