

Literal Translations

Quarterly Magazine

Published by Litmocracy Publications

Your Ad Here

1/8 page, \$25

1/4 page tall, \$40

Dollar Bill ad, \$30

1/2 page, \$70

Full page, \$125

This coveted 1/2 page goes for \$120

Center spread, \$175

Back cover, \$200

**Best Value!!!!!!!
The Dollar Bill ad.**

Contents

Reward Notice	by Green Fingere	3
Pidgeon English.....	by Maureen Wilkin	5
November Rain	by Theresa Ferron	7
Lunacy.....	by Jason J.R. Gaskell	9
Lucifer’s Crown.....	by Dean m. Drinkel	18
Insurance.....	by Robin Reed	23
Illiterate Little Brats	by Julia Colterjohn	26
Dirty Man	by iwill	28
Christmas myth.....	by Maureen Wilkin	31
Almost	by David Sebek	34
8 Haikus	by Harris Tobias	43
About the Authors		45
About Litmocracy		48

Freelance Writing Work

Litmocracy receives requests from the public for freelance writers. If you would like to get work as a freelancer, please visit the website at www.litmocracy.com and check out the link on the right side titled “**Be a Freelance Writer - Submit Writing Samples**”.

Reward Notice

by Green Fingered Skinner

Reward

I hereby and herein offer a reward payable to anyone for the safe return of my husband of thirty years, Carl Robert Frederick, chairperson of the Department of English, Punxinkle Cove College of the Humanities, Punxinkle Cove, Delaware.

Carl, you old fool, where are you hiding this time?

Last seen late last Friday night at the Hoist A Few Pub on Main Street in downtown Farmington, Delaware, eyewitnesses claim Professor Frederick appeared to be having a goodtime playing drinking games, with a group of zany freshman co-eds.

The elderly reprobate has done this before. The most recent episode of old age overload came on suddenly, after his former editor, Ms. Emily Clack, of Domsdorft Distleburg & Company, rejected his latest manuscript, saying “...It stinks!” Suffering untold unkind unwanted directness, Carl stormed out of the house, headed towards the only bar in town.

It is with great concern for his well-being that I offer up as a reward, a one of a kind literary treasure; a gold embossed set of World Book encyclopedias, 1978 Edition. The set is missing volume 13, representing the letter M. Readily shippable postage prepaid to anywhere, even China, the reward is payable to the first person who accurately reports the location of my missing husband to me, his much worried wife.

If you have any information concerning the whereabouts of the toothless, pot bellied, balding, four eyed, Viagra popping, sleepwalking, always gaseous, feeble-minded, butt-headed, renowned professor of literature, please contact Mrs. Francine Frederick toll free at XXX-XXX-XXXX. The number has been purposely redacted to prevent a repeat of the barrage of excessive crank calls I received the last time my husband disappeared.

Seriously, if anyone knows where my husband Carl is, please send him home to me. Only I beg you, please do not leave him tied to the tree on the front lawn again this time, as I did not notice him for a week, until I raked the leaves off the lawn, the following Saturday morning.

Thanking you in advance for your kindness,
Mrs. Francine Frederick

FYI Carl: The dog died. You left your lower denture plate on the kitchen table again, only this time; Muttsy swallowed it whole and choked to death. Come home soon, Carl.

Pidgeon English

by Maureen Wilkinson

The American tourist placed a well-manicured finger on the map. ‘We’re here, honey, a village called Thay – Den – Bois.’ He took his wife’s arm. ‘There must be a pub around. Every English village has a public house.’

‘And a market place,’ his wife said, as she put the last morsel of a meat pie between her lips and licked her fingers. ‘I guess it’s not hygienic buying food off a stall, but I was starving and that meat pie sure tasted good.’

They meandered along Main Street, a combination of cottages with a few shops mixed in like after-thoughts. The couple scrutinised each red brick building for a public house sign above the doorway.

The tourist’s wife grumbled about the lack of amenities and the terrible British weather. ‘Ya could die of thirst or cold in this dammed country,’ she muttered

They had almost reached the outskirts of the village, when the tourist’s wife took a sharp breath, and with a slim hand heavy with rings, she clutched at her husbands sleeve.

‘Look at that, Clarence. Ya ever see such a thing? All those birds gathered around that old woman.’ She pointed over a low hedge to a woman in a nearby garden.

Pigeons, white, grey markings of black on wing and back, swooped and landed with a flutter to parade around the woman like disarrayed soldiers. They placed pink tinged feet precisely, one in front of the other, on flagstones white with droppings.

The old woman sat before a slatted, wood table and dipped her hand into a large, brown paper bag. In steady rhythm she scattered birdseed in a wide arcs across the adjoining lawn with lumpy, uncared for hands.

