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AURORA

A U R O R A

1991

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Patsy's Man

Twilla J. Kunkel

The earth, bare and frozen, lay mute in pained expectation for the cleansing, killing cold to descend. It was as if the entire natural world reflected the sullen silence of an indifferent heaven. Even the man in tattered linsey-woolsey ceased his labor to lean upon a sturdy fencepost and study the sea of gray surging over the western horizon.

Marcus fumbled in his coat pocket and withdrew a knife sporting a worn wooden handle. He retrieved a small piece of kindling, whittled the rough edges from the wood and lifted his soft doe-eyes toward the numb mantle cloaking the sky. The day was almost peaceful. Almost. The silence his an underlying tension that left the air brittle.

"Marcus!" The shrill intrusion shattered a silence, eerie and pensive, to pensive, to mortal perception.

Marcus leaped around to stare nervously at his wife and master. Patsy stood with arms akimbo and feet planted firmly apart. Her wiry hair was brushed tightly and pinned back in a neat, little bun. She was still a fine sight for her age of

thirty-seven years. Her oval face was smooth molasses with only a few tiny lines, her limbs were still long and comely lending her the grace and beauty any queen could envy.

"Nigger," she huffed. "If you don't quit this foolishness and get some work done, I'm goin' to sell you off down the river. Let's see how you like pickin' cotton for your bread."

He waited. She generally had a reason for seeking him out.

"Go get your hat," she sighed in exasperation. "I want you to run down to the mill and fetch some meal. It may get bad and we've got to have some food in the house. Don't just stand there gawkin'. Hurry up."

Marcus ran inside the house and snatched his hat and gloves from the small dresser in the bedroom, pausing only to glance in a dusty mirror perched atop the dresser. He reached out to touch a few curly wisps of gray. Marcus considered himself to be good-looking in his own way. His face was firm and dark with a strong, square jaw and he rather liked his eyes. They were a soft, liquid brown with lashes so long and thick that they curled backward in a lush, feathery line.

"Marcus," she yelled. "You had best hurry yourself."

Marcus raced to the barn to saddle Patsy's new, white mule. He threw the old leather harness about the silky neck and rode out to find her waiting.

Patsy extended her arm. "Here, this is for the cornmeal."

He snatched the money and struck out toward the town of Middleburg. The naked trees and shrubs passed by him for the most part unnoticed. There wasn't anything spectacular to look at during this time of the year.

Marcus thought of Patsy and her rude treatment of him. He hated the way she made him feel, like he was just some sort of possession, to be bought or sold when the whim suited her. Still, he shrugged, white men weren't much better off. There was always some woman that tried to put chains on a man no matter what color he was. Yes sir, white women weren't a bit different except, of course, they couldn't get any legitimate papers of ownership drawn up. Maybe they couldn't sell their men off down the river, but they could make life a living hell just the same.

Women learned early how to make idiots of menfolks. It was funny that he had never noticed any private instruction on the matter when he was growing up. At times he thought it a conspiracy preached at the mother's knee; at other, he believed their talents to be a natural flaw in their make-up. The worst part of it all was the knowledge that you were going to be absolutely dead wrong about their approach to any given situation. Mostly, they yelled and if that didn't work they would get all thin lipped and stop talking for what seemed like eons before they finally broke down in big sloppy tears and made a man feel like the biggest, damn fool in the world for ever having denied them anything.

Some times were worse than others. Marcus could set a clock by Patsy. About once every month she would find some small inconsequential thing to nag about. This month he'd gotten his clothes torn while cutting wood and last month she couldn't find the right color of thread she needed. When those days came Marcus would find himself in the barn talking to the mule. He found the beast a more amiable companion. But those days, like all days, passed.

Marcus shook his head in self-disgust. He seemed to think about her more often than not. She wasn't a bad woman. It was just that she had never been a slave. Her people had been set free before the revolution. Some rich man gained an ounce of shame and let all of his blacks go free. Her people had bought land and settled her on the outskirts of this small Kentucky burg. She had never had to serve anyone and he knew that she considered herself a good deal better than her husband.

But at night she was different. She was a woman just like any other. Many times Marcus had reached out to touch her skin and he was always surprised at the warm softness of her skin. The iron was hidden in her soul, not the flesh that houses the spirit. She was like a cat. One minute she would spit and hiss, ready to fly at him in a fury and tear his dignity to shreds. The next, she purred in his arms with lithe limbs stretched in feline contentment.

Marcus saw the mill ahead and picked up the mule's pace with a gentle nudge. The temperature had dropped slightly and he wanted to be home before dark.

Marcus noticed the faces of the men as they turned to stare. He knew them. Faces too old to join the war. They parked their grizzled, tobacco-stained mugs outside the mill to watch each day pass in much the same way that every day passes. Inactivity had given a vicious turn to their natures. Marcus wondered at the looks he was receiving and with the feeling that he was about to enter a lion's den, he dismounted and tied the mule to an old tree.

"Howdy, Marcus," called a weatherbeaten face from the open door.

"Howdy, Mistah Zeke," said Marcus. "Mistah Taylor, Mistah Luster. How are y'all today?"

A chorus of complaints about the weather assaulted his ears like disgruntled, fiddle strings. Then everything seemed to go silent for a moment. The old men stood about grinning like they were crazy and Marcus began to get edgy.

Zeke turned, spat a wad of juice from his wad and tapped the edge of his boot on an old slate rock. "So, tell me, Marcus," he said. "What's it like to be a free man?"

Marcus shook his head. "What you mean? Don't go saying stuff like that."

"Naw, it's the God's honest," Luster rushed to assure him. President Lincoln freed all of the slaves. He signed the Emancipation Proclamation. He signed it on the first day of this year."

Marcus hedged. "What's that mean?"

Zeke laughed and slapped him across the back. "It means ya can go anywhere you want and nobody can stop ya."

Marcus kept his face carefully closed. He knew that they were trying to gage his reaction to their news. Marcus turned, walked into the mill and returned with a big bag of cornmeal. He strode over to the mule and flopped the bag behind the pommel. Before he turned the mule around and rode away Marcus tossed them a small smile over his shoulder.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen."

