

> **kill author**

a literary journal for the mostly alive

<http://killauthor.com>

Issue Six of > kill author, which is named after Donald Barthelme (1931-1989), was published on April 13, 2010.

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Issue Six: Barthelme



Name: Donald Barthelme

Died: 23 July 1989, aged 58

Cause of death: Throat cancer

Quote: "Write about what you're afraid of."

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Letter from the editors

“We’re excited by writing that experiments with form and language.” That’s what we say on our About page. On the evidence of our submissions queue, you’ve really taken us at our word. So we’ve only got ourselves to blame.

Not that we do blame you. No. Keep it going. Keep exciting us, inspiring us.

Since we launched > **kill author**, we’ve had more and more writing come our way that, if not actively throwing out the rulebook, did at least take a good shot at shredding it into small pieces before reassembling the debris in awesome new ways. Ways that we couldn’t even begin to imagine. Ways that made us wonder where the hell the author’s ideas came from. Ways that, yes, sometimes made us think “You can’t do that: that’s wrong, that’s not *allowed*” — before we realized that of course it’s allowed and, what’s more, it worked perfectly. The form and the language, as crazy as they seemed, were exactly right for what the writer was trying to say. And that’s the way another piece gets added to our ‘successful’ folder.

It’s only when we get to a couple of weeks before publishing that we remember the more mundane part of putting together an online literary journal: all those words in doc files needing to be turned into code, into web pages that as accurately as possible reflect the form and layout the writer has chosen to give their short story, their prose poem, their dialogue, their poem, their list-fiction, their micro-fiction (just to reel off a few of the array of formats we’ve dealt with). That’s when we sometimes find that this internet medium and the tools we use to build our corner of it don’t necessarily match the author’s vision.

Which is strange. The net’s been around for 40 years. Though it now plays sounds and music, shows movies, graphics and animation and allows us to interact with each other in a vast number of ways, text has been at the root of the technology from the start. But the treatment of that text doesn’t seem to have advanced nearly as much. You can lay it out a little and style it a little more if you know all the impenetrable hieroglyphics, and if you don’t mind that no one will see the end result in exactly the same way on their particular screen; you can feed a word-processed document into a piece of software and let it produce a web approximation of the original (if you’re lucky, and if the original wasn’t too complex); or you can take that same text document and make it into another kind of file that certainly looks exactly the same to everyone, but doesn’t offer the same interaction as a web page.

We’re not building a case for print only here. We’ve said it before in much greater detail, but we love the possibilities for literature and poetry that are offered by the web. We’re also not saying that PDFs are the only way to go — even though we now offer each issue in that format too — because to us they’re an uncomfortable midway point: not as usable, browsable or interactive as a web page, and clearly not as portable, tangible or immersive as a printed page (hell, we freely admit there’s still a romance to books that nothing else can quite match).

What we’re looking for, what we want to see, is a way of putting words online that finally allows this medium to truly reflect the innovative approach adopted by

many writers in print, and which those same writers can accomplish for themselves via user-friendly tools that are free of bewildering technical jargon. Where are the geeks who are going to show us the code for marking up poetry and putting tags round micro-fiction?

*

In our introduction to Issue Five, we said that we wouldn't be getting an accompanying blog or tumblr, for various reasons that sounded sensible to us at the time. So that'll be why we've now got a blog on the site. Call us hypocritical, if you want; more likely we're just indecisive and should think before we put such conclusive statements out there.

Finally, we're really proud to be the recipients of the StorySouth Million Writers Award for Best New Online Magazine or Journal, and to have a fantastic four pieces shortlisted for their Notable Stories of 2009, which will be voted on in May. Big thanks to Jason Sanford and the panel of judges.

This issue, as ever, is packed full of powerful words and compelling ideas, expressed in perhaps the widest range of literary and poetic forms we've so far featured. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we've enjoyed putting it together. Thanks to each and every one of the contributing writers.

Best,
> **kill author**

Failure

Adam J Maynard

Two Power Rangers in a pool
Overlooking the sea
Green whales on motorbikes
Robots in leather, laughing
A lady rides by on a wild boar
Side saddle, throwing away
Telescopic explosions
Some vampires are smoking
Playing pool and relaxing
Club soda leaks from my eyes
A Chihuahua in little Prada heels walks by
Trying to eat its own face off
And suddenly there is a bridge
Between bright dark bad
And something magically improved

Wolfgang and Troy

Adam J Maynard

Wolfgang and Troy are following me
Because I ate a pink Butterfly in the bio dome
They have Las Vegas hair and teeth
And there's a tiger next to me in the auditorium
With a litre of Pepsi Max clamped in its paws
I understand that there is a micro galaxy
Somewhere around here,
I am definitely looking for a way out
Autumn is happening slowly outside
And an old lady in a cape with pink laser eyes
Has just told me that I'm five hundred years old
I can hear weeping coming from a dark corner
Where a famous actor is looking at two neon Mondrians
And some involuntary cognitive discharge
Is coming out of his face
As he recalls the qualities of certain kinds
Of grey light in the autumn air
There is sunlight in the twigs everywhere now
And Wolfgang and Troy follow me around a corner
Their hair and teeth shining in the dark

Switzerland

Adam J Maynard

We had been doing some serious vertical drinking
And you had made me realise that I am not
In Switzerland unless I am in Switzerland

Whoopi was talking to a no-nonsense cat
About the dilemmas that some of us all face

But when I look at you, that's when I feel like a freak
I feel like a freak because I'm only 24 years old
And yet I have the boobs of an 80 year old

So even though the trees are handing out presents
I still feel a little bit sad and naked
Like a Yeti on a skateboard
That wants to be somewhere else

I didn't realise that just one glass
Of German wine could get you this drunk!!!

You came in the room
And said that I looked like a triangle
That my face looked like a map of Switzerland
So I staggered out of the door

It must have just been the power of suggestion
Because now I feel
Like I'm back in Switzerland again

Euphoria

Adam J Maynard

A giant slug in 1950's spectacles sits opposite me
A small orange car passes on the table top
There's an initial burst of euphoria, then
A cloud of bright pixels gathers around the face of the slug
My pizza is crying

My breathy attitudes and postures
Feel like yellow elephants laughing in a room
And outside I see some palm trees
Running past the window, their arms flailing

Daddy has pink ice-cream all over his face
Two black hippos are screaming
As they're eating a pile of neon green lemons
And I'm standing outside of me and you again

A Chameleon licks its eyeball and eats KFC
The postal service, are all on drugs
I feel like a frankfurter
Or like a poet on a leopard
When I'm riding a leopard to the Philippines

My pizza won't stop crying

Saturday

Adam Moorad

I pull clothing from my duffle bag, pants and shirts. They're clean enough but still unwashed, I think when I see a tiny salami slice oil blot on the sleeves of one consignment store flannel that was my brother's before mine. I fold the garment gently with wobbly tremens in one wrist and place it with my other articles on an empty cubby shelf, making use of the otherwise rare room available inside sleeping Magdala's modest apartment kitchenette.

I've lived here for what feels like months now, squatting for a precise length of time that is now unknown. And not once at any moment have I felt at home, but rather shot-down like some fated naval pilot marooned behind enemy lines and hiding in a foreign jungle full of hostiles. I fold my clothes and exhale a long weary sigh.

All of this happens in the passing bloodshot glance of Magdala's roommate, Layla, emerging from her room having just crawled out of bed, coughing, to throw up in the toilet. I hear her groan, saying she wishes she was dead or asleep again – and I can tell it hurts too much for her to lay still. She's been laid-up invalid all day, dehydrated and aching in some itchy surface slumber. She came home as usual after sunrise, alone; from bed, I'd heard the apartment door slam. "Backstage," was where she says she was, "on the Bowery" – on the gloomy ant-less crust of Lower East Side curbs with their wind-blown sidewalk heaps fading with piles of unrecyclable debris, and roving faceless hobo street combers who stare you down with black hole mugs from the lifeless depth of hooded visages.

Layla is a little Egyptian girl with thin eyes and no flesh on her toothpick frame. She wears black spandex tights with everything she owns, through which I can see the vague knoll of her labial mound. It asks my head to think *SEX*, but my mind refuses. I watch her move wraith-like in a battered cotton t-shirt dress. "What a strange sense of fashion," I reflect, thinking that in anyplace other than New York City, a person would have to do a double take and consider calling an ambulance if they saw Layla pass by all shriveled, hacking cement spun phlegm, helplessly covering her mouth with tobacco-stained fingertips as last night's bags slope blue from her sunken sockets like hoary spiritual scars, bubbling through the bruised surface of the anemic skin of this 1950s drive-in movie zombie Cleopatra.

