
2018 WINTER WRITING CONTEST

ADULT ENTRY WINNERS

The Winter Writing Contest is sponsored by the Adult Writers' Group of the Oldham County Public Library. The AWG meets biweekly on Saturdays at the Main Library in LaGrange and is open to all. For the 2018 Writing Contest, flash fiction entries were solicited through the month of January. Submissions were open to anyone in the community, and were judged anonymously by the core members of the Writers' Group. Submissions had to have the following criteria: Stories needed to be flash fiction (under 2,000 words), and contain three elements added at the author's discretion (a ticket, winter, and the phrase "To put it another way".) Submitted entries were evaluated on a set rubric. The following are the winning entries from the adult category. The Adult Writers' Group wishes to thank all who submitted stories and participated in the contest.

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1ST PLACE WINNER, ADULT CATEGORY

LINKS OF TRUST

TRAVIS MCCLAIN

“Does anyone else think it’s messed up they won’t let us keep our shoelaces, but they give us Battleship to play in here? I mean, isn’t that full of choking hazards?”

It was a good question. Before I could even address it, though, the patient who had asked it, a young man by the name of Justin, had already turned his attention to the TV.

“No, wait, go back! No, not the Weather Channel. We already know it’s snowing. The ball game!” That got everyone’s attention. He watched as Dawn, the pink-haired patient with the remote, navigated through a few channels before landing on ESPN-2 showing a basketball game between Western Kentucky University and Ball State. “Bam! I knew I saw a game on! I knew it!”

“Dude, seriously!” I motioned at him to lower his voice. “Remember, you got a lot of people around you with some serious anxiety problems.” I was one of them.

“Sorry,” he said. “I’m sorry, everyone. I’ll try to keep it down. Didn’t mean to upset anyone.”

“Alright, now listen,” Dawn addressed him. “I’ll put it on this game but if you can’t keep it toned down, you’ll have to go in the other group room.” That meant banishment to the smaller social room--without a TV.

“Okay, yeah, totally. I can be quiet, you guys. Here, watch!” He sauntered over to a couch opposite me and sat down between Maurice, a crotchety old dude who looked like Santa Claus but was easily provoked, and a newcomer whose name I hadn’t caught who sat with her knees pulled up to her chest and her arms wrapped around them.

No sooner had Justin sat down than the newcomer burst up from the couch and fled the room.

“What that was about?” asked Gene, who had been here for three weeks. He was my roommate, and he was friendly enough, but it was already apparent that he regarded the rest of us as little more than interactive entertainment for his stay. I was content to mollify him, but kept my distance. His handlebar mustache was snazzy, though.

“I dunno. I’ve only talked with her once,” answered Ramona, a single mom in her early-40’s. Ramona and I had hit it off easily. At the end of my first night, she and I and a

few others had sat around sharing about ourselves. There was an easy chemistry among us and we'd quickly formed a little clique. We all shared a wry humor, but more importantly, we were all supportive of each other.

"What'd you talk about?" I asked.

"Well, she's my new roommate. Her name's Claire. Anyway, all we really talked about was just stuff like where to do laundry and what time we eat and stuff like that, you know? We didn't get into, like, why she was here or nothin'. I figured we'd get to that stuff later."

"Maybe now's a good time?" I suggested.

"Yeah, okay. *Fine*," she feigned protest.

While she went to coax Claire out of seclusion, I took my origami project and Ramona's Sudoku puzzle book to the other room and waited. I was finishing my fifth reindeer when they finally came in. Claire was still a sobbing mess. Or, to put it another way, a more supportive way, Claire was still recomposing herself.

"So this," Ramona started, "is my new roommate, Claire. Claire, this is my friend Zach I was telling you about." Ramona sat opposite me, with Claire on the end of the table between us. As before, she sat with her knees drawn, hugging herself, and looking down. Periodically, she wiped at her puffy, red eyes.

"Hey," I said as softly as I could. "You don't have to talk about anything," I started. "But if you *want* to talk about anything, we'll listen. That's what we've been doing for each other since I got here. It's been helpful."

"It really has been nice," Ramona added. "Nate got discharged yesterday. There's another girl named Marissa that's part of our group. She's in bed with a headache. You'll meet her later. She's cool."

Claire swallowed, clearly trying to make herself talk. "I'm sorry," she blurted.

"For what?" I asked.

"I'm such a mess," she finally managed before her sobbing resumed.

"Hey, that's okay, though. That's why we're all here. We were all a bunch of messes when we first got here, you know? Like, I was bawling my eyes out way worse than you. I mean, I had the snot coming down my face and everything, no joke."

I joined. "I wasn't crying when I got here, but that's mostly because when I got here, I was exhausted. I came in in the evening and didn't get to the floor until around midnight. But Ramona can tell you, that next day I was not doing well at all. I didn't want to talk to

anyone. But then later that night, like she was just saying, we got to talking in our little group and that helped me feel okay about being here. It looks like maybe you don't feel okay about being here."

