

**the supernatural
issue**

{ Zoey Indiana's ideal first date
Kaethe Flynn gets spicy

CHERRY



the finest in pop fiction.

plus: Brian Flynn returns, with Carrion

The sun went down two hours ago, and I heard the last rifle two hours before that. It's finally dark enough that I can stand up without being seen.

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All illustrations by Rachel Weeks. Find more at patreon.com/cherrymagazine

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My wool blanket has left a coarse, cross-hatch brand on my knees. The moist night air feels so cold against the skin. I roll the blanket and wedge it into my satchel, followed by my canteen. I stash it under the pricker bush, five paces north of the rock, thirty paces west of the stream.

Thirty paces west, five paces north. Grab the satchel. South along the stream to the willow tree, then sixteen paces more to the ford. Then west until I come to the farmer's road. I walked the route three times yesterday, mixed in with the spectators staking out the best place to watch the battle. Still I repeat it, tap out the rhythm of it on my thigh. I make the escape route my drumbeat.

I trailed the army into Sharpsburg a week ago. The town was pulsing. They always are before a battle. The people a mix of curiosity and horror at their curiosity. They are no different here. The war had come to them, nestled between the Potomac and Antietam Creek. I got a room at the boardinghouse. From my window I could see the creep of the building trenches. Looking out I felt a falling in my gut, the pull of thousands of men dying.

I climb the mound and stand outstretched because it's night and because I can. I look through the stand of elms, across the stream, and into the bend where the boys with the lanterns step between the bodies. They stop every few feet and bend over into the face of a dead man. Some of the men have little brass medals with their name carved on them, that's what the boys are looking for. They unbutton collars, place their hands behind necks which get colder by the body. The boys are followed by two carts, one for the named, the other for the rest.

I make my way down the slope. I know it so well in the daylight, but I can't afford an unseen rock or a sudden hole. I have to keep my thoughts smooth, like Father would say when he would take me with him through the neighbors' houses. If your head is messy, your feet will be too.

My head is clear, my feet are quick. I reach

the elms, invisible. The body crews are still so far away, their lanterns look like stars. Still, crossing the stream is going to make noise so I need to prepare myself. I breathe until I notice I am breathing. Breathe until the sound of water fills my ears.

I slip my foot into the stream and it's warm. Warmer than it should be. The mud of the bottom pulls on my boot and the water runs inside it. Ten paces to the far bank, and with each step my feet soak in more of that water. It feels like someone is pressing their body against my submerged skin. I splash across the stream to the bank, louder than I ever should.

I scramble up the bank and throw myself behind a tree trunk. I force myself to double-check that I can't be seen from the battlefield. The ragged elm bark scrapes at my back. I torture myself to pull off my wet boots as they suck on my skin. I just need to get these damn things off and I can keep going, then I can clear my head.

My boots hit the ground with a wet thud. I stretch my feet into the grass and I breathe until I notice the black wetness covering my legs. A warm, inky rivulet spread down my shins. My feet look like coal. I've never seen so much blood. The breeze blows across the blood. It dries and cracks.

Before I remember how much I loathed standing in that stream, I scramble inside it again. Scrubbing with my nails in the moist air. I drown my hands in the water, the temperature of a bath. I can see the water is thick and black with blood in moonlight.

I struggle up the embankment, my limbs tangle trying to get me away. A patch of drying blood drags on my shirt. My breath is ragged. I don't want to look back into that ditch. I don't want to look down at my hands. I run until I no longer feel the fear of falling backwards into that awful stream.

I rest my elbows on my knee and try to control my breath. I breathe in and it bubbles. I breathe out and it rattles. Only when I catch my breath do I realize that I am exposed.

My dash from the stream has me stranded in the open and I drop onto my stomach in the grass.

There is a blue body eight feet in front of me.

I should turn around. Should head back to the boardinghouse. But here I am. I know turning back would require me to wade through that water again. They must have killed some trying to cross the stream, I tell myself. Shot them as they fought with the mud. It can't take too many bodies to bloody the water. I know where these dead boys keep their trinkets, and how many it will take to fill my pocket. I know the thrill of putting someone else's things in a drawer. The drawer I never open but to throw something new inside.

I meet the gaze of the dead boy in front of me. I crawl towards him, dragging myself along the ground. He has a gray face in a blue uniform, and his bottom half is missing. His eyes are open, brown, and young, set in sunken skin. I reach into his breast pocket and it yields me a pinch of tobacco and a crushed bullet, a souvenir from a luckier day. Some of these animals will leave the dead boys with nothing. I've come to a battlefield late and found the brass buttons stripped from their uniforms. I don't touch anything that can be seen. Let them be buried with something.

I smell it first. It breaks the monotony of the death stench. It's the sour smell of stagnant water mixed with a metallic sting. I look to my left and see him crawling towards me over the bodies. Soaked in black which catches the moonlight and makes him gleam. He drips with the inky mess. I wait until he gets close enough for me to see his face. He moves closer and closer to me with a wet rasping. He climbs a torn-apart body and is within only a few yards of me when I realize with a churn in my gut that he does not have a face.

A sudden light is thrown on the fiend and in an instant I can absorb the horror of its form. The thing is not covered in the bloody water, it is made from it. Its limbs drip and congeal and make a horrific sucking sound as it freezes in the light.

