



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

## Alien Soliloquy

by Lisa Davis

"You're an Alien."

"You mean like an immigrant?"

"No. You're an alien being from another planet."

"Oh." I didn't know what to say. Since I had a real fear of aliens, this was very bad news.

Lilith continued, "You have never been to this earth plane before, and you have many lessons to learn. We're supposed to help you."

"Help me what? Pay the bills?"

A smile broke through some ethereal place to spread across my mom's face. Mom channeled the voice of Lilith. They both said, "Don't worry; you'll know what to do when the time comes."

I did feel worried. I always felt worried. That's the thing about spirit guides - you can't get a straight answer out of them.

Mom sat in the big leather chair with her hands folded in her lap and her feet tucked under her. She looked serene, happy, and finally where she belonged. Mom, a brand new psychic since Pop had studied hypnosis, had been declared a perfect subject for "somnambulism". I looked the word up in my dictionary and questioned Pop about it, but he told me, "The stupid book is wrong."

Mom first tried automatic writing the night a vicious storm ripped through our Midwestern town. It was on my last evening to work at the ice cream shop, since I was lucky enough to get a cashier's job that had

opened up around the corner at Safeway. I didn't have my driver's license yet, but there wasn't any money for a second car anyway. Pop drove me to work after school and picked me up every night, or I bummed a ride. I was sixteen and the only person in our household with a job. Pop couldn't be employed because he'd found healing in his hands. He tried to talk to Oral Roberts, but they weren't interested in him. So he started his own church. It had six members. Mom and Pop and I accounted for three.

The storm that night was frightening. Heavy winds felled trees. The creek rose, crested, and flooded three full blocks of houses. After work, I begged the assistant manager, Tom, to drop me off at the barn so I could move my horse, Chester, into our backyard to keep an eye on him. Tom lent me a small flashlight from his glove box, and then apologized for not being able to stay and help me. His eyes were round circles in the dim light, and he jerked his head left and right as the thunder and lightning continued. I pulled on the door handle. The fight between the car door and the wind made me wonder if it would even be possible for me to get my horse home. Two miles seemed a long way.

It only took a few seconds to put a halter and lead rope on Chester. The wind continued to blow through the aisle of the barn and whistle its way through the large cracks and spaces in the old wood. I slid the stall gate open and led him out. Everything rattled as we started for the open double door at the entrance of the barn. Both doors clanged loudly against the chains that held them. Chester snorted and pranced. In the distance, the tail lights of Tom's car were barely visible as he made his way through the deep ruts and puddles in the dirt road leading out to the street. He turned, and the lights were gone.

Chester whinnied shrilly while I tried to keep his pace checked to a brisk walk. He lunged forward repeatedly as we made our way through the dark streets in the pelting rain. His nostrils flared, head held high, the whites of his eyes showed. I struggled with him the entire distance until finally, after reaching our house; I turned him loose into the confines of the small yard. I hurried to fill an old wash tub with water while he ran up and down the chain link fence and gouged out divots of grass. He probably would never calm down enough to drink during the night, but it

still seemed necessary to try to take care of him. The air was thick with the storm, dripping with menace. An eerie green light flashed over everything with each bolt of lightning. Thunder rolled. The sound of it became deafening as it crashed nearer each time. There was the possibility that Chester might be struck since horses are high in static electricity, but I hoped with all my heart that he would be safer close to me. I stood under the stoop of the back door and watched him. The storm raged on.

It seemed the best I could do. I took a deep breath, turned, and made my way into the shelter of the small kitchen in our rented house. A candle sat atop the yellow Formica table. The shadows the light cast backlit Mom and Pop. Mom, very slim and in her forties, sat erect, tablet and pencil in hand. Pop sat as he always did, casually smoking a cigarette.

The weakened flashlight made the scene in front of me more confusing. Pop held his finger to his lips, demanded I not break Mom's concentration. I stared. Pop asked Mom questions in a deep voice. She scribbled in a nonstop frenzy. The wind howled and shook the house. I tried to tell them the neighborhood had flooded, tornadoes had touched down everywhere, and maybe we should do something. Pop shot me a look.

I started to point out the window to Chester, but instead frantically shook the flashlight as it went out. I walked further into the room, curious in spite of myself. Mom's eyes were closed. It was creepy.

Another thunderous blast outside jarred the house. I jumped. The lightning illuminated Mom. Her hand raced across the pages as she scrawled drawn-out sentences. Time passed.

Finally, I gave up and went to bed, drew the covers up to my eyes. Mom and Pop would be okay. Chester and I would have to cope with the storm by ourselves.

Around four in the morning, I made my way through the dark house to the kitchen. Pop started to read mom's papers out loud as he gestured with his cigarette. He saw me peer through the doorway. He looked excited as he motioned me into the room to tell me about our newest

family members. Spirits aren't afraid of tornadoes because Lilith arrived that night. Harry, Pop's spirit guide, did too.

Lilith was from Lemuria which made her more important than if she had been from Atlantis. She was a very old soul and wise. I took Pop's word for it. Harry, a jokester, always carried an old black medical bag. I wondered if they'd be able to leave anything in the collection plate.

Mom seemed to be in a state of wonder. Pop explained how the energy from the tornadoes and the lightning had helped her tune in to their spirit guides. I felt pretty sure about missing some of the main points, but then again, they would talk about it for months, maybe forever. I glanced time and again through the window over the kitchen sink, trying to see Chester. Without the flashes of light, he was hard to make out in the darkness.

I snuck back to bed while Pop kept busy highlighting some of mom's passages in yellow.

A Red Cross truck was parked next door in the morning. Even though our place sat two blocks from the creek, the house was left untouched by the flood. Pop told me Harry and Lilith had protected us.

Chester and I walked back to the stables through mud and standing water. Scattered clumps of fallen tree limbs turned the road into an obstacle course for us. Relief swept over me as I put my horse back into his stall. He happily ate his breakfast. The trek back home was nice. The sun shone brightly that Sunday morning. Pop's church service began at six o'clock, so my day would be hurried to get everything done before it started.

