



Collection THREE

June, 2011

The April Reader

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Preface:

The April Reader is a monthly publication of poetry, prose, and miscellaneous user-submitted content. Initially conceived as a successor publication to the now-defunct Zine Writers Guild, The April Reader aims to become a hub of online writing and content. Operating under the belief that the rise of the internet has allowed the written word to regain parity with mass-media and television, The April Reader hopes to serve as a launching point for the future writers of this generation.

Updates:

In response to complaints regarding poor copy-editing, TAR has now added a 5th editor (“Nipplelesshorse”) who has professional editing experience. Expect more comprehensive editor email feedback on submissions as a result of this.

Additionally,

- The publication now has an e-book format ready for download.
- TAR now has a submission deadline. This is the 14th of each month. Submissions after this date will be published the issue after.
- Starting immediately after this issue, TAR will no longer accept episodic submissions which are unfinished, or unfinished submissions of any sort.

For the future, the TAR team is looking into the possibility of creating a compilation of the year's best submissions. The significant feature about this would be that rather than being limited to web release only, the compilation would be prepared for online self-publishing via a site such as lulu.com or the like. Possibly, this would include equal dividing of potential profits with all authors whose work was submitted.

As always, we will be looking forward to reader response on these changes and proposals. We hope you enjoy reading Issue 3 of The April Reader.

-TAR

Our IRC Channel:

Server: irc.freenode.net

Room: #TAR

Our Distribution Page:

www.theaprilreader.org

Submit your writing, comments, and whatever else to:

theaprilreader@gmail.com

FICTION

You're a woman, I'm a machine

-Anonymous

The old women were still wailing that fucking *karanga* and everyone was crying – everyone except for my family. They sat quietly by the box. Entering the *marae* my brother, AJ, only looked at me for a second - he was tired too – and then went back to staring at the ground. My mother couldn't tear herself away from Roimata, as if she would somehow lose her again. I couldn't look at it. Instead I watched the audience watching me as I led the shuffling procession to the end. They sat on mattresses lining the walls with their brown faces, some with grey hair – most with black – and all wearing a mess of greens, blues, browns, and purples. I'd have felt out of place all dressed up in my too-small black suit, but my family matched, and besides: my sister was dead.

I hadn't felt anything on the phone, in the taxi, or on the plane. I hadn't even cried. But it all started to congeal when Uncle Steve opened the door to his old pickup truck; thickened when I saw the *marae* archway – through which I'd walked bored to countless funerals before; and, staring up at her portrait on the wall, I burst. It was one of those stock photos, with the multi-blue background, the kind where children are lulled into forced smiles through promises of sweets or movies or beatings. She wasn't faking a thing though; she had the same grin she'd worn when I'd I caught her watching TV at 11 at night and, rather than clipping her ears, told her to use my set instead. That smile was how I knew it was her. What a difference two years can make; from cute to beautiful.

Hers wasn't the only picture on the wall. She was in the center, with a small halo of space around her, and beyond that the faces of old men and women – some in tribal drab – creeping towards her like mold, with their tongues wagging and arms flailing, trying to take her away. I wanted to tear every one of them down and smash them to pieces, but it was too much.

I had to look in the end. In the box was this thing; this cold, fucking dead thing that wasn't her. I wished it was bullshit; I wished that it was all some cruel joke, where the moment I'd start sobbing everyone would laugh, and Roi would run through the door laughing, still five like I remember her. She'd fling herself into my arms, place her arms around my neck, kiss my nose, and giggle "surprise."

That didn't happen of course. I waited forever, but she really was gone. Crying, I brushed back her hair and kissed her little nose – it was clammy and cold. I whispered, just between us, that her dress was horrible, but she didn't find it funny. I took my place by my mother. She looked like she'd aged too much, her eyes glazed like cataracts, but her hair was perfect. I tried to rub her hands but she flinched at the contact. In that second I felt that she was cold too. If I was younger that would have hurt, but I was twenty then, and I understood mum perfectly.

People came to pay their respects throughout the day. It was the same play every time: the wailing old women wave green branches, the visitors file in sombre, the cold-cheek kisses, the old-men talking, and then the newcomers take their place on the wall, their initiation to the audience complete.

At one point the wailing started again, "*Haere mai. Haere mai*" the women cawed through smoke-gargled voice boxes, but the cries cut short and then there was a commotion. A few of the bigger guys went out to look, men with their arms stretched out too far even for their barrel stomachs, real staunch – the warriors.

Then I heard that fucking whinge, "She's still my daughter."

