

The Malcontent

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Estee Lauder Makes Cheap Mirrors

I broke a mirror today.

I didn't comprehend that it had actually fallen until I heard the crackling crunch of the glass as it hit the hard tile floor. I cursed and picked it up with a deftness that I should have had prior to its crash. It had broken in a pretty arc, but it was broken nonetheless.

I can't believe I broke a mirror.

I groaned inwardly and tried to stop obsessing about it. I tried to rationalize that it didn't count. Maybe you only get seven years bad luck when it breaks completely apart. What was I going to do with seven years bad luck? Wasn't there a consolation prize?

I can't believe I broke a mirror today.

And I was having such a good day.

Janine Wilkins

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Shabby Coat

A shabby coat
and silver buttons

I'm stitching up the innards
of my shabby coat
my shining coat
it looks so nice

 on the outside
the buttons you stitched on
 look beautiful
with their royal crest and
single word
 "honor"
at the feet of nobility

Beautiful

And it deserves so much more
 now
this adorned shell needs
to be made as great
as the image in your head
when you dug out your
 sewing kit
and went to work
on such a shabby coat
as mine
an image I had forgotten
or put off 'til better days
 (or never)

Impetus for change
cause for belief
motivation to do what I
 had always meant to do
or even a road back
to not a pinnacle
but certainly higher on the
 mountain path than before

A little trick
like sewing buttons on a coat
could do so much
could lead me back
 to you
 thank you

Ben Ide

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Voices Far And Near

Echo's of my idols
sound eloquent and near
soothing my soul
with POWERFUL verses
ENTICING my ear
Counten Cullen, Langston Hughes,
Zora Neale Huston
and James Baldwin
echo's of my idols
sound eloquent and near
pouring forth meaningful
 prose
calling me their kindred spirit
their presence still here
echo's of my idols make
 my purpose clear

Shaunda Holloway

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Halloween

Death passed by me on the street today. He looked at me once and then looked away and then looked back again. Eyes circled in black and hooded shroud with sickle hanging behind. I saw Death on the street today and he looked at me. Right at me.

I had forgotten it was Halloween.

I thought that I was hallucinating before I could realize this fact. I quickly snapped back to reality after I saw the mummy walk by with a backpack slung over its shoulder.

It was Halloween, and I had forgotten.

I tried to forget about it at first. I tried to ignore the fact that I had seen the Grim Reaper crossing a bridge that I was going to cross, too. It almost made me turn around and run the other way because I didn't want to go where Death had just come from.

For weeks afterward I would peer nervously around corners to make certain that if death was there, I would surprise him instead of the other way around. For weeks I tried to outsmart Death: I walked down different streets, I left work at different times, I wore different hats so that he couldn't recognize me. I rationalized that if I changed my routine, myself, that Death wouldn't want me. I hoped that he would get bored with me and go away.

After all, Halloween was over.

I spent my days trying to stay out of his way, and at night, took solace in the fact that he didn't know where I lived, so I was safe. I told no one of my hide and seek games with Death.

The New Year's Eve party that I went to that year was a masquerade party, but I was not informed of this. I was dressed as myself. I was informed too late that the theme was to dress as someone or something that frightened you. I laughed.

When I walked into the party I saw the usual monsters of our childhood, plus the occasional dentist and nun, but no one was dressed as themselves. People asked me who I was supposed to be, they didn't realize that I wasn't wearing a costume.

I retreated to a corner to avoid being questioned further on who I was supposed to be. I surveyed the scene and saw a Bryant Gumbel dancing with an Ivana Trump. A cluster of guys in suits who were supposed to be the Senate Hearing Committee were arguing at the punch bowl, and a Jay Leno was drunk and trying to strip, but people were disgusted at the thought and kept walking away.

I was getting extremely bored and was about to leave my perch when I saw Death sitting on the opposite side of the room, eyeing me. We stared at each other for an inordinate amount of time and then Death got up. Death got up and started walking my way. I wanted to flee, but I couldn't move, and I was barely breathing by the time he reached me. He loomed menacingly close, looked down at me with those kohl-smudged eyes, smiled, and asked me if I wanted to go out sometime.

And it wasn't even Halloween.

Janine Wilkins
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Love Song Not!

I'm lonely
I cry
Your death is all I crave
I hate you
You know why
I'll see you in your grave

Gritting teeth
Choked back tears
To you I've been a slave
Words of love
Met with jeers
I'll see you in your grave

Gun is cold
Blood is hot
My revenge you cannot stave
Life goes on
But yours will not
I'll help you to your grave!