After making myself some toast, I studied for a test until well after lunch time. I took a quick look at the clock, leaned back, stretched, and then put away my school work. Everything lay stacked carefully on my small desk. A pencil rested slightly askew, so I straightened it, turned, and made my way down the hallway.

Mom sat in her leather chair and listened to Lilith, cocked her head, nodded to a comment I couldn't hear. She waved me off. I left both of them in the living room and high-tailed it back to the rundown barn. It wasn't much, but all I could afford with my part-time job.

The barn had been abandoned when I first discovered it. When I walked that day through the broken horse paddocks, empty arena, and dilapidated barn, it was obvious that it had once been beautiful, full of horses and people. I heard a cough, then a curse, and found the old man that owned the place living in a battered horse trailer. He came out the side door when I pounded on the tailgate. The pungent odor of alcohol and filth slapped my face. The old man told me the stable had once been a well-known and established English riding center. The property had been divided during his divorce; the creek separated it into two halves now. His ex-wife ran the expensive facility across the water. He showed me a picture of her as he spit tobacco out onto the dirt through yellow teeth.

He swore under his breath and then said, "She got the better side."

We struck a deal: I could fix up one stall and one paddock fence if I left him in peace. Drunk all the time, he never spoke to me again. I did not see him except when I would knock on the back of the trailer to hand him the ten dollar bill for another month's rent.

Mom and Lilith were still in the living room that afternoon when I rode my bike to the old stable. As I neared the barn, the thud of hooves could be heard hitting dusty wood. The closer I got, the more distinct the sound became. When I stopped in front of the stall, my heart sank. Chester had colicked. Anxious and guilty, I realized I had probably caused it. In my confusion and fear of the storm, I had made the wrong decision to move him onto the fresh green grass in our backyard. He had always been fed hay and grain. Horses have to be given days to get used to new feed or their intestines can become fatally impacted.

He had wedged himself against the side of the wall as he rolled in extreme pain. He could not get up. He kicked and struggled; his deadly hooves thrashed out. I knew I needed to get help quickly or he would die. There was no phone connection at the old barn. It was too far to ride my bike back home and try to get my parents to help me.

Suddenly voices drifted into the barn from the English stable across the creek. I realized there were "horse-people" there and they would know what to do. A woman at the Red Cross truck had told me the bridge a half mile downstream had been taken out by a large tree. I knew

there wasn't time to ride my bike the long way around, since it was almost three miles to the next bridge. I turned, frantic, and headed out the barn toward the creek. I ran down the embankment, and plunged into the cold water. The level had subsided to just over my knees, but it still ran fast from the storm the night before. I struggled to make my way across, and then managed to climb the steep hill on the other side. I topped it and slid through the white rail fence. An instructor continued to talk over a loud speaker.

I followed the sound to an indoor arena where I saw girls participating in a riding lesson. I recognized the old man's ex-wife from the faded photograph he had bitterly showed me all those months ago. She stood in the middle of the area as she taught the class. As the riders passed me on their mounts, they all looked perfect in their attire, crops in hand, black boots shiny. The sides of the horses paced by me in a blur, and it was as if I were trying to get across a busy highway. I stood dripping. My hair was plastered to my head. The woman halted the class and I rushed to her, pleading. At first she resisted and said she couldn't possibly leave. Finally she relented, but eyeing my wet clothes, she said she would drive herself around and meet me there when the class ended in ten minutes. More precious time lost. All the girls stared at me as I ran past them, out of the arena, and back to the other side of the creek. Branches whipped across my arms and face as I raced down to the water, sinking in the mud. There was a sucking sound as the goo oozed over my boot tops again. I pitched forward, lost one boot, one sock, fought to hurry, never looked back.

Chester still thrashed in the stall, but he seemed weaker. He had pounded his head on the wall and he bled from self-inflicted gashes. I wrung my hands, desperate. The wait seemed an eternity. At long last, the woman arrived. She ran to me.

She shook her head and said, "I can't help you. It's too late and it's too dangerous to try to go in there and turn him. His hooves will kill you."

I said, "You aren't going to do anything?"

She shook her head again. "No."

"What am I supposed to do?" Crying, I wiped my nose on a torn sleeve.

"Don't you go in there! He's cast against the wall and there's nothing you can do. His gut has probably already twisted and he'll die anyway. It won't be long now." She turned, left my horse and me. I watched her as she made her way back to her new truck. She had parked it right next to the horse trailer her ex-husband called home. She hesitated as she glared at the trailer, then jerked open her door, hopped in, and slammed it shut. She spun out as she left, spraying mud and bits of wet gravel across the rusted side of his trailer.

I couldn't give up on Chester. He wasn't a fancy horse. He had only cost three hundred dollars with a saddle and all his tack, but you couldn't buy a heart as strong as his. If I could turn him over, he could stand up and walk. If Chester died, I would have nothing. He was my only friend.

I grabbed a front leg as he struck out, fighting the pain. It took all my strength, but I managed to swing him over on his side. He struggled to rise, and then stood shaking, battered and bloody, his head hung low. I murmured to him. His sides heaved. My own breath came in sobs as my cheek rested on his shoulder, as my hand stroked his wet coat.

I took off my remaining boot and sock, then put a halter on my exhausted horse, and barefoot, we walked for hours. Every time I attempted to stop, he would try to lie down and roll again because of the pain. I feared to leave him because rolling might cause him to twist an intestine.

Mom found Chester and me in the broken-down covered arena where the lights had gone out years before. The soft footing of the dirt made no sound. She called out in the darkness. Clearly, Lilith didn't tune in on horses. Mom drove home to call a vet after I assured her that she would not have to pay for it.

The next morning Chester was tired but the crisis had passed. When I got back from the barn, Mom sat in the chair and listened to Lilith. She called me over and said, "We got that alien business backwards, Annie."

