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From the Editor

Andrew Rothery

Change.
For many people, it is the only thing in this world that is really consistent. I am not one of those people, but I do have to admit that a lot of it sure does seem to happen a lot of the time. It happens so fast, on occasion, that nobody can keep up.

Take, for example, what happened this summer. Concordia became a University. The old quarter system was replaced by semesters. Weber Hall was completely and drastically remodeled.

Any one of those changes can be dealt with easily. Some people may even be able to handle two or all three of them. But Concordia’s changes go further than just that. People graduated, transferred, and left for other reasons. They were replaced, to a small extent, by a new group of freshmen and transfer students. Each change in the student body is reflected in the basic feel of the campus. Who knows how many years go by before a former student can come back and barely recognize his or her surroundings?

Many of the pieces in this issue of The Promethean deal with change to some extent. The winner of the short story contest, Heidi Wilke, features one of the most drastic and more permanent forms of change, but I’ll let you read that for yourself.

A magazine like this does not come about through the efforts of a lone person. Thanks go to my staff, whose names are listed to the right, for the effort they put into helping select the contents of this issue. Special thanks go to Dr. Wright, who, on the first day of the semester called me into his office and asked if I would like to be the editor. Hopefully, his faith in my skill has been rewarded.

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First Mission

Jeffery J. Gordon

I’ll never forget the old man at the bar.
I was a young kid, just out of the academy and heading on my first maneuvers as a military pee-on. Because of my college education, they put me through officer school and I’d eventually get to be a flyboy, but right now I was what was commonly referred to as a 90-day wonder. Anyway, I only had about an hour before I had to check in for final departure and I felt like having something to drink. Since the barracks were on the third planet in the binary system Sirius, a planet with about one-third the gravity of home, it was not uncommon to see old geezers pretty much everywhere. The sensation of being in a lower gravity environment was similar to that of being submerged in water, the stress on the joints and bones was lessened.

So I didn’t make much of the old guy sitting at the far end of the bar. He was a nice enough old fart. Biologically he was probably around 85 or so but he fit the bill of one of the older cryo-monkeys that frequented the joint. In the old days, before hyper-dimensional travel, the military used cryogenic techniques for long space trips. Since they could only travel at near the speed of light, it took years to get to the nearest star systems. The only way to send crews on missions was to freeze them into suspended animation, essentially stopping the aging process, and reviving them when they arrived at their destination. The result was that these guys ended up living hundreds of years after going on multiple missions. They didn’t look any older than the traditional geezers; what tipped you off was how much they talked. They could rely on centuries of travel, not decades, and from the sounds of this guy, he was one experienced S.O.B.

I took a seat a few places away. He had been talking the ear off of the bartender when he spied me at the corner, sipped his drink, and let in with one helluva story. I admit I didn’t want to listen at first, figuring that if he was a cryo-monkey, the story would be military in nature, and after the last 90 days, hearing someone else’s recollections of military protocol didn’t seem too inviting. It only took a moment for me to change my mind. “First mission?” he asked me.

“Me? Yea, first mission.” I stumbled with the response, knowing it would lead to an inevitable rendering of his first trip into space.

“First time. God, that brings back memories. It’s been, oh hell about 1,100 or so since my first trip.”

“1,100?” I asked, realizing that he was indeed a cryo-monkey, but still somewhat astonished by the alleged age. “That would have had to have been one of the first missions out of the system?”

“It was. I was 22 when we pulled out. They froze us. The first team to ever go through with a cryo-flight. We didn’t have fancy hyper-dimensional travel back then. It was all a big gamble. Didn’t even know if we could be thawed properly.”

“How long were you frozen?” I asked, then paused, realizing he had gone through this process more than once. “I mean, the first time?”

“15 years. The system was 12.6 light years out, and back then we could hit the high side of 95% of light. We couldn’t fold space like these new ships, but we hauled pretty good for old crates. Back then the military was real big on searching for signs of intelligent life. We figured we weren’t alone. Anyway, we’d been searching for nearly a century when we started picking up erratic radio signals from a gas giant in that system. Now, gas giants can create radio signals within their own atmospheres under the right conditions but it also might have been a signature from some sentient life form. There was no way to tell without exploration, so they decided to send us to do a minimum of three years of research into the phenomena.”

