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Page 1 – THE GIRL WHO LOVED BRUCE CAMPBELL by Christa Carmen. Christa Carmen lives in Westerly, Rhode Island with her fiancé and a beagle who rivals her in stubbornness. Her short stories have been accepted for publication by *Literally Stories*, *Fiction on the Web*, *Jitter Press*, and the *DreamFusion Press* anthology, *Infected World*. She has an undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania in English and psychology, and a master's degree in counseling psychology. Christa works for BioClinica in clinical trial support, and at a local hospital as a mental health clinician.

Page 13 – JUMP! by Janet Amalia Weinberg & Margaret Karmarzin Margaret Karmazin's credits include stories published in literary and national magazines, including *Rosebud*, *Chrysalis Reader*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Mobius*, *Confrontation*, *Pennsylvania Review*, *Another Realm* and *Hyperpulp* for a future publication. Her stories in *The MacGuffin*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Licking River Review* and *Words of Wisdom* were nominated for Pushcart awards. Her story, "The Manly Thing," was nominated for the 2010 Million Writers Award. She has stories included in *Still Going Strong*, *Ten Twisted Tales*, *Pieces Of Eight (Autism Acceptance)*, *Zero Gravity*, *Cover Of Darkness*, *Daughters Of Icarus*, *M-Brane Sci-Fi Quarterlies*, and a YA novel, **Replacing Fiona** and children's book, **Flick-Flick & Dreamer**, published by etreasurespublishing.com.

Janet Amalia Weinberg is a former psychologist and the editor of an anthology which was an Independent Publisher Award Finalist (**Still Going Strong; Memoirs, Stories, and Poems About Great Older Women**, *Routledge*). Her writing credits include essays in *Psychology Tomorrow*, *Long Island Woman* and *New Age Travel* and short stories in *Room*, *Wild Violet*, *Long Story Short*, *Weave Magazine*, *Moondance*, *West Wind Review*, *Ascent Aspirations* and other literary and sci-fi magazines.



THE GIRL WHO LOVED BRUCE CAMPBELL

by CHRISTA CARMEN

No Bottom Pond might have had a bottom, but as far as the three clammy and restless individuals that sat in the idling car by its banks knew, it very well might not. The cold sweats and body aches would not assail them for much longer; the lankier of the two males divvied up the wax baggies of brown powder, and each in turn began their own sacred ritual of preparation. It took only seconds for the first of the three to realize a key element was missing from their assorted paraphernalia.

“Dammit,” the stocky male said. “Does anyone have a water bottle?”

There was no reply as each of the three checked the space around their feet, and the nearest cup holder.

“Now what?” the lone female asked. “We can’t hit a gas station. We need to stay off the roads for a while, someone may have seen us leave that house.”

There was murmured agreement from the two men, followed by a morose silence. The lanky man broke the quiet with a snort of derision.

“This shit’s fried our brains,” he said. “We’re sitting next to a lake, complaining about not having any water to shoot up with.”

“It’s not a lake, it’s a pond,” the woman said.

“Technically, it’s not even a pond. It’s an estuary. And we can’t use that water because it’s brackish.” The stouter man sounded matter-of-fact.

“What’s brackish mean? That it’s dirty? Please, I’ve seen you use the water from the tank of a gas station toilet, dirty should be the least of your worries.” This, from the woman.

“No, not dirty, *brackish*. It means it’s half freshwater, half salt. We can’t shoot that, it might mess with our bodies’ electrolyte levels or something.” Now the stocky man sounded less sure of himself.

The lanky man opened the car door. He reached for an empty Dunkin Donuts cup discarded on the floor of the passenger seat, removed the lid, and looked suspiciously into its depths. Shrugging, he started for the pond’s weedy shore.

“I didn’t just get away with a B&E and buy dope from the shadiest dealer in town to let a little saltwater stop me. It’s only *half* salt anyways,” he called over his shoulder.

The woman and the stout man watched him creep toward the water’s edge. He folded his tall frame in half and scooped a cupful of water into the Styrofoam. He did this in the light of a moon so close it seemed to be perched atop the hill that loomed over No Bottom Pond, a luminous cherry on top

of a black forest cake.

The first full moon to rise on Christmas in forty years had occurred the night before. "A Christmas miracle," the woman had said sarcastically as they listened to a radio talk show host lament the previous night's fog cover on their way to Shore Road, and the house they'd been casing most of the past week. The upscale home had yielded extensive reserves of jewelry, cash, and three guns. There'd been a safe, but they had no use for a safe. They only took what they could trade quickly and easily to their dealer, and Pablo had no interest in safes.

The lunar display of December twenty-sixth happened to be free from a smothering blanket of fog. As the woman watched the tall man return, she noticed that in the bright moonlight, the water's surface had a strange sparkle to it, was almost phosphorescent in the gleam. Parts of the pond were the shiny, black, oil-slick of water-in-moonlight she'd expect. Having spent her whole life in the seaside town, she'd seen water undulating under the moon enough times for the sight to be commonplace, but No Bottom Pond seemed greenish in its radiance, and seemed not to steam as much as gurgle, like the stew in a witch's cauldron.

She forgot her inquisitiveness over the appearance of the water when the passenger door slammed shut. Three syringe tips plunged greedily into the captured pond water, transporting water from cup to three waiting spoons. Mysticism, Rhode Island was a small town (the population was reduced by half in the winter), and the heroin dealers had been tapped into the same pipelines in

and out of the closest major cities for decades; the three longtime users expected the same cut and purity of dope they'd had both the previous day, and on the occasion of their first use. Subsequently, no lighter flicked on to form dancing shadows on the car walls, no Butane-fueled flame burned prospective toxins out of the contents of their spoons, spoons that had shed the innocence of their kitchen days for something more sinister. They each shot up, one, two, three, and each fell into that first nod of euphoria, a scarecrow short of Dorothy and her friends in the poppy field.

At the same time that legions of fish were rising to the vaporous surface of No Bottom Pond, dead and already beginning to putrefy, small boils began to pop up under the skin of the three beings in the car. The tall man thought he'd injected a 'hot shot,' while the woman jerked out of her nod in wild agitation to inspect the tip of her needle, convinced she'd given herself 'cotton fever' by neglecting to free the point from Q-tip remnants. Both of them were wrong.