He left them gawking in the street. Marcus knew that each of them would have loved to follow him back over the ridge and toss the news in Patsy's face. What was he

going to say to Patsy? Patsy had been a ruler, a queen in her own little domain. She passed her own laws and issued her own punishments, meek as they were. Still, they were hers. Everything had been hers. It was Patsy's house, Patsy's mule, Patsy's nigger-slave husband.

His hand tightened about the reins. He had often wondered what he would say to her if he were free. Maybe he would rush in, slap her across the backside and demand his supper. He had no idea how he would react when he saw her.

He sucked the sharp air into his lungs. Free air. He was a free man! No more would he be told how to behave or think. He wasn't someone's possession any longer. He was somebody. There was something that made a man feel low when he belonged to someone other than himself. It was like some little essential part was torn away and that man ceased to be important or special.

Marcus glanced about at the row of oak trees lining the road. He could smell the stale leaves cluttered about the forest floor. The oaks had always reminded him of some people. Strong and unbending, they looked as if they could support the entire world. But, there were winds that raged in over the hills

and plucked the stalwart trees up like old corn husks and tossed them about with little concern as to where they fell. Well, he had a breeze for Patsy.

President Lincoln had signed a paper that made him free. Free as a black man could be. He didn't believe that he would be treated any differently by the whites. They didn't care if a black man had his papers or not. He was just a nigger either way to them. Unless, of course, they were one of those screaming, religious folks that rolled on the ground and got visions from God in between bouts of the jerks.

Marcus shivered as the cold sliced through his body. He had ridden the largest part of the way home in a dreamy haze. Thoughts of President Lincoln, proclamations, and oak trees fled from his mind as the sky darkened a bit more. He nudged the mule onward toward the warm little shack that was his home. His home. That had a nice ring to it. It was his home, their home. Something to share and make perfect. Marcus thought of the warmth of the fire burning in their cabin and pushed the mule to a slow trot.

The house and barn loomed out of the gray, a haven for his soul. He wasn't surprised that he hadn't

considered leaving Patsy. Perhaps there was some part of him that she still owned.

Marcus brought the mule to a halt in the barn and rubbed him down after taking off the saddle and bridle. The bag of meal slung over his shoulder, Marcus headed toward the house. Tiny snowflakes drifted to the ground in wispy, lazy confusion. He halted next to a fencepost and reached his long, brown fingers into a coat pocket and withdrew the knife. A piece of wood lay on the ground and he bent to pick it up. Marcus looked up into the gray, evening sky and let the soothing, icy flakes wash across his face. He guided the knife across the wood in a slow, thoughtful fashion.

"Marcus," her voice shrill and commanding brought a slow smile to his lips.

He didn't answer.

"Nigger," she called. "Get in out of de cold. You crazy? Get in here with that meal right now before I change my mind and sell you off down the river."

"No more," he said.

"What'd you say?" she demanded. "You tell me what you said."

His smile broadened to a toothy grin. With a slow elaborate shake of his head, Marcus turned to look her in the eye.

"No more."

Marcus flipped the wood aside and stalked by her toward the house, leaving her to drag the heavy bag of meal as best she could. He decided that he would be a gentleman and hold the door open for her. Being a generous sort, he wouldn't allow her to shoulder the entire burden. Her labored breathing and strained back underscored the heartfelt appreciation she must have been feeling.

Suddenly, his teeth ground together in an effort to squelch the scream of pain that threatened to burst from his lips. His frozen toes emitted a sickening crunch as Patsy stumbled over a protruding boot.

"Darn it," he boomed. "You did it apurpose."

She said nothing. Marcus grappled with his left boot while hopping about on one leg. He stripped off a well-mended sock and wiggled the offended digits with exaggerated care. The boot was tossed across the room and Marcus gingerly lowered his foot to the floor, careful not to apply too much pressure.

He seethed. "Where are you going? Get in here."

He saw her back stiffen. She had stuffed the heavy bag of meal into the tiny, crowded pantry. The tiny flakes of snow had melted and drops of moisture left behind clung to the tendrils that framed her dark, honeyed face.

"You want me," she said with a slight lift of her brows.

Patsy's composure grated on his nerves. Marcus wanted to reach out and shake her until she rattled like old leaves thrashed about in late autumn's wind. His fingers clenched in anticipation.

"Yes ma'am," he hissed. "I wanted you."

She waited several moments. "Are we talking about something?"

He laughed. "No ma'am. I'm gonna talk about something. You're gonna sit in that corner chair and listen."

He noted the quiet composed movements Patsy used as she pulled the chair several feet out of the corner until it sat in the center of

the room and then eased her frame down into the seat. Well, he thought, she was seated, but not cornered.

"Patsy," he began. "I ain't gonna be your slave, no more. President Lincoln freed me and every other black man."

"How you figure?" she asked.

"He wrote up the Emancipation Proclamation. It says I'm free. Free to tell you where to go with your old Kentucky dirt farm.

"Naw," she sighed. "I don't believe he did."

Marcus ground his teeth in frustration. She never listened. Didn't try to listen.

"Woman," he said. "I've tried to tell you what I know as a fact and you just sit there like you can hide from the truth. Well, here's the truth, you don't own me or anybody else. You don't tell me what to do, where to go, or when I can whittle a piece of wood."

"Marcus," she seemed to let her breath out in a long whoosh. "President Lincoln's fancy proclamation don't care nothing about slaves in Union territories. He ain't gonna make no white folks mad for you or any other black man. The

emancipated slaves are free in states that don't even belong to him anymore. I think that he wants the slaves to rise up and join the North."

Her voice sounded tired. He wanted to scream, to cry, to pick her up and break her like a glass doll. If she had been lying he might have done all of those things. But, she hadn't lied. The look of wretched hopelessness etched across her features in a curious misery. Curious, because it had not been her pardon that was revoked.

"I've known about it since last year," she said.

Marcus, rooted to the floor, had listened with dumb horror. It was gone, crushed like some newly acquired trinket smashed in an alley fight. His dream fell to earth in meaningless fragments. His thoughts scrambled in a thousand different directions. They begged for justice, hope, anything at all to relieve the icy dread knotted in the pit of his gut.

"I'm sorry," she said.

