

.. The following "Love Story" stems from a "Magical Milkweed" I found just as it was ready to split. When I tried to grasp it, the silk inside cut loose into the sky & flew... I was able to catch those first few fluffs & then all that was left were a couple of tufts stuck in the bottom. The rest took to the breeze & glided away. These seeds of thought were blown around this world we share, from the U.S., to Europe, back over, down under, up, across, around again... Thrice! That's one Helluva Nor-Easta! The Escapees drifted down to rest on the pens of 25 wishful word slingers. They attached their own dreams & blew them back into the air. One common wish clings to every word: "I hope Stephen King likes this." I think he will! He's the inspiration behind it all!

My thanks to all who joined this flight...& to our Kelly Girl /Moderator/ Stewardess/ Pilot,(many other functions), who flies this wonderfully wicked Plane we joyfully ride.

Keep those pens & pencils close & catch every white fluffy that wafts your way. If it bounces up just out of reach... maybe that one wasn't yours... blow it a little puff & wish it well... grab another, there are many more! TBlack-a.k.a.-Mister Ed.

... to have & to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,
in sickness & in health, to love, to cherish...

"Till Death Do Us Part"

- Book of Common Prayer-

TBlack

He slid his self down between the cushions and found that worn hollow where the springs no longer did what springs is supposed to do, grabbed a wet Gennessee from the Twelver? No... Seven Pack beside the spool and wedged it against his throbbing temple. "Sweet Jesus, Joseph, Mother Mary & All the Shepherds GODAMMIT!" This one was HER fault... Stupid Wench!... And he meant to tell her too, Laws Yes! He meant to tell her Big, Big!

She'd come wagging that ass of hers through the door at 4:19 just like every other afternoon... *Hi Honey, I'm home, you nappin? Got a couple of Corn-Dogs here & a little Chili that was left. Cheryl took the 'tater salad 'cuz Jimmy's out again & Wanda snagged the weenies right outta my hand!* *MAN!*
Them kids of hers can pack away the Pork!

Blah-Blah-Blabberdy-Friggin'-Blah!!! Ferchristsakes! Was she tryin' to piss him off? He hooked a toe through Mama's daisy square afghan and kicked it down off the couch. She'd be walkin' in here any minute now wantin' to see if "Oopra" was on. God he hated that bitch too, made him miss Gilligan every damn day! (That Coconut Radio one killed him every time!)

She was out of the kitchen now; squeezin' past the toolbox into the livingroom, headed straight for the damn TV. He could hear today's tips jingling in her apron. M-O-O-N spelled Tips... Trimmer knew that... T-I-P-S spelled another late one down to the Post. "OHMPHFFF!" He threw himself up from recline and got off a purely resplendent fart that blew a dead Genny off the ceramic Doberman's head, just before Alice came into the room...

Twitch

When the hell will she leave him alone?! It was almost pleasurable for him to see the disgust on her face at the smell. Sometimes she needs to be made uncomfortable (as alien as the concept seemed to her). Laws Yes... she deserved it, making him soo mad all the time. M-O-O-N, that spells Mad. Yep, real mad!

She changed the channel, expecting nothing. (stupid wench never does)

"I was watching that for Christ's Sake!" he whined. She looked startled. She just wandered back out, watching the TV.

One day I'll blow my top and goddamn she'll be sorry, he thought, she will, she will.

Other days (the less irritable ones) made him just want to up and go. But Noooo! The stupid band on his finger came with the promise -Till Death Do Us Part-, *GODDAMN*, he thought, *When Oh When will it be my time to fucking part?!*

He looked at Alice in a steady malice. In his mind he asked her questions Alice would never answer. *Hunny? I'm sick of your constant shit in my life, shall I part with you first or will you?* He asked these questions sweetly. As if simply asking her if she would like him to take her out for dinner, *GOD!* he thought again, *When Oh When will it be my time to fucking part?*

Dana Jean

Every cell, every nerve in his small and sweaty body tingled with hatred. Ice-cold rage flooded his brain. It took a self-control he didn't normally possess to keep from leaping out of his La-Z-Boy and hammerin' her head with his beer can. "Love means never having to say: 'Oops. Sorry I crushed your skull. My bad.'" No way would he let her get the best of him and ruin his plans. He'd worked for weeks on the details and she wasn't going to rush his touchdown dance.

And the plan--his plan--started with the grave. He had busted his nuts on it every time she worked a night shift. Out in the desert off of I-84, it had taken longer than expected to get it just right. His narrow shoulder muscles had cramped and burned with every thrust of the dull shovel into the dry, hard earth. Even now, the soreness he still felt gave him joy.

He reached for a cigarette and lit it, sucking the smoky goodness down deep into his lungs. It calmed him and left him feeling light headed and giddy. His euphoria was probably a combination of booze, the nicotine dizzies, and the thought that by weeks' end, she'd be laying in *Chez Hole* with that look of disrespect he'd come to know so well, frozen on her stiff face. The smell of piss drying and caked with dirt on her spider-veined legs would replace the flowery aroma of her funeral spray.

Rick Smith

Trimmer chugged, belched pleurably, and lost himself in thoughts of claw hammers and shower

curtains and raw dirt holes. Shit, brother. That Scott Peterson was an addle-capped frockwit. You don't shove a body in the drink, dye your hair and make a break for Mexico. Hell no. Mama Trimmer dint raise no frockwits.

In the water, sooner or later, everything floats. In the dirt, though... Down in the dirt...

His beer was forgotten. "Oofrah" was forgotten. Even Alice's blather ("Where's my Mister Whipple? Where's my goodboy who's a goodboy what a goodboy!") was forgotten.

Trimmer flexed his aching muscles, glanced at his toolbox, and grinned.

Alice Trimmer sat on the edge of the sagging bed, stroking Mister Whipple's ratty fur and chattering mindlessly at him. She wasn't thinking about Mister Whipple. She was thinking about the coffee can buried in the backyard, by the clothesline, with the loaded revolver inside.

