

> **kill author**

a literary journal for the mostly alive

<http://killauthor.com>

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Issue 8: Nabokov



Name: Vladimir Nabokov

Died: 2 July 1977, aged 78

Cause of death: Viral infection

Quote: "Happy is the novelist who manages to preserve an actual love letter that he received when he was young within a work of fiction, embedded in it like a clean bullet in flabby flesh and quite secure there, among spurious lives."

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Letter from the editors

Summer means lots of reading. For many people, that means fat doorstep novels with garish, shiny covers – the type that are picked up without much thought from bargain bins all across the land as readers head off for a change of scene. Page after page of escapist trash centered round the lives of the rich and famous, who do nothing more than engage in tedious family revelations, endless muckraking court cases, and numerous titillating softcore porn scenes that always somehow manage to let the bedroom door swing closed before the sweat ‘n’ semen money shot.

Not to disappoint, this August issue of **> kill author** is just made for summer reading. No softcore pornography here (sorry), but it’s certainly our longest issue yet, our own equivalent of the holiday getaway doorstep. We’ve got twenty-five writers in the line-up, each of them ready to floor you with their words. Call it our public service: we’re just doing what we can to keep your spirits up, as the nights start to draw in and fall approaches, before our next issue arrives in early October.

Summer also means the “silly season” for news. Foreign wars, oil spills and sliding presidential poll ratings continue, of course, but the networks don’t want to trouble you with that when the sun’s out and the pollen’s high. They’re far more interested in what country Madonna might be heading to for her next superstar-savior adoption, before turning their attention to some fantastic new video clips of a skateboarding rabbit. So cute!

We thought we should come up with something to say about the “silly season” that the lit scene has experienced of late, but although we tried, we couldn’t really come up with our own versions of the scandals that were written about in so many places and in so many paragraphs over the past couple of months. Should **> kill author** insist that anyone who submits work to us provide evidence that they have genuinely, as suggested by our journal’s title, *killed* another author, perhaps by repeatedly bludgeoning them in the head with a copy of a novel bought from an independent bookstore? Probably not. As for accepting a bunch of submissions and then deciding, a few months later, that we’re not going to use them – “sorry, best of luck placing your work elsewhere again, etc.” – that would just be ridiculous, wouldn’t it? That would never happen. Surely no journal editors would ever do that, would they?

So we’ll just keep concentrating on the content, if that’s okay with everyone.

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It’s always fascinating to us when particular themes – however vague – begin to emerge in the selection of pieces we put together for an issue. This time round, there seemed to be a few examples of stories that focused on the minutiae of everyday lives – from Andrew Roe’s *Flight: SFO to LAX*, the descriptions of average (yet not average) days for the characters at the center of Frank Hinton’s *You Enjoy Myself* and Jennifer Spiegel’s *This Is What I Do*, through to the intricate portrayal of

an elderly couple nearing the end of their life together in Mitch James's *The Sadder of Two Places* and the seemingly homely scene taking place in Rae Bryant's *Featherbedding*.

But it wouldn't be **> kill author** without some unsettling visions of a possible near future – and of a possible past, too. Check out Cezarija Abartis's *The Labyrinth*, Elaine Chiew's *Italo Calvino People*, David Backer's *Proscribe: ostracize, banish (v.)*, and Ryder Collins's *We Were Listening For The Shattering*.

And there's more. Like the sense of the absurd that permeates through David Laskowski's *The Anatomy of the Novel*, or Steve and Edmond Caldwell's *A Paper Moon*, or the selection of hugely powerful poetry that's featured throughout this latest issue.

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One last thing, a statement we've made before but which always bears repeating. The editors of any literary magazine will tell you, quite rightly, that if you're planning to submit work to their publication, then the very best way to get to know what they're looking for is by thoroughly reading a few past issues. Whatever you think of our editorial anonymity – and we know, even after eight issues in which we hope we've established that we're taking this gig seriously, that not everyone approves – we realize there isn't the back-up of knowing more about us, the editors, either through personal correspondence or googling our names to see what we've written elsewhere. All you've got to go on is what we publish here every couple of months. Well, if you want a place to start, then Issue Eight is a prime example of the breadth of what we love, what challenges us, what moves us and gets us excited.

So get your notebooks out, or just scratch marks on the walls.

Best,

> kill author

Flight: SFO to LAX

Andrew Roe

The hair. The first, foremost, fundamental thing is the hair.

Predictably it's blonde—blonde, beautiful, abundant. Well, not quite blonde. Not exactly. Not the blonde of models and movie stars. But blonde with variations of color, probably enhanced by various products and chemicals, although that doesn't seem to matter. Blonde but also red and brown and gold and other lesser hues hardly ever seen lushly thriving on the human (female) head. All mixed together, a tasteful swirl. And freshly shampooed, too. So that you want to reach out and stroke it, the hair, her hair, the woman sitting in front of you on this short flight—San Francisco to Los Angeles, barely enough time for the drink cart to make its dottering passage down the aisle—and who reminds you of something, someone, a feeling, a time, a place, something. You don't date much, or rather not at all (these days at least), and this is partly why: your inability to see people as actual people and not as stand-ins or symbols for someone or something else. You are aware.

She is also traveling alone. Ah. And what's the story there? And what is it about the pleasant, even somewhat sexy, anonymity of air travel? It is time away from ourselves, time removed. We can shed our jobs, our frustrations and limitations, our wedding rings. Every passenger a possibility, another life that you can slip into. An hour, or two, or five (depending on the destination), in which we are actors and actresses, writers, busy executives, nature photographers on assignment, all leading glamorous, bursting lives. You are none of these things. You can vividly picture the blank stare that would accompany your description of what you "do." What you "do" is ho-hum. What you "do" actually has nothing to do with who you are, your buried essence. You imagine trying to tell her this, too, all the words coming out wrong, another language entirely, a tongue lost to the ages.

You are both aisles. This seems significant. Not windows, but aisles.

The flight attendant comes by and you say no thanks to the offer of a drink and snack, even though you are thirsty and hungry. You do not want to lose your focus as you continue filling in the blanks. She travels for work. Has had the same, or similar, thoughts. She is searching; a vague loneliness to her days and nights.

You stand up, stretch, make the first of two trips to the bathroom. She doesn't look up as you pass, both times. There could be a beauty mark above the left eyebrow, but you're not sure. She has long legs and a long neck and long hands. Reading, but it's a gossip magazine, glossy and thick and perfumed. You take in all you can and then return to your seat. You like the view from the back better anyway. From there, it's just hair. Fewer complications. She's all yours.

The idea that cannot die—no matter how engrossing the in-flight magazine, the pathos in the faces of those depicted as about to die in the laminated emergency card or the conversation about living gluten-free going on behind you: to reach out and touch this hair. Nothing weird, nothing sexual. Just touch. Just confirmation of

something. Well, maybe it is sexual, a little. But not licentious sexual. Not porn sexual. Just the affirmation that you have love and that you are willing to give it, even though you wonder if it, your love, will be too much or too little, or if these things can even be quantified in such a quantifiable manner. Probably not.

But if you did it, reached out and touched the blonde hair that is not technically blonde hair (again, there are many colors, many hues) it could get ugly. There would be stares, accusations, charges. Legal action perhaps. And isn't that what the big retard guy in *Of Mice and Men* wanted to do? Just touch that woman's hair? And then he did. And then she freaked. And then he freaked. And then he panicked and killed her. You'll have to look it up when you get home, see if you have a copy of the book somewhere, leftover from college and rotting away next to your Hemingway, your Fitzgerald, your Vonnegut and Tom Robbins.

The plane lands. The seatbelts come off in one communal click. Then the passengers stand even though they can't move yet. She, however, chooses to sit until it's her turn to merge into the aisle—evidence, you decide, of her wisdom; you always do the same thing as well. You plan on jockeying to slip in right behind her, closer proximity at last, but another man—large and meaty and oblivious—snakes his way in between the two of you, his rolled carryon bag almost clocking you on the side of the head as he extracts it from the overhead bin. Once inside the airport, the woman gets caught up in a cluster ahead of you. And you have to piss. You really have to piss. So: you give up. You pull back. You start to forget the woman, her hair.

The shuttle bus that takes you to Parking Lot B is crowded. So crowded that you have to stand. Dark outside now, light when you left San Francisco. There is the drive home, the settling in at home, the coming of tomorrow and the day after and the day after that. The challenge: to remember the woman, the hair, the possibilities you felt. But you know you won't. It doesn't work that way, and it's not like this hasn't happened before. You don't want to miss the shuttle bus stop because then you'll have to loop around the parking lot again. No one on the bus speaks. You wait for the driver to call out your stop, and then he does, and then you obey and step off the bus, the night air rushing up at you as if it had been waiting.

Dogs and cats are ugly

Cameron Pierce

I've worn the same boxer-briefs for about ten days in a row and I feel punk as fuck.
It's unnecessary to wipe your ass every time you shit.

I am clean exactly how I am.

Several times a night I run my fingers through my pubes and ass hairs.

I am always damp because I ride my bike all over town
and I smell my fingers and think that I have only taken two showers
since we last slept together.

It is like two degrees of liquid separate our genitals.

We should stop showering forever

or else forget about pulling away when we finish fucking
and sleep inside/outside each other all night long

our juices coagulating overnight

forming a thick hard web

and when we wake up in the morning we will be glued together

our pubic hair like skinny supermodels preserved in amber.

I burn up when I think about holding your hand.

I am glad your ears don't smell because I like nuzzling my face in your neck

and I like giving your ears wet kisses

even though I know you are grossed out by my tongue flicking in and
out of your ears.

I am ready to marry you just say the words

and we'll go down to the doughnut shop

and we'll get married in the doughnut shop

and please remember I am just a skeleton and some canned food and so are you.

I want to be self-absorbed with you and tell dogs and cats they're ugly to their faces.

I want to celebrate Halloween with you forever.

It's not an argument if you don't call it one

Cameron Pierce

the walls of this apartment are made of cherry pits
and there's a man and a woman in the closet losing their skin

we have always said we will not be like them
but every night after dinner
our eyes turn red

The Labyrinth

Cezarija Abartis

The Minotaur imprisoned in the center of the labyrinth was rumored to be a monster, half man and half bull, but he was only horribly disfigured. Queen Pasiphae and King Minos were ashamed to show the son with his humpback, large head, round eyes on the sides of his face, pendulous lips, and braying voice. This is what love produced.

She dandled the infant on her lap and prayed to the gods to cure him of his monstrous features. As he grew into childhood, his skin thickened, fell into folds around his neck, and he walked on all fours because he could not stand upright very long. She visited him in his old nursery, since she still felt affection for the child, now twenty years old. He sprawled on pillows on the floor and stroked his long nose, then licked his fingers.

“Don’t do that, dear,” she said.

He bellowed and brayed.

She closed her eyes and tried to think her way out of the puzzle. “My baby son,” she said.

He bellowed and swung his head.

She had long stopped imagining he was speaking words. He had the flesh and bones of a human, but not the mind. She had tried to teach him counting. Over and over, she said “one” and “two” as she offered him honey-flavored sweets. He grabbed the sweets, snorting, and swallowed them. He never smiled. She repeated words: “Mama,” “Papa,” “love.” He looked away and yawned. He moaned.

This time she brought a small loaf of salt-crusted bread because he liked salt. He brayed and took the bread, tearing it instead of just eating it whole. Her eyes opened wide. She stroked his wrist. She offered another loaf of bread, and he tore that too. Perhaps the gods were withdrawing their punishment. She offered him grapes and he ate them one by one. The youth was learning manners!

They walked outside the cave; he blinked in the soft evening light. Spring blossomed on the land: wisps of leaves on the olive trees, thin blades of green on the ground. He moaned and swung his head. He stumbled and spilled his cup of water onto the ground. He sank down to put his hand in the mud. She caressed his face and saw that one of his teeth was rotten. The gods were afflicting him further. It was not enough that he could not speak nor think. She would send a doctor to him.

Ten years ago she agreed to put him in the cave because she could not bear to look at him anymore. Minos had stopped visiting him years earlier. She would devote herself to her other children; she would pretend that this one was dead.

A human was given only as much pain as one could endure. That’s what she was taught. She thought now that there was no bottom to pain—it was rain on the ocean, sand on the beach, a dark cave at night. One could always be given more pain.

Just as she turned to the entrance, he moaned and said, “Mud.” She was sure he said it. Her deepest prayers had been answered. This redeemed everything—all the pain, the hope, the curses. This would make her life normal, give her a normal future, give him a normal life.

He spit up a crust of bread and moaned. “Ma-a-a.”

No pay

Cheyenne Nimes

Shooting stars aren't stars that move for you, so don't wish on them. They're meteorites that fall into Earth's atmosphere. Burn into a white flame-out. Some were warm-blooded (that's how we got here). Here's what happens: A solitary spark of light falls through a black opening into the vacuum of space, the great space between the worlds – *blackbird wash* – and disappears in an incredible burst of sound and speed; it's not going to stop for anything, exultant at being on the loose – *lightcurves* – then one day Bang: it enters a new limbo – twisting just past us, opening wider to gulp in more and more sky, straining to draw itself back in its hole (these prayers became the soil shined off the seen wind) – before we – two hundred and seventy miles below it this whole time – hunt it down. For now, it bears the curse of discovery. All we had to do is dig in the area for some fast cash, huge tires webbed with chains, a power winch, densely packed teeth, bone saws, shotguns in the crooks of our arms, the Don of rocks. Until it's ratted out, jutting rawboned out the soil. To it, we are a figure holding a bloodletting instrument. It will simply be carried off – how sharks go limp when inverted – asking for the sky and get Plexiglass, like a Christmas decoration hanging vertically with its mouth open, bathed in a halo of light, preserved by means of chemical injections, feeling as though it belongs to no one and everyone all at once, and hate everyone to the bitter end. At ShowWorld, each skeleton-meteorite bears a label of identification, a rating: R. Signs gleam a conspicuous white, remind you to be respectful and not take photographs. They can be loved to death by visitors who accidentally break things. Of course, for some, all this is just a lure, and they saunter smilingly toward the rock like it's a timid animal who enjoys being petted. "STOP" the signboards warn, same white fever. They swear up and down, the closer to the altar they get, sizing her up, love-struck. Spotlighted, propped up like a living-dead doll, sits and takes it. You can stare at the dead with an intense, close-up curiosity the living would never tolerate. They don't know she's wrapping her arms around herself, that no pay could ever be enough.

The Lovers

Cheyenne Nimes

If a meteorite is both large and moves fast enough, it glows at a degree often brighter than the sun. It blocks out the sun, the light the world appears in, the bruised light. Face-off. The Lovers is not an easy card in any deck. Their hot breath hits us in the face. Primal ember, prehensile tail, you wouldn't believe something that big could come in that close and be so quiet. The enemy always tries to surprise you, to catch you off guard. The menace of an empty sky. You just keep upping the ante. To capture this on film you must be quick. Get on an even angle with your subject and shoot it straight on. Whatever town you're in, just say that name. If you're on the surface, float motionless. Don't touch ground. The four card, the devil's bedposts. Five is fever. Seven fishhook. You're supposed to play out the hand you're dealt. But you can't conquer it, settle it, even own it. White reflects all visible frequencies, it sends back everything. *Don't look at me.* Stepping toward earth and away again. A heart-shaped region. A single stone was observed to fall. The thing which was seen was not made out of the things that appear. She was wearing a cloak and a hood and a really burnt face. What it was in the end when the sun lifted itself off it. There's no place left to run. Swinging in circles, under the influence of the gravity of another body. And the final escapist minutes. Revealing a layer of white gristle and dark muscle. Most knew what they were seeing before it hit the ground. But if they ever find her she won't be herself.

Road, and other prophecies

Cheyenne Nimes

Road: “identifiable route, way or path between 2 or more places.” So, what they say is there isn’t just one place. You can go one way or the other.

80, 70, 15 into Vegas. Route 66, now sinking beneath its weight. The moment seemed endless, didn’t it.

Say it with me: *This* is road and that’s *not* road. It’s how we get by. Feeling at the same time lost and found. To chase long. What is it you do not have? It’s the same story, so stop telling it. There are people who reach the end of their lives without --.