"You mean I'm not an alien, Mom?"

"Oh no, silly, you're still an alien, but you're supposed to help us."



Lisa A. Davis is a member of the Guild and lives in Texas. She is an accomplished portrait artist, sculptor, photographer, and a hobbyist beekeeper. Recently she journeyed to Seoul, South Korea, to meet a friend. They then

traveled on to Thailand to tour the country and experience the culture. The trip enabled her to do research for the completion of her second novel, Love Thy Neighbor, a comedy that is due out soon. In 2015, Lisa wrote and illustrated her first children's book, *Boompa Rabbit and the Woolly Worm*.



## Love, Lies and Lavender

by William Huntsman

High School was difficult for me when it came to romance. I never had a date, or talked to a girl until my senior year. That's when I met my one true love, at least it felt like love, or what I think love should feel like. I know this because ever since that moment, the one where she auditioned for Juliet in Mrs. C.'s Advanced Drama class, I couldn't stop thinking of her. And when I thought of her my heart beat faster, I would become light headed, and everything around me drifted away leaving me in my own private world, which was great except when I left the confines of my bedroom.

Her name is Kathy and she's an aspiring actor of 17, playing lead in our high school play, Romeo and Juliet. I wanted to be her Romeo, to stand in front of the backdrops, hold her in my arms, tell her how much I loved her, but I worked behind the scenes as a technical director because I was too nervous, too nervous until the rehearsal party.

After the first week of rehearsals, Mrs. C. has a party. Mrs. C. is a demanding teacher with a voice that projects into the far reaches of the auditorium. More than once, I found myself mesmerized by Kathy's presence on stage as I followed her with a rose-colored spot when I'd heard Mrs. C. shout, "Fergus!"

The party allows students to come together, gives the supporting cast an opportunity to come out of the shadows and mingle with the stars. It's a party of pizza and soda where everyone does their best to iron out the little mistakes between production and performing. It's a time when actors and crew take a deep breath as opening night draws near.

It was on Saturday, three weeks before opening night in the Advance Drama classroom adjacent to the auditorium. I stood across the room watching her sip a soda when in-between slices of pepperoni pizza; I finally found the courage to ask Kathy for a date. She was sitting at a table with several of the costume girls, trying to decide which material went best with her long red hair. My hands were shaking so much that I had to put my soda and pizza down before I tossed them in her lap. She looked up at me with her amazing green eyes. My heart stopped then took off like a racehorse leaving the starting gate at the Kentucky Derby. Everything went a little fuzzy then I swallowed and said, "Kathy would you like to go out on a date, sometime, with me?"

She said, "Yes, where do you want to go?"

The entire room seemed to stop for the longest moment as I took in the fact that I talked to a girl about something other than, 'hi' or 'yes, Fergus is my real name.' I was surprised with her calmness because my heart was pounding and my eyes started to tear as I lost myself in a haze. I hadn't considered going anywhere, much less her saying yes. "Why don't you pick a place?"

"How about the Sunset Drive-In, they have the foreign version of Romeo and Juliet by Zefirelli playing?"

I didn't think it was possible but her eyes grew wider and prettier and her lips formed the cutest shapes as she spoke which is why I said, "Sure, maybe next Saturday?"

"Why don't you pick me up at seven?"

"Pick you up? Seven? Okay." I shook her hand then grabbed my pizza and drink.

She smiled and leaned across the table to say something to her girlfriends. I stood there staring as she whispered. They all looked my way. I half smiled, before walking out of the room wondering how I got myself into so much trouble. *Pick her up at seven. I don't even own a car, and Dad would never let me use his. I did have a Schwinn 10 speed. What have I done?*

Sunday morning, I need to talk with both of my friends, Dale and Blair, to see if they have a solution to my problem.

"Don't forget to help Mrs. Benson with her yardwork." Mom said as I headed out the door.

"I won't be gone long. I'm meeting Dale and Blair at the library, bye." I said as I rode off on my bike.

When I found my friends, they were shocked when I told them I was going out with a girl, doubly shocked that she said yes. They said they'd like to help but all they had were bikes, Schwinn 10 speeds. After about an hour pondering over useless options, they suggested that I tell her the truth; my parents wouldn't let me drive a car until I finished high school.

I told them 'thanks' and headed for home. *I could use my bike. Kathy could ride on the crossbar, shifting gears as I peddled, my arms wrapped around her and her warm body leaning back against my shoulder. Maybe if we were both ten years old I'd get her to ride with me, but as seniors in high school, not likely.* Then I saw Kathy in the passenger's seat of Judy's new Mustang. They headed up 4<sup>th</sup> Street, towards Judy's house. I flew through the intersection shifting gears as I followed them up the road. My feet peddled faster but they kept pulling away until they crested the hill and disappeared. Ten minutes later, I reached the top of the hill and they were nowhere in sight.

By the time, I returned home it was too late to help Mrs. Benson. She'd already left for the cemetery, something she did every Sunday since her husband died last year. Mom didn't say a word, she didn't need to, her look of disappointment was enough to send me to my room.

I sat on my bed looking out my window at Mrs. Benson's house. The bushes were scraggly and her lawn looked a little ragged but I'm sure she'd understand, after all, she still loved her husband. Felix and Hilda Benson were married almost fifty-six years, now that is love. If there was ever going to be a Fergus and Kathy Jäggersman there was only one thing left to do. Lie.

Monday morning I grabbed my lunch sack and headed out the door before Mom could say a word. I went through the motions of listening in class while I plotted out the first big lie I'd ever considered in my whole life. Later that day as Kathy floated across the stage reciting her lines; I stood in the back of the theater, rehearsing my lie. It couldn't be just any lie it had to be big and it needed to be convincing. I needed to be convincing, no time for stage fright.

When I got home from rehearsals, my dinner was on the table and Mom and Dad were in the living room watching television. I ate quietly then washed my dishes before heading to my room.