Another lingering belch from the living room. Alice's face twisted in fury at the hateful sound. She thought soothingly of the noise he'd make when she stuck the gun in his ear and thumbed back the hammer. The last noise he'd make, before she made a noise of her own. *Pretty soon now. Pretty soon...*

John

Love is sweet, like an apple when first bitten; but eventually the fruit is eaten and the core decays like much of the life Trimmer and Alice now shared. Love American Style, hardly. Trimmer had things on his own mind, things in his head that weren't adding up to love. If he got rid of his wife that \$250,000 worth of life insurance, which they both took out on each other would surely come in handy. He fantasized of strangling her so as to not leave any trace of blood, and drag her out to the trunk of his car and properly dispose of her somewhere, then file a missing persons report; but where to put the body without it being discovered weighed against his premeditation.

Alice as much hated him and wanted him just as much dead, which is the reason she had purchased the snub-nosed revolver. She knew he'd kill her if he ever found it hidden in the house; especially if he knew that it was planned to be used on him. She thought it was best to hide it in the coffee can, which was buried in the garden by the clothes-line, seeing that Trimmer rarely bothered her there while prepping and weeding the garden.

That 250,000 dollar policy was a lot of money to Alice, too, who worked like a slave for her husband, handing over her daily tips and waitress pay that would get topped off at the end of the day with a bruise filled beating. Alice was fed up with it and knew she could claim self defense, seeing that reports of abuse were filed against him in the past, when she wasn't so afraid of him. It was the last beating that did it; the last call she made to the police; it infuriated him to the point that he nearly strangled her, and promised he would kill her with his bare hands if she called the police once more.

"Come on Bill, I can't believe it - this is weird shit man!" What they both didn't realize was that Peter was hurt badly. And being young boys neither understood the great risk of their actions.

They had been playing chicken out in the desert. It was a beautiful Indian Summer and though it was September the sun was strong and the desert was vast, a perfect playground for the boys. A hot arid wind was blowing, causing the whirling sand to slow their game. Before too long they were very far from home. Bill decided it was time to head back. Petey knew he would not be missed if late, his sister and her boyfriend wouldn't even notice. But Bill's mom would freak out.

Bill saw the hole first and stopped in time, but Peter fell in. For a minute Bill thought his friend was dead. He climbed down and saw the blood on the rocks, as Petey raised his head. His jeans were also torn. "Wow Big Bill! Look at this!! Its so deep! - I mean like a grave!" There was a bag in the hole, inside was a shovel, a rope and a gun. A vulture called out over head but neither boy noticed, too engrossed in their cool find. *This was great! just like the old movies Bill's dad watched. A gun! in the desert!* Now all they had to do was wait for the bad guy to show... and dinner was years away when you were 10 years old...

Bill noticed Petey's head droop, so he took a closer look at him. One pupil was bigger than the other, and being that his Da was a Paramedic; he knew Petey was headed for trouble. And fast! Scooting backwards in the pit, he managed to get an arm around his friend's shoulders; Petey was heavier than Bill - so it was with great effort that he managed to finally drag him up and over the lip of the Grave. "C'mon you fat bugger, gerrup!" Grunting, Bill pulled Petey to his feet. "We've gotta get you back..." he was interrupted by the crunch of tires on gravel. A beat-up Ford utility pulled along side of them on the road shoulder. "Ooh Shiiite" Bill moaned.

A man stepped down from the cab, his eyes squinting against the sun's glare - he didn't look at all happy. "Whatchu's doin' out 'ere!" Spit flew from his cracked and peeling lips. A strong alcoholic stench emanated from him. Reaching for his toolbox from the cab, he pushed past a mangy dog that was sitting under the dashboard, it cowered back as he spat out "Aw whyn'tcha go take a rollin' Fuck atta flyin' doughnu' yer lousy chain-snappin cur!" His sneer was smug. Much to the chargin of his precious bride, ole Trimmer loved to quote Alice's favourite author at any possible opportunity. Nothing got up her left nostril more than the way he always misquoted that wordslinger,-- 'Keeghan Singh'.

As Trim sniggered at his latest funny, Bill judged the distance between 'Aroha' - Petey's horse, and themselves. He thought they could make it. He would have to leave 'Mana' of course. But horses were smart, she'd find her way home...

Jo Noonan

As Bill was staring at Mana, he heard a loud thump come from the covered bed of the man's rose madder colored truck. He whipped his head around and looked at it. He couldn't see anything out of place; it didn't seem as if anything had fallen off of it. What was that? he thought, frowning in confusion.

"Whatchyu starin' at, boy? Something wrong with my old set of wheels?" Trimmer said. Screams sounded from the back of his truck. They were muffled but audible. "Sir, is somebody back there, in the bed of your truck?" Bill said.

Trimmer laughed, a haunting laugh that sent shivers up Bill's back, even in the heat. The laughter turned into a coughing fit. Trimmer made several disgusting noises in his throat before spitting onto the ground.

"If somebody's back there, maybe its none of your business. A damned little pup like you should be minding his own business! Go throw rocks at your friend, or something. I've got things to attend to. My husband duties."

As Trimmer walked towards the back of the truck, Petey shot Bill a look. "Run!" he said, keeping his voice low. Bill couldn't hear his friend. All he could hear was the man singing. "When I feel my finger on your trigger, I know nobody can do me no harm, because happiness is a warm gun, mama!" Trimmer sang.

He took the cover off the bed of the truck and the screams Bill had heard grew louder. He saw a woman, tied up and with a wad of socks stuffed in her mouth, laying in the truck.