"Who are you?"

I don't know how long the voice behind me has been speaking.

"You, man, who are you? Are you hurt?"

I turn around and see a lantern boy, no older than fifteen. This is the first time I've realized that the lantern boys carry rifles, too.

They shoot scavengers.

The tobacco falls from my hand, and I sprint back toward the stream. I briefly consider throwing my hands up in surrender. I don't know what the punishment is for scavengers.

A crack rips the air above my head. They shoot scavengers.

A second after the shot, I hear the boy scream. Then a low bubbling sound.

I am gaining quickly on the stand of elms and I know I don't want to wash my body in that filth again. I push myself between the trees and jump for the far bank with a flailing leap.

I fall onto my wrists in the blood and water. I howl and the awful liquid fills my mouth and burns my nostrils. I find my feet and rush up the bank.

Holding my tender wrist, I force myself to look back across the stream. I don't see the horrible thing working through the trees. Hopefully whatever it did to the unfortunate child took long enough that it can no longer follow me. I can see my boots abandoned under the tree across the stream. Compared to the thought of being on the other side for even a second longer, walking an hour and a half back into town barefoot feels like a blessing.

I look up at the stars. I find north first so I can find west. I count out my paces, but they're all wrong. I'm moving faster than I know I should. But I still rejoice when I see the rock, five paces from my satchel. I reach into the pricker bush then seize in horror when I glimpse my arm in the moonlight.

The stain which before had only covered my hands and wrists is now spread up to almost my shoulder. The pale light gives it a polished metallic gleam. I roll up my trouser leg but I cannot see where the deep red oozing begins or ends. Sickness wells in me. It spews from my mouth, black. After I finish, I

wipe the tears from my eyes and they are brackish gray.

I run through over the hills and troughs to the farmer's road. My pack with my water is where I left it. I gasp and pant and I can feel the skin on the soles of my feet crack. The road goes over two small hills and one large one, then there is the Shaker church, and a left onto Main Street. Then the boardinghouse and a bath to wash this stinking growth off me.

My legs feel like clay, heavy with fatigue, and each time they hit the ground I can feel them quiver more and more. I can taste blood, and I hope it's my own.

I run down the farmer's road. The moon looms in the sky directly in front of me. I look up one moment and the white is blinding. I look up another and the moon is the color of rust. My breath scratches at the bottom of my lungs, desperate. I drag myself to the peak of the second small hill when that hateful sucking sound rises in the distance, from where the stream curves around the town.

I am so close now, but the thing creeps across my limbs. I fight against its pull as I crawl up the tallest hill into town. I see the wood paneling of the church. I know what salvation feels like. Soon I will be in my room, in the bath, the door locked against the thing outside. I can find my escape. Let it swallow the rest of the boardinghouse while I climb out the window and leave this damned war behind. A feeling of victory surges through my heart and then my toe catches on a rock and I fall, feet over the back of my head down the side of the hill. I land in the bottom of the road. The crack from my legs fills my ears.

I try to crawl down the road. My leg drags behind me, twisted like a bird's nest. My arms quiver until they fall limp and I lie, exhausted and broken in the farmer's road. I look up at the moon, the rust turning to a shining black, the color of coffee. It seems to pull me towards it.

I can feel the ink pooling up around my neck, crawling over my back. That persistent sucking sound growing louder and louder until I can feel it in my stomach. That's when I can locate the sound. It is not

coming from the stream, which whispers along its banks unpolluted. That sound is coming from me.

The black comes across my eyes.

The sound rises until it's everywhere.

My face scrapes against the dirt. The black mass drags me away from the town.

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A Haunted Blind Date

by Zoey Indiana

I barely held back a scream as a door slammed behind me. I spun around the old storage room, but no one was there. Arms wrapped around my neck and cut off my air supply. I fought for a breath as my fingers dug into strong arms.

“Damien!” I managed to gasp as my head started to spin. The arms loosened and my breath rushed back.

“Emily, I’m so sorry!” Damien whispered, as he continued to hide behind me.

How such a tall, muscular man could hide behind such a petite woman, I would never know. I didn’t see anyone around that would have caused the door to slam. I tried to take a step forward, but strong hands clutched my shoulders, holding me back. I reached a hand up and patted the fingers.

“There’s nothing to worry about. I’m just going to check out the door.” I heard Damien whimper as I extricated myself from his death grip.

As I walked to the door, I thought about how I had ended up in this odd situation. My closest friend, Amalia, set me up on a blind date. Apparently her boyfriend’s best friend had gone through a nasty breakup and they were trying to get him back to his former self. I had protested at being a rebound, but Amalia insisted that we were far outside of the rebound time period. According to her, the girl had done a number on his ego. I eventually relented, because we both knew that when Amalia got an idea, it was easier to give in than resist. When she told me that Damien had chosen the infamous Prentice House, I was aghast.

Prentice House was not one of those dorky Halloween haunted houses where dressed-up people jumped out at you. It was a legitimate haunted house built in 1895. Local legend stated the murders started just a year after the original structure was built. It was a small house that held the founding family and a few laborers. A local man, John Tilley, protested their plan to build a 12 room bed and breakfast. He used a

hatchet to murder all eight people. Six months later, some of the family related to the murdered owners appeared, and announced they would continue the building project. Tilley was captured and hanged on the property where the bed and breakfast now sat. Since then, five more documented murders happened on the property.

