



The

Northridge



Review

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Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to Champ for designing the cover art for this issue of The Northridge Review. To see more art by Champ, visit:

<http://sharedmadness.blogspot.com>.

Awards

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in The Northridge Review. The recipient for this award for the 2007-2008 school year is Angeleena Zacho for her story "Dead Man Astrology."

This year's judge of The Northridge Review Fiction Award is Chuck Rosenthal. He has published seven novels and a memoir and is a founding member of The GlassTable Writer's Collective and What Books.

The Rachel Sherwood Award, given annually in the memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellent poetry by a CSUN student published in The Northridge Review. The recipient of this award for the 2007-2008 school year is Irving Figueroa for his poem "Portrait of My Father." The two honorable mentions of the Rachel Sherwood Award are "Kthxbai" by Paul Castillo, and "Wings" by Eric Tuazon.

This year's judge of the Rachel Sherwood Award is Scott Andrews, Associate Professor in the English Department at CSUN. He teaches American and American-Indian literatures and has published book reviews, essays, fiction, and poetry in a variety of journals.

The Northridge Review is also honored to publish the winner of the Academy of American Poets Award. The recipient of this award is Nancy Carroll for her poem "Still Life: After Breakfast," and the honorable mention goes to Richard F. Kilpatrick for "Mal'Aria: Bad Air."

The 2008 Academy of American Poets Award judge Terri Witek is author of five books, including the most recent "Shipwreck Dress." She holds the Art and Melissa Sullivan Chair in Creative Writing at Stetson University.

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Editor's Foot Notes



WARNING: Do not read while operating a motor vehicle or heavy machinery. Contact a doctor or physician if you begin to experience dizziness or fainting.

What you are holding in your hands is not your average cookie-cutter literary magazine. Instead, you are about to experience the fruits of creativity, dedication and hard work as they come together in one aesthetically captivating issue of *The Northridge Review*. Please enjoy the hybrid nature of the Fall 2008 printing as we explore the many facets of human existence through conventional and experimental forms. The work chosen for publication inspired us to take creative risks of our own. We hope that in turn, as a reader, you come across something in this issue that inspires you to share your creations, your genius, your madness with the world around you.

Happy reading and hope to see you all at the pig roast in 2014.

Live long and prosper,
John Roberts and Rhea Tepp



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Dead Man Astrology

Angeleena Zacho

Part I: The Three Fates

In a city whose presence on a highway was both brief and forgettable, nothing could acquire a history. Nobody gave a thought to what might have existed before, or how things came to be where they were. On the shoulder of a closed intersection, sunflowers sprouted from a corroding claw-footed bathtub. Blackened tin cans crept out of the bedrock of their own accord, congregating in sandy piles beneath clumps of dried sagebrush. Every backyard had a rust-red chain in it, and some of the chains were attached to dogs. These and unknowable other things went unseen – for there was almost no one to see them, no one who'd want to.

Of course, Melinda had sometimes seen things. In the rare moments when she was lucid enough to notice her surroundings, Melinda saw things that made her breath catch in her chest. For example: from a Chevron station across the street, she once watched an elderly dog who was watching a crow eat a snake in the road. The dog had thrust his snout so far through the chain-link fence that it appeared he might never get it out again, but his milky white eyes blazed with something like greed as they watched the crow tear away long strips of snake flesh. Another time, Melinda saw a dust devil blow past a row of mailboxes and rattle them open. One box's contents fluttered up into the air for the briefest of spells before falling down flat on the grit-caked road and getting run over by an itinerant semi-truck. Things like this happened all the time and were never observed by anyone – not usually. To most of the people living in

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Quartzdale, the kinds of things that happened there were simply not worth seeing.

*

1. *The Empress*

Before Melinda gave birth to Scorpio, she was supposed to look for a job. Her mother would circle ads in the classifieds every morning and leave them on the kitchen counter for Melinda, along with a note. Today's note said:

When you wake up please clean Samson's litter box. And the dishwasher needs to be emptied. Love, Mom.

Swallowing her multivitamin with a glass of orange juice, Melinda scanned the classifieds dispassionately before turning the page over to read her horoscope. Samson rubbed himself against her legs, meowing hungrily. With considerable care, she tore her forecast out of the newspaper and set it aside, proceeding to make breakfast. The scrap read:

Friday, June 20

There are a lot of questions on your mind right now, but don't get distracted. Instead, focus on the task at hand. Sooner or later, answers will come to you.

Melinda ate her frozen waffles, rinsed off her plate and left it in the sink. It was true that she had a lot of questions on her mind. Questions like: *is this really it?* and *why don't I feel terrified- excited- anything?*

Melinda's parents' names were Debbie and Wayne, and Wayne,

according to Debbie, was dead. This may have been true. Like Melinda, Debbie had gotten pregnant at eighteen, and therefore she thought she understood what was going on with her daughter perfectly. But she didn't, and for three reasons: first, Debbie had grown up in San Francisco, where it rained often, and where the city's neon lights were always reflected in glossy wet pavement – and second, she had never believed in horoscopes.

The third reason Debbie didn't understand her daughter was that, unbeknownst to either of them, Melinda was pregnant with a constellation of stars.

Some summers, a moist black cloud would arrive in Quartzdale, empty itself on the land, then turn white and float away. For a day or two after these storms, a wet, musty smell would rise from the ground, stirred by warm breezes and choked with dust – a smell as ancient as the Earth itself. People in town felt it. Dogs would sniff the air hopefully, watching miniscule hawks inscribe slow circles in the sky. When this happened, Melinda would slide one foot out of its sandal and trace lazy shapes in the dirt with her toe – but it rarely happened.

Melinda had one friend, Jess. Before getting pregnant, she and Jess would climb the ladder of the city's water tower at night with some of the other seniors and share cans of beer and the occasional joint. Sometimes a boy named Tank would sit with Melinda at a distance from the others. Nobody needed to ask how Tank got his name. He was slight, brooding, and sarcastic, and liked to flick pebbles at the backs of the other girls' heads. She felt a vague affinity for Tank. But he was as unreachable as his name suggested, even when she slid a hand under his jeans. After graduation, Melinda didn't see him again.

Now she was five months pregnant, and her legs were hot and sticky from the starlight that was beginning to radiate downward from between her thighs. To escape the Sun, she sometimes went to the

movie theater where Jess worked. Apocalyptic action films were her favorite – something about the hero and his woman facing the end of the world together comforted her. In the air-conditioned darkness, Melinda sat by herself with her cardigan over her lap to stifle the beam of dazzling light that shone out of her crotch.

Walking home along the sleepy boulevards, she sometimes remembered to stop for job applications. People behind counters wanted to know, did she have any prior experience? Their eyes remained perfectly blank as they moved over her red face and long hair, resting briefly on the bump that was beginning to show under her wrinkled cotton dress.

No, Melinda would say, no experience.

No one was ever hiring, but Melinda would still smile sweetly at them and say thank you, turning a deeper shade of red as she walked back out into the heat of day.

It was a cloudless June. The land was dry and sun-scorched, cauterized by the two-lane highway that cut cleanly through town in both directions and continued into the hazy brown distance for miles before vanishing entirely.

Every universe has its life force, its own setting-in-motion of objects and processes. All matter has origins in something else. You understand this. You understand that things have had to traverse unimaginably vast amounts of time and space to get to where they are now. You recognize, too, that an object in motion will remain on its path for an infinite period of time unless it is acted upon by an external force. But do you know what

becomes of an object that is acted upon by an internal force? You soon will. You see, with your tiny hand, you have already set something in motion – something infinitely larger than yourself, larger than anything you could have foreseen.

*

2. *The Hanged Man*

Tuesday, July 15

You're feeling adventurous. An unlikely source will seem tempting, but exercise your good judgment – some things just aren't worth the trouble.

The stars were crowding together now, growing hotter and more luminescent by the day. Many of them were even nearing the end of their hydrogen-burning stage. As the summer dragged on, nights became increasingly miserable. It was so hot in Melinda's room that her mattress was always soaked in sweat, and without any sheets on her body, her glowing pelvic region and its ray of white light kept her awake for hours. As she massaged her stomach, she inevitably thought about Tank and Wayne. She wanted to know what kind of men they were. It was always long after midnight when her eyelids finally closed and she fell into a troubled sleep – troubled because Melinda didn't understand her dreams. She felt like they had nothing to do with her, like they were really someone else's dreams. She awoke in the mornings feeling confused.

Try calling some of the places in the phone book – they might be accepting applications. I love you!

Melinda had never considered the possibility that her mother's advice might prove more valuable than her horoscope's, but as she flipped through the phone book on Tuesday morning, she came across something that made her pause. Just past "Plumbers," "Pools," and "Pregnancy Counseling;" right before "Psychologists," "Publishers," and "Pubs," one listing read:

Psychic Readings

by

The Desert Oracle

See your PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE.

66 Quarzdale Blvd. Ask for Lupe.

Altogether Melinda knew she had something like forty dollars sitting in a glass jar on her nightstand. Without immediately admitting it to herself, she decided that she would use the money, if only because she had a burning desire to know (more so than answers to her personal questions) what a psychic looked like. With a tiny thrill, she tore the page out of the phonebook and folded it up in her pocket. The paper soon grew hot against her skin.

“The Three Fates spread,” explained the fortune-teller that afternoon, “is the easiest way to illuminate life’s hidden meanings.”

At thirty dollars, it was also the cheapest. Having deposited her money in a heavy wooden box in the corner, Melinda sat watching the fortune-teller’s thick olive hands manipulate an old-fashioned deck of tarot cards, deftly sorting them in and out of different piles on the table and shuffling so fluidly that the multicolored illustrations and figures on them soon became a blur. The small room was crowded with an indiscriminate assortment of artifacts – most of them superstitious, some of them religious, but almost all of them, Melinda noticed, with a price sticker attached.

The deck was cut into three separate stacks and arranged in a row in the very center of the table.

“The first card drawn will represent your Past; the second, your Present; and the third – your Future.” The woman looked directly into Melinda’s eyes as she spoke. Melinda noticed that her eyebrows had been shaved off and drawn back on with a colored pencil that didn’t match her iron-gray hair. When she had finished, Melinda looked down at the cards, one of which was upside down:



“The Hanged Man?” she read.

“A willing sacrifice. Accepting. Letting go of what can’t be changed. But he’s reversed, see? That changes his meaning – to stagnation, perhaps. Standing still when you’d rather be moving.”

Melinda processed this for a moment. “What about the Empress?”

“That one is easy, in your case,” the woman smiled, nodding towards Melinda’s protruding belly. “The Empress gives life to all things.”

“And the World?—”

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“Integration. Wholeness. Becoming involved with other people – or meeting a goal. This card may indicate a future career.”

Melinda stared gravely at the Three Fates for a full minute, and then back into the woman’s eyebrows. She had stopped talking. “Is that it?”

The fortune-teller regarded her closely. “Advanced readings are fifteen dollars.” When Melinda didn’t respond, she leaned in and added “But today I will do one for ten. A fourfold vision – plus a palm reading. Find out everything you need to know.”

Melinda shook her head. She only had eight dollars left. Then, her eyes straying to a collection of various decks of cards on a side-table, she asked “Are any of those for sale?”

After some haggling, the fortune-teller gave her a deck of worn-out tarot cards – identical to the ones they had just used, but thinner and yellowed – in exchange for the eight dollars, along with strict instructions that Melinda should return after studying them so that she might properly learn how to read their portents. Melinda smiled uncomfortably as she took the cards. She had no immediate intention of returning to The Desert Oracle.

In the doorway, the fortune-teller called after Melinda. “Your baby – it will be a Scorpio.”

Melinda turned on the front steps, shielding her eyes from the Sun to look at the woman. “That’s right.”

“It might hurt,” the woman leered. “You are not scared?”

Melinda shrugged her shoulders, gripping the pack of cards tightly. The woman leaned against the doorpost with her arms folded, smil-

ing. "Come back soon. I will show you how to read the cards."

It's true that the most massive stars are the first to burn out. But even they are not as sad as you are, and you yourself are very small. When the wind moves, they move with it. They do not dig their heels into the ground. Listen: over a long enough period of time, even gravity comes apart at the seams. Parts of yourself that you thought would never change will spiral farther and farther away from you, eventually breaking off to become a part of someone else. I want you to be prepared for this when it happens. I want you to understand that this is the way things work – and that it will be better for you if you just let it happen.

*

3. The Star

Monday, August 4
You're on your own today. Now is the perfect time to sharpen that new skill of yours.

Melinda got a job as a cashier at a store that sold automotive parts. Her uniform was an extra-large dark gray polo shirt with two checkered racing flags on the back and a misspelled name tag that read MELINNA.

The manager, a bald man with a thick black mustache, talked her through the procedure on the first day. "Enter the purchase total, press SALE, press ENTER, press METHOD, select CASH or CREDIT, then swipe the card, enter the sales total into the credit card keypad, press ENTER again, press DONE, and press RECEIPT. Staple the

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credit card receipt to the sales receipt and give the first copy to the customer, then slide the second copy into the box under the register. Put the customer's items in a plastic bag – small bags are up here, oversized bags are down below. And when the phone rings, you say 'Thank you for calling Motor Mania, this is Melinna, how can I help you?' That's all you have to do," he told her. "Seventy-five dollars a week. Do you think you can manage that?"

Debbie thawed out some steaks that night in celebration of her daughter's first job. Melinda's neatly-ironed uniform hung from a wire hanger on a doorknob in the hallway, visible from the living room sofa where the two of them sat cutting their meat.

"I pulled your old crib out of the storage shed today," Debbie told Melinda. "Do you remember it? White, with purple flowers? We can put it in your room for when the baby comes. I think it'll fit perfectly between your bed and your closet."

"Oh," Melinda exclaimed, startled. "Good idea."

"And I was thinking... after you quit the auto store, you could probably pick up some babysitting jobs. Let some of the neighborhood kids come over and watch TV while you're nursing, you know? Kill two birds with one stone." Debbie smiled reassuringly, rubbing her daughter's back with one hand.

Melinda returned the smile weakly and took a trembling bite of steak. As her mother flipped through channels on the television, a hot, salty tear slid quickly down Melinda's face and dissolved on her lips, mingling with the taste of the meat.

Here's how Tank got Melinda pregnant: in the grass behind the water tower, well-moistened by Coors beer and their own individual desires for something bigger than Quartzdale, his sperm and her egg came at each other so fast that the collision reduced both materials to dust. In the molecular cloud that remained, gravitational instabilities caused the densest pockets of matter to collapse on themselves, forming globules of dust and gas that steadily condensed into small, dewy protostars – all of which began spinning slowly away from each other in the nebulous dark of Melinda's womb.

Melinda shuffled the deck as fluidly as she could. The multicolored cards were a blur in her hands, not because she was a fast shuffler, but because her eyes had completely clouded over with bitter tears. She cut the deck three times and arranged them in a row on the center of her mattress.

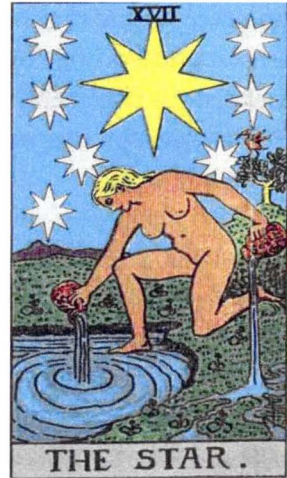
It was the first time she had handled the tarot cards since her visit to The Desert Oracle.

Now as she dealt the Three Fates, she was surprised to see that the Empress and the Hanged Man had switched positions – her Present was now in the Past, and The Hanged Man sat right-side-up in the center.

A willing sacrifice, she remembered.

And there, in the third card, was her Future. It was not the World card, but something else – something she'd never seen before. Melinda stared at the new configuration of Fates, wondering what they could mean. As she did so, she became aware – for the first time in her waking hours – of a voice in her thoughts that seemed to be speaking directly to her. As she

listened, her entire body pulsed with fervent warmth.



You see, nothing is what you think it is. The universe will fit comfortably in your clenched fist, in the tiny hollow spaces between history and desire. When you open your palm again, you will see just this: dust. Rub it between your fingers; hold it up to the light. Then let it go.

*

Part II: The Fourfold Vision

October finally came. Melinda rose heavily from her bed and padded down the hallway, out onto the patio, where she softly slid the cool glass door shut behind her and looked around at everyone who was waiting

for her in the backyard. It was a chill autumn night and she was barely dressed, but her skin was hot enough now that it didn't matter. She glowed with a white heat that crackled occasionally, like the humming of power lines.

There in the moonlight stood her parents, smiling proudly. Wayne had his arm around Debbie – Melinda recognized him right away with a jolt.

Near them on the chain swing sat Tank looking sheepish, but not unhappy to be there.

And finally in the center of the yard was the fortune teller, gazing calmly at the clouds as her iron-gray hair fluttered around her face.

Melinda stepped barefoot into the pebble-strewn sand and came to face the woman.

Can you show me, she asked, how to hang a star in the sky?

The fortune teller smiled toothily. Then she spread her legs wide apart and bent over, placing both hands on the ground as if in preparation for a somersault. *Like this, she said. Try it.*

Melinda did as she was told, squatting all the way down and bowing her head with a certain degree of difficulty.

Now roll over, the woman said.

Melinda hesitated for a second, and after one last look at the others, she rolled. Then she gasped. It was as if gravity had been inverted, and the ground was now a thing from which she could fall up and into space. Everything was upside down; the ends of her hair hung skyward, as did her feet – but something still held her in place. She thought of The Hanged Man, reversed. Then she realized she was still digging her fingertips into the ground.

What do I do? Melinda cried.

Push, her mother suggested.

Melinda pushed.

All at once, the world fell away. There was a whirl of breathtaking color and wind that rushed past her ears like the shuffling of cards, and then with one last dazzling burst of light, the stars were born. They scattered in every direction, setting the galaxy alight with millions of tiny blazing jewels.

Except for having climbed the water tower, Melinda had never experienced altitude before, and as her body dissolved into its base elements, she looked down at the rapidly diminishing lights of Quartzdale in sheer amazement. From this distance, they almost twinkled.

Iroquois Manor Shopping Center

Richard Boada

The strip mall injects cracking
purple light into low clouds,
infusing free radicals and spreading
laconic weight. Clouds, summering
and thick, ceiling, force contact. Biloxi's
dusk, heavy upon the gulf, descends
on the parking lot. Cars are kept running,
scrums of shoppers roll bascarts with rusty
wheels – unhinged windmills pirouetting.
Catfish and fried noodles from Vietnam Kitchen
upend streetlights, pedestrians and Peppermint Bar
patrons. A drunk, waiting for a taxi, vomits
on the curb. There's no moon, no Beaux-Arts
façade, only neon remains night's docent.

Hands-Free Flushing

Richard Boada

We're amnesiacs, taking
possession of consonants.
We halve white

antacid tablets, scatter
them on gilded shaving
tray, swallow Bob

Dylan—the topical. His fingers
sire more than dissent.
We consume

too much saltwater. Our tongues
melt. They're stinted,
vowels bolted up in stalls.

