Messages from Upstate

by Larry Strattner

A Message from Upstate

I heard about this flash fiction thing and I wondered how could someone write any kind of story in so few words? To write a story things have to have space to develop. A story needs some characters and a plot.

But then I got it. The story could be about me. If it's about me I can tell you I look pretty normal, except maybe when I get upset I yell a little, but then who doesn't?

It took me a long time to hack into a good spot where I figured someone could read my story. My computer isn't really set up for office tasks and I had to use Veronica to get in and open the door. Veronica means “Very Easy Rodent Oriented Net-wide Index to Computer Archives”. It's from back in the day but it works.

Flash fiction is made for me too since I can only type with one finger and not too fast at that. It's hard for me to reach the keyboard. The lap top is only set up in here some of the time and it's mostly hooked up to control my chemical drip and administer periodic electroshock. If I just nudge the wall with one hand and toe I can roll over and reach the keyboard with one finger even though they have the restraints tightened down so it's pretty uncomfortable.

Uh. Oh. I hear the orderlies coming. Crap. And I've only used up 285 words. They always send two orderlies. Since I bit the tip of the one guy's nose off they always send two. Well…gotta sign off. It would get them upset if they found out I was cruising around, talking to you.

Till next time.

A Message from Upstate II

Today I've been laying here looking at cracks in the ceiling. Some of them seem to be moving a little but you can't be sure if maybe it's just the building shifting in the wind. I wish the wind would twist the building enough so the cracks would get wider and I could see the sun.

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I'm still typing with one finger. I tried to get to two but I kept hitting the letter next to the one I was thinking of, like rhinking if. That was a bitch. I think it's the electroshock doing me. It's low voltage but every time I get situated, zing. It feels like my whole body went to sleep sitting on the toilet and then I tried to get up. You know what I mean? Like someone is rolling a drum over you with all sewing needles sticking out of it. That's a bitch. You'd type the wrong letter too.

I don't understand why they keep up the chemical drip. After I bit that guy on the nose they gave me a shot that was a lot better. I think they just want to make me passively uncomfortable, the pukes. Nobody better get a nose too close. You know what I mean?

Looking at cracks all day doesn't do much for me except get me chomping, like my Australian Blue Heeler, Ely. I could do with having him around. He calms me down. I guess if you ran four or five miles with some herd dog chomping at your heels you'd calm down some too. Go figure.

I got to You Tube today. Some kid on it was pushing his crib around to get to his blankie just like I do to get to the laptop. I stay away from You Tube though. For a lot of the stuff you need to hear the sound and they'll catch me for sure if I yurn the sound up. Shit. The kid was funny though. I'll say that.

Anyway, I'm mentally mapping the cracks in reference to each other so I can tell if they're growing and I'll be able to see through any time soon. Maybe if I can see through I'll see you. Or the other way around if you know what I mean. Just kidding. A little bull shit to lighten things up. I'm not *that* crazy.

Voices in the hall. They're talking soft. Trying to sneak up on me but I hear them. They know their noses are going on Jeopardy. “What is a *mondo* bite mark?”

Gotta sign off. I can hear the key ring jingling.

Till next time.

A Message from Upstate III

I think they might have turned up the voltage on me but they still haven't figured out the computer thing. The bed has rubber wheels,

I can't really tell but they may be leaving marks on the floor when I push the bed. Have to be careful about leaving tracks, you know? I haven't had any noses near me for a while. I heard them saying the guy I bit actually had two stitches. I'll bet that smarted. At least they aren't pulling the restraints down so tight now. They don't hurt as much but they aren't loose enough for two-finger typing either.

The cracks in the ceiling aren't making any progress. I gave them a once over today and they seem about the same. The good news is I got moved to a room with a window even though there is a chain-link screen over it. I saw a crow fly past. I can see some treetops but I can't see the ground. I hate fucking crows. They eat baby bunnies and other babies too. All the food chain stuff. The bastards. They're black and big and loud and evil and I fucking hate them. Other than that I'm maybe making some progress. They carried out the guy next door last night. His eyes were bleeding. Maybe they'll move me up the hall to his room. Maybe the view is better. Maybe he had cable TV. Maybe he hung himself with the cable and it made his eyes bleed. Maybe he had the Premium Channels and they made his eyes bleed. Check this out. I'm almost at three hundred words. Maybe my eyes will bleed. Better than having them pecked out by a fucking crow though right? Fucking bunny killers.

