



Klamath Writers' Guild is pleased to present a winning story from our short story competition. The competition covered three different themes: The Teacher, Slavery, and Romance. The following story will fall under at least one of these themes.

## Sister Spatula and the Clippers

by Ed Silling

The shuffling line of graduates moved like a night crawler, expanding, contracting, concertina-like, serpentineing its way into the auditorium, filing in to *Pomp and Circumstance* playing on an endless loop. Family in the back gave bursts of sporadic applause and whistles. It was a long procession by the time the platform party entered the graduates were expending their overspent energy on their slab phones, tweeting and texting, playing video games. When the Star Spangled Banner began, they stumbled to attention with their phones laid respectfully over their hearts.

A pastor gave the benediction beseeching the Almighty Father to guide these splendid young people for ever and ever. Amen. A quavering valediction, greetings from the Board of Higher Education, a song from the choir, a poem about a road. At last the college president introduced the commencement speaker, a philanthropic software billionaire with pasty face and wire glasses.

He looked mismatched to his regalia—black robe trimmed with blue, full sleeves with wide horizontal bars like the Doge of Venice. His floppy velvet hat was tasseled not with a stringy thing that students hang on their rear view mirrors, but with a fist of gold cord. The students, in their acetate disposables, paused in their scrolling and swiping to hear what this stupendous nerd would have to say, what secrets of success he would impart, because, after all, he must know them or he wouldn't be standing here.

The red-headed girl next to Frank leaned slightly without turning her head. "My name's Alice. Honors History." It was pure chance they'd lined up together. He'd been too shy to speak to her, but since she'd

started it, he said, “Frank. Marketing.”

A ripple of laughter in the auditorium signaled that the speaker had delivered his opening witticism. He surveyed the graduates with a penetrating bespectacled look, a look of ‘now the fun is over. It’s serious from here on out.’ Frank had already come to that conclusion, job-hunting for the last six months, loans piled precariously high. Whenever somebody said, ‘Hey Frank, what are you doing after graduation?’ He’d mumble, ‘Got some things lined up. I might take some time and travel. Need to blow off steam, you know.’

‘Yeah, me too.’

Blowing off steam? Dad had calculated the average student beer budget at about six thousand a year. “You know, Frank, pitchers are what, seven bucks? Three a night, that’s \$1470 a term, plus margaritas, five bucks at happy hour. Five a night on weekends, right? That’s \$500 a term for a total of about \$2,000. Six thousand a year. I’m not saying don’t drink. What’s college for? I’m just saying it’s a lot cheaper to drink at your place. Get a pony keg, and *José* is what, nine bucks a fifth? Cheap.”

“You,” said the commencement speaker, pointing a pale finger straight at Frank, “are the future.” It was a challenge, a burden, an accusation. “The road of life lies open before you, a road of infinite possibilities.”

The only possibilities Frank could envisage, what kind of appliance box would he live in? What alley? The weight of life bore down on Frank’s shoulders. He was buried to his neck in sand with the tide of the world coming in, the tide of the speaker’s words. “You must take the future in your hands, forge ahead bravely. This is called commencement for you are commencing on life’s journey. And in truth you are just commencing to learn.”

The press of her shoulder brought him back to the present. “What are you doing afterwards?”

He half turned. “I hear there’s a big party at...” Maybe she’d want to go with him.

“No.” she said with a laugh, “I meant on your road of life. What do you want?”

“A better phone for one, and one of those refrigerators with a keg handle in the door. And mag wheels. But I’ll need a car first.”

The college president had joined the commencement speaker at the lectern. “On behalf of the graduates and parents, deepest thanks for your

words of wisdom.” He turned to the graduates. “It is your solemn responsibility to change the world. You can and must make a difference. And now, would the graduates please rise. By the authority bestowed on me by the board, I grant you the degrees of whatever you got, with all the rights and privileges thereto appertaining. Now you may shift your tassels from right to left.”

Frank's tassel was hanging down the back and it took him some time to find it. It was just yellow string but it meant he was done, finished. He had proved himself, up to a point. Not only that, he seemed to have a girl.

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They walked outside into the crowd of milling graduates and their families and after the picture-taking and congratulations found a grassy knoll under the trees. He caught the scent of something on her breath.

“I'm not really a graduate,” she said. “None of us are. Look, the diplomas are blank until we pay our library fines and catch up our incompletes. I have to finish my project on slavery for U.S. History.”

