

SLEUTHING IN NEW MEXICO

Small town darkness
barking dogs
weathered houses
searching for a cousin
down a pothole street
when a window pops out
square
with yellow light
and the aroma of frying
onions
pinpoints cousin's house
before I read the number

-- Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

Tulare CA

EXCERPTS

Three hummingbirds in the space of ten seconds crash headlong into the plate glass picture window. Two of them are dead, but the third, its tiny beak broken, trembles feebly on the flagstone patio.

The wagon loses a rear wheel, the axle bonking on the ground. The driver climbs down, unhooks the axe from the sideboard and, spitting on his hands, hacks the loose wheel to pieces, counting the blows. Twenty.

A lonely bachelor, after a morning of great anxiety in the office, spends his lunch hour begging his boss for a raise. At the moment everything is settled at work, his home phone is being rung long distance with news that will change his life irrevocably.

An old man, shading his eyes from the sun, watches a small boy put a heavy sinker on a cheap rod & reel and cast out from the pier. The spinner jams, tangling the line. The man, smiling, moves to help. He lowers his hand, and, with the sun in his eyes, sneezes full in the small boy's face.

A carpenter, alone on a small job, reaches for the keyhole saw he used half an hour ago. He has owned that saw for eighteen years. It is gone. He looks everywhere, but cannot find it. He will never see it again.

An elderly woman rides a bus home from church on a Sunday which happens to be her 81st birthday. She witnesses, from the moving window, exactly at the moment she glances at them, two merchants closing their shops, a mother slapping her child, two window-shades being drawn and a motorcycle policeman being struck by an antique Model T Ford painted gold.

Applying for credit at Sears one morning, Emmett Dee, who is new in town and has spent his life explaining the spelling of his name as "two M's, two T's, two E's," suddenly cannot think who he is.

A mediocre New York painter is sitting in a coffee house window on a rainy day sipping tea, fantasizing the sudden death of a successful colleague who is, at that moment, lying dead by electrocution in his Staten Island bathtub with his dog.

Distressed and anxious over continuous quarrels with her father, a young woman, on her coffee break one morning, wringing her hands in the women's toilet, breaks the little finger of her left hand.

A salesman from Cleveland, a compulsively scheduled man who has been traveling the same route for sixteen years, awakens in a motel in Minneapolis from a dream of extreme peace to find that it is 4 p.m. in the afternoon of the next day and that firemen are standing in the room with resuscitation equipment.

A Philippino healer, who has cured 161 cases of cancer with minute doses of arsenic, is shot to death in his cheap room by a woman he was treating. She tells police that he was the devil and had to die. The bullet, silver, 22 caliber, entered directly between the eyes, was deflected by the back of the skull downward, and left the body via the anus, thence through the seat of the chair to lodge in the floor in the center of a mandala just finished being painted there by the victim before his assailant entered.

-- Donald Schenker

Berkeley CA