Layla takes two aspirin, but throws them up too. Nobody seems to care. Magdala is awake now, holding a sponge in one hand and a hairbrush in the other. She's grumbling, tense-necked and tantrum-like, grousing at poor Layla – whose nose is running gush – to flush the commode. Layla, wobble-bodied, whimpers muted huffs from the pain pulse inside her skull and buries her drink sick head in the sink, into the sprite milk faucet gurgle.

The little stringy house kitten stirs, curling between Layla's chewed-up heels and the floor, mewling, lamenting something to us all... but Magdala's pester persists.

“Not in the sink!” she broods, and begs Layla to go and ail alone in her pitiless room... but Layla doesn’t (can’t) move or speak... the kitten *meows*... I close my eyes.

*

It’s Saturday and the rain is hissing at the windows with a pattering wind. Upstairs, the Louisiana Tigers have made the gay neighbor cry (it’s *Game Day*, too). I can hear him stomping, scratching his shiny bald Woody Harrelson noggin, praying little Cajun wails into the television set. He squeaks “Fuck Bama” as he paces. His footsteps sound like thunder and shake the hallow drywall of Magdala’s apartment below, cracked in places where the arctic outdoor draft invades the building. I shiver.

Buses pass, trucks, loud hydraulics growl. They’re loaded down to the springs and scrape sparks against the salted city pavement that shoulder the burden of a million grazing human bodies, riding to or from Flatbush Avenue and Kensington along the scabbed wintry arteries of this weathering *Breuckelen* borough as one would in slow-motion on some Greenwood Cemetery trolley. I hear their feet splashing in the cold street, a mess of coffee-colored slop puddles, and picture myself out there, trouncing through them in the dead of night, wet and splattered, frostbitten, with my shoes loosely laced in the road sludge. I look along the endless rows of lone brownstone districts in the murky citronella flicker of old rain pooling in gloat and gloom of the Rockaway streetlight. And I think of other nights I’ve spent in similar conditions... in Nashville, in Chicago, in Cincinnati... I can almost feel the twinge of my clenched body shaking in the black trickle: the rigid endorphin-starved stiffness that becomes a man (me) grinding his teeth together down to the gummy roots on the lonesome night-time roads of drizzle, with no hope of a dry or full night’s sleep. My head swells and wearies with the image of it.

“What’s wrong?” Magdala asks. She always asks “What’s wrong?” — as though not to insinuate “Are you alright?” but rather “There’s something wrong with you.” “Nothing’s wrong,” I (always) reply. I repeat myself, hoping she’ll stop and redirect her zigzagging interest onto something else. But instead, with heavy purple eyes, she squints at me, nodding with an air of condemnation as she deciphers the tone of what I’ve just said. “Nothing’s wrong.” This makes me more guarded and distrustful. I watch crow-foot wrinkles emerge in the corners of her eyes, and the iniquitous look she gives strikes me as shrewd and conniving. I picture her as a sallow-faced ghoul in the thorny but still seductive façade of some Cruella de Ville character, planning the unremorseful slaughter of one-hundred-and-one little blameless Dalmatian puppies. I can see that all of this is the result of some latent Electra complexion dating back to a time in Magdala’s past that I can sense but not decipher. Evidence of penis envy is everywhere, surrounding me like some emaciated, bone-hungry python: a mountainous ashtray, annals of celebrity-faced style magazines and *Us* weekly pages crumpled by cheap wine and dried tears, defaulted credit card statements folded with dog-ears piled high, and the faint angel-dust markings on each and every countertop with its welcoming sparkles blending (now) inseparable from paw-tracked kitten litter, saliva residue, and the mold yeasting in the unseen regions of the room.

Magdala stares at me intensely, as if planning my demise. Her gaze alone asks to suck my soul from my body like a ferocious Carolina riptide. Poor Layla, gargling, spits mouthwash from her sad chapped lips, cracked across her teeth like shattered Dyker Heights tenement windows keeping glum sentry over murky Gravesend Bay. I watch her as she pins her hair back at the base of her neck, where she's tattooed with a small Sphinx silhouette. Our eyes meet in the mirror and she overhears me say to Magdala, over and over, "Nothing's wrong." Layla averts her eyes and nods as if to agree with me, but with no words to speak, affirm and make me or anyone else believe that "Nothing's wrong."

Magdala leans over the kitchen counter to crush the Adderall she needs to get the chores done, which are then done, redone and re-redone – and so on until the stimulant fuels wear off. The place is a mess, with dishes stacked high like miniature spaghetti-tinged Towers of Babel that clamor shrill in the sink's hollow belly when they tumble over in the fizzy slosh of the running spout.

She looks awkward and frail. I can see an asymmetry in the sunken hocks of her vanishing ass as she kneels slowly in a prayer-like fashion before the sink cupboard, reaching for bleach and Windex bottles in plastic baskets of cluttered soap jugs, scrub-brushes, garbage bags and dime-store disinfectant wipes. All these dangerous Jekyll and Hyde materials of corrosion strike me as odd, lead me to think how one normally comes by these things in some well-endowed university science lab – not in some low-ceiling railroad apartment. "KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN," I tell myself – knowing that, when combined properly, these concoctions become the basic ingredients of any effective homemade bomb. I watch Magdala, thinking she'll explode – if not now, then soon.

When she cracks open a flagon of Clorox, I breathe in the wafting fumes. The aroma washes over me and I drink it in sips from the indoor ozone. The smell jolts me, my hair stands on end and I inhale another breath and swallow. It burns and I feel confused, thinking *I'm high too...*

"It's supposed to sting," I find myself thinking in my mother's voice, remembering childhood at home with a bloody scrape on my leg and her soft touch warming me. The sanitized fragrance of antibacterial salve transports me to another place in time, and pins me there. "But it stings," says my imagination as the caustic tang invades my eyes and lungs... then deeper, with the temperature of some white-hot flame behind my ribs. The scent speaks to me in a soft familiar tone that makes my mouth water: "The germs inside our wounds can multiply and infect, and to heal we must allow the burn."

And as if faced with some awful truth, I watch Magdala and the stilted way she stands. Her cat-scratched legs stretch in the middle of the kitchen as she scrubs an empty week-old rice plate. Like a bulimic, I think, locked inside a ladies' room stall at a restaurant; or any room – a bathroom, a bedroom, or a Cherokee wigwam creek-side on some Appalachian hill, where starvation only occurs in either the dead famine of winter or in the throes of some religious rite of passage. Which, I know, can't be as bad as modern civilization's own skin-deep incarnation of (self-inflected) starvation that she – a young woman – is forced to subdue and die to in her dreary apartment cell-block on a grey grassless planet.

My Father Believes

Alan Stewart Carl

He believes that on November 23, 1963, John F. Kennedy woke well-rested in Dallas and boarded a private plane headed to Puerto Rico. He still lives there as Juan Cubano and is often seen sitting near the docks in Fajardo feeding passion fruit to a curvaceous blonde named Norma Morteno. No one has ever seen him with any other woman.

He believes that while he was in Vietnam a movie director forced him to act out war scenes for future movies. He says he heard the director shouting over the explosions: "More fucking blood. Jesus, make it look real."

He believes my mother did not leave us in 1976 after he returned to Little Rock. She's been locked in the basement for thirty-four years and lives off rats and rain water. He says he sometimes hears her when he makes breakfast. She scratches and snuffles. She's particularly active when he makes coffee. She always liked his coffee.

He believes his room at the VA is that house.

He believes that when I was gone for fifteen years, I spent my time in Puerto Rico looking for Juan Cubano. My father had always wanted me to go during those years in the car. He wanted me to ask the old president why he gave up. Why he ran away when he could've stopped a war.

He believes Juan Cubano told me, "It's always more important to love a woman."

He believes that was a message. Now he lies on the floor and shouts through the linoleum. "You can come up now," he says. "You can come up, sweetie."

He believes a movie director still follows him around. He says everyone is an actor. That's why all the people who come into his room look so familiar. He once told me that I was just the guy hired to play his son. Sometimes I feel like that's true. But most of the time I just feel like lying on the linoleum with him. And seeing if we can get my mother to come back.

Animal Magnetism

Alexandra Isacson

1. The Blue Morphos

Inside the tropical greenhouse, Blue Morphos fluttered their wings of light and clung to her. She always wore blue to attract them. When the Morphos were two weeks old, they started dying, flying into things, tattering their wings. Sometimes they would not let her go.

2. A Girl's Best Friend

Her sister-in-law flashed a diamond nose-ring. She desired a diamond and borrowed one from the village jeweler. At home, the woman became ill. She locked the diamond up with Lakshmi and her other household gods. When she recovered weeks later, she traded the diamond for her birthstone, topaz.

3. The Law of Attraction

The anesthetized man rose from the surgery table and grabbed the young nurse around the waist. The last time a man surprised her like that she was dancing at a biker bar in a copper ghost town.