Carrie Anne

Petey, head pulsing now, backed away and stumbled while reaching for Bill's hand. Bill grabbed him and both boys ran. Trimmer watched the boys quickly scater off before turning his attention to his one and only. *He'd really have to hurry now. Those snot nosed boys would be back before long.* Little did he know about the mud caked snub nose revolver in the pocket of Alice's housecoat as he struggled to pull her squirming, loathsome body from the bed of the truck. Little did he know, she had been in the back yard, digging up the gun's coffee can from her pitiful garden while he sat in the hot, dim living room, going over his airtight plan, and crushing his umpteenth beer can.

The sun was blazing with it's 5:00 glare as Trimmer's long shadow tugged and pulled and Alice's long shadow slowly loosened the binding knots around her wrists. Fine dust blew across both of them, sticking to their sweat gleamed faces and stinging their eyes. Finally, Trimmer pulled Alice from the truck , just as her hands came free and reached for her pocket. Bill and Petey, now far down the road, heard a shot and stopped momentarily to watch two struggling figures against the setting sun. Wide eyed and frightened, they both ran faster than they had ever run in their lives.

James S

The only reason Trimmer wasn't splattered across the foot of his makeshift grave was because Alice wanted him dead so badly. She had come up shooting and, in her haste, missed. Trimmer grabbed surprisingly quick for the gun in her hand. They momentarily embraced in their death dance: Alice now holding the gun with both hands pointing upward toward the late afternoon sun; Trimmer holding the butt of the \$50 throwaway with her fingers caught between, squeezing, and pushing upward.

Bitches, he thought, *can't trust any of 'em. Keep a roof over her head, put out the trash, and for what? She musta been planning to kill me*, his fading intoxication concluded. The bitch hid a gun to shoot her own husband – what sorta shit was that?

He looked over his shoulder toward what he had dug in the ground. “Oh, you're going in head first,” he muttered. She lunged at him with her mouth, biting.

Trimmer twisted sideways and jerked the gun, and Alice, downward. She heard both of her shoulders loudly pop, and felt sharp pain knife through her neck. Trimmer continued to rotate as Alice went to the ground. She lay there, both arms extended over her head while Trimmer pinned her wrists down with a foot, and began uncurling her fingers from the Saturday Night Special...

Bob Collins

Alice fought Trimmer with everything she possessed but he was still overpowering her. She had heard many stories, watching her beloved “Oprah”, where people, under extreme circumstances, were imbued with “superhuman” strength, and she prayed with all of her heart that something like that would happen to her.

Trimmer had wrenched that piece of shit gun away from her trembling fingers and threw it as far as he could to his left, then turned his attention back to the task at hand. *Bury this bitch and let's go grab another Genny*, he thought. He dropped down on top of her relishing in the look of terror on the face that he had grown to hate so much. He wrapped his hands around her throat and started to squeeze the life out of her.

“*Oh my God!! I am going to die here! I am really going to die here!!*” went through Alice's mind and her heart was beating so fast and hard she could swear that she could actually hear it echo off of the walls in the hole that Trimmer had spent so long preparing for her. Trimmer's big, powerful hands, that she had once found irresistible on him, were squeezing her neck so hard that she felt as if her eyes were going to pop out of her head. Her ears were ringing and her head was pounding and even though she was clawing and scratching, she felt her life slipping away and had nearly given up on living at all. That was when the sound of a gunshot came to her ears and a bright red spot appeared on Trimmer's shirt and she looked up at his face and saw a look of utter disbelief there...

Ellen Allison

Trimmer, with one hand still around Alice's throat, and the other on the red spot on his shirt, immediately thought of the gun he had took from his wife earlier. *She got to it!*, he thought. *Somehow the bitch still managed to shoot me!* With that, his hatred grew. He began to squeeze harder. "I'll show you, you triflin' , fat, Ofrah lovin', no cookin', slut whore mongrel!!!" The only thing keeping Trimmer alive was the bottomless pit of hatred he had for his wife. He took a knife out of his boot, mumbling to his self and smiling, "I was saving this part for later!"

Alice had turned at least two different shades of red by now. *Where did that shot come from?* She thought. That's when five inches of metal slid through her left arm. "You bastard!" she screamed, in spite of the death grip her beloved now had her in. *Shit, I missed!* thought Trimmer, his hands red and slippery with blood, his and hers. Just slippery enough to loosen the grip on her throat. Alice seized this opportunity. Tendons and muscles flapping from the gash in her arm, she brought both hands down on Trimmer's head. "You're right honey, Alice smirked. You did miss, but I promise you, I won't"...

Dana

Alice's blow to Trimmer's head was just hard enough to momentarily distract him from his murderous task. As she squirmed her way out from under him, the smell of cheap beer, blood, and adrenaline nearly overpowered her senses. Holding her left arm, which now barely resembled a human appendage, she managed to deliver several swift kicks to Trimmer's drunken face. She listened with grim satisfaction as he cursed her through a mouthful of broken teeth. The expression on his slightly rearranged face was an almost comical mixture of shock and rage. "Git baaack heere, you fat lazy skank" he grumbled as she inched away.

For a brief moment, Alice was nearly overcome with emotion. *I used to be head over heels for this man*, she reflected. *Now I wouldn't piss on him if he were on fire! Oh, well*, she rationalized. *All boys are bad. It's axiomatic.'*

Except that wasn't quite right. *No*, she thought . . . *Not all boys . . . Not Earl*. Her heart sank as she remembered that Earl Rednick, her boss and her best kept secret, was probably wondering why she wasn't at the motel by now. Earl was certainly no prize; he was a burly, barrel chested man unable to part with his curly gray mullet(which undoubtedly made him a chick magnet back in the day), but he loved her unconditionally. Much of their stolen time together was spent planning for the day she would become Mrs. Earl Rednick.

The sound of Trimmer's increasingly loud, although barely understandable threats made her realize she had to act fast. She picked up the knife that Trimmer had used to slice her arm and staggered over to where he lay face down in the dirt. The grotesque popping noises and splattering blood were nearly unbearable as she relentlessly hacked his right ankle. Once she was sure she had severed his Achilles Tendon, she began walking away, still clutching the bloody knife in her hand...