Claire chewed her bottom lip and brushed the back of her hands across her eyes again. Several silent minutes passed before she finally spoke. Her voice was measured and steady. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make a scene."

"You didn't 'make a scene'," insisted Ramona. "You don't have anything to apologize for, to us or to anyone else."

"She's right," I added, sensing that Claire thought we were downplaying the utter turmoil she'd caused. "You didn't upset anyone. We just saw *you* were upset and thought you might wanna talk about it."

Claire seemed to accept us at face value...for the time being. "Well, I'm still sorry, but thank you."

"We both know how that first day feels. Mine was last week. The day before Christmas Eve, no less! I'll tell you something Ramona told me that first night. She said she knew I was gonna be okay because I was in the room with everyone else and not holing up in my room. You were out there with everyone else tonight, too. I didn't really get what she meant the first time she said it, but I get it now, and she's right. And that's how I know you're gonna be okay, too."

Claire's bottom lip quivered. "But what if I'm not?"

I smiled wistfully, recalling that I'd asked Ramona the same thing. So, it was my turn to be on this side of the table. "We've seen lots of people come and go while we've been here. We can see the ones who want to get better and the ones just playing the game. You want to get better. And I have complete confidence that you will, just like Ramona had complete confidence in me." I added, "I didn't believe her, either, for what it's worth."

"Do you wanna talk about what got you in here?" Ramona asked.

Claire tensed up, and shook her head.

"Do you wanna talk about why you got up and left the other room?" Ramona asked.

Claire began to cry again, even more heavily than we had already seen. We had finally hit on something.

I asked the obvious. "Was something in the room connected to whatever it is that happened out there?"

Claire nodded her head sharply through her sobbing.

I replayed the scene in my head: Justin... Battleship... Dawn... remote... ballgame... Dawn... Justin... Santa Claus.... It wasn't Battleship, surely. If it had been Santa, we'd all have known. I remembered the moment Claire had gotten up. "Was it Justin?"

Claire shook her head, still unable to look at either of us or speak.

"Was it the game?"

Claire leaned across the table and laid her face down. Her crying seemed to stop entirely. She exhaled and her body seemed to relax, as though she had somehow finally gotten something out of her system. Her stillness was more distressing than her sobbing.

Ramona and I looked at Claire, and at one another. After what felt like an appropriate pause, I returned us to the conversation. "So the game had something to do with what's going on with you...." I trailed off, hoping Claire would take it from there.

She slowly sat upright again, throwing her head back and rolling it around on her shoulders. She was trying to shake herself free of something, that much was clear.

"So I go to U of L. Last season we played against Western down in Bowling Green and me and some friends got tickets for Christmas and we went to the game. And after the game, there was a party. Well, there was lots of parties all over campus, but anyway, there was one that we went to. And we were just hanging out and playing some beer pong and there were some guys there."

We both understood from the change in Claire's tone what happened. She knew we knew. That made it easier that she didn't have to say the words. It made it harder because now we knew.

"Hey," Ramona soothed, "It's not your fault."

"But I shouldn't have had so much beer and I should have left when Casey left!" she shouted, the anger startling Ramona and me.

I let the feeling subside before asking, "Do you remember what I said a few minutes ago? About being sure you're going to be okay?"

Claire was visibly confused, not expecting to shift from her trauma back to some asinine pep talk from ten minutes ago.

"You were right to ask, what if you're not? I asked Ramona that same question. And I asked it because a lot of why I'm in here now has to do with the same thing as you. Except for me, it happened a lot longer ago and I never really dealt with it until now. I know all about reliving it whenever you hear or see something that reminds you of it, even something as simple as a ballgame. I know all about fixating on everything you did, and

didn't do, that you should have done or not done that would have stopped it from ever happening. And I know it's all a bunch of bullshit, because it doesn't matter what I did or what you did. The people who hurt us are the ones who did what they weren't supposed to do. And that's all there is to that part of it. And I know how empty that sounds right now, because it sounded just that empty to me just a few days ago."

I could see Claire was taking in everything I was saying, but she was entirely too distraught to fully process it in the moment. That was okay. I just needed to sow the seed and give her some reason to start believing that healing was possible.

"I didn't understand anything about healing when I got here. I just knew I hurt and I needed the hurt to stop. I made a mess out of Christmas! But since I've been here, I've learned some things about myself and about healing. I don't have it all figured out yet. I've only barely started. But I know now it can be done, and I intend to do it. I've started on it. Baby steps, but real steps. And I know you can take those same steps. I'll help you take them, if you want. We can learn to walk together for the New Year. What do you think?"

Claire sat motionless, almost in a daze. Her eyes began to search my face, and for the first time, she seemed to truly see me.

"Can I trust you?" she asked, her voice plaintive and feeble.

I presented her the same offer Ramona had extended to me. "*I'll trust you*, and you can decide as we go. How about that?"