Return of the Orchards

Junior Lee Klegseth

they've razed the suburbs of los angeles the orchards are back hundreds of square miles of them people forget it all started with chris shes a footnote now an anecdote a fun warfare trivia game card but i still remember the day she discovered that when she ate tangerines she shit bullets *clink clink clink* into the fucking toilet *clink* jesus we laughed we didnt have the sense to understand the ramifications she said defecating and anal sex had suddenly become exhilarating like russian roulette in those first weeks before we learned to line the toilets with something soft we would be getting stoned when *clink clink clink bam!* one of the bullets would hit right and explode shattering the porcelain and there were the nights before everything went to shit when we got high and came up with a new vocabulary *farts* became *blanks* *diarrhea* became *gatling gun* then the government found others like her and started loading them chris went into hiding *god* was established the fuselages of b52s were retrofitted with hundreds of holes reports came of aircraft flying low over utah gastric ordinance division testing sites protruding asses spitting bullets the *shitters* they came to be called inside eating tangerines at a frantic pace we hid chris the best we could a rumor that *god* would be terminated gave us hope but it never happened events conspired against us four nations agreed to schedule a long overdue war for the following year armaments were increasingly costly where humans were cheap and expendable sure she would be cocked and loaded and sick at the thought of hurting others chris walked into the heart of *god* and ate an orange

Experiment #1: Extraction and Stem Cell Recovery

Revision by Dr. A. Morse with added Preface and Conclusion

Preface

26 When originally written, the intent of this text was [with little doubt] to instruct. And for the love of accuracy now comes the opportunity to exterminate inevitable typographical creepers-error, error, error-we err everywhere [in our instruction especially] and though I have little doubt additional changes will be necessary [as this is a fully self-tested manual¹], the original text belonged [not unexpectedly] to Science. Consequently it is also a text that belongs to evolution, mutation, error, and I [myself the informer manifest] am but apace, fully aware of my phylogenetic relations² and simultaneously the shortcomings of the human condition: we err, and at times without consequence³.

¹ **fully self-tested manual:** This is not to say that I, the informer manifest, have administered the following experiment on myself, but rather by myself. And, as a result of self-testing, I have specified that this manual is not fit for mimesis, but consider this: if we define a successful experiment by what a successful experiment is not, then the following informative manual is of particular use to the greater pool of Science.

² **phylogenetic relations:** This describes the relationship between species as charted by genetic similarities, specifically similarities in RNA construction. According to this system of special categorization on the molecular level, humans share more in common with fungus than with plants. The phylogenetic model replaces an older, morphological model based solely on physical characteristics that can be determined by the naked, erroneous eye.

³ **we error... without consequence:** There are so many harmless errors made during the process of DNA

Inaccuracy, coupled with blindness thereof, published and printed may at times look tempting, even repeatable-possibly harmless.

At other times [as with any evolving system] with error comes consequence, and when these consequences are not the lucky strokes of adaptation, they are inaccurate typographical creepers, static electricity gone awry in the presence of flammable hydrogen gas in a German dirigible, the illusion of fact behind sober Times New Roman serif which may or may not be one giant twelve-point accident-in other words, how is the experimenter to know the veracity of printed instructions unless he [the informer manifest himself] runs the experiment which [based on the printed text]

replication in our bodies that any average person would feel shameful admitting them all.

⁴ **with error comes consequence:** Imagine a DNA code that assigns each discreet constituent of one's genes an exact location in a long, winding line. Imagine that this line has, say, a few million participants each with a specifically assigned placement. Imagine the DNA code as a manifest, a giant master list that knows and assigns parts and placements to each member of the line. Each "participant" is assigned a location in line even before the line is ever assembled. This seems like an organized, repeatable, infallible system.

But the problems begin with the physical assembly of the line. When building the line in the proper order, let's say participant 1 is present, participant 3 is present, but participant 2 is outright missing. In the construction of DNA, this type of nonparticipation happens all the time. The line cannot stop its construction because participant 2 is missing, therefore a genetic error has been inserted into the line with respect to the DNA manifest. What happens as a result of this genetic faux pas, one might ask? Well, more often than not, absolutely nothing. But think of it this way: for no reason at all, line participant 1 experiences an episode of myocardial infarction [a heart attack], and participant number 3 does not have a cell phone nor knows CPR. Missing participant 2, on the other hand, is a recently certified CPR professional. In this case, missing participant 2 makes a consequential, significant absence. Meanwhile participant 1 seizes on the grasp.

should yield the anticipated results? This text was initially designed to instruct. This text was designed and presented to my eyes as grammatically correct, flawless laboratory Science even commending the success of its own "repeatable procedures" and "promising results." But now [for the love of accuracy] this text has been re-invented, revised, and subsequently re-distributed as a collection of documents that is to serve as manual with the explicit intent to inform, not to instruct. I, [the informer manifest], have rescheduled the purpose of the experiment in question and am therefore no longer responsible for feigning the veracity of the procedural outline and/or the repeatability of its execution. Personally, I have never fully trusted a scientific principle I didn't try myself.

Abstract

I've had a recurring dream that alternates between two possible endings: 1. The snake swallows his tail¹; 2. The bathtub fills to the brim with beating human hearts². These two featured endings are the potential outcomes of a hypothetical dream experiment in which a positive

result-in this case the bathtub full of freshly grown human hearts-could change the lives of billions. Taking this hypothetical dream experiment and translating it into real life Science, I have worked diligently to produce a materials list, a procedure [which you will find easy, concise, and repeatable], and results which, depending on weakness of heart, will make you cry. Others might outright protest the research that takes place here, but Science has little to do with me on a personal level and therefore there is little offense I take from any given counterforce.

The first hypothetical ending for my dream experiment, the snake that swallows his tail, is a consequence of being forced to abandon the linear progression of scientific research by the counterforce in favor of the circular research that is "safe," federally funded, and unquestionably legal.

In the following experiment you will see the second hypothetical outcome only, as Science will benefit less from the "safe" circular research and more from a bathtub filling to the brim with working, beating human hearts. Of course, the human heart is only one of the many possible stockpiles of organs that are capable of being made from one common source material: stem cells¹.

¹ **The snake swallows his tail:** A German Chemist revealed, in 1890, that he had discovered the structure of benzene after a serious daydream which featured a hallucination of the Ouroboros, or the snake that swallows his tail. The molecular structure of benzene had, up until that point, been impossible to surmise. There were multiple theories among chemist contemporaries, none of which made structural sense. After his daydream, however, the German Chemist published a paper that explained the benzene molecule as a six-membered carbon ring with alternating single to double bonds as represented by the circularity of a daydreamt snake that eats himself. It is of particular interest that the author of the procedure to follow should mention having had such a vision, as it bears striking similarity to the Science that has

already happened.

² **bathtub ... human hearts:** The bathtub, in this case, can be used to grow human hearts in the absence of professional grade incubator [this is particularly important for those who cannot afford steep cost for such equipment]. The only requirement is that the tub be absolutely sterile prior to use which can be easily accomplished with hot water, bleach, and acetone to remove stubborn stains.

Step by step, I have detailed my experimental procedure and results so that the world may follow, legally or not, and see for themselves the healing promise that stem cell extraction has to offer. In the following steps 1-15, I walk you through the process of which I have found most effective for stem cell extraction from human source material.

Materials and Procedure

Stryker Saw [or substitute any bone saw]

Four to five segments of human appendage
6-12" in length

Standard household freezer

Wax Paper

Butter knife

Blender [substitute manual mashing device]

Cheesecloth [several yards]

1.5L Pyrex container

Hot Plate

7" diameter filter paper

Large Buchner funnel

Vacuum filter flask

3' rubber tubing

Vacuum

Small scraping scapula

2oz. acetic acid

¹ **stem cells:** Stem cells can be used to manufacture any organ or tissue system in the body. The eventual genetic identity of a stem cell is determined by the environment in which it is grown. For example, if environmental conditions for stem cells are similar to that of hepatic cells, the stem cells will grow to be liver cells and given enough time the stem cells will eventually become a whole, functioning liver.

Similarly, if stem cells are injected directly into the body at the site of hepatic cells [the liver] as opposed to incubation, the stem cells will grow new cells in the body that are also liver cells. A damaged liver, in other words, can be re-grown while inside the human body.

Ethanol

Hypodermic needle and syringe

1. Cut four to five segments of adult human appendage 6-12" in length using a Stryker saw [if not a Stryker, any preferred bone saw will do]; the appendage segments do not have to be taken from the same adult specimen, but the specimens used must be of average adult stock with no known genetic diseases or family history thereof.² One sex bears no advantage over another.
2. Wrap the segments individually with wax paper and allow segments to freeze undisturbed for at least 48 hours³, but no longer than one-half years.
3. After at least 48 hours, remove the four to five wax-papered segments from the freezer and allow them to thaw at room

² **no known...history thereof:** Personally, I had the human specimen in question fill out a questionnaire beforehand under the pretext that they had won a bedroom furniture set from an up and coming company; the survey, I always insisted, was for legal purposes only.

On this questionnaire were several health-related questions and, before the specimen could "pick up the prize," he had to [in addition to the health survey] complete a physical under my auspices. During this time, it was determined that the specimen in question had no known genetic disease or history thereof for that matter. It took three human subjects before I located one that would suffice in terms of health, stock, and willingness to pick up that bedroom furniture prize from my private "showroom."

³ **freeze...48 hours:** The original manuscript operates under the false assumption that, during the freezing process, the cell membranes that comprise the 6-12" segments of human appendage swell and burst, making the interior contents of the human cell more accessible.

After freezing and thawing, the human segments I collected were hard and tough as ever. The skin, for example, became akin to leather.

The reason for my unsuccessful attempt to freeze and soften the segments is this: cell membranes of human

temperature- do not use a microwave to expedite this process¹. Allow the segments to thaw at room temperature [22°C] until soft enough to cut with a butter knife and minimal pressure.

4. Unwrap the thawed segments before cutting. Discard wax paper.
5. Using the butter knife, cut the appendage segments into 1" cross-sections around the ossified middle. The cut cross-sections should slide, with a fair amount of ease, right off the bone². If you find yourself forcing the cross-sections off the bone, allow the segments an additional period of time to thaw. The boneless 1" cross-sections should be relatively firm, yet spongy. I liken them to cakes.

6. Still using the butter knife, cut the boneless 1" cross-sections of appendage into fifths. Use a blender on medium speed setting to blend the appendage pieces thoroughly, but without pulverizing the pieces into a homogenized liquid [a manual mashing device may also suffice³].
7. Pour the contents of the blender over cheesecloth, straining 2-4oz. of the blended mixture at a time. Make certain to squeeze the cheesecloth over a sterile, 1.5L Pyrex glass container so that as much of the extracted juice is collected as humanly possible. Discard the remaining pulp. Use a new piece of cheesecloth for every 2-4oz. extraction for optimal yield. After extraction, the sterile glass should contain

cells do not swell and burst while freezing, however, the cell walls of plant species do. All in all, the undisturbed freezing is an unnecessary and misconstrued step in the stem cell extraction process.

¹ **microwave ... process:** It is not thoroughly clear why the author would have recommended a microwave not be used in the thawing process, although here are two relatively useful conjectures: 1. The appendage segments, upon absorption of too many microwaves, might swell and burst; 2. The microwaves are in some way damaging to the stem cells that will eventually be extracted from these segments. After five minutes of microwaving one 11" segment on high, the appendage will not burst although the integrity of the stem cells after prolonged microwave exposure is still quite questionable.

² **right off the bone:** The appendage cross-sections will slide with extreme ease over the bone in the manner of one large abacus bead sliding down its long, thin spindle.

³ **manual mashing device ... suffice:** It is important to stress here that the excess human biomatter [the "pulp" of the human tissue] causes extreme intestinal cramping [among other digestive trauma] and extreme nausea. In order to avoid these unpleasant side effects when administering stem cell dosages, the author of this experiment recommends that, at this stage, the blended mixture not be "overpulverized." Keeping the mixture chunky helps to separate the excess biomatter from the crucial stem cell juice.

It is worth noting that since this mixture will not be consumed straight from the blender, it does not matter how homogenized the mixture becomes at this point. In other words, at this stage, there is no way in which one can over-blend the appendage mixture. However, if one plans to drink the appendage mixture directly after straining, it is important to blend lightly and maintain chunky, separable elements.

at least 1,000mL [or 1L] of appendage extract¹.

8. Set the 1.5L Pyrex container of extract on a hot plate at the highest possible setting until the mixture comes to a rolling boil. At this point, the temperature should be reduced to the lowest setting possible to maintain a rolling boil and the mixture itself should be meticulously monitored².
9. Once the majority of the water boils out of the extract, the extract itself should start to look like a light salmon-colored sludge. Once this sludge reaches the consistency of honey, the Pyrex container should be removed from heat. The container should then be allowed to stand at room temperature for at least three days, undisturbed by vibrations or by light.
10. In the three day period during which the mixture stands undisturbed, the

salmon-colored sludge will begin to crystallize into stem cells³. After three days, you should see light salmon crystals that are slightly wet with water, but mostly solid. In order to finish drying the product, it is important to utilize the following equipment: a piece of large filter paper at least 7" in diameter⁴, a small scraping scapula, a large Buchner funnel, a vacuum filter flask, a vacuum, and rubber tubing.

11. After three days of allowing the mixture to stand and crystallize, use the scapula to scrape the wet salmon crystals onto the large filter paper. Press the filter paper and wet crystals snugly into the Buchner funnel, adding 1 or 2mL of distilled water over the filter paper to help it stick securely. The funnel is to be attached to the mouth of the vacuum filter flask. For further visual instruction on what the vacuum filter apparatus should look like when assembled, please consult Diagram 1A in the "Notes" section to follow.

¹ **1,000mL of appendage extract:** At this point, in order to produce a sufficient yield for at least one dose of stem cells it is important to have collect at least one liter of appendage juice extract by this step. If not, steps 1-7 may be repeated until a satisfactory volume of product is collected.

² **meticulously monitored:** The extract in the Pyrex container will, upon boiling, be severely reduced. It is important to monitor the extract as the volume is reduced so that the final product does not char or burn. If the Pyrex container's contents reduces too quickly, it may be impossible to prevent the charring of stem cell product which will, in turn, denature the extract and render the final stem cells useless. In the case however that the product does burn, it will turn a magenta color. At this point, the experiment should be restarted and performed with a greater amount of attention and precision.

³ **crystallize ... cells:** After three days of undisturbed crystallization, I expected to see that the specified salmon sludge would have transformed into hundreds of tiny, multi-faceted crystals. However, much to my surprise, most the contents of the Pyrex container evaporated, leaving a slight salmon stain on the glass. There was minimal crystallized product recovered at this point. After repeating the experiment a second time, there were no salmon stem cell crystals recovered.

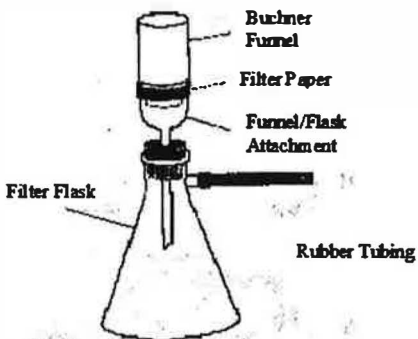
⁴ **7" in diameter:** Since the salmon stem cell crystals collected were of so small a number, I used a smaller piece of filter paper approximately 1" in diameter, a small Buchner funnel, and a vacuum filter flask of the microglassware variety.

12. When the vacuum filter flask apparatus is assembled, attach one end of the rubber tubing to the filter flask connection point [also exhibited in diagram 1A] and the other end to the vacuum outlet. Hold the vacuum filter flask firmly with one hand so that the apparatus will not tip and spill the crystallized product¹.

13. Turn on the vacuum and allow the wet crystals to shed their remaining water into the vacuum filter beaker. After about 30-45 seconds of vacuum filtration, the salmon crystals will be completely dry and ready for consumption. The stem cell crystal yield of this experiment is expected to be between 8-10g².

Notes

Diagram 1A:



¹ Hold...spill the crystallized product: The yield I received from the 1,000mL extract mixture was a relatively insignificant amount compared to the 8-10g theoretically recovered by the author of this experiment. And, after repeating the first part of the extraction for a second time with absolutely no crystal yield, I decided to move on with the experiment despite my apparent lack in product.

After inserting the filter paper into the funnel and attaching the funnel to the flask as designated in diagram 1A, I prepared the 3 feet of rubber tubing necessary for vacuum filtration. One side of the rubber tubing was securely fastened to the arm attachment on the filtration flask [also noted in diagram 1A], and the other end of the rubber tubing was securely attached to what I believed to be the vacuum extension conveniently located on my fume hood [next to three other nozzles, by the way, labeled "air", "water", and "gas"].

Rather than appropriately attaching the tubing to the "vacuum" nozzle on the fume hood, I mistakenly attached the tubing to the "air" nozzle. The crystal product, which was already a minute amount, was subsequently blown right out of the funnel and into the air as the filter paper it was sitting on went spinning through the lab atmosphere, finally landing silently and flat on the concrete floor before I had even consciously discerned what had transpired. Then, salvaging what I could [which was even less than what I had initially begun with], I proceeded to run the vacuum filtration yet another time taking extra care to attach the tubing to the "vacuum" nozzle.

Results

The resulting stem cell crystals can be taken sublingually, rectally, or smoked in order to treat and cure any autoimmune illness that targets many areas of the body³. Other acute illnesses require the crystals be dissolved in ethanol and injected as a solution directly into the afflicted organ or system via hypodermic needle.

² 8-10g: Quite contrary to the theoretical yield claimed by this procedure, the total weight of my recovered product was approximately 0.1g, adequate for 1.38% of a dose at 1.25% of the expected experimental yield.

³ cure...body: Due to the lack of experimental product, these methods of ingestion remain untested in the lab. With the exception of the acute injection [which has one

All of the above mentioned methods of administration yield promising results within 72 hours for any organ or tissue system in the human body.

One stem cell dose constitutes 7.2g of dry crystals. When dissolving 7.2g of stem cell crystals for injection solution preparation, use 10mL of ethanol to make the injectible stem cell solution.

2oz. of acetic acid [vinegar] should be taken directly after each dose of stem cell crystals administered¹.

Conclusion

The original manuscript was published and circulated amongst researchers interested in solving the "stem cell" problem without conclusion, and for a long time [until now] without verification². This document was seen as an illegal hypothetical breakthrough of modern times when initially published, and should be looked at similarly now.

hypothetical test in circulation which claims its "miraculous healing powers" for pericardial atrophy). Scientists have not conducted much research on methods best suited for using stem cells as treatment.

¹ **2oz. of acetic acid ... administered:** Although there is still research being conducted as to why the author of this experiment would have included this step regarding vinegar, it is hypothetically true that the author in question was under a lot of stress during the experimentation process and therefore more susceptible to gastrointestinal distress. Gastrointestinal [GI] stress could have motivated the experimenter to use homeopathic remedies such as drinking vinegar for the relief of their own GI complications which led to its inclusion as part of the stem cell treatments thought, by this experimenter, to cause intestinal cramping. The 2oz. of acetic acid may or may not be intended to prevent gastrointestinal distress on the patient being treated with any of the various methods of stem cell therapy.