Drive to follow the rising sun! But darkishness. Sun has its own skin, turns out. Sun remarked its last sayings. The street can reach and grab some people. There’s blood out here everywhere.

How about a straight-on question, I said to my astrologer. How will I die? Car. Be careful around cars. With supernatural accuracy.

Last picture: me, in a burnout tee, pointing up at the sky, knowing sky, almost there (small white gravestone shadow already behind me on the hood). It’s a ‘72 Chevy, year I was born. Covered in custom flames. Meantime, the flames are doing this. Stars rocking back and forth. Counterglow to a car’s headlights. All objects about to tip. Before the broken windshield glass.

Four Turns

Daniel Carter

I. It sat by the fire with two fowls in its hands, two mechanical eyes to each fowl that saw the scene: the nice wood, nice man, the curving walls and down below a bathtub of copper, a big clock belly with an open face. The man reached in with a wrench.

II. The nice man reached into the bowl to garble the owl that sat on its throne and sang all the songs. He garbled its wings with little twists so they swung like the legs of a little maimed horse, and he garbled its silver beak good with a smash, and then that little pyramid fell and didn't sing anymore.

III. The pyramid didn't sing anymore like this: O, the cowl o'er my head, the rough black sack, the bag over the moon, I jumped off the castle, the moat, the monster, the golden man down there, the man with one arm in the machine.

IV. The machine held the one arm of the man to its face and made gestures as if to say that it was the mayor, the chief, the engineer. As if to say that the wrench were its mustache, its special new teeth, its favorite little chompers, and if the owl were not ungarbled, the pyramid not unfelled, and the moon not unbagged then it would chew the nice man's skin and bite at his bones, but the man sat slumped, the fowl saw, and could not move.

Attention

Daniel Romo

You pulled out an extra hundred dollar bill from the teller. It's crisp and feels like an expensive suit you'll never wear. Tastes like a rich dessert after you're already full. Smells the way midlife crisis sports car upholstery smells in your dreams, the ones where you're taller and have better posture. The patriotic fibers bleed into your fingertips causing everything you touch to be left with imprints of stars and stripes. The paper towel dispenser in the bathroom at Walmart. The salt and pepper shakers at the Mexican restaurant. Your lover's breasts. You wipe your brow in an act of surrender wondering when this Betsy Ross bs will end. A liverspotted veteran walks by and salutes you.

Buzzing

Daniel Romo

Hum transcendental while flicking off insects that crawl up the seams of your jeans bought last weekend from the Gap. Your conscience is clean, mostly. Isn't that what credit cards are for? Aren't there enough bugs in the world? But you start to feel just a bit sooty, and wonder if three feet of shade, a hoagie, and a good book are worth taking their lives? Those that live sail like unwilling paratroopers bullied by a bearded man with a Slavic accent who mutters, *You must go*, right before he pushes them out of the plane, then smirks and lights a cigar. The humming part is supposed to make you feel better—make you feel as if your childhood sins should be blown away too because after all you were young, and the wings were neatly torn; the stinger left still intact. You carefully dust breadcrumbs from your pants, gulp the last of your Dr. Pepper, and finish reading the poet who despises the words *decadence* and *pastoral*. The sun becomes stronger. The shade is fading away. The bees start to circle.

Translation *(for Quinn)*

Daniel Romo

Her tendrils swung in front of her face like flirty antennae (who wears tendrils?). Pull them one at a time, flirt; keep her off-balanced. You are a boy who doesn't speak much: only the language Random. Warn her about the danger of carcinogens, but secretly know there's something to be said for breathing in her second-hand smoke. Take her to the movies. Don't make a move. She'll wonder if you're gay. She'll later discover you're just scared—summer when we were young. The girl's tendrils have grown into a wife's ponytail. In winter months I have bangs. Sometimes I'm a man. Mainly I'm an ass. I'm now bilingual. I speak the language Hurt.

Revision

Daniel Romo

Let's say we're seahorses. Let's say our forgotten birthday candles have melted into coral. Let's say the coral is forgotten too. Let's say the water is repetition. It is high tide. We have washed ashore. The children scoop us up with plastic shovels.

They drop us into half-filled buckets of sandy water hoping to revive us. Their mothers convince them to throw us back. Our bodies turn to foam.

We are already dead.

Let's say we're notorious bank robbers planning our heist from our hideout.

Let's say our masks are big yellow happy faces. Let's say we are bad men.

Our mothers have written us letters trying to convince us to turn ourselves in. We rip them up and smile. We were always disobedient children.

Let's say we're cops who have been tipped off, about to raid the hideout.

Let's say our guns are loaded, and our laughs are loud.

Let's say we're liars and none of this happened.

Let's say we were seahorses.

Let's say our birthdays were never celebrated.

Let's say we've crossed out those times in our lives.

Let's say we're convenient rough drafts.

Proscribe: ostracize, banish (v.)

David Backer

guilt O.E. *gylt* “crime, sin, fault, fine,” of *unknown origin*, though some suspect a connection to O.E. *gielðan* “to pay for, debt,” but O.E.D. editors find this “inadmissible phonologically.”

As is evident from the etymology above, there is confusion about the history of guilt. We will resolve this confusion presently in the form of a narrative. Our story begins with ostriches and ends with a boy buried in the dirt.

No religion or theory of science mentions it, but there was a time when ostriches were the dominant species on earth. They had a complete society with governments, economies, and cultures. Their populations were densest in what was to become Western Europe.

For our purposes, one custom ubiquitous throughout ostrich society must be described in detail: their system of justice. Crimes occurred in the cities of ostriches but, given the goodness of the animals, an ostrich crime was more indicative of forgetfulness or absent-mindedness than maliciousness toward other ostriches. As soon as an ostrich committed a crime, he almost always remembered the rule that had slipped his mind. Once cognizant of his mistake he went to the outskirts of the city, into the forests and fields and meadows, and found an earthy spot to bury his head in the ground until he felt confident that he would remember the rule in the future.

Therefore, ostrich society did not need a justice system *per se*. Criminals punished themselves.

*

For our purposes, it should also be noted that ostriches co-existed peacefully with other, lesser animals. Wild herds of *Homo erectus*, for example, roamed the undeveloped countryside, hunting and sleeping in caves.

In one such cave, near the outskirts of the ostrich capitol, a pair of *Homo erectus* parents gave birth to a strangely hairless and upright boy with a large head. This individual was the first *Homo sapiens*, though his parents could not know this. They cared for him and raised him, despite his abnormalities, feeding him nuts and berries and small mammals. Things were relatively normal until the strange boy reached adolescence. Then the problems began.

When he turned sixteen, the boy began to act very oddly. He pointed at things and made strange noises that his parents didn't understand. He pointed at the ostrich cities, he pointed at the mountains, he pointed at the sun, he pointed at the valleys, and he pointed at their fire and at the walls of their cave. For each of these things he had a different noise, which he would repeat over and over again. When he

made these noises, his parents merely shrugged and smiled and continued with their business, patting him on the head.

We suppose here that these noises were the first instances of human language.

One day, a particularly important day for our purposes, while hunting and gathering, the son witnessed the violent murder of a chimpanzee by a rival group of other chimpanzees. The boy attempted to resuscitate the dead chimp, but failed. He returned to his parents' cave carrying the mauled body. The chimp's face was mutilated and its arms were twisted and covered in dried blood. The son held the corpse in front of his parents, shaking it back and forth and yelling many noises, noises they'd never heard before. (This, we submit, was the first human complaint against injustice.) His mother became concerned. She reached out to her son, whose eyes were bloodshot and spilling tears, but the son, in a rage, threw the carcass of the mauled primate at his mother. Then he grabbed her arm in anger and she winced, her eyes filled with horror at her child's behavior.

His father, confused and afraid, threw himself at his son and yelled to protect his wife. The son didn't stop. He continued hurting his mother. His father grabbed the boy by the neck and dragged him to the entrance of their cave and threw him to the ground. The father blinked and pointed his hairy finger to the fields, away from their cave, toward the ostrich cities.

The son rose to his feet and ran in the direction his father pointed. Both father's and son's faces were wet with tears.

*

After several days of delirious wandering, the boy found the top of a small hill and looked down into the ostrich capitol. With nowhere else to go, he walked towards it.

On his way to the city he saw something he'd never seen before. In a field, spread far apart from one another, three ostriches sat with their heads buried in the ground. He stopped to consider these creatures and muttered several noises to himself. He walked on without disturbing them.

When the boy (who we must remember was the first *Homo sapiens*) reached the edge of the city, he was exhausted. He sat against the side of a building. Within a few minutes a delegation of ostriches quickly circled around him. The birds, communicating through complex blinks and twists of their necks, decided he was not a threat. They brought him to the hut of an ostrich that had a spare room. They gave the boy water to drink and grain to eat. They showed him a mattress of straw where he could spend the night. The boy felt safe and happy in the company of the ostriches. After eating and making many noises at the ostriches, he lay down on the straw mattress and fell into a deep sleep. The group of ostriches looked at one another, blinking in approval, and left the boy in peace.

*

That night there came a piercing shriek from the house where the boy slept. It was not mammalian, but avian. The scream echoed through the streets of the city

and a herd of ostriches ran towards the house. Inside they found the boy beating his host with his fists, his face tensed in anger. Blood was spilled upon the dirt floor like a carpet beneath the corpse of the host ostrich.

Two of the ostriches ran to the boy and pushed him back with their necks and legs. He struggled, but was overwhelmed by the chaotic flapping and kicking all around him. Through the legs of the ostriches he saw the body of the ostrich that had been so kind to him. The boy felt a surge of confusion and pain. He began to make noises that were pitiful and sad. He cried, choking on these pieces of a language no one could understand.

After the ostriches detained him to their satisfaction, they decided what would be done with the ranting boy.

One of the stronger birds kicked him in the head and the boy passed out. Then the ostrich herd dragged him to the outskirts of their city. They dragged him over rocks and tree roots until, after much searching in the darkness, they found a flat patch of earthy ground. It was there that they buried the boy's head in the dirt, in accordance with their system of justice.

They left him. After several minutes the boy woke up, unable to breathe. His eyes, ears, nose, and mouth were filled with soil. He experienced total blackness and in this blackness he saw the body of the ostrich he had beaten to death, the face of the mauled primate, and his mother's face the night he was sent away from his home. He felt a new feeling then. It was a dull heaviness that weighed like a stone on his heart. The son lifted his head out of the ground. Dirt filled his throat and he coughed it up. As he coughed, he looked out into the night and found that he was alone. He began to cry and make a new noise, a noise he had never heard himself make before, a new word in his language that would become ours.

It sounded like "gylt, gylt."

The Anatomy of the Novel, or Steve

David Laskowski

According to Dr. Aldo Nova of the Institute for Words in a Specific Order, the novel consists of several descending articulations that proceed numerically into infinity. Although mathematicians have no idea what Nova is talking about, the articulations, according to Nova, proceed by accumulation and accumulate due to the novel's need to progress linearly along a biographical line located anywhere but six feet from here. The accumulations consist of a complex tangle of phobias (the character), an irrationally composed rationality based on a faulty understanding of time (the plot), and the ideational thematic (the Steve). Unfortunately, the prime critics of the novel's accumulation (dinks, nobs and gollywogs) believe only character and plot make the novel possible and, thus, the Steve, or Steve, is often picked last, if at all. In addition, on advice from the public decency, and for fear of being fit with a casket made for a metaphor, the novel has recently filed suit against Steve for what it calls his "dithering."

However, what the novel is unaware of is that Steve's dithering, in the words of scholar Miles Dithers, who has no relation to dithering, is "foundational to the establishment of this and that, here and there, and, especially," he writes in his book, *Sunday Evenings with Steve*, "the hieratic semantics of linguistic cognizance." The reason Steve's role in the novel has been overlooked, Dithers dallies, is due to "the public decency's addiction to the narrator, or what many call the novel's voice," which, for Dithers, is nothing more than the expression of "the regret, or what is the true motivating force in novel accumulation. The voice," he explains, "is a desire to rectify what cannot be rectified, or that which drives all art or, in other words, allows it to attach to the novel's verbal column by glue applied post-completion and by verbose transistors from the golden age of radio. In other words, the public decency is so enamored of the voice because the voice provides them with what Dr. Bryce D. Hour defines as access to 'secrets and rumors, all of which are not only clandestine, but also untrue.'"

What is interesting is that the novel's suit against Steve comes at a time when many question the role of the novel in everyday life, a state that wishes to succeed, according to Dr. Myers Default, author of *It's You, Not Me*, because of "the federal government's intrusion into its knickers." According to Default, "Often weak and crumbly, the novel suffers from arthritis of the posterior guilt, a condition that can frequently cause a marked elasticity in sentence formation resulting in several non-invasive misgivings that radiate into the space left absent by the retreating ego, which is replaced not by hot air, but by a purple, gelatinous substance produced by the mirror, a reflective device used for ego enhancement and, unfortunately, reduction." In other words, exactly.

Many believe the novel's resistance to the Steve is due to the novel's flaky consistency, a profuse sentimentality composed of petroleum-based tissues used to

wipe away excess due diligence from the rims of the blunderbuss extremities. However, many believe this is simply rhetoric, preferring, instead, the theory that the novel is just nervous about its upcoming marriage to digital media. The problem with this theory is that it is untrue, especially considering that the novel has never liked Steve, according to scientist and amateur mystery writer, Marlowe Erlenmeyer, because Steve's role has always been to criticize the novel for its use of character and plot, working to connect the metaphorical with the literal and the metaphysical with the physical, although these are tasks, Steve thinks, better suited to philosophy and literature, and even though Steve knows deep in his "Todd" that philosophy and literature are too busy with morality and who killed the electric car.

Steve's primary job, according to Professor Hardly Matters of St. Striated Vein in Valencia, Orange, has been to keep the novel from unnecessary intrusions, including the rigorous waves of the rocky lake; the ambergris sky descending like a buckshot bird; the tangled jungle; the feeling that he is not who he is supposed to be; the age one realizes the desire to be something is not enough; and shirtless, he thought of the time Andy had visited from Winnebago and how they had chased each other through the woods only to be caught in the downpour brought on by the silt of the smelting mill. "In other words," Matters cares less, "the novel, which has always loved itself for its own sake, resisted the Steve because Steve's purpose is to keep the novel grounded, or worth reading. Obviously, the novel has been ignoring Steve for a long time since the size of the novel, which increases the critical return on the novel and thus increases its figurative weight, increasing the importance of the novel's originating propitiate, or author, has grown to epic propositions." Even though some have proposed the theory that the author has nothing to do with the novel, there is no proof to that effect, an effect that has led to a cause that has recently begun writing letters to the editor of the *New York Gazette*.

The Steve, according to Matters, works, for the most part, not because of the free flow of information between the system's separate elements, but because each section does its best to stay away from the other sections. Known, Matters sighs, as "innate inversion, each part of the system has done its best to construct what is essentially a six-foot fence between them, despite the advice of real estate agents and property assessors. Nevertheless, some interaction is not only necessary, but also more than likely, a fact that has caused many a system part to start drinking."

What is probably most interesting about the system as a whole, Matters hates his life, is the novel's ability to reproduce itself, an ability used by many to gain fame and money, although not necessarily in that order. In other words, Matters cries himself to sleep, the continual turning and twisting of the author at night allows for an infinite number of permutations of the same general, old, tired idea we have all heard before. Nevertheless, since new ideas do not really exist anyway, the author is only doing what God intended, or not. The best Matters can figure is that the author's twists and turns are due an extended series of vicious onslaughts carried out by a particularly mathematical species of flowering insecurities.

Yet, surprisingly, despite all that Matters despises about the production of the novel, he actually knows very little about the novel itself since, as everyone knows, he is illiterate, an illiteracy that without the love of a stout-hearted concertina, might have led Matters to phenomenon and, inevitably, to substantiality.

However, Matters should not feel so ethereal, since even authors know very little about the novel. For example, even though they are aware of the role the pre-frontal ancestry and the guilt mirrors play in the production of the novel, they do not know exactly how they manage to construct a novel's breathtaking descriptions or its breathlessly vivid prose. This condition is quite different from the situation of most corporate executives and bond traders who know that their "money bone," a long cylindrical greed-flunky located not in the rear of the abdomen in the lower posterior between two large fleshy cheeks, is responsible for their insatiable appetites.