The mutations occurred quickly and the changes were profound. When the transformation was complete, the three beings were no longer satisfied with the heroin that flowed through their veins. They were hungry for more. Hungry in a way that made every torturous withdrawal symptom or harrowing mental craving of the past seem like a petty annoyance, a mere itch that could go without being scratched.

Two hours earlier, a local scientist named Craig Silas stood on a dip of Watch Hill

Road, a dark silhouette overlooking the river that rushed into No Bottom Pond. Craig worked at a nearby pharmaceutical company, and the previous year had snuck a project home to his basement laboratory to continue his work free from the oversight and ethical regulations of his employer.

In the wake of a country-wide opiate epidemic, Big Pharma had sufficient incentive to develop an opioid-free painkiller, eliminating the potential for abuse and addiction. Craig had stumbled on an unanticipated side-effect of the chemical compound he'd been studying, and upon bringing his research home, further unlocked the potential of the drug. Characteristics included superhuman strength, laser-point focus, and a complete inability to feel pain. Craig spent weeks hypothesizing on the drug's seemingly limitless prospects, until he'd descended the basement stairs one morning to find one of the pink-eyed lab rats feasting on his cage-mates' brains. It seemed that with every possibility of experiencing pain eliminated, the rats' behavior had morphed into something much more ominous...and much more deadly.

After driving up and down the streets of Mysticism with the concoction swishing around a large vat in his trunk, Craig noticed that the adjacent river ran under the road and into a wide inlet. Theorizing that the body of water before him was the equivalent of a dead end street, he pulled onto the narrow shoulder and muscled the vat onto the guardrail before another car could appear. Craig Silas had left No Bottom Pond ten miles behind him by the time his miracle

drug had seeped into the pond's ecosystem, and was home in his favorite armchair with his feet up by the time the first transformations began to occur.

Sophisticated cognition already reduced to animalistic compulsion, the three addicts, who had become fiends of a different nature, were barely able to recall the chain of events that had led them to their last high, brought to the utmost intensity by the unorthodox mixture of heroin and pond-dispersed, opiate-free analgesic. But they were able to recall enough to know what they needed to do to feed the hunger that gnawed at their insides like so many of Silas' lab rats. And so they began to move.

Kartya watched the spray of blood waterfall through the front door of the cabin, and grabbed Kit's arm.

"That ... was ... awesome!" she cheered, the arm-grabbing escalating to arm-slapping. She turned to face her boyfriend. "How much time is left?" she asked him.

"Kar, just watch it, I'm not messing with it again. It's thirty minutes long, like all the other episodes."

This appeased Kartya enough to watch the last ten minutes in silence. She twirled a ringlet of cherry-coke-colored hair around blood-red fingernails. When the show was over, she turned to Kit again, eager to hear his opinion on the latest installment. "Well," Kit said. "They definitely set us up for an epic showdown at the cabin."

"Agreed!" Kartya paused. "I wish there was more than ten episodes. That was a good

one though. Buckets of blood!” A mischievous smile turned up the corners of her lips.

“Twisted, gory, and hilarious,” Kit said. “The dead cop put her fists through those campers’ skulls, and turned them into corpse puppets!”

“Let’s be serious, the other characters only exist to compliment Ash. To give the directors a springboard for Ash’s amazing one-liners. And so we can see some different weapons brandished against the Deadites. ‘Cause, you know, it can’t be all about Ash’s chainsaw arm and ‘boomstick.’” She mimed obliterating Kit with a shotgun blast to the face and snickered.

“Also, did I tell you that Ash, err, sorry, Bruce Campbell wrote an autobiography a few years back...called ‘If Chins Could Kill?’”

Kit gave her a look that conveyed both incredulity and reverence, and broke into a hearty chuckle, no doubt visualizing the B-list movie actor’s signature square chin.

“Are you kidding me? That’s amazing. You need to get that book.” He gestured to two bookshelves flanking the television, which still rolled the blood-splattered credits for the show.

Kartya nodded with enthusiasm but did

not turn to regard the bookshelves, pointing instead to the two ‘Vinyl Pop’ characters facing off from their respective posts atop surround sound speakers. The superbly-

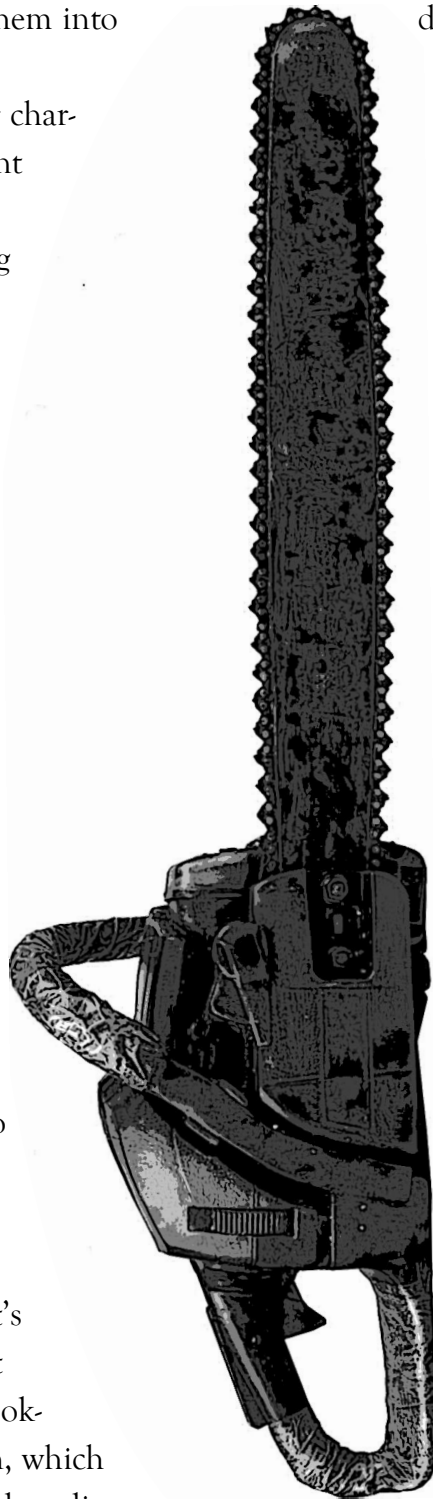
detailed plastic Ash and an ‘Army of Darkness’ Deadite had been

Christmas gifts from her mother the previous morning. Though she did not share her daughter’s love for horror, Kartya’s mother knew Kartya and Kit harbored a cultish enthusiasm for Ash, and all things ‘Evil Dead,’ from the campy originals to the 2013 remake, and now, the new original series. She had wrapped the figurines knowing it would bring appreciative smiles to their faces.