Claire smiled, establishing another link in our growing chain of trust.

I smiled, too.

2nd Place winner, adult category

THE WINTER HEIST

JACOB SOUTHARD

All was still, a serene peace lay on the land as can only be found in the Sierras. It was in the middle of winter, but the men huddled by the fire were not troubled by the cold. There were three of them, one abnormally tall man built like a titan of Greece, an average looking man with a low slung gun, and then the shortest member of the bunch, Harvey – aka ‘Boss’ – Rosnin. Boss stood five foot even, with graying hair that today hung down to his shoulders, tied into a ponytail. His beard, which was normally well-groomed, was unkempt from being in the wild for a long period of time. His quick, calculating blue eyes examined the map drawn in the snow by the gunman, known only as Ferral Fife. While he never openly advertised or boasted about his skill, rumor was that he killed twenty men and fought off two Apache raids. Once, when he was drunk, he claimed to have been bitten in the New Mexico desert by a rattler after the raid. After three days of excruciating pain, Fife said the snake had died.

“You sure it’s just Mike McDonald riding shotgun?”

“Yeah, they’re trying to keep it low-key, acting all normal and sich.” Fife said with his Texas drawl. “Passengers and everything – only naturally they don’t know the gold’s on the stage, or the women-folk would get hysterical.”

Rosnin’s eyes glinted. Three thousand dollars in gold, easy pickings too. Easy, at least, if their key player performed his task as like he was supposed to.

“You know your part, Mouse?” He asked the giant, and then again. “Mouse?”

“Huh?” Mouse looked down at him, absently breaking a stick up and leaving the pieces strewn about.

“Do. You. Remember. Your. Part. In. This. Very. Vital. Mission?” Rosnin asked patiently.

“Oh yeah,” Mouse grinned.

Just like a child. Rosnin thought. “What is it?”

Mouse’s smile faded. “Gosh, don’t you know? You’re the one that told me...”

“I know that!” Rosnin said sharply. “But do *you* know?”

Mouse studied it some, thinking about his very important mission. "Oh yeah, I use this slip of paper Ferral gave me-"

"The ticket." Fife said patiently.

"Uh, yeah. And take it to... to..."

"The station master."

"Yeah, that's it."

"And ask him."

"And ask him when the stage comes for... for..."

"North Fork Dry Diggings."

"That's the one!" Mouse exclaimed excitedly.

"Dog gone it Ferral! Stop leading him on like that! What ya gonna do, hold his hand into town and walk him through the steps in front of ev'ybody?" Rosnin asked.

"Sorry."

Rosnin shook his head. "And then, Mouse?"

"I's gets on the stage and wait until we pass the signal cactus."

"And what is the signal?"

Mouse looked puzzled. "The cactus?"

Rosnin rolled his eyes. "What's on the Cactus? What makes it a signal?"

"Oh," The big man's eyes rolled heavenward and he watched a buzzard circle lazily overhead. "Um, a skull."

Rosnin sighed in relief. "And then what?"

"I get sick."

"Very good Mouse! And after they stop the stage and we jump out?"

"I stop the shotgun and driver."

"Very good, Mouse! I am confident that you will follow the steps to the T, right?"

Mouse paused. "What T? I don't remember you telling-"

"Nevermind about it, then." Rosnin gave him a strained smile. "Go on into town, and we'll see you in a little while."

"Okay." Mouse walked over to his Percheron mix, it being the only horse they found that was big enough to carry him and faster than an ox, and stepped into the saddle. "You ain't gonna leave me, are ya?"

Rosnin's eyes flashed, but to his credit, he kept his temper in check. "No, Mouse. You are a valued member of this team, not to mention the man we are depending on to bring this job to a very lucrative end for all of us."

"Oh boy! What's lucrative mean?"

Rosnin threw his hands in the air and walked away from the camp.

"To put it in another way... it means lots of steak for you and a warm bed instead of sand and rock." Ferral said.

Mouse nodded, and said the word again, listening to the sound. "Luke - rah - tiv. Luke -"

"You best get on now," Ferral said. "Else the Boss will get mighty upset with you."

Mouse nodded and walked his horse towards the town, still saying the word out loud.

"You best follow him into town," Rosnin said coming back. "I don't want that silly giant ruining this job. Make sure he doesn't see you, or he'll want to talk to you and then we're in a pickle once the job is done."

Ferral nodded and swung up into the saddle easily, cantering away. "I'll make sure he's at the station and then I'll be back."

Boss nodded and began packing up camp. He had hired Mouse out of a freak circus he was a member of, if only for a brief time, hoping to exploit Mouse's muscle. Unfortunately, Mouse lacked intelligence, which now made Boss wonder if he made the right decision. One wrong word from the giant and it was the hangman's noose for the three of them. Rosnin carefully erased signs of the campfire and threw his blanket roll behind his saddle. The stage would come through in about two hours, and he wanted to case the road once more.