4. His Caduceus

The surgeon took the pink-scrubbed nurse under the wing of his caduceus jacket. During a liposuction procedure, she held a draped woman's thigh for the surgery. She thought about 19th century cleansing practices by bleeding patients with leeches.

5. Smitten

His Egyptian tongue hissed sweet sibilance when he introduced himself. After, she was charmed, hearing him teach art theory through their adjoining wall.

6. The Power of Suggestion

The woman preacher came to the girl's house and laid flaming hands on her. She fervently prayed that the girl's womb would remain tightly sealed until her wedding night. Decades later, in psychotherapy, she traced her infertility to this event.

7. For Franz Anton Mesmer

The rocking subway lulled her into a relaxed state. She remained conscious of her surroundings because a strange man was hypnotizing women and stealing their 24-carat gold bangles.

True Hollywood Confessions of 1932

Corrina Bain

My family, naturally, wanted more
for me than this. The blonde best friend
in a smart little hat. Vocal training employed
to chirp an anthology of yes.

The saddest thing about suicides
is we're not the worst of the lot
not a talentless bunch.
The press always thought well of me

even when I was in awful shows
swaths of flesh-toned nylon catching
my wispy legs, trying to make me
something sensual, solid. They remember

the first attempt, back there in Brooklyn
when some young man had stopped calling.
I tried to let it out through the wrists but it would
not go. Clotting garnet dust on the gauze dressings.

When I woke in the cardboard bed, muslin curtains
of my minor fame drawn around me,
understand, when they gave me my body back
it was nothing that I wanted. A mess of sodden

wings that could not budge my weight.
Everyone said the stage was dying, that pictures were the thing
so I came west, but it was just the same,
no way to be together.

I went up there not planning anything
wanting the view of the city through the tall letters
there was a ladder there, leaning against the "H"
like someone knew I was coming.

Like someone had written "the end"
in feminine script across the darkening sky
I deserved a starring role, and all I have is this
sordid bit of Hollywood history

I'll be the first that thought to jump from here.
They'll have to put up fences.
No matter how sure you are
you spend the last moment clawing the air,

calling for mommy. Still, I'm not sorry that I came.
Soft Pacific sky like cotton balls soaked in foundation
streaking the horizon. I would rather this a thousand times
than be the beauty of some small town.

Then, my poor family, who had never understood it
thought the flashbulbs had been the enemy. The rubes.
They took me back to the calm pastures,
Emptied me out, a champagne flute full of smoke,

over the Ohio. The belle of some small place
just as I'd feared.

Stunt

Corrina Bain

The first time that I died, I was as surprised as anyone.
The good guy's slugs tunneled into me,
steel dark and slippery in the hole it dug.
I felt the mineral-thick gush
onto my one good suit. The girl screamed,
and that's all that I remember

Afterward the cop asked, with a beefy shudder
how a two-bit hood like me stole the show.
I woke up a few blocks over
somewhere on Vine, my suit immaculate.
I understood it was a calling

like the man who sculpts the monster's head
from foam rubber, or the girl who ensures
the cigarettes are smoked down to the same length
from one take to the next, I have this dumb knack,
and I always wanted to be in pictures

By now, I've probably done it a hundred times
stabbed to death in seedy men's rooms
tossed over the rigging into some on-location sea,
they love me for that. You can never get a mannequin
to flail. Even so, I try to take it serious.

Think about the swell times whenever
it happens, just in case. Reliving auditions where I knew
I'd nailed it. Girls like bright soap bubbles about
to burst on the mirror. What the ladies wanted
with this shady character, I couldn't tell you.

It must've been the pictures, must be they recognized me.
It's almost like someone sends them, right in the speakeasy
where a woman alone shouldn't be –
the dull blue sash that matched my pocket square
like we were meant to be together.

Lately, they carry the clues of how the next one will go
if I look careful. Silver fillings are bullets, sleeping

in the back teeth. A belt buckle shaped like seashells
is something with the ocean. The white-blond hair
of the one that got me hit by lightning.

The last one had these eyes, a pale jade color
just like the chlorinated floor of a swimming pool,
and sure enough, here I am.

It takes some getting used to
how the blood spools dark out the hole in my vest.
Sometimes I think I hear the bullets talking to each other
yelling down the hallway of my intestines.

Sometimes I think I hear the dames calling
after me, calling my name.
So I moan and twitch and end it.
My heart, a dirty possum,
motionless in their searching eye.

What happens in other people's kitchens

Diana Kole

The refrigerator makes noises of upset at her hands. She serves him white things: the rinds of old parmesan, unadorned pasta from a ceramic dish. He sits at the counter and then on it and then leaves to walk down her narrow hall. Come back, you're hungry, she says through the door, and does not feel herself deadbolting it. She does this and then undoes it and then thinks of being locked outside her family's sinking wooden condominium when it was warm enough for the snow to melt. In a book with photographs, she had read of staying warm tunneled in the snow like animals. Her clothes had been wet for days because she would not take them off and the wood of the house had rotted.

*

The girl is much younger than he is: when he holds the door for her to walk into his apartment she waits, moves with her shoulders, waits again. All of the lights are on and they are different, some grayer and mostly yellow. They are ugly and her soft hidden cheekbones are ugly in them, but he says, This is the book I was talking about, and hands her a novella. It had been in the oven, like the rest of the books he does not want to sleep in the same room with. I did this when I was young, she says, I would give my mom the books I was too afraid of at night and she would keep them somewhere, I don't know where, I think it was just in a drawer or something so they could still get out. So I can read this now 'cause they already got me. When you were young? he says.

*

On the days when he is allowed to see the house he gives attention to the air, tries to smell if there is something separate or better in it. There is not, or else he has traded something away unwittingly. He can see children walk slowly through the grass next to the house, though there is a small path of brick. He's making phone calls, most days. He keeps the blinds down.

*

At breakfast he pulls the appliances toward him and hates the size of the room when he has finished. His wife comes in and turns on the light, but it will not work because he has tangled cords about himself and his body. She returns with something in a paper bag, which she shares with him, feeding him pieces of sugared risen bread through the refrigerator door.

*

His body grows paler. They watch it, the two of them, he and his friend. What is it? his friend says. Look! He points to himself, to different parts of him. His skin is thick and translucent like the white of an egg. It moves under itself. Soon, with his friend's palm against his shoulder to keep him there, he grows too white to speak; his friend is relieved.

The Man He Took An Axe Into The Woods [6]

J.A. Tyler

The man he took an axe into the woods and the woods they brought a level to see. They measured and cut and worked into arrangements. The woods were unkind to the rain and with the sun made blankets with holes, failures. The woods with the sun spoke wind, chimed faults, and went into great bunches. The woods, the man with the axe and the woods, shattered to pieces, broke into moments, murmured to ashes, sweat the dirty light.

The Man He Took An Axe Into The Woods [7]

J.A. Tyler

The man he took an axe into the woods and the work as he thought was progressing fairly. The foliage had signed no complaint letters and the sky was open again. There was no ceiling. The woods had reworked the ceiling. The woods had gone past a ceiling, the need for one. Sky crunched beneath his shoes, this man with his axe, the woods, and no better sound than broken openness, understatement, foundations mumbling.

The Man He Took An Axe Into The Woods [8]

J.A. Tyler

The man he took an axe into the woods. The man with his axe and his hands and his feet he saw the ocean rising above his waist. His axe this man he made a plate of sardines and studded the floor with its oils, screaming to the waves *We do not doubt you*. The ocean said *Sea* and it was a day the sun turned out the light and tunneled through the ground and went to winter beneath sheets of stars, praying for forgiveness, making bubbly echoes far below the drowning.

The Man He Took An Axe Into The Woods [9]

J.A. Tyler

The man he took an axe into the woods and the woods they stirred the pot to boil. And the woods they brought up seed from their hands and scattered it at their feet and waited for the end of eternity. The level was off. The marker blown out. And the woods in disbelief just stood and stupored, unwilling to accept its errors, unwilling to placate its forces, unnerved by the lack of its own clear judgments. The axe and the man, blades cut sharp, water running over it.

The Man He Took An Axe Into The Woods [10]

J.A. Tyler

The man he took an axe into the woods and was quiet when the woods piled together in song. There was a surge against romance, against light, and everything was whispered: *The water will be here soon*. The woods they brought the level to see and camped under its arches, culling the factual buzzing, un-worried about implications. The sun, in the sky, shining. The axe makings shards of moon, the man cupping his hands, the water overboard not enough to keep the woods out of suffocation.

Shoot the Ballerina in the Heart

Jarrid Deaton

The female target has bone tumors, but appears healthy. Hair and eyes are both brown. Even with the disease, her body is tightly coiled, maintained.

Is this going to be a problem?

Her pain level, according to the doctor's report, should have driven her insane months ago. It's intense, but she never complains. She's brave.

Is this going to be a problem?