“It must have been exciting back then.”

“Are you kidding? The mission was a bust.”

“Radio signals turn out to be nothing?” I asked.

“Atmospheric static. But that’s the tip of the iceberg.” No, the real story was about what happened to this greenhorn kid who, just like me, was on his first mission. I’ll never forget that kid. His name was Christopher Jessigs. He was an
ensign. Good kid. Not too bright, but with a good heart, y'know?"

I acknowledged I did with a quick nod and dug my heels in for the long story.

"Now the interesting thing about Jessigs," the old man continued, "was his lungs. It might seem odd at first, but this guy's fantastic set of windbags changed the whole course of the mission. You see, we found that big gas giant and quickly realized that the radio signals were just an atmospheric fluke. It seemed like a helluva long trip to make to be so quickly disappointed. That's when we started to look at the other planets."

"There were other planets?"

"Oh hell yes. And on one in particular, we hit paydirt."

"Whaddya mean?"

"One planet was different. I mean really different. It had a dense atmosphere, life-sustaining temperatures and no shortage of water. Hell, it was damn near completely covered with water. Long story short, we decided to investigate it instead of wasting any more time on the gas giant, and that's where Jessigs came in handy."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, the guy lived in the tropical regions back home and had spent most of his time in and around the ocean. Anyway, this guy used to go deep sea pearl diving. Not only could he hold his breath for ten minutes or so, but he could handle intensified atmospheric pressure better than anything short of a blowfish. Now the atmosphere of this planet was breathable, it was just a little dense. We went without pressure suits or anything figuring why wear the damn cumbersome bastards unless it was absolutely necessary. Everything was fine at first but after an hour most of us were doubled up with the bends. Hurt like hell."

"So that's where this kid came in?"

"Uh huh. They ran a check on everyone on the ship and found that Jessigs had lots of diving experience. They thawed him, briefed him, and before he knew what he was doing, he was smack dab in the middle of a little desert on a mostly water planet."

"He could handle the atmosphere?"

"A lot better than we could. The first time down we brought him back into the ship within about an hour and he was fine. Didn't even faze him. Slowly but surely we increased his exposure time and in the course of a few days he was able to stay out for up to three hours at a time without any negative effects. It was about that time that things really got interesting."

The old man was beginning to spice up his story with interpretive hand motions. It reminded me of old times when camp counselors would tell ghost stories around the fire at night.

"Well, we'd sent out a couple of probes, to do some digital mapping, and not too far from where we were putting Jessigs through his paces we came across some geographical anomalies."

"Like what exactly?" I queried, begging the question.

"Like cities. Good sized cities. Primitive stuff, adobe style, but still cities. What's more, we could discern some definite inhabitants."

"You mean you guys found an intelligent life form? First trip out?"

"Well, we found a life form, but they were hardly intelligent. They looked a great deal like we do, a little shorter, and with the oddest colored eyes you ever say, but intelligent they weren't."

"But they had cities. That's something. That's when you sent the Jessigs kid in to investigate?"

"Not right away. We used probes and such to gather as much information as possible. Realize now, they had a spoken and written language that we had to learn about, they had customs we needed to be aware of, lots of stuff. We couldn't just send some kid in there with a military jumpsuit on and expect good results."

"But how could you learn the nuances of the language from probes?"