Ann Morrison

She kept going until she was sure Trimmer wasn't going to spring back onto both legs any second and lunge at her, yelling, "SKAAAANK !!!" Every nerve in her body stood on end and she could

smell herself now. She smelled no better than her husband: chemical sweat and coppery blood. Puffs of air blew sand into her eyes and made her squint. She shielded her left arm by folding it close toward her body. A great deal of sand had already fastened itself into the flayed raw crevice there and the acute sting was nauseating.

Images of the last twelve hours played for her in a loop and it was endlessly adding to this worse case scenario. She was scared shitless. She moved away from her husband, careful not to turn her back on him just yet. The images still came, faster now like a slide show. Blink! *Trimmer in the Laz-E-Boy, farting and howling at her from the darkened gloomy living room.* Blink! *Oprah popped in front of her looking eager and pleased to be her best friend and share some sound advice.* Blink! *Paper money with little wings on them flapping skyward.* Blink! *Oprah turned into Mr. Whipple. Mr Whipple turned into Earl.*

Alice blinked again and there was the man whom she had loved so long ago and who had once loved her. She felt torn; they almost murdered one another twenty minutes ago for crissake and now they were alone and...and...She shuddered. At any rate, they were alone. Except for that empty grave. It smiled up at Alice in the setting sun. *'Til Death do us part, she thought, for as long as we both shall live.*

Night was ahead. With the night came the dark. With the dark came the unknown. With the unknown came other horrors... *For as long as we both shall live.*

She looked around cautiously, inhaling the dry dusty air, then returned her gaze to the body. A gust of wind made her sway. She swore the body had moved...

Angela

Alice knew that she should leave, should run far away from here and from Trimmer. Something inside her made her want to stay. Trimmer was not dead, she knew that. She hadn't killed him. Suddenly, she remembered the shot. *The gun! Where had that shot come from?*

She looked around, seeing no one. The boys she had seen earlier were long gone. *Who had fired that shot?* Then she noted that the gun she had tried to shoot Trimmer with was still lying exactly where it had landed when he had knocked it from her hands. A great wave of fear washed over her as she realized that she was not alone out here in the wilds. Someone was out there, perhaps they had fled after shooting Trimmer. Perhaps they were still out there, waiting, watching her every move.

She crawled across the desert floor, scrabbling for the gun, as tears began trickling down her face unchecked. She opened the cylinder, checking to make sure there were still five bullets left in the gun, then she turned toward Trimmer's truck. She felt certain that the gunshot had come from somewhere behind the truck, so she stayed low to the ground, practically inching along on her belly as she made her way to it. As she reached the passenger door, she sat up, resting against the side of the truck as she looked around. She still believed that the person who had shot Trimmer was somewhere behind her.

Screwing up her courage, she reached up and grasped the handle of the door and quickly stood as she yanked the door open. Trim's pitiful dog yelped & jumped past her as she did. *Stupid dog!* Crawling inside, she jerked the door shut behind her, the sound reverberating like the sharp report

of a gunshot. Alice dropped into the floor board and reached over to start the truck . . . but nothing happened. Sobbing now, she hunched down in the passenger floor board, leaning against the door, thinking wildly.

Liz (Antubis)

“Oh Jesus Christ!!! I’m gonna die” She screamed, still trying desperately to start the truck. God Damn you, you piece of shit- START-STARRRRRTTT!!!!!!!” she screamed at it until she was hoarse as if that would magically fix it. She heard footsteps coming towards the car, each step sounding closer and closer to her. Her heart pounded in her chest until she thought it was going to rip out, he, she, it, whatever it was, was so close, if she didn’t get the truck started it would be the end of her. She turned the ignition again and this time, as if by some miracle it started. Without hesitation her foot found the pedal and the truck lurched forward. She tried to grab the wheel but a shot of pain hit her arm where she had been stabbed, and her blood soaked hands slipped. The truck swerved to the right and crashed into the grave.

She was still alive, by some unexplained miracle, Alice Trimmer was still alive. She picked her head up from the wheel and tried to move. Her vision was fuzzy, and it felt as though every bone in her body was crushed. She thought of nothing but getting out of there, something was after her and she was going to die. Every attempt she made to even move her hand was futile. Each attempt made her weaker, until she just couldn’t do it anymore. She looked through the windshield of the car. A ladder had been stuck down into the hole and she saw a man climbing down. *This is it, this is the end. ... CURSE YOU TRIMMER , YOU SHIT!* she screamed to herself. The last thing she saw before she passed out was a fuzzy image of a man with a curly gray mullet...

Kay Stirling

Birds chirped gaily outside the bedroom window as Alice came to. She shook her head side to side. The fog of her unexpected slumber was beginning to clear but why did her whole body ache? A loud belch from across the room signaled that she was not alone. Her head still spinning she tried to move her arms and head towards the direction but the straps held stubbornly tight. "What the fuck?" she screamed. Laughter this time but it was making her skin break out in goose flesh. She knew that laugh. Oh yes indeed she knew it quite well.

“Hi there purty”. Trimmer said slowly. Now she remembered. Just how had the miserable jerk managed to get her bleeding unconscious butt out of the hole and into the house without being noticed? And where the hell was Earl? Wasn’t he at the hole or did she imagine him?

“Where is Earl?” What have you done with him!” she panted, her head still aching. “Yer gonna find out and soon but did you really think I didn’t know about you sluttin around like a bitch in heat?” Trimmer replied. "Where is he?" she demanded again. “Don’t you worry you’ll be seein’ that no good rotten pig soon ‘nuff but I sure ain’t done with you yet”. “Get it over with then you miserable piece of shit!" she yelled back loudly. Maybe Earl would hear her. "Now Alice, my purty wife, you thinkin’ I might hert you?" Trimmer said, slowly limping toward the bed. She couldn’t see his hands. Then again she didn’t want to. "You mean again?" she shot back.

