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The Game This Year

By Lisa Goldstein

28 July 2003

It is a little before midnight, and three old people, two women and a man, are laboriously climbing the stairs in a ramshackle old office building.

Lily, the youngest-looking of the three, carries a box-shaped package. She looks like a woman you might see in a shopping mall or a church though a little over-dressed and behind the times. The other woman, Grace, is wearing a long coat patched together out of sky-blue velvet and emerald silk and ivory lace and embroidered upholstery fabric. Her gray hair is tied back in a bun, and a tabby cat, the same color as her hair, rides across her shoulders. Collier, the man, is using a stout staff to pull himself up the stairs. All the bulbs have burned out; the only light, a soft golden illumination, comes from the top of his staff. He is bald except for a few tufts of white hair, like sheep's wool, that surround his head. He stops, panting, and pushes up his round gold spectacles.

They come to the third floor and head toward the office at the end of the hall. Lily is moving too quickly; she steps on the train of Grace's coat. There is a tearing sound and the cat turns and mews softly. When they reach the office Lily opens her purse, takes out a heavy old-fashioned key, and unlocks the door.

She switches on the light and they stand clustered together in the doorway for a moment. There is an old battered desk and chair in the office and nothing else. Dust is everywhere; it covers the furniture and is strewn across the floor. In the breeze from the open door it spins and coalesces in the corners the way stars are said to do out in space. The cat sneezes.

Lily sets down her bundle and flings open the window. The window does not look out on more office buildings but on a

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