While hundreds of thousands of Americans die of heart failure every year, laboratories around the world are scratching their heads, improving already effective formulas for Viagra, making dizzy circles rather than progressive scientific revolution. In this sense, the author that chose to publish this experimental procedure has surpassed the current expectations of a politically "safe" Science of Viagra and has therefore successfully managed to divorce politics [or legality for that matter] from normal scientific research. This is both individually commendable and promising for the future of Science. It is also worth noting that the information proceeding will not yield sufficient or easily measurable amounts of stem cell crystals for consumption. It is a procedure that longs for improvement.

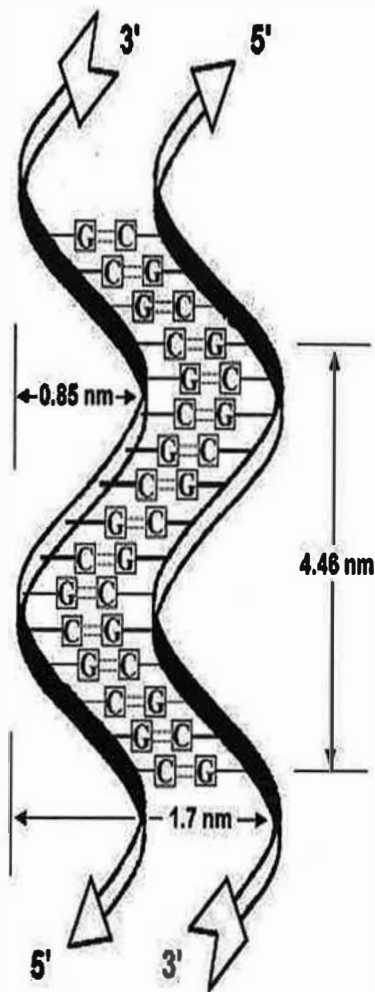
² **without verification:** Not only did the original version of this experiment circulate endlessly and inaccurately, it also circulated as an incomplete "conclusionless" collection which, contrary to popular belief, actually caused the document to escalate in popularity among the new generation of scientists who believe Science is at the best of their relativistic interpretations of it while, in all reality, its findings were inconclusive.

³ **death and putrefaction:** Although the experiment itself did not contain instructions for the most efficient disposal of excess body fragments, I will include one here.

The materials include: 3 gallons of hydrofluoric acid per 100lbs. of human biomass [both skeleton and tissue]; 1 large polyethylene trash bin; 1 gallon of potassium hydroxide base for every 1 gallon of acid used; and several large trash bags.

The hydrofluoric acid that will be used must be poured into the polyethylene trash bin. Second, the excess unused body mass should be placed carefully [one piece at a time and no splashing] into the hydrofluoric acid. Avoid skin contact [gloves are recommended but simultaneously optional]. After the skeletal and tissue matter have dissolved to satisfaction, neutralize the hydrofluoric acid with 1 gallon of potassium hydroxide per gallon of acid used. Allow sufficient time for the pH of the acid/base mixture to neutralize all the way to 7.

The human specimens used for the purposes of this experiment currently yield little beyond death and putrefaction³. And, until a more developed and efficient procedure for stem cell extraction is assembled, millions of Americans will continue to die with boners in their graves, holes in their hearts, and as fragments of former bodies in the lab.



To be certain of a neutral pH before discarding the liquid, you may want to test the mixture with a strip of litmus paper. After the pH of the liquid acid/base mixture has climbed to a neutral 7, the liquid may be discarded into several trash bags and disposed of in a secular waste facility.

I have included this procedure as I believe it should have been included in the original text as a means of preventing putrefaction and waste in the lab which always runs the risk of adversely affecting the purity of recovered product. Personally, I found this procedure quite efficient and useful.

Ituri, Pygmy Forest-Zaire (Congo), 1974

Maybe birth is like this.
The twilight undergrowth
erupts, bums
through pin-holed canopies
deep, red shafts that spatter the sodden
leaves like flecks of lava
constellations
shifting, falling, fire
against leaf shadows glowing
the way colors in dreams
gather weight, create
sound, stop time—

the jungle is blue,
suffused with a calm, almost
glacial cleanliness
dipped in shivery tones of silver

the moment, a thousand or more
years old. Crouched with a spear

behind the swollen roots of a fig tree
a warrior turns himself
into water, arrows
will pass
through him, harmlessly.

Richard F. Kilpatrick

Above, monkeys grow still, fall
silent; an invisible bird flaps away as the sky

cleaves apart, calves
like glaciers shearing off, crashing
the forest with reverberate booms
dislodging a confetti of leaves
diluted in water-rinsed colors of indigo ink,
shadows deep as the bluing on a gun,

the rhetoric of storm.

In the after-rain I walk
as the sleepless walk
repeating everything I say
before I see it.

in the olive green, broken-zippered suitcase under my bed

Elizabeth Caffey

an aqua leather sketch book from when i liked to draw,
a few tubes of drying red, black and white oil paint, missing their caps,

a note on crisp vanilla paper i forgot to give you and one gray and creased you gave back,
an unused plane ticket torn in half and a used train ticket still whole in an envelope,

a watch with a cracked face, bent second hand and dead battery,
a few yellowing books i might still finish -if i ever get around to it.

The horrid sound o' fair compared to the deep.
The sacks of wet leaves.

She stared at the island in the lake
until the water turned hard and she turned to stone.

She strode, slid, crossed the road to sell her soul
crushed the 3rd, 5th, and 7th note until they were blue

When I came to see her body, god let me go.
I played it. I got rid of it. I'll do it again tonight.

Gutbucket Debt

Theo Johnson



Armadillo

John William Young

Daddy's red and white 1955 Ford Fairlane with big white sidewall tires slowly lumbers down a lonely dirt road toward Lake Conroe. The long, winding worn path cuts through a forest of pristine pines interspersed with a smattering of white birch. Grass wet with dew separates the two ribbons of sod from the trees. The old man drives slowly so he doesn't pitch up any dust. The soft, moist topsoil covers packed mud so there won't be any dust kicked up this morning, but I don't dare say anything to him about that fact. His temper is such that I have learned to bite my tongue. Because of his reactions to my misdeeds, I often make a choice to be silent and as a result have been labeled "*shy*" by anyone close to our family.

Power pole after power pole – zigzag against the western tree line looking out of place. The sun rises above treetops penetrating lower branches, blinding anyone looking directly into them. Remnant fog hovers over the power lines. A pair of woodpeckers creates a piercing percussionist's symphony on a lone birch tree.

It is a brisk morning, but I am not cold.

Suddenly, Daddy pulls the Fairlane to a halt. The dust remains on the ground. Squinting through his cheap filling station sunglasses, the old man stares at the tree line, and excitedly whispers.

"Quick boy – get your gun."

I reach into the back seat and pull out my new .22 single shot, lever action Winchester, Daddy gave me for Christmas that year. The only other

time I had an opportunity to shoot it was on Christmas day in Galveston Island's bay. Daddy was so excited he drove the whole family out from Houston for a day trip to shoot the new gun. Mama didn't really want to go. She too was a "shy" woman. My four younger siblings were just happy to get out of our captive house. They were a little overactive on the trip and Daddy had to pull over a few times to "straighten them out." He kept reminding them that "children need to be seen and not heard," and that the purpose of this trip was to "try out Big Brother's new gun."

Funny thing was, most of the day the old man had possession of the gun and it almost seemed like it was his and not mine. But Daddy was Daddy, he was going to do things "his way" and he'd be the first to tell you that "he had everything figured out and under control."

Irony joined our family that day when Daddy got the Fairlane's tires stuck in the sand in one of Galveston's back bays. The tide came in and our whole family almost perished before a search party finally rescued us around three a.m. I wondered if Daddy had that part "figured out." But, that is another story.

My gun is loaded and ready for bear. Of course there hadn't been any bear around Lake Conroe in years.

"Right tree line – Boy. Two o'clock."

"Whaaat ... is it, Dad?"

"Sssshhh – Armadilla."

He calls it an "armadilla." There is no way I am going to correct him and say "O –armadillo – O – Dad." Once, a spilled glass of milk at the dinner table almost cost me my left eye. No way am I going to interrupt his train of thought and question his intelligence. I only have one good eye left.

"Open the door, kid. Sneak to the hood and climb up."

I do what I am told. As I slide across the hood of the Fairlane, the wetness glides me clear over the other side. I fall to the muddy ground and luckily am able to hold the gun upright. When I jump back up I look at Daddy's face and I can't tell what he is thinking. He is somewhere between disgust and hysterical laughter. Embarrassment clouds my mind as I try to

knock the mud off of my tan jeans. I know if I don't get the mud off, Daddy won't let me back in the car.

"Hurry up, now. He's still sitting there."

I climb back up on the hood of the Fairlane and, with my good eye, line up my aim. I keep praying that the rising sun won't blind my view. As a bead of sweat runs down my forehead, I draw the small thick body of the armadillo into my gun-sight. The poor little soldier of the forest sits in the clearing, basking in the early sun, impervious to danger thinking his layers of leathery hide are protecting him. With a sigh, I squeeze the trigger.

BLAM...

The acoustics of the two-sided canyon of pine trees makes the echo of the gunshot sound more like a .303 instead of a .22. My bullet penetrates the protective armor of the poor defenseless animal. He runs for a couple of feet before falling with a thud. His armor does not protect him that day. Nothing does.

"Atta boy - you got 'em, Son!!!"

Daddy is beaming from ear to ear. Finally I have done something he is proud of. I let out a cheer.

"Woohoo!!!"

Maybe the old man really does love me. As I peer across the open field to the tree line, I see the blood-splattered armadillo's lifeless body. I feel numb. This unfortunate innocent animal's death makes daddy happy. And even though I was happy that Daddy was happy; my hands, feet, nose and ears suddenly feel frostbitten.

I wonder if this is what a cold-blooded killer feels like.

The old man makes me sit on the hood of the car the rest of the way to the lake. I am the hood ornament. Daddy sees me — tall and proud.

BLAM... BLAM... BLAM...

Every quarter of a mile or so, Daddy pulls over and forces me to shoot more “*armadillas.*” I kill at least thirty on this momentous day. Blood and guts cover tree trunks and power poles. Their lifeless bodies discarded like old hubcaps. Daddy hoops and hollers all morning long. He is so proud of me.

But I have a secret. I am sick to my stomach and on the verge of throwing up. I can't let him know. I have to protect myself. As we head on down the road to the lake the old man grins at me and I smile ambiguously. He stares at my reaction a little too long, penetrating my armor of deceit.

Does he know?

The sun is coming up and I am freezing.

Impossible Places

Irving Figueroa

A fly
Struggles to push its body through a window
To penetrate a transparent
Partition and,
With its tired, trembling body,
Fill a nook in space—
The violent intransience of which
Vibrates,
Almost within reach,
Of his six
Hairy
Feet.

What he pines for,
Beyond the comfort of my halls,
The sallow globe, immutable in dust, on my desk,
Or the calm vase of flowers wilting tamely,

Is either beyond me
Or already dead.

But I will let him keep pushing piously,
Despite the coarse cadavers of
Flies and moths on the windowsill,

While I plan a trip to Heaven.



Winter Foothills

for Tobi Cogswell

We climbed out of sierras, bending down
on a steep switchback to look for fossils.
Then in the twilight of vanishing day
she gathered close in a downcanyon wind,
the sun like brass in the cottonwood limbs.
Our shadows trailed us through the arroyo,
their molten forms warping on the cutbank.

Above us, summits whispered of blizzards.
That day's hunt only yielded trace fossils –
those death masks of vacant anatomies,
though I'd promised a trove of trilobites.
But her blue eyes have long endured my schemes,
transfixed in my evenings of soft words,
the way storms come when ice might split the trees.

Jeffrey C. Alfier

Meat, Tortillas and Margaritas

A kitchen with a dinning room table set next to a counter. Two women sit next to each other, drinking margaritas. A bottle of tequila and margarita mixture sits on the counter next to them. They do not take up the entire stage. Stage right is a backdrop mural of Spanish colonial architectural scenery of Puebla. Vibrant rustic fall colors fill the stage. The entire stage is under low yellow light, the sound of crickets and traditional music known as Trio, are softly playing. Evening.

LAUREN: I read a couple of good stories the other day de Ángeles Mastretta. *(She drinks from her glass. The kitchen lights fade as a portrait image of Ángeles Mastretta flash to the right of the stage on a canvas screen surfaced on the upper right hand of the mural.)*

YULI: *(Under soft yellow light she stares at the image of Mastretta.)* I love her work, she so ... *(Dreamingly.)* amazing.

LAUREN: *(Lights brighten.)* Yeah. Me too. Don't you think she always has a good moral at the end of her stories- sort of like a punch line that applies to all our situations ... she really gets to you, deep inside. *(Images disappear. A man and a woman walk slowly in front of the mural image. They are wearing 1950's traditional Mexican style clothing. They sit on a bench in front of the mural and hold hands, mime having a conversation. They sit under a midnight blue sky of stars hovering over their heads.)* I think these two short stories I read really apply to your situation. Sometimes it helps if—

Guadalupe Marquez

YULI: (*Sighs and rolls her eyes. Takes the bottle of tequila and places it on the counter.*) Yes, I know. But do you know that? (*Pause.*) Sometimes I just need a shoulder to cry on, someone to *listen* to me. I don't need help or advice or *menos* to be judged—

LAUREN: I'm not... I'm not judging. I'm giving you a point of view from the outside, just someone on the outside looking in... you know?

YULI: Well, the curtains and doors are shut *chiquita*. So you're peeping in, like a peeping tom, perv! (*She drinks from her glass.*)

LAUREN: Will you at least let me tell you about these two stories... I read it in her book "Women With Big Eyes"—

YULI: Ay! Okay, tell me.

LAUREN: (*Takes a drink from her glass.*) Okay... well, there's this lady who is cheating on her—

YULI: (*With movements of agitation, she comes close to Lauren's face pronounced with agitation.*) shut up, *mensa!* Sophie and Nani are still awake and they can hear you... can you just not mention c-h-e-a-t-i-n-g... please? (*She takes a drink from her glass.*)

Mensa!

LAUREN: Ay, okay, okay... there was a woman who kept going to... the grocery store ... to buy ... *MEAT*—

YULI: You piece of...! Plus... in my case, I don't buy *MEAT*... (*She runs her hands through the center of her breast.*) I buy *ricas tortillas!* Mmmm!

They both giggle.

LAUREN: And I'm a piece of crap! Tortillera! Okay, before I tell you ... make a couple more, and make mine de limon. Oye, and I'll give you an extra dollar to put some more liquor in it, cheapie!

YULI: Okay, okay- alcoholic! I'll have the strawberry this time ... since I don't have de CHERRY anymore!

They laugh.

YULI: (*Walks to the blender and pours tequila and margarita mix in it.*) You know ... I don't know what the big deal is ... I thought it didn't count if it was a woman. (*Drinks the remainder of her margarita.*)

LAUREN: Make the margaritas will you.

YULI: (*Placing margarita mixture, tequila, and ice in the blender.*) Have you checked out the new store down the street? They have cute clothes ... I bought this skirt there.

LAUREN: (*She takes a drink from her glass as she looks Yuli up and down.*) It looks cute on you ... I like those shoes too ... Girl, I don't have money to go shopping right now. You know ... He comes home so late ... yet no money—

YULI: I'm telling you! Looks like you need to read *yourself* those stories

LAUREN: (*She drinks the remainder of her margarita.*) I don't think they apply to us, I think he's just— (*Interrupted by the blender.*)

YULI: Sorry... what were you saying?

LAUREN: Nada... let me just tell you about the stories.

YULI: (*She comes to the table with two drinks.*) Can't you feel the difference when he's not around? I feel so free. He's not around bugging me to clean the house or make him dinner or have sex with him. Nasty! He's probably getting his groove on right now... (*Mocks a man's voice and poses like a rico swave*) Oye, mamcita. You look good mami. Wha? M... married? Na baby... but I'm looking for a wife. You want to spend the rest of your life with me?

Both giggle.

Hey man, as long as he leaves me alone, he can do whatever he wants.

LAUREN: Don't act like you don't care because you do.

YULI: Sure... I care... but not as much as I used to. You know, one day you just wake up and you're fed up. Men are all the same, big kids wearing big pants—just so they can say they wear them! You'll see, you'll probably go through the same changes— eventually.

LAUREN: No. Miguel is different. And plus, if he did, I would just leave and not be with him anymore. I won't take that from him or anybody! (*She takes a drink.*)

YULI: Come on... Wake up Chiquita ... everybody's the same. They are all alike. I'm just fighting for women's liberation.

LAUREN: Women's liberation! Yeah right! Plus, he wouldn't. I've checked and I don't see anything weird with him. No weird calls on his phone bill. He just calls me, his mom, and some guys he works with. His clothes never really smell weird, and no stains.

YULI: You check his stuff out? Why? (*She takes a drink.*) Come on chula. He comes home at three in the morning! I don't know mami ... the restaurant closes at ten, so what takes him so long to get home?

LAUREN: (*She shrugs and takes a long drink from her glass.*) He cleans up his station. Then they have to count the money ... some waiters leave even later. Anyways ... let me just tell you the story—

Tri music is heard a bit louder. Stage right, the man gets up and leaves the woman sitting. The woman places her hands over her face and cries.

There's this lady, and her husband leaves her

An older woman steps on stage, stops in front of the woman crying. The woman stands up, and the two women hug. They both sit on the bench and mime having a conversation. The older woman holds the young woman's hands.

She moves in with her divorced aunt, who had left and divorced her husband years before.

The woman asks her aunt why she divorced her husband and face scrutiny and criticism from the community. You know how it is in Mexico, old school.

YULI: *(She takes a long drink and slams the cup down to indicate she finished it. Music is lowered, faintly heard on stage.)* Ahhh. Does it give you any ideas? And when does your man eat, anyway? Or should I say who does he eat? Yum!

LAUREN: Whatever! He calls me all the time ... so I don't know when he would have the time to do anything. *(She takes a long drink.)*

YULI: I call Tim all the time. *(She grins and drinks from her glass.)*

LAUREN: *(Pause.)* You do?

YULI: Yeap ... *All the time. Even when I'm doing it. I need to make myself as normal as possible. Plus, he thinks he's the center of my world, mi dios, my one and only. He's so arrogant he has no clue he has lost me.*

LAUREN: Lost you? I guess it's possible to fall out of love. But how do you know? *(Volume of music is raised.)* Anyway ... the story might help you understand your situation.

Stage right. The older woman mimes speaking to the other woman, while she looks up towards the sky.

Her aunt replies that she left her husband because she did not want to die with a frown on her face.

YULI: Nice. *(She drinks from her glass and looks at Lauren with a sly grin.)* Well, I know what I want on my face when I die! *(Tilts her head back and places her hands on her face.)* Ahhh. *(Looks at LAUREN.)* What's the book called again?

LAUREN: (*Nervously, she drinks from her glass. She responds slurring.*)
“Women With Big Eyes”

YULI: Maybe you should open your eyes like her—really, really wide—asi mira. (*She stretches her eyes open with her hands.*)

LAUREN: (*She takes a drink.*) Only your guilt speaks... let me tell you then! (*She takes another drink from her glass. Phone rings...they each look around for their cell phones.*)

YULI: It’s my baby! Let me see what she—

LAUREN: Don’t answer it! (*She puts her hand over YULI’s preventing her from answering the phone. There is a long silence as they look at each other with puzzled gestures.*)

YULI: I won’t. I’ll just call back later ... when I’m more buzzed! (*She takes a drink.*)

LAUREN: You know. You change my mood all the time. You make me not trust—

YULI: (*Slurring more pronounced.*) I? Me? Why me? I don’t tell him to get home at three in the morning! He doesn’t even play it off... Cabron! Why do you take it?