I had been determined to call off the date, but Amalia reassured me that it was safe. It wasn’t the dead I was afraid of. When I met Damien at the front steps, I felt reassured. Damien towered over my 5’5” frame by almost a foot. Just a quick look at him confirmed that he was a linebacker for the local university. The only thing I hadn’t expected tonight was that my petite little self would be the brave one.

A thorough look at the door revealed there were no strings or latches that would cause the door to slam. Grabbing the doorknob, I easily opened it and looked at the other side and the hinges. Nothing at all stood out as a parlor trick. It was probably something built into the door. I never bought into the supernatural. Mostly because nothing had ever happened to me that couldn’t be explained by something factual. Quite often I watched the ghost hunter shows just to get a good laugh about how ridiculously easy it was to spot the mechanisms.

I turned back to Damien and shrugged. He frantically waved me over. When I got within arm’s reach of him, he latched onto my right side. I looked down at his hand clutched on my arm. Our skin tones were vastly different. His was a deep sandalwood while my own resembled the color of a sun bleached bone that one might find in the desert. I looked up at him and he peered down at me. Even visibly afraid, Damien still remained extremely attractive. His wavy black hair was mostly contained in a low ponytail, and his eyes were a dark brown that took my breath away. My hair and eyes also contrasted with his. My eyes were a light green that everyone felt the need to point out, and my wild auburn hair left me at the center of a never-ending litany of ginger jokes.

A slow creaking shattered the spell that his eyes held me in. Damien looked up and his mouth

dropped open. I turned to see what caught his attention, expecting to see just a door opening. Instead what I saw made my heart skip a beat. A translucent man stood in the open doorway. He had a noose hanging loose around his neck and what appeared to be a hatchet in one hand. The hair on the back of my neck stood up. Even though I didn't believe in ghosts, something in my gut told me that we should leave.

Not wanting to let my fears get the best of me, I forced myself to remain still. Everyone knew about John Tilley, the murderer of the original family. This had to be a well-designed hologram or something. Damien gave a soft tug on my arm but I shook my head. I wouldn't run from something that wasn't real. Well, that was my reasoning—until the hologram of the murderer swung the hatchet at me. Despite my resolve, I flinched and raised my arms to protect myself. Pain sliced through my left arm while a small squeak of pain and surprise escaped my lips. I fell back into Damien in my attempt to retreat from the translucent murderer.

Damien swept me up into his strong arms and took off towards the door we had come through, but the door wouldn't open like it did for me before. Damien spun around and faced the ghost who slowly walked towards us. I didn't hear anything, but he appeared to be talking and laughing. I quickly looked down to see a large hatchet-sized gash in my forearm. Blood was steadily dripping off my elbow onto the floor.

"Damien, we have to get out of here!" I shrieked.

Damien didn't hesitate. He let out what sounded like a war cry, protectively curled me into him, and ran full force towards the ghost. Unable to believe what was happening, I closed my eyes and braced for impact. It wasn't until I felt us slowing down that I realized we made it past the ghost. Damien set me down and rushed to lock the door. I hated to point out that if that was indeed a ghost, a door would hardly keep it at bay.

"What do we do now?" It looked like

Damien's 20 seconds of courage were over.

"First we find a way to stop this bleeding. Then we get out of here." I held my hand over the still-bleeding wound. We searched what appeared to be the servant quarters. It took a couple of minutes to find a first aid kit in the bathroom. I remembered that the house had been functional until about 10 years ago, when the last murder had been reported. A guest was found in their room, cut into pieces, and next to them was a bloody hatchet. Since then, the bed and breakfast had been closed, and left to the state. It wasn't uncommon for thrill seekers to break in and go on DIY ghost tours.

Damien fished through the kit to pull out what we needed. His touch was warm and gentle as he cleaned the blood up. He gently held a gauze square over the wound as he firmly wrapped it with more gauze. Finally he found a self adhesive bandage to cover it all. For some reason, I hadn't expected someone so large to be so gentle.

"How does that feel?" His eyes looked up into mine from where he kneeled down in front of me.

He shouldn't be taking this long...

"Much better." The added pressure made the throbbing pain stop. I couldn't seem to look away. There was so much depth to his eyes. His hand reached up and wiped something off my cheek.

"You had a little smear on your cheek." After his hand left my skin, the warm sensation remained.

"Thank you." I quickly jumped up from where I was sitting and tried to calm the fluttering in my belly. Even though I had only known Damien for an hour, he seemed to be a nice person. The fact that I couldn't stop the butterflies every time I looked at him threw me for a loop. I had never been this attracted to someone. A quick glance around showed there was only one way to go that didn't involve going back through the room with the murderous

ghost.

“Come on, let’s try this way.” I pointed to the doorway that headed out and started in that direction. Damien followed and didn’t say anything about what had just happened. Probably because nothing had happened. He helped me bandage a wound. That was it. I was just getting ahead of myself. Before he could catch up to me, I took off up the stairs. I reached the landing and stopped to catch my breath while Damien caught up. After a few minutes the hair stood up on the back of my neck again. He shouldn’t be taking this long. Uneasiness built in my belly as I cautiously crept down the stairs. There was a door that I hadn’t seen when I first came through. The handle didn’t budge when I tried to open it.

