

WINNER!

SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

By Christine Knapp

“Edible flowers are so *chic*. I’m glad I had them added to your cake.”

I twisted my gold band, hoping I had married the man of my dreams and not his mother.

“And I don’t know why you chose that messy bouquet,” she continued. “It looks like it was randomly picked from some farmer’s field. But don’t worry, my lost lamb. I’ll guide you to become a proper city mouse.”

The moon was rising over the bay as my love and I left for the airport, bound for Paris.

“Mother hardly ate a bite all day,” my new husband said with concern.

“Don’t worry, honey. Carrot cake with cream cheese icing is her favorite. She insisted on it. There’s a large slice at her place.”

Country girls knew their wildflowers. Funny how hemlock resembled Queen Anne’s Lace.

It would be a good life.

I so loved happy endings.

WINNER!

AN EASTER RISING

By Maureen Milliken

Her people weren't Irish. She disdained the drunken parade, the ridiculous Mass. Pike leprechaun; unhappily tolerated the Celtics' ugly green uniforms.

Then, in college, Irish Literature class went deep to her heart. She understood.

At a keg party, lost in dreams of beauty and heartbreak, she saw him chugging Guinness, shamrock tattoo on his forearm, boasting about Whitey Bulger lineage as he bopped to the Dropkick Murphys.

Her own Gaelic king.

Twenty years later, as he lolled in his recliner like an undercooked cod, eating the chocolate bunny she'd bought for herself, while he mansplained *Ulysses* – which she knew for a fact he'd never read – he shredded her last stinkin' nerve.

Forty-one blows did the trick – one for every sticky Guinness ring on the oak side table.

She buried him in the yard as the moon rose over the bay. Then she lifted a glass to her own Easter rising.

WINNER!

COLLOQUY ON THE BOUNTY

By Vincent H. O'Neil

“He’s no average citizen.” McGinley steered the boat through the city bay’s dark water.

“More like one of their kings.”

I looked at the deck, where the moon outlined a long canvas bundle bound in heavy chain. My constitution is strong, but I knew the thing would haunt my dreams.

“They always pay you in gold for these jobs?”

“Sunken treasure stuff. Not surprising, considering where they live.”

“Do a lot of them do this? Run off, try to get lost among us?”

“Enough to keep me busy.” McGinley cut the engine. “Grab his feet.”

When we lifted it, the bundle let out a cry.

“Stop whining. It’s not like you can drown.” We tossed him into the deep, and I shuddered.

“Hey.” McGinley patted my shoulder. “It’s part of the covenant. We don’t go down there, and the humanoids don’t come up here.”

PANIC ATTACK

By Tom Lyons

William Martin stepped to the podium. “Before I start my comments today, I want to relate what happened when my new book, December '41, was shipped from the printers. According to my publisher, it seems that the entire printing bound for the city was lost, stolen from a transfer yard off the Pike. Despite my usual calm and collected constitution, panic set in. How long would a reprint take? Dreams of standing here today with no new book to offer put me in a deep funk. Who would have the nerve to steal a trailer from a secure lot? A week later I got a call. The trailer was found on Cape Cod, in the woods near Buzzards Bay. The books were there, but one box was open, and a book was missing. So I want to say to the man who took the book, Thank you for that.”

‘TAKE THE VENTILATION SHAFT,
TRAVIS!’

By Dave Pasquantonio

Take the ventilation shaft, Travis! they said.
You’re a pro, they said. You’ve got nerve.
Here’s forty-one yards of nylon rope, some
carabiners, some suction cups. Get to the roof,
shimmy down the shaft to the basement, grab
the gold, walk right out the door. The place’ll be
deserted! It’s a king’s ransom! It’ll be easy!

Boy, were they wrong.

Now I’m wedged deep in the shaft. Can’t go
back up, can’t go down. My big dreams of
pulling off one last score, all lost because some
bonehead couldn’t read building plans.

It can’t get any worse.

“Citizen!” a man’s voice echoes, rising from
below, followed by the ratchet of a shotgun and
the snarling of German Shepherds. “Come out
now or I’ll blow your head off!”

Okay, it just got worse.