The tourists watched until the bag was empty. ‘I think she must be one of those English eccentrics. Pigeons are vermin; look at the mess on the patio and windows.’ The tourist’s wife shuddered. ‘Look at that pigeon poop all over her. She looks mighty weird to me. Whatcha think, honey?’

Clarence eyed the woman. Wiry grey hair appeared to be reaching for the sky, she wore opened toe sandals from which poked yellow nailed toes, and the sleeves and shoulders of her faded cardigan bore the white stained attentions of the birds.

He shrugged. ‘The English are all weird.’

The birds scattered like snow in the wind as the old woman rose and walked purposefully toward a brick structure close to the house.

'Is that a Kiln? What the hell is she doing now?' Clarence said

'How'd I know – perhaps she's into pottery.' The tourist's wife pulled at his arm. 'Let's go, I don't want to stand here all day watching a filthy old woman. Let's go get a beer, I'm thirsty.'

Even the promise of a cool beer could not distract Clarence's attention from strange looking old woman. 'Just let's wait and see what she does. She might be a famous sculptress, perhaps we can pick up something cheap.'

A faint snigger came from behind him. 'What, old Rosie a sculptress? That's a joke.'

Clarence turned and faced the speaker, a well dressed, middle-aged man in a check cap.

'Then why has she a Kiln in her garden?'

The man eyed the crumbs, nestling on the chest of tourist's wife.

'That's not a Kiln old chap, that's an oven,' he replied

The tourist's wife snorted. 'See didn't I tell ya, honey, the Brits are all crazy. What does she want with an oven in the garden?'

The well dressed man gave a sly smile. 'She catches birds in a net, bakes them into pies and her daughter sells them to you tourists on market day - and I've heard it said, they are very nice too - that's if you don't get food poisoning.'

Please note I have taken the pee out of the Brits as well as the USA tourists ;-)

November Rain

by Theresa Ferron

November Rain is the song, by Guns-N-Roses, that screamed through the speakers of my brother's car as I drove him – drunk and crying – back to the trailer we lived in with my husband, on top of a mountain.

November was the month. It was also my birthday. It was also the day that November Rain – the song, the meaning, and the cold drops from the sky – solidified sadness, relief, resolution, and loss in my heart.

My brother and I stopped twice so he could vomit, each time he said he was sorry, over and over. “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry.” The mantra lasted, until, sitting on the bed he slept on at 4:00 in the morning, his head cradled in my lap, I finally understood.

He wasn't just sorry about being drunk, or about vomiting out the window with stinky bits of curdled liquor and chicken pieces stuck to the corners of his mouth. He wasn't only apologizing for his obnoxious behavior or for his often violent imposition on my husband and me.

He was sorry for November; because he was remembering too. November rain fell in one of our many childhood homes, mixing with the red clay to make mud that we played in; sliding down hills, digging holes, making mud pies that stained our clothes and hair. Chilled to the bone, we would eventually return home, where we would bathe in warm water and cleanse ourselves of our disobedience.

But that November, things happened that even November Rain couldn't cleanse or destroy. I learned things that taint souls and tarnish hearts, things that alter a young girl's vision of the world and the people in it. My innocence disappeared, flowing as freely away like the rivulets of red mud down the bank.

It is a blessing that innocence and ignorance are not inseparable, for I remained ignorant, until many years later. I held fast to my belief that all was normal; that what had happened was average. I even attempted to use it to my advantage, discreetly divulging pieces of information about male anatomy that my friends openly wondered about when they were the appropriate age. Fortunately, they shunned me when they learned that I was already experienced, at the tender age of 13, and my ignorance shattered. I fully understood that I had been wronged, that other girls didn't suffer at the hands of their older brothers, and my heart went limp in my chest.

I idolized my brother; he was my only ally in an unforgiving and confusing world of divorce and relocation. With the exception of one very unfortunate and cold November day, he was my best friend. He beat me up, he protected

me, he taught me how to protect myself, and I loved him. I got over the anger and buried the pain. I had no idea how much that day affected my life.

Years later, celebrating my birthday, almost exactly ten years later, I learned how deeply that day cut us both.

Yes, he was sorry about getting drunk, about being violent, and about intruding on my life. But more than anything else, he was sorry for hurting me. He carried that with him, and it cut him and hurt him and slowly destroyed him. I had been hurt, but he carried the much stronger emotion from having hurt someone he loved dearly.

I forgave him on that November day. Shortly after, my marriage shattered and I ran to the warm and unchanging landscape of southern California – where November rains don't visit. I started over in a place where the seasons don't change, where November means you might need a sweater and you have to travel for Christmas snow.

