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The Flamingo

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Fall 1959

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FLAMINGO

**FALL ISSUE 1959**

# FLAMINGO

VOLUME No. 39

FALL 1959

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## COWPO

H. BRUCE GREENE

The morning had a crisp chill as usual. The gray of early morning filtered through the boards of a lost decade nailed to poles; the whole works threatening to come down in the next wind.

The morning we had left Pusan Air Base there had been eighteen men on board our WB-50, Weather Reconnaissance Plane; only five of us were left. The other forty-two men were from 8th Army; total — forty-seven. This was Cowpo, North Korea.

Cowpo was just a small P. W. Camp, one of the many the Reds had. It was halfway up the side of a hill, barren and desolate like its surroundings. Our shabby, shaky hut sat in the center of the compound two hundred feet square. I know; I walked it enough.

Our clothes were torn and shabby, our feet wrapped in rags, as our brogans had been removed. One doesn't walk far in rag-wrapped feet on the rocky terrain in Korea. They knew this, so, no brogans. We slept like snakes in the straw we had for beds, all curled up to each other for warmth.

There was a rattle outside the door and we knew it was the guard unlocking it. The chilly wind chilled any marrow that wasn't. We stumbled out and huddled together waiting for roll call and our food. Jack, our radio operator, was late getting out, so our guard, being nice and understanding, and knowing Jack was sick and weak, helped him along. Helped him! Well, a rifle barrel across the shoulders moves one, but not in the right direction. Our guard thought it was right, for he can kick you much better. To jump the guard would relieve you of your pain and worry: that is to say, his bayonet was very sharp.

Breakfast arrived — cold rice and warm tea. We mixed our rice and tea in dirty little cups and sloped away like pigs. No one noticed manners after a while. You didn't know how or why you changed, you just did and accepted it.

Later in the morning Lt. Mokohashie, the camp commander, addressed us in his poor English. He asked, "You sleep well?"

"Go to Hell, you S. O. B.!" retorted one of the men. Moko-hashie laughed as if someone had told a good joke. Next he told us that we should sign some papers; then we would get more food and better clothes and quarters. He would probably have shot us once he got our signatures. Hell, the pig would sell his mother for kicks.

The Lt. decided he would teach us how to march. I never did like Lt.'s — especially Reds. He told me to march and I said, "Go to hell, you b——d." His swagger stick hit my left cheek. He had a very effective stick, a razor blade in the end. Being so chilled, I didn't feel it until the warm blood started to run. I spat in his face and all hell broke loose. I didn't know where the guard came from, all I knew was that he hit me a good one on the back. I didn't complain, as several of us got it each day; it was just my turn, I guess.

Noon chow came and the steady diet of cold rice and warm tea. As we were eating, we noticed a treat — meat. Meat did I say? Well, rice worms have meat. They are like maggots, only brown.

The afternoon was the hardest; that is, if you were chosen for interrogation. They had all sorts. The one I hated most, above the Pig Box and other little tortures, was a psychology torture. First you were blind-folded and cotton was stuffed in your ears. This was bound tight. Then your mouth was covered so you couldn't open it. Your hands and feet were wrapped in

cotton and then wrapped with a cloth. After this you were placed in a soft bed and wrapped in a sheet tied to the bed. You could see, hear, and feel nothing. At first you slept what seemed a long time. When you awoke and remembered some of the things the Lt. had said, "I hear your girl is having a very good time drinking and dining every night with a different man."

No, you told yourself, but then you started to think — how long had it been? Eleven — no eighteen months. You weren't so sure, and this and other things disturbed you mentally. You tried to hear, to feel, or to see anything. You couldn't. After what seemed days, you were released and asked to sign. You didn't, so they told you that next time your time would be twice as long.

Although this doesn't sound so bad, the mind has its limit. You went back to the compound and sat in the hut. Supper was like the other meals with the exception that you got one cigarette. The paper was discolored from being wet, but it was a smoke. We were allowed a small fire in the hut at night for as long as the little coal they gave us lasted. As the fire died we lay on our straw pads and waited. The guard counted us and locked the door.

They always put us to sleep with a grenade thrown somewhere outside the compound. It could have been at any time and the tension grew. When it did, everyone twitched, but a great relief was felt as another day ended, and we could rest in peace.



