

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 document of no more than 1000 words (approximately 2 pages). 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 for information. The Pen & Ink Writer's Group returns to the Eisenhower Library beginning on July 18, 2022.

Original Works by Members of the Pen & Ink Writers' Group
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July 2022 selection – Vengeance

Ragnarok: Twilight of the Gods
by Vicki Elberfeld

According to prophecy...

Brother fights brother, fathers kill sons, oaths are broken, and the world is filled with chaos and death.

Three winters follow each other successively for three years, uninterrupted by any summer.

Wolves swallow the sun and moon, the earth is covered in darkness, and even the stars vanish.

Three roosters sound a warning: one crows to the gods, the Aesir, in Valhalla, another crows to the giants in Jotunheim, and the third crows to the dead in Hel, the underworld, which accommodates those mortals who didn't die in battle.

Loki and the giants approach in a ship called Naglfar, constructed entirely from the fingernails of dead men. This encourages Norsemen to keep their nails well-trimmed and short so that when they die, Loki's boat will not have much dead men's fingernail material to work with.

Heimdall, guardian of the bridge, blows his Gjallarhorn to alert the gods that the giants and monsters are coming.

Thor kills the world serpent, Jormungandr, who wraps himself entirely around the earth and bites his tail to make a complete circle. While Jormungander is expiring, he spews forth his poison which kills Thor and thereby avenges his own death.

Fenrir the wolf, brother of Jormungandr (both are Loki's offspring), avenges himself on all the gods who have kept him bound for an eternity by swallowing Odin the Allfather. Shortly thereafter Odin's son, Vidar, god of vengeance, avenges his father by stepping with his strong boot onto Fenrir's lower jaw. His sturdy boot is made from all the leather scraps that have been thrown away by humans trimming their shoes. With his strong arms and hands Vidar then reaches up to stretch Fenrir's upper jaw until it breaks and the wolf dies.

Loki, the trickster, and Heimdall, the guardian of the bridge leading to Asgard, home of the gods, do battle with each slaying the other.

The fire giant Surtr sets the world on fire destroying all, all but two humans who hide out in a thicket of trees. A fresh earth rises from the sea, and the human couple repopulates the new earth. The humans are not the only survivors as Vidar, the avenger of Odin's death, and his brother, Vali, survive as do the sons of Thor, Modi and Magni, who return with their father's powerful hammer, Mjolnir. Baldr, the sun god and his blind brother, Hodr who was tricked by Loki into killing his brother, are released from Hel and return. The gods dwell in Odin's former hall, and they gather to tell their history.

###

From Scientific Journalist to Film Journalist: An Experience for Elizabeth Sagan By Katy Coakley

Elizabeth Sagan has been very isolated and introverted ever since her parents, Jonathan and Samantha, have retired to London. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin with degrees in Astronomy and Journalism and now works as a science journalist for NASA. However, her new article has landed her position in deep water. Elizabeth talks about how metallic asteroids might be hitting Earth in the next year. She also states that the asteroids can be good because we can use them for future metal equipments. Plus, they make up our various planets in the Solar System. However, numerous employees and readers found this to be offensive due to the fact that Elizabeth doesn't state in the article that asteroids are dangerous

and could possibly take the lives of millions of individuals. Others accused her of spreading misinformation about the asteroids and showed supposed evidence of how they can never come to earth. This commotion has resulted in Elizabeth being fired by her strict boss, Eric. Now, Elizabeth is penniless and doesn't have a clue about what her future will hold

After Elizabeth's horrible firing, she calls her parents to tell them everything. Feeling sympathetic, Jonathan and Samantha decide to make a visit to Lake Geneva, Elizabeth's hometown, to help her find a new profession and gain back her confidence. While unpacking her suitcase, Samantha gives Elizabeth the Wisconsin Post, the state's newspaper, and shows her that there are upcoming applications for journalists. This time, it's for journalists who are interested in writing about movies for the Wisconsin's Screens, a film critic's organization. She believes that this will be an amazing opportunity to help Elizabeth earn enough money to pay her rent and go on her dream vacation to San Diego for Comic-Con. While Elizabeth is a journalist, she doesn't know much about films. However, she decided to fix this problem by going to Barnes & Nobles and buying as many books as she can in order to understand the history of Hollywood. She and her parents watch classic Hollywood movies like *Singin' in the Rain* and *Rear Window*. With enough research on movies, Elizabeth is ready for her interview.

