

STRATHCONA WRITERS' MUSE

Monkey

By Karen Probert

Alissa slumped onto the end of the bench. She let her head fall forward as she tried to catch her breath in the frigid air. It was so still here. So cold. Her hands rested on her knees. Her side ached. Alissa had run hard to get here so her breath came in gasps. Her heart pounded. The thin T-shirt she had on was soaked in sweat. At least she'd grabbed her coat before she left the party.

It had been a mistake to go to the party. She'd known it was, deep in her gut. She'd known and her mother had known. Stubborn. That's what she was – stubborn.

The party had been the talk of the school all week. Whispers in hallways. Texts. Tweets. But Alissa wasn't one of the popular kids, not part of the 'in crowd'. Not pretty enough, nor athletic enough, not funny enough.

Then Nathan had asked her, "Hey, Monkey, you coming on Saturday? Hope so."

The idea built in her mind. Nathan, the jock, wanted her to be at the party. As she explained it to her mother, "He invited me."

She'd chosen skinny jeans and a white T. Didn't want to look dressed up. And thigh high boots. Big gold hoop earrings. She'd washed her hair and added blue streaks to bring out the colour of her eyes. She'd showed up at 9 – not too early, not too late. Alissa had never been to a party in this area. And she didn't know who lived in this house. It was a big house and beautifully decorated. When she'd run out the sliding doors everything in the house was being trashed. Two couples were naked on beds and another couple were screwing against the kitchen island. There was trash on the floor and Nathan had puked on a pale green chair by the fireplace. Alissa could smell drugs and see white lines and colourful pills on the glass coffee table. The music had gotten louder and heavier but no one was dancing. No one was laughing. Everyone was stoned on booze or drugs. Maybe both.

Josh had leaned next to Alissa and put his hand on her ass. "The little monkey came," he slurred to Carlos who was on the other side of her, leaning in. "Let's show her how to party." Each one took an elbow and lifted Alissa off the floor. They carried her to a linen closet. After Carlos opened the door, Josh said, "Me first" and started to kiss her and pull her shirt off. "Nathan said she'd be here. She's sixteen now so it's time she learned how juniors learn from senior primates," he'd snorted.

Alissa struggled and then remembered a self-defense course her mother made her take. She went limp and dropped to the floor. That's when she ran. Down the stairs into the front bedroom. She'd left her coat there right next to the headboard. She'd grabbed it and run out the sliding doors, across the patio and around the corner, through the gate and out to the street. She kept running. No one followed her.

She'd be the laughing stock at school on Monday. 'Monkey'. They thought she looked like a monkey. *No, that's not it*, she decided. Monkey meant virgin. How could she not have known?

As her breathing eased, Alissa sat back against the bench and looked around. She was in a part of town she didn't know, but it was bright with lots of street lights, shops and offices, and condos with lights still on. But, so cold. She dug into her pocket for her phone.

"Mom, it's me. Can you come get me? Please. I'm at the corner of 111th Street and Bretton Way. I'm cold. I'm okay. Please. I'm sitting on a bench. I'll wait."

Alissa put her phone back. She'd expected her mother to be mad, but she'd just sounded relieved and said she'd be there in a few minutes. Alissa shivered as she heard and then saw police cars rushing past on 111th back the way she'd run from. She moved a bit closer to the middle of the bench. Hooked over the far end was a scarf. A soft, knitted scarf in mauves and blues. The note pinned to it read, "If you're cold and need this scarf, take it to stay warm. Knitted with love."

Alissa looked around. Nobody was close. *Who'd knit a scarf and leave it for someone they didn't know?* She wrapped it around her head and neck. She found her gloves in her coat pocket and pulled them on. She thought of a little old lady knitting scarves but that was ridiculous in this upscale neighbourhood.

The shivering had stopped. Her mom was on the way. Her head was warm, and her neck. She was safe. She'd be okay. She'd wear the scarf to school on Monday – it would be a talisman that she'd passed the test. She wouldn't be so stupid next time. Fitting in wouldn't be her goal anymore. She didn't care if she was a monkey. She'd stay one until she decided not to be one. Monkeys can wear soft, pretty scarves.

As her mother's car turned the corner, Alissa stood up straight and waved. The scarf held her warm breath in. Alissa climbed into the front seat where the heater was blasting. Her mother said, "Nice scarf!"

"Long story, Mom. Thanks for coming so quick. I'll explain later, okay?" And, as she sat back against the warm seat, she thought, *I'll wear the scarf when I talk to Mom. I won't tell her everything – just that there was booze and pot. She'll understand that. I'll tell her she was right. I won't explain about being a monkey – she doesn't need to know that part. This scarf will help me be strong.*

EDITOR'S NOTE

Beth Rowe

The weather has been so beautiful it is hard to believe it is March. It makes one itch to be out in the yard. You keep expecting trees to bud and flowers to begin to appear.