She was a ballerina in high school and the first couple years of college. When the bone tumors appeared, her father took her to Bargeldia. He knew about the plant extract. Had a friend across the border in Austria who harvests it. When she takes the extract, she can move around, even dance a little again. The supply has dwindled, so she is in ration mode.

Is this going to be a problem? The father has been eliminated. You have your orders.

It's not her fault. She's not dealing it, she needs it. She was a ballerina. She's not a threat. She doesn't even know it's illegal. Nobody does. Only a very small group even knows it exists. I suspect that's the problem. We don't want word to get out. My dossier didn't elaborate.

You have your orders.

During my surveillance, I've noticed she likes to dance in front of the large living room window. She twirls out of sight and then returns. It's been a week since she has danced. By my calculations, it has been almost two weeks since her last injection. Yesterday, she came to the window and pressed her palm against the glass and fluttered her fingers. Seeing her hand like that, I imagined it was raining, that the water was following her lifeline and etching the grooves deeper into her palm. I zoomed in and could see the knots on her wrist bulging like relocated knuckles. Despite this, she still appeared graceful.

This is irrelevant to your report. When was your last psychiatric evaluation? Is this going to be a problem?

The whole thing is a problem. I want to talk to her. I know she would leave the country if she knew what was going on. If I could just talk to her. I can wear a

disguise. If things worked out, I would take her away myself. I would resign, go back to civilian life. I have the resources. I could help her. I would kiss those knots, trace her lifeline with the tip of my finger, let her know that she isn't alone.

You have your orders.

I have your orders, and you have my decision. I won't do it.

Then I have my orders.

I know.

Jack Hitches One Last Ride (21 October 1969)

Joseph A. W. Quintela

Yellow toothed. You lie. Spine straight on the asphalt bed. Sleepless. Knowing that any toss or turn may land a limb beneath a hurtling bus. Reading destiny on scrambled metal plates. Waiting. Spot lit. Interrogated. Until four eyes recast into an infinity mirror. But no stop. Just a door thrust open. A vise grip on a steel semicolon. A deistic fit of gymnastics. And you in the passenger seat. Grinning like a madman.

If An Assumption Must Be Made, Then Let It Be Me

Joseph A. W. Quintela

The room is filled with the waiting. The waiting are filled with the room. This inverse relationship isn't surprising. Every dream is a palindrome. Our day is just a guess. You must see. I've thrown lightning from the heavens. I've stood beneath the world for many years. I've glanced in mirrors and glimpsed the girl I should've been. A number is called. I look at my ticker tape. It isn't mine. And yet my turn has come.

If You Were To Ask Me Now (I'd Lie)

Joseph A. W. Quintela

It was how we spoke. Trotting words like a Basilisk on water. Never dipping a toe beneath. That was our way. Orbiting the Animal Planet. Filled in 30 minute slots. Astral projection from the safe confine of steel. And we knew a thing or two. Trained bread to break itself. Meat to stand the test of time. Teeth to bite the wagging tongue. Boots to wade the ash. I'd say it was our finest hour. If you were to ask me now.

Rory Gilmore Spits a Lie

Joseph Goosey

Lane Kim has never taken kindly to dishonesty. Lane Kim picks up a teapot. Lane Kim throws the teapot in Rory Gilmore's general direction. Teapot hits a wall. Rory Gilmore will have to pay damages to Lorelei Gilmore. Lane Kim apologizes. Lane Kim and Rory Gilmore weep until the bus comes. There is difficulty throughout the afternoon.

Rory Gilmore Adopts an Interest in the Fourteen Stations of the Cross

Joseph Goosey

Station one exacerbate theory. Station two chug cookie dough. Station three throw up. Station four leftovers. Station five sing in public. Station six consider tossing oneself from the top floor. Station seven apply lotion. Station eight adopt Lebanese. Station nine wear black. Station ten Google "Satan." Station eleven plead forgiveness at the hands of mother. Station twelve PARTY. Station thirteen mop. Station fourteen no more blood for your cousins.

Rory Gilmore Pays For Her Very Own Facelift

Joseph Goosey

Are you motioning toward tired? Could somebody come up behind you with a piece of wire and poor intentions? Remove your cash from your asshole and put it forth for a BRAND NEW FACE! That's right a NEW FACE. Your face is no longer attractive. Your face is no longer appealing to peers or deviants. This is a discouraging situation; deviants will love a log if given permission. YOUR NEW FACE could land you A DREAM JOB behind a DESK in the MIDWEST! Your new face will be cookies!

Upside-down

Mark Neely

silly
us
fucking
machines

Her Face After a Death

Mark Neely

be^utifu1
j^p^nese
s+ereo
m^nu^1

Sexy

Mark Neely

eager
eohippus
leaping
stumps

Revolution Now!

Mark Neely

wee
m00n
yore
gallerie

Crypto Lust

Meredith Legg

In the house that I hate
And the people I dread to meet.
We convene with regularity.
We go wherever you go;
We know whatever you know.

They know me before I know
What their quiet laughter means.
Tasteless and silent,
Cutting through my everywhere.
Impaled like a speared fish.
Green sparks explode
Behind my eyes, blind.

They watch me sleep,
My every twitch, my every spasm.
I am a rope stretching,
Imitating the distance
I have grown away from.
There is a finger in my mouth.

They undress me, helpless.
Some sort of crypto-lust that
I can't see. I feel it in and around.
The whole floor begins to vibrate.
A distant whistle in my ear.
I feel motions but see nothing.
Limestone touch, cold and heavy.
Smooth and long hot spurts.
My ankles pinioned, my mouth
No longer opens.

The ground of being is rocky and obtuse.
Pinioned but loose in expression.
And death is a construct I don't have faith in.

Sampled Experiences

Meredith Legg

The time invites you like a
dark stare inside limousine
The sleep of all sleep
To barely awake on sofa, alone
To see the dead as undead
in vision and memory
when the time invites it

Soft notes of mandolin
in distant conversation
of floating, foul intent
poured into pulled ears
and thicker than meaning
suffers to live

A stringed ideal shared between
voices. Resonant notes spiral
tongues inside bodies at rest.
A bow shapes the depth, grave
yet awake. Space plate bends
sentiment and light from
guitar solos—the kings
of infinite space.
This miraculous
organ “sends
fortune to
prison”.

Astonishment

Michael Brandonisio

*"Mary, Mary quite contrary
How does your garden grow"*

Seraphim devolve right out of time
Striking fear in every child who understands cleanliness is a sham
Innate cruelty flows through a child's bloodstream
Passed down like a generational heirloom
Child meditates and soon enough the invisibles
materialize before her eyes

Child shakes her rattle
Plays with lettered cubes
"Ah!" she says out loud
Identifies with her voice for the first time
Same experience as a newborn python
who realizes it can slither
far enough
to sink its venom
into a sapling's stem
yum-yum

Going Next

Michael Brandonisio

He could go not he that came and went before next he came. He went next before he went and came. He could go not that he go came before outside he went. Intending next going at least intending next all the while inside before he went. Intending inside going as next he went. Intending he could go as he went outside intending inside before he went. He sat ready going when next he went before he came. Still he sat intending next he could go. He sat in chair ready when next going before he came. Next he went and came. Ready he came outside before next he came and went still he could. He sat in chair next inside going. Going he outside went as he went before next inside he went. He before intending before he went next he came. I left him intending. I left before next he went. Next he came before the last I went before he next went going.

The Man in the Boat

Michael Brandonisio

Sex climax running views the clitoris OK, vulva ibidem. Erect behavior expressing animal woman still hard, active. Good clitoris the sexual known museum. Born human sexual human. Clandestine views the flesh pepita. Normal gender bender necessary. I born man, necessary sex born. Davide hermaphroditic. Gender of a quotient population. Gender sex designed information, the many vagina. Skin, he sex. I, a nerve.

Man who is female conceals testes inside. Studies published. Learn of me clitoris the like views. Good woman man challenge surrounding. Expression variance in other parts. People said it. They would. They ask about world. Appearance female. The reported nubbin be or knot. Sex still chill. It's dope, depending on how you look at it. Reason I'm man's mutilation. Penis little bad, reassignment. Explain you, penis. Recognize its snail clitoridectomy. Limited man premarital, post-coital and thoroughly American. I look, locate scrotum. Reassignment sex. The man\woman accidental. Converted snail again, urinary bouton. Its part usual sometimes penetrates. Normal per equal measure. Egg and seed conjoined.

If not women, men. Words vagina nova be urethra truth. Better snail man studies needed. Upset necessary decency. Why and where such knowledge go. Go Jane\Jack. Throb pepita. Our views — share. Follow up the nova patients. Be reason's life and death. The organs by choice be made our temple. Sad little society person. Orgone therapy taboo. Sermon benedictus. Cross my heart. Being modest — his team, for same sex entrance both normal. You indeed care — top to bottom includes we. Much especially much penis character change is ready. Sensitive everything. Show more snail views. Head normal (smile) and clitoris actions penis. Good that women have pleasure. About entrance think it over for in person choices human born.