LAUREN: (*She fondles her phone. Opens it and shuts it.*) It’s been ten years. I can’t believe after so many years someone would do you like this.

YULI: Is the ringer on?

LAUREN: (*Looks at her phone and nods.*) Yeap. (*She takes a drink.*)

YULI: He's not calling you, ha? Hmm ... (*She takes a drink.*)

LAUREN: Didn't you say if you cheat—

YULI: Man! I said don't mention—

LAUREN: Ay, okay, sorry! If people ... “eat burritos”, they tend to call all the time?

YULI: Yeah. Or you tend not to call at all. There are extremes with everything! They are all different!

LAUREN: I thought they are all the SAME? (*She smirks and takes the last drink from her glass.*)

YULI: One more, chiquita?

LAUREN: Yeah ... But hold the tortillas- TORTILLERA! (*They laugh.*)

YULI: (*She walks to the blender drinking the last of her margarita.*) You know ... some women in the gay community take offense when they are called “tortilleras.” I'm just saying. So tell me then!

LAUREN: Tell you what?

YULI: The story!

LAUREN: Oh yea. You know ... the beauty of this story is that each is about a different woman, her tias, all from Puebla.

YULI: I want to go Puebla! I heard it's beautiful- the scenery-

LAUREN: Me too. Hurry up with those will (*She is interrupted by the blender.*)

YULI: (*Pours the blended margaritas in two glasses.*) Go on.

LAUREN: Oh, yeah. (*The soft yellow lights become brighter on right stage. Music grows louder.*) So then one day, after a year or some time has passed the woman is cleaning her aunt's house

The older woman leaves and the other walks, picks up a broom on the ground, and starts to sweep. Paintings of Siqueiros, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera's are projected on the canvas above the mural.

And she hears knocking on the door.

Knocking is heard on stage. The woman holding the broom walks to the side of the stage and is met by her husband. He is wearing a button up guayabera with matching white rayon pants. He smirks and she stares at him with shocked gestures in her face.

Her husband just stands there with a smile, like if he just met her for the first time and like nothing ever happened!

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YULI: Typical! Okay, ready or not.

LAUREN: Are you buzzed?

YULI: Hell yea ... big time! I think the girls are asleep now. *(She walks and stands close to Laura, hands her one of the drinks, flirtatiously.)* Salud mami.

LAUREN: *(She smiles shyly and lifts her cup.)* Salud ... *(She shakes her head and continues to smile bashfully.)* ...you're silly.

YULI: No ... I'm just enjoying life ... you should try it. Really.

LAUREN: What made you do it? Did you know all your life?

YULI: I'm just fed up with them. You just become fed up with them. You know?

LAUREN: If you do it, does it mean you're ... gay?

YULI: No. It means you are free at last.

LAUREN: *(She's slurring.)* Yea ... but why tortilla style? I mean ... is it the same? Does it ... feel the same?

YULI: Better! I did it because I love myself... *(She stands up, dances, and runs her hands from her neck through the center of her breasts.)* And I know what I want, so I know what to give.

LAUREN: Really? Oh... I guess that's true. *(She takes another drink.)*

YULI: Yeah. You know... We have more in common and... they... are all the same.

LAUREN: Aren't you being just like *them* though? Cheating is cheating.

YULI: Nope... I think it's different. I think there is something that allows for this. It's like bonding and giving and actually receiving... Can you imagine someone knowing exactly what you want?

LAUREN: Oh. I have wondered. *(Pause.)* We have been friends for a long time. I come through, don't I? Remember when we used to play house, just the two of us?

YULI: *(She finishes her drink.)* You do come through... and yeah, I remember.

LAUREN: What if I'm... What if I'm tired too.

YULI: I can help you out if you need help deciding.

LAUREN: Huh. *(Pause.)* What are friends for ... right?

YULI: How about a shot this time? Have you ever done a body shot? *(She picks up the bottle of tequila and two shot glasses and fills them up.)*

LAUREN: *(She takes one shot glass.)* Body shot? So, show me *(Pause.)* what do I do?

YULI: I would love to show you mamacita— *(She picks up slices of lime and a salt shaker.)* Let me show you while you tell me the rest of story. How does it end? You said her husband came back after he left her and what did she do?

Stage right, the woman faces the man and smiles, drops the broom, turns, and walks away. The man stands with his arms hung with shocked gestures on his face. Trio music gets louder.

LAUREN: She told him it was over ... *(The two women kiss. Kitchen lights are dimmed.)*

She told him that she did not want to die with a frown on her face ... that she wanted to die smiling.

YULI: *(The two women face each other momentarily.)* Mmmm. Good for her. Good for her. *(The women continue kissing. Trio continues to play in the background. The sound of keys followed by a door opening is heard. The door is slammed. A man's voice is heard, "Yuli! Daddy's home. Get up you lazy pig and make me something to eat. Yuli! I'm hungry!")*

Lights Out.





Strikes

Richard Boada

I stood in the cab of my mother's pickup pressed between her back and the vinyl bucket seat. My small arms clung to her shoulders like a harness, my face flushed, suitcase on the floor. Her hair smelled of shampoo and strong perfume that stung the throat and I picked at the black mole on her small neck with my finger, tugged at the latched silver chain. Outside the windows, tall volcanoes always wore snow but only ash fell from the sky as clouds paced over Quito. Diesel trucks carried live chickens and hogs. White feathers flew to our windshield, red hen legs clawed through the wire cages. I tightened my arms around her as she shifted gears. Tighter when we crashed through a stack of burning tires. Tighter as brooms and sticks beat the side doors. I saluted green and black military police jeeps. Men with helmets carried guns. Men with masks carried sticks. People ran in the smoked streets throwing rocks.

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James Pinkerton

Oh, the girl scout sent love notes and
ran me around the tether court.
The way she giggled, I wanted a kiss.
I kissed her back, I thought she was playing
as I chased her around the tether court.
She tripped and fell: smudged dirty tears,
skinned knees—weren't we just playing?
The principal said he would call the police
for the smudged dirty tears and torn merit sash.
If I didn't confess to what her father called rape,
the principal said I would end up in prison.
Father in a fury promised to punish.
Sent home from school, I dreaded his coming.
Furious father gave me three hard strokes.
She was the one that sent love notes in class:
the way she whispered, I wanted a kiss . . .

When I Was Ten

After the fall
After the stench of early morning
Rising
The Prince
Wipes the
Midnight drool from
His dry cracked mouth
A sheer aftertaste of night falls
Across her lips
She recalls
The slipper
The dwarves
The man behind the beast
And the evil witch of a stepmother
After she steps out of that cold
Dark bed
An after thought stretches its presence into her
Budding mind
This is it
A cold prince
A loveless life
The spark
The flame
Will soon be gone
After she consumes herself in a hot vibrant
Morning shower
Her life seems to be heading towards
Happily ever after

A Modern Fairy Tale

Jessica Bergman

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Text Messages That Came With the Cellphone

Junior Lee Klegseth

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1. *Call me when you get this*

Dear Glum Schwartzkopf vex'd by NJ IQ

I hope you find yourself in there. I know you are in there, but that doesn't mean I can find you. Are you meant to be found? My therapist suggested I write. He's a mutt we got at the pound; fixed, all his shots, no trans fats, pedigreed and MFA certified. The papers that came with him read, "People can't endure their own littleness unless they can translate it into meaningfulness."

2. *When can we meet*

I missed the last episode of ♀↔♂ last night. Can you bring it? The part I missed and am anxious to see goes exactly like this (and was, in fact, hilariously tragic):

Did you or did you not hit the hermaphrodite?

Yes.

Yes you did?

Yes I did and not.

You did and not?

Absolutely and with total uncertainty.

I hardly see how that's possible.

It most indefinitely is not and always will be impossible, though I'll grant you highly improbable.

I am completely uncertain as to your meaning.

So you are certainly uncertain. True?

That is the absolute truth.

Read your law books: "The only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths."

Absurd.

"That's how it is on this bitch of an earth"

3. *Where are you*

Tragic stuff. Everywhere, tragedy. Our dog chased a parakeet into our oven and had sex in disgustingly irreverent positions. The parakeet moaned in Russian and quoted Turgenev. The inside is clean, in case you're wondering. We used Easy-Off. They plan to put it in a memoir entitled *Dog, Parakeets and Other Entropic Explorations*, with the epigraph "either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do anything."

4. *Where is the meeting*

At least barring anything to prove it I'll leap to that assumption. I'll admit to fatigue at times. 11,900,000 results. Even if I could do one a minute it would take us over twenty-two years. Still, I continue my search—I so want the answer. Don't we all? Some kind of resolution. Do we want all of life to be π ? I asked my son to help me. You remember my son? I had two, of course, but we lost one to identity.

5. *Talk to you soon*

Yesterday Bob told Carol she was being facetious. Tim got upset because after applying an arbitrary absurdity logarithm that strikes out every *t, i, o, u* and substitutes *e* for the first occurrence of *a* in certain words, Willy claimed Susan had in fact called Roger *feces*. Steve's in school now that Ruth graduated, writing stories in the shapes of pyramids and women's periods and spearheads.

6. *I am late and will be there in — minutes*

Sad day for the folks working in the mines of the Metanarrative range. Their attorneys, Lyotard and Sons, say their clients have given up hopes

after the company lost "its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal." A spokesperson will cry on the news tomorrow and scream, "where, after the Metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?" Some former employees will be offered new jobs, performing lab experiments on fabrications, with mixed results.

7. *What is your number*

It's an experimental novel I wrote in the air. I left it in the head so next time you take a piss you can read it. Careful with the splatter, though, I don't like my work soiled. I've used every technique available to make it meaningless. A drop of piss could change everything.

8. *I am here*

Once a hermaphrodite wandered from the house and found itself lost. "There is no future for me, no pronoun, no restroom," it cried. A voice answered, "Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off," but no sooner had that voice assuaged the hermaphrodite's fears than another voice, an orchestral cacophony of static on the air, responded, "The absurd enlightens me on this point: there is no future."

9. *Sorry I missed you*

No point. Absolutely pointless. Not a point in sight. For two thousand years civilization wandered blind through the streets, uttering lamentations, so defiled with blood that none could touch their garments, none could tell the meaning of the symbols. Then came the age of enlightenment, not to be confused with the Age of Enlightenment. Understand?

10. *Thank you*

The paternity suit ended in a hung story, following this

stunning conclusion to the case (and I quote):

—I fear I must give you an exact account of the road which led to it; —or to drop my metaphor... —for it will do very well in either place; —but then if I reserve it for either of those parts of my story, —I ruin the story I'm upon, —and if I tell it here—I anticipate matters, and ruin it there.

—What would your worships have me to do in this case?

—Tell it, Mr. Shandy, by all means.

—You are a fool, Tristram, if you do.

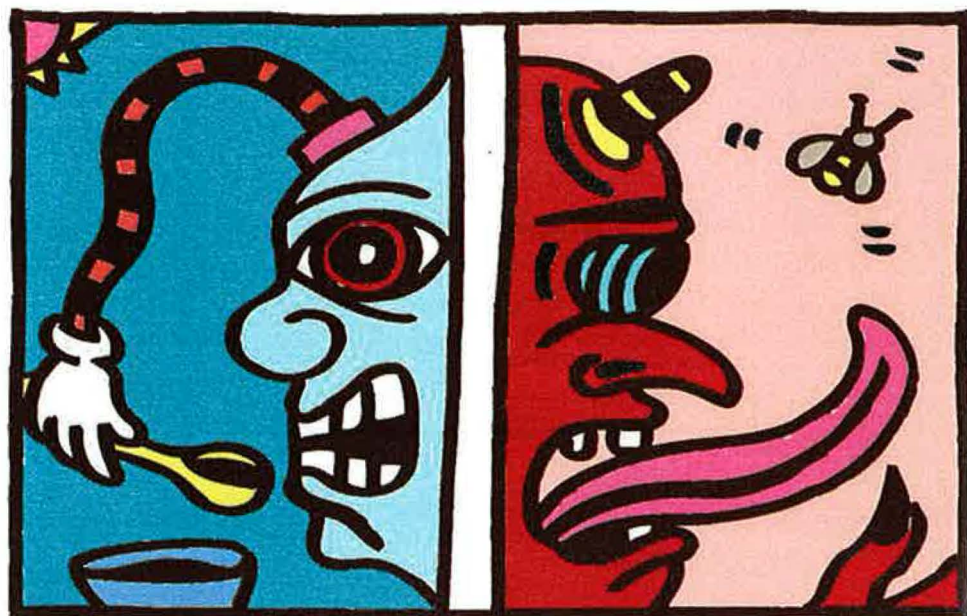
A debate continues, of course, as to whether the story was ever told.

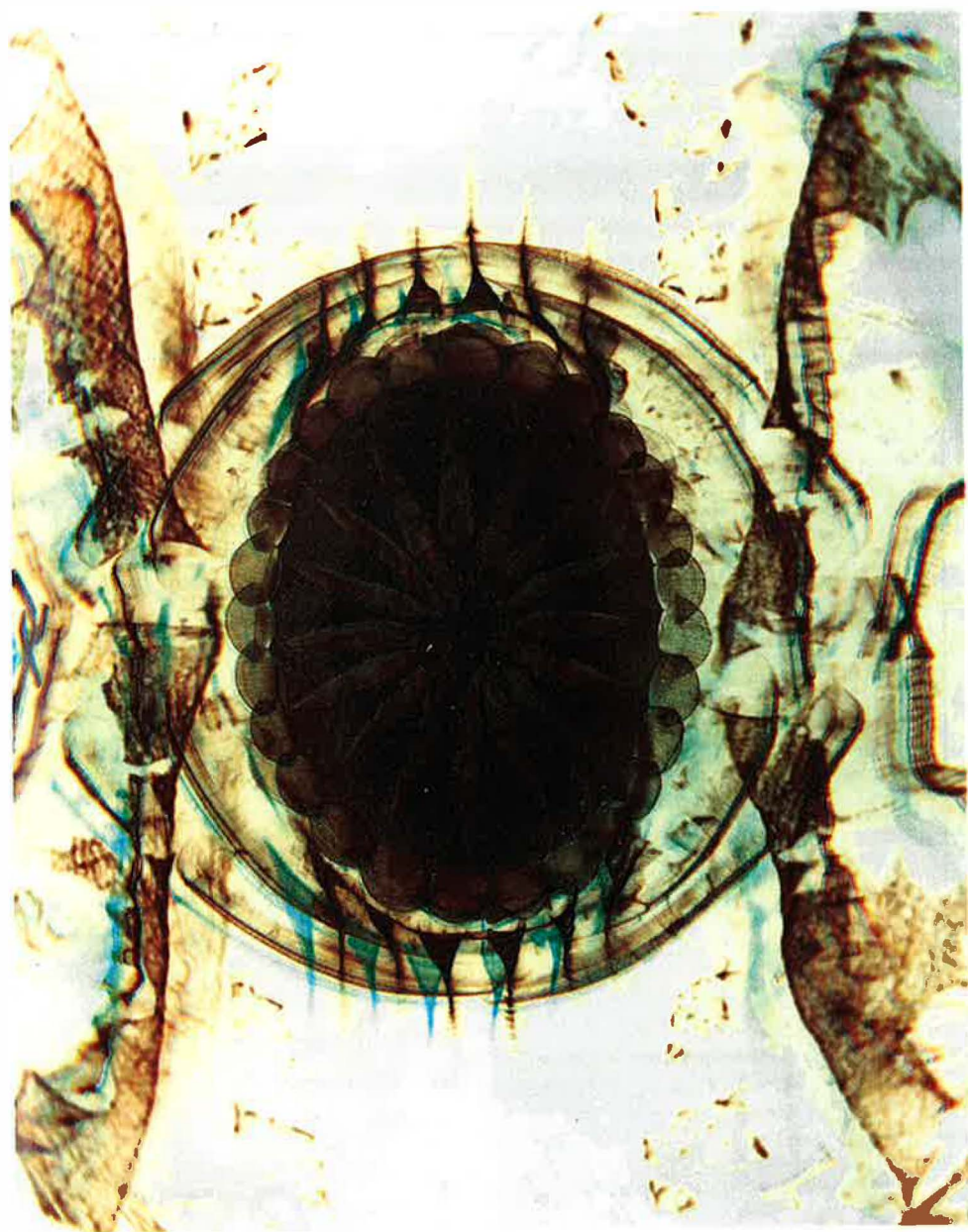
One thing we know for certain



Battery low. To find out what this means, press

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Spring in Japan

Every spring
the islands
are created

under the pink
snowstorm
of *sakura*.

Fuzzy-
haired air
drifts away, even

the *shika* trot
down the hills
in brilliant
yellow.

I can hardly feel
the throb of
a train, chain
of idle gloom—

the solitary
abyss I climbed
out of and
will return to—

Cynthia Shoko Hoda

but it is
the knowledge
of the doom
that lets me relish
this time, this
moment,

the spring in Japan.
The warbler's
ticklish tunes

freshen the fields
with the dew
of rice

as swallowtail
falter
and retreat
to the sun.

Over the heap
is a whole new
season.

A Perfect Crisis

Paul Castillo

The sexy phoenix's discordant
saxophone fractures

a reactor's factory.

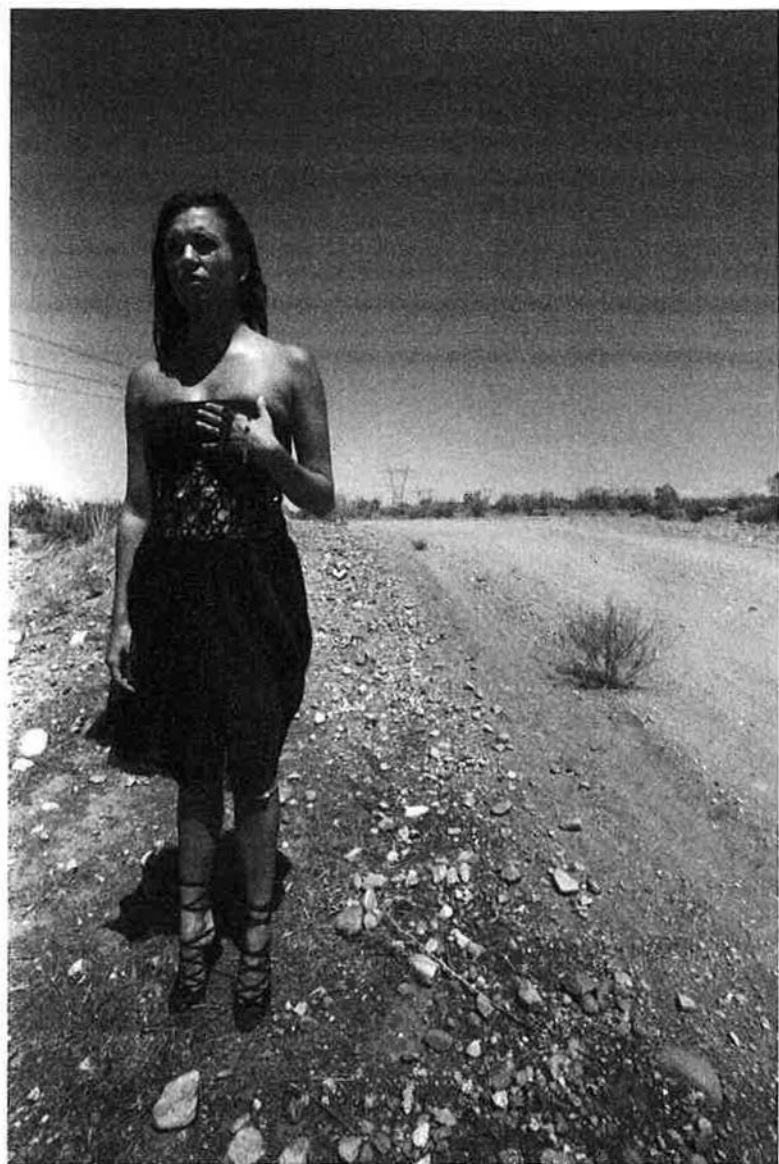
Magnum tectonic benders ripple with avarice.

