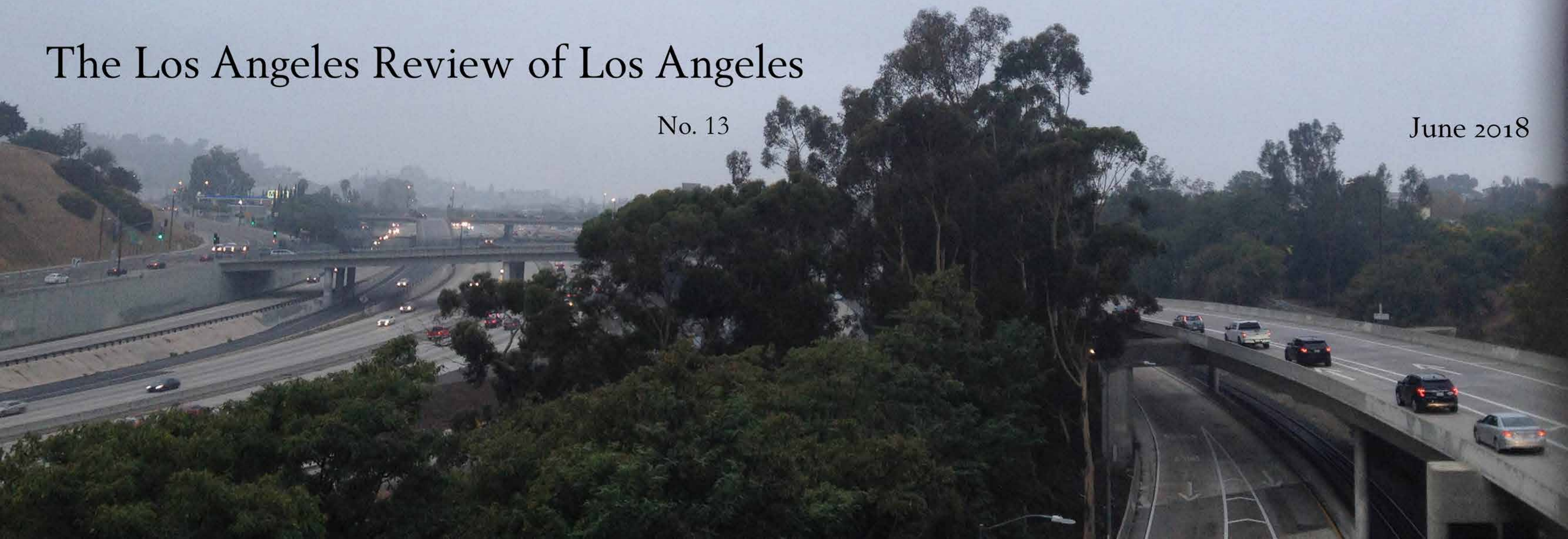


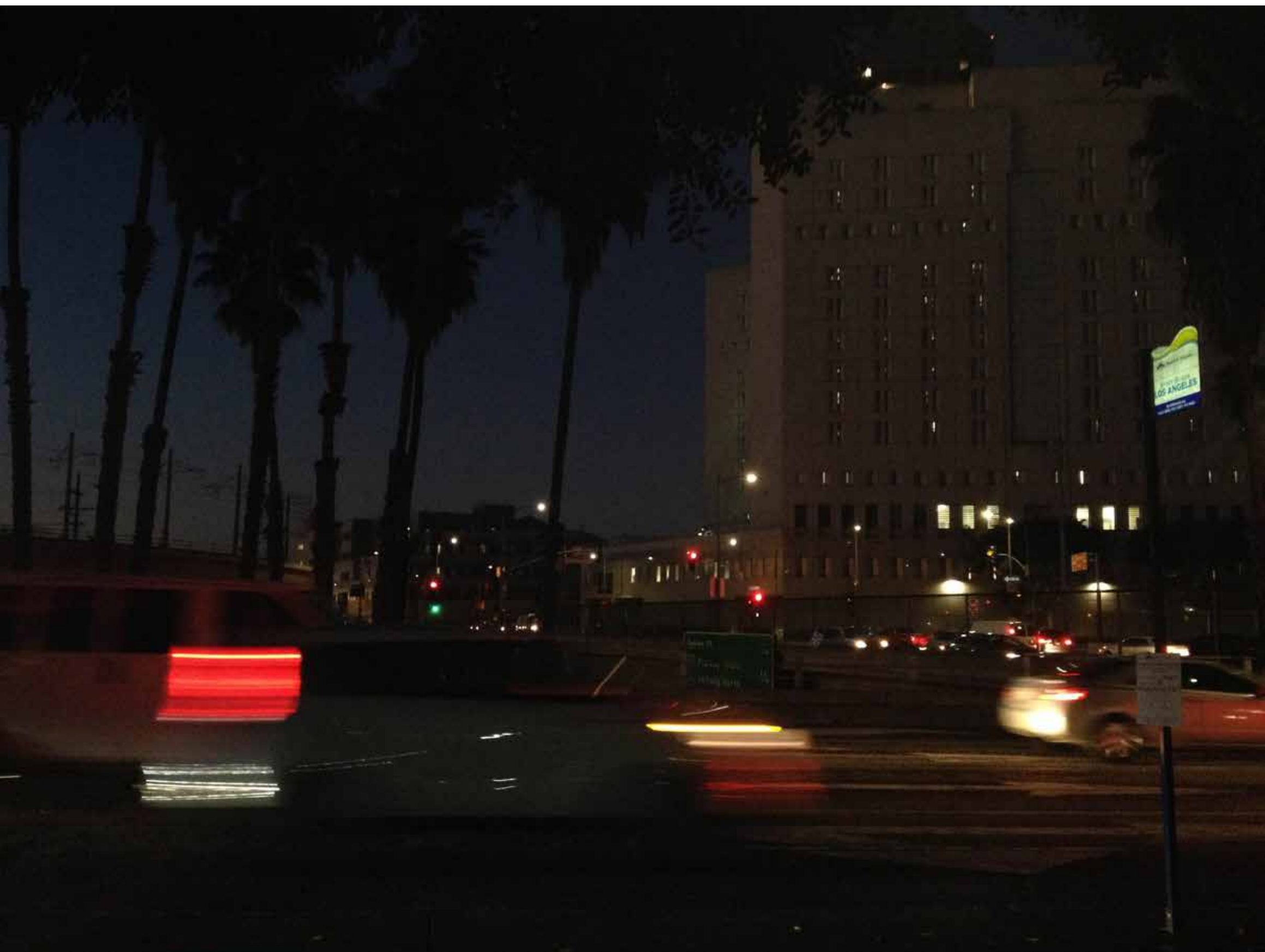
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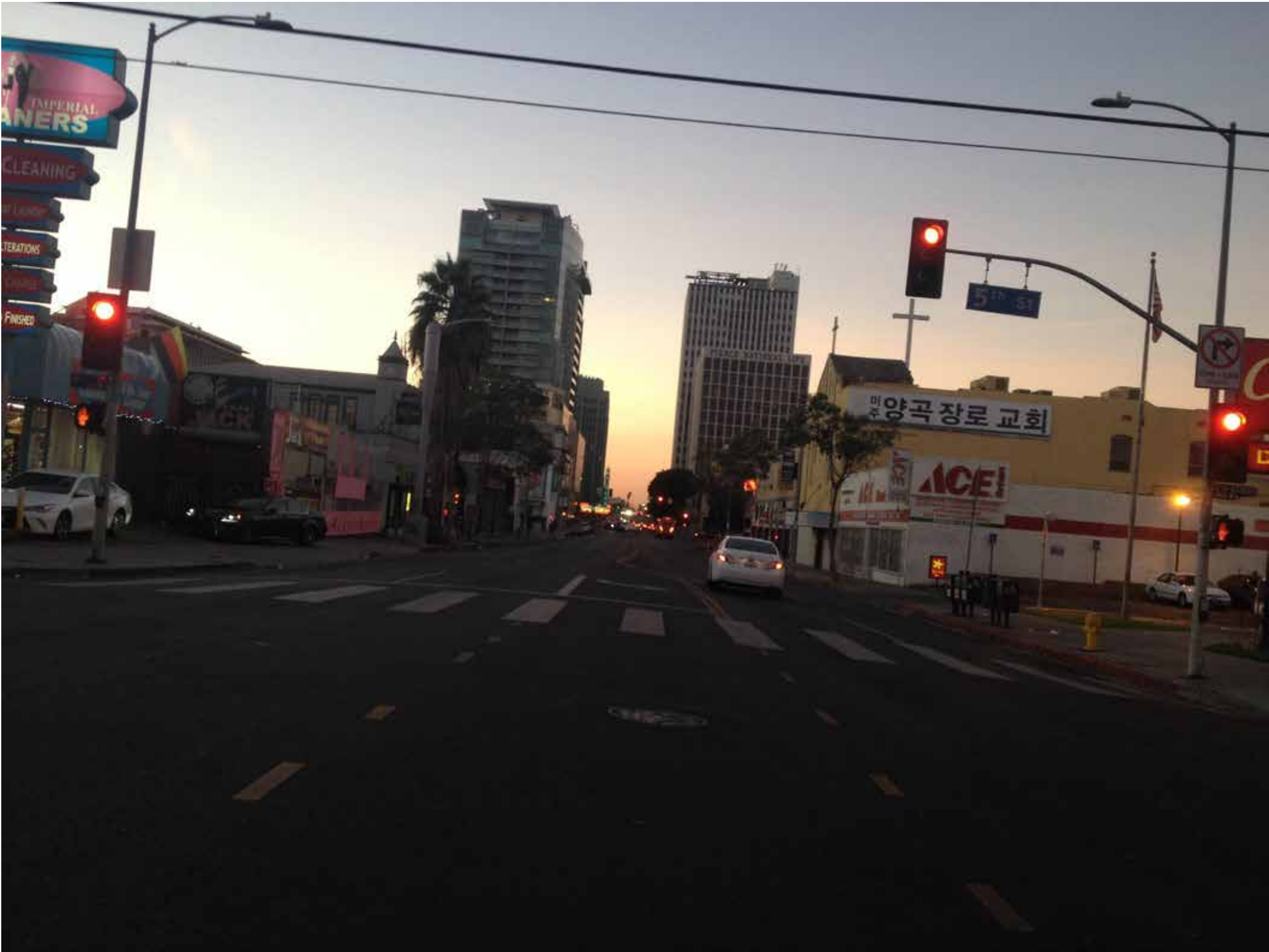
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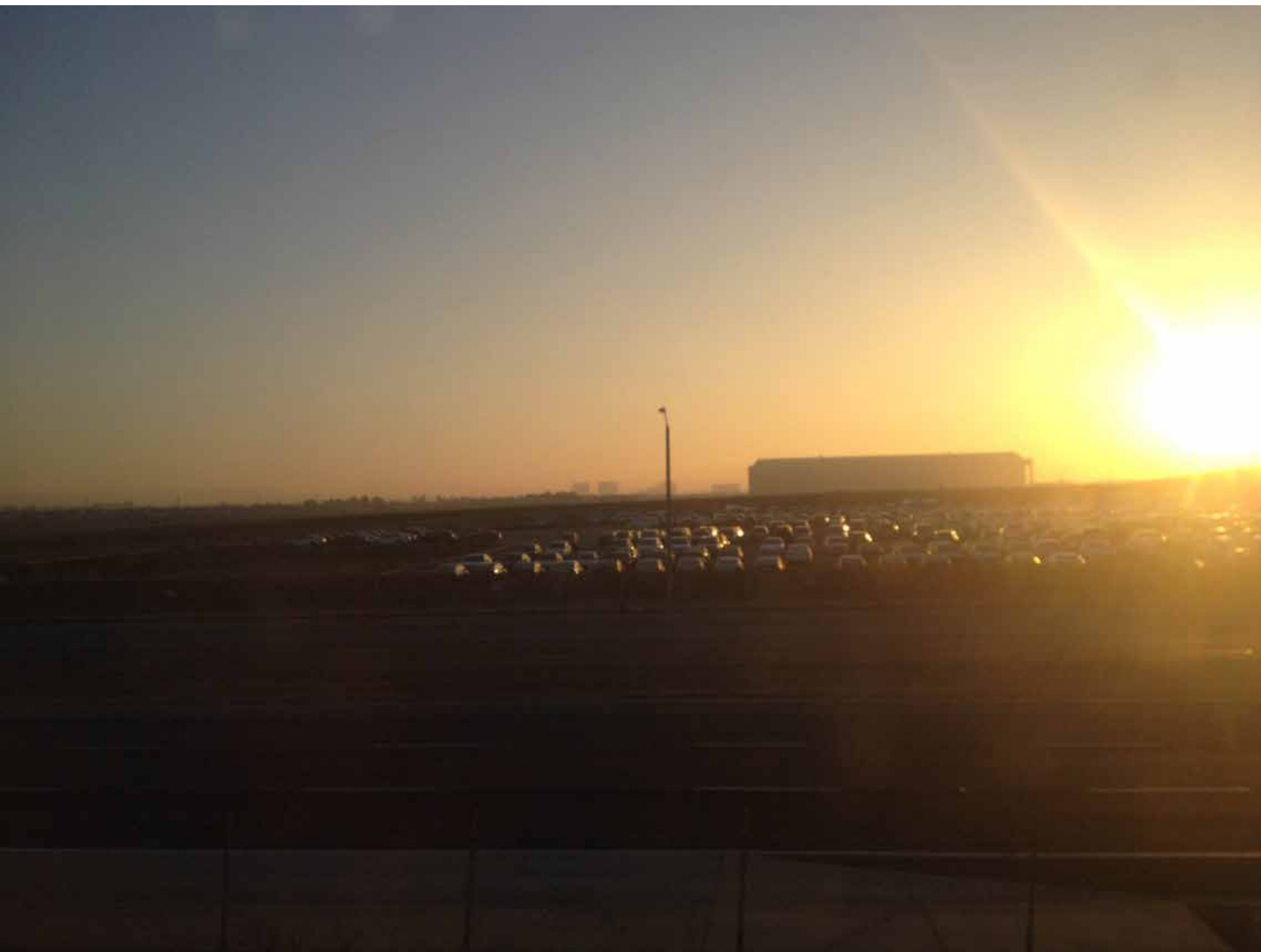


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The Throne

SCOTT LAUDATI

i don't want them to have hope
i know what they'll do with it.
it becomes freedom
it becomes equality
it runs away from the founders
and digs deeper trenches.
you've had a best friend
were they there when you needed them?
everyone's been burned by the ones they love.
you can hear it in the cop's voice as he clears the street.
a man with blood in his eyes

a man who doesn't care who pays his check.
its an oath that's gone insane.
its a dick that only rises for violence.
and when the tides recede and the dark horse gets the gun
there's never a sanctuary for the guilty.
the streets run back the other way
and finally the underdog
gets the thing he used to pray for.
but the throne was always a funny thing.
all men want it
and no one ever knows
what to do with it.

My Suitcase is Packed

SCOTT LAUDATI

i know you're home somewhere out there
in colorado
where the desert flowers
wait all year to turn yellow
and horses with spanish blood
whip their manes under lightning
as the snows melt down to refill
the dried beds.
somewhere where enough was enough
and you had to put a continent between me
and new jersey.
i've seen that land and pulled over
to swim naked where the white crests shatter
and freedom is something more than a dream.
there are no dead ends on your streets,
the rain only falls straight down
and even stray cats
come when they're called.
i bled for you once
when the war was still far from over
and the end hasn't gotten any closer
so i guess
i'd do it again

Unmarked

MATTHEW TWIGG

Your body is a piece of parchment: every mark tells a story. The story of you. You can edit as much as you like – ink and sharp edges – but still it's you.

Take Betty Noir for instance – palliative nurse and prescription drug thief. You can tell by the pallor. Amoxicillin. Used to treat ear ache, urinary tract infections, acne in teenagers. She mixes it with Amlodipine. She doesn't have high blood pressure but she loves that numbness in her fingers and toes, how she can't move. Anything could happen.

The bright red lipstick doesn't do her any favours.

Naughty nurse.

Her lips aren't full enough to pull it off. And it's shoddily applied.

Note to self: no make-up when you're withdrawing.

Poor Betty Noir. Her nose wasn't always like that. Not drugs this time.

Husband. Violent man. Ex-husband. Flatmate. That's how it goes.

And that's just her face.

Look at the way her bra straps dig into her shoulders. That'll leave a mark for sure. She thinks it's worth it for the extra hoist.

Scar on her knee. Left knee. Childhood accident – tricycle menace.

Happy youth gone wrong somewhere. Somewhere between her knees and her breasts, something's gone wrong. The worst place for life to get you.

