

# Jersey Devil Press

Issue 68

July 2015





# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

July 2015, Issue 68

ISSN 2152-2162

Online Editor: Laura Garrison

Production Editor: Samuel Snoek-Brown

Associate Editor: Monica Rodriguez

Readers: Rebecca Vaccaro, Amanda Chiado

Founding Editor/Publisher: Eirik Gumeny

All stories and other contributions are copyrighted to their respective authors  
unless otherwise noted.

[www.jerseydevilpress.com](http://www.jerseydevilpress.com)

## Table of Contents:

<b>Editor's Note</b>	3
<b>Riding the Hog</b> , Stone Showers	4
<b>Because Sometimes Little Boys Do Not Listen to Their Mothers</b> , Anna Lea Jancewicz	12
<b>Alchemy</b> , Anton Rose	18
<b>Old Bill and the Zombie Stripper</b> , Gary Moshimer	19
<b>Wall</b> , Nikolaj Volgushev	24

## Editor's Note

While the fourth of July is traditionally the day on which America commemorates our liberation from the Island of Soggy Bread Desserts by wolfing burnt hot dogs in hideous lawn chairs and playing drunk bocce, we JDP-ers like to extend the celebration of independence to include free thinking and a general lack of adult supervision. In that spirit, we present writings from two authors new to our pages and three who have been spotted here before. Stone Showers pits a city boy against an ornery porker named Hellraiser. Anna Lea Jancewicz shows how quickly things can take odd and uncomfortable turns when we ignore parental advice. Anton Rose offers a lyrical description of kitchen sorcery. Gary Moshimer introduces us to an undead exotic dancer and the man who loves her. Nikolaj Volgushev shares the story of a man whose waking life is disturbed by his subconscious forays into masonry.

Read, enjoy, share. And when it's time for your Bastille Day festivities, follow Troy McClure's advice and use caution around fireworks; they are the silent killers, after all.

—Laura Garrison

# Riding the Hog

## Stone Showers

Clancy's Place wasn't so much a restaurant as it was a place for the local ranch hands to hang out in those long dry hours that separated quitin' time and sundown. Clientele most days was a mix of ropers, wranglers, and the occasional drifter drawn in by the smell of charcoaled beef. If the weather was fair, most of the boys sat on the wraparound porch. From there, they could see the stables out back and the hog pens too. And if the wind was just right, they could even smell 'em both a little bit—and not just the good parts either.

Clancy bred his own beef, Angus mostly, and that's how he kept his prices so low. But in the past few years he'd branched out into pigs, and one of those had earned himself a bit of a reputation thereabouts. That one they called Hellraiser.

Now Hellraiser was just what his name implied: an 800-pound monster that Clancy had raised up from a little piglet. He was mean as pigs go, more wild than tame, really—as likely to charge a man as he was to pee on his boot. Clancy said he tried to keep him penned up, but Hellraiser just kept breaking down the fences. Truth be told, Clancy was scared of that animal, and rightly so.

Most of the time Hellraiser ignored the hands that came to visit. But every now and again he would get this mean look in his eye and grunt like someone had kicked him hard in the flank. Those that were paying attention usually moved inside when this happened. Those that weren't soon wished they had.

Whenever Hellraiser got himself into one of his moods, he'd shake his head a little bit, and then without any more warning than that, he'd charge right into the midst of whatever crowd he could find. Tossing his head back and forth like a bull on rampage, that pig would proceed to scatter men like driftwood. Clancy would run out onto the porch then, the distraught pig owner flapping his arms like a giant mother hen. After a lot of yelling, and sometimes even a little bit of swearing, Clancy would eventually manage to get that hog rounded up and settled into one of the pens out back. But by the time he'd done that, most would have already gone home to have their dinner somewhere more peaceful.

Of course, it wasn't always so exciting around Clancy's place. Most nights the boys just sat around swapping stories. By the time the crickets began to chirp, that deck of Clancy's would be littered with tall tales and empty cans.

Out of all of 'em, Pinky Wilson was the best at spinning out yarns. That boy was a natural-born storyteller—or bold-faced liar—it was hard to tell which. They called him Pinky 'cause a dog had gnawed off his little finger back when he was a kid. Pinky hated that nickname. But once something like that sticks to you it don't never go away.

Anyways, Pinky was telling a story about how he'd wrestled a bear one time, when a car nobody had ever seen before turned in off the highway. The ranch hands all went quiet as soon as they saw it, even Pinky. Out front, Hellraiser had found himself a shovel and that pig was gnawing on the handle just like a dog might do with a bone. Even the pig looked up as the car drove past.

See, Clancy didn't get many city folks out to his place. At least he didn't used to. But a couple years prior a group of do-gooders

had managed to get the hills behind Clancy's place declared a *National Scenic Area*—which was kind of a joke amongst the locals, since there really wasn't nothing much up there but sagebrush and rattlers. But ever since they done that, those hills had been overrun with city folk.