Unfortunately, doctors do not know why authors are so oblivious to their own faults, even though many believe it is due to the denial, a river in Egypt, or a venal intrusion into the mortal sin inherent in every artist. The denial, which consists of the word count, the unnecessary description, and the mildly thrilling conclusion, apparently "gets in the way" of the rose-colored glasses, or that which makes looking backwards and forwards at the same time possible. Still, some believe that authors are unable to examine their own asses because of what doctors call mommies, or the pain that forces many authors to put pen to paper since, according to Dr. Recess Bully, "Everyone knows no one would waste one's time writing a novel unless whoever was writing it had something to prove. Typically, the author was hurt in some way by someone much better looking."

In other words, the primary difficulties associated with sketching out the particulars of such a peculiar system are that these difficulties can be quite hard. What is hardest, or the most concrete, is the move past our own literary prejudices to see what, in this case, the novel is trying to achieve. In addition, since so many novels are, as one critic has noted, "bad," the move beyond, or through, our own prejudices is almost impossible since these prejudices are comfortable, familiar, and, above all, like puppies, fuzzy.

In other words, the best, it seems, we can do, considering we can do anything, is to wallow in our Steve in the hopes of softening our insistence on fermenting, or fomenting, the follicle-gone, or the baldness of our shortcomings. To do this, we must – and we mean must – should, could and would, if we assume the opportunity would present itself. That we should, could, and would are made manifest by the idea that we are determined, committed, and, of course, determinedly dedicated to the commitment of a dedicated determinism. In other words, no, possibly, and what were we saying?

Perhaps the best method to utilize in understanding the novel in all of its radical simplicity is the method outlined by Dr. Nova in his 1973 rock epic, *Journeyman of the Infinite Stars*, or what geologist Moss Stone calls "a psychedelic topiary of the soul." On track nine, part four, or *Rainbow Oven*, Nova describes the novel as "psychic sunshine on a cloudy frontal lobe," and proceeds to suggest through a series of totally righteous excursions into the beyond, or guitar solos, that the novel can only be understood, can only be "felt," by reading it. In other words, Nova claims that the only way a novel can be fully "experienced" is by sitting down "in a comfy chair for an afternoon and reading it." Even though we are mistrustful of Nova, especially due to his recent arrest for rhyme, we think his idea might be just crazy enough to work.

A Paper Moon

Edmond Caldwell

It's already dark and I haven't accomplished anything. From Column A ("Desire") or Column B ("Responsibility").

Roman comes in. "What are you doing there," he laughs, "just sitting in the dark?" His people are older than my people.

I am not sitting, I explain. I have fallen between two stools.

"Nevertheless," says Roman.

It goes on this way for some time.

Finally Deirdre arrives and she and Roman undress. They slap together like pancakes.

"I can hear you, you know," I say.

They keep ignoring me. "Butter!" cries one. "Syrup!" the other.

It's making me hungry. I switch on the light. (Suddenly everything's easy.)

Surprise! A press of faces and balloons.

My navel is compared to a cockle shell. I am given my first pair of shoes.

In the shoes I am ready to deliver the lecture. Everyone settles in and I clear my throat. This goes on for some time. The beautiful woman in the front row nods helpfully at each cough.

At last I come out with a large, wet brain. I hold the brain in front of the audience. Everyone applauds as it drips.

A foundation is founded in my name. My statue is erected in the square.

Roman comes by. "What are you doing up there," he laughs, "with pigeon shit all over your head?" His people are younger than mine.

Deirdre arrives and they assemble the launch module. Terrorists, they are going to use me to destroy the moon.

I issue strenuous objections. What about all those nights together, just the three of us?

"You were always too strenuous," says Deirdre.

It goes on this way for some time. Together they light the fuse.

Fortunately, "It's Only a Paper Moon."

Published in 1933, this popular song was written by Harold Arlen with lyrics by E.Y. Harburg and Billy Rose.

It was written originally for an unsuccessful Broadway play called *The Great Magoo*, set in Coney Island. It was subsequently used in the movie *Take a Chance*, in 1933.

But its lasting fame stems from a series of recordings of the song by popular artists such as the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, the Nat King Cole Trio, and Ella Fitzgerald.

And from its use as a vehicle for improvisation by many jazz musicians.

Italo Calvino People

Elaine Chiew

After the success of the series “What to Expect When You’re Expecting”, there was “What to Expect in The First Year”, followed by “What to Expect in the Toddler Years”. It became generally accepted that nutrition in the womb made for smarter babies, on a level with piping in Tchaikovsky and Elgar and Saint-Saens via iPod nubs fastened to strategic places of the belly aided by ultrasound positioning.

Foreign languages – Spanish and Chinese mainly, because then the child will be able to converse with 95% of the world’s population – were babbled towards the infant in the cot, and more Tchaikovsky, Elgar and Saint-Saens were piped in.

Also, art and drama and ballet and tap dancing and hip hop and baby yoga and the greatest speeches of the world’s foremost politicians and the suicide theories of Durkheim and the current cosmological state of superstring M-theories. These were all important too.

A whole class of child prodigies was bred, and child prodigies at five could read Italo Calvino and do trigonometry. At six they digested Heidegger and performed multivariable calculus. Then, at seven, some would migrate to the science branch, where they would explore astrophysics, functional analysis and number theorems, while others would write Godot-like plays, draw evolutions of Picasso and sculpt revolutions of Giacomettis (because art, unlike science, is more cyclical).

At seven years old, they wrote bildungsromans of their own childhoods and prepared themselves for marriage. By the time they reached puberty they would have spent the requisite amount of time getting to know their spouses and be able to spend the rest of their life in a healthy marital equilibrium.

They were Italo Calvino babies, so called not because they were the embodiment of magical realism, but because they were an experiment – in the spirit of Italo Calvino experimentation – riddled with hopeful optimism camouflaging a deep misanthropic belief that humans were flawed and needed to be perfected. And because they could read Italo Calvino at five.

Italo Calvino people were special. They were never lonely because the answer to any question was already embryonic in the question. They ate only organic and understood the principles of molecular gastronomy.

They were not troubled by the absence of God because they did not wonder where the soul went after death. They already knew the answer and had sensed it intuitively since their capsuled journey through the birth canal.

Italo Calvino people were able to discern relationships between seemingly random events and connections among random spatial objects, and these inevitably produced insights that astonished others and invoked awe. Their insights into physical truths did not make them less or more happy; like blowing on very hot soup, Italo Calvino people understood that eventually an equilibrium between happiness and unhappiness would be struck.

They reproduced happily and, without exception, couples bore one child each, because the Earth's resources were dwindling and a Malthusian calculation of the rest of the world's unthinking breeding allowed them to have the optimal offspring of one.

Without unhappiness, however, there was also no reason to live longer than the lifespan needed to achieve an Italo Calvino baby's full potential. Suicide became uncoupled from its moral underpinnings, and once they'd lived to their full potential and raised their child to self-sufficiency, there was no further reason to prolong life. This, in fact, is more Darwinian and in accordance with the predominant calculation in nature, from male honeybees to spiders to scorpionflies to mites and midges. Humans that want to continue living for as long as they can without reproducing are more an aberration. Italo Calvino people experienced this realization as a surface vibration on their skin; the realization itself breaking into a quantum string subatomic particles that are attracted by the monopole force of Italo Calvino people. But this, of course, spun many philosophers and biologists and ethicists on their heads.

After raising their only child to be self-sufficient, Italo Calvino people self-destructed by committing suicide in the most expedient ways. They carried themselves to the nearest oven, rooftop, bathtub, highway, pharmacy or gun store.

And then, it was discovered that because all Italo Calvino people ended their lives voluntarily, and this turned out to be much younger than the average population, the effect was an exponential expiration of Italo Calvino people and the numbers began to drop like the downward curve of a binomial distribution.

The government acted swiftly. It decreed that henceforth Italo Calvino people would no longer be buried or cremated, but preserved in cryogenic aspic for the future. Counseling outfits were set up to specifically psychoanalyze Italo Calvino people and dissuade them from self-destruction. But the psychoanalysis did not work, because the layer of unconscious id in Italo Calvino people was very thin.

A very clever scientist theorized that over centuries of evolution, self-selection favored the coding of superior Italo Calvino genes. We just had to keep Italo Calvino babies around long enough for this to happen. With quantum science, we sped this up. We could inject people with a serum that contained an encoding of the DNA of Italo Calvino people and so their genetic information would pass on. People relaxed and stopped worrying.

And thus, only centuries later, Italo Calvino people faded into history as if they were a passing display of weather. As did the practice of piping in to the embryo all the knowledge of the world. It had been successfully encoded into our genes. There were certain things we knew about nuclear fusion or the novel arrangement of musical notes that were genetic. Talent was more egalitarian than ever.

But there was one aspect of surpassing grace. Italo Calvino people who did not believe in gods in their lifetimes now supplanted Greek myths and Norse legends, and we worshipped them as supernaturals. We pursued advancements in cryogenics towards other ends.

And one bright morning, millions of centuries later, an intrepid explorer would discover all these millions of jellied brains, lined up side by side underneath the hard-packed soil like a holocaust.

You Enjoy Myself

Frank Hinton

Yem is sleeping

Here's Yem sleeping. He's laying ass up in the air. His nipples are flat on the mattress. He's Asian (Korean?) and balding and half-fat, half-not-fat. He exhales and then slides his knees and dips flat onto his stomach like step-two of a caterpillar's crawl. He rolls onto his side. His mouth makes a sound like when you pull a spoon out of porridge. What dreams are in his head, if any? What world will he awake to?

Awake, 6:28

Yem wakes and inspects himself. He looks at his belly in the bathroom mirror. He looks at his man-boobs and his facial hair. He knows deep down that he needs to shave, but decides not to. He knows he needs to stop drinking and eating so much chocolate. He senses that the density of his man-boobs has increased dramatically in the last six months. Six months ago he was fitter, it seems. He looks at the purple underneath his eyes. He looks at the grease and the white flakes in his hair. He smells his own breath.

He hasn't been up for five minutes and he is already angry at himself. He doesn't say anything, he doesn't even groan. Yem strips and turns on the shower and twists the faucet delicately trying to find a perfect heat that never comes. He steps under the water and lets it run. He has a song in his head, but refuses to sing it aloud. He doesn't want the neighbors to hear (him sing). Yem picks the chunks of white anti-perspirant from his armpits. He covers himself in soap and washes. He knows, deep down, that he needs to shampoo his hair, but decides not to. Just a rinse for Yem this morning.

Yem watches his Grade 5 class enter the classroom

Here is Kevin, 11, wearing the same shirt he wore yesterday. He's half the size he should be for his age. His passions are rap, violence and sexual jokes. He's told Yem to fuck off six times in the last week.

Here's Umur, 11, walking in. He's a second generation Kenyan. He's got on those gray jogging pants. He's twice the size he should be for his age. Umur's thyroid is fully stretched. His voice at 11 is deeper than Yem's. Umur is the class pervert. He looks at things while breathing heavily. He bites his bottom lip when looking at the buttocks of any male or female within the school. He sweats. His body odour is putrid. He's asked Yem on a date at least three times. He touches himself. His file indicates possible molestation.

Here's Ashlynne. She's short and fat. Her hair falls in coarse brown strands like frayed string. Her back is arched inward and her front is layered in fat. She's like a small harp covered in folds of flesh. Her mom's got an amazing sense of fashion and Ashlynne's decked out. Today she's wearing red child's size XL high-waist shorts and a gray child's size XL mid-length pocket t-shirt. Oh god is she overfed. She's like some sick parody of what little girls should look like. Her eyes are the eyes of a spoiled child. Kevin calls Ashlynne the *Samsquanch*. Yem pretends not to hear the epithet, partly because he is afraid of Kevin, partly because he believes Ashlynne to be an actual *Samsquanch*.

Yem eats his lunch

A half-warm cup of coffee fills and lets off no steam. The cup is cheap *Dollarama* Styrofoam. The coffee is cheap *President's Choice* house blend. There's a fried egg sandwich poorly wrapped in plastic wrap. It gets unwrapped. The egg is cold. The bread is white. There is a faint spot of green-white mold growing and slowly extending in thousands of fungal filaments on the underside of the sandwich, the part that touches the cold fried egg. Yem hasn't noticed. He eats the meal.

Effort is placed on pretending the meal is not actually being eaten. The diversion leads to contemplation of nutritional value. That's the important stuff. Bugger taste. Yem needs the carbs and protein. He looks at the *Snickers* bar in his bag. A glance at the amount of fat and the calories displayed on the label. Strong is the knowledge of what a *Snickers* bar tastes like. Fat is no big deal. Yem will do push-ups tonight. Yem will dust off the treadmill. His man-boobs and his gut are both forgotten. The *Snickers* is gone in less than forty-one seconds. The regret has set in on the thirtieth second. He regrets eating the chocolate bar and equally regrets not having another chocolate bar to eat at that moment. The wrapper of the chocolate bar is inspected for chocolate crumbs. The crust of the fried egg sandwich remains uneaten.

The last of the once warm but now cold coffee is gulped. A terrible expression appears on Yem's face. It (his face) looks like when you kick a man in the balls. It (his face) looks as if it is being pinched from the inside.

Relaxation back at home

Here's Yem sitting at a computer desk. The computer makes terrible, insectoid sounds. The computer is old. The plastic is white-gone-oliveish due to the amount of nose-picking and food-eating and masturbating that Yem has done around it over the last three years.

Here is a routine: one hour, pants down, ass-cheeks stuck and sweaty on his black leather chair, Yem looks through half a hundred free online videos for the perfect five second clip to climax upon.

Yem's supper

No vegetables in the fridge. The milk is one day bad. The bread is moldy. He pulls a TV dinner from the freezer. Yem knows he is breaking a promise to himself *not to drink pop or eat any more TV dinners*, but whatever. This is sort of an emergency. He peels the cardboard cover of the TV dinner box (at the corner) and throws it in the microwave for 7 minutes. He never stops at 4 minutes in to mix the potatoes or stir the gravy. He's grown used to eating the potatoes cold in the middle. He's grown used to burned clumps of gravy you need to scrape from the side of the cardboard bowl. He's grown used to picking the brownie treat up with one fork-stab and shoving it into his mouth whole. He's grown used to the tasteless crunch.

Yem's Mental Grocery List:

Eggs

Chips

Chicken breasts

Frozen mixed vegetables

Peanut butter

Bread

Sugar-covered licorice

Milk

Chocolate milk

Whatever fruit is on sale

Transcript of a Facebook conversation between Yem in Halifax and Anna in Victoria

Me 7:02

You there?

Me 7:03

Helloooooooooo

Anna 7:05

hey

Anna 7:05

sup

Anna 7:05

?

Me 7:05

Thinkin

Me 7:06
Of

Me 7:06
u.

Anna 7:07
haha, why me?

Me 7:07
i like ur new profile pic.

Anna 7:08
thanks Yem

Me 7:08
Whatre you up to?

Anna 7:08
nothing. relaxing. doin laundry. you?

Me 7:09
Thinking of you. Wishing you lived closer.

Me 7:10
Wishing we could go out.

Anna 7:11
yeah.

Me 7:11
maybe I'll buy a bus ticket.

Anna 7:11
to Victoria?

Me 7:12
maybe.

Anna 7:12
expensive ticket

Me 7:13
someday.

Anna 7:15
what would you do if you made it here?

Yem types a line of text and his finger hovers over the enter key. He reads over the sentence he's typed and then jams his ring finger onto the delete key and holds it down until the text field is blank. He says fuck.

Me 7:19
i gotta run. But, thinkin of you.

Anna 7:20
oh. ok. me too (thinking of you), now.

Me 7:20
byee. xoxo.

Anna 7:21
o

Yem writes before bed

Yem sits down and starts to write a story. He starts by writing something true and real. He decides that he will use another person's name in the story. He decides that his true story is worthy of fiction. He will spare no detail and tell no one it is based on him. He knows he will never publish the story because the part of him that believes he can write is much weaker than the part of him that is sure he can't.

He opens a moleskine and uncaps a blue pen. He turns on a desk light, and from his mind and memory his nerves move his muscles in just the right way to write the words being born from the ideas in his head. It's a simple process and the pen bleeds.

My mother tried to have an abortion.