But life moves on, and I now celebrate this November with gray skies, yellow trees and sidewalks, and a definite chill in the air. November feels again, and I weep and smile for all I've learned.

I have learned that I will not be angry at my ignorant and curious pubescent teenage brother's mistake. I will not be hurt that my mother didn't know, that my parents didn't teach him better, or that they didn't make themselves available for me to trust. I will not hate myself for not knowing better, for not telling, for not being normal in the face of discord, or for not being strong enough to escape unscathed.

I have learned that I will speak to my son and daughters about appropriate behavior early and often, I will make conversations about sex as comfortable as conversations about a tummy ache, I will define for them their role in keeping themselves healthy and protecting their hearts, souls, and futures.

But most importantly, I have learned that we are not perfect – none of us. We lie, cheat, steal, and hurt people we love; often not on purpose, but we do. Forgiveness is the greatest gift we can give each other, and I will hand it out freely and honestly. I'm quite sure the only saint ever to have existed is the donkey that carried Mary to the manger; the rest of us make mistakes and deserve to be forgiven and offered the chance to learn from them.

Now, my birthday draws near, and I find myself hoping for rain. I see now that November rains are not unleashed in an effort to force the earth to roll over and die; they drift from the sky to cleanse the earth, and us. This November, I will stand in the rain and remember who I am, how I've grown, and all the people who helped me become. And I will thank them all. I will remember that everything I suffer through is a learning experience that can make me stronger, and that the pain is only temporary.

Nothing lasts forever, even Cold November Rain.

Lunacy

by Jason J.R. Gaskell

May 27th 2071, 6:47pm

I sat with my back to Sasha like I always did, finishing up a research paper to take with me when I went back to Earth. I knew she was awake; I could just sense it. That's when she hissed to get my attention—

“Easy...”

I turned around and faced the reinforced glass that separated us; and as I looked at her, I could see the reflection of my own face superimposed over hers, creating what looked like a monstrous chimera. A being betwixt beings glared back at me and my heart thumped erratically in response to the deformation.

Sasha hissed again—

“I'm going away for a few days Sash. There's something I have to do...” I said to get a feeling of normality back. Sasha said nothing of course. The other two behind the glass were sleeping so I slipped Sasha an extra piece of raw meat through the hatch. She snatched it from me and gobbled it down. How could I not favor her? It seemed like only yesterday we were a young couple in love.

“Be back soon...”

However now, her once golden locks were mangled and unkempt; dull and lifeless. Her previously flawless skin was ragged and she had dark bags under her eyes. She used to laugh so much but she hadn't smiled for so many years. I really missed that. She was no longer the brilliant woman I'd once so admired; but now and again, maybe it was just my imagination, but sometimes I saw a glimmer of what she used to be like.

“Be good,” I said habitually.

I would leave first thing in the morning and I was on edge about being away from the lab for so long. I'd only ever left them twice before and as usual; I was leaving them in the hands of Dr. Bridges. Those other times I'd not been so nervous to go, but this occasion seemed different. My usually reliable colleague was getting old and I'd noticed a few mistakes of late. I had a bad feeling about it but there was no other choice. There simply wasn't anyone else I could trust. God – please, please be good.

I'd got the news about my brother dying just yesterday and all the necessary arrangements had already been made for me to attend the funeral. I couldn't miss it. Tom had supported me more than anyone over the years. In fact, he was one of the few people who I'd been truly honest with - a real friend. I only wish I could have seen him more.

“And be nice to Dr. Bridges...”

After she was done licking her bloodstained fingers, Sasha lay down on the floor like an animal and went to sleep—

“Goodnight then.”

I took some whiskey out of a drawer and knocked back a generous measure to calm my nerves before heading back to my quarters to get some rest. It would be a long trip.

*

June 2nd 2071, 2:46pm

I got the call around noon on my third day back on Earth; the day after my brother's funeral—

“Mr. Willard? Dr. Gore Willard? This is Zak Knight at the Cape Johnson Communications Center. It seems that we have a problem sir - it's Tranquility. Communications are down. Have been for a few days...”

They said at first they thought it was just a technical problem – and then finally, a real-time video message had come through, which they automatically recorded and sent on to me for my opinion. I'd never met the engineer who'd sent the message, but I think I'd seen him around a few times as he looked familiar. He spoke urgently with wide-eyed terror and sweat globules glistened on his contorted face—

“They've gone mad they have! All of em'... I don't know if anyone else made it. I locked myself in here and now... one of them is trying to break the door in... no, oh God... leave me alone!”

Just then, all too vividly captured on the mini-cam, one of the crew smashed down the door and jumped on the engineer, overpowering him. They struggled briefly before the assailant began to tear chunks of the engineer's face away with his teeth. They struggled some more, there were screams and muffled shouts—and finally the camera was knocked over and the picture turned to a silent, wintry-cold static.

