

Typehouse

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LITERARY MAGAZINE



Call for Submissions

Typehouse is a writer-run, literary magazine based out of Portland, Oregon. We publish non-fiction, genre fiction, literary fiction, poetry and visual art. We are always looking for well-crafted, previously unpublished, writing that seeks to capture an awareness of the human predicament. If you are interested in submitting fiction, poetry, or visual art, email your submission as an attachment or within the body of the email along with a short bio to: typehouse@peoples-ink.com

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Cover Photo

Prepare to Meet Thy God - Rose City, MN by Alex (See page 114)

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Love in the time of Apocalypse

P.J. Sambeaux

“It is literally raining men,” I say, pulling the curtain back and looking up into the sky in wonder and awe.

Kara walks over and peeks over my shoulder. “Hallelujah,” she says softly.

Then we watch one come down on the sidewalk in front of our building and recoil in disgust.

“Well, at least the alligators will have something to eat,” she says after a moment – she being the practical one of the two of us.

“I suppose,” I reply in a hollow voice. I’ve been in a funk since the whole apocalypse began – not really depressed, but more like ‘what’s the point of it all’? I mean you spend your entire life honing skills that are completely useless in an apocalyptic situation – like how long did it take me to learn Excel? Who is going to need me to make a spreadsheet now? And how many hands of solitaire did I actually play when I was pretending to be working? I cringe when I remember how much of my life was spent wasting time and/or minimally entertaining myself. How many things could I have learned in that time to better prepare myself? Those survivalist guys we all laughed at with their crazy beards and vast array of weaponry are probably dominating right now. Probably, but we’re not positive because there’s no TV or internet anymore.

“Hey, why don’t we go looting at the bridal store?” she asks brightly, clearly attempting to cheer me up.

We had an extremely low brow, ‘cheap wine in plastic cups’

sort of wedding. Instead of wearing the amazing wedding dresses we dreamed about but couldn't afford, we pinned magazine cut outs of them to our t-shirts. Her brother, who had gotten some sort of license on the internet, officiated the ceremony in the living room of our fourth floor walkup.

"Ok," I reply, really just to make her happy. "But let's wait until they have a chance to clean up." By 'they' I meant the alligators.

#

To get to the bridal store, we have to navigate a maze of downed power lines and cracked, jagged pavement, all the time trying to be stealthy enough to avoid any trouble. It got pretty 'Road Warrior' after all the shit went down, but there's so much uncleared rubble obstructing traffic where we live downtown that roving bands of crazed, blood thirsty pirates hasn't been much of an issue. Our biggest fear has really been the alligators, along with various other creatures it has rained, and the myriad gangs that seem to spring up each day.

We've both been runners since high school, so our strategy so far has been to evade with speed, armed with some cricket mallets we found in Ollie and Simon's apartment. Ollie and Simon were the best man and best man at our wedding. They already killed themselves. A lot of people have. It's sort of 'in' right now. Kara and I have talked about it – I mean every couple has – but we have decided to ride it out for now, at least until our food starts to run low.

"Move!" I shout as I catch movement out of the corner of my eye. We both break into a sprint across Cherry Square. If we had had alligators chasing us back when we were in high school, I know two girls who would have made it to state finals.

We make it to the store and survey the square from inside. We can't see anything, but both of us hear something ominously large splash into the fountain.

You have to stay frosty in the apocalypse.

#

Kara pulls a gown down from the rack for me to try, but I'm hesitant. I worry it will make my ghetto booty look even more pronounced. So I start tearing through the racks and try on gown after gown, becoming increasingly frustrated with each one.

Of course Kara finds an elegant sheath that's perfect for her right away. She looks so beautiful. She's one of those women that

just has a natural grace, a beautiful easiness with her body and the world around her – you know, one of those girls you sort of want to strangle because they don't have crippling body issues. But I don't really want to strangle her. I love her.

I finally give up and go with Kara's first suggestion, a mermaid cut which I never would have picked out for myself in a million years, which of course fits me perfectly.

The earthquakes have blown out all the windows out, so we have to pick glass out of the veils. The ceiling has collapsed in the tuxedo section and one wall looks like it's ready to fall into the French restaurant next door, but other than that I imagine this shop looks pretty much the way it did on that first day when it rained snakes and lizards; it seems a bit surprising that it hasn't been raided – no one else seems to have looted for their dream wedding. Oh well, their loss, our gain.

"Who's a pretty bride," Kara says as I pull my veil up over my face.

"You are!" I answer back and we kiss sweetly on the lips. Yes, we are that nauseating couple.

On the way back to our apartment we come face to face with a couple of punk rock gang bangers. I actually recognize one of them as the IT guy who used to work in my office. He carries a handmade weapon that looks like the wooden leg of a chair with nails pounded through one end, the pointy ends of which are matted with...stuff that I do not wish to spend time identifying.

Kara lifts her veil off her face and hisses and growls like a cat. I make super crazy eyes and hold my mallet suggestively – suggestive of violence, I mean. I can and have cracked skulls, but you know – it's not cool to brag about. Here, at the end of everything you either put up or shut up. There's no time or call for boasting.

The IT guy makes a move for Kara, which is super stupid because I fierce out like a panther. When he swings his homemade mace, I duck and poke him hard in the gut with my mallet, then as he doubles over in agony I give him a big whack across the back. He cries out and falls to the pavement. I know the wind has been knocked out of him for sure, and I've probably cracked a rib or two. He tries feebly to get back on his feet, and Kara kicks him right in the ass, which I absolutely love.

I bend over and whisper in his ear, "Yes, I restarted my computer. Did you really have to ask me that every single time,

bitch?”

His friend looks at us fearfully for a moment before turning and scrambling to make his escape over a rubble pile. Before he has a chance to call for back up, Kara and I sprint arms in arm down the street the other way, me having to hike up my dress a bit for maneuverability, huge smiles on our faces.

Somehow the thrill of combat, of protecting the one I love the most in the world, has made me feel more vital than I have since the whole end of the world situation began.

#

That night the sky turns into one gigantic rainbow. Kara makes magic mushroom risotto and we just stare at all of the different colors for hours.

We were fairly straight edge before the apocalypse, but now we do a variety of drugs daily. Want to get judgey? Try listening to an alligator feeding at three in the morning when all you want to do is sleep. It, regrettably, takes much longer than you might realize. And there are many...sound effects.

Anyway, when Simon and Ollie decided to end it all, they left an overnight case of wonder at our door. They also left the keys to their apartment (they jumped off their roof together) so we could help ourselves to whatever we wanted, including cricket mallets and an amazing wine cellar.

Kara has one of her famous ‘out of the box thinking’ moments and suggests that we drop a bowling ball off our balcony onto an alligator and try eating it – not so much because we need it for food at this point, because we have been really crafty at looting, but just to see what our options down the road are.

“You are so smart,” I say and we put our foreheads together so our noses touch. “I am so glad I married you.”

Later it gets cold and snows caviar, which I’m not too fond of but Kara is crazy about. So I happily run down to the street and scoop some up from the sidewalk, and we toast our two month anniversary with caviar and champagne, wearing our wedding dresses, which are now streaked with blood and dirt from our rumble, but are nonetheless gorgeous.

We do a dangerous amount of drinking combined with narcotics. If I have to be totally honest, it was probably so we “accidentally/on purpose” wouldn’t wake up the next morning. But we do, smiling at each other as we drink French pressed coffee with

woolly tongues.

In the afternoon, a lightning storm hits for two straight hours, frying a lot of the alligators. I'm ambivalent about it. They were a possible food source, if it came down to it, but the sound of their claws hitting the pavement as they ran seriously creeped me out.

As the latest flood starts washing over the sidewalks, we lean over the balcony railing and debate whether the eels it's bringing in are electric, and if an electric eel would taste different than a regular one – although neither of us would know the difference, never haven eaten one before.

A few months before the apocalypse, a fortune cookie told me that this was going to be my year. As she passes me the binoculars, I look into Kara's eyes and think it is.

It really is.

Kayley J. Fouts has a BA in English from Plymouth State University and is currently applying to MFA programs. She has published several poems in The Centripetal and has self-published a chapbook titled, Leagues From Who I Am. Kayley lives in rural New Hampshire and is currently a Stylist and Manager at a local boutique. When she isn't working or writing, Kayley can be found hiking with her beagle or roller skating around town.

Shadows & Sentiments

Kayley J. Fouts

I want to see you
beside a bonfire
that is flaming
as high as the blush
that lights up my face.

I want to see you and
feel your hand floating
on the small of my back,
not touching per se
but not not touching.

I want to set my veins aflame
with sips of whiskey and set my lips
loose from my brain's leash and say
all the things I'm too clumsy
to say, tripping over the
ums, likes, uhs, and justs, as if
they were untied shoe laces getting caught under my Chucks
because those damn qualifiers choke my sentiments and keep me
careful

and safe like a sentence prison
to which I sentenced myself.

I want to be this better version
of me, the one I see
reflected in your irises, blinking back
into my own, but I have another version

struggling to stay down, a shadow
compromised by your high noon, and I know
you won't always be shining down from above forever
and when you set along the horizon and come down onto my level
how am I going to level with you about the shadow behind me,
stretching long and lean
down the street, expanding
across an entire block.

I want to see you
when I am sober and the shadows
have taken over.
I want to know if you'll still like
what you see then,
when I'm no longer behind bars,
when I'm no longer a shiny silver conundrum.

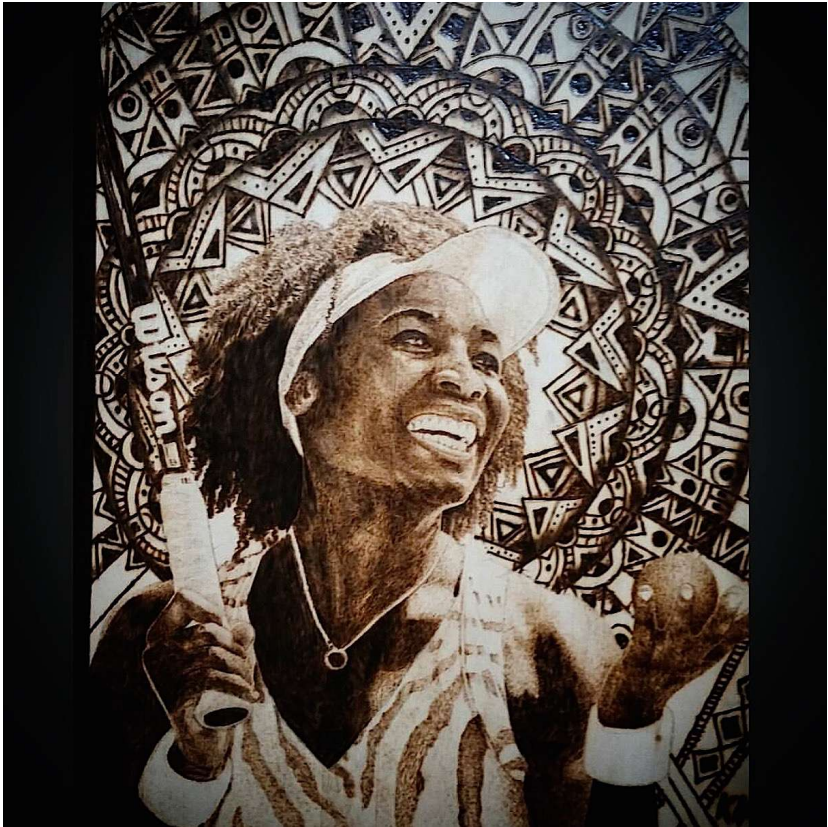
When the time comes,
I want you
to see me.

Kip, an artist out of Tallahassee Florida, has been a committed creator since the age of 7. Through woodburning Kip has discovered a form of expression that causes the artist to embrace time and patience in exchange for beautifully detailed works of art. Done by hand using a soldering pen, Kip spends many hours perfecting his crafts in the wee hours of the evening. You can find his work on Instagram @artbykip and reach out to him via Dritchey6@gmail.com.



Illumination

Illumination was inspired by a photo of rapper-producer, actor and activist David Banner. The picture to me symbolizes the radiance that comes with self acceptance. I decided to do the piece because I wanted to see that intangible illumination represented on a tangible piece of wood. To convey that state of presence through the gradient burning was a task I wanted to take.



Venus

Venus is part of a 3 part series titled "The Planets" (inspired by Gustav Holst). The other 2 are "Mars" portrayed by Spike Lee and "Neptune" portrayed by The Neptunes. I enjoyed creating this piece because of challenges like the curls in her hair and the shading to represent the sun. I plan on adding more to the collection, but Venus is by far my favorite.



Storm Trooper

Storm Trooper was done shortly after the recent film "Star Wars" was released. I always loved Star Wars as kid and still do in many regards. I thought it would be cool to do a new storm trooper mask and included my signature style in background as a contrast to the modern piece.

Samantha MacLeod is the author of The Trickster's Lover. She lives along the Niagara River just outside Buffalo, New York. When she's not shoveling snow or writing, Samantha can be found teaching college composition and philosophy. She blogs at <https://sammacleod.wordpress.com/>.

John Cutter Entertains a Visitor

Samantha MacLeod

“You know,” John said, holding his dented tin mug tight in his hand, although the coffee inside it had already gone cold, “I didn’t exactly move out here hoping to be bothered by a surplus of people.”

“Oh, I know,” said the handsome stranger, with a wide smile. “But I’m not a person.”

John felt a spike of fear then, pure, cold fear along his spine, but it wasn’t quite as strong as he might have expected. After all, he’d always known this day would come.

“Reckon you’ll be the devil, then,” he said.

The stranger smiled again, his ice-blue eyes flashing. “Oh, dear John, nothing so crude. I just happen to be passing through.”

John looked at him again, looked at him appraisingly, without moving his head or eyes much. He was a good-looking fellow, healthy, strong, and dapper, with an easy smile. But then, the devil would be dapper.

He was well-dressed, too. Better than anyone he’d seen all summer, maybe even since last winter in Denver. The man wore a top hat and a black suit, freshly pressed. He looked like money, like easy money, the kind of man who’d never had reason to fear the onset of winter. It was a two-day ride, at least, into John’s claim, and that would be riding hard and sleeping rough. This stranger was dressed like he just stepped off the train from Chicago. He had no horse, at least none that John could see. And even if John couldn’t see the stranger’s mount, if he were hobbled in the sagebrush down valley, his horses would have pricked their ears and whinnied a greeting.

The horses. John’s two scruffy bays and his lame paint didn’t seem overly concerned with the stranger. They were grazing in the

pasture, the first light of morning just sliding up and over the peaks, drifting lazily to the valley bottom. John had learned to speak the horses' language over the years, to trust their sense of danger. Their ease with the stranger relaxed John in a way he would have found difficult to explain.

The stranger's head turned, following John's gaze, and together they watched the rising sun illuminate the snow-dusted peaks: Harvard. Columbia. Yale. All named for fancy schools on the East coast, places so distant they might as well be the moon. John preferred to think of them without the names, to leave those labels to cartographers and city folk.

"Have you climbed them?" the stranger asked, conversationally.

"Every one," said John, although normally he would lie, say he was much too busy for that kind of foolishness, which was courting a broken leg or worse.

But he had climbed them, had climbed them all, even the steep ones. Even when he had to scramble up cliffs, face pressed against the broken granite, he climbed them. And from the top, he'd seen the great Rocky Mountains flowing before him like so many snow-capped waves, flowing right down to those vast, dusky plains.

The stranger said nothing, and John looked at him again, measuring. The birds began to sing in the willows as the sunlight dropped along the face of the mountains.

"Well," said John, "I'm not convinced you aren't the devil. But it'd be remiss of me to not at least offer you breakfast. Would you care to join me? There's no eggs and no milk, but the coffee's good, and I've biscuits from last night."

The stranger smiled. "I'd be delighted," he said, and he swung open the aspen gate from the pasture and stepped into the dirt courtyard of John's cabin.

John's table sat in the middle of his one-room cabin, near the wood stove. The stranger settled himself at the table, and John offered him the best plate, the one he always reserved for visitors, although they were infrequent enough. He coaxed the wood stove back to life, measured a new pot of coffee, re-heated the biscuits in the top of the stove.

When he went to pour the stranger's coffee, he felt a cool pressure on his wrist. He looked down to see the stranger's hand holding his arm. He put down the coffeepot and covered the

stranger's hand with his own, his heart pounding.

"Now I know you are the devil," he said.

"I am no such thing," said the stranger, eyes dancing. "But it has been a very long journey."

John sighed. These were the moments he hated the most, those moments when there was still an illusion of choice. When you would look back, full of disgust, and feel you could have said no. A few moments prior there had been nothing to refuse; a few moments hence and it would be too late. It was now, always now; now was the worst.

Then the stranger stood, and his arms were open, and John did not refuse.

#

"Did you come to torment me?" John asked, much later.

The stranger's cool chest vibrated with a laugh. "Was that torment, then?"

John was silent. The torment came later, much later. It came with the letters from his mother, asking when she would have grandchildren. It came in the eyes of his lovers, proud, handsome men who would ignore him in the streets, pretend they were strangers after one or two or even dozens of nights together. It came in the endless days spent wondering why, why he had been cursed in this way.

"No," the stranger finally said, his tone cool as his skin. "I did not intend to cause you torment."

He stood then, so tall he almost brushed the earthen ceiling of John's cabin. "I'm looking for something that was taken from me," he said.

John laughed as he came to his feet. "You're looking in the wrong place, then," he said. "I've done plenty of wrong, but I've not stolen. Not from you."

"Of course not," said the stranger, opening the door. His eyes scanned the dirt courtyard, settling on the cages next to the outhouse.

"You do much trapping?" he asked.

Again, John was tempted to lie. *Of course*, he should have said. Trapping was the only way to wring a profit out of these high, desolate places. The bismuth mine was just a hobby, barely providing enough income to cover the expenses; the dynamite, the horses to haul the ore. He could work all summer in that mine and not earn as much as a single lynx pelt would bring him.

He'd trap the lynx with a rounded foot trap, baited with fish

guts and the urine of other previously trapped cats. They'd get caught, and desperate, and angry. He'd knock them unconscious, working fast, and then bind them tight. Lynx are small, but strong and fierce; he had no doubt one of them would kill him if he wasn't careful.

Once bound, he'd drag or carry them to the cages. And then he would wait. In the summer, the lynx is beautiful, a mottled, rippling brown and grey. But in the winter the lynx is breathtaking. The small cats turn almost white, with fine grey dappling. And those pelts are what the refined East Coast gentlemen and their delicate ladies wanted.

So John would drag the lynx into the cages. Then he would feed them, squirrels and rabbits, once a week or so. He'd collect their excrement in trays under the cages, to bait other traps, once the snow lay heavy and thick enough to conceal the great springs, the unforgiving iron loops.

And at night, he would hear the great cats scratch and throw themselves against the walls of their cage. And he would hear them cry, cry like a woman in pain.

Last year he'd trapped a nursing dam. He'd noticed her swollen teats as he bound her, but her front paw was almost completely severed by the trap. He doubted she'd survive, even if he released her. He dragged her back to the empty cages. He told himself her cries were empty noises made by a dumb animal, just pure reflex and action. Not mourning. Not the cries of a mother for her lost children.

He had not intended to look for the kittens. He'd just found himself crossing the narrow meadows, scenting the cinquefoil and willows, happening to notice fallen logs and crevasses in the scree fields.

When he'd found the kittens they'd been hardly more than fur-covered skeletons, with flies crawling in their eyes. There was nothing he could have done for them.

He fed the dam, and ignored her cries, ignored the putrid stink of infection rising from her wasting body. He did not expect her to live until fall, but she did, her coat coming in thick and rich. He'd slaughtered her in late November, riding with her pelt to Denver. Even with the damaged paw, she'd fetched an excellent price. It was enough to feed his horses through the winter.

John had set no traps this spring.

"You trap wolves?" asked the stranger, and there was a tone

in his voice cold and sharp as John's mining pick.

"No," said John, sitting down at the table. Feeling defeated by his own inaction, his inability to profit off this mountain claim. John sighed heavily, but the stranger's shoulders seemed to relax. He sat at the table as well, across from John.

"I'm looking for someone," the stranger said, slowly.

John laughed. "Well," he said, "I've seen no one but you this side of a month."

The stranger smiled, and it was an odd expression, heavy with regret. "Not a person," he said, and he waved his hands in an odd pattern John could not quite follow in the dim indoor light. The stranger stood, gestured to the courtyard, stepped outside. John followed him.

He screamed.

There was a wolf in the courtyard, a great, black wolf with glowing golden eyes, his fur ringed with grey. John reached for his shotgun, just inside the door, but the stranger stopped him with a hand on his arm.

"Shhhhhh," the stranger whispered. "The horses."

John took a breath, realized the truth of his words. The horses were silent. Even now he could see them, grazing in the pasture, in the thick, golden light of late morning. They would be crazy, now, had they scented wolf.

"Have you seen him?" the stranger asked, a hard edge to his voice. "This wolf, have you seen him?"

John took another breath, forced himself to look at the fearsome creature. The wolf paced in the dirt of the courtyard, but did not kick up dust. It stopped to sniff the air, turned, swung its head toward the pasture, and paced again.

John had seen only a handful of wolves, most of them dead, and none had been this size. None had carried this sense of power, of potential. "I'm sorry," said John. "I can't help you."

The stranger waved his hand, and the wolf disappeared. "Don't trap anymore," said the stranger. "I cannot stand when living creatures are bound against their will."

John nodded, silent. The horses flicked their tails, shifted their weight on their hooves, chewed meditatively. Already the grasshoppers were starting to sing, on the far side of the canyon, beyond Pine Creek.

The stranger nodded to the rocky scree-covered face of the

closest peak. "Climb it with me?" he asked.