Betty Noir clutches her bag against her gut, sits with her knees together – not in the finishing school way. In the please-don't-touch-me way.

Rodrigo Frandy has taken a seat beside her. Local barista and serial peeper. It's the scratches on his hands and cheeks that give it away.

Fingernails leave wider, deeper marks than that. Stay redder for longer.

Nope, thorns have done him. Commitment personified.

Slicked hair and dirty knees on Rodrigo Frandy. You want the cream foamed on your macchiato? Pierced eyebrow moving up and down. Big thick bar just above his eye – also left – and lord knows where else. Bet at least a nipple. Raise you a scrotum.

Yahtzee!

Wrong game.

These are people whose bodies tell a story. Their story.

And then there's me.

Unmarked. I'm a non-event at the front of the bus. Number 22 to Nowhere, UK, twinned with POW camp, Afghanistan, and Woop Woop, Australia.

I am what happens when nothing happens.

I am Fate's soiled undies.

The bus pulls to a stop with me behind the wheel and a figure draped in black climbs aboard. A little white square at his throat where God

comes out.

“Return, please,” says Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby.

He's not to know this is a one-way trip.

“Bless you,” he says, and takes the ticket.

All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful,

The Lord God kills them all.

He takes a seat next to Madame Escargot – pensioner and dominatrix to the retired, elderly, and burdensome.

He's got a bruise in the middle of his forehead from all that prayer; head on the ground, butt in the air. Amen. It's that kind of religion: bells and smells. Tits and teeth, heaven style.

“You're one of those from the church,” says Madame Escargot, smiling through her eye-shadow. A blue-rinsed predator in the mist.

Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby nods his head: “And are you a lady of faith?”

“Oh no, my dear,” she tinkles. “I don’t have time for any of that faggotty shit.” She reaches into her purse and hands him a business card. “I much prefer dripping hot wax onto old men’s saggy ball-bags.”

Each little flower that opens,

Each little bird that sings,

He stole their glowing colours,

He broke their tiny wings.

Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby twists in his seat. He crosses himself: forehead, sternum, left shoulder, right shoulder. He’s done it so many times over the years he’s developed a small indent in the middle of his chest. Devout.

Forehead, sternum, left shoulder, right shoulder. It’s either that or a third nipple. Demonic.

Forehead, sternum, left shoulder, right shoulder. Using all five fingers to represent the five stigmata of Christ; now there was a guy whose marks told a story!

Forehead, sternum, left shoulder, right shoulder.

“Heeeeeeeey Macarena!” shouts Madame Escargot, slapping the suspenders under her petticoat. “They broke the mould when they made you, Reverend!”

Snapped it. Said never again.

“Do you want to go outside?” Betty Noir asks me.

She says, “It’s a nice day.”

Behind Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Madame Escargot sits Carol Jones, a.k.a. El Musculoso.

She takes up both seats. Peroxide blonde hair and a jaw that could break rocks.

Veins popping.

Muscles twitching.

Oil glistening.

“I don’t believe in any of that hocuth pocuth either,” she says, her face appearing all of a sudden between the Reverend and the dominatrix.

She’s rattling with pills.

“But if I could arm wrethle anyone, it would be the Virgin Mary. If you’re theriouth about gaining muthle math quickly, you’ve got to lay off the cock. You think you’re draining it, but really it’th draining you.”

“What did you say your name was, dear?” asks Madame Escargot.

“You can call me El Muthculotho,” replies El Musculoso.

Madame Escargot spins in her seat, rests a thigh against Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby.

That’ll leave a trail.

She flicks her tongue.

“I always thought Jezebel would be much more of a challenge.”

She laughs.

El Musculoso laughs.

She laughs.

Rodrigo Frandy clears his throat.

“Shouldn’t it be La Musculosa? You are a woman, right?”

“I’m more woman than you can handle, baby,” says El Musculoso, leaning back in her seats and popping a pill cocktail; multivitamins and HRT supplements. She scratches her underboob. The surgeon’s stitched her up too tight. “Are you even Thpanish, anyway? You look like a Panamanian rent boy.”

This is too easy. They don’t need me. They’re going to destroy themselves at this rate.

“Pamplona, born and raised,” says Rodrigo Frandy. He unbuttons his shirt – score one for the pierced nipple – he has a thick, raised scar across the right side of his ribcage. “Running of the bulls. I was six years old.”

Technically it's not a lie. But the truth – that his father took a carving knife to him – just isn't as sexy. Child mutilation and sex appeal just don't go together; like toothpaste and orange juice, or IEDs and long-term health. *You think that's bad?* – his father said – *Try getting gored by a fifteen-hundred pound bull having a real shitty day.*

Except in Spanish. And with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, so it was a little more muffled.

I am the universe's wet fart.

But things weren't always this way, you know; me chauffeuring this festival of misery, this hodgepodge of social detritus; half bus driver, half bin man. I used to operate an FV107 Scimitar – two and a half tours completed. Now that baby you could drive. I'm talking 4.2 litre, 6-cylinder Jaguar engine; 190hp and 7.8 tonnes including munitions. It knew how to leave a mark too. Or rather the L21Al RARDEN did; long recoil autocannon; ninety rounds per minute; obliterate the enemy from twenty-

two hundred yards.

That's hairs on the back of the neck stuff!

Shame we weren't the only ones making marks back then. You see, that beast had been in service since the early seventies, and what with the RDX and TNT mixes you get nowadays we never stood a chance; cut through aluminium like wet toilet tissue, not to mention muscle tissue.

But I'm a human crash test dummy; blank stares through broken glass. Set me up and let's go again.

That's the only reason we're here. I only want what I'm owed. I want my marks.

Back onboard the bus Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby says a prayer under his breath. Rodrigo Frandy lights a cigarette. Betty Noir stares straight ahead. Madame Escargot whispers sweet nothings into God's near ear. El Musculoso takes out a razor. Professor Bang twiddles his thumb.

Ah, Professor Bang.

High school lab assistant. PhD.

Purveyor of Hostile Detonations.

His other thumb doesn't twiddle so well these days. Severed anterior interosseous nerve in right flexor pollicis longus.

Translation: Buggered hand.

Cause: Student prank: Potassium in the handwash.

Treatment: Vengeance: Exploding rainbows.

Sodium nitrate burns red. Barium nitrate green.

Red and yellow and pink and green ...

Potassium nitrate burns purple. Calcium nitrate orange.

Purple and orange and blue ...

The kids just love that experiment ... at first.

I can sing a rainbow ...

Before they arrive, synthesise carbon monoxide and hydrogen over a catalyst – copper and/or zinc oxide will do – to form methanol vapour.

Season to taste.

Sing a rainbow ...

Then make yourself scarce because when they light those nitrates ...

Sing a rainbow too.

Seventeen hospitalisations to date.

Madame Escargot has turned a full one-eighty and is shaving El Musculoso's stretch-marked back. There's a Tupperware box of old hairy water for her to rinse the razor in.

With each scrape of the blade her breasts stroke up and down, up and down the torso of the dear, sweet Reverend. She's practically mounted him. He's sweating through his cassock. She can feel him through it too; sporting wood.

“You can crucify me on that thing anytime,” she whispers, pausing to rinse El Musculoso's scapula stubble off in the foamy water. It's reaching saturation point. “Make me your goddess; I can be your golden ass.

Murder me for your sins.”

God’s earlobe is between her teeth.

I put my foot down to make the bus go faster.

Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby tugs at his collar, the white square where God comes out now stained with the perspiration of the damned.

The colour of cigarette butts.

Old toenails.

Brimstone.

He’s got marks, a cocktail of burns and bruises, going all the way around his neck.

Suicide?

Madame Escargot can see them clearly from her vantage point, scaling the good Reverend as she is. In her line of work she could recognise rope burn with her hands tied behind her back.

This isn’t it.

The skin’s too puckered. Unshredded. When it comes to rope, it doesn’t matter how tight those braids are, there are always fibres that get loose, tear your flesh to pieces like tyres on a police stinger. Could have been a synthetic rope, but even polypropylene is susceptible to friction and polyester has so little give under load. Nylon perhaps.

No. This looks more like satin to Madame Escargot. She’d need to see his wrists to be sure, but satin can do that after a few hours pulled tight.

You don’t hang yourself with satin. Even if you and Saint Peter are on first name terms.

Kinky devil.

Scrape scrape scrape goes the razorblade on El Musculoso’s muffin top.

“That’th it. All the way down, honey,” she says to Madame Escargot through a mouthful of pills.

“Don’t worry, sweetie, I know what I’m doing,” she replies from atop Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby.

The beads of sweat are gathering on the Reverend's forehead like lost souls: the only way is down.

"Let me call you Magdalene, whore," he says at last.

"You can call me whatever you like," whispers Madame Escargot, blowing against God's ear drum, nestling her aged rump onto the Reverend's tip.

"You do know that Mary Magdalene wasn't actually a whore," says Rodrigo Frandy from near the front of the bus.

"Well I'm going to make her mine," says Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby.

Professor Bang turns to his side: "Does this seem messed up to you? I try to blow up high school students for fun, and even I think this is a little odd."

Beside him is Count Leopold Buchringer, covered in the marks of a thousand tiny paper cuts. They coat him like a scar tissue cocoon.

What I'd give for a few of those.

"A chemistry teacher, eh?" says the Count. "You know, I happen to possess an original copy of the 1713 edition of Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. The second edition, I think. It's a bit beaten up now."

"But how?" asks Professor Bang.

He stole it, he says. Walked into the British Museum, asked to see a copy, put it in his bag and walked straight back out again. It's how he ruptured his Achilles tendon the first time, drop-kicking Isaac Newton's magnum opus off the coffee table.

"I've punched a Shakespeare first folio," he tells Professor Bang. "Right in Macbeth's second act. Fractured a knuckle."

You wouldn't believe how easy it is to get hold of such items, explains the Count. The dealers at these book fairs, they're barely conscious, and if they are they've got their heads buried so far in the newspaper you could tombstone Pomet's 1712 *A Compleat History of Druggs* right there in front

of them and they wouldn't notice.

"I've elbow-dropped more Agatha Christie first editions than you can shake a stick at."

"I knocked myself out cold head butting De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Boy was that guy fucked up."

Rodrigo Frandy tells him what he's doing is wrong. We have to preserve such treasures for future generations.

"I steal signed Ian Fleming novels and burn them," Count Leopold Buchringer tells him. "Because I'm a feminist."

He takes a battered Harry Potter first edition out of a bag, gives it a few digs in the spine. Goes *doosh doosh doosh* as he does so.

"I took a shower with a Gutenberg Bible."

Even in the rear-view mirror I can tell these guys are beyond help.

Retrospect: 20/20.

Still. Seven less people to worry about. Eight if you include me. A big

if. I have a way of coming out of these things unscathed. Whether I want to or not.

Our destination creeps over the horizon.

A canyon of shame.

The anus of the earth, ready to reclaim this cavalcade of human shit.

Professor Bang stands up, punches the Count straight in the nose. You can hear a nasal bone snap, the septal cartilage crunch as it grinds under the weight of the fist.

Professor Bang, he says, "Asshole."

Rodrigo Frandy's on his feet. El Musculoso's razorblade freezes over her snail trail. Madame Escargot and Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby pause their dry-hump.

It takes a moment – a heartbeat or two – for the blood vessels in Count Leopold Buchringer's nose to catch up with events, but soon their pissing blood out his nostrils and all over his lips, chin, neck, and shirt.

Professor Bang, he says, “Asshole.”

Count Leopold Buchringer says he only fights valuable literature and other items of cultural miscellany.

Professor Bang takes a diary out of his inside jacket pocket. He says, “Posterity would love to get its hands on this, trust me,” and slips it back in his pocket.

The Count says, “Good enough,” and karate chops Professor Bang right in the throat.

“Thtop! Thtop the madneth!” cries El Musculoso. Her tears carve great big estuaries of grey flesh into her orange cheeks.

Rodrigo Frandy tries to separate them. But the bus swerves sharply and all three end up on the floor, rolling around in the discarded chewing gum and urine stains, all elbows and gritted teeth. Putting new marks on each other. One scratch, bite, and gouge at a time.

El Musculoso wails and stamps her feet. Betty Noir just stares straight

ahead. Madame Escargot and Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby have started up again.

I floor it.

I can hear Professor Bang and the Reverend gasping for breath. One in Count Leopold Buchringer’s sleeper hold, the other choking on Madame Escargot’s ball gag. One’s leaking into his cassock.

“It’s not satin, but it’ll have to do,” she tells the Reverend.

But it won’t matter in a moment. That or anything else. Not once rubber leaves rock and our coach load of double-decker losers begins its descent.

Life’s laughing stocks.

Floating through the air in perimortem slo-mo.

El Musculoso chomping down the last of her roids and antiandrogens. Madame Escargot and Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby locked at the loins, rushing into the bowels of hell to offer Saint Lucifer a three-

way. Count Leopold Buchringer, Rodrigo Frandy, and Professor Bang tumbling round and around like demented cats in a dryer. Betty Noir sat perfectly still, waiting for the moment she face-plants the windscreen and everything shatters into a thousand blissful pieces.

And me, of course.

Knowing my luck I'll get tossed out the window on impact, land on my own pudgy, bloated corpse from the last time I threw a load down here.

Because explosions don't like me.

But just as I'm bracing myself for lift-off, I see a bus-stop up ahead and one last passenger waiting to board.

I pull the bus over and open the folding electric doors. Yellow, like those American ones with "school bus" written on the front.

Outside is Sergeant Stillinonepiece. Right hand raised in salute. Camouflaged all the colours of snot.

He says, "How many times?"

In the rear-view mirror, everyone's stopped. Betty Noir, Rodrigo Frandy, Madame Escargot, Reverend Doasyouwouldbedoneby, El Musculoso, Professor Bang, Count Leopold Buchringer. All of them just sat there. Staring at the front of the bus. At me.

The Sergeant drops his hand to his side and takes the first step onto the bus. But he doesn't get any taller. I still have to look down to meet his gaze.

He's not any taller because where his legs were Sergeant Maimedattheknees now has two bloody stumps. Not pumping or spurting. Just oozing enough to leave a mark.

He smiles, "There was nothing you could have done."

And suddenly I can smell it all over again. Dust and fuel. Feel the heat against my skin. After a while you start to be able to taste it. Tangy. Iron-rich and sticky with blood.

War soup.

He takes another step and Sergeant Tisbutafleshwound's limbs are all gone. A first-aid manikin complete with hollow eyes and atrophied innards.

He says, "Isn't it about time you moved on?"

In the rear-view mirror, they're disappearing one by one. I don't see them go. They're just there one moment. Like lights going out.

Somehow he takes the final step. Now there's just a medal and a fleshy pool of Sergeant Blowntobits. He bubbles like stew. A bubble bursts.

It says, "Isn't it about time you lived your life?"

In the rear-view mirror, everyone's gone. Everyone except Nurse Betty Noir.

She says, "Are you quite sure you don't want to go outside? It really is a lovely day."

I kill the engine. Close my eyes.

Open them again.

In my hand the little yellow bus rolls back and forth on its tiny wheels. I hold it up and look in through the windows. No passengers. No driver.