The car rolled real slow down the driveway, almost like the driver hadn't yet made up his mind whether this was such a good idea or not. The man parked out next to the flowerbeds, but left his engine running. He said a few words to his wife, then stepped out of the car. Stretching himself up real tall, he nodded in a dignified sort of way.

"Howdy," he said.

City folks always seemed to start conversations that way—almost like they thought that was the way people was supposed to talk when they got out away from the city.

"Howdy," Pinky replied. "What can we do you for?" Pinky was always happy to give people what they was expecting.

"We saw your sign out by the highway," the city boy said.

Pinky nodded real slow. "Yep. We seen it too."

The visitor considered this for a moment. I guess he wasn't too sure what to make of Pinky. He glanced back at his wife, then looked around at the rest of the men gathered there on that porch. Behind him, Hellraiser dropped the shovel he'd been gnawing and lumbered to his feet.

"I was hoping one of you might be able to help us out." The man waited for someone to respond. When none did, he went ahead and kept talking. "You see, we've gotten ourselves into a bit of a situation," he said.



The visitor was small for a full-grown man—couldn't of weighed much more than a buck forty. His forehead and upper lip were both white with salt—kinda like he'd been sweating but the moisture had all dried up.

"A sit-u-ation?" Pinky said.

The city boy licked his lips with a tongue dry as sandpaper. "We were having a picnic out on the desert," he said. "It's a National Scenic Area now, you know. Anyway, we had all of our food in a knapsack, and we put our wallets in there too, just for safekeeping." Behind him, Hellraiser shook his head from side to side, almost like that animal was trying to shake loose an idea.

"Well, you might not believe this," the boy said, "but while we were having our picnic a rattlesnake crawled into that knapsack."

The visitor paused in his telling as if waiting for someone to comment. Out in the yard, the hog snorted and pawed at the ground. The city boy looked at him and smiled. That poor fool didn't have any idea what kind of danger he was in.

"That there's a pretty good story," Pinky said. "What happened next?"

The city boy turned his back on Hellraiser. I guess nobody had ever bothered to tell him that bacon could actually be dangerous.

"Well, we did everything we could to get that rattlesnake out," he said. "We poked it with sticks. We threw rocks at it. But I guess that snake just didn't want to come out." The boy was having trouble talking now. "The sun gets pretty hot out on that desert," he said.

"Yep, it sure does," Pinky replied.

"We were getting pretty thirsty by then—" The boy swallowed hard as if to show what he meant. Pinky smiled and waited for him

to go on. The city boy wiped at his brow with a red handkerchief. "Well, we finally decided we couldn't wait any longer. But when we got back in the car, we realized we didn't have enough gas to get us home, and all of our money was back in that knapsack."

Pinky took a long draw off his drink. The hog grunted.

"That does sound like a pretty good predicament," Pinky said. "What'd you do next?"

The city boy's jaw twitched a little bit, almost like Pinky's bull-headedness was starting to rile a bit. The boy swallowed hard, then looked down at the ground.

"I guess we was hoping one of you gentlemen might be able to help us out with some gas. And maybe a drink of water."

A couple of the ranch hands laughed at being referred to as gentlemen. Pinky leaned forward in his chair, the wooden legs creaking. Across the yard, Hellraiser shivered. The sound of Pinky's chair had obviously set him on edge.

"Problem is," Pinky said, "This here ain't no gas station."

Now Pinky wasn't really being mean to that boy. He was going to help him out eventually, and everyone sittin' there on that porch knew it. But they also knew that Pinky liked to have fun with people when he saw an opportunity. And that poor boy had walked straight into this one.

Pinky scratched at his chin for a minute, then leaned back in his chair.

"You know what," Pinky said, "I like you. You seem like a decent young feller. I think I might just have a solution to your problem."

"Go on," the boy said.

“Here’s what I’m gonna do. I’m going to treat you and your wife to dinner, and all you can drink too. And, heck, I’ll even throw in a free tank of gas.”

“What’s the catch?” The boy asked. I guess that city boy wasn’t quite as dumb as he looked.

“Catch?” Pinky said. “Ain’t no catch. You just have to ride that there hog is all.”

The city boy turned and looked in the direction that Pinky was pointing. Hellfire returned his stare, a bit of drool leaking down of the side of his snout.

“Is it safe?” The boy asked.

“Sure it’s safe,” Pinky said. “Just as long as you hold on tight.”

Now any sane person would have walked away right then. But I’ll be damned if that boy didn’t look like he was considering Pinky’s proposal.

“I’ll have to talk to my wife first,” he said.

“You go right ahead and talk,” Pinky said. “The hog’ll wait.”