Marcus dropped to his knees and covered his face with strong, ebony hands. For what seemed like hours, he remained like a great monument to

his torture. He stirred only to look up as her hands reached out to knead his shoulders.

"Marcus," she whispered. "You can leave whenever you want. I never told you so, but you could have gone anytime you wanted. I wouldn't have sent anyone after you."

The dam broke. Torrents of anguish washed over him as great, salty globules poured from his eyes.

"Lord, woman," he chocked. "Where would I go?"

"Anywhere," she answered. "After this war is over there won't be any more slavery. But, you can do whatever you want right now. I ain't gonna hold ya no more. You're free. I shouldn't have waited this long to tell you."

"Then why did you," he sobbed. "Why?"

Her mouth trembled. "Because it's hard trying to work all this land by myself. I needed help. Now that you know you're free you won't help. Always before, I could at least get a little aid when I threatened you."

Patsy's usually straight shoulders were hunched in defeat.

She hadn't been strong or enduring; she had been proud. Too proud to admit that she needed him.

"Patsy," he said. "Nobody wants to be a slave. Working with someone is different from being forced to work for someone. I didn't work hard for you because you made me feel like I was just something else you owned."

Marcus pulled her down beside him and hugged her tightly. She smelled of apple pie and wood smoke. She smelled like home. He realized that home was the only place he could find the freedom that he needed. Liberty wasn't something you could run away to find, he concluded, it was an important part of the soul that needed expression and room to grow. It was a commodity that should be preserved in the heart of everyman.

Tucked safe inside the little house, Marcus discovered the interdependence that happy people know. Lost in nature's oblivious march, they grew and learned and enjoyed the contrasts in the world they would build for themselves. As bitter winter silence descended, a light, faint and hopeful, illuminated the various shades of gray.

Victim

Cut me up--
Dismember me
into the separate parts
you so like to paw at.

Hang me up
for passers-by to gawk at:
your trophy, your prize,
your rag doll with real eyes.

Lay me out
on your worldly floor:
your dirt reflection,
a human roll-up carpet.

--Except that I
won't be cut up much longer.
Your trophy will come to life
like a taxidermist's nightmare.

I will rise up
and I will smile
at your
dying squeal.

Donna L. Brockman

He came to me--
spinning his passion
cocoon.

And left me--
with permanent smile
on the face of my life.

Donna L. Brockman

War

jungle spirit
suspended in
nightmare
of unknowing
limbo -- this
fucking war
festers
until life
loses all
reason and
forces spirit
a retreat to
darkness.

Donna L. Brockman

True Blindness

Donna L. Brockmam

"Table for two?" the waiter asked, glancing admirably at the handsome man by my side.

Fritz, whom I later discovered hadn't the time for insipid questions or for anyone lower on the social ladder, answered with a curt nod of the head.

The euphoric cloud on which I had been quaintly perched since last week was still solid beneath me. I remembered the magical afternoon well. Being struck with a sudden burst of inspiration, I had dragged out my old folder of poetry and begun to sift through what was revisable. I hadn't written in a while, and I could feel the old contented excitement beginning to creep into my system. In my concentration, I didn't even hear the phone ringing.

"Karen? Can you get that?" my roommate had shouted from the bathroom.

Irritable that the ringing had made me forget an ingenious line, I grabbed the phone and said hello.

Little did I know it would be

from afar, asking ME for a dinner date.

I had said yes immediately, forgetting my personal promise never to date a man I didn't really know. We had been assigned to different group projects in an English class just last week, but all I could remember about Fritz was his preppy attire and good looks. His hair was impeccably combed in a blonde wave over his forehead, and I assumed his eyes were halting blue (although I had never seen them due to the presence of his Ray-Bans).

And now, here I was, facing him over exquisite china and very expensive menus, looking into his (indeed) blue eyes.

"This is a four star restaurant," Fritz said over his water glass. "Shall we start with escargots?"

"Well," I mumbled, trying to decide if I should tell him that I had never heard of "Bif's Bistro," much less had escargot.

It didn't matter because he was already talking about something else.

"So what did you say your father does?"

"I didn't," I replied, "but he sells insurance."

"Insurance? . . . I see."

"And my mother is an attorney," I said wondering why he was so interested in my parent's occupations.

"Your mother works?" asked Fritz, with more than subtle disapproval. "How nice."

I was about to ask him why he seemed surprised, feeling my unapologetic feminist urges rise, but was interrupted by a voice behind us.

"Oh, hi Fritz!" the nasal voice was coming from the next table over.

I turned around to see a blonde girl with a big nose.

"My God, Bianca, is that you?" Fritz exclaimed with the most enthusiasm I had heard all evening.

"I'll be right back," he said, still gazing at her.

"Nice talking to you," I mumbled, but Fritz was already gone.

I took a gulp of water and glanced around at the obviously classy decor of "Bif's Bistro." The

mauve walls sported famous paintings and beautiful photographs of exotic landscapes. On one side of the room stood a handsome bronze statue, a fountain at his feet.

Besides the blonde girl next to us, a couple and their infant were seated a few tables over, the parents obviously delighting in their child's capers. Two men were eating at a table across the restaurant, and I noticed a walking stick at one of the men's feet.

"Sorry to do that to you," Fritz said as he sat back down. I wondered if he meant leaving or coming back.

"Bianca's family and mine go way back," he explained. "We take all our European trips together."

"Really?" I said, genuinely interested. "I've been to Canada; it was so beautiful. I wrote some poetry about."

"Canada? It's okay," he chuckled. "By the way, could you help me with some ideas for my class project?"

Somewhere between this point and the arrival of our lobster dinner, I realized that Fritz was not the man for me.

The couple's baby a few tables over had begun to whimper, and I could tell Fritz was getting angry.

"Why do parents bring children to fine restaurants?" Fritz exclamation was loud, and I hoped the parents didn't hear.

It was then that he noticed one of the men across the restaurant glancing at me quite frequently.

"That's something else that really irks me: what's that man looking at?"

"Maybe he's enjoying the artwork," I said, pointing to a Monet painting behind me.

This soothed my date's ill temper for a while, and we ate our dinner without much conversation. We were waiting for dessert when I realized the man was looking in my direction again. Fritz noticed too; I could see the little veins standing up in his neck like angry welts.