“Damien!” I pounded on the door with my fist. I didn’t hear anything coming from the other side. I frantically searched for something that I could use to open the door. Eventually I found a set of keys sitting on a shelf in the corner. I ran back to the door. My hands shook as I attempted each key. I heard a crash from the other side and dropped the keys as I pounded on the door with both fists. “Damien!”

The door didn’t budge. I snatched the keys off the floor and resumed trying to unlock the door. It felt like an eternity by the time I heard the tumblers click. I made sure to keep the keys as I ran into the room. Damien was laying flat on his back, with scratches all over his arms. He didn’t move as I squatted next to him. I touched his cheek and his forehead furrowed. He was alive.

“Come on, Damien. Wake up.” I shook his shoulder, and was surprised at how taut the muscle was. His eyes popped open and looked up at me.

“You came back for me.” He whispered in amazement. His hand went up and rubbed his hair. When he pushed himself up into a sitting position, his hair stood up in all directions. Honestly, it was adorable.

“Come on. We need to get out of here.” I held a hand out for him and he grasped it. He didn’t pull as he stood up then let go. He was even too polite to refuse assistance he didn’t need.

The butterflies resumed when he grabbed my other hand and held it. I darted a glance at him and he grinned. I returned my focus to getting us out of Prentice House. He refused to let go of my hand, even on the stairs. I tried asking him what happened when we got separated, but he refused to talk about it. I dropped the subject and continued to search for the way out. Eventually I found the parlor, which had a door that let out to the back patio. We bolted out and ran around the outside of the house towards the road. Amalia had dropped me off and said she would pick me up when I called her. Instead of calling her, I followed Damien to his car. He finally let go of my hand so we could jump in the car and he locked the doors. The only thing audible was our rapid breathing. Just as we started to calm, every light in Prentice House turned on at the exact same time.

“We should leave,” I said, without looking away from the house.

Damien grunted in agreement and started the car. He turned and drove down the long driveway. I closed my eyes as I tried to come to terms with what had just happened. The car stopping pulled me away from my internal drama.

He had stopped at a park. When the engine turned off I looked at him. “I thought you might want to end the night somewhere more peaceful. Unless you want me to take you home or meet Amalia somewhere.” His face fell a little at the last sentence.

“That would be a good idea after tonight.” Damien looked down at his hands and sighed. “Oh, no. I meant the ending the night on a more peaceful note, not leaving.” I coughed awkwardly, “unless you want to call it a night.”

“I’m sorry about Prentice House. Landon suggested it. I’m not really into that sort of thing, as you noticed.” I couldn’t help it. I laughed. At first Damien looked confused, then he joined in.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t laugh, but please do not ever listen to Landon again. He has horrible ideas.” We both broke into uncontrollable laughter. It was quite a while before we sobered.

“Come on, let’s go for a walk,” I told Damien

as I opened the car door.

We strolled over to the walking path. Damien's hand found mine as we walked. I could feel his gaze on me as we flopped onto a bench overlooking the lake. His arm brushed mine. My mind was in a whirl as we sat in silence. What could I say to a guy who took my breath away? At least at the house I stayed focused on trying to escape the ghost. Now that we were safe, I couldn't focus on anything other than how gentle he had been when he bandaged my arm.

I turned to say something to him, but couldn't speak when his lips met mine. They were soft and gentle during the brief kiss. He pulled away, but continued to stare into my eyes. I could barely breathe let alone think. Quickly I stared down at my hands in my lap and fiddled with the hem of my shirt.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that." Damien said quietly.

I didn't know how to respond to that. I enjoyed the kiss. I wanted to kiss him again, but didn't know what I was doing. My last relationship had been several years ago and I didn't consider myself the type to date. Damien started to stand up, but I grabbed his hand.

"I didn't mind." It was all I could think to say. It was then that I noticed his scratches were gone. "Damien, look at your arm. All the scratches are gone."

Damien sat back down and looked at both of his arms. They both looked like nothing had happened.

"What happened to them? What about your arm?"

He gently took my arm in his hands and peeled back the bandage. There was no blood and no wound. We both stared at it for a moment before we started laughing again. At this point I was beyond trying to understand what happened tonight. We both grew silent again. Damien put his arm around my shoulders as I shivered a little. Before I lost my courage I turned, grasped his face with both hands, and kissed him. He wrapped both of his arms around

me. I sighed as a pulled back. He loosened his arms a little, but not much. I let go of his face and wrapped one arm around him. He pulled me in and rested his chin on my head. He smelled delightful.

"So...how do you feel about diner food? I know this little all-night diner that has the best food this time of night."

"That sounds wonderful." I paused as I thought about it. "As long as it's not haunted."

His chest rumbled as he let out a hearty laugh. "No ghosts. I promise."

Zoey Indiana loves to write short stories and has been a ghostwriter for the last 7 years. She is a PRO member of Romance Writers of America and is in the process of publishing a new fiction series. She has three rescued fur-babies: two adorable kittens and a laser light loving dog.

The Adventures of

Einstein and Indiana Jones



Top left and above: Indiana Jones (l) and Einstein (r). Bottom left: Indiana Jones gets a close-up.