Ed Hoyer, Jr.
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Don't Panic

Now don't panic
What's left is a ghost from days gone by
What I feel for you is right
I stilled my tongue but not my voice
My pen spoke as did my deeds
But cryptic messages were too cryptic
And my prose flattered but embarrassed
You were true to yourself
No matter what the message was
Maybe someday my prose will bring
a warm memory
Until then, don't panic

Ed Hoyer, Jr.
9-13-92

Your Picture When You Were Different

You showed me a picture the other day, a picture when you were different. I took the picture from your hand carefully, wondering if the you in it was someone I wouldn't recognize. My fear evaporated with my first glance.

It was you, sitting blackly, in front of a white wall. Black hair, black dress, black leggings, black shoes. I thought of a statement of mathematics: the subtraction of color from the sum of all color.

Your face betrayed the equation. Nearly as pale as the wall you eclipsed, your face was the sum, restrained, but not absorbed, by the power of the subtraction.

What were you thinking, as you were looking toward the camera, through the physics of the lens, past the mechanics of the shutter, your image enwebbed by the chemistry of the film?

I looked up from the picture, and our eyes met. You were watching me intensely, and I wondered, what you were thinking now, as you looked through the physiology of my eyes, into the metaphysics of my soul?

I handed the picture back to you carefully, for fear of disturbing the thoughts of the you, when you were different. As you put the picture in the pocket of your white blouse, your blond hair fell across your eyes.

"I certainly did look different," you said. And as you brushed the strands of sunlight from your face, your smile lit up the universe.

Ed Hoyer, Jr.
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My People

So what do you think when you see me?

Do you think:

white guy
with his dead-white-European power tag
and his hair
and his little earring
that's supposed to say
"I'm hot property?"

Do you see someone who
grew up in a very white
almost rural suburb
with only two black kids in his school

(We treated them like they were white,
I hope they didn't mind)

Or do you see what I see
son of dead oppressors
inheritor to
torture, frustration, hopelessness
slavery
killer's boy

Can you almost see the hood
my grandpappy woulda worn
if he thought his neighborhood needed it

I can

I see the weight of
centuries of oppression
my people forced on those
who were different - "inferior" - to them

I feel the guilt

I feel the shame

I feel justified and vindicated
when some angry man
says "Cracka" under his breath
'cuz that's what my people were

You have a proud heritage
because you were stolen, raped
and listed as commodities
and yet you are still alive
you can hold your head up high
and say "My spirit is free
like I am free and
no one will take that away"

You are innocent

And I am the son of
white aggressors
and I can only be proud
that I hate who my people were

'Cuz I would rather have been
at the end of that rope
than sitting in that pick-up
and grinning

Ben Ide

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Mr. Ide wrote this poem for Black History Month, and performed it at a Black History Month celebration at Brownell Hall, SCSU, on February 28, 1993.

Once there was this idea,
 almost a voice or rationality,
 that burned within me. And this
 almost voice, this almost rationality
 started as a tiny spark that said,
 "You're an independent person who will
 lose his individuality in the
 fusion of marriage."
 I heard it but I didn't listen to it,
 thinking how nice it would be to
 never be alone again.
 And then this small candle light said,
 "What if it is not your destiny
 to marry this person?
 And doesn't it
 gall you when she treats you like a child?"
 This time I laughed at it for using
 the word "destiny"
 but I did confess that sometimes
 she did treat me like an idiot.
 And then this warming fireplace
 spoke to me and said,
 "You know you are an intelligent and
 self sufficient being. A man. You
 can rely on your spirit and intellect
 until that perfect person comes around."
 And I thought to myself that
 maybe I could but it would be
 so horribly painful.
 And that burning fire of inner wisdom,
 that hot sauna-shower of self support said,
 "Do it! I will protect you." And so
 I told her that we were through and that
 we were leaving her. And then
 that roaring bonfire, that
 lighthouse beacon cutting through the night,
 that almost voice and almost rationality
VANISHED
 and I haven't heard from it since.

I am left alone with the
 feeling that I have been talked into
 jumping from an airplane by a man
 who neglected to give me a
 parachute.

Ben Ide

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Tzo

We that shine,
 shine bright and bold.
 We that learn
 have a history to be told.
 We that love
 exchange care.
 We that live,
 We reject despair.

Shaunda Holloway

Copyright 1991, Shaunda Holloway

Ode to Ozzy

Ozzy's God!
 I know that sounds odd,
 but
 Ozzy's God!

Ozzy's God!
 To his glory we sing!
 Yes, Ozzy's God,
 but
 Elvis is still the King.

Edward Hoyer, Jr.

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The Night Train

Gun rocket bullet
Fast driven speeding onward
Into don't know where

Ben Ide

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Brushes

An artist's paradise,
A studio out of doors;
The depth of green,
The reaches of smooth grey rock,
And a house on a hill
Draw the eye.
Drops of soft summer rain knead the
Water in the marshland far below,
And a woman with nature's face
Deftly strokes her canvas with the
Grace of an artist.