On the day of the interview, Elizabeth meets with the president of Wisconsin's Screens, Mary Bateman, and asks her why she is so passionate about movies. She tells Mary honestly about having an Astronomy degree instead of a Film degree, but has shown her previous work in Journalism. She did give a presentation about the concepts of authorship, narrative, and genre in films and how they can connect with the audiences. Mary was a bit shocked when she heard about Elizabeth's past firing, but stated that her opinions matter and will do all she can to protect her First Amendment rights. One day after the interview, Samantha rushes to pick up the phone and tells Elizabeth that it's the Wisconsin's Screens. Mary tells Elizabeth that she would be honored in having her write articles for her organization. She becomes shocked, but tells her that she would bend over backwards to get those movie articles published quickly. Once she hung up the phone, she knew that her life was going to be getting better.

When Elizabeth arrived on her first day, her first task was to write about specific scenes and camera angles used in movies and to discuss why audiences should be intrigued by what the filmmakers are trying to get them to understand. She feels nervous because she doesn't know which movie she is going to discuss, but starts to calm down and focus on what she needs to do. For example, she talks about how the film, *The Truman Show*, uses sequences to let the audience learn how the character Christof, the creator of the show, is talking to Sylvia, an extra, through the TV even though they cannot see each other. She also criticizes the movie for the lack of privacy that is given to the main character, Truman. As she types, Elizabeth feels relieved because she knows that she is working hard. She titles her article: "How The Truman Show has gotten the audience's attention." Once she has finished, she sends her article to Mary, who reviews them before publishing in the newspaper. Mary thanks Elizabeth for her strong efforts and tells her to go home early.

The next day, Jonathan tells Elizabeth that the newspaper has arrived and is so excited to see what she has written. She rushes to her dad, grabs the paper, and starts to read out loud until she sees that her name is not written under the article. The name that is written is Mary Bateman. Feeling confused, Elizabeth calls Mary to tell her about the mistake and asks her why her name is the paper. She tells her that she didn't know that this was going to happen and tells Mary that she wants them to fix the name. She asks Elizabeth to stay calm and promises her that she will give her a raise and that this error will never happen again. This helps Elizabeth feel relieved, but is still a little upset that the newspaper cannot immediately fix the name. Over the next few weeks, Elizabeth starts to write more articles about horror films like *The Shining* and science fiction films like *Blade Runner*. However, she notices that the articles she has written have not been published in the newspaper, but her coworker, Alex, told her the organization has a new website. She believes that technology has become more popular within the century and thinks that more people will see more of the articles. While she has been publishing more articles, she hasn't been able to read her past work due to her busy work schedule, but she is really looking forward to the Wisconsin's Screens Awards.

A few days later, it's now the day of the awards and Samantha surprises Elizabeth with a custom made movie dress with all different types of posters and cameras. They attend the ceremony and Elizabeth is excited to see all of her new coworkers and is thrilled to have her family by her side. When the award for Best Film Writer comes up, she doesn't know if she will be receiving this incredible honor. As the presenter lists all of the nominees, Elizabeth starts to fidget with her fingers. As the winner announces her Truman Show article, she feels like she is on cloud nine until the presenter states "by Mary Bateman." Mary starts to laugh and smile as she accepts the award. She talks about how this article means so much to her as Elizabeth watches her with fury. She leaves the room feeling heartbroken as her parents follow her. She tells them that Mary has been setting her up just to make money and win awards. Samantha comforts Elizabeth and since she finally has a break, she looks on the website and sees that all of her work has been written under Mary Bateman. Elizabeth realizes that she has had enough and decides to sue Mary for plagiarism.

After the awards, Mary furiously tells Elizabeth that she has hurt her so much by pulling this lawsuit on her. She told her that what goes around comes around with the choices that she makes. When they arrived at court, the judge wanted to see evidence from Elizabeth's lawyer. Her lawyer, Diane, showed that 28 articles by Elizabeth have been written under Mary's name and stated that she had not received any checks or bills in the mail for all of the work that she had accomplished. Then, Diane showed that Elizabeth was supposed to receive the Best Film Writer award that night of the ceremony, but Mary told the producers that it was her, who was to receive the honor. Mary's lawyers just started to make up imaginary stories and did not have much evidence to prove that Elizabeth was wrong.