“Instead of that wobbly speaker, a hardcover copy of ‘If Chins Could Kill’ could be mini-Ash’s battleground in the fight against evil,” Kartya said.

Kit surveyed the current setup displaying their action figures, smiled, and got to his feet.

“You’re cute, babe. I love that you love blood and guts as much as I do.” Kit stretched his six-foot-three frame toward the ceiling and let out a groan. “But the party’s over. I



have to get to work.”

“I can’t believe you agreed to work the night after Christmas,” Kartya said. She tried to pout, but a yawn claimed her features instead. “Although to be honest, you’re not going to miss much. I’m beat and will probably be asleep fifteen minutes after you leave.”

As Kit dragged himself up the stairs to get changed, Kartya heard a muffled chime, and realized she was sitting on her phone. A preview of the text message scrolled across the screen. Kartya’s friend Laura had written: ‘Better lock your door...’

Laura did well as an emergency room nurse, working as an independent contractor in different hospitals from Hartford to Boston. She vacationed often, and had just returned that morning from her fourth trip to St. John since the year began. Kartya thumbed at the screen until she could see the rest of the message. In its entirety, it read: ‘Better lock your door...because my house just got broken into.’

A fat worm of fear speared itself between the layers of Kartya’s intestines. There had been numerous reports of break-ins in Mysticism over the last month, and Laura lived less than a mile from the riverfront home Kartya and Kit rented. Her fingers jerking in furious spasms, Kartya texted Laura back: ‘Were you home? Are you ok? What did they take?’

As she waited for Laura’s reply, Kit trudged back down the stairs. He was able to read the worry on her face with a single glance.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Laura and Seth’s house got broken into.

I asked her what they took and if they were home. She hasn’t answered me yet.”

The concern on Kit’s face mixed with anger. With a grim head shake, he reached out to pull her off the couch.

“No way. This is not happening. There’s no way I get switched to the night shift a month before the worst string of burglaries this town’s ever seen. Follow me.”

“But why? Where are we going?” Kartya asked him, her attention split between his grip on her forearm and her phone announcing a newly-arrived message.

Kit gestured up the stairs, but let go of her so she could navigate to her text message app. She read silently, her brow creased, then raised her eyes to meet Kit’s.

“She said they were out getting drinks and they came home to a broken window in the living room. They’d been on vacation for the past week so someone obviously anticipated an empty house. They took jewelry, cash, some other valuables...” Kartya tried to trail off effectively, as if this was the extent of stolen goods.

“And? What else?” When Kartya didn’t answer, he said, “What else did they take, Kartya?”

“Three of her guns were missing,” she said, knowing this piece of information would fan Kit’s anger and apprehension into a full-blown blaze.

Motivated anew, Kit took her hand and resumed their ascent. In the guest bedroom, he retrieved a lockbox from an opaque-fronted entertainment stand.

“I would never forgive myself if something happened to you. I know, I know, you’re

going to protest, but agree to it for my sake.” He pulled a handgun from the box and spun the chamber, counting bullets.

“Kit,” Kartya objected.

“Please, just come here so I can give you a quick refresher on how to...”

“Kit—” She was about to insist on an end to this surreal conversation. Instead, Kartya sighed and took the gun from Kit’s hands, showing him that she remembered how to wield the weapon properly, flicking the safety off and adopting a shooter’s stance.

“You’ve dragged me to the range a hundred times. I know what I’m doing well enough to defend myself if it came to it.”

Kit nodded, but he seemed distracted. She reengaged the safety and returned the gun to the lockbox. Spinning on her heel for the hall, she stopped short when she heard the scrape of something much larger being unearthed from the closet.

Without turning, she said, “Kit, I do *not* need the shotgun to be within arm’s reach when I go to bed tonight. End of discussion.”

Torn between Kartya’s obvious intention to refuse the shotgun and his need to be assured of her safety, Kit placed the shotgun on top of the stand.

“Fine,” he said. “But I’m leaving it here, just in case. The revolver is going on your nightstand. And that’s also not open for discussion.”

“Whatever,” Kartya said, her belief that the house was impregnable, that the probability of burglars targeting their quiet, one-acre lot over any other in town causing her to grow bored with the conversation. “Drive

safe please, and try to have a good night at work.”

Kartya let Kit lead her into their bedroom, saying nothing as he placed the revolver on a paperback, two feet from where she was to lay her head down on the pillow. He kissed her goodnight and turned off the bedside lamp, and Kartya listened to his footsteps on the stairs as she nestled beneath the covers. She had been overblown in her prediction: it did not take even fifteen minutes from Kit’s departure for Kartya to be sound asleep.

A noise awoke her, what sounded like the skeletal finger of a winter-dead tree tapping on a window. She sat up, disoriented. Had Kit forgotten something, perhaps his badge, or the food she’d packed for him to eat on his break? She groped for her cell, found the button to illuminate the screen. Ten forty-five. Kit would be forty-five minutes into an hour-long commute, so it wouldn’t be him tapping. She strained to catch the sound again, but it had stopped. Kartya sunk down onto the pillow, drawing the comforter up to her neck, then groaned. She flung the comforter back, forcing herself to bear the cold trek to the bathroom before returning to sleep. Halfway there, the tapping began again.

Kartya froze. There in the hallway, equally removed from both the revolver and the shotgun Kit had set out for her protection, vulnerable in her bare feet, with full bladder and panic fluttering in her brain like a moth trapped in a lantern, the details of the nearby break-in came roaring back, having been temporarily stolen by the fugue of sleep.

As she stood rooted in paralysis, her rational mind attempted to quell her fears, reading from the familiar script all terrified souls call upon in times of need: 'It's nothing, it's just the wind. There's a perfectly good explanation for this.' Repeating those words with the same tenacity as a drowning swimmer flailing for a rescue buoy, she started down the stairs in the dark.

Kartya's bare feet sunk into the shag carpet as she crossed the living room to the big picture window on the right, struggling to see in the all-encompassing blackness. Wondering why the moon refused to aid her in her endeavor, cursing the peaks and gables of the house's roofline, she moved from the window to the front door, whacking her hip on the corner of the heavy, oak desk in her blindness, and switched on the outdoor floodlights.