She's never told me this, I found out on my own. I read it in her journal. I also read about it in a letter from my father. He was so insistent. He was begging her.

'My family won't understand it,' he wrote. 'It's not you, it's them. You have to do it. We have the baby and we ruin three lives. I love you, but we're too young.'

My mother's journal was stained with tea and wine drops. She wrote the entries while living in Korea. She probably lived in some dank little apartment where the shower-head hangs right over the toilet and you can wash yourself while you shit. She wrote in mixed-Hangul with words that were more like feelings than actual words. She wrote that she wasn't sure what to do. She wrote that she hated herself and hated Bret (my father) and that she hated the fact that

she was Asian and that he was a soldier and she wrote about the taboo of it all. She said there was a man named Li-mi that could do the abortion. He was a part-time vet, but in those days not many people kept pets so he did abortions on the side. She wrote that she'd heard Li-mi was good and quick and did his best to make it all painless.

Here I am. Li-mi never touched her. I'm the mistake that almost wasn't.

Yem lays in bed

Yem thinks about eating a snack or doing push-ups or masturbating. Instead he closes his eyes and thinks about being something else, like a plant or something. He imagines himself as a little brown leaf. He's dry and quivering stiffly on a cold autumn day. One more touch of wind and he'll be off the branch.

The Oregon Trail can play three chords on its Fender

Gregory Sherl

You say I have a funny feeling about my lungs churning into gravel. I count the rhythms in your throat, spell your name behind your ear. Tonight the oxen are spooked because there might be ghosts in the grass they already chewed. That would mean there would be ghosts in their stomachs: ghost bile.

At night you dream you're drowning in the Kansas River. You're sweating in your dream where you're drowning. You don't know where your sweat ends and the river begins. *There is so much water, you think. Do I have to pee?*

A thief comes in the middle of the night, steals the bellies from our oxen.

You should know it's daylight but you're still asleep, sweating and drowning. Child #2, Wendy, is playing in the ghost bile that has leaked from the stolen oxen's bellies. She is painting her face with bile. On her left cheek, a green butterfly.

The oxen are ashamed of their nakedness. They blush ripe pimento. They look at the chewed grass and wonder if their hearts are haunted. Would the thief come back for those?

The thief left a ransom note. *What is normal?* the note wants to know. The thief wants 37 rusted bullets for each haunted oxen belly. Wendy's head is spinning like a wagon wheel. I rest my head on the trail, listen to the soil, damp where Jesus once walked.

The Oregon Trail is The Oregon Trail is bipolar

Gregory Sherl

Look at the sky still in the sky. How long now?
So many years I've slept alone, felt the world struggle
beneath me. Before the pills I slept with everything under me,
I was a collector. I told the trail *Be my museum*.
The first time I saw you I thought *If you were water I'd be wet*.
Now we wrestle in the back of the wagon, sell rifles
to Indian guides, pretend this corn is going to be easy
to digest. Today I have bones that feel like Pixy
Stix, get-well cards I'll forget to mail out. Never
start the trail in March, always pack two sets of clothing
per passenger. On this day in March the Kansas River
flows too quickly to freeze, and my heart skips too fast
to catch. Watch me watch you go. Goodbye,
confidence! Goodbye, I love your left dimple
the most! I blow into a torn piece of grass, play spoons
on the inside of my thighs. This is sexy talk for the deaf.
Come hatch my chest, I am over your inner beauty.
This is my mind on nothing but my mind. Tonight
we sleep on blankets covered in dust.

The Oregon Trail sold death without caskets

Gregory Sherl

I pause the game but your heart still beats slowly. I rest the oxen, sing you folk songs about mining a future west of Fort Kearney. We hide from typhoid behind trees suffocating the earth, but it still catches child #2, Wendy, and your heart drops like a bowling ball down a sewer. We always ford the river but today the swell is God's stomachache, and we lose two oxen.

Christopher, child #1, falls into a ditch of rattlesnakes. Venom like whoa. Death eats grass and the weeds wrap around the wagon's wheels, cracking the axel. I can't fix the axel, so we have to trade 40 bullets to a banker from Boston. Your ankles are showing and a bulge is showing in the banker from Boston, so I shoot him and take the bullets back.

On a night too lonely for color, you find blood in places where blood should not be. Your tears are a muted computer screen. Your dysentery is my dysentery. I hold your hand and your eyes are milk. I tell you *Soon*. Soon zombies will walk the earth, pouring salt on open wounds. Today my fever kills my appetite, and the bear I shot is rotting the end of the world.

The Oregon Trail decides to make a movie

Gregory Sherl

I hold the boom mic, hold it so high
I've mic'd the sky. The clouds are
talking about going on strike. The union
representative keeps saying words
like *dust bowl* and *potato famine*. If birds
were zombies the sky would sound
like hell. Everything would be backwards:
my wayward heart, your Sunday dress,
they'd be at the bottom of a well, not
in the back of the wagon. There your
smile is concrete, is cinnamon toothpaste,
is a little too strong to touch. I sit next
to it, tell it stories of oxen filled with
so much bile they're green, blending
in with the grass, the bottoms of your
skirts. The first scene of the day involves
the wagon fording the Kansas River.
The river is deep, angry—understand
it's really an ocean & doesn't like to
be called a river. *We will all drown*
the actors whisper to the dust on their
boots. The Oregon Trail yells action.
The Kansas River that's really an ocean
opens its mouth. These are the days
we forget to write about. We are quiet
under our clouds.

The Heat

Jack Boettcher

Record rains displace record rains, all summer.
Let's play hide-and-seek in half-built office
parks after dark. All summer spring growth
never quits and if you sleep too late you wake
to swaths of fine moss furring the headboards.
The alleys brim with new hybrid flora just marvelous
enough to hoist our flagging romanticism.
Let's cross creepy foggy alleys the same way
the devoted cross a bed of breathing coals.
Let's be the botanists of the new. Like us,
the city wants to fight the new depression.
They're mailing annotated versions of the phone book
to participating lonelier men.
They're repainting the Laundromats, duct-
taping the coin slots of the damaged machines.
Let's interview each other for imaginary jobs
that don't make any sense. It's one way to have
a conversation. You don't have to wash your clothes
in a river while it rains to be a barker of lost moods.
You can wash them in a regular Laundromat.
Here's to the heat coming off of every utterance.

Some Words From The Machine

Jack Boettcher

“Greetings from the machine”
is one I’ve always longed to say
to someone I love. The right
time never came. “The atoms
of living things are among the smallest”
is another. But do I actually think
“time” has anything to do with it?
An eon fails to pass. I think of
grand swaths of time, but they aren’t
my thoughts. Some physicist
paraphrased on the radio
said it. All I do is drive all night
to see if I can swerve
away from every shadow
I see breathing in the darkness
of the thicket
of nerves coating this state.
Driving on the highway at night
huge billboards with puns
are always there to bully you
into friendship. No one
on this highway is in control
right now. Which is why everyone’s
sister is so beautiful tonight.

Riders Picking Peaches on The Landlord's Earth

Jack Boettcher

The mule was ill so to lease it was cheap
its lungs scarred with maps etched by the travel of breathing
At dawn my girl and I rode toward our landlord's manse
and we only needed to stop at a magic shop en route
The slug of a hoof, then another to bind it
to gravity and the pleasure of floating on turbulence
In countryside reddened already by sunup
a glut of young butchers blushed the tattered hills
We answered the greetings of innumerable villages
with verilies, patience, and public domain blessings
Goods were cheap, beer and electricity were cheap
so we quenched and we bought what watts we could budget
By their dirty light we danced the ladies and the gents
till the village began to crumple with fatigue
then we slow-danced the village into a restless sleep
The women wore the same familiar scent on their wrists
which was essence of a storm yet to plummet
When noon failed to budge we trawled the local wunderkammer
It sold salvaged containers with mystery items inside
and you were guaranteed at least one mystery item
but only one-in-one-thousand odds of something "special"
which didn't necessarily mean valuable
so we bought a copper teakettle and we dug out the mystery
It was the deed to the world's largest rat from the carnival
and with relish the storekeeper proclaimed it a dud
That rat had died months ago, a newfound lab cancer
inflicted by a short-lived experiment with gum
Another couple got tickets to a drive-in theater
that hadn't existed for at least thirty years
and so I guess we didn't have it so bad, and so
with verilies, patience, and public domain blessings
and no less high on traditional heart
we galloped on to the sprawling outskirts of dusk
where we saw no villages but a few deserted orchards
brushed with white dust in electrified blue darkness
and ripe of no fruit known in books
We dismounted to rest in the night-blooming jasmine

while our rent mule got sick in the dank water pit
of a beaten cinder track no longer given to young footfall
Then wistful I said such pompous things I'd have never
had I not been engaged as I was on a quest
I said, "my dear, in the days to come there shall be time
to wonder why, and even, simply, to wonder"
and she flashed me this scathingly skeptical grin
as if to suggest I knew nothing of fortune
The blown road rose on the spine of the escarpment
then narrowed and spilled into a dry tributary
its bed hobbled and strewn with scuffed stones
Whatever prefix they rightly bore, the scapes
we then traveled seemed fevered, depopulated, done for
or done in, and we elected to slump into our narrative's lull
a period of distinct and unrivaled boredom
conducted by the clobber of the hooves
along the teething terrain, interrupted by bandits
encamped by invisible fires, or fires whose illusion
of invisibility the bandits were struggling to perfect
They hawked hotel lobby coffee and hot pie by the plate
but an honest one whispered that the pies had all been jacked
from grandmas who believed the thieves were children
and so we decided not to buy pie from those bandits
Riddled by lament we moved on hungry but proud
The plain was once again empty, and indeed it rolled upon us
until as always at last we came upon a lone oak tree
and it was probably the biggest oak tree we had ever seen
and it did not move in the wind, though wind moved against it
It was obvious the tree was both a tree and a forest
and among its boughs we found our landlord's simple quarters
A bed, a glass of water, a sack with our money in it
An expensive chair by an end table with a stack of propaganda
still waiting to be read under a whorl of lamplight
and our landlord it seemed had accepted his own quest
and he would never return within time
and time no longer recognized itself as duration
and we knew we were meant to live in the roots

This Is What I Do

Jennifer Spiegel

New York, 1995

This is what I do.

I set my alarm for 5:35 a.m., and that's when I wake. I go to a gym on Seventh Ave, where beautiful gay men and single women without make-up work out. I always look like hell—steamy glasses, cellulite on thighs, hair wild but not sexy.

Every morning, it's the same. "Hi," I shyly mutter to the guy at the front desk.

"How are you?" he asks. I don't know his name, but I think he's straight.

"Fine, thanks. And you?"

He takes the ferry in from Staten Island at four in the morning. He told this to me once while he checked my account for late fees. "Great." Last month, when I stopped at reception to see if my sunglasses had been found in the lockers, he mentioned he was an actor.

It bothers me that this is all we have. That he's just another potentially gay man and I'm just another unglamorous woman who works out before my job.

This is what I do.

I work out. I dread wasting time, so I read a book or watch CNN while on the Stairmaster. I read the entirety of *The Satanic Verses* on exercise equipment over the course of several days; this is a mild source of pride for me.

Afterwards, I go home and eat measured portions of breakfast food. If one serving equals three-fourths cup of dried cereal, by God, I'm eating three-fourths cup of dried cereal. At the start of the day I have no problems with food; food is my friend. While eating bran flakes, I envision myself showing other women how it's done on *Richard Simmons*.

Then, I go to my temp job. If I walk, I listen to a tape. Maybe *Godspell*, maybe Van Morrison. This will leave me feeling lonesome and tragic. I'll resort to daydreams—standard, weary daydreams. Once, they were good. Back in the eighties.

In September, at Bendix, Madeline looked at me over wheat germ and declared, "Even my fantasies bore me."

Usually, I imagine being the wife or gorgeous girlfriend of a monogamous guitar player, a really excellent one—as good as Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, or The Edge. We're always on the road. I like to think of us in airports, wearing dark glasses and carrying duffel bags. We're typically off to London, Paris, or Rome. We usually have to avoid millions of cameras because everyone is dying to see us, and the lights are blinding. We hold hands tightly, moving quickly, not saying much. The paparazzi go wild. In my ear, *Day By Day*.

At my temporary office, I flip on the lights, the computer, the printer. I follow the temp rules, trying to find time to write. Sometimes, I have flashes of self-importance. Sometimes, Jeff Simon calls.

Jeff's a financial analyst who looks like a soap star. He's cute. In fact, he's *really* cute, categorically *dashing*. The guy has dark brown hair, classic good looks like Ralph Lauren Polo ads, and a snuggly but manly wardrobe of taupe pants and black turtlenecks. A regular Pierce Brosnan. A great jaw. During the week, he's at the World Trade Center. On weekends, maybe the Hamptons. In tweed sportcoats, he attends Sunday brunches. Muffins and mimosas.

He likes the fact that his girlfriend lives in squalor. When I tell this to Madeline, she says, "You do *not* live in squalor, Sybil. Dream on."

It's nice to be a financial analyst, and it's nice to say that your girlfriend is a writer in the Village, but the squalor part is best. Waking up in the middle of the night in a single bed, the girl pressed against the wall like a sexy Eliza Doolittle/cockney-street-urchin-cum-Audrey Hepburn, the train rumbling beneath the floor—he wonders, "How *did* I get so lucky?" He leaves before daybreak; we rarely wake together.

In my Village abode, Jeff gloats over the knee-high fridge, the cans of tuna on the shelf. He likes the toilet paper rolls behind my bed. He's fond of the desk made from an old door retrieved from the garbage.

What an interesting bohemian/writer girl! Doors for desks, tuna for dinner!

He isn't a bad guy, this Jeff Simon. He isn't *that* removed from the middle class. He enjoys dipping into the lives of the less fortunate. Who better be artists.

How I feel about him: he'll eat McDonald's on road trips. He keeps talking about going to the Grand Ole Opry in the summer. Despite his lunches at the Yale Club, he'll touch my face, saying he wants to see me, asking no questions.

This is what I do.

I get wind of free food at work. Actually, let me be frank: I keep a lookout for it—my ears are open; they're *burning*. I'm not looking to gossip by the water cooler. I don't care about the nitty-gritty details of the lives of these people—I'm a temp. Here today, gone tomorrow. I just want to know who has the chicken wings, who brought in the cinnamon buns with the sugar glaze frosting shit.

My good intentions, the measured cereal, the Stairmaster antics: gone! It happens around ten-thirty in the morning. When I'm done checking my e-mail. Right before I try to figure out how to do a spreadsheet on Excel. A spreadsheet? Excel? *Um, I don't think so!* I'm a writer, a temp, the potential love-interest of an excellent, monogamous guitar player!

Free shortcake in the house!

A baker's dozen is really thirteen? Thirteen sesame seed bagels with real cream cheese, please!

This may be a way to save money: eat everything in sight in order to avoid grocery shopping later. I search out office leftovers, the remains of business lunches, someone's box of chocolate doughnuts. I climb stairs, wander back halls, look carefree, lie about what I last ate. When I run into the Events Coordinator or the Human Resources Woman, I say I haven't eaten in *days*. I pretend I'm *starved*.

Then, I find what I'm looking for. Forget the measured three-fourths cup of dried cereal. Forget the gym and the actor, gay or straight. I eat like there's no tomorrow. I love mini-muffins and cold quiche, roast beef or turkey sandwich halves, trays of stuffed mushrooms. I'll be there for shrimp cocktail, little pizzas, mini eggrolls. You name it.

Afterwards, I go back to my office with my head hung low.

When the day is done, I go home to my basement apartment, look at my mail, maybe watch TV. Perhaps I'll balance my checkbook, call Madeline, or make gazpacho (I did it once!). Perhaps, I'll ralph. If I'm good, I'll write. Additional flashes of self-importance are likely.

Sometimes, Jeff calls. "Meet me at my office."

Before I go, I undress and weigh myself on the scale I keep in the fireplace. My bedroom is the living room, which is also the dining room. It opens onto the street. Between Tom and me, only a kitchen exists. But Tom is in Greece, so I stand around naked till I reassemble the Sybil Presentation, the exhibition of Bohemian Writer Living in Squalor who I take to Jeff Simon's office in lower Manhattan.