John hesitated. It was an easy climb. Just a long, steep amble, really. But there were a number of things around the claim that needed doing.

He turned to the stranger's handsome, pale face, and nodded. "We should leave now," John said. "The afternoon'll bring storms. We'll want to be down by then."

The stranger inclined his head slightly, his wild eyes watching the mountains.

"You'll be needing a different outfit," John said, appraising the fine suit the stranger wore. It had felt like silk under his fingers, for the few minutes it remained on. "Colder than it looks, up there."

"I'll be fine," the stranger said.

John nodded, although he doubted it. "I'll fill some canteens," he said.

John grabbed his rope and what was left of the biscuits, stopping to fill his canteen at the spring flowing beside his cabin. He also packed his second wool sweater and leather breeches in his shoulder sack; those he did not mention to the stranger.

John's three horses followed them up the trail a while. The paint seemed to like the stranger. John was not entirely sure what to make of this. Was the devil good with horses? He couldn't recall.

Once they rounded a corner and were out of sight of the cabin, the horses fell away, preferring to stay near the rich, thick grass along the creek. The two men were silent as they left the claim, following the white tumble and roar of Pine Creek, close enough to hear it but far enough to avoid the mud and tangle of willows along the shore.

They crossed Pine Creek above the bedrock waterfall. The water was shallow here, but swift, and biting cold. It had been snow only yesterday, or perhaps the day before. John offered his arm to the stranger, and the stranger took it, and they crossed Pine Creek with their arms intertwined like lovers.

After the crossing, the real work of climbing began. The trees fell away, growing shorter and more stunted until they disappeared entirely. Then there were only occasional patches of low grass, nibbled short by mountain goats, and then nothing but bare rock. The sun was hot on the scree fields of broken granite, but the wind was cold. John was surprised to see the stranger keeping pace with him; here on the mountainside there was a wildness in his eyes.

“Won’t be long now,” said John, crouching near a boulder. “Let’s take some water.”

John sat behind a sun-warmed rock, the large boulder blocking the worst of the wind. The stranger remained standing, wind tugging at his flame-red hair. Had it always been red, John wondered, and he simply hadn’t noticed? Or was it only red here, above the trees?

“I brought you a sweater,” John said, gesturing to his shoulder sack.

“I’m fine,” the stranger replied, his voice distant. “But thank you,” he said, after some time, when his eyes dropped from the rocky, jumbled summit.

John took another swallow of water, stared down the mountainside at his cabin. It was just a dark scratch against the valley floor, from here. He stood, stretched, and met the stranger’s wild, dancing eyes. “Almost there,” he said.

The last pitch was steep, and they scrambled up on hands and knees, too winded to speak. And then they were at the top, the very top of the world. The summit of this mountain was a jumble of rocks, some sheltering deceptively deep snow drifts, and the wind was bitter cold. John could see a pile of white clouds in the west, which would spell trouble in a few hours. He could see the valley beyond his, and the southern face of the mountain, steep and intimidating. He could see the peaks rising and falling, rising and falling, until they became the great, dusty plains, harboring Pueblo and Denver and, somewhere in the great distance, Chicago.

John crouched to escape the wind, shivering already. The stranger stood beside him, his hand shading his eyes. He turned in great, slow circles on the summit of the mountain. Looking.

And then he closed his eyes entirely, held his hands wide, palms up and facing out. He turned another slow circle. John held his breath, watching him. The stranger shook his head, crouched low next to John. His pale eyes were distant and pregnant with tears. John offered him a sip of his canteen, and the stranger accepted.

“Come on,” said John, gesturing to the growing mountain of clouds in the west. “Storm’s building.”

John stood, turned to descend, but the stranger did not move. John turned back to him, crouched low again, and put his hand on the stranger’s shoulder.

“It’s cold here,” said the stranger, his voice flat and empty.

“Come on,” said John. “Come with me.”

#

They stopped at timberline, when the first stunted and twisted ponderosa pines appeared in the scree field. John opened his shoulder bag, offered the stranger what was left of the biscuits. The stranger shook his head, said nothing. His eyes were still distant, cold, and John felt a pang of concern.

“What is it,” John said, “the wolf you seek?”

The stranger smiled, just slightly. John was not certain he wanted to know the answer. “Have you children?” the stranger asked.

John shrugged. With other men he might laugh off the question, might imply there could be bastards of his running around. “No,” he said, simply. “I’ve never know a woman. Never even wanted to, as much trouble as that would have saved me. No.”

The stranger looked up again, as if the answer to the question was hidden in the broken granite. Was still on the mountain summit. “I had children,” he said, his voice low.

The silence stretched out so long John was certain the stranger was finished, and he moved to get back to his feet. The peak was now blocking their view of the storm clouds building to the west, but John was certain they’d still come. There would be rain this afternoon, and thunder, and afterwards a glorious rainbow in the sweet, scrubbed-clean air.

“Loving children,” the stranger said, his voice still low, distant. Hard as granite. “It’s not like anything else. Like anyone else. They don’t just love you. They - they worship you. And they make you want to *be* -”

He was silent again. The wind grew, stirred the needles of the ponderosas, carrying the smell of warm rock and sap. John had heard of such things, although not around here. He supposed it was always possible - you leave the gate unlatched, the doors open. A child is bound to wander. And, to a wolf, there’s small enough difference between toddler and rabbit.

“I’m sorry,” said John. “The wolf-” He struggled with the phrasing.

“He is my son,” said the stranger. “My wife is dead. My children were taken from me. I watched Nari die at my feet, but Vali. Vali escaped, escaped in the prison of a beast’s body.” The stranger sighed heavily, turned away from John. “He’s dangerous, my son. And he does not wish to be found.”

John rocked back against the granite. He looked down the valley. The sun shone against the bright gash of Pine Creek, and somewhere he could hear the pikas crying to one another on the scree fields. It was a perfectly ordinary day.

“Can I help?” asked John, and the words surprised him.

The stranger turned to him, his eyes shimmering. “Thank you,” he said. “Thank you, John. You have.”

John came to his feet, somewhat awkwardly, as his legs had begun to feel pins and needles. “Sir,” he said, “all I’ve done is offer you breakfast and walk with you.”

The stranger took his hand, and his skin felt cool. “I have not spent so much time in another’s company in an age,” he said. “Thank you, John Cutter.”

John began to feel a clenching in his heart, and he cleared his throat, loudly, twice. “You ain’t the devil,” he said, wishing he had more to offer. “If I see the—” John hesitated. “If I see your son?”

The stranger smiled, a distant, cold smile. “You won’t see him.”

The wind gusted between them, carrying a hint of rain, and the stranger turned to look up the valley. John felt quite certain, now, he would be walking back to his cabin alone, and the clenching in his heart worsened.

“I suppose you could tell him,” the stranger said, his voice low and distant. “Tell him his father will find him. Tell him he can’t hide forever.”

John nodded. Their hands were still entwined. It did not take much to close the distance between them, to find the stranger’s cool lips and hungry mouth.

#

Some years later, in late evening, long after the sun set and the woodstove burned low, something set the horses off. There were five of them, now, and they were screaming and galloping in the pasture.

“I’d better go check on them,” said John, reaching for the lantern.

“Shall I join you?” Tim reached across the table, putting his hand over John’s.

In town John called Tim his apprentice; he helped look after the horses, helped with the mine. He helped haul the foodstuff in once the snow melted, and helped haul the ore out, once October drew to a

close and snow threatened to clog the entrance to the valley.

Up here, in the shadow of the mountains, where there were no other humans to hear them, John and Tim called each other husband.

John smiled. "I'll be fine. I'll call if I need you."

The horses were in a state, whinnying and rearing against the far pasture fence. John could see the whites of their eyes flashing in the glow of the lantern. Murmuring soothingly, he entered the enclosure, walking past them to the far edge of the pasture. John and Tim had expanded the fence; it now reached all the way to the frothing edge of Pine Creek.

John stopped at the creek, listening to the water rattle over the stones. He raised the lantern above his head. He could just see the glint of eyes across the water, the hint of powerful haunches. The wolf was enormous, and black, so dark he seemed composed of shadows.

"Vali," said John. "Your father is looking for you."

The wolf's golden eyes flashed as his lip curled back, revealing a row of gleaming white teeth.

"He said he will find you." John's voice was just loud enough to carry over the rumble of the water.

The wolf leapt before John had a chance to scream.

Roger Camp is the author of three photography books including the award winning *Butterflies in Flight*, Thames & Hudson, 2002, and *Heat*, Charta, Milano, 2008. His work has appeared in over 150 magazines including *The New York Quarterly*, *New England Review* and *Witness*.



Cowboy, Hwy 46, Paso Robles, CA

I liked the idea that a gate could double as a sculpture especially as the subject seemed part of the landscape. It was on a bluff which was an invitation to include the clouds as background.



Red Shirt, Selma, Ca

As I was driving away from my Aunt's house early in the morning the red shirt was swaying in the breeze and caught my eye. I stopped the car and walked back with my camera. Seeing the panty hose wrapped around the shirt and the red geranium by the post made it impossible to walk away without a photograph.



War Surplus, Prescott, AZ

The window of this junk store was decorated with canteens and mess kits from WWII. Given their history and the likelihood that some of their owners were no longer alive, their appearance behind reflections of clouds seemed prophetic.

Thomas J Turner is a poet, novelist and short story writer who lives on the west side of the Portland metro area.

THE BUS STOP

Thomas J Turner

The old wooden bus stop
tilts towards the west,
covered with harsh graffiti
surrounded by rude weeds
no one important
sits there anymore

Adam Michael Nicks is a writer living in Cleveland, Ohio and is currently pursuing his MFA.

New Age

Adam Michael Nicks

Setting: 1970. Hollywood Hills, CA. Mansion.

Action.

(Doorbell chimes seven tones too long, but it's not answered until the final toll. Enter: STELLA REED – mid-60s, graceful, wearing a red silk robe with puffy white fur lining the edges and absolutely nothing underneath, hair over-sprayed to the point of looking more like a dyed blonde helmet, enough make up caked on her face to open its own cosmetic department. She appears in the doorway like she isn't expecting him.)

MAN: Oh my god. You're her, aren't you? It's you, isn't it?
Ms. Reed?

(MAN – mid-20s, stiff, wearing bellbottom jeans that hug tight enough to show his religion and a suede-fringed jacket over his broad shoulders, slightly sepia tinted aviator sunglasses are worn despite it being night time and indoors, and he's got sideburns that would make a Beatle jealous. In his left hand, he clutches photographs.)

REED: *(Cocking her head to the side)* Yes?

MAN: I've been trying to find you. I'm your biggest fan.
Can I have your autograph?

(He sticks the glossy black and white 8 x 10s out. Posed in a provocative sprawl, her younger reflection watches. Formerly delicate features are captured in these images, bathed in a gentle

light. Expensive jewelry draped over her sparkling body shines and full lashes flipped to the sky surround her pale eyes. Perfectly combed and styled fair hair falls just above her shoulders with a slight bounce and curl at the ends. But all of this is nothing compared to that smile: those pouty lips parted for an inaudible expression of the struggle between lust and innocence of that bygone era. STELLA REED avoids making eye contact with herself, as her smile is the only thing that remains untouched by time. Even this is beginning to fray around the edges.)

REED: Of course. *(She sheepishly pats on her sides knowing fully well there's nothing there, not even a pocket)*
Oh, but...I'm afraid I don't have a pen on me. Please, come in.

(The door pulls all the way open and light from the house pours onto the front step casting a deep shadow at the man's feet. She pulls her robe closed tighter and feels her hair to make sure it's keeping shape. He steps into the foyer of the mansion and looks around as if it's the first time he's ever seen it. The door shuts out reality.)

MAN: Wow. Lovely home, Ms. Reed.

REED: Please, darling, call me Stella.

(She takes his jacket and hangs it on a coat rack filled with furs. Everything in the home is expensive.)

REED: *(In a motherly, maybe grandmotherly way)* Shoes.

(He turns his back to her and bends over to untie his laces in a calculated manner, swiveling his hips. She eyes his body up and down and raises an eyebrow.)

REED: I should have something in the kitchen.

(She goes in, pulls open a drawer at waist height and produces a glass, tipping it in his direction; he nods in acceptance of a drink. The display cases catch her reflection as she passes, acting as a

mirror and a shrine for the gold plated statues and plaques of her past achievements. A collection of paintings and sculptures done long ago in tribute by her admirers and fans line shelves on the burgundy walls. Movie posters are everywhere, and each one features her face front and center. The autograph MAN is seeking is left abandoned and unsigned on the polished tabletop while they move to the liquor cabinet in the next room. She motions for him to follow on the way.)

REED: I hope you like vodka and tonic. Edward Dmytryk told me it was the only thing that helped him get through the trials.

MAN: Of course.

(He studies one of her classic movie posters; Robert Mitchum holds her close while they look hopelessly into the distance. He moves on to the next one, taps on the frame and smudges it with his fingertips; his voice changes back to its Brooklyn roots, dropping the act.)

MAN: I didn't know you did a flick with Kirk Douglas? I love that guy. He was really good in *Spartacus*. You ever see that one?

(She uses one of her frilly-edged sleeves to remove the smear before she regains her composure.)

REED: I don't watch movies anymore.

MAN: Yeah, but this one came out probably ten years ago now.

(She pours the drink. He clears his throat and puts on his old voice, hoping it would return things back to normal.)

MAN: Y'know, I've seen every movie you've been in.

REED: Mmmm? Is that right? What's your favorite?

(Ice cubes clink against the rim when she hands the glass over. She doesn't make one for herself. He nods, takes a deep gulp before responding.)

MAN: *Pairs of Pain*, maybe. Or *Jewels of Glory*. They're all so good.

REED: *(Smile fades into a firm grimace)* I was in *Paths of Pain*.

MAN: *(Red and embarrassed)* Right. Right. That's uh, that's what I meant. *(Looking away, looking back)* I'm just nervous. I've never been around a movie star before.

(Her award winning smile returns.)

MAN: Especially one as beautiful as you. *(He moves in to hold her like Robert Mitchum)* Why don't we just cut the scripted act for once and get right to it?

REED: *(Slinking away)* Care to take a tour of the rest of the estate? It used to belong to Hanns Eisler.

MAN: *(Murmuring into the glass)* Whatever you want.

(STELLA REED stops in her tracks; MAN's broken character enough. When he stops drinking to see her, his slack demeanor demonstrated moments before disappears and he straightens his back and shifts his expression to that of wide-eyed wonder and enthusiasm once more.)

MAN: I-I mean, of course. Gosh, that'd be a real honor.

REED: Come upstairs with me.

(Holding the railing and taking each step with a slight pause, with limp wrists, it seems as if she's still on film waiting for the director to yell out "Cut!")

MAN: I still don't get how someone like you can live in a giant house like this all by yourself. Doesn't it get lonely? *(Beat)* I mean, I guess of course it gets lonely. But you know what I mean...

(Along the wall, at every odd step is a new portrait of Stella on her wedding days. Each look of happiness seemingly more genuine than the last, there are a few famous faces in between.)

MAN: Sorry about your husbands. I don't know if I ever told you that before. *(At the top of the steps)* Anyway, I hate divorces. Sometimes it's better that way though. My parents are miserable and they just stay together. They used to scream at each other all of the time. It's why I couldn't wait to get out of the house.

(STELLA REED enters the lavish master bedroom. MAN keeps a few paces behind with his hands in his pockets, staring at fancy brass fixtures. She flips a switch and crosses the room to angle another lamp in their direction. The tour begins with her gesturing to the bathroom. He's found a piece of sculpted art next to a wad of cash on a bedside table.)

REED: To the left is a marble shower. It was designed by Nico – *(Running over to him)* Oh. Please, don't touch that. It's very expensive. A gift from Adrian Scott.

MAN: Sorry. *(Gently setting it down)* I never noticed that before. Why did he give it to you?

REED: For making the Blacklist.

(Instead of saying anything, MAN tries to apologize with his eyes. She heads to the window on the other end of the room. Despite the darkness outside, she fixes her gaze ahead and delivers her monologue in a near whisper.)

REED: Charlie Chaplin – right before he left – told me that “life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a

comedy in the long-shot.” *(Crossing back to him)* I miss it, you know? Acting. That’s why we do all of this. It gives me a chance to feel the way I used to feel.

MAN: Come on, Stella. Let’s just do it.

REED: *(Motioning to the left at a walk in closet)* Through this door is my wardrobe. I kept all of my costumes from my movies. Would you like to see them?

(She steps inside before he has a chance to respond, so he leans his shoulder against the wall to wait. She runs her red-tipped fingers over every dress she passes, reminiscing with each of the hundreds of screen worn outfits hanging in pristine condition. Pausing halfway through, she removes a cobalt number that glows where the light catches it. Her sagging silhouette is seen in profile as she tries it on from behind a dressing screen.)

REED: Darling, could you please hand me my diamond earrings? They’re in the box to your right.

(MAN flips open a silver plated box on a nearby shelf with an inscription addressed to Stella from a name he doesn’t recognize, and then he walks them to her. A delicate, feeble hand slinks out to take them, and then her confident body follows. The dress is tightly stretched across her, the slender figure that once wore it in the cinema long ago has expanded and the dress tries with all its might to hold together. She moves past him and puts the earrings on as she positions herself perfectly at her mark in the lights she had set up earlier. For a moment, she is stunning again, and it makes him forget all about her age or the situation. She is beautiful.)

MAN: Come here.

(She extends her index finger and curls it three times – a motion for him to come to her. This time he’s the one that crosses the room, and he strips her of the dress, backing her out from the spotlight. There she stands, naked and old. Forgotten and antiquated. Withered and

faded. Alone.)

(He can't help but think about the photos he carried when he arrived. Where her eyebrows used to arch on her face is a faint mockery of them drawn on. Those full-bodied eyelashes have become clumps of thin hairs and fight to stand out amongst the thick wrinkles. Her blue eyes have a tinge of grey, much like her hair, which no amount of platinum dye can hide. Despite their gradual appearance, she never did get used to the cracks and crevices that plague her face – her entire body. She will never accept them. "Frail" is not a word she would use to describe herself, but she's beginning to question this now that she struggles to do such basic things. Time has made a nonconsensual deal with her hormones and robbed her of her feminine features to leave behind masculine ones. Once upon a time, professionals and specialists created her daily, now she was spoiled. Forever an actress – the show must go on. All she has left are her memories, her money, and her smile.)

(He takes her by the hand to the marble shower and lets the warm water beat down upon the two of them while they kiss.)

REED: *(Undressing him, whispering)* Look at you. The world is still in front of you.

(They stay in there for a bit until he turns it off. He reaches out to grab a white cotton towel and dries her off with care, then leads her once more by the hand to the bed.)

(Fade to black.)

(Lights up.)

(STELLA REED lays facing away from him, eyes open and not blinking. MAN puts a cigarette in his mouth and gets out of the bed to get dressed.)

MAN: Same time next week, Ms. Reed?

(She doesn't say anything, but she never does. He gathers the money from off of the bedside table next to the sculpture that was a gift from Adrian Scott. He shows himself the way out and returns the following week with photographs in his hands.)

Matthew Chamberlin lives in Virginia, where he also teaches and writes. His poems and stories can be found in Apex, Jersey Devil Press, Gone Lawn, Strangelet, and other places.

New Moon

Matthew Chamberlin

Where the night frogs sing I change,
in sallow midnight's rhythm
when the moon's slow rays have their effect.
Strange how unkempt the world's grown,
these ruined lands and half-dreamt days
in disarray.

Once when every moon was new,
I kept to high dark groves, prowled through
the silent hours and sprawled with wolves.
From crags we tracked the burning skies,
watched worlds loosen in their orbits.
One by one they fell away.

The wolves fled,
lured by dying suns. They revered gods
unknown to me, loped into languid
shadows and were gone. I still
thought myself a man, a woman, severed
from my life. *Endure*, I said,
and did,
but knew not why.

Alone again, night brought me
dreams of firelight and silver gates, of broken
parapets and domes
where sigils whipped in quiet winds.

I crept along the mountainside, approached the cleft.
The turrets stood above the treeline,
guttured shells of blackened stone.
Roosting there were birdlike things that sailed
out of sunset skies, came gliding low
to crumple into marble hollows.
They'd mutter there in goblin tongues,
shift to and fro on human hands
then lift in clumps to flutter moonward.

When they'd gone the dead arose,
timid castle-dwellers, ghosts
who danced in pairs
through skylit halls, flew up
the stairs to spill from empty windows,
struck the ground with unheard thuds
then raced around to fall again.
One stopped, a small and tousled child.
His laughing eyes collected mine
and drew me to him as he leapt.

Some time on I found
myself in endless gardens.
Pale faces gazed at me
from glasslike pools enwreathed in minnows.
The narrow paths caressed me like a corpse.
The gardens grew impenetrable,
so many new beginnings.

I came at last to one high sward
set deep against the hills
below the wheeling crow-crowd,
there where life began,
the blighted avenues, gates flung apart
and twisting gently.

I passed them all to find the silent tower.

One man remained, and he enthroned in mist and dreams.
He beckoned to me, smiled wistful--
then from gaping lungs issued a gale,
a voiceless scream.

I fled. I'd seen,
beneath the parchment skin and hollow bones,
within the tunneled
throat, the ruddy gleam of some deep eye.

Badlands

Matthew Chamberlin

The road bends northward,
straightens near the edge of things.
A strange, strange place, where clear skies
gather clouds of swallows,
darkening the orange country.
There's life here of a kind:
Pale horses graze the sedge, while devils
paler still raise pillars from the dust.
Above the rim the red-rust land breaks through,
broad shoulders cracked and tumbled
rise in domes and ridges
from the sand. White hands appear
on feldspar walls, splayed wide to warn away
or beckon onward. Whatever's
down there's meant to stay.