I smiled at Fritz and turned my face to the side, but the man continued his unblinking stare.

Then to my absolute horror, Fritz jumped up and headed for the man.

"No, Wait!" I scrambled up after him, but I knew it was too late.

Fritz was almost to their table, and had already begun a string of insults, his voice rising with every word.

I bounded to the table, pulling on Fritz's arm, in time to see the man raise his face slowly. He was staring vacantly, but his eyes didn't seem to be focusing.

With three words that resounded through my heart, the man said sadly, "I am blind."

I turned and ran out of "Bif's Bistro," stumbling to escape the high class of stupidity and a frozen, bronze statue named Fritz.

With Brothers Like You

Kathy S. McIntosh

As Jim climbed between the covers, he felt the cold hard steel of the king pin against his chest. With a gasp, he thought once again why it was there.

He'd had enough. Tim had cuckolded him for the last time. Jim had watched from the side lines, time after time, as his twin brother Tim had, smooth as silk, slipped in and taken Jim's girlfriends. Why did this happen? Tim wasn't better looking than he was. It must be that he could screw better. But that was only because he had more experience than Jim. And anyway, how would all the girls know this, unless of course, they bragged about their conquests just like the guys. Yeah, that must be it . . . But this time Tim had gone too far. This time he'd taken Rose . . .

So, here Jim lay, hands clutching a piece of metal, waiting for his brother to get back from his latest conquest. Victory at Jim's expense . . . It was obvious that Tim had no brotherly love for him. Of this Jim was sure. Else why would he continually take Jim's girlfriends, and then come home,

bragging about "that wonderful pussy."

What would Jim do with the king pin when Tim got there? He smiled slyly as he lay there in the dark. Yeah, this was the end . . . Tim would never again steal his girlfriends and then come home gloating about having fucked another one of Jim's girlfriends before Jim got the chance. In fact, after Tim was through, the girls never seemed interested in Jim anymore

Again Jim smiled, the corners of his mouth slowly gliding towards his ears. Ears . . . Hoskins' ears. That was what was so puzzling. Tim had the Hoskins' ears. Big as cabbage leaves. And, still all the girls preferred Tim over Jim. But, no more. No more would Jim stand by in humiliation as Tim slipped into the night with Jim's girl.

Jim let the scene play across his mind as he thought of how he would do it. Tim would come home and slide into bed next to his brothers. That was in Jim's favor. Because the family was poor, all the boys had to sleep in one bed, together. So, all Jim had to do was wait. Eventually Tim had to come home. And when he did . . .

Jim would be there . . . patiently waiting.

Jim could see it now. He'd hear the car first, that old Model A that Tim drove. Rattled like the coal trains on Coal Harbor Mountain. The ones that hauled the coal from Kentucky mines to big cities like Cincinnati and Toledo. Then Tim would come toward the house, probably staggering from one to many beers, and sloppily whistling under his breath --- Jim remembered all the times he'd warned Tim to knock it off with his girls, and Tim had just laughed, whistling as he walked away.

Next, the screen door would slam and Tim would remember -- too late -- that Mom had threatened to beat the next one who let the door bang shut. But, Mom was too deeply asleep to ever hear the door slam this late at night. Once her head hit the pillow, she was gone. The way she managed the family, the house, and the country store the family owned, it was no wonder. Especially after getting up at four every morning, Sunday included. she never missed a Sunday in church. Too bad some of her religion didn't rub off on Tim.

But then Tim was beyond help now. He didn't love nobody but himself. Yeah, everybody would be

better off with Tim dead. And, everyone would thank Jim for having the courage to end his wicked life. Well, sure, Mom would cry for a while, but that was normal. After all, she had given birth to Tim eighteen years ago, and had lived in the same house with him all those years. Jim knew she'd miss Tim all right, but she'd be better off in the long run. Someday she might even thank Jim . . .

After the slamming of the door, Tim would trip over Sandy's bed on the way through the house, to the back door, heading for the outhouse. Yeah, he'd probably have to puke and piss after all those beers. Then he'd trip over Sandy again as he stumbled back through the house, groping for the bedroom door, just to the left of Sandy's bed. Tim always whined about Sandy having a bed to herself when all the guys had to sleep together, but, after all, Sandy was the only girl, and Don knew he sure didn't want to sleep with her. She was so boy crazy she might just try to jump his bones. Then he'd have to kill her, too.

Then Tim would clumsily tiptoe past the folks' bed, trying to move quietly, without success. He probably would stub his toe on the antique table Mom kept in the center of the room -- God only knew

why. Probably just to trip them up for trying to sneak in late. If that was the reason though, it never worked. Even Tim's muffled "Shit!" would fail to arouse her.

Finally, Tim would find the bed where his brothers were already asleep (or so he'd think). Todd and Tracy were, or rather, had been until the "shit!", but Jim knew they would drift back off almost immediately. By the time Tim reached the edge of the bed, Jim would be the only one who would still be wide awake. But, Tim wouldn't know that. He'd fall across the foot of the bed, lay there for a couple of minutes, then slowly roll around and feel for his share of the big bolster pillow. He'd groan and moan about the hangover he'd have in the morning. Well, he wouldn't have to worry about that this time. Jim silently promised himself that Tim would not have a hangover in the morning. He'd see to it.

Wait . . . is that Tim's car? Yes, it was turning onto the dirt lane where they lived, but when it should have slowed down, it sped and went on by. Just T.J., his cousin who lived behind them, further on up the lane.

Jim's heart stopped racing and slowly resumed its normal pace.

Why was he so jumpy? He had thought this thing clear through. In fact, he'd pondered for nearly two months about whether or not to go through with it. It was Tim himself who finally made up Jim's mind for him . . .

It happened just this evening. Rose had been there -- with Jim. Oh, how long Jim had waited, trying to get up the nerve to ask her out. But Rose was upper crust. Her daddy owned the coal trucks that Jim and his brothers drove. And, he owned the coal tipple where they hauled from. Hell, he probably owned the mine the coal came from, too. Jim wasn't sure. What he was sure of was that Rose was the prettiest girl in the whole school. And, when he finally did get up his nerve, she totally surprised him by saying "Yes!" Sure, Jim knew she'd been out with plenty of guys, and Jim also knew that he probably wouldn't be her first, but he still thought she was the best thing he'd seen in a long time. Someday soon, he'd get in her pants, and screw her head off. It'd be so good, better than he'd ever had.