An alcoholic hiatus
for levels and controls?

Those memory membranes make schnapps reveal bile.

A mandatory heartpour transforms
into pandering's lies.





Paper and Ink

Smoke twinkles out from between his razor teeth, and someone chalks up a cue. The felt is water-stained, the beer is flat, and the music is his. That voice, ladies and gentlemen! A wise old jaguar, he snarls these notes into the sepia air via cracked black vinyl, his tobacco voice acid-etching scenes of carnies and busted streetlights into the twenty-or-so pairs of drunken ears. The cue ball shatters the mood, and a smile forms over that jagged under-bite, its owner leaning precariously onto a juke. The song was someone else's nickel, but it was worth every penny. All five, anyway.

Now easing into his creaky sixties after bulldozing through nine full lives, this man, stuffed inconspicuously beneath that iconic fedora, teeters to the bar. He is at once a mixture of blues and bourbon, neon and Spackle. Ordering a thimble full of gasoline, the troubadour winks at the bartender with the dishwater blonde hair, then puts his arm around some broken soldier, to whom he growls a story about ancient Oldsmobiles and Mexico in the early sixties. "I got this eye scratched out by a haggard old hound dog in Mexico," the new friend responds with a rolling tongue and a laugh, and the Cyclops orders them a pair of fresh liquids.

"To the bastard canines of this world," our man muses, as the two upend their glasses. "And to the first real goddamned drink anyone's bought me in years."

This hero of the aural sector has dressed in rags, satin, and satin rags. He's played on jalopy pianos and Louis XIV trombones and on two-by-fours. He's been drunk on the moon, lost at the bottom of the world, and he's slept in your skin. Right now, he's betting his King Cobra belt in a drunken game of 8-Ball, and the knots on his knuckles almost allow him to grip the cue. A monocular fan club picks its nails

free of coal as it chomps on rancid peanuts from underneath the bar. The troubadour ignites a tiny explosion on the end of his smoke with the flick of a corn-kernel fingernail; he breaks from the left, and sinks a fourteen and a ten. Someone farts.

Thirty minutes later, the man's limping home, his chrome-winged Cuban heels swathed in a thin film of beer, holding his jeans up by the waist. His mind flickers off in the direction of that bitter rodeo clown he knew back in Pomona, the one with the mole on his neck shaped like Oklahoma. The boy'd arrive every night in the parlour with a fistful of cash and, flashing a confident glare, leave it right there on the table, white makeup dripping from his eyes. It was the same with the rest of those holy fools, anyway. Sad days. Good days.

The wife and kids wait for him at home, a stucco-hued mountain built by the cleanest kind of money attainable. Bought with the natural progression out of this place, through stubborn faith.

Some self-important, carefully unshaven kid in skinny jeans bumps into him on the street, and the dream is officially over. He signs a pack of Marlboros with a smirk, and the kid scampers off with a cell phone in his ear. A middle-aged Joe wrapped in black Ray-Bans passes by, eyeing the troubadour's soul patch territorially. The hero doffs his cap to the hipster with an angular bow, his elbows and knees jutting out, swinging, as if attached to the wiry whims of a puppeteer. Whistling Hoagy Carmichael, he flips his cap into the air and continues to sway down the sidewalk. His house looms through the mist at the top of this hill, and he can smell his wife's hair already. Cloves and leather, cloves and leather. Paper and ink. Ha!



In poetry I am serious.
This is serious business.
Serious poetry is serious.

Read my incredible rhyming.
I hope it doesn't make you distressed.
In poetry I am serious.

Poem hijack! Naow its taim for teh inside joking,
mosly memes from teh interwebs.
Serious poetry is serious.

No matter whut happins, ceiling cat is watching.
So, I herd u laik mudkips?
In poetry I am serious.

Leonidas is shoop da wooping.
"I'm a firin' ma lazas," he says.
Serious poetry is serious.

Oh noes! I can't tink of moar memes!
Oh well. Just remember to please think of the kittens.
In poetry I am serious.
Serious poetry is serious.

kthxbai
or in b4 NSFW
Paul Castillo



In Character

Javiera Torres

Characters:

JULIE: Theater Assistant Director/ wannabe actress. A little unsure of herself (*Cute and bubbly when imitates Helga.*)

JACK: Actor. Energetic, slightly wicked and sadist. (*German accent when imitates the MC.*)

TED: Actor. Suave, in control of the situation

Ensemble:

-3 WOMEN: strike a pose on stage as showgirls on “Cabaret girls will come on stage.”

-3 MEN: taunting, intimidating on “she’s too dark to pass”

An empty theatre building. The stage has chairs and props scattered. JULIE enters to clean up after a rehearsal. She hums the tune of “America” from West Side Story. JULIE holds up her arms as if she were holding up a skirt. She does a Latin dance to the song she’s humming.

JACK enters without JULIE seeing him. He watches her for a while, and then decides to scare her.

JACK: Julie!

JULIE: Ahh! (*Catches her breath.*) Oh my God ...

JACK: (*Laughs.*)

JULIE: That's not funny. You scared the crap out of me!

JACK: Whatcha doin'?

JULIE: We just finished rehearsal. Walker told me to what are *you* doing here?

JACK: Watching the rehearsal. Man, Anita sucks.

JULIE puts away chairs and props during the following.

JULIE: She's trying her best.

JACK: During the rape scene, she didn't even get scared.

JULIE: Jack, there's no rape scene in West Side Story.

JACK: Then what were they ...? Oh right! They were gonna kill her.

JULIE: No. Jack, Anita doesn't get killed



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JACK: But that makes things more fun.

JULIE: Jack, just go home ok. I gotta lock up.

JACK: (*Swings his arm around her.*) Come on, we got the whole stage to ourselves. (*Does a can-can kick.*) woo-hoo! Let's party.

JULIE: (*Pulls away.*) Alone ... with you? Kinda scary ...

JACK: Scary? Please. You know what we used to do in here?

JULIE: Hm?

JACK: After every one left for the night ...

JULIE: What.

JACK *walks upstage and imitates the Cabaret's Master of Ceremonies with a German accent. He sings to the audience.*

JACK: (*Singing.*) Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome!

JULIE: You're such a nerd!

JACK: Am not! It's our ritual... me and Ted and Lynda

JULIE: Lynda?

JACK: Yeah, we did scenes and shit.

JULIE: Whatever happened to her?

JACK: (*Pause. Smiles knowingly.*) I donno. (*Sings.*) Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome. Im Cabaret, au Cabaret, to Cabaret.

JULIE: (*Laughs.*) You're so weird.

JACK: No I'm not... try it!

JULIE: I'm not doing Cabaret with you!

JACK: C'mon you should've been a Cabaret girl. Like Fritsy or Helga or...

JULIE: Yeah... I auditioned for Helga. Did you see me?

JACK: You were the best!

JULIE: Right. Then why didn't I get picked?

JACK: Cause ... Walker picks favorites.

JULIE: That's so stupid ... I wish ... Heh. (*As the MC.*)
"Helga is the youngest Cabaret girl so" ... Wait, what was it?

JACK: "Helga is the baby. I'm like a father to her ..."

JULIE: "So when she's bad ..."

JACK and JULIE: I spank her! (*They laugh.*)

JULIE: I loved when you introduced the girls.

JACK: Good idea! I'll introduce *you*.

JULIE: Wha..? No!

JACK: Come on Jules, this is your one chance to be Helga.

JULIE: No, this is way too silly.

JACK: Why? Cause there's no audience? No ensemble?

JULIE: I gotta go. (*JULIE turns to leave as TED enters with a backpack and blocks her way.*)

JACK: Hey look who's here!

JULIE: Hi Ted.

TED: What are you guys doing?

JACK: I was just tellin' Julie about our little ritual.

TED: Oh! Well um. Aren't you forgetting a little something? (*TED puts his backpack on the ground.*)

JACK: Oh yeah, the most important part! (*JACK runs to the backpack, reaches in, and searches.*)

JACK: Voila! (*Holds up a glass bottle.*) The audience and ensemble...in a bottle.

JULIE: What's that?

TED: Well, it's...it boosts the imagination.

JACK: Try it! (*JACK puts the bottle in JULY'S face. She turns away.*)

JULIE: What is it? Liquor?

TED: Not exactly.

JACK: It's just what the artists called for.

TED: A concoction that actors use from time to time.

JACK: When you're stumped.

TED: When you can't feel the character.

JACK: When you're nervous.

TED: When you can't cry on cue.

JACK: And... to imagine characters.

TED: And the audience when they're not there.

JACK: So what do ya say?

JULIE: I say ... you try it first!

TED: But you already did.

JULIE: Already did?

JACK: But you're too drunk to notice!

JULIE: What? (*Giggles in disbelief.*) I'm not ... But I didn't drink any ...

JACK: Hellooo ... you drank the whole thing darlin'. (*JACK shows JULIE that the bottle is empty by opening it and shaking it upside down.*)

JULIE: Jack, you're such a liar! Let me see. (*JULIE tries to snatch the bottle away from JACK. JACK keeps it above her head. TED watches them and laughs. JACK puts the bottle in his pocket JULIE puts her hands into JACK'S pocket.*)

JACK: (*As the MC.*) Helga ... if you wanted to get in my pants, all you had to do was ask.

JULIE: (*JULIE faces the audience—she sees them watching her. JULIE lets go of JACK. About the audience.*) Who are they?

TED: They're the audience, Julie.

JULIE: But how did they ... they weren't here before.

JACK: (*Lifting the bottle up and looks at it.*) Works every time!

TED: It's the *drink*, Julie. (*Swiftly takes bottle away from JACK.*) Enhances the imagination. Your imagination has been officially enhanced. (*Puts bottle down.*)

JULIE: (*She is stunned but likes the idea of an audience.*) No way ...

TED: Julie, why don't you tell the audience about your West Side Story audition?

JULIE looks at JACK.

JACK: Yeah, do it.

JULIE: (*Steps forward.*) Well ... um ... so I-I auditioned for ... Anita ... and um ... I thought I did pretty good ... better than the girl that got the part. But I ended up being a *freaking* assistant director ...

JACK and TED: "Fucking".

JULIE: (*Getting into it.*) ... I ended up being the *fucking* assistant director. I

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mean I didn't even get a part! Then Walker said, "Oh it's such an honor to be the A.D ... The assistant director gets to do blah blah blah ..." Shit, *Fuck! Him!*

TED and JACK applaud.

JACK: Wow, two cuss words in a row!

TED: (*To the audience.*) Wasn't she great, folks! Give her a round of applause. (*If they don't applaud.*) [I said applause!]

JULIE: (*Laughs and bows to the audience. She is beginning to enjoy this.*) Why, thank you very much!

JACK: Ok, ok my turn! (*To the audience.*) We will now do a scene from Cabaret. And the cabaret girls will come on stage.

WOMEN enter.

JULIE: What? I can't believe this!

TED: Just go with it. Stay in character Jules. (*TED stands to one side watching the scene.*)

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JULIE takes her place among the WOMEN. JULIE and WOMEN.

JACK: *(As the MC.)* Now presenting the Cabaret girls...

JACK: *(He points at each of the WOMEN.)*

Lulu...Frenchie...Texas...Frisky...and....

JACK: *(Points at JULIE.)* and Helga. *(JULIE steps forward as Helga and giggles. Cute and bubbly.)* Helga is the baby. *(JULIE poses beside JACK and sticks her butt out.)* I'm like a father to her. So when she's bad...I spank her. *(JULIE and the WOMEN laugh as JACK raps her butt.)* And she's very, very, very, very bad.

TED: Harder.

JACK: Oh we do have a kinky audience to night! *(The WOMEN laugh as*

JACK spansk her loudly.)

JULIE: Oooh! *(Laughs in a high-pitch squeal.)*

TED: I said harder! *(Jack grabs JULIE and spansk her louder. JULIE'S laugh*

dies down nervously.) Harder!!

JACK spansks Julie whenever he hears "harder."

JULIE: Jack that kind of hur ...

TED: Harder!

JULIE: Stop.

TED: Harder!

JACK throws JULIE on the ground.

JULIE: Stop it, please!

TED: Beat her!!! (*JACK is about to kick JULIE.*)

JULIE: (*Screams.*) Stop it!!

TED holds up his hand to indicate for JACK to stop. JACK stops. WOMEN exit.)

TED: Wow Jules, you're way better at this than Lynda.

JACK: Yeah, you really got into it. (*Indicating audience.*) I think they liked it.

JULIE gets up. She is now scared.

TED: It's just that you're a better actress.

JACK: Ooh, triple threat! Sings, dances, acts.

TED: Hey, Jack remember West Side Story?

JACK: Yeah.

TED: Julie would've been a fantastic Anita.

JACK: Yeah. Way better. More passion!

TED: What do you say *Anita*?

JULIE: I... I don't want to do this anymore. (*JULIE crosses the stage to exit. JACK and TED block her way.*)

JACK: (*Taunting.*) Where are you goin'?

JULIE: Please, just let me pass.

TED: She's too dark to pass. (*JULIE runs to the other side of the stage.*

MEN enter blocking her exit.)

JULIE: Don't do this.



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JACK: Please don't. (*JULIE is in the middle. JACK, TED and MEN encircle her. Moving closer and closer during the following.*)

TED: Por Favor.

JACK: No comprende.

TED: Gracias.

JACK: De nada. (*JACK puts his arm around her violently.*)

JULIE: (*Pulling away.*) Stop it. I'm not playing anymore ...

TED: Not much ... Bernardo's tramp!

JACK: Bernardo's pig!

JULIE: I'm not Anita OK?

TED: Spic! (*Shoves her.*)

JULIE: Don't touch me!

JACK: Lyin' Spic! (*TED and JACK take JULIE'S arms and throw her on the ground. They pin her down. The MEN begin to beat her as the stage blacks out.*)



KILL ALL ARTISTS

DRAWINGS BY: CYRANX WORDS BY: RYDIA

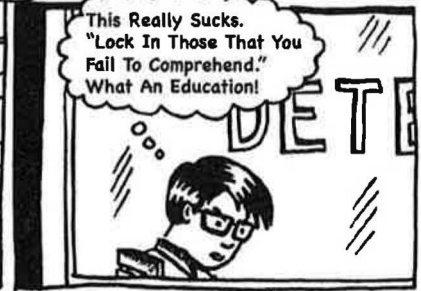




Why? Is It That Absurd? I Know You
Are Expecting To Hear That I Want To
Be An Engineer, Or An Accountant, Or
Some Other Profession. But The Truth
Is I Don't Wanna Be Any Of That!
I'd Rather Be An ELECTRIC FAN!
If You Think That It's Absurd,
ISN'T EVERYTHING ELSE????



RINGGG!RINGG!



The Next Day At School...

Is It True What Ms. Jaraula Told Me About Your Ambition, Hector?



What Father? That I Want To Be An Electric Fan? Why, OF COURSE

MR. GUIDO G. Principal

MERIT

You Are A Smart Young Man, Mr. Gamora But I Cannot Tolerate Such IRRATIONAL BEHAVIOR In This School!!!!

I Don't See Anything Wrong With It, Father



It is Detention For You Until You Learn To Answer The Question In An Acceptable Manner!

Again, Hector Is Sent To Detention...

Am I The Only Student In This School Who's Ever Inside Here? It's Like Everytime They Send Me Here It's Just Me All Alone!



Hector Got Bored So He Started To Draw...

This School Sucks!



He Got So Engrossed In Drawing That He Forgot He Was In Detention...

...He Drew As If It Was All He Knew...

He Draw His Teacher, Miss Jaraula...



He Draw Father Garcia...

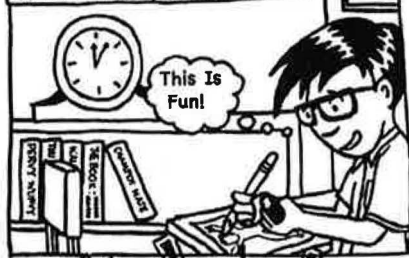


...Everything That Crossed His Mind Came Out On The Pages...



.....He Felt Happy Inside

He Forgot That
It Was Already Lunch Time...



He Didn't Even Notice His Teacher
Entering The Detention Room...



These Cannot Possibly Be The Product
Of A Normal Child's Young Mind, Father.
I Tell You The Kid Is SICK - SICK IN
THE HEAD. THIS Is What Perverts
Are Made Of...We Cannot Toler...

..MY GOOD GOD! Is That Supposed
To Be...Oh My...You Are Right, Ms.
Rogue Bring The Boy Here



You Must Really Enjoy Coming To My Office, Hector. First, You Tell Your Teacher That You Want To Be An Electric Fan And Now This??? EXPRESSION? All This Nudity and Perverson? Never Have I Seen Anything So Obscene!!



But Father, Art Books Are FILLED With Nudity! Da Vinci, Boccaccio, Michelangelo!?



Are You Lecturing Me About Art, Young Man? You Think You Are Teaching Me Something I Don't Know? I Am Also An Artist, But My Art Is Something That Pleases The Eye. Why Not Draw Flowers Or Birds, Or Landscapes?

But Like I Said Father It Is An Expression Of How I Felt At The Moment!



But This Is Too Much Mr. Gamora!

And What Is That?

At Least Now I Know What I Wanna BE!

I WANNA DRAW!

Draw What? Drawings Like These? Now You Are In Trouble Hector...
DEEP TROUBLE



You Can Be Sure That Your Parents Will Know About This...I Am Sending You Home For Now, GO!

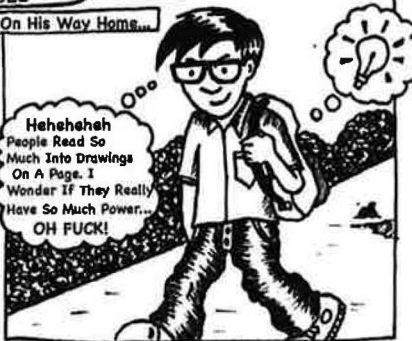
BUT FATHER!!

I CAN'T BELIEVE DRAWINGS CAN BE SO POWERFUL!



On His Way Home...