Photos by Amanda Whitbeck: Indiana and Einstein were both rescues. Indiana loved to be carried and would meow at me from the moment I got home from work. Einstein was the sweetest cat. It only took him 3 years to warm up to me, but after that it was impossible to sit down anywhere without him appearing in my lap to be petted. The two of them were always together, snuggled up.

Want to get your cat featured? Email us at cherrymagazinelovesyou@gmail.com.

Fat Girls Want to Fuck, Too

by Kaethe Flynn

Aggie sighed as her hands dropped, holding the open book. To fuck, or not to fuck—that was her question. Her sexuality and morality had always wrestled (quite robustly) over the question. But lately, she was going out of her mind thinking about it. Raised in a strict Methodist household, Aggie was taught that masturbation was a sin, because you were probably imagining sex with someone who was not your spouse. And it would open doors to other, more serious sins. She was indoctrinated with the belief that sex was for a husband and wife. Period. So, it was no surprise that growing up she dedicated herself to staying “pure,” and waiting to have sex until she was married.

Had there been anyone in her teen and early adult years who’d been interested, it probably would have been a different story—all Aggie wanted was to belong, to be loved. Ha! It was so easy to not do something when there was no temptation. If it doesn’t taste good, there is no temptation to eat it. Since no one had ever shown the least bit of interest, it had been an easy choice. Well, that’s not completely true. There was one guy who’d shown attraction to her, but he was a lying, married, douchebag, even if he was pretty damn good looking. He wanted to shag anything with a pulse, and Aggie wanted better.

Aggie was a late bloomer. She remained a junior version of her religious mother until, at some point in her twenties, she woke up and decided that she wanted to make her own decisions—not just do what she was told to do by some pastor or religion. After her spiritual awakening, she began to wonder what was so wrong about sex in a loving relationship. Aggie definitely did not see the appeal in going out and shagging everything that moved—too much risk. Just her luck she’d end up with the clap. But, if two people were in a relationship and cared about one another, why not?

Once, she thought she had finally found happiness, that it was finally her turn, but it wasn’t

after all. She was coming to terms with the fact that the relationship that consumed her attention for years was coming to an end. Strike that—it was at an end. Over. She kept thinking to herself, “What the fuck have you been doing with your life?” Perhaps Aggie’s friends were right—he was the safe choice, but not the right choice. Though nothing about this journey had seemed safe.

She met him in college, when Aggie had gone as far away from home as she could. Even if she didn’t, *they* didn’t realize it, they fell in love almost immediately. Honestly, Aggie didn’t even know what had happened until much later. After years of long-distance love, flying back and forth, talking on the phone for hours, emailing and texting, they decided he would move to the mountains with her. Finally, they would be together.

Only that was almost three years ago, and they still had not managed it. Aggie was willing to do whatever it took, but Richard, he no longer contributed much to the relationship. There was always some excuse. She had no doubt that he loved her, but she could see she was no longer a priority in his life.

Aggie was finally facing the fact maybe there was no happily ever after for them...no matter how much she wanted it. Maybe her friend was right—not only was he safe, but maybe Aggie was only in love with the potential of what could be. She didn’t know. Aggie just didn’t know anything right now except for how much it fucking hurt. And how pissed off she was. At him, at herself, at the world.

Then it happened. Out of the blue, Richard called.

“Aggie, I’ve been offered a really great promotion.”

Long, awkward pause...

“I guess what I’m saying is...we’re just not going to work out.”

Aggie sat in stunned silence for a full fifteen minutes after Richard hung up, phone still in her hand. She spent hours journaling, crying, getting angry, and then journaling some more. She Skyped

with a friend and talked it through, and then accepted the fact that it had really been over for a while.

Granted, it had only been a few days since that phone call, and she was still greatly conflicted. Aggie was trying to get herself to a place where she was fully ready to move on. That's where she was at present—sitting in her chair, conflicted over whether she wants to just find someone for the now, just to fulfill her carnal urges, or if she wanted to keep up her higher-than-average morals and wait for the guy with whom she will build a long term relationship, even if it's not marriage.

Damn it! How could one person have, at once, such strong levels of sexuality and morality, and which one would win out?

"Hmmm," she said to herself as she took a long drink of whiskey, "to fuck, or not to fuck? What a shitty day to be making this decision." She glanced at the calendar, which showed big purple hearts and the number 14. *Fucking Valentine's Day. Who created this stupid-ass holiday, anyway?* Aggie's inner voice grumbled.

Curiosity made her get out her computer and, fittingly, since it was Valentine's Day, sign up on OKCupid. "Okay, Cupid, you little shithead, shoot an arrow in this ass! It's big enough you shouldn't miss."

After getting her profile set up, being sure to include lots of pictures, and several full body shots (she wanted people to know what they were getting), she just left it there, not yet brave enough to like anyone. Satisfied for the moment, Aggie closed her laptop with a triumphant "hmpf" and went to bed.

She had the morning off and decided to sleep in. When she woke up, she felt like laying there with the warm sunshine bathing her in bed. She wasn't exactly sure how much time had gone by, but it felt like a good while, and her bladder started urging her to get up. After a huge, lazy stretch, Aggie finally made herself get out of bed. She made herself a nice cup of her favorite vanilla chai with heavy cream, her not-so-guilty pleasure, and propped herself up in bed. She liked to sit on her bed with tons of fluffy pillows behind her. She put one of the pillows on her lap and

deposited her laptop on top of it.