"We couldn't. After a while we realized some abductions would be necessary."
"You took some of them into the ship?"
"Had to. Especially for the language. That was a tuffy. But the abductions turned out to be a big breakthrough."
"In what way?"
"We ran all sorts of tests on them and pretty much learned enough about them to fill a library. We didn't find much good about them. They weren't particularly healthy. They ate way too much. They almost all had a venereal disease of some kind or another. They were terribly aggressive. And they were phenomenally superstitious. They could grasp scientific concepts okay, technology was definitely in their future, but they lacked wisdom. Anything that happened was the whim of a god. That's where we felt we could have an impact."
"You used their own superstition against them?"
"Exactly. They never saw any of us on the ship, but the technology we had must have made us seem like gods to them. Now, as a culture, they did two things well."
"They ate and they screwed, you already told me."
"Okay, they did four things well. They also gossipped and speculated. Anyway, it gave us an idea. Every abductee told us the same basic story. They thought their abduction was a sign from their god that something was about to happen."
"A sign that something was going to happen? What did they think was going to happen?"
"The most popular speculation was the end of the world. Never met so many damn cynics in my whole damn life. Not one of them we talked to felt they wouldn't see their world destroyed within their lifetime. And as violent as those little idiots were, it wasn't that hard to believe. Hell, if they've ever developed technology we're all in trouble."
"So what did you do?"
"It went against all of our ethical dogma, but we felt it was necessary." The old man paused, sipping his drink and appearing to drift off."
"What? What was necessary?"
"We started a little rumor."

"A little rumor? What, exactly?"
"We told a couple of the abductees that a messenger was being sent. A messenger that would walk among them, teach them, sort of be a guide for their consciences."
"And that was Jessigs?"
"Yea, that was Jessigs. With our little abductees spreading the word with the natives, it was time to drop the kid right in the heart of downtown backwardsville. He was a good kid. A nice kid. Little naive, but nobody's perfect, right?"
"How did it go? Did the rumor idea work?"
"Yes and no. We definitely he the nail on the head as far as the gossip idea went. Everyone knew Jessigs was coming. What we didn't consider was the natives' unique capacity to, how would you say, fill in the gaps."
"What do you mean, fill in the gaps?"
Well, apparently facets of their experiences that they couldn't explain they would sort of speculate on and essentially fill in he gaps. In other words, they told stories."
"That was a bad thing?"
"Sort of. By the time we put Jessigs down amongst them, they figured he was some sort of big political figure, like a king. They thought he was there to run for office and make their lives better."
"Well, in their defense, wasn't it your intention to make their lives better? Whether they wanted your help or not?"
"We struggled with those same thoughts. But for obvious reasons he couldn't stay for very long. We had already used up six months of our trip studying them, and we were only going to stay for a maximum of three years. Nevertheless, he did infiltrate the native population and made friends. Unfortunately, he could never pick up their language, but we got around that. We programmed one of our translators for their language so that he could communicate. They'd speak to him in their language, the translator would convert it to ours, Jessigs would respond and his speech would be electronically converted into their language. It scared the hell out of the natives the first couple of times."
"What ended up happening?"
"They killed him."
"My God! Are you kidding?"
"No, they killed him. Or at least they tried to kill him. Hanged the poor kid. Damn sad too. All we were trying to do was tell them to stop
screwing around and getting diseases, stop cheating, fighting, and killing. They showed real promise; we were just trying to help. And they tried to kill him.”

“Then he didn’t die?”

“No, but he damn near did. We couldn’t trace his location electronically because he had damaged his military ID tag. Back then we didn’t put chips in our boys’ heads so we could know where they were all the time; we had dog tags. Normally, they sent out a continuous signal let the home ship know where we were at all times, but, of course, Jessigs had used his to pry open a stubborn rations box a few days earlier and busted that part off. Anyway, we were able to find him and bring him back to sick bay. He hadn’t died, just passed out because of the atmosphere. He was in it too long, even for us, and just up and passed out. Three days later he was in good spirits as usual, but by that time we were properly pissed. We brought the main ship close over that city and just fired the lasers off the port bow in all directions. It must have looked like the biggest lightning storm those little cowards ever saw.”

“You didn’t kill any of them, did you?”

“No. We just put the fear of God into them.”

“You head back for home after that?”

“Pretty much, but Jessigs had lost that tag and the captain wanted it back. In retrospect, it was silly to return for it, but the captain felt it would be a bad idea to leave any advanced technology behind. I think that the technology we had showed with that laser barrage was a little more life-changing, but he didn’t want anything physical left behind. Of course, when we went back this time, we were in full pressure suits and armed to the teeth. I’ll never forget the look of absolute fear the natives showed when they saw Jessigs again.”