*Petals crimson soft  
Resting in my hand  
Lonely fingers grasp —  
Windless rand.*

*Coarsing mouths that spout the vilest day's repast  
Clutching nails aflame with bodies bronzen cast*

*Dona nobis vit — and  
Though I spit out rust  
Petals crimson sweet  
Drift and soothe my lust.*

ANONYMOUS

# ELEGY IN RED

*Hail to thee, blithe Commy,  
Comrade to us all  
You shake the roots  
Of all our boots  
On this celestial Ball.*

*We, extemporaneously,  
contemplate our fall —  
and what has been  
our Original Sin  
At the cause of all this fal-de-ral.*

*To then agree, O Blithe Comm-y  
on differences in philosophy  
we must be wed  
on truth's hard bed  
and the offspring selectively fed.*

*Shoot the moon, change your tune,  
Rewrite life's buffoonery jest!  
We're still alive!  
We've yet survived!  
For second-best's still second-blest.*

*So Hail to thee, blithe Commy,  
Come take away our pay —  
With all your toots  
and green recruits  
to snatch our marvelous toys away!*

K. BRACEWELL

*The noise is over and the quiet never to end again now  
has come*

*the fight is done neither won nor lost but just forgotten  
with indifference by the ones that always win in the  
end because they are dull and have nothing to say*

*but you learn that it is safer to say nothing with sage  
wise silence and nod gently to the wild word burning  
red brim thought-full youth who*

*dances since he has found the connection to all that has  
never been found before*

*but those who have been forgotten do not forget so easily  
too sad to forget too proud and too believing and too  
frantic and too lone lost to forget*

*on across the continent they will flee nightmare followed  
by the mean eyed mockery of their devastating and  
inescapable defeat*

*fearful that they should wake some pierce brained morn to  
find they are at peace and unprepared*

*no hangover no juice no lay of rhythm in the sheets no terror  
from the sleet of rain whipped dream high orgies*

*but left with waterfall bird song smooth breezed day and  
puzzled how to handle this because it's not in har-  
mony with the jazz of neonblurred experience*

*fleeing over America land getting more frightened not to find  
anything*

*in all the corners of the once illusioned bluejeaned motor-  
cycled world they thought was greatfully worshipping  
at ther holely-sneakered feet*

# AFTER THE HOWL IS OVER and the BEAT are TIRED

SARAH LANIER BARBER

*jumping into flying carpet boxcars going going to find  
regardless for the impulse is there and you've got  
to fly*

*into the octopus towers of the cities silhouetted against  
the many leveled caverns of the night*

*leaving behind echoing the words  
look for us  
in the hills of San Francisco*

*look for us  
in the flat souled wheat grained far eye reaching little  
demanding western plains*

*look for us  
on the roof top star gazing angel seeing all night no  
morning speculations broke and tired  
admitting nothing*

*look for us  
in the middle of the night bolt upright remembrance  
of a past withdrawal*

*look for us  
on the beach by the side of the surf contemplating  
footprints being gobbled by the sea*

*o God look for us  
look  
for*

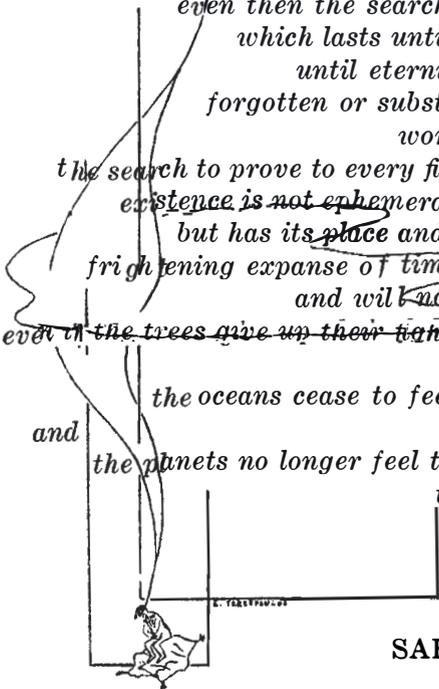
*us  
for we have gone*

# MEDITATION

Way back eons when something formed the earth  
when stars and moons and comets decided they would make  
their home within the always changing blues and  
greys and blacks that are the backdrop of that  
we lift our eyes up to  
when the oceans first began their inexorable course  
of beating on the powerless innumerable dots  
of sand that try to build dunes and then  
are inundated and eroded back  
into the famished mouth of the ubiquitous and hungry sea  
when trees first tried to break their embryonic chains  
stretch their branches  
and grasp the sky thinking they could  
reach the equivocal presence that dwells  
within the cosmos

when amoeba were the monarchs of humanity  
even then the search began  
which lasts until this day and will last  
until eternity is passed  
forgotten or substituted by another  
word or symbol

the search to prove to every finite soul  
~~existence is not ephemeral~~  
but has its place and meaning in the  
frightening expanse of time  
and will not be forsaken  
~~even if the trees give up their fight to reach the~~  
firmament  
the oceans cease to feed upon the sand  
and  
the planets no longer feel their home to be  
the universe