Subways, pigeons, and scary business suits at the Twin Towers. The TKTS box office, escalators, elevators. Everyone looks busy. I greet Jeff with a kiss, reminding my lips to pucker.

Jeff usually sits at his desk. I read magazines like I'm at a doctor's office or I talk to investment bankers about their vacation plans. They're frequently about to take off for Bermuda. Sometimes, I massage Jeff's shoulders while he's on the computer. He gets into it and moves around, rolling his body under my hands, and, for some reason, this irritates me more than actually having sex with him. It's like—and I know this sounds goofy—I'm devouring free food. When I'm kneading his shoulders and he's responding to my touch, I feel as if I'm consuming chocolate pie. Stuffing it in.

Wasted calories.

This is no time for judgment; this is what I do.

Even though I was a glutton at lunch, we go for dinner. With Jeff, it's *dining*. He knows the good places, and, sometimes, a good place is where he wants to go. Usually, I say, "I'll just get a drink." Yet another sad misfortune of my life. Just when someone's willing to take me to Lutèce or One If By Land, I have to bow out because I ate a dozen cheese puffs at four. I never plan ahead. I never hold out. Good things come to those who wait? Hah!

If it's a weeknight, he may come back to my place.

If it's a weekend, I may go to his place on Central Park West.

It's Jeff Simon's apartment I'm after. Jeff and I met on a blind date. He made dinner for mutual friends and me.

"Is this your place?" I first said to him, setting a plate of tinfoil-wrapped burnt cookie bars—which took me all afternoon to make—down on an immaculate counter in a drop-dead gorgeous loft apartment overlooking Central Park. A huge picture window framed the Park, and the room was sectioned off by strategically-placed pieces of furniture to indicate a kitchen, dining room and living room. A giant woodblock table stood in the middle of the kitchen, something I've always loved. Copper pots and pans hung over the sink and counters; the couch matched Jeff's

pants; maroon pillows rested on a taupe sofa. ("It's fawn, mushroom," he said, describing the color.) Lit candles—golden, mustard yellow—were on a table. The only bedroom was a loft upstairs. The entire place was dimly lit, except for candle- and city light.

I felt like Lily Bart in *The House Of Mirth*, not like myself one lousy bit.

"Yeah, I bought it last year." He served us chicken and squash.

"I brought chocolate rocks for dessert," I announced over chardonnay.

"I'll make coffee," he said. "Since those are my favorite."

He ate three hockey pucks, and I decided to stay with him for that. A man who took what I had to offer, no matter how little it was! Sweet Jeff Simon!

We've been dating for six months. We're accessories in picturesque lives, trappings in visions of bohemia and the Stock Exchange. We say nice things to each other. When we have sex, we are more than decent to one another. He's a kind man. Jeff Simon and I are *kind* lovers.

This is not the world I imagined, the world I set out for, the world I even admire. My friends used to talk about a love that makes one stagger. No one told me about disappointment. No one mentioned necessity.

And Jeff Simon, in his approach to my naked body, is kind when it comes to disappointment and necessity. Jeff doesn't wretch or perpetually mourn or spout off biting, erudite witticisms. Rather, he kindly solves for *X*, never telling me I'm an equation with a number missing. He is a *kind* lover, and, for this, I like him.

If I'm alone, if Jeff has never been over, I read before bed. One of the reasons I hate work so much is that it cuts into my reading time. I've got Tolstoy on my shelves, Shakespeare too.

I pray when the lights go out. Like my fantasies, these prayers are standard and weary. I know what I'm praying for, and I know for whom I pray. To whom I pray, I do not know. I pray and I pray and I pray.

This is what I do.

The Ways They Let Themselves Be Fooled

Jessica Newman

It was night and mosquitoes.

She could not remember if they like light or dark and so stood on the edge of shadow.

He leaned toward water. He leaned himself toward rock.

He whispered dim words. He whispered church whispers, sounds of a darker, other, place.

Waves against rock and still his sounds were more liquid. She did not understand, but watched the moon which she also did not understand.

He seemed a man other than himself.

He seemed a man he did not know.

There Was Nothing We Could Do

Lauren Becker

I bit the word “NOTHING” inked in block letters on his shoulder. I wanted to bring my teeth together through his skin. He stopped moving down my body with his gentler mouth, held me by the throat, examined the teeth marks, smiled, then kissed me hard and smacked me harder in the face. I saw black diamonds — the kind on playing cards. I made no noise.

Whoever made noise lost. Lost face. Lost respect. Lost paradise.

We were ugly. We were not ugly enough. We were not ugly.

The last line of his favorite Bukowski story. “The night kept coming and there was nothing I could do.”

We bit and smacked and punched and sliced and scraped and burned night but it still kept coming and we kept leaving and coming back. Nobody else gave and took as deliberately as we. We were gracious in keeping track.

Outside of night, we ordered food and took baths and watched movies, lying on the couch as others do. We covered our wounds. He covered the words. Nobody but us knew they were there but the guy who carved them so beautifully into his shoulder, not caring what they meant. The tattoo guy counted out the \$400, mostly tens and twenties, arranging the bills so that all of the chins pointed to his left, before placing them in a lockbox that he put somewhere in the back of the shop.

Comforted by the man’s meticulousness, we offered the shoulder. He made no sound when the needle punctured his skin again, again and more. With his free hand, he pinched my thigh, he pulled my hair, he squeezed my wrist, he bent my fingers. When he did these things, the tattoo guy said keep still, man.

When the tattoo began to heal, we picked at the scabby words, creating scars that emphasized them. Highlighted them in a halo of angry skin.

The thing happened. It doesn’t matter what it was. We agreed without words to never speak of it. We agreed to the rules of losing.

We no longer had names. We moved to a new town. We did not have internet or e-mail. We did not have telephones. We did not talk to neighbors. We had what we needed.

The guy asked if I wanted one, too. We shook our heads. The shoulder belonged to us both. It would never leave.

The Final Neural Firings of The Eternal Starlet (Takes 1-3)

Matt Mullins

Take One:

Because they love this
beautiful me, I'm forever
becoming what is not
love: starving for always
feeding on nothing
but the point of this
body their love misses
as my life dissolves.

Take Two:

Because they love this beautiful me
I'm forever becoming what is not love:

starving for always, feeding on nothing
but the point of this body their love misses

as my life dissolves.

Take Three:

Because they love
this beautiful me
I'm forever becoming

what is not love:
starving for always
feeding on nothing

but the point of this body
their love misses
as my life dissolves.

I Will Make an Exquisite Corpse

Matt Mullins

Head

Dead stalled and riddled with
the blue smoke of too many holes
punched through what's the matter
with this, I hereby bequeath you

Torso

a gnarled meat heart, that clutched fist
grinding the ratchet of an unsteady beat
reverberating throughout my core and shaken

Extremities

spooling out to the knot holding fast
the bitter end of why shouldn't I
do my worst and soak the towels
in gasoline, fondle the wan hours
across which I will mull the facts
drawing all the while and absolutely
nearer to this final revelation come
to marry how with when.

The Charge That Struck Us

Melissa Lee-Houghton

Wish fulfilment was a major catalyst for change in Brookville. The small town was undergoing a crisis of imagination. There were common themes in dreams talked about over the breakfast table each morning, the uncanny resemblance of which was unbeknown to the residents.

One night, Dean, a labourer and husband of Jackie Zee, dreamt of lightning bolts striking his beloved seven times before he woke up in a fit of panic and relief to see her sleeping soundly with a tiny snore that became so loud to him he didn't go back to sleep.

Gerry, the baker and husband of the voluptuous Harley Dumas, dreamt of lightning bolts striking the pair in their marital bed, therefore unleashing a fury of lust and repressed desire that shook the entire house.

Maisie, the little daughter of the postman and rather more financially capable accountant on Rushmore Avenue, dreamt of lightning striking the same place seven times, bringing a mist that, once dispersed, left a thin, kindly woman in an apron who had come to replace her ambitious mother, Carole Redburn.

And so on. These people kept their dreams to themselves. This was one example of how basic intuition and psychic suggestion was bringing the town into the realm of the improbable and strange. Dean did not wish his wife were dead in real life, but every time she so much as sneezed he had the overwhelming urge to smack her on the back of the head with a spade—or indeed anything that might be in his hand at the particular moment.

Gerry had a happy marriage and a perfectly fervent sex life with his much desired wife, but he was almost petrified of the power of her hold over him, thus rendering all his sexual dreams as nightmares rather than the gratuitous fulfilment of repressed desires.

Maisie plain and simple dreamt of a new mother without the careerist drives and delusions of social entitlement and social rank, which her husband didn't reach in terms of salary or prospects.

It happened that an event charged a particular night's dreams with such ferocity as to shake the nerve of the entire place. During a lightning storm, three firefighters on duty and waiting command stepped out to look at the aggressive electrical storm over the harbour, and were struck by lightning, each in turn dying instantaneously. Fresh in the imaginations of every one of 321 residents, dreaming climaxed at two in the morning with the fear, grief, loneliness and passion that had been building in the collective well-pool of somatic activity that day.

Jackie Zee dreamed of her husband, Dean, rescuing her from the brink of death after being struck by lightning, as firemen stood around, all incapable of resuscitating her.

Harley Dumas dreamt that for the first night in three and a half years, her husband Gerry wasn't up for sex and instead wanted to watch TV, on which they saw amateur footage of the lightning storm and the terrifying deaths of the three firemen.

Maisie's mother, Redburn, dreamt of a highly charged lightning bolt coming from her husband's chest and into hers, making her bigger and bigger until she easily climbed out of the roof of the house and saved the three firemen, who instantly fell in love with her.

It was true that Jackie dreamt of being saved by Dean very regularly, because she imagined him as the hero and she wanted more than anything to be in peril, in deathly danger so that the world around her would see her, would panic and hold their breath and say by God you are lucky to be alive. It was also true that Harley Dumas had gotten bored of sexual Olympics with Gerry some time ago and had begun to dream quite simply of being with him without *being* with him. It was absolutely true that Redburn had severe delusions of her own worth.

On the night of the lightning strikes the whole town incorporated lightning into their uninhibited dreams, but they would never know. With the electricity, the deaths, the grief and the peculiar edginess which every resident felt, there was a whole night for each member of the community to process these feelings, thoughts, needs. The mayor of Brookville, after speaking to a news crew and offering them the reassurance that "this town has a backbone and a heart and we will weather the storm together," went home to three tall Scotches and another estranged night without his wife, Lisa, who had gone mad last winter and was still in the State mental asylum. He dreamt that Lisa was making the storms from the hospital, sending the lightning through her hands and out an open window, to punish him for letting them keep her there. He was terrified of her, even though she was a frail woman and usually only ever in a nightshirt; she would sit day after day in the cold, rocking gently, with her busy hands playing with the edges of her nightshirts until they wore holes and the seams came undone.

In the morning, the mayor visited the morgue to talk to the coroner about the bodies of Charlton, Bates and Girty, the three firemen who had perished that evening. He said it was cut and dried. They were friends, the mayor and the coroner, so the mayor confided, "I dreamt that Lisa was dealing the lightning bolts through her hands, sending them over here to teach me a lesson, maybe the whole town." Of course, Carter, the coroner told him he should get more sleep, or maybe take a week's vacation. The pair laughed, but Gainsburgh, the mayor of Brookville for over 25 years, knew that he couldn't change the weather or ease the suffering of the firemen's new widows, and he couldn't help Lisa come around from the catatonia she was gone to, but he could try to assert change in Brookville so that the women wouldn't have to play second fiddle to their men or get ground down by town gossip and other people's business. The unemployed needed work badly, and there was nothing to offer unless they went out of town. He had thought for years about building new houses, something that he believed could bring work to the people for many years to come. He thought about a kind of liberation from the stagnant social values that would always be experienced in such a small town with such loyal people.

That night Gainsburgh dreamt of a hammer repeatedly bashing his hand, which was being held on a brick by a bodiless arm.

Dean dreamt of a hammer bashing in his wife, Jackie's head repeatedly and slowly. He woke in the morning to light a cigarette and say a prayer for his own soul.

Gerry dreamt of intercourse, in every position conceivable.

Maisie dreamt of a hammer breaking down the door of her home, which she was locked out of for arguing with Redburn, her mother. The hammer easily smashed through the wood and glass to her mother's screams.

Jackie Zee dreamt of breaking the glass of a hatchet on the wall of her basement to help her and Dean escape from a fire in the house upstairs. She smashed a window and helped them both to safety, with glass shards cutting her body so badly that she needed specialist medical attention.

Harley dreamt of watching a TV show about hammers and tools, with Gerry rubbing her feet and hand-feeding her chocolate.

Redburn dreamt of hammering down the doors of richer people and stealing their jewellery.

That night, while everyone dreamed and the world was finally quiet again after a day of mourning and well-wishing and prayer, Gainsburgh, the town mayor, died of a heart attack in his sleep. He never had to wake to a day of change and initiating new ideas, consoling wives, re-evaluating values. He never had to dream about Lisa again, or feel ashamed about her.

Dean never actually laid a finger on Jackie, but bought some ear plugs to stop waking up from her snoring, delicate as it was.

Gerry Dumas never took the hints given by his wife and continued to make love to her with vigour, every night for the next eleven years.

Maisie didn't get a new mother, but she did learn that if you know enough and you're quick enough, you can always win an argument.

Lisa was well enough to attend the funeral of her late husband, the mayor, after a night of uniquely lucid conversation with a nurse about the importance of having your own mind, thinking your own thoughts and dreaming your own dreams. At the funeral, the whole town avoided her, the vacuum of all their shame, embarrassment, vitriol. Lisa sang all the hymns, after barely opening her mouth to utter a sound for years. She had always loved her husband.

The Sadder of Two Places

Mitch James

There were cobwebs in the old apartment, hanging, forgotten in high corners. Dated dishware and yellow lampshades stood like stage props, untouched for too long. Roused shag carpet spun the tale of the many strides taken over the years. It told the life of Elise and Herbert Memphis: a couple well into their eighties, well into being forgotten themselves. Their steps once mashed the carpet. Now shuffle lanes crawled across the living room like paths made when the dead are dragged through dirt. It was a slow-paced life. The apartment smelled like old fabric and dead skin, like things smell when their colors fade into yellows and browns.

Herbert and Elise were set together in a past that never meant to grow into its present. And where once their love for one another meant passion, tears, smiles and future, it now meant fear and comfort, a result of eighty plus years of a know-nothing-else lifestyle. All they knew and loved died many pulses back, and second and third generation grandchildren hardly knew their names. Their Christmas cards were never answered, their funds cast away into an abyss, to a family tree with stretching branches and dying roots.

Across the hall from them was a young woman in her early twenties. Though kind, the girl was mockingly nubile with her fair, tight skin and bouncing auburn curls. Her clothes were solid colors stacked on one another, layered by fashion know-how. She wore jeans or Capri's, flip-flops or sneakers. She never wore polyester or plain-colored fabric, never ankle-length dresses peppered with fading pastoral prints.

The girl next door didn't just look youthful, though; she smelled of fake fruit-packed candles, lotions and oils, of mystic smells of incense and the bitter smell of pot. Though the Memphis's had never viewed the girl's apartment beyond the refrigerator and the back of the chair at the dinner table (which was all they could see through a cracked door), they guessed there were posters all over the walls of crazy-haired youths, haggard from rebellion and deviance. They envisioned pictures of musicians standing in bullet-proof stances, eyes cast down like they couldn't care less that to some people they were everything. They both thought (though never discussed) there were likely tapestries with mesmeric patterns draping the length of whole rooms, making entire sections look like puzzle walls in some Egyptian pyramid. They both figured that her closet and dresser drawers were filled with light, lacey things, with bright colors and white colors, things made seamlessly by an artist on a sewing machine.

They were right.

One year for Christmas they left a card in her mailbox. *Merry Christmas, neighbor, from the Memphis's*, it said.

The girl next door wasn't sure how to respond, so she didn't.

The three of them co-existed. They passed one another on the stairs from time to time, the girl flying down the steps, the Memphis's floating up as if on an escalator. On occasion the girl would knock on the Memphis's door and ask them to turn their television down. If played too loudly it would rattle with a blown tweeter. Elise and Herbert were near deaf after almost ninety years of listening to the sounds of the world.

It was one night, though, that Elise's hearing opened the world back up to her.