Slowly, giving the desk a wider berth, she crept to the right, so focused on the grate-free expanse of the window that she did not notice the shadow stretched across the ground in front of her.

A hapless civilian had become possessed by the Kandarian Demon, and subsequently turned into a Deadite...or at least this was the only explanation that occurred to Kartya when she came face-to-face with the diseased-looking monstrosity separated from her by only a half-inch of glass. For one breathless moment, Kartya thought she was dreaming, or perhaps had slipped on the stairs and knocked herself out, and was now subject to some trauma-induced hallucination. Then the demon-thing cocked its head to one side and emitted a guttural chuffing noise, and

Kartya knew that somehow, what she was seeing was real.

She may have stood staring into the black pits of the creature's eyes, a creature who had once been a tall, lanky, human man, until Kit returned home from work the next morning, but the spell was broken when the now-inhuman thing's arm shot out as if from a cannon, smashing through the six-foot tall window pane with no more effort than a man punching his hand through a piece of paper.

Kartya did not think, not in any conscious, deliberate manner. She ran to the stairs on reflex, sprinting up them two at a time, her body knowing where it was taking her, seeing her destination in her mind as clearly as an earlier scene from 'Evil Dead.' Though it defied logic, though an hour ago it had seemed impossible, she had to get to the revolver if she wanted to survive. As she flew down the hall for the bedroom, she had the wherewithal to dart her arm into the bathroom and flip the switch, the overhead fixture just bright enough to allow a half-moon of light to spill into the hallway.

It took all of Kartya's willpower not to shut and lock the bedroom door behind her, but knowing how easily the thing had infiltrated the ground floor, she knew it would behoove her to leave the door open and see it coming, rather than be ignorant to its diabolical design. She grabbed the gun from the nightstand and slid along the front wall of the bedroom while she removed the safety. She molded her hands to fit around the butt in what she hoped was a relaxed position ('never choke your gun,' the range attendant

had told her, 'that's a surefire way to hit everything but your target,') and crouched by the closet, the thinnest rectangle of hallway visible from her spot on the floor.

The sound of footsteps shuffle-dragging up the stairs after her was interrupted by a second downstairs window imploding, and then, horribly, a third. Kartya wanted to curse. She wanted to scream, or cry, or curl up in the fetal position on the floor. Instead, she pulled the hammer back, prayed for consistency, squinted one eye, and kept perfectly quiet.

The thing made it to the top of the stairs and turned the corner. The hallway was short and Kartya had a clear shot, but forced herself to hold fire. The thing took a long, lumbering step, then another. It was wearing jeans and a plaid flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and as it stepped into the crescent of light filtering out of the bathroom, Kartya saw strange marks on its forearms. The thing moved forward again.

The first shot shocked Kartya in its loudness, and she realized she'd never experienced gunfire firsthand without protective ear muffs. She recovered quickly, as she had to, concentrating on readying a second shot despite the knowledge that the thing had not been halted or even slowed in its pursuit. She'd hit it three inches below the chest, a mark devoid of any major organs. Kartya figured this could be why the creature was still on its feet, but she had a sneaking suspicion that it was not the only thing spurring the demon forward.

Kartya hit the creature again, in the shoulder, and again, clipping its neck, spurts of

blood exploding from the torn flesh, and again, another shot to the stomach. Still it stalked toward her, so Kartya took a deep breath and held it, steadying her hands and her gaze, and aimed for its right kneecap. She hit it dead center, and the thing's leg seemed to fold backward, threatening to topple the creature ass over teakettle, but it would not go down. Before it could fully right itself, she aimed for the left kneecap. Another direct hit, and when the thing's jeans tore and knee shattered, Kartya thought she saw a substantial fragment of bone go catapulting through the air like a haphazardly-thrown Frisbee. Again, the creature stayed on its feet.

Kit had considered the possibility of a break-in serious enough to warrant planting the revolver by her bedside, but not serious enough to provide her with extra bullets. The thing had swayed like a drunken sorority girl in too-high heels, but when it took another step, hesitant, but advancing all the same, Kartya knew she had to enact plan B.

Before she could change her mind, she rushed at the thing with calculated strides, coming to a stop before she reached the end of the damask-patterned runner. She bent before the creature, loath to take her eyes off it for even a moment, and took the corner of the rug up in her fingers. She knew she couldn't yank the runner hard enough to accomplish her end goal of toppling the creature over the bannister and initiating a freefall to the ground floor below, but she hoped to knock it off its feet enough to start that process. Luck was on her side, however, and the creature had already begun to fall off

balance, so that when she yanked the runner with a throaty grunt, its back was already pressed against the bannister, and the upward movement of the rug functioned to throw the creature's legs up and over its head in a graceless backflip over the railing.

It fell the distance of fourteen hardwood steps and crashed to the floor below. Flipping on the hall light, Kartya leaned over and peered into the abyss. The thing had already gotten up and was placing one splintered but still-operational leg onto the bottom step.

"You have got be kidding me," Kartya said out loud, scuttling back from the edge and heading for the guest bedroom.

Kartya had only fired the shotgun on one prior occasion, and even then she'd almost passed on the opportunity, preferring to refine her technique with the handgun. Before she exited the bedroom, she slipped her still-bare feet into a pair of red Victoria's Secret slippers, the left foot embroidered with the word 'naughty' in white stitching, and the right with the word 'nice.' It occurred to her that it would be immeasurably easier to fight Deadites without a full bladder, so she walked to the bathroom to relieve herself, pointing the shotgun at an opening in the bannister rails as she did,

counting herself lucky when she heard what sounded like a scuffle amongst the creatures at the bottom of the stairs, delaying their climb. She declined to flush, not sure if the noise would send their zombie-like brains into a frenzy, and stood at the threshold of the passage to the stairs. *What would Ash do*, she thought? She looked down at her feet.

"Time to put the 'naughty' foot forward," she said, forcing a half-grin, and stepped her left foot out into the hallway.