Tuesday morning — after a long night of writing and rewriting my lie, I woke up late. I scrambled to clean up and get dressed but when I went to pick up my lunch in the kitchen, the only thing I saw was an empty paper sack and Mom standing by the refrigerator.

“Mom, where's my lunch?”

“It's there on the table.”

In a neat row, she'd placed the dill pickle jar, a knife, bread, mayonnaise, and baloney.

“But Mom, I'm late!”

“You have time,” she said with a smile.

I opened the mayonnaise, grabbed the bread and knife and made my sandwich filling it with two slices of baloney. Mom reached for the Saran Wrap above the refrigerator and set it on the table. For every teenager Saran Wrapping a sandwich is like trying to bathe a cat, it sounds simple but always ends up in frustration. My first attempt to tear off a sheet crinkled up into a tangled mess.

“Here let me help you. Just lay the wrap on the table and place your open hand near the cutting edge and pull up and away.” A flat sheet of plastic remained on the table.

I finished wrapping my sandwich and put it in the bag.

“Don’t you want a pickle?”

Looking at the Saran Wrap and the pickle I said, “I don’t think I can wrap one.”

“Sure you can, just lay the wrap flat, roll the pickle in it and use a rubber band to hold it in place.” She pointed to the rubber bands in a plastic cup she’d collected from the morning newspaper. “That’s what I do for your father.”

“I’ll just stick with the sandwich, bye.” I rode off to school.

The day seemed to be flying by until Phys. Ed. A boys locker room is where most guys learn about girls and sex and things you don’t want to be caught doing. The best information often comes from the jocks because they’re the loudest and think they know everything.

“I can do it with just my thumb and these two fingers,” Buddy Jackson said holding up his hand with his index and middle finger pressed against his thumb. “In ten seconds I can have a girl’s bra undone and be holding a little bit of heaven.”

“If you want to do more than just feel around, you’re going to need one of these.” Kurt Adams held up his wallet with a little ring worn in the leather. “It also helps to have a little bit of” he looked around the room and whispered, “weed.”

The word was barely out of his mouth when Coach Wilson rounded the corner, grabbed his hand holding the wallet and led Kurt to his office.

The rest of the day the Vice Principal went through some of the student lockers sending several to the Principal’s office. By the time rehearsals ended, eight students were expelled for having marijuana in their lockers.

Wednesday morning I made my sandwich and rode off to the biggest performance of my life. School was filled with whispers as more lockers were opened but all I could think about was the lie. The morning seemed

to drag as one class ran into another. I wanted to put off talking with Kathy because the more I practiced, the more confused I became. Lying wasn't easy.

I waited for her outside the drama room door. I knew if I timed it just right, I could get the lie out and the bell would ring before she could ask me any questions. I paced back and forth checking my Timex every few seconds, wanting to stay and go at the same time when Kathy walked up to me and said, "Hi."

I looked at her, then my watch. *Too soon, she is here too soon.* I smiled and checked my watch again.

"Are you okay?"

I swallowed hard. "Kathy, yesterday I was driving down the hill on Crescent Road when my car jumped out of gear. I pushed the clutch in and a loud POP came from underneath, then a big BANG. I tried to put the car in gear and it came off right in my hand...the...the shift thing. I pushed on the brake but my car wouldn't stop. Faster and faster, I rolled down the hill. I didn't know what to do. I pushed down on the emergency brake and it snapped back, almost breaking my leg. Kids were playing ball in the street so I honked my horn and swerved to the other side of the road. My car scraped against a light post, but it didn't slow down. I saw the grove of trees at the bottom of the hill and I thought I was going to die. Then I noticed two trees just far enough apart that maybe my car would fit. I gripped the steering wheel with all my strength. My car leaped the curb, flew 50 feet through the air and landed perfectly between the trees."

Kathy stood there staring.

"Oh yeah, and the trees broke all the windows in the car and the engine blew up!"

Not a word from Kathy.

I panicked. "People came rushing down the hill to see if I was okay. When I got out of the car, they started cheering and patting me on the back. They said they had never seen anything as courageous as what I did to save those kids. They said the mayor should give me a medal or the keys to the city." I swallowed again and glanced at my watch. One minute to go before the bell, *I'm doomed!*

"You are the bravest man I have ever known." Kathy said as she touched my arm. "Don't you worry; we are going out Saturday night even if I have to make my brother take us."

My mouth dropped open, the bell rang, and we went inside. Kathy's voice boomed to the back of the theater during rehearsal. I felt she was talking to me when she said, "Romeo, Romeo. Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

Thursday — The Vice Principal finished his locker search leaving eleven students expelled for drugs and you'd think that would be the topic around campus, and it was except for Kathy's friends. For her friends, it was all about the big crash, and they wanted all of the details. I was nervous at first as they listened to every word reacting to each bang and pop. After telling it, two or three times it became easier. I even began believing it myself as Kathy's words sang in my ears, "You are the bravest man I have ever known." *Man? I did want to be her man.*

I saw Kathy during lunch and she told me that we would be double dating with her brother and his girlfriend. She said they'd pick me up at seven on Saturday. Kathy touched my hand, my heart pounded in my ears. She said, "I can hardly wait until we're together." Then she turned and went to class. I stood watching her skirt sway trying to imagine us together. The bell rang.

My Mom's favorite author is Willa Cather, and during times of stress, Mom would often quote her saying, '*There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm.*' Friday morning my storm began with Mom chopping vegetables for her chicken casserole.

I just finished making my sandwich when Mom said. "I need you to come home right after classes today. My hair appointment is this afternoon so I need you to put this casserole in the oven and set the temperature to 350°."

"But Mom, I have rehearsals after school."

"Your father is picking me up after work and Mrs. Benson is kind enough to give me a ride downtown. You'll just have to skip rehearsals today."

“But I’m the Technical Director!”

