

The truth is...we gather on the Third Monday of each month to practice our writing skills. We listen and share in each other's work. We are small in number and our commitment is strictly to produce and foster creativity among our members.

We started in July 1999 and consist of adults that enjoy writing memoirs, commentaries, essays, poems, and/or prose. Our simple method each month is to use a pre-selected word or phrase as the basis of a story, an idea, an opinion, a derivative of, or an implied essence of and write a 1 to 1 ½ page document. We share our stories, comment, and in that way build up our writing skills through practice and presentation. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive, and the feedback is gentle.

Curious? Always wanted to try writing for fun, entertainment, or even profit? Come visit with us at any of our open meetings. Bring a sample of your work. Sit in and see what we do. If you like it, join us every month and become a member. Contact Nancy at nestewart@ameritech.net to zoom with us during COVID restrictions.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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October selection – Twist

The Werewolves of Silver Moon
By Mark Moe

We have lived among you, although you would have never known it, save for a handful of idiots throughout the centuries who have exposed werewolves to the world. We call ourselves “Garou,” but werewolf is an acceptable term as well. It is much better than “fuzzy butt.” Our role has been one of a predatory nature, who hunts down other super-natural creatures at least those of us that follow the Path of the Silver Moon. Our secret order has been charged with limiting the presence of other super-natural creatures since the first werewolf was created through a ritual that used the power of the moon to fuse a strong wolf with a mighty human warrior.

As werewolves, we actually have three forms: human, the human-wolf hybrid that has been our primary form and the last one is a large wolf. The wolf form is the most useful as a way to escape and hide among normal packs of wolves, when we are being hunted by humans. Since humans rarely see us transform into the large wolf, it provides us with safety and

anonymity. As such, we maintain good relationships with several wolf packs wherever we go and they readily accept us as members. Also, when we are around, we can find meat at much further distances than the wolf pack would typically travel.

As the new head of the order, I John Talbot have been tasked with bringing werewolves into the digital age. It is certainly an unexpected *“twist”* coming from our ruling counsel. To me it sounds like a way to encourage more idiots to become werewolves and more dishonorable behavior that will encourage more humans to hunt us with silver-based and holy weapons. I have recognized the counsel’s reasoning, but could you imagine a web ad that went something like this: (Radio Announcer style) “Are you physically in great shape? Would you love being in peak human condition? Would you feel good about gaining supernatural strength and heightened senses? How do you feel about gaining long, coarse fur all over your body and hunting other supernatural creatures? If you answered yes, click the link below for more information.” We would have so many horrible people to interview and probably only a few worthy individuals who would act as an honorable werewolf.

Granted there is no formal code of honor for werewolves but, the few who have joined up with vampires and other supernatural creatures throughout the centuries have made us more targets to be hunted. That also does not include werewolves who have given into the bloodlust to hunt anything but the creatures of the night. Our power is both a gift and a curse. It is a gift in the sense of feeling like we make a difference in controlling the presence of supernatural creatures. It can be a curse for having a normal life because of the demands placed upon us. I will also admit that when the vampire had just fed before the kill. They are certainly the least tasteful of the supernatural. Another problem is that the magic of our ritual does not prevent bloodlust. One of the only ways to control it is to only kill the other creatures of the night. If we kill natural animals of the world, it has little effect and killing humans makes the condition exponentially worse. When werewolves get the taste of human blood, it can become an addiction that will lead down the path of being hunted by human supernatural hunters like Van Helsing and the notorious Simon Belmont.

Dealing with the Belmont family coming after you is an absolute nightmare. They are relentless once you are in their sights. Fortunately, we have an agreement with the family to inform them when one of us has fallen to the temptation of bloodlust. We also assist them once the hunt begins so that hopefully the fallen werewolf would see us as the last thing they see after the Belmont family cripples them. It is our last way to honor our band that we share as werewolves.

Now I do not wish to continue to complain because, tomorrow I must meet with a digital advertising agency to attract our internet recruits. The next day, a middle-aged man who could have been mistaken for Hugh Jackman’s portrayal of Wolverine arrived mid-morning at the advertising firm, Antenna in downtown Chicago. He looked very casual in appearance with a most unusual blue plaid shirt and khaki pants which made him stand out in a sea of formal business attire.

“Now let’s see how this company can help us, if they will help us,” John said to himself. “Maybe I should leave out the fact that I represent a small group of werewolves looking for new

recruits. It might work out better.” He laughed as he opened the door of the lobby and went to sign in for his appointment.