M.E.

Copyright 1992, M.E.

<p>ABCDEFGHIJKLM NOPQRST VWXZY</p>
--

The Abominable Snowman

Crystalline trees in winterstorm aftermath,
footsteps along the path,
The Abominable Snowman decides
on his plan and attacks.
The battle was long, the people
fought hard,
They lit a great fire
and the trees were charred.
Then they formed a ring, and chose
their king, to lead them --
to end it all.
"The smaller they are the
softer they fall," he cried,
Then fell off the wall and died.
Well, they finally succeeded;
The monster defeated,
he crawled away to his lair.
With broken claws, he scatched
the fleas in his snowy hair.

M.E.

Copyright 1992, M.E.

Complexity

Drugs in my community...
drugs in my school....
Drugs on my street corner...
awaiting a naive fool...
Catastrophic behavior....
Makes my heart bleed...
But what tears at...
My soul is...
That the bottom line...
Is greed....

Shaunda Holloway

Copyright 1993, Shaunda Holloway

**SHADOWPANTHS
OR
YOU ALWAYS GET
THE SHADOW LORD
YOU DESERVE**

Part 1

The evening of the day the High Lord of ShadowTellus summoned me, I was sitting in a police cruiser writing a report about a missing cat and trying not to spill the last drops of a lukewarm cup of coffee on my clipboard. It was eleven o'clock at night, and I was parked behind the church in the commuter parking lot.

I was not a police officer, although hardly anyone could have been blamed for mistaking me for one, my being dressed like a police officer and driving a town police cruiser. I was a CVPA, a Community Volunteer Police Assistant.

My duties as a CVPA were to handle car lockouts, assist at medical calls, direct traffic at accidents, and handle other non-criminal complaints. In theory, that freed up the full-time or regular police officers from handling minor complaints, and allowed them to concentrate on more serious criminal matters. That was the theory.

In practice, the CVPA's drove around a lot and wasted the town's gasoline. There was not all that much for us to do. A few of the younger CVPA's found community assistance boring. They wanted action and excitement. They didn't understand that the real task of the CVPA's was not crime fighting, it was community relations. That was the reason I had to write a report about a missing cat and forward it to the Animal Control Officer.

I really wasn't interested writing the report,

or drinking the coffee either. I started contemplating on whether to drink the last drops, or pour that cooled, brown liquid out the driver's window and hope I didn't hit the town seal on the door of the car. It was a hard decision.

I'd bought the coffee from a fast food restaurant down the street. I had no idea if it was good coffee or not. I've never been able to tell. I hate coffee. Or rather, I should say, I tolerate coffee, but only to a point.

I stretched my arm out the cruiser window and poured what was left of the coffee on the pavement. Then I threw the cup on the floor of the passenger's side of the cruiser with the rest of my accumulated trash for the evening. The cup bounced off an empty french fries carton, and landed on a cheeseburger wrapper, a testament to my good nutritional practices. I started working on my report again.

My concentration was disturbed by the dispatcher's voice over the radio. The evening shift was over, he announced, and all cars were to return to the station. I heard the midnight shift sign on, announcing the zones they would cover. I was listening for one particular voice.

The town was divided into three overlapping patrol zones; North, Central, and South. A busy state highway ran east to west and neatly bisected the town. The North zone was all the streets north of the highway, and the South zone was all the streets south of the highway. The Central zone was the highway itself, and all the streets for a half mile on either side of the highway. That overlap allowed the Central zone car to assist with complaints in either the North or South zones, and gave extra coverage to the heavily travelled highway.

Occasionally, there were extra cars on the road. There might be one or two traffic enforcement cars, running radar or investigating traffic accidents. There could be a Rover car that could be dispatched to complaints in all three zones. Then there was me.

CVPA's didn't have zones like the other cars. While based primarily in the area of the business district, CVPA's could be dispatched to a complaint anywhere in the town. CVPA's usually worked the evening shift during the week, and the morning and evening shifts on weekends. I have a tendency to stay a little bit into the midnight shift when a certain regular officer works.

The Central Zone car signed on the air, a welcome and familiar voice on my radio. I smiled and went back to my report. It was not a very complicated report to write, but my mind was on other things. I stared at the report sheet trying to form a few simple sentences.

I began daydreaming, scenes from the novel I'd been trying to write appeared in my mind. I'd been writing this novel for several years. It was an odd story I could never seem to finish. I didn't know what the ending was. It was a journey somewhere and somewhen. The hero didn't know why he was there, and no one else he met seemed to know either. They all appeared to be expecting someone else, not him. It was as if his presence was a mistake that no one would admit to.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a blacked out car pull into the commuter lot, and start driving toward me. I knew what was coming. I closed my eyes, but it rarely did much good. I heard the other car stop in front of my cruiser. Suddenly, I was bathed in a bright, white light.