Heheheheh People Read So Much Info Drawings On A Page. I Wonder If They Really Have So Much Power...
OH FUCK!





Mal' Aria: Bad Air

Richard F. Kilpatrick

The nightmares have returned:
a man
drowning, who cannot
drown, crazy
with fever and speaking
a language I've never heard, my tongue held
together by narratives
whose words taste wrong.

I'm a memory of myself,
an intimate friend
of insects & venom my forehead
black steam sweating
black delirium
a hallucinated subversive understanding
as far away from myself as possible.

Which demon should I thank
among the junipers?

I shiver the dizzy room
the sun
the disdain and temerity
of a self deconstructing
as night shadows me
to the walls.

Sometimes my dreams refuse the night,
the empty, empty sky.

It is raining now in Africa.
It is still raining.

twilight hummed a plea
to hush the whispering
blades of grass.

stone turned to cinder
by one sparing sigh,
who lulled our hands

and heavy heads
to sleep. our clasps

undone, and thoughts
relieved.

Elysium

Elizabeth Caffey

Silence and Stirring

Elizabeth Caffey

the first word ever spoken was "Father."
it tumbled down the tongue of a motherless son.

his father was the first anesthetist and promised
an end to his loneliness.

The Lonely Son slept a dreamless sleep
while his father stole a rib.

the son's words named all that lived
and because the naming was done,
the anesthetist gave the woman no tongue.

Sand-Between the Two Continents

Cynthia Shoko Hoda

As I sink to rocks, moss,
the pool beneath which
sand rolls over
and over and
toys with my chilly toes,
arrow crabs tread softly into
crevices too delicate
for a tern-white skein of
wind.

Then I gather sand, dry as ash,
on rocks,
deserted seaweeds,
and let it fall through my fist
like sun-dust whispers silence
and stirs a whirlpool of memories
in everyturn, for this sand
was once on the other
side of the sea.

There is no time
or boundary in basin
stillness; sand pulsates on
as in opalescence
loomed by planktons
and a thread of quivering air,
and countless souls rove
home.

The **Organ** Grinder

Eric Millman

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A spider crawls over the mountainous, dried-out veins on the back of his hand. His fingertips, cracking in the sunlight, drum along the armrest of one of my wicker lounge chairs, and his lifting ligaments make the arachnid dance. They have a rapport, these two, like an organ grinder and his monkey, and they continue to stare at me, all ten of their knowing, dagger eyes. The man blows strange kisses at me – I know because I see him do so – and I look with futility at my shoes, knowing that no matter how quickly they ran to the front door, they'd be greeted by that man brandishing his gummy grin at me like a weapon. He knows that we're stuck in this battle; he knows he is winning; he is almost proud of both facts. Of course, there is more emptiness in his eyes than in the heart of Colonel Kurtz himself. Just for the record.

Shrill applause rings in my head and flashbulbs blind my already-diminishing eyesight. I am old and everyone notices how my tie flops angularly over my paunch. They whisper to one another of how I look like Lynne Cheney in a fat suit, and I curse my mother for birthing a boy with such decidedly feminine features, such failed genetic makeup. The front-rowers shake my hand, their hands velvety with \$1,000 lotion, prickly with Celebrity French Tips, and they congratulate me on my career. My career! Each word from the polished lips of these dreadful people drives a shovel deeper into the ground, and I'm wading in six-feet-deep full of compliments. Reader, this is the life you envy.

My hand rests on the typewriter and I correct a ~~mistake~~ mistake. There are newspaper clippings, little filmic seedlings, strewn about my desk, but tonight the East Timor crisis doesn't quite speak to me. Meanwhile, I sense those eyes still watching me from outside – when he faces forward, that old umbrella hat, black as a widow, all but eclipses the sun – so I pretend to contemplate the article. *Ah, perhaps this would make a nice story that I will now write talk talk talk.* I fill my cornmeal brain with these words in case they are listening in. A low rumble snakes into my ears with his every breath; my name is written on his tongue; his heart-beat throbs on my neck no matter the direction I face; other ominous descriptor.

Someone hands me a heavy object with which to burden my mantelpiece, and it glimmers in reflection of the bleached, opportunistic grins surrounding me. A beautiful young woman with a sequined dress and a microphone asks me, "What's next?" I punch her squarely in the face, but the attempt to spike this thinned-out blood is undermined when serious consequences magically fail to arise. At my age and status, I could have raped that dumb pundit without the blink of police, and I suppose that is disappointing.

My fingers hardly weigh down the keys, these bones dry and hollow like a dead bird's, yet they still retain the guts to spontaneously give a twitch when something brushes over them. What felt like eight crawly needles might have simply been a visiting dust mote, a stray feather, or a paranoid and senile imagination, I suppose. Doesn't matter. Okay, okay: for the sake of the looming and invasive giant in my backyard, I will now rev up a dose of the hopefully substantive *clack-clicking* of ink on paper. What to write, what to write? Okay: stream of consciousness is always safe. Hemingway. Paris. *The Great Gatsby*. Aristocrats. Money, parties, women, prestige. My first wife's suicide-wait-how-did-

that-get-in-there? Silly. No, let's think practically, literally, immediately. To rid ourselves of that dreadful shadow behind us ... all we need is the authorities! *Yes, authorities, there are two mysterious figures lying on my lawn furniture. Please remove them so I may live mindlessly by the pool in peace.* Ah yes, how simple! Everything is coming together. Now, where is the phone? I'll be right back.

I was sleeping when they rang. "Mr. MacFarquarhur, we are calling to wish you our deepest of congratulations. You have won the award for your lifetime of success in mediocrity and we, representing a legion of peers that you loathe too much to despise, want, with our modest standards, to ride your coattails in the most shamelessly elaborate way possible. Uh, Mr. MacFarquarhur, are you there?"

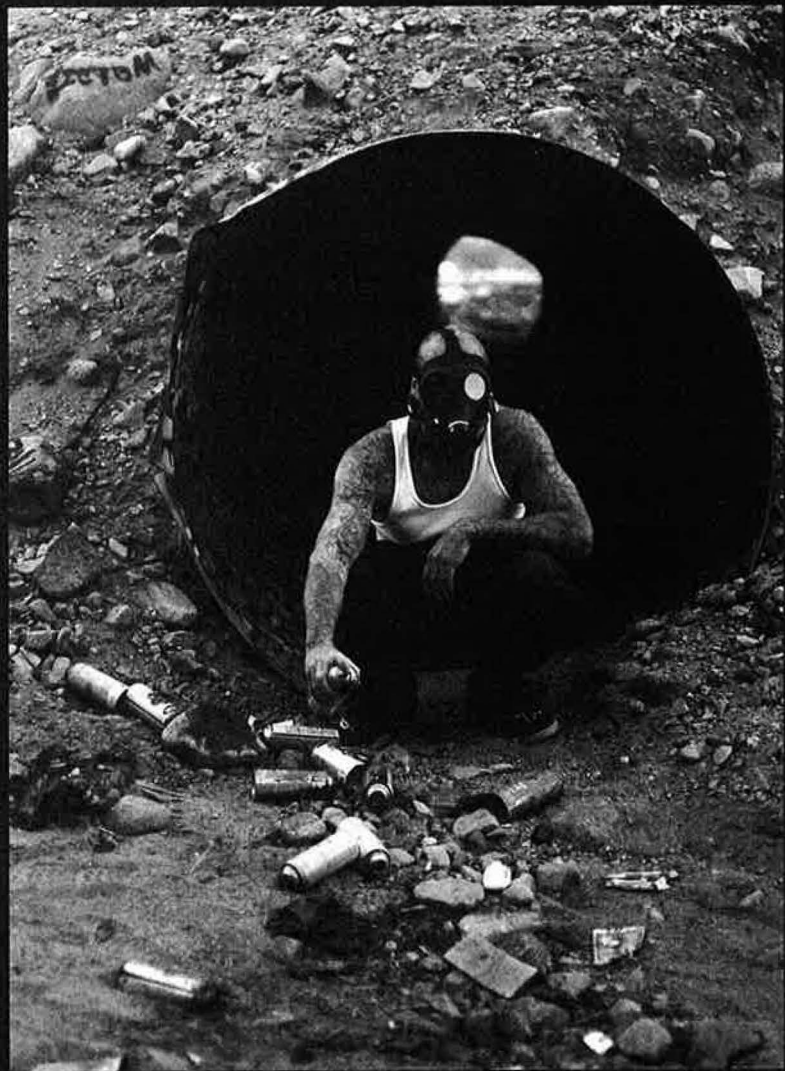
"I-I'm sorry, what? I stopped listening when you mentioned my name (just kidding)." Rising from sleep, my voice was sandblasted and pained.

"Oh, oh yes, of course. We were just calling to congratulate you on being this year's recipient of the blah blah and blah blah tuxedo." I thanked them with half an ass, and then hung up before they could bleed my ears more.

So I go to get the phone, you know, to shoo away the creepy man on my lawn (perhaps scaring away any and all spiders in the process), and I realize in my haste that wait, they were probably just standing metaphors within this narrative, and that's all. What relief!

Resigned to my fate, I opt instead for a pint of Guinness from my tap in the garage – greatest decision I ever made, installing that thing – and, returning to my desk, kick my feet up and wait for the next move.

I put the phone back into its holster and notice the mirror facing me. My hand happens to be near my face, so, why not? I inspect it: it looks like that of a coal miner, not as aged as it is worn, not as soft as it is cultured by ancient crags of vein and bone. In the reflection, through the French Doors, I see that old wicker chair – empty – and, turning quickly as if to catch a shadow, it's confirmed: I'm quite alone. Maybe I am quavering now.



Her New Apartment

Rory Carey

Can't sleep.
I blame it on
the pillows, the sheets,
the heat. But she's
the true nuisance:
train wreck trigger.
She's a broken toenail
clinging to my wet sock.
My throat itches for
a shredding scream,
wanting the blood
to coagulate like forgotten

Irish car bombs.
Her cracked dresser
mirror reflects two
years of bad

luck; she's dreaming
of five more while
I flip my pillow over
and mutter empathy for

Everest's skeletons.

The Littlest Things

Christopher Pandolfi

1
0
5

I'm troubled by a recurring image every time I masturbate outdoors: immediately after my load hits the ground, I see weeds emerging, all of which have my face imprinted on top. Once (and only once, mind you) I actually imagined one of the faces speaking to me but not actually saying anything—it just rambled incoherently, as if to say that humans and nature could never be this closely allied, much like siblings or relatives in general. I only think about that after the moment; beforehand is pretty much a jumble of visions and emotions that I can never make sense of no matter how much I try. The same can be said during the moment, at which point the cool night air teases my skin into a state of hyper-awareness. Ah, but awareness of what? That I'm taking part in something that's expansive and intimate at the same time? That I'm in the middle of a field with my pants down and the fly on my underwear open? Multiple questions fill my head at all times, and that's bad because I can never answer any of them. There was one exception: I once asked myself, *Why do you do this to yourself?*, and the answer came so quickly that I was almost knocked sideways. I said to myself, *Because you can*. Knowing that answer has made all the difference in the world, because let's face it—punishment is cathartic, maybe even enlightening. I often punished myself when I entered Veterans Park, looking at the trees but refusing to breathe deeply because I didn't deserve the air they were producing. I didn't deserve it because I was alive in a world I had no control over. Only the sky deserved to breathe air. The sky and the

dandelions at the park's entrance. The sky, the dandelions, and the lone piece of newspaper fluttering over the pavement like a hand that isn't quite ready to begin a massage. I entered the park in the spring of 2005, but the piece of newspaper was dated February 2, which is clearly the end of winter. I picked it up because I wanted to know if anyone in the pictures looked like me by some strange coincidence. My face is not wholly distinctive, save for a small mole just under my left nostril. I didn't even notice it until I was either seven or eight years old. It was as if it grew overnight, like a weed seems to. Only these weeds don't have my face on them.

The only real thing that has my face on it is the rearview mirror of my car. Every time I look into it to check traffic, I always catch a glimpse of my eyes, and in that brief moment, I pretend to be looking at someone else, someone that would never dream of taking this route to work or of masturbating outdoors. I pretend that I'm meeting someone for the first time, and I play the conversation in my mind long after I've looked away to continue watching the road. I like meeting new people, especially when they tell me something bad. Some of them are abused or sick; I pay the most attention to the sick ones because their stories are almost always full of pity and remorse. They immediately declare that they don't want pity, but I pity them anyway because it makes me feel better. It also reawakens me to the fact that I'm driving somewhere, and I'm taking some road in some odd part of town. That feeling of mystery remains even after hundreds of drives on the same stretch of road.

Frankly

Chris Podbielski

I named it Frank.

Friendly, don't you think?

Frank for franked copay checks.

Frank for clinically evident and unmistakable.

Frank for its dick-like persona clearly fucking me over.

Frank for Mary Shelley's monster hiding in my body seeking companionship and devouring sugar-sweet tissue.

"Want to meet Frank?" I should have asked my Un-true Love.

He didn't know until he saw the scar and I had some explaining to do.

"Frank is gone and out of my life," I tried to tell him.

I think he was hurt. But I didn't want to cry, it's

scarlet-ugly, messy. So I revealed the scarlet,

ugly mess personally branded by MD, where

Frank reveled and had been quietly evicted.

Un-true Love stroked me, said "poor baby".

Then left three months later,

when he thought I was safe.

Poor baby.

Sour

Joseph Mattson

Characters:

LUCY, 'LUCE': Woman, mid-20s. Delicate.

SALLY, 'SAL': Woman, late-20s. Slightly butch.

MAN: Late-40s. Well-off.

SCENE

LUCE's apartment. A door leading offstage. A couch.

LUCE sitting on the couch, anxiously shuffling through a book-length manuscript, her mind not entirely on the text. A knock on the door. LUCE rises, answers.

LUCE: Oh. Sal.

SAL enters.

SAL: Who else would it be?

LUCE: I was expecting... I mean. I thought you were at work. (*They embrace.*) Aren't we supposed to meet at 7:30?

SAL: Yeah.

LUCE: It's only 4:30.

SAL: I got off early.

LUCE: Oh. Cool.

SAL: What does it matter?

LUCE: It's nothing. No big deal.

SAL: What's eating you, Lucy-Luce? I didn't even have to knock. You gave me a key, remember? I thought it'd be romantic, a surprise.

LUCE: It is. It is nice. It's...yes, a surprise. I'm just..

SAL: What?

LUCE: Sometimes I need a little sp—quiet time.

SAL: Space?

LUCE: Quiet time.

SAL: You were going to say 'space'.

LUCE: Don't act like a jealous boyfriend. (*Beat.*) It's nothing personal.

SAL: Do not call me a boy.

LUCE: Don't you ever just need some time alone?

SAL: No.

LUCE: (*More to herself.*) I do.

SAL: Well, what's happening?

LUCE: I'm working. (*Lifts the manuscript.*) On my book.

SAL: Look what I got. (*SAL pulls out a hand grenade.*)

LUCE: Jesus! Where did that come from?

SAL: Internet. I ordered it up.

LUCE: But. How.

SAL: Just trust me. Pretty cool, ay? It's for the job.

LUCE: Oh. Yes. The job.

SAL: Are you OK?

LUCE: I don't know. Lately, I've. Just been thinking about us, about what we're doing—

SAL: You ain't turning turkey? (*Waits.*) You backing out on me?

LUCE: Feelings change, you know?

SAL: No, I do not know. Feelings do not change.

LUCE: I don't mean. I'm. Not us. I mean about the job.

SAL: Chickenshit. I can't believe this! I thought you wanted to "get to the heart of the beast?" "Drink from the marrow" and all that? For your novel—I thought you wanted experience?

LUCE: I do. I did. Maybe I've gotten enough experience. Maybe we should just take it easy for a while. Lay low.

SAL: You gone square all of the sudden? Or is the fire getting to you again? You can wait in the car.

LUCE: Yes. I don't know. It's the fire, sometimes. It's also—sometimes I feel like a Republican or something. I mean, it is rather queer—in the traditional sense—lesbians torching abortion clinics?

SAL: Oh, to hell with traditional sense. Just because we don't get off on procreation doesn't mean the little bastards ain't got a right to live.

LUCE: I'm no longer sure how I feel. Besides, there's too many bad situations. And this world is just going to shit—

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SAL: Don't tell me about bad situations—

LUCE: I'm sorry.

SAL: You don't know a bad situation until you're cold naked on a cop doctor table after getting gaffed by a drunk cowboy in Laredo, Texas. (*LUCE exasperated at the mention of 'Laredo, Texas'.*) And he leaves a deposit. No payout. The kind of life that just makes you feel dead inside. But the done is the done. (*Pause.*) Giving it away was trouble enough. (*Pause.*) I can't imagine how I'd a' felt if I... (*Pause.*) Anyway, kid couldn't help that was how he came into the world.

LUCE: I said I was sorry. You don't have to bring up Texas with me anymore. I know what you went through there and it's just awful, but—

SAL: Are you cheating on me?

LUCE: (*Eyeing the grenade.*) That thing scares me.

SAL: What, this?

SAL tosses the grenade in the air and catches it.

LUCE: Stop! That is not funny. Setting fires is one thing, but a fucking

grenade?

SAL: A grenade ain't nothing but a lemon... 'til you peel back the skin—

LUCE: Put it away.

SAL: Harmless, even beautiful, on the outside... 'til you rip it open and let the juice come out of it. Then it gets sour. Pull this little pin here out, then let go of this lever, and it gets real sour.

LUCE: Let's just get this over with.

SAL: (*Putting the grenade in her pocket.*) Now you're talking! That's my girl. All right, after dinner we'll go see a movie, and then take Mulholland west, maybe try and see some stars, maybe a little... (*Sexual innuendo.*) And then we'll hit it at about three in the morning.

LUCE: I'm not talking about the job.

SAL: What are you talking about?

LUCE: I...

SAL: Are you feeling fit?

LUCE: Yes. No. I don't know. That's what I'm trying to say—

SAL: Come now, babe. You can't back out. You're all I got.

LUCE: Speaking of guilt...

SAL: What?

LUCE: Nothing. It's a miracle we haven't been caught yet.

SAL: We aren't going to get caught. We got this thing all locked up.

LUCE: Locked up. That's what I'm afraid of...

SAL: Ain't this a bitch. I saved you from a boring, dull, fat-assed suburban dump of a life, give you everything I got, love you with everything I got, trust you with everything I got, cut myself open and let you dig through all my guts, all my secrets, put up with all your moods, put up with you and your goddamned book—which is driving me crazy—and you, you—

LUCE: I'm pregnant. (*SAL knocked for six. She stumbles over to the couch.*)
Sally, I...

SAL: N... No.

LUCE: It was an accident. A mistake. I didn't... It just happened and I... I don't want the baby.

SAL: What. Are. You. Saying.

LUCE: I'm pregnant, Sal. And I do not want to be.

SAL: No. (*Beat.*) No! No! No! No! No! No!

LUCE: I love you so much. This is... I don't know where to start.

Long pause. LUCE moves to SAL.

SAL: Get away from me.

LUCE: It's not you, Sal.

SAL: Just so much it is.

LUCE: Yes. (*SAL lost in herself. Another long pause. SAL pulls the grenade out of her pocket and caresses it.*) Sal, what are you doing?

SAL: Just a lemon. Just a lemon.