“Did you get the tag back?”

“Yea, we got it back.” The old man stopped and reached into his pocket and retrieved a small silverish medallion. “I thought I’d show you this in case you doubted me.”

He handed it to me and I turned it over to read the inscription. I could see where the tail end of it was broken off. On the other side, in typical military last name first name last fashion was the very scratched but still discernible, partial name Jessigs, Christ.

“Well I’ll be damned,” I said to the old man. “Wonder if they remember the kid?”

“Doubt it,” the old man said as he climbed down from the chair.

He placed a withered old hand on my shoulder, retrieved the ID tag with his free hand and slipped it back in his pocket. It was then that I noticed that on both of his wrists were identical scars about a half inch in diameter.

“Where’d those come from?” I asked as he headed out of the bar.

“First mission,” came his sardonic reply.
November 1992: Washington, D.C.

Karen L. Morris

When your name is read, there will be a reverberation in the thin, late autumn sunlight, like the echo that follows the scream of a jet or the dust that settles in the first seconds after the firebomb in the Saigon cafe, before the girl delivering fish starts to scream.

It began with the rattling of a black, beaded curtain hung in the doorway at Crazy Jim's. a May night, soft stars like moths against the screen smoke, green eyes, your fingers on the Gibson's strings

It ends here:

a cold black wall your name.
A Dream

Jennifer Galloway

We got into my big red jeep and drove off with a roar, with the radio blasting out the Greatful Dead, Ann and I both thought of the 1/2 hour drive out to Witches Castle. The rain started to come down hard and the sky turned to a dark grey color.

"Oh great! My gas tank is almost on empty and it's raining outside," I said in a worried voice.

"Do you think that we will have enough to get to the party?" asked Ann.

"Yeah, I think so. If I see a gas station I'll stop. But don't worry about it," I said with confidence.

We continued down a dark dirt road just five miles from the freeway. The rain came down harder, and it was hard to see where we were going. I saw in the distance a huge semi truck ahead on the dirt road.

I swerved to the side to keep from getting hit.

"That's odd to see a huge semi on this dirt road, isn't it?" Ann asked.

"Yeah, but once I get close enough, I'm gonna pass him." As I said it, we both started to laugh. As we got close to the semi, I pushed my gas pedal as fast and as hard as I could. "Look, I buried the needle," I said with pride.

Ann said, "Oh my gosh--look out! He's gonna hit you. The truck is gonna hit you!"

I swerved to the side to keep from getting hit. The problem was the road was too narrow. We could feel the jeep slip off the side of the road and slide into the ditch. With a big jump the car came to a stop. Both of us sat in shock because of what had just happened. I looked back to see where the semi had gone, but I couldn't see with all the tree branches in the way.

"Ann, are you okay?" I asked.

Ann replied, "Yes, I'm just a little shook up, that's all."

"All right, I'm gonna get out to see where the semi went," I said as I hopped out of my jeep.

I crawled through the opening in the trees and brush my jeep had made. I could see that the semi had pulled to the side of the road with its hazard lights on. I walked up to where the semi had stopped to see what was going on. When I saw that the driver's door was open, my heart started to pound with fear. I peeked in to see if the driver was there.

Nothing.

A cold chill ran down my spine as I walked around the huge truck to see where the driver had gone. Again, nothing. I stood in the middle of the dirt road in the pouring rain looking into an empty truck.

I ran back to the jeep to tell Ann this weird story. When I got there, Ann was nowhere to be seen. I started to get sick to my stomach and then broke into tears. I got in the jeep to get out of the rain and to think things over. With tears streaming down my face, I decided to go back to the semi to see if Ann had tried to find me. As I started back in the direction of the truck, I felt an eerie feeling come over me. I spun around only to see a big burly man with a strange beard covering the lower portion of his face. He held Ann with a knife to her throat! She lay there, limp in his arms. Then, suddenly, an annoying ring went off, and I woke up from my nap. I peered at the clock: 6:15 flashed brightly. "Oh crap," I said as I noticed Ann pulling into the driveway. I jumped into my clothes and met her at the front door. We decided I should drive because I had more gas. As we drove down the old dirt road to Witches Castle, I told Ann about my dream. Ann said, "Don't worry, Jennifer! Nothing like that ever really happens."