The city boy walked back to the car and spoke to his wife for a minute, the hog eyeing him the entire time. Inside the car, the woman looked like she was angry with her man—almost like she blamed him for the whole deal with the rattler. Women can get like that sometimes. Ain’t no explaining it—that’s just the way they’re made.

The city boy looked back at Pinky and nodded. “All right,” he said. “I’ll do it. What are the rules?”

“Rules?” Pinky said. “Ain’t no rules. You just stay on that hog for eight seconds and dinner’s on me.”

The boy nodded, his upper lip quiverin’ just a bit. For a second he looked like he might back out, but then he marched up to

Hellraiser and held his hand out like a man might do when meetin' a dog for the first time. The hog opened his mouth.

"You be careful, Kenny."

That there was the man's wife. She had rolled down her window and was leaning half way out of it so that she could get a better view. Hellraiser and Kenny both turned to look at her, and I'm not sure which one had an angrier look in his eye.

"You stay in the car," the man said. "This won't take but a minute."

Then, quick as lightening, Kenny jumped onto the hog's back. He grabbed hold of its ears and dug both heels into that pig's hindquarters. Hellraiser for his part looked mighty surprised by this turn of events. He squealed real loud and took off running. Those stubby pig legs were pumping fast, dust flying every which way. Hellraiser ran clear across the parking lot, crashed into one of the fences, then turned and ran back the other way again. By all rights that boy shoulda fallen' off straight away, but by some miracle he managed to keep himself aboard. Kenny had a hold of that pig's ears just like he thought they was reins on a mare, and after he'd been on for a bit he even learned how to turn that hog just by pulling on one ear a little more than the other.

Now Pinky had told that boy that he only had to ride the hog for eight seconds. But getting on a pig is one thing. Getting off him again once he's worked himself up to full gallop is something else entirely. Truth be told, no one knows how long that boy rode for, but it musta been closer to eight minutes than eight seconds.

'Course, all the boys on the porch started whoopin' and hollerin' just as soon as they realized what they was seein'. Even the man's wife got into the celebration. As Kenny rode past for the third time

she got out of the car and commenced to jumping up and down and clapping her hands. She seemed right proud of her man, and rightfully so. It turns out that woman's husband was a natural-born pig wrangler.

Now right about then was when Clancy come running out onto the porch. He didn't seem none too happy with what he saw.

"Get that fool off my pig," he yelled.

'Course it wasn't the boy that Clancy was worried about. But it didn't matter much anyway, 'cause right about then Hellraiser collapsed into the dust, his sides heaving with exhaustion. And I'll be tickled if that boy didn't step right off him just like he was some sort of conquering hero. When the boys on the porch saw this they all rushed out and lifted Kenny up onto their shoulders. They paraded him around the yard for a couple of minutes and then up onto the porch. Everyone was laughin' by this time, and all of them talkin' about the amazing thing they had just seen.

Pinky was true to his word. He bought Kenny and his wife dinner that night, and even filled up their gas tank just like he'd promised. And Hellraiser? Well, he recovered all right. 'Course he kept his distance for a while. But you know what? Not a single person complained about that, not even Clancy.

**Stone Showers** lives in Central Oregon with his wife and two children. He has never actually ridden a live hog (or a dead one for that matter) but knows people who have. His short fiction has recently appeared in or been accepted by *Ember: A Journal of Luminous Things*, *Stupefying Stories* and *Black Denim Lit*.

# Because Sometimes Little Boys Do Not Listen to Their Mothers

Anna Lea Jancewicz

Once, there was a boy who swallowed a bee. His mother told him not to do it. She wrung her hands like threadbare dishrags and keened, but he didn't listen because sometimes little boys do not listen to their mothers. The bee didn't sting his throat or his belly, but it didn't die either. It buzzed around inside of him and made itself at home. It started building a castle made of wax. The castle got bigger and bigger inside him until there was little room left for anything else. It nudged against his heart and his lungs. Its spires pushed at the roots of his teeth, thrusting them out of his mouth one by one. His mother collected the teeth in the pockets of her kitchen apron and then she saved them in a pretty hatbox she kept on the top of her dresser. The boy cried and had to eat soft foods. His mother made a lot of chocolate pudding for him.

When the bee was finished building the castle, it invited ghosts to come and live in its many rooms. The ghosts brought little things with them. Thimbles, hairpins, lost earring backs. Springs and cogs from inside wristwatches. Shiny pennies. Slowly, the boy's body began to grow heavier. He wasn't so good anymore at winning foot-races or hopping fences. Other children made fun of him because they could hear him rattling and jangling inside as he walked. He tried wearing a thick parka to muffle the noise, but it wasn't that cold out and so it was very uncomfortable. His mother said *Enough is enough* and she took him to see the doctor. The doctor ordered a lot of x-rays and he looked at all the little things

inside of the boy and listened with his stethoscope to the buzzing of the bee and the whispering of the ghosts. Then the doctor sucked his coffee-stained teeth and shook his bald head and said he would not operate on the boy. He said the boy would probably die and then the mother would sue him for a lot of money. The doctor said *No way, José*. The boy was confused because his name wasn't José, but his mother explained that it was just a saying. *Know what I mean, jellybean?* she said. The boy cried some more and his mother made more chocolate pudding.