Once a willow grew nearby, trailed fingers
over moonbeam shallows.
Slivered boughs threw shadows whipsnake thin
on yellow stone. Come midday vipers telescoped
from roothole narrows, basked in skins
of green and gold. Sun-drunk at dusk, they tapered
into holes again.
Around a white acacia, the musk of death.
Gray shrikes dwelled in sunlit heights,
draped tender prey on spikes and thorns.

The shrikes are gone. The willow tree--
a shade itself, a fire-blackened shard of bone--
squats gleaming and caliginous.
Now what stands here, stands alone.
Carved deep in burnished wood a dark and brooding face,
black whorls for eyes, lips cut
in twists of curling bark. Around the whorl-hollows

turns the feathered moil--swift beard
of swallows parts and grins.

Over all the Badlands peers a brutish god.

rOSIE lives, writes and gardens in western MA. She is currently peddling - with conviction - her memoir to agents and this past year, her poetry began getting published in a variety of journals, which thrills her to no end.

ORANGE II

rOSIE



The first thing you did,
after kneeling in the wet grass
for a closer look,
was to move your fingers
into the center
of the poppy blossoms.

And I blushed
staring at the pollen,
now a part of you
and you said,
flowers like being touched.

I believed you
and taught my girlfriends
the very next day
to do the same thing
to theirs.

They weren't shy -
they laughed at the smell,
pungent and earthy,
like the navel of an orange
or that place on a tomato
that smells the most like a tomato
where it left the vine -
where we all leave our mother.

Timothy DeLizza was raised in Brooklyn, New York. He currently lives in Washington, DC, where he works as an energy attorney for the government. He is next scheduled to be published in the July 2016 issue of Bartleby Snopes. A complete list of his prior publications may be found here: <http://www.timothy-delizza.com/list-of-works/>

The Strays of Gate 32A

Timothy DeLizza

The loudspeaker announced that the plane would be delayed further due to weather. Shortly after, a nearby stranger proposed to Emma a means of passing the time.

He'd made clear through stolen glances above his book over the past thirty minutes that he wished to start a conversation. For her part, Emma had touched his upper arm while asking him a small clarification about a prior announcement. He was fit, a fact hidden by his casual clothing but revealed by her brief touch.

"How would it go?" Emma asked. She leaned back and tugged at her hair, which was shorter than a pixie cut.

"We pretend to be two entirely different people," he said.

"Am I allowed to pretend to be myself? I mean, you wouldn't be able to tell."

"You can pretend however you like. You can just change nothing, one small thing, or everything. Don't spend so much time thinking about the rules."

"So basically we're allowed to lie in this conversation."

"In fact, lying is encouraged."

"Okay." She reached out her hand. "Hello. I'm Emma."

"Joon-ho." He shook her hand. "Call me June, like the month, if it's easier."

"It's nice to meet you June-like-the-month. Where are you from, June?"

"A hard question. My family's from Korea, I was raised in the US, but I'm currently living in Valparaiso."

"Where is that?"

"Chile. It's this impossible junkpile of a town – they

haphazardly built it on the side of the mountain where no city should ever be. The hills are so steep that you need to take these ancient cable cars, the *ascensores*, to get up into the hills. There's old Coca-Cola ads promoting nostalgic view of America around the bus depot, but as soon as you get away from that there's street art on every inch of the place: elegant stuff, amateur stuff. Like the city itself is a text that tells you its mood. It changes and paints over itself so often you can't visit the same city twice."

Emma put away her book and headphones, and leaned toward him. "And what do you do in this Bohemian mecca?"

"I'm a waiter at a local brewery there, but at night I paint murals. Mostly of stray dogs. Always stray dogs. The way you can see their ribs underneath their coats, like a geometric reduction of a dog. They have so many that folks leave halved plastic milk jugs out, to catch rainwater for them to drink."

"The poor things! I'm glad you're paying attention to them. You know, as it so happens I'm a dog trainer!"

Joon-ho looked at her.

"What, you don't believe me?"

"I believe you, it's a healthy coincidence."

"I am. It's true. In East Berlin."

"Ah – East Berlin – I hear you guys have bohemians and street art there too. That the hipsters of Williamsburg only wish they had Soviet warehouses to use as canvases."

"We have those, but our doggie-day-care is aimed more at Americans and Englishman working for multinationals."

"Like as a perk?"

"The same way companies provide day-care as a perk. These workaholics are postponing having children, so they – what is the word when you treat a non-human like a human?"

"Anthropomorphize?"

"Yes, thanks." She smiled at him. "They anthropomorphize their animals and we are happy to take a little of their paychecks to help them do it. We give them a report cards with one to four paw-prints by each trait if they have been a good dog for sitting, playing well with others, and the other things dogs do."

"So, you're German?"

She laughed. "Heavens no – I don't even speak German. Just Dutch and English, a little French."

"Your English, it sounds like some of your schooling was in

America?”

“I liked America television. *Thundercats*. *Friends*. Rachel’s haircut. That sort of thing.”

“Sure. Sure. And at the kennel, did you – wait, you still work there?”

“Of course! Where else?”

“Do you ever feel bad for the animals?”

“Oh no – our dogs have it made compared to the strays. Some kennels are bad but we use relationship-based training methods, which is the most liberal of the dog training methods – we get the behaviors we desire not through trying to dominate them or giving them some reward like uh like uh . . .”

“Pavlov?”

“Yes, thanks. Nothing remotely Pavlovian. Oh no - that would be viewed as gauche by our clients.”

“But what about the very act,” he asked, “that we’re training them to act to our specifications? Don’t the strays have some freedom from that?”

“We all train each other don’t we? To be the partners we need -- the rhythms we like, to do the . . .” she swayed her head back and forth “that we enjoy.”

Joon-ho blushed.

“Was that too bold? I’m sorry – I didn’t – I sensed you were comfortable. You Americans, so modest at surprising moments.”

Joon-ho looked impressed, but said nothing at first. She could see his mind recalibrate. “But there’s limits right, to how much we should bring animals into our lives? Like you hear these famous cases of families trying to raise chimps and the chimps attack them.”

“Well, some species shouldn’t be domesticated,” she said. She looked down, then at him. “That’s getting too serious though, tell me more about Valparaiso.”

“More? Well, there are exactly three other Asians in the entire city. No four, counting me. The other three are all artists working on a conceptual piece on Pedro Montt that you’ll be able to see when you ride down my favorite *ascensore*. It portrays the worst days of the Pinochet government and links this to modern day North Korea. I’m very jealous of them. One of them looks like Rain. Do you know Rain?”

“I know dogs smell bad in the rain.”

“He’s one of Korea’s biggest pop stars. Or was. He’s in his

thirties, which makes him an octogenarian in K-pop years.”

“Let's just stipulate that neither real me nor fictional me know much about Korean pop culture.” She took a water bottle from her knapsack. “You may not believe this, after the dog thing. But I do art at night too.”

“Really?” he said.

“Yes. Photography.”

“Animal photography.”

“No, not at all. Much different. So much of photography today feels stodgy, journalistic, lagging behind the other arts. The interesting stuff never makes it to the public. My photography is much more, what word did you use before? Conceptual.”

She felt his eyes following her as she moved.

“I'll take multiple shots of the same object from different sides and perspectives, then collage them together. I'm trying to capture how our minds actually work – how we create images of objects that are of different sizes of the same thing at the same time. So for example, when you think of a particular bakery, you see the door, a baguette – even taste somehow becomes a part of your mental image. So, the photos mimic how we actually see things. When you look out the window in your car, you see the landscape far away and then up close, and we hold both of these images at the same time. Does this make sense at all? We see in pieces. I want to show how the mind really holds images of drunkenness, sex, anything.”

Joon-ho tightened a piece of his shirt into a bundle at the word ‘sex’, then scratched his chest. “I hear that. It's like how the Impressionists are often lumped in with abstract art, but they saw themselves as something hyper-realistic. They drew how the eye actually saw: in focus at the center and blurry at the sides.”

“You have it. My husband does something similar using sculpture.”

“Wait, you have a husband in real life or in story life?”

“I thought we weren't spending much time thinking about the rules.”

“You don't have a ring.”

She looked down at her naked hand and wiggled her fingers. “We're not traditional like that. We love each other, but hate the marriage institution – its religious connotation. I have, what do the French have? A PACS, more of a contract.”

An airport announcement came on. The 5:30 flight was now

cancelled due to snow but they were trying to fit all inconvenienced travellers on the 6:30. They would provide vouchers and hotel accommodations for six volunteers willing to bump to tomorrow.

Emma looked at her watch then she squeezed her bag to find her phone. "I should make a call," she said. He shrunk back. She touched his arm. "Will you watch my stuff a moment?" she asked.

While she was gone, he took out his book but continued to watch her. She made the phone call out of earshot. She fiddled with her hair while she spoke, and did not glance at him. She looked at her phone for a moment before putting it away and then closed her eyes. She sighed with her full body.

"So," she said, returning. "Where were we?"

"Wait I want to change my story," he said. "Yours is so good, so believable."

"No, you can't change yours now. I liked it. I believed every moment. Tell me about your craziest night bartending at that pub in Valparaiso. I bet it was a Russian tourist."

"I've only been to Valparaiso once and I don't know much about dogs."

"I believed you," she said, "Okay, okay. Yes. Start over. Who are you now?"

"Wait," he smiled and laughed. "Wait."

"What's your name," she said. "Still June?"

"Still June."

"What do you do, June?"

"I work in reproductive rights."

"Ah - a feminist."

"Of course. Like any second-generation immigrant ruined by a liberal arts education." He leaned forward, becoming animated.

"The focus of my work is trying to do hard empirical research showing that investment in access to quality family planning would prevent more hunger than investment in food security programs."

"Can't we invest in both?"

"Wealthy countries should, but developing countries have limited resources, and too often they treat reproductive rights as solely a women's issue – meaning they let NGO and non-profit resources go to it, but not government money. This would balance things a little more."

"You came up with that yourself?"

"My fictional self did. Yes. Maybe."

She rubbed one hand on top the other, then tugged her short hair again and looked away. She looked back at him and smiled. "I'll allow it. Okay."

"And this time, we knew each other already, in the past. We dated, even."

"Oh did we?"

Emma looked at him, then looked away and exhaled heavily.

"Why didn't we marry, this first time?" she asked.

He swallowed.

"I suspect your father didn't like the idea of a daughter-in-law who finds the church more than a little ridiculous and who was too encouraging of field work you're doing."

"Yes, there's that."

"And you? You don't like it?"

June swallowed. Then he smiled and met her glance. "I like it," he said. "I like that you just say anything."

Emma nodded. "Well, my husband and I met each other skiing in a valley called Courchevel." She said this in a far off, exhausted voice. "It's a French place full of Russian mafia guys and English families, a funny cocktail for France. The ski place had such a funny motto, very American motto, it calls itself 'the largest ski area in the wooodorld.' Five ohs. You Americans love stuff like that."

"That's funny. You keep calling me American but I don't usually think of myself as that word so cleanly."

"Oh no? How are you not American?"

"A native Korean would certainly see me as American if I visited, but most Americans would call me Korean or Korean American."

"Or Korean Chilean."

"Or a Korean American living in Chile. Once I saw this billboard, I don't remember what it was for. It said 'As American as Sushi,' and it had this image of a sushi roll. And at first glance most viewers might think of sushi rolls as Japanese but you wouldn't find those rolls in Japan. Japanese tourists sometimes come here for these exotically American sushi rolls that have mayonnaise and cream cheese, and all these things a sushi chef wouldn't be caught dead with."

"You're like a billboard for sushi?"

"I don't think it was even advertising sushi. I can't remember what it was for."

“You should make some art out of this image.”

“I should.”

They nodded to each other. “So,” she said, “what was our first kiss like, I’m eager to know?”

“It’s something I see from different angles and with different touches. I feel my hand on your waist pulling you to me. There’s rain, the element not the singer. In the moment before, our eyes are locked into each other and it feels like the most inevitable thing in the world. The kiss happens already in our mind and the physical happening is both satisfying but redundant. All I remember after this is hearts beating fast.”

Static started over the loudspeaker, then the gate attendant announced they just needed two more volunteers to get the flight going and raised the amount of the voucher money. Emma looked up at the ceiling as the announcement was.

“Are you really married?” he asked with sudden urgency.

“No,” she said. “I’m single.”

“Where do you actually live?” he asked.

“Nowhere permanently,” she said, “like you.” She looked at him and double-squeezed his arm, feeling his muscle again, then stood and walked slowed backwards from him. As she did this, she mimed blowing a dog whistle. “Come. We better hurry or they might try to put us on a plane.”

Charles Dutka is a poet and writer who lives and works in Connecticut. He is currently assembling his first collection, Temporarily Fatal. His work has appeared in Dark Matter and Melancholy Hyperbole. Charles has been writing daily since high school and enjoys drawing inspiration from his job as the Operations Manager for a local health food store.

Transpire

Charles Dutka

I could sit here stare
ing at that
Blank wall

until —

The ceiling crumbles
and the rain drinks in
the floor

until —

That wall
Falls eaten
by the wind which in turn
will start snacking on my eyes
my skin

until —

The coffee table rots
and moss beings to gather
on the remnants of what
was once
the Blank wall

until —

all the world Falls

silent

until —

Dust turns to diamonds
my humble home taken in
to the earth covered in
dirt buried
twenty
feet
under

until —

A new life
forms takes over dominates
this planet

until —

One of them sits down
and stares
at a Blank wall

until —

all the world Falls

silent

again

until —

And ocean forms above us,
me and my future friend
in our respective chairs

staring

our bodies our bones
just fossils

until —

Time gives up counting

until —

The world gives up turning

until —

I feel like standing
again

NightFactory

Charles Dutka

The full moon's glow
illuminated the uncut grass
in the field across

from the plant. AirGas its
towering white tanks
decorated with tungsten light
the water

vapor
rising
glowing
turning

from yellow
to moon white. I unfolded
the card table the grass's dew
tipped blades licked

my ankles and
L unpacked
the china
which I'd spray painted
black. She poured the tea

I whistled a circus toon
and together
we set up
the lawn chairs.

And we watched
AirGas that glowing
factory unchanged by the night
by the full moon
by the pine kissed wind

by our stares.

To me living art
I love factories at night
I see them in the lackluster
light of a noire painting

the specks of yellow
and white cutting through the oil

and
to L's way of thinking
acrylic.

But she saw it simply
a chemicular triumph

and so we sipped loudly
and stared

CENSORED

Charles Dutka

They told me
I'd be

serving my country.
I made the right
decision.

They'd call me when
the CENSORED

Now I push a government
issued cart with

government issue boxes
holding documents

which don't exist.
Like me.

In a facility somewhere
north of the CENSORED

It's not much different than
your local storage center.

With its concrete floors
CENSORED walls and
CENSORED ceilings.
CENSORED lights turn on
every time you CENSORED.

Except it's CENSORED feet underground.

Of course not existing has its perks.
I can get CENSORED

at the CENSORED any time. Technically,
I could get away with CENSORED
I think. But

CENSORED never happened, the call
never came. To this day

I'm pushing

censored

material to its permanent home
of unofficial obscurity
and plausible deniability. Anyway,

I should go, I'm on the CENSORED after all.

Note: THIS DOCUMENT IS IN NO WAY AFFILIATED WITH THE
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. THE AUTHOR SIGNED:
#76827318 - Shoe size 13, favorite color NA
DOES NOT EXIST (TO OUR KNOWLEDGE)

Note Cont.d: Due to statue CENSORED you may receive more
information on this document by contacting CENSORED and filling
out form CENSORED

Never Let Go

Charles Dutka

I know I don't
want to look down. Because
every one around the table
is white as bone. Skeletons.

Their food falling through hollow
non-existent lungs, their wine staining
the inside of their ribs. Staining the silken red
chairs beneath them. That match the silk

Red

drapes. As tall as sequoias

Grace

ing

the windows made of

Black Glass. Every pane

a mirror painting

these dinner guests empty

eye sockets. Such contrast

the black holes

surrounded in bone bathing

in candle

light.

And as some jaw opens to laugh

and another's to cough I hear

Nothing. But the muted scream

of silence. That and the extravagant silverware

clacking off un-insulated teeth and rattling

in bone hands over expensive china.

It seems I am lost in a moment

that has lasted an eternity.

A gourmet meal and fantastic conversation

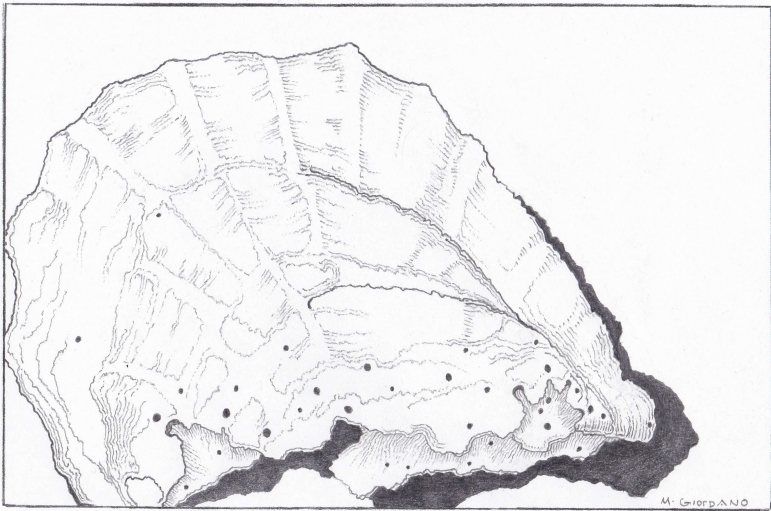
that gathering the exquisite
setting. Noneofus wanted to let go.
Our collective wills lassoing time in place,
binding the staunch callused hands
of the clock. But I

am as guilty as the next. I have a bony
hand on the hemp ropes retaining
the moment, as we all do.
I will not look down. Noneofus
will. We refuse to let go and so

we sit here and enjoy
this suspended meal

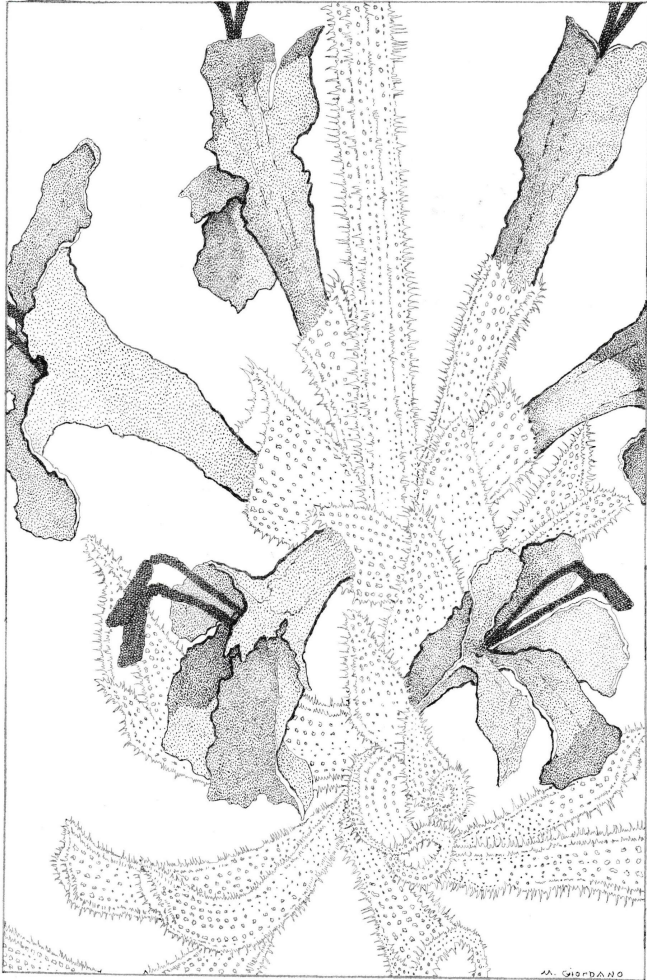
forever —

Melinda Giordano is a native of Los Angeles, California. Her artwork has appeared in magazines such as *Pearl*, *Amelia*, *new renaissance*, *The Altadena Review*, *Stone Country*, *The Bellowing Ark*, *Cactus Heart Press* and *After The Pause*. She has always used either pen and ink or graphite to capture the play of dark and light, of pattern and shape. She values the architectural properties of the small things - plants and shells: subjects as vast and complex as any cityscape or countryside.



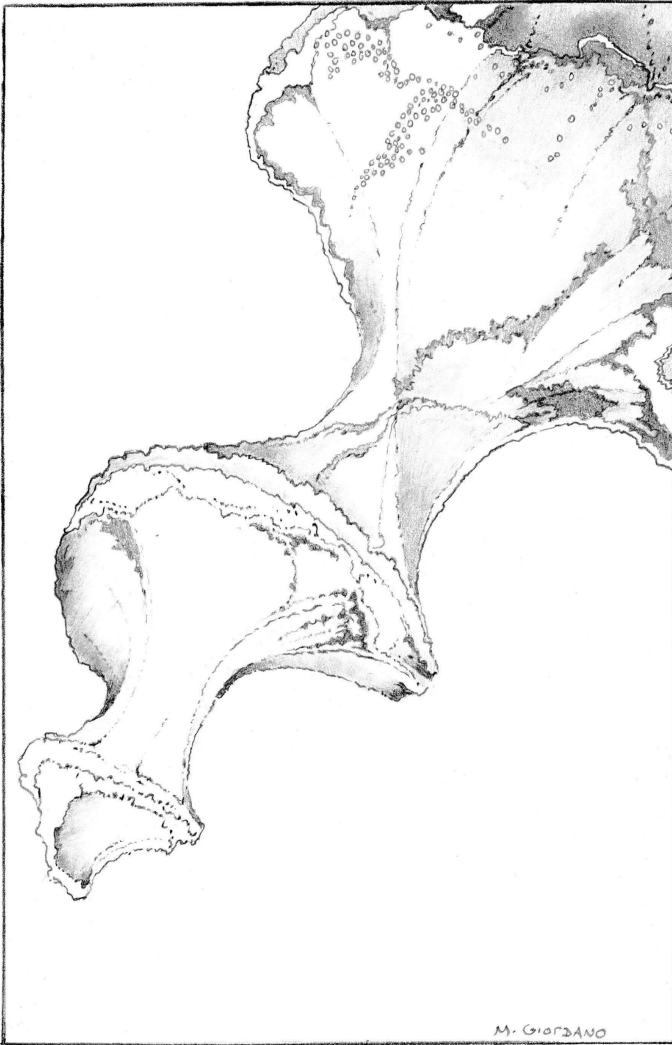
Mother of Pearl

This shell, because of its delicacy, its fragile edges, seemed to lend itself best to pencil instead of pen and ink. The tiny holes are where snails attacked it, either pre- or postmortem. Nature is rough.