The other car was a police cruiser, and the driver had just blinded me with the high-intensity spotlights built into the cruise-light bar on the roof of the car.

The other cruiser blacked out again, and pulled up next to my car, our driver's doors almost touching. We both rolled down our driver's windows at the same time.

"Good evening, Community Volunteer Police Assistant Skyler," a woman's voice greeted me from the other cruiser.

"Good evening, Regular Police Officer Kestrel," I answered, a smile on my face.

A cigarette lighter flickered in the interior of the other car, a young woman with blond hair dressed in the dark blue of a regular officer revealed by the tiny flame. It was Kestrel, Officer Elizabeth Kestrel, two-year veteran of the police force, and my best friend. Kestrel was the reason I lingered past the end of the evening shift. She took a drag on her cigarette and playfully blew the smoke in my direction.

"Working on your novel again?" she asked.

"No," I replied, "Fluffy escaped from Mrs. Samson's apartment at the Senior Village again. The ACO has the evening off, so they sent me to fill out the "missing feline" report."

"Oh, yeah. Fluffy. I remember," Kestrel said. "I went there one Sunday afternoon when Fluffy got out and mauled a dog a few doors down from Mrs. Samson. That cat must weigh twenty pounds easy."

"Try thirty," I said, "And I hear Fluffy keeps a count of the number of dogs he beats up on the wall next to his litter box."

Kestrel laughed. "I hate cats," she said, "Give me a Golden Retriever instead. I love those dogs."

"I guess that means you don't like Furball, my cat?"

"Your cat is strange Eric. Almost as strange as you."

The dispatcher's voice crackled over the radio. "Assistance-one."

I reached for the microphone. "Assistance-one, church commuter lot."

"Assistance-one, are you holding over?"

"Ten-four," I replied, "Another half hour or so."

"Ten-four Assistance-one, dispatch out."

"They're checking up on you again," laughed Kestrel.

"They know where I am," I said.

"And who you're with," she added. "I swear, after all this time, they still think we're having an affair."

"That would be nice," I said hopefully. Kestrel glared at me, obviously displeased with my truthfulness. I felt the steel of the car melting from the intensity of her blue eyes.

"You know how I feel about you," I said, "And, yes, I know I'm not what you're looking for. But I can still dream, can't I?"

Kestrel took another drag on her cigarette. There was an uncomfortable silence. Then she smiled. "It's nice to be dreamed about," she said.

"Still friends?" I asked.

"Still friends," she replied, "Forever."

"Or a reasonable facsimile thereof," I said. We both laughed. Kestrel looked at me thoughtfully.

"So, when are you going to get a real job?" she asked.

"A real job? Like becoming a regular officer, maybe?" I smiled. "Too much work. I'm content being a CVPA and driving around wasting the town's gasoline."

"You're going to be the oldest CVPA in town," Kestrel said, "Maybe the whole state."

She was right. At thirty-five years old, I was at least ten to fifteen years older than the other CVPA's in the department. I was even older than most of the rookie regular officers. Kestrel was only twenty-five years old, herself. I'd been a CVPA for over seven years. I was the last one left from my training class, the others having left the department years ago. In all that time, I had never wanted to be a regular officer.

I wondered what I had accomplished all those years. I knew that I had little ambition, no drive to succeed. Sometimes, I had this empty feeling, like a part of my life was missing, a part that even Kestrel's friendship and affection could not fill.

"Hey, Eric," Kestrel said, "Where'd you go on me? Are you okay?"

I snapped out of my day dreaming. "Sorry Liz. I was just thinking about stuff."

"Well be careful," she said in a mock serious

tone, "Thinking is dangerous in this police department." We both laughed.

I was about to ask her a question, when the alert tone from the radio interrupted my thoughts.

"South-one, Central-one, Medic-one," said the dispatcher, "Motor vehicle accident, car versus pole, possible injuries, Main Street by the South Village Green. Code two response."

"Central-one, that's you," I said, but Kestrel had already put her cruiser in gear and was driving out of the parking lot, flashing blue strobe-lights cutting through the darkness. I watched in the rear view mirror as she disappeared around the side of the church. I heard her voice over the radio, calm and professional as always, "Central-one, church commuter lot, responding code two, South Village Green."

I took a few more minutes to finish my report, the radio busy with messages about the accident. It turned out to be a fender-bender, with minor damage to the car, and major embarrassment for the driver.