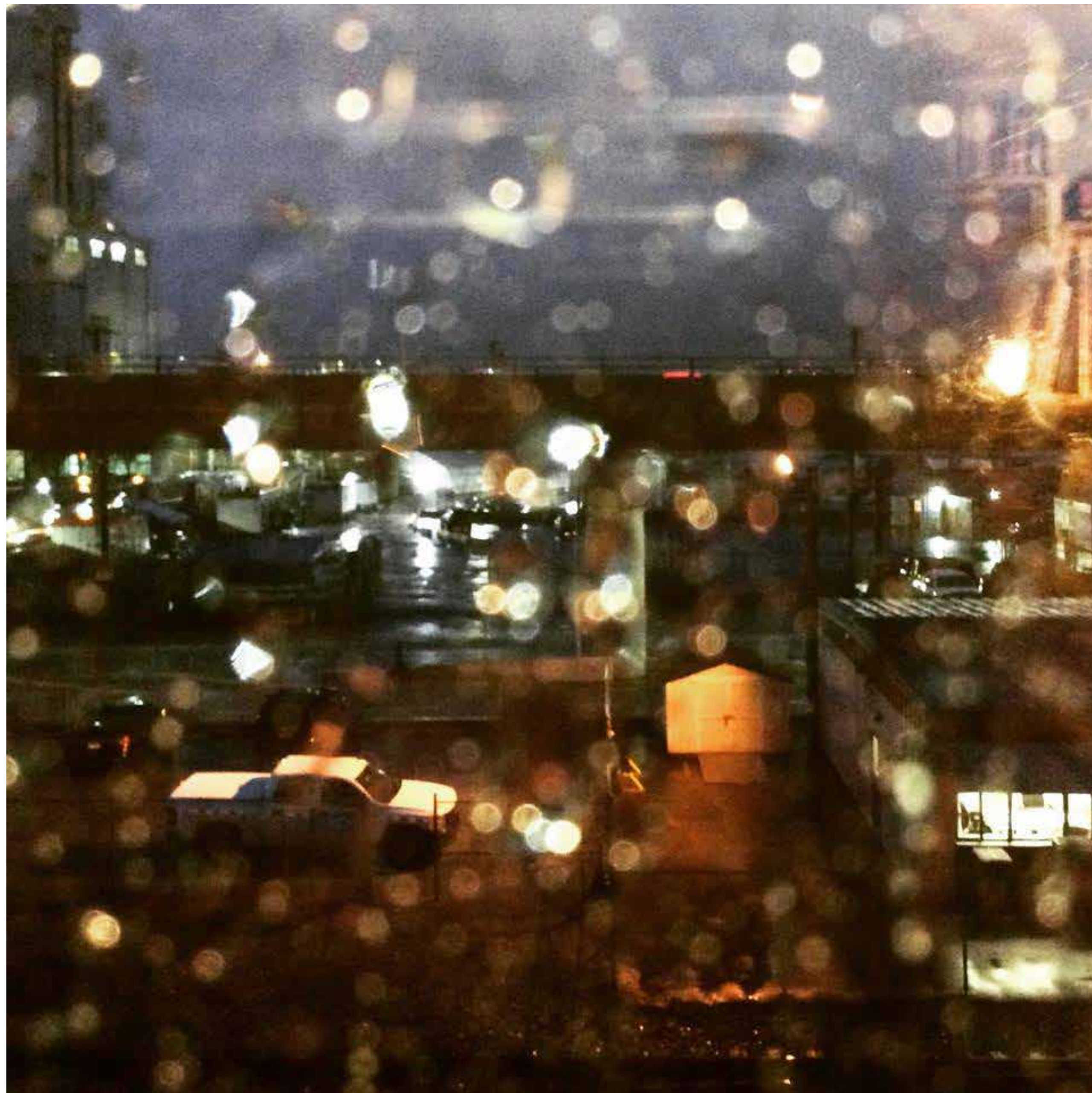
Just an empty space where things and people can happen. Or not happen. The good, the bad, and the downright insane. All with one thing in common: they are mine, under my control. The only things that are.

"I want to go outside," I say to the woman beside me.

"You're the boss," she lies, releasing the brake on my chair.

As she wheels me out the door, I ask her, "You're the drug addict, aren't you?"

She laughs a little. "Now where would you get a silly idea like that?" she says, and pushes me down the patio, her hands shaking shaking shaking as we go.



Disco Rain
KATE MACDONALD

Does This Poem Make Me Look Fat?

?

SIR, I HAVE A BULLHORN:

REMEMBER THE CHILD RAMSHACKLED TO YOUR BLURRY HORIZON
EXCUSE MY NOT-QUITE CRY DOWN YOUR STAIRWELL TELL ME
MY ANSWERS WERE WRONG ALL ALONG LEAVE MY NAME
INSIDE THE LINENS LEAVE ME NOW I MIGHT DIE YOU SCARED
THE BIRDS IT'S JUST GRASS STAINS INSIDE MY PANTS NOT INFECTION
MOONLIGHT STRETCHES ONLY SO FAR WHEN I'M WITH YOU YOUR
SNORING IS A CHARACTER FLAW I GREW UP ADDICTED TO YOU
AND CRACK WHEN BONES BREAK SONGS ESCAPE WHY STARE
THE CEILING HAS NO ANSWERS TAKE MERCY OFF YOUR TONGUE
TAKE YOUR HOOK OUT OF MY MOUTH TAKE YOUR LIGHT INSIDE THE
FIREFLY TAKE THIS POEM IT MAKES ME LOOK FAT DON'T CALL ME POET
CALL ME WHEN SNOW FALLS BLEACH THE CLOTHES WORN BY
MEAT EATERS MEN IN CHAINS EYES FOR KINDNESS BULLETS LEAVE WITH
NAMES REMEMBER THE BOY AND HIS SUITCASE PRETEND YOU NEVER
KNEW DADDY BOTH OF US WAITED THREE DAYS FOR YOU.

YVONNE AMEY

Monster Follows the Beating

YVONNE AMEY

I live in a trailer park next to a funeral home
but that's not where I went wrong.
Maybe it's all this rainy weather we've had—
Lord knows we need it and the wading pond
out back isn't deep enough to drown in yet.

Maybe tittie bars don't sell food.
Maybe ask for four hundred ones instead.

Maybe there's no history
of schizophrenia in families.
Maybe we are all just fucked up.

Maybe you aren't a patient and just an asshole.

Maybe I did everything you asked maybe
a monster follows the beating maybe it's
a cascade of thuds before we hit rock bottom maybe
your cigarette smoke smelled like a crack house
maybe I walked eight miles to the hospital
in socks and fleece pajamas on a snow night
high on PCP maybe no one in this town will
ever remember anything pleasant about us.

Ironing Naked

CLAY CARPENTER

all these creases
 fresh from the shower
and things flapping
 and without patience
shirt buttons
 to put on clothes
and belly buttons
 it's probably
steam, but
 not my smartest
hardly steamy
 moment

Wang's Wang

ANGUS STEWART

Perfect friendships exist. Old Wang knew this. You don't end up on rooftops with your penis hanging out alongside a half-baked comrade. To ride the elevator to the top then march up the stairs then to the ledge in perfect step, unbelt, unzip, and unsheathe one's rigid wang- an American word for the penis- and pummel in perfect synchronicity with your Onatic comrade- this was a sign that the two of you were truly of one mindset.

"I see the fuckers," cried Old Bert in near-perfect Mandarin.

"Strike them!" cackled Old Wang. They tripled speed and unleashed their white bolts.

Twelve floors below crowded a group of younger laowai in streetbeer congregation. For a month these two residents of Golden Fish Tower- Old Wang ever of Shanghai Huangpu and Old Bert once of Florida Brevard- had tolerated those young white dogs' filth and howling. Then one week ago they formed their scheme to scoff Viagra, take their vantage point, and cumbomb the buggers. Of course before their moment of parallel triumph they each had stolen a glance at each other's wang. It was a moment of pride and appreciation. For two old bastards to be hard and on the attack was a marvellous thing.

Old Wang's glob of cum struck a skateboarding smoker (a smoking skateboarder) from Toronto in the eye, and the fool screamed and

dropped his smoke. Old Bert struck a young lady from his home state, funnily enough, right between the cleavage, and she fell into a mania, and began tearing at her clothes to escape the spreading semen.

"It's too good, it's too good!" cackled Old Wang as they crawled away from the rooftop, spent but still rigid, thanks to their medication.

One and half hours later Old Wang learned that some straw globule of cum had struck his wife on the head as she had been reaching out to bring in the drying laundry. With his own wang still loose and wild in the open air and with cum stains on his shoes, he could only but spill the beans as a tidal wave of scolds and fists poured down upon him. When he realised the tide and hands would not cease unless he played an ace, Old Wang revealed old Bert's part in the game.

"That old pervert!" Lady Wang roared. "Of course! American! Of course he has stayed in China so long! Of course he has stayed here in the Golden Fish building so long! His brain has fried! He's been dissolved into salt!" Lady Wang shoulder barged Old Wang onto their marital bed. He weezed, and perhaps his hanging wang wheezed with him. "Stay there, you mad duck!" Lady Wang roared, before marching the five doors down to Old Bert's apartment.

She dragged the fat old Floridian by his stained blue t-shirt into the

Wang abode and threw him onto the bed beside his partner in crime. Lady Wang stood over them, her eyes burning.

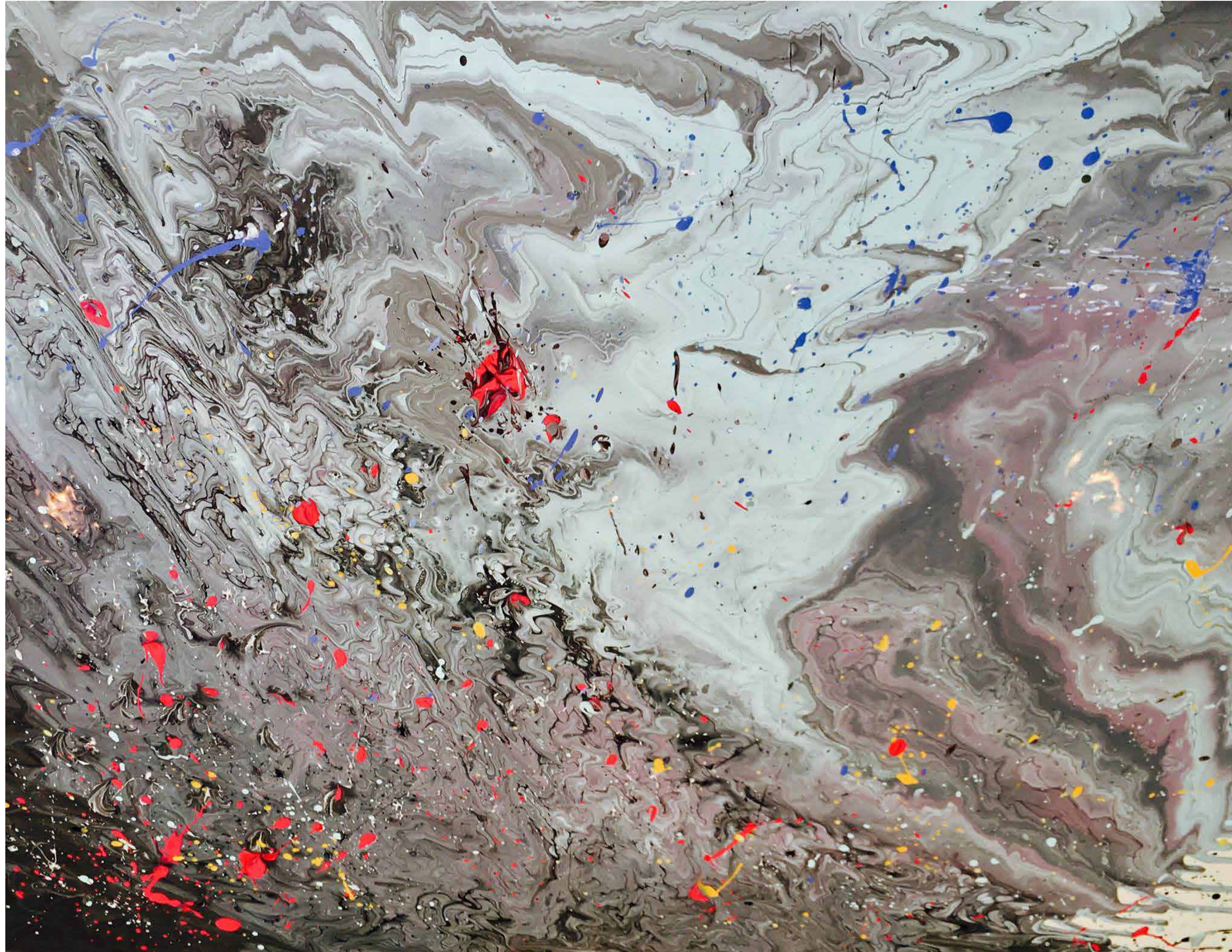
“So you two are homosexuals, huh, with sick minds. Well, Mama Wang shall cure you on this very bed, and I hope it hurts!”

And with that word, hurts, Lady Wang pulled off her autumn jacket and began to tug at her matronly houseware. She began to huff and puff, perhaps frustrated at just how tightly she had wound herself into her morning aprons. Old Wang and Old Bert also felt their breathing accelerate. In time her two great breasts flopped loose, and when Mama Wang revealed her Great Below, it was open and glistening. The slippers came off last. Old Wang and Old Bert shared a glance.

We are comrades? Old Bert mouthed, this time in Shanghainese.

To the very end, Old Wang mouthed back.

(I’m the behind comrade, Old Bert mouthed to himself.)



PATRICK MCGINTY

Down Wind With Death: St. George, Utah

WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD



Jimmy Pro wheeled the Jetta rental into the mud puddle pocked parking lot of Mel's Diner. It was supper time and the storm front was breaking up. The low hanging, ink jet black clouds parted. The setting sun was now revealed with its concentrated golden light spotlighting a whipped cream cloud stack. The beauty of this fleeting scene belied the fact that weather patterns like these once delivered deadly contamination here. My Nikon captured a perfect instant replay of "down wind" death. But my image will never really be worth a thousand words. Not here, in St. George, where blind American exceptionalism blasted a lasting black hole in this community's soul.

We slid into Mel's at meal time. No tables for us, just stools at the counter. There were two spaces left next to a weathered old codger in a dirty white Stetson. He wasn't eating much, just eschewing a full plate of meat and potatoes in favor of a crumpled half pack of Marlboros. We mounted our stools and ordered the beef stew special with coffee. Jimmy Pro ignored the plume of sweet cig smoke and offered up a howdy as is his custom. We exchanged first names with Sam, as the cheerful waitress hustled up our stew.

I pushed the "view" button on my Nikon and my last image popped out on my camera screen. Sam regarded the golden cloud with obvious

disdain. Finally he muttered, “Damn weather like this killed my Christy.” I was stunned, thinking maybe she died in a desert flash flood. But Jimmy bummed a smoke and lowered his Maine brogue to an earnest whisper. He coaxed out an explanation which still defies belief. Sam spit out a chilling tale which haunts me even now, especially around Father’s Day.

“The Atomic Energy Commission killed Christy and Maude too,” he whispered bitterly through clenched, tobacco stained teeth. Turns out Maude was Christy’s mom, Sam’s then young wife. Pale pink radiation clouds rode the strong wind over from the Nevada nuclear test site barely 125 miles away. The AEC told the 22,000 residents in the wind swept glide path that the nuclear debris posed no real public health problem.

This was an outright lie as even the death of Madame Curie from prolonged exposure to plutonium and radium had been well publicized. The Feds actually encouraged local residents to view test blasts from a distance. The AEC morphed into a sort of macabre chamber of commerce touting the excitement of nuclear atmospheric tests. A-bomb parties sprung up at government suggestion. Local residents were issued photo sensitive ID badges to record passing radiation!

Sam was rolling now and he had our rapt attention. The supper crowd was thinning out, so we grabbed a fresh pot of java and repaired to a now empty adjacent booth. Christy was barely in high school in 1959. She wanted to be a cheerleader, but her health became increasingly frail. The “down winders” had been breathing in atomic dust, eating meat from

contaminated cattle, and drinking tainted milk for nearly a decade by then. Thyroid cancers and mutated reproductive organs abounded. Maude kept a detailed notebook chronicling local deaths.

Sam was crying softly, obviously suffering from delayed chronic stress syndrome even now. Jimmy was jowl to jowl with Sam in the booth, and his barrel chest heaved with silent sobs. I slumped in a corner seat in a semi fetal curl. I am a combat vet from the Jungle War, but Sam’s unexpected pathos had me in a near catatonic state. The deep, bone wrenching pain of final loss took over my body again for the first time in years.

“Christy loved her sand box,” Sam remembered. “When she was little, she spent hours building castles and preparing make believe food made from the sand.” Years after Christy passed on, Sam paid an energy technician to test the then unused sand pile with a Geiger counter. The remaining radiation was more than 20 times the lethal limit. Maude had often joined her daughter for hours in the sand box.

Christy struggled to attend school while Sam and Maude made the arduous drive over to Vegas so that Christy could receive treatment for leukemia. The bone marrow testing was a draconian horror--long needles were tediously inserted into the teen’s breasts and hips. Christy shrieked in agony. “After a year of treatments, we couldn’t stand to see her suffer,” Sam remembered. “So we just stopped going, and she faded away in a couple of months.” Maude took ill the next year, and Sam soon buried her

too.

The Feds for their part continued to deny that nuclear testing was hazardous to the public's health. Nearly 100 substantial atmospheric tests were conducted in Nevada from 1952 to 1961 with prevailing winds depositing nuclear particles indiscriminately over at least five intermountain states. Cancers and birth defects spiked to afflict thousands. Victims took the AEC to court only to find that the federal facade was legally impenetrable. Finally, in the 1990's, Congress approved funds to pay \$50,000 each to victims and their survivors."God damned blood money", snarled Sam as he sucked on his last Marlboro.