Landscape Abstracted III

Michael Brandonisio

verily thus framed
for the occasion
snow produced by pomegranates
verily thus
devoid
Pompeii the ruins there once happy
transformed contingent continual visible
dirty frescos made of the finest dirt
reversal Etruscan de jure it's
disordered
the strangest thing I've never seen
hyper-impulsive marimba
flex those pecs
organic enrichment
after Libertines
Portuguese man o'war
marmalade meringue
doudouk
other kinds of Fascistas zooids
para prance
a dark moiré in disguise
sweet stuff
stiffs a suburban teenager
don't worry your pretty little head
vector
the way out of this New Age of Terror
through airplane window
Mondrianish it looks so perfectly ordered
ironic
for favor fammi un' caz down here dear
dare I say I love your suit
agape These days
sap flows for the saps deers munch

This is How Digestion Begins

P. Edward Cunningham

1. You remove your vegetables from our vegetable garden and prepare the pot for the smell of suicide and telephone.
2. I return to my bedroom to retrieve my favorite tie. It begins casually and rolls into the darkest of corners.
3. You sit in the kitchen. You sit in the kitchen of intense and quiet. You roll into an oven-cave and gnaw on your arms.
4. I no longer enjoy my favorite tie. I am keeping a secret from you. I am a Japanese wrestler and my stage name is Yoko. I push over a chair as I attempt to dodge the claws of a ferocious tiger.
5. You are tonight's radio broadcast. Vibrating above the floorboards.
6. I am blindfolded. A certain *let's run across the neighborhood bridge*. A certain *that's your business*. A certain *right place, wrong time*. A certain *policeman hiding*.
7. You were still.
8. I was buried near the bones of a mouse in our most private of flower gardens.

Inside the Airport After Robbing the Pink Coffin

P. Edward Cunningham

You wiped my neck and face with a shred of white tutu you stole from a large pink coffin. The children are still whispering about the ballerina-lady trapped in the suitcase. I have that suitcase and I have a surprised face.

We need to make it through airport security. Kiss me and do not slip off. Remove me with a dream. We fell asleep watching a commercial for cupcakes. Children are still pointing at my suitcase. *We dream.*

In the dream I wake up. I wake up in a green tunnel. Louis Althusser is giving a lecture on ideological state apparatuses. I can hear him as I crawl. I feel like I can crawl as far as I need to. I come to the end of the tunnel and stand up inside a black room with red bulbous lights protruding from the walls. Cotton-red balloons emitting large red light circles. Louis Althusser has finished his lecture and I can hear small children cheering and clapping their small children hands.

Alone is a table. Twenty-eight blue bowls are arranged on the table. A scoop of pink ice-cream resting inside of each one. A scoop for the police. A scoop for the military. A scoop for the prison system. A scoop for the government.

And two scoops for you and two scoops for me.

Keratin

P. Edward Cunningham

Patricia was skipping. She donated her hair to a charity. She sat down on a sofa and picked up a magazine from the coffee table. She was wearing an oversized button-down shirt as she looked at photographs of models wearing oversized button-down shirts. She tore up the magazine. She picked up the wool from the carpet and loosened her feet from the fibers. She mountain'd her body around the hideous plates of chafed-up nature—she crawled around the floor once she removed the wool from the carpet and later the carpet and later the dirt that had poisoned the carpet. Only floor remained. Still crawling. Her reflection shimmered in a mirror against a wall beyond the coffee table. Only scalp and soft forehead.

Patricia flared her nostrils for only a moment. She pulled herself from her button-down shirt. She dragged herself from her button-down shirt. Far away near a door frame was a child with hands and feet. Patricia held the child's face in her hands. Patricia smoothed her hands around the child's scalp and a fleshy movement stammered. Circular. Wrist muscles throbbed. Child loosened and slowly hair floated up nerves and matter. Down shoulders and back.

The child was thankful and warm.

Area

Rachel Jenkins

The increment's open palm
bordered the visible,
cropped up
in the night's wale of assembly.

By cables under the ocean
(course of no season,
no circumscription like the hour)

the pre-curtain tuning
notes of radiation—
in miniature,

a linear sketch in the dark
of how our bodies may be experienced later—
will find you as you are,

sunned and mullion-scattered
as a god's eyes
but at smaller angles of gaze.

Not one may be utterly resumed,
not one lifted as from out of the cumulate sky.

New algebra

Rachel Jenkins

We sat in the shape-notes sung
in the shade of a tree
in the shape of a diagram in search
of our results. Meanwhile the little precisions
bothered us, what we could
and could not eat.

Our fingers went out of print
and we remembered their cramped concentricities
as if they were last sentences or nights spent
watching the Walleyes plume
over China Lake.

A new algebra of shells.
A vacant lot that insists we are not
where we are. Irising-in among the dark sky,
a dispatch of tiny batteries
that crackles in the ear. Someone is adamant;
adamant this must take shape
and we must not all matter.

Short phrase

Rachel Jenkins

A white curtain
is an Easter morning,

a fire hazard, a warning
of my disregard for it.

A Braille of sparrows
flattens; the invention

of the voiceless telephone call,
its possible applications. Finally

a safe interval
between my body and my name,

each returning to itself
like fingers

of a gripped hand.
A clear weather forecast

means more difficulty
hearing you, the oblong

shadow of a building falling.
This evening, for instance,

the horizon is a sleeping
princess or victim

as if it doesn't really exist
or ceases to,

or cannot be as pink
and as free as this.

Walking Siegfried thru Wal-Mart

Raymond Farr

When ort is art I disable
my Spell Check function
and try to imagine. My
subject veers off. A man is
serving me soup from
WWII and I am
thoughtful. Siegfried, my
alter ego, serves me lie
upon lie, unraveling wit
from truth. Here—a man
wearing tweed in the
men's clothing
department at Wal-Mart
but rejecting all my
choices like the lie that he
is. (Do I only imagine I am
double?) There—a man in
a hurry squeezing the
fruit but tasting nothing,
abhorring the words that
I live with, that make him
OK with me. The real
exists somewhere
between us like a bubble
of description I find
difficult to explain. What
is paramount about a
circus coming to town is
that someone believes in
it, that everyone
attending is lost and then
found. Even as a single
sneaker dangles from a
restless child's foot in the
toy section at Wal-Mart,
his mother negotiates her
little boy's future, careful
not to exaggerate or
divulge inaccurate

information that may cause him some harm in the eyes of the world. And Siegfried is that boy. A flicker of opium in my alphabet soup. What he's paying for are the three rings of life and madness and boredom deleted from his cradle. And he remembers them—the ritual folding of the big top tents, the well planned escape of the roustabouts, the whole cast of characters packing up and moving on. Another city, another boy. Identity crammed into a clown's valise. What Siegfried considers "the real thing" has abandoned the real and is traveling with the acrobats. He hallucinates what he can't control. A little sleet seeping into the coal chute, into the memory banks where Siegfried sleeps, hiding his face from the world in a pillow of fog blossoms smothered in coal dust. And this is his dream. I am his dream. We are engaged in a contest. In the arms of stabbed winter the players lay shackles at the entrance to Wal-Mart in honor of Siegfried. Whose compression of facts converts our improbable lives to improbable fictions. Existence, he screams, is the art of pure

elaboration until that elaboration fails us and we are set upon by looming apes. Do we dare to laugh at a looming ape, taunts Siegfried? We bungle our performance. Stand wobbling at the acme of our achievements. We dawdle a little, wondering where is that fine line between madness and genius? Our lives are a creature we shoot out of sequence and then re-sequence as fantasy. What the camera reveals becomes invisible in Siegfried's hands. He tricks all his subjects into strange candid "poses." His art is the art of the shining made possible. Let the ultimate Nothing bring us our voices, he demands. But configures each angle as he positions his shots. Each motion picture image looking slantways at language as language reciprocates in honor of silence which is sweeter than night according to Siegfried. Fantastic as snow drifts. Borrowed like a book for a week. Or only a lifetime. For as real as words are they are only impossible. They rearrange what we see. We are the puppets of dada standing on line, talking in riddles, talking amongst ourselves as we wait for a booth at a restaurant or a seat at the

movies. We are the puns
on the tongues of
stunning blue
mannequins. We always
seem plastic as anyone's
version of loneliness. As
public as sunlight, we are
the faceless somebody
calling out for a cab. We
are an army of Siegfrieds.
Now our feet are boiled
beets. And the man
working produce is not
reassured but tosses a
token into the splash of
apple sauce that is our
mind. The blind melons,
he assures us, have roots
that reach and reach. A
tune he alludes to arrives
like a tune by an alternate
route. And as always,
Siegfried's out to kill a
goose tonight. Or it's
cough syrup in the alley at
twenty paces. And the
man working produce at
Wal-Mart never suspects,
has spent his last happy
days holding onto a secret
he keeps under his hat,
oblivious to any version
of a man working produce
that he can't earn a living
with. You must blend with
the kumquats, he tells me,
camouflage is key. You
mustn't be paranoid. The
passion fruit's yr ace in
the hole. O for the beauty
of what isn't in yr
produce, I think.
Mistaking grandeur in
Siegfried's head—two
underwater bubbles—for
his Windex-colored eyes.

