2012 COLFA Research Paper Competition
Creative Writing Submission

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Harmony / Parallel Worlds / Slip, The Ghost of Philip
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Harmony

On a wooden table against a wall in the center of the living room sits the statue of a man. If he stood up he would be as tall as me, but since he is a statue, he never moves. Mama says he is the Buddha, which seems wrong because Buddha is the statue of the jolly bald man who has his arms raised so that people can touch his big belly in front of the shops downtown. Mama says that they are both the Buddha, even though they look different.

Our Buddha is the green color of moss on a stone. He sits in the lotus position, which is like sitting Indian style but harder – Mama showed me how – one ankle has to go on top of my leg above my knee and then I have to make the other ankle go in the same place on the opposite leg. It’s easy for me to do now because I have practiced for a long time, but I remember when it was harder. Buddha’s hair is twisted in little knobs on the top of his head, his eyes are closed and his hands rest in his lap, fingers and thumb forming a sideways zero. Mama says he’s meditating. He looks like he will soon fall asleep, which is what always happens to me whenever Mama tries to teach me how to meditate.

A chilly spring breeze makes the sky blue curtains in the living room billow; the white incense smoke swirls before the large Buddha. The thick wisps curl up the wall to the image of another man, framed in gold.

The man in the frame is Jesus. Mama didn’t have to tell me that. I’ve seen lots of pictures of Jesus and they are mostly the same: he always has long hair and a beard and wears robe. In this picture, his robe is the color of the needles on a pine tree, a darker green than Buddha. When I see Jesus at church, his arms are stretched out and his head hangs on his chest, hands pierced; he is dying. I like this picture better: he sits on a big grey rock, one foot on top of another, smaller rock, the other foot dangling over the edge of the cliff. His hands rest loosely in his lap
and he looks down at faintly visible trees and a mist covered city. Mama says the trees are Cyprus, the city Jerusalem.

Jesus isn’t meditating. I can tell because his eyes are open. He looks like he is thinking very hard about something. Mama says that he will weep soon, but I think he is just thinking. Maybe he is praying. Jesus prayed a lot.

*An icy gust howls through the house, thrusting the curtains perpendicular to the floor.*

*The tip of the incense flares red then dims to black, ashes scatter across the table.*

When I help Mama close the windows I see that the sky is dark and heavy with snow clouds. “It’s the middle of March,” she grumbles, annoyed. She invites me into the kitchen for hot chocolate and marshmallows, so I leave Buddha and Jesus alone to meditate and pray together.
Parallel Worlds

The Inspector pressed grey buttons with her long yellow beak, and then waited as the telescope rose from its perch, hover above the land, and focus. The Event would occur soon, as it did every ten years, but she was new to the job, and therefore nervous. She knew the Omnipotent must have a perfect view, so that the plans of the next ten years could bring them closer to the Ultimate Goal.

The Inspector went to the roof and stepped out into the dry, brisk desert air. She looked to the horizon and waited, her feathers ruffled as the charged air pricked her skin with gooseflesh. Automatically, she preened her plumage back into place. The soft light on the horizon brightened, the rhythmic rumbling deep in the earth quickened, the sky glowed pink and orange, and a sweet, burnt, metallic scent mingled with the cool, fresh breeze that wafted through the land. The Inspector stuck out her tongue to scratch it on the edge of her beak, and sneezed in rapid succession. The ground rumbled and shuddered with escalating land tides and yellow and blue lightening crackled across the atmosphere as the planetary orbits began to collide. The mountain range fifty miles to the east exploded, spewing steam. The wind gusted brought the aroma of dead eggs and blacktop heat, which mingled with the taste of metal that still lingered in her throat, like liquid lightening. She watched in stoic silence, even as the building swayed frantically beneath her feet. As liquefaction began and the building crumbled, the Inspector calmly spread her feathered limbs and gracefully took flight. She climbed into the air filtered protective casing of the perch on the telescope, and then she flicked her head to one side and placed her dark, lidless eye against the lens. She watched the other planet as hers was turned to rubble and dust. They would have to rebuild, but the planet she observed through her telescope had no buildings, only white clouds floating inside a clear bubble of air and water.
The telescope’s visual range sharpened and magnified until the Inspector could see tiny forms moving about the Other Planet; the telescope sharpened and magnified again, until she could almost see the strange and grotesque features of the creatures as they cavorted on their planet. They floated about effortlessly, without any noticeable means of aerial locomotion. Their forms consisted of a singular globule body that constantly seemed to form, absorb, and re-form flexible radiating limbs that moved in all directions. Some of the bodies were iridescent dark, some were pearlescent white, and others were rainbow clear. The appendages of any singular one could reach out toward others, and occasionally, when they touched, the separate bodies melded into one larger structure, and after a few moments, they would reorganize as several individuals more than what had initiated the group. The scintillating colors on their bodies moved and pulsated in disjointed, individual chaos.