I watched the clip they sent me just the once for I knew what had happened and it was all my fault. The guilt began choking me as I breathed in the awful revelation of the truth; and I could hear a vein pulsating relentlessly in my head. The disease had somehow got out and spread.

*

June 5th 2071, 7:31pm

I arrived back on the moon two days later as part of a reconnaissance team. The colony was in the Mare Tranquilitatis region, the very place where man had first stepped foot on the moon. In fact, there was still that original American flag planted by Neil Armstrong encased inside a small glass dome in a grand hall, an enduring iconic monument in the rising city of Tranquility. However, all that seemed so nugatory now that the colony had been infected with the madness. All that we'd built was in danger of being ripped apart—I still couldn't breathe properly. The guilt seemed to consume me from the inside out; eating away at me.

“Welcome back Dr. Willard. Shall we move out?”

I had come back with a small team consisting of a scientist and some military personnel whose mission it was to gather information about what had happened

and to relay that information back to Earth and await further instruction. The team consisted of myself, whom they'd sent mainly for a practical knowledge of the base, Dr. Podoloski, who was a Polish expert in the field of microbiology, and three soldiers known as Tommy, Jen, and Mute.

Mute sure didn't speak much; hence the nickname. Conversely Jen was a loud-mouthed and tough looking Hispanic woman who didn't take any crap from anyone, especially not from Tommy; although he tried his best to constantly wind her and everyone else up at every possible opportunity. Dr. Podoloski was in charge and the military were simply there for protection. I knew more than anybody that we'd need them, but I hadn't told them what I knew just yet. I couldn't, you see – it was never meant to come to this and I'd returned with the intention to end it, once and for all. However, the time had come to let them know exactly what they were dealing with.

“Before we do that, I'm afraid there are a few things that you all should know...”

So I started to tell them about what had happened all those years ago when the colony was in its infancy—

*

September 11th 2044, 8:46am

Our main research had been focused on extracting helium-3 from the lunar dust to be used for fusion power, but our discovery of water that summer forced us to amend our schedule and prepare the liquid for use on the colony. It was a major breakthrough.

The filtering process took some time and when our machines finally told us the water was free of contaminants, Sasha volunteered to try some. When she sipped the water, we all held our breaths with excited anticipation, waiting to celebrate— but within five seconds of the liquid passing her ambrosial lips; we'd witnessed her chilling metamorphosis complete. First, her skin went pallid, her eyes darkled and went bloodshot; she twitched uncontrollably and salivated like a rabid dog. Then, all of a sudden, she came alive with rage and grabbed the tremulous Koncheski; sinking her teeth deep into his neck like an animal. Another five seconds or so later, Sasha and the bleeding Koncheski were both on top of Jeff, tearing at the flesh on his face as he screamed. That is when myself, Doctor Bridges and Ms. Gabagkova had run out and sealed the doors; knowing that a quick quarantine was the best that we could do.

Koncheski slammed against the reinforced glass of the lab - pulpy blood oozing viscidly down his chin; his eyes totally dead and devoid of any intelligent consciousness, a shell of his former self. Ms. Gabagkova screamed— I shook her by the shoulders until she stopped and took her down to her quarters, giving her a shot of something to help her sleep.

We knew the virus threatened the stability of the colony, but we also knew that the authorities would want to dissect our friends if they found out, to document the disease and incinerate them. The problem was, Sasha and me had been getting so close – they were all our friends in there; they were sick and needed

our help. So after much soul-searching, we decided to keep it a secret for a while and persevere to find a cure.

The weeks and months drifted by without much progress. We made a hatch in the wall to feed them through and discovered they would only eat raw meat. Ms. Gabagkova couldn't handle it for long and she went back to Earth, promising not to tell anyone what happened.

The colony grew exponentially over the next few years and we continued to study the disease, but along with conducting our regular research, which we had to keep up for appearances, it was slow going. It was difficult to fake the paperwork and do the research of three other people, which the funding bodies expected, so eventually we had to fake their deaths in a staged explosion. We had lunar funerals and everything. It was very elaborate and demanding but we somehow managed to pull it off.

Year after year passed without much success and Doctor Bridges grew into an old man. The funny thing was - Sasha, Koncheski and Jeff seemed to age more slowly than we did but their minds remained dull and aggressive; so all we could do was not give up and cling on to one enduring notion—

There is always new science to try.

*

June 5th 2071, 7:47pm

“You should have told us all this before,” said Doctor Podoloski. “You should have reported this back to Earth. When did all this happen?”

“Twenty-seven years ago.”

“Oh my God... Are you telling us that you've had your colleagues locked up, experimenting on them... for all this time? This is sick,” said Jen. “Sick. What the hell is wrong with you?”