When Ferral trotted into town, he watched Mouse as the giant tied up his horse at the hitching rail and walk over to the stage station. He walked kinda slow and serious like a kid who was nervous about being caught with his hand in the cookie jar, looking cautiously about, yet moving with studied determination. Shaking his head, Ferral tied up his mare on the other side of Mouse's gelding and glanced at the saloon. He had time for a drink, there was no telling what you might learn in there just by listening... besides, he was darn thirsty.

When he came out fifteen minutes later, he almost bumped into a handsome young woman. He tipped his hat politely and untied both horses, swinging up in the saddle. He paused to watch as she crossed the street and ascended the boardwalk to the station. That was his mistake. Mouse looked up at her and saw Ferral beyond, and raised his hand to wave. Ferral dipped his head so that his hat brim covered his face, and cantered out of town, leading Mouse's horse behind.

Thankfully for Ferral, the woman thought that Mouse was waving at her. Seeing Mouse's beaming, and then crestfallen face with its cherub like innocence, she smiled.

"How are you doing?" She asked in a sweet, eastern accent.

Being addressed by her, and knowing that he wasn't really supposed to talk to anyone but not wanting to be rude, Mouse faced a really tough situation. He stared straight ahead and nodded. "I'm doing well, ma'am, how are you?" He asked with all the civility he could muster over his fright.

She sat down beside him. "I am fine, thank you. Whew! Is it always this hot out here?"

"Yes'm, gets so hot in the desert that you could fry rattler on a rock. I done it before."

She was impressed. "Rattler? I don't believe I have heard of it. What is it?"

Mouse smiled shyly at her. "Some of the best meat you'll ever meat, ma'am."

She nodded, and they sat in silence for a few minutes.

"May I ask why you are going to North Fork?" She asked, looking to make conversation.

Mouse had forgotten all about caution. She talked funny in a nice way, and he never talked to a girl before.

"I ain't exactly headed to North Fork." He said. "I'm gett'n off parway."

She looked puzzled. "Oh, I thought the manager said the stage has no stops in between. Where are you getting off at?"

“The desert.”

This perplexed her. “What on earth for? I’m... I’m sorry, I don’t mean to pry. You must have a ranch or some land out there. I hear that there are some places in the mountains where there is green grass for cattle, and streams to pan for gold.”

Mouse began to feel uncomfortably at the word ‘pry.’ “Where are you headed?” He asked.

Her face beamed. “San Francisco! Why, I hear that it is absolutely gorgeous out there!”

“Gorgeous?” He furrowed his brow. “What’s that mean?”

She smiled. “Beautiful, the ocean and the sunsets,” she sighed. “Heaven on earth.”

He shrugged. “I ain’t been there, so I wouldn’t know.”

“You should go see it sometime.” She said. “Come visit me. My father runs a warehouse down by the docks for a shipping company.”

Mouse smiled bashfully. “Well thank you miss... miss...”

“Lucinda, Lucinda Carter.” She said. “And your name is?”

“Barney,” He said. “But my friends call me Mouse.”

The stage rolled in and they stood up, Mouse thoughtfully remembering to help her with her luggage. She thanked him and stepped inside.

There were three other passengers, making for crowded space one side. Mouse was sitting opposite Miss Lucinda, slightly uncomfortable with the stuffy quarters – he took up two seats, after all – while she chatted away about San Francisco and the women’s college she attended back east. He enjoyed listening to her, and asked questions about the big cities he never seen, places where people could live near each other and never know their names, which was mystifying to him since the wide west seemed a massive community to him.

So enrapt with her stories he barely caught sight of the old cow skull perched atop the cactus like an angry sentinel left behind enemy lines. Which reminded him, how does someone get sick if they ain’t? He should’ve asked Boss...

“S’cuse me Miss Lucinda,” He interrupted. “I’m supposed to get sick.”

“What?” She asked. “You’re feeling sick?”

Mouse nodded.

“How do you feel bad?”

“Um...” he shrugged.

“You et today, boy?” Asked one of the other passengers, a former buffalo hunter. Mouse shook his head.

“Sometimes the motion of the coach gives you motion sickness if you haven’t eaten.” Miss Lucinda said. She blushed. “I read it in a book.”

“I do believe it’s true.” Said the other woman passenger. “Why I declare this ride will destroy what’s left of my nerves before we’re through.”

“To bad I ain’t got any jerked meat on me, else that would settle your belly.” Said the hunter.

“It’s your stomach then, giving you problems?” Asked the fifth passenger, an Irishman named Peter Finney, traveling salesman. “Never fear, I have the cure for that right here in my bag. O’Malley’s herbal bolsum. It’ll cure most anything. Here, try my sample, free of charge.” He thrust the bottle towards Mouse.

Unsure what to do, he accepted it and glanced about uncertainly.

“Take a drink.” Finney encouraged.

“Oh dear, not too much, mind you.” Said the older woman. “It might make you sicker.”