The mother decided they would go to see the witch who lived on 35<sup>th</sup> Street. The witch lived in an apartment over top of the laundromat and she had four cats. Her apartment smelled like boiled potatoes. The apartment was also extremely hot, from all the heat of the clothes dryers below, compounded by the fact that all the windows were veiled in thick plastic sheeting sealed with Hello Kitty duct tape. The boy and his mother were damp with sweat right away, but the witch's skin was matte and dry even though she was wearing a heavy woolen poncho. It had gray and brown fringe, and beads carved from a variety of different woods. When the boy and his mother sat down on the witch's sofa, its plastic slipcover made a fart noise. The witch turned her head away, but they could tell she was giggling. After the mother had explained their predicament, they all sat in silence for a moment.

Then the witch told them that usually she did things like making love potions out of stolen hair clippings or boiling avocado pits to make a fertility tea, or sometimes making little bags of gross dead things that would curse people who parked in handicapped spots when they weren't allowed to do it. *What you need is going to be very sophisticated* she said. The mother asked if the witch would

be able to help them. *Okay, yeah, she said, but it's not going to be easy, so for payment I want a flat-screen TV and also the DVD boxed set of WKRP in Cincinnati.* The boy looked at his mother. His mother looked at the witch. *What?* the witch said. *I've always had the hots for Howard Hesseman.*

The first thing the witch did was make it even hotter in her apartment. The idea was to melt the wax of the castle. She bundled the boy up in several musty old fur coats that she'd had stashed away in her attic crawlspace and got out the kerosene space-heater she used in the winter. The boy's skin turned bright red and he lost consciousness. He had dreams about department store mannequins coming to life and breakdancing in the cafeteria at his school. But it worked. He started weeping wax. Sweating wax. Wax poured from his ears, his nose, his mouth. He pooped wax. It was horrible to behold. His mother had to duck into the witch's kitchenette and get sick in the sink. The witch rolled her eyes toward the cobwebby ceiling and muttered *Gawd. I'm doing it all for you, Howard Hesseman.*

To flush the ghosts from the boy's body, the witch prepared an herbal enema solution. She would not divulge the formula, but it smelled strongly of rosemary. She took the boy into her bathtub and rinsed him out thoroughly. Only one ghost was expelled. The ghost sat on the witch's shag-carpeted toilet seat with a smirk on his face and a ball cap on his head that read *Direct Action Gets the Goods*. He explained that the ghosts had organized, and he was their union representative. They'd become Wobblies. Strength in numbers. He was there to negotiate the collective bargaining. The boy's mother was indignant. She was skeptical about the ghosts' status as "workers." The ghost said that they'd started a factory in the wax castle. They'd been producing ghost-shirts. Their means of



production had been destroyed. He called the boy's mother a capitalist stooge. It was not a friendly exchange. The witch called a time-out so they could all cool it. She made a nice pitcher of catnip-spiked lemonade. They all sat on the sofa and sipped. The mother got a chocolate pudding snack-pack out of her handbag for the boy. He ate it with a plastic spoon and eyeballed the ghost timidly.

It was finally decided that the ghosts would vacate the premises, which was to say, the boy, on the condition that they would be provided an adequate space to set up their own ghost-shirt co-op. The witch was kind enough to offer her linen closet, which sounded kind of paltry at first, but was in fact more spacious than an eight-year-old child's abdominal cavity. The workers' committee agreed to the provision that they would take their little things with them. The thimbles, the hairpins, the lost earring backs. The springs and cogs. The shiny pennies. The witch offered the ghost-workers two small but very attractive Salvadoran baskets, hand-woven, to store their goods. The baskets would not fit in the linen cabinet, but the workers would enjoy full access to them under the bathroom sink. The ghosts fled the boy's body in a mass of raveled whispers and clinking communal property, and the boy felt lighter immediately. He got up and bounced on the witch's sofa, making gleeful juvenescent sounds. The witch said *Mellow out, kid*.

That left only the bee to deal with. The boy could feel it thrumming behind his rib cage, tickling, although he couldn't tell which emotion was fueling its activity. He figured maybe if it was really mad about the evictions it would've stung him already, pierced some vital organ. The witch burned a bundle of desiccated sage and wafted the smoke up the boy's nose. He sneezed, and the

bee was disgorged through his mouth. The bee settled upon the witch's coffee table, between the empty lemonade pitcher and an issue of TV Guide. There was a dirty-looking person from a zombie show on the cover. Everybody waited for the bee to speak.