The judge ordered Mary to pay \$180,000, which is the total of all the checks that were to be given to Elizabeth. Her position as president was terminated and was eventually transferred for Elizabeth, but she declined in order to move to London with her parents. She let Alex take

over the company and now gets to write about comedy films, which is his favorite genre. She moved into a nice cottage with lots of storage to keep all of her books safe and attended Middlesex University to earn a Master's degree in Film Studies. With savings from the court money, she managed to take her parents with her to San Diego for a nice family vacation. Now, she works for the London Times getting to write about both movies and science, her two favorite topics

###

Vengeance **By carol Karvon**

“Now he's gone too far. This has to stop, Nick was in the kitchen venting to Betsy, his ever-patient wife about his brother Mack's latest prank.

“I'm going to fix him somehow, but I don't know yet what to do. I want vengeance! Mack has been playing his annoying pranks since we were kids. It's time he grew up.”

Mack was Nick's older brother by two years and had always been impulsive and prone to playing tricks on his little brother, as he called him.

This time he was causing a problem for Nick and Betsy as well.

Apparently, Mack had passed off Nick's home phone number as his own to a woman he met in a bar. She had been calling Nick and Betsy's home and leaving suggestive messages. At first, Betsy was amused. She knew her husband was not going out and meeting women. But as the woman called almost daily, Betsy's patience was wearing very thin.

When Nick figured out that Mack was the one who had given out their phone number, he was livid and vowed to get even. This wasn't funny and could actually cause him a problem in his marriage. It could also become a problem in the relationship with his brother. In the past he almost always laughed off Mack's impulsive and outrageous antics, but he couldn't let this go any further. This wasn't funny.

He wondered, too, if Mack had circulated their phone number to others as well. Sometimes in the past there had been phone calls from unknown numbers, or there was no one on the line when they picked up the phone.

In the past, Mack had ordered pizzas and other things to be delivered to Nick and Betsy's home and they had to deal with deliveries showing up, sometimes at odd hours. They'd had to explain to the food delivery drivers that they hadn't ordered a super large family pizza or a

catered dinner for two. Sometimes they paid the driver and brought the food into the house. It wasn't the driver's fault they had been sent on a wild goose chase. Other times they refused a delivery but offered the driver a tip.

Nick had tried reasoning with Mack in the past and the pranks stopped for a while. Then after a brief interval, Mack would think up a new scheme to harass his brother. Their parents secretly found the whole situation amusing and their belief was that "boys will be boys".

Betsy decided on her own to actually answer the next phone call from the mystery woman. She thought it might serve Mack right if she pretended to be his wife and give the woman Mack's cell phone number.

But, on the other hand, that might worsen the matter and Mack would find a way to further embarrass Nick. Maybe the best thing to do was just let their answering machine field all calls. She would discuss that possibility with Nick and get this opinion of that as a solution.

She was furious with her brother-in-law and that disturbed her own peace of mind. She was ordinarily a very calm, unperturbed woman and didn't like this feeling of animosity she was experiencing now.

Nick and Betsy had talked about asking the phone company to change their phone number but that was only as a last resort. It would actually cause them a potentially big problem since all their friends, relatives and a few business contacts had their home phone number. So, for the time being, they decided to strongly voice their objections to Mack and ignore the woman's phone calls. Hopefully, she would get tired of not getting any response and move on to someone else. Better still, maybe Mack would tire of his childish behavior and finally grow up. One could always hope! For now, vengeance would have to wait.

###

A Tale of Three Witches **By Megan Moe**

Once upon a time, there lived three witches deep in the forest. It was a green and scary moon on the day that the three witches were born. Gothel the oldest followed by Primrose and Hazel. They all had different powers. Gothel had the power of super speed, Primrose had the power of invisibility and Hazel had the power to silence people and animals. The three witches lived in a cottage deep within the forest. As they grew, they sought to cause more mischief in the world. As teenagers, they stole a school bus from a near village and used it to run over grave markers in an unkempt graveyard.

When they reached their early twenties, they made their way from their deep forest just outside of South Hampton, England to the city proper. There they found out about a giant boat called the Titanic heading to America on its maiden voyage. This was the perfect opportunity for more mischief. It did not matter that the final destination would take them across the pond to some famous city called New York City. They took advantage of their powers and to steal enough money to buy three first class tickets and proceeded to board the ship. As Gothel and her sisters entered the ship, they saw beautiful ornate decorations, stuffed bears and elegant painted circles on both the floors and ceilings.