Opening the laptop, she was greeted to a red number 15 on the top corner of the OKCupid app. Her eyes opened wide in puzzlement. What did that mean? Had that many people reported her for being hideous? Were those all messages from the app itself? Aggie clicked tentatively on the pink icon and watched as a

Aggie had a real naughty streak in her...

screen opened before her: *You have 15 new likes!*

Dumbfounded, Aggie sat staring at her laptop. Her mouth may have been hanging open slightly.

"They're probably all nasty," she mumbled to herself. Slowly, Aggie scrolled through the list down to the bottom and began clicking on the profiles.

Michael: 34, single, straight, male, 6' 0", thin, smoker, occasional drinker, has kids, doesn't want more. Summary: ...

He wasn't ugly, but not great looking. Looked kinda rough around the edges. Nothing in the summary...pass.

Stephen: 38, single, straight, male, 5' 10". You should message me if: You wanna hook up.

Pass...

"Hmm," she thought to herself as she scrolled through profiles, "I'm not really super interested, but I should keep an open mind." But as she kept scrolling, she stopped. "I don't have to do anything! I can like or dislike whomever I please. I don't have to take the first douchebag that comes along."

It was if a light bulb in her mind that had been blocked by boxes of old emotions and baggage had been uncovered and now shone brightly. She was no dog. She had a lot to offer. With that in mind, she started passing on those profiles that really did not

interest her. Why waste anyone's time if she really wasn't interested? After a few likes, some on profiles that she figured probably weren't real, but hey, why not give it a try, she clicked on an average-looking guy.

"Hmmm," she said. "He's not bad."

She looked over his profile and he seemed like a pretty decent guy, and while he was no super model, he was not half-bad.

Her mouse hovered over *Like*...

Click.

Aggie felt a little triumphant. She had had the balls to click like on the profile of a normal looking dude. For a chubby girl, it felt sinful. Which she actually found kind of sad when she thought about it.

It wasn't too long until a message popped up.

"You ever thought about having sex at your work place?"

Normally, Aggie just rolled her eyes when talk immediately turned to sex, but for some reason this time she was intrigued.

"I've thought about sex in a lot of places..."

Aggie had a real naughty streak in her that had largely—no, almost completely—been repressed for her life up till now. She was feeling bold and decided to play along.

"Have you pleased yourself at work before?"

"Yes, in the past..."

"Oh, that's hot."

She liked where this was going and kept the conversation up. A few times she really surprised herself, but she was pleased at the same time. "Damn girl!" she exclaimed after a particularly juicy comeback, "I never knew you had it in you!!"

"I'll please you. When can we meet?"

The cursor sat blinking at her. Was this for real?

"Oh shit," she thought. Her heart started racing. "What do I do?"

She wanted to go meet him, but she only half believed that anything would happen after they met. And what if something did happen? Her mother

would so disapprove of her hooking up with some guy.

Wait...was this the real issue? After all these years she was still trying to please her mother? Was she still trying to be the good little religious robot that she had been?

"Fuck that!" she exclaimed.

"Tomorrow," she typed and hit send.

"Fuck," she thought to herself. The answer to her question was definitely fuck. She deserved to have some fun. Besides that, it was what she wanted, and wasn't that reason enough?

Kaethe Flynn is a librarian, book nerd, Iowa native, world traveler, and old soul—she writes because she must.

The Outer Limits of Belonging

by Barb Cashman

I think of the bumper sticker that warns “don’t believe everything you think.” It seems we often have difficulty distinguishing in our minds between thinking and believing. This difficulty becomes an obstacle in communicating our own human experience with others and that can be compounded when we ourselves struggle to make sense of an experience and its meaning.

Then there is the seeing. “Seeing is believing” - may be so - but some things must be believed to be seen. I’m not talking about magic tricks, mirages or illusions. There is our eyesight, which most of us use to detect the surface or shape of things, but there is also the broader vision. Vision often involves symbols, which point us beyond what we can see.

In some inexplicable way, this woman seemed to recognize me in this strange place, or at least appeared to know why I was there. I felt such relief, because at least one of us understood the reason for my visit. I didn’t yet know *how* I was going to help this woman, but I nodded my agreement to her.

I faced her there, and in her eyes I heard the question: *Where are my children’s bodies to be found?* I took a long draw of breath inward and held the question carefully. This I knew: she didn’t *want* to know the answer, but she *needed* to know—had to know it, to honor their memories and grieve their loss. She would have to see their bodies to be able to grieve properly and lovingly tell them goodbye.

I understood this. A mother must be able to see her child’s body to know it, to believe that death would be possible. This is so whether it be a mother of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, who still marches with a picture of her disappeared child more than forty years later, or a mother of a September 11 victim, who struggles to grieve without any identifiable remains of her child.

I turned away from her slightly, looked into the distance and waited for the information that I knew would be coming to me. And then, as if on cue,

one foot lurched forward, haltingly. In just a few more steps my gait became firm and deliberate, even if it was challenging to negotiate the heaps and piles of rubble thrown up onto the ground, like a partly digested meal.