“When you say it like that—”

Mute spoke for the first time during the trip so everyone listened. “He was just trying to help his friends,” he said. There was a few seconds of silence while everyone took in what had been said. I appreciated the unexpected support.

“Oh, it speaks,” said Tommy sarcastically.

“We should send the son of a bitch back right now,” shouted Jen.

Dr. Podoloski calmed and spoke with clear authority. “Let him finish.”

I swallowed hard and took a deep breath. “Last week I returned back to Earth to go to my brother's funeral. It seems the disease somehow got out and I'm afraid my good friend Doctor Bridges was probably the first to be infected—I'll miss him terribly. He was my only confidant - I would have gone mad without him.”

“Would have...” said Tommy with a mocking tone.

Podoloski breathed a giant sigh. “So the question is... now what do we do?”

*

June 5th 2071, 9:01pm

“Okay look, I have a plan. What we need to do is get to the oxygen ventilation plant. From there, I can shut down the system for a while until the infected choke to death. For anyone not infected, we will put an announcement out on the loudspeaker for them to get into some space suits so they can breathe. The infected won’t comprehend this. They have no linguistic capabilities subsequent to infection.”

“And what if these... survivors... can’t get to a space suit Dr. Willard. What then? You’d be giving them a death sentence,” said Podoloski.

“Of course I thought of that. But there are suits in glass cases in every room inside the complex for emergencies – so unless someone is hiding in a vent or a storage room, there should be no problem. We can leave oxygen in all the vents and storage rooms just in case anyway to cover every eventuality.”

“Got it all sussed out haven’t you Doc,” said Tommy wryly. Thankfully, everyone seemed to be ignoring him.

“So what can you tell us about this... condition then?” asked Jen.

“I was just coming to that Jen, thanks. We’ve learned much about the condition over the years. You must all listen carefully; what I tell you may save your life.”

“Shoot,” said Tommy without looking up while he was cleaning his gun.

“Firstly, the infected are in no way slowed down or made sluggish by the virus. Their bodies are alive and if anything, their auto-motor function responses are quicker than the average human. They are also much stronger and have a super-human tolerance to pain. In fact, their nerve cells are so damaged that they do, in a very real sense, feel no pain at all. Conversely, their intelligence is significantly diminished to that similar to a primate. They can sometimes work out how to use simple tools but show little interest in anything else unless there is a reward in the form of raw meat. We did some Pavlovian classical conditioning experiments with this, and the subjects... my friends... they were able to successfully complete various tasks when there was a reward involved. But I must stress that these tasks were very elementary.”

“So... super human strength and dumb as cheese. Oh come on Doc get on with it! I can’t wait to get in there and shoot some of these freaks,” said Tommy.

“Well, those freaks were normal healthy people just a few weeks ago and some of them were my friends and colleagues – so have some respect please.”

Tommy squared up to me. “I’m not here to be respectful Doc, I’m here to shoot stuff and that’s what I intend to do. So if you’ve no other handy hints, we’d be advised to get on with it.” I backed off.

“Is there anything else that you’d like to add Doctor Willard?” asked Podoloski.

“No, that’s about it. Oh, and just one more thing. They seem to have a pack like mentality and they sometimes hunt that way – so let’s not get cornered.”

“Duly noted. Let’s move out,” said Tommy; so we did.

*

June 5th 2071, 9:23pm

The colony was a mess – it looked like it had been vandalized and looted. Our first contact with the diseased was when an infected girl wandered up the corridor sucking on a frozen turkey leg. She was wide-eyed, momentarily placid; and then she dropped the turkey Popsicle and ran at us in a rage. That was when Tommy shot her four times in quick succession. She twitched several times and then finally— stopped moving.

“Keep your eyes peeled people. These mothers are quick. Jeez - this is going to be fun,” said Tommy. I couldn’t believe it - he was actually grinning.

“The OV plant is not far. Just down this corridor and to the right. We can get there in two minutes,” I said. Just then, from around the corner at the end of the corridor came a full pack of the infected heading right for us – some beginning to run with cat-like agility— Tommy, Jen and Mute all opened fire; but they were coming far too quickly. They grabbed Mute and he submitted to their hunger without a word, firing off a few rounds. Tommy and Jen tried to save him but it was already too late. The infected gorged on him like ravenous coyotes—

“Quick, in here,” shouted the increasingly tremulous Podoloski. We all backed into a storage room and locked the door. Tommy and Jen reloaded.

“Now what genius?” asked Jen. The hordes soon began pounding relentlessly against the thin wooden door – it would not hold for long. I looked up at the vents – it was understood.