“My bolsum cures sickness, mind you, not cause it.” Finney said in defense.

“Now I know you mean well, Mr. Finney, but my Johnny served in the war and was wounded. They gave him morphine for the pain, and he’s been addicted ever since.”

“You can’t get addicted to bolsum!”

“How do you feel bad, exactly?” The hunter asked.

Mouse had downed the bottle, and felt wonderful. He never had anything alcoholic before in such quantity, and was feeling a little tipsy. “I’m just fine now.” He slurred.

“Oh dear.” Lucinda said.

“What’s in that liquid, boy?” The hunter asked.

Finney held up another bottle. "It's organic, Mr. Black. I didn't know he'd have a reaction to it-"

The hunter took the bottle, uncapped it, and took a swig. He wiped his mouth off with the back of his hand, quaffed the rest, and then tossed the bottle out the window. "Just as I thought, boy can't hold his liquor. Got any more, Mr. Finney?"

There was a shot, and the stage came to a stop.

"What's happening?" Lucinda asked.

"Alright, hold your hands where I can see 'em – you there, yes you – toss that scattergun to the ground. Don't try anything foolishness, I've killed men for less."

"Ferral?" Mouse's face lit up. He opened the door and staggered out.

"Mouse! What in the blue blazes happened?"

Mouse drew himself up to his full height, leaning a little. "O'Malley's bolsum, its good and good for ya! Best thing since... since..." He fell over with a thud.

"Good Lor!" Rosnin came down out of the rocks, his scattergun cradled in his arms at the driver. "Alright, all passengers out! Don't bother, mister – we'll take care of him. Out out out!"

"What's the holdup for?" Asked the stage driver. "You robbing civilians? They ain't likely to have anything on them."

"Course not." Rosnin swung the barrel towards the passengers. "But you are. Throw down that strong box!"

The shotgun rider looked askance at the driver, and then reached under the seat and pulled it out. He threw it down. "Let's go folks, they got what they wanted."

"Wait just a minute." Rosnin said, smiling. "Let's take a look, shall we?"

He drew his revolver and shot the lock off while Ferral stood guard. Keeping the shotgun pointed at the passengers, he bent over to open it. At this moment, Mouse revived. He blinked groggily and stood up, rubbing his head. He staggered around the coach unnoticed and threw up. Just as Rosnin was eagerly lifting the strongbox lid, Mouse rounded the front of the wagon and stepped on the coachgun alying there in the sand. What followed next was kind of hard for everyone to explain. The gun went off into the ground, but the boom caused Rosnin to jump back in alarm and dive for cover. Ferral let loose a string of shots, and the passengers leapt into the coach. The driver had managed to hold the horses, but now he let them go and off they went.

“Mercy sakes alive!” Rosnin exclaimed. “What in tarnation happened?”

Ferral came out, holding his gun. “Dunno, must’ve been another man inside.” He looked about. “Hey, where’s Mouse?”

Rosnin bent over the chest, looking around. “Dunno, maybe he jumped aboard?” *Good riddance.* He smiled as he lifted the lid.

“Hey Mouse! There he is! Whatcha doing?”

Mouse rose slowing from the fetal position and looked woefully about. “Blimey, Ferral. I’ve got a massive headache...”

Rosnin let loose a string of curses, looking at Ferral and throwing little pieces of paper at the ground. “Newspaper clippings!”

Ferral looked at the shotgun lying on the ground, still smoking, and guessed what happened. He reloaded his revolver and holstered it. “No matter, I heard about another prospect for us while in town.”

3RD PLACE WINNER, ADULT CATEGORY

THE BEAUTIFUL DESOLATION

ETHAN BERG

Whiteness, that is all that could be seen across the land, and beyond that the mountains and the clouds. Above there was no sun and below there was no earth. The storm had passed but it had consumed everything: the green plains, the blue sky and the human life.

The traveler, bundled in his snow gear, stood there to take in this beautiful desolation. He had just a day ago saw a green land, filled with peace, beauty and life. Then, the birds left. They took the peace with them as they fled to the west in swarms, cawing. Next, the clouds came. They took the beauty with them as they came from the east with white darkness. Finally, the sirens began. They took the life with them as they signaled its impending doom.

The traveler, who was a resident then, was not stunned by this apocalyptic storm for he had known of its inevitable arrival. With little time to spare, he fled to his lone shelter, which was meant for the bombs but would do its part to keep him alive. He sealed himself in it to no longer hear the sirens. Now all he could do was wait for the storm to pass. Within minutes he heard unrelenting poundings on the confines of his bunker. Later, when he had a drink, he saw the vibrations of the storm shake it. He could only imagine what horrors were happening above. He eventually shut his eyes and slept for the rest of the night.