“And I’m your mother so if you want to go out on Saturday, you’ll make sure this casserole is in the oven at 4:30.”

“Yes Mam, 350° at 4:30.” I grabbed the lunch sack and started toward the front door.

Mom tore off a sheet of Saran Wrap and covered the casserole bowl. “Don’t forget, you’re helping Mrs. Benson with her yardwork on Saturday.”

“Saturday! We have rehearsals and. . .”

“You’ve put things off long enough. You will come home after class today and you will help Mrs. Benson tomorrow. Now hurry off so you’re not late to school.”

The school day started with lectures by the police in my first three classes about drugs and the consequences of using them, especially on campus. I wanted to work on my lie but couldn’t come up with something to say if the police asked me, ‘What are you writing?’

I didn’t think, *Well officer, my mom is making me come home after school and I need to come up with a big lie to tell my teacher*, would work so I just listened and waited for lunch. By the time, I found a secluded place to write during lunch, the period was half over. My last lie took three days to create but now I only had fifteen minutes to come up with the second biggest lie in my life. When the bell sounded ending lunch, I had nothing.

I felt like Sisyphus pushing that huge bolder up a hill as I turned the corner toward drama class, each step draining the strength from my legs as I watched one foot plod in front of the other. When I looked up, I saw Kathy and several other students reading a sign posted on the door.

“What’s going on?” I asked Kathy as she turned towards me.

“Rehearsals are cancelled for the next two days. Mrs. C. has to go to a stupid symposium on health and drugs in school.”

I almost jumped for joy, my bolder lifted by the Gods, until I saw the sadness in Kathy’s eyes. “This is terrible,” I said in the saddest voice I could muster.

“We won’t be able to use the auditorium but several of us are going to get together and read lines. Do you want to come?”

My heart said *Yes* but my mind said *Mom*. “Thanks, but I need to go over the lighting with the crew.”

Kathy frowned for a moment then smiled. “Tomorrow night you will be my Romeo.”

After school, I hurried home on my 10 speed. I put my bike in the garage then turned on the oven. It would take a few minutes for the oven to heat up so I went to check out Dad's colognes and after shaves. That’s when I saw my mother's bra on the chair in front of her makeup desk. I picked it up and my body started to tingle all over. I inhaled deeply and smiled, it was the first bra I had ever touched. I felt the soft silk inside the cups and thought of Kathy.

I remembered Buddy bragging about how he could slip his hand under a girl’s blouse and unhook her bra. I looked at my mom's bra, four sets of loops and hooks. I hooked them together. Holding the bra with one hand, I undid the clasps with the other. *That’s easy*, I thought wondering what the big deal was as I hooked it back together and undid it again. *Maybe it's different if someone is wearing it*.

I looked around the room before deciding to put the bra around the back of mom's small vanity chair. It was a tight fit and after a few tries I was able to connect the hooks on the last set of loops. I tested the fit, plucking the connection like a guitar string; the chair held it firmly in place. Sitting on the seat, I closed my eyes and reached around the back as I tried to squeeze the clasps with my fingers. This is going to be more difficult than I thought. After several more attempts with no success, I turned the chair around so the back faced the vanity mirror. I looked at the clock on next to the mirror, 4:37. I ran to the kitchen, pulled the Saran Wrap off the casserole and nearly singed the hair off my eyebrows putting it into the oven.

“You can do this,” I said to my hand as I walked back to my parent’s bedroom. The defiant bra waited for me as I sat down in the chair. “Stay focused and work together,” I challenged my fingers. My hand slipped behind the chair, my thumb and fingers squeezing the hoops

and loops together. I held my breath as the first two hooks slipped off and then the third, finally, the last hook popped out of its loop and the bra sailed to the floor.

Saturday morning and I'm beginning the biggest day of my life walking across the street to do yardwork for Mrs. Benson. She's kneeling in front of a flowerbed by her porch as I come up her sidewalk. "Hi, Mrs. Benson, where would you like me to start?"

"Oh, hi Fergus, would you help me up and I'll show you?"

I reached down and supported her arm as she used a small shovel to steady herself.

"Thanks, I'm not as nimble as I was when Felix was alive."

Mrs. Benson showed me to her push-mower and rakes in the garage. She carried the pruning shears as I dragged the mower and rakes to the front yard. The mower seemed in good condition, no rust, but in this modern age of gas powered automatic baggers, I wasn't inspired.

"Felix never believed in power mowers, felt they were too noisy and always needed fixing." She smiled. "Besides pushing a mower is great exercise and builds stamina which is good for a growing young man."

*Young man*, the words were barely out of her mouth when I smiled. *Is that what she thinks of me, that I am a young man?*

"I have to finish planting these flowers so maybe you should start on the side of the house and work your way to the front."

"Yes Mam."

It took a little over three hours to cut the grass with that push-mower and that was only the side and front yard. I was halfway through the back when Mrs. Benson came out to her porch.

"Fergus take a break and join me for lunch." She'd set up an old washbasin with warm water for me to clean my hands along with a hand towel to dry them. The porch was covered and she'd spread a red gingham tablecloth over a small table, with two chairs, one on each side. On the tablecloth were two plates, each with a sandwich and a large pitcher of lemonade.

"I hope you like turkey sandwiches?"

"Yes Mam." I washed my hands and the warm water felt good.

“Come, have a seat and stop all this Mam stuff. Call me Hilda.”

“Yes Mam, I mean Hilda.” I dried my hands and sat down. The sandwich looked a little strange. It didn’t look like the turkey sandwiches Mom makes.

“These are Felix’s favorite sandwich, made with turkey, cranberry sauce, lettuce and cream cheese on homemade bread.”

“Cranberry sauce and cream cheese, you don’t use mayonnaise?”

“Never have mayonnaise when you’re going out on a date. It’s like eggs or beans, because it has a way of sneaking up on you at the most inopportune time.” She pinched her nose. “Cranberry and cream cheese make the perfect combination for a young man going out on his first date.”