He sounded calm, deadly calm. Alice knew that he had planned no easy quick death for her or Earl if he really here somewhere in the house. This was going to be painful and slow, just as their marriage had been. *Filthy rotten bastard*, she thought, *at least she was gonna do him in quick*. "Alice, yer breakin' my heart, I just brought you something that's all". "Wanna seeeee?" Trimmer whispered.

ANGIE

Although Alice didn't trust him a damn bit, she nodded her head yes, too stunned to do anything else. With the most evil grin she had ever seen in her life, Trimmer brought his hands out from behind his back. There was Earl! Well, his head, to be exact. Alice stared in horror as he held it up higher, swinging it back and forth in front of her face. She tried to run, forgetting about being tied up. Trimmer smacked her a good one, causing her to see stars. She stopped, and just laid there trembling.

"Look at me, you lying deceitful little whore!", he screamed. Afraid not to, she obeyed. In his other hand was Earl's heart. Oh god! As she watched, he sliced it in half, offering her a piece. "Let's see how much you loved him, Alice" he said with a gleam in his eye. "Let's just see how much!"

Lying there helpless, she had no choice but to watch as he slowly raised it to his mouth, closing his eyes in ecstasy as he chewed. Lying there gagging, trying desperately not to throw up the chili dog she had eaten while at work (*was that only seven hours ago?*), she looked about for something that would be of use to her. Nothing! GODAMMIT! What was she going to do now? This was the man who she had promised to love, honor and obey? Not fucking likely! This man was insane! But... if she knew anything, it was the way his mind worked. Thinking fast, knowing it was the only way to get out of this mess, she said "Trimm honey? Aren't you going to share?".....

Cathy

Trimmer stopped chewing and looked at her, blood dribbling down his chin. "Yer wanna bit, huh?"

He felt his crotch stir as he watched his wife; bound and bloodied, and pleading with broken eyes. Mister Whipple wound in and out of her legs, butting his head against her hands. Trimmer hopped a little, and leaned on his shovel for balance, his eyes traveling over her body. Outside, the wind started to howl and the sun sank low over the desert. Inside, Alice watched her husband inch closer, with Earl's heart dripping through his fingers.

She tried to focus, but the heart wobbling in his hand was too much. Her stomach lurched in one uncontrollable heave, and the stench of puke escaped into the air. Trimmer reeled as chewed-up chili dog splattered over his boots and legs and hands. Earl's heart fell to the ground with a thud, and Alice heaved again. She cursed her weak stomach, but she couldn't help but grin just a little bit too. "Filthy whore", screamed Trimmer, clobbering the side of her head with all the strength he had left, the strain forcing out another of his blow-torch farts. Alice turned away, imagining the skin peeling from the inside of her nostrils.

Then there was a knock at the door. Alice glanced out the window and saw two boys, one with a

wonky eye, disappearing around the corner on horseback, as Trimmer undid the latch and stuck his head outside. A man stood below the steps with his back to the door; stocky, with a gray mullet hairdo and a gun dangling from his left hand.

Trimmer gasped, looking over his shoulder at the severed gray head on his floor. *Well, who the hell is that?* he thought. Then the visitor at the door turned around and his yellow teeth split in an eerie, forced grin. "Evenin' Trimm ya stupid `hole!", he said, flexing a hand caked with mud, its fingernails cracked and bloodied. "Dint nobody tell yer 'bout Dora? She was... mah twinner!"

Thomas Moore

The face at the door looked so much like the face on the floor that Trimmer was confused and more than a little scared. "Boys tell me I ought a come take a look" The gray mulleted man rasped. He fixed Trimmer with one sharp eye. "Said there was some trouble." Trimmer pulled the door closed so his body blocked the view into the room. "Just a misunderstandin' 'tween me and the missus, non of your goddamn bidness!"

The stranger streamed a brown squirt of chaw between his teeth onto the first step and glanced at Trimmer's bloody shirt. "I seen a truck out on the flats stuck in a grave sized hole just where the boys showed me. Whole lotta blood out there; more 'n a man can live without." Trimmer stared at the gun, now aimed directly at the bridge of his nose. "Ain't been out to the flats. Those boys are tellin' you a story."

Alice squirmed on the bed trying to clear the retch out of her throat enough to yell. The severed head stared milky eyed indifference at her from the floor. She didn't know who was outside and she was afraid Trimmer would kill them if she called out. The head on the floor gave no advice and continued to stare at her with a lack-luster gaze.

"The boys tell me I might a had somthin' to do with that hole in your shirt." He gestured with the gun barrel at the bloody hole in Trimmer's shirt. "Mebbe I better come in and sort this out."

Trimmer reached his hidden hand out and grabbed the shovel leaning against the wall behind the door. It was still coated with blood from when he'd used it to hack off Earl's head out on the flats. "Ain't nothin' to sort out. Them boys are prob'ly tryin' to cover up some mischief they've been in and sent you on a wild goose chase."

Earl raised the gun back to the bridge-of-the-nose position again and started up the stairs. "Nothin' ventured, nothin' gained, I always say." Alice watched in horror as Trimmer raised the shovel like a machete and stepped back from the door. As the visitor became visible with the bright setting desert sun streaming around him, she started to scream...

Robyn

Slowly, without turning to face him, Earl said, "Trim, you and I both know you'll be dead before that shovel comes close to me." Shaking now with fear for the first time since he'd come up with this plan, Trim was scared. *How did he know without looking?* Slowly he lowered the shovel. "I think them boys be a foolin' you mister, Me and little Alley was just havin' us some funnin'." Earl turned to the window and saw the boys looking in. "Trim, it sure don't look like little Alice

here is having much fun."Looking at Alice made him want to squeeze the trigger. Slowly turning to face Trimmer for the first time, Earl repeated, "Nope! Sure don't look like she's having much fun at all!"

