

# The Present

by Niamh Keogh

There was a sharp knock at the door, just as I had fallen asleep. I pulled myself off the couch, breathing hard in the stifling heat, as I sluggishly made my way to the door.

My doorstep was empty except for a brown-paper wrapped box.

I set the box on the table and returned to my coffee and the couch. Eyeing the box, I lit my cigarette and flipped back to Oprah.

I could barely hear the scrabbling noise through Geraldo's shouting. Mute. The scritch-scratch was clearer now, resembling rodent gnawing. I felt obliged to investigate. With some trepidation and growing curiosity, I tore open the package. It was not the abandoned gerbil that I expected, but a long, pale, slender finger, complete with a ruby ring at the knuckle end. Or maybe garnet, it's hard to tell. What fingernail it had was bitten straight to the quick, which must have been painful for it the way it had

been digging at the sides of the box.

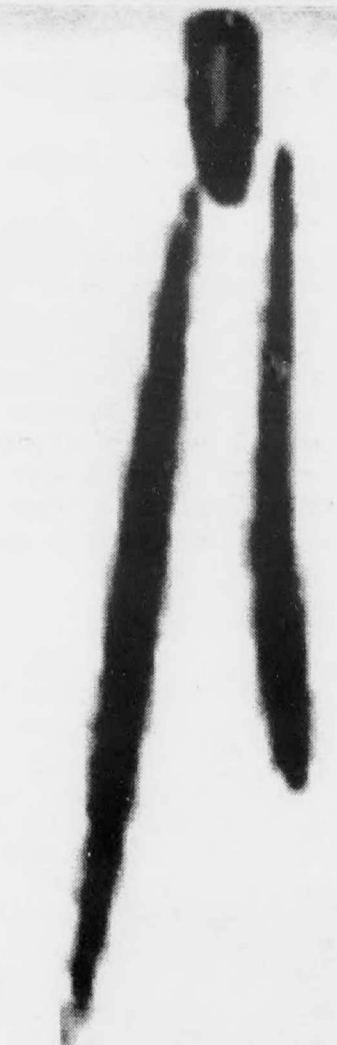
I reached in to pick it up, but at the slightest touch it rolled up into a caterpillar-like ball. I knew it needed a minute or so to unwind so I went to the couch for my coffee. I had only turned away for a few seconds but when I glanced back, the finger had reached the lip of the box and was swaying precariously on its fingertip. The ring made it very unstable. The finger hit the floor with a smack and I hurried back to make sure it was OK.

It recovered even before I got there and started to snake its way across my kitchen floor like an inch-worm on speed. I ran over, and without a thought, raised my foot to

stamp on it, like I would a beetle or a spider. But the finger leapt from the floor like lightning and with an explosion of pain, buried itself deep into my left eye.

I screamed and I stumbled backwards, which must be when I hit my head.

I have told the nurse the story twice already. She has changed the bandages on my head and arms and the medicine has made me very drowsy. The finger is not here.



d i s t r a c t i o n s

Wedding Night  
by André Robichaud

We left the wedding dance  
& went out  
& sat in the car  
sharing a beer like  
naughty High Schoolers:  
taking swills & passing it  
with quick glances  
to maintain our cover.

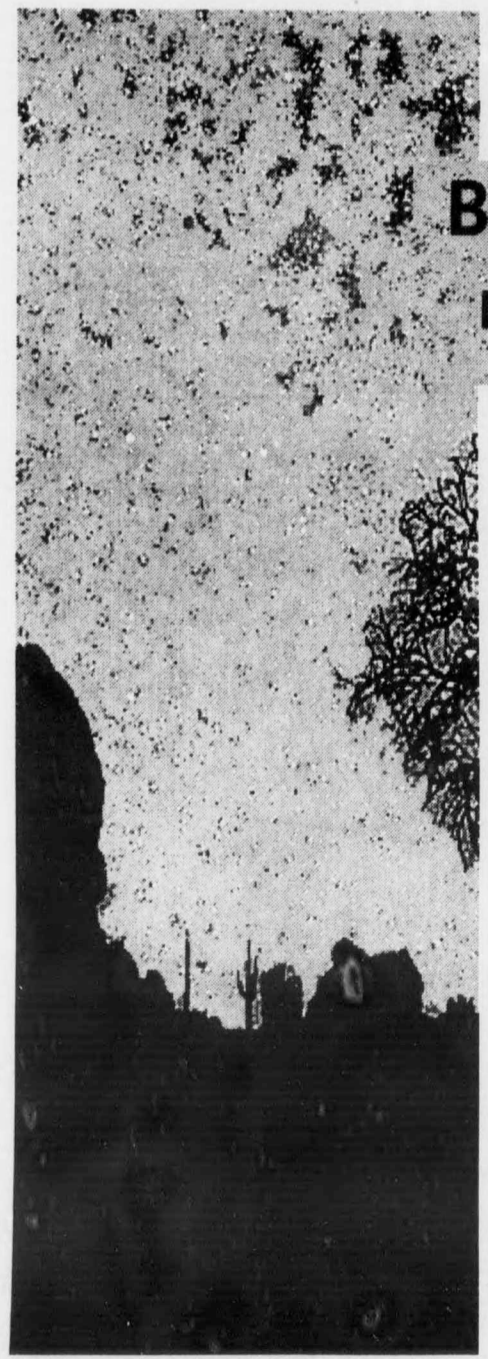
My Father, my Uncle Charlie  
& me trying to decide  
whether we were stooges  
or muskateers  
& bursting with joy  
over this meeting.  
The rites of manhood  
& the Fountain of youth.