Hilda watched as I cautiously took a bite. I couldn’t conceal the smile that grew across my face as I savored a second bite. “This is a great sandwich.”

“I thought you’d like it, my Felix did.”

We both sat quietly enjoying the sandwiches and lemonade.

“Where are you going on this date?” Hilda asked.

“We’re going to Sunset Drive-In with her brother and his girlfriend,” I replied, wiping my hands on the napkin.

“When Felix and I started dating, we would go to the drive-in so we could snuggle and kiss little. Do you think that you and . . .”

“Kathy, her name is Kathy.”

“Do you think you and Kathy will be hugging and kissing?”

“I hope so.” I couldn’t believe that I was talking like this to Hilda. “I mean, if she wants too.”

Hilda tilted her head first to the right then to the left, “I think she’ll want to have a little romance, but there are several things that you must remember.”

I sat up straight like a boy waiting to be lectured about the etiquette of taking his date to a drive-in.

“First of all don’t go out with a full stomach and definitely don’t eat something that will bring the wrong aroma. Once that happens the only place to watch the movies is on the hood and you won’t be doing much kissing there.”

I felt like I should be taking notes.

“If you buy food, never get popcorn. Kissing someone with bits of popcorn in your teeth is terrible and the butter always stays on your fingers no matter how much you try to wipe it off. You don’t want Kathy to go home and find a grease stain on her favorite blouse.”

There must be a book where all this is written. If not, Hilda should write one.

“Don’t drink sodas, have the punch or lemonade. The carbonation in the sodas will act like eggs; only instead of going south the aroma will be in her face.”

Everything she said was amazing because everything she said made sense. I could have blown my first date by eating Mom’s casserole, or buying popcorn or a coke. “Thank you Hilda. I could have made so many mistakes.”

“You’re welcome Fergus. Just remember to enjoy each other and if you do get something to eat or drink always grab extra napkins. You can never have too many napkins at a drive-in.” She stood up and stacked the plates together. “Be adventurous and respectful and don’t be afraid to let her lead a little. Now finish cutting the grass while I put these dishes away.”

“Yes Mam, I mean Hilda.”

“And Fergus, would you please trim the bush out front, the one under my kitchen window”

“Will do.”

It took about an hour to finish cutting the grass and trimming the bush under her window. I thanked her for the advice and she gave me a tip, twenty dollars for all the work I did, just in case I needed some cash for my date.

After taking a shower, I slipped on a pair of shorts and stood next to the ironing board staring at my pants. It’s all part of my Mom’s new plan to make me more responsible, by fixing my own lunch and ironing my own pants. Next, she’ll probably have me washing my own laundry.

I wanted my pants to look like Dad’s so I used starch to get a sharp crease in front. At first it didn’t take, but after few more sprays, the

crease was set. I turned off the iron and polished my shoes. Dad said I should wear my dress leathers because a first date should be memorable and it all starts with the way you look.

At 5:30, Dad called me to the living room. I had been sitting on my bed looking out the window at Hilda's house wondering if Kathy and I would have a home like that someday.

"Is that what you're wearing tonight?" Mom said as I came out of my room in shorts, a tee shirt, and flip-flops.

"No, my dress shirt is hanging in my closet, my pants are on the ironing board so they don't wrinkle and my shoes are polished."

"Very good," Dad said. "Make sure you take your key because the door automatically locks and we won't be home until midnight or a little later."

"I set aside some of the casserole for you," Mom added as she straightened the hair on my head.

I stared at her blouse wondering if she was wearing the same bra, I'd fastened around her chair.

Mom smiled, "Have a good time but don't be too late."

I followed them to the door and waved bye as they left for an evening of dinner and dancing. After they were out of sight, I walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. On the center shelf was a bowl of chicken casserole covered with Saran Wrap and a note saying 'Have Fun,' and a drawing of a happy face. I could hear Hilda in the back of my mind saying, *don't eat something that will bring the wrong aroma*, as I closed the door.

It took a while to get dressed. I'd used little too much starch on my pants and I needed to slide my arm down each leg to separate the material. Putting on my shoes was a tricky also, but I was able to put my foot on my desk chair and tie them. I started to sit on my bed then decided that standing was the better option. Drawing the two panels of the window curtains closer I left just enough space for me to look out unnoticed.

At 7:15, they arrived in a white Pontiac Fire Chief and I almost tripped over my shoes when I heard, *AAOOGAH! AAOOGAH!*

I rushed toward the front door going over my checklist in my head, *keys, yes, cash, yes, wallet, yes, comb, no. AAOOGAH!* Catching my breath, I licked the palm of my hand and smoothed my hair down.

When I climbed into the back seat with Kathy, she introduced her brother, Mike, and his date, Wendy. I said, “Hi. Nice horn,” and from that moment on, I knew everything was wrong. First of all Mike could see me in his rear view mirror and every few seconds he’d glance back, monitoring my movements, first with a smile, then a serious stare. To top that off, Kathy was on the wrong side, she needed to be on my right because with her on the left, I’d have to reach all the way around her to unhook her bra, and finally, my pants didn’t bend so my legs stuck straight out. I was ready to leap from the car when Kathy placed her hand on my leg. I inhaled sharply and Mike’s eyes shot up to the rear view mirror. I smiled and looked down at Kathy. She leaned towards me; her left arm extended behind my neck and pulled me to her lips. We kissed; my first kiss and everything was perfect until I looked up and saw Mike staring.

The Sunset Drive-In charges by the carload and I insisted on paying since Mike drove. We finally found a parking place in the third row from the back about fifteen minutes before the show was scheduled to start. Mike grabbed the speaker and put it on the rear window by Kathy. He pulled Wendy toward him and just when I thought things might improve he adjusted the mirror and gave me a quick smile.

The screen filled with images of pizza, popcorn, sodas and animated people in red and white striped clothes telling everyone to go to the concessions.