Upon awaking there was only silence. He knew it was over and safe to leave. He put on his snow gear and his survival bag. He unlocked the bunker door and with some struggle pulled it open. Snow came pouring in all the way from the very top of the entrance. He grabbed his shovel and began to dig his way out. After digging several feet, he reached the cold, still surface. He looked around to see only bands of snow. A place that never had snow during its winter was now buried in it. His and his neighbor's homes were gone. Everything was gone. Using his snow shoes, he stayed on the surface and started to slowly walk towards his destination.

It seemed there was nowhere to go, but at a certain time there would be one. The traveler walked forward into oblivion with only faith in his instructions. He either was walking to salvation or doom. The wind was unyielding making brief moments of intolerable coldness. He persevered though because resting meant death. He climbed a large snow dune with his ski poles as support. At the top he saw the shape of a black zeppelin in the distance. He would reach it in time before its departure. He strutted down the dune and towards his safety. As he got closer to the zeppelin, more travelers from all

directions came to view as they strutted toward the same place. It started to snow again signaling the arrival of another storm.

Arriving at the zeppelin, the traveler saw a crowd waiting to get on. At the front there were a few people wearing the same snow gear. On the sides of their jacket's sleeves were the U.S. flag sowed on. They controlled the crowd making them speak to one of them. After consulting with this soldier, they were allowed to step onto the zeppelin that was dangling barely above the ground. The traveler made his way to the front and approached the soldier.

Muffled by the fabric she said, "Show me your ticket!"

Using his teeth, he pulled off his right glove and grabbed something from his pocket. He showed her, with his hand shaking, a dark yellow raffle ticket with "R-21-1" written across it.

After taking a glimpse at it, she said, "Alright get on."

The traveler quickly walked over to the zeppelin. He was directed up some stairs to the passenger area and immediately felt warmth on his frozen cheeks. He found an empty seat at a table across a stranger looking out the window. Without greeting them he sat down and undressed his snow gear so he didn't overheat. He then warmed his hands with his breath and rubbed them.

A man in a server uniform approached the table and said, "Would you like any refreshments?"

The traveler didn't respond at first, being surprised on having dining service in a rescue mission.

"Refreshment sir?"

He finally replied, "I would like a bourbon."

The server then asked the stranger, "And you Madame?"

She turned to look at the server and answered, "I will have water with ice."

The traveler looked at her after hearing her request.

The server replied, "I will have your drinks right away," and left.

She noticed him looking at her and said, "What?"

He asked, "How can you want in this freezing weather a glass of ice water?"

She replied, "I got here first and have been in the heat for a while."

"Oh, I see. I wish I got here first."

She then asked, "How long did it take you to get here?"

He answered, "About eight hours. And you?"

"One hour."

He remarked, "Damn, did they land here for you?"

She responded, "In fact they did."

He asked, "What makes you so special for the U.S. government to plan for your convenience?"

She answered, "My family is the owners of a large pharmaceutical company."

"Which one?"

"AMP."

He responded, "American Medicinal Providers? Why do they need you? No offense."

She said, "None taken. Well, it's obvious that for the past twenty years my family's company has been the largest provider of pharmaceuticals in the United States and is one of the largest American businesses. To put it another way, I am an American who has a shit load of money."

He then said, "I didn't know they let people buy their way on here."

She then remarked, "Someone has to pay to rebuild civilization."

"And that's you?"

"One of them. I can guarantee you that the top hundred richest people are on the other zeppelins right now."

The server came by and gave them their drinks.

He then said, before he took a sip of his bourbon, "I guess money can buy you anything."

She responded, "We all bought our tickets. I bought mine with money and meds. What did you buy it with? What makes you so special for the U.S. government to save you?"

After taking his sip, he answered, "I am in it."

"What do you do?"

"If I told you, I would have to kill you."

She then said, "You can't kill me. We are an endangered species now."

"I still can't tell you."

She responded, "We live in a brave new world. Civilization can't be built on secrets."

He replied, "It already has. Everyone who isn't on these zeppelins wasn't told about the storms. They didn't know in less than a day the world would be buried in snow and ice. They didn't have the time to seek shelter. They weren't supposed to survive. They were supposed to die. We kept the secret because the other 7.5 billion of humanity wouldn't be able to comprehend not being allowed to live. They would have stormed our governments and compromised all of this."

She then replied, "That is in the past with the old world. Your secrets survived the storms with you."

He then said, "All I can tell you is I am here to make sure the new civilization doesn't go into anarchy."

"You're the brute strength."

"You can say that."

Suddenly they heard the sirens from the day before. This time they were coming from the zeppelin. The soldiers, who were the last outside, started running onto the zeppelin. Once they were all on, one of them sealed the door. The people on board soon felt a sudden tug as the zeppelin turned and elevated. The traveler looked out the window and saw the storm at the mountains. The zeppelin was moving as fast as possible in the opposite direction.

The woman then said, looking out the window, "They left someone behind."

The traveler saw down below another traveler waving his hand in the air probably crying out for help.

He said, "He should have come sooner."

The zeppelin flew past the person below and they fell onto their knees knowing they were dead.