Looked like rain today when they came to bring me down. I hate the rain. Now that I have a window I have to turn my head to the wall to sleep while it rains. I wish my dog was here with me. Ely. A good dog. Turn him loose in the yard and he'd scare the shit out of those crows. They wouldn't be around if Ely was here. It's funny though, I think Ely might eat a bunny too if you gave him half a chance. But it's not the same as a black fucking crow. I just miss having somebody around who's not whacko. I miss having myself around.

But I have to go. They're coming to get me. Probably walking down the hall telling stories about me. You notice though, they don't get their noses too close, do they?

Till next time

A Message from Upstate IV

You ever read the “The Fall of the House of Usher”? No? I didn't either. It's a classic. I saw the Classic Comic Book once though. It had a big old house getting hit by lightning on the cover. I might have been a comic book guy once but I don't really remember. Comic books read too fast anyway. You kind of zap through them and they're done. Superficial. Sometimes “Tales from the Crypt” were good. Scare the crap out of you. The guy you thought was dead knocking on the door with a bloody knife hidden behind him. Whoa! I'd read more but they say I can't refrain; or maybe it's retain. Anyway speaking of zap, they've been busy fooling with my intervals. My hair's been standing up straight all of the time instead of some of the time. My eyes are wide open. I look like a graphic novel. My world is black and white. I'm poorly drawn. All sounds have an exclamation point.

I've done nothing untoward recently and my restraints are looser. A bit more comfortable. My shock intervals are programmed into the computer. The orderlies haven't been coming around so often. I even risked You Tube yesterday. I can't really select anything. I just have to click on one of the home page videos. It was a bunch of babies lying down laughing hysterically with their father. Everybody likes babies. I had to turn it off. It sounded too much like the way they laugh in Room Two Twenty. Hysterical. Day and night.

They still have me on the drip. I'm alone. There's no window. I wish the place would crack in two like Roderick Usher's. I don't hear anyone coming but I do hear some screaming a long way off. The bastards. I'm tired.

A Message from Upstate - V

I'm off the stimulation cycle or whatever the hell they call it. The good news is my hair stays down. The good news is I don't feel like a goddamn pin cushion twelve times a day. The good news is my eyes aren't all bugged out half the time. How much good news can there be?

The bad news is the tech who brings the laptop around with the routines loaded in it maybe won't need to come anymore. They must be able to run the drip without a laptop.

I'll be off line. My system will be down. I'll be crashed. Shit. You're about the only person I have to talk to. Everybody they put in my room with me is a sheet clutching mouth breather. Try to have meaningful communication with one of those.

I did catch a snatch of conversation from a nurse (catch a snatch, get it?) they were going to off load me into a nursing home now that I'm being chemically managed. Right. I'll give them chemically managed. Bite me. Like I'm some kind of sewage treatment plant.

The good news is I'll be a little more mobile. I'll try not to bite anybody and I'll do fine. They have computers in nursing homes. I'll have a window. I hate fucking crows. It seems like there always are crows outside my window. Either that or it's raining.

A Message from Upstate VI

There's a patio here at the wrinkle farm. Also a computer they use for mental stimulation whatever that means. I've got plenty of mental stimulation without a computer. The other day I had an erection lasting more than four hours but I got no medical attention only mini-shrieks from the nurses although I have to say a few of the fat ones looked interested. I told them, I said, “It lasts until the time is right.”

VERONICA got me in again to share stories with you. The computer has all kinds of stupid games and diversionary stuff on it. What a drag. I still can't type well because the rules say I have to be restrained to the wheelchair when I'm up and about. I have my own room with a window and so far no crows, no rain. Hallefuckinglujah! I'm sure that won't last forever. But I am sounding a little more coherent aren't I? That's what the wrinkle shrink told me. “You're sounding much more coherent today.” I'll say. At least more coherent than Mrs. Wigglespoon over there who shit her pants during lunch last week.

But no complaints. This place is better than the other place. Any day goes by without an electrode attached to my dick is a good day. Don't talk to me about Abu Ghraib man. I've been hooked up to it in person.

Out on the patio there are all these kind of thin leafed green plants coming up. No stems just the leaves right out of the ground in bunches. Today back in the leaves I saw a yellow flower. It looked kind of like the front of a trumpet only with a wavy rim. You know the kind of flower I mean? I'll bet I looked at it for an hour. I'll bet there are more coming. Where I grew up you never saw anything like that. Not even in a pot on a fire escape landing. I'll bet there will be yellow flowers all over the place. I'm gonna try and hold that thought.

Till next time.