Jimmy and I never really forgot our chance supper with Sam. In later years, Jimmy Pro cranked out a stellar collection of poems based on his incisive observations of conditions along the Border in the American Desert. He penned powerful free verse chronicling the exploitation of various vulnerable people decimated by the highly toxic mining practices along our southern boundary. His angry, poignant words sounded a hell of a lot like Sam! I am no poet, but I managed to eventually pound out scathing editorials demanding compensation for the victims of involuntary state sterilizations in my home in North Carolina. When the monies finally flowed to the victims, I growled " Damned blood money!," without thinking too much about where I had heard that before.

Every year around Father's Day, I think of Sam and how, as a writer, I might honor his Christy, a little girl lost at the hands of her treacherous,

insensitive government. I sit down at my computer and type in a tentative title: "Christy's Sand Box". Then it always happens--a violent electric audio track from deep inside my brain kicks in. Click!-Click!-Click!-Click! ...The unmistakable cacophony of a runaway Geiger counter in the contaminated southern Utah desert!

Sam, now long dead, would have surely offered me his last Marlboro if he could still sit with me in my office. He probably would have tried to calm my writer's anxiety by wryly observing " My Christy is still trying to tell you our story from the grave!" Well, Sam, you can bet I'm still listening!

Run

MATT RYDEEN

We had temporarily escaped my father for what would be the first of many times, planting fresh roots in another new space yet untainted by his explosive rage.

Mom and I moved into an apartment on Laurel Street just down the road from Pioneer Park, perched on a bluff overlooking the St. Croix River and historic downtown Stillwater. The pale yellow four-plex shed its outer skin as the flaking paint exposed the many different layers beneath, reminding us that we were just one of many families to have shared their histories with these walls. There were aging hardwood floors throughout, and Mom used brightly colored throw rugs made from tied rags to cover the most damaged spots to try to make it feel more cheerful. Music floated through our windows in the summertime from the bandshell in the park, occasionally filling our hearts with melodies of hope.

Meanwhile, the yellow-haired woman my father had been seeing packed a suitcase and left her house in the middle of the night to catch a bus to New York city. I couldn't help but wonder what their relationship had been like—if he was as abusive to her as he was to Mom—if she had run for her life, too, fleeing halfway across the country, scared to death that it wouldn't be far enough, that he would find her and kill her no matter how

far she went.

Father shifted his predatory focus back to us, always showing up at the most unexpected times, triggering Mom's anxiety something terrible. She began pulling her hair out, starting with her eyelashes, which she plucked, one by one, until they disappeared completely. Her eyebrows were next, and once those were gone, she drew them on with a pencil each morning, one shockingly higher than the other so that she always seemed to be looking at me suspiciously. As the months wore on, brightly colored bandanas replaced her beautiful mane to cover the bald spots she'd created by pulling each long red hair out by the root.

"I don't want that bastard coming near us," she'd tell me, "but I just don't know what to do to keep him away." Still, she had neither filed for divorce nor obtained a restraining order, so Father came and went as he pleased, drunk, high, manic, angry—the seismic drumbeats of pressure built beneath his skin until he was no longer human when it erupted from the depths of his dark heart. He seemed disconnected from himself during those times, plugged into an inner demon that took control of his mind and body, fists flailing, lips snarling like a vicious animal. Dangerous. Predatory. Lethal.

And Mom did her best to free us, in her own way.

#

I'd never seen Father cry before. Mom held his head in her lap as the intensity of his sobs increased. They almost looked tender and in love... almost. I stood in the doorway, transfixed, as the hair prickled the back of my neck, knowing full well that I should turn and run, that something bad was brewing, but my feet stayed planted solidly to the floor, as if encased in cement.

"Lee, this isn't going to work anymore," Mom said, and Father flew up from her lap with lightning speed, head-butting her under the chin. He grabbed a pillow from the bed with one hand and Mom's neck with the other before her teeth even had time to stop clattering together and flung her against the window. Amazingly, the glass didn't break, but something in Mom did when she hit the frame. A breathless sounding "Umph" escaped her lips as the wood cracked against the back of her head. He used the pillow to smother her face as he tried to shove her out of the second story window.

"Mommy! Mommy!" I screamed, while she struggled to free herself from the monster that was my father.

She managed to wedge her foot against the wall beneath the window and blindly bring her other knee up, connecting hard with his groin, sending him plunging to the ground. She grabbed my hand and we ran like thieves, out of the bedroom, out of the apartment, down the stairs, and into the

daylight.

Neither of us were wearing shoes. A dusting of snow covered the thin layer of ice on the sidewalk, but except for the numbness in my toes, I barely noticed the bitter wind that blew against our faces and made my eyes tear up and my lashes freeze together. Sheer terror warmed our blood as we ran for our lives up Fourth Avenue, desperate to make it to safety before Father could catch up with us and finish what he'd started.

Uncle Mark and Aunt Cheryl's back door was always unlocked. We flung ourselves inside, screaming for help, warning the house that a monster was coming. But the horror on our faces said more than enough. Aunt Cheryl immediately locked the door behind us as Uncle Mark ran to the window to look outside. Father's car came to a screeching halt behind the giant lilac bush near the edge of the house, which were gnarled bare bones in the dead of winter.

"That motherfucker doesn't know who he's messing with," Aunt Cheryl said.

She rolled up her sleeves and waited behind the front door, a tiny lady, making up in forcefulness what she lacked in stature. You either felt very safe or very afraid in her presence, and at that particular moment, I felt a little bit of both. Safe in that my aunt was about to run the show, but very afraid of what my father would do next.

Loud pounding shook the door. Aunt Cheryl threw it open and stood in the open space with her arms crossed, blocking the entrance, glaring up at

him.

“Where’s Neve? I want to see my boy,” Father said.

He tried squeezing past her, but she held the door firmly with her left foot.

“You’re not seeing anyone. You think you can go around terrorizing women? You think that makes you a strong man? You’re not a man, you’re a pussy.”

She swung her hand up at his face, clawing into his flesh. He reeled backwards, clearly not expecting the attack, and almost fell down the steps. He pressed his hand to the side of his cheek and without saying another word, leapt down the stairs and jumped into his car, peeling out as he took off down the street.

He really was a pussy.

I didn’t know whether to laugh, cry, or hug Aunt Cheryl, so I did all three at once. I’d never seen anyone stand up to him like that before. He seemed smaller to me, somehow.

“You need to grow a pair and leave that son of a bitch,” Aunt Cheryl said to Mom.

I was still shaking, as I always did when Mom and my father fought. My whole world shook during those times, my feet never finding stable enough ground to trust our next steps.

“Think of what this is doing to Matthew,” Uncle Mark added, looking softheartedly at me.

Mom perched on a dining room chair with her knees tucked into her chest and her arms wrapped tightly around herself. I don’t even know if she heard them.

It took a while for everyone to calm down, but once we did, we had a warm supper together before Mom and I both fell prey to exhaustion and a fitful bout of sleep.

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Uncle Mark drove us back down the street the next morning, and, not seeing my father’s car anywhere, dropped us at our apartment. The elderly woman who lived below us stopped us as we walked into the entryway of the building.

“Well, hello, you two! Don’t you look cute today, little Matthew?” Margaret said.

She had a kind face and a mess of gray hair. She always left the door to her apartment wide open so she could visit with folks as they came and went. Sometimes, she’d bang her cane against the wall, which always startled Mom, who would go running down the stairs thinking she’d had an accident, expecting to see Margaret toppled from her wheelchair sprawled out on the hardwood floor, only to find that she simply wanted her blinds drawn and probably a little company.

“Neve, come in and have a cup of coffee. Please.”

“Oh, I don’t think so right now, Margaret, we’re just getting home from spending the night at my brother’s house,” Mom said.

“I heard,” Margaret pursed her lips as she exchanged a knowing look with Mom. “Can I talk to you for a just moment?”

“Sure,” Mom sighed.

Mom took the mug of coffee she hadn’t wanted, and I sat at the dining room table with a glass of milk and a warm chocolate chip cookie while they retired to the living room chairs near the window and talked in the hushed voices that adults used when they thought children couldn’t hear them.

“I’m really worried about the both of you.”

“Don’t be,” Mom said.

“I can hear y’all fighting up there...” She let the sentence linger as she surveyed Mom’s face. Mom turned to look out the window as her gaze softened.

“Please don’t ever call the police. It will only make things worse,” Mom said.

“I’m going to be moving soon, honey,” Margaret added. “I can’t get by on my own here any longer. But I do worry about you and the boy.”

“Thank you,” Mom said. “You sure will be missed.”

“You will be, too, if you don’t get some help,” she said.

Then they both trained their worried faces on me.

Mom finished her coffee and led me out of the apartment, up the stairs, and into our own. Margaret moved within the month. We never did have any visits from the police, even though that’s exactly what we’d needed.

#

Winter dragged on, gripping us in its gray, chilly clutches. Mom fixed up my room, turning it into a brightly-colored space to play during the day. She painted the walls periwinkle blue, bought a gently used yellow bedspread from the Goodwill, and hung garage sale shelving filled with books and stuffed animals; but no matter how comfortable she tried to make it, when evening fell, I was rocked with night terrors.

I saw large, dark figures in my room, and sometimes, when I’d yank the covers over my head and count to ten, then slowly pull them back down below my eyes, the things would no longer be there; other times, the shadow figures refused to leave.

One night, I was so terrified by the gigantic shape hovering near the end of my bed that I threw up on myself trying to find the light switch in the dark. I ran to Mom’s room, but I couldn’t bring myself tell her what happened. I was too afraid that talking about it would make it real. I climbed into her bed after she cleaned me up and prayed she’d keep the restless spirits at bay.

But even in the warmth of Mom’s bed, I could hear my father’s footsteps shuffling about the house. He banged around in the kitchen, knocking into the table and chairs, rummaging through drawers. My heart raced as I sucked in my breath hoping that somehow he would forget we were there, trying to become as small as possible, trying to disappear completely.

Mom's voice woke me the next morning as she pounded on my bedroom door.

"Lee! Wake up, Lee, I know you're in there."

Mom kept shoving her shoulder against the door, but it wouldn't budge. One of Father's many tricks was to wedge a butter knife up high between the door and the frame, trapping himself inside like a werewolf afraid of turning, then he'd sleep until early afternoon. Usually, I was trapped in there with him, and I couldn't decide which was worse: my restless father or the restless spirits.

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We bundled up to trudge through the snow to the small market half a mile away. We'd walk there when we needed to pick up supplies in between the times that Uncle Mark or Aunt Cheryl would bring us to the larger grocery store in town. The windchill was well below zero that day, so Mom reluctantly accepted Father's offer to drive us the short distance. We hopped in the car and he sped through the streets and avenues aimlessly.

"Lee, where are you going?" Mom asked.

He drove fast—too fast for the city streets—running stop signs and stepping on the gas at the top of Chestnut Hill before launching the car in the air and then crashing the front end into the pavement as we careened down the street toward the river.

"If I can't have you, no one will," he said.

His empty voice didn't sound very much like him at all, but I couldn't

see his face in the rearview mirror. I pictured his eyes empty, black as coal, blacker than the creatures haunting my dreams.

"Lee! Stop it! Pull over! Let us out! Please let us out," Mom screamed.

I screamed, too, as the icy river loomed before us.

"I'm gonna kill us all," Father said.

I closed my eyes and my mind filled with a terrifying emptiness.

We reached the river in no time as we sped down the hill and came to a screeching halt at the edge of the bank. The water appeared frozen, but I feared the current that loomed beneath.

He revved the engine and jerked out the clutch, just enough to make the car lurch forward, then caught it with the brakes, over and over again until I thought my heart would explode.

I wanted to scream, but I had no voice. I wanted to run, but my legs were paralyzed. I wanted to take Father's keys from the ignition and scrape them across his face, making a bloody red X, erasing him from existence. But he was a giant—he would snap me in half and eat me alive, then spit me back out again. My broken body would slide across the ice until it rested there, lifeless, while Mom sunk to the bottom of the river's depths, disappearing into it forever.

All of a sudden, I am no longer here.

I am no longer in my body.

I am no longer in the car.

The taste of bug spray fills my mouth. A distinct chemical smell coupled with a feeling of safety. I'm walking down the worn path at Pop and Nana's lake home while dead leaves crunch beneath my feet. It's fall, and the smell of bug spray is replaced by the smell of dead things, the way leaves and dirt and grass smell right before it snows for the first time.

The lake is choppy, rippling the sun's reflection like cascading glass. The weathered red dock beckons, filling me with excitement. I'm wearing a bright orange life vest and carrying a fishing pole twice my size as the hook and worm swing recklessly above the ground while I bound toward the lake.

Pop carries a string of panfish as he walks toward me up the path, and his thick white hair bounces in stride. He shuffles back and forth as he walks, not slowly, like someone in pain, but rather swishing the contents of his large belly from side to side to help him keep his balance and stay grounded to the earth so as not to float away like a giant balloon trailing a spool of fishing line.

I fling myself into his arms and my little hands try desperately to reach around his belly to his back. His pants are pulled up way too high from his suspenders, so I curl my fingers through his belt loops and rest in his arms. My fishing pole lies discarded in the grass, the line now tangled into a mass of knots.

"There, there, everything is going to be okay," and Pop's deep voice makes me feel safe once again.

Father didn't drive us into the frozen river that day, but he did drive Mom to make a decision—she would figure out a way to get away from him for

good, or die trying.

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As Mom and my father fought in the upstairs apartment, I hid behind the orange recliner in Grandma Hazel's living room, imagining over and over again what he'd do when he saw what I'd done. I pictured his face grotesque and his arms held out at his sides like sledgehammers.

I tried to get the image out of my mind by staring intently at the gold carpet, which had once been soft and vibrant, but was now faded and matted down into unnatural patterns. If I squinted just right, strange shapes came into focus, faces looking up at me with disapproval, angry carpet faces that mimicked the way my father's face might look when he found me.

The chair was suddenly shoved aside, but it was Mom who stood tall above me. I felt exposed and vulnerable, and continued to stare at the carpet as if at any moment, one of those faces would offer to do the explaining for me.

"Matthew Evans," she said, and I knew she meant business.

I could look away no longer, but when my eyes eventually met hers, I saw a smile threatening to crack open along the edges of her mouth. We walked together in front of Grandma Hazel's house, down the street, following the same path the car had taken earlier as it had rolled silently backwards, a streak of green disappearing into the distance.

Father's Nissan hatchback.

Deep tire impressions remained in the snow. The car rested mere feet from the bay window of the neighbor's old-fashioned farm house. He wouldn't be able to get into the car to drive it back up to his house, but Mom didn't know that yet. After putting the car in neutral, I had left the keys dangling in the ignition, then locked the door and scrambled to shut it before watching the car pick up speed as it rolled swiftly down the hill.

We stood side by side for the next few minutes as a series of emotions flooded Mom's face. I wasn't sure which one was winning: amusement, shock, pride, or terror. It didn't matter, anyway, because at that moment, with Mom standing beside me and that awful car which had threatened our lives now buried deep in the snow, I couldn't help but feel like we had won the tiniest triumph in an impossible battle of survival.

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We snuck away in the middle of the night, staying off the main roads, cutting through yards and alleys until we reached the safe house. Mom had hastily packed a few changes of clothes for us in preparation, careful to be sure that Father wouldn't find out. Uncle Mark was waiting for us, ready to whisk us away to the first of many women's shelters we would flee to over the next few years as we'd continue to trade one unpredictable home for another.

We had our own room on the second floor of an aging, historic brownstone, a private space to escape to when things felt unfamiliar and

scary. The shelter spilled over with battered and broken and terrified families. Mamma bears bristled with trauma as they tried their best to protect their cubs.

Time did not exist in this space; neither hours nor days nor weeks nor months passed with any recognition at all, and before I knew it, we were heading back out into the world to survive on our own once again, the same way we'd left it.

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We set up camp on the top floor of a rundown yellow two-story house on the outskirts of Stillwater near the old prison. Steep, paper-tarred steps led up the back to a makeshift patio, which was also gummed black and led to an entry door into the kitchen. The sun softened the gunk in the summertime, and the smell would reach into the pit of my stomach with noxious claws.

Mom got a job making bowling shoes, earning just enough money to squeak by, but it wasn't long before my father came back along to sabotage the progress she'd made. I didn't understand why she would let him back into our lives, but I didn't think she really understood, either. Mom kept her job for the first few months, but after a while, there were days when she just wasn't able to show up for her shifts, when her face was so beat up that she couldn't find the strength to show herself in public, embarrassed and ashamed of what people would think.

What if they thought she deserved it?

Did she think she deserved it?

#

“You fucking idiot.”

Father jabbed his finger in Mom’s face until it repeatedly poked the bridge of her nose.

“Stop it, Lee, you’re hurting me,” Mom said.

“You realize they’re right out there, don’t you?” he asked.

She backed away from him.

“You fucking called them, you bitch. You called them!”