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Twist the Night Away
By Carol Karvon

Sharon and her husband Daniel loved their kids and were committed to family life. But, every so often they had to have an evening out for just the two of them. She was with the kids all day and craved grown-up conversation. She needed to get dressed up and feel attractive again, if only for an evening.

She truly enjoyed being a stay-at-home mom, but sometimes needed adult stimulation. She thought it made her a more appreciative mother to her five kids if she could get away at times, even for an hour or two or three or more. As much as she enjoyed them, there were days when she daydreamt of life after – after they were grown up and she and Dan had more time for each other. Her mother-in-law used to tell her to enjoy the kids while they were little and had small problems. She always said, big kids, big problems. Sharon was careful about what she wished for. She didn’t want them to grow up too fast. She just needed a little break every so often.

Daniel worked in an insurance agency every day and often thought his job was as exciting as watching grass grow. But, to his credit, he never complained and felt pride in supporting his family. He decided a long time ago that if he ever was lucky enough to have a wife and children, his family would take priority over any job. You could always get another job!

On one particular evening Sharon had arranged for her mom to take care of her grandkids at her house. A treat for grandma and grandkids and a chance to spend quality time together. She wanted to surprise Daniel when he got home.

While the kids were in school, she was able to get her hair cut and styled, a manicure and pedicure, and even indulged herself with a luxurious bubble bath. The new dress she had gotten for her birthday was hanging in the closet and would make its debut tonight. She had a plan.

One of their favorite things to do was have dinner out at a little Italian restaurant in the neighborhood followed by dancing. Sharon had made a reservation for dinner and requested a table for two in a quiet dimly lit corner, making it more romantic. Dinner would be followed by dancing. The Twist had become very popular lately. It wasn’t exactly romantic, but might be fun. Only problem was, Sharon never seemed to be in sync with the music. She started off alright and then found herself tripping over her own feet. How awkward! The restaurant had a small dance floor and after they played a Twist or two, they would switch to more romantic standards for some serious cheek-to-cheek dancing.

Daniel had no idea what was awaiting him at home. Being a Friday, he had looked forward to the end of the day and start of the weekend. When he got home and walked in the door, something didn’t seem right. It was too quiet. No one ran to hug him and ask if he brought them

anything. What was going on here? Had something happened to Sharon and the kids? Where was everyone. The quiet that he often wished for, was unnerving.

Sharon heard Daniel come in and went to greet him at the door. She was wearing the new dress and Daniel was surprised and actually whistled his approval.

“Honey, you look beautiful. Is that the new dress I gave you for your birthday? Is this some kind of special occasion I forgot about? God, I sure hope not. And, where is everyone? What did you do with the kids? No one came to greet me at the door? What’s going on? Are we expecting company?” he asked all of this before she could get a word in to explain.

“No,” she said, “I have a surprise for you. Don’t worry about the kids. They’re fine. My mom took them to her house for the evening. They’ll be back tomorrow. Why don’t you take a shower and change? I’m taking you out for the evening. No kids. No TV. Just you and me out on the town for fun and maybe a little Twisting the night away. No more questions, please, just get ready to enjoy. Okay?”

“Okay, yes ma’am! Let’s do this. Just give me half an hour and I’m all yours. I love your surprises, but I guess you know that by now.”

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Twisted Sisters Bar and Grill
By N. Stewart

We were out for a causal fall drive in the countryside and thought it was time to stop for lunch. The small town of Thunder Cove had limited places to stop or shop but the “Twisted Sisters Bar and Grill” looked like it might be an interesting place for lunch. Like most small towns this one was located on both sides of the country road, having one gas station/convenience store combination, the bar, two churches and a few old, old houses scattered along the main road. Cars and service trucks were lined up in front and alongside of the bar. With so many cars, we thought it must be a good place to eat.

We pulled off the road and parked the car. The front of the bar was decorated with pumpkins, not only orange but white, greenish, and iridescent blue. Dried corn stalks stood on the corners of the building along with bales of hay. An enormous royal purple spider web with a huge black spider covered the entire store front window. The spider’s head rotated toward us as we entered the building. The place was bitch black inside. Candle lit large and small pumpkins were scattered about as a source of light. Orange light bulbs were strung from the top of the bar and every seat at the bar was filled.