Tommy stood on a table and hoisted himself up into the vent before helping pull the rest of us in there. It wasn’t a moment too soon either. The infected easily smashed down the door and swarmed into the room—

“This way...” I said.

It wasn’t far to the OV room and Tommy dropped down first to check it out. “Clear.”

We all followed and sealed the room. It was a much more secure environment than the storage room, with a sturdy door and a lock on the handle.

“Okay, I’ll cut the oxygen supply in all rooms but this one, the vents and the supply rooms... okay done. But the rooms are obviously already filled with O-two so this will take time folks. Once the oxygen begins to run out the infected will start to become weakened and eventually die. I’ll just make that announcement on the loudspeaker for any survivors...”

Jen paced around while I was making the announcement.

“Done,” I said. “We should be all right here – that door should hold them.”

“So we just sit tight here then until they all die?” asked Jen.

I couldn’t help thinking of Sasha. “Yeah - that’s all we can do. We sit tight.”

*

June 5th 2071, 11:58am

“So how much longer do we—“ Jen was cut off by a violent crash against the door.

“Here they come again,” said Tommy getting excited. A small window in the door allowed us to see a pack of the infected coming our way. Thirty... maybe even fifty of them – all wired with rage and hunger. One of them punched through the glass panel in the door and tried to grab the handle, which in turn would release the lock. Skin peeled off its arm and blood spurted as it reached in because the panel was too narrow, but it was undeterred. Tommy fired off a few shots at the hand but it was quickly replaced by another, and then yet another. Jen tried to hold the handle down while Tommy reloaded but pretty soon the pack overpowered us and opened the door. After that, all hell broke loose and there was a barrage of gunfire.

“Keep shooting...”

“I’m empty.”

“Me too! Grenade...”

Explosion from the back— flesh bomb.

“Get it off me! Arrggh...” Jen was overpowered and dragged forward, the same macabre fate as Mute.

Tommy was reloading. “Shoot her!” shouted Podoloski. Tommy obliged without hesitation.

“Back in the vent – quick, up,” I urged, knowing it was our hope.

*

June 6th 2071, 12:04am

Now that the oxygen was running out in the other rooms, a lot of the infected had flocked inside the OV room to breathe. They were packed in like cattle and they sensed us up in the vent – they always smelled the meat you see. The bad news was that Tommy couldn’t use the rest of the grenades because the explosion would rise up into the vent and fry the three of us. The good news – the infected hadn’t yet figured out how to get in the vents and were not likely to either.

“Okay – here’s what we’re going to do,” said Tommy. “We’re going to crawl across to the room opposite here and then I’ll drop down. You wait in the vent and I’ll head back over to this room and throw a few grenades. That should finish most of em’ off and you should have enough distance in the vents so that things don’t get too toasty. Then I’ll pick off the rest with my gun and we can get out of here and have some dinner. You got any problem with that Doc? Jolly good. Let’s go...”

*

June 6th 2071, 12:14am

Tommy was good to his word and seemed to wipe out most of the infected with ease. He picked off the last few with a few precise shots to their heads; but in the end, it was his overconfidence that became his own downfall. When we dropped down from the vent he was smiling back at us and blowing on his gun arrogantly when one of the diseased came from behind a door and bit him on the neck— He managed to wrestle the thing off him and put one in its head before blowing his own brains out— He dropped lifelessly to the floor.

“My God...”

Podoloski took out a gun of his own, a pistol, and shot Tommy and his assailant one more time just to make sure—

“Too bad,” said Podoloski insincerely. “Looks like it’s just you and me then...”

The air was thin but just about breathable.

“Let’s get out of here,” I suggested. “We don’t have much time.”

Podoloski took out an empty vial, knelt in front of the carnage and started scraping up some of the infected blood.

“What the hell are you doing?” I asked incredulously. Podoloski was calm and threw me a thin smile. He popped a cap on the vial and slipped it back into his jacket pocket. Then he stood up and pointed his pistol at me.

“I will tell them you got caught in the cross-fire.”

That pulsating vein in my head was back and this time it felt like it was going to pop.

“But why?”

“That was my assignment Dr. Willard - to bring home a sample of the virus. The Novae Res Foundation can use it for their mission. It will become a very important weapon for us. Dr. Willard ... you have been of great help; as has our newest member – a Mrs. Martina Kim, formally known as Ms. Martina Gabagkova - I believe.”

She’d betrayed us.

“Novae Res? The terrorists? You’re no better than Al Qaeda or the IRA were. You’re just fanatics. This is madness.”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to be judgmental now are you. Goodbye Mr. Willard.”

I braced myself for the shot - I welcomed it; but that is when Sasha jumped down from one of the vents – right on top of Podoloski. She tore at his flesh until he stopped moving; and then she turned her attention to me. I expected her to run over in a frenzy and deliver a similarly grisly fate - I deserved no less; but she never did. She simply ambled away with a piece of Podoloski and disappeared around a corridor.