As the boat left port, the three witches looked for opportunity to sabotage people and eventually turned their attention to the ship itself. The course of the ship had passed near a few icebergs, but the attentive crew had guided them away from any danger. Gothel suggested that Primrose use her power to make another iceberg along the path invisible. The night when they decided to do it, the dense fog had done the job for them. The Titanic struck into the unseen iceberg and the damage caused the ship to start sinking. Unlike the other passengers, the two sisters clung to Gothel as she used her super speed to carry them away from the sinking ship and in the direction of New York City. They made it to New York City a couple of days later because they had to stop to allow Gothel to rest. Gothel also sought “*vengeance*” on Hazel because she stole a precious gem from Gothel while she was sleeping.

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Laugh Your Troubles Away
By J. Smetana

So man when are you gonna execute great VENGEANCE and furious rebukes on Stevie for playing that dirty trick on you guys when he took you guys to the gay bar?

Peaches you'll be the first to know

Was this after Stonewall?

No peaches it was before Stonewall. We were nine years old at the time. We drank ginger ale and tried to blend in.

###

Vengeance
By Pauline Bastek

Third grade at Sacred Heart School stands out in my memory whenever I hear vengeance, revenge. Getting even as sung by us on the playground at recess. Do they still have recess? After the recent Texas school shooting, administrators must be questioning the safety of outdoor recess where it still exists. In the forties after WWII, it was our favorite time of morning and afternoon. It was also the time injustices that occurred in class could be settled by uttering those famous words,

“Tit for tat, butter for fat, you took my ball, I'll take your bat.”

This was followed by announcing what injustice had been wreaked and a swift retaliation. Girls would retaliate by pulling hair or pinching an arm while boys would yank up the victim's shirt or twist their arm.

It had to be done quickly out of sight of the nun doing playground duty. Since this assignment usually fell to Sister Rosalia, the oldest nun who never stopped counting her rosary beads, it gave us a lot of leeway and was found to be an effective way of settling scores without interference from adults. Unfortunately, this did not take into consideration that even third grade may have a tyrant in the making.

We had Betty Mae and she was just coming into her element. She was the undisputed winner of retaliating for imaginary slights. If she was envious of your shoes, she would step on your foot with a muddy shoe, claiming she was getting even for you having stepped on her toe, which none of us had the temerity of doing. In the winter after a snowfall, she was in her element, retaliating with snowballs in your face, shouting her "Tit for tat; butter for fat," followed by a face full of icy snow. Oh, yes, she waited for those days when the snow would form that heavy icy ball.

It was the day before Thanksgiving, and the snow had been falling all afternoon and shortly before the dismissal bell, it had turned into hail. Anticipating the four-day holiday, we were sliding home when out of nowhere came these words, "Tit for tat, butter for fat," followed by a snowball. I was not great at throwing a ball but I made up for it by being great at ducking. This I did automatically and the snowball hit Connie who was next to me, in the eye.

She screamed and good old Betty Mae shouted at me that it was my fault for ducking since the snowball was meant for me. Connie's screams brought out the nuns who quickly determined that a doctor was needed since the snowball had broken Connie's glasses and cut her eye. She spent Thanksgiving in the hospital recovering from surgery. Her eye was saved but her vision was reduced to a bare minimum since her other eye had what was called a lazy muscle and she relied on the eye the snowball hit. When we returned to school after Thanksgiving holiday Sister Superior addressed the school on the subject of retaliation, stating the vengeance was the Lord's and we were never to utter the "Tit for tat" henceforth.

Life went on and in eighth grade some of us went to the local beauty salon to get permanents to curl our hair as was the fashion in those days. I went on the Saturday before graduation to get my hair trimmed. I was sitting in the chair, patiently waiting while girls were getting cuts, hair sets, and, of course, the new machine-less permanents which consisted of the smelliest solution being applied to hair that had been rolled up. Suddenly screams came from the chair next to mine. The solution had run into the eye of the girl sitting there.