After a few anxious moments, the boy's mother loosed an exasperated sigh and said *Has anybody considered the possibility that the bee can't talk, because it's, you know, a bee?* The witch frowned and shrugged her shoulders, said, *Yeah, okay. You've got a point.* The boy piped up, *I learned in school that bees communicate through dance.* Then the boy rose to his feet and performed a sublime, heartbreaking interpretive dance piece that any jerk could obviously understand meant *I am sure sorry that I swallowed you and I hope you are okay and that you will go live someplace else besides my insides because I just want to be a normal boy again.* The bee quivered. It did a little Gangnam-style horse move. The boy crossed the room and opened up the witch's front door, and the bee flew off without making a heavy thing out of good-byes. *Gawd*, said the witch, *I'm glad that's over.* The boy and his mother both said, *Me too* simultaneously. *But what about his teeth?* the mother then added, the edges of her smile sagging. *Yeah, okay*, said the witch, *that part's really easy. All he's got to do is let me eat one of his fingers. You can choose which one.* The boy and his mother blanched. *No, haha, I'm just fucking with you*, said the witch. *Just a little witch humor. You kept the teeth, right? Just have him swallow them all and then drink this.* She got out a battered bottle with a grubby cork plugging its mouth. It was half-full of sloshy murk. *There's not poop in there, is there?* asked the boy. *Don't ask questions*, said the witch, *and make sure you chug it.*

They all got into the mother's station wagon and drove to Target, where the witch picked out a flat-screen TV. She didn't

choose the top-of-the-line model, but she didn't choose the cheapest one either. That night, the mother ordered the *WKRP in Cincinnati* DVD boxed set on Amazon. It was on sale for \$84.75, plus shipping. It would be delivered to the witch's apartment within 7-10 business days. The boy drank the bitter liquid from the bottle after swallowing all of his teeth. They grew back right away, all at once, and it was awfully painful, but he was very glad to have teeth again so he didn't whine about it.

His mother made his favorites for supper, all things he had missed so much when he'd been a toothless loser. He gnawed on pot roast with no carrots, toasted bagels with blueberry jam, and corn on the cob glossed in butter. His mother told him there was, of course, plenty of chocolate pudding for dessert, but he was sick of chocolate pudding and pretty sure he'd never eat any again as long as he lived. That part didn't turn out to be true, but it did take a few years before he ate it again. After dinner the boy left his mother to wash up the dirty dishes. He cozied up under his favorite blanket and skimmed happily along the surface of sleep. His mother poked her head into his bedroom a little later and said, *Okay, buddy, don't forget to brush those nice new teeth!* The boy nodded drowsily and said that he would, but he didn't. He was swamped by pleasant dreams. And deep in a cranny of his backmost bottom left molar, the tiny inkling of a cavity was yawning into being, because sometimes little boys do not listen to their mothers.

**Anna Lea Jancewicz** lives in Norfolk, Virginia, where she homeschools her children and haunts the public libraries. She is an Associate Editor at *Night Train*, and her writing has appeared or is forthcoming at *Atticus Review*, *Hobart*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Phantom Drift*, and many other venues. Her flash fiction "Marriage" was chosen for The Best Small Fictions 2015. She is working on her first novel. Yes, you CAN say Jancewicz: Yahnt-SEV-ich. More at: [annajancewicz.wordpress.com](http://annajancewicz.wordpress.com)

## Alchemy

Anton Rose

She deals in alchemy,  
elbows drawing the slice of a knife,  
parting meat from sinew and bone,  
butchered death becoming new life  
in her hands.

She finds instructions, tested  
guides for culinary spells, becomes  
a pyromancer with kitchen blowtorch,  
eyes of light, flambéed mussel shells  
in wine.

And then she brings cheesecake  
on ceramic plates with ceremonial blade,  
a perfect construction, mystical circle,  
biscuit foundation and made  
by the goddess herself.

**Anton** lives in Durham, U.K. He writes fiction and poetry while working on a PhD in Theology, all fueled by numerous cups of tea. Find him at [antonrose.com](http://antonrose.com) or @antonjrose.

# Old Bill and the Zombie Stripper

Gary Moshimer

This was back in the day, of course, when there were still strip joints in the hills and video stores with X-rated VHS tapes. I was in the rental place, picking up a copy of *Ghostbusters*, when the old man tottered out of the “back room” with an armload of dirty tapes. You weren't supposed to bring the boxes up front; you were supposed to bring the little tags. But he hadn't heard. As he approached the checkout he could no longer handle his load; the boxes toppled and scattered, showing their lurid titles and cover photos to everyone, including some little kids. Mothers and fathers covered the kids' faces. The girl at the checkout was cool. She calmly picked up the boxes and brought them behind the counter and addressed the old man as Bill. She reminded him about the tags, but Bill was smiling a crooked and perverted smile, oblivious to everything but his future pleasure. I had to smile. One of the titles was ZOMBIE STRIPPERS. I had something to offer old Bill.