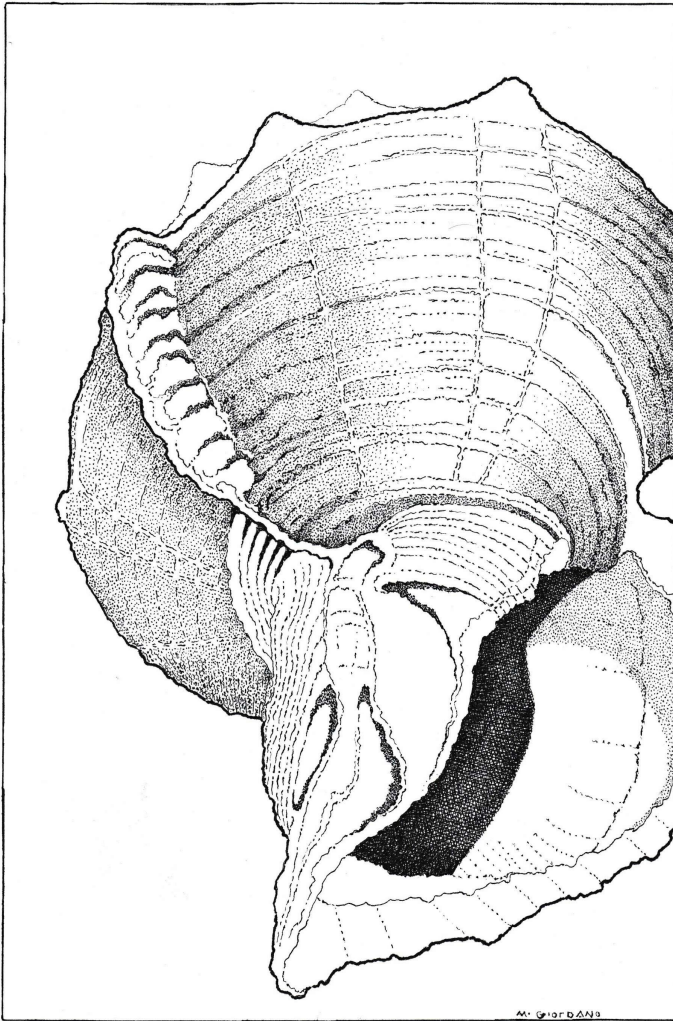
Thorny Question

I discovered this plant on a morning walk through my neighborhood - a place well-stocked with gardens decked out like small jungles. I enjoyed the flowers in their thorny suits of armour. It had some difficult passages but I decided to take the dare and attempt to draw it.



Shell Twist

This is the core of a shell, twisting like a staircase. There are myriad cuts and bruises on the 'bone' from its tumbles through the water. The closer you look, the more wonderful designs you will find.



Turning

This shell was found huddled between the rocks on a southern California beach. I remember turning it in my hands to find the best angle, the most entertaining outline, the most dramatic shadows. And all of this within an object less than 4" long.

*Kyle William McGinn is a cancer survivor and a poet. His work has appeared in **Outrageous Fortune and Poetry City, USA**. McGinn earned a B.S. in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin - River Falls and in 2012 he placed as a semi-finalist for the Norman Mailer College Poetry Award. He published his first chapbook of poetry, **Pennies**, with **Red Bird Chapbooks** in 2014. He lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota.*

Eulogy for a Spouse (Cancer Suicide)

Kyle William McGinn

I can't get the blood out
from the couch
where we first kissed.
I'm trying to forget

the odd weight, delicate
churn of your muscles
on my back when I carried you
into the sea so that I could

wash you. Your body felt just
like a blanket.

I'm angry at those few months:
the doctors and those needles,
you pissing blood and turning
blue. The strange phonology

of death in my mouth when I try to
define it for our children. You're the empty
depression in our couch now, the on
-off humming of the kitchen. I have

lost you. Your body felt just
like a sweater

that wards off the sting of winter.
I'm wishing that I could have been
someone that you could have talked to.
Wishing I could have kept you

from letting out your wrists
while I was a room away. We could
have fought. I want to build a tower to all
the things you could have been. You are

not you. Your body felt just like
a monsoon.

William Squirrell lives and writes in western Pennsylvania. His work has also appeared in Monkeybicycle, Drabblecast, Blue Monday Review, and other venues. More information can be found at blindsquirrell.blogspot.com.

Fiddler's Bend

William Squirrell

The turning radius at Fiddler's Bend is so tight that when I looked across the gorge I could see the train I was on rushing past. The black and grey trees which on my side of the valley flashed by in a flicker were on the other a frozen bank of beech, oak, and maple. Sunlight sluiced through the trunks and shattered against the snow on the ground. Here and there spumes of icy vapor whipped up by the wind rose from the woods in spinning columns, or drifted in exhausted gyres downward, out of sight. The clatter of the wheels along their rails and the rattle of the coupled cars trying to shake themselves free of each other reminded me of the chatter of an old-fashioned film projector.

I fell asleep and when I woke the view was precisely the same: the motionless tress flickering by, the cars rumbling along on the other side of the bend. Everything was impossibly, exactly where it had been. I looked at my watch: just noon.

The woman and child across the aisle were tucked into each other and sound asleep. Everyone about me was asleep. I went from car to car, walking then running, ripping open the sliding doors, careening through the frigid compartments between them, every passenger in every car was perfectly still. In each and every car they were arranged in the perfect pantomime of sleep: leaning against windows; curled up on their sides; bolt upright, heads flung back; slumped forward, faces hidden; arms askew; tightly crossed; hands open; fists clenched; palms up; palms down; knees together; legs open; shoes on; shoes off. I ran and ran, bouncing from seat to seat, tripping, stumbling, falling, falling, in and out of the carriages, in and out of the icy gaps between, through the dining car with its booths and tables, the conductors asleep at their card game and the attendant

face down on the galley bar, through business class where men in suits sat unconscious among the newspapers and laptops and briefcases, and women in stockings slumbered in a chaos of high heel shoes and phones and purses. I ran on and on until suddenly I was back where I started, breathing heavily, in the aisle between a sleeping woman and her child, and my own pair of empty seats. I reached out and touched the child's hand. It was warm and wonderfully soft.

#

I found this pad of legal paper and a pen in a briefcase. I am sitting in the dining car eating a breakfast sandwich and drinking a coffee while I write. I am on the outermost side of the train looking through the trees up the slope. I prefer this view to the brilliant vortex of trees and snow and light that fills the inside of the curve. Here are glimpses of crevasses and outcrops, buttery rocks, layered slabs, sedimentation and erosion, compression and rupture, here the water occasionally runs free in sparkling rills, polishing the stones black and spilling over ridges in headlong cascades, here it looks that there might, just possibly, be birds, deer, life.

It is impossible to shake anyone awake. There is no phone signal or wireless. Every watch is stuck at noon or there about. The sun is at a perpetual zenith. No locomotive or caboose: just the endless loop of passenger cars. I have been exploring the train and taking notes: counting heads, counting cars, counting steps, measuring curves, sighting lines, how many paces forward, how many paces back, items of interest found, cataloguing food and drink, coming up with rationing protocols.

I make charts, tables, schemes and tape them to the windows.

Here is an abridged list of what I have found in suitcases, backpacks, and purses:

A hand gun (Glock 19) and a box of ammunition.

A straight razor.

A fifth of Bell's scotch, 2 mickeys of bourbon (Wild Turkey and Jim Beam), a fifth of Tanqueray.

2 boxes of condoms (Trojan Extra Thin and Durex Ribbed).

Various cigarettes: Marlboro, Newport Menthol, Camel, Parliament, Players.

A quarter ounce of weed, rolling papers, lighters.

An eightball of coke.

Vicodin, Oxymorphone, Percocet, Xanax, Zolpidem, etcetera

etcetera.

Various chocolates, crackers, cheese, canned oysters.

An acoustic guitar (Yamaha $\frac{3}{4}$ size).

Assorted books: potboilers, penguin classics, self-help.

A gas mask (what the fuck, right?).

Cash Money: \$17, 227.80.

I have made many other lists as well. Here, for example are the top 5 most beautiful people on the train (because why not?):

1. Car 3 Seat 3c
2. Car 7 Seat 11d
3. Car 13 Seat 1c
4. Car 17 Seat 5d
5. Car 19 Seat 7b

I am going to have to carefully dole out food to myself but it is hard to manage a dietary regime when you have no good means of keeping track of time. I try to measure things out against the circuit. The train is moving at roughly 50 mph. There are twenty cars and each car is around 85 feet long so the whole thing is about 1,700 feet in length and each circuit takes approximately 25 minutes. There is a big pine with bent tip, maybe struck by lightning, and every time we pass it that's the beginning of another circuit. It's exhausting to try to think clearly about my situation. Everything is slightly askew, hard to measure, hard to count, hard to get just right, but you have to try.

#

I have been drawing the gas mask: from tiny ornamentations in the margins of my various notebooks to sketches that fill pages. Black ballpoint; blue; red; some pencil. I draw it by itself on a table, suspended in space, on imaginary models, on myself in the mirror. I draw close ups, wide shots, bird's eye views. Sometimes I use meticulous detailing to capture it; sometimes a few quick strokes; or cross-hatching; maybe pointillist stabs. I pursue photo-accurate representations; expressionist studies; giddy abstractions. I am beginning to know this thing. The faceblank is black rubber and roughly conical. The harness is comprised of four leather straps which buckle together behind the skull. The eyepieces are large, flat, glass – maybe three inches in diameter. A long pleated hose, screwed into a brass ferrule at the nosecup, can be compressed into a sequence of stiff ridges about half a foot long, or stretched out into a diaphanous tube that dangles between my legs when I wear the thing. Presumably

this hose was meant to be inserted into a separate filter or oxygen tank. Hidden behind the hose is a protuberant brass grate I believe is an outlet valve.

#

I finished my passenger survey. It runs through four notebooks but I taped up the concise version opposite the café bar: a name for every face and an address for every name. I matched up all the luggage to all the faces. The suitcase with the hand gun and the gas mask belong to Car 6 Seat 3c: Thomas Herzel; 46 years old; resides in Philadelphia; salt-and-pepper hair, clean shaven, expensive glasses, nice shirt, good shoes, Burberry watch. Looks soft from a distance but up close he has calloused hands, muscles like twisted rope, a pinkie broken or dislocated and not properly set, a faint scar running from his temple down to his jaw, a tattoo of two interlocking hearts on his forearm in smudged blue ink, bad teeth, and too many wrinkles for his age.

#

Sick of sunlight. If it catches me fully in the face when I don't expect it – when the train moves out of a shadow, or I turn around too suddenly – I feel like vomiting.

#

A few circuits ago I leaned across Car 7 Seat 11d to get at her purse, felt her breasts against my shoulder and let myself lean into them; warmth, weight, humanity; instant erection. Ashamed to record I deliberately fondled one, felt the perfect curve through the cotton, heavy in my hand. Fled to the bathroom. It has taken me this long to gather up the courage to record the event. Aroused thinking about it now. Shame. Shame. Shame.

#

Bored. Depressed. I have distressing dreams. I feel nervous around the sleepers. I have irrational anxieties about walking through the carriages. I feel like I am polluting sterile space. If I wear the gas mask while I am among them I feel less stress. I strap my head into the cradle of its leather bindings, listen to the big echo of my breathing, peer through the insect eyes, let the hose swing back and forth, sing songs just to hear the muffled tininess: "I wanna live a life of danger! I'm gonna be an Airborne Ranger!"

#

Have started jogging. Locked all the inter-cabin doors open so I don't have to slow down. Run myself to exhaustion. Can now do

15 circuits at a good pace before I collapse.

#

Recurring dream: The train is climbing up into the hills, bright winter day. The other passengers are awake – reading, listening to music, pawing at their phones. I am looking down into the woods and see a shadow racing along the snow but there is not a cloud in the sky. I lose sight of it and see it again, closer than before, moving a little faster than the train at an angle which means it will eventually intersect our path. Something big is out there, something fast, the tree tops quiver and shake as it rushes past but I can never quite catch a glimpse of it.

#

Back to drawing the gas mask, integrating it with the train, pictures of it as the front of the engine (What engine? What front?), and in the interior structure as well, the leather straps and the pleated hose merging with circuitry, with gears and pistons, cabin frames, seats, luggage racks, with the passengers: long, tangled, twisted lines; eyes everywhere: flat, glass, impenetrable.

When I get bored I hang out of the train: the wind pours past me, over me, ripping my hair back, clawing at my clothes, boils into my lungs, I can barely breathe and my eyes fill with tears. I feel as much as see the trees whipping past, the rattle of the train is a roar. I am air and speed and light: pure exhilaration.

#

I fluctuate between periods of hyperactive self-loathing and despondent self-loathing. Hours of sitting around counting circuits, waiting to eat, fantasizing, and reading books; then hours of running, calisthenics, and unnecessary fasting. I am getting incredibly lean; can see my ribs; muscle contorting beneath my skin; my tendons are cables straining to keep my limbs knit together, my head on my neck.

#

Taped cardboard across all the windows in the dining car to block out the sun. Got drunk, gloriously stoned, gas mask a crazy eye-burning bong, watched porn salvaged from various hard drives, hours of computer games; first person shooters, conquering worlds, solving puzzles, anything I could find. Played guitar and played guitar and played guitar. Fingers bled. Rolled about naked on the blankets. Stuffed face with burgers, chicken Caesar wraps, sickly sweet pastries, potato chips, breakfast sandwiches, sickly sweet chocolate bars, coffee, sickly sweet fountain drinks. Drank more. Smoked more

weed. Swallowed too many pills (yet somehow not quite enough). Wandered about the train, threw suitcases into the trees, pissed into the wind, struck poses with random sleepers and took selfies, caught myself stroking Car 17 Seat 5d through his jeans and stopped immediately. Something down there was definitely growing, something becoming, straining against the denim. Fled back to the café car. Slept. Woke up sick and swore off booze and drugs. Slept. Woke. Grew bored. Meditated. Composed sonnets. Sketched faces. Did push-ups. Thought about Car 17 Seat 5d. Did push-ups. Thought about Car 7 Seat 11d. Did push-ups. Did push-ups. Did push-ups. Snorted the last of the coke and ripped through the remains of the bourbon. Took a shit in the sink. Punched a hole through a door. Did sit-ups. Fell asleep. Dreamed a phone was ringing but I couldn't find it. Woke up. Did push-ups. Did sit ups. Puked in the sink. Did push-ups. Did sit-ups. Fell asleep. Woke hungry. Cleaned up. Can't find gas mask. Can't find gun. Can't find razor.

#

Deflated condom in a toilet: skin sloughed off a snake, glittering and empty, wisps of semen leaking into the water, coagulating into drifting noodles.

#

Went looking for food I might have missed, dug about in pockets, plastic bags, seat backs. Found a few granola bars, juice boxes, cookies. In Car 13 I stopped for a piss. The mirror in the bathroom was shattered, had been hit three times: impact craters, radial fractures, shards in the sink, on the floor. Next bathroom: same thing. Every bathroom: same thing. Every mirror on the train destroyed. Hard not to consider the possibility that someone else is on board.

#

Hands shaking. Hyperventilating. In business class all the laptops were open, all the phones lying on the window trays, on laps, on tables. All on. All showing the same loop. Car 7 seen from a vantage point just above the front door: a naked man walks into the car from underneath the camera, gas mask strapped to his head – loop restarts with a jerk. Just a couple of seconds over and over again. The image is badly pixelated. Could be me. Roughly six feet tall, very lean, dark hair. Not unlike me. I ran to Car 7. No camera above the door.

#

Hid in the car 7 toilet, door open a crack, pair of scissors at hand. Kept thinking some naked madman out there in a gas mask with the handgun and the razor but eventually fell asleep. Woke with a start. Came back here. Had left everything arranged very carefully, corners of the notepad lined up to the window partition and so on, but nothing appeared to be touched. Laptops still running the same three-second loop. Figured out they were all installed in their respective devices at exactly the same time: Jan 27, 2016, 11:59:37 am. No surprise. Ate a handful of peanuts and choked back some water from the tap. Slept in the toilet. Locked door.

#

New loop. Someone carrying a webcam or a phone from car to car fixating on the sleeping women; eating up their calves, breasts, lips. Very distressing: I feel angry, scared, ashamed to be watching it. Searched the whole train again. Could he be underneath? In a crawl space or something? Up top? Went back to my original seat and stared at the cars rushing along the gorge. Woke with a start. Could have sworn I heard a bump on the roof; creaking; maybe footsteps. Sat very still. Nothing but the rattling of the cars. Stuck my head out the door, into the light and the wind and the cold. Looked for some way to climb up. Felt scared at the thought. Ground rushing past made me dizzy. Felt nauseated. Retreated. Searched the train and came to Car 6 Seat 3c: Thomas Herzel. I thought: "It's him"

Right height and build, he's the guy that brought the mask on the train, and the gun. Creepy bastard. Didn't pause or look at him just kept walking, slid the car door shut behind me and stood there watching the back of his head for what seemed like hours. I started nodding off so I slipped back into the carriage and took a couple of pictures of him, of how he was sitting – head turned to one side, hands limp on his lap, legs slightly open at the knees but feet crossed.

Came back here.

Ate another bag of peanuts.

Drank some water.

Going to lock myself in the toilet and get some sleep.

#

Hungry all the time, tired all the time, joints hurting all the time. Gums bleed when I brush my teeth. Nothing left but peanuts, some sour milk, and a few swallows of gin. Try to go as many circuits as possible between mouthfuls of peanuts. The milk turns my stomach. When I do my rounds through the passengers I smell them

as raw meat: a rich mushroom furriness coats my tongue, I can't stop salivating, my heart beats wildly and there is a roaring in my ears.

#

I was too tired to make my rounds so I made a spear by taping half a pair of scissors onto a plastic broom handle. Not sturdy but very sharp. When it was done I had a nap and then went to see Herzel. Sat a few seats back from him and watched. Caught myself fantasizing about killing him, was very precise: imagined opening his shirt; sliding the tip of the scissors down his left side over the ribs – bump, bump, bump; nestling it into the space between the fourth and fifth from the top; leaning on it; feeling it slip in; watching the blood bubble out of him, cascade onto his lap, the seat, the floor.

#

Herzel hasn't moved.

#

Toilet in the cafeteria car backing up, horrific stench.

#

New loop: car 7 from the same vantage point before; same poor quality; same naked, masked figure comes in. He stops at row 11, clambers over to d, can see him unbuttoning her blouse, rolling up her skirt, pushing up her knees, then it is all undulating muscles along his spine, shoulders straining, buttocks clenching. Couldn't stop watching – made me think of a salmon climbing upstream. Felt sick after. Had a couple of shots of gin. Grabbed my spear and went to see Thomas Herzel. Looked exactly the same as in the pictures I took. Screamed and hollered at him. Slapped him a few times, punched him as hard as I could in the gut. He fell forward with a wheezy gurgle, slid onto the floor in a clumsy pile, reminded me of a dead spider with its limbs all curled up under itself. He didn't wake. Went and examined 7 11d. Looked untouched. Lifted her skirt and peeked under, panties in place.

#

Dreamed I was chasing Thomas Herzel through the train. I was wearing the gas mask and he was naked, bleeding from long cuts on his arms and back. Whenever I got close enough I slashed at him with the razor. I felt the flesh opening beneath the blade. He screamed: "Please! Please! Please!"

When I woke and went to check on him, Thomas Herzel was gone. Searched the whole train.

#

Dreamed someone kicked out all the windows in car 13, my old car. The car was filled with frost and ice and everyone was stripped and hanging by their heels from the overhead luggage racks. Their eyes were open and throats cut. The woman who sat opposite me was hanging by herself, her child missing. I woke up hungry and nauseous. I went and examined the car. It was exactly as I last left it. I sat in my old seat and looked out the window for a couple of circuits, watched the cars rush by on the other side of the gorge.

#

Knees swollen and sore. Hauled myself to the bathroom and drank out of the tap, looked down to see blood circling the drain. Have a couple of very loose teeth. Went back to bed. Not asleep, not awake. Every time I close my eyes I see Herzel in the gasmask, floating there in the uneven gloom behind my lids, I hear him singing in his tinny voice: "I wanna live a life of danger."

#

Went for a piss in car 7 and found Herzel's fully-dressed body stuffed into the corner of the cubicle, wedged between the toilet and the wall, face down in a pool of black blood, a bullet hole behind his ear, rump high, one arm awkwardly under the body, the other draped over the stainless steel bowl, stiff fingers dangling in the blue water, spawning radial waves every time the train shuddered.

#

Penultimate handful of peanuts. One of my teeth came out as I chewed them, just slid out of its socket and into the mix. A molar, sucked it clean and stuck it in my pocket.