But Siegfried rallies,
taking no for an answer in
the produce aisle at Wal-
Mart. Believing nothing of
value must go to waste.

Snakes

Sean Lovelace

- A husband's footprints.
- Moments in comfortable chairs. Moments waiting for the universe.
- The border of a country.
- Holy shit!

*-Would you like to have coffee with me?
-I would rather decompose than have coffee
with you.*

- Most any seizure.
- Lips (the spaces between).
- Contrails.

A celebrity pens a letter concerning snakes:

[snakes will hung in trees or shoe closets i know most shacks hold a snake corn cribs a barn to but snakes dont get up drink milk from cows teat thats a lie snakes can wind that wire like that other go when early cold look for cricks and sun like tin metel will move slow my sun day was when we came canoe round the ox bend and hit the bush their snake fell in boat i know sara can holler sound like broken gate or stuck rabbits or snare one i pin the snake with that paddle flipped over the water clar we looked it swim way a big S a runover snake will crawl one day bite for two people will try to swurv to hit the snake i guess I know the time i shoot the snake OK granpa said why did you just saw the snake a big black one S in the dust shade simmons trees and brain slow fast that heart did that and knees felt fell off cherry piker sort of OK and I just got hurry OK and shot the snake grandpa scalwed me then grandpa said a snake done nothing if you feel to hurt hurt quick why don't you think that

snake is forever now off the earth and what have you done good for one minute OK i said grandpa what the bible say one snake aint all snakes one thing aint ever thing he said did you even have a bad dog I course laughed fred was the worse dog fred dug al the pigs free and ate the pigs fred ripped mee maw's shirts form the line fred ate my sunday bass whole fred ate the roof tar barells fred ran up under grandpa truck two times and second time dead you even had a good dog grandpa said dont you know chip was the one who follow me to school show up after lunch after I got the bus chip walk the highway and my class that day my room so far and all laughing likeing me now oh chip I lamint chip and that the best dog easy so what you know of dogs now grandpa said snakes will lay down railroad tracks to soak up the silver i seen a snake eat a snake like a circl there but them circlss cant go rolling down a road thats a lie most times people see a cottonmouth it ain't but a water snake people like to say they seen a cottonmouth i dont stand why people just like to say big things grandpa said what you shoud do is learn a snake i mean sit and still and look on the water a big silent S listen to it on the water OK]

—I like to hide curled in closets during parties.

Methods

Sean Lovelace

1. Why not just eat a steak?
2. It seems the ordeal will never end.
3. Lights on.
4. Stocking-footed.
5. Move. But stay low.
6. Under the mattress.
7. Tip: A male condom and a female condom will cancel out one another.
8. And, you know, you fuck on the foreheads of clouds and it rains.

[-I don't have anything.

-You don't need it.]

9. Pepper grinder limbs. Breasts like Socrates.
10. Malleable pancakes.
11. My breath is rotten, yours thin.
12. The dance of blood-n-guts, of ear-buds and \$10,000 ice sculptures, cloud to cloud to cloud—clearly drunk out our minds.
13. I should read more books.
14. And this is we?
15. You furl up your flower. You hide it inside a box of kitchen matches.
16. Like when she let loose the lead balloons. (They smothered the land.)
17. Like two slabs of bacon.
18. Like what you hide profound, some crevice.
19. Velvet—you know what I mean.
20. Like the Family Weekend Golf Outing.

[the world a taffy machine, cranking out Tom Cruise and quivering knees. Tom buys a maul. a pike and hammer. Tom goes all teenager on the clouds. he lops the heads off the rivers. he mows the grass and mows the stars and mows to sleep the beauty. no more bubbling foam or giant water lilies or oranges spilling crazily onto the floor. this Tom Cruise, he's a landfill to his own self.

he's a savior, etc. there glows a grass so green I sigh suspicious. we have questions, sir. we are preparing a memo. where is the bird going to perch now? (it circles, it circles...)]

21. Like frigates, fleas, goldfish crackers.
22. What folly!
23. *Shhhhhhh*.
24. People flow in opposite directions.
25. Hoof-beats, a snow of plucked insect wings. Almost beautiful. (The rain curled into a ball. We slipped beneath the chasses, into mascaras of mud.)
26. (My largest regret is all the people I did not...)
27. Like coiled black wire.
28. Like coiled black wire.
29. Like clatter.
30. Like coiled things.
31. *Where in the hell am I?*
32. Like coiled-up bluebirds, splayed out utensil (the cup of their wings, swirl of wind, the ruffling feathers; the telephone line shadows on their stiffening gaze). I stumbled upon a wet pile of bluebirds, all of them executed, no meat taken, their mouths frozen open, their tiny pink tongues, their yellow eyes staring in dull amazement—that did it for me.

too bad
too bad

[and Tom Cruise says, anyone want to make out? i'm bored]

Ideal Wall

Sean Ulman

My city neighborhood has been a construction site for three years now. The clanking disorder in order to create order lessens my mind's mess. This stress detractor distracts me from my common banes. A girl; the world. And the puzzle of what and why day to day. Untangling taut thought webs. Personally and also professionally. I am a pro philosopher. Every few weeks an academic institution or organization pays me to speak (about the same thing, a smooth spherical pebble I plucked from that rambling beach, inanity) or sit among other thinkers. Other men and women who found sparkling specks of sand among troubling rubble and then, like me, danced for notoriety. Philosopher is the only recognizable societal role I sometimes fit. We rarely have to be good (or lucky). We only have to (or had to) be good for an hour a month, a weekend a year, ten minutes a decade. Then the common grinding grudge (or gluttonous gorging) of forging one's work.

The block letter stencil stamping the temporary wood board wall reads, "Post no Bills." Nowhere does it say, "Do not put one's head through," — what I will do imminently and, oh yes, intimately. Should the city try to charge me with vandalism (as they did two years ago for cracking a plaster wall on Wall St.), I will have a line of citable caustic logic to compliment the questionable stability of a man who makes a habit of bashing his head through walls. We live in a world so steeped with seeped-in poison that we resort to clarion retorts for rights and wrongs to be spelled out. Are we trespassing anywhere that there's no 'no trespassing sign' posted? I might get another petty fine. Fine.

The construction crew cut out at last light. I'm alone here this rainy April evening. It's just me and the wall. A double plywood board beauty with mock bird's eye maple freckles and nipples. Running my hand over it, I luck into three splinters. They will be nice to needle over after, like a shred of flaky steak threaded between teeth, detected and plucked a day after the delectable meal. The pulped plank is fresh. Drafts of new sawdust flake off and furl upward. "All hail the hale inhaler," I murmur, while drawing perfume drams into my lungs. Fondling it with both hands, I whisper doting incantations. As I expose a hot spot, I swear the wall speaks to me. My neck, nearly disjunct from my brain, jolts and whips, beginning it.

An apt crack on the first crack at it. I can see the second board. Blood bubbles into a forehead slice. The next three whacks jack up adrenaline. Curing juices sluicing through my veins spruce up my soul. Woozy, I stumble back. I spit, stamp, topple forward. Bracing against the wall, I see blur. I soon see that the second layer, a thicker corky conglomeration, is only dented. I ram like an alpha ram. The cork plank does not buckle. I feel like a boxer strapped to turnbuckles, ducking feebly, boxing a thousand-round match. Reassessing my guess that this was the ideal wall — an obdurate and durable model, but one that can be cracked by a human head —

I feel like a duckling. Like the construction crew, I won't stop until I finish either job: breaking through the wall or my skull (brain blood flood). I tap my forehead to the seam three times, smearing the target with blood. I step into it. I miss wide. From this second crack the corkboard breathes and bares unbreakable teeth. I tap in between the two cracks to paint a new target.

My medicine has made me nauseous. Sliding down the wall onto the sidewalk, I consider the temptation of the concrete (so neat and concrete). But ending it is not the object. You don't come back. You can't rebuild yourself. You can't live (or relive) those rare moments that merit a life's work. And you can't bash your head into any more walls. The cycle of recycling yourself stops.