I went outside the entrance and smoked and waited for Bill. He emerged with his bag of tapes, and I said, “Psssst, Bill.”

He stopped and we studied one another. In the sun his skin was transparent, showing his old green and purple veins. His eyes were colorless, as were his lips. He was still smiling, his brown teeth pointed and covered with something that resembled dried blood. “I know a place you'll like,” I said. His hands shook. He probably couldn't wait to get to his VCR. But he kept smiling and didn't say a word. “If you like zombie strippers. It's the real deal.” He made a grunting sound. I wondered if he was deaf. He worked his greenish

tongue over those teeth. He pulled out the ZOMBIE STRIPPERS tape and showed it to me, nodding his head.

“Let me follow you home,” I said, moving my mouth slowly before those creepy eyes. “Then I can pick you up tonight and take you there. It’s an awesome place. Trust me.”

He put the tape back and held his hand out to me. It was freezing, as I expected. “Okay,” he said, his voice a gravelly whisper that gave me a chill. I walked with him; his house was just around the corner. He said he lived by himself, that he was lonely, the girls in the tapes were his company. Sometimes he fell in love, but there was something missing. I told him I’d pick him up at eight, and he held my hand again. This time he scraped my palm with a long, yellowish nail. My spine trembled.

He wore all black—pants and a tunic, black fedora. He smelled of cheap cologne disguising the odor of impending doom. He blinked those colorless eyes, and I noticed the tears. “My friend,” he said. “Thank you.”

“Bill, this will be something you won’t forget.”

I drove from the hollow up into the purple hills. The eerie sundown made Bill glow. I could see the blood pulsing at his neck, a slow beat. He smiled at me and nodded his head. He didn’t ask where we were going—he had total trust in me.

The place was at the top of a mountain, far past where the houses stopped. A few battered pick-ups sat in the parking lot. Not a lot of people knew of this place. I’d found it one night when I was driving around, trying to forget how my wife left with the appliance guy. The auto graveyard was next to the parking lot.

Some of the dancers had died in car wrecks, and those cars were sitting out there. Some stayed in their cars during the day.

Bill trembled as we entered. It was totally dark except for the stage, where Mercedes was doing her thing. She was named for the car she perished in. Now she was peeling her burnt skin from her bones. Zombie strippers can do that. There were whistles from the good old boys in the dark. "These are the real zombie strippers, Bill." Boy how he shook. He took my hand and I led him to a table up front. There was usually a vacant zone because of the smell. Bill didn't mind the smell; he said it reminded him of when he was young—gasoline and burnt rubber. He didn't mention the burnt flesh. He said he could love a woman like that.

Mercedes shook her bare bones. They rattled. She removed her blonde hair like a wig and swung it around, her naked skull grinning. Bill clapped and tried to whistle, but he was dry. I summoned the waitress, Molly, whose chubby arms molted skin as they took my order. I ordered us both a whiskey, and when it came we toasted and downed them, sputtering. Bill whistled. Mercedes was done and Angela took the stage. She spun on a stool, removing her legs and then her arms in a sexy way. She rolled on the stage and arched her back. She looked in pain but she smiled. The pain was short-lived when she was hit by the truck that severed her. Projected on a screen behind her was a picture of the tractor-trailer, and the men booed at first. Then they cheered, realizing that without the truck there would be no Angela the zombie. Then came Susanne, who had been murdered by her boyfriend with a big knife across her throat. She did a bump and grind while slowly removing her head and holding it by the black hair. All the strippers had died in terrible ways, and Bill was shedding tears of sorrow and joy.

"I want to help these poor girls," he said.

"There's no helping them, Bill. They're dead. They stay in the junkyard when they're not dancing."

"I want to meet one, to hear her story. I want to meet Mercedes. Can that happen?"

Mercedes was sitting at the bar. She'd pulled her skin back on and freshened up a bit. I sat next to her and asked if she could do a favor for an old, appreciative man who didn't just see her as skin and bones.

Her smile looked painful. How she had suffered in her crash, but not for long. I nodded towards Bill, and she said she'd be glad to tell her sad story to a man who cared. "He's a lonely man," I said.

"I can help him," she said, her voice just empty puffs of air. I could smell the metal, the old blood, but also something sweet and innocent from her former life. "I'm done for the night. We can go to my car."

I took Bill by the hand and we followed her into the moonlight, winding between all the cars until we came to hers, a late model Mercedes with the front end crushed. They climbed into the back seat like a couple of teens. Mercedes told him the story of her life—the abusive husband that caused her to drink and drive way too fast one too many times. Bill said he didn't understand how such a beautiful woman couldn't just break free from the bastard, and she said Bill was sweet. He laid his head on her shoulder. She kissed his head with her bluish lips that were sliding off her face, and Bill was in heaven.