Trimmer was tired of this bullshit, tired of waiting for his freedom. Slowly in his mind a new plan was hatching . . . *Yes of course! Earl here just made it easier!* Poor Ole Trim walks in and catches his wife and this gray haired bastard doing it with that severed head between them. Hell! He'd be a hero for killing them. He saw the headlines clearly in his mind. It'd make it harder, but wasn't that part of why he hated her so much? Always causing him trouble? Yet looking at her, lying there tied to the bed with fear in her eyes, he felt his groin grow hard. Oh yes both of them would die, *But Alice, Oh my pretty Alice, you will pay, you will pay!* Knowing he would kill her last, he started to think of all the ways he could make her hurt before he finished it. He planed to cum and piss on her dead body. Dance around in her blood for what she had put him through. *Oh Laws Yes, she would pay!*

Trimmer had forgotten the two boys standing at the window, but the boys had not forgotten him. They were making their own plans, plans that Earl had handed them before he'd entered the house . . . Plans that would come for Trimmer like the wind . . .

Gayle

Alice's eyes darted back and forth between the two men and the head on the floor. "Dora!?!?!!" She was incredulous. Earl had once mentioned a twin, but Alice had forgotten. What she'd been doing out in the desert was anybody's guess. Alice was confused. If it was Earl who shot Trimmer in the desert, then why had he left her there alone?

"Put the shovel down, Trimm." Earl held the gun steady and never took his eyes off Trimmer. "I'll put it down through the middle of yer stinking head!!" Trimmer's eyes bulged and his face reddened as he raised the shovel high. Earl lowered the gun to waist level. He pulled the trigger, but the only sound was an audible click. He tried again, with the same result, and now it was too late, Trimmer brought the shovel down and Earl ducked out of the way, but not fast enough. The shovel delivered a glancing blow that knocked him from his feet, and the gun went skittering across the floor. Alice cried out in fear and agony as she saw Earl laying in a stunned heap. Trimmer raised the shovel again, "Ya stupid son-uv-a bitch!!, I cut cher damn head off onc't an' I'll do 'er again!"

Alice struggled to free herself, her pain forgotten as she watched the one man who had ever truly cared for her about to be bludgeoned to death by the man whose abuse she'd suffered for years. But Trimmer wavered, whether from loss of blood or loss of balance he somehow missed Earl and gravity drove him forward onto the floor, and he landed face first in the stinking mess of puke.

Earl tried to stagger to his feet over and over again, but he was still dizzy from the first blow, and he couldn't seem to manage the art of standing up. He crab-walked across the floor towards the gun. "Damn, fucking bitch!!" Trimmer wiped vomit from his face with a filthy hand. "Oh-no-you-don't!!" He lurched forward towards Earl. Both men reached for the gun at the same time, and Alice screamed again...

John Atkinson

Earl reached the gun first but what God had decided to not give Trimmer in brains, he made up for in brawn..He had fifty pounds on Earl and when he put it to a punch, it could drop a man like a sack of concrete..Trimmer threw a haymaker that shattered Earls jaw on contact. The gun flipped from his hands and sent him flying across the room in a mist of blood and teeth into the television .A short crackle came from the set, as the glass screen smashed in, and a small billow of smoke rose from the back of the console..Earl lay spread out on the floor beside it. "My Zenith!! Trimmer screamed to the broken set. I just got that at the pawn shop!!!"

At this, Alice just had to laugh..How many tables had she waited on, so he could have that damned TV in the bedroom? So he could watch Gilligan or The Duke Boys when she got home from work? Her small giggles soon gave way to large maniacal cackles. Trimmer turned and looked at her. "You think that's funny bitch? You havin' fun?"

Alice saw bits of Dora's heart stuck between his teeth when he spoke..A small stream of blood leaked from his ear .He pulled a snot- caked bandana from his back pocket, and wrapped it around his head as he spoke."Oh if you think that's funny? Wait till you getta load of this!"He limped towards Earl , the .45 gripped tight in his hands."You're gonna love this!!!"He pushed the television out of the way , and pulled Earl up by the collar of his chambray work shirt covered in blood and flecks of tooth- and pressed the gun directly between his eyes."So help me God if you're a triplet, I'm gonna find your mamma, and shoot her dead!" He cocked the hammer back.

"What are you going to do with that gun buddy?", a voice spoke from behind him, Just what do you think you are going to do?"

Jade

Trimmer froze. He heard Alice give a rowdy "Yes!" from the bed. He didn't want to take his eyes off Earl, afraid if he did the son of a bitch would try something. Trimmer could feel the pull of the muscles in his neck as he strained not to look. He wanted to look, but Earl was not to be trusted. Earl glanced behind Trimmer's shoulder and then rested his eyes on the man holding a gun to his head. "Get what you deserve," Earl whispered. "Shut up, you piece of shit!" Trimmer screamed. His gun hand was shaking, making whirls of blood on Earl's forehead.

"Turn around," the person standing behind Trimmer said. "Drop the gun and turn around!" The sound of a hammer being drawn back filled the room. Trimmer kept his eyes focused on the man he was holding. Earl was grinning through a mouthful of broken teeth. "Turn around, now! I'll shoot, I swear I will!"

Trimmer let go of Earl's shirt and the man dropped to the floor. He slowly turned, holding the dresser for support, to face the person behind him. "Oh, Jesus. No way, no fucking way is this happening," Trimmer said. *Stupid fucking kids! I should have killed them and threw them in the hole with Alice!*

The smaller boy from the desert was peering out from behind the man standing in front of Trimmer. The man was wearing a paramedic's uniform. He was also holding a gun and pointing it towards Trimmer's forehead. "My Da is going to take care of you!" The small boy said.

Trimmer glanced around the room looking for a way out of this shit hole mess he was in. His eyes roamed over the dresser that was holding him up and he saw just what he needed to get him out of here...