SARAH LANIER BARBER

*I*

*The pears were much too hard yesterday,  
Too green for raiding;  
Ah, but today they're honey in the mouth —  
Summer is fading.*

*Before, green leaves  
Dappled the lawn;  
Now green leaves are russet —  
Summer has gone.*

*Yesterday was blade-bright  
Beneath a metal sun;  
Today that bronze is hazed —  
Autumn has come.*

*II*

*The clouds —  
— not one does dare  
to stray in the high blue sky on this October day.*

*Nose on its paws,  
Tail curled around,  
The wind lies  
among the fallen leaves —  
Scattered, burnt, brittle and brown.*

*III*

*The wind is not always stormy —  
Nor does it always roar when tearing through space.*

*There is a soft sound, too.  
The sea clucking under the dock,  
Bright washing of foamy pebbles,  
Little splashings from the dippers of the tides.  
Yes, the wind too can be gentle —  
as if it had never wrestled with a branch  
or never cracked a mast  
as if never guilty in its life.*

*The driftwood log burns with persistence  
— The fire's flame nods and we shiver.*



IV

*Slowly —*

*— DROP —*

*The mellow days*

*Ripe and radiant fruit in an amber haze.*

*Summer went —*

*— Rose by rose,*

*So —*

*Leaf by every golden leaf — autumn goes.*



J. LEVIN

# **THE INFIDEL**

ALBERTO SEPULVEDA

The den was warm and deliciously comfortable. He lay limply on the couch listening to the pitter-patter of rain in the flower bed outside the window. Soft, red reflections leaped intermittently from the fireplace, taking warm bites from his socked feet and pushing him farther into the murky world of oblivion. Drowsily he gazed at the familiar guns and pictures around the room. They seemed to float intangibly about, never bumping each other in the green mist of wallpaper. The rain, unusually abundant for December, drizzled steadily through the elms by the walk, making splashy puddles in the street. To him, those gay winters of snow and sleds seemed to have passed.

Music seeped into the room filling each glass and ashtray like heavy smoke. It seemed to flow over the furniture, settling at last on the floor in listless clouds. He drew his hand back and forth across the rug, as if disturbing its melancholy vapors. Grunting lazily he turned on one side and began to watch the girl. She was bent precisely at the waist, adjusting the knobs on the phonograph. Occasionally she gazed at him, making small cautious smiles. He closed his eyes again and drifted about in the atmosphere, taking bites of it and pushing his face into it. Relaxed completely now, his mind stole back to the party. Out of the door he flew and into the midst of giddy, bright people and bubbly laughter. Once again he wandered aimlessly about, speaking passively to friends and acquaintances. Lighting a cigarette, he had asked the waiter for another drink. Then looking out of the large window he had watched all the little lights below. Some blinked bravely through the sodden air, but most of them just stared in their bright, unembarrassed way. Then he had his fresh drink and was wandering again. This time he stopped with his back to a long red curtain. He took a quick sip and began playing absently into the ice cubes. This was when the strange girl had spoken to him. He had looked up into two brown eyes and thought how attractive this strange girl was. She pleasantly asked if he was enjoying himself and looking down once more, he mumbled something inappropriate. She had smiled somewhat disappointedly and walked away. He had wanted frantically to stop her, but he didn't. Instead he sat his drink aside and prepared to leave. Grabbing his own Nellie he said good-night to the host. At the door he had turned to see if she was watching, but she wasn't. Nellie had asked what was the matter. He said someone had called.

Now his mind flew back to the fire and the music, for he was opening his eyes again. Nellie was sitting beside him now, and even though it was almost dark, he knew she was smiling. Vaguely he recalled how she had smiled ever since he had known her. It seemed as though her smiles lately were all sad ones. He realized what a sweet girl she was and also how much she loved him. Somehow it didn't really matter anymore. She had become a habit and he was tired, not of her, but of himself.