"I want to stay here with you," he told her.

"You have to be dead to get in here. Otherwise you'll have to



keep going back to your life. You have to eat. We have no food here."

"Then come live with me," Bill said. "I'll take care of you. You won't have to dance anymore. I'll buy you new clothes, and make-up, and we can spend our days inside. Until I die, then we can come back here and live forever. "What do you say?"

So that's how it happened. I would walk by Bill's house at night and see them dancing. He had gotten her white dresses from Goodwill so she looked more angel than demon. I'd see him brushing her hair, but it was falling out. So he got her a wig. He rarely left the house, and she never did. He rented only normal movies now, so they could watch them and she'd feel like a real person again.

But then something terrible happened; Bill stepped in front of the number seven bus. You could say it was an accident, or you could know the truth like me. At the funeral I caught glimpses of Mercedes in the distance. She waved to me. She was happy. Bill would be with her now.

His house was auctioned, but I still looked in the windows for them. I drove to the junkyard. They were staying in the Mercedes now. She was working as a waitress, and Bill was a stay-in-car zombie. He showed me his special ability; he could pose his arms and legs in all possible contortions, thanks to the bus. They lived there happily. Over the years I visited, became old myself, and started looking for my own zombie girl.

**Gary Moshimer** has stories in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *PANK*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Necessary Fiction*, and many other places. He wishes to be a zombie.

# Wall

Nikolaj Volgushev

Jerry is building a wall. He tells me, 'I'm building a wall.'

I don't really understand.

'But Jerry,' I say. 'Jerry, we are software engineers. How come you are building a wall? How do you even find the time?'

Jerry sharpens a pencil. He is uncomfortable. 'Well, I'm building it in my sleep,' he admits eventually, after the pencil is so sharp you could drive it right through a telephone book.

'So you're sleepbuilding a wall?' I clarify. 'That's interesting. Did you know I have a cousin who sleepwalks?'

Jerry snaps the pencil in half. He is upset. 'No. It's not like that. I'm not sleepbuilding a wall. I'm building a wall in my dreams.'

'Ah,' I say. I still don't really understand. I think about my cousin Bill. He sleepwalked right out of a window once. What a hoot.

Jerry puts down the two halves of the pencil. He feels the need to explain.

'Every night, I go to bed and I fall asleep and dream that I'm building a wall.'

'Ah!' I say. Now I understand. 'Dreams are weird, aren't they? I dreamt the other day I was an otter.'

Jerry sharpens another pencil.

'This is different. I keep dreaming about the wall, night after night. For over a week now. I've been building this damn wall for over a week now.'

'Ah,' I say. I'm intrigued.

‘Well, are you making progress?’ I venture.

Jerry nods, testing the sharpness of the pencil with his fingertip.

‘Yes, it’s going all right.’

Jerry puts the pencil aside. ‘The problem is, I have back pains and blisters now. From building the wall, you know?’

Jerry shows me his hands. They’re raw and red and shaky.

‘Yowza!’ I exclaim.

‘Yeah . . . It’s hard work,’ Jerry says and produces a phone book from a drawer. He picks it up and drives the pencil and the sharp half of the broken pencil right through. Jerry gets that way sometimes.

I feel like I should cheer him up.

‘Hey, Jerry,’ I say. ‘Do you want to explain to me again what a subroutine is? A motherboard? Encapsulation?’

That does the trick.

Jerry doesn’t come into work for a whole week. Sick days. The team is falling behind on the project. There are bug reports. All unit tests are failing. I smack a ruler on the table. No one listens.

‘Where is Jerry?’ a man wearing a red tie demands to know.

I don’t like his tone. ‘Jerry is building a wall,’ I tell him. ‘Jerry is building the wall of his dreams.’

The man turns the color of his tie. ‘Have some grace,’ he tells me. I turn back to my computer. Gosh darn. Another bug report.

I meet Jerry for lunch. He is a different man now, not the Jerry from two weeks ago. His eyes are like wells, his hands are calloused, his

movements sparse. His mere presence inspires awe.

‘How are you, Jerry?’ I ask, ordering clams.

Jerry orders a shrimp dish, a salmon dish, a lobster dish, a tuna dish, a squid dish, also mussels. Jerry is insatiable.

‘Are you still building the wall?’ I dare to ask.

Jerry swallows the lobster whole. He crunches on the shell.

‘Well, what kind of wall is it? Are you using mortar and brick? Is it a cement wall? Are you wearing a hardhat? What is the purpose of the wall? Is the purpose of the wall to keep people in, or to keep people out? Is it merely decorative? Are you reconstructing the Berlin Wall as a social commentary? Do you stand upon the wall and look out into the sunrise at the end of the night? Will quality assurance need to stay up for days testing your wall once you’re done building it?’