She was shuffling into the kitchen to make some decaffeinated tea. It was mid evening for most, but well past bedtime for Elise. Herb had been sleeping for three hours already while Elise sat up in her chair, under yellow lamplight, looking at crochet patterns that her arthritic hands hadn't been able to reproduce for years. She looked anyway, awake, victim to an aging body forgetting life's basic rhythms. She had slept little the last two days. She was worried that her body couldn't handle sleep deprivation like it once had. Pushing somber thoughts away, she got up for her tea, something to sip away the night.

As she approached the stove to turn on the burner, she heard a dull, repetitive thumping that resonated through the wall of her sink's back splash. It was coming from next door. The thumping wasn't direct, like a hammer hitting a nail. Instead, it was the sound of something larger and padded slamming up against the wall. It was repetitive, but controlled and different every time. There were variances in the speed and sounds of the impacts, and it all sounded uncanny, so strangely familiar, common but far removed.

Elise filled her teapot with water and continued listening to the sounds in her walls. What was making the sound, a sound quite familiar to her? She didn't know why she was interested, but she was. She listened a bit longer, believing she'd discovered the source of the sound. She had to cross the hall to find out for sure. Her anxiety made her ashamed. She twisted the motive.

"Something could be wrong," she mumbled out loud to herself, placing the pot over the wavering flame. "I should make sure everything is okay. Something might be the matter over there," as if she, a woman of eighty-seven years old, could be of assistance in a struggle.

She shuffled from the kitchen and into the hall. The sounds became clearer now. Other sounds accompanied the thudding. There were higher pitched sounds, vocal sounds, muffled utterances—moans getting lost in soft things. The girl was making love. Elise knew it. The girl next door was making love to some boy. Was it the tall, stocky, fair-skinned boy, the jeans and tee-shirt boy? Was it the rather plain boy that Elise had passed on the stairs from time to time? Was it the boy with the heavy booted step that drummed up the stairs late at night when Elise wished to be in bed? She'd heard those steps many times, but these sounds beating through the walls were new ones. Was this their first time?

Oh, God, she remembered her first time. So many of her friends regretted *their's*, lied about the splendors of it, but not Elise. No. Her first time *was* amazing. It went through the walls, too. It had its own set of muffled ecstasies, its own rhythms of bodies drumming together. And though the pillow that had cradled her moans that night had long decomposed by then, she remembered offering to it her first

sounds. And she left her sounds in the walls and in the dirt; and she left herself on the bed of straw, and he left himself in her that night, too, inside all of her, inside her mind and heart, and in that sleep deprived night he tore the door to her past from its hinges.

She spread her palms open and put them to the wall. She sprawled there with her arms stretched wide and her face and chest pressed against the cool sheet rock. Her ear was there against the wall, soaking in the sounds—the sounds that made the yellow hallway fall away behind her. There were smothered moans wafting from the room. But Elise heard her own moans from sixty-seven years prior; and the hall was now that straw-filled pallet on the floor of the old work shed. The smell of stale apartment paint dissipated, replaced by the scents of lithium grease and dirt—straw and kerosene from a glowing lamp. The scratching from next door (maybe legs to furniture being ground into the floor) was no longer there. For Elise the sounds turned to crickets that purred together in that cool night, on that farm, in that machine shed, with that boy, that strong farm boy with shaggy hair and the first sprouting of a beard; and how her hands spread over his back and his fissures of muscles and his hard ass that worked like a piston; and her face was against his, and his lips were to her neck and shoulder.

“Oh, God,” Elise heard exclaimed from next door.

Oh, God, she said to the straw, to the crickets in the night, to the silent machines.

“Oh, God.”

Oh, God.

“Oh, God” *Oh, God.*

“Close.” *Close.*

“Yes.” *Yes.*

“Yes!”

Elise’s legs were tense and ached deeper than they had in years. Her pulse drummed away in her chest, and her arms stretched, joints screaming.

“Yes,” mumbled Elise. “Oh, God, Lord, yes,” she said, sinking down to the floor slowly, where she collapsed into herself like a folding flower. She held herself there, on the floor, in sobs. Her body jolted. She smothered her mouth with her shoulder and stared into her kitchen through the door, slightly ajar. She could see a third of her refrigerator, and on it was a cat magnet holding a desiccated and cracking newspaper clipping. It was a clipping of her great granddaughter. Haley was seven in the picture and smiling with a gap-toothed grin from losing baby teeth. She was the daughter of a dead mother. Twenty-seven now, and about to be a mother herself. Elise hadn’t heard from Haley since the funeral nine years before. When Elise was there, and she approached Haley with remorse, Haley smiled, and Terry Lee—Elise’s granddaughter, Haley’s cousin—whispered Elise’s name into Haley’s ear so that Haley would know who that haggard, shrunken woman was floating over to her with an aged smile and a collapsing face on the day she was to bury her own mother.

She’s in a better place. This is the last thing Elise heard Haley say into her ear, while in an empty hug.

“She’s in a better place.”

Elise looked at the clipping curling in on itself, yellowing with age, and she moaned into her shoulder, alone in the hall, under a bulb with a glass dome cover full of dead bugs.

*

The next day Elise awoke to Herb offering her coffee. “Elise, get up. It’s getting late. It’s a nice day. You should try and see a bit of it.”

He placed the coffee on the nightstand by the bed. Elise, rolled up in heavy blankets, looked around at the once white room, now yellowing with age. Herb had slept away the early parts of the morning by the time Elise had collected herself enough to sleep.

“Smidge, your eyes look like two piss holes in the snow,” Herb said, matter of factly.

Elise looked from the window, where a shade sliced a beam of sunlight in half. Herb stared at her for a moment, waiting for a response to his comment. He shuffled sluggishly from the room without one.

Elise looked around at the four walls, at the dated wooden furniture (that Herb had to have), at the mirrors framed in matching wood, and at the little wooden shelves with dusty doilies holding random dottings of china, flowers, and old pictures. In the corner was an antique wash stand that, in another time, she had used nearly every day. She had relied on it for years. Now it was a decoration, a symbol of older ways.

Elise thought about the early morning experience, in the hall, at the top of the stairs. It was time travel to forgotten places, to times with the smells and sounds of life sprouting and dying around her. In her youth she was amongst the life cycle, amongst the living and dying, amongst it all happening together at the same moment. Now, towards the tail end of the cycle, life was stale. It was mothballs and thick-soled shoes. It was the same smell of *Ivory* dish soap for forty years, the same bar soap and the same perfumes, now practically given away at the local dollar store, relegated for more favorable scents. Her scents were forgotten among the many new ones, like her life forgotten amongst the many that were birthed after her, forgotten with all the ones that died at better times than she would. That was it, she thought. She waited too long to die.

She had cried while the morning broke. She had cried in joy and in pain, in fear and in remembrance. As the sun pushed its way through a gray, sheet sky, like shale stone, she lived, briefly, on the floor of that hall, in a corridor that connected two disparate lives tumbling together into the same chasm.

Once Elise was out of bed she spent all day waiting for the night to come. Herb squandered his day away in front of the television. Herb held the TV’s remote like a fizzled out wand. It was nearly useless to him, as big as his forearm and making no sense at all; anything on the remote that wasn’t arrows or numbers was alien to Herb. Elise sat in front of the television. She didn’t watch it, though. She was digging her way into her past, trying to discover ecstasy like earlier that morning. She climbed through her past like legless soldiers over leveled cities. She struggled and found nothing like before, nothing like that morning.

All day Elise sat in her chair doing nothing. She watched Herb lumber across the apartment from time to time, occasionally shaking her head to his random questions. With the exception of the occasional bathroom break or coffee refill, Elise simply watched the crisp bright day sink to a cool blue, like the blank face of a mountain. When the television began casting itself in long shadows on the walls, Herb kissed Elise on the cheek and made his way to bed. As he disappeared down the hall and the closing bedroom door plugged the sounds of his shuffled strides, Elise's pulse quickened. Her head grew light. Her feet tingled, fingertips tapped rapidly on the soft, stained, arm of her old chair. She sat, enthralled by the night, by her sudden hope to hear those heavy footsteps up the stairs.

Eventually they came. Much later than usual, but they came. The boy climbed the stairs, his boots dropping like bricks in the hall. Elise listened, hearing a knock on the door. There she sat, beside her yellow lamp, holding her breath, waiting to hear the door open, her heart punching her sternum. Elise couldn't just sit and wait; she was up, making her way across the room to look through the peephole. She pressed her face to her door; the young man stood in the hall, waiting, wearing jeans and boots and a dark blue tee shirt with a few noticeable holes here and there. He wore a stone-colored ball cap and held a case of beer under his arm. Raising his fist, he went to knock again, but ceased as the swoosh-clink of the dead bolt sounded, followed by the sliding and dropping of the chain. The door opened, and Elise caught a brief glance of her neighbor's red hair. But the boy stepped into her embracing arms, blotting her image out entirely. The door slammed behind him, leaving sounds of the limp chain scratching.

She stood at her door, still peering through the hole and out into the hall with the spilling yellow light. She stood there and opened her hand slowly. She ran her fingertips down the smooth wood door as she stared. She listened, her ears gripping dead air—air with no sound waves other than the scratching of the flagging chain. Elise watched her neighbor's door, hearing her own punching heart, thinking what might be transpiring behind the wooden rectangle.

He was telling her about work, maybe. She was telling him she had waited all day for him to come home, and he would say that work had never seemed so long, and that he couldn't wait to see her, that he'd been thinking about her all day.

Elise's hand caressed the door; her fingertips were blooming petals, making their way up the smooth wood, fingering a cold hinge on the way.

Thinking about earlier that morning, the boy would joke alluringly; he'd tell her how tired he was at work because of how late they had stayed up enjoying each other's bodies. This would make the girl so wild for him. It would.

As if on cue, Elise heard it happening. It was a ruffle followed by the sound of nothing at all—the sound that is the start of anything important. The silence was long and pulsing, pregnant with absence. Then there was a loud thud against the door. Elise was forcing her eye into the peephole now, the metal ring pushing painfully against it. She stared at the neighbor's closed portal. There was a deep scratching sound against it now. A button on his jeans, maybe? Her nails? The sounds halted for a moment, but were rejuvenated with a clank. A belt buckle hitting the floor? Would it be his belt, wrapped up in those heavy jeans, bunched up about

his ankles now? Would he be standing there, hard? What would she do? What should she do with it? Her hand? Her mouth? Inside her? Anywhere?

Elise heard moans and the creaking of pressure against the door. She reached her hand to her doorknob, cool to the touch. It opened slowly, silently, and she passed through, floating across the hall, pressing her ear to the neighbor's door. She heard passion, lust, flesh sliding up and down the wooden surface, grinding against it with hot friction, with young, tight bodies connecting against one another again and again. Elise's hands were pressed to the door, her head held sideways, her ear tunneling in the sounds. She could feel their warm bodies heating the wood—two people so caught up in each other that the world could fly from its axis and it wouldn't matter much. Nothing mattered to them right then but their own selves. They were one another's balance, sanity—everything.

“Oh, Lord.”

Elise slid slowly to the floor, peering through the crack below. She saw two feet, large and veined. The feet flexed and bulged as they balanced two slamming, dancing bodies. The toes were clenched, clutching and gripping, to only moments later bloom into a spread-toed grapple. There was a sweat pant pile on the floor as well, the girl's, no doubt. Her foot was wrapped up in the maroon folds somewhere, fighting its own battle for balance. Elise lay there, listening to the girl moan, call God, curse; and she listened to the boy grunt and exhale breaths and guttural moans.

Amongst all the noise—the girl's body bouncing off the door, sliding up and down it, and amongst the boy's hellish growls and clutching toes—Elise was able to find herself there on the floor, on the dirty carpet of the hall, with her fingertips, with her hand of so soft skin, visible veins and old, uncared-for yellow nails. She found herself. It had been years. And she stared under the door at the boy's feet, now on their balls, and let the children's music tumble into her ears. She heard them orchestrate deep sounds together. She heard the door scream with the weight of them pressing against it. Elise watched the boy's feet fall back to their heels, and he sunk to his knees.

“Oh, baby,” Elise heard through the door.

Elise's eyes filled with tears. The boy's legs turned to a diaphanous rippling as Elise's hands pulled her away from the dirty floor, the yellow hall, her present state.

*

Elise lay in bed. A tree outside her window stretched the length of the ceiling, a silhouette cast about by a streetlight. It looked contrived. It looked like a replica of a real thing meant to convince someone it *was* the real thing. Elise couldn't sleep. She looked around her room, at everything in a veil of butter light, piss yellow sterility, smelling stale and forgotten. Next to her, Herb snored away the night with the noise of viscous lung tissue splayed to ribbons. His face was glowing butter-crème yellow, and his skin climbed over itself in wrinkles, like that of a smashed grape. His eyes rolled under his lids, vividly watching everything in his mind, casting glances in all directions, despite being blind to everything in hours of wakefulness.

Elise squeezed her hand, bunching the sheet below her in a clawed grip. She stared at Herbert, who was still as stone. The comforter on the bed was like a coffin to her, pressing her to death, tucking itself in around her, below her, crawling furtively to her throat. Herb laid somnambulant, oblivious to life creeping along to put an end to things, creeping around everywhere, anywhere. Elise flailed with fists and feet, her legs and arms like working gears, jolting like the barrels of fired guns. The blanket over her bounced around like it might rupture back into atoms. After much fighting, the blanket lay, felled, in a silent pile on the floor at the foot of the bed. Herb laid on his side, curled up like a fetus that felt numb and dumb in the womb.

Elise was up now, out of the room and into the kitchen. She was sweating through her nightgown. In the hall, only moments ago, she had remembered everything from her past. Yet she had forgotten a great many things already, revived memories were now dead again, an identity asphyxiated by time. Her life was seized by time's gorilla grip, and that leech drank her gone, so gone, until she alone heard her pulse. It was a slow and tired. Even it wanted little to do with her anymore.

On the floor, in the hall, she remembered for a moment what it was to be something to someone else, what it felt like to be anything at all. Now she is a habit to others. That is all, she thought. She was lover, she was nervousness and butterflies; she was blushing cheeks and stumbled speech. Now she is forgotten, old. She is ... *was*.

"Something wrong?" asked Herb through slits for eyes. He leaned against the frame where the kitchen met the hall.

The kitchen light was beaming from the ceiling, bleeding white and antispectic, uncaring of the hour. Elise leaned against the refrigerator and stared right through Herbert. She felt magnets prodding into her shoulder blades and her flesh—a thin, skin sleeve, nothing more. Herb made his way over to Elise.

"I asked you what's wrong." He stepped closer to her. "Well, are ya feelin' all right or no?"

Elise stared him down with lost eyes.

"Do I need to call an ambulance? Elise! Are you okay?" Herbert seized her shoulder. "Don't just stand there, God damn it, respond. Are you all right?"

Elise, as if her gaze were pulled from the end of the world itself, jumped from Herb's touch. She was looking at him now, into his hazel eyes; she was looking at him, into him. He was unflinching, unblinking, utterly stone and entirely confused. He was lost, not even breathing. Elise leaned in, and with warm lips placed a gentle kiss to his mouth. He didn't know what was happening, what it meant, but so many years told his mouth exactly how to respond, and it did.

He kissed her softly, like he did on the day of their wedding, like he had every morning and evening for the last eighty years. He didn't kiss her like he did the first night they fucked behind a hill in a small cemetery, gated in black cast iron, pinned in by walls of onyx-curtained cornfields in August. He didn't kiss her like he did over and over again that night, under a sky full of thin gray clouds that passed below a gleaming moon, looking like grease stains on a napkin. He didn't kiss her like the way he kissed her neck and shoulders that night, the way he bit her breasts and ears while she spread out for him in the grass. He didn't kiss her the way he did when he

held her small hands pressed into the cool earth while he panted over her, while she watched thin-skinned clouds linked and dragging across dense night sky. Right then, in the kitchen bursting white, he didn't kiss her like he did the night he thought the baby boy was conceived. He didn't kiss her like he did on the night he believed he filled her belly with the boy who would never know knowing. There, in the kitchen, Herbert didn't kiss Elise like he did on the night he was told the origin of the miscarried child, the child he would be led to believe was his and not some other boy's from a farm, some other boy with a shed and a pile of straw. She would never tell him about the child, the only boy ever made in her belly, and he would never kiss her like he did on the night that forced them together for eighty years, forced them together till death.

