

Stalk

by Tantra Bensko

A crab owns its own sidewaysness under the streetlight on the darkest corner around, the sudden beam of light giving birth to detail suddenly as evening pops out night. An arched doorway, scratched with the word "BLUEBIRD" in white, on top of much larger black scratches, obviously from earlier years. Red paint on the door peeling to show cobalt blue underneath. All cut off from their colorfulness by the curve of the shadow of the circle of amber clarity around the street light.

The night is not pulp fiction. No mass murderers lurking, nor women wearing black vinyl. No. The spot in space observing all of this leans with a studied gaunt tilt of the pelvis, like a cowboy in black practicing his scene in a movie, and tips its head upward, up, and puts its gun away, the curved circle with the tiny pupil in the center disappearing into pants.

Details sewn into the scene, stitched together, out of light and shadow along the edges of the curved illumination: broken crab shells on the dirty concrete beside the arched door in a pile, which the crab keeps looking back at, its eyes arcing over on their stalks, with precisely edged pupils; a window with a curved arch on one side only, vines growing up the other side; a dark figure inside the room, as he sits in a chair, bending over the table, painting on very oddly shaped cards. He is just on the shadow edge of the circle of light coming from inside the apartment.

He paints meticulously on the cards with little shapes poking out from them, the details of what he paints obscured by the shadow of his head on the page. As he moves the cards into the light, it

becomes obvious he's painting on top of one of a set of cards made out of flattened frogs, with details in black ink, over washes of rich colors overlapping and fading. He sits in the outer darkness outside of the curve of light from a lamp giving off golden light.

The crab stretches and twists its eyes to see in the window where the man sits next to his dinner plate with bits of something crisp still in it, shoved to the side of the table, into the shadows. The cards are rectangular, and are designed with an arching red border detailed in black ink. The arms and legs sticking out must be delicate, explaining why he handles the cards with much meticulous gentleness.

A spot in space observes all this, with its eyes arching over on their stalks. The observation point dangles one eye above the other, turning the roundness of them suddenly. The cards' bright bright flash of light reflected off their shiny surfaces as he turns them. They move around on the table, when they are turned face down, humping up a bit and flopping.

I watch from inside the car with my partner, in our costumes for pretending to deliver roses from someone dear. We will smile as if we're going to sing to him a telegram about someone who loves him. The man will rise up from his cards, and angle around the table to get to the door quickly. As we then hand him the envelope to open --- pow, we have given him the summons. Silk roses to hang around the truck look convincing, but we don't yet know how to cover up the advertisements on it with the picture of my partner in anti-crime. We lurk in the shadows. We have looked through his trash.

We found in his trash the evidence we needed. But we need more. We need everything. Everything to tell us, somehow in the cardboard and the shredded receipts of deceptions, everything. Everything. A spot in space takes the conceptual flashlight out of its pocket and turns it around here and there in circles in the curves of darkness, showing, showing what what what.

He will not get away with it, will he? Will he?

No. He won't.

We will weave together the details; will find him if it is still him, if the man is the man we want, the man we want, in the darkness now blowing on the frog cards. Is it him? Or has someone else moved into the house? The angles of shadow seem somewhat like the criminal's. But sometimes, when he moves slightly closer to the light of the lamp inside, he seems to not be him.

He won't get away with this.

Crab legs show themselves on his plate, broken into shells, with a stone. A turquoise stone. Has smashed the legs crack crack crack. CRACK CRACK CRACK his hands stones shells teeth life—someone else's life.

We want to find the man has stolen everything. Everything. We will get it back.

We will retrieve the everything. We are flashlight, gun, stalks, pulse.

The man in the house stands up and walks to the window, looking down at the sink. Is it the man we're looking for? Our pupils narrow on the stalks, and in the gun's site, and in the range of the flashlight ready to be turned on---Ah.

It's someone else. The man we want has fled.

A fugitive. To chase with roses, advertisements on the sides of the truck painted over, scratched, peeled, and turned into the slickest summons-delivering truck this side of open-and-shut cases.

We'll get him. We'll win. We are everything. Here.

We know the details. We know the crime. We have gone through the trash. We have followed every number back to us, and every letter back to us.

We turn a flashlight on, underneath each others' chins. We avoid the cliché of grimace. Then both, at once, make the most sideways of grimaces, exaggerated to the peak of changing our faces into everything else. The light enters the nostrils and shines through the length of the nose. Seen from any of the spots in space observing, the nose glows with a soft red light. Like that of a nightmare clown.