The missing cat report finished, I drove leisurely back to the police station. I stopped at the gas pump behind the building, where I filled the tank up for the next person to use this car, and cleaned out my accumulated trash for the evening. Then I parked the cruiser in the rear lot with the other cruisers. I pulled out my briefcase, PR-24 nightstick, and my CVPA jacket, and then carefully locked all the doors of the car. It was a little ritual drilled into me late one night by a very loud and angry Sergeant.

The ambulance building was next to the cruiser lot, the ambulance just pulling in from the car accident as I walked to the

patrol entrance. I waved at the crew, and then punched the security code on the door lock, and went inside the station.

My first stop was the roll call room where I put my briefcase and other stuff on a chair. On one wall of the room was a set of pigeon hole shelves used as mail and message boxes. All the full-time regular officers had their own labelled box. The thirty part-time CVPA's shared a box. I looked for the case-card the dispatcher filled out when I was assigned to the missing cat complaint. Case-cards noted such information as the time the complaint was received, the time an officer was assigned to the complaint and which officer was assigned, the time the officer arrived at the incident location, and the time when the officer cleared the incident or went back out on patrol.

I found the case-card in the CVPA box, and double checked the case number and other information against what I had in my report. I paper-clipped the report and the case-card together. My second stop was the patrol shift supervisor's office next to the roll call room.

The Sergeant in charge of the midnight shift nodded at me as I placed the car keys back in the vehicle key rack and removed my name from the vehicle assignment board. I placed the case-card and report in the basket on his desk. All reports, no matter how simple, had to be checked by a shift supervisor. He scowled. The previous shift supervisor had left a lot of reports unchecked.

I walked into the roll call room and placed my portable radio into an open slot in the battery charger rack. I carefully noted the time I returned the radio in the sign-out log book next to the charger.

Next stop was the armory. I punched in my

security code on the computerized door lock. The armory access computer program verified my code and noted the time I entered and exited the armory. I swung the door open and walked inside and over to the weapon locker assigned to me.

For six of my seven years, the CVPA's were unarmed. Then ten of us were given weapons training and armed. We, "the chosen few," passed a new weapons use psychological profile test the chief of police read about and decided to experiment with. It was supposed to measure and predict reactions to stressful or dangerous situations. Low scores indicated calmness, while high scores indicated excitability. At least, that was the theory. The test results indicated that we were the CVPA's least likely to draw a weapon in anger or panic and use it. I got the lowest score. The test examiner wanted to know if I always walked around half asleep.

It was not the first time I'd been criticized for being too calm. Kestrel took me skiing once. I'd never been on skis before and she was trying to teach me what to do. The lesson was not going very well. My apparent lack of enthusiasm for Kestrel's favorite sport annoyed her. We were standing at the top of the beginner's practise slope when Kestrel asked me if there was anything at all that excited me. I told her that she did. I got a face full of snow as a reward for my truthfulness.

I unholstered the 20 shot semi-automatic pistol, and carefully unloaded the bullet clip. I placed the pistol, bullet clip, and spare clips from my belt, into the locker.

I always felt better when I was not wearing a handgun. I sometimes regreted not faking my answers on the weapons use psychological profile test. I should have said that I wanted

to blow away litterbugs, people with loud car radios, skateboarders, and other dangerous disrupters of our quiet, little town. With my luck though, they probably would have issued me the handgun anyway, and said that I was perfectly normal for someone of my age.

I left the armory and headed upstairs to the radio control room. There was only one dispatcher working the midnight shift tonight. It was Tom Wyzk, a 16 year veteran of the department. Tom liked working the midnight shift. "No meddling administrators or brass to deal with," he confided to me once. He was reading the incident log for the previous shift. I sat at an empty dispatcher station.

"Hi, Tom," I said, "It was a slow shift."

"Hi, Eric," he replied, "Yeah, that's unusual for evenings. I see Fluffy escaped again. That cat will never be taken alive. The shift supervisor should have called out the SWAT Team."

The telephone rang. There was a multi-line telephone at each dispatcher station. I noticed that the call was coming in on the private line only police personnel were supposed to know about. Wyzk answered with a British accent to his voice, "Office of Control." He listened for a second and then laughed. "It's for you," he said.

I pressed the private line button on the phone, and picked up the receiver. "CVPA Skyler," I said.

"Don't you ever go home?" asked a familiar voice on the phone. It was Kestrel, at a pay phone somewhere.

"I was just about to go home," I answered, "I've got to work my day job tomorrow."

"Do you want a wake up call?" Kestrel

asked.

"Yes! That would be nice. Thanks."

"Good," Kestrel said, "If I get bored tonight, I'll call and wake you up." Then she hung up.

I sat there for a minute imagining groping in the dark for a ringing telephone at two or three in the morning. I hung up the receiver.