DENIED

By Sharon Daynard

Dell Howland held his gaze with a woman as cold as cod, seated at a table of five across the room. He took a deep, nasally breath, sighed and mouthed the name of her perfume—*Black Moon*. He teased with a wink and a suggestive grin and waited until she lost her nerve and turned her eyes to the view of the bay, to begin his narrative.

“They say you never forget your first. They’re wrong. It’s the one that got away that haunts your dreams with what-might-have-beens and fairytale endings. Forty-one years and I’m still carrying a torch for her.” He pulled up his sleeve and tapped on a tattoo that read GOLDIE. “There isn’t a day goes by without me thinking what I could’ve done to keep her. Bound, gagged, shackled and drugged, and she still—”

“Mr. Howland,” the woman interrupted. “We’ve heard enough. Parole denied.”

A MIDNIGHT STROLL

By Susan Fleet

The nerve of her, insulting him like that. Did she forget he was king of the underworld?

Let her sleep with the fishes! He didn't need some fictional godfather to choreograph it.

A pity, though. Such endings inevitably came with a splash of sorrow, but humanoids could be self-centered, even cruel when they were forty-one and losing their allure.

He pocketed the telephonic device and studied the golden disc rising in the inky darkness. Not a full moon, but soon it would be.

That's when his powers were strongest, including his powers of persuasion.

Entice her to leave the city for a decadent evening along the bay. Fine wine, a sumptuous dinner, and a sensuous caress to spark a midnight stroll on the deserted beach.

Full moon, high tide, deep waters. Wrap his cape around her, bound tight so she couldn't escape, and whisper, "Sweet dreams with the fishes."

FAREWELL

By Sheryl Kayne

Living on the bay, local citizens and others from nearby cities walk along the water's edge. One man appears lost, deep within his own dreams, repeating forty-one or so feet, up and down beneath the rising moon. Perhaps he's upset by whatever he placed by my dock? I watched him leave something small there. Is he wondering as I am, will it be pulled out with high tide? Is it something he no longer wants or stole from someone? Or stories 2022 maybe it was his, but no longer is? The pain across his face reveals his struggle as he returns to the dock for what he left. Picks it up, removes a gold wedding band he slides onto his finger. Two other rings are held in his hand. Closing his eyes, and perhaps saying a prayer first, he throws a diamond wedding band and matching diamond engagement ring into the water.

REVENGE

By Cheryl Landes

She pulled her cape tighter around her body, watching the moon rising above the city. Her gaze shifted to the yard. She was disappointed the snow didn't turn the puddle of blood to pink, her favorite color. Instead, the frozen crystals melted into a shallow crimson crater.

The nerve of that man! She'd warned him, but he wouldn't listen. Forty-one years they'd kept the secret, but now he wanted to go to the police because she threatened to leave him. She refused to be bound to anyone who cheated on her.

Now she will follow her dreams. No one will know about the life insurance policy they swindled from an elderly woman who wanted company.

She turned to walk to the back porch, stumbled on a rock, and landed on the ax blade he left on the stump. *So much for happy endings*, she thought as her last breath escaped.

HER DREAMS

By Lisa Quigley

Forty-one. Forty-one and still not published. She couldn't believe it. She felt lost. She was losing her nerve... and her dreams.

So she quit. She just.... Quit.

She left the city, took a drive and ended up at the Cape. Her parents' weekend place. She'd rethink, start a new path.

The rising moon lit the dark, overgrown yard. She found the key and slipped into the seaside cottage. If she wanted quiet, this was the place.

Forty-one! And not published. The beating of her racing heart and her punishing thoughts were clamoring for attention.

Groping for the lights, she noticed an overwhelming smell. Seemed almost, no... she couldn't let her mind play tricks. Too much time plotting mystery novels that went nowhere.... She spotted the light switch. And then... a man— dead, a knife in his chest!

Ding! Her phone lit up—a text from her agent.

“Amazing News—call me!”

LOST AT SEA

By Janet Anderson-Murch

The Prius swerved wildly along Route 1A, bound for Belfast Bay, careening past small capes with manicured yards. At forty-one, treasure diver Cybil King didn't care about her safety. She had to get to the man whom she treasured more than gold. More than life.

Her little brother. Douglas.

A local citizen had found him; his body entangled in fishing nets along the shoreline.

