



***FLASHWORDS!***

New England Crime Bake™

**2016**



## **FLASHWORDS!**

We challenged the folks attending the 15th annual New England Crime Bake to write a compelling crime story in 150 words or less, using at least ten of twenty title words from novels by our Guest of Honor, William Kent Krueger.

We received 41 official entries displaying a wide variety of styles and depths of talent and creativity.

The three winning stories were selected with great difficulty in blind judging. In no particular order, they are:

*“Arc Fault”*

*by Connie Campbell Berry*

*“Madder Lake”*

*by Eleanor Ingbretson*

*“Two of a Kind”*

*by Judy F. White*

Congratulations and thank you to all who participated with such enthusiasm. Enjoy!

**Title Words:** angle, bay, bed, blood, boundary, copper, drift, grace, hollow, iron, island, lake, mercy, ordinary, point, red, ridge, river, thunder, waters.

## Arc Fault

*By Connie Campbell Berry*

Grace watched Harold hover over his model railroad. He'd thought of every detail, even the painted copper rust in the iron yard. The lay-out began with a single track on the dining room table. Now it snaked through the entire house.

Why couldn't they have an ordinary retirement—rent a cottage on the river, spend Sunday mornings in bed? Romance was the last thing on Harold's mind. It took him three weeks to notice she'd dyed her hair red.

"I'll win first prize this year or die trying," Harold said. "I created an electrical arc. When the train climbs the ridge, I flip this lever and *voilà!* Thunder, lightning!"

Grace knew all about wiring. She hadn't worked for an electrical contractor all those years for nothing.

"Well," he said. "Plug me in."

Grace thought about the travel brochure—a singles' cruise for adventurous seniors—and every twinge of mercy faded.

## Madder Lake

*By Eleanor Ingbretson*

So Harold-like, allowing his gloomy shadow to drift over the bed of oysters in the waters below.

And Harold, who had crossed one boundary too many, lay sprawled across the rocks above them.

Red graced the beak of a common crow perched on Harold's supraorbital ridge. Blood, in color similar to the madder lake of Harold's palette, puddled in the hollow of his throat and had finally ceased its burbling. The copper palette knife, incised neatly between Harold's clavicles, forced the bird to feed at an awkward angle, but added more nutrients to an iron rich meal.

Harold had hated crows; how serendipitous of this one to enjoy him after all those rocks he'd thrown without mercy.

And not just an ordinary common crow. This one wiped its beak clean on the knife's handle, eliminating my prints, before it flew to shelter.

Gray clouds thundered in and shadows spread.

## Two of a Kind

*By Judy F White*

She was the fifth girl I'd brought to the lake house, but I was the one who woke up shackled to the bed. I thought everything had gone according to plan—nothing out of the ordinary. She drank my special cocktail. I remember the bright red lipstick stain on her glass. So what happened? My eyes drifted in and out of focus, as she entered the bedroom. She was clutching the copper butcher knife. My special knife! I was supposed to be using it on her, cutting her delicate skin. She was supposed to be shackled to the bed, begging for mercy as the blood slowly drained from her. It wasn't fair. She looked down at me with cold, hollow eyes. "Don't worry, I'll be quick," she said. "There's no point to torture." Before I could say a word in my defense, the blade was at my throat.

Ω

## **Braids**

*By Penny Goetjen*

Her head snapped back at an angle as searing pain shot through her head. That nasty boy in the seat behind her chuckled to himself. Damn her mother for insisting she braid her hair that morning. As the geography teacher droned on about rivers, lakes, boundaries and the waters around some distant island, oblivious to the harassment going on in the back of the room, Grace curled her fist tightly around her ordinary ball point pen, envisioning herself whirling around and burying the tip of it into his neck. In her mind, red blood spurted as his face grew ashen and he slumped over his desk. Thunder echoed in her ears as she thought of her mother's reaction when she learned of her young daughter's crime. Probably would say she needed more iron in her diet. Lord have mercy on her soul if he didn't stop.

Ω

## Don't Bother, They're Here

*By Stacey Altieri*

Accident? Who could say?

Tragedy? Without a doubt.