“Clever girl.”

I sat there for a while holding Podoloski’s gun in the vacuous silence, wondering what to do next.

I got up and went after Sasha.

*

June 6th 2071, 1:03am

When I found her, sitting in a corner gnawing on some of Podoloski's flesh— she seemed almost happy to see me. It was the first time in twenty-seven years that we'd come face to face, without the separation of any reinforced glass. Of course, I'd tested and operated on her many times after she'd been sedated; but we'd never had any contact like this. It never occurred to me that she wouldn't attack me like she did the others. I was still cautious but deep down, I felt that she wouldn't harm me.

I'd come back with the intention to kill her, but now, I couldn't do it – despite everything that had happened; I just couldn't do it. So instead I chose to capture her and take her back to the lab until I decided what to do next. She came almost willingly too. I guided her with an electro-rod that I'd brought for my own self-defense. She only needed one or two zaps before she got the message. Clever girl.

*

September 17, 2072

It took three months for them to sterilize and rebuild the colony. A whole new staff was employed and I even kept my old job. I'd hidden Sasha in an abandoned mine while the cleanup was initiated. After that I got her back to my lab and continued to persevere to find a cure. What she'd done had been a major breakthrough and she continued to demonstrate further autonomy and advanced thinking over the next few months. I lived with all the guilt for just a chance at bringing her back. I guess I love her you see— and that, is a most powerful infection indeed.

About a year later we no longer needed the separation of the glass. The human contact and love that I showed her seemed to fuel a remission of the virus.

One miraculous day she seemed almost lucid. She smiled for the first time in years and we hugged and ended up making love. To my dismay, the remission was all too short and she soon began exhibiting violent tendencies again, so I had no choice but to put her back behind the glass.

She's pregnant now – we're going to have a baby! It's due any day and I've been working hard on a new idea for a cure. There's always new science to try you see and I think this time it could really work. We're meant to be together – we're a family; and you have to look out for your family now don't you? I think everything is going to be okay. Yes, I'm sure - everything is going to be just fine. I'm going to be a father.

END

Lucifer's Crown

by Dean m. Drinkel

Inspired By True Events...

There was silence when the boy was hung. First the monkey, then the boy. Though whether the boy was as guilty as the monkey – of course, there had been some debate. But as the monkey had singled out the boy during the trial, the judges had no choice but to hang them both. Yes, that's justice for you!

Yet whether the silence that ensued was because Molly Thirkettle had just hitched up her skirts (revealing a very sordid sight indeed) or due to the comet that tore through the sky (which was always a portent of bad luck) no one could quite agree. There were many in the crowd that had wanted to howl at what exactly was hanging between Molly's bow-legs and indeed there were some that had vomited at the sight but to say it was a crowd silencer was surely missing the point.

So, back to the boy: how deep was he really involved in this sorry situation? Well, for starters as he could neither speak nor hear, then the question of how good a spy he could be was raised. But just as his use was doubted, a drunkard (one Thomas Cryer) mumbled that there was nothing wrong with the boy's eyesight was there? – And so, to that end, everyone concurred, the boy was tried, guilty declared and led to the gallows, hand in hand with the odious monkey.

As was the norm with such spectacles, there was to be some rumpus as the guilty pair began their march along Traitor's Path. To be expected, they were pelted with rotten vegetables, fruits and other sweetmeats and because of this it took a seemingly never-ending time for them to reach their destination. Of course, the boy wasn't helped by the fair-weathered monkey who couldn't cease stopping every now and again for a quick bite of an ankle here or a squat to release its bowels there. Many began to curse at the top of their voices: 'familiar', 'incubus' or 'devil's imp' – though of these there had been no divine proof – but it was said Mistress Cordwangle dropped dead right there on the spot when the monkey fixed on her a wanton stare – which went some way to prove their accusations. Of course, it was conveniently forgotten that she had been suffering from Black Pox (given to her, they claimed by Mayor Munson and his cucumbered cory).

After the Thirkettle debacle and once the comet had passed through the sky, the crowd fell silent for nigh on an hour. Once satisfied that justice had indeed been done they started to return to their respective hovels for their own brand of merry-making. It was strange that no-one remarked why, as was the usual decorum with festivities such as these, that no cheer had gone up when the ropes were pulled and the necks snapped broke. Instead, there had just been an

ominous silence which waited above the on-lookers threateningly; threateningly, because there in the clouds, in the wake of the comet's tail, a savage storm was about to be loosened.