Dispatcher Wyzk was smiling at me. I was pretty sure he knew what Kestrel just did. He and Kestrel had been friends since her early teens when she was a police explorer cadet. Kestrel once told me that Wyzk was like an older brother to her.

Wyzk and I chatted for a few minutes, but I was much too tired tonight to stay any later into the shift. I said "Good night" and went back downstairs to the roll call room. I gathered up my stuff, and walked out to my car.

Ten minutes later, I was unlocking the front door of the townhouse condominium I rented. Once inside, I noticed that the kitchen light was on. I remembered turning that light off, as I almost knocked over Furball's water dish when I did it.

I placed my jacket and briefcase on the floor. PR-24 nightstick in hand, I walked down the short hallway into the kitchen. I looked around. My cat, Furball, was standing on the kitchen table sniffing at a grey envelope.

The envelope was about the same size as a greeting card. My name was written in black ink on the front. The handwriting was very florid and elegant. I picked the envelope up. Furball sat on her haunches and watched me intently. I turned the envelope over, and noticed that it was sealed with a drop of black wax.

I was curious at this point, and I opened the envelope carefully. There was a grey card inside. It looked like an invitation. It read:

*You are Hereby
Summoned to Appear
before the
High Lord of ShadowTellus
and the
Great Council of ShadowTellus
on a Matter of
Importance
to the ShadowTellus Realm.*

An escort will be provided.

*Sincerely,
RekruTah
Secretary to the High Lord of ShadowTellus*

*N.B.
Your cooperation is appreciated,
but not required.*

The "invitation" was written in the same elegant handwriting as on the envelope. I put it back on the table. Furball sniffed at it, and then, satisfied or bored, jumped down to the floor and walked out of the kitchen.

"This must be a joke," I thought, but I was too tired to think about who could have written it, and how they'd gotten it on to my kitchen table. Outside of the landlord, the only other person with a key was Kestrel. I'd given it to her shortly after I'd moved in. She was reluctant to take the key, at first.

"Eric, I'm not moving in with you," she told me, "I've got my own apartment, and I like living alone."

I told Kestrel that I understood her position, and that I wasn't asking her to move in with me. I was giving her the key because my place was local, and convenient to the police station. Kestrel's apartment was ten miles away from town. I told her that she could use my place if she didn't have time to get home, or she was too tired, or the weather was lousy, or any other reason she could think of.

Kestrel took the key. "Okay, but I'm sure I'll never need it," she said.

I soon lost track of the number of times I found a certain police officer, still in her uniform, dozing on my couch after she'd worked a double patrol shift.

I turned off the kitchen light and went upstairs to bed, the mysterious invitation forgotten in my rush for sleep.

Kestrel was kind to me. She only called once and she waited until four in the morning before she did it.

We talked for a while, but I was too sleepy to be a good conversationalist.

"You sound tired," Kestrel finally said.

"I am," I said.

"You should get a phone answering machine like I have."

"Why would I want a phone answering machine?" I asked sleepily.

"So you won't get woken up by people calling you at four in the morning," she said. Then she hung up on me.

The dial tone buzzed in my ear for a minute or two before it sunk in that Kestrel had

been playing with me again. I smiled, hung up the receiver, and fell back asleep.

The morning of the day I was to appear before the High Lord of ShadowTellus started off like most days. The alarm in the clock-radio went off at its regular setting of 6:30a.m., the obnoxious patter of a morning DJ team interrupting my peaceful dreaming. I got up out of bed and began my boringly normal routine of turning off the radio, shaving, showering, and getting dressed for my day job.

Then I walked downstairs to the front hallway, where Furball normally waited for me. The routine was that we would both walk into the kitchen where I would open up a horrible smelling can of cat food for Furball's breakfast. I got to the bottom of the stairs. Furball was not there.

I started walking down the hallway to the kitchen. The kitchen light was on again, and Furball had her face in her bowl, greedily chomping down her breakfast.

It was when I walked into the kitchen that I realized that it was not going to be a normal day.

There was a small, dark skinned man sitting at the kitchen table. I blinked, and shook my head, to wake myself up. When I looked again, I realized that I had been mistaken. It wasn't a small, dark skinned man at all. It was a small, dark skinned creature.

The creature had an ovalish head, with no hair or ears. Its nose and face were almost flat. It had two round, large yellow eyes, with black pupils. Its skin was a deep brown color, dark and leathery. It looked like It was wearing a black, silk T-shirt.

I stood there, stupidly I must admit now,

wondering if I were still asleep and this was just the start of a bad dream. And then, I noticed that It was reading the comics section of the morning newspaper and chuckling softly to Itself.