“Maybe they'll let it go. Wasn't your history teacher on the platform when the chancellor said don't look over your shoulder. Keep your eyes on the future. Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. Forget slavery.”

“That particular negative,” she said, “took a civil war and 600,000 lives to eliminate.”

“True, but it's eliminated now. You've got to look forward, not backward and if we want to change the world, if we see things that need to be changed, we've got to get off our duffs and change them. We have to be part of the solution or else we're part of the problem.” He looked at her closely. She seemed tired, unfocussed. “Are you all right?”

“Just a bit stoned.”

Frank was not a stoner. He was a good Catholic boy; his mother wanted him to be a priest. She would say, significantly, “I pray for one of my sons to become a priest. It's a mother's passport to heaven.” Since his older brother was already married....

“Would you like a toke?”

The question set him back. He'd heard of tokes, seen *Reefer Madness*, knew that the water-slide to Hell began with a little innocent

fun, knew that temptation could be, well, tempting, which is why Sister Mary Spatula had always recommended the *Our Father* in these situations. It was very specific about temptation, delivery from evil and served as a weapon against both, as an apple keeps the doctor away. He could still hear the old nun saying, *All sins of the flesh are mortal, even if you're just thinking about it. Get to confession right away, because you never know when your time will come. You don't want to be caught short and burn in Hell for all eternity. Do you, Francis?*

No he didn't, and tried very hard to keep his mind pure and white, not to think about the things he shouldn't think about, which he found very difficult. For instance, even the cosmetics department of the local box store got him thinking about what he shouldn't, with those posters of perfect girls with blowing hair and parted lips. *Lead us not into temptation.* Hell, the whole world was temptation. Just being alive was temptation.

It wasn't Sister Spatula's words, but the coloring she put in his mind that led him almost to say, half-joking, not wanting to seem anal, "Sorry, no, I *would* have a toke but the Pope wouldn't approve." But the Pope seemed at the moment a bit abstract, and so did Sister Spatula.

Alice, on the other hand, would approve and unlike the Pope, she was sitting right next to him, in the warmth of the day, the cool of the shade, the wind sometimes whipping her hair into his face. Add to this the words of the commencement speaker, 'the road of possibilities lies before you,' He crammed the Pope, Sister and the Lord's Prayer into the back closet of his mind.

She handed him a stubby brassbound pipe. He couldn't get the knack of holding the lighter sideways and sucking the flame into the bowl. He burned his finger, a premonition of Hell.

Gagging, he found himself in a philosophical mood. He was a college graduate now, licensed to think outside the catechism. "Have you ever thought," he said hoarsely, "how weird the *Our Father* is?"

She looked puzzled.

"I mean the temptation stuff. You're praying, 'please don't lead us into temptation.' But who are you praying to?"

"The Father."

"Right. The Father's leading us into temptation and we're asking him to stop. You know what that means?"

"What?"

“It means God is the tempter. And damn, I always thought the tempter was the devil. So, and this is the deep part...”

But he was looking at the sunlight in her hair and lost his train of thought.

They puffed and reflected. “What made you pick slavery for your history paper? Depressing.”

“My people were slaves, so I have a special connection.”

“What are you talking about? You're pale, red hair, freckles.”

“Not all slaves are black. My dad's a wage slave in grocery retail. He's president of Meatcutters Local 502. That's how I got my scholarship.”

They floated into silence again. Stan was considering the big step of asking Alice to dinner or something but the idea was terrifying. She might say no or, worse—he was broke and car-less—she might say yes and he'd look like a real idiot: “Could you pick me up at seven and, by the way can I borrow...”

But the problem was solved as if by divine intervention, as if the Father himself was leading him into temptation. A friend of Alice's walked up. “Hey guys, what are you doing tomorrow?”

“Having a hangover?”

“We're occupying Westlake Square downtown. There's a big demonstration.”

“Yeah,” he said. “I'll go. How about you?”

Alice nodded. “It's a date.”

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Light rail took them under the heart of the city and ejected them in the basement of a department store.

They rode the escalators up to the main floor where security guards eyed the strange mix of people: racing shoppers with big paper bags emblazoned with the store logo, a red star. “You'd think you were in Moscow,” Alice said—others were differently equipped: backpacks, protest signs, water bottles, a few with gas masks. An old man, gray and osteoporotic sat at the hissing exit doors checking receipts and the contents of the red-starred bags. “Have a wonderful day.”