The small body lay face down in her flower bed. The full, blood moon, so appropriate tonight, cast an eerie copper glow over him, the lawn, and the now-quiet street. The collar of his ordinary plaid shirt—Howdy Doody? Lumberjack?—was torn, exposing a scrawny neck. A hollow feeling enveloped her as she imagined a malicious hand grabbing the collar and flinging him to the ground. It was no accident.

“Lord have mercy” thundered through her head as she knelt beside him. Flocks of Iron Lane trick-or-treaters must have inadvertently hidden the deed. Horrified, she stared at one thin arm which lay twisted at an impossible angle. Then she saw it. Shaking, she plucked the red rubber nose from a lake of gold and orange mums. And she screamed.

“When I find the clowns who ruined my scarecrow, I’ll make you pay!”

Ω

# Evidence

*By Linda Grochowalski*

Policewoman Mercy Thunder surveyed the items on the driftwood table: copper pitcher, hollow iron tube, blood stained red kerchief. Her sergeant called them clues, but no one had tied them to her grandfather's death.

Mercy, however, already knew who the murder was, and fingering the right person wouldn't be difficult: they were on an island, after all.

She looked around the room. Alone. Taking out a prepared piece of cellophane tape with her aunt's fingerprint on it, she pressed it first to the tube, then to the pitcher.

"You won't get to inherit that way, Mercy," said her sergeant's voice from a hidden angle outside the open bay window. "Nice of you to supply a fingerprint, even though it isn't the right one. The right one is yours."

Mercy said, "How do you know?"

"Your aunt was with me all night, in my bed. It had to be you."



## The Cut

*By Jill Fletcher*

When Cairo turned twenty, his father said, “A man can drift through life’s rivers only so long before his blood seeks boundaries. Recirculation is the ebb and flow of days and oceans. When the sun comes up and goes down, keep your boots next to the same bed. It will give you presence of mind to see God’s grace in still waters and feel God’s mercy in passing thunder.”

Despite these words, Cairo only felt trapped. He left their island and crossed the great lake leaving an ordinary life behind.

Now, as a bounty hunter, he had no room for mercy. Blood did not stay in veins. He slept with his boots on. If he’d fathered a son, that boy would not hear his words or his grandfather’s words spoken or re-spoken. A cut had been made in family ties, and on this night, across the hunted’s throat.

Ω

# **Eight Lies and One Lesson Learned**

*By Amy Fish*

## **Lies I Told the Police Officer**

1. She was in bed watching *Will & Grace* on the old Magnavox when we left.
2. Must've been 3? 3:30? We rowed out to the island to pick blueberries. Came back when we heard thunder.
3. I called 911 the minute I saw the blood.
4. Sure, I'd love some coffee.

## **Lies the Damn Copper Told Me**

1. Coffee is fresh. Brewed it myself this morning.
2. Nah, we don't have an angle. Just asking ordinary questions.
3. No point in calling a lawyer.
4. Haven't checked the iron for fingerprints yet.

## **Lesson Learned**

No matter how much she begged you to end her life, mercy killing is not an excuse for hitting your mother over the head with a scalding iron.

Ω

## An Heir's-Eye View

*By Eleanor Cawood Jones*

May he rest in peace.

“I’ve looked at it from every angle, and you’ve pushed the boundary of ordinary mercy killings,” I told her. “You’ve got blood on your hands.”

Gracefully pushing back the copper hair drifting from her barrette, she turned to me, her iron gray eyes reflecting the waters of the thundering river roiling beneath us as we stood atop the ridge on Bay Island’s eastern side. Her polished nails were Bordeaux red.

“Uncle Jenkins had become a hollow man and he wanted to go. You know he was practically bedridden. Giving him a little push into the river was a mercy and had nothing to do with being his heir. He’ll end up at eternal rest in the lake.” She paused. “And breathe a word about this, Cousin, and I’ll show *you* a little mercy at the next family reunion.”

I saw her point.

Ω

# **Doubloon Double-Cross**

*By JM Taylor*

We angled south from Tortuga Bay in the shadow of Turtleback Ridge, beneath the thunder of English cannon raining iron on our decks. Captain Eggers set a course for Hispaniola, planning to hire replacements for those killed by the British volley. But I, the first mate, had other ideas. Once we hit deeper waters, the captain fell to his grog and stumbled to his berth. When I heard his besotted snores, I let slip the rudder chain, and the *Sweet Marie* floated adrift. I snuck into his cabin, put my blade to the hollow of his belly. The point passed smoothly through his filthy shirt. His blood bubbled until I tasted copper on my tongue. His eyes flew open, and he lived long enough to see who killed him. There be no mercy among pirates, but I, I was an ordinary English soldier, and I had done my duty.