Trimmer knew what people thought of him. He knew what that bitch of a wife of his thought too. Hell, everybody was always sayin' he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. He knew that his strength lied in his strength and his speed. But maybe everybody was wrong about him. In that moment Trimmer was smart enough to realize that his quick reflexes were gonna get him out of this particular bind he found himself in.

Looking the man with the gun squarely in the eyes and without a sound, he let those reflexes take over. There was a certain beauty in his quickness as he effortlessly grabbed Alice's .38 from the dresser and aimed it directly at the face of the man's son. Yeah Ol' Trimmer was smart enough to know that M-O-O-N spells temporary salvation. The tremble from the man's hand confirmed that Trim had bought himself some time with this move. Surely the next idea would come to him. Right?

"My Da's gonna take care of you!"

The sound of his son's voice was enough to raise the hair on the back of John's neck. He had told the boy to wait outside the door. He had told him not to make a sound. Of all the goddamn times for Bill to disobey! It took every muscle in his body to stay focused on the man in front of him, on the job he had to do. What happened next was so quick it was almost a blur. Somehow that dirty, sweaty son of a bitch had the gun again. And just like that it was pointed in Bill's face. Against the cheek that John had kissed goodnight a thousand times, the face of John's dead wife, the face of his future.. Maybe a cop would have acted quicker. Maybe someone more trained in taking lives could have pulled the trigger before Trimmer had aimed so squarely. But John was only a paramedic for Christ's sake, not a cop! His job was to save lives...

Sharon C.

"Back away, and lay down the gun, buddy, Trimmer smirked, unless ya don't love the boy as much as ya think!" How dare this stranger try to ruin his well laid plans! Well, alls ya gotta do is threaten the pup and Deputy Dog will react. It didn't matter that this guy wasn't a cop - he had a uniform- that was enough for him.

Cursing softly, John dropped the gun. "Kick it over, bud," Trimmer ordered. Behind Trimmer, Alice lay on the floor and caught John's eye. Nodding imperceptibly, John kicked the gun beyond Trimmer straight into Alice's outstretched hand.

"You bastard" Trimmer growled as he pulled the trigger. Click, click - What the fu...? Alice realized then what Trimmer didn't know. She hadn't had a chance to re-load the damned thing. "Praise the Lord, and I forgot the ammunition." She snorted weakly at her own wit. John pushed Billy aside and launched himself at Trimmer like a quarterback trying for the winning touchdown in the last few seconds of the Superbowl. As they both hit the floor, Alice croaked "Trimmer, you low life piece of shit, move away from that man and look at me!". Trimmer slowly turned towards her and seeing the gun in her hand, froze. Alice smiled.

It seemed like an eternity passed as Trimmer and Alice locked eyes. "Earl baby? Come on over here and untie me please," Alice said softly. Earl picked his way around the debris on the floor. Alice watched Trimmer warily as Earl cut her upper strap with slow deliberation. "One move... one tic.. and I'll blow your everloving face off." Forgotten for the moment, John dragged himself up and backed towards the door. "I'll call the police." "No! Don't you call anyone!" Alice warned. Her legs were free now. "You take your boys and leave, Mister. I 'preciate the help but this is family bidness." John hesitated. He knew what he ought to do but there was a dark voice inside that whispered, *Fuck him, he tried to kill your boy. Do you really give a shit what happens to him?* No. He didn't. "Come on Billy, Petey. Let's go home."

As they cleared the dooryard, Trim's unruly hound ran at them. John, in no mood for further crap, grabbed the dog around the neck, nearly choking him, dragged him to the rusty chain and, with Billy's help, managed to chain him back up. Stupid mutt was always running free, getting into stuff. He wished he still had his gun, he'd put the damn thing down. Now he armed sweat off his forehead and gathered the boys. It was time to blow this popsicle stand.

"Now it's just us, Trim ol' boy." Alice stood very slowly, Earl's hand on her back for support. "You sonuvabitch. I ought to cut you to pieces and feed you to your "best friend" out back. But ya know what? I'm feeling magnanimous. Earl.. grab Trim a beer, hon. That special bottle I bought him." Earl did as he was bid, returning with a bottle of Sam Adams. Alice nodded towards Trim. "Set it down by him. Now Trim baby, you wanna move real fuckin' slow gettin' that beer or I *will* blow your goddamn head off," Alice's tone was sweetly condescending. Trimmer thought for a split second that he would spring, but his Achille's tendon, (what was left of it) quiet until now, had begun to scream pain. He knew he couldn't make it. He slowly took the bottle. "Drink up baby, it's yer last." Alice and Earl watched as Trimmer took a tentative sip. Alice knew that would be all it took but... "Drink up.. that there's expensive stuff. I spent a lot of time getting that for ya." Trimmer drank. And then the pain began inside.

Alice watched smiling, as Trimmer writhed on the floor. "Fuckin bitch..!" he spat through clenched teeth. "What did you do...?" Alice's smile widened. "Added my own special ingredient, hon.. gives it a kick, dontcha think?" She thought briefly of the Oleander growing by the diner. *Oh yeah. Special ingredient.* Earl was grinning now, too. His woman was one smart cookie. "Ya know what tho?... I think I'll put you out of your misery. Would you like that, Trim?" Trimmer's eyes glared as he spasmed hideously. No way he was gonna beg the bitch. No fucking way. "No? Give it a few more seconds..... Now beg me you rat bastard. Beg me to KILL YOU!!!" Alice's last straw broke and she stood over her former love, her husband... and stuck the gun in his face. "See you in hell, muthafucker!" Trimmer's face came apart in a spray of blood and bone and brains. Alice laughed wildly. "Looke there! He actually had some!!!" She collapsed into Earl's arms.