Yes, my feet would take us to the place. The place where the bodies of her two oldest children were buried under the rubble of the earthquake. I showed the mother where to dig to find and recover their bodies.

That was how I completed my task. My work in Pakistan was finished and in what felt like an instant, like the gust of a breeze moving a curtain, I returned to my sleeping body. But questions have lingered and some, like seed dropping from a bird’s flight, have germinated in unlikely places. How is it that we are connected to each other and that we belong to each other? Years later I continue to struggle with the questions, and know they are what is true. The answers change with the moment.

There are so many places to travel in this world and seemingly endless ways of getting there. Sometimes the travel is of necessity and other times it represents a journey of desire. I often find it difficult to tell the difference between the two.

My journey began like the other experiences I have had since I was a teenager more than thirty years prior. They are infrequent experiences, but always potent in meaning. I couldn’t say who was this woman and why I had been summoned to help her. Was it my spirit who had communicated with the woman whose children had been tragically killed or was it some mirror reflection of our world soul of mother?

I lay sound asleep, or so I had thought. At some point in the early hours of the morning, I felt that part of me had been gathered up, to allow me travel through space, but not in my body. My body remained sleeping in my bed. The odd paradox of this out of body travel is that the senses become heightened and acute. At first I was gliding. My awareness focused on that movement.

The gliding soon stopped, and I came to a rest

somewhere. I wasn't certain how I could feel that, or if I could determine where I had arrived. I had a sense that I had traveled far away from where my body lay sleeping, but the distance was not reflected in the time it took to arrive.

It was an unfamiliar place and the first thing I was aware of was that I was standing on my feet. This didn't seem possible, but those feet beneath me seemed to belong to me, at least for the present time.

Such an obvious angle, to be looking down at one's feet. But I doubted they were mine. I studied them, because they were connected to this strange ground. I waited. While my gaze remained fixed on my feet, my questions eventually gave way to my other senses, which were accumulating their own information.

I occupied myself with smelling the rawness of the earth, and what it uncovered and brought down, the mud and the pieces of debris strewn about. Eventually I looked around for the source of those smells and noted the shredded pieces of things under and near my feet. It revealed itself as an upsetting landscape, the scene of catastrophe. I was still looking downward, and with my sense of smell, my nostrils were helping me acclimate to the place. Yes, I concluded, I must belong here. I just didn't know yet *how* I belonged here. The smells were somehow familiar—but only in the vaguest sort of way.

As I looked down at my feet I could see they were encrusted with a mixture of mud and dust atop an uneven piece of ground. It seemed an odd combination to me, as if the earth, in a fit of expurgation, had violently thrown up some of its contents.

I stood there, not sure whether I could move. I thought I could smell a kind of season in the air. A season of calamity, or a season of nature's predictable cycles. There was some familiarity of connection with my sense of smell, but with no specific reference.

I was still looking downward, and my nostrils were helping me acclimate to the place. The smells were somehow familiar—but only in the vaguest sort of way. I took in several long and slow breaths, hoping

to interrogate further that information coming from my nose to some primordial part of my brain that could answer the question, "Where am I?"

All of my senses, set to this unusual frequency, would help me identify the "where" and eventually also the "why" and "what" of my travel. I waited there, standing under the mystery of the unfamiliar. Sensing with all of my senses which have been given me is natural to me, they may seem otherworldly to others, but it is an aspect of being in a body. Whether it is understanding or standing under, being with the senses is the experience, as a physical act or a metaphorical or symbolic one. I ask the question again.

Barb is a multisensory type and ardent defender of the human experience on the subjective level. She earns bread writing prosaic stuff but also works in the poetic and symbolic universe, listening with her heart and hearing with her eyes. She has a German Shepherd rescue dog named Heidi, just like in Hogan's Heroes.

Safehouse by Jen Kolic

She stared up at me from the front walk. Her hair and her coat and everything about her drooping in the rain.

“I can’t tell you where to find her,” I said.

“And I wouldn’t, anyway.”

She made a move towards the stairs and I held up my hand to stop her. She looked so desperate.

“She’s a reporter. She moves around a lot. I’m not saying any more.”

On the next block the elevated tracks rumbled and in my mind I saw the *Times* warehouse, corrugated and ugly. As a girl I thought that was the whole operation—phone banks and desks all spread through a windowless hangar. The woman turned to go. I let the rotting door slam.

She doesn’t know what you’re thinking, she’s not a mind reader. She’d never get there anyway.

Back inside I looked for more evidence. The carpet was damp most of the way up the stairs. The sectional couch deflated and sagging. Houseplants all dead. I thought of my car three blocks down and wondered if it was safe.

When the smell started getting to me I went back out to the porch. Years ago it was beautiful. The windows were cracked and dirty, and large bushes hid them from the street. It caught my eye too late, the spot where the floorboards rotted through. They broke beneath me, the crack of wood cutting through the thick, humid air. My thigh was very warm, then very cold. My left arm was caught beneath the floor and I tried not to twist too much as I felt around, the jagged ends scraping needles against my skin. I felt a slickness on my jeans, a shocking intersection where the wood went in.

The woman would be back, I was sure. If I could just think of what to say.



Jen Kolic is the publisher of Cherry Magazine and founder of Rotten Girl Press.