Certainly better than the little slut who sat behind him in Algebra class. Not only was she ugly, but she couldn't fuck worth a shit. Maybe she was a virgin, or rather, had been, until Jim got a

hold of her. But if you didn't know how to use the gifts God gave you, what good were they, anyway? What was her name? Sarah, Clara? Something like that. Tara! That was it. Well, it could have been "Suck Dick" for all Jim cared. He'd never go out with her again. Because he had Rose. Or at least, he'd had her. Until Tim came home from work early and found them getting ready to leave for the movies. He'd moved in for the kill, just like he always did, and then Rose had gone with him rather than Jim. Oh, Tim was slick, all right. Took Rose right out from under Jim's nose before he even knew he'd been left home alone. No Rose -- and no pussy!

But no more. This time Tim would pay. He wouldn't ever take another of Jim's girlfriends. He wouldn't ever screw another girl, period. Jim's or anyone else's.

If Jim closed his eyes, he could still see Rose as she had been just before leaving with Tim. Long silky brown hair, with eyebrows of the same color. That meant her hair color was natural. No artificial stuff for Rose -- just pure wholesome lust. That's what she aroused in Jim. And, he was willing to bet that her pussy hair was the same color as the hair on her head and brows. Silky

brown. And soft as one of Mom's baby chicks. Silky smooth. Just thinking about sliding his rod into that silky smoothness gave him a hard-on. Damn! Now he'd have to jack-off again.

Think about Tim, not Rose. Tim, who was the one who was probably sliding his rock-hard dick into that silky smoothness right now. Stop! Stop thinking about that. Or rather, think about it only to fuel the fire. Build the hatred of Tim so that there'd be no second thoughts about doing what had to be done. And soon. Tim should be home any time now. Then Jim would do it.

Just as Tim would reach around for his share of the bolster, Jim would slide his hands down under the covers and grasp the heavy piece of steel. Even now, he could feel its coldness as it nestled next to his body. Soon . . .

Shush! What was that? Another car turning down the lane. But . . . not the Model A. Probably T.J.'s wife, Tammy coming home from work. She did the three-to-eleven shift at the hospital where she was an R.N. Not for the first time Jim wondered if she knew that T.J. had been with Sheila again. Hell, he spent almost every evening with her, always coming

home just before eleven, when he knew Tammy would be home shortly.

Jim remembered the night he'd gone over to the Crystal Pystol bar in the next county over. T.J. and Sheila had been there, cuddled in a dark booth near the rear of the bar. But Jim doubted that Tammy really cared. What was the name of that doctor at the hospital. Martin, that's it. Jim had heard that all the double shifts Tammy had pulled wasn't pulled at the hospital . . .

Again Jim tensed as still another car turned into the lane. Yes! It was the Model A! Tim would be here any minute now, and then he would be dead.

Jim listened as Tim pulled into the wide spot across from the house. He could hear Tim cursing as he struggled to close the car door as quietly as the unoiled hinges would allow. Any minute now, Jim would hear the front door squeak open. Shit! What was taking that sonovabitch so long? He must have gone around the house, to the outhouse first, rather than coming through the house and tripping over Sandy. Yes, that was it. Jim heard the door on the outhouse screech as Tim stumbled inside. Silence. Then, after about five minutes, the door

screached once more as Tim came out and made his way across the backyard, again stumbling over the root of that old maple, landing with a thud on the back steps. Again, Jim promised himself that Tim would feel no pain come morning. He was really doing Tim a favor, saving him from all that untold pain. Jim waiting to hear Tim pick himself up, but all was quiet. Why doesn't he come on so I can get this over with? After a few minutes which seemed more like hours, Jim could contain himself no longer, he gripped the kingpin and eased himself out of bed. Carrying the kingpin in front of him, Jim couldn't reach his hands out in front of himself to feel where he was going, but that was no problem. Jim had lain awake so long that his eyes had long ago adjusted to the darkness.

Jim made his way through the living room, past Sandy's bed, feeling proud of himself for managing not to stumble over her as Tim did every night.

Still clutching the kingpin to his chest, he made his way through the kitchen, to the back porch. The moon shone brightly in the sky, illuminating Tim as he slowly picked himself up off the ground. Must have addled himself for a moment, Jim thought. Just as Tim

managed to upright himself, Jim heard a screech of tires from the front of the house. He had been so intent upon his purpose that he hadn't even heard the car lurch onto the lane. As he raised the kingpin quietly over Tim's head, Rose came barreling around the corner of the house. Reaching Tim, she clutched at him, molding her body to his, sobbing hysterically. "Tim! Tim! Please, hold me close! I can't stand being away from you! Don't leave me anymore."

In shock, Jim lowered the kingpin, mutely observing the couple as they made their way to the woods behind the outhouse. The muffled sounds emanating from the woods played a morbid, melancholy tune unendingly across Jim's mind. He dropped dejectedly to the step with a dull thud, realizing that Tim and Rose were still unaware of his presence. He realized too, that he had, once again, lost the battle . . . No, this time it was the war. It was over. Tim had won.

Hell

Scorching

fiery coals. . .
branding crimson souls.

Glowing red

needles from the forge. . .
scratching scarlet tattoos
across tainted minds.

Empty

clammy silence. . .
shrouding
a fog embedded hollow
at 3 a.m.

Flailing

lonely arms. . .
aching to hold
another
warming pulsating
body near.

Itching

restless discontent. . .
kicking pebbles
through daylight,
whimpering for moonlight,
stamping
through midnight,
screeching for dawn.

Hell. . .

what we each
in our turn
perceive it to be.

Lisa J. Denney

I Dream in Darkness

I dream in darkness,
 silent,
 enshrouding,
 echoes
 of lost souls
 crying
in hollowed burned forests.