Suddenly, both of us looked up, only to see something that made us both shudder. A semi truck was pulling onto the old dirt road.
The Night I Died

Heidi Wilke

"Loud isn't it? Want to go somewhere quiet where we can talk?" J.R. asked.
"Sure, I'll go get the keys. Meet me at the car," I shouted over the music and the chatter.
I squeezed through the people at the party, found J.R.'s coat with his keys and headed for the door. Holly, my best friend, stopped me before I left and told me it wouldn't be a good idea for J.R. or myself to drive since we had both been drinking. I gave her a hug and told her not to worry, we were just going to sit in the car and talk until we sobered up. She made me promise

It wouldn't be a good idea for J.R. or myself to drive since we had both been drinking.

and said she's see me in the morning.

Driving away, I told J.R. what Holly said. He told me he wasn't drunk and that we weren't going that far anyways. As we headed to our favorite make out place, it began to rain. The roads got slippery and J.R. lost control of the car. We skidded into a telephone pole and I blacked out as I flew through the front windshield. J.R., saved by the airbag, jumped out of the car and found me lying in a pool of blood.

I was in a coma for three weeks, unable to move, talk, or communicate. I could hear my family, my friends, and the doctors come in and out of my room. Suddenly, I saw a light, through my dark mind with my eyes shut a bright light. It was indeed the Lord, and he held out his hands and said, "Come my child." The last words I heard were the doctors saying "We're losing her." My mother squeezed my hand and whispered, "I'll see you in heaven."
Boys Will Be Boys

Karl Bjergo

Joey was my best friend. That changed over the years, but at that time he was. He, like so many times before, was staying over.

We were just about done with supper when we saw the signs. Joey's and my eyes met with a look of oh, no; we both knew Dad's stories took awhile.

Don't get me wrong. We both liked Dad's stories, but there is a time and place for everything. This was the place but not the time. Joey and I had big plans for the night, a mouse hunt in the barn. We would turn over the hay bales near or at the bottom of the stack, the ones that had been sitting there for a while. About every fifth bale would produce a small nest of three or four mice. When we discovered a nest we would jump. About the time we were in mid-flight the mice could see, by huge forms dropping on them, that their cover was blown, and then the fun began. The mice would scatter and we would be in hot, haphazard, pursuit. Even the cats wouldn't get close to the action when Joey and I were chasing mice.

Dad pushed his plate out of the way and leaned back. He started the same way he always starts.

"You know boys, when I was about your age . . ."

Dad was never thirteen and going on a mouse hunt. "... I had a really enjoyable experience . . ."

No! not an 'insight to a better life' story. Joey's head slumped so that he was looking right at what was left of his meal. I turned to stare out the window.

"Good, a light skiff of snow, better tracking," I thought. Even though we would be in the barn, it can never hurt to have a light skiff of snow around.

"... I was headed out to the woodshed to get the night's share of fuel . . ."

Both of us switched. Joey watched the day's light fading and I watched my uneaten peas.

"... the old truck was warm so it started right away . . ."

I knew from past stories that Dad used a truck to get the wood, because back when he was a kid the woodshed was behind the barn. It had since been moved closer, so all I got to use was a wheel barrel, but, as Dad continually reminded me, I was thankful to have that.

"... as I was about to get out of the truck I saw something move just to the right of the shed, so I stayed put. . . . Do you know what it was?" he asked.

Oh, no! a question. I snapped back to reality. "What, Dad?" I asked

"Do you know what moved?"

"A killer with a bad attitude!" blurted Joey.

"No, no," Dad said, giving Joey a nasty look. "It was a deer."

A deer! Great . . . we only see a dozen a day on the way to town.