They emerged into bright sunlight and upscale storefronts, marble copings, brass-framed doors of smoky glass. The Pineapple Republic

with the latest quasi-safari fashions, fronted like a tropical bungalow with tall wooden shutters, standing open to vent imaginary tropical heat.

Westlake Park was a downtown triangle—benches fountains, trees. But along the edge of the park, ominous cop-colored buses with barred windows, a slab-sided SPD Mobile Communications unit topped with satellite dishes and spiky antennas. Alice shook her head. “They don't get to play army very often.”

“Why all the water bottles?”

“To wash the pepper spray from your eyes. And it's always good to carry these.”

“Toenail clippers?”

“My parents were at the WTO,” she said with a hint of pride. “The cops cuffed them with plastic ties and jammed them into buses for hours. Imagine trying to piss with your hands tied. The clippers can set you free.”

Hundreds of people in the park, young and old, tables, tents, music, dancing, people waving signs at passing cars. People in turtle suits, butterfly wings, a couple in rainbow hats on stilts. Goths, Rastas, elderly with walkers and wheelchairs.

On one side of the triangle, a row of boutiques, a coffee shop. A line of cops lounged against the storefronts—bicycle cops, cool and yuppie-ish, in sunglasses, tight shorts, guns in holsters, sticks and spray canisters dangling from their belts, dismounted motorcycle cops in jackboots and hardhats, talking into their shoulders.

By noon the crowd was large, maybe a couple of thousand with signs, 'Banksters go directly to jail, do not collect 2 trillion,' 'We are the 99%,' a sign pointing to a Lyndon Laroush supporter, 'I'm with Stupid,' *hazmat* on a bank door,

They passed through the line of police and into the coffee shop. Behind the counter was George, graduated last year with full honors. He recognized them and looked away.

“George, hi,” said Frank, adding tactlessly, and feeling bad after, even though George was a loser. “Thought you'd gone to medical school. Sorry to see you in fast food.”

George shrugged and gestured vaguely around the shop. “No scholarships. No funding. Next term, I guess, when I've saved some money. And to set the record straight, I'm not a fast food worker.”

“You make your lattés pretty fast.”

“Coffee is not strictly food.”

“No, it's more of a drug,” said Frank, forgetting he was now a stoner. “So you're a fast drug worker.”

Alice hissed, “Knock it off!”

George was rising to the battle. “No, I'm a barista, and it takes smarts to do this job. Look at that menu—latté, iced latté, vanilla latté with a sprinkle of cinnamon, mocha with all the iterations. There's punch cards, and I have some autonomy there. If I like you—a significant look—I can give two, maybe three punches.”

Frank laughed, “Really stick it to the man...”

“And I can irritate you by saying 'perfect' with a sprinkle of sarcasm so you don't know you're bit until later when it starts to itch. I hate it when they order 'to go.' That means a paper cup, hot jacket, plastic lid, hole-stopper—jaw-dropping environmental irresponsibility. That's when I can say 'perfect' perfectly.”

By now George was wearing thin and Alice, with a perfect touch of her own, jutted her chin at the whole behind-the-counter scene. “Is this fair trade coffee? How many acres of rainforest, how many species did you destroy for this Columbian Dark? How many indigenous did you drive off the land?”

Just as George was reaching for her throat, the manager entered. George slapped on the smile he'd learned at barista orientation. “Perfect. Two viéntes extra hot, flat, one raw sugar each, a sprinkle of cinnamon and two punches. Perfect. Eight ninety five. You want those to go?”

“Two punches?”

George rolled his eyes and tilted his head toward the manager.

Alice dropped some odd dimes and pennies into the tip jar, noisily, cupping her hand so you couldn't see how much it was. But George knew the trick. “Thank you so much. Perfect. By the way, when you get tired of changing the world, we're hiring. Who's Next?”

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The crowd in the park had swollen to several thousand. Overhead the chatter of helicopters, KING Breaking News, KOMO Eye in the Sky, and on the ground with their mobile units, Fox, fair and balanced, Al Jazeera roving with shoulder cams, Indymedia.