An accident, shouted the owner of the salon who came running to assist the operator who had accidentally let the solution run down the forehead into the girl's eye. They were assuring her she would be fine as it was safe and would soon stop stinging. It turned out that it wasn't and an ambulance was soon outside.

That's when I saw who was sitting next to me, crying helplessly, Betty Mae. The same Betty Mae who threw that snowball in Connie's eye the day before Thanksgiving so many years ago. As the medics carried her to the ambulance, the salon owner caught my attention and softly whispered, "Tit for Tat...."

Betty Mae recovered after a few months. When the solution was tested by the hospital lab it was deemed safe and no conclusion was ever reached as how it could have damaged her eye.

The lab said it would have had to be a least triple strength to do such damage. No liability was found against the salon

Betty Mae did miss her graduation as Connie had missed Thanksgiving in the third grade. Connie no longer went to sacred Heart School and no one knew that the salon owner was her mother's sister. I only realized it years later at Connie's wedding when I found myself sitting next to her at the reception. She smiled at me and whispered, "Tit for tat..." I heard at our last class reunion that Betty Mae rarely leaves the small town where she retired. Probably safer for her. Connie wasn't her only victim.

###

Arcane League of Legends: Jinx's Revenge **By Mark Moe**

It has been said that the famous "shot heard around the world" happened long ago on American soil in 1775. Now in this time of magic infused technology, I could safely say a similar "shot heard around the world" was unleashed. It all began when two orphaned sisters in the slums of the city Zaun, were taken in by a local bartender and raised as his own daughters. The older one violet who went by Vi, has short cropped, magenta-colored hair and the baby sister, Powder has azure blue hair with the length that was down to the base of her neck. Vi was always the fighter trying to prove how tough she could be and had learned boxing from their massive 6'4, massively muscled father named Vander at an early age. Powder also learned to box, but was more into inventing little machines that were mostly good for annoying distractions when Vi, Powder and their two brothers would go raiding the rich city of Piltover. The merchants and citizens of Piltover were easy targets for the destitute people living in the lower city of Zaun. It was how the lower residents survived since there was little employment and high crime.

The four siblings: Vi who acted as the leader of their raids, Claggor the nerdy muscle, Mylo the scraggly thin young man with excellent lockpicking skills and finally, Powder the annoying little sister with malfunctioning technology went on most of the raids despite their adoptive father Vander's concern for the dangerousness involved within conducting the raids themselves. On one particular raid, Vi, Claggor and Mylo felt that the conditions were going to be too stringent for Powder to handle and forced her to stay home. Unfortunately, Powder found a way to come against the group's better judgment. As was previously mentioned, Powder was great at making distracting technology that often misfires and creates annoyances to anyone chasing after the rest of the group. We often call her our little "Jinx" because bringing her around makes things go wrong in the most unfortunate ways. This time, she managed to make a live grenade that would actually work. She used it when she saw us in trouble because we were being chased by the Enforcers and a large security detail from one of the High Counselors of Piltover.

The explosion from the grenade caused a large section of a building to collapse and crush both Claggor and Mylo under the massive weight. Vi managed to catch only a part of the shockwave and got knocked down. In fact, she was knocked off of one of the roof corners on a very angular high rise. Once she recovered her feet, another group of Enforcers began to pour out of another nearby terrace and were rapidly approaching her and Powder. Powder ran the opposite direction from Vi and managed to escape the Enforcers but came face to face with Silco's mutated henchmen and the crime boss, Silco himself. Their father Vander, once considered Silco like a brother, but Silco betrayed him a long time ago. Powder was beyond upset and Silco took advantage of her emotional instability to become a new father figure to Powder. He corrupted her pure heart and eventually she would take on the name of Jinx when she became a teenager.

Vi did not see her sister for five years because she had been caught by the Enforcers and quickly tried in the Justice system and sent away to prison for a period of ten years. As far as she knew, Powder most likely had died as a result of trying to escape both the Enforcers and the lumbering mutants of Silco. While in prison, Vi continued to prove how well she could take and give beatings and Powder perfected her flawed technology and even stole prototype hex tech from one of the High Counselors and his research partner. The two of them were overconfident that no one else could figure out their technology. They failed to consider the resourcefulness and ingenuity of Powder especially when she became Jinx, the bipolar, hallucinating, technological genius and psychopath.