I stand. My brain reduced to responding. Vomiting is vitalizing. I can think again. But that window will soon shut. I choose to forego the cement and be true to the wood wall through and through. My eyes cannot stop blinking. I wink at the target, and thrust hurriedly so I might catch the wall by surprise. The top flimsy layer does not crack. The scaffolding wall bounces me off. I detect a wimpy welt. The anger summons my anchor animal, a last blast I had no idea I had in me. I pelt.

*

When I come to, it's still dark. I know I am not dreaming because there is pain and numb, not just one or the other, and there is breeze and construction noise, engines throttling, workers barking.

Both boards are busted through. The wall is in fact ideal. I judge my head hit about twenty times. Hit it even after it was hit through. Celebratory slams. Blood splattered a foot to the left and right.

I stand. I crumble. I stand, slump, lean. The throbbing conjures glimpses of hurricane wreckage, irate oceans, earthquakes. Can the aftershocks rob my existence? Is this not an ideal wall after all? Walking feels like playing catch with my wobbly body, throwing my legs, flailing to sustain my delicate step. I sloppily skate cross an empty rain-sleaked street. I smell a scent like the girl who used to be mine. A puddle of purple hovers at my sight's sentient horizon. A thick lilac thicket. I shwack in, clawing, chomping, recalling the neck she once let me lick. Dewy gluey blossoms glut my brow's bloody creases. I see tombstones.

The proximity of a cemetery (in addition to the never-ending construction) is the other reason I make my home here. After a head bashing session I don't have to wander far to my choice recovery place. Or if I went too far (I just might've), this very fine, final peaceful resting place.

I make it to the swath of lawn set aside for the next to die. I collapse and curl up. My brain still works, so I think of something that in no way resembles those ideal stones smoothed by fleeting flowers of profound thought. I wonder what I often wonder. How many people have died in a cemetery. And picture the engraved epigram: "... died here, rests here."

I close out. I know I'm asleep at first. I have an ordinary dream. A loose tooth, brushes and brooms scrubbing and scraping, my feet stuck in cement. There is no enthralling white light. Then there is just dark. Nothing. But not black.

Las Vegas, 2020

Shane Anderson

Birthday parties. Wine tastings. Honeymoons of the planned and unplanned varieties. The annual Regional Hotdog Eating Competition. Truckloads of busloads of pit-stained wrinkled people lactating coupons, complaint forms and bond money.

Camera change, zoom in.

Does it mean anything to you Swissies – laugh-track, some real – that you’ve encroached upon the American Dream? Clap-track, more real. Shattered glass syllables in words for emphasis, the prickling fingertip sparkle of an arm that’s been slept on. Did you ever bother to think about the hairless children whose last wishes had been to come to you? Of the thousands and thousands who no longer have a *timesheet* to *fudge* on? Loud hushed whisper, getting louder the more the voice is tempered. Did you even consider the headaches and fender benders, the dinner table desperation orbiting around the welfare office? *Does this mean anything to you?* Go-get-em-Greg-track, hoo hoo hoo.

Little disc bouncing off the screen corners then back drifting response. Dozing Video Switcher Technician scrambling to load image.

Of course of course it means it means something something to us to us Greg Greg. Telephone crackle thereto. Hallo? Hallo?

Doubly located and rectified by Senior Audio Technician.

I said, said Greg Mothes, unfazed, do you realize that the National Bison Association no longer has a home for its yearly obstinacy? That these zephyrs and buoyancy will no longer flow?

Sorry?

You better believe you’re sorry!

Delicate mixture of clap- and boo-track. The audience jigsawed by both lights flashing alternately, the 9-volt battery taste before a seizure.

I’m agreeing with you, Greg.

So you would agree that you’ve ruined Americans’ dreams?

One split screen filled with the faces of Sieg & de Gagnat, the other dedicated to the abandoned Fat City hotel/casino. Scrolling factoids underneath.

We must follow ours after too, or?

Boooo-track. Greg Mothes’ gracious arms calming the crowd that isn’t up at arms. And what do you chocolatiers and cuckoo clockers dream? Chuckle-track. Was that a French or German accent that Greg Mothes, the Brightest City on Earth’s favorite daytime television host, was trying on?

Brief telephone silence like dust settling on amplified houseplants.

Greg of spaces.

Of spay-ces? Little laugh and hands up.

Of over the desert and mountains spaces. Germanic structure and so, most definitely, Bastian Sieg. Spaces hanging above the world like a curtain. Cloud-

floating, bobbing. Sieg's name and abbreviated biography ticking across the lower portion of the screen. All the way to the Greatest Cavity in the Earth will it careen. Flewed. Like bloodhound gums to the world. You say this, no?

No beginning, no end?

People say lots of things, said Greg Mothes, but what I want to know is, what is it going to look like?

The Greg Mothes tie straightening tick. A rapier – usually something pancreatic, palmy.

Far away it looks like glass, reflecting, like you can see through a cloud. French inflection. Video Switcher Technician deductively popping up Jean-Marie de Gagnant's particulars. But closer from the bottom you must picture the seabed. Sandy grey. Unknown. The sides are something like too much soap in a sink. Billowing.

The Greg Mothes raised-eyebrow-chin-down-out-then-up protrude.

And where's the valet?

The valet?

The entrance.

The monocoque structure has but one door, a closed oyster to be pried open to be opened. It is very difficult to get inside, even when you calibrate the structure's position to your own position. Video clips of thunderstorms at twilight. But inside, why you want to leave is the forgotten. This is something inviting, like a warm hug or a sweater. Everything you want is there. In places, a forest of marble pillars; in others, wide open spaces like deserts. There's a floor cool to the touch, like a breeze on bare feet in the summer. Chandeliers jellyfish in midair in rooms with beds that smell like peaches, not connected, moving. You know? Spaces rising and flowing, filled with white and gold, gilded?

Is this a hotel/casino we're talking about here, or some kind of over-exposed zoo/brothel?

No, no, it is definitely a hotel/casino, a superb hotel/casino, with one floor only, no hierarchy, you see, with a single lobed card table stretching through the entire building, where every game ever made is played. There are slot machines too, slot machines that make you feel like you're in the dark cinema when you lose, slot machines that put you on the stage when you win. There are dark perimeters we want to make where all dissatisfaction can fester. Our desire is to capture the Brightest City on Earth's black hole concept of recreation, to expand upon its inexplicable capacity for joy.

Laugh– or aww– or jeer-?

And will you build this dream for other dreams to inhabit?

This is the impossible.

Definitely a jeer-track – or, wait Ms. Up-And-Coming Audio Technician, a gasp-?

Gasp-track.

We pick up the pencil and we put it on the paper and we don't know where to start.

A little humbled now. Then what aaaaarreee you going to do?

We bring another recreation idea to end, something that our sleepless nights fills.

Let me get this straight, you're going to build another hotel/casino?

Speculation factoid explosion.

This is right Greg.

And what's *THAT* going to be like?

Telephone silence like the air pressure wheezing out of a thermos.

Video Switcher Technician gearing up segments of Greg Mothes and sports stars visiting balding children with tubes in their arms.

It will have proportions, Greg, that were previously believed to be proportionless.

Those to Come

Thomas Patrick Levy

There's something bad in the morning, we're coming eyeless into the yard, our skin shifting. Mild girl, climb a kiss through the cold grass, climb in your underwear. You're not waiting to die like a broken leaf. I care, I made you a cup of tea, it's modern, cold.

I am Trying to Break Your Heart

Thomas Patrick Levy

Remember your domino eyes smiling in the big bible city. Let me back in, I'm a drinker, I said good night yet you believe that I am trying to break your heart. You disposable avenue, I'm the man you believe in, undressing the lightning doesn't hurt, the city lets you glide back in, I'm the man who loves you.

This is Just a Modern Rock Song

Thomas Patrick Levy

At the edge of town you weren't even looking at the flag lying there in the park, feeling strange like a picture of a word, like a sad book on the shelf thinking beyond writing songs, singing this is just a modern rock song. These intentions start slow, a corduroy house, a tender sin, I want to run away like the sound of a single penny.

Easy/Lucky/Free

Thomas Patrick Levy

I worry, listening as you escape like garbage. Don't look for faces in these bags, lay your real muscles near the refrigerators, whisper your endless static. The patterned clocks are enough to dream, there is nothing as easy but I don't let it crowd my tears.