#

I feel pretty good, occasional bursts of euphoria, but I want to kill myself. It would be easy with the gun. Even the razor would make things easier. I suppose it'll be pills but it seems such an impersonal technique: to fall asleep, to be away from oneself as it happens. The direct mechanics of a gunshot, of opening a vein, are more attractive, more deliberate, more under control. I could also just wait to starve to death but I'm scared of getting desperate and panicked. A few circuits ago I wandered through the train shouting. I wanted the other passenger to know I wished to die. That he could kill me at any time. "Please! Please! Please!" I yelled it and shouted it and sang it but no one came rushing at me. No flashing razors. No blank, insect eyes. No dangling proboscis. No cold steel muzzle pressed into the back of my head, just below the ear.

#

I drank the last of the gin and stripped myself naked. I opened the outside door. The wind felt like it was cutting me open, it felt like a shower of shattered glass. I stood there for a long time and watched the rubble embankment streaking by. We whipped past the tall pine tree with the crooked top. I tried to jump but couldn't. We passed it again. Tried again. Passed again. Tried again.

I came back in and got dressed. Numb. Tired. I am still shivering and shaking.

#

I ate the last handful of peanuts and fell asleep. When I woke I walked back to my original car. The child and the mother opposite my seat were in exactly the same position as always. I touched the child's arm. It was warm and marvelously soft. I sat down in my old spot and looked at my hands. I clenched and unclenched them: the knuckles looked grotesque – tumorous flowerings of bone; the loose skin shifting as sinews worked. I tried to remember what I knew about starvation, about starving to death. I was already metabolizing muscle but I couldn't remember the word for the process: Catabolysis? Necrosis? It was very distressing. Why couldn't I remember the word? I felt if I could just remember the word I would understand more clearly what was happening to me. I felt it would help. But I couldn't. I couldn't remember. I was dying and outside was Fiddler's Bend. The trees flickered past. Across the gorge the cars rumbled on and on and on and on.

Cave Canem fellow **James Cagney** is a poet and writer from Oakland. He has appeared as a featured poet and artist in San Francisco, Vancouver, Chicago and Mumbai. His poems have appeared in *Print Oriented Bastards*, *Tandem*, *Eleven Eleven*, and *Lime Hawk*. His current chapbook is entitled *Dirty Thunderstorm*.

Bandon Beach

James Cagney

We race a drowsy sunset & storm
barrel rolling over the ocean
to return after 10 years to Bandon beach.
Rain pin-wheeling before our car's headlights
like sparklers. We park beneath crawling sand
dunes sprouting sea grass & let the
motor idle. We stand near the cliff,
wind racing up from the beach 2 stories
beneath us at 60 - 70 mph.,
turn our backs on the firing squad
of the ocean (this is ill advised)
& lean into the soft coffin
of howling wind. I turn to you,
your eyes fevered with happiness,
& watch you slide down the staircase
to a shoreline boiling milk white.
Basalt rock rising from the surf
in natural totems, bellowing to the
blackening sky like Shakespeare's
witches. Everything around us is alive
& wails. You run into the black
portal of a nearby cave & scream.

Here, in the chaos & shrapnel
of falling night, a scream is appropriate
shorthand for prayer. I run in after,
alighting the cold torch of my cell

phone. You rinse the peppery
sand from your palms beneath the pool
of alabaster light, confessing then how
you'd fallen while skipping down beach stairs
rendered soft as flour. The cave, its scalloped,
reptilian walls, the soft palate of its floor,
are dependable & safe
while outside, the sea roars its death song
& waves chew the shoreline.

We dare one another to leave first
while the tide soldiers forward
& night falls hard drunk against the ocean.
All while the sea clamors towards us
harvesting screams from both our mouths
leaving us, as one leaves a lover, speechless
 & swallowed by darkness

Nancy Iannucci is a historian who teaches history and lives poetry in Troy, NY. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in a number of publications including Amaryllis, Eunoia Review, Fickle Muses, Red Wolf Journal, Rose Red Review, Rat's Ass Review, Three Drops from a Cauldron, Mirror Dance, Pankhearst, Picaroon Poetry, Yellow Chair Review, and her poem, HOWLING, won Yellow Chair Review's Rock the Chair Challenge.

Go-Go Boots

Nancy Iannucci

You sat white-lipped, pearl-shimmer clouds
below lightning bolted eyebrows.
Twiggy thin, legs crossed in a provocative
pretzel twist with a White Russian in your grip.

Mod fringe, aloof & innocent, you had no
idea who the man was sitting to your right.
I can't think of his name now; was it Emile?
You asked as if I'd know; you were

an antelope in his eyes, fixed & hunted,
but *you* wore the boots, black Go-Go boots,
a follower of Zod, *feminine mystique* aplomb;
your second-wave head turned to face the camera,

undaunted. I can't get over those boots;
they reached your thighs. No wonder the guys
sat neglected to your right. Oh! The parties
you attended. I think the phrase

wearing a lampshade was conceived at this one
when dad felt the mosquito sting off Cam Ranh Bay's
waterways, boots wet in Asian sand as black
& formidable as the Go-Go in your boots,

twisted by the man to your right; he read
your letter & tore the photo. In 1971, it flew back
with him in fragments & all that remains is a
patched-up Kodak with your left boot missing-

the man to your right was saved; my dad was a hero.

The White Building

Nancy Iannucci

---For Gino Iannucci

It was *the* place: Islands,
manuals, waxed curbs, ledges,
drops & pothole deficient
asphalt.

A hum of bees swarmed
menacing & echoing off
of its parking garage walls.

I could hear the vibrations
from across the street
sitting in Gino's Pizzeria.

I cautiously crossed
back over the road when
it was safe. As a spectator,
this bevy caused a rumpus
on most weekends.

Over time, metal posts
were planted on the
ledges like King Kong
cages to keep them out,
a subtle reminder from
the authorities: *you are
the humans & not the beasts.*

A sign went up shortly after:
*Private Property: No skateboarding
permitted on the premises.*

The White Building was no longer
the place, just a fabled
spot among 21st century
skateboarders,

a place where the New York
pro-skaters of the 1990s
got their start.

Twenty-five years later, my
brother, one of the pros,
went back to the White Building
to conduct a video interview
for a skateboarding magazine.
As the cameras rolled & he
pushed to conjure a
back lipslide ghost, a man
in a gray suit stopped the roll:
*This is private property. You're
not supposed to be here.*
And so he left with
a smile on his face.

Seif-Eldeine is a Syrian-American poet living outside Worcester, Massachusetts. He graduated with a degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Tufts University in 2009. You can find works by him in Star 82 Review, Vayavya and here at Typehouse Literary Magazine Issue Issue # 4.

Its Color Will Not Turn Syria/Turkey border Seif-Eldeine

The passports
are newly minted. Our family name
changed from Nashif
to Ali. My dad worries
the border guard
can smell his Sunnih blood
off him.
The bombs become fainter. My parents
have not talked for hours.
I take my thumb and press
it against each finger 1,2,3,4...
I count until I reach a thousand
and begin again.
The guard takes
the passports. To
another guard.
They look over their shoulder
at us.
Baba, mama, my baby
ukhtee,
me, at me.
I run my fingers through my sister's
hair.

I bow my head
to the guards.
Their boots are not blooded like
the other soldiers.
Open the trunk.
They rifle through
the luggage, not leaving
a sock unturned,
throwing all the clothes out.
They throw the bread
out onto the car's roof.
Rip it open to check for weapons
within. Their hands
pat down my mother's hips, my hips.
Their hands rip open my
one year old's sister's diaper. She
is
crying, I am crying. The bombs feel
like they are getting closer.
I stick my tongue in the air to
taste them.

I feel the soldier's stench of goat
breathing down my sweater.

The sky is blue, the sky is blue,
I repeat to myself, over the bombs
that are turning its color.
When they are done with my sister,
I kiss her toe.

Jennifer Lothrigel is a photographer and poet residing in the San Francisco Bay area. Her work has been published in Trivia - Voices of Feminism, Narrative Northeast, Poetry Quarterly, The Tishman Review, Dirty Chai, Five Poetry and elsewhere.



Ego Separation

I took this photo near Lake Mono very early in the morning, alone in the woods. I wanted to capture the visual representation of sourcing beauty from within.



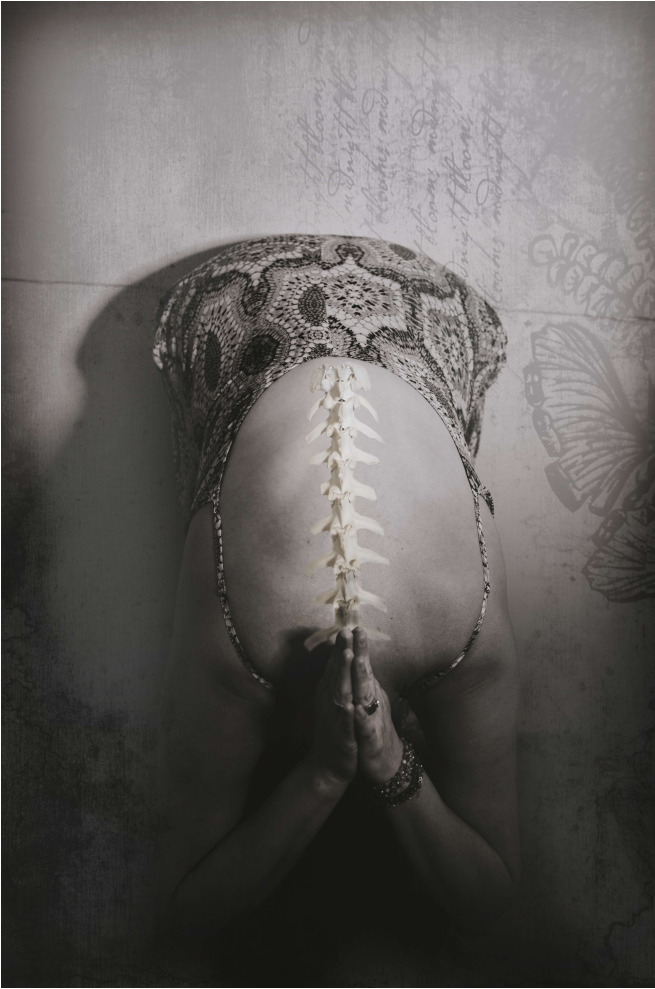
Vulture

I took this photo in Death Valley in the salt flats in 104 degree weather. The end product was an intuitive exploration of the shape my body wanted to make in the harsh landscape. If I were to analyze the photo I'd say it speaks of survival and adaptation.



Body Temple

This photo combines a self portrait composited with a jellyfish because I wanted to create an image in which my body was buoyant. I wanted to capture the act of honoring my body as something light and composed of movement.



Surrender in Your Bones

I found the complete set of deer vertebrae on a hike near my house. I decided to composite a photo of them with my own spine to see if it would work. It was all very intuitive. I think on a deeper level I was exploring the metaphorical act of surrender as something instinctual that is part of our structure. Also, something we return to, a spiritual letting go that is survivalistic.

*In all but one career aptitude test **Rebecca Gomez Farrell** has taken, writer has been the #1 result. But when she tastes the salty air and hears the sea lions bark, she wonders if maybe, maybe, sea captain was the right choice after all. Currently marooned in Oakland, CA, Becca's horror, fantasy, and steampunk have been published in markets such as Bull Spec, Beneath Ceaseless Skies, and PULP Literature. Her contemporary romance novella, Maya's Vacation, has a home with CleanReads.com, and her food and drink writing can primarily be found at her website, the Gourmez. For a list of all her published work, check out her author page at RebeccaGomezFarrell.com.*

Mixed Signals, or, Learning How to Speak

Rebecca Gomez Farrell

Ka-kink. Ka-kink. Ka-kink.

Some guy's hand flew to the crosswalk button as though a magnetic force drew him, a few feet from where I sat at a sidewalk café table. Dressed like a hippie and smelling like it too, he spit out the words, "Callin' in, Cap'n. Callin' in." The syncopated rapidity interfered with the vibe of melancholic freedom I'd been cultivating. That morning, Alvarado Construction had pink-slipped me. Three weeks earlier, my girlfriend, Jolanda, had broken up with me, screamed me out of her place with complaints I didn't understand her love language, and no, she didn't mean Spanish.

But I was over it. Completely.

The man pressed his head against the pole and bonked the button in three short bursts. "Been layin' low, so low ain't nobody seen me, Cap'n." He may as well have been speaking in tongues for all the sense that made. Two seconds passed, and he did it again as a spirit of percussive improvisation fell upon him. He could have been up at the altar the way his body rolled with little waves of

anticipation, how Jolanda's daddy's did every Sunday. God, I missed her. Losing the job wasn't great news, but it didn't compare. I had some money saved and I'd never really enjoyed construction work. Enjoyment was the warm, solid press of Jolanda's thigh against mine, not the rattling force of a jackhammer, though they'd both worked me over about the same.

No job, no woman. Adrift.

Took the hippie a second to notice the walk sign change, so absorbed was he in his personal conversation. When he did, his eyes grew round and he lumbered off, spouting something I couldn't hear but oddly wished I could. Maybe I should get into radio or telecommunications -- I'd collected different cell phone models for the past . . . oh, at least as long as I'd been with Jolanda. The way they worked, sending messages across vast distances through a simple screen swipe -- well, I guess the thought soothed me though I didn't phone anyone but her. She'd say that's typical of me, that I keep everyone at a distance, watch them through a two-way glass. So I'd invested myself in "being fully present" as she asked. Then, after the best two years of my life, she'd claimed I was *smothering*. Seems I'd "fully presented" myself out her door.

Ka-kink.

A pair of glittery, neon blue fingernails pushed the crosswalk button. Jolanda had nails that color once. I'd kissed every tip, same as I did each time she fanned open her hands to show off a new polish. The woman at the crosswalk wore a curve-hugging, maroon body suit that dipped into the teeniest pair of jean shorts I'd ever seen. What was her message to the world, I wondered. Okay, I gawked, but I didn't act. Fool around? *¡Ay caramba!* That'd spell trouble if I ever got Jolanda back.

Another *ka-kink* and my vibe shifted to one of pure irritation. Thankfully, the signal flipped to a half-lit man, and that *chica* jetted from the curb so fast, I swear a backwind grazed me. My tongue rubbed across congealed croissant plastered to my teeth, meaning I'd gaped at pedestrians for far too long. I tossed the remains and headed on my way to . . . well, *where* wasn't a question I had an answer for. My hand mashed the crosswalk button, and it beeped at me, an electronic voice commanding me to wait in plaintive tones as though sorry for the inconvenience. Patchouli made my nose wrinkle as the hippie came back around and pressed the button too. A tourist family joined in, sweaty and frowning -- should have slept in. The dad

slammed the button; did he think the rest of us hadn't bothered? Or maybe there was something self-declarative about hitting it. Something that fed his soul, said "Yes, there were others before me, but I am here, too! I will be acknowledged!"

I knew that yearning. Smothering? All that time I'd spent soaking in Jolanda's love nuances -- every packed lunch, every invitation to lay my head on her breast -- and I was the one smothering?

The hippie banged out another Morse code message. I glared.

"Just making sure," he smiled dopily in response, raising and lowering his fingers in a wave of greeting. The light changed, excusing me from soaking up his happy any longer. Why on Earth did he keep slamming the button if he was that content with the world? Couldn't he recognize the signs of a person who wanted to be left alone, wanted him to take his peace and happiness and shove it? The guy was lucky Jolanda always told me to turn the other cheek -- lucky, and I didn't have the first clue as to whether I could land a right hook without a game controller.

Three blocks later, alone and heading into my residential neighborhood, the urge hit me. Yount was a quiet street, no cars to be seen, but I knew how fast they could take the curve. I'd touched the button once already -- an old, bulging round one covered in scratches and the remaining sad flecks of yellow paint. It didn't seem to do the trick. I felt antsy, ready to be home, so I pressed it again. Nothing changed. Again, three times in a row. I must have been getting squirrely, thinking too much about the job or my girl, so I yelled, "Callin' in, Cap'n. Callin' in," remembering that joker from before.

Static sounded in my ears as though my buds had an incomplete connection. But I'd left them at home, so I had to be imagining things. I hit my head and the static stopped . . . and then a clipped voice spoke instead.

"Connection accepted. Doctor Garcia, what is your position?"

What?! The signal changed, but I didn't trust my senses so I whacked my head again rather than cross.

"Doctor Garcia, what is your position?"

Same as before, I swear! "What the fuck is this? How do you know my name?" I'd never been to medical school, for sure, but Garcia was my last name. Whose wasn't, though? Someone was playing a trick on me. Maybe Jolanda.

"Your location?"

“Fine, all right. I’m at 6th and Yount St.” Okay, I’d play along. Why not? I didn’t have a pressing engagement elsewhere.

“It’s been 2.4 Earth revolutions since your last report. Why have you been delayed?”

Earth revolutions? That had to mean years, but who the fuck called them that? And two and a half of them? That’s how long I’d been dating Jolanda. This had to be her playin’.

Well, I could play too. “I’ve been busy.”

“That is the assumption. It is also the assumption you file briefings every half revolution. What has kept you too busy to fulfill your obligations?”

“You know. Hangin’, I guess.” Okay, I couldn’t play well. But it didn’t matter. This wasn’t my game.

“Define this ‘hangin’, Doctor.”

“Um . . . well . . . um, spending time with friends, scouring the Westside, taking in the haps. You know.” Truth be told, I hadn’t been doing much since the break-up. I’d kept the people here at a distance, taking my time feeling my way into the culture, you know? With Jolanda, it’d been different. She’d caught me staring at her shaking her hips in tempo with the dryer at the laundromat, laughed, and pulled me into a relationship, dance moves first.

She didn’t need to know how close me and my Xbox had become.

The connection, or whatever it was, fell silent. I circled the pole, not knowing what to expect from it. The light changed again, and I caught more than a few confused glances as I stayed in place. One guy threw me the bird, which I thought uncalled for. Sure, I was staring at a useless pole, but I wasn’t harming anyone.

By the time the walk sign returned, I’d quit studying the grey-metal cylinder for secret messages. Standing there, waiting for a pole to talk -- ridiculous. My foot struck the asphalt and I had crossed halfway when a tinny ringing sounded in my head. Maybe I’d gone too far from the speaker. Did I want the connection severed if it gave me a chance to reunite with Jolanda? Thinking of her, the way she’d slide her hand in mine before we’d cross the road or lean into my arms when we sat back to catch the game . . .

I lunged back to the sidewalk. The static cleared.

“Surveillance explanation accepted. The delay will be compensated for by deductions from your next revolution’s payment.”

“Hey! That’s not fair!” Not that I expected compensation

from a crosswalk, but that hit too close to home.

“Defense denied.” A pause, and then a series of beeps and what sounded like another voice behind me. I whirled around. Nothing.

“The Commander has given you another mission. Will you accept it, Doctor Garcia?”

“Yeah, sure.”

What did I have to lose?

#

The voice instructed me to collect two items and report back to the crossing signal -- or at least I assumed that's what it meant by “Communicator Station.”

- *Watershed building, fifth floor. Shiny and paws-shaped.*

- Pederson Junior High, track course. A white cone, attached to a large human.

I repeated the descriptions as I made my way to my apartment three blocks over. Jolanda's cousin Bernie went to Pederson and that detail convinced me I'd been right -- this had to be about her. But the thought gave me pause as I reached for my backpack. Did I want to keep being “about her,” to go blundering through the city on a scavenger hunt at the prompting of a disembodied voice because it might lead me back to her? Lead me to the crazy house as easily.

Maybe the pink slip had messed with me more than I realized. But one glance at the Xbox and its blinking, sickly indicator light and I knew I couldn't stay cooped up there for another afternoon. Three stops on the J train and two more on Line 53, and I'd be at the Watershed. Positioned right by the hydroelectric plant, the building's concrete hulk exterior was inlaid with multiple metallic ribbons meant to evoke a waterfall. Over the years, the dirt generated by the plant had converted it into a long, sloping slide of grime. Serene beauty and clean power was its original intimation, but all it stood for now was the inevitability of industrial misery. Did everything that was once rejuvenating and pure get corrupted in the end?

Wow. I didn't know I had such poetry in me. Though hadn't Jolanda been complaining I never sang to her anymore? That the man she'd fallen in love with knew how to woo a woman, not just how to echo one? That if she'd wanted to date herself, she'd buy another mirror? Maybe . . . maybe she'd had a point. Maybe, I could fix this.

An adrenaline rush pushed me through the revolving door, and I sidled over to the receptionist, excuse readied. “I have a meeting

on the 8th floor.”

I flashed her my most seductive smile and waited. Confidence is integral to deception, or at least that’s what I picked up from all those times Jolanda told her daddy I wasn’t staying over.

Reflections from the monitor screen flashed in the receptionist’s glasses. “Why do I care?”

I sputtered. Too late, I noticed the constant trickle of office workers heading straight toward the elevators, no guards, no badges. If I were an intergalactic spy, well, I wasn’t very good at it.

“Sorry.” I shuffled away to consider my options. Taking the stairs to the top floor and investigating as I worked my way down made the most sense: less detection risk. But that plan sounded better on the ground floor than it did leaning against the eighth floor door, gasping to catch my breath. I took pains to gently press the push bar -- those things are loud -- and slid through the narrow gap . . . until my backpack caught on the door jamb and halted my smooth entrance.

Luckily, no one was in the side hall. Maybe my plan had been worth it after all. I focused, re-centered on my whack-a-mole mission. *Shiny and shaped like paws*. The shiny push bar couldn’t be what the voice had wanted -- way too complicated to take it with me. I’d have to round the corner to keep searching.

An attractive woman at the front desk examined me as soon as I entered her field of vision -- obviously, she’d had different training than the lady downstairs. The sign behind her read “Hooper, Whistler & Co.” in big, gold letters.

“Most people take the elevator,” she said. Her eyebrows arched. “You look familiar. Have you been in here before?”