In a way, Jinx's actions inspired an Enforcer who Vi referred to as Cupcake, to secure Vi's freedom as a means to find out the mastermind behind a series of coordinated assassination attacks focused on Enforcers and high-ranking government officials. The Enforcers believe it was someone working for Silco, but Silco never was the bold and suicidal type. He preferred to work in the shadows feeding off of the corruption of both Piltover and Zaun. When Cupcake showed Vi the same immature artwork that was characteristic of Powder's flawed annoying tech, Vi realized that her sister was still alive. She made it her mission to find her with the help of her new Enforcer friend and attempt to solve the mystery and connection of Jinx to Powder.

Vi and Cupcake went to meet up with an informant in Zaun that was willing to share some information about this Jinx person. The Enforcer wanted to bring him or her in for questioning, but admitted that her superiors wanted Jinx dead on arrival. He had a hidden security camera video that Jinx did not disable during one of her attacks. Vi recognized the face instantly, because it was her little sister Powder. Her sister has grown up from being the sweet, little girl with short blue hair to an intense looking psychopath with two long braids going down to her waist. He also informed them about the hex tech theft she acquired and they knew her "*vengeance*" was coming soon.

I

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Voodoo Vengeance By Kelly Tansor

Of all the post-work bars I've been to, I just *had* to show up at *Kevin's* bar.

I speed home, seeing red the whole time. The minute I walk in the door of my apartment, I head straight for the liquor cabinet. Pull out a bottle of Jameson and a shot glass. Pour it. Throw it back without even thinking.

Kevin hadn't apologized or even acknowledged anything that happened. Like just because a number of years has passed, I should just *forget* about it? That whole "that wasn't me" spiel was a load of -

I inhale another shot. I bang my shot glass down on the counter and look around. My roommate works night shifts, so she is not home. I lean against the counter and take a deep, frustrated breath.

The room around me slowly begins to spin. I blink hard to keep steady. Still, my arms and legs feel loose. I should focus my eyes on something. So I look to our table and see my roommate's textbook she had left out. It is for her World Religions class. She had told me yesterday her class is going over African religions this week – one of them deals with voodoo. I laugh to myself as I remember our conversation. Voodoo is more than just the "voodoo dolls" we heard about in grade school. We thought as kids that any damage you inflict on a voodoo doll will then transfer onto whatever person that doll is modeled after. Like I said, though, there is more to it than that. There are chants, dances, spirit worship – but yes, dolls, too.

I start to imagine *myself* as a voodoo doll. Can you imagine? Any damage done to *me* could go straight to anyone. Like...Kevin?

I smile at the thought. I slowly walk over to the kitchen table, my legs feeling wobbly like jello. I lean over the back of a chair. I hope Kevin feels as loopy as I do right now. I laugh to myself as I imagine Kevin trying to walk around the bar, not able to walk straight, probably throwing glasses around with no idea as to how.

It is in that moment I start to crave a cigarette. I'm not sure what it is about whiskey, but as soon as I start drinking it, all I want is to smoke. Anyone who has ever smoked cigarettes knows what the craving is like. It's more than a want – it's a desire, a *need*. The only thing you can think about. The only thing to make the shaking stop. Make the racing thoughts stop.

I look over my shoulder before heading to my room to find my Marlboro Reds. If my roommate were here, she'd say, "Smoking killed my grandpa." I don't care. This stuff is so insanely unhealthy. I don't care. It damages my throat and lungs, it makes me smell bad, it leaves a terrible taste in my mouth.

I still don't care.

I step outside to smoke, leaning on our building to keep myself standing. As I inhale, I imagine the smoke slowly entering Kevin's lungs, lingering there like a tumor. When I exhale, his toxicity escapes me. All the negative energy that surrounds him starts to leave me. I throw my head back, finally feeling relaxed.

Still, I know this is all in my head. Kevin isn't feeling any of this. He's still at the bar, making his money, talking to his buddies. I'm the only one who's feeling what I'm feeling. It's more than just the drunkenness, though. I've spent over five years now feeling this. Feeling like there's a target on my back, like I always need to watch my back. Feeling like I can't trust anyone, and any act of kindness is just a trap. That's what I've been feeling all this time.

And Kevin? He's just fine.

###

Vengeance at Camp Willa Willa

By N. Stewart

It took me a long time to settle down. I was called some terrible names and I didn't deserve any of them. It happened at the goodbye party for the counselors as we all gathered around the fire, sitting on the sand, talking and singing camp songs. The summer was over. The camp was to be closed in a few hours. It was the end of the season and everyone soon would be going their separate ways.