"... Only this time I sat in the truck and watched the animal as it the tall grass alongside the shed . . ."

Joey threw himself against the back of his chair, flung his head and began staring at the ceiling. I glared at the rapidly hardening pile of mashed potatoes in the middle of the table. How much longer . . . ?

"... It was a doe. She moved with real grace and beauty . . ."

Don't get the idea my dad is some kind of earth muffin, he's no bleeding heart. He gets a couple of deer each season. However, he gets in these moods and the resulting 'moral' story can be almost sickening. To overzealous mouse hunters, anyway.

"... I sat and watched her sniff the path leading up to the shed and then the door handle. She must have smelled my scent from the day before, because she turned and walked back into the woods . . ."

Joey and I sat up. The end was close and soon some mice would be hating life.

"... Well, I got the wood and went back with a good feeling . . ."

We knew this was the end because Dad started clearing his dinner area. Joey and I were half way to the kitchen with our plates when we heard
"... boys..." We froze, clenching our teeth, as my dad addressed out backs.

"... could you do me a favor and get the IH out of the west field... drive it into the barn for the night... Thanks."

There was no point in arguing. Dad would just bring up the fact that he "went out of his way" by taking us into town this morning. We silently got dressed for the cold; Joey knew it would be improper to say anything about not being able to go hunting in the house.

"I guess he did take us to town this morning," moaned Joey, a hint of bitterness in his voice, as we stepped off the porch.

"Yeah," I added.

My father has this uncanny ability of knowing when I've been having too much fun, and lately Joey and I have. In the last couple of days we had built forts, destroyed whole cities, and slaughtered entire armies. I suppose it was about time we were made to feel like we were earning our keep.

Half way across the roughly plowed field we decided it would have been much easier and less injurious to have gone the long way on the road. The frozen earth didn't give, so it pitched us side to side and to and fro as we walked. Just as I was about to add something to the subject as hand I tripped over an unusually large dos and fell.

"Damn, look what I did to my suit," I said as I got to my feet. We both looked at the white insulation that was now bleeding from the knee of my snowmobile suit.

We should have taken the road, but at our age the cognitive process of decision making involves a lot of trial and error. We continued on.

The apple orchard and then the tractor came into view as we topped the slope. It was parked next to the apple trees right where Dad finished.

"I hope 'Red Bruiser' wants to start," Joey said, referring to the big cabover tractor. My dad has a habit of naming his vehicles and larger pieces of farm equipment. Joey and I thought this was corny, but we both ended up using the same dumb little names. Good, I thought as we got closer, Dad already unhooked the plow. I hate undoing the nut on the big bolt which serves as the link pin, because I have to get on my knees, take off my gloves, reach under the tractor hitch, and turn the cold chunk of metal.

We jumped into the cab and closed the door, stopping much of the cold we felt from the north breeze.

Joey hit the electric main, and with static in his voice, said "All gauges responding, sir!"

"Stand by for contact, lieutenant," I said, my hand cupped over my mouth like a mike.

I was about to punch the starter but stopped because Joey had stopped playing our game and was now looking out the left side window. He had that 'cat about to pounce' look frozen on his face. I followed his line of sight and saw the deer also.

We watched as the young doe ate the tall grass at the base of the closest apple tree. She wasn't more than thirty feet away. I couldn't remember if I had ever been this close to a live deer before.

"Wow, just like your dad's story," whispered Joey out of the side of his mouth.

"Yeah, she must have just lost her spots."

We sat and watched for a good five seconds before both of our hands slammed down on the big tractor's horn. It let out a blast that would have woke the dead. Her body reacted before her brain even knew what was going on. Her back legs collapsed out from under her and she staggered a few feet sideways using only front wheel drive. She regained her composure and ran off, still unaware of what had just tried to kill her. I was doubled over in the captain's chair unable to breathe. Joey continued to to reenact the doe's legs giving out, sending me into renewed spasms of laughter.

We continued howling until it became safe to start the tractor. All the way back we continued to break out in almost uncontrollable fits of hysteric.

It wasn't until years later, with kids of my own, that I asked my dad if the old truck he used to get wood with had a working horn.