"Elise." Herbert touched her jaw softly. He was looking into her now, with sorry eyes. He felt something thick and sorrowful growing in the room. His sagging face begged for an answer.

Elise moved in close to Herbert. She could feel his moist breath blow warm on her lips. Her lips touched his softly. She rested her upper lip on his lower. "Fuck me," she mouthed. Her lips traced the F and M over his lower lip—pushed it away with the F, wrestled it up with the M.

"Wha?" Years appeared to drain from Herb's face as the demand sunk in.

"Like you did that night." Elise stepped up to Herbert, closing any space between them. He looked away into the sink. 'Fuck me, Herb. Again. Fuck me again.'

"Can't." his reply was soft, barely audible.

"Herbert?"

Herbert suddenly stiffened, pushing Elise's hand from his hip.

"What the hell's gotten into you?"

Elise grabbed Herb's nightshirt collar in a white-knuckled fist.

"You fuck me!"

"What? No! You're Goddamned crazy. What the hell's come over you?"

Elise grabbed Herb's jaw with her open hand. "You fuck me, Herb. You do it, you son of a bitch. You did it then! You had no problem then, did you, you son of a bitch? When I was young, and you wanted nothing else more, you didn't have a problem then, did you?"

Herb chopped her hands from his face and collar.

"What's wrong with you? Are you out of your mind? What are yo--"

"You fuck me!"

"God damn it, woman! I will not—"

"You never have. Once. Once you did, and never again."

"You're my wife."

"I'm a woman, Herbert, you bastard! I always have been, always had passions, drives."

"Christ, Elise, you're almost ninety—"

"I'm still alive. I've been alive for years after that night. Now you fuck me!"

Herbert stood still, his face blotchy with red and pink.

"Fuck me."

Herb looked at the floor, unresponsive.

“Fuck me, you son of a bitch,” Elise belted, running her hands down the front of the refrigerator. The magnets bounced and slid about the linoleum, clicking like tumbling tacks. Haley’s picture floated with a whisper to the kitchen floor. “Fuck me,” Elise demanded, growling almost demonically now. Herb stepped back with genuine fear.

“Elise, you need to calm down.”

Elise looked at him, pressing, heavy. “Fuck me,” she whispered.

“Calm down.”

“You son of a bitch,” she said, with her head cast down, staring up at him.

“Calm down, Elise.”

“Eighty God damned years, you son of a bitch. You never meant a bit of it.”

“Cal—”

“Fuck me. Fuck me, now. Do it!”

“Calm,” Herb, said, quietly like he would to a whimpering child.

Elise began flailing with nails that swatted at Herb’s face like a chainsaw. “Enough!” she belted in tears, tearing at Herb’s nightshirt, face, eyes, everything, right into his soul. “Enough! Enough!” she screamed. “You son of a bitch, enough!”

She stepped into Herb, pressing her body into his, and stomped Haley’s clipping, busting it into jagged tissue particles. Herb placed one foot behind the other in his clumsy retreat. His body spilled to the ground like a great felled tree. Small incisions bled from his forehead and scalp, where her nails had found a home in its soft skin. He looked up at her, blood crawling slowly down one cheek and across the bridge of his nose. She stood over him, a compact, heaving shadow, blotting out the light above. Herbert lay bleeding, sweating, panting—staring with wide eyes.

“You know, Herbert,” the shadow spoke sardonically. “That night...I have a secret about that night at the cemetery.”

Herbert just stared up at her.

“You know, Herbert; the night you filled me with a boy not strong enough to make it?”

A tear found a place on the rim of Herbert’s eye as he lay sprawled at the feet of the shadow.

“Let me tell you, little Herbert; let me tell you about that night. It—”

“Mr. and Mrs Memphis?” came a voice in the hall, followed by a knock at the door. “Is everything all right in there?”

Featherbedding

Rae Bryant

He brings her water and miniature corn muffins, halved open and spread with bright green pepper jelly from a glass jar she's kept all these years. She lengthens her legs down the mattress, sets the four muffin halves side by side on the white cloth napkin that he's unfolded for her, lain over her thighs like a tablecloth.

She's not eaten today.

This is the last of their food. Nothing left in the cabinet or refrigerator or the hiding places neither of them tells each other about. The muffins are necessary now, like the moment when a child knows there are no magical gift givers or tooth fairies or St. Christophers. Only mortals and starvation.

Something pitiful in the way he holds them, as if an offering.

She sets the muffins aside, opens herself, nymph-like, mouth spread and gritty. She pulls the dirty edge of his gray t-shirt up so to show herself to him, spreads herself across the mattress like thin flesh oil over too much canvas. He moves over her, pushes her thicker sections, spreads her more thinly, more evenly so to smooth out the bruises and lines. He can see through her now, understand her better. He falls in love with her anyway.

He calls her Calliope and sings a song for her about swimming in a stream, the deep part where they twine thin hungry legs, tread water, pull back their heads and fall beneath the surface so to kiss long water kisses. They ignore the bruises.

Fill me, my darling

Pour yourself.

He digs a trench for her, forms a mote around her body, rips mattress and blanket and sheets and feather pillows to better pad the nest. He says: we can wait out the winter here in feathers and mattress springs. Then he burrows beneath her, turns his body, settles beneath her.

I want you on top of me forever.

But we haven't any food. We'll waste away.

She lays flat against him, warms her breasts and stomach, pushes her legs and arms against his. Where their skins touch, they grow moist and warm and he imagines they could grow sustenance, a garden between their skins. He tries to pull feathers up and onto her back so to warm her, but they've floated off the bed and onto the floor. They stay this way for days.

*

Where are the muffins? she says.

They sit stale now, on the bedside table, feathers caked in the hardened green pepper jelly.

Pity, she says, my mother had given it to me. The jelly, I mean. She falls out over him. Should have eaten it while it was still fresh.

The Pueblo Is In My Name

Raymond Farr

Super-luminol gales of a cocktail concoction in human glass is ever at the ready to party, to then figure things out in Suburbia. And always par for the course. We become supra-human as someone crying germ-a-phobe! in a crowded theater, or someone else who is germane on principle. Those early years were telling it slant, sometimes all CAPS, sometimes underscored for emphasis like the title of a novel. I have to ask you: Who is that other, that third Third Reich who always stands beside you there dispiriting the ghosts whose saddles lie prone at the wishing well's base, whose romantic trigger is a postmodern fiction, a fragment of self perpetuated by language? I am wishing that his or her insane crazy apples are the toast of Bulgaria; that their happy day lunch at Comeuppance Café on the Circle near Medford is positively charged—a Protean neon that glistens in winter. In summer I'm a tee shirt

hung on a clothesline. I am out to dry, in some instances precluded by sculpture and seminal texts. As a career choice I am smelling of wood smoke. I was cooking last night at the 4th of July bar bbq. The one where we met on LSD so long ago, WD40 greasing our tongues, our palms hungry for petrol that's raunchy raunchy medicine. You and me huddled together for five brief infinite minutes as though speed dating our way into an all hipster lifestyle seemed too fantastic a dream to possibly hope for. We had a fine selection of choice Kobi beefsteaks. And Clorox is what I still smell like after doing the laundry this morning. Let me kiss yr SMS. Let me hold yr RSS feed against the roof of my mouth. On the chapped lips of my poem you gather yr petals one by one, dropping only the slightest of hints you are real, that you originate somewhere in reality. The real world is never the most real thing to you. We have beds that we lie down in and drown in, choked up on glory in the suburbs—this way to Cheops or the Lenscrafter's on Highway 200. An '06 Chevy Suburban is a mobile

pueblo. Or a child's hypnotic Moebius Strip defined by the stare of Da Vinci's Madonna. The pueblo is modern and free hanging in the face of pop music. It is legally registered in my name in name only. For the purposes of this poem it drives off the road in 2010 in my mind and smashes into a Rooms-To-Go across from the Lenscrafter's where I generated lenses that qualify as work. My open door is a joke I wish everyone would get. Pax or pox to you, Super Mario Brothers and yr intransitive state. I remember we talked about this, the games we play as young adults growing more and more sophisticated. Our participation in these esoteric waves of existence rituals and post postmodern games: libido vs lovers, risk vs value, chance vs the alphabet, the violin sheet music of a sure thing vs the boiled feet and potato smell of yr mother's beet and macaroni salad (which you sd would remind me so much of my years in my father and mother's cellar studying the subway system in order to achieve fiscal dominance and save moolah for college). An

electric boy of 12, incandescent with my stash of Marvel Comics and tubes of glue (this is not a confession, Officer Reinhold. This is a bio of a schizoid boy, of someone clever that I cleverly dug up, hallucinating my life in gritty urban subculture). I memorized my lines. I committed shock therapy. I was Science Officer Spock using my ability to mind meld on a Klingon (or was it a Romulan?) unable to fully connect with those cute little tribbles or any other insentient alien lifeform I encountered in the emptiness of space. In the emptiness of space I discovered the skill of elision and evasion. While back here on Earth I studied the dangerous art and science of criminal detection as practiced by Sherlock Holmes. His use of opium as a mind-altering drug in order to solve crimes seemed bizarre and off-putting, entrenched as it was, deep in the high Victorian era, where he would sit and cogitate often for weeks, lost in his rooms at 221b Baker Street, his interest in the occult, much like my own, a hapless escapism. And then you appeared drizzling honey on the tastiest Coleslaw of words

I'd ever experienced. Some quote you read on the internet or some piece of text you scabbled after after reading it in some book about Postmodern Culture. Tan Lin's Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004 The Joy of Cooking [Airport Novel Musical Poem Painting Film Photo Hallucination Landscape] A Book of Meta Data [Standards] Downloaded, Recipes, with Photographs From a Flea Market for instance. Even as you stood, once upon a time, at the top of my cellar stairs, shade comingling with decadent daylight, yr fierce demeanor showed all over yr face, lit with rays of light from a window at eye level. The light in yr eyes, and sometimes you yourself, were just a split infinitive or the one little bit of irony I asked for and never really needed or felt I deserved in my life. And bending down to pick up a leaflet fallen from my windshield, I asked you what would happen if I just decided to go there. No one ever could control the World though it lay like a handsome dog at their feet sleeping thru the flash and din of that boisterous New Years' Eve bash at the turn of the

new millennium. No crash occurred. Apocalypse averted. And this after reading the menu at Sir Lancelot's Fine Dining & Camelot Experience: a tavern trapped in a fawn's wild eye, replayed in a digital realm. You dreamed once you'd subverted yr group therapy group, aloud in the subconscious flicker of a schoolyard where anyone could hear it. The schoolyard you dreamed of (so taboo) you called the Outback for Ninnies. You sd no one controls the head if you know what I mean and we all knew what you meant when you added: if you all get my drift. You were speaking in tongues or in slang and that was a dish we all liked to lick, hoping to hallucinate: jobs, lovers, poems, children, lives of the poets always a tear jerk away from the norm. It was yr poem, that fawn of the public record, which seemed most of the time a car out of control, dashing headlong into the young jacaranda tree outside of Skidmore's Printing and Copies. You sd it was a poem that you lived more than a poem that you wrote down on paper. Back then it was 1977 and the tree I speak of was a grapefruit tree and

the silence of just before dawn was a squirrel or white tail deer paralyzed in yr head lights, blocking out all logic, frustrated in the screech of yr foot hitting the defective brake pedal, which pursues (as it always does and did) jug jug to dirty ears, after which yr sable eyes and evergreen skin took miles to prepare, once more, for yr long night awash in the degradation of the System. The System which is and causes its own cause célèbre. What shattered that night was Ben Hur in the public psychotic episode starring Mel Gibson and the Chipmunks from Sesame Street. As I sd, I sd I love you there and you passed me doing 90 mph. What is the meaning of god or love if a man ignores his own trajectory thru clouds, thru traumatic bedrock, while somebody else gets up and line dances after three fingers of scotch like a good public official? At the time of yr accident I breathed in Ralph Wiggim nickels and dimes hoping to recant my epic about f-stops, but got a punchline you'd written as a gesture of yr sincerity in exchange instead.

Sink[w]hole

R L Swihart

“Moorish white,” she said. And he said, “How do you know?”

“Here’s one hand—and here’s another,” she said. “Now watch hands multiply like rabbits.”

He grabbed her hand and whispered a silly nothing, “The whole hinges on whether the whole is hinged.”

“I’d like to examine your hand,” she said, splaying his palm and admiring his lifeline. “But unfortunately I haven’t the time.”

“I’m busy, too, my love: I’m at the end of a semester. Please mete my donut, Mr. Pappus.”

“Moorish white,” she said. And he said, “How do you know?”

Bringing In The Sheaves

R L Swihart

In Paul's case
helium is an easier choice
than Nebutal

It's about twenty minutes
from his room to the outskirts
of Zürich

Tschüss, Tschüss, Tschüss
and he breathes in the sheaves
of his favorite hymn

In The Shadows of Scepter Valley

R L Swihart

Czapka: cap. Cat: kot. Image: after-image. Sól i pieprz

She's polishing an apple. On the table: violets

The police car opens: black leather and Gothic heads bobble out

When the bubble pops she screams in English but he hears only gibberish

Cat's Ice

R L Swihart

- Here—and the reason isn't clear—you can choose any color you like
- Orlando lands or doesn't, and Orlando chooses blue
- Blue: Baltic. Blue: Palimpsest. Darkness through light
- From Sopot's strand he observes himself and the scrivener gulls
- Waves and wrinkles trace migrations, warships, and language in flux
- With his beak the watchman crow pulls a blue hood over a black
- A yarning rat, balling up gray, drowns in blue
- Now a smithy is on one knee hammering chaos into cosmos
- Here—and with clear reason—any color you choose is gray

We Were Listening For The Shattering

Ryder Collins

Creeping in on the parking lot, I'd said, What? You'd said, What? Mama whispered, Listen! Baby didn't say nothing.

We got in; we got out. Smooth this time.

Now we were smooshed in the cab of a pick-up truck and Daddy's ghost leered over all of us.

I'm lying; Daddy was driving and driving dirty down dirt roads. We were passing a new whiskey bottle around, except for Baby who'd lost her Nuk. She'd never get another, but we didn't have the hearts to tell her yet.

There was nothing to do but drive or join the black-masked anarchists smashing all the glass in the world.

We were trying to beat them to all the package stores in the world; we'd just scored one for the home team.

Mama said, They're not called package stores in every state.

We all looked at her funny, even Baby. That's when our Christian radio station, K-ROS, went all squiggly and the speaking in tongues.

You had one hand on my thigh and the other inching closer to my left breast, but Mama and Daddy didn't seem to care. All the rules'd gone out the window and the anarchists were finishing them off with bats and rocks and baseballs and armadillos and toilets and lamps and animal bones and human skulls and Campbell's soup cans and paintings of Campbell's soup cans, hymnals, food processors, computers, baby dolls, babies, etc. Anything, basically, those fuckers felt like chucking.

We were gonna make goddamned sure we stayed out of their way. The whiskey went round again and you were squeezing on me and it almost felt good. I almost forgot for a sec.

Then we heard crashing coming from down the road.

Soon all that'd be left of the world would be frames, beaten, disjointed, broken, displaced.

Just like us.

Playing

Sheldon Lee Compton

They clawed the ground for worms and piled them to the side. A little rain the night before helped, the edge of the yard coming up in mud pies, a sucking sound and then two or three would curl loose.

Savanna ate one. Tim didn't dare her or anything. She just pushed it past her lips and swallowed. Then she ate another one. And another.

When they had about twenty or so, Tim asked Savanna how many she could eat. She smiled and starting picking them out, popping them in her mouth. Then Tim dared her to chew them, not just swallow.

She never got sick. She said all they ever ate was dirt and didn't taste like anything.

When there were about a dozen left, Tim stepped on them and bent close. Maybe they ate dirt. What was there was mostly black. He decided he would eat one, too. But Savanna was gone, her pot belly and slimy lips somewhere else now, another yard, another boy.

He scattered the worm mess with his shoe, wiped his hands on the side of the house and went inside to jerk off.