Jerry takes a swig of wine and wipes his mouth with the back of his enormous, calloused hand.

‘Jerry, you must understand, these aren’t just my questions. People around the office are curious, you see? They feel strongly that they have a right to know.’

I produce a legal pad with a list of questions I was asked to ask Jerry during lunch.

Jerry takes the pad from me and answers them all.

His answers are satisfactory.

‘Thank you, Jerry. I appreciate you taking the time.’

Jerry finishes the mussels, leaving six clean plates on the table. He leans back into his chair and unbuckles his belt.

‘One more thing I would like to know, if it’s no trouble . . .’ I try my luck, ‘What is it like building the wall? Would you say it is a hardship? Do you scream out at night—Good God, I never asked

for this—or is it more of a blessing, a liberation of the soul, are you filled with the overwhelming joy of creation?’

Jerry doesn’t answer. He just sheds one gigantic, salty tear. It rolls down his cheek and lands on the floor noisily.

‘Hey, Jerry,’ I say in an attempt to undo the damage I have done. ‘Do you want to explain to me again what a call stack is? RAM? Polymorphism?’

Jerry does.

The next morning I get a call from Jerry’s wife. She tells me Jerry won’t wake up any more. She tells me she has assembled all the alarms around the house and that they’re going off (she isn’t lying, I can hear them in the background), that she has tried splashing Jerry with water, and punching him in the face, and whispering to him softly.

‘Well, is he breathing?’ I demand.

‘He is snoring.’ (Again, this is the truth, I can hear his giant breath over the sound of the alarms.)

‘I will be right there,’ I assure her, get in the car, and run a million red lights.

We’re all gathered around Jerry’s bed. His wife is holding his hand in both of hers (it’s so enormous, it won’t fit otherwise). The window is open; there is a fresh alpine breeze. Some of the alarms are still going off periodically because with some clocks the mechanism of turning the alarm off is an enigma, even to us software engineers. Jerry is breathing heavily, making the room

shake.

Pedro, the janitor, walks in. He apologizes for being late and takes a seat next to the ladies from quality assurance.

Someone demands that we discuss the semantics of the wall Jerry is building. 'I would like to know Jerry's intentions in building this wall. I would like to know the deep childhood trauma which caused him to do so. I would like to have it affirmed that Jerry is building the wall symbolically, to solidify his deep isolation from reality. Can we all agree that Jerry is building the wall because he is lost, because he is fearful of death, because the universe is a fleeting, cold creature that is immeasurable and yet collapsing further and further onto itself every perceived moment of time?'

Jerry's wife breaks into tears. We offer her tissues. 'Now, now,' we say. 'There, there.'

'What do you think will happen once he's finished building the wall?' someone ventures eventually. Jerry's wife, just having calmed down, resumes sobbing again. We assure her that we didn't mean it that way.

'Surely he'll wake up,' I offer my opinion, though in my heart of hearts I am not convinced. In my heart of hearts there is fear and doubt and uncertainty.

Jerry sneezes, then turns over onto his side. His shadow covers us all; the temperature drops. Jerry's wife returns with hot chocolate and blankets for everyone. We continue in our vigil.

These days, whenever I pass a wall I imagine that Jerry built it. Especially those stone walls trailing off into the forest, moss-

covered and derelict, dysfunctional at first glance.

I wonder what the purpose of these walls is; I mean, look at them among the pines and shrubs and roots, what are these walls actually dividing?

‘All forgotten spaces,’ Jerry tells me from afar. ‘They’re dividing all forgotten spaces, don’t you feel it?’

I tell him that I do, but really I don’t. There’s a certain nostalgia to this kind of lie, a bright, childish disappointment.

Maybe one of these days I ought to build a wall myself, I think. Maybe.

**Nikolaj Volgushev** was born in Goettingen, Germany, in 1991. Volgushev works in the medium of short fiction with a focus on the magic realist and absurdist genres. He obtained his B.S. in Computer Science at the University of Connecticut in 2013 and currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts. He is pursuing his PhD in Cybersecurity at Boston University. Volgushev draws influence from writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Haruki Murakami, and Donald Barthelme as well as the strange realms of software development and formal logics.







## On the cover:

### "DINO SCRAPS"

Jon Snoek

**JON SNOEK** is a bearded hippie from Texas who makes stop-motion animated films ([funnyordie.com/snoeked](http://funnyordie.com/snoeked)), paints, and writes children's books about lost robots. He is currently building a scale replica of the *Evil Dead* cabin using found objects and handcrafted miniatures ([facebook.com/pages/Evil-dead-cabin/577137652385124](https://facebook.com/pages/Evil-dead-cabin/577137652385124)).