Each season, the counselors pair up. Not everyone finds someone for the summer and some remain alone. Shirley was one of those that remained alone. She liked Bill, a good-looking guy, she liked him a lot and always seemed to force herself upon him. She sat near him at breakfast every day and at dinner every night. On free Sundays, she asked him to go to the town with her to the movies. He always kindly and gently refused her invitation. Yet, she continued the same meal routine day after day, and the same movie routine week after week.

Bill would seek me out in the food line and his eyes would plead with to sit with him. I'd sit across from him on the picnic table and we'd talk about the things we had in common, sometimes including her, sometimes not. She would stare at me with hate in her eyes the entire time. Bill and I had known each other from high school and were camp counselors together this summer. We had many friends and interests in common and were glad to see each other when we arrived at camp Willa Willa. We'd spend free time together as well as being together for assigned camp tasks. We were friends from high school and knew each other and that was all there was to it. Both of us had special people back home.

As the evening at the beach party progressed, Shirley was sipping from what looked like an iced tea bottle. She was laughing way too loud and talking way too loudly, drawing attention to herself. She kept looking over in my direction with a vengeance. I felt uncomfortable and avoided her when possible. She appeared to react to whatever was in the iced tea she sipped and she began to stumble around and slur her words. The evening was almost over, the fire dying down when Shirley got up from where she had fallen in the sand and staggered around the fire toward me. "You bitch," she yelled at me. She continued to verbally attack me, saying I stole her man, her one and only chance at summer love. She continued yelling that I was a liar, a cheat, and a thief. She took another unsteady step toward me, swinging the bottle.

Bill stood and faced her, trying to quiet her down. She attempted to sidestep him and to run at me with the bottle held high over her head. He caught her with his arms, pinning her arms to her sides to keep her from hitting me. She kicked at his legs and tried to bite him but he held on to her. By now several of the other counselors reached the scene and held on to her and tried to calm down her hysterics. Bill let go of her and came over to me. With his arm on my shoulder, he guided me away from the beach area.

It was only a few steps to reach my cabin and we could still hear the incoherent, uncontrollable screaming of Shirley. She was shouting my name followed by a list of dreadful words she spewed forth. There was no way I wanted to be in that cabin alone with that lunatic outside raving.

I heard the siren in the far distance. The sound became louder as it came closer and closer to the camp, then it stopped. We went back outside to look. Someone had thankfully called for professional help. The paramedics arrived, evaluating the situation. Unable to calm her, Shirley was straightjacketed and the EMTs escorted her and the bottle into the ambulance and then they took off for the nearest hospital about 30 miles away.

Even though she was gone, I was all shook up by Shirley's screaming and false accusations and didn't want to be alone in the cabin that night. Bill offered to stay with me. We listened to music, played cards, and we fell asleep in each other's arms. Bill and I were friends, just friends and how Shirley worked that into something that didn't exist was a mystery to me.

Shirley had not returned the next morning. And though I was sorry for what happened to her, I was glad I wouldn't have to face her ever again. Bill and I each packed our things, put all in our cars and headed home. Like the good guy Bill is he followed me all the way home to make sure I was okay and that I arrived home safely.

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Vengeance
By Ed Scheffler

There are times when the decorum of
etiquette is stretched too far.
When the strait-laced principles of proper
behavior becomes prudish.
When incentive for the non-conformist awaits to
challenge this mode of conduct.

As the renowned playwright Tennessee Williams
portrayed such anguish
in his written

Masterpiece

**“Summer and Smoke”
Subtitled
Eccentricities of the Nightingale”**

It reveals Alma Winekeller,
the minister’s daughter
who is both shy and repressive,
while in contrast surfaces her neighbor,
Doctor Johnny Buchanan, an unruly and
mischievous person of wanton behavior

Circumstances has offered them a twist of fate,
compelling each to acknowledge their extremes.

How natural is it that one extreme
will react in conflict against an opposing extreme
in the irony of poetic justice.

They exchange alternate consignments,
as the tables were to be turned
with a vengeance

But with a Vengeance.
As this nemesis inflicts a heavy price paid
reluctantly within the conflicts
of their soul.

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