Fabricio Coloccini Loves The Whore

Thomas Bunstead

When my friend was complaining to me and opening his heart about things relating to his family and how he felt powerless to the way they had shaped his unhappy character, I said to him, what about Fabricio Coloccini? Fabricio Coloccini is a professional footballer who plays centre half for Newcastle United, and for the Argentina national side – not that I had to explain this to my friend. I said, what about Fabricio Coloccini, the insults he receives, week in week out, with fifty thousand or so football fans shouting unreserved abuse at his person? Imagine that, I said.

Across from me at the tiny red table, which our knees barely fit beneath these days, my friend squinted. The smile at the corner of his mouth was as if to say, you're trying to make me feel better by coming up with something that has nothing to do with this; you're trying to make me laugh. I wasn't, though. It was only that I was unwilling to listen to my boyhood friend's complaints (by now familiar) to do with how powerless he feels in his life. Otherwise, possibly, I might have been less imaginative in my insensitivity.

This thing about Fabricio Coloccini, though. God knows, the thought had never occurred to me fully formed – that Fabricio Coloccini's woes put in perspective those of self-pitying young men – but I said to my friend, without really knowing exactly why, consider Fabricio Coloccini. I might have told him to turn his mind to any professional footballer, but it was Fabricio Coloccini I chose.

I must, though, know something about why it was this particular footballer who came to mind, with his distinctive complement of curly blonde hair, with the incomplete polygon of his career path, as I see it – beginning in Argentina, before signing for clubs in Italy, then Spain, then England. Increasingly, after all, the time I have been spending on trains, morning and evening (going away from the red table, coming back to it), has been taken up letting my mind escape like vapours and take form in the high drama and tragedy of Fabricio Coloccini's life in Newcastle.

*

Fabricio Coloccini lands in Newcastle for the first time. He has his agent with him, a man for whom he has little affection, but who has orchestrated his transfer from Deportivo La Coruña to Newcastle FC, with its attendant forty thousand pounds a week pay rise. Fabricio Coloccini knows that this will have taken some work on the agent's part, but also that the agent won't have done badly out of the deal either. So they manage to keep it civil. But their feelings towards one another, little more than tepid, mean that when Fabricio Coloccini steps out into the fantastic grey of this part of the world, England's north east, and when the hairs on his forearms are quickly patterned by the drizzle coming across the runway, even

though it is August, he has no one to whom he might express the drop in spirits he feels. It is a pang he has not felt since his mother waved him off to his first semi-professional footballing academy, in his early teens, all those years and a number of continents ago. His body remembers that feeling, as he emerges from First Class onto the runway steps; he tries to account for the queasiness – he tells himself that it was possibly the crayfish, the kiwi coulis, the grapes, the Cointreau truffles – but a louder voice in him is just saying, this is all wrong – but maybe – no: this *is* all wrong. He feels opened at his stomach, his innards drawn in a slow slippery heave, as he observes each detail of the manicured but patently third class interior of Newcastle International: kicked blue carpets, years old chairs, 70's lines, possibly polystyrene ceiling panels. And the women, in whose admiring looks he might usually find consolation, they have so many layers of makeup he thinks they must be hiding something, and their eyes are none of them kind. He keeps his very large Ray Ban aviators on.

The signing of the contract and introduction to various board members passes without incident, and all in a babble foreign to Fabricio Coloccini, even though he knows English quite well and could recite whole scenes hailing from *Conan The Barbarian*, *The Running Man*, *Total Recall*, *Twins* and the *Terminator* franchise. Even though he's pretty clear about the language when Arnold Schwarzenegger's speaking it, the Geordie accent has little in common with the Austrian, android clarity which Schwarzenegger's enunciation achieves.

Pre-season training also passes relatively straightforwardly. Fabricio Coloccini has an interpreter on the sidelines and for team talks, and his prodigious physical talents and ability to anticipate the flow of a game serve him well. His Spanish-speaking colleagues say encouraging things, and he feels something peculiar which is to do with an understanding that they are being genuine – because he is a good player, possibly the most naturally gifted in the squad – but that the things they say do not seem heartfelt, and he suspects the manager has told them they have to make these remarks to help him feel at home. When he is in the gym doing squats, or in with the physio having his calves massaged, or in the showers, they come by and say things, but he does not believe them. They are thinking about performance-related bonuses, not him.

All of which is to say, after a particularly easy training session, when he gets back to his multi-million pound home in a gated community on the city's south-eastern edge, when he recognizes that the colours of the rugs and the carpets, the quartzed marble in the kitchen and bedrooms, as well as the flotilla of squash-faced dogs that greet him, are all of someone else's choosing, and when it is dark outside, Fabricio Coloccini is quite alone in the world. And he knows it. The constant drizzle against the floor-to-ceiling windows – it is only like multiples of his solitude, repetitions of ones – is there any way he might find comfort in it?

What does he do? What would any man do?

He rings up José Enrique Sánchez Díaz (known to Newcastle teammates and fans as “The Bull,” and on his club shirt simply as “Enrique”). The Bull says *sin problemas. Dejalo a mi* – leave it to me. José Enrique (known to the cadre of pimps and night club owners who service him and other highly paid, time-rich footballers

in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle, as a “tiddler” – an easy catch) makes a phone call.

The next night, of the six young women who accompany José Enrique and his cousin, Danny, to Fabricio Coloccini’s home, the one who interests Fabricio Coloccini is the one who does *not* feign surprise or pleasure or delight at the contents and style of his mansion’s B-palatial interior. Her false smile is less practised, less assured, other things slip through: uncertainties. It is the one who is least theatrically thankful when, twenty-five minutes and a glass of champagne each later, they go through the motions of love-making in front of the contemporary stone fireplace. It is the one who looks him in the eye when he ejaculates on her collarbone and chin.

She’s the one.

The next time José Enrique and Danny come over, a week later, true to the straightforward romantic push-pull which Fabricio Coloccini’s heart is subject to (due to days and weeks spent watching all that Schwarzenegger, bleak small hotel hours taking comfort in films whose romantic arrangements repeat, with an undeniable and almost recursive insistency, in the lives and loves of the imaginatively idle), there had been a mix up with the order. It is one busty nineteen-year-old Asian beauty and one considerably older Norwegian madam that take it in turns with Fabricio Coloccini on the overcast Thursday afternoon in question. The Ukrainian waif with the piercing eyes (that pierced him), she of the leg length barbed wire-and-roses tattoo, is not there. We interpret Fabricio Coloccini’s distracted looks throughout *fruits de mer* and coitus to say: has she been shipped back to Eastern Europe, or is she perhaps attending some fat, unkind, bearded property developer from Beresfield, or has she endured some other, worse fate, unimaginable to the love-struck?

His mind is affected. He remembers something his mother once said. Maybe he is in love.

True to the straightforward romantic dialectic at work when *I* imagine the workings of Fabricio Coloccini’s lonely heart, the progression of the pair’s relations barely need describing. It is not long before he has sought her employers, found the whereabouts of her shared accommodation, foxed his team physio by dislocating his shoulder (something he can pop in and pop out at will, when in need of time off), and taken Remarova for a week of pinchos, Albariño wine and walks on the Atlantic waterfront at Coruña. He hopes that, like a diamond dropped in a polluted stretch of water, her presence will transform the mansion, as much as his life. Soon he’s given her the keys to the castle (a phrase they find works equally well in Spanish, English and most Eastern European languages, and which happens to feature in their shared favourite Schwarzenegger movie), and she is there waiting when he returns from battle on Saturdays. She cooks dumplings and sings hauntingly on the loo –

Fabricio Coloccini, Fabricio Coloccini, Fabricio Coloccini, Fabricio Coloccini

– and soon they have given away the squadron of stupid, inbred Pekinese to the local dog home, who are pleased because, they say, the money they fetch could possibly save it from the threat of bankruptcy and closure.

*

So, I have this very melodramatic and quite sketchy idea of one or two scenes that relate highly indirectly to Fabricio Coloccini himself, the details of whose inner life I'll never be privy to.

I don't know Newcastle, either. I might have stopped there a few times on trains to other places, maybe even changed trains and bought a Cornish pasty in the station. I have an impression of the city that is patched together from Geordies I have met, the saying that carrying coals there would be a waste of time and the related idea of its folk as industrial workers, and, God knows, probably also related to the fact that the city's football team plays in the most unspangled of kits – black and white striped shirt, black shorts, black socks.

Neither do I know Argentina. My impressions of it have to do with other things: the way Spanish in the Argentinean accent, spoken by women, sounds luxurious. The shape in the mouth of the words "Tierra Del Fuego." Sierras or cordilleras or whatever it is they have there, gauchos or matreros; huge, billion-starred skies.

Not that my friend, sitting across from me, looking even more sullen than before, knew anything about this, not that it made the red table any more comfortable to cram ourselves under, and not that I could have told my friend, even, very much of this story – about the things I know and can say about the things I don't know. But, in my mind, it is certain that Fabricio Coloccini loves the whore.

Contributors' biographies

Andrew Roe lives in Oceanside, California, which is indeed by the ocean, although he lives about 4-5 miles inland, right on the border between Oceanside and the next town over, which is called Vista. He's lived in Southern California for most of his life and he's not entirely okay with this. As for writing stuff, he's had fiction published in places like One Story, Tin House, The Cincinnati Review, SmokeLong Quarterly and elsewhere. You can find out more at <http://andrewroe.blogspot.com>.

Cameron Pierce lives in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of *Lost in Cat Brain Land* (Eraserhead Press, 2010) and a few other books. He hates his website: <http://meatmagick.wordpress.com>.

Cezarija Abartis teaches at St. Cloud State University. Her collection, *Nice Girls and Other Stories*, was published by New Rivers Press. Her work has appeared in *Grey Sparrow Review*, *Ghoti*, *Everyday Genius*, *Word Riot*, *Underground Voices*, *Story Quarterly* and *New York Tyrant*, among others. *The Labyrinth* was begun on ShowMeYourLits in response to a writing prompt. Recently she has also completed a novel, a thriller.

Cheyenne Nimes was the 2009 winner of DIAGRAM's hybrid essay contest. She has just graduated from the non-fiction writing program at Iowa. More of her writing can be found at <http://strangeh2os.wordpress.com>.

Daniel Carter works, studies and writes in Columbus, OH.

Daniel Romo teaches high school creative writing, and lives in Long Beach, CA. His recent poems can be found in *The Legendary*, *Zygote in My Coffee*, and *Blaze VOX*. He is an MFA candidate in poetry at Antioch University, and bleeds Dodger Blue. A lot. More of his blood can be found at <http://danielromo.wordpress.com>.

David Backer edits <http://fictiondaily.org>, an aggregator site for online fiction. He teaches Theory of Knowledge in Quito, Ecuador. He plays old-timey banjo. He's listening to Carla Bruni as a sign from a party he threw last night waves in the breeze coming through his window. The sign says "No votar la ceniza por la ventana, chucha" which means "Don't throw your ashes out the window, cunt." It worked. There are no ashes on his neighbor's car like last time.

David Laskowski lives in Madison, WI and teaches at Edgewood College.

Edmond Caldwell's work has not appeared nor is it forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Iowa Review*, *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Harper's* or *Paris Review*. He lives near Boston and blogs here: <http://thechagallposition.blogspot.com>.

Elaine Chiew lives in Hong Kong and has been writing since 2005. She won first prize in the Bridport Short Story Competition in 2008. Her fiction has appeared in a variety of print and online publications. She is interested in the attraction of mass phenomenons, science, myths, food and hip hop. You can read more on her blog at: <http://elainepchiew.blogspot.com>.

Frank Hinton lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She edits <http://www.metazen.ca>, a daily fiction journal. She is a coffee and alcohol addict. Frank is not her real name.

Gregory Sherl is the author of *The Oregon Trail Is the Oregon Trail* (Mud Luscious Press, 2012). These poems are for Katherine Sullivan and the empire she built him over her garage. Find out more at: <http://gregorysherl.com>.

Jack Boettcher lives in Austin, Texas. He is the author of the chapbook *The Deviants* (Greying Ghost), and his writing has appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Puerto del Sol*, among others. He has a Norwegian forest cat named Mr. X, but like him the cat is from Mississippi, not Norway. He has a blog at <http://dropperbomber.blogspot.com>.

Jennifer Spiegel's collection of short stories, *The Freak Chronicles*, will be published by Dzanc Books in 2012. Having taught composition, literature, and creative writing at the college level—including several fiction workshops for ASU's Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing—she continues to teach a variety of online university courses. Her work has appeared in several anthologies and journals, ranging from *The Gettysburg Review* to *Nimrod*. Recent work can be read in the May issues of *PANK* online and *The Scrambler*. Additionally, an essay on "Lost" and the Redemptive End is online at *The Emprise Review*.

Jessica Newman graduated from Brown University and lives in Brooklyn, along with everyone else. This is not her fault. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *elimae*, *Unsaid*, *Caketrain*, *Birkensnake* and others.

Lauren Becker lives in Oakland, California. She doesn't look like anyone famous and is okay with that. She sometimes says some things at <http://lauren-graysheep.blogspot.com>.

Matt Mullins is a slash of centerline pinging your head's transistor. A blue chord hung from a rusty fingernail driven through the spine of a backstage door. His daughter, age three, just came into the room wearing nylon angel wings and told him to try harder. At what, she didn't say. Recent work is in print in *Pleiades* and online at *Hobart*. He's trying to write a poem a day and mostly isn't. Read them at <http://mullmullingitover.blogspot.com>.

Melissa Lee-Houghton was much happier when she thought she was on the way to see *The Wizard of Oz*, admittedly, but is now perfectly happy sipping hot coffee and

writing shorts. She has a poetry collection out in 2011, and work forthcoming in Stand.

Mitch James lives in Western Pennsylvania. He spends his mornings writing, his days working, and his nights drinking; he believes sleep is overrated. His favorite pipe is an Israeli made Allegro, with which he smokes an ever-mild Butter Nut Burly tobacco while sipping Jack on the rocks. Mitch welcomes critiques of his work and considers it a professional courtesy. Please contact him at tgzn@iup.edu or find him on Facebook if you'd like to discuss his material.

Rae Bryant's fiction has received Honors and Awards in the Lorian Hemingway and Bartleby Snopes competitions. You can read her stories now and soon forthcoming in Rick Magazine (formerly Mississippi Review), PANK, Gargoyle Magazine, Annalemma, Menda City Review, and Word Riot, among other publications. She is an M.A. Writing candidate at Johns Hopkins and editor of Moon Milk Review. Rae lives in Maryland with her husband and two children. Read more on her website: <http://www.raebryant.com>.

Raymond Farr lives a wacky existence but finds himself often bored by it. You can find him most days wandering around lost, looking for something he never possessed or writing poems in his mobile home kitchen office. He has poems in Otoliths, Moria, BlazeVox2kX, Letterbox, The Argotist Online, Cricket Online Review, Apocryphal Text, EOAGH, Clutching at Straws, and many others. He has published one chap book, Two Hats Appear When Applauded, as part of the Dusie Kollektiv 2007. His first full-length book, Two Texts (Chalk Editions 2010) is available free. For more samples of his work visit <http://mjonesrview.blogspot.com>.

R L Swihart currently lives in Long Beach, CA and teaches high school mathematics in Los Angeles. His background is scattered: Engineering, Education, Ancient Near Eastern Literature. His poems have appeared in various online and print journals, including Mimesis, Barnwood, and Bateau.

Ryder Collins wants back over the Mason-Dixon. She has work published in DIAGRAM, Monkeybicycle, Blood Lotus, and Juked, among others. Her chapbook, Orpheus on Toast, is forthcoming from Imaginary Friend Press. She writes at <http://bignortherngirlgoes.blogspot.com>.

Sheldon Lee Compton survives in Kentucky. There are two hard-as-nails dogs that hang out with him most days named Frik and Frak. Learn more at <http://bentcountry.blogspot.com>.

Thomas Bunstead loves those that know not how to live, except as downgoers, for they are they overgoers. <http://throwyourlaptopdownthestairs.blogspot.com>.

Forthcoming



“I think that novels that leave out technology misrepresent life as badly as Victorians misrepresented life by leaving out sex.”

The ninth issue of > kill author, named after Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007), will be published during the first half of October. Read our guidelines and submit your work to us now. Photographs showing you smoking a cigarette as coolly as he did might help get you noticed, but probably not.