I traipse
through the smoldering darkness
 in tattered rags,
 wandering quietly
through cremated ashes
 of all those
I have known before.
I long to embrace them,
 but they,
 mere spirits,
rising from cinders,
 float past me,

a now unrecognizable figurature
 refugee
 from a forgotten
 forest
once laden long ago
 with sunlight
with dancing emerald leaves.

Lisa J. Denney

Desensitized

Numb
I knew long ago
I would feel this way
for I felt too much
loved too deep
gave too much of myself
to others
and to live.

And after
being cut by blades
that I didn't expect,
being burned
by torches
thrown too fast,

I've learned
to close myself off-
to walk away
cynical
amused
desensitized
unable even to cry.

Lisa J. Denney

Scars

I empty myself
strip naked
in the night
stand bare
in the moonlight
and examine my scars

scars
requiring
the stitches
of time
scars
once bloody,
gaping gashes
now covered
with fresh pink tissue
I touch each one
acknowledge
these blemished
each a separate engraving
upon an already spotted soul.

Lisa J. Denney

Dissection

Striped bare,
standing
in a forest
of frozen ragged trees.
Naked,
fleshly procelian
silhouette
whimpering in the dusk.

My soul
sliced open
with a dripping scalpel
bleeding silently
awaiting
your instrument of dissection.

Your needles
probe and poke,
tease
my memories and history
into fine threads
of crimson
to be examined
closer yet,
microscopically viewed,
in order
to satisfy your cravings,
your curiosity,
to look upon a soul
fascinating,
so different from your own.

Lisa J. Denney

Dissection II

So you probe and tear
prick my soul
until you tire
of your dissection
wash your hands of me
and retreat to your safe home
where no curiosities
do abide.

Leaving me
stripped bare
the remains of my soul
dripping from my hands
bleeding silently,
whimpering
in the dusk.

Lisa J. Denney

Hollow dancers
changers in dark caverns
silhouettes around a fire
screeching
cutting themselves with stone.

Obsessed
possessed
or merely survivors
crying
the only way they can

when tears
are but salty drips
of crystalline
and heartbreak
a bureaucratized word
when laughter
is an echo
from some unmarked grave
and trust beheaded
long ago.
Survivors,
pleading
for the scent of their own death,
cutting themselves with stones.

Lisa J. Denney

Naked Soldiers

Winter trees,
naked soldiers
standing at attention.

Crystalline limbs
frozen in position
awaiting
the thawing
of spring.

Once I felt sympathy
for these
desolate battalions of winter,
camouflaged
beneath the frozen grey sky.

Now I just wonder
how it would feel
to be frozen,
numb,
deaf,
to sobs
of tortured souls
warming their hands
over the glowing coals
of life.

Lisa J. Denney

The Changeling (Or Coming of Age)

Katherine Roberts

Torment! It must have been destined at the moment of my birth, and it has continued long after the death of Her I loved too well. Torment! What else has She bequeathed to me? For the love of She who love me more deeply than any mortal woman, I paid dearly.

There are many interesting and varying stories concerning my adoption (for my life is now a legend), but no one, save for Mother, knows the truth. Beautiful, mysterious, obsessively enchanting Mother --of Her I began to question my heritage at a very early age. I questioned for the same reason that everyone who chanced to meet us questioned -- we were as different as North and South. As opposite in appearance as the day and the night. Thus it was obvious to all that we were not bound by blood. Rather, we were bound by a mutual love far surpassing that of any natural Mother and child.

Her hair was as black as the feather of a raven, while mine is as white as snow. Her pallid, yet beautiful flesh was completely unblemished and, in being so, eerily resembled that of a china doll. I, on the other hand, have always been tanned and ruddy of complexion. Small and fragile, She carried Herself with such an air of dignity that She seemed taller than Her five-foot frame truly was. I, being

quite tall and muscular, seemed a giant in Her midst. Save for one striking similarity, we were, at least in visage, nothing alike. That similarity lay in our eyes. We both possessed eyes of smoldering crystal blue, unlike I have ever encountered before on any other Man. Our eyes were by far the most memorable feature with which we were both endowed.

My Mother was an extraordinary creature capable of unsurpassable affections, and though She loved me more deeply than any other could have, I adored Her even more deeply, and with more passion, than She could have known. I would have laid down my life for Her a hundred times over for She was, in fact, my very life.

We spent several years together in the grand old mansion bestowed upon Her by an unknown relative. Passed down generation after generation through Her Rumanian family, the house meant a great deal to Her. It meant even more to me because it was that very inheritance which enabled Her to take me in and raise me as Her own.

How fondly I remember the warm summer evenings of my early childhood when we, alone as usual, would sit together in the cluttered little parlor and converse on topics which would continue to be our favorites for years to come. I asked questions and She always knew the answers. Nature and Her many splendors were my most beloved subjects, and from where I sat

(snuggled up against Her legs on the floor) I had a brilliant view of the lovely woods which spread its voluptuous eagle's wings around our home for protection. Memories of such discussions still, to this day, possess my mind and bring tears to my eyes.

I would sit and listen as She spoke in Her eloquent poet's words about fairies, elves, nymphs, and gnomes -- Her beloved "creatures of the forest." She spoke of the perfect love that the creatures held for one another, always stressing that the tenderness She felt for me was unequalled even by the fairies in their flowery abodes. The only emotion that even compared to Her love for me, She said, was the deep and undying love that a She-wolf possesses for her mate and her cubs. This wolf-love She seemed to hold in very high-esteem. Mother spoke so knowledgeably about the creatures, in fact, that She seemed to know and love them intimately, and because I loved my Mother so powerfully, I yearned to know and love these creatures as She did.

It was not until I was much older, however, nearly twenty-one, that She confided in me that She herself (and I also) was one of the race of the forest creatures. At first Her words delighted me, for I thought that She was going to revive the pretty stories of my youth for the sake of entertainment. However, when She persisted I became worried. I, being a sensible and educated young man, believed Her to be reverting into some

sort of fantasy world. Since She was coming along in years it was quite easy for me to construe that Her age (and possible senility) was bringing on paranoid delusions.