Ω

## Baby Is the Safe Word

*By Peggy McFarland*

Grace counted diamond points in the copper ceiling while she waited for his orgasm. Lord have mercy, how long would he take? The handcuffs chafed. “Ooh, Baby,” she moaned sultrily, as he bent her legs up over her head. He tied her ankles to the wrought iron headboard. Its ridges pressed into her skin.

“Yeah,” he said. “I like this angle.”

“Um. Baby? Blood’s rushing to my head. Can we try something more... ordinary?”

She wanted to laugh at *ordinary handcuff sex*, but a cramp spasmed her.

His pace intensified. Her chafing escalated to pain. She floundered for the safe word. “Red!”

“Last. Week’s. Cuh-lor.”

“Pleeease. Jack!”

He shot off her. He put on his clothes.

“Wh-what are you doing?”

He shrugged into his jacket, then shook his keys.

“Baby, unlock me!”

He paused at the door. “I’m not Jack,” he said, then left her cuffed to their bed.

# Desperate

By Sandy Judd

“I’m going ahead with Operation Grace,” I said.

The man stiffened. “This is no ordinary job. This type of remote targeting is like taking out a particular coconut on an uncharted island during a thunder storm.”

“I’m sure you’ll manage.”

“We’re crossing a major ethical boundary, too. *And* she’s your child.” His demeanor disagreed with his words; he was eager for the challenge.

“It will be a mercy,” I insisted unnecessarily.

“You’re sure she won’t cooperate?”

“Never. She’s an addict. She sits on the bed all day drifting around in a hollow world of memes, LOLs, and Likes. Her brain is turning to mush. Just do it.”

Across town a young woman gets a Facebook message and automatically clicks on the link inside. A man appears on her screen and says, “Your eyes are getting heavy... From this point on, the thought of Facebook will make you vomit.”

# The Scream

*By Julie Brogan Uhrich*

At the trail's end, George froze when he saw the late-night kayaker beached by the lake. "Did you hear that?" The man pointed to the ridge where George had just left his lover in a hollow on a copper bed of fallen leaves, a river of red draining from her skull.

"I didn't hear a thing." George's mind thundered with rage for this witness.

"A woman screamed. Do you have a phone? Call 911." George obliged. He had a plan.

They climbed. An autumn moon lit the way to her body.

"Lord have mercy. It's my wife!" The kayaker knelt and cradled her bloody head on his lap. Sirens drifted up from the road.

\* \* \*

"You the caller?" The officer asked George.

"Yes. I heard a scream and found them."

The officer approached the sobbing kayaker. "Step away from her. Keep your hands where I can see them."

Ω

## Last Call

*By William Curatolo*

I snuffed my Pall Mall as I answered the call, and my mind began to drift.

Something always goes down at the far end of town, just at the end of my shift.

My partner Midge hit the siren and lights, as we tore in the old dented flivver,

Over the ridge to the Charlestown Bridge, then over the icy Charles River.

We sped to the Point in the sleet and the thunder, and things just didn't look right,

Walking into the joint, we started to wonder *Why not a copper in sight?*

Blood on the walls, blood on the bed, slippery red muck on the floor,

I reconnoitered the house with dread. Midge opened the cellar door.

She stepped through the door and into the dark and screamed in a horrible way,

I yelled Midge! Midge! and pulled out my gun to keep the five pit bulls at bay.



# A Cape as Red as Blood

*By Jonathan Saunders*

The girl ran from the cottage, hood thrown back, red cape streaming behind her. Memories of what she had just witnessed flooded her mind: the copper smell in the air, the body angled across the stained bed, the savage form hovering over it, pointed white teeth grinning in lupine jaws, dark liquid dripping.

As she leapt over driftwood and cleared the riverbed, a baying started and the sound almost froze her. Out of breath, she reached the hollow tree.

"Hunter," she coughed. "Hunter, I've seen it! It's coming."