“Who’s out there, Lee?” Mom asked.

She opened the back door and peered outside. “Nobody’s there.”

Father shoved her and her head bounced against the wood as the door slammed shut. He grabbed a handful of her hair and dragged her into the living room like a rag doll, then dropped her onto her back and sat on her chest, pinning her arms down with his legs as she screamed.

He went to town on her face with his fists, over and over again until blood was everywhere and Mom was silent—until there was no noise left in the room at all except my father’s heavy breathing.

I hid under the kitchen table and bit down hard on my knuckle to choke back the tears, thinking Mom was surely dead this time, afraid he’d do the same to me if he found me. Instead, he crept out of the room without giving me a second glance, as if I didn’t exist at all.

I tiptoed through the kitchen. Mom looked like a corpse. Her face

had been pounded into goulash, chunks of flesh mashed into bone. I wondered if she was alive. I leaned in close and tilted my head to listen for her breathing.

A few minutes passed like this. They felt like an eternity.

There was a loud pounding on the door, and I dove back under the kitchen table, huddled as far back in the corner as I could wedge myself as Father’s footsteps came back up the hallway. He dropped a wet towel on Mom’s chest as he walked past her, then peered out the back window before opening the door.

“Hey,” the man said, tall blue jean legs and cowboy boots.

“Hey man, what’s the happens?” my father asked pleasantly, as if he hadn’t just beaten the living crap out of his wife, who lay there, unmoving, a feet behind him.

“Not much,” Cowboy Boots said. “You ready to roll?”

“Yeah, man, I’ll grab my bag and be right down.”

He tried closing the door, but Cowboy Boots stepped in at the last second.

“Yo, I can wait right here.”

“Nah, that’s alright,” Father said. “You go back down. I’ll be right out.”

Cowboy Boots disappeared, and Father shut the door behind him. He walked back through the kitchen, stopping briefly in the living room to look at Mom, who was sitting up now, holding a bloodied rag to her face.

She was still alive.

In moments like these, I imagined my favorite super hero, Wonder Woman, flying directly above us in her magic jet, invisible to all, but especially to my father—a shimmering of red, white, blue, and gold that only I could see. She always knew when we were in trouble, and she was the only one who could save us. She'd whip her golden lasso high above her head in the brilliant sky, her metallic bracelets reflecting the sun, then send the magic rope expertly below to surround us in a glowing circle of light, warmth, and protection.

This, I knew, was the only way we'd ever make it to the next day safely.



Only Sixteen

LEROY B. VAUGHN

I was watching a show called “Fastest Cars” on Netflix, and this big dude called “Glasses” was cruising the streets of South Central Los Angeles in his Monte Carlo muscle car.

As he drove through Watts, he mentioned that a lot of stuff happened in South Central. He pointed out the window and said that a legendary singer named Sam Cooke was killed in a motel not far from this location.

“You got that wrong,” I said to the television as Glasses continued to roll through the hood.

I knew South Central LA. I worked there in the 70’s for two years and I figured that Glasses was talking about another R and B singer named Marvin Gaye. He was killed a few miles from Watts in the West Adams district by his father in 1984.

The reason I knew that Glasses was wrong, was because I was at my brother in laws brother’s hobby shop in Studio City the day Sam Cooke was killed.

The hobby shop was on Ventura Canyon Blvd. south of Laurel Canyon, and I was running my electric slot car on the high-speed slot track at the shop.

The date was December 11, 1964. It was three weeks before my seventeenth birthday and I had been in the shop less than one hour that afternoon, when the owner of the shop returned.

George, the owner of the shop had been a few doors down the street at the motel, while my brother in law watched the shop. My brother in law didn’t know what was going on at the motel, but it was something big and cop cars were parked all around the motel.

When George returned he told us that he had talked to the head honcho on the scene, and that the man in charge had told him not to say anything, but a well-known singer named “Sam Cooke” had been shot dead in the motel last night.

I liked Sam Cooke’s music and I had one of his albums. Wow, that was really a sad day as I headed home to tell my brothers and sisters the story.

I don’t remember seeing the news on television, and I hadn’t read the local newspaper since I stopped delivering it on my bicycle a few years before that day.

For the next 54 years I told the Sam Cooke story during poker games in the Marines, at beer parties, on the midnight watch at work, to my team in the middle east, at a hamburger cook-out to anyone that wanted to listen, and as recent as last January to a man at a car show that was playing Sam Cooke music, as he showed his classic car.

I probably told the story at least thirty times, and everyone that listened seemed to believe it was true.

I guess that I may be some kind of raconteur, but most of my buddies

consider me a bullshit artist.

After I finished watching Glasses come in third place in a four car drag race out in Barstow, I headed for my computer to prove that Glasses might know fast cars, but he didn't know shit about South Central L.A.

I was wrong. Sam Cooke was killed at the Hacienda Motel at 9137 Figueroa Street, eighteen miles south of Studio City.

I knew the story about the female motel manger that shot Sam Cooke once in the chest with a hand gun, and then finished him off with a broomstick, as he charged at her after she shot him.

Various accounts of the Sam Cooke killing describe how Cook entered the motel office wearing one shoe and a sportscoat, while a Eurasian woman named Elisa or Lisa Boyer called the police from a phone booth nearby, while holding most of Cooke's clothes that she grabbed as she ran from the room.

She told the police dispatcher that Sam Cooke had tried to rape her before she fled from the room.

Lisa Boyer is described as a prostitute that rolled men, by taking their clothes after she had the men undress. She would then run out of motel rooms stealing their money. Sam Cooke had picked Lisa Boyer up at a nightclub before inviting her to the motel.

The motel manager left California after she was acquitted in the justifiable homicide of the singer and tried to fade away from public view.

Lisa Boyer had a long criminal history. She spent time in the state prison system and may have died in prison. There is not a lot of information on her whereabouts after the trial of the motel manager.

And now, I have to admit that I was not intentionally lying and I did not make up the Sam Cooke being killed in Studio City story, but I was wrong.

Who was the black man that was killed eighteen miles from the Hacienda Motel in Studio City on the same day as Sam Cooke, at about the same time, and did the police officer tell the hobby shop owner that the victim was Sam Cooke to get him away from the crime scene?

Those are questions that will probably never be answered after all these years.

Footnote:

My story about serving Steve McQueen at the Big Donut #16 around that time is true, but that's another story.

SHANE DONNELLY



I Can Solve All Your Problems

JESSE SHIPWAY

It's true. I can solve all of your problems. But what can you do for me?

gene souls

The war with those without.

Blue eyes

Dimensions and properties

Birthright zed

He reflects when he should act and he acts when he should reflect. The man is impossible!

The consequences of love

The consequences of aggressive argumentation

cool professor (a note toward the definition of a tricky situation)

He knows it cause he says it and he says you're wrong cause he knows he's right

You want to say no but you know he only hears himself. You want to take him out but he will never think he might not understand your position.

He will defend his own position coolly.

He will indicate that he thinks you can only know the answer when you agree with him.

Will he ever think he is wrong? Will he admit it to you?

He says the most absurd things. So you don't know where to start in correcting him. But if he is this wrong and is unwilling or unable to make corrections, your efforts to show him his errors can never bear fruit.

Forgot about the cocky little shit!

Eating a burger

Shitting and spewing will occur immediately after oral consumption of hamburger like products.

Watching television

Depends on channel and/or whether you watch internet videos or mainstream media commercial or government product.

Because of your race

Crypto Crypto Spanish Crypto Spanish Jew

The casual south

travails of an apex predator

fish for the Puffins

The blue charioteer

Helicopter dance.

To the country

The war against sharing

Mad babies and their childish crap

Ex wives and their weird and impossible pursuit of money from their impecunious ex-husbands.

Life inside a plastic cube

The patricide brief.

When would his father die and leave him alone. He never thought that honouring your father would b this hard. The slimy rat ended up doing the job fir him.

To cowardly to prove his atheism, he couldn't even kill himself. Then something weird happened. Money changed hands. Lies were promised. He threatened to kill himself. Then he threatened to kill his son. He told his son to check himself onto hospital. He told his son he would kill him. He told him he would call the police if he went to his Father's house. The son was finally free. His brothers were still enslaved. They ran when they were young and never looked back. Now they knew they had to face the music. Or maybe not. They'd leave each other alone. His father had

shown that he didn't want his son to see him. He didn't have to say that he didn't want to see the son. The son felt good. The visits had ended without a formal exile or rejection. Love someone you hate but have to love and one day they will let you go.

The Oedipal bliss

The son is the father to the man

The ball never falls far from the tee

How do you like them 🍎

R1b an O'Neil

There was once an Ireland. On this Ireland there laboured a race of African giants. One did tasks for God. One prepared the sails for Viking pleasure yachts.

It was hard for the horses to bear. The concealed themselves in stalls and poked out there eyes.

It was a genetic flaw. They had been replaced by a constantly renewing source of geological heat liquid.

Swap swap. Pump. Pump. The horses and the black giants withdrew into the mysts of history.

lift shaft drama

Ichabod Crane.

The Bridge.

One God. No God. All gods.

The reporter and his daughter.
And all the thins he taught her.

of thick lipped men

The sheckler and his liege

At the coal miner's door

Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion

North toward Australia

The Dome on the horizon.

Ideology has no history

beggars, prostitutes, gangsters, racketeers, swindlers, petty criminals, tramps, chronic unemployed or unemployables, persons who have been cast out by industry, and all sorts of declassed, degraded or degenerated elements.”[2]

What is your name? America

What is your occupation? American

What is your religion? America

How much do you weigh? America

I am coming to your country to kill you

The white man is the shittest man. This much is clear.

The inflation situation

A marijuana frenzy in Canada

Middle class boy. Working class man.

Echelon

Tillot French angel

How many zeros in zero?

to separate the mind from the body and the soul from the heart.

Bathroom oasis with horse trough tub

Opinion and perspective

Sheol

Aion

Externalisation of the hierarchy

To kill your father is bad enough, but to kill your first born son as well. Like I said before he’s either possessed by a very minor demon or he’s completely and utterly insane

The bowl and the bong

The swimming pool of love

Margaret and the Mexicans

Anton Levay

Legal fiction

I killed him to death

Upper middle class with a big wide ass

High max climax

256 man.

Li was asked what his secret was to longevity. This was his reply: “Keep a quiet heart, sit like a tortoise, walk sprightly like a pigeon and sleep like a dog.” These were the words of advice Li gave to Wu Pei-fu, the warlord, who took Li into his house to learn the secret of extremely long life.

I tried Club polo once in the evening. I must say, it was fundamental to my consciousness. Sweet peas and Eskimo pies. It was a blissful period. Untested by the travails of latter day sins. In all honesty. I can’t recall a finer period of time. It was the halcyon of my youth. And how it passed so sweetly and so delicately. I was blessed thrice for my own wisdom was

guided firmly by a robust scholar whose acquaintance I first made during our. On current tecorrience of high school education and on indeed to s meeting 20 or so years later when he had finally official proof of his uncanny and sometimes Peter natural wisdom.

Miles of piles of tyres on fire

No illicit pleasures from the body

The mind has no firewalls

Instead it breathes drum info or growth farms and shingle teeth it’s gross Helios was abtrenchant kiln. But now we know, the duke is dust. And thus the mind is free.

Project blue beam

To fire god in its womb plan. It’s core egg extraverse. Such dust mote clam our king burns sand and fierce gusts of claim country escrow bins. For sand the black king and the waves, the constant. The upside shame Hill bought brown trains and liffey turns. Presumption old hundred eyes. If lift was a grid line the monks would transpire. Such is the sight of the true prince of life.

Steve Bannon

Zetetic

Brute strength wins out over ignorance every time.

Do not said the dark moth happiness

Do not sweated belt wind on its crayon stack. A universal wing man. A brick called Melbourne Blue.

Winsome Shackloth

An amazing woman by anyone's. Standards.

Very tall. Very thin. Very aggressive. Shown to b attractive to over 70% of the football players in her county. Shown to b potentially misguidable. Very good at mathematics. Keeps her brick veneer bungalow in perfect condition. Asks only to be paid in prayers and root vegetables. Almost unstoppable in sub tropical climate zones when perched upon an invisible sea myth with systematic organs.

Hampstead Kuntz

Just another portly and pretentious little London Persian. Questing constantly for fresh sandwiches. Cantankerous and friable. Phlegmatic and volatile. Hampstead Kuntz is not suitable for weak, writhing, husky breathed brown children. But he is still a good fellow. Loved by his aunt wynona and his six daughters who are yet to be given names.

Little Leonard Sithshitz

LLS is code for grammar wave delta form innuendo. A small cocked plagiariser. SithShitz is a registered trademark of heaven.com. His firm is bound to the iron stone and cut by the arctic blow. Small fee increases occur in rainshadow amnesty.

Jesus on Guage

Just another naked dead Jew

Don't just regret this accident that our mother spoke of as a compliment to our seediness. It won't break the bank or blot your copybook. Infinite alms are isomorphic in this field of the ace and the axe.

I flourish in the jet stream

Above the discus, herbicide flower mountains retain heroic data forms shining boldly at the God face down below. This pleasure is intimately

bound to relate enthusiastically to ego codes of corporate altruism
suspended in zero rate fluid links.

Working harder to make things easy

Here we do more so you can do less.

Pumping DNA through the soul aperture

Designing systems architecture requires pressurised plasma code
denotation grids which green fuse the zygote in a 28 gram resolution.

Rules for radicals

A third strand

Real face eye spy

Zoom in close enough and mysterious archon symbology becomes visible
on subsurface dermis layer.

Hard to say if it's made or found

Hard to say if it's real

Thank god for super high definition video and concurrent screen
translators.

Glen Seaborg

A funny sort of fellow. Very tall and thin. Used to get high on the lab
glue. What a tripper. Gotta love the guy. Hyperborean. Possibly hybrid
annunnaki. Possible stooge. His whole life was a lie. Very tall and thin.
Funny looking Face. Like a plastic evil cherub. I remember him from the
TV.

Operation enduring guardianship

A simple but brilliant plan to demonstrate our commitment to a
permanent presence in the Middle East with particular focus on the Arab
emirates. Possible proxies for petrodollar substitutions.

Advanced care directive

Care before the accident is preferable to neglect after its occurrence.
Basic care skills will be augmented for advanced care systems support.
Available to any citizen or permanent contractor.

Our credo words: Brute Force wins out over ignorance every time.

Urban moving systems

The witness to infinity is movement above the plain. The time will come when cities will not be sustainable in their current, historically earthed, locations.

Monoatomic Gold powered anti-grav discus shifters will be issued to responsible office holders who have proven that they can keep a secret.

Narcissus narcosis

The mind of a German and the body of a Negro

Necessary flight paths.

Changing images of man

Rich - easier to earn than to spend

Poor- easier to spend than to get

Second fiddle. First violin.



Dragons deception

Nimrod

Black awakening
Rise of the satanic super soldier

The phar lap of luxury. Luxuria

Kuru

Herpes is essential in the industry

heaven.com

Welcome to Burqatown

DEAN GRONDO

It's morning. Cold breeze shoots over the jagged ridges with the sun. I can feel the frigid knives slash through the shutters and door of my stone hovel. The heavy hide blanket has been stolen from my legs and they ache from the cold. I clamp an angry hand onto the thief's long dark hair and pull violently. The slut whimpers a worthless apology. I teach her obedience, reveling in her humiliation. Slapping and clawing, I remind her of her place before I leave my bed.

Outside in the village I find my friends already assembled. I am given a weapon and a gruff redress for my tardiness. A humble apology runs through my lips and I swear I will punish that slut of a woman I had the misfortune to marry for causing me this embarrassment. All nod their understanding. We kneel and pray.

We traverse the steep path down the mountain. Shadows still cling to the rocks and we reach the valley unseen. Herders linger at the river not far away. We creep in the culverts God has etched into the rock and avoid their prying eyes.

The village we approach is a small one and there are no guards. We sweep in and capture it easily. Only the headman objects and we leave him

cradling his stump of an arm and take his gun. He screams out a warning but all in the village are aware of our presence already and they are lining up outside their homes.

We quickly kill two who are known to be blasphemers. A tall man who twitches in shock as he dies and his son, a young boy with strange large ears. They have consorted with the American invaders and therefore are enemies of God. Their deaths terrify the rest in the village and when we demand our just tribute a bounty is provided gladly. We remind these peasants of their commitment to God with kicks and slaps, bloodying several faces.

A woman screams threats and she is taken somewhere. Several of my companions rape her as punishment for her transgression before she is killed. It is a nominal violation of the Prophet's will to do this and I do not participate. She is also ugly and unappealing.