In an hour or so the storm was out of site and no longer a threat. The passengers went on to get to know each other, since many would become neighbors and colleagues in

their new home. The traveler and the woman stayed to themselves though, staring out the window for most of the journey.

A voice on the intercom of the ship said, "This is the captain speaking. We have taken a detour to avoid the storms and are now in direct route to our destination. We are now leaving the United States and have just entered the Gulf of Mexico."

The woman asked, "Where is it?"

The traveler answered, "It's gone."

The storms had even consumed the seas. The continents were once more connected by a bridge not of land but of ice that covered most of the Earth. It would be thousands of more miles before they reached waters and then hundreds of more miles before they came across any other survivors. They would all be heading to the same place: a continent once stranger to human life that had melted and was now humanity's last hope. For the next thousands of years, human civilization would take shelter there until the winter in the north passed.

HONORABLE MENTION, ADULT CATEGORY

PORGY

BOB SHRADER

It was cold. The wind had wiped the snow up over the top step of the back porch. Raymond had to push hard against the storm door to move the snow aside. The snow in some places came up over his boots as he carried a plate of scraps of food to his friend that had been banished to the old wooden barn.

He made his way to the large red-faded barndoors; and like the storm-door to the house; the barndoor was covered in a foot of snow. He managed to get the door open enough to squeeze his small frame into the barn.

Porgy was curled-up in a ball on her bed made up of hay and an old horse blanket. A light with a metal shade burned above her bed in attempt to fight-off the cold from the barn.

Raymond put the scraps of food along with a couple of scoops of dry dog food in her bowl. He bent over and sat down next to her. His glove came off and he rubbed her head; she licked his face and hand as her tail waged with joy.

She was a spotted black and white bird dog; a present to Raymond on his third birthday. They both were about to celebrate birthdays; her tenth and his thirteenth. They had grown up together. She was the sibling that Raymond never had; even more, she was his best friend.

His Aunt Maud had banished Porgy to the barn.

“No dog is going to be in the same house I cook and eat in.” She had proclaimed.

“If mom was here, she would let you come in and lay by the fireplace,” Raymond said, as Porgy ate some of the leftover ham fat in her bowl.

“Mom and Dad wouldn’t treat you like this.”

Raymond reached into his pocket and pulled out a bus ticket.

“You see this? They are sending me to Kansas, to Uncle Lewis’s farm. I have only met him twice in my whole life.” Porgy looked up from her plate and licked Raymond gentle on his chin.

“I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to leave LaGrange and leave you here to Aunt Maud’s care.”

“The world doesn’t make any sense. Since the accident, I feel like I’m someone’s burden. I overheard Aunt Maud on the phone; tell Uncle Lewis she couldn’t handle me and the farm. To put it another way, she said, she ‘just wasn’t used to raising kids,’” Raymond said mocking his aunt’s voice.

Tears weld up in Raymond’s eyes. He hadn’t cried once since the funeral, however now, a tear rolled down over his freckled cheeks. He took off his John Deere hat from his curly strawberry blond hair and wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

Porgy sensed Raymond’s sadness and stood up by her friend, burying her head in his chest. Raymond grabbed her head and hugged her with all his strength.

Through tears Raymond said, “It’s as if they think I’m still a kid. I’m not!” His voice cracked an octave as he said the last words.

He looked at the ticket again. I’m not getting on any old bus and traveling to a place I have never been. He looked up at the hay that he and his dad stacked last summer. His dad had a way of making everything fun.

His dad had laughed at him, when a bull broke down a fence and his dad looked up to see Raymond leading the bull back to a fenced area.

His dad told him that summer, “Raymond, that bull doesn’t like anyone; you have a way with animals; it’s like they know you are there for them. I have never seen anyone with your spirit with animals.”

Raymond closed his eyes to see his parent’s faces in his mind. A barn owl’s flapping wings brought him back to the present.

Raymond looked back at Porgy and remembered his dad once saying he wished Uncle Lewis didn’t take life so serious. It was the only time he really ever heard his dad talk about his older brother.

“Uncle Lewis just wants another farm hand. He doesn’t care about me or you.” Raymond said quietly, as he continued to rub Porgy’s head and looking deep into her eyes.

“Let’s run away! Tomorrow! I will get my backpack and put some food in it for both of us. I will get my 410 rifle too. We can shoot rabbits and squirrels. First thing tomorrow

morning. I will see you then girl. You stay here and keep warm and I will see you in the morning.”

A stream of late afternoon light spilled through a crack between boards as it illuminated a 1 pm bus ticket stuck between two bales of hay.

The next morning, Aunt Maud yelled up to Raymond to get out of bed and do his chores and then pack for his bus trip. She was running to her house in Shelbyville to pick up a few things and would be back by 10 am to take him to Louisville.

“Not today,” Raymond said under his breath.

He packed everything he thought he and Porgy would need. He had a plan.