A whistle followed by a purring click exited the beak of the Inspector: “Savages.”
Slip, the Ghost of Philip

My name is Slip and I hear you calling. I feel your need to know that there is something out there beyond the borders of your own tiresome world. You want to know that there is more to life and after life. I am happy to tell you whatever lies you might want to hear. Well, I used to be.

If you are one of those people who choose to ignore me then I will reach out to you. I am the knock in your walls and the figure glaring at you in the dark while you sleep. You will find me laughing with your missing keys or when a seemingly steady object suddenly topples to the floor. You hear me whisper but do not know it.

You enjoy it; these things that I do give you a connection to something beyond your own mundane dimension. Your whole lives you wish for me. If you didn’t then you wouldn’t make up fairy stories for your children and horror movies for yourselves.

So, I would like to say that it is inconsiderate (especially after all I do to infuse a little liveliness into your simple existence) for you to pull this kind of crap. I mean I roll up my proverbial sleeves and I work hard to give you a thrill and this is how you repay me? You should bow down and worship me but instead this is the recognition that I get?

You don’t know what I’m talking about do you? I forget how limited you creatures are and that you can only learn through direct communication. Memories of events are stored in fragile bits of paper or in unreliable machines but mostly your memories die at the end of your stinking existence.

Let me explain further so you can understand. The grudge I hold against you creatures started in 1972 at the Toronto Society for Psychical research. Just before arriving there I had been exorcised from a little girl I had deliciously tormented. I was feeling a little bummed. I
hung out near Phoenix and toyed with an Ouija Board to build up my confidence. But, ultimately Ouija Boards are a bit of a yawn. Also, there was an old hag that constantly prayed for the thankless little spawns with whom I was trying to communicate. I decided to move on because there was too much self-righteous interference and there would be no opportunity to inhabit new skin.

I wandered to and fro moving further up north until I ended up in Canada at the Toronto Society. I observed them carefully for weeks and it seemed like they were ripe. I thought a few of them might be weak and gracious enough to be my new host. They were holding séances for a ghost named Philip.

I searched their thoughts and read the literature on the man. I even saw a picture. There wasn’t much about him. Philip was apparently some lovesick oaf who killed himself when he couldn’t get the lady of his life. He’d lived during the seventeenth century. I felt as though this was my new big break.

As they sat around the huge oak table one night calling for Philip I made my presence known. I stuck to the classics and I knocked inside the table.

The room went silent and then uneasy laughter spread from one person to the next. They accused each other of causing the sound of the knock. When they calmed down they continued the séance. I knocked again, politely as a visitor at the front door.

The nervous glances they gave each other were fabulous. I could taste the collective pulse of the group speed up. I had their attention and their leader asked, “Is it really you Philip? Two knocks for yes and one knock for no.”

I knocked twice barely able to contain my excitement. A noise of collective jubilation escaped their throats. When they again grew silent they began to question me further.
“We have waited a long time to hear from you Philip,” said a tall, skinny man who had a smile like a chimpanzee. “Is it nice in the after-life?”

I didn’t give an answer immediately. It’s always good to make them wait especially after a loud outburst. I pretended to be a little taken aback by the noise.

I made Skinny Chimp ask the question twice more before I answered. I was not only being a good showman but it also gave me time to think. When I responded I knocked only once, in effect saying, “No”.

“You are not happy,” asked a woman with a round face and blonde, feathered hair. The hair didn’t suit her.

I knocked once.

They began chatting excitedly among themselves trying to figure out how to ask their next inquiry as a closed question. I listened and gloated and grew fat on their excitement and belief.


The decision to end for the night seemed a little sudden to me but perhaps it had to do with time. I am eternal and time is a little strange to me. Breaking up one’s existence in to increments of certain types of moments is ludicrous but understandable since you have to recharge, I guess.

We visited like this for several months. I got to know them better. The Skinny Chimp was named Allen. Bad Hair lady was named Sophie. There was also John, Samuel, Clara, Susan and Bob. They were all employed in some capacity and they all lead their little lives. Bob, Clara and Susan had spouses and kids. Samuel was a widower with grown children. Sophie was single.
though I felt sure that would soon change if she would just notice the way Allen looked at her.

They were interesting as humans go but what seafood lover gets involved in the life of the lobster he’s about to devour?

I told them a lot more about Philip. He hadn’t moved on because he couldn’t find the woman he loved. Poor, pathetic, fictitious sap! If I weren’t impersonating Philip I would have told him to give it up. She wasn’t into him; she thought he was a stalker. I digress. I did lots of great tricks for them. I knocked and made the table move. I danced a lamp across the room. They were into it. I thought had them where I wanted them but really they had me.

One day they asked me if they could film our session. I agreed and they set it all up with cameras and even a studio audience. I was on top of the world!

Seven small words toppled me from my summit.

Allen, the Skinny Chimp said, “We only made you up, you know.”

When he said it I knew it was true. I didn’t respond. It was worse than the exorcism months before. I ran off. I sulked.

I don’t do parlor tricks anymore. I possess, oppress, haunt and curse and if you meet me now you won’t enjoy it because you won’t survive.

They didn’t.