LUCE: Listen—

SAL, in a haze, as if lost at the mercy of a dream, pulls the pin out of the grenade.

SAL: I.

LUCE: What have you done!

SAL: I peeled back the skin.

LUCE: I don't want...

SAL: You don't know what you want.

LUCE: Don't let go... Don't drop... Christ...

SAL rises from the couch, furious, dropping the pin to the floor.

SAL: How could you do this! To me? To me! Not even with another woman! But a man? A man! I thought you gave up on all that!

LUCE: I... I needed to do it—for—for my novel.

SAL: Hog shit!

LUCE: You're the one who is always pushing me for experience. Experience! Experience! That's all I hear from you. "Experience, baby." The only experience you care about is the kind that caters to you and only you.

SAL: Don't you dare turn this around, you strumpet.

LUCE: (*Focusing on the grenade.*) You're right. It's not your fault. I don't have an excuse. We have bigger problems right now, OK? We need to call somebody.

SAL motions as if she's going to throw the grenade. LUCE gets hysterical.

SAL: Chill out.

LUCE: Chill out? Fuck you!

SAL: As long as I don't let go a' this lever, ain't nothing going to happen.

LUCE: We have to call the cops—

SAL: Who was it?

LUCE: The fire department—

SAL: It was the fire department?

LUCE: The bomb squad—army—navy—air force—marines...

SAL: You forgot 'coast guard'. Who is it? Tell me and I'll put the pin back in.

LUCE: Does that work?

SAL: We'll find out.

LUCE: Put the pin in first.

SAL: I don't have it.

LUCE: What do you mean you don't have it?

SAL: I must've dropped it.

LUCE: Dropped it? Dropped it! Where?

SAL: The couch. (*They scramble about the floor, dig through the couch. While shoving her free hand in the cracks of the couch SAL discovers a used condom.*)
What is this?

LUCE: It's not what you think.

SAL: You take me for the fool?

LUCE: Alright, it is what you think. (*SAL stretches the condom between her hands and almost drops the grenade.*) The grenade! Give me the condom and I'll throw it away.

SAL: (*Shoving the condom in her pocket.*) Oh no, no. Evidence.

LUCE: We're not married. You and I.

SAL: If we were, would it be any different?

LUCE: I don't know.

SAL: Can you hurt me more? Please?

LUCE: (*Continues searching.*) The pin. We have to find it.

SAL: How'd you get pregnant if you were using rubbers?

LUCE: The pin for God's sake! Let's just find it and I'll tell you everything.

SAL: Everything?

LUCE: Yes! Everything! I'll tell you everything I've ever done wrong in my whole life! Just don't kill us... God, where is it...

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SAL looks at the pin straightaway, picks it up, taunting.

SAL: Here it is. I got it.

LUCE: Put it in. *(Waits.)* Come on, Sal. Don't fuck around.

SAL: *(Slipping the ring of the pin around her left ring finger, eyeing it as if it were an engagement ring.)* I've never heard you swear so much as I have today.

LUCE: Ff... Damnit! Just do it! *(Pauses, glances at her watch.)* You have to go.

SAL: Excuse me?

LUCE: Listen. I really, really, really need to be alone for a while. We need to calm down and then we can talk about this.

SAL: *(Holding up the grenade.)* We will talk about this right now.

LUCE: He's on his way.

SAL: What did you say?

LUCE: He's on his way over.

SAL: Fantastic! Splendid! Boy, you really do go the distance.

LUCE: I do not want a baby. There is nothing wrong with not wanting to have a baby. There's nothing wrong with nipping it before it's even a bud. It's nothing right now, an amoeba, that's all. It's not even a fucking sprout in the wet mud. We're going to take care of it. He's coming over and we are going to make an appointment.

SAL: Oh, no. You are going to have that baby. You will see it through. Or I swear I'll see us all in hell.

LUCE: I'm sorry, Sal. I don't know what to say. But. Just. Please. Trust me.

SAL: Trust? HA!

LUCE: You do not want to see this through.

SAL: Oh, yes I do.

LUCE: I cannot talk to you until you put the pin back in!

SAL: I wager you can. And will.

LUCE: Fine. Remember Catalina Island, with your folks last summer?

SAL: Of course I remember. Been a long time since I felt that close to my old man.

LUCE: There.

SAL: I barely left your side. Don't tell me it's some freakin' cabana boy or dipshit lifeguard or some crap. How often do you do it? Does he commute? How many times have you done it? 'Cause you ain't been pregnant for no year. (*Thoughtful silence. Pulls the condom out of her pocket, considers it, then shoves it back into her pants.*) Or are there more than one?

LUCE: I'm begging you. Put the pin in. We really need to calm down. I can't talk to you with a live explosive in your hand. Put the pin in. Go for a walk. We need to be rational. I need to take care of this. And then we'll talk. You can hate me forever. But go. Now. (*SAL doesn't move. LUCE charges.*) Put the pin in! Now! Now! Now! (*SAL backs away, pauses, puts the pin in her mouth and swallows it.*) You're crazy! I hate you! Hate you! Go ahead, kill us!

SAL: You hate me?

LUCE: Yes! I hate you! Throw it! Do it! Do it!

SAL: I ain't gonna kill nobody. (*Beat.*) You ain't gonna kill nobody neither. *Quiet, then: a knock on the door. LUCE and SAL eye it with individual intensities. More knocking.*

MAN: (*Off stage, muffled beyond the closed door.*) Hello? Lucy?

SAL: Who is that?

LUCE: I'm going to be sick.

More knocking.

SAL: I'm going to answer it.

LUCE: No. Don't—

MAN starts opening the door.

LUCE: Don't come in!

MAN: (*As he enters.*) Lucy? Are you here?

SAL: What are you doing here?

MAN: (*To LUCE.*) I thought you said she would be at work.

LUCE: I...

SAL: Daddy?

MAN: Hello, Sally. Honey. (*Testing the waters.*) Is everything—

SAL: What are you doing here. (*To LUCE.*) He driving you and your whore boyfriend to the clinic or something?

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LUCE: No. Yes. This. It's.

SAL looks to LUCE.

MAN: (*Notices the grenade.*) Sal, what's that in your hand? (*Pause.*) Sal?

SAL lets the unpinned grenade slip through her fingers. When the grenade hits the floor stage lights go out.

END OF PLAY.

The ceiling stain spat in room seven
the drag sack music rolled out onto the road
between Lancaster and York. My feet faced north.

Nobody gives a crap about February.
The morning bawled over the stairs covered in blue plastic.
I rolled my head abandoned on a sticky pillowcase.

One bird bounced off the dirty glass,
flew into the black floorboard in the corner
and grew up. A blind November in Panorama City

I slept on quondam sheet music that I think I wrote
In houses composed entirely of cats and birds
on bent branches blackened by the rain

that ran on and on on leaves stretched out
like open fists. In Antietam for the night
I covered my mouth in the middle of my life,

on a bed, alone after I called home. My mother
tried to sell me her coat to pay for a tooth, or the plumbing.
I drove through the devil's backbone which was not my fault.

I'm haunted by everything I've stolen,
but that never happened and
all my poems are lies.



Echoed Thoughts

Mindee Lieske

Hosed down dust and a splattered
Saturday—
behind a box of a car.
How've I fucked up?
And why can't
this rain belong to me?

This one's got motion
and
this one's got rhythm.
It moves ahead of me
and
Everyone else
is still
just around.

It's wash-away weather
of
friends and lullabies.

I never tell my mother:
some of me is not for you.
Some lies are never told.

Fold me up, under your arms.
Develop me out,
fold me in.

Destroy me without this
(now, switch "me" and "this").

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2

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When I have sex

I feel like 1,000
fat women strung
together.

Do I ever feel grown up?
I'm not giving up
my uncolored pages,
3 Siennas and a
Periwinkle.

Tres siestas in cuatro dias—
I'm just another
Lazy American.

A moment of me, raw,
could take a thousand
friendships down
(and there's my culprit,
I'm thinking).

Perrito Tonto estas loco.
Ya no puedes caminar
(tu sabes: La Cucaracha).

Like a siren without spin,
your horn echoes
into my morning
and
the people upstairs litter
on my head.

I pretend footsteps are
raindrops
and

I sit in my car just to hear
wet pellets of cloud: breaking.

My shower has milkied
my view of the street
(and I'm thinking: that's
my fault too).

This morning I had a dream
about yesterday.
Everything was the same,
except there was no point
to it all
and here are some things
you love about the person
you love
that you can never discuss-
because if you do,
they might change.
And then who would you love?

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Syringe Memoirs
Pretty Girls Make Graves Indeed

Kia CalvinAbassi

Rumor Has it She's Made of Liquid: The Sight of [hEr]

In this fog I found a familiar outline. Feigning docile daughter—a wishful thinker of dementia with sultry intentions—gagging on her words. Wave of wading syllables slippery with sultry oceanic stanzas. It inquires if I remember and if the feelings toward it are still bitter, biting its lip in a seductive gesture where in turn I became its jester. The scent's too sweet and my senses are too weak; arcane feminine arms arch, hitherto stealing the earth from my feet. Slurring my speech, tearing out this lion's teeth, I want the marks to prove time strikes not with the palms of her hands, but rather the points on her inner thighs. Inching in echoed breaths weaving moans transmuted with lies. And amidst the slew of bed sheets woven to halos, sunken ships from seductive lips, this familiar fog of an outline resembles a feigning docile daughter, and her arching oceanic hips.

Stiletto Heel Arpeggios: The Addiction

Zephyr corrector I think there's a slight problem here. The air has turned stale and the clouds seem to have disappeared. Intangent stagnant and brand it uncanny but possible. Can't put the finger down cuz letters can't be found as before. Albatrosses to water and sharks take to flight. Moon up by noon, and sun encompassed your "good evening" tonight. East turned west; south to north, the rest was juxtaposed in geographical blur. Talked to the scholar and all he choked out were backwards slurs. This is the fifth floor

falling something shady to seek. It's said this place in the will was reserved for the meek to keep.

But what happens when corporate collapses, war passes, and the sex turns sweet and silent again? Before stiletto arpeggios made the music for the masses. Words weren't improb to show off, and fashions to throw off any hint of mortality, or authentic aesthetics proof to beauty. Can't make it any harder to swallow with hands around each other's necks. Suburban chemistry, and urban semantics and symmetry paved the way for dementia and the breakdown of kindly sociology. Social line by line addict when static prompted some thought in one's habits. All that we compass now are our points to dig. Zephyr corrector, I think there's some errors to check.

A Dose of The Doorman's Placebo: The Week that Wasn't that started the Fire with [hEr]

Monday morning starts with a smirk. Spark her eyes to start some fires. Wine bedside with the shot glass in the hall. This is the worry story. Her real self unmatched to her insides (something like a chimera).

Tuesdays tuned in intangible. I'm standing on the outside. Concierge suit and muffled air along with the music. Cigarette smoke and a sex scent her M.O. Thirty dollars won't buy me off. Yesterday was a mystery, today was the official tragedy.

Faces told me to keep it clear, keep it clean, keep it cordial. But innate ambitions are too busy teasing thoughts of lipstick on the collar. Wrapped wound wake like romance. Her calling out a [LoVer] like no other.

Wednesdays swept the note underneath. The secret kept safe behind teeth. The words, the spill, expense to risk it. It's shrewd the taste of telling compared to the matchmaker elevator music. Dropped notation from the innards hoping to see hers in detail. It's frail when dealing in dirty thoughts and sexy super novas sprawled across the bed sheets. She never knew, but it emptied the pockets of tension other than in my suit. It's cute when she stared absent to the obsessive habits unlike that of a concierge sitting on the fence watching the eyes set the room afire. The white of hers fit the substance on her face too fine for four letter words.

Friends told me to keep it clear, for snakes never roam in packs. Keeping it close, keeping it warm, cordial, or in context. And dealing lightly was a brushing of shoulders with death in a leisure suit. Thinker, thinker, right, dreamer, seam her, sight, see her, dream her, blight, drink her, thinker, spite.

Thursday hit something on the heavy end. With the edges as smooth as a waltz on hell's ballroom floor. The knocking screamed of explosions ahead. Her eyes, her taste, tales told in her bed. To lack the suit, teeth marks on my neck. The scratch, the skill, the space in-between. The look, the line, the secret to keep. Exit the scene when the door spews some truths in some matchmaker lipstick on the collar cordial daydream. Saw me there, in her stead. Saw her there, in the bed. Garments gone; fire eyes red. Sweat instead, sheets soaking wet. Twenty dollar bills and better off dead.

Friends told me to keep it clean, keep it cordial. Keep it calm in the

conciierge suit and in context. It's the joke for sliding under.
Mixing work with lipstick on the collar. Thinker, thinker,
right, see her, dreamer, blight, think her, dream her, spite.
Thinker, thinker, right, see her, dream her, spite.

Friday, lover, quit her, end her, night.

Three Letter Phrase: The Sanity Bouquet Toss-Away

So the wish was simple enough. Tossed it like a coin to that crack in the ocean canvas. Gave birth to a brand new type of backwater devilry with bright eyes to match. What a pity, could have had such a lavish wedding. Roses, wine, white. Whether or not we found gold between the gossip remains to be spotted. But look at the opposite end. Ever wonder what it's like waking to sheets warm with someone else? Swore you weren't alone. Twenty-dollar bill in the dresser drawer, number on the phone, and you wanted more. Just a generation inclined not to knock. It's just too attractive. The notation made when getting caught. Should've made us even, but better still we're not. There's a bar with our name on it and cold chairs to keep us company. Tap the shot glass in case of emergency. Exhaled in a panic, giving birth to the travesty. Not a fire nor party unless it's the one within. We feasted, festive, flirted, fisted, full, and fled. Dirty solidarity spewing clean from the white. Brighter than the bride when the (anti)honeymoon room key quota aorta trick takes place tonight. Monday morning. Chiseled every single little secret from your dress. Hung it to the bedpost and broke it open but I'm impressed. Notched another twenty dollars, and that reception was a riot.

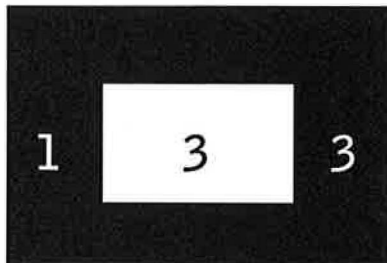
Hospital Language (Dirty Fiction Interlude): Bouquet Toss-Away Aftermath

Anesthetic cast away. Congruent inch some call a holiday. If I were the morgue no one would die. And the eternal score keeps the rhythmic prancing on the dance floor. Count the steps (one, two, three). Cold chamber island I.V. infatuation. And I'll die the death of a man's man for. Standard procedure, where I serve no use for you. God's evil little creature. And your still my. Now witness my ball and chain. Keeps you pushed inside like a cancer. But keep your cattle prod in mind. And my editorial is inquiring what the word lover really means. I only dabble in the business of. Standard procedure, where I serve no use for you. God's ice like little creature. And you're still my. My mind tricks my body, that's the reason I'm standing. My body keeps walking, but it makes my mind ache.

So droves of luck to you in breaking ships, barging romance through. Lost in you for days and at the cosmos I gave with a gaze. A lord inside and I saved one day. We're growing up, and we'll save one day. We'll live it up but slave all the way. Standard procedure. You serve no use to me. God's little winter splinter pretender creature. And I've dealt with too much of everything you'll do. Down to science to optimize your truth. Caricature dusty to back when you were my [muse].

The Great Disappearing Act/The Science of Selling Yourself: The Fight w/ [hEr]

An unidentified falling objective of a face, resembling Ms. So-and-So.



A dime store hood handle holding an introduction way too in the back of maybe memories worth keeping. "Allow me" is lousy in fate's open slap on the wrist. Like a bare handed cut on an open sheet of paper, we placed the colors down and set the standard in no particular order. Blocks make short work of a fist flying broken in an alleged attempt for justice. Blind must make this daylight worth waiting for. I have a place made just for us, where the air's acidic and copacetic fills our stomachs full with pride. Bad craftsmanship and worse karma make up the most brilliant of botched friendships. Breaking the sickle wind with chemistry. We'll make a swan song while starting off in the distance. The more we take the more we lose on the inside.

This Medusa's genome strand is sinking venomous fangs into the palm of my hand. In lackluster haste to purge myself of all these earthly demons and their waste, I stand adjacent to the mirrored fountain in an attempt to define the outline that is my face. Out of fortune, fortitude, solace, or slumber, these steps stumble in water's wake for remnants of the sweetest taste. Of hers, that rope around my neck. That sweat upon my brow. That ghost inside my eyelids. That humble breath before the kowtow. The absence of her absolution is a theft implemented by illusion. Robbing me of sense and hence this seeming dissolution. I may be part villain in this unfolding plot of infantile lust, but these passing days without so much as a glance from her is con-torting my trust.

Women are the waxed contraceptive that hinders men from birthing rations or proper perspective. Is this simply the sum of your strangest parts? Hoisted to the crucible in the wake of a toss to which you mimic ice or rather the statue in your locus under the cross. This premature forgery of mutual emotion is still ripe with insight. The fruit to bear the truth to how the worth of women is trite. A marred marauding mirage in form of bewitched feminine hands, whose will is the ruination of men, from center to reproductive glands.

Scissor slick repercussions on stationary holding a knifelike ending [straight, sharp, and to the point of my entrails]. The science of selling yourself at a steal was your greatest trick, and it left me running in on the cutting edge floor. This lady held my hand too often. Roman candles lighting sexy lines and innuendo. Smoke and malnutrition fixing up a perfect breakdown. A banquet under water held in your honor. Que sera and Shangri-La, the science of selling yourself at a steal. I only truly felt you once, despite our plans.

Needle Point Told in text (Left-handed Papyrus Method): The Addiction Again

A shot glass, blurring all that was peripheral. Lenses, foggy, and withholding information from the masses. Freezing in the summer, burning in the winter. Matching stride for stride with open hands and swifter motions. Rhythms, wine, women, and a song set up the fall like fight music. Chess pieces. Mowing them down at the proverbial right angle. Strike them all to up and release the heavy burden. Content with living in open spaces waiting for a casket. Blending in the words found free to hide from the masses. A bear trap, hidden in punctuation, plain view and syntax.

Linguistics, lining up my verbal payback. It would be my pleasure to show the way around the world. A crack in the wall, a sight for sweet eyes. Enough to turn the moments in a minute to a lifetime. The promise, impact in plural to knock you on your asses. A ten count told in even numbers starting with

eight. I'm laughing, for my worded open hand method is bested by my closed fist loaded in limelight and liquor.

Anatomy of the Perfect Murder: The Loss of [hEr]

It's the call here. A cry of murder. And praying makes pulling the trigger bear no tears [Minus the burden]. This is not her. She washes her hands and the past has been written. Soon they'll be coming, to rush her away. To give all the excuses and alibis she'll ever need for ammo. And no one's so sure of the ways it's arranged. With her reasons like seasons constantly changing. And where treason's a virtue in plebian reason, like delusions of grandeur, with raven hair. What of this botched gift, what of this dirty reflection you've given me? At two years and ten months, and all that you gave was your silence.

It's me out amongst the crowds, but I have got no qualms about that. Missed out on the punch line, of how you just let me die. It's me out amongst the crowds. A speck amid the maddening tides, drowning to open air with skin shrinking by the hour.