The bottle of pink liquid dish washing soap I normally kept on the kitchen sink was sitting on the table. The creature reached out a thin, spindly arm, and picked up the bottle with equally thin, bony fingers, each graced with a murderously sharp claw. It poured some of the dish washing soap into a coffee cup that Kestrel had entrusted in my care a few months ago.

"This is my favorite cup, Eric," Kestrel told me, a smile on her face, that suddenly turned into a hard, mean look. "If anything happens to this cup, you're a dead man."

The creature picked up Kestrel's cup, and began to sip the dish washing soap, still engrossed in reading the comics. There was something disturbingly familiar about the scene, but I couldn't remember why. I tried to speak, to scream, to do anything, but all I managed to do was clear my throat with a high squeak. The creature turned Its head, looked me up and down once, and smiled, flashing dozens of needle-like teeth glistening with saliva and pink liquid dish washing soap.

Something in the back of my mind told me that the best course of action at this point was to scream at the top of my lungs and run for the front door. The creature had other plans in mind.

It began to speak.

"Good Morning, Eric," It said, in a cheery voice with just a trace of a British accent, "I've been waiting for you. I do hope you don't mind that I took the liberty of reading your morning newspaper." It folded the

newspaper carefully and placed it in the center of the kitchen table.

"Some of the comic strips are quite universal in their humor," It continued, "and I find them an excellent way to start off my day. And this cleaning product," It held up Kestrel's soap filled coffee cup, "I happen to find quite refreshing." It took another sip.

"Ah, excellent," It said, "This is one of the few delights I have found on your polluted and backward planet." It drank the rest of the dish washing soap, and put Kestrel's cup down on the table.

"I am forgetting my manners, Eric, please forgive me," It said, "I usually do not forget my manners. Tight schedule or not one should always use proper etiquette at all times. It is the mark of a gentlemen." Not knowing what else to do, I nodded my head in agreement.

"I'm glad you agree," It said as It stood up. "Please allow me the honor of formally introducing myself." It stepped from behind the table.

It was not much taller than I was and rather thin. The black, silk-like T-shirt was actually a Roman style tunic that ended in mid-thigh. There was a thick black belt around Its waist that appeared to be one continuous piece. In the middle of Its chest was an odd shaped medallion I didn't notice before. It was impossibly black, and appeared to contain tiny twinkling lights.

The creature bowed slightly. "I am Rekrutah, personal Secretary to her eminence, KuPer, High Lord of ShadowTellus, and palatine of the ShadowTellus Realm."

"I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," I said in the politest voice I could without

stuttering. The creature smiled and gestured toward an empty kitchen chair.

“Do sit down,” It said, “I have many things to discuss with you and, I’m afraid, there’s not much time.” Its voice became quite serious now. “I have to get you to the Great Hall of the Council of ShadowTellus before your planet makes a full revolution about its axis.”

I sat on the edge of the chair and leaned forward. For some reason, I instinctively understood that what my horrible looking guest was about to say was extremely important both to him and to me, and that my very survival depended on listening to his words extremely carefully.

Looking back on it all, I should have realized that any normal person would have been too terrified to remember their name, and probably would not have been able to concentrate on what a dark, leathery creature sitting at their kitchen table was saying. Unless of course, they’d been down that road before. The warning bells of my mind had long ago been silenced. I wonder if it would have made any difference if I had remembered?

To Be Continued . . .

Ed Hoyer, Jr.

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Devotion

Metal blaring
in my ears
chase the darkness
crush my fears

Sound and fury
grab my soul
power and chaos
out of control

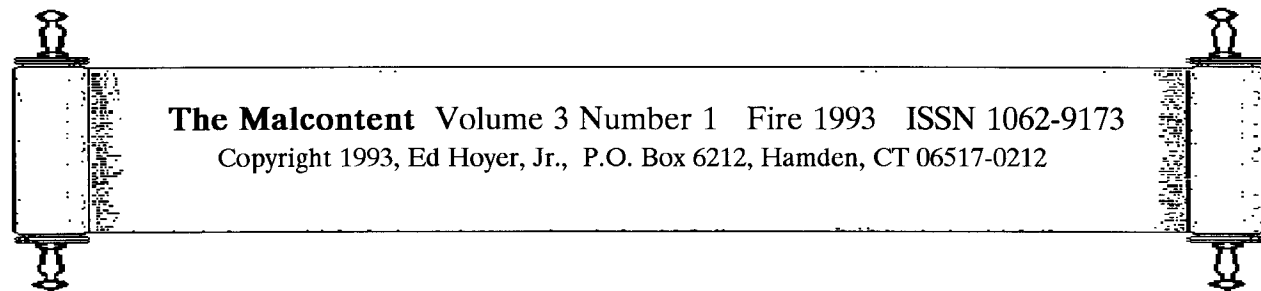
Anger, frustration
hate and rage
free my demons
from their cage

Penitants moshing
in the pit
bodies thrashing
flesh is ripped

This is our church
our holy temple
we who worship
are metal mental

Ed Hoyer, Jr.