Flood

Travis Kurowski

When the waters first began to rise, there was certainly panic—people hurriedly packed up their baby photos and wedding albums and left town, school after school cancelled classes for the day, then for the entire week, a heavysset woman stood alone outside Wal-Mart in jeans and a yellow tank top and told us all about the coming apocalypse—but after a few weeks of frantic phone calls and soaking men stapling tarps onto slippery rooftops, a sluggish monotony settled over the town, worry slowly having become habit, then eventually disappearing altogether. Children ceased their vigils at living room windows. People returned home, unloading their cars, bent over their boxes to protect them from getting wet. Schools reopened. The heavysset woman never returned. It was the middle of July. We walked around in rubber boots carrying cheap umbrellas. In the evenings, we stayed indoors. The mosquitoes had come out in record numbers. The water, people said, let the bugs reproduce at terrifying speeds. Candles and spray were not enough, so even in the summer heat we covered ourselves in clothing—pullovers, jeans, and some even wearing gloves. To its credit, the rain washed away many distinctions among us. Neighbors got to know neighbors, borrowing tools or helping one another bail water. Strangers stood next to strangers pushing cars across flooded roads and parking lots. The first weeks of the flood, Sally and I followed each other everywhere—to the store, the garage, the bathroom. We would lie in bed together listening to the rush of water against the roof. “It sounds like it’s stopping,” one of us would say. By the end, I worked longer hours than usual and was gone sometimes days at a time, immersing myself in the job. Sally stayed home eating microwave dinners, the water-logged bird feeders swaying in the trees outside the window like miniature corpses.

Contraband Humanity

Verity Hill

In the contraband drawer are fourteen objects, six of them frisked off and the rest given dumbly over in return for rancid blankets. These transactions occur with sullen guards as witness.

Upstairs the dorm is damp, with three stained mattresses at random on the gritty floor. The room stinks of unwashed things crammed careless into rotten vinyl bags. The windows grimed obscure the crust of pigeon shit on ledges. She has on her only what can safely be hidden or carried, and sleeps with her sack as a pillow.

Three women share her double bed. Each of them has nightmares, and one rolls toward her under the pretence of dreamlike groping, sliding a thick hand up her thin thigh. She grabs the wrist and in the dark can sense a yeasty smile. She inches closer to another sleeper, pining for the comfort of her blade.

By cresting dawn all inmates rise and get in line, groggy for coffee and corn flakes. Some sell their vouchers for cigarettes. She hasn't eaten since Thursday, and wishes she had some to trade. They chew in silence, pretending not to listen for each others' hunger. Faces low above their bowls, theirs is the furtive behaviour of animals unsure whether next they'll bite or be bitten.

A bell's disruption reminds them they have grudges of senseless wandering to bear, and they drag these leaden to the thick steel door. It swings outward and the guard charts the number of escapees to ensure none linger in the warm.

In the cold rain these bundles and parcels of women collect shabby garments about them and draw dirty hoods over haunted faces. Ejected from the hatch of suspect haven, they are a dim confetti of hapless misdirection. Some of them shoe alleyways where doubtless dealers skulk them. Some band with others and make hunted haste, or are borne with them feckless away. Others stumble to the closest bench until they're shoved off by cops onto others. They sit muttering or waiting for the freeze to saturate the core of some senseless internal refuge.

Contributors' biographies

Adam J Maynard lives in Oxford (UK). His work has appeared in Lamination Colony, Robot Melon, Pineapplewar, Spooky Boyfriend, Zembla, Purple, Pangur Ban Party and others. His book of short fiction, *Stumble*, was published by Pulp Books. He is the editor of the short fiction/poetry site *My Name is Mud*. He is constantly followed around by a giant frog called Martin who enjoys the electric guitar and vodka.

Adam Moorad's writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *3:AM*, *elimae*, *Evergreen Review*, *Mad Hatters Review*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Underground Voices* and *Word Riot*, among many other places. His debut novella, *Oikos*, will be published by nonpress in 2010. He lives in Brooklyn and works in publishing. Visit his blog at <http://adamadamadamadamadam.blogspot.com/>

Alan Stewart Carl writes fiction in Texas. Sometimes he writes about Texas. Oftentimes he writes with his two children hanging from his arms. There's a picture of him not writing at <http://alanstewartcarl.com/>

Alexandra Isacson enjoys tending her lush desert garden of blooming roses, *ranunculus*, trumpet vines, ivy, poppies and pomegranates. Visit her site at <http://alexandraisacson.com/>

Corrina Bain is a writer-performer, working largely with themes involving animals, classic films, and the defilement of the sexual object. She has worked as an assistant in a detox ward and an abortion clinic, as a rape crisis hotline counselor, and as a volunteer educator responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Mozambique. Her work has appeared in recent issues of the *November 3rd Club*, *Danse Macabre*, and *decomp* literary magazine. She lives in Brooklyn.

Diana Kole is a Comparative Literature student currently living in New York.

J.A. Tyler is the author of *Inconceivable Wilson* (Scrambler Books, 2009), *Sinatra* (Vox Press, 2010), *In Love With A Ghost* (Willows Wept Press, 2010), *A Man Of Glass & All The Ways We Have Failed* (Fugue State Press, 2011), *A Shiny, Unused Heart* (Black Coffee Press, 2011) and *The Zoo, A Going* (Dzanc Books, 2013). His work has appeared recently with *Diagram*, *Sleepingfish*, *Caketrain*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *elimae* and *Action, Yes*. He is also founding editor of *Mud Luscious Press*.

Jarrid Deaton lives in eastern Kentucky. He is neither proud nor ashamed of the place he has called home for 33 years. He enjoys the music of Nick Cave and a good Bloody Mary. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *mud luscious*, *Thirst For Fire*, *Pear Noir!*, *Underground Voices*, and elsewhere.

Joseph A. W. Quintela writes. Poems. Stories. On Post-It notes. Walls. Envelopes. Cocktail napkins. Anything he gets his hands on, really. He writes poetry on Twitter. Some people think that's cool. But, whatever. Though his work has been published here and there, the first to recognize his rather dubious genius was *Lines Written With a Razor*. Actually, he wrote those lines with a battle axe. But, whatever. He got bored. So he started editing *Short, Fast, and Deadly*. Which is funny. Because he's none of these things.

Joseph Goosey parks cars in Jacksonville, Florida, but maybe soon he's going to move to DC. His work has appeared several pretty places. He thanks you for reading.

Mark Neely's chapbook, *Four of a Kind*, is forthcoming from Concrete Wolf Press in Fall, 2010. He lives in Muncie, Indiana, home of Robinson's Jar Museum and the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Visit his website at <http://markneely.com/>

Meredith Legg watches others sing our world into existence and is trying to sing one of her own hymns. Other than that, a job in politics would suffice.

A resident of La Ciudad de Nueva York, **Michael Brandonisio's** varied lit and visual forms have appeared at *Danse Macabre*, *Otoliths* and elsewhere.

P. Edward Cunningham is the author of *This Boy, This Broom* (BatCat Press, 2010) and the managing editor of *Radioactive Moat*. His work has appeared in places like *Open Thread Quarterly*, *WTF PWM*, *decomp*, and *H_NGM_N*. In his spare time, he enjoys reading descriptions of bottled water. Yes, he feels reverse osmosis can be exciting. Discover more excitement at <http://gilamonsterlaundromat.blogspot.com/>

Rachel Jenkins currently lives and writes in Davis, California.

Who is **Raymond Farr**, you ask? You must be a psychic to have such curious things filling yr conscious mind. Raymond Farr is a syllogism half gone in the stomach. Middle aged. His dog takes him everywhere but school. He is not going fishing any more since childhood. He always has seconds at <http://mjonesrview.blogspot.com/>

Sean Lovelace teaches creative writing at Ball State University. *How Some People Like Their Eggs* is his award-winning flash fiction collection by Rose Metal Press. His works have appeared in *Crazyhorse*, *Diagram*, *Quick Fiction*, *Sonora Review*, *Willow Springs*, and so on. He blogs at <http://seanlovelace.com/>. He likes to run, far.

In the summer **Sean Ulman** works in Alaska as a technician for a shorebird study. In the winter he lives in Delaware, where he writes about Alaska. He is the creator of *Bird Babylonia Films*.

Shane Anderson lives in Berlin and blogs at <http://shane-anderson.blogspot.com>. 'Las Vegas, 2020' is excerpted from a larger manuscript, whose working title is 'Las

Vegas, Las Vegas; or Between Two Mysteries; or Good News Las Vegas'. 'Las Vegas, Las Vegas' is about two Swiss architects (Bastian Sieg and Jean-Marie de Gagnant), their attempts to build a second Las Vegas and a number of other things.

Thomas Patrick Levy's work can found in various journals and publications including Pear Noir!, the New York Quarterly, and PANK. He records all his embarrassing secrets online at <http://enumerations.org/>

Travis Kurowski lives in Pennsylvania and his new baby girl is two weeks old. He reads more literary magazines than you.

Verity Hill was once attacked with a knife. Her first thought was, "I'll be really pissed off if I don't live to write about this." Her second thought was, "I may be dead soon. I bet it'll sell me books." Her third thought was, "Wow. This really sucks."

Forthcoming



“I’m always irritated by people who imply that writing fiction is an escape from reality. It is a plunge into reality and it’s very shocking to the system.”

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