Although I was in no way prepared to hear the seemingly ridiculous story She was about to convey, I bade Her continue and I listened reluctantly, praying all the while that She would soon return to Her senses and reveal that She found humor in the nonsensical farce She was playing out at my expense. As She spoke, with great authority I might add, concerning the wolves in the forest and their intercourses with such fictitious characters as elves and fairies, I resolved to seek help of the best psychologist in the world, sparing no expense to regain the sensible and beloved Mother whom I had known and devoted myself to for my entire life.

She went on to explain that when She was young I was given to Her by a stranger in the woods, the very woods behind our house, but several miles away (for our woods stretched for miles in three directions). As She spoke, I rose from my place at Her feet and ambled slowly to the bar -- half to hide the tears which were rising in my eyes and half to attain a much needed tumbler of Bourbon. As I prepared my drink, I was aware of Her voice, but intentionally blocked out Her words. Returning to my place I remember that She muttered, "A stranger with brilliant crystal blue eyes."

Two days passed, and because of my approaching twenty-first birthday, I put-off contacting a physician. I began wishfully thinking that Mother had only lapsed into a temporary spell and that She was quite Herself again. The subject of wolves and the like had not been mentioned since the initial confrontation, and I began to believe that God in Heaven had answered my prayer. This, God blast it, was not to be our fate.

At dinner the same day, two nights after the ominous lecture, Mother again returned to the theme of Her supernatural creatures of whose line I supposedly came. In an attempt to divert Her attention, I pointed out that She appeared extremely fatigued and that Her person was somewhat haggard. When I commented thus, she only replied, "Such is our plight." Many times I attempted to change the subject of our conversation, but She continually returned to what had become the only issue She cared to pursue with me. She appeared to my dismay to be quite changed -- not at all the spectacular woman She had been just days before. Though She had appeared "sick" in the past with much the same symptoms, this seemed to be Her worst bout yet, bringing with it an additional filthy symptom -- insanity!

That night I retired feeling somewhat defeated. I considered contacting the doctor first thing in the morning, but feared hearing him say what I thought I already knew -- that Mother was indeed crazy.

Hour after hour passed that dreadful night as I lay wide awake in my bed. Thoughts raced through my head and I could find no peace. I was terrified that the only soul I had every truly loved was out of my reach. She had become obsessed with the crazy fantasy, and what's more, She desired me, Her only child, to accompany Her down the morbid path of inevitable destruction led by Her gruesome guide -- Madness!

No longer able to tolerate the claustrophobia I felt in my little chamber, I arose and, with the intent to embark on a short tour of the garden, began to dress. While pulling on my trousers, I chanced to gaze out the window, into the darkness, at the garden which stood directly below my window-lattice. In the hazy darkness I thought I spied a figure dressed all in white darting quickly through the bushes. At first I thought little of the figure, but with further scrutinization I recognized the figure as that of a naked woman who was, at this point, running at the speed of a leopard in the direction of the forest.

Throwing on the remainder of my clothing, I dashed down the stairs and stumbled out into the foggy night-air. Although I did not recognize the figure due to the darkness, I assumed she was a hungry traveler stopping in our garden to steal vegetables, and upon my appearance at the window, she retreated into the woods in fear of reproach.

Because the form was female, I felt it was my duty as a gentleman to follow her and retrieve her from the wood in which she would undoubtedly lose her way in the darkness.

With this task in mind, I followed her into the forest. With nothing but the full moon to guide my feet, I realized suddenly the difficulty of my venture. If the pursued was aware of my presence, and thought that I was after her for retribution's sake, she would run even faster, and thus be extremely difficult to over-take. Still I surged onward. Strange night-sounds surrounded me, and with an almost painful bang, my mind exploded with visions of evil elves and hungry wolves, though surprisingly I was unafraid. My Mother had warned me never to fear such forest-dwellers, and possibly for that reason, I continued on -- and for the sake of the pale leopard-woman.

For what seemed like an eternity, I wandered aimlessly among the shadows, sinking deeper and deeper into the labyrinth of foliage. I consistently cried out in the hope that she would hear my cries and quit the dangerous wood, but that was not the case. After scanning the forest for an uncalculated amount of time, I quit my vain hunt and headed in the direction of the house. On my return, I noticed a number of things which I had apparently missed during my search for the woman. by this time my eyes had adjusted to the darkness, and I was able to make

out blood on the trail before me. My heart sunk for the woman, the probable victim of what appeared to be a wolf -- his tracks still fresh in the impressionable earth. In no time I reached the edge of the woods, and my safe abode. And because of the night's exertion, I feel asleep in no time wondering if the strange, unknown leopard-woman could have been Mother, nut no. She was in Her bed (I had learned upon passing Her room) and the woman I had seen was most likely dead.

I still remember with much detail the dream which invaded my sleep that night, and caused me to cry out so loudly that the servant who slept on the other side of the house reported having heard my cries in the middle of the night. In the dream I was young. So young, in fact, that Mother was forced to carry me on Her back through the forest due to my lack of coordination. We were apparently journeying by way of the wood, on what appeared to be the very path which winds up behind our home. So far the trip had been uneventful, as far as I was concerned, but Mother was tired and found it necessary to unburden Herself of my weight. She placed me down on the ground on all fours, I being too young yet to walk upright. Immediately I began to cry -- sheer terror bolted through me like an electrical current as I attempted to gain control of myself. The more I cried, the more I frightened myself, for the cry was not that of a human child, but the

throaty wining of a . . . a wolf! What was wrong?

I awakened with a start, and finding myself covered in perspiration, instantly recalled the dream from which I had just been roused. For a moment I shuddered in horror, but soon contained myself enough to push off the quilts and heave my feet onto the floor. They were spattered from top to bottom in dried earth. What had gone on? Did I really . . . ? As one would expect, I soon began rationalizing the entire incident as having been the result of too many horror stories on Mother's part and too much whiskey on my own. Surely I had undressed after my escapade in the forest. "What was happening to me?" Could it have something to do with . . . ?

"Mother, did you see a woman in the garden last night?" I asked. "Mother, did you hear me pass by your room last night?" Her answer to all of my inquiries was the same, "These are the nights of the full moon. Many strange things happen on such nights as these. But you choose not to listen. You choose to believe that your faithful Mother is insane!"