Kartya marched down the stairs, beholding the scene below her, and cocked the shotgun. There were three creatures, as she'd guessed from the equal number of shattered



windows, and they appeared more akin to Deadites than she'd have thought possible apart from being on-set for a taping of 'Ash vs Evil Dead.' They appeared to be undeterred by pain but incapable of reason, and they were unable to begin their onslaught of the second floor because they couldn't decide amongst the three of them who was going

to go up first. Kartya helped them out by blowing the arm off the shorter, stocky man on the left, who looked down to regard the blood and sinew hanging from his shoulder with serene detachment.

The thing to the right of the tall creature

had been female in her human form, and Kartya made the mistake of pulling the trigger as she moved down another step, throwing off her aim and catching the she-thing in the upper portion of the skull, blowing off the top half of its scalp and rocking the thing's head back on its neck. The head snapped back to its original position. Kartya recalled the catchphrase of the popular children's toy that refused to be bowled over: "Weebles wobble, but they don't fall down." With dark amusement, she wondered if anyone had tried to knock a Weeble down with a double barrel shotgun.

Kartya told herself to focus on this next shot. She aimed for the center of the tall one's head and in her nervousness whispered to herself, "boom."

The shot was absolute in its devastation, the shell forging a hole in the thing's skull like the point of a pastry-bag digging through a jelly-filled donut. Kartya was ecstatic to see that with its brain dislodged and projected somewhere into her living room, the Deadite-thing was finally incapable of pursuit.

So that's it, she thought. Although they don't appear human, they can be killed as such. The Necronomicon proposed three specific ways to release a possessed soul: a live burial, bodily dismemberment, or purification by fire. Thinking that she liked her house, and would rather not burn it to the ground, and that time did not permit the digging of two graves in frozen soil, Kartya re-cocked the shotgun. Wistfully, she pictured Ash's chainsaw hand. Bodily dismemberment would be a hell of a lot easier with her hero's weapon

of choice than by the excruciatingly slow process of fortuitous shotgun hits, but beggars can't be choosers.

Oblivious to the flecks of blood and brain matter peppering her body, Kartya closed the distance between her and the two evil things still standing. Needing to make it to the front door, she had to descend the stairs low enough to shoot the creatures sideways, preferably one to the right and one to the left. Getting within arm's reach of the things was not her idea of a good time, but neither was wasting two barrels of the shotgun into anywhere but their heads.

Kartya had properly determined the direction the things would be propelled in, but she wasn't lucky enough to replicate the angle of her shot to the taller creature's head. Though the things were knocked to the floor and out of her path, they were reanimating quicker than she would have liked. Grabbing her car keys from their hook, wishing she had time to find a coat, Kartya fled into the cold night in only her slippers, t-shirt, and sweatpants, the ash-grey shirt darkened in several places with the demon-things' blood.

Ten steps down the front walkway and the moon made a glorious reappearance, lighting Kartya's path to the garage and keeping her from tripping on a bizarre pile of items laid out at the base of her driveway. Allowing one second for curious inspection, Kartya stooped and beheld the needles, spoons, and a random Dunkin Donuts cup of what appeared to be coffee-tainted water. Then the water hissed, geysering up from the cup in an angry spout, and she reevaluated her

first interpretation.

“Crazed junkies or the infected victims of a science experiment gone wrong,” she said as she jogged for the garage. “Either way, no thanks.”

The garage door groaned in protest as Kartya flung it open. She unlocked the Jeep’s doors with a terse beep, praying the noise was not enough to attract the evil things. She surveyed the driveway and as much of the yard as was visible: nothing came for her. Hopping into the car, thinking she could be at the police station in less than five minutes, hoping this was quick enough to bring back reinforcements before the creatures could abandon her place for somewhere else, she threw the car into reverse and prepared to backup. The stout male thing and the lone female one took up the entirety of her rearview mirror.

“I don’t think so,” Kartya said, and flooded the gas. The things disappeared under the Jeep and Kartya flinched as she registered the sounds of splitting flesh and crunching bone. It sounded like someone had thrown a cantaloupe onto pavement from six stories up. Then, there was quiet.

Kartya sat in the driver’s seat, feeling her skin slide over the leather under its coating of gore. She had time for one profound exhalation before a figure blotted out the moonlight streaming through the passenger’s side window. As she regarded the reanimated corpse-woman with horror, the driver’s door opened and Kartya was pulled out of the Jeep by a pair of rough hands inserted under her armpits.

At the last second, before her legs had

fully passed the frame of the vehicle, she found purchase and launched herself backward. The thing hit the pavement again with a wet thump, and Kartya managed to disentangle herself from its clutches.

The house was too far so she ran for the garage, hoping to find a pair of gardening shears. Instead, her headlights illuminated a beautiful sight, the most beautiful sight she’d ever seen. She said a silent apology for ever nagging Kit about cleaning out the garage, packed full with junk from previous tenants, and sprinted for the chainsaw.

She flipped the start switch and placed the saw on the dusty floor, gripping the handlebar with her left hand.

“Here goes everything,” she said, and pulled the starter rope like she’d seen her father, Kit, and Ash all do on numerous occasions. The saw popped, but did not start.

“Dammit!” she yelled, as she watched the first of the possessed-things, which after its run-in with her Jeep had lost even a passing resemblance to a living human, approach the mouth of the garage. She jimmied a black lever on one side and tried the starter rope again. The saw came to life with a deafening rumble.

Kartya had been a vegetarian for eight years, so the extent of her experience with chopping flesh was limited. By the time she’d finished a violent vertical dismemberment of the stout man, she was so thoroughly covered in blood that she did not imagine the second creature’s vivisection could be any worse. It was coming for her, the female, and though Kartya almost slipped in the lake

of blood that covered the two-car garage from wall-to-wall, she was ready for it.

“I must say, you’re taller than Chuckles over there, so this could take a while,” Kartya told the demon-thing.

Kartya missed the creature’s hellish reply under the unforgiving tremors of the chainsaw.

Headlights announced the approach of a vehicle. Drenched from head to foot with an unfathomable amount of blood, Kartya was not curious as to the identity of the driver until the car passed the entrance to No Bottom Pond Road and started down the driveway. Wiping a film of blood from around her eyes, she was surprised to see Kit’s Volkswagen nearing the carnage.

When the car turned slightly and illuminated the blood-covered specter that was Kartya, Kit threw the car in park and was at her side in seconds.

“What the hell! What the—” his hands grasped her shoulders and he surveyed her wildly, looking for a wound.