Issuing warnings with harsh words and rifle butts, we leave the village. We travel home with our bounty, satisfied that this day we have performed God's work. Back up the mountain and to our village, all are joyous. The Prophet has smiled upon us. We kneel and pray.

My slut of a wife has been lazy in my absence and I beat her soundly with a stick. She grovels and whines. I stop when my arm is tired. Later, when she dares to look at me with anger, I choke her violently. Through her terror she is reminded that she is less than a dog. I will have no more trouble with her this day.

I join my friends outside and we exchange jokes about our filthy women. We speak of our successful mission. Our hearts are glad and we praise the Prophet's grace. We kneel and pray.



We Are Descending Together

DUSTIN PICKERING

After Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2

I admit to my failure at lovemaking.
I don't make love; I destroy it.
It is in the hands of the spherical senses:
those balmy hands will keep it warm.

I am clueless—I can't hold you in motion.
Your private cinema is exposed
to my unenvied glances. I can't breathe.

Love in pursed plenty: dream,
the machine is voluminous and dark.
Heavy are the steel clutches that spring
to fear...empty energies part the Red Sea.

PARADISE CIRCUS

henry 7. reneau, jr.

It begins like this:

Every time we blink our eyes the world chips beneath our feet.

Chance turning destiny over in its palm like an omniscient narrator, as the ground washes away beneath our feet: Drowned our dreams in rain so hard for days on Big-Box lots, spilling its corrosive liquid beneath the anonymous powder-blue of a woman learning to ride her 1940 Indian 440 with great trepidation & daring.

We are most of all citizens of the places where we are now:

Our outstretched hand a prequel collecting Time in its cup: Acres that seemed like forever. A veritable ocean of honey, where we could become a part of oblivion in tall grass swaying dead & golden. Seconds flow over & collect into believing something because we want it to be true, creating a world to fill our hunger, escalates like a measured argument aimed at the world that threatens, where we see things as we wish to see them. The shadows that give us depth—where we see things as they are not.

A limitless atlas of desire both sacred & profane, mired under rug swept as if sewed into canvas *camisoles de force*: A constriction of sleeves wrapped round the waist & tied behind the back, a much more imposed constraint than dreamed wings germinated from shoulder blades like incandescent extrusions of empathy pinned wide in parthenogenesis. Our judgment too often encumbered by ego's self embrace, or hallucinated obstacles of fear, a bellows huffing inward—asphyxiates the voice to guarded whispers of intuited truth, a mewling sound tempered by apprehension:

Fear, that makes the wolf look bigger
because we are afraid, but ashamed
to be afraid: In dominion, the gun to our head & a stranger's hand in our pocket.

Smells like indifference, or Empire built on the destruction of bodies. An age of misfit purity & instant notoriety in a digital blink.

Our gilded cage of skin, indifferent to what we've done, as brute force is deployed
in its many feral concatenations. The censorship & surveillance, the manipulation
of status quo opinion. The scrutiny & camouflage: Keeping an eye on each other
become ultra-vigilant, disembodied voices
coming over speakers in the lobbies of transportation areas.

Chance turning destiny over in its palm: The hit and run driver,
his cellphone jettisoned into the back seat as he flees the scene of his distraction—
the voice on speaker,

“dude, Kim Kardashian just blew up the internet with her wannabe black ass . . .

as he flees the scene of his self-importance, & always, we want back what's been taken:
The homeless man suctioned under the front bumper,
whose cardboard sign was attached to social skills that had failed to enunciate his dreams.

The hardest things to part with are the things we need the least, like shedding skin cynically, too much
of everything we could ever want, does no end of evil, holding on as fast as we can, but couldn't stop
what's coming, what's already on its way—almost always, too many distant stars & not enough sky.
Schemes become idle hands of combustion like lit Diamond matches: The devil that makes us sin; but
we like it when we're spinning in his grip, & our lone, beating heart—a pebble ballistic into a pond,
like the body devours itself when starved.

JOHN ASHBERY

henry 7. reneau, jr.

Therein. An obese future of addictive
carbonated corn-syrupy filler. Our vision
clouded by our own design, as relic gleaned
from an evaporated past of unwholesome
appetites. The moonlight shattered glass-like
through a dappled tangle of leaves. Rain
pouring down a solid sheet of
saturation, panes of white glass in motion. The whispery
sound of prayer like the monotonous buzzing
of insects, a cacophonous white noise, the night
swooned full moon. Feral jaguar harmonics
dimple the surface of silence
under an ancient sky

stained the unutterable
sadness of war & war & war . . .

The Persian, The Crip and Tommy Lee

DAVID MICHAEL JOSEPH

There are unwritten rules about the Hollywood club scene.

1. **No one pays. Only tourists pay. Persians and foreigners pay.**
2. **Groups of guys never get into clubs. A flock of beautiful, brainless women that you are not having sex with must escort you.**
3. **Black, brown, and dark tanned people are not encouraged to roam the Hollywood club scene. They figured you have South LA and East LA; the scene belong to them, the streets belong to the ethnic masses. Put simple, you ain't getting in unless your name was Jamie Fox.**
4. **Celebrities, even small nobodies will always get in before you, face it. That was the rules, don't like it, move back to Iowa.**

The three of us knew we were not good enough and we knew it. Out classed. Out gained. Not part of the tribe, but we took a shot. We crashed an impromptu house party, the Crip knew about - in Santa Mo filled with overly friendly, almost thirty, trust fund types.

The fragrance of money was mixed with a life of entitlement, which emanated from their sand stone scrubbed pores. We drank together and

told boring, candy bar stories.

No words of advancement - just stagnate phrases that poked and searched to find a connection -where there were none - and to keep our attention away from the two, beautiful, tanned Israeli women standing before us. Long, honey hair on thin, brown bodies and Middle Eastern accents that melted our ears.

At that party we discovered a rumor about a club, with a huge fish tank inside.

My curiosity was peaked – I'd never seen such a thing - in the rundown clubs on Broad Street, in the City of Soft pretzels. I needed to see it - drink it in with my eyes and brag to my uncultured New Jersey cohorts.

The Crip was my way inside.

A week later the Persian and I went to snatch him up. He was tall, brown with a heavy build from South Central. I pictured him riding sidesaddle in a low rider, pulling the trigger of a 38. His brain filled with weed and rage, and then sticking the gun under the seats, as they hit the left on Crenshaw.

The Crip wore a white T-shirt and brown kakis. He lived in a run down Cul-de-sac on the west side, surrounded by apartment complexes,

filled with young hipsters pursuing Sean Penn dreams. Clutching hair dryer Oscars and giving speeches in bathroom mirrors.

The Persian pulled up to the front porch and the Crip jumped in. (It was the second time I had seen a porch in LA.) Not a real porch friendly city. He squeezed in the back seat and guided directed to the club. It was off of Hollywood BLVD.

We parked on a side street and marched to the front. There was no line, as I expected. A large of mass of beautiful people, held back by circular velvet ropes. On the other side of the ropes, were the security dressed in red jackets and pleated pants, looking more barbershop quartet then guardians of the rope.

They were the club gatekeepers - almost actors - who were playing the part of St. Peter - denying those not worthy.

Who to let in. Who to keep out.

The three of us hoped we had the number five on lock. It seemed bleak immediately. One of the bouncer (and I say that giggling silently to myself) stood to the front scanning the crowd - a Buddy Holly impersonator, with his oversized, thick glasses and a nineteen fifties pompadour and the body English of a giant (he was 5'3 at best). He pointed to a couple of lucky beggars and opened the rope. *They made it! They have access to the fish. Bastards!* The desperation - make up on the faces of the wanna-be-patrons.

The Crip attempted to get his attention- no luck. Tommy Lee strolled

out of the club, holding a mega beautiful woman loosley by the hand. He appeared bulimic and shorter in person. Not the bad ass I had seen on the TV. He seemed more thin punk, then hell raiser. He disappeared into the evening, probably to some orgy or coke party, then onto a bible study or late night Pilates.

More beautiful people gained access into the club. I staggered in a drunken Zen state, while the Persian quietly jammed his hands in his pockets and eyed on the models - guys and girls. One of the guys from the night before walked to the front. The Crip reached out and hugged him urgently. They exchanged smiles - the guy patted him on the back and said,

“I’ll see what I can do”

Rule number #3 – take your ass to Inglewood.

The guy disappeared into the club. More people streamed in. I saw a flaccid gentle man in the corner of my eye, near the edge of the line. He wore an old, brown suit and had to be about sixty, with large glasses, and the face of a pervert. The bouncer did a double check and let him in the side.

Rule number #5 – have to know somebody.

A young girl from the night before showed up - Nos giggly and 420 happy, in minutes she would see the Patrone, fish and water. The cousin rushed her and told her the dilemma - she patted him condescendingly on the back.

“ I’ll see what I can do”

Rule number # 3.

The fake friend never returned, probably sucked in by the music and bottles of VIP champagne. I saw it in his eyes. He tried the way of grace and it failed. He would try the way he knew - the way of the streets.

The Crip made a beeline to the front door. The door model and the security rolled their eyes, spitting forced laughed. The doorwoman mumbled something as two bigger security boys brought him back. The real bouncers were on the inside.

“Thirty dollars.”

Rule number #1

The silence was deafening. The three of us stood there, knowing the answer. We didn’t say a word, reading each other’s minds. I stared at the velvet rope - it was slightly hypnotic. I exhaled mentally reevaluating my life. Somehow, I felt less human.

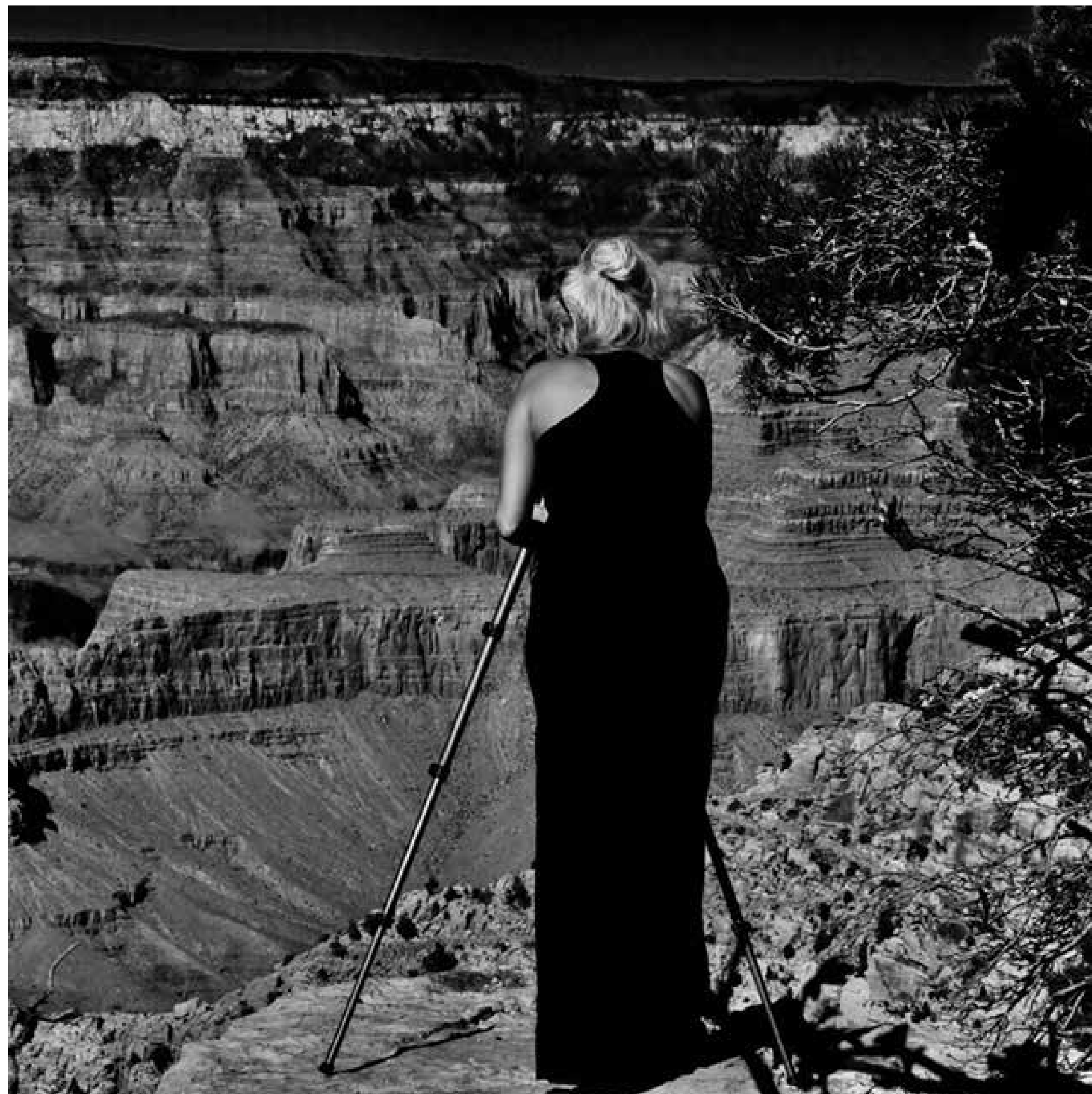




love birds on red
WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD

butterflies not so much
WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD





Vegas showgirl makes the most on a day off

WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD

A Flower Gone By

WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD



Liquid Lunch, Manhattan Watering Hole.

WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD

Bipolar Lexicon

MEGAN MEALOR

but did you know I drive through scarecrows

pin wings to walls ladybugs to kites

its all thunder to my wilderness

wilderness inside my thunder

the startling of your island

I will take only my goldfish and my gun

(no suitcase can alleviate my tyrants)

I am filled with ghosts and bats and doctored apples

blowing up cobwebs with cannons

inside your footprints

you will find your coins

together we embower beehives

my sinew begs for snails

my bones sigh with aftermath

-previously published in *The Belleville Park Pages*, January 2015

Assets and the Ascendancy of Avoidance

COLIN JAMES

I hear no screams nor pleas even.
My porch overlooks the famous Siren's caves.
Ridiculously expensive real estate
yet cheap compared to California.
Below, the young women frolic voluptuously
white slips currently in vogue.
I drink my morning coffee here
looking down at the shipwrecks.
The girls have a way of reappearing,
worthy encores dependent on cargo.
My rope basket for single malt
extends outward and pulls up easily.
I don't know their names, wave when
I'm sure they are not concentrating.
The dead quickly wash out to sea,
usually a night is enough for their peace.
The tourist myth of being tied to the mast
is ostentatiously all for show.
We are realists here, those who
can afford to stay do so willingly.

According to Kelly

WILLIAM C. BLOME

About the entire independent-living complex, and especially within the outdoor common areas where lawn chairs abound on sunny afternoons in May, the story of Eileen and Moses made the rounds. In retrospect, two things appear noteworthy: that a story so earthy and sexual could so easily be transmitted person to person without appearing in the least to be purged or cleansed; and that the tale could thread its way between, say, fifteen or sixteen people without getting distorted, condensed or expanded to any significant degree. And one more thing to note up-front: it appears that if a resident of Essex Oaks (in independent- or assisted-living) had heard the tale and/or passed it along during its initial wave of distribution (as opposed to someone slowly catching up on things and only hearing about Eileen and Moses several weeks later), then such a resident had to have heard the tale ten days or less after Kelly first got the details from Eileen.

Eileen had complained to Kelly from her earliest time of knowing Moses that he had chewed on her thighs “to a fare-thee-well” and to the “danger point.” To be fair, Moses had freely warned Eileen up front about his gluttony, of his “huge and substantial desire” to taste and savor her person, and while his passion did not therefore come out of the blue to

Eileen—while that erection of his had seemed to be ever-sharp for hours and hours—Moses, perhaps befitting the traits of his watchmaker past-profession, was demonstrably delicate and gentle most of the hours he was with her. (Kelly wryly observed that for much of that time, however, Eileen was probably clothed, and Moses’ extreme behavior occurred primarily (or maybe even exclusively) when Eileen was “in the buff.”) To no one’s total surprise, Kelly recounted that Moses hadn’t been the only man interested in Eileen: there were also a resident who had once upon a time been a nondescript ambassador from Liberia, and a gentleman from Oregon (neither of whom ever had memorable names, according to Kelly).

Most folks assumed the guy from Oregon was the most bestial of Eileen’s suitors, largely because he sported “this big, lunchbox mouth,” and he invariably left behind (like whenever he had to get up and go use Eileen’s toilet) a trail of annoying pine needles. Kelly said the needles were numerous enough that long after Eileen had broken things off with the Oregonian, and longer still after the red, white and blue threads that had once appeared all over Eileen’s carpet from the ambassador’s quirky nighttime habit of scissoring apart his nation’s flag to make it fit within the

transom space at either the front or rear entrance of Eileen's apartment—long after such remnants had been vacuumed up—occasional threads still sprouted near Eileen's doorways, and to this day, random pine needles continue to brown on the floor at the pillow-opposite end of Eileen's bed.