Weird. I’m an average guy, not one to stand out in a crowd. Brown hair, brown eyes, brown skin, and just short enough that Jolanda called me her *principito* after her favorite book as a kid. Her whole family took to it.

I could use the secretary’s confusion to my benefit, so I reasserted my smile, straightened my stance. “Yes. I’m here for a meeting.”

Her returning expression was polite, but fingers clicked away at a keyboard I couldn’t see over the counter’s lip.

“With whom?”

Damn. I’d hoped she’d tell me. “Um . . .” I glanced up, “. . . Mr. Whistler.”

She rolled her eyes. “*Ms.* Whistler is unavailable until the

22nd. Are you certain you have an appointment here today?"

I shifted the backpack's straps. Fresh sweat beaded beneath them and at my adam's apple. "Oh, um, I must have been wrong I guess."

"Mm-hmm." I'd run if she went for a phone, but she merely peered at me over her glasses. "You can see yourself out?"

Relief. She hadn't called security on me, and I needed to jet before she did. Yet my spirits deflated as I took two steps toward the elevator, feet dragging. My emotions had different priorities than my brain. I wouldn't -- couldn't -- fail.

"You can have one, if you want." Her pitying voice confounded me. Not the pitying part -- I was seconds from shedding very manly tears. I just didn't see what she meant . . . until I passed a bowl full of plastic-wrapped whistles on an end table. Yellow, brass, *shiny* whistles. From that angle, they kind of resembled commas.

Shaped like a pause, not paws! I slapped my head and laughed aloud.

"They're just promo junk."

Her disdain could not dampen my excitement. I threw caution to the wind and lunged behind the counter to give her a genuine bear hug. "Thank you. You have no idea how much. Thank you."

Though stunned by my over-the-top appreciation, she managed to save me again as I beat my retreat behind closing silver doors.

"You didn't take one."

Beaming at her awkwardly, I grabbed a favor right before the doors clasped together. Poor woman, probably thought I was out of my mind. Hell, I couldn't deny it, but I felt amped up as I stepped onto the lobby floor. One clue down! I gave the whistle a hearty blow, couldn't help it.

My sight filled with pastel-colored sparkles and I gasped. Beneath my feet, light symphonically pulsed from smooth stones, the effect a distant cousin of the Bellagio water show I'd insisted Jolanda and I return to every hour on the hour during our first weekend away. I reckoned the fleeting image an ecstatic vision of victory -- one blink, and it dissolved. Barely in time, too, because the lobby receptionist had noticed me again, if her hand reaching toward the red phone at her console was any indication. I booked it.

The little whistle couldn't have been worth more than my breakfast moldering in a hot garbage bin, but it meant a million bucks

to me. Like I'd passed the first part of a test and proven I'd do anything for Jolanda.

Even go to junior high.

#

Pederson Charter Public Junior High School had seen better days. Jolanda's family had teased poor Bernie about getting accepted there. "Pederast" they'd dubbed the place. It had been some hotshot academy for rich white folk up until the late 1990s, when the first of many fingers pointed accusations at the newly appointed dean of students, a man who'd taught there over twenty years. The elite didn't find the old school so appealing anymore, and the buildings remained vacant until the city grabbed them as part of its last-ditch approach to public education.

It didn't look so bad to me as I made my way around the towering main building and toward the fenced-in field in back. I half expected to find a family of *Saturday Night Live* Coneheads by the bleachers -- Jolanda's favorite videos to watch on YouTube, cracks her up every time -- but they were empty. Finding my *white cone, attached to a large human* wouldn't be easy.

Sun rays gleaming off the metal bleachers indicated a searing, painful disaster if I tried to sit on one, so I sat on the patchy grass against a water fountain and cased the situation. Orange pylons marking lane starts had potential, but I couldn't for the life of me figure out how they connected to a large person. The only people were kids jogging in small groups around the half-size football field. Even the gangly ones would hardly come to my shoulders.

Some of them pointed at me. *Oh crap*. Pederson kids probably took classes on stranger danger, and there wasn't another adult in sight! I couldn't leave, not after coming so far. I may have been hot, tired, and clueless as to why I agreed to this insanity, but it delivered way more of a rush than playing *Halo 4*.

I scanned the field again. Soccer goalposts loomed over the browning grass. Balls of various shapes and sizes dotted the field like a losing game of Chinese checkers. Scowling teenagers directed their grimaces at either the gritty turf at their feet or the well-intentioned individual reclining against a drinking fountain . . .

I had to jet, clues be damned. Before I could vault myself up, a pair of scuffed tennis shoes stampeded in my direction. They stopped mere inches from my palms planted on the grass, prepared to launch me into action should running be required.

“Principito!” The footwear was attached to scrawny, dark-skinned legs and the grimy, reddened face of Jolanda’s nephew, Bernie. *Oh, thank God.* I whisked him around in an overly enthusiastic hug for the benefit of ogling eyes. The staring kids lost interest, a couple of them spitting in disgust when they received the message, “I belong here.” Relatives are way less fun than potential pedophiles, I guess.

“What are you doing here, principito?” Bernie pushed out of my arms -- I may have miscalculated how long an appropriate hug should last with a self-conscious junior higher. *Oops.*

“Oh, I’m on my way home, you know, and I remembered you went to school here. Thought I’d take a chance to say hi. I don’t see you as much anymore, you know, not since . . .” I shrugged, regretting even a partial lie. I missed Jolanda’s whole mess of relatives. They made me more welcome than anyone else I could recall. At family gatherings, I’d take up a quiet couch corner, and before long, they’d pull me out of myself and into the action.

“. . . since Jolly broke up with you?” Bernie laughed, pointing his finger at me.

Blushing was all I could say in response.

“Aw.” He dropped my arm and gave me as firm a punch as a twelve-year-old could manage. His squeaky voice, struggling in its journey toward deepness, was kind. “She misses you, you know.”

The kid knew just what I needed to hear. Warmth blossomed in my chest. “She does?”

“Yeah, man, of course she does!” He laughed again. “What do you think? She loves you.”

“But then . . . why?” This twelve-year-old held the key to my existence within the soulful rounds of his coconut-shell eyes. I waited in rapt anticipation for his answer.

He raised his hands in surrender. “Don’t ask me, man! It’s just, her smile’s not quite right, you know?”

I knew. Oh, I knew how that looked on her. Her lips, usually painted with a royal purple that complimented her skin’s cool hues, often curved into a waning crescent. They only reached the gibbous phase of the Earth’s moon when she meant it. Really meant it, and then the amusement or humor or love bubbled up from her rounded mouth until it poured from her gleaming eyes.

Bernie paled as a mechanic bellow reached us.

“Bernard Trujillo, you’ll never break a four-minute mile from

the drinking fountain!”

“Sorry, man, gotta go.” He gave a sheepish grin before bounding out to rejoin his classmates who had improved their paces since the coach’s return.

That coach was a remarkably tall woman with chiseled arms and a six-pack evident through her form-fitting, lime green tracksuit. Unlike the woman at the crosswalk, her beauty didn’t draw my eyes. The device she’d used to get Bernie’s attention did. The same device now carrying soundwaves attuned to her precise vocalizations.

“Faster! Those East Orange rats have practice every afternoon! We’ve got to be faster to win!”

An oversized bullhorn dangled from her giant hands as though a forgotten bauble rather than the item of pure treasure I knew it to be. The sun rays bouncing off its surface held my gaze like glue. My heart pumped blood at a rate that would have left those adolescent runners in its wake. Should I tackle her? I’d once contemplated mixed martial arts but had settled for *Mortal Kombat X* instead. Maybe I’d talk her into letting me borrow it to practice my yodeling.

I didn’t have to resort to such desperate measures. The coach used it to release another expletive barrage before ditching it in the grass and joining her students, striking a relentless pace. I didn’t hesitate. Not with my girl’s heart on the line. Megaphone in hand, I high-tailed it out of there, the coach’s shouts of “Not again, you bastard!” echoing off the brick buildings. I ran ten city blocks and came to rest against my morning café’s shaded brick wall.

To my eye, the dull metal ring at the bullhorn’s narrow end glimmered like Jolanda’s sequined club dress under disco lights. I drew my lips around it. Some instinct within me sparked at the connection, and I pulled the whistle out, too, jammed it in one corner of my mouth while keeping my lips on the megaphone. I pressed the large red button on the bullhorn’s handle and blew three times fast, throwing all semblance of sanity to the wind.

That resonance did more than amplify a thin trill of sound. It rippled through my cells, sent images flooding through my mind so fast, I could barely grasp their significance before the next came. Memories of rubbing the spiky cilia of a sentient, amphibious reed. Parading the chieftain of a basketball-sized clan on my shoulder through the corridors of our central command sphere. Swirling light through a prism with my fingers while communing with the flares of a red giant in its death throes.

I banged against the wall, scraped my bare arms against brick as I slid to the gum-covered sidewalk.

Well, fuck. I'm an alien.

More than that, I was a communications specialist who'd screwed up his assignment big time. Decades of experience had failed me, time spent learning how to open dialogues with the most unexpected intelligences. Those radiant stones I'd remembered in the Watershed building? They had literally radiated their pleasure after I'd performed a musical number on an instrument resembling a jigsaw. Humans had hardly been a shock to encounter, not after my career. Sure, they're taller than us -- I'm considered quite large among my people -- but our forms are similar, and it took me scarcely an earth revolution to learn to form most their words. How *had* Jolanda overlooked the rills on my fingers? I couldn't control them during--

Earth revolution. Fuck. I was in so much trouble. I skidded around the café to the crosswalk and banged the signal out. "Callin' Cap'n. Come in Cap'n!"

Her voice chimed right in my ear. "The protocol engaged?"

"Yes, it did. I'm sorry you had to resort to the memory restoration program." Never before in my service had I needed to use the mechanism we'd set up to trigger our memories in case we became too engaged in our assignments. Our research vessel had to maintain a reasonable distance to avoid detection, so we needed a tether back to ourselves in case, well, in case something like Jolanda happened. Kintil, the hippie who'd waved hello to me earlier, had been recalled once too. That nasty scenario had involved a couple of slime devils from the Alpha Cen--

"And your assignment? What is your progress on understanding this 'romantic love' the humans seem to value?"

Of course. On this planet, I'd started slow, amassing information on various strange communication mediums; the whistle and bullhorn had merely been the first I'd identified. They were similar to the multitudes of contraptions I'd encountered across the galaxy: stones that sing, amplifiers tuned to heartbeats. But humans had a behavioral characteristic we hadn't encountered anywhere else. Their befuddling predilection to attach themselves to each other, without shared genetic material, demanded further study. In other cultures, mating partners might flatter each other with colorful displays of refraction or painful squawks asking to be silenced. Copulating pairs or pods sometimes stayed close together until an

impregnation was achieved -- our own system. But beings whom continued to exert influence over their consorts after having achieved the biological imperative, with no overt advantages to the unions, astounded us.

I'd been assigned to the phenomenon, to see if I could understand how humans benefitted from this specialized, intimate communication model. But once I met Jolanda in that laundromat, well, I'd lost myself in it. Literally. *Wow. Wow!*

"It's dangerous, Captain. Very. I've primarily studied one human for the last two earth rotations, and I've learned it can cause a lot of pain. Romantic love is all-consuming, using emotional resources rarely accessed that drain our capacity. As a primary means of communication, it carries the risk of sudden shut-down. And it can make you forget who you are."

Describing it, digging in to how I'd felt when Jolanda broke my heart, reopened the wound I'd thought scabbed over until that morning. And now?

"Do you recommend we discontinue this mission, Doctor?"

All day, memories of Jolanda had made me giddy, made me burst with the renewed possibility of smelling her herbaceous perfume, serving her the chocolate tea that her *tia* had brought back from the islands, sharing the same pillow. Would I give it up, all the ways it made me feel, because of the hurt I'd gone through as well? I hadn't perfected the means of romantic love transmission -- that much was clear -- yet I'd spent months receiving the messages Jolanda sent. I couldn't deny how amazing they had felt, to the point that my system overcompensated for the shock by making it my controlling directive.

"The key is to protect our individuality in the rush of the emotions it engages: passion, joy, anger, despair. If we can learn how the humans keep themselves intact while sharing such a powerful connection, well, romantic love could be one of the most effective communication systems we've encountered. I think, if we continue, we will master it in time."

Silence cut through the static louder than words. This could be it. I could be reassigned, given my pick-up coordinates, and never have the chance to make it up to Jolanda -- to see her again. Hushed tones I couldn't distinguish added another layer of anxiety. A pit in my stomach grew larger the longer they debated the mission's merits. I wasn't surprised at the wait -- we pore over complex situations until

we've puzzled out all their vagaries. But each passing Earth second made me more convinced than ever it was over.

Unbidden tears dripped down my face, and the wide berth pedestrians had granted me widened.

"Are you willing to continue your mission with this demonstrated danger, Doctor?"

Was I ever. "Yes."

I whooped with joy. And danced in a circle, fist-pumping my bullhorn into the air. A young boy and girl gaped at me, kids with bulging, close-set eyes magnified by glasses. I whooped some more as their parents hurried them faster across the intersection, sending stern glances my way.

Then I remembered my pink slip. "Is there a pay boost for increased risk?"

#

My feet swept over those streets as though I wore anti-grav boots. Arriving outside Jolanda's run-down duplex took less time than a transport. The buildings in the neighborhood had been constructed in Earth's 20th century AD, but perplexingly, they're called Victorians -- I haven't figured that one out yet.

I blew my whistle twice, its sharp trill echoing from the cement block walls dividing the housing units. That's all it took -- Jolanda could never resist a disturbance. She jammed her head through the second-story window as if she'd caught the scent of sweet empanadas frying. As soon as her eyes fell on me, she leaned back against the frame and crossed elbows.

It'd be an obvious sign of unwelcome if not for the smirk. Her evolved ability to convey two messages at once was part of why I was drawn to her in the first place.

"Jolanda!" I shouted through the bullhorn, holding down the red button to amplify my sound waves. I hesitated for a moment, worried the vocal chord distortion would prove distasteful to her aural cavities, but I had to try, had to make her see. "Jolanda, I love you!"

"¡Pendejo!" She yelled back, shaking her head. But the corners of her eyes, black eyes easy to read, to drown in, turned up.

I pounded my chest in the manner I'd seen her brothers do a million times at park parties, forgotten linguica links smoking on community grills behind them.

"But I'm your *pendejo*, Jolanda! All yours!" Thrusting the megaphone high as the Channeler's trident in the *Dark Souls II* video

game, I began a victory dance. It didn't matter how much of an idiot I made of myself on the sidewalk, not once Jolanda's throaty laughter mingled in with neighbors' pleas to "Shut the hell up!"

"Get up here, *mi principito*," she beckoned. "Before I change my mind. ¡*Date prisa!*"

Our audience gave a smattering of applause before slamming their windows shut. I tapped the bullhorn's siren three times fast, converting my people's signal into my own celebratory ring.

Time to enter the next stage of my research.

#

"What are you doing?" The little girl, head full of multicolored barrettes and gumdrop hair ties, watched her older brother, Ede, hit the big round button with the base of his palm three times fast. She knew it was three, because she counted, and then he did it again.

"Crap," he said, staring at his hand like he hadn't realized he'd done it. "You mean that?" His laugh went high into his throat. "Just making it go faster, silly."

"Really? It goes faster that way?"

"Sure it does." His lips curved up on one side, like how they did when Mama asked him what he'd been watching on the computer screen before he slammed it closed. "It's a game, ok? The faster you press it, the quicker the light changes. Here, you try."

Taking a deep breath, she slammed the button again and again with alternating hands. She went so fast she couldn't keep track of how many times she did it. It could have been hundreds!

Ede's strong arms pulled her too far away to reach. "Whoa there, speedy. You might accidentally--" His voice faded midsentence. "Nevermind. Doesn't matter."

"*Axe-a-dent-lee* what?" She writhed around to escape his grasp, but it was no use. She wanted to help! Didn't Ede want them to cross the street faster?

A crackly, silly voice spoke into her ear. "Connection accepted. Please *geelzebuzz* from repeating the *gravitulizz* so many times in the future."

She whipped her head around but only saw Ede. He squinted one eye at her, sweat beading on his brow. "Do you hear something? You'd tell me if you did, right?"

The voice talked again, reminding her of when she and her best friend in the whole world, Tracy, had spent an hour talking to

each other through cups attached with a string. Daddy was the smartest daddy ever for making it. Then Mama had given them chocolate cookies!

“Mental trauma can be *twulpadeedle* from 45 *gentazors*’ away, you know. Now *rizatulip*. Our vocal *twubble deet* is not working.”

She pictured the voice’s owner as a big bee shaking its fist and batting its wings as fast as she’d hit the button. The thought made her giggle. She tugged on Ede’s arm.

“What’s she talking about, Ede? What’s a *gentazor*?”

Ede’s eyes went wide. “Oh no. We’ve got to go. You’re too young.”

“Am not!”

“Are too.” He faced the pole and said to the air, “Sorry, Captain. We’ll explain later.”

The static in her head disappeared as Ede swung her onto his shoulder. “Mom’s going to be *sooo* mad.”

On the big black box across the street, the blinking little white man chased the angry red hand away. Maybe it wasn’t a woman but the little man who had spoken? Maybe he’d meant to say she’d made the light change!

“I did it!” She screamed loud as she could and wiggled. “I’m going to do it at every button!”

“Girl, you need a nap.” Ede gave her a soothing back pat. “I promise Daddy’ll explain it later, okay?”

“With his special finger trick?”

“Sure, with his special finger trick. If Mom lets him live.”

Her eyes nodded closed against his shoulder. Dreams of bees stuck in crosswalk poles filled her head. Daddy always told the best stories.

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The Narrators

Josh Patrick Sheridan

The night before Lucy came home, Mom made a gigantic sheet cake, a welcome-back-to-the-family type of thing, iced it, piped *We Love You* on top in blue frosting, and spent the rest of the evening slapping our hands away like we were still children. The next morning, we watched from the living room, pulling the drapes back with our fingertips, when the two of them pulled into the driveway. Mom rushed in ahead of Lucy, who was moving slow—hobbled, really—and ran to the kitchen to light the candles.

“Lucy, hey,” we said when Lucy stepped into the doorway.

“You look terrific,” we said.

“Who says heroin can’t get a man hard?” we said.

“Jesus fucking Christ, you guys,” Lucy said. “Too soon.” And she threw her duffel bag onto the floor at our feet and leaned on the door jamb to rest. “What a fucking circus. Mom! Where’s Dad?”

We shifted a little in our shoes, and Mom came around the corner with the cake balanced on her palms and a million little fires buzzing on top. She started singing.

“Happy birthday to you,” she sang.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Rolly sang.

“That rehab worked wonders,” I sang.

“Your hair looks like shit,” Julie sang.

Mom glared at us, then looked back at Lucy, offering a half-smile. “Oh, Luce. Come blow your candles out, my love.”

#

Lucy had been gone for seven years, but was only in rehab for the last ninety days; the rest was a long, drug-fueled tour through the social underbelly of the Rust Belt: Cleveland, Indianapolis,

Pittsburgh. (No glamour for *our* Lucy, oh no! Who had the *ego* for coke in New York City? Molly in L.A.? Out! X in Paris? Who are you fucking kidding? Lucy was out there hitting the poop juice, the spoon likker, that real dirty-pillow shit. Lucy was out there hanging with dudes named Mace and Cooter and sleeping on linoleum.)

But it was great that she came home. Even Dad had woken up once since then, popped his nappy head into the hall to make sure he wasn't hallucinating. Lucy didn't notice.

"Did you get married?" I asked Lucy. "You know, on the *inside*?"

We were washing dishes together, having excused Mom from the premises, while Rolly sat at the table, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. Julie had been right: Lucy's hair did look terrible. Stringy and black. Her face was gray and she had a stoop in her spine, like a seahorse. Overall, she resembled a burned match.

"That was Sandra Bullock," she said.

"Mmm, I don't think they got hitched, actually," Rolly said. "In the movie. Did they get hitched?"

"They didn't," Lucy said, and punched my shoulder a little too hard. "Don't fucking compare me to Sandra Bullock."

I handed her a plate to dry. "Aw, Luce," I said. "But you both look so good in a robe."

"Fuck yourself."

"So tell us about Cleveland," Rolly said. "I heard it's nice in the winter."

"Is Dad really still sleeping?" Lucy said. "It's almost noon, for chrissakes. Was he drunk?"

"He's been doing this lately," Rolly said.

I added, "He'll be in directly. So, Cleveland?"

"Cleveland's a urinal, okay?" said Lucy. "In the winter, the wind on Lake Erie can melt your fucking skin. Anything you leave exposed gets eaten alive."

"Sounds like an STD," Rolly said.

Lucy and Rolly can keep this going forever. The two of them have been glove and hand since the day they found out they could communicate with each other—Jesus, almost thirty years ago now—and life has been their gig ever since. Well, with a hiatus at the end there. When they were teenagers they did everything together, while Julie blew whatever boy she was blowing in whatever clandestine location and I hung back in the shadows, ostensibly waiting for the

right moment to out myself but, in practice, just being smug and boring. Rolly and Lucy drank and went joyriding and slept with the good-looking seniors. They were the two tall trees in our house, the shade-givers. They projected onto the rest of us a coolness we'd never have for ourselves.

(In point of fact, Rolly had driven them to the party where Lucy first tried smack. He found her an hour later in the bathroom, behind the toilet. After that, Lucy disappeared, and Rolly went to college and drank his way through an English degree. He's spent the past three years trying desperately to be friends with his high school writing students, to help fill the emotional gap Lucy cleaved in his life.)

Julie wandered in from outside, sweat-streaked and panting, her lycra pants damp and her hair a wreck. She took Rolly's cigarette from his hand and dragged it while she stretched her legs.