“It’s ok it’s not my blood,” Kartya told him. She gestured behind her where four halves equaled two bodies.

Kit’s jaw dropped. He was incapable of speech.

“I’ll explain everything, but we should probably call the police at some point. I think they either took some sort of recreational drug that turned out to be far from recreational, or were infected with something that turned them into zombies. Or...Deadites.” She said these last words hesitantly, as if despite the very concrete evi-

dence of chaos behind her, Kit would think she’d lost her mind at the mention of the purportedly-fictional walking dead.

“Jesus, I can’t believe this. I’m so glad you’re alright. I pulled into the lot at work and said ‘what the hell am I doing?’ The night after the holiday, the night our friends get robbed, I shouldn’t have left you. I should have been here for you. So I called in sick from the parking lot and came home. You should have called me, Kartya. No, you should have called the police right away!”

Moved past the point of revulsion to Kartya’s blood-saturated state, Kit pulled her into a savage embrace. She let him hug her, still a bit shell shocked, then stepped back and took it all in.

The gore packed into her Jeep’s tire treads winked in the moonlight. The dismembered bodies glistened in wide pools of blood near the still-purring chainsaw. The pile of syringes and infected water sat in the foreground of the house’s smashed windows. The house itself, a looming skull with its two front teeth knocked out. Her eyes came back to settle on Kit, and she smiled.

“There was no time to call anyone. I didn’t have much in the way of options, didn’t really have time to come up with a plan. I had to rely on myself, I guess, and on my own tenacity. With a little inspiration from a certain groovy guy.” She paused, wiped a smear of blood from under her cheek, and continued:

“But I’m ok. And everything’s going to be ok. Now come here and gimme some sugar, baby.” ❖

JUMP

BY JANET AMALIA WEINBERG & MARGARET KARMARZIN

I was what you'd probably call an old lady. I also happened to be a physicist—of some renown, if I say so myself. At least until I got kicked out of the physics department. That's what it felt like when they made me retire. They gave me an office, continued use of the lab, and the title, "professor emeritus," but I still went through a bout of the blues; it's natural to feel hurt and angry if all you see is what you've lost. Then one day I realized what I had gained: liberation! I was free to work on what I wanted and no longer had to care what anyone thought.

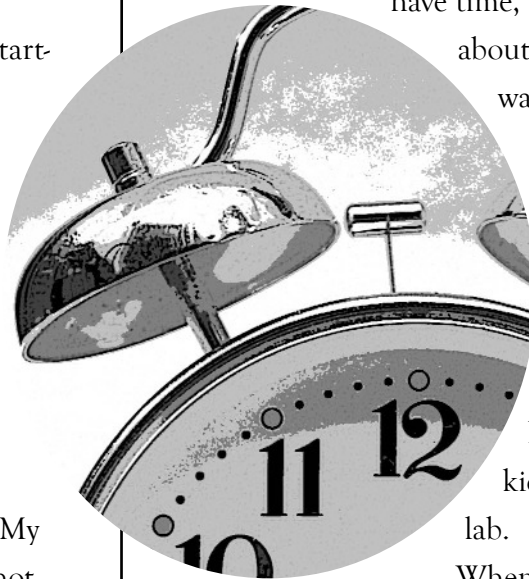
The idea that multiple realities could co-exist simultaneously with ours had always intrigued me. Unfortunately, back when I started out, kids who dropped acid may have talked about other versions of reality but not respected scientists, and I didn't want to risk my career on it. But once I retired, I no longer *had* a career and could finally tackle the problem. It took years of concentrated effort but I succeeded in detecting what I believed was a link to a parallel realm of existence.

No one knew what I was working on. My colleagues—if you can call them that—were not interested in my ideas anymore. They probably thought a shrinking, wrinkled woman with thinning gray hair and some memory loss didn't have any. It was just as well; if they knew what I was up to they probably would have laughed.

I tried not to let their attitude bother me. When I was their age, I had regarded retired professors with the same disrespect and realized that young people simply can't imagine the depth and breadth of understanding that can come with experience. But one time, after being patronized once too often, I made an appointment with Patel, the guy who had replaced me as chair of physics, to show him what a woman my age could do. When I knocked on his door, he yanked it open and snarled, "Don't you remember? I *told* you I had a meeting." Then he called over his shoulder as he hurried off, "When I have time, I want to hear all about your nephew at... was it Brown?"

I fumed and wished him into a black hole but later, realized how lucky I was; if he had seen my work he might have kicked me out of his lab.

When I retired, Patel took over the office I'd enjoyed as chair of the department and I was granted a windowless room, about the size of a large supply closet, crammed with two work areas and a couch. And I had to share it with a graduate student. A student! It



was an insult but I made the best of it and was soon looking forward to afternoon breaks with my office-mate, Lisa. Since I had stopped teaching and had no children of my own, I missed being around the energy and optimism of youth—which Lisa had plenty of. I'd grab a coffee, she'd fill up her water bottle and off we'd go for a lively stroll around the quad or sometimes we'd just hang out on the couch and talk.

Mostly, Lisa worried about what to do with her life—career, men, babies—the typical challenges for young people, and I listened with the ear of a mentor. One day she turned to me and asked what made me become a physicist. I hesitated, but decided to tell her. “My grandmother used to tell me stories about an invisible world. ‘I can almost see it,’ she'd say. ‘It's right here, overlapping ours.’ The family thought she was loony but when I was nine, I decided to become the kind of scientist who could search for it.”

“Surely they were just stories?” Her tone said, “You couldn't be *that* nuts—could you?” and made me defensive.

“That doesn't rule out that gran might have been on to something,” I said. “In fact, with the current interest in the Many-Worlds Interpretation, physics may finally be catching up to her.”

Lisa looked surprised and said, “You mean that under the nose of Patel, famous for dismissing any notion of alternate realities as New Age nonsense, you're looking for another reality?” Instead of ridiculing me, as I expected, she seemed delighted by the incongruity. “He'd shit a camel if he knew,” she said and added something that really touched me. “I'm honored you told me. Truly.”

Not long after that, I was in my office, fine-

tuning my equipment. It was around midnight—normally, I only worked on my apparatus at night when no one was around.