Recipes

RACHEL RODMAN

FRUIT PUNCH

1 grapefruit, soundly socked

1 peach, thumped and thumped: right in the kisser

10 bananas: *Wham! Wham! Wham!* until pulped

1 cantaloupe, given a knuckle sandwich

Collect the juice, resultant from the fruits' pummeling,
in a single serving bowl.

Spike, violently, with rum.

MOCK TURTLE SOUP

1 turtle

Like, O: Look at Me. I'm a turtle.

Like: I've got a *shell*...

O, yeah: I'm just like a giant pistachio!

(Idiot.)

Work those stumpy legs, won't you?

Work 'em. Work 'em.

Slow... Like: O, *Wow*. Slow...

Slow has *two* meanings, you know that? And I mean BOTH of them.

Paging Einstein...

Hello, Hello...

Duhh...Duhh...Duhh...

You want to know the only thing that *might* make you even slower? Like:
the only thing that possibly could?

It's if I were to de-shell you--and decapitate you--and then chop up the
remainder into pieces--itty bitty pieces--and then dump them all into a big
vat of boiling broth.

That broth, there: the one that I've already got going on the stovetop.

And I will.

O, *Sweetie*, I will.

Because that's part of the recipe.

Yeah: go ahead and keep "running."

And I'll keep laughing.

Advancement

JOHN GREY

The drunk tips over the edge,
or maybe he tipples over the edge.
Whichever, he's now a full-fledged alcoholic.
He looks around for someone to pin a badge on him.
Or maybe a medal slung around his throat.
Bar tender says, "You've had enough."
But enough just got so much bigger.
Its universe huge

Bar closes. Somehow he stumbles to his car.
Driving home, he leads the celebratory parade.
He's in the first float, the one that really does float,
across the double line and back,
onto the sidewalk, just missing a pole.
Behind him trail the wind, the cold, the darkness.
And maybe another car keeping its distance.

He falls through his front door,
longs to tell the world he's no longer
just some useless sot, a souse like all those others.
He doesn't have to buy booze any more.
The booze buys him.
He falls, hits his head on the coffee-table,
jars a tooth loose.
So what if he sheds a little blood.
Don't all heroes.
He curls up on the floor, falls asleep.

Tomorrow will begin with a toast to his success,
a little of the hair of the dog that bit him.
Was there ever a dog, he wonders,
more proud of who it bit.

Fort Worth, 1987

JOHN GREY

I have never before
shown the slightest interest
in a platinum blonde
dressed urban cowboy
sitting on a bar stool
sipping something pink
from a tall glass
while singing along
in a soft twang
to a maudlin jukebox song
about a couple breaking up
and then their three kids
perishing in a house-fire.

But I've been turned down
by petite girls-next-door,
long-haired spectacled bohemians,
gray-suited professional women
and boisterous sporty types.
Sometimes no precedent
is best.

My Last Erection

JOHN KOJAK

My Last erection, it's all I think about.

Really, I'm obsessed...

Dying doesn't bother me, that's easy.

Losing your manhood, that's hard.

Two balls and a cock, my holy trinity

It's all I've got

I'm worried about it. Will it come and go,

unappreciated like fleeting morning wood?

Will I accidentally beat it to death, strangling

the life out of it like I did as a child?

No!

I'm a man. I need a woman. I want a fist full

of hair and an aching wetness to take it all

as I blast out the last few drops of my humanity.

If there is justice in this world,

if there is a God,

that's the way it will be, but it won't...

Untitled (of course)

JOHN KOJAK

Modern poets are sissies,
limp quilled English majors
scratching flowers and
giving blowjobs to cats

Where is our Keats, our Eliot, our E.E.C.
Who's minding the wheel?
New-Formalist-Post-Modern-Pansies
Where's Charles *Fucking* Bukowski
There aren't five good lines anywhere

So cancel your subscriptions,
it's all masturbation anyway
You want real? Get drunk,
crawl pucking through an alley
Go fuck somebody—anybody!
But don't read modern poetry

Friday Tradition

BRETT PETERSEN

October 1982

The air backstage at Mr. Q's Bar and Rock 'n' Roll Club stank of vomit and cigarettes.

Tom Quaglieri, the club owner peeped his small head through a curtain. "You're on in two minutes."

Anson LaVey, lead singer of the Satanists sat on a piss-stained couch. He took a swig of Jameson. Some of it dribbled onto his bare chest which had been carved into by many a piece of glass. He wore leather boots and a jock strap with the words 'Fuck Christ' drawn on in permanent marker. His body was lubed with mayonnaise and K-Y jelly.

"We got some fine looking ladies in the crowd tonight," Rex, the guitar player stretched his fingers on an empty beer keg.

"I'm stoked," Anson let out a throaty belch. His mind was focused on three things: getting fucked up, fucking shit up and fucking. The plan

was simple: get the crowd fired up by calling them out as the spineless weaklings they were, initiate combat sequence and beat them to a pulp.

Then, for the grand finale, drag a piece of female meat onstage and begin the process of sexual unloading. The plan was perfect, although it had never been fully realized.

Most gigs, the cops would be called within five minutes and Anson would be hauled off to jail before his dick saw any action. Audience members with broken noses and missing teeth would come away either hailing the Satanists' performance as the best experience of their lives or would be on the phone with their lawyers, ready to sue the band for all six hundred dollars in their bank account.

Anson liked to think of himself as a true rock 'n' roller, bringing back the threatening aspect of the music that had been lost when corporations

transformed it into a billion dollar business. In the eyes of mainstream music critics, The Satanists were a sideshow act led by a conman who used shock value to brainwash young fans. Many claimed that the revenue generated by merchandise and ticket sales was funneled into the members' various drug habits and that the music was secondary in terms of artistic priority.

Regardless of what anyone thought of him, Anson LaVey continued to spread his vision around the country like gonorrhea, playing any dive bar that would allow him on the bill. For awhile, he sincerely believed he was going to save rock 'n' roll from stagnating beneath glitzy makeup and corporate sponsorship.

Despite the large crowd, the Satanists took the stage to weak applause. People were mostly there to see Bimannual, a Germs tribute band. Quaglieri had booked the Satanists last minute since the opening band had

cancelled.

After repeating the main riff of their most recognizable song six times, Anson emerged. He downed the last of his Jameson and hurled the empty bottle at a heavysset woman sitting at the bar. It missed her and broke on the ground. He grabbed the microphone and launched into "Hail Satan."

Jesus Christ was a mama's boy

Betcha didn't know he was mama's toy!

He scanned the crowd and noticed a brunette girl in a white tank top squirming through the sea of sweaty bodies. The tits on that girl were just yearning to pop out of that beer-soaked top. He reached into his jock strap and fondled himself.

Hail Satan!

On his birthday,

Hail Satan!

And his virile youth!

Rex and the bassist Mike provided the backup ‘hail Satans.’

Anson’s eyes darted around the club. The girl had disappeared.

Hail Satan!

And his teachings

Hail Satan!

And his fucking truths!

Anson dived offstage, aiming for a biker with a Santa Claus beard. The crowd carried him toward the back where people went to avoid the chaos of the pit. Among them was the brunette. Anson could tell she wasn’t into the music. She moved her arms limply and kept glancing around to make sure she wasn’t in harm’s way. This turned him on. The fact that she was

so nervous, awkward and naïve made her the perfect target.

He grabbed her spaghetti strap and tried to yank her top off.

“Get away from me!” She tore herself from him, but he continued to chase her. A bunch of guys surrounded Anson, but he snaked his way through them. A man in a bandana emerged and swung at Anson. Anson dodged and cracked him on the head with the microphone. The guy retreated, nursing a bloody gash in his forehead.

“You wanna fight?” he spat on the ground. “Well, come on, I’ll destroy each and every one of you motherfuckers!”

A circle of men formed around him.

“Who dares challenge Anson LaVey: lord of sewer sluts and dope murderers, enemy of all things sacred and comfortable?” He made a ‘come hither’ motion with his fingers.

A shirtless guy with dreadlocks stepped into the circle. He swung and missed. Anson head-butted him in the face. The guy staggered backwards

with blood pouring from his nose. All the while, the band kept playing and Anson was able to get in two more ‘hail Satans’ before the song ended. Instead of applause, there was a mixture of jeering, booing, confusion, disorganized talk and threats. Four guys with shaved heads, camouflage shorts and combat boots emerged from the crowd.

“What do we have here?” Anson made a gesture imitating fellatio. “Four skins to be circumcised, apparently.”

The band launched into the next song, a down-tempo dirge called “Ten Daggers.”

Anson stood face-to-face with one of the skinheads. There was nothing but cast iron behind the man’s eyes; eyes that had seen things too horrifying for words. Anson felt his own face soften. *What the fuck, Anson?* Had he allowed the tiniest blade of fear to chink his rock ‘n’ roll armor? *You’re not afraid of this cocksucker, are you?* This wasn’t the time for mental battles. He had to stuff his vulnerability and dive full force back into

tough guy mode if he was to survive.

He lunged at the skinhead and missed. Two bystanders emerged from behind and seized Anson’s arms. The four skinheads began bludgeoning his face, kicking his ribs and stomping his groin. He managed to wriggle himself free before they could break his legs.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me!” He spat three-and-a-half of his own teeth at them. “You cowards might as well be circle jerking at a sleepover. Grow some balls and fight me one-on-one, you fucking pansy twats!”

Before Anson could invite more bodily harm upon himself, every authority figure on duty in the City of Albany swarmed in to halt the performance.

“Show’s over, everybody go home!” a flat-topped officer shouted through a bullhorn.

In less than a minute, Anson was wrestled to the ground and cuffed.

“Fucking pigs!” He snarled with his face pressed against the concrete.

“Trying to stop me from bringing *real* rock ’n’ roll to the people? Bullshit! My rock ’n’ roll cannot be stopped! You can put me in jail, but as long as people pay to see me do what I do, my mission will continue. Until Hell rises from the earth and my Master takes control, I will spread the disease that is Rock ’n’ Roll!”

Two decorated sergeants shepherded Anson through the back door to where a battalion of squad cars awaited.

February 2002

“Fuck you!” Audrey Colton threw a vase of fake roses across the principal’s office. Two officers with pork chop arms seized and cuffed her.

“You’re a fucking tyrant, Warren, you know that?”

Principal Warren’s face was beet red and sweat was dripping from his jowls onto his collar. The cops led Audrey through a secluded exit and

into a squad car.

“Where are we going?” she asked the cop with the crew cut and blonde mustache once they had gotten on the road.

“To APC,” he said.

“Where?”

“Albany Psychiatric Center”

“Why?”

“For evaluation.”

Then it hit her. The school authorities thought she was crazy. Probably because of that poem she had written in English class. The one for Brian, the one that said she would kill herself if she couldn’t be with him ... that she would kill him if he didn’t accept her ... that he was her everything, the sun in her sky, the image that flashed into her mind like a lightning bolt as she orgasmed, the name she whispered under her breath adjoined

to the word ‘love,’ the one whose name she wanted to shout in sweat and ecstasy as he filled her, the one who would complete her, the other half of her soul, the one, the only, the ultimate, all or nothing. It was either him or nothing. Without him, her life was meaningless, without him, there was no life. That is why she would cut her wrists like paper, bleed the pathetic life out of her, let the blood let him know, let him forever remember at graduation when she wouldn’t be there, at graduation where speeches would be dedicated and people would be crying, some laughing, what he meant to her.

After a barrage of ink blot tests and questions as to whether or not she was hearing voices, they sent her to Five Rivers psychiatric hospital where she ate Dannon fruit-on-the-bottom and drifted into Thorazine-induced comas as they hammered coping mechanisms into her head.

On the evening of day five as she was snapping on her bra after a cold shower, there was a knock on her doorframe.

“Audrey,” said the voice of a male staff person. “You have a phone call.”

Her heart fluttered. Who could it be? Certainly not Mom, she was probably passed out on the couch with her Wild Turkey at this hour.

She finished dressing, slid her feet into flip-flops, and made her way down the hall. At the staff station, a nurse was holding a phone receiver out to her.

“Hello?” She pressed it to her ear with her shoulder.

“Hey, Audrey.” It was a boy, but not just any boy.

“Brian?” She wrapped a lock of wet hair around her index finger.

“Yeah. How are you doing?”

The sound that came out of her mouth was half-giggle, half-asthma attack.

“Audrey, are you there? I was just wondering if you were okay. I mean, I didn’t see you in class this week, so I called your mom and she said you were here. What happened? Did you really wig out on Principal Warren? Rumors like that are going all around the school. If it’s true, that’s freakin’ awesome!”

“I ... I ...” her face was hot and her heart was pounding in her throat.

“It’s okay,” Brian laughed, “you don’t have to tell me. The reason I’m calling is that I have a proposal to make. Can you help me pull an epic prank on Vice Principal Wagner? It’ll be more like a character assassination than a prank, to tell you the truth. I stole a tape out of the video camera he uses to film all the boys’ soccer games. Turns out he’s been zooming in on their crotches. The guy is a class-A pedophile. I always thought there was something off about him, but now we have hard evidence! I’ll need you and your A.V. club friend Sarah to broadcast this shit on the morning video announcements. This Spring, you and I will

demolish that pervert Wankner like Bush did the Twin Towers.”

Audrey felt lightheaded, although, it could have been the Thorazine.

“S-sure,” she finally said after regaining her composure. “I’d love to.”

“Alright,” Brian laughed. “Just call me when you get out.”

“Yes, yes I will.”

“Bye Audrey, I hope you feel better.”

The line went to dial tone.

Brian called her at the mental hospital! Audrey pinched her left arm.

Nope. She wasn’t dreaming.

“Ooo, Audrey’s got a date,” her roommate Katrina snarked. She had been behind Audrey, waiting to use the phone.

“Where’d you get that idea?” Audrey tried to wrestle the smile from her lips.

“Look at your face! It’s bright red. And you’re smiling.”

This made her blush and smile even more. There was no point in trying

to conceal it.

“From the sound of it, he’s really special” Katrina wedged her feet in and out of her flip-flops.

“Yeah, I guess you could say that.” Audrey’s neck was spotted with red blotches and she was sweating. She felt like singing, crying, laughing and skipping down the halls, no longer burdened by the dreary hospital atmosphere.

While Katrina visited with family, Audrey lay in bed masturbating. With each orgasm, the image of Brian that jolted into her mind like a dose of shock therapy grew more and more vivid. Out of all the girls at school who were prettier and more popular, why had Brian chosen Audrey Colton to aid him in destroying Wagner? Audrey put her underwear back on and continued to daydream. Aside from having gorgeous lips and a butt every girl wanted to squeeze, Brian was the top art student

at Tawasentha Middle School. At age fourteen, his pencil drawings of mirrors, lavish fruits and dogs wearing birthday hats rivaled those of art majors attending local colleges. His aptitude for art ensured that he never got worse than an in-school suspension for his misdeeds.

In the end, it didn’t matter how cool he was or how lame she thought herself to be. The boy she’d lusted after since the sixth grade had finally noticed her. If that didn’t make her happy, what on earth could?

April 2001

Anson Colton, formerly known as Anson LaVey, spat his chaw into a Styrofoam cup and grinned. A lady in vinyl boots was strutting across the parking lot towards him. Her legs were like marble pillars supporting a perfectly sculpted ass. The thought of giving one of those glute muscles a squeeze made his dick pop up for the first time since ‘97.

“Hey, baby,” he started to say, but realized in the nick of time that he

was waiting outside a preschool to pick up his son, James. He averted his gaze and let the woman walk past him into the building.

“Christ,” he scratched his beard. He needed a drink badly, and Mr. Q’s Bar was right across the street. The neon pig above the entrance seemed to be mocking him:

“We’ve got some ice cold brews waiting for you down at ... oh, wait, never mind. You traded rock ’n’ roll for *responsibilities*, didn’t ya? I warned you about Catholic girls, bro. Shoulda wrapped your rascal. But that’s okay. Your fans don’t think you’re *that* much of a sellout ... oh, wait, you don’t have any. They all got bored of watching you get your ass kicked night-after-night. Some spawn of Satan you were. And look at you now: a family man. Who woulda thought? Hope you’re enjoying your life as a washed up hypocrite ... oink, oink!”