If all you have is a hammer,

everything looks like a nail.

## Breakfast

Dale Roberts



"...in a fiery explosion early this morning. Here's Jen Forland who was live at the scene," the anchorman said over the view screen.

"Thank you, Ryan. This was the scene earlier today as the Earth's planned demolition went according to scheduled schematics. As anyone who hasn't just been released from an iso-chamber could tell you, the Earth has been an uninhabitable waste site for the last forty years. Cleanup was dubbed unfeasible two years ago and just last October a motion was passed okaying plans for its demolition. Along with Earth, the solitary moon in its orbit was also demolished, preventing a possible spiral towards Mars and endangering still-existing colonies there. The senate's motion for the demolition was based heavily upon the McDeere shuttle craft incident five years ago in which 25,000 lifeforms perished. A commonplace forward thruster failure had prevented the craft from avoiding the Earth's gravitational pull. No rescue mission was attempted, none were thought to have survived the sixteen hour grace period that rescue operators allow themselves before an attempt into volatile atmospheres. Return to you Ryan."

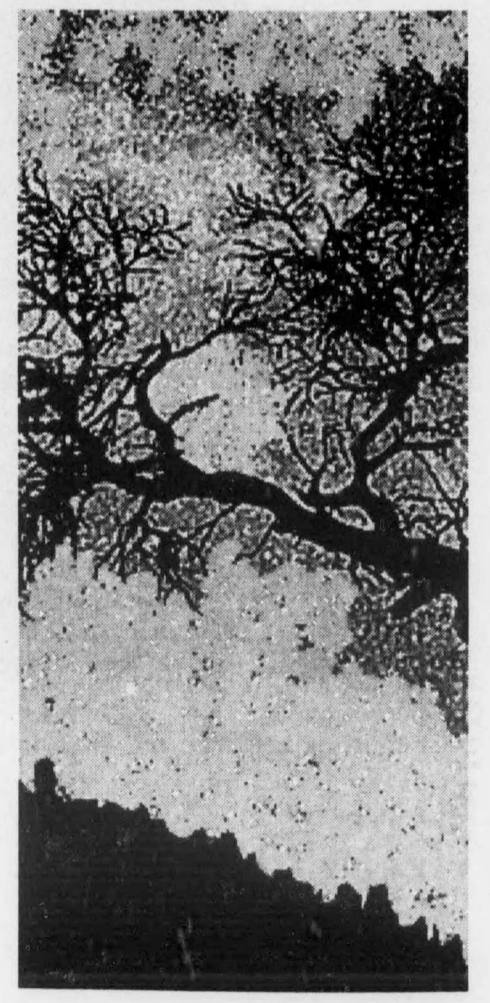
"Thank you, Jen. Now we go to Arleene Moran who is live with one of the family members of the McDeere craft casualties."

"Thank you, Ryan. As Jen mentioned, there were 25,000 individuals killed in the accident. The surviving family members of those victims sued the Canterbury Shuttle Enterprises for the forward thruster failure, and the Chaucer-Lawrence Corporation, the present owner of the planet. Both companies subsequently filed for bankruptcy before either case could reach court. The companies' holdings were investigated and they were both found to be far in debt long before the incident. The families, unhappy at not obtaining some sort of monetary compensation, then sued the rescue worker operation which was forced to sell all their equipment and disband to pay the 250 billion dollar settlement the court awarded to the families. I am with Maurine LaCroix, one of those family members. Mrs. LaCroix, how do you feel about the earth's demolition?"

"I'm just happy that no one will ever have to suffer again because of that mudhole. Money can never really take the place of..."

The man clicks off the view screen and sits down at its front with a cup of Simul-coffee in his hand. His wife walks in and asks, "Anything important on the news?"

Not looking up from his cup he answers, "Nope."



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By Gabe Martin  
"The BORDERLINE"