Testing one of the receptors for the umpteenth time, I flipped the switch and a shimmery area, approximately four feet by five, appeared in the central space of the room. I'd seen that before and identified it as a portal to the parallel realm I was seeking. Although I hadn't actually created the link, I *was* able to reliably detect it. Everything I'd already shoved in and out of it—organic as well as inorganic, had come back in apparent good shape. Now it was *my* turn.

Unfortunately, if I wanted to return, the equipment would have to remain set up during my absence. The shimmering connection between the two planes would also be visible but I hoped my lack of importance would keep people out of my office. Lisa, of course, might see it but I trusted her and left her a note asking her not to worry or interfere.

It was time. I walked up to the rippling area, took a deep breath and stepped in. There was a deafening buzz. Every cell in my body seemed to vibrate and spin out of control. It was like being ripped apart by a giant force-field. I thought I was going to die.

But I didn't. And when the spinning stopped I found myself in a windowless room about the size of my own office. A strange apparatus sat in one corner. Aside from that, the room was bare.

I cracked the door open and saw a large unlit physics lab, similar to the lab adjacent to my own office. Even in the dark I could see that the workbenches and equipment, though recognizable, were all oddly different from what I was

used to.

I trembled with amazement. Had I done it? Really made the jump to a parallel reality? I was afraid to believe it but what else could I think? I was imagining my old gran grinning and giving me a ‘right-on’ salute when my insides heaved and started spinning again. Overwhelmed with vertigo, I stumbled back to the shimmery area and, after a long wrenching moment, found myself on the couch in my own office. I had enough presence of mind to discard the note I’d left for Lisa but it took hours to recover from the nausea and fright. All the while, I kept asking myself, *Was I really in another world? Or did I dream it?*

That night I went to bed with a dull headache but woke, convinced the experience was too real to have been a dream. And I was raring to go again. I figured the shock of entry would diminish as I got used to it but, to be on the safe side, decided to take anti-nausea meds before the next jump. The opportunity came the following Monday. Everyone in the department was attending a nano-materials workshop in the conference room and the lab was deserted.

I set up the equipment in my office, left a note again for Lisa, and entered the portal. As expected, the transition was easier. I found myself back in the windowless room, only this time the door wouldn’t open. I fiddled with the knob as quietly as I could but someone must have noticed. I heard footsteps, then a key turning in the lock....

I braced myself.

The door was yanked open and a figure stood back-lit in glaring light.

“What are you doing in here?” a male voice boomed.

“Dr. Patel!?” I gasped. The man looked just like him, but the Patel I knew probably would have scolded me; this one sounded relieved to find me. And his clothes! The Patel I knew was the tweed jacket-pressed khaki slacks type. This one had on a velvety-soft kimono jacket and comfortable looking green bell-bottom pants!

“Uh, I uh-” I stammered.

“We’ve been waiting for you!” he said as he hastened me through the lab, down a hall and into a conference room where I got an even bigger shock.

I met myself!—or an alternate version of myself. As I entered the room, a woman who looked just like me, only more attractive and full of pizzazz, was coming through another door. I stared, speechless. The five or six other people present seemed just as stunned.

The man who looked like Patel broke the silence. “Oh! Now I see.” He paused as if to collect himself. “We were sort of expecting this. But still... amazing!”

“This is Dr. Marty Kravitz,” he said introducing the other woman. “And you are?”

I could barely speak but managed to whisper, “Dr. Martha Kravitz.”

The Patel-look-alike suggested the meeting adjourn, “So these two women can have time to get used to each other.”

The group broke up and, still dazed, I followed the woman to her office—a prestige-palace compared to the dump I worked in.

We sat, looking at each other. Marty had my physical features—the same Slavic face and chunky body only she seemed full of life compared to me and had the relaxed glow my girlfriends and I used to call “that just laid look.” It

had been ages since I'd felt like that. Her long silver hair was loosely gathered in a chignon—I wore mine in a bun—and she had on slacks and a kimono shirt that looked soft and comfortable.

The first thing I said was, “Are you really real?”

She smiled. “As real as you.”

It's one thing to mathematically demonstrate the existence of multiple realities, but quite another to actually *be* in one. And to meet someone who seems to be me but isn't...I wondered if I was having a breakdown or losing my mind.

“Me too.” she said, as if reading my mind. “It's unnerving.”

It was like looking in a mirror and hearing your image talk back to you. “Are you also a physicist?” I asked.

“Think about it,” she said. “If you and I are as alike as we seem, we've probably even been working on the same problem.”

“Multiple realities?”

She nodded.

“Did you create the portal?” I asked. When she nodded I said, “We're not totally alike then; I merely detected it.”

“The whole physics lab was involved,” she said.

I asked if her colleagues still respected her and could see from her reaction that the question made no sense to her. “Still?” she asked.

I felt my bitterness but this was too thrilling a moment to get caught up in it. “So show me,” I said, all excited. “I can't wait to see your work.”

“You mean on the portal?” she said, as if it wasn't important. “Actually, I'm not so into that anymore.”

My mouth must have dropped open because she added. “I still check in at the lab and do some work there but only when I feel like it. I'm more into working on a book now. A memoir.”

Then she put her hand on my shoulder and said she'd show me around.

She took me through an area of college bars and cafés. I felt close to her, as if I'd always known her. Suddenly she turned to me and said, “I feel close to you, as if I've always known you.”

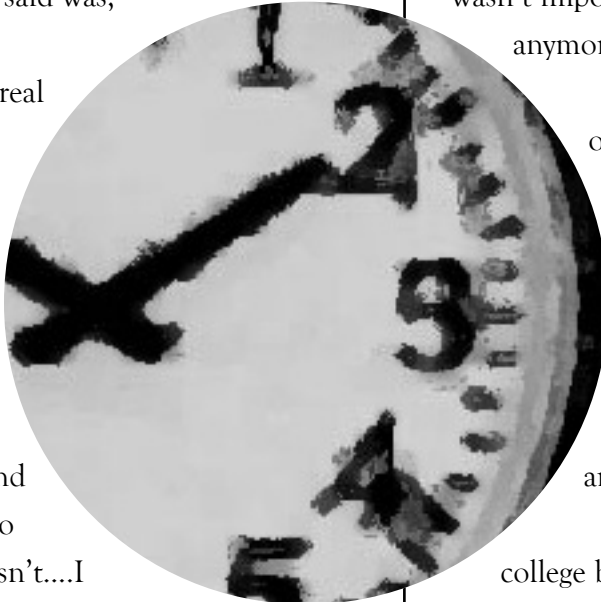
That gave me chills. It was like having a twin, only more so.