The park seemed too small for the crowd, even before the unions arrived: Teamsters, longshoremen, nurses, teachers, all in in bright t-shirts and signs, 'Labor is the basis of wealth,' 'Fund Education,' 'Books not Bombs,' 'Let the Pentagon have a bake sale.'

Alice scanned the crowd, hand above her eyes. "You know who's missing here? Everyone on the commencement platform, the speaker, the president, the chancellor."

He missed her irony. "Yeah, education's important. It's pretty crowded. Maybe we're just not seeing them. Hey, but isn't that your history teacher? Maybe she'll give you extra credit for making history instead of just writing about it. Let's go say hi."

"Are you occupying tonight?" said the teacher. "You're welcome to camp with me."

"Thanks. We're not sure."

Shoppers still mingled with the occupiers, listening to speeches, wandering among the tables as if at Saturday market—Radical Women, King County Reds, Iraq Veterans Against the War, with their books, bumper-stickers, pamphlets. So far, everyone was staying on the sidewalk, unwilling to step into the forbidden zone, the street, except when signals permitted, and then scurrying across. Green light, Red light. Go back. Disobeying was a dangerous transgression.

Besides death and maiming, there was the law. Jaywalking was a crime. Plain *street* jaywalking was one thing but jaywalking in that holiest of places, the intersection, was a whole new level of trespass, a mortal sin. In the last big one, the WTO demonstrations, they'd occupied the intersections, playing high stakes from the start, sitting in circles with their arms chained together so the cops couldn't drag them off piecemeal. This was America. You couldn't just saw people's arms off, not in broad daylight anyway, with network news on the beat.

Frank had watched the WTO on tv, with running commentary from his uncle. "That's the trouble with kids these days. No respect for the law. They should just clear them with a bulldozer." Remarkably, a bulldozer appeared just after he said it, grinding up to within a few paces of the demonstrators. The driver revved his engine and lowered his blade. Then an elderly professor type jumped onto the machine and had some earnest words with the driver, who raised his blade and backed away. Even uncle was relieved.

Alice was saying, "You can't change the world if you don't take the

streets, if you don't step off the curb.” But Frank, weighed down by all the mental stuff, couldn't lift his foot to do it. He turned to her in a dither, held back by old thoughts—it was dangerous in the street. Look both ways, hold mother's hand or you'll be pulverized by bone-crushing cars, trucks, buses, killer cabs.

The curb loomed like the Israeli security wall. “But *how* do we step off it?” he said, trapped in paralysis. At that moment a diesel Ram accelerated dangerously close to them, blasting foul exhaust. This act of aggression triggered what happened next. The crowd surged. First a dozen, then a hundred, then everyone stepped off into the forbidden zone. Damn the cars.

Alice said, “*How* do we step off the curb? *Together.*”

Then everyone was in the street, moving in a common direction, the signals continuing their cycle, red hands, green walkers, beeping countdowns, tin voices saying, “It is now safe to cross 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.”

Frank was almost dizzy with the rush of it—the realm of freedom, like entering the exit, running in the hall, taking the Bastille, using the women's room. Frank had never felt the thrill of mass solidarity. Alice grabbed his hand, spontaneously, naturally. This occupy thing was solving a lot of problems. First, the hurdle of dating, second, holding hands, never an easy move for a shy one.

He'd never done anything this dangerous before, something you could get arrested for—impeding traffic—with all those cops right there. In front of their very faces. He'd watched the Oakland demonstrations on the web, teargas, flash-bang grenades, barricades, like a war zone. Live news! A young veteran hit with a teargas canister, unconscious in the emergency room.

Frank expected a phalanx of armored cops, shields and helmets, swinging batons, loosing gas grenades. He thought of movies, medieval men-at-arms, lions on their shields, pennants on their lances, killing peasants. But these men-at-arms were black and grim, not lions on their shields but stark initials, SPD, not swords but sticks and tasers.

The cops didn't attack, but made a show of escorting the demonstration, of protecting and serving, leading with patrol cars, bumping their sirens and flashing their lights. Frank thought of the K-Mart blue light special. The demonstrators took a long circuit. The city was theirs, the sense of danger giving way to carnival, groups stopping to drum and dance in the intersections. Sunlight caught the glass and marble

facades of the banks and corporate high rises. Someone was saying, “Why don't they arrest these guys?”—with a sweeping gesture at the glass towers above, the reflection of the windows blending into the sky.