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Sitting in the half light,
 The words stream from my pen.
 Should I conserve on what I'm writing
 Or cut back on what I send?
 There's no sense in fighting
 What I often cannot start.
 It's just functional murmurs
 of my ailing heart.

There's no use my denying
 It's no good for my health.
 With chocolates, cards and flowers,
 There's cancer in my wealth.
 And if my charming powers
 Have changed from sweet to tart
 Blame the faintly fluttering palpitations
 of my failing heart.

So if my words take action
 (And if the timing matters)
 In all I do and say,
 Then let the rhyming flatter
 'Cuz I've done nothing all today.
 You'll have to do my part
 In writing compositional linguistics
 of my broken heart.

I don't mean to hurt you,
 Although I often do.
 I'll hurt you much more often
 Before our time is though.
 If your resolve should soften
 From an occasional dart,
 Remember it's just rhetorical rhetoric
 of my token heart.

Ben Ide

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I would say
 She speaks of loveliness in her form
 and grace and soul
 But she doesn't
 Why would the nightingale be content
 with speech
 When she could
 Fill the lowering night with crystalline
 magic and overtone purity
 And would sing

And I could say
 She walks in beauty of her form
 and grace and soul
 But I don't
 Why would I limit the swan
 to walking
 When she can
 Soar across the morning and float
 and stream and hover
 And can fly

Ben Ide

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The Malcontent

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Awakening

I
 dream of Zambia
 and Soweto and
 Egypt and then
 the Nile,
 and when I awake
 I smile!

Shaunda Holloway

Copyright 1991, Shaunda Holloway

The Nile Is Crying

The Nile is crying
 So many of us have been
 killed
 The Nile is crying
 Africa's legacy has not
 been fulfilled
 The Nile is crying
 We are truly divided
 The Nile is crying
 Education we must gain
 back
 The Nile is crying
 We carry the burden of
 racism on our backs

Shaunda Holloway

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A Question

In the Ghetto, Mothers
 Cry
 Young boys get killed
 We all know
 Why
 Understand this if you
 Would
 Guns ain't made in the hood
 To ease the pain of
 Constant death is too difficult
 To even
 try!
 Will things change, if young white boys die?

Shaunda Holloway

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Reform

His story
 Always the slave
 His story
 Never the Brave
 His story
 Straight to the grave
 His story?
 Have they forgotten
 about Tousand, Garvey
 and Africa rich with Ivory
 and Gold?
 Our story must Now
 Be
 Told!

Shaunda Holloway

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Working At The Mall Again

I'm working at the mall again
 I'm working at the mall again
 Standing here lonely
 without a single friend
 I'm working at the mall again

It's Christmas at the mall again
 It's Christmas at the mall again
 The decorations
 all look so lame
 It's Christmas at the mall again

I'm bored at the mall again
 I'm bored at the mall again
 I'm just a slave
 without a name
 I'm bored at the mall again

I'm eating at the food court again
 I'm eating at the food court again
 Warmed over grease
 all tastes so strange
 I'm eating at the food court again

I'm lost in the parking lot again
 I'm lost in the parking lot again
 Snow covered cars
 all look the same
 I'm lost in the parking lot again

I'm working at the mall again
 I'm working at the mall again
 Standing here lonely
 without a single friend
 I'm working at the mall again

Ed Hoyer, Jr.
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All The Madmen

A cool, windy Autumn day
 all the madmen came my way
 Walking swiftly dressed in green
 all the madmen could be seen

I stood there staring like a fool
 all the madmen were at my school
 I saw them inside the library
 all the madmen beckoned me

I listened to them many a day
 all the madmen had much to say
 Then came that bright summer's day
 all the madmen went away

They all left and though I yearn
 all the madmen their bridges burn
 Loving a madman I couldn't avoid
 all the madmen are paranoid

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When you just have to know . . .

Grim Information
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A *Cryptic* Message

It's raining out,
and I feel wet,
if I was inside,
I'd be dry, I bet!
Can't understand
why you don't like me anymore,
what have I done
to make you so sore?
Please don't be mad,
and please don't feel blue,
you know very well,
I could never hurt you.
Standing outside,
in the cold and the rain,
my soul is aching,
heart full of pain.
My life is unchanging,
ever the same,
people keep leaving,
and I'm lonely again.
It's raining harder,
I'm melting away,
there's so many words
I didn't say.
I'm going now,
I don't know where,
but I'll never forget
the brief time you cared.
I'm leaving now,
I'm used to the pain,
don't worry about me,
I like the rain.

Mis Eng Yu

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