The lightning, the thunder, the torment of rain that fell from the angry sky drenched those unlucky enough not to get to shelter in time. The local pub, the Green Dragon, was full to bursting as the mead and bad wine was flowing. Parties were in full swing as they ignored the furious elements outside, leaving Missy Cordwangle's body to rot in the gutter with the stream of effluence. Molly Thirkettle was out plying her trade as best she could, though her reputation was sullied somewhat with her tail well and truly between her legs.

But wait a moment, what of Thomas Cryer, he who had spoken out against the boy and the simian? Well, with no money and no credit he sobered up soon enough and must have tasted Epiphany for he realised that what he had said, his words, his accusation against the boy, had been meant as mere observation and not necessarily hard evidence. Whilst he couldn't accept responsibility for the demise of the monkey (after all they didn't carry the Divine Spark did they?), the boy was a different kettle of fish. The lad had been hung on what he, Thomas Aloysius Cryer had muttered – which was definitely more than either the monkey or the boy could do – after all the boy was a mute, and no-one could be sure exactly what language the monkey spoke.

These then were the thoughts that sloshed from side to side in Thomas's head whilst he lay in the horse-trough, dumped there by Henry Pickle, landlord of the Dragon and Justice of the Peace – ironic that only hours earlier Pickle had slapped Thomas on the shoulder and called him a hero for his evidence that had led to the hangings. But that was then, and now, here he lay, battered by the rain and holding his ears from the thunder and praying, by God was he praying, that he didn't get zapped by the lightning. And as the effects of the drink drained further away, he began to firmly believe that he had made a mistake. As best he could, he sat up and cast his eyes across the town square to where the spies hung. Their bruised bodies blew this way and that in the tempest's tumult.

After a severe bout of flatulence, which made even Thomas's eyes sting as it brewed through the fetid water around him, he concocted a plan. Summoning up all his courage he climbed out of the trough and headed deeper into the melee. Most of his energy was spent as he headed towards those hanging bodies. Many a time he was knocked off his feet by the gusts, sending him back as far as he had come, but then, as seemingly hours had passed and now unsure whether he was doing the right thing, he made it to the scaffold that surrounded the Hanging Tree.

He fought for breath and hung onto the trunk for dear life, staring up at the bodies. The boy, not far from being a man, and the monkey (well no-one was sure whether he was old or young) in Thomas's eyes looked old and ancient, though not necessarily wise. In the storm they danced like marionettes and tellingly, their entertainment value was similar, bringing a wry smile to Thomas'

parched lips, if only he had a couple of farthings to throw them he could take his leave. But, his purse was empty and he had a debt to repay.

His smile soon became a frown, a frown of determination. Thomas had decided that the very least thing he could do was cut the boy down and give him a decent send-off. It would be hard work for sure, but the lad deserved a Christian burial, spy or not. As for the monkey, whilst they thought him heathen, Thomas didn't doubt there was a good heart in their somewhere, and though creatures such as he didn't go to heaven, it wasn't decent to leave him to the birds and their beaks and claws.

How though he was going to get to the top of the scaffold in this weather was open to conjecture, there were no ladders, nor horses to aid him. A rather expressive explosion of light revealed that not too far away lay a length of rope. He guessed that if he was to tie one end around his leg, he could throw the other over the top of the scaffold and hitch himself up.

Of course, it wasn't as easy as he had imagined. And far from the storm moving on as he had hoped, perhaps towards Everville, it was eerily apparent that it was here to stay. Many attempts later however, he managed to get the rope over the top and with great aplomb, he began to winch himself up. Despite the rain, it was hard work and his hands were burnt by the coil, the blood soon flowing from the deep calluses that had formed in the skin. He cursed himself too, he hit his head many times on the scaffold, but rather than knocking sense into him, it only made him more determined to finish his promise.

Sometime later then, with still no let up from the firmament above, with only feet to go, he could smell the shit and other fluids the ape and child had excreted during their last moments on Earth. It was true what they said about the human body and so it had proved to be with the simian – though whether any witch or Quack's Nightingale had been waiting underneath to catch their semen he couldn't be certain.

Suddenly, Thomas ducked. An almighty fork of lightning hit the scaffold only inches from his head and an ear-splitting roar of thunder that loosened his own bowels. He knew that God was angry and he didn't have that much time to get the hanged pair down. He cursed himself again, he had forgotten to bring any kind of cutting instrument with him so now the only option open was to physically untie the rope from around their necks.

Which was far easier said than done, this high up from the ground and those vicious elements conspiring against him. This close to the bodies, Thomas noticed that they were holding hands. Interesting, he thought, that they hadn't had their hands tied behind their backs, as was the norm for these kind of executions. Strange perhaps also, that with their hands free, they hadn't tried to untie themselves. Though that was seemingly the truth, they had both accepted their fate.