"Yes, it did," he recalled instantly, remembering an obviously obscure and unimportant fact of childhood. It was then I realized that Dad had once been young, and a mouse hunter... like me.
A Slave No More

Harmony Grant

Granite in wood,
Carved in oak,
I depicted my plight
For other folk.

With only a penknife,
I told my tale,
Carved in tree bark,
Firm and hale.

With tears for ink
And a knife for a pen,
I recall what I wrote
Only now and then.

Only four words,
But the firmest four,
I told what I was,
But am no more.

For soiled with blood,
That bark did declare,
In boldest print,
That a slave had been there.
The Dunes

Scott Zimmer

It was dark that night. I realized this as we walked through an invisible forest of trees that kept brushing and pulling against my shirt. If I looked up I could make out a tiny difference between the sky and the trees; the sky was the lighter gray. There was no moon that night, and the clouds blocked all the stars. I was a little nervous walking through the trees in this dark, and as I tightened my grip on the person in front of me, I pictured how we must have looked to someone who could see in this dark, like a conga line stumbling through a forest looking for a lake and some sand dunes. There were no flashlights cutting through the darkness; we had decided it would be fun that way.

I realized that we were walking up a hill, then back down. Suddenly there was a change in the grayness in front of me, in between two shadows, the trees at the end of the path, I saw a shimmering gray, somewhat brighter than the sky. Everyone gasped as we realized that we'd walked right up to the edge of the lake. I thought it was sand at first but as we got closer I could hear water lapping against the shore. I could also hear the distant sound of a dune buggy, its mosquito whine cutting through the forest sounds. I looked across the water towards the sound, but all I could see was a giant snow-white shape rising out of the water. I couldn't figure out what it was. It was the brightest thing to look at and rolled off into the darkness.

"Is that mist?" I asked.

Someone standing in the darkness behind me replies, "No, those are the dunes."
The Frog's Galliard

Edna Kovacs

The grasshopper's going to be married,
he asks the mosquito's daughter;
The beetle wants to be best man,
The flea jumps, too, and wants to be chief
witness;
All the bugs want to be guests.
- from Béla Barótk's The Hungarian Folk Song.

These were the words I couldn't help but overhear as I sat in August's alabaster dusk,
admiring the wild huckleberries.

Soon I espy ants and ladybugs scurrying out of logs and mounds. Caterpillars leap from the mouths of jays; caddisflies from the gullets of trout. Grasses part for the queen bee and her loyal workers.

Along the fence, where creeping tansy proliferates, a procession of earwigs, termites, and katydids emerge towards a glen of spruce where the nuptial ceremony is about to take place.

There, standing debonair and proud, is the grasshopper and his clan. On a bed of sequestered pine needles, the mosquito's daughter sits preening, while her mother flits to and fro.

Hidden in the harebell, I watch them. Nearby, a caddis-worm builds a house out of sticks and stones.

"Aren't you going to the wedding?" I inquire.
"Sorry. I'm too bashful," he responds.

Bustling troubadours sing from the woods. I bid farewell to the industrious caddis-worm, to my ishmus amid the willowherb and sage, and, feeling lighthearted, I set off to follow that highway of bugs that are gradually making their ascent over the knotted-pine fence.

It takes more than three attempts at leaping before I can make my way over the fence successfully. I confess, I've grown a bit paunchy from too many evenings of lingering, witnessing beautiful sunsets.

Other frogs tease me. They say I should be out courting. My sister tells me it's time I be getting married.

"I'm too busy for marriage," I tell her.
"Too busy for marriage? How's that?" my brothers and sisters curiously pry.

"I'm making detailed observations of our environment."
"Our what?"
"Environment."
"Trivial. Foolish. Why?"
"I'm studying the changes in our territory. Today we may jump freely, but do you realize that since last summer not only has the pond grown murky, but jolly Mr. Badger no longer plants peas in his garden, and Mrs. Porcupine has moved away.

"Did you know they've taken robin's nest away? She's feeling most forlorn these days. And all the ladybugs have flown away.