Suddenly, we felt a chilling sensation behind us, and next we were guided to a table, being seated by a ghost-like presence that disappeared in a flash. A menu with one single entrée floated down from the ceiling. It was an uncommon menu to say the least: eye ball martini served with toenail chips, squashed eye of newt soup, chopped finger salad, mystery stew served

in a steaming black cauldron and for dessert, of course, devil's food cake with forked-tongue icing.

A warted-nose witch appeared at our table, asking if we had ever been here before. She explained that the sisters were Halloween fanatics and for a few days once a year lunch and dinner was served as a trick or treat special. People flocked from all around the area to see what the year's menu would be. She cackled and said we could have other things to eat if we so desired. We were out for an adventure and why not participate. So, we ordered the Halloween Trick or Treat special, Martini included. She took the order and left the table.

It wasn't long and whiskered black cat-like creature brought our drinks. She mewed softly as she put them down on the table. It was vodka with an overstuffed blue cheese olive centered with a caper for the iris and floating in the glass. The toenail chips had spicy red salsa at their tips, the soup was cream of squash and had a floating plastic newt on top, the salad was cooked fingerling potatoes of various colors mixed with a ranch dressing and served on a bed of greens. A warlock brought our steaming cauldron of stew, warning us that it was very hot. It tasted more like a delicious ratatouille than a simple stew. The plates were taken away by a grotesque multi-arms creature that leered at us. The witch returned with a dessert fork stabbed into a piece of Devil's food cake with icing that trickled like blood down the side for each of us.

We could see why many would travel for this treat on Halloween. The food was delicious and the ambience perfect. The witch came with the bill and we paid, telling her what a fun experience this was. Our country drive turned into an unexpected culinary Halloween adventure.

As we walked out the door of the Twisted Sisters Bar and Grill, the black spider hanging on the window web drew closer to us and seemingly winked.

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Friendship's Fabric
By Edward John Scheffler

Woven Threads,
 A twist of textured twine.
Laced with grace,
 Yet not to cling to –
Too tightly,
 As ropes, or cords to bind.

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The Real Halloween
by Vicki Elberfeld

Halloween is coming soon, and I'm beginning to think of what scares and even terrifies me. All the scary movies and stories and sometimes gruesome costumes lead me to believe that people like to be scared. But not me. Nope! No Siree! Never me. Ordinary, everyday life has so much that scares me, that I don't need to think of ghosts, goblins, zombies, werewolves, and vampires to get my heart racing.

I once saw a film and later read the book called the House of Sand and Fog. I can't recall the situation exactly, but in it a woman loses or ignores or simply doesn't see a property tax bill, and as a result she neglects to pay it. This begins a series of catastrophes including the loss of her home and the death of three people.

While I've always paid my property taxes, many things come to me in the mail which involve the filling out of forms, a fate worse than death itself, and I live in fear that some form of neglect or carelessness will cause devastating consequences for me and mine.

Loss of health is probably my biggest fear. I was around for the death of my mother, and while I wasn't present for the actual moment of my father's death, I witnessed the events leading up to it: first the Hodgkin's lymphoma which he fortunately recovered from and finally the pancreatic cancer which was slow but absolutely unyielding. My mother also died from cancer as did her father, both of my dad's parents, and several of my cousins. I fear cancer which not only kills but tortures you first.

Strokes of course are terrifying. I had a transient ischemic attack, a reversible stroke, which nevertheless filled me with dread for the future. My brother also suffered a stroke which at first had him speaking wildly incoherently, but with a lot of work and time, he has recovered the vast majority of his verbal abilities which are prodigious. Naturally this hasn't been easy.

Age and disability are also pretty scary. Whenever I go for a medical checkup, not only do I worry about less than ideal results, but I pass so many folks going into the professional building who are elderly and not only can't stand straight but cannot move with any kind of speed, shuffling along just like very slow snails.

And of course, there's the money business. Social security just slashed my benefits claiming I both retired and took a pension beginning in July, neither of which I did. They said they are overwhelmed right now thanks to the pandemic and so many folks retiring all at once. Here it is October, and they still haven't gotten back to me about the status of my claim. I see a future with mindless bureaucracies controlling the benefits I seriously need in order to live and which provide my comforts and basic security.

And I've heard that both social security and Medicare are so underfunded they will vanish before too many years pass. What in the world would I and my friends and relatives do then?

I've never felt fear of spiders and insects apart from the occasional mosquito. Once I was stung by a yellow jacket resting on the doorknob, I turned to enter a restaurant, so its sting was in self-defense. Most critters won't bother me if I don't first bother them.