“Well, as your twin,” she said, “do I have the right to ask why you seem so...” She paused as if looking for the least offensive word. “... so diminished.”

“I'm getting old,” I said, “so I'm getting smaller.” I was angry that she'd made me say it. “You lose your work, your health, maybe even your mind. And then you die.”

“It sounds like you don't see any value in all that,” she said. I thought she was kidding but she wasn't. Apparently, in Marty's world, the ability to face loss of one's self without fear was considered a transcendent achievement, a way to develop depth and power.

While I mulled that over, we came to a café



and Marty suggested we go in. Lace curtains, white linens, chandeliers—it was very Viennese so I wasn't surprised to hear harpsichord music in the background. Marty chose a window table and ordered for us while I looked out at the passing scene.

A group of teenaged girls walked by. They all had white hair!

Marty smiled. "It's 'in' to look older."

"That's funny," I said, "the young here look old, or try to, and if you're an example, the old look young."

She appeared confused again so I explained that I'd meant she seemed full of life.

After a moment, she asked if my world associated vitality only with youth. When I nodded, she said. "Your world must be a terrible place to grow old."

Our order arrived— a pink drink that reminded me of chai and pastry filled with a creamy marzipan-type filling. I was enjoying the tastes when I noticed how worried she looked and asked what was wrong.

"Your world disturbs me," she said. "My guess is, Mid-Lifers run it without much input from Elders; it must be way out of balance."

"Mid-Lifers?"

"People in the building-careers-and-families stage," Marty explained. "They get a lot done, but they're driven by their hormones and the poor things are always pushing onward and upward, needing more and better. The stress! It makes me tired just to think of it."

"But what about it?" I asked.

"That's fine and right for that stage of life but our own stage is more about acceptance and compassion. And without the wisdom of the long-range perspective of Elders, I hate to think what your world might do with our discovery. The military would probably take it over."

Marty paused then shook her head. "I will of course need to discuss this with my colleagues, but I know they'll agree: we can't risk connecting with such an immature world."

I understood that meant that I couldn't keep coming back.

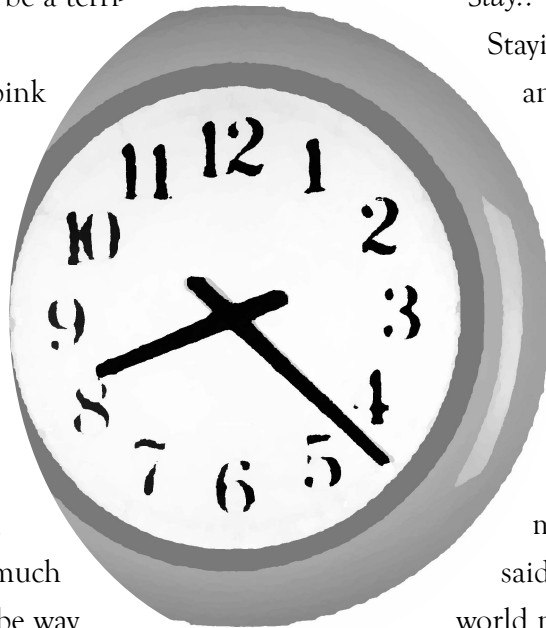
"Not until your world can appreciate Elderhood." She paused and her eyes lit up. "But you could stay," she said.

Stay?! That set off an upheaval inside me.

Staying there wasn't like moving to another country, it was about jumping to a another world. I imagined life at home—the lab, the people who ignored me. It would only grow worse as I got older. On the other hand, I'd spent my whole life there - my friends, my home, it was all there.

Again I wondered if I could trust my mind to see clearly when Marty said, "You probably see your own world more clearly now than ever."

It was time to go; I was uneasy about leaving my apparatus exposed too long in my office. Marty promised to keep the portal open another three days to give me time to decide and we returned to the windowless room that contained the portal. I felt a terrible sense of loss as I stepped through the inter-dimensional doorway. Then Marty called, "Three days!" and flipped



the switch.

I must have blanked out because when I came to, I was sitting up on the couch in my office and Patel—my Patel, and a man in a uniform had their backs to me and were addressing a crowd outside my door. Empowered by my experience in Marty's world, I walked right up to them and asked what was going on.

Both of them spun around and looked surprised to see me.

The uniformed guy recovered first. He grabbed my arm and barked, "Who let *you* in?"

I looked straight at him till he dropped my arm but he moved in aggressively too close when I turned to ask Patel what was going on.

Patel sputtered but managed to tell me that a strange instrument had been discovered in my office.

"It seems to be generating an area of unexplained, pulsing oscillation," he said. "Word got out and now the army is taking over." He shot the other man an outraged look. "That's Colonel Clark."

I glanced from one to the other and said, "How dare you interfere with my work!"

Clark paid no attention to what I'd said and told me I would need to be debriefed, then added, "Even if you know nothing about it."

'Know nothing'? My mind was racing. The rest of my life was about to be decided.

I could read the man's face; he was going to confiscate my equipment, block off the area and install a military presence. I'd be barred from the lab and treated as a doddering fool.

My mind raced. If I went to Marty's world I'd be respected. It was possible that I'd meet alternate versions of everyone I cared about. But I wasn't a hundred percent certain her world was real. There *was*, however, one thing, I could be certain of. Whether it was or it wasn't real, my life would be better there.

"Just a minute," I said with authority I hadn't felt in years. "I am responsible for this!"

The look on Patel's face was priceless: confusion, dismay, disbelief, anger.

"You?" he said.

All eyes were on me.

Colonel Clark elbowed Patel aside, pointed to my sensor and snarled, "What do you know about that?"

My age worked in my favor now; they would not suspect me capable of what I was about to do. "I'll show you how it operates," I said with grandmotherly sweetness. I re-positioned the device so I could discreetly set the controls to "auto-destruct"—an option I had wisely programmed into the mechanism. Then I backed slowly towards the portal.

Clark grew suspicious. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

Patel was hovering anxiously.

The portal was less than three feet from me. Suddenly, I pointed straight ahead and yelled, "Oh my God!"

It was the corniest old trick but it worked. And while the two men, and everyone else turned to stare in the indicated direction, I whirled around and jumped. ❖

END TRANSMISSION