

Fiction at Work

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Issue #15

6 October 08

Packed

by Ira S. Murfin

She was not packed yet. And he was not many years younger than her, but some. He did not taste like salt or come or possibility, but just time ticking. She would do this instead of sleep or pack. It wasn't bad, it was distracting. And what? And interesting.

Sensations rising and falling and stopping. Then starting again. Long minutes of stillness. Time passed. And then everything smashed together, soft and clammy – her breathing, even she didn't know if it was performed or pleasure.

It stopped before it was over. Both of them. Fatigued or waiting or something like it. Back to stillness. One thing resting against another. Place markers, something to come back to later. Or to think about coming back to later. To wonder about while she was gone. It couldn't have been everything or it would have been everything.

Instead of packing she drew him in fitfully, impatient except when it stopped and then it didn't matter again. Impatient and then not. Still not packed. Waiting. Her body new and raw against him.

He tugged at her, at nipples and earlobes and above knees for legs to open, with padded hot fingers and dampened little tongue, pried his way in where it was soft and warm and wet. He was interested in these places, these crevices, more than in her or than in fucking her or anything – just going to them, resting. She was a surface to press against. He liked that. Liked her responses. Even if it wasn't him causing them.

In the morning. And it was already morning. He would walk out into the street with her and see her in the light and touch her again on the stomach or lightly on the breast as if this was the only place he could find to rest his hand. She would have things to do - pack and get on a plane and leave the country.

He could sleep then, nothing changed. That was the amazing thing, the only amazing thing. In all this there was so much changing - so much straining and morphing and becoming, almost coming, making it, making due, breathing as if birthing, squirming as if in pain. And then just the street and late morning sleep while she left. Changing without change. It was nothing – after, it felt like nothing. And that was something, too.

Her decisions on what to pack had little to do with necessity, she was losing track of what that might be anyway. It was all external, coming in towards her. She thought about what a person, not herself, might take for six months in the desert. Writing and evening walks, occasional readings and workshops. Hot in the day and cold at night.

What might someone in that position bring?

Issue #16

13 October 08

Difficult Choices

by Michael A. Kechula

"What a mess!" Frank yelled when confronting jungle thickets. "I thought rowing a hundred miles down the Amazon was bad, especially when the boat flipped and the crocs almost got us. This is ten times worse. How the hell are we gonna cut our way through this? For two cents, I'd forget the whole thing and go back to New York empty handed."

"You wanna quit after all we've gone through to get here?" Charlie asked. "You were the one who was so charged up about going into the Brazilian jungle to find the Ruby Idol."

"Hey, the stupid map made it look like a piece of cake. It just said 'jungle.' Not demon bushes right out of a King Kong movie. Look at that thing over there."

"What thing?"

"That humongous yellow flower. Look at the size of that bastard. See how it's opening and closing?"

"You're imagining things," Charlie said. "That flower ain't any bigger than a lily. Remember how that old timer back in the village warned us about mirages from the heat? You better take your malaria pills."

"I took them. You're the one who needs pills. If you can't see that huge flower, something's wrong with your freakin' eyesight."

"Okay, Frank. I'll prove it to you. I'll pluck the damn thing to show you."

"Don't be stupid. If something happens, I'll be stuck here all alone."

"What the hell's gonna happen? It's just a little flower."

As Charlie approached the flower, Frank saw it turn toward Charlie.

"Charlie! It sees you!"

Without answering, Charlie reached down to pull the flower from the soil. A second later, only his jungle boots protruded from the flower.

Frank screamed, as he watched them disappear inside.

Falling to his knees in anguish, he heard a thunderous burp. Two boots flew from the flower, slammed his head, and knocked him unconscious.

When he woke, he saw snapping crocodiles creeping toward him. One almost grabbed his foot.

He fired his pistol, but they kept coming. With the jungle his only salvation, he grabbed his machete, and rushed toward it.

Hundreds of huge yellow flowers turned his way.

Issue #17

20 October 08

Live Young

by Jennifer Gravley

Aunt Sara's babies always died inside her. This was a different kind of death than when Smokey lay down on the little dark one for too long. Aunt Sara couldn't show you her babies because they didn't look like babies, and they couldn't be put in the ground in the backyard.

Kimberly didn't know that she even believed in Aunt Sara's babies. Maybe she just made them up for attention. Kimberly's mother had resolutely made her stop talking about Annabelle last summer, and now Kimberly could barely remember anything about her, let alone try to make her real to an audience. When Kimberly suggested this strategy might work for Aunt Sara, her mother sent her outside but later told Aunt Jean it was not a bad idea.

Outside, Marta suggested that Aunt Sara lay eggs like Sunshine, her pet chicken, launching Ryan into a lecture on the characteristics of mammals. Kimberly theorized that Aunt Sara might not be a mammal but only share some of the fundamental characteristics. Perhaps that was why she failed to give birth to live young and she could be persuaded to try the reproduction methodology employed by some other kinds of animals. Ryan knew all about different kinds of animals—he had a special box of cards in his room, Kimberly had seen them at Thanksgiving, with pictures of and facts and figures on all kinds of exotic animals and even one on uppity plants that act like animals—but he stormed off to torment Smokey and refused to engage in further conversation.

Marta began to recite Sunshine's latest exploits, incorporating perhaps the laziest objective correlative by pinching Kimberly's arm at moments of greatest emotional intensity. When Marta's monologue was momentarily derailed by Smokey tearing by, Kimberly took the opportunity to sneak back into the house. Her arms were bruised pink and already throbbed in tandem with her heartbeat.

Her right foot was barely maintaining contact with the closed toilet when Aunt Sara walked in with her hand over her stomach. Kimberly ducked her head and tried to become invisible, but she could not--her arms were awkwardly submerged in a sinkful of water that made her teeth shake but had not yet lessened the pounding that now bloomed in her head and her stomach as well as the effected limbs.

When Aunt Sara turned and left the room, there was no way that Kimberly, still hanging for a moment over the lip of the sink in humiliated indecision before sliding down and fleeing, could know that Aunt Sara would return with ice to pull her onto her lap and wrap her arms in cold towels that would suck away the fever she was on the verge of, an act so tender it would have made her put her own hand to Aunt Sara's mammal stomach and prayed for the pulse that raged inside her to find life there.