If ghosts are real, I figure they are pretty much like spiders and will avoid me if I don't trouble them. I may have stepped on one or two in my time, but if I hurt any, it must have been mild, for I received no complaints whatsoever. And whatever could a vampire do to me, anyway? Give me eternal undeath? I've read my Anne Rice. Clearly vampires are so sexy and appealing that becoming one certainly wouldn't be the worst fate imaginable.

So, I will be home this October 31st as usual, sitting in my living room, battling my own inner demons, and I call upon all supernatural creatures to visit me. So do your worst, you classical creeps! I know full well what is scary and what isn't and frankly, you all won't scare me one little bit!

###

Twisted
By Pauline Bastek

The news is so depressing these days that I try to mute the TV until the weather report comes on so I almost missed the story about an adopted son's happy reunion with his biological father. He had been given up for adoption by his young mother soon after birth and the records he had obtained gave no clue to his father's identity. Now, it seemed through one of the genetic testing sites they had found each other and were happily proclaiming their joy to the world. I paused the TV and sat in my recliner wondering how many lives could have been changed for the better as theirs seemed to be if these tests had been available 60 years ago.

Jackie was an attractive blond when I meet him at my cousin George's farewell party prior to his departure to the Air Force having enlisted rather than taking a chance on the draft landing him in an army barracks. Jackie was one of his buddies that I had never met, which wasn't strange, as George's parents let him use their brick bungalow's basement as a way station for his friends. I had been seeing one of these friends, Joey, who was working late that evening and had been visiting with George's mother, my aunt, upstairs and just came down to join everyone. He just smiled and said that if Joey didn't come, he wasn't planning on going anywhere. Joey took that moment to materialize and hug me. As those parties use to go, everyone drinking and dancing, I forgot about Jackie's hitting on me and wondered as Joey was driving me home if I should even mention it. When we found ourselves stuck waiting at the railroad crossing for a freight train that couldn't decide which way it was going, I mentioned it to Joey who said that Jackie had recently moved into the area and that he and Lou his buddy had hung out with him for a while but decided to give him some space. Joey was quiet and usually very accepting of people, but said I wasn't the first girl he hit on who was going with another guy in their group. He had tried it with Lou's girl who fell for it and then told Lou it was the other way around. They patched it up but Joey said Jackie was just someone he would rather avoid. He just seems different.

Maybe it's that he's new in the neighborhood. Joey and I went our separate ways that fall, I to college and he in the navy. Years later at George's wedding reception we met. Joey was there with Lou, still buddies, while their wives were at an out-of-town college reunion. Jeannie who was one of the prettiest girls in that old group of ours. Came up to us to tell us she was flying solo and would be at our table. She was also one of the nicest girls I had ever met and I told her I was happy to be able to catch up as my husband was on a fishing trip up north with his buddies, a yearly even that took precedence over weddings of my relatives.

I asked her if she married and the look on Joey's face told me that this was a mistake. I found out later that the mistake was the Jeannie had married Jackie. Yes, the same Jackie that had hit on me at the party years ago. But Jeannie hadn't told her boyfriend when he hit on her, she was fascinated that he was different from the other guys in the group They were married only a few months when she found out how different. Not only had he quit his job, but he blew through the money they received as wedding gifts. He said he was using it to register for college as he only had a year or so to get his degree. He never even finished high school. He left her on the hook for payments on a new Pontiac and wrecked the engine by neglecting to check the oil. When I asked her if she wanted me to recommend an attorney, as I was working as a paralegal, she smiled at Joey and Lou who had been listening with an expression that told me they had heard it all before, and said that it wasn't really all Jackie's fault. He had been adopted and didn't find out till he was sixteen and a cousin told he. His adoptive parents were furious that he found out and said if he ever mentioned it, they would throw him out. They told him his biological parents didn't want him and he was lucky they took care of him. Jeannie looked at us and said they twisted him and it's all their fault. She suddenly got up and said, she would be right back but she never returned.

Joey, Lou and I talked throughout dinner and I thanked Joey for telling me all those years ago that Jackie wasn't what he seemed to be. Quiet Lou looked at me and said he agreed that Jackie's parents had to be twisted, but did that mean he had to be. Joey just looked and said he guessed that he did what was done to him.

That morning watching the joyous reunion of the biological father and son, I wondered how many adoptees in years gone by before genetic testing, in the days of sealed adoption records, ended up as twisted as Jackie. I turned off the TV.

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