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The setting sun cast shafts of light and shadow in the canyon streets and lights flickered on like roseate moons dappled by leaves.

“It's beautiful,” said Alice. “The trees, fountains, wrought iron benches like *la belle epoch*.”

“What's that?” said Frank.

“Paris in the 1890s, after the Commune, after they'd cleared the slums.”

“Where do you get this stuff?”

“From not sleeping in history class.”

“I can almost imagine Paris except for all the camping gear.”

The thinned-out group of occupiers were relaxed, playing guitars, drumming, flashing peace at the traffic, now flowing again. The glow of success seemed to warm the camp.

A group had gathered near a statue and someone was speaking. “It was a great day. Thousands showed up. What's your guess? Five thousand?”

Someone fingered a touch screen. “Paper says two thousand.”

“Ha! It was seven.”

Raised hands, fingers wiggling.

Frank snorted. “What's that about?”

“It's how they take the temperature of the group, you know, how people are feeling about what's being said. If you like it, raise your hands and twinkle your fingers.”

“Twinkle?”

“Like this.” She raised her hands and wiggled her fingers. “And if you don't like what they're saying, you give fingers down.”

“Wish we could do that at graduation.”

“And if you want to say something, they'll put you in the queue.”

“Not me. I'm staying out of it.”

“Well it's a free country, or it will be.”

A speaker stepped onto a bench. “Yes, it was a great day. Our organizing really paid off.” People raised their hands, twinkling their

fingers. Frank found himself doing it too.

At the edge of the crowd stood a police officer listening attentively, with apparent approval. “These people,” he said, indicating the assembly, “are serious. Those people—pointing to a group flashing peace at traffic and getting honked in return—are not. They're just here to disrupt.”

A dark-skinned woman stepped onto the bench, pointing angrily at the dark-skinned cop. “He shouldn't be here. He' one of them—with a sweeping gesture at the circle of police—if he wants to join us he should come when he's off duty, out of uniform.”

Some listeners twinkled, some drooped. Officer Washington, according to his name tag, didn't react to the speaker's comments—no change of expression, no stepping away.

Frank wasn't sure whether to droop or twinkle. “I don't know. He seems ok.”

“Yeah,” said Alice, “Ok in a limited sort of way, I mean he's a cop, a regulator, like the traffic lights. You can't expect much from them beyond 'red light, green light'.”

“Well they went along with it when we took the streets.”

The night carried mixed emotions. Gone was the sense of safety in numbers, the reassuring presence of the formidable unions—not the Fraternal Order of Police, but the Teamsters and Longshoremen, strong and grim-faced, who wore hard hats and were known to push back, as opposed to teachers, nurses and church ladies, who could be pepper-sprayed and thrown down with no inconvenience. When the unions left, safety and solidarity evaporated and now the occupiers were left to hold their ground in paper-thin tents, some cheap acetate, others more upscale, no doubt from the same outlets where the bicycle cops bought their shorts. And the number of cops was increasing. He thought of *Les Misérables*, with the students manning the barricades alone.

On the other hand, he was proud to be staying, with Alice, his first real date, occupying, making history, changing the world. *We happy few*, as some Shakespeare king said. And it was a great learning moment for Frank—as the commencement speaker had predicted, “Graduation is just the beginning of your education”—to realize that night, not day, was the optimum time for the cops. The eye-in-the-sky news helicopters had been replaced by circling black ones, malevolent dragonflies slashing the camp with light shafts, the thump of rotors resonating in the canyons.

Frank said, “We should head out.”

Alice was considering it when the history teacher tapped her shoulder. “Good. You're still here. I've got a tent and swim floats for mattresses. You'll have to share a sleeping bag.”

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The activity of the encampment died down. Muffled discussion from the other tents, the surf-like passing of traffic, the persistent thumping of the helicopters, the soft streetlight cut by shafts of searchlight.

It must have been 2:30 or so. Frank, thinking of Sister Spatula, wasn't ready to share a sleeping bag so he left it to Alice and flopped down on an air mattress. In spite of the noise he drifted off, not into deep sleep but a semi-conscious floating up and down, catching sounds and images at the surface and pulling them under with him, the kind of sleep that makes you tired.