A woman dropped from the branches of the tree. Her ragged clothes were patched with bits of leather and an iron ax hung at her side. She smiled with extraordinary calm. "Finally. These killings end today."

Ω

## Ladies Who Lunch

*By Louisa Clerici*

The citizens of Blood Island had no idea Grace Whitmore had a hobby. She appeared to be an ordinary retired lady living in a quaint house overlooking Thunder Bay. Trouble was, Grace was bored and she had no boundaries. Unlike Samantha Southmore and the other red-faced women of the ladies-who-lunch club, she was fed up with their pointless afternoon activity -watching hunky fishermen angle their rods at the waters of the Iron Lake.

So Grace formulated a plan. It was easy. So many unlocked cottage doors and Grace with her shopping bags. Collectibles and copper candles. She was ready for a fun afternoon on e-bay. If she got caught she'd made her bed. She'd have to cry a river of tears and say, "Have mercy, my mind is drifting." But mysteriously, Grace was found at the bottom of Hollow Ridge. Samantha Southmore had a new hobby.

Ω

## Ambrose Is Down

*By W.M. Wilson*

It happened so fast. Sergeant Waters and Officer Kennedy were speeding to a domestic dispute, going under the overpass and the next moment; they were waking up with Waters pinned by the copper Continental. Kennedy awoke first.

“Sarge, you all right?” he called out as he tried to roust Waters with no success.

Their radio was fried, their squad car out of commission. He checked out the other car, the driver was dead. Using his cellphone, he asked the station for an ambulance. Waters stirred.

Ambrose! I know now: Tiffany Lake murdered the Count with her iron pen with a hollow point to conceal the poison.”

“Who the hell is Ambrose?” as the EMT’s arrived.

“Don’t you see? The body found in Blood River before it empties into the bay. Just before the red ridge, upstream from Tupper’s Island.”

“Concussion probably,” an EMT explained.

# I Stand and Wait

*By Joanne Bianco*

Time seems hollow—out of joint  
So killing him will make my point,  
But mercy runs like waters deep  
Against its tide must vengeance seep  
and keep me strong.  
No ordinary river red  
will flow into the unmade bed  
When I am done.  
My iron will is set to kill this monster.  
Beaten wife I am, and in fear,  
Yet revel when the moment's near  
And deed is done to fill that space.  
Yet here I wait and pray for grace.  
Am I from heaven, or from hell?  
I drift between them with the smell  
Of blood.

Ω

## After the Storm

*By Patricia Jane Berg*

He bursts in as the woman and her husband watch the storm approach, snug in their lake home. He points a pistol at them, but kisses the woman and gives her the gun.

“The money is under the bed,” she says.

She shoots, and her husband’s blood splatters the elegant wallpaper.

The intruder sneers at the body, flaunting a bag of cash as he and the woman run for their skiff.

“No mercy, Dad.”

\* \*

In the bay, a sailor races against the thunder. Near shore, he rescues a couple from a struggling skiff. The woman produces a pistol, and a command: “To the island.” She points at a distant speck.

The sailor angles toward the island. There, the woman shoots him and the intruder. Then she disappears into a hidden boathouse, with its skiff and fuel.

\* \*

The storm moves on. In calm waters now, the shattered sailboat drifts.

Ω

# **Satan's Point**

*By Debra Lawless*

Ever since they moved to the island, Mother yanked Grace from the iron bed when she heard thunder. “Do you want to be electrocuted?” she’d yell over the storm. Well, that was over. Mother had been dead now for three hours.

Grace’s bed was set under the window at an angle to view the churning waters of the bay. Lightning flashed as Grace prayed on her mattress. A crazed thing Mother had been, shuffling along the ridge in the black rain. Mother hated water her whole life, yet she drowned herself in the bay, rocks in her pockets. Or so the police said.

Grace counted to five and thunder boomed.

An hour ago, Grace had found Mother’s mangled iPhone in a Baggie on Satan’s Point. It was slick with someone’s blood. Whose?

The iPhone was hidden under the bed now. And Grace was alone.

Lord have mercy, she whispered.