He stared blankly at the ceiling, his mind whirling from present to past and occasionally bouncing against the future. The rain had stopped and the gutter over the door dripped regularly on to the porch. The gutter was probably clogged with leaves. The drain at his house used to do the same thing.

He faintly remembered his father coming home one evening a little intoxicated and climbing onto the roof with a broom and a coathanger, squatting on the edge, and throwing leaves into the street. The neighbors had watched the knotty little man shouting and thrashing about, and were too afraid even to complain to each other. He smiled slightly now. That was a long time ago, although really not so long. He must write the old man soon; how ungrateful he must seem. Drowsily he remembered how a poet had summed it all up. Something about how way leads on to way, and how hard it is to get back. He had planned to be a writer once but he had managed to convince himself that he didn't have time. Now he remembered his older brother too, dashing off to Europe despite his mother's tears. Then he himself had left for school, and didn't even come home for Christmas. Home towns are so depressing. He would go home next Christmas though, he really must.

He opened his eyes again. Nellie sat very still beside him, quietly watching and not daring to speak. He glanced at her figure, composed and becoming. She was not quite slender, but she was not fat either. She was so fresh and he loved to run his hand over her smooth opaque skin. Yes, he loved to touch her. She never bothered him; he knew if she did, he would just get mad. How strangely things work out. Occasionally he thought back to other places and other girls. He didn't remain long. He knew it was time to take her in his arms now. It was the same little voice hissing in his ear over which he had no control.

Slowly he sat up and put his arms around her waist. She smiled again and then he kissed her. Again he lay back on the couch. His head seemed to sink into a black abyss, her smiling face on the edge, just out of reach. A slightly quizzical expression spread across Nellie's face. Pretending not to notice it, he grabbed her by the arm and pulled her down against him. The fire sputtered uneasily, as if threatening to die and let in the cold. Shadows loomed up suddenly and then subsided with the uncertain flames.

At that moment Nellie sat up, not suddenly but steadily. Staring at the floor she clapped her hands and sighed heavily. Puzzled, he once more reached up to her, not boldly now, but persuasively. She calmly shook her head. He lay there not knowing what to do. He felt useless and then utterly lonely. He rose slowly and began to grapple for his shoes in the dark. He could scarcely see, and the infinite quietness rang loud in his ears. Slipping into his shoes, he stood and looked at her there in the darkness. She sat completely still her hands lying heavily in her lap. He reached unsteadily into a chair and picked up his sweater. Digging his hands into it uneasily, he stepped to the door. Again he turned, but she gave no response to his somewhat bewildered gaze. He blinked slowly, and looking away, stepped outside.

Water still dripped from the gutter on to the brick, splashing daintily each time. The porch was made of old brick, probably very expensive. Yes, he was sure of it, brick like that was not cheap. He stepped lightly down the steps to a small walk that led to the street. Little hedges grew neatly on either side, as if showing him the way. The streetlight flashed spastically on the wet pavement and a cold wind whispered solemnly through the trees. He walked slowly toward the street, putting on his sweater as he went. Stars twinkled cautiously through the hazy air, and a dog barked two blocks away. Stuffing his hands in his pockets, he hurried toward the subway, his shoulders swinging with each step. He needn't run; it wouldn't rain again that night.

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♦♦

I

*I can see you standing across a room  
Of champagne and laughter, or in the gloom  
Of a sleepy street with the stars above,  
And a heart of quiet, and a face of love.  
I can see you standing beside the shore  
Of an emerald sea, or upon a moor  
Of wild azalea, for though apart—  
I can see you always within my heart.*

II

*The day is dull—  
  its colors, drab and dead.  
Its light, one light,  
  that shows a rose as red.  
But ah! the night  
  when color leaps and sways,  
One thousand lights  
  show red one thousand ways!*

by VICKI L. BOGGS

# THE TREE OF BLOOD

JOHN HICKEY

Blood drips from its branches, blood runs in tiny streams on its long dead leaves, blood soaks the thick, black trunk, blood is sucked into the thirsty ground beneath. The moon, the laughing eye of a dying crone, hangs in the branches and tastes the blood. And in the wind is her scream that will live forever in the grass that covers the gnarled roots of the tree.

A scar lies on the soft, brown breast of earth where the tree stands. In the death of her joy, in the death of her life, she struck out with her foot and ripped the earth and left a scar.