The increasing noise of helicopters shook the tent, then blinding whiteness, shrieking whistles, gruff voices. A blade slashed the fabric. Hands grabbed his legs. One dark figure held his body, another twisted his foot until the tendons popped. Real pain. The light caught the face of Officer Washington. All around them, tents, bedding, clothing, lap tops, camp stuff, piled into a dumpster. Alice was shouting strong words at Washington. He threw her face down on the ground, cuffing her hands with brutal efficiency, like a cowboy roping his calf and downing it for branding.

Alice, Frank and scores of others were herded and prodded up the ramp of a cavernous paddy wagon. Dim caged lights overhead, high barred windows, benches along the sides, steel pews made of traction grating. No restroom of course, not that you could use it in your cuffs, no water cooler, just bodies stuffed in, hands pinned behind with plastic cinch-ties. No air, no room to move.

Alice was beside him. He heard a couple of snips and a sigh of relief. She held up her hands with the cinch-ties dangling from her wrists. “Blessed are the toenail clippers.”

Sister's voice rose with a muffled echo. “*You must take your punishment. Suffering is good for you. That's why we have plain wooden kneelers in church. Hard wood was good enough for the cross and it's good enough for Catholic knees. I'm looking at you, Francis O'*

*Finnegan. Keep your hand out.”*

“Hold still,” said Alice.

*Sister looked at him with a burning squint. She pointed to the crucifix over the blackboard. “Jesus didn't pull away while they nailed him down, did he?” She held his wrist vice-like. “You—smack—are—smack—a very—smack—naughty—smack—boy. Straighten up or I'll send you to Father Feely.”*

Alice was snipping at his cuffs. Sister? Alice? Sister had shriveled after all these years. Alice on the other hand was right there with him, tangible, breathing, confident, not shriveled in the least. Three firm snips. The cuffs fell away like a charm bracelet hung with black robes, churches, altars, commandments, lecterns, classrooms, flags, clicking heels, stiff-arm salutes. The air of the mobile jail seemed fresh.

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“All rise. Silence in court.” The judge smoothed his robes. “You are all in violation of section 102.331 of the State Traffic Code, impeding lawful commerce. You are also charged with loitering in a public park, parading without a permit.” He pulled his half glasses to the tip of his nose alternately shifting his gaze from the jaywalkers to his legal pad, tapping with his pen, clearing his throat. “Though it is potentially good, this commitment to making the world a better place, blocking traffic is not the way to do it. I'm going to dismiss charges. In future be responsible. Obey the laws, do your civic duty—voting and serving on juries. Most of all, get a job.”

Some days later they went downtown again, the traffic lights were still on guard duty, shoppers still shopping, city workers clearing away the remains of the camp. In the coffee shop George was still barista-ing. “Hey,” he said, “how did it go?”

“We got beat up and arrested. Two tall lattès. To go.”

He glanced around to see if the manager was watching then gave their cards three punches each.

←—————→

Last month Literally Speaking requested stories about immigration. The

stories could cover any timeline or genre' and were only limited by the imagination of the writer. The first story *Trapped*, is by J.C. Phillips, a writer out of Florida who is not a Guild member. If you have a story, you'd like the Guild to consider for publication in Literally Speaking, please email us at [klamathwritersguild@hotmail.com](mailto:klamathwritersguild@hotmail.com) .



## TRAPPED

by J.C. Phillips

Liza had only been in the US for two years when her middle-aged son Misha passed away. He had worked hard all his life in Russia as an engineer to bring his family to America. He had maybe put away a little too much vodka and cognac when he took a break with his cronies. Now Liza was left alone in her mid-seventies in a strange country, not knowing the language and relying on checks forwarded from Moscow for her upkeep.

Her only friend, also an immigrant and a friend of mine, introduced me to her, suggesting that we become some kind of couple. . . maybe even live together . . .since we both lived alone. When I took her out to dinner, I found that my language fluency left something to be desired. There were awkward silences when I was searching for the proper word or had to ask her to repeat what she had just said.

Liza is a nice enough person—charming grandmotherly type—I'm no spring chicken either. I was surprised when she asked me to go with her back to the old country to check on her properties and verify that the economy was as bad as her one business contact said it was. I thought that I might end up being driver for her—but driving in Russia is no lark. Vehicles always have the right of way over pedestrians and they don't use their headlights in the city.

Unfortunately my knowledge of business is limited even in this country, let alone the circuitous catacombs of Russian *beeznes* – where Mafioso with machine guns are waiting around the corner for you if you have something they want or you just happen to be in the way.