"But that's not the least of it. I hear men now -- men. And if I'm not mistaken, they seem to be digging and working with something they call machines. I heard them say they were making a road."

"A road. What's a road?" my fellow frogs bellow in unison.

I'm compiling a dictionary. I pull out my note pad and put on my bifocals prior to answering.

"Road. R-o-a-d. An open way, generally public, for the passage of vehicles, persons, and animals."
"Animals with people?" my sister chortles.
"Nonsense."
"People eat animals."

Hmmph. Such were their remarks.

"That's why I'm a vegetarian," I tell them.
"You see, the bugs don't fear me. rather, they have tamed me."

"Ridiculous!" shouls my oldest sister. "Who's ever heard of a tame frog?"

In all seriousness I continue.
"If we're to coexist on this earth, we must learn to be sensible. Mushroom soup and cabbage stew

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are good enough for me. Perhaps a taste of linzer tart with fresh berries every now and then . . . . But now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to a wedding!”

The frogs chuckle after me with mocking amusement. Strangers creep like buttercups. How could I explain to them the gravity of the situation?

When I approached the wild wood, any feelings of forlornness would have entirely disappeared upon seeing my friends and neighbors heartily congratulating the grasshopper groom and his mosquito bride.

There was much backslapping and wing poking, festive buzzing and droning, but in the distance I could hear chain saws and voices.

I always keep my notebook with me to record pertinent data. In it, I also keep a calendar.

Hmm . . . let's see. Today's Saturday, the eleventh of August. Men never used to work on Saturdays until now. Now I understand the meaning of overtime.

With my binoculars, I witness fire opal clouds usher in from my favorite blueberry ravine. Oh dear! This means slashing and burning -- a sure sign of development.

I see the great repast. I hear the crickets sing, the owl hoot.

"Mrs. Mosquito!" I yelp as loud as I possibly can.

"The mother of the bride flits from flower to pine cone, acorn to berry, hovering around her betrothed daughter.

"Mrs. Mosquito, do you smell men?"

She does indeed, and hears my summonings. She dashes out to scout the environs as soon as she can make an oblique exit. She, as well as I, wishes not to disturb the wedding party.

With my binoculars, I watch with horrific awe as pine and spruce fall to the ground. The earth shakes. The earth trembles. Mrs. Mosquito returns with a worried expression which confirms my own fears and doubts.

Dusky gray-blue grouse cry Whoop! Whoop! Whoop! And the gray-cheeked thrush calls Chuck! Chuck!

Bees drink the last nectar of summer's paling room. The wood grows frosty with a thrumming chill.

"Attention! Attention!" I herald them. And I admit, with respect, my command is adhered to.

All the wood creatures and bugs fall silent then. Even the ravens stop their barking across dusk's sky cimmaron.

"Listen, my friends and neighbors. When I leap, I like to make a good splash. But not when a caravan of machines is in such close proximity, all but tearing up front gates.

"It's time to put a fermata on this gaiety and make a complete exodus. I suggest paddling downstream, taking wind, riding on the backside of a companion, or scrambling away just as fast as you can."

Prior to departing, the grasshopper kisses his bride. All flee like Noah's creatures before the storm. I alone remain in the forest, along with the bracket fungus.

It's my custom to record the milieu daily. My studies are mapped and plotted with accuracy. Included in my data are the following:

Date, time of day, water quality, temperature, precipitation (if any), air pollution index, forecast, and other miscellaneous information which may include such tidbits as squirrel having a tea party with sparrow, crickets sleeping in the jo-pye weed, or olive-brown boletus spotted among the hemlock.

Today, as I stood on my forelegs in contemplation, about to record the day's observations, a man who came on quiet feet picked me up in palm of his hand and spoke.

"Come, my brave frog and born naturalist. I will show you the ways of man. take your notebook with you, for you will need it as well as your keenness."

It was Janos, the mystic storyteller. I recognized his voice when he told me, "In this life, you're a frog. In the next, you shall be a prince."

And that was the last I saw of the wild wood.
Contributors

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