Ω

## Certain Grace

*By Kelle Ruden*

From this angle, her profile had a certain grace. In the light, she had appeared ordinary; too thin, with hollow cheeks and red-rimmed eyes. It was a mercy that the storm had brought a calming darkness to the room, allowing her to drift towards sleep. She laid on the bed, her face turned towards the window and the river, as I did my best to clean up the blood. We would need to leave soon, the water was rising quickly. A clap of thunder made us both jump, as the cabin door swung open.

Ω

## A Rose for Emily

*By Dale T. Phillips*

We'd never had any violence on this river, so when the body washed up in the waters eddying around the island, it was no ordinary thing. Four red circles marked where the copper-jacketed slugs had ended his life, at an angle that showed he was shot from above. There was no ID, but he'd carried a picture of a woman, with "Love, Emily" written on it. He also had ten thousand dollars strapped to his body. He'd got the money away from his killer, but it was a hollow victory. Point is, he must have done something pretty bad, but we never found out the who or what of it, since the body went unclaimed. Was Emily lying in her bed somewhere, wondering what had become of the man who'd promised to return? Would knowing his fate have been a mercy, or was it better she never found out?

Ω



# This Time

By Charlie Pogue

Walter rose to a hollow thud, the unmistakable sound of a *paddle against the wooden canoe drifting round the point* toward his island refuge. They're early, he thought, but I'm ready.

He left his lights ablaze and angled past the bed toward the back door, grabbing the nine iron he used as a cane. Limping toward the lake, his lungs welcomed the chill air and his eyes adjusted to the light from the copper moon reflected on the bay.

As he waited in the dark shadow of an ancient oak, blood thundered in his ears from remembered humiliations. This time, he'd show no mercy. This time he'd net them, best them, and sink their bodies beneath the placid waters to feed the turtles.

Hearing hesitant steps, he raised his club for the *coup de grace*. Suddenly a spotlight illuminated his wizened frame and their raw laughter engulfed him.

Ω

## Easy Money

*By Nadine Nettmann*

I waited until I drifted under the copper bridge to make my exit, digging into the sand of the island as I pulled myself from the thunderous waters. The river turned almost lake-like ahead, but there was no shelter there. I was safe here, the angle of the pale green pylons hiding me until dark.

Enough people had seen me jump. They would be looking for my body, her body, down the river and they would find it. Pushed into the water somewhere along the bay. By him.

I was innocent of that point. I had only jumped, wearing his wife's red dress and a hollow feeling. He'd meet me tomorrow with the money.

And yet here he was, a tire iron in his hand. There was no use in begging for mercy. He'd set this up all along. Silly girl. Nothing in life is ever easy.

Ω

## **Mucked Up**

*By John R. Clark*

I wrenched my wrecked foot from the muddy bay and smelled the copper tang of blood. Thunder in the distance promised more misery. Beyond the boundary fence, something drifted around the point with an eerie grace and the hollow feeling in my gut had me wishing I'd ignored my instinctive desire to rescue people. Where was she anyhow?

How could a Saturday evening go bad so quickly? Sure, I'd lost my cool earlier, tossing my six-iron into the river from the ridge overlooking the seventeenth hole. My golfing buddies had shown no mercy and the round ended up costing me at the nineteenth hole. Then one call from Sue Lake at midnight and now I was crouching, scared and hurt. Moonlight shining through scudding clouds revealed a boat between me and the island. The red dot on my forehead was the last thing I remembered.

Ω

# Saving John

*By Ruth M. McCarty*

Rain pounded the cabin as Grace added a log to the fire. Electricity out, and cell phone service nonexistent, she felt uneasy being alone on the lake. Multiple lightning strikes and house-shaking thunder had her up and pacing.

John had said he'd come, but Grace worried the choppy waters would keep him from the island. She filled a copper pot to boil water. The house shook again.

"Mercy, it's a bad one."

Lightning flashed. The door flew open. "John," she cried. "You made it."

John stood covered in blood—a man holding a gun beside him.

"Sorry, Grace. He's an escapee from Red River prison. Coldcocked me at the dock."

"Sit on the bed so I can clean your head."

Grace grabbed the boiling water, flung it in the convict's face, then seized his gun.

"Glad you made it, John." Grace smiled. "I hate being alone."