So there I was—as much as I hated flying and as little as I knew about business anywhere. Our flight was routed through London and Helsinki because direct flights from New York to Moscow are more expensive. We landed in St. Petersburg and spent three days there. There's a lot of Russian history to see there.

Soon I became known as “Meester NeechyeVOH” Mr. Nothing. For my lack of knowledge and paucity of experience. People Liza met with looked at me as if I were along just to drive and keep Liza warm during the long Russian nights. And I didn't even do a good job of the latter.

Then I met Lionid. He's several years younger than I—in his mid-fifties. He keeps himself trim and is dark and muscular. He knew about the government's ban on anything gay in public. Thank the Russian Orthodox Church for that. As a foreigner, of course, I was not as aware of the punishable activities and, of course, as a foreigner I was always being watched.

One wrong move—showing affection in public, and as a result I end up in this Russian prison for being who I am. Jeez! Me and Dostoyevsky. Me and Solzhenitsyn and all those others who looked askew at the powers that be or expressed an opinion not in line with the Party. I might have been assassinated, I suppose, but just wasn't important enough. What's one more deviate in such a large country? I pity the effeminate guys, gay or not, when they are drafted into the army. Some don't survive the beatings they receive from the other soldiers and officers.

As to Lisa, she has been trying to leave Russia and is running into problems. She is owner of some large pieces of Russian property, but has no political clout. Upscale hotels are not easy to sell even in a good economy. How does one find a trustworthy lawyer to represent your interests in Russian society? How much will it cost you? There are so many shysters -- all trying to feather their own nests. Her son was able to deal with all that. He was well known and knew all the right people. Now she is trapped in her own country. When she was in the U.S. she was trapped there too. Living in a single room and watching Russian TV. I wish they had TV in this miserable Russian jail.



## **Terra 2**

by Shirley Leggett

### **Meeting Notes of Method Farm**

End of year reports have all been made and copies sent to Earth Station. Because of the time lag, we won't hear back from them for a year.

All three farming colonies are doing well. Our method of each family keeping their own independent farm, but everyone working together at planting and harvest has had good production. The Idaho Farm, where each family works completely independently except if emergency circumstances arise, also had good production, but had more varieties. The Progress Farm keeps one enormous farm and everyone works it every day. Their production was only slightly higher than everyone else's, but their varieties were fewer, since they only chose crops with the same growing season.

Each farm still has enough supplies preserved to make it through. The goats will come fresh soon and we will have milk and cheese again. As soon as the ground warms we'll be planting.

The Bartletts have petitioned to sow beans only on their farm this year so we can build up a backlog, since they store so well. We'll take a vote on that next meeting.

### **Officer of the Day Log: Idaho Farm**

Three tiny shuttle-style ships seen in the sky this A.M. Warning sounded. No one leaves shelters unarmed. Alert sent to headquarters at Earth Station.

Planting continues.

### **Exec. Secretary Progress Farm**

#### **Diary Entry:**

1 - Alert received from Idaho Preppers re: three ufos

2 - Sightings confirmed by Progress field manager and by Methodist family Bartlett

3 - Progress workers report landing of small ship. Young child disembarked and ship withdrew.

4 - Reports arrived that each farm colony received a similar landing and a similar young child.

### **Meeting Notes of Method Farm**

A darling little alien girl was abandoned at the Bartlett farm and has been living with them since then. She is not human because her skin has a distinctly green tint and her eyes are overly large and she does not speak. She doesn't seem able to learn language at all. ABCs or other written words hold no interest and she doesn't even seem capable of mimicking sounds. She eats whatever the Bartletts eat and follows them closely doing whatever they do. She is really cute and everyone finds her enchanting.

The Bartlett request to grow only beans this season has been voted down to avoid loss of variety, but they have been encouraged to till up an additional small plot to grow extra beans. All families have agreed to pump a little extra water from their wells to allow for the extra needs of the beans. We all feel the extra dried supply will be an advantage.

It's hard to understand why any people would choose to abandon such darling children. We call ours Amy, which means loveable.

### **Officer of the Day Log: Idaho Farm**

There has been long debate and even arguments about the alien baby dumped here. Each farm has got one. Ours is orangey. Everyone agrees it is cute, but some of us are sure it is a spy. It learns quick and does a lot considering it is only about four years old - or would be if it was human. We each take it for a week so it doesn't use too many supplies or time of any one family. It doesn't seem to be more attached to one family over any other. Still doesn't speak but makes a sort of tuneful hum that the goats like. We can't decide on if it should have a name so most of us just call it Orange.