~Epilogue~

Alice grabbed her shawl & walked out onto the back stoop. She raised her good arm in a friendly "Hello" to the two boys across the pasture. Petey still wasn't quite recovered yet but Bill returned the greeting with a smile. There was a light frost in the air that was sure to wilt the tomatoes if she didn't get 'em covered. She scurried down & around the house toward the shed with Mr. Whipple dancing around her slippers. They both jumped when Trimmer's Dobie/Mix "Harley-Boy" lunged from his house. "Lousy cur would easily have yer neck Whip if'n them tire-chains snap!" Trim had beaten the poor dog more often than he'd corrected her... *-No... she'd probably won that little competition!*

She flipped the hasp & stepped in, over the assortment of cycle parts to get to the ancient chest freezer against the far wall. Most of what was left from the diner at the end of each day had found a niche within the 1940s Fridgidaire. They'd eaten purdy damned decent for S.I.N.K.S *Single-Income-No-Klass!* (Wanda's giggle, not hers)

She shuffled meatloafs, weenies & about a hundred day-olds, up to the left & leaned all the way in until she reached the layer of gift-wrapped cylinders at the bottom. Alice unearthed the largest & lugged it over to Trimmer's table saw, wincing as the stitches holding her bicept pulled taut. *15 pounds maybe, -Frozen Solid... Perfect!* She cranked the blade up as high as it would go. Four inch chunks worked pretty good, she'd found, *smaller than that was OverKill! -(twitter) - 2 to 3 hours time on a slow boil & the meat pert near fell right off!* She could just fling the bones into Harley's muddy circle, *"Vicious ass-licker would have 'em pulverized & pushed through Lickity-Brindle!"* If he missed anything -He never did- he'd just push it through twice! Who was gunna get near him anyway? The local Coffin Hunters had their eyeballs so far up Jimmy's ass they couldn't blink! Alice had turned on the tears for Cheryl... Ol Trimm had taught her that one..."Laws Yess, Alice was Trig with that!"

By Tuesday next, she figured to have her tomatoes, basil & oregano harvested & stewed. Most of what she was simmering here tonight would be diced into that.

The Stroganoff she'd brought into "Rednick's Ron-Day-Voo" last week had sold out like you wouldn't believe!—*Blue Plate Special* Side of Sugar Snap Peas* Slice O Pie*\$6.95!!!* The Townies were askin' Earl, "What's Alice cookin' next?" She'd watched while they strapped on the feedbags every afternoon like otters to water. She winked an eye at Mr. Whipple & cooed, "Hare-N-Bear-N-Birds-N-Fishes, Yer Papa's packin' Pasta Dishes!" Her Goodboy twitched an ear, displayed his snaggletooth & smiled in agreement. They'd gotten off a few good yuks together over the years, her & her Lil' Whipper.

She fired the saw to life & rammed Trimmer's thigh across the blade about 20 times. She dropped the chunks into Trimm's stupid "Terry Bradshaw Turkey Cooker" which was already starting to boil. When it came up to a steady roll, she'd turn it down to simmer. Alice wanted him tender. Tendon free. Nothing would ruin the fine dining experience down at Rednecks more than some asshole finding a hunk of Trimmer's own hairy hole draped across their fork! Alice knew that.

Tonight she hoped to lay out six or seven more pans of her famous deep dish lasagna. Four for the diner... a small one for Cheryl & the two big-uns for Wanda & the boys, *"Man them kids of hers could pack away the pork!!"*

Big Earl was inside right now whisking together a Garlic/Peppercorn Rub. Her man mixed up a marinade that could make a woman moist. She figured on goin' in for a little taste in just a few.

They already had a boneless Trim Rump-Roast lounging in a Kiwi-Lime bath that was sure to tenderize some tongues. *Nuthin beat cookin for a man... `cept maybe Cookin' him! *Thin Sliced, Open Face, side of yellow wax beans, slab of cobbler... Yes sir?... NO! Thank YOU sir!!! Ala Mode? Cup of Coffee wth that?* The Early Bird crowd was way up down at work. Tips were fantastic! She wouldn't need to look toward that insurance money for quite awhile... *Maybe not at all...!*

Alice had everything she needed... everything she'd ever truly wanted... She had Earl. And soon, very soon, he'd say those words that she was longing to hear once again. *To have... To hold... "Till Death Do Us Part"*.

~The End~

Dear Stephen:

As I suspect you know, the group mind at work in a round-robin exercise is a wonderful, frustrating, laugh-out-loud phenomenon. One writer limns a dog with ratty fur; the next misconstrues it for an actual rat. Malcontent teens play "chicken" in one writer's imagination; another magically changes their bicycles into horses. And gives them British accents. For half a page only.

What fascinates most, I think, about the experience of writing a ghoulish online tale with fellow Stephen King fans from around the world is not the continuity gaffes or the enthusiastic tug-of-war between grand guignol fun and plain old ordinary logic (how DOES a pickup truck fall into a grave meant for a single corpse, or a man with a severed Achilles tendon move "so quick [he] was almost a blur?").

No, what's most fascinating is the wicked glee with which all the participants threw themselves to the task of dismembering -- one day and (usually) one writer at a time -- the marriage of beer-guzzling redneck Trimmer and his long-suffering wife Alice. With barely a clearing of the literary throat to establish the scene, writer after writer enthusiastically unloaded some truly disturbing punishments on this beleaguered couple (not to mention a couple of bike/horse-riding teen-passers by and Alice's lover... oh, and his twin, who may just have the worst luck of any horror-story character since Scatman Crothers made it back to the Overlook in Kubrick's version of THE SHINING). Even the denouement is so cheerily, unrepentantly nasty, you may find yourself wondering about the relative mental stability of these authors.

If so, keep in mind: it's our Valentine's Day ode to our favorite Wordslinger, his faithful Web site Moderator ("She Who Walks Behind the Bytes") and the long, nervous nights we've all passed in the relentless thrall of our favorite S.K. thrillers.

Did I call this a wonderful, frustrating, laugh-out-loud experience?

Well... isn't that also a pretty good definition of love?

Warmest regards,
Rick Smith & the Ka-tet of the Stephen King Message Board