Things had to change and the coke ads gave me an idea. “Does anyone want something to drink?”

“Sure,” Mike said, “as long as you’re buying.”

“Michael, you can pay for your own drinks,” Kathy said as she hit the back of his seat.

“It’s okay Kathy, I don’t mind. Hilda, I mean Mrs. Benson gave me a tip for trimming her bush.”

Mike and Wendy started laughing, but Mike's laugh continued until it consumed him so much, he couldn't catch his breath and had to sit up straight.

"What's so funny?" I asked. "She just paid me for a little yardwork."

"C'mon, Fergus, let's go." Kathy reached across my body and opened the door.

It took a moment for me to get my legs moving and help her out of the car. Kathy slammed the door shut just as Mike and Wendy exited on the driver's side.

"I'm sorry Sis; it's just that your date is. . ."

"His name is Fergus!"

"I know and I'm sorry." Mike stifled a laugh and took Wendy's hand. "Let's just get something to drink, and maybe some popcorn."

They headed toward the concession stand and I reached down and took Kathy's hand. It felt soft and warm and I never wanted to let it go.

When we arrived at the concessions, Mike was near the middle of a growing line. Wendy came over to us and said to Kathy, "I'm going to the restroom, want to join me?" She looked back at Mike then turned to me. "I'm sorry, he's a good person but sometimes he can be a jerk."

"Thanks, why don't the two of you go ahead. I need to stop at the men's room if I'm going to wait in that line."

"Just tell Mike what you want. He's already in line." Kathy said as she squeezed my hand before letting it go, "Lemonade for me please."

The line was moving quickly and by the time I reached Mike he was already at the window, ordering. "Do you and Kathy want some popcorn? It's cheaper if we get the big tub."

"Just two medium lemonades for us,"

"Damn, I left my wallet in the car. You can handle this can't you, and I'll pay you when we get to my car." Mike stepped back and pulled me in front of the window.

The expression on his face told me that he always forgets his wallet when it came time to pay. The cashier rang up the two lemonades, a medium coke for Wendy, and the Giant Gulp & Family Tub of popcorn

Mike wanted; total \$15.98. I went over to the napkin dispenser, and pulled out a large hand full.

“You plan on sweating a lot?” Mike asked.

“Nope,” I said.

*You can never have too many napkins at a drive-in.*

Kathy and Wendy met up with us outside the concessions. Mike handed Wendy her coke as he held the tub of popcorn cradled in his right arm and the 48oz Gulp, in his other hand.

I gave Kathy her lemonade and we walked back to the Pontiac, only this time I opened the rear driver’s side door and held both lemonades as Kathy slid into the back seat. I handed her the drinks and slipped in beside her.

The previews of coming attractions were ending when Wendy said, “Oh no, the last time you had extra butter you ruined my new blouse. Just keep your greasy fingers to yourself.”

*Thank you Hilda.*

They fussed a little more and the movie finally started with Mike behind the wheel munching popcorn and Wendy sipping her coke near the passenger door.

Everything was perfect. The night sky was turning dark and my one true love was sitting next to me. Kathy’s hand rested on my right leg. We turned towards each other and kissed. I felt her chest rise to meet me as she leaned a little forward and I moved my right arm behind her back. I pressed my feet down, trying to turn my body more but the leather soles on my dress shoes slipped on the carpet. My left foot found something firm and I pushed hard but the shoe skid between the front seat and the door, hitting the controls by the driver’s door sending Mike and Wendy forward. Everyone jumped, especially Mike as his Giant Gulp and Family Tub went flying all over him.

Wendy screamed as soda and popcorn covered the front seat. She opened the passenger door and got out just in time to escape the flood of carbonated buttered popcorn. I offered him some napkins and everyone laughed, except Mike.

At first, Mike was angry then he said it didn't matter because he had to get Wendy home early. My heart sank. Because of my big feet, the first date with my one true love was over.

Wendy rode in the back next to Kathy as he drove to my house. Everyone was quiet as I held Kathy's hand knowing the only thing memorable from this date, would be flying sodas and popcorn. I started to get out of the car when Mike asked, "Can Kathy wait with you while I take Wendy home?"

I looked at Kathy, "That would be great, if it's okay with you?"

Kathy squeezed my hand and said, "Yes."

Mike said he wouldn't be too long, maybe an hour or so, but there must have been a time warp or something, because the next thing I knew, Kathy and I were on the front porch watching Mike drive away with Wendy riding in the back seat.

I unlocked the door.

"Are your parents home?"

"No...They went out and won't be home until after midnight."

"Oh, so we're alone?"

"Yes." We walked into the living room.

"Your parents have a very nice house."

"Thank you." She turned and kissed me right in the middle of the living room.

Suddenly Kathy stepped back. I felt that I must have done something wrong, so I started to apologize when Kathy said, "What's down there?"

"Oh, that's the hallway to the bedrooms and bathroom. Do you need to, go, use the..."

Kathy cut me off, "Is your bedroom down there?"

"Yes, it's the, the first one on the left."

"Would you show me?"

I could feel my legs tremble as I led Kathy down the hallway. I opened the door and turned on the light. This is the first time I remember being happy that I had made my bed, then I saw my underwear on the floor. Quickly I kicked it under the bed. I walked over to my desk and pulled out the chair.

"Sorry about the mess, would you like to sit down?"

Kathy walked past me to the window and turned on the bedside lamp. Do you mind, that overhead light is too bright."

"Huh, a . . .no," and I flipped the switch.

"Come here."

I heard the words but I couldn't move.

"Come here." Kathy said again and held out her hand.

*Be adventurous and respectful, and don't be afraid to let her lead a little.*

I must have floated across the room because I don't think my feet touched the carpet. We kissed again and this time when she pulled away I knew I did something wrong.

She looked down between us and said, "Something is poking me."

I looked down puzzled then I remembered. "It must be my keys," I said and pulled them from my pocket and tossed them next to the lamp.