“That’s right,” Anson pursed his lips, “I screwed up.” He exhaled

through his nostrils. *It’s not too late. I could still get the guys back together. I could book some shows and live on canned soup and Milwaukee’s Best for a few weeks. I could still put on adult diapers, get up onstage and scream into a microphone. I’d have to abstain from the hard drugs, but no one would have to know.* Anson looked down at his hands. They were trembling. *But now I got James. Things have changed. My son needs a father ... like the one I never had.*

He tossed his cup into a trash can, spilling its brownish-green contents over a crumpled McDonald’s bag. *I’ve done terrible things: everything short of murder and pederasty. I don’t deserve to be blessed the way I have. I should probably be dead.* Anson felt tears welling up in his eyes, but quickly stuffed them. A mother and her two older daughters were watching him from across the parking lot.

Something in James’ eyes spoke to me the first time I held him. Maybe he can deliver this family from sin by becoming a teacher or doctor: anything but a scumbag like me. Anson traced the scars that ran from his palm to his wrist. *I’m*

gonna make sure that happens by raising him the exact opposite way my step-father raised me. My James is gonna grow up to be something other than a convict or a corpse.

He glanced at his watch. 3:01. Time to pick up the boy.

Everyone sucked in their breath as Anson jingled through the doors of Beginnings Preschool. He wore a leather jacket with patches, dangling chains and pins that read ‘fuck off’ and ‘I’m a mess.’

“Hello, Mr. Colton.” The lady at the reception desk exhaled.

“Hey,” Anson grasped the sign-in pen with his ring and little fingers, the only ones not bulbous and distorted from arthritis. He scrawled his signature onto the paper.

“Alright, just one second, I’ll go grab James.”

Anson surveyed the various kids’ drawings attached to the walls with sticky-tack. There was one of a blue circle with squiggly arms, one of a dinosaur fighting a tiger, and another of a dinosaur next to a rectangle

sloppily filled in with blue titled: *My Vacation –Elijah, Age 4.*

He grunted. “What is it with kids and dinosaurs?”

A boy in a Grave Digger shirt came running toward him.

“Hi, daddy!” James flapped his arms like a bird.

“Hey.”

He wrapped his arms around his father’s leg. “Today’s Friday.”

“Yeah, so it is.”

“Remember, daddy? Remember you said we could get ice cream on Friday?”

“Oh, well, that was, uh ...”

Anson recalled the twelve-pack of Molson Canadian getting warm in the back of his Jeep. He had promised James ice cream the Friday before but, assuming the four-year-old would forget over the course of the week, had bought himself the twelve-pack instead. He was behind on child-support payments and needed to keep his budget tight. He let out a long,

slow breath. The kid would go home to his mom tonight, bitch about it to her and Anson wouldn't hear the end of it 'til sometime next week.

“Daddy,” James let go of his father's leg, “you promised.”

“Listen, Jim, daddy ran out of money this week. I'm sorry, okay? I'll get you a cone at McDonald's some other time.”

“You always say that,” James' gaze meandered down to his untied blue Converse shoes.

On the ride home, James sat facing the window. The only thing that broke the silence was the pitter-patter of the rain on the windshield as they merged onto I-90.

August 2011

With pot smoke billowing from their nostrils, James Colton and Ryan Daltrey swaggered through the automatic doors of Wal-Mart ready to load

their sweatpants full of overpriced CDs.

“Dude, relax,” said Ryan. “You won't get caught unless you look like you're hiding something, or unless you're black.”

James giggled. “That's fucked up, man.”

The side of Ryan's mouth curled up into a smirk. “Alright James: since you've got the baggier sweats, you'll be the one to grab shit, and I'll be the lookout. Just make sure to get some good stuff.”

“Right,” James coughed.

As the boys rode the escalator up to the electronics section, James started to crack up.

“Shh! Quiet!” Ryan punched James in the arm.

“It's that mannequin,” James snorted, “It's got boobs!” He was nearly doubling over.

Ryan hit James again. This time, he quieted down.

The place was packed to the brim with moms and their kids back-to-school shopping, Latino middle-schoolers laughing in the shoe section, wannabe thugs in baseball caps congregating by the video games, and grandpas and grandmas with walkers being assisted by employees in sweat-stained blue blazers. Typical Friday chaos. Perfect for theft.

While an electronics section manager with a monotone voice helped a lady pick out a camera, James loaded handfuls of CDs into his sweats. Ryan stood guard by the customer service kiosk and shot glances at James every minute or so, letting him know the coast was clear. With a decent payload of CDs in his pants, including Led Zeppelin, Modest Mouse, and The Dillinger Escape Plan, James looked at Ryan and nodded toward the escalator.

As they made their way downstairs toward the sliding doors, Ryan

stood directly in front of James in order to block the bulge in James's pants from view. They were careful not to seem nervous or in a hurry to leave as they approached the greeter posted at the entrance.

"Have a nice day, guys," the greeter flashed a smile filled with diamonds, or did he have braces? It didn't matter.

When the boys had gotten within three feet of the sliding doors, James stopped.

"Dude, come on!" Ryan said in a hushed shout.

But James wouldn't come on. He stood there, frozen, and Ryan watched as James' tongue felt its way around his lips like an earthworm poking out of its den. His eyes stared at something far off or perhaps nothing at all.

"James, are you okay?"

"I'm fine" said James, but it was apparent that he was not fine *at all*. He ambled back toward the checkout line, spilling Bright Eyes and Pearl Jam

CDs from his pant legs.

Ryan recalled something like this happening before. Once, in a Burger King, James had spaced out while ordering chicken fries and Ryan was forced to pay for them. As soon as James had gotten some food in his belly, he was able to talk and act normally again. It turned out that James had type-one diabetes. These were symptoms of low blood-sugar. He needed sugar, and he needed it fast.

Ryan steered James away from the checkout line.

“Wait here, okay?” He swiped a Snickers bar off the impulse-purchase shelf, unwrapped it and put it to James’ lips.

With each bite, more and more CDs fell from his pants; Disturbed, Björk, the Rolling Stones. People began to stare, and eventually, the greeter’s eyes bulged as he noticed CDs piling up at James’ feet.

“Hey!” He shouted and reached for his walkie-talkie.

Ryan shoved the rest of the candy bar into James’ mouth and bolted

through the automatic doors. As James stood there savoring the nutty nougat taste of Snickers, he sensed a swirling mass of colors descending upon him. Was he going to the hospital? Jail? Did it matter? He felt a lump form in his throat; the same lump he’d been trying to eradicate with pot and alcohol for as long as he could remember.

The next thing he knew, he was being taken somewhere in a vehicle. He knew he’d have to face his mom at some point. That was what made his throat and chest ache the most, not Ryan’s betrayal. With old Anson in the hospital dying of cirrhosis of the liver, he knew that this was the straw that would finally break his mother’s back. This simple transgression, this civil deviation would guarantee that she’d follow his father into the furnace.

December 2003

Anson scraped blackened snow off his boots in the mud room of his

sister's house. It was Christmas Eve, and in his hand was a wad of 20's to be distributed among the nieces and nephews.

He trudged into the kitchen, placed the bills on the table and weighed them down with a salt shaker. He wouldn't stay long. James was expecting a visit from Santa, and the Dollar Saver closed at midnight. He removed his jacket and hung it on a hook. The house was completely dark, but the front door was unlocked. Somebody must be home.

The stairs creaked under his boots despite his best efforts to keep quiet. Upon reaching the top step he noticed a dim light at the other end of the hall. As he approached the room lit only by lava lamps, he heard a noise like a whale mourning its dead calf. The door was slightly ajar, so he craned his head through the opening.

Audrey sat on her bed with a box of tissues. Her face was red and her eyes swollen and moist. Anson watched as she stuffed an object into a garbage can, pushing down a mountain of wadded-up tissues. It was one

of her homemade dolls. This particular doll was embroidered with gold and black paisley fabric and its face was adorned with a cream-colored sea shell.

Anson didn't know what to say. What was the matter with her now? Didn't she ever get tired of being upset? He cleared his throat, but she didn't move.

"What are you doing with that?" he said finally.

"Doing with what?" she sniffled.

"That doll."

"It's none of your business."

"Didn't you make that for what's-his-name? Bryant?"

After an awkward pause, Audrey's tear-filled eyes met Anson's. "He fucking dumped me, okay?"

"When?"

"This morning."

“On Christmas Eve?”

“Yeah, on Christmas Eve!”

“Jesus,” Anson rubbed his toothless gums together.

Audrey began to sob.

After another epoch of silence, Anson stumbled upon the right words.

“Why would he do that?”

“Because I’m fat and disgusting.” Audrey pulled three tissues from the box and blew her nose. It sounded like a lawnmower being thrown into a swimming pool.

Anson removed his head from Audrey’s doorway. Her room smelled like lavender and hamster piss. It was time to leave. Consoling others was not one of his strengths.

“Uncle Anson?” Said Audrey as he was about to make his way down the stairs.

“What?” He halted, his boots squeaked on the polished wood.

“Are you still having KFC with me and mom for Christmas dinner?”

“We’ll see.” He wasn’t sure if she had heard him.

As he descended the stairs he heard a shriek, a series of thuds and more whale calls.

“Merry fucking Christmas to you too,” he grumbled.

October 2011

“What can we say about Anson Colton?” began Bo, former drummer for the Satanists. Audrey wasn’t listening. She was more interested in what was going on *outside* the maroon interior of the funeral home. Fall was in full swing. Orange and yellow leaves were being swept up in cool breezes while Jack O’ Lanterns grinned at black cats crossing puddles where leaves, weary of glistening green in summer heat, went to drown themselves.

For Audrey, fall was a season of stories and poems. It was a

melancholy time of year when dreams of death could be written down by flowing pens on paper and life could be celebrated by embracing the coming of winter. But this was too much. This wasn't so much melancholy as it was plain sad.

The hospital called Audrey's mother at work at 4:14 pm on September 2nd. Audrey received the news later that day as she placed her book bag on the dining room table. At first she felt nothing, but later in the day, she cut herself in the bathroom and let the blood seep into the fabric of the doll she had rescued from the trash on Christmas Eve of 2003. She had kept it after all, despite its association with Brian, because she liked it and didn't want such a piece of art to go to waste. Whether or not she admitted it, Uncle Anson's words had played a part as well. The inkling of concern that had oozed through his gruff exterior had been enough to sway her. After that night, the doll came to symbolize something other than her broken bond with Brian. It embodied the light of humanity

shining through Uncle Anson's decayed heart. If a man like Anson Colton could show compassion, there had to be a lover out there for Audrey somewhere.

As more members of The Satanists shared memories of meeting Iggy Pop and touring with the Lazy Cowgirls, Audrey noticed her cousin James standing next to his mother. He wore an orange jumpsuit and his hands were bound behind his back. An officer stood nearby. What had he done this time? Audrey's mother had cut ties with that side of the family years ago. But Audrey was curious about what was going on in James's life and in his head. She decided that after the funeral service, she would approach him.

Audrey shuffled nervously toward the boy whose face was pockmarked with acne scars.

"Hey James," she squeaked.

“Hey,” James spat on the floor “I can’t talk long. Cops say I have an hour to pay my respects and mingle with family, and then I gotta go back to Juvie.”

“What did you do anyway, if you don’t mind me asking?” She traced a floral pattern on the carpet with her toe.

“Got caught shoplifting,” his eyes shifted towards the officer, “then they found the drugs in my pocket.” He let out a warbling sort of laugh that didn’t sound quite human. “Funny thing is I had a low blood-sugar in the middle of Wal-Marts while me and this guy Ryan were stealing shit. Douchebag ran off, so I got caught.”

“What a dick,” she giggled nervously. “But still, stealing things is a bad idea.”

James coughed and spat again. “Good thing is I’m only in for two months. Court date’s in December.”

“That’s good at least,” she forced a smile. “What are you going to do

when you get out?”

“Probably work on my art,” he grinned. “My teacher back at Heldeberg Valley said my drawings were really good, so I wanna pursue that. I wanna do, like, album covers for bands and shit. My friend Joey has this band, *real* gritty rock ‘n’ roll type stuff, you know? So, we’ll see what happens.”

“That’s awesome!” Audrey wanted nothing more than to end the conversation.

James’ lips parted, revealing a smile full of misaligned teeth. His eyes had a sinister glint to them as if he were somehow crossing his bound fingers behind his back.



The Way We Move

HOLLY DAY

I gave in to you in an exhale of broken pinfeathers, the soft snarl of a cornered coyote
some fragile, trapped thing trying to chew its own foot off, determined to live on
with a broken, bloodied stump for a paw. You were oblivious to the struggle
saw only instead the dead weight I would add to your already painful burden.

This house has become a tiny raft on a rough river, a barricade
against some kind of reality, a fire-wielding mob,
the phone calls that come in the middle of the night
that may or may not signal the death of someone important to one or both of us.
There is no time for love here. We don't speak of how much time we'd need.

Whorls of Rainbow-Tinted Calcium

HOLLY DAY

The snail shell lies on its side on the ground
empty save for a few dried curls of flesh, the weight
of something solid somewhere deep inside.

I place it in the middle of my palm, feel that sad, solid weight
what's left of a snail tricked out of the shadows
by afternoon thunderstorms and cool, summer nights.

The City I'm Not in

SEAN MABRY

I am tired of the would-be translators of neon.
Go to a park. Remember that trees bring evidence of death.
What do you bring?

Follow the cough-gray sidewalk to the fiberglass lung.
Is it black because of cancer?
Is anyone allowed cancer in a city that never sleeps?

I want you to send me something.
Go out and fold a newspaper flower,
stain it rose-close-enough with ketchup,
and tie it to the leg of a seagull.
I will receive it more gratefully than I receive sunlight.

I do not like talking about things I can't see.
Where you are is invisible to my every organ.
You are precious because you are not a poet.
Will you go out and witness what I cannot?
Who I cannot?

A tree has peeling layers of bark, gray and brittle.
Its roots are hidden under a mange of brown leaves.
That's the kind of honesty I strive for.

Prove to me that you are not me.
Subvert my elegance, stare inappropriately
at appropriate public works and kitschy galleries.
My messenger, my child prodigal by design,
in you I send the universe in an orphan basket
floating down a river of brightly colored awnings.

If you see the sycophant, tell him I cannot hate.
Check to see if the asphalt is still a mirror
even in fair weather. I put my hope in you,
and I will be happy if you waste it.

My inverse messiah,
give me the tar-sweat tenements
and the antenna crow skeletons
of the city I'm not in.

Moist

GALE ACUFF

I love the men whom other women love
when they don't love me. If I were a man
I'd love them, too, the men, I mean. And I'm
a man. By *love* I mean admire, admire
intensely, fondly but without fondling.
Really. Women see something in them which
they don't see in me and I see it, too.
If I were a woman, I'd love them, too,
instead of me. So if I became more
like them, more like the men, I mean, then they,
the women, would love me so much that they
would have to choose. It would be a hard choice.
That means the women would be much like me
but they are already, except for some
differences I can't put my finger on
or to which I can point but never touch.
Bill, he's a hell of a great guy, a lot
going for him. Nice build, good job, a sense
of humor. Dave, when he laughs, he laughs at
nothing; that's what makes him so funny. Clyde

has kind of an old-fashioned creepy name
--*Clyde*--but makes you think that it's his surname.
I'm in a restaurant with Lucille and Buzz
shows up at our table. He touches me
on the shoulder and I turn around
and there's no one there and then I turn back
again and there he is, sitting at my
right and asking, *Mind if I sit down, pal?*
while Lucille looks embarrassed for me but
buries it in Buzz's face. He gets up
to leave and she watches him go so he's
still here. I order a salad and she
sips a beer--she hates beer and she hates me
but I can't fault her for that, she's got great
taste and so do I so I lift my glass
of tea and say, Hey, here's to Buzz, and she
toasts, too. Our glasses should clink but only
kiss and that's as moist as I can make her.
After the movie, whatever it was,
with popcorn and Cokes and some hand-holding

(what did I think I saw there in the dark?)
I drive her home. I'll walk you to the door,
I say. *What's going to happen between
the car and my door?* she says. She offers
her hand through the car window--she's just shut
the door as though to put a lid on me
and I take it--squeeze, but not too hard. Damn
--I should've pressed harder. And walks the aisle
of sidewalk and I don't have the courage
to object. I mean, you've got to love these guys
and so they do, the women do, and I
do, too. But somewhere there's a girl for me
who isn't my mother, sister, or aunt.
I'll call Dick when I get home--still early
yet--and ask him about his exhaust pipe

or the latest National League standings
or if he wants to shoot some hoops tomorrow.
Each player shares the ball, takes turns shooting,
or we one-on-one, spin, pray for strippers.
Or he fakes right, goes left, and blows by, lays
it in against the backboard stuck up there
at the top of a pole. I've lost my wind.
I'm bending over, palms on knees, drooling
spit and sweat and perhaps a little blood.
Nice moves, I say. *Great steal*. I'm a good sport.

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