In the deep valley, she waited by the river. On the long evenings of the shadowy summer, she brushed her long and golden hair by the silky river. Slowly she brushed her long and golden hair till the yellow moon swam in the black water. And when the red sun coated the river with fire in its bloody dawn, she dreamed of the night when he would come from the river, his voice hushed like the river's whisper, when he would come and call her name,

“Sharon. Sharon with the long and golden hair.”

And when the sun had risen, and he had not come, with a silver scissors, she snipped off a piece of her hair.

Elijah MacCuspie watched the rutted, torn dirt road bake endlessly in front of him. Following, he followed the tree topped levee, the trees forming a wild picket fence between the Mississippi and the land it nurtured. Elijah MacCuspie bounced on his buttocks when the wheels of the old car found the ruts in the road. Elijah MacCuspie sang to himself, a hymn of praise to the God whose word he spread. But Elijah MacCuspie's mind wasn't on the tree topped levee, nor the river beyond. Elijah MacCuspie's mind was on the girl who waited by the river, the girl with the long and golden hair. In the summer nights, she needed the word of God, but more than that she needed the voice of a man. Elijah MacCuspie felt a quickening in his loins when he thought of the girl with the long and golden hair.

He passed an old man walking down the dusty road. He stopped to give to the old man the word of God, the word that every good man should know. The old man smiled with broken teeth.

He passed a young boy walking down the dusty road. He stopped to give the young boy the word of God, the word that every good man should know. The young boy didn't look up

from the dust that was rising between his toes.

Elijah MacCuspie bounced on his buttocks, sang of the God whose word he preached, and longed for the girl with the long and golden hair.

Jason Black sucked at the white foam covering the glass of beer, icy in his hand. He sucked the white foam and listened to the reverent voices filling the musty bar, smelling of vomit and cat-urine. Jason Black stood, drank, lived alone. But the reverent voices made him watch with his deep, dark eyes and listen. He had heard the story before, in himself he knew the story. Maybe a dream one night on the choppy sea, or in a cold freight car crossing icy fields. The voices printed pictures in the air of a girl beside the river. Sharon. From somewhere deep inside himself came the name. Jason Black didn't question from where. He moved closer to the quivering voices.

"Sitting up there on the levee . . ."

"Everytime I pass at night . . ."

"Don't know . . ."

"Someday I'm . . . ."

Fog was creeping in St. Louis. Born in the river, rising, floating into the streets. Wisps like curling cigarette smoke touching Jason Black.

At the end of one of the docks, where it fell off into a seeming void of nothingness, stood a barge. Jason Black stepped aboard. A voice stopped him, biting through the fog.

"What you want?"

"Goin' down river?"

"Yeah."

"That's what I want."

Sharon with the long and golden hair. That's what I want. Frank Clemet shouted to his youngest boy, Billy.

"Billy, you go on back up to the house. I gotta close up the store here. Damn store. Nobody ever buys anythin' anyway. Someday'll burn the damn thing down. I'll go back down to Neeew Orleens and set around the French Quarter drinking and smoking and such. Someday'll just burn the damn thing down."

A wheezing, rheumatic engine clicking over the dusty road made him turn.

"Well I'll be damned! The Circuit Rider." Fat soft body, bobbing down to the side of the road to meet the oncoming car.

"Howdy, Preacher! Frank Clemet waved his sausage fat hand at Elijah MacCuspie. The car sputtered to a halt. With effort Frank Clemet lifted his foot up to the running board and leaned his arm on the window.

"May the ever bountiful Jehovah bless you, Frank Clemet."

"Thank ya', thank ya'. Been a long time since you were through, Preacher."

"The Lord has seen fit to make my flock large and scattered."

"Com'n to the store and set a spell, Preacher."

"Thank you, Frank Clemet."

Elijah MacCuspie sat down in the battered rocker and stretched his cramped legs. "Things haven't changed much, Brother Clemet."

Frank Clemet leaned his weight on the bruised counter cupping his fat chin in his fat red hand.

"Don't see much reason to change, Preacher. Not many folks come in here. Those that do want the same things anyway. Did get some new things in though."

Elijah nodded. "Folk's are about the same everywhere."

"Got some Bibles in, Preacher. Thought you might like to see them."

The light coming through the screen door of the store was getting dimmer. The flies that had been buzzing all afternoon had glued themselves to the screen.

Frank reached up to a shelf and pulled down a black box. He set it on the counter.