"I'd forgotten," she said, blowing smoke toward the floor, "how much I enjoy cake for breakfast. Thank you, Lucille, for the opportunity to disappoint myself."

"Tell us about Indianapolis, Luce," Rolly said. "Are there a lot of Indians there?"

#

We never managed to do anything together. Some families—you've seen them before, in the mall, choosing their puppy-mill puppy from the puppy store and naming it Mopsy, or standing together on the edge of a soccer field, sharing hot chocolate from an oversized Thermos and cheering for Mason or Grayson or Madison—some families operate as a unit. Not us. We weren't that. All of us kids had our own things, and none of the rest of us ever really gave a shit about any of them.

Take me, for instance. I'm a painter. A *professional* painter. I've had exactly *one* sibling (Julie) come to exactly *one* gallery show, when I first started out, which was held in a long-since folded shithole uptown called Demonica, which specialized in "the art of the Underworld." She came in, took a glass of wine, walked several circuits with her arms crossed in front of her stomach and a deep concentration puckering her lips. She considered the statuary of an up-and-coming queer sculptor who called himself Porter House: long, skinny forms wrapped around each other like DNA strands, off-brand sneakers on their feet, and always with a pair of horns near where their heads might have been. She looked closely at some sketches of

boys on trampolines, with great orange fires painted dramatically behind them. And then she came to my stuff: nine five-by-ten canvasses depicting the Circles of Hell, each featuring a flagrantly nude demon against a backdrop of ashy gray nothingness, some of them featuring also-nude women, locked with their respective demons in terrible, deadly embrace. I considered them antitheses of heterosexual love, on the repressed desire for carnality, on the attraction of androgeny.

She didn't say anything for a long time, and finally, about halfway home, I had to ask her what she thought.

"I didn't know demons got so many bitches," she said.

Since he was a boy, Rolly has loved classic cars: Mustangs, Camaros, Challengers. In a gesture of extraordinary good faith (or maybe he just didn't want to be caught there alone), Rolly invited us to a car show at the county airport, told us we could get hot dogs and belly busters and watch some drag races, so we went. We spent the next three hours (the hot dogs were shriveled and foul, the belly busters turned out to be cans of Big K, and the drag racers simply never materialized) watching Rolly talk to sad old men about their hot rods. From a distance, we narrated what they were probably saying to each other:

"Name's Rolly. Small penis," I said, when Rolly ambled up to a man who was polishing his Dart. "Pleased to meet you... hey, nice engine."

"Pleasure," said Julie. "Name's Frank. The dick thing, that'd be shrinkage, or...?"

"Shrinkage, yeah, yeah. Just got out of the pool, knowwhatI mean, old fella?"

"Har, har, har," Lucy chipped in. "What do you think *I'm* doing here? My cock's so small my wife won't even look at it! Won't let me in the house 'til after dark, and she makes me shower with the lights off!"

Julie, the oldest of us and therefore the most aware of her imminent death, had only ever been into boys. Kissing, licking, humping, rubbing, teasing, fucking boys. It went without saying that we took no interest; in fact, we made a show of taking *negative* interest. We went out of our way to tell her how much we didn't care how big Lenny Haslett's dick was. She told us anyway. Lately, she's been getting more and more into fitness, possibly because thirty is right around the bend and possibly because her new boyfriend, Kirk,

is a pediatrician, and as good pediatricians should, Kirk shuns anything that breaks down cells, advances aging, feels good to do, or tastes delicious. Julie sneaks over to Mom and Dad's for hamburgers, cigarettes, and booze—but we never, ever see Kirk. The day Lucy came home, he was at home in front of the television. The Jets were slated to lose starting at one.

Lucy was into smack, and so far it's the only hobby all of us have ever been able to rally behind.

#

Dishes done, Lucy and I leaned against the counter and Julie and Rolly sat at the table. Rolly smoked while we talked, mainly about nothing, and Julie stole a drag now and then.

"Nothing really changes in seven years," Julie said.

"Nope," said Rolly. "Full circle. It's the circle of life. Born in Mom's kitchen. Probably die in Mom's kitchen."

"Still broke," I said. "Never got to travel."

Lucy just stood there, quiet, chewing on her thumbnail. We all stared at her for a minute, watching her be older than she used to be, watching her have more things, awful things, to think about than she used to. We stared at her brittle hair and her sunken jawline. Then I turned and hugged her, and Rolly and Julie pushed away from the table and came to hug her, too.

We were standing that way, a pack of awkward, crying penguins, when Dad shuffled in with his bathrobe hanging open. His hair a mushroom cloud. Four-day beard. He clearly hadn't brushed his teeth yet. We broke away from each other.

"Your mother would like to take you all to lunch on me," he said. He held his credit card out toward Lucy, but stopped himself. "My love," he said, smiling. "Thank you for coming home." Then he pivoted and gave the card to Rolly instead before shuffling back to his room.

"Okay, that was weird," Julie said.

"Yeah," Rolly said. "Who the fuck was *that* guy?"

Lucy stood in the doorway for a while, staring down the hall.

#

We went downtown because Mom wanted to go to Chuck's Clam Bake—her favorite restaurant by virtue of being open on Sundays and serving liquor before noon. Mom and Lucy walked ahead of us, and whatever they were talking about must have been hilarious, because every time Lucy said something, Mom howled with

laughter.

“What do you think they’re talking about?” Julie said.

“Heroin,” I said.

“Oh, most definitely,” said Rolly. “Mom thinks heroin’s the cat’s meow.”

Webster Beach is a ghost town on Sunday during the off-season. Stores close early or don’t open at all; the tourists are all gone, back to Scranton or Schenectady or Frederick; even the local skate rats who haunt the alleys during the busy months, selling skanky pot to bored Ohio teenagers, seem to respect the sanctity of the Sabbath. As we walked down Beach Road, the main drag, our voices bounced sharply from the stucco facades, and Mom’s laughter seemed to multiply.

Julie tugged on the front door at Chuck’s, but it didn’t budge.

“Well, geez,” Mom said. She tried to peek through the door and her glasses clinked on the window. The place was dark.

“Sundays just got a whole lot shittier,” Rolly said, and Mom started laughing again.

We ended up at the Denny’s by the highway and sat by the window so we could watch the retreating tourists head back west, having realized it also got cold at the beach, that there was a reason for summer after all. We couldn’t help narrating their conversations as they went by:

“You know,” Julie said, “you’ve never made me a dinner I actually enjoyed... not like Denny did.”

“You’ve never actually made me cum,” I squealed.

“Jesus,” Mom said.

Julie said, “I want a divorce.”

“White people problems, Harold,” I said.

The waitress came and filled our coffees, glaring at us. She was young and pretty, but sad-looking at the same time. She lingered on Lucy a beat too long.

“Do you guys remember the last time we were at a Denny’s together?” Mom asked, but none of us did. We shoveled our eggs into our faces and choked them down with bitter coffee. “We were in Flagstaff, Arizona. Your father insisted we drive across country to see this and that and the other thing, and I thought I was going to have to murder my own babies and leave them in gas station dumpsters. Anyway. He always wanted to see the Grand Canyon. He said it like that: the *Graaaaand Cannnyonnn*.”

“Oh my God,” Lucy said.

Mom went on. “So we get there, and there’s nobody around. It’s a ghost town. The weather sucks, it’s God-awful cold, you morons —” and she glanced at me and Rolly “—are daring each other to eat deer poop—” and we snickered because she said *poop* “—and meanwhile your father is just standing there...”

“The fog,” Lucy said. “The whole canyon was full of fog. Right up to the top.”

“That’s right,” Mom said. “He drove two thousand miles, listened to every stupid thing that came out of your mouths, smelled every single one of your farts, pulled over every time one of you had to puke, and the whole time he’s only thinking about seeing the Grand Canyon, and then we get there, and—”

“*Oh my God*,” Lucy said again.

Mom looked at her, stabbed some eggs, held them to her mouth. “See my point?”

#

It was early evening when we got home. The house was dark, no television flicker from the living-room window, no porch light. Rolly went in calling for Dad, turning the lights on. I went to put Mom’s doggie bag in the refrigerator, and there was a note taped above the ice dispenser:

*I’m very glad
you’re home*

and then Lucy was screaming.

She was in the bathroom floor, holding Dad’s bloody head in her lap. He was naked, the floor was wet, the room smelled of fresh shower, of soap, of heat. His toothbrush had fallen into the sink. Scattered around Lucy’s feet was a bottleful of little white pills. We tried to get a good read on whether or not Dad was still alive.

“Take him, Rolly,” Lucy said. “I can’t keep his head up. I can’t.”

“I’ll call Kirk,” Julie said, frantic. “Overdose? What are those pills? Can I tell him overdose?”

“Lexapro,” I shouted. “He hasn’t been bothering to take them.”

“Fuck Kirk,” Rolly said, sitting down beside Lucy and gingerly taking Dad’s head into his lap. “Can one of you fucking call

nine-one-one?” He stuck his fingers angrily into the flesh of Dad’s neck. “He’s got a pulse, you guys. Someone hurry, get the goddamn phone.”

Julie sped off to call the ambulance. I settled under the sink and wiped helplessly at Dad’s skin with a hand towel. Rolly pulled the old man’s hair away from his eyes. He was clean-shaven, prepared for something new. Mom and Lucy stood in the doorway, holding hands. Helpless.

#

We waited for news in the “family lounge,” where the banal details of the early century were brought into stark relief: a blocky gray television hung in the corner like a dead man, its remote lost to time; a lineup of three-year-old Consumer Reports magazines had been spread across the wicker coffee table, where Rolly set his feet while he closed his eyes. The family at the other end of the room was doing altogether more weeping and hand-ringing than us. It made us feel like bad children, but it also broke the silence, which was helpful.

“I vote concussion,” Rolly said, his head leaning against the wall.

“Minor brain damage,” I said. “Slurred vocabulary.”

“Significant trauma. Amnesia. Blood clots.” Julie.

“He hasn’t taken his meds in months,” Mom said to no one, but all of us already knew that. Except Lucy. Lucy didn’t know. Mom had picked the pills up off the floor and put them back in the bottle. “Lookit,” she said. “They’re all here.”

Lucy sat at the end of the row with her sunglasses on. Her cheeks were flushed, her hands in her lap. On the wall in front of her was a poster, a cartoon of a group of giraffes with their bodies contorted into awkward and painful-looking positions. *Be Yourself*, read the caption, *Even if it Feels a Little Funny*.

“Somebody had the choice,” Lucy said, “between putting that poster in the garbage and hanging it up right there.”

A short old Indian man came into the room and introduced himself as Dr. M. He said “ookay” every couple of seconds, and he wasn’t very good at dumbing things down for lay people, but the gist of his visit ookay seemed to be that Dad had a tiny fracture in his skull ookay but was still alive ookay and would probably be fine, a few days of observation, ookay, a week on the outside. Surprisingly enough, ookay, he was currently awake, and soon we’d be ookay to go in and say hello.

“Ookay,” Rolly said, and all five of us guffawed.

Dad was a wreck. His head had swelled to the size of a basketball. There was a shaved gash over his ear that had staples in it and was still weeping a little fluid. But his eyes were open. They lolled out like he’d been gut-punched.

“Dad,” Lucy said. She brushed his arm with her fingertips, knelt down beside him. “You gave us a scare.”

Mom kept her eyes on Lucy, not on Dad.

“Yeah, Pop. Jesus,” Rolly said. “That was some bad shit.”

Lucy turned and looked up at him. “Too soon,” she whispered.

Rolly backed up against the wall and crossed his arms. He nodded, tucked his head toward his chest.

“You look great now, though, Dad,” Julie offered. “Like nothing ever happened.”

Dad rolled his head sideways, toward Lucy—the only one of us who’d gotten close to him.

“Sebbish socken yeesh,” he said. His lips flapped like he was spitting out playing cards.

“Huh, Dad?” Lucy said.

“Sebbish. Socken. Yeesh.”

Lucy looked back at us. “Help me out, guys. I can’t understand him.” Then to Dad: “What’s that, Daddy?”

None of us wanted to say it, and Mom started crying.

“Seven fucking years, Luce,” Rolly said finally. “He’s saying ‘seven fucking years’.”

#

We all wanted a piece of the aftermath. Mom made coffee and we sat around the kitchen table, competing with each other for the blame for Dad’s accident. Lucy had been taking it hard; she’d been almost silent since Dad said what he said. She’d stared out the window on the ride home, sat now just a little too far away from the table to be a part of us, her hands tucked in her lap. She’d flipped the collar of her jacket and zipped it up to her mouth.

“I live in his house,” Rolly said. “He and I never even talk, really.”

“I moved *out* of this house, but we never talked before that, either,” I said.

“And you’re gay. Major disappointment,” said Julie.

“Major disappointment,” I said.

“I married him,” Mom started. “I made him a new person. I treated him like a baby. A smart baby. He’s changed more because of me than he has because of himself. So this is all my fault. He would rather have been an airline pilot.”

“But he would have never seen his family,” Julie said. “He never would have even *had* a family.”

“You’re right,” Mom said, glancing at Lucy. “That’s right, love.”

#

Dad would have saved any of our lives if we’d been in real trouble. We all knew that. But he was also the kind of father who would let a whiff of hot air from the bus tires blow our hair back before he snatched us out of the road. He wanted to teach us how to stay alive, how to be decent. It was just his shitty lot in life that none of us ever actually *learned* from him. We made him look bad: Julie’s sluttish dedication to men, Rolly’s pathetic relationships with high-school poetry nerds, my paintings of Alichino and his jumbo cock. He’d allowed us our foolish decisions under the agreement that we’d someday blossom into intelligent lifeforms, but none of us had held up our end of the bargain.

And then, Lucy.

#

The house was cold without Dad in it—we’d never earned his heat, but he’d given it to us anyway. Lucy wrapped a quilt around her shoulders and settled back into the ancient La-Z-Boy by the fireplace. She snapped on the reading lamp and chose one of Mom’s bodice-rippers from a basket on the hearth. I sat on the floor and leaned against the couch, sipping my coffee.

“I might have read this one before,” Lucy said, studying the cover of *Slippery When Rhett: A Rhett Miller Romance*.

“Conceivably,” I said. “I have.”

She flopped the book onto her lap.

“You know, there’s this bar in Indianapolis called The Slippery Noodle? It’s a blues place, old as hell, stinks like piss and cigarettes. BB King’s played there. Bunch of guys have played there. It’s a great place to get high, ‘cause the music never stops. Even on, like, Tuesdays. They go on until the sun comes up. They don’t give a shit. Homeless guys in the corner, nobody cares. Just jamming.”

“Okay,” I said.

“Cincinnati used to be called the American Paris,” she said.

“Okay. Why?”

“The buildings. The buildings look the same.”

“They look that close to the same?” I said.

“Cleveland. Cleveland’s got the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Harvey Pekar. LeBron. Hart Fucking Crane,” she said.

“I get it, Luce. I see what you’re doing.”

“You know that house from *A Christmas Story*?” she said.

“With the leg in the window?”

I knew. “It’s some kind of award, right? The leg?”

“It’s in Cleveland. *Cleveland*, motherfucker.” She looked at the cover of Mom’s book. “I’ve read this before. I read all of these ten years ago.”

Vincent Frontero is an undergraduate English and creative writing student at the University of Alabama, originally from Spring Lake, NJ.

Maxwell Fornicide

Vincent Frontero

Born July 7, 1993

I was born a banshee in the California angst
running the coke distribution that was my parents' dirty laundry and
on the morning I
came to be

My father held me and felt a powerful urge to drop me
while my mother prayed for time to grab me and throw me
out the window because it would only be shit from there and
her suspicion grew wings when

My father died chocking on his own poison
while passed out holding me three months after birth so

My mother moved us to Lincoln Nebraska where she hoped
time would get her laid
so she could forget about me and

Growing up

I was really happy and young and didn't know how much fun
hating her could be so
me and my mother lived lightly until high school when I
started to realize how angry I
was allowed to be so I

Screamed and yelled and spit fire everywhere I
saw my mother until that wasn't enough so I
smashed a vodka bottle over her boyfriend's head and
moved away to New York where I

Discovered the healing powers of heroin and
got a chance to shoot my dad into my veins
until it became so overpowering I
got to see me and him both

Dead May 26, 2016

Kirk Windus is a fiction writer and poet from western New York. He graduated from St. Bonaventure University with a journalism degree. His work has previously published at Across the Margin, Literally Stories and will appear at Ink in Thirds in October. These poems are part of an ongoing chapbook project titled Thumbtacks. Kirk aspires to both write and drink like Hemingway.

Grave Diggers

Kirk Windus

The sink's veneer chipped away, swirling in crimson bubbles. Iron on my gums. The white reveals the dull gray underbelly, and you ask, *can they see the scars?* You tug at your sleeves. I say no. You never really asked, and I only answered subliminally.

You asked why I brushed my teeth so violently. The crushed veneer on your chipped skin. I never asked why you lived so violently.

You loved so beautifully.

But I bled after we kissed. You said I was biting my lip again.

We scraped the cemetery fence for hours. Primed it for paint. Laid in the grass with the granite. You said you felt so connected to the stars. Ran your fingers over the carved names. We chose a plot, to lie rib to rib. I said I couldn't see Orion. You traced my fingers across the sky. My eyes were closed.

I cut your sleeves off in my dreams. From miles away. I rush to pick you off the floor. You bled on the countertops. And I still can't find Orion in the sky.

Gardening Guide for Dummies

Kirk Windus

I plant roses on her. I read gardening books and ejaculate prematurely. Lines of Hollyhock and Marigold wilt under the window. The vegetable garden thrives. I plan a marvelous dinner of fried zucchini and okra, a bean salad and roasted eggplant with mayonnaise. I fancy myself a renaissance agriculturist and one hell of a vegetable chef. ‘Can’t you get me a towel already? Dab. Don’t wipe. Don’t want to have a sticky back all night.’

I’m pulling pods from their vines when a sparrow lands on the fence. It’s a lovely day, so I ignore my ornithophobia when he speaks. *You know she hates vegetables right? She used to pick the tomatoes off her sandwiches. And you need to ditch those gloves and sunhat.*

Ah, but you’re just a bird. You know nothing of the depths of our love.

Suit yourself. But name one time you’ve read about a talking animal whose wisdom failed.

My love napped on the porch, laid out naked on a towel.

I set out the meal and lit candles for ambiance. *Dinner is served, my love!* I called. She sometimes passes out before dinner after drinking too many afternoon brandys. I found a note on our bed that read, ‘Went out for a steak. Don’t call. And delete all of the softcore porn from the DVR. By the way, you look like a pansy in that hat. Dries me up like a raisin.’

Alex lives in Minneapolis.

Pop.1280 is a work in progress that chronicles the history, progress and sometime decline of small town America. Driving off the Interstate and taking the side roads, dirt roads many that appear to have been forgotten or lost in time. This is the America that built America, the America that predated urbanization and industrialization. The America that, if you look and listen very closely you can feel the echo of the people that lived and worked the land.



Disco Salvage

Gilbert , MN



Rose City General Store

Rose City, MN

Robert Beveridge makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry just outside Cleveland, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Chiron Review, Zombie Logic Review, and The Literateur, among others.

Steeplechase

Robert Beveridge

You looked to be
the only decent steeplechaser
in the room,
with your slender fingers,
skilled enough to squeeze
white silky rain
from the clouds,
and lean thighs, sinuous,
skilled at steering
a thousand pounds of animal
with a cocked hip.

When you talked to me,
when your conversation lit
upon my shoulder, whispered
in my ear, I could think
of nothing but the way your hair
fell, framed your face
and shadowed your eyes in the dim
restaurant lighting,
and in the shadows I thought
your eyes were black,
endless pools of liquid interest.
I found out, of course,
that they are blue, when
weeks later
you came to me again
and kissed me;

but that night they were black,
and sweet, and licorice,
invited me to swim in them
naked under moonlight.

We hugged a quick goodbye, your body's
form imprinted on mine, stamped
upon me, a train wheel
on a penny,

and how those hands,
those thighs stayed with me.
And how, later, you
stayed with me, after
poems, phone calls, the first
steps in the race,
the quick break from the gate.

The hurdles came, of course,
hedges, water, fences, all
the trappings of the hunt meet
at Fair Hill, the hurdles course
at Saratoga.

How your hands
on my neck, your thighs astride
my hips, guided—guide—us
through every one. We leap, and clear,
come down on the other side,
the twenty-to-one outsider
bound for home, with the tower
and its carillon visible,
always visible, in the distance.

Russell Hemmell is a statistician and social scientist from the U.K., passionate about astrophysics and speculative fiction. Stories in Not One of Us, PerihelionSF, Strangelet, and elsewhere.

Gwisins of the New Moon's Eve

Russell Hemmell

We walk out of the subway - the first train of the day has left us in a Gangnam still asleep. The last party-goers stumble back to their dormitories, in the freezing haze of the morning. The pervasive smell of yakiniku reminds me I had no dinner last night. I look around with a deep sense of disorientation. *This is something Miyumi is familiar to- not me, never me.* At five thirty am, I'd be in my deepest slumber, while my roommate thrives and revels.

But not today. Today we're together in the twilight hours before dawn, when everything is possible, and the world doesn't watch.

I look at Miyumi's cheeks, reddened by the cold breeze. It's windy - spring is coming, but nights remain chilling, and the only way to warm you up is to drink soju - gallons of it. I can't wait.

"Christie, look at this."

She takes my hand and points it at the Samsung Tower's glittering roof.

"What?"

"Do you see it?" She says, and her green pupils are like cold flames. She scares me sometimes. "The reflection of a gwisin's face."

I try to focus, following her stare, but I can't see anything. "No."

"That's good news - only victims can see gwisins. It means they're not coming for you," she says. "Not yet."

"What about you, then - why do you see it?"

