

Three Foggy Mornings and One Rainy Day

by Eric Roe

So this is how it's going to be: I call, you pick up, but you don't say anything. Not even *hello*? Not even *Piss off, Malcolm*? You won't even hang up. Fine, then. Look, I'm calling to talk. You said we never talk. So don't say anything. What can I do? Don't say anything, it's fine. I just wanted to tell you about this dream I had. We used to tell each other our dreams. You told me about the kids in the hot air balloons, remember? Where you walked outside and there were these little kids falling out of the sky? And you looked up and saw hundreds of hot air balloons, and that's where the kids were falling from. It was raining kids. And you caught one, and he about broke your arms, he was falling so fast. You caught him, you broke his fall, but the force was so hard he fell through your arms and hit the ground, and you took him to the hospital, you wanted to save him. You handed him over to the doctors. But then when you rode down in the elevator, all of a sudden you couldn't breathe. Like all the air'd been sucked out of the elevator car and right out of your lungs. And you woke up gasping for breath and crying.

You probably didn't think I was listening when you told me that. You think I tune out whenever you talk about kids. But what am I supposed to say?

I'm calling because I dreamed about Tyler last night.

Are you there?

It's all right. Maybe I can only tell you this way. Maybe it's the only way I can get the nerve. Don't say anything. I was sitting upstairs when I dreamed about him. The windows got shot out again—did I tell you that? It was that Palmer kid, I'm sure of it. I came home from work a few days ago and found all the upstairs windows broken. BBs all over the floor. So last night I faked him out. I took off for work like I always do, but then I parked down the street and snuck back, went and dug Tyler's BB gun out of the closet, then sat up by his window, waiting. Fig-

ured the Palmer kid would come back to see if I'd replaced the windows. Figured I'd sit up there by Tyler's window and wait, let him have it if he showed up with his gun. See how he likes being on the receiving end. You remember when he used to shoot at Tyler at the bus stop. Tyler never said anything about it until after we got him the BB gun. *Then* he told us why he wanted it. You remember? You were at work already. He wanted to take the gun to school, and of course that was out of the question, and so he finally broke down and told me why. He wanted to be able to defend himself. So I figured last night, I figured if it's war the Palmer kid wants— But I fell asleep waiting. I must have fallen asleep. Because then there was Tyler, sitting on the edge of his bed, looking at me. He had a black eye. He didn't say anything, he didn't do anything significant. Just sat there. There was so much I wanted to ask him. We just gazed at each other for the longest time. You know dreams. How time stretches out.

When I woke up— Well, I don't remember falling asleep in the first place. Instead, I just remember gazing and gazing until the sun came through and I realized Tyler wasn't there, of course. And I thought how silly it would be, a grown man— Can you see the headline? *Grieving father duels with neighborhood bully*. But I want to pound the daylights out of the Palmer kid. It's my way of dealing. My way of catching all the Tylers falling out of hot air balloons. But then you realize you can never make the catch, and you wake up suffocating. Isn't that exactly what happens?

This would be a good time for you to say something. Say, *Yes, yes, that's exactly how I feel, Malcolm*. Say, *I can see you understand, Malcolm, after all this time, you finally get it*.

Say, *Maybe I could try to come home now*. *Maybe now it would be okay*.

Don't say anything. It's all right. I'll just sit here and listen. I'm listening.

Frank Pearce is a retired Marine Corps officer who resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He has many stories about life and experiences in the Marines, not all combat, but many family experiences, some very humorous. He has been encouraged by many friends who hear his stories to write a book and express the humor, family life, and certainly some of his unique combat experiences covering three combat tours in Viet Nam. He held several positions in the Marines which required developing combat plans and orders, and which had to be expressed in a more technical and direct aspect. He is now taking Creative Writing at SFCC, and the unique true story described in this book is one he wrote as a class assignment—to eventually be included in his book.

Margaret Peters has an M.A. in English from Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California. Originally from Texas, she has lived in Santa Fe and taught English at SFCC for 16 years. Currently, Margaret is dean of the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Arts, Design, and Media Arts. In her spare time, she enjoys bookbinding and playing with her dogs, Sweetie Pie and Biscuit.

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Eric Roe's work has appeared in the *Best American Fantasy* anthology, *Redivider*, *Barrelhouse*, *Fugue*, *Midway Journal*, and *The Newer York*. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.