Four days earlier, Douglas had been lost at sea. He and Richard, their oldest brother, had gone out on the family yacht. Drunker than skunks on cheap whiskey. Fishing for cod. Under the rising moon, Douglas dared Richard to jump in for a swim. Richard lost his nerve. Douglas stood and slipped, fully clothed, into the frigid Maine sea.

Cybil parked and sprinted toward the crowd. Detective Ward rushed forward and caught her mid-stride.

"Cybil," he said, "It's not Douglas."

Cybil's eyes widened.

"It's Richard."

STUPOR SOAKERS

By Jack C. White

Deep in the shadows of his back porch, anger rising, William looked past a hedge of dead rosebushes as noisy drunk dormitory-bound frat-bro-shaped humanoids stumbled past his moonlit yard.

Their nightly nerve-fraying constitutionals flushed any dreams of happy endings for his peaceful retirement in this so-called “city on a hill.” Boston promised culture and health care, but instead delivered endless nocturnal merrymakers, modern-day cod pieces unzipped, murdering his roses with vile streams of liquid gold after nearby bars’ last call. Nature designed rosebush thorns to inflict damage via prick. Not the reverse.

Moving trucks arrived tomorrow. He’d lost the war, but tonight he’d win the final battle.

Another young man paused by his garden. William raised the first of five nearby weapons and aimed.

Forty-one feet to the target. Each gun’s range, twice that. All loaded with sixty-five ounces of ammunition, days in the making.

He fired. “WEEEEEEEEEEEE.”

CALLING ALL EARTHLINGS

By Adelene Ellenberg

We lost a hero today.

The new One-Universe constitution now lets humanoids (those born on the moon, with unnatural powers and unseemly behavior), become Earth citizens.

A man you know, my Earthling friend and neighbor, Boris, was enraged by this. Boris braved deep ocean waves in a small dinghy. His plan: cross the bay and breach the island's high-walled castle yard. He'd assassinate the forty-one-century-old king of the universe, who ordered this change.

But an undercover humanoid, having somehow read the mind of Boris, and knowing his intentions, sabotaged the boat's wooden hull at its seams. I watched him do it at the boatyard, but was too terrified to challenge him. The rising sea drove the sinking dinghy onto cruel rock endings, smashing the boat and drowning Boris.

Alas! Mind-reading humanoids crush our freedom.

All is lost!

A WHEELMAN'S DECEIT

By Richard D. Groves

Someone of stronger constitution might have forgiven my partner's attempt to cheat me out of my share of the loot. Too many lost dreams and forty-one bars of gold strengthened my nerve and stopped any thoughts of leniency. He would find his ending before the next moon, deep in his own backyard.

Breaking into his house on Cape Cod, I waited for the loser to return. He walked in and I quickly bound him. Holding up wire cutters and his left pinky, I said, "Where is it?" He jerked his head towards the garage, regret in his eyes. The fool had made no attempt to hide it.

Not so bright, Joe, but you *were* the best wheelman I ever had. You know how it goes now."

A forty-five in the temple and a little shovel work and I was on my way to being king of my future.

DON'T WAIT TO DIE

By Catherine Bellaconis

“Don't worry,’ the man said. ‘You won't be bound for long.’

“Deep inside I knew out of the two possible endings, he wasn't going to let me go. And if my fate was to meet the Almighty King, I wasn't going to make it easy for him. I used the light of the moon to see what I could. A singing cod, a gold ashtray with about forty-one butts- not much else. All seemed lost. Then I felt a prick. The chair had a small piece of metal protruding out. I took a chance. The rope began to fray.

“The bay will take her out. No one will find her.’ As he unlocked the door, I grabbed the ashtray and hid. While his back was to me, I struck him. Then I ran. I kept running until I found someone to call 911. And here you are detective.”

WHEN GOOD DEEDS GO BAD

By Vicki Erwin

The babe with golden curls rolled into my room and I was a goner. Still, my tingling nerves told me something was wrong. When I sat across from her and she burst into tears, I knew I was right.

“Lost. Taken. Help!” might have been her garbled words. No idea of the object of the crime. It could have been the man in the moon or a frozen cod. I searched. In the yard, a bag hid in deep grass. I fetched it and dropped it in her lap. She glowed, then spilled the contents in her lap.

Before the babe found what was lost, Ma entered and yelled, “No! Thief!”

She grabbed my collar and locked me in my kennel. That’s no way to treat the king of crime-solving. Ask my dream babe.