Peas and radishes and lettuces are up.

## **Exec. Secretary Progress Farm**

### **Diary Entry:**

1 - Plantings have sprouted early this season.

2 - Care of alien child has not been a burden. She sleeps in the bunkhouse with the unmarried females and is predominately self care.

3 - Doctor has examined her. Report follows:

Female child, large brown eyes, light blue skin. Hearing and sight seem normal. Muscle development and coordination above normal compared to human child of similar size. Human of this size would be 3 - 5 years old. Has black, shoulder length 'hair' that is not actual hair and does not seem to grow over time. Eats and eliminates in human fashion. Has no fingernails. Seems to understand and follow commands easily but does not speak. Range of motion in joints normal except ankles which have unusual flexibility. Pulse is slightly high. Blood pressure normal. Temp. low normal.

No explanation I can find for unusual endearing quality, however it is noticeable.

4 - Unmarried females have named our alien Azure. Child shows no ability for finger spelling but finds finger math engaging.

### **Meeting Notes of Method Farm**

The Bartletts' plot of beans holds special fascination for Amy and she focuses her attention on it, weeding and humming tunes near it. Her plot is growing faster than the rest of the gardens. No one minds the extra work pumping water for the plot since it makes Amy so happy.

The Harris family has started singing to their plants, too, as an experiment.

### **Officer of the Day Log: Idaho Farm**

Report from Methodists is that alien child makes plants grow better.

Orange seems to like herding the goats best. Some are still sure the aliens

put the toddlers here as spies. Ginny says she saw our alien eat a newborn baby goat whole, but everyone thinks she said that to get attention. Every goat birth this spring has been twins but one.

Crops are growing faster than last season. Radishes were harvested and put in cool room. Officer of the Day yesterday found them missing. Three bushels of radishes. Only person near the cool room has been Orange and the child is suddenly several inches taller.

Ginny reported the goats were alone today when they should have been brought back to the barn. Orange has gone missing.

Inventory of ammunition shows one box of pistol shells three bullets short.

### **Exec. Secretary Progress Farm**

#### **Diary Entry:**

1 - The report that the alien child makes crops grow faster is being tested in the field. General consensus is that if true, it could be a wonderful advantage.

2 - Large ship was reported as seen in the sky by one worker, but is not confirmed.

### **Meeting Notes of Method Farm**

A large ship landed and disgorged itself of thirty alien children. We cannot believe they would just abandon their little ones in this manner. We have taken half the children and Progress Farm has taken the other half. Idaho Farm has declined to take any. Perhaps the mysterious loss of their little Orange was too hard for them to bear. She was a beautiful child.

### **Exec. Secretary Progress Farm**

#### **Diary Entry:**

1 - Farm members have agreed to take in half of the little aliens dropped off on Terra 2. If they can enhance the growth of all our crops in the way

Amy has the Bartletts' bean plot, we will see considerable growth of yield per acre this season - an opportunity that can't be passed up.

2- Normal protocol would be to wait for permission from Earth Station, but the abandoned children would never be able to survive alone and must be cared for. There is not time to wait for permission. It is only the paranoia of the Idaho Preppers that makes them insist on getting permission before taking any more children. These children are not spies, they are orphans.

**From: Officer of the Day Idaho Farm**

**To: Earth Station**

**Urgent Report - Alert - Alert**

Four of us are all that's left. Alien children learned how to run the farms and called in more. Once they arrived, they killed off everybody. Don't be fooled. They are cute, but they eat everything.

**From: Earth Station**

**To: Method, Idaho, Progress Farms**

Permission to take in alien orphans granted.

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The Klamath Writers' Guild has open meetings twice each month where individuals interested in writing can see if the Guild meets their writing needs. Our next two open meetings are April 24<sup>th</sup> and May 8<sup>th</sup>.

The Guild meets in the Fisher Nicholson Realty meeting room in the Houston Building at 403 Main Street. For information about the Guild or our meetings visit our website: [klamathwritersguild.org](http://klamathwritersguild.org) or email us at: [klamathwritersguild@hotmail.com](mailto:klamathwritersguild@hotmail.com) .