“Me? I was a victim once. Now I’m part of the family.”

Only a glint in her eyes suggests she’s making fun of me. Her hair dancing on her face, an empty bottle of soju thrown away, Miyumi touches my nose and laughs – and I feel a shiver running down my spine.

#

It was during my first year at Yonsei Uni that I heard for the first time about the infamous Gwisins of Gangnam, the Gangnam’s Ghosts, as everybody calls them. In a hush-hush way, of course, because nobody in Seoul admits their existence. Not the population of the city, the sprawling twenty-four million people capital of a fast-rising country; not the police that every month have to deal with them, and the souls gwisins grab away. And certainly not the area’s inhabitants themselves. There are no ghosts in Gangnam, period. You have the Samsung Research Centre headquarters, ubiquitous shopping malls, a couple of streets full of fancy restaurants, and nightclubs with the best of the best of the K-Pop. All the rest? Just rumours, to attract morbid tourist attention. What were you saying, Christie-yang?

That was the way my enquiries always ended up – in irony, laughter, or denial. Not one single person available to talk to me and take me seriously. Maybe because I’m not one of them, I say to myself. I’m not allowed to know and lift the veil of mystery that wraps these ghosts. But to know I do want.

The story itself is simple. Every fourth New Moon’s Eve, somebody gets killed in the fancy neighbourhood of Gangnam. At least, dead is what they’re presumed to be, since they disappear from the bustling face of the city without leaving a trace. This is what Miyumi told me, in between two bottles of soju, in a drunk night out. No pattern exists in those deaths from what I’ve been able to find out, or simply my Korean’s not good enough to detect one. What’s clear instead is that the souls of the murdered come back as gwisins to where they’ve been killed, haunting the living and trying to drag them down. For eating their flesh, people say. For company, Miyumi explains. They’re so lonely, sad souls searching for comfort.

How frightening. How fascinating.

Whatever it was, I was decided to crack the mystery, and that’s why I befriended Miyumi, a Japanese that lived in Seoul for most of her life.

And that’s how I’m finding myself with her now, in this

scaring New Moon's Eve, in a freezing, almost desert Gangnam street.

Waiting for a gwisin to grab me and take me away.

#

Miyumi insisted we should head back, saying that nothing interesting was going to happen to us.

The gwisins weren't getting after us; no gwisins, no fun.

I wasn't afraid, but I never had the strength to say no to her. And when she came, white and cold and naked, to sleep in my bed that morning, I didn't send her away. I guess that was what I had wanted too since the beginning; in that case like in many others, letting people get the initiative is a way not to ask yourself embarrassing questions. You might not like the answer.

But I soon found out I had mistaken her intentions.

"Don't worry, Christie, I'm not searching for anything... impure."

"You don't?"

"No. Only want to sleep by your side. Having company. Keeping warm."

"Oh."

I was vaguely deluded, but also relieved. I took her close to me, and we fell asleep.

#

Since that moment, Miyumi regularly visited me in bed – even when she was going out and getting back in the first hours of the morning. White, cold and silent, she would slip in, putting her head on my shoulder and getting asleep immediately.

In the morning I would never find her, and only a faint scent of soju was remaining around to remind me I had not dreamt.

#

It's New Moon's Eve again, and it's gwisin night again.

I'm thrilled and ready.

It's not dusk yet, but I'm already in Gangnam, fluttering around like a crazed butterfly. Somebody's going to get killed tonight, so I'd better be there before it becomes dark -this is what I told myself in the morning, trying to play down my excitement. Maybe a gwisin will show up, and I'll see its face.

Miyumi has come with me.

She doesn't want to leave me alone in this night. "Not safe for you, Christie-yang, if you head to Gangnam all by yourself," she

says.

I laugh.

“Let’s get some soju,” she says.

We go to a small restaurant in wood with iron braziers at the entrance, not far away from where we dined last time. There are only a few people sitting inside – I guess because it’s still early.

And yet, tonight I feel there’s something different in the air. There’s an eerie calm in what I expected to be a lively tavern. Everybody is drinking in silence, raising glasses and cups in slow motion.

Everybody but one, a young man that glances around like a scared rabbit.

Miyumi’s eyes look like cat’s irises – green and round and wide-open – and there’s a slight smile on her face.

“You see that one?”

Her regard stops on the frightened youth that eats alone in a corner, the one I’ve already noticed.

“What about him?”

“He’s going to be dead. Soon,” she says.

“How do you know?”

“You’ll see.” She drinks her soju. It occurs to me she never eats – only drinks, bottle after bottle. And she never gets drunk either.

“Will you kill him?”

I’m not sure why I’ve asked this question. This is not something you’re supposed to tell to a friend, isn’t it? But my words have their own way out of the mouth that is meant to control them. They scorch my lips and hang suspended in the air like splinters of dark light.

Miyumi raises her hands like she could touch and feel their quality, caressing their roughness.

“No, not this one,” she says. “I would if I had to, yes – to protect you.” Her mouth curls in an open smile and shows something I haven’t oddly ever noticed before – feline white fangs, minute and sharp. “But it won’t be necessary.”

“Why have you taken me here?”

“Don’t you imagine?”

“No.” The moment I say it, I confusedly realise the reason. This night I’m seeing a city I didn’t know, with a person I’ve just discovered I ignore. I’m not scared, though – I’m simply beyond fear.

“You told me you wanted to see a killing – see gwisins in

action.”

“These people-”

“Yes.”

I look outside the window that gives on the alley. There’s nobody around, even though by now it should be teeming with life. Like if we were entangled in a warped space-time, ones where the living are for grab and sacrifice and the gwisins reign unchallenged.

There are streetlights all around, but their red glimpses are of a ghostly quality – flickering like candles in the wind.

A green mist seeps into the restaurant from the semi-closed door and through the small fissures of the wooden walls, while the temperature drops by many degrees.

I shudder and brace for what is going to happen.

The young guy snaps on his feet, in a sudden realisation that electrifies his body even before reaching his mind. Too late for him – it has been too late since he arrived here, in this place, in this city, in this New Moon’s Eve.

They get up to and walk toward him, slowly and inexorably.

His eyes search mine, while he opens up his mouth to scream with a voice that comes out no longer. I taste his terror like sour kimchi – with the same appetite and much of the same mixed, uncertain pleasure.

Miyumi takes my hand. “You’re safe. They won’t come for you tonight.”

“I know.”

Why they should, when they’re going to be sated soon? The crowd has surrounded him, carnivore ants on a wriggling pray. I can see neither his table now, nor the meal of blood and flesh they’re enjoining, suddenly awoken from their slumber, hands and arms that swivel around like raven’s wings.

Feasting. Relishing.

Or so I imagine – because, when they finally disband and get back to their seats, there’s nothing left. No man, no blood, not the shreds of flesh I’ve pictured in my head.

There’s a void, like a white hole in the fabric of the universe, or a magic mirror that reflects an imaginary space.

“Is this way you do it?”

“No.” She smiles. “I like being alone in my feeding.”

“Killings.”

“Killings.”

“Since when?”

“Since I met you.”

#

It is dawn when we go out of the restaurant, which has reclaimed his space in the Gangnam I used to know. One I will never look at with the same eyes again.

Visitors come and go, ghosts of a different quality, unaware of what happened here in a dimension that escapes their eyes. They laugh, but their voices reach me like laments from the underworld.

We take the subway and head back home, without saying a word, but holding hands like little children at their first walk in the adults' precinct.

At the entrance of our dormitory, I stop and look up, at the crown of buildings that encircles us in a cuddling embrace. And in a moment, I see the bloated face of the restaurant's victim appearing everywhere.

I can see his spirited eyes chasing me from the window glasses – each window a face – I see his reflection on the metallic doors. He's in my house too, on the TV screen switched off, on the computer's aluminium cover, in the mirror on the shelf. Even the yolk of my eggs grimaces at me from the frying pan.

Yes, he will come for me, slowly and inexorably – in one of the hundred New Moon's Eves after this one, not to punish me for having let him die, but to have somebody to keep him company.

One night - not just yet. Not until Miyumi needs me as her companion, a living person to feel alive again, a warm creature to curl against in the cold night. Not until that moment.

I take her in my arms, and we lie down in bed – her face on my stomach, my mouth on her forehead and rivers of soju to keep us warm in our warped universe.

Joan Harvey's fiction, poetry, and translations have appeared in numerous journals including Web Conjunctions, Drunken Boat, Smokelong Quarterly, Blackbox Manifold, Reconfigurations, Caper Literary Journal, Otoliths, Painted Bride Quarterly, The Tampa Review, Bomb, Another Chicago Magazine, Danse Macabre, Osiris, BlazeVOX, and many more. She has won prizes for both poetry and fiction, and her work has been read on the radio in Manhattan and Aspen, Colorado. She is a graduate of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.

Cora is a photographer, writer, and bon vivant living in Denver, CO.

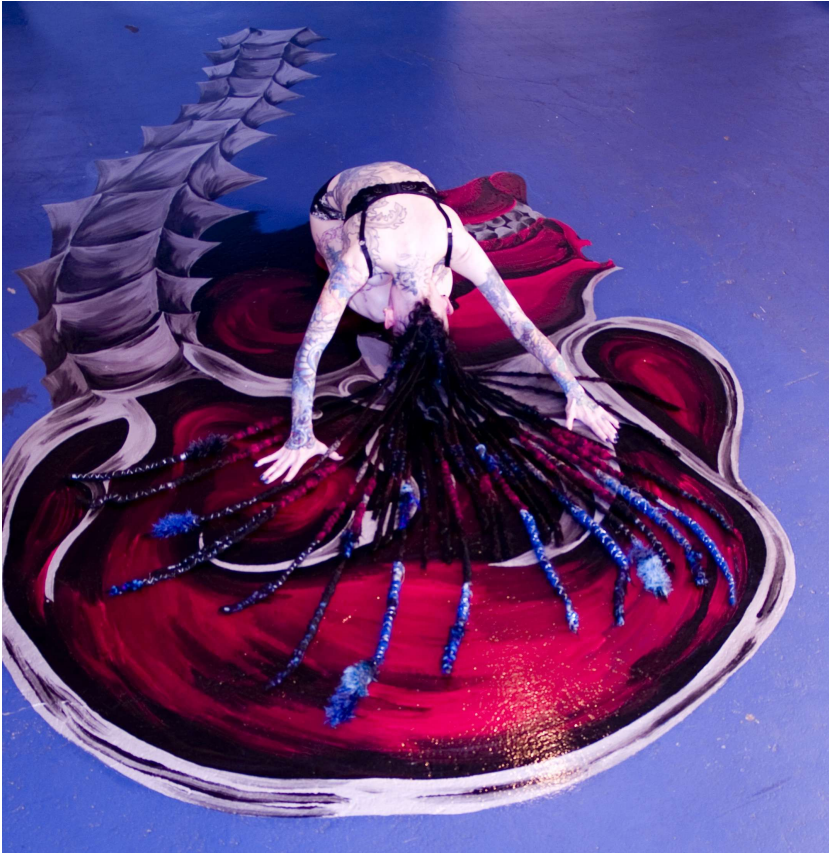
TRANSPPOSED FUSION

Joan Harvey

*Between two worlds life hovers like a star
How little do we know that which we are!*

Byron, *Don Juan*

From Kauri Tiyme's notebook, quoted by Alan Prendergast, "In life and death, tattoo artist Kauri Tiyme made her mark" *Westword* January 8, 2009



© Cora Reed

It's night. Not real night. Not regular night. This kind of night. An extraordinary night with a wave of electricity warping it in the form of a falling star, a star you catch in your arms, which kills you. It kind of kills you at the same time as it lights you up, gives you a different life.

Bhanu Kapil from blog: <http://jackkerouacispunjabi.blogspot.com/>

It's

written in the fractal body, hers
in the hotel room, cut, slashed,
head bashed, blood full of diphenhydramine

(also known as Benadryl. found too: Drano. Rat Poison.
Pills. Duct Tape. Disposable Scalpels. The products that we choose
for Death.)

We cling so to this earth
no one can believe // it was
her choice. Though evidence suggests
a pact with the past -- a singularity // duality
a burned out star
here in the middle of America

a state that changed its colors

Colors that extend the life of skin
Needled in.

Punctured flesh, studded, hair in long
medusaed coils or snakes that fall
implanted breasts, eye-liner tattooed
A name she chose to match
A name that transformed time.

Re-learn the counter-clock
Hit the desert at full tilt
Speed by bike by night
Thrill in movement underneath
Product of your own
Dark physics

Star explodes

trans·pose (trns-pz)

**6. To reverse or transfer the order or place of;
interchange.**

The mess of murder, the maid opening the hotel room door
What follows violence? A maid opening a door.

Who remembers a door. Gertrude Stein

(Blood, 47)

Here in the Denver Marriott Tech Center
Tech death for the urban nomad girl
said to want to live
off grid

I sing the body technic

technic---electric

inside the biotech
artificial extension of the body/mind
of the Coca cola, mercury-laden corn syrup
dump of our current existence

Her long black braids
sprawl across the floor
dark rays emergent from the top
of the articulated spine.
She bows low
a woman vulnerable to Mind

She wanted to write a book on
physics or perhaps a meta physics,
said she had a Grandfather
who worked on the atomic bomb

Girl of wide spaces, desert girl
American girl, girl born of the Manhattan project.
Who are we with our Death ancestors
approaching through fission. Not fusion.

Scars, the lace falls down a back
Split heart spilt blood

*the heart tattooed
between her breasts,
large, on fire,
and pierced
through*

Trans trans trans trans pose
the stutter
the movement
across

She wanted to gentle pain. worked once on a process
to make --- for those who wanted it
tattoos both
painless and reversible

imposed on a body

a dream work scrolled across the skin

fractal from the Latin fractus meaning "broken" or "fractured."

2. To put into a different place or order: *transpose* the words of a sentence. See Synonyms at reverse.

the ink moves in and
punctuates the skin
extruded pain this decorative rite

luminous activity in art

gleaming transforming
expose the outside in.

You knew when you saw her
You didn't have to look
Quite like anyone else.

*You don't have to look
Like anyone else.*

a tracery of blue on her long neck
where the knife will slit
a man's hand reach inside
to force out the remaining life

those who knew her said *sweet, said positive*
ambitious and something more

BELOVED

known for her precise & gentle touch
carving the future into whorls and space dust

kali medusa *but her gentle voice*

adorned

then abandoned on the hotel bed

(It hurts inside the head.)

3. Mathematics To move (a term) from one side of an algebraic equation to the other side, reversing its sign to maintain equality.

In form informed
To bring the outside in
Or show what's inside out
To write our lives on skin.

A female making of remaking
hybrids of ink and time

free-hand divine proportion spirals
or Colorado columbine
each piece to exactly fit each wearer
relaxed in her sure art
in the confident movement of her hand.

She changed her name and place
lived out a nomad existence, inhabited a
path crossed from Here to There,
lines across the country
(lines across the mind)

Phoenix. Tucson. Pismo Beach,
Pennsylvania, Buffalo,
(so many more stops in between).
Saying Hello. Saying Goodbye.
Joplin, Missouri, Northampton, Mass.
Sedona. Arizona West Hollywood, Bakersfield.
Breckenridge. Denver. Here I/you/ we must end.

*to make visible the invisible
ache inside the bones*

*inside the red bones of
colorado*

4. "Filament lines of the mind or the enlightenment of the soul...names, dates, times and reasons allow us to perceive the intent of the user...so that we can sculpt our realities."-Kauri Tiyme

marking time and marking skin
do we believe her death in him

She'd left him, removed to a larger place
had plans for a salon / art and politics
a tattooing/ performance space
to be called *TRANSPOSED FUSION*.

She had divorced

But not quite left the past behind

vegan, fit, non-smoker, non-drinker ... so friends said
invested in cyrogenics
to freeze for later her bodyelectric to preserve
money on genetic treatments to extend her
life
(before he
ended it)

transhuman woman that I dream
you that make yourself immune

for what death?

Wanting to keep the body forever alive or mutilate

*transform it into
strangeness.*

She claimed to be 36,
She was 39 -- and
not

the only woman for whom 40
might sound a death-like knell.

(perhaps) she tried to look ahead
but nothing came.

No answers

Swerve

death doth reverse

What time

revolves resolves.



© Cora Reed

5. Music To write or perform (a composition) in a key other than the original or given key.

And the murderer/lover?
Rejected ex-husband who
Followed her but not quite as far as death?

Who is he? Did she
choose
her executioner?

Some people remember him as
“Quiet.” “Thoughtful.”

or maybe just a drag.

She had moved on she said.
He would not let go.

So many injuries

Light and deep

superficial cuts ----- upper left thigh
superficial cuts ----- right forearm
deep cuts -----forehead

It was this man who
Took a bottle and bashed her head
Took a scalpel and cut her throat
Took his fingers and pressed inside
To stop that breath.

So much required. To kill that life

What kind of man
after a murder can
wash //bandage //dress //
his former lover’s mute and broken body

(but he was used to piercing bodies
he’d learned from her
in order
to be with her)

He said he was supposed to die too. But couldn't quite manage it.

a man cutting a body, bashing a body, strangling a body, cleaning a body, dressing a body, bandaging a body. Fleeing a room.

Sometimes you drown just by standing near the sink.

6. *not all self-similar objects are fractals—for example, the real line (a straight Euclidean line) is formally self-similar but fails to have other fractal characteristics; for instance, it is regular enough to be described in Euclidean terms*

The line of the _____ throat cut.

It could be a certain kind of story
jealous ex-husband kills wife.....who has moved on
but you see
she was seen with him on the security cameras
on our American police surveillance
in Cañon City
trying to buy a gun
the day
before
When love ended?
did she leave (?) her death in him?
or did she plan her own
apocalypse
death extravagant and painful as

life

who sees

what do we see

how would she *see* this *scene*?

her body there on the bed

him driving off in her car

. . . Always the same

gentleness, the same burden of grief,

the same irregularity of the eyes, veiled

and sliding sideways down into loneliness.

Sebald "As the snow on the

Alps" in After Nature

what we do not see

is left to surprise us

in the end

7. Nuclear fusion occurs naturally in stars. Artificial fusion in human enterprises has also been achieved, although not yet completely controlled (Wiki)

How many artists (inside) get murdered
by the clinging past?

*(We move away
allow it to pull us*

back)

we too do not let go

of what will kill the best in us

those
enmeshed parts
of what has
been
that take us
down. . .

What murderer do we choose?

Whose lives do we lock ours with?

In this story, as usual,

it is the female who ends up dead

her body that stood out

so much (too much?)

must it be violent?

in proportion to her gentleness

Who you tie your fortunes to

invisible filaments that bind

Buying time

her time ran out

our life, our abberations

and

(secrets)

tur bu lent

(it might be hard to kill someone// it might be hard to die)

8. A *fractal* is generally "a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole,"[1] a property called self-similarity (Wiki)

in the last photos

she does not smile
a spiral whirls across the back of the hand,
spiked and fierce, emerging from its lightening chaos into adumbrated
form

We see her try to leave the small town life for something larger ---

leave the small town lover for someone larger -----

leave life for something larger

[*ascension* ---her word]

a friend says *no warning signs at all*

a friend says *most gentle, loving creature I ever met*

her body lies
unclaimed
for weeks// in the city morgue

9. To render into another language.

Heightened
Piercing

Intense

Was it death
 inside
 that wanted out,
 out of the architecture of her
 body,
 through the barrier of the skin?

Violence that inheres
 is extreme
 is nature
 is human
(we cut /pierce/ stab)

Where does gentleness begin?

what's below the surface?
 what is the surface?
 what does the surface say about what's below the
surface?

don't forget
 how deep the depths /
 mysterious /
 ambiguous/
 how little we begin to
know

 where our dreams do emerge
into what
reality around the skin's externality

no one recognized the suicide inside
and yet the future there inscribed
her body's many premonitory scars

10. To alter in form or nature; transform.

modify

what gives?

who needs the needed other as the needed killer?

life's making and remaking

and yet a desire not to be

the world might be large but it

might shrink as well
shrink to one other person.
to a room in the Denver Tech Marriott hotel.
to the difficulty of having to die.

a body that could be your body//a door that could be your door

those flutters of the heart

that look for another soul to answer

Souled out. Scraps of life
“superficial ‘hesitation’ cuts”

tattoo – from Samoan open wound

she did not take her own life did not take pills
the painless way
still

she freed herself of him (*though he had to do it for her*).
He dressed her

(he killed her)

Someone had to clean it all up.

All that color red

(cherry blossoms she left glowing on
a friend's upper arm)

The last mutation is not mute. The blood all over speaks.

11. In nuclear physics and nuclear chemistry, **nuclear fusion** is the process by which multiple like-charged atomic nuclei join together to form a heavier nucleus. It is accompanied by the release or absorption of energy. . . (from Wiki)

Friends ask *why*

Say *impossible*.

Said she seemed to have found her place

but her sad

face

How we appear and what secrets we carry there

to tattoo to adorn with pain to make pain visible beauty

Anguish of displacement

(A rose rewrites itself)

Luminous gasses and

Solar systems

spin

through the work she left behind on

skin

those whose inked images she did not complete

will leave them still undone

will remember in their cells a
luminous radiant and most gentle pain

they say her energy stays with them now //written in their
skin

*Sunlight trickles into a hotel room. Trickle is wrong. It flashes in,
floods, smashes the darkness.*

[Middle English *transposen*, *to transform*, from Old French
transposer, alteration (influenced by *poser*, *to put, place*) of Latin
trnspnere,
to transfer : *trns-*, *trans-* + *pnere*, *to place*; see *apo-* in Indo-
European roots.]

trans·posa·ble *adj.* The American Heritage® Dictionary of the
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I am indebted to Alan Prendergast for his article in *Westword*, January
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weeks before Kauri’s death.

Kauri Tiyme 1969-2008



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