They were headed to the Mackey Woods. A couple of years ago, he wandered into the woods one day while helping a farmer set tobacco. He remembered an old house that stood in the middle of the woods. He always thought it looked haunted. It was remote, and no one would find him there. He remembered it had a fireplace.

He decided it was time he made some of his own decisions about his future. People were making decisions about him and his family’s farm and were not even asking Raymond what he wanted.

That stopped today. He needed some time to think.

He and Porgy had traveled about five miles; they were still about a mile and a half from the cabin in the woods, when they came to Tanner’s Pond. Raymond started around the frozen pond. Porgy had a better idea. Before Raymond knew what was happening, he saw Porgy in the middle of the pond.

“Porgy no! Come now!”

He heard the ice cracking; a slow munching sound at first, then a cracking sound that bit into the cold air.

“Come on Porgy, come on, you can do it. Come to me.”

Then the sound of the ice giving way to Porgy’s weight suddenly was in slow motion. Raymond saw her splash into the cold water; she was frantically trying to climb free. She cried for help.

“NO!” Raymond yelled.

Raymond stepped out onto the pond; inching his way to his friend. He could hear the ice give strain with each step of his 75 pounds, as he slowly moved across the surface.

Porgy was fighting for her life; chipping away at the ice with her paws.

Raymond laid flat on the ice, to redistribute his weight over a larger area.

He finally reached Porgy and grabbed her collar; he pulled her with all his strength onto the surface of the ice. He slowly slid her to the shore.

Porgy couldn't stand. Raymond wrapped a blanket around her and held her close to his body. They were next to the woods. Raymond gathered some twigs and sticks and built a fire and laid Porgy next to the fire to warm up. He looked into her face and knew if he didn't get her some help, she would never make it.

His dad always worked with Dr. Ben Reynolds, a veterinarian for all their livestock. Raymond had been to his farm on many occasions. He felt like Dr. Reynolds's farm was about 5 miles down highway 53.

While the fire burned, Raymond built a carrier out of a couple of sticks and his backpack. He had a rope and laced it together, so he could pull the carrier.

The fire was dying, and it would be dark in a couple of hours. He covered Porgy in the carrier and started pulling it down the road.

They had gone about three miles when a pickup truck stopped, and the man rolled down his window.

"Raymond, is that you? You know half the county is looking for you."

"Dr. Reynolds, I am so glad to see you; I was on my way to your farm. Porgy fell through the ice on Tanner's pond. I don't think she is doing so well."

"You get in the car. I will get Porgy."

Dr. Reynolds carried Porgy into his examining room and yelled for his wife Nancy, who was also a Veterinarian.

Porgy was non-responsive.

Raymond looked into her eyes and ran out the door to a snow bank. He went down on his knees and yell to the sky.

"God no! Don't take her too! Help me Mom, Dad please help." Tears flooded his face as all the drama of the past few weeks filled him.

He sat there with feelings of total hopelessness.

An arm reached down around him.

“Raymond, you okay? I have been meaning to come over and take you out to a ball game or something.”

Raymond turn to see Chris. Chris was Nancy and Ben’s sixteen-year- old son.

“Chris, Porgy fell through the ice, I don’t think she is going to make it. They want to send me to Kansas. I don’t know what to do. I feel so lost!”

He threw his arms around Chris and cried like he had never cried before.

“Come on, let’s go in and check on Porgy,” Chris said. “We can work this out. Come on, we have been pals for years.”

They walked in to see the examining room door closed.

“Have a seat for a second Raymond, I will check on Porgy and be right back.”

Raymond dried his eyes and stared off into the fish tank in the waiting room.

Dr. Reynolds came out and sat down next to Raymond.

“Raymond, I have given Porgy some medicine to help her rest. You did good, trying to bring her to me. Raymond, she is ten years old, but I think she will make it.”

Raymond hugged Dr. Reynolds as Nancy and Chris walked in to join them.

“Raymond, Nancy, Chris and I have been talking; how would you like to come and stay with us for a while?” Dr. Reynold asked. “Your dad and I talked last summer about you shadowing me. He said your love for animals was amazing. I could use someone around here that likes to work with animals.”

“You mean it?” Raymond asked.

Chris spoke up. “Raymond, I hope to go to medical school in a few years; maybe you might want to think about looking at becoming a veterinarian like my mom and dad.”

“How could I ever do that?” Raymond asked.

“I will talk to your aunt and the lawyer that is handling your families’ estate. We will work something out that will help establish your future; however, right now, let’s see if we can’t convince your aunt, that it might be best if you could stay right here for the time being, with us here on the farm. You wouldn’t have to change schools and we have an extra bedroom next to Chris.”

“Can Porgy stay here too?”

“Sure, Porgy will be a welcome addition to our menagerie.”

The next day, Raymond saw Porgy up and about, as she licked his face from nose to ear; her whole body wagged from her happy wagging tail.

Life is a journey. A new chapter just opened for Raymond and Porgy.