## Red Sun at Morning

*By Elaine Will Sparber*

The waters of Long Island Sound lashed at the Connecticut shoreline under the angry morning sky. Thunder cracked as Maggie smoothed the dirt around the base of the black chokeberry bush she'd planted at the foot of her husband's grave, up on Widow's Point. Tom had loved the Sound, taking his boat out, drifting, fishing, guzzling beer. Cleaning his stinky catch in her shiny kitchen sink, then tumbling into her freshly made bed, his sweaty flannel shirt and filthy jeans still sporting fish blood and guts. Maggie bent down to check Tom's view from his grave. The angle was perfect; he'd never see his beloved Sound again. She stood. An ordinary bush. A plain mound of dirt. She stabbed the blood-stained oar into the earth, grabbed the mud-caked shovel, and left, finally walking with grace.

Ω

## 240 Miles

By Dave Pasquantonio

"Where did you meet her?"

"The Gaumont Theatre in Ipswich. The U2 concert. March 5. A month ago. I spotted her, she was singing *Under A Blood Red Sky*, the music thundered, my heart thundered, the way she looked ... I fell for her in an instant."

"What did you say to her?"

"That she looked like Grace Kelly. It was stupid but true. She said, 'I'm more of a Veronica Lake, don't you think?'"

"Then?"

"She pointed at a copper and said he'd drag me off if I didn't quit bothering her."

"What happened next?"

"She took me to bed."

"After that."

"We ran away. Here. To Cardiff."

"What happened last night?"

"I told her that before I met her, I was hollow, I was drifting. I was an island, and she saved me. But I couldn't stay. I left her."

"You mean you killed her."

"No."

# Sherry's List

*By Sherry Holt*

When I heard the owl call my name, I echoed it back to him.

I pressed myself behind the restaurant's dumpster, scraping against the filthy red brick wall. My hunter stalked me from the opening of the alley, but from my angle all I could see was the other end, which had a couple of dark truck bays with drifting piles of garbage.

He may have drawn blood, but that was his first and last mistake. Because I was female and wounded, his cursorial instincts took over. I became ordinary prey to him. No longer silent, I listened to hollow footsteps coming down the alley. His shadow paused by the dumpster, then moved on.

Silently slipping the point of my knife under the ridges of his ribs, I found his heart.

"Sometimes the prey is also a hunter. Boundaries can blur," I whispered before rejoining the crowds on Bourbon Street.

Ω

# Danuta's Fix

*By Adlene Ellenberg*

Danuta, my cousin, and a longtime drifter, returned to Grandma's house in upstate New York, seeking mercy and money to feed her heroin habit.

Danuta checked out every angle to score some cash, from the hollow space behind the upright piano, to trolling for silver and copper coins in the crevices of Grandma's sagging couch.

Yesterday, she fell across Grandma's bed, in withdrawal, howling a river of anguish and shame. She demanded I take her to our town's seediest neighborhood. I did, then watched her shoot up.

While she relaxed with poisonous pleasure, we drove towards our next destination: nearby Niagara Falls. High above the Falls, cool mist coated our faces, chilled my heart.

I pointed to luminous rainbows arcing overhead. As she gazed heavenward, I shoved her hard under the iron rail—down into the thundering waters below. She just got her final “fix.”

Ω



# Border Wars

*By Roger Guay*

Looking at the angle the bullet passed through the moose, it was clear the shooter was on the Canadian side of the boundary when he fired the fatal shot. The red-coated game warden found a blood trail leading from the moose carcass down the ridge toward Thunder Falls. Expecting to find another dead moose, he froze in his tracks when the blood trail ended at a human body lying face down 30 yards ahead near the shore. At the landing was a green canoe drifting eerily with no passengers onboard. A shot rang out from the nearby island and the copper-coated hollow point bullet ripped into the warden's heart, just missing the badge. The sun set that night with the darkness enveloping the evil slaughter of the innocent. Only the shooter and the forest would know the reason for what happened that October day.

Ω

## Dinner Date

*By Zakariah Johnson*

My pestle swirls without mercy, pulverizing bay leaves in the mortar's hollow. His silhouette descends the ridge behind my home. He's walked here. More evidence?

"Hello!" he says. He's brought wine.

"Come in. Dinner's ready."

Inside, I view this ordinary man from many angles, mentally superimposing old police sketches over his thinning hairline. His mother's house-fire consumed all photographs when he disappeared. She never talked. Is this he?