Moral of the story: it’s a dog’s life when good deeds go bad.

HUNTER'S MOON

By Ruth M. McCarty

I gulped another swig of whiskey from my perch atop the jetty. Turning forty-one had touched a nerve. I left the city a year ago to start over on the Cape—only to have my dreams once again shattered by a man who stole my heart and then my money.

October's Hunter's Moon lights the bay. I try to block out his pleas as he lies bound at my feet. The rising tide slowly caressed his face.

“All I wanted was a warm body,” I scream into the cold wind. “Someone to love me.”

I hear a gurgle as the water engulfs his head. I lift the whiskey in a final toast. “Cheers,” I say, then down the rest of the bottle.

Just like all the others, I think. Wouldn't they ever learn?

THE GOOD CITIZEN

By Matthew Cost

There were exactly forty-one reasons why the man had to die. He'd haunted my dreams. A full moon was rising. He was a humanoid. And thirty-eight reasons more. As a good citizen, slitting his throat was my duty. I then took him out on the bay of Cape Cod and tossed him overboard bound to a John Deere tractor. But then doubt crept in. Had he been the wrong man? I started looking again.

UPSTANDING

By Shira Shiloah

From her kitchen window, as she washed the dinner dishes, her gaze wandered to the deep blue bay and the rising moon. She'd skewered the cod with oleander, and watched her man, once a dream, eat alone in front of the flat screen. He was sweating and vomiting, and she heard him moan in the bathroom.

“How was dinner, my king? Did I serve it warm enough?” she said, a smile forming on her bruised lips. He reached for her, but she stepped back, watching as he collapsed on the bathroom tile.

She took off her gloves and removed the car keys from his jeans pocket. Her purse was heavy with gold coins. She stepped into the yard, and the cool breeze hit her scarred cheeks. She'd been a loyal wife for forty-one years, despite his cruelty. Tonight was for new beginnings and righteous endings. She lit the match.

NIGHT HUNT

By Dru Ann Love

Bounded by the dark of night, I felt my dreams were kept at bay when I didn't allow myself to sleep. So, with the moon rising above the city skyline, I felt more like a lost citizen than one of the humanoids bedded deep in the yard. The nerve of that man telling me I cannot kill for fun. For forty-one gold nuggets, I'd even kill the caped crusader because I AM the king of what I do.

THE CHRISTENING

By Steve Nicholson

I hadn't seen a bad moon since forty-one.
The tide was rising. The boats in the marine
yard cast a bleak shadow on the bay. And here
was William King, the recently-reported-lost
Cape Cod man: bound, gagged, and trussed to
the rudder of the sloop poised on the slipway.

Bad endings are the province of dark
dreams and darker deeds. King had enjoyed the
proceeds of our caper for many years while I'd
rotted in my cell. Now I was old, weary,
meaner. He'd left me there, been a no-show at
my release. I'd learned he'd changed his name
and been living the life of his new moniker. The
deep rage I'd harbored for decades made the
next steps easy.

What remained of our gold was nestled in a
sack at my feet. King's eyes pleaded for mercy.

Revenge, it turns out, is a dish best
launched cold.

GREAT TASTE!

By Katherine Fast

As one humanoid to another, I've discovered that real humans taste like chicken. Every man, regardless of race, has the same flavor whether roasted, baked, sauteed, braised, or fried. Tonight, I feasted like a king. I grilled tenderized thigh meat on a *shish kabob* skewer until it turned a deep gold. For obvious reasons, I prefer to grill in the privacy of the fireplace in my yard. Later, I'll take a brisk walk along the Eastham beach on Cape Cod bay. Exercise increases circulation, discourages rising bile, and is good for the constitution. Upon return, I'll look forward to one of my specialties, blood pudding, before retiring to my bed for sleep and sweet dreams of tomorrow's menu, barbecued ribs or perchance a stir-fry or fingerlings. For starters I may try Rocky man oysters, skinned, coated in flour, pounded and deep fried. Yum!

KIDNAPPED

By Sandy Hautanen

In the shifting darkness, perhaps aided by the faint city lights or the shimmering half-moon rising over the bay, he had found us. We were trapped, terrified, bound tightly together with biting cords, struggling wildly to get free, but he dragged us with him. No more glimmering golden dreams ahead, only cold frozen endings.