By this time She had adequately convinced me that an appointment with a psychologist was in order. Fearing that both of us were completely insane, I sat down and wrote a letter to a well-known doctor named William Christy. In my letter I described the peculiar behavior She had been exhibiting recently,

including also a bit of family history and a return address. His reply was short and somewhat disappointing. It included a simple regret on the grounds that he planned on taking some time off from work -- apparently in order to go hunting. He promised to contact me upon his return to the office.

With these unusual and disappointing events still weighing heavily on my head, the day turned into night. Mother occupied Herself in a book as the full moon became visible in the night sky. I, on the other hand, was occupied with my thoughts. I obviously had a lot to think about considering that I was about to turn twenty-one, my Mother appeared to be losing Her mind, and I was not completely certain of my own mental well-being. As I wrestled with my thoughts, I became aware that the woman whom I loved was uttering something quietly to Herself, something about the moon. As I turned to face Her, She said to me, "The moon represents many things to us my son, but above all it represents change."

"Tonight," I said, "the moon represents my transition from boy into man. At midnight I'll be twenty-one years old."

"Yes," She replied softly, "and with manhood comes responsibilities which you have not allowed me to teach you about. Because of your lack of faith in me, you will suffer greatly, and in your suffering, I too will be in pain because I

love you so much and because I FAILED YOU."

As She said those words, the pale moon-light played upon Her features, and She looked to me like the young woman who raised me -- who taught me to read and to write and to think. A feeling of despair and regret suddenly overwhelmed me and I ran to Her, "You have not failed me Mother, it is I who have failed you. You taught me everything I know about the world!" Internally I reprimanded myself for every having doubted Her sanity. How could I ever have betrayed Her, even in thought? I thought myself a despicable wretch!

She held me gently for a moment, then held me away from Her at arm's length, staring intently into my eyes. "I must tell you now, quickly, of your fate."

What fate are you referring to, Mother? What are you trying to say?"

"At midnight tonight you will be compelled to..."

"What do you mean compelled? I don't understand."

"Do not be concerned. You will have the wolves and me as your guides."

"Mother!" I growled, "Stop this lunacy at once!" With this, I bolted from the room. In tears, I considered leaving the mansion. I was an intelligent young

man -- I could easily find employment and a wife. I could leave and never return! I could escape this lunatic who was my Mother

But Nay! I could not desert Her in Her hour of need. Damn Dr. Christy! Damn his hunting! The love that I held in my heart for my only parent was powerful enough, even then, to hold me there though the thought of beholding Her madness was more than I could bear. The thought of betraying Her was close to blasphemy to me -- for Mother, even in madness so closely resembled a goddess.

An hour passed in such reveries, and I wondered what She, who so completely controlled my heart, was thinking. I was considering the horrible possibilities when the unnerving sound of a wild animal in excruciating pain rang out in the distance. An intense searing pain enveloped my own body at the same time, causing me to double-over and fall to my knees on the floor. My head was pounding as I picked myself back up and began rationalizing that the pain was due to the recent stress I had been experiencing. It ceased as suddenly as it had struck, and I resolved to investigate the noise.

I raced to the closet which contained my rifle, acquired it, and set out in the direction of the howling. The closer I got, the louder and more feverish the shrieks became. The animal was undoubtedly suffering immensely. As I approached the scene, I became aware of a

man standing over a wild dog. The animal had been wounded and was bleeding to death before our eyes. It was easy to discern that the wolf was, indeed, the source of the sounds I had heard from the house. The more I listened, the more certain I became -- the howls which the animal emitted were not purely those of a wolf, they were half human!

While I stood there, stupefied, I remembered that I was not alone with the injured animal. A rather distinguished-looking gentleman was located on its other side. He raised his rifle, aiming for the dog's head and shot. The moment before it died, the dog looked at me, seeming to plead for its life. It actually seemed intelligent!

At once, I fell to my knees and grasped the dead beast. I lifted its limp head and caught a final glimpse of its smoky-blue eyes -- my eyes! Through a red blur, I gazed up at the stranger. He had replaced his weapon with a camera, and was engaged in photographing myself and the beast.

"What, may I ask, are you doing, sir?" I inquired. He did not reply.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked, this time my voice sounded unexplainably hostile.

There followed a long, uncomfortable pause during which he stared down at the dead beast and I glared up at him. After

clearing his throat nervously, he replied, "Look at the beast you are so lovingly caressing, sir!"

Without thinking, I extracted my gaze from the killer and shifted it onto . . . my Mother. The wolf which had, moments earlier, been lying dead in my arms was gone, and in its place lay my beloved!

I clasped my face in my hand, gasping for air, agonizing.

"I don't understand! What has happened? My poor dead Mother!"

"You're Mother," questioned the man in a bewildered tone, "this, this thing is your mother?"

"You are a murderer, sir!"

"How can this be? You have just witnessed the transformation of a lycanthrope after death. You say this is your Mother?"

Slowly, the stranger made his way back to his rifle-pouch. Before I had time to recover, it was aimed at me.

"Why are you not changed tonight, demon?"

"I . . ."

"On this night of the full moon, why are you not changed? How old are you,

beast? Are you blood-kin to this female?"

"No, no," I stammered, "I was adopted during childhood! Who are you might I ask?"

With a look of distrust, the man lowered his gun slightly, "I am Dr. William Christy of Birmingham. It is lucky for you, my boy, that you are not directly related to this beast. She was pure evil. Pure evil, lucky for you.

Upon hearing his name I understood quite a lot. This was the "renowned psychologist" Dr. Christy, and he was doing his hunting in my very-own back yard. Little by little everything became clear -- the creatures of the forest, the fate Mother had warned me about, the change . . .

"But where do I come in?" I thought.

"My home is just beyond that hill, Dr. Christy. Would you be so kind as to accompany me there? I believe I deserve an explanation of the events which have taken place here tonight."

"Yes, I think I can do that, my boy. This must be an awful . . ."

"Please doctor. Go ahead of me, right up that hill. I will join you presently. I want . . . I need to say farewell."

"Of course." And he was gone.

Midnight came while I was in the forest. There was some pain, but it was minimal. Christy and I met later at the house -- he was never seen again. It was his night to die. It was my night to become a man.