"Salesman came through not three weeks ago," said Frank Clemet. "I go the word of God in this black box. A big man he was, hands all white. Said he had the word of the Lord in this old black box. Said he felt that people hereabouts should have that word and my reward would be richer if'n I was the one to supply 'em with it. They're real pretty Bibles, Preacher."

"I been hearing stories, Frank Clemet. I been hearing stories about a girl who has been neglected when it comes to the teachings of the Lord." Fat, red hands pushed the black box closer to the edge of the counter, closer to Elijah MacCuspie. "It seems this young woman has been sadly neglected."

"Maybe one of these Bibles . . ."

"Folks tell me she lives by the river."

Frank Clemet took the lid off the box. He tried to turn it so the light would shine the brightest on the black imitation leather covers of the word of God. "Lots of folks, most everybody lives by the river, Preacher."

"She lives by herself, Frank Clemet. All alone without the comfort of God's wisdom."

Frank picked up one of the Bibles tenderly. He opened it to the first page. "Revised Version, King James Bible, it says here. Course most people around here can't read, but it would be a comfort for them to have them in their homes."

"They say at night she sits on the levee, Frank Clemet. Looking for something. Seems she's looking for the word of God and don't know it."

Frank thumbed through the Bible in his hand. "Lot of people looking for that and don't know it. Got a half dozen of these Bibles. Most folks can't afford them. Be inspirin' if some good person took into his head to give them one. A man of the cloth say."

Elijah MacCuspie stared up at the ceiling dreamily.

"They say she has long and golden hair, Frank Clemet."

"Seems I heard about such a woman hereabouts. Can't seem to recollect where though, Preacher."

The Preacher looked over at the box on the counter. "How much are those Bibles, Frank Clemet?"

"Fifty cents a piece, Preacher. Seems I heard she lives not far from here."



“I think it would be a deserving act if I took those six Bibles and gave them to needy people hereabouts.”

Frank closed the box and smiled. “Seems to me I heard she lives about a mile from here. A little cabin set all by itself. Can’t miss it.”

Elijah MacCuspie settled back in his chair.

“Thank you, Frank Clemet.”

Jason Black stood at the side of the barge staring into the dark trees that lined the river. The little weasel of man who stood beside him whispered a rasping whisper into his ear.

"About a half hour from here. Just after we turn a bend. You'll see her sitting up there, staring out into the river."

Elijah MacCuspie found the little cabin that stood by itself. He stopped his car and climbed the levee. The old tree spread its branches like witches scrawny arms into the moonlight. Only the night sounds and the scratching of the branches at the wind broke the stillness. Sharon sat beneath the tree looking into the black river. He called her name softly. "Sharon."

She turned. Deep eyes filled with surprise and fear. Asking who.

Nearer to her now, nearer to the long and golden hair beneath the shadowy tree.

"Sharon."

A little cry from her white throat, and then, "Who are you?"

"The Reverend Elijah MacCuspie. I've come to help you, Sister."

Her hands reaching back for the thick bark of the tree, she stood up. Her long hair fell glisteningly down to her sides.

"Don't be afraid, Sister. I bring the word of God."

Closer to the tree. Her back was touching it. He stood in front of her, his eyes seeing, taking, violating. Sweat gleamed on his forehead and on the backs of his hands.

"I've come to help you, Sharon."

Closer to her. Animal's breath licking out, touching, disgusting her. He reached around her, his talon-hands grasping, grabbing.

She let her mouth open into a little smile and sank the long scissors into his back.

He fell away from her, mouth open, eyes open and full of blood. He lay on his back driving the scissors deeper, a hand waving in the air, grabbing at life, desperately grasping to hold on. Then he was still.

Jason Black slid over the side, and swam silently towards shore. He stood at the foot of the levee, big and full and called her name.

"Sharon. Sharon with the long and golden hair."

Against the tree she raised her head and smiled.

He pulled her to him, pushed her to the ground. Down, down, driving her into the very earth beneath them. She screamed in pain, in pleasure, in death. He stood up and walked back to the river.

Blood drips from the branches, blood runs in tiny streams on the long dead leaves, blood soaks the thick, black trunk, blood is sucked into the thirsty ground beneath. The moon, a laughing eye of a dying crone, hangs in the branches and tastes the blood. And in the wind in her scream that will live forever in the grass that covers the gnarled roots of the tree. The tree of blood.



*Awake Remembering*



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