

# BURIED TREASURE

The second winner of our Really Very Extremely Short Fiction Contest

BY JOEY STONE

METROPOLIS

**JENNY PICKED THE BOTTLE UP** off the porch and refilled my glass, splashing in a little water from a pitcher.

"I've always hated whiskey," I said. She slipped in a few ice cubes.

"There's not much left. You want to get some wine?"

"I've got some change," I told her. "We'll count it up, see what we've got."

"In a minute." She leaned back against the couch cushions and lit a cigarette, sighing. We watched a sliver of moon creep up the night sky. Near Jenny's elbow, the front door cracked open and two little blue eyes peeked out.

"Go inside, mister," Jenny said. The boy whined in protest.

"Not now," she told him. "Go. Get inside." He complained a little louder, but pulled the door shut, leaving us alone again. It was late, the street was empty, but a rushing sound of traffic on the nearby interstate washed over our houses.

Like an ocean, I sometimes said. Doesn't it sound almost like the ocean?

"That doesn't sound like any ocean," Jake would say.

But my imagination clung to those almost soothing waves. At night, noises were strange, often frightening, and it was hard to sleep. I'd be about to drift off, when dogs across the street would start barking, then yelping in pain.

They cried for hours, it seemed. Once, I dozed on the couch in front of the television and was woken by a rapid fire of sharp, cracking sounds. Like fireworks, but not fireworks.

"Do you ever hear things at night?" I asked Jenny.

"No." She looked out at the row of darkened houses, her gaze reaching through them to some unknown place.

It was quiet for a while, and then Jake came outside with a glass. Jenny stared ahead. He lit a joint and started it going around, flung an arm over his wife's shoulders and pulled her

tight into the crook of his elbow.

We passed back and forth. From my chair I saw Jenny lean into Jake and smile. She started giggling and rubbing her eyes, where tears leaked out. I thought of water breaking along the shores of the bay.

We kept on with the bottle and lit some candles. Jenny moved out of the shadows to point out a little dimple beside her left eye, a souvenir from some stray cat.

"Crazy little bitch," she said. "It hung on to my face, almost blinded me." She tossed her cigarette into the dirt yard and I saw its glowing arc hang in the air for several seconds.

I lifted up the tail of my shirt to show off a long white scrawl down my right side.

"My stomach," I explained. "A valve closed up when I was just a baby. The mark grew with me — it used to be just this big," I said, holding a space of about two inches between my thumb and forefinger.

"That's not shit," Jake said, laughing. "You guys." Jenny and I looked at each other. He took a long puff on a cigarette and blew out three lazy smoke rings, running his fingers over a round pockmark on his chin, about the size of a pencil eraser.

"At the hospital they pulled a rock out of here with tweezers, a big green emerald," he said. "My mom had a wicked backhand." He spat on the floor. "Doctor held it up, looked at it. Everyone looked at Mom."

Jake paused, looked out at the sky with a twisted grin. Stars winked back, diamonds

in a velvet drape.

"So that's where that went!" she says, and holds out her hand. She's laughing, and the doctor starts laughing, and he gives it to her."

Jenny blew out the candles.

"Top that one," Jake said.

*Joey Stone is the pen name of a Tampa writer and photographer who draws on*

**SEE METROPOLIS P.8**



JOEY STONE

### METROPOLIS FROM P.7

*life experience to create art imbued with personal significance. This is her first published short story.*

**Editor's note:** There is something very immediate about this gem of a short story that puts the reader right on the porch almost in real time with these three friends on a lazy night somewhere in the city. The narrative freezes a moment, almost like a photograph or short film, showing mostly the surfaces of the characters, so that you must surmise their true thoughts from the subtext.

In this story, the subtext carries sadness and pain, and hints at so much going on beneath the surface of the meandering dialogue. This is the quality that gives the story an authentic feel and artistic voice. It's

in the way Jenny stares through the darkened houses nearby to some unknown place, the way she giggles and yet leaks tears when her husband draws her to him. It's in the way a childhood scar grows with the narrator, an old injury that gets bigger rather than fading away. It's in the way Jake laughs when telling a painful story that he has fashioned into a joke with a punchline that doesn't quite ring true. I was touched by the dreaminess of the narrator and the way she imagines and clings to bits of beauty amid the ugliness around her. She hears soothing ocean waves in the sound of traffic on the nearby highway, and sees diamonds and velvet in the sky above the dirt yard. She is like a hopeful prospector digging for treasures buried in a junk heap.

—SUSAN F. EDWARDS

### DON'T PANIC FROM P.7

West, the U.N. or Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture, does something soon. The people being driven from their homes are farmers who just missed planting season. Food production in the area is going to plummet and thousands more will starve to death.

The government of Sudan, of course, denies supporting the Janjaweed. Observers know that they're lying because Darfur villages are being attacked from the air, which means that either Sudan's government is attacking or the Janjaweed are using flying camels.

In a clumsy attempt to get people off his government's case, Sudan's Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail recently claimed that the

government was cracking down on the Janjaweed and that its activities had been "reduced by 80 percent." I guess that means that instead of driving people from their homes at a rate of 1.1 million per year, they've slowed it down to about 200,000. That Mustafa is a real humanitarian.

Despite all of the "never again" talk accompanying the recent 10th anniversary of the Rwanda genocide, the United Nations and United States are doing little to stop the Darfur disaster. The U.N. did, however, add insult to injury by appointing a Sudanese government official to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. It's too bad that bitter irony won't cure the world's ills, because the U.N. produces plenty of that.

ANDSHENGCREATIVELDAVING.COM