"Sauce?"

"What's in it?" he asks.

"Just heaps of garlic and oregano!"

"Wonderful!"

His spoon clatters after one mouthful. He claws his throat, gurgling: "You...!"

"Yes. I recognized you, too."

Squeezing his mouth open, I drain my lake of revenge, submerging him beneath a blood-red river of marinara.

He convulses, eyes panicked, but questioning: How?

"Your grandmother told me about your bay leaf allergy."

His arms drift down, dislodging a knife from one sleeve, its point sticking fast in the linoleum.

# The Body by the River

*By Dianne Herlihy*

There's a river that runs through the center of downtown; the waters of which have the most ferocious currents I've ever seen. It was dusk on the night I saw lightning streak across the rainy, windswept sky followed by a crack of thunder so loud it caused me to duck and that's when I saw it—a body—along the bank. One minute I was enjoying my walk and the next minute, there it was. I only noticed it because of the peculiar angle of the lower right leg resting on top of the copper ridge of an old, hollow pipe—the point of the boot was facing up, while the body itself was facing down. I reached for my cell to call the police.

“Hello,” I said, desperate to keep my eyes from drifting back to that horrible sight. “Lord have mercy, I've found another body.”

Ω

# **The Garden**

*By Cynthia Gould*

A flash of lightning.

A roll of thunder.

The smell of copper in the air.

The sundial bathed in a red pool.

A body in the flower bed.

The iron point of the gnomon at the perfect angle.

The hollow in his throat oozing blood.

My foot at the back of his neck.

No mercy.

Ω

# Jenny, Headed North

*By Jill Hand*

He didn't see the knife. His eyes were on the road as his hand slid under her dress, as if it had a will of its own. He felt something touch his face and smelled copper. Startled, his fingers came away covered in blood.

He'd picked her up outside Montpelier. The setting sun shone red on the waters of a lake, silhouetting her as she stood beside the road, thumb out.

He asked where she was headed. She answered, "North. To see a man." She had a good figure, but her face was just ordinary.

"Your boyfriend?" he asked.

She didn't reply.

He let her off in a hollow by Grace Point Diner, where tractor-trailers were parked at an angle. She took his wallet.

It was thundering as he drove away. He thought about the man she was going to see and knew she'd show him no mercy.

Ω

# Family Night

*By Robin Stuart*

The wide-angle lens zoomed in tight. The copper sky of twilight shrank to a narrow point as it met the ridge. My retinas burned. I zoomed back out and blinked several times to reset my eyes. A clump of red pine needles drifted along the gurgling waters of the river. A bluish blur upset the bucolic scene. I dropped my camera in the loam. A hand had tangled in the gnarled branches of riparian vegetation. The island of flesh was exposed to the elbow, the rest of the body submerged. I recognized Grace's bracelet. My sister's lifeless form created wakes in the river's current.

"Boundaries and consequences," a voice said behind me.

Ice particles formed in my bloodstream. I turned. My reflexes were faster than my father's. The thundering explosion from my police-issued Glock echoed through the valley before he had a chance to raise his weapon.

Ω

# Island for Sale

*By Lydia Main*

Mercy and Grace angled the small outboard motorboat into the pier at the lakeshore home of Linda Mixer.

“Aunt Linda owns the island, no phone but has electricity. My cousin Mark has his own cottage in the hollow over that way.”

Leaves of copper, red, and orange swirled around the girls’ legs as they walked the path to the house.

From the door they could see Linda covered in blood on the bed, a cast iron pan by her head.

They heard the outboard, ran outside to see their boat going across the water to Bradford. Linda’s boat adrift and sinking.

“Mark Mixer you are under arrest for the murder of Linda Mixer. You have the right to remain silent...”

“How did you know?”

“Ever hear of cell phones?” pointing to the tower on the hill.

Ω

**July 4, 3014**

*By Cheryl Lawton Malone*

From his vantage point on the ridge, Natas flexed his wings. The insidious little people of the city below had chosen to set fire to their homes rather than wrap their collective apocalyptic heads around something as simple as a moon that had split in two. Two copper fragments hung in the night sky. Their twin lights shined on the bay, turning its shimmering surface into a lake of blood. To Natas, the moons looked ordinary—the consequence of an over-industrialized mother planet with a gravitational imbalance. To everyone else, the lepton-splitting thunder and sudden rupture of the old moon had signaled a finale of biblical dimensions.