She smiled and pulled me close to her. My right hand slipped under her blouse as our lips met. I could feel my heart pounding in my ears when she stepped back again. "Is something wrong?" I asked, "Did I do something wrong?"

She looked down between us and said, "I think your pants are scratching my legs."

"I'm sorry, it must be the starch. It's the first time I ever ironed and I used too much starch."

"Why don't you take them off?"

"My pants?"

"Then they wouldn't scratch my legs."

My heart stopped.

"Why don't you take off your pants and I'll take off my skirt. That way neither of us will be embarrassed."

"My pants?"

"And my skirt." She undid a button on the side of her waist, slid the zipper down and her skirt fell to the floor. "Now it's your turn."

I couldn't believe the love of my life was standing in my bedroom with only her blouse and lavender panties. *I love lavender.* I looked at

her panties then up to her eyes. “Did you know I wanted to paint my bedroom lavender but I couldn’t decide on which shade.”

She looked me in the eyes then down at my pants.

“Oh, right.” I kicked off my shoes, removed my pants and tossed them toward the closet where they stood leaning against the door.

Kathy pulled me close and our kisses became so intense I thought that any moment we’d explode into flames. She stepped back again but this time she started unbuttoning my shirt. She stopped and grabbed my hands and moved them to the buttons on her blouse. Our eyes locked and she smiled then continued to unbutton my shirt as I tried to get those little bitty buttons through the tiny eyelets. I felt like I was wearing mittens.

By the time I got the top button undone, she was finished. She pulled me close and kissed me again only to step back once more. She slid her hand up my stomach to my chest and said, “You do have protection don’t you?”

Visions of Kurt Adams wallet flashed in front of my eyes, the worn ring imbedded in the leather.

Kathy looked down between us and said, “Because I don’t think it was your keys poking me.”

I looked down and my tighty-whities looked like someone decided to pitch a tent.

“Protection,” She smiled.

"I'll be right back." I closed the door behind me as I went into the hallway. I hurried into my parent’s room and began going through my Dad's dresser, nothing. *Dad must use something I am an only child.* I emptied his drawers onto the bed then the night stands. I looked at Mom’s dresser and vanity. *Maybe she keeps them.* I searched quickly and found some lavender panties, but no protection!

I ran down the hall and stopped at my bedroom. Pushing the door open, I saw Kathy sitting on my bed without her blouse. The table lamp was off as a sliver of light from the corner street lamp filtered through the slight opening in the curtain, caressing her body. It was difficult to see because her back was to the door but I believe her bra was the same color lavender as her panties. She removed her bra straps from her

shoulders and reached behind her back with both hands. “Is that you my Romeo?”

“Soon my Juliet, soon,” I headed down the hall to the kitchen. I looked in the drawers and cupboards. *What am I thinking no one keeps protection in the kitchen!* My heart was racing so hard I wanted to scream and then I saw it on top of the refrigerator, Saran Wrap. I took the wrap, laid it flat on the table just like Mom showed me, and tore off a strip. I looked at the wrap and my tighty-whities trying to figure what to do next. A voice in my head said, *just take them off*, so I removed my underwear and put it on the table. I stretched the Saran Wrap over my penis when it started to go limp and the wrap began to come off. That’s when I remembered pickles, and grabbed a rubber band from the cup on the table. I pulled the Saran Wrap tight and looped the rubber band over it twice. It looked like it might work, but I had to hurry.

I stood outside my bedroom door in my dress shirt, black socks, and a Saran Wrapped penis. I turned the knob and entered. Kathy was standing next to the window in only her panties. Her arms were crossed covering her now naked breasts. “What light from yonder window breaks, it is. . .”

A flash of light blew through the slit in the curtain and Kathy turned to look. “It’s my brother!” She turned and sat on the edge of the bed, grabbed her bra from the nightstand and slipped it around her waist.

I stood watching as she put it on backward, fastening the clasp in front before spinning it around, inserting her arms through the holes and pulling the straps over her shoulder. “Hurry Fergus before my brother ...”

*AAOOGAH! AAOOGAH!*

“Oh no, not the horn the neighbors will hear!” I grabbed my pants and jumped into them with both feet. *So that’s how firemen do it.*

A moment later we were hopping down the hallway as I tried to help her put on her shoes. I opened the front door and we stepped out onto the porch. I saw several lights come on including Hilda’s but I didn’t care. Kathy stared into my eyes and gave me a kiss so passionate I almost fainted, then that damn horn blared again. *AAOOGAH!*

Kathy smiled, “You can breathe now,” she whispered.

I exhaled and it felt as if my heart was racing after her. She climbed into the back seat and Mike pulled his Pontiac out of the driveway.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow," she said as she leaned out the window of Mike's car as it turned the corner.

I waved and began to reply when a strange howling sound escaped my mouth, flooding the night air. The rubber band snapped in my pants.

I turned to go back into the house but the door had shut and locked. I reached for my keys but my pockets were empty. I sat down on the porch trying to decide what lie I could tell my folks when I remembered Dad's clothes dumped all over his bed. Then I remembered my underwear on the dining room table next to the Saran Wrap. I got up determined to get into the house when I heard.

"Fergus. Oh Fergus."

I turned to see Hilda, coming across the street in her pink robe and matching slippers holding something high in her hand. That's when I remembered Felix was a locksmith and he taught Hilda how to pick locks. I knew this because she helped Mom a couple months ago when Mom locked herself out of the house.

"See Fergus, I told you she'd kiss you. Now let's see if I can pick that lock one more time."



William Huntsman moved to Klamath Falls 28 years ago to marry his wife, Margo, who continues to be his strength. He is the President of the Klamath Writers' Guild and is currently working on the final drafts of several novels. "I believe there are two processes in writing: the creative process, where the writer focuses in on story, and the publishing process, where marketing and promoting occupy all of your time. Currently I'm in the creative process."

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