One can only hope that this mild winter does not harm the perennials.



Important Dates

Arts Expo *note change of date and venue * now at Common Ground on Saturday, March 19th

IVC Volunteer Fair at the Agora on Wednesday, April 13th

WFSC 2016 Conference on October 30th at County Hall meeting room 1 - workshop sessions all day

Upcoming Dates

Submission deadline
March 30th

Writers Circle
April 5th

Reflection
by Mike Derogowski

I see you.
Do you see me?
Do you see the person I want me to be?

My eyes are the wrong colour.
My stomach's too big!
My arms could be broader.
I could use a wig!

Why can't I see who I want to see?
Why do you have to show me, me?

I see you.
Do you see me?
Don't you see the person I know you to be?

You look like a superstar.
You're incredibly smart!
Apply yourself to anything and you will go far.
And never forget your giant heart.

Why can't you see who I see?
Why can't I see me?



Echoes of Time
By Mike Derogowski

I sit here staring at the midnight sky
Many years later, still wondering why
You came into my life, only to die
Left me suddenly, left here to cry

The cogs still turn
The ashes still burn
within your memory, I do not learn
The echoes of time form another trend
still many years later, I am trying to mend

One? Two? Three? Four?
How many years must I suffer more?
The echoes of time weave a merciless thread
Forever reminding me that you are dead.

A care giver
A listener
A protector
An entertainer till the end
The echoes of time took a best friend

As time falls through the hour glass
and earth revolves around the sun
My memories of you will be the only one
The echoes of time may be merciless, indeed,
but you will be with me always, wherever I need

It may take another year, or maybe more
but I will see you again, for that I am sure
In a dream
In a smile
In nature's wild

When my sands end and I must leave, too
The echoes of time will let me see you

The Sound of All and Bone by Mandy Eve-Barnett

The dull thudding sound penetrated my dazed mind. I strained to open my eyes only to be faced with a peeling ceiling and cobwebs overhead. I tried to move but realized my wrists and ankles were bound, keeping me from moving from the bed.

Thud, thud, thud.

My mind searched for the answer - What is that?

Thud, thud, thud.

I rolled back and forth in an effort to free myself, there was no loosening of the leather straps bound tightly around my flesh and anchored to the bed frame.

Thud, thud.

I waited for the final thud, but it did not come. The silence was scary. What did it mean?

A key turned in the door lock to my room and it creaked on its rusty hinges. A dark figure appeared and its grotesque smile froze my blood. A saw in its hand dripped with a dark liquid, pooling on the floor.

Mini Rainbows & Sunshine

by Linda J. Pedley

Small shards of light splashed their brilliance across the room, decorating the ceiling and walls and all other flat surfaces with their amazing show. These faceted displays always delighted Ruby because it meant sunlight filtered in through her open window – welcoming, as it showered her with yellow promise of the day. Dull winter with its smothering grey skies held far too tight a grip upon the spring loving girl. By the middle of January her emotions were already drained as the dead of winter pressed on. She smiled as the red tipped mini rainbows shifted and dazzled on their journey around the room. The sun filled blue skies were a welcome relief even if the temperatures remained cool.

A rhythmic purr emanated from a fluffy cushion on the bed as a beam of warmth splayed its hand across Tiger. Even Ruby's orange and white tabby cat enjoyed the day, lolling comfortably in the middle of the flowered duvet. The splashes of color from the glass prisms were lost among the myriad of blossoms and leaves and ribbons. The cat briefly shifted his gaze, watching her as she watched him, his green eyes soon narrowing, and then closing, with apparent disinterest.

Her spirits lifted, Ruby made plans to take a short walk around the block to breathe in the fresh air and enjoy the sunshine. Without looking in the mirror, she recaptured the fly away strands of hair escaping their tie, the signature violet streaks almost lost amongst the ebony. She pulled a black hoodie over her loose fitting indigo t-shirt, slipped into her worn leather boots and headed out the door. The little diamonds of refracted light were always welcome in an otherwise colorless life.

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Writers Foundation of Strathcona County

2015 – 2016 Board Members and contact information:

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Bethany Horne	Vice President	cbhorne@shaw.ca	
Linda Pedley	Treasurer	wildhorse33@hotmail.com	780-445-0991
	Web Site Administration		
Mandy Barnett	Secretary	mandybar@shaw.ca	
Karen Probert	Past President		
	Library Liaison	karen@lumevision.com	780-464-6632
Beth Rowe	Director /Newsletter	bethrowe1@telus.net	780-718-7253
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www.wfscsherwoodpark.com

Email: wfscsherwoodpark@hotmail.com