The people screamed in disbelief. They looted from themselves. They streamed out of the city in torrents like the river of hysterical humanity he knew them to be.

He had warned them.

They hadn't listened.

He would show no mercy.

Ω



## Family Rate

*By Claire A. Murray*

Morning sun rose behind the lake and shone through the window of May's diner, bouncing off copper pans lining the wall. Squinting against the blood red glow, she began breakfast for her first and only customer. "Going to the island, Dan?" She angled the skillet to let fat cover it before adding eggs to the bacon. Grits simmered in another pan.

"Mercy, no. Truck got stuck on the ridge last night, bed full of heavy rock. Phil give me a lift up river to Hunter's Point to rent a hauler."

"Huh. What he want in return? He does no good deed without a price."

Dan smiled and lifted the iron crowbar from the floor. "Phil's no problem, May. He sticks to my price." He lowered it again.

She smiled, set down his overflowing plate, and charged him the family rate.

Ω

## In a Flash

*By Melinda Abraham*

The Chief of Police of Nantucket Island tried to drift off to sleep. But then she heard the thunder. A chill ran up her spine. The gruesome images of the mornings after each of the last three storms flashed before her. In each case a socialite had been found dead in her bed, strangled with an ordinary red ribbon. All were victims of the Blood Orange Strangler, a predator who struck during thunderstorms and left a blood orange atop each corpse. The Police Chief prayed for mercy for her traumatized hamlet. She tossed and turned a few times before admitting that sleep was impossible. She got up; went to the kitchen; and turned on the copper kettle to make a cup of Hudson Bay tea. She looked out the window just as a flash of lightning illuminated the bedroom of the socialite who lived at the top of the ridge.

Ω

# Grace?

*By Tina deBellegarde*

“Grace?”

The father started his search optimistically. Under her bed? Her closet? Her reading nook? No Grace. He faced his fears. Lately, there had been mischief on the island. She had a daring sense of adventure he secretly cherished, but today he wished for an ordinary girl, one who stayed home and played with dolls.

As he walked out the door he grabbed an iron poker, the only weapon in the house. Copper flashes over the bay. His stomach clenched at the first clap of thunder.

A flutter, a movement near the ridge to his left. He squeezed the poker. Grace was walking down the hill. He ran to her, grateful for this undeserved mercy. She quickly wriggled out of his embrace. The porch light glowed, inviting them home.

A moth banged against the bulb. Was that blood on her neck?

Ω

## The Cock Crows at Dawn

*By Peter E. Murray*

His heated blood infused the red ridge bifurcating the hemispheres of his skull. He ducked and limbo danced under the angle-iron barring the doorway. He would have them all, save the copper-toned one for last. She was special, off sleeping alone, as if on an island of her own making. He had seen her earlier, before the drifting clouds and rolling thunder had sent the girls scurrying for shelter. There was a certain grace in her walk, haughty, untouchable. Lightning, bright as a halogen beam, lit the room. The windblown rain lashed at the window; and the river coming under the door was at the point of becoming a lake. He would have to be careful. They had held him at bay, set boundaries, left him hollow. Not anymore! There would be no mercy. Who in hell did the cops think he was anyway, just some ordinary rooster?

Ω

## Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary

*By Mo Walsh*

“Sheriff, get rid of that VICIOUS dog!” Mary points a gloved finger beyond a ridge of white pickets.

From my angle, the copper ball of fur is an ordinary puppy peeing on the boundary fence, then drifting to sleep in the hollow space under a bush.

“That animal destroys EVERYTHING. Just LOOK at my flower bed!”

Looks more like islands of grass in a lake of color—red roses, orange lilies, a graceful river of blue and purple things flowing around a wrought iron bench under a bay window.

“Very pretty, ma’am.” I wonder how much she weeds and waters all this to keep it growing.

“PRETTY?! It’s a lifetime of sweat and blood! That BEAST squeezed under MY fence and DUG HOLES.”

My head thunders from all her shouting. “Puppies dig, ma’am.”

“Look at that HOLE!”

No mercy here. I peek in, see...toes? I’m going to deputize that dog.