Time passed.

Then, a vibrating rumble and a violent snap, and the taut cords around us sprang apart. In a flash, we silvery citizens of the deep darted back into the shelter of the waters off the Cape and disappeared.

He had lost.

The final score: Cod – forty-one. Man – zero.

LOST

By Richard Goutal

Man or woman, we want our heroes to have a cape. Figuratively, at the least. Willard could not leap over tall buildings in a single bound, but he had dreams and he had nerve. His renown as an activist in the city of Worcester was rising. That said, at forty-one, after years of picketing, letter-writing, and yes, even harassing the city clerk and many voters in line to cast their ballots, not a single citizen paid him much attention.

Except of course, his wife. On a late summer night, she sat alone in their back yard under a half moon, consuming chardonnay, wondering how to rid herself of Willard, who deeply embarrassed her.

Two weeks later, a tearful wife led patrol officers to a garage.

"My husband's in there," she sobbed. He was hanging from a beam wearing only tight-fitting Superman underpants and a flowing red cape.

BECOMING THE LADY OF SLATE BAY

By Kate Michaelson

It was almost too easy to become a ghost on a night like that, with the Hunter's Moon rising over the bay, the waves clattering and sucking at the stones on the beach where I lay—facedown, hands bound over my head like a merwoman washed ashore. My hair crisscrossed my arms like strands of kelp. At my feet, the lights of the city danced like gold coins on the bay.

Looking down, I saw the legend I was to become: the Lady of Slate Bay, a picturesque demon to chase kids from their yards on October nights when dusk fell by dinnertime, when even the bravest lost their nerve.

And the way the man stood over me, almost reverent, told me he knew his part in the story: the deeper boogeyman who'd carved me, the one who would haunt my dreams as I—soaked-through and throat-slit—would haunt his.

AT LEAST SIXTEEN INCHES OF LOOSE
SOIL

By Eleanor Ingbretson

This yard work is brutal. Those years in prison really wreaked havoc with my constitution. Maybe I need more protein?

The sliver of a moon gives hardly enough light, but I think the hole is deep enough and yank Harold into it. Harold King, that prissy model citizen turned cop, had had the nerve to arrest *me* for indecency! Did I plant him too close to the city prosecutor? Good. They hated each other.

I spread the lovely cod compost they sell by the bay over Harold and measure the distance from him to the surface: forty-one centimeters. Perfect. I peer at the planting instructions in the near dark and fill the hole with loose soil. I unwrap my young plants and set them in the dirt; their root endings will adore the nutrients.

I lean on the shovel wondering, would I still be vegan if I ate the asparagus?

DREAMS OF HOME

By Karen Whalen

He reeks of wealth and cod; his stink nettles her nerves. Citizens bowing deeply before him as though he were king repulse her.

During her morning constitutional around his terraced yard overlooking the bay, she watches his ship sail away. That night she dreams of home.

She waits for the full moon rising in the east where she is bound to return. How she survived on those city streets is not his concern; perhaps the knife in her Bible should be. Her cape hides layers of dresses and petticoats, tacked into their hems coins and gems, her bounty for forty-one days of captivity. He takes more pleasure in fondling his treasures than in the things he does to her in the night.

The man who guards her bleeds on the carpet before the open safe, empty now but for his master's gold chains, as she steals away into the darkness.

WATERFRONT CAPER

By Judy Carlough

“I can get the gold,” Morgan said, nervous.

“Find forty-one bars of pure gold, lost in a city of fifty thousand? You nuts?” said Sly.

The moon was rising over Cape Ledoux as they left *The Cod-father Bar*, a waterfront dive famous for obliterating the broken dreams and deep regrets of its regulars, mostly fishermen, but also a few patrons suspected of dumping things into the bay, not hauling them out.

“We’ll live like kings,” Morgan said.

“If we find it, man.”

“Remus told me it’s on Sully’s trawler. He jimmed a lock to steal Sully’s tools, but the big chest wouldn’t budge. Gold is heavy.”

Sly stopped. “Told you *when*?”

“Saturday. Before Sully found Remus and shot him.”

Sly nodded. “For Remus, it’s as good an ending as any.”

“Maybe for us, too,” Morgan said, as they headed to Sully’s boat.