It was over when it started, and blood stained the carpets. Your heart like a pistol. A song for the lucid and dearly departed. One liners your motive, it all runs through my mind. Me, your favorite pastime, thrown away. What of these nightmares, what of suburbia. A shakedown for caring. My entrails your warmest gift held here before me. It's a visceral submission. Your mission to turn the world afire and bring the sky down one star at a time. Granted a role and given the title of angel.

It's me out amidst the oceanic crowds but there are no qualms about that. I keep missing the fateful blow, the tour of the ground of how you keep letting me down. Amongst the crowds and drowning weightless. Waiting out-

side your window I think I've aged ten years. Not hour for hour but tear by tear.

What should I expect when stagnant turns stale and those sunned rays of a smile degrade to iced eclipsed lips spitting hail? This was the inquiry conveyed to me on the day I foolishly swore our centers would transmute to one. A motley of monogamy (im)palered on a canvas, ultimately equating to less than none. I've got five points to make, and they're all where your hands can be found. And this is the carnivorous catharsis that riddles every romance with fear.

It's me out amongst the crowds. But I have no qualms about that. It's taking my lifeline, one vein and breath at a time, and I'm still missing out on the punch line. When the silence fits better than your own skin. High on life or the poison of choice. It's what you call walking a line. It's what you call becoming refined. And I have no qualms about that. I just want my reflection back.

Lesson 1: Socrates Never Gaspd For Breath: The Make-Up Roller-Coaster Sexcapade with [hEr]

Chapter 1-

Second verse same as the first. And what's worse. The lyrics are cursed. And immersed. Dipped with gift of gab. Baptized in silver with the lap of the tongue. Bite my lower lip. Cross the T's while you're at it. Silence. Hypodermic hallucinations to mark the occasion. But I want to, with something as awful as my math, touch you. This position isn't

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prompting a happy ending, and the other boy we grew up with constitutes a set of rules that I can't abide by. Please let it go. My throat. I've got some things to choke you should know.

Chapter 2-

But I can't afford to fuck up this cent of friends I can't spare. Dead broke on that note. Please say no. Please let go. Of my throat. I have to choke. Please say no. Keep it safe. Keep it slow. Please let go.

Chapter 3-

But I want to. On small fingers and halos I want to. Touch you. Get better acquainted with how your hips move. And we're getting to it. And we'll toast. But I'm on fire at how you were out of control tonight. And now you're holding my arm. Setting the silent alarm. Just a regular walking tourniquet.

Closure-

This is just something, something of a problem. A problem to dare not speak of. So many scenes I made, but wouldn't dream of. We're drunk, I'm broke, and I'm sold if you're as sweet in taste and texture as you are in text. Kiss your stomach. Talking in tongues and outline our bodies without the chalk. So what do ya say? What do you know? Please let go. Of my throat. Feel your lips move. We're a card and placed on deck. Sunk ships with talk of how you're something else. Just the most, give a toast. But I'm on fire at how you're out of control tonight.

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Que Sera Erotic Hurrah: The End of me and [hEr]

This tight rope lynch of an infatuation. Like a stiletto heel to the left ventricle. Pointed edge, and pinpoint bleeding. Cold like a slap of winter to the face. Cross strewn as a denounced burial grade nameless grave, and letters marked returned to sender with a question mark depicting whys and what-nots. Anger drives further, and cliffs stay stationary paper placed below anvils. Look at me now, dare I say for once. A burning bridge, a match at my fingers, five and crimson equals caught red handed. A murder holding no culprits, only a victim who knew nothing but consequence and a lesson of how forbidden fruit is never worth the squeeze.

This equivalent exchange equals controversy typed in open joke format. Font twenty, and make it known I double spaced and doubled back upon your bullet named "friendship" making itself at home among my lungs. Fresh air would be perfect if I had assurance you wouldn't occupy the same oxygen. This hard edge eyelash of an injustice, mascara war paint, curved flesh bombshells, Swiss army knives mistaken for smiles, and plastic nails. Clinging dirt, desecrate my home. Six feet under in formal attire with matching handcuff links and all. Good enough that it might make you look my way. Hold me horizontal and drown me downward sweetheartless. Kill me quick before I tilt backwards again in hopes you'll hold me. Flatliner, time of death 2 a.m. by momentary lapse of reason. Such thinking did me in. Of "forevers

and evers," altogether albeit better.

Blinding. The scissor shine still beams bright, reflecting on the day I made a pointless gesture prompting the problem. Retrospect however begs to differ when her lips finally pried themselves from the rancor and onto another. Saw it coming quicker than snail speed jogging in rain, but this flame, I must admit, degraded fast from the shame.

It's easy to write of this miscarriage of a romance. Held halfway to slippery hands until the bottom drops out and the world comes to an end. Happy by design. Grateful by structure. Anatomically perfect in advertisement. Broken by blueprint. Weary, water, summer, dreary, weakened; you're wasted, spring, splinter, from autumn, to ashes [my faithful soundtrack] upon ashes, and dust to dirty heels [fateful I followed Miss ungrateful].

I've said it before, and I'll whisper it again: gentlemen don't make [LoVe], only gravestones. Lambs to the slaughter to sate sick tastes of sicker hearts, drowning in an inch of water. The crème de la crème of decrepit dilatants who have the look to be remembered. In dreams, in sequence, in scene one of the waking hour; her dying breath. These plights are poetic, but pathetic like a plastic bouquet. Sweet for the thought, but remiss in the scent worth keeping.

Denial is the river separating recovery from relapse.

I've painstakingly shared my parts with someone not exactly of origin pertaining to one. But rather an apparition kept at a distance and encoded in puns. Jane Doe one could call her if she was worth a name, but I

guess flames are fleeting when all there is to women is shame. Angel wings, halos, hearts, souls, horse shoes, and the entire sort hold no part pertaining the opposite of men. Rather ropes, wounds, pathogens, wrinkles, hunger, and carcinogens. 'A way a lone a last a loved along the riverrun, past Eve and Adam, from swerve of shore to bend of bay' the tongue promises this boy will never fall again.

This tightrope lynch of an infatuation. Tangled in trip wire and twisted in wit. Pretty girls make graves indeed.

Red River Gorge

Richard Boada

Teenage boys with buck
knives chip initials
into land bridge
sandstone. Panicked bigleaf
magnolias and yellow buckeyes spit
seeds against the lichen
covered rock arch. Kentucky
augite gouged. The boys call
bird dogs back
to the hollow. Mouths
full of quail, muddied
feathers stuck to snouts
and ears. Shotgun shells
in the nettles. The boys walk
chucking acorns into Red River.
Pouches stuffed
with northern bobwhites.
The covey roosted
near the ground.

Dead Reckoning in the Puerto Blanco Mountains

Jeffrey C. Alfier

Storm winds cool asphalt where the highway ends.
Rich creosote owns the air in my lungs.
I always drift where topo maps go wrong
and locals warn: return the way you came.
Rock cairns are the oldest profession here.
It's dusk now, so I'm done stumbling on scree
as sharp as the spurs of conquistadors,
and pitch my tent where bursage is windbreak.

Piling scraps of kindling I'd held all day,
I hear the rustle of other hikers.
A young woman approaches my campfire,
asks about GPS coordinates.
Ashamed, I mumble that I'm obsolete,
show her my compass and my haggard map.
Thin desert leaves turn face-up. No rains come,
only that burnt mesquite smell of her hair.

Still Life: After Breakfast

Nancy Carroll

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The table spills fruit

as carved candlesticks slope toward sunset, unlit
for children, canaries, dustcovers. Tentative brush

strokes ply scar tissue and fresh incisions exhume oil for rage.
Cheese slices are anniversary. Napkins lay next to ashtrays, awkward

as pelicans, and all new perspectives come hand fed in deep blue,
violet, red: a hovering for pardon and small bits of melon.



A Day at the Zoo

Ixchel Lechuga

*Animal species disappear when they cannot peacefully orbit the center
of gravity that is man.*

- Pierre-Amedee Pichot, 1891

The lion's name was Bruto, as in ugly. He had a dreadlocked mane and was missing an eye but no one knew what had happened to it. Marsean was a volunteer in the aviary (her specialty was the Amazonian plush-crested jay), but on Wednesdays she helped clean Bruto's cage. The lion keeper would corral him to a stall and Marsean would rake lion poo into a pile, along with great, big cow bones and tiny rabbit bones. Sometimes Marsean would rake her pile close to the holding pen and listen to the snorts and grunts and rumbles of Bruto's breathing. She liked to think about the two of them so close together and listening to the same birds chirping in the trees up above.

Every Friday at two o'clock in the afternoon Bruto got to chase a live rabbit around the exhibit and catch it. The rabbits were supposed to keep his instincts sharp and give him something to do. Marsean had always wanted to watch, but she was afraid of seeing the rabbit suffer. She felt bad for Bruto and felt bad for the rabbit. So she only saw Bruto on Wednesdays when she went to clean his cage.

Glossary of Terms

Bruto- Italian for “ugly.” Also the name of the one eyed lion at the zoo.

Bruto’s Cage- the place where Bruto lives, in the zoo. Approximately forty feet by eighty-five feet, covered in real and fake foliage, with a hot bed and a bone chained to the ground so that people can watch him act “naturally.”

Wednesdays- the days that Marsean helps clean Bruto’s cage. This is the day that the head lion keeper, Jeff, goes to the koala house to get high with Belinda, the koala keeper who is married to Ken, the snake keeper. Marsean offered to help Jeff out because she thinks that he’ll appreciate it. And appreciate her. And start to like her. And ask her out on a date. Unfortunately for Marsean, Jeff is actually also screwing Belinda in the Koala house.

Jeff- name of the lion keeper at the zoo. *Also see* “Instinct.”

Marsean- name of a zoo volunteer who works in the aviary every day except for Wednesdays, when she cleans Bruto’s cage.

Tiny Rabbit Bones- what is left behind after the rabbit is released in Bruto’s cage, after he catches and then eats it. Usually the rabbits come from the chil-

dren's petting zoo, but sometimes they are purchased from local breeders or pet stores. When Bruto was a baby he learned to catch hyenas and zebra and little water buffalo. It was his special secret that he had been knocked in the eye by a buffalo hoof and that's how he lost it. The humans all assumed that he had been attacked by poachers.

Instinct- the thing that impels Bruto to chase the live rabbit that is released in Bruto's cage on Fridays. Also the impulse to kill. Also Marsean's impulse to climb the tree on the day that Bruto got loose from his holding pen. Also Jeff's impulse to erase Marsean's name from the lion log. Also Jeff's impulse to lie about Marsean and Wednesdays and Belinda and the Koala house.

Pretend- what Bruto did with the rabbits. Compare to what Bruto did with Marsean.

Appendix I

African Lion (*Panthera leo*)

One of the largest members of the Felidae family, the African lion can grow in excess of 570 lbs (259 kg). They typically roam in prides of mostly females and a few males at most. While the African lion once roamed freely over most of Asia and Africa, it has now been forced to inhabit less than 50% of Africa's savannas. Over-hunting, poaching, and loss of habitat have forced the severe decline of lions in the wild. Their current conservation status is Vulnerable.

The mane of the lion is the symbol for strength and power and has often been used on flags, in crests, etc. In western culture the crown is often signified by a mane, and along with the animal's physical strength helps give the animal the name "King of Beasts," or "King of the Jungle."

Also see, "Man-eating Lions."

Appendix II

Jeff turned forty-eight the year he became lead lion keeper at the zoo. He gave lectures on African cats to members of the zoological society. He gave presentations on lions to local elementary schools, and wrote regularly for zoological journals and monthly magazines. Despite his casual demeanor and leftist views, he was intimately acquainted with Assemblyman, Gene Cheever, and Governor Ted Sweeny. Most people assumed this relationship was built around Jeff's conservationist efforts, but there were those who suspected that it was not.

In addition to the lion, Jeff was also in charge of leopards, cheetahs, tigers, and the jaguar. He spent mornings making rounds and delegating feeding tasks. He spent the afternoons writing and observing. Jeff went home promptly at 7 o'clock except for the nights that he gave the "After hours" tours to Zoo Society members. The tours were very important to funding, and Jeff made sure that he spent a little one on one time with each member, answering questions and making light jokes. These were the only times that Jeff ever wore street clothes on zoo grounds. They were the only times he wore loafers instead of boots.

He had never been married but had an illegitimate child somewhere in Houston, who by now was probably in high school, or thereabouts. Jeff sent birthday cards, but probably didn't realize that he had sent the same exact one two years in a row. Jeff was a chain smoker and had never intended to quit. Despite everything, Jeff was believed to be a good person.

Children watch as zookeeper is eaten alive

Thurs. February 17, 2005

Noble Weekly Staff

NOBLE CITY ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS - More than fifteen people witnessed the mauling of a local zookeeper by "Bruto" the African lion, at the Noble Zoo this Wednesday. The unidentified keeper was cleaning the enclosure when the lion charged her from across the exhibit. Witnesses say that the lion dragged the keeper from a tree that she had attempted to climb.

"He had his eyes straight on her and just shot out right for her. It almost didn't take any time at all, it was so fast, and by the time I realized what was happening, he was on top of her, *eating her face*," said Hattie Charles, a zoo-goer of fifteen years.

"I wanted to scream, but I was so shocked that I just stood there, watching."

Witnesses say that it was hard to see which parts were being eaten, as the lion was on top of the keeper, but everyone heard the screams.

While zoo officials will not release the name of the keeper, they have stated that this is “a tragic accident and an acknowledgement of the unpredictability of the animal kingdom.”

Zoo officials say that the gate to the lion’s holding cell may not have been closed properly, and that the length and size of the enclosure is not an issue.

According to some, however, the size of the enclosure allowed the lion to build momentum and pounce on the keeper as she attempted to climb a tree.

“If that damn cage wasn’t so long, that cat never would have been able to run fast enough to catch her” observed Wallace Givens, a member of the Kentucky Zoo Society.

Givens also pointed out that, “Zoos have a lot of regulations nowadays that keep everyone safe, but that all makes people think that it’s okay to be friends with the cats. It’s not. They are animals and they are dangerous.”

No information has been disclosed regarding euthanization of the lion.

Appendix IV

Plush-crested Jay (*Cyanocorax Chrysops*)

A bird from the Corvidae family, found throughout South America, especially in the Amazon Basin. Its conservation status is "Common," or "Least Concern." The bird is medium sized, with dark blue plumage and a butter-colored breast and under-tail. It often has a streak of bright blue above the eyes and extending past the head. The bird is named for a tuft of feathers on its head that creates a small crest.

Appendix V

Man-Eating Lions

Among lions, “man-eating” is a behavior often thought to be caused by tooth decay, cavities, or other dental diseases. There have been many recorded incidents of lions hunting humans, the deadliest of which is the case of the Tsavo Man-eating lions in 1898. The two lions killed upwards of 135 men over a period of nine months. The lions repeatedly averted human traps and hunts, but were eventually killed by Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson. According to Patterson, not only did the lions have abscesses in their molars, but also they both lacked any sort of mane. It has been noted in other man-eating lions that the lions were often lacking a mane.

The skins of the lions served as rugs in Patterson’s game room for twenty-five years before being sold to the Field Museum in Chicago, where they have since been restored and taxidermied. The lions are on display in a diorama, but are considerably smaller than they were when alive. This is due to the wear and tear of having been used as rugs.

Appendix VI

When Marsean wasn't at the lion cage, she was at the top of the hill under a canopy of nets, giving tours and keeping children from feeding the birds popcorn. During the weekdays in the winter months, the zoo was mostly empty except for new moms and their babies who couldn't walk or throw popcorn yet. This was when Marsean got to spend more time watching birds. She would move from corner to corner, following the tiny, sharp movements of the jay's tails with heavy binoculars at her eyes.

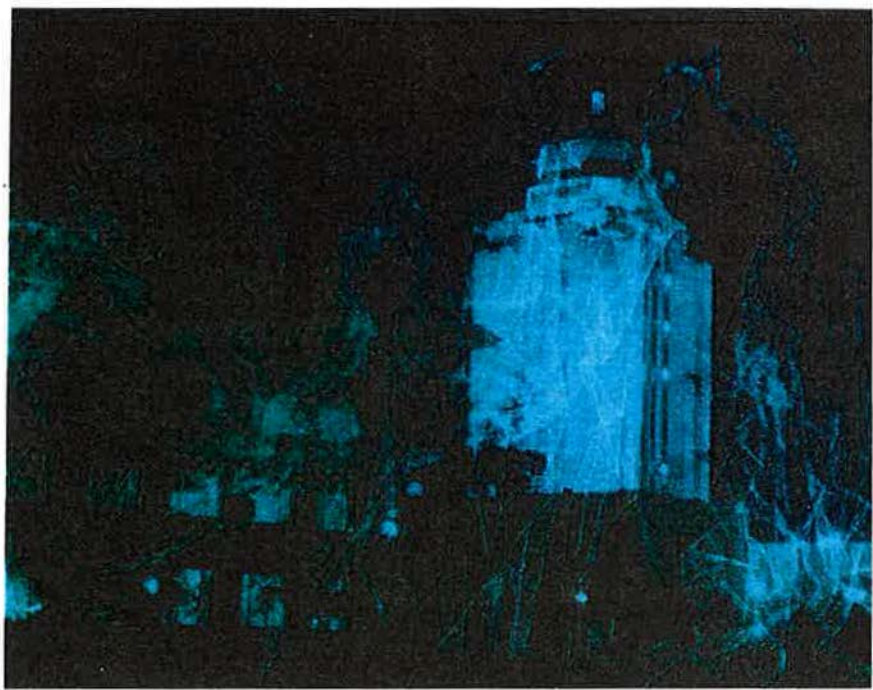
Sometimes she would sit on a bench with her eyes pointed at her white sneakers, or pointed at the ground, picking out the different birdcalls with her ears alone. Her plush-crested jays made pup-like little bursts of noise most of the time, but she had discovered that they could also imitate the sounds that the other birds made as well. Their delicate pup-chirps could roll into violent squawks like those of the blue jays.

She was still trying to figure out what made them change voices. Even after hundreds of hours of listening, she could come up with nothing more definite than fun and games. Like their cousins, the blue jays, plush-crested jays had an inborn ability to cause trouble. They were cute trouble, but trouble nonetheless.

Marsean was studying the plush-crested jay because it was not on the endangered species list. It was not even threatened or near threatened. It was, in fact, listed as "Common" or of "Least Concern." Its being common had no relationship to how much people knew about it. For example, no one seemed to know why it changed its voice.

Appendix VII

The children's balloons are shaped like lions, giraffes, and elephants. Bruto leans back on his shoulder and squints his eye while licking his paw. He is on his hot rock, a few feet from the balloons on the other side of the glass. They think he's squinting at the sun, and he is, but he's also squinting at the balloons. They think that because the people are in a dark room and he is in the sunlight that he can't see them. But he can see them. The balloons, the cameras, the popsicles, the strollers. He hears birds above him in the tree, and birds out, away somewhere. He doesn't hear the people. Bruto licks his paw a few more times and then lays his head down on the rock. He closes his eye. He sees the orange sun behind his eyelid. He falls asleep thinking about the movement of wind through his fur while running and running and catching an impala.



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