Coming soon from Rotten Girl Press

Us What's Left: A Zombie Story



by Jen Kolic

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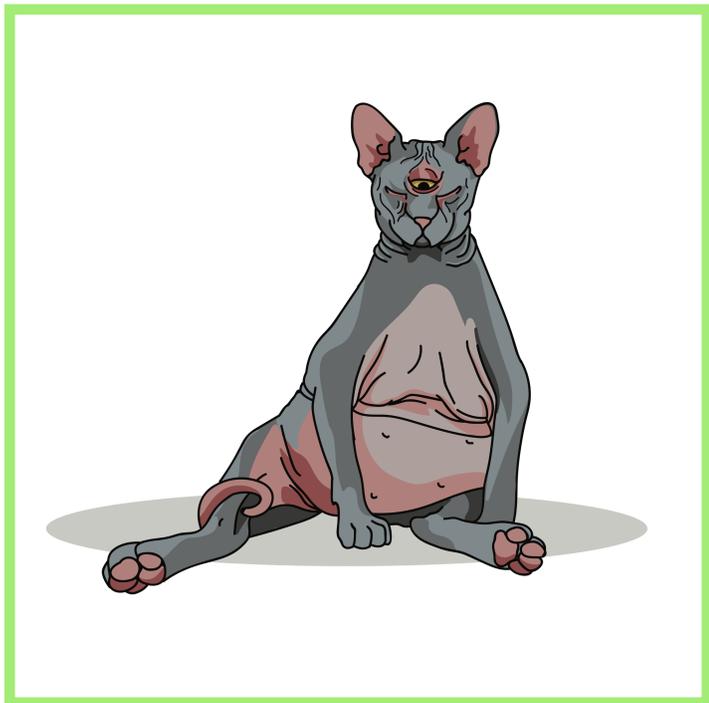
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Genre fiction, humor, and the generally unsettling are all encouraged. We especially love hearing from LGBTQ folks, people of color, immigrants, and women.

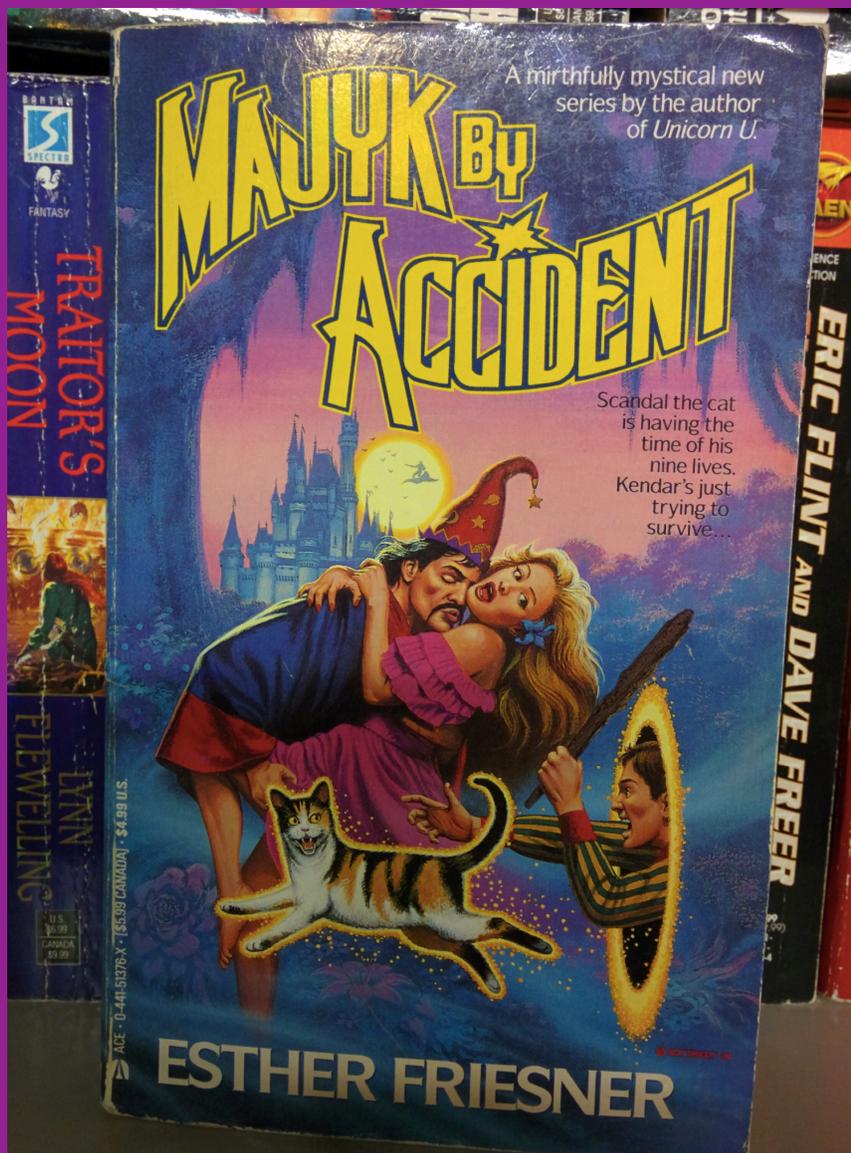
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Corrections Corner: In issue 2, we misspelled the names of S. E. Smolinski and Brandy Joiner. Our bad!

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