I saw his bloated red sun-burnt face and that smile. That fucking smile; he used it whenever he was late or caught with his pants down. He'd joke about everything being intended, how I just didn't understand the world as well as he did, then he'd just smile, and smile, and smile. A cheating, drunken, stealing bastard through and through. And the kicker: the one thing he left me was that smile. So now I smile at mirrors and see a bastard.

He shut up when he saw us. He looked pathetic as usual - like he was about to cry - but I had no sympathy, it just made me angrier – how can you possibly feel sorry for *yourself*? I pictured his head on the ground, hair torn, one cheek bitten by gravel shards and the other compressing under my boot; he's wincing, his nose is running, he's crying "oh god oh god oh god!" I walk off, but not before kicking him in the stomach, leaving him there winded outside his daughter's funeral, sobbing like a little girl. I looked at my brother.

AJ held me back; he was always the stronger one and his grip told me it wasn't worth it. I didn't even waste my spit on him. We left him in the car park, and I'd only seen him once since. He tried to add me on Facebook. He had 17 friends – none of them I recognized – and he was married to some fat bitch up in Kerikeri. Priceless.

I calmed down pretty quick and the rest of the day was uneventful. At Maori funerals the family doesn't speak. We're *tapu* – something I never fully understood, a mix between sacred and filthy from what I could gather, so we have others speak on our behalf, and when new people come we watch these outsiders converse. Words aren't everything though – the people in the march and the people on the walls still speak through their eyes. Some – the ones who've been where we were – spoke solace through prolonged gazes and minute nods tinged with empathic sorrow, like they were stretching out an invisible comforting hand. Some, the ones who didn't know why they were there, watched us too, like we were behind plexiglass with a plaque in front reading "The Bereaved." When you look back at those ones they turn away; some even flinch as if we were contagious. The rest don't care. Not that it matters much, they were all bastards in my mind, and I hated having those gawkers around, especially at night when they left for the eating hall. We couldn't eat with them, not that I wanted to, but you could smell the boil ups, the breads, and the colored cordials on their breath as they laughed under the shitty fluorescent lighting.

The kids were awful too. I knew they didn't want to be

there. They whispered whinges and tugged at their mother's coattail. She slapped them, they sulked for a while, and then went back to being bored. I was once that kid too; funerals for people you don't know are dreadful – they're dead, who gives a shit? Hell, I still find them boring, but now I at least pretend not to, or I remember Roi and AJ and I well up – it's not as if the bereaved know who you're crying for.

At night they trickled back to the hall still smelling of food and happy. They looked like a time-lapsed film. The women brought back kids, tucked them in bed, mothers left, kids rustled, then they were gone, mothers came back and tucked themselves in bed with the kids, dads come back (maybe a little woozy), and then together they would rest.

I hadn't slept since the flight, and, honestly, the corpse freaked me out a little, so I thought sleep would have to wait for another day. I watched the families in the dark and wondered if being connected like that makes your heart beat in sync, or whether together you'd share a collective dream. Then I fell asleep.

I'm ten. I'm walking along a path through a forest at night with a girl in a red dress. We're calm. It's pitch black on either side, but the moon lights our way. Suddenly the leaves and rocks vibrate ever so slightly, imperceptibly at first, but they energize with each second. Then there's a boom, and another, then more – each one louder than the last. I grab the girl by the arm. She struggles for a while, but then we're running weightlessly; I'm a feather. But no matter how quick we fly, the thing is coming closer and closer. At this point I realize that I've been here before, this is just a dream, so I stop. I face the fifteen-foot giant: he's bald, he's ugly, his ears are huge, and so is this club he's swinging. In a girlish tenor timbre I tell him to go fuck himself and then I throw a fist. It connects, and I'm younger: I'm six or seven, standing in the same *marae* where I'm sleeping. The people lining the walls are faceless but I know they're watching me as I stand over an old lady in a coffin. She's skeletal with white hair and sallow yellow cheeks, but still she looks like peace. I know this dream too. I look at the portrait and it's the old lady, but this time I recognize the smile. My stomach drops because I know what happens next. First, the

mourners start clapping – 1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3 - and then I jump. I land on the other side of the coffin, they cheer, so I jump again for my choir. I jump. I jump again and again. Back then I was laughing, but this time I'm crying, yet I'm a slave to my fate, so I jump. I jump once more but it fails; as I'm falling face first her eyes open – they're brown – and I land with a thud on her hollow chest. She's warm. I try to pick myself up but when I'm almost free she embraces me, the crowd's laughing, and she's wheezing-laughing as the coffin lid closes us to black.

I woke up crying. AJ was sleeping, but, in beam of moonlight shining through a window, I saw my mother looking like peace as she stroked Roi's forehead. She leaned over and kissed her daughter's brow. It reminded me of dad. Sometimes he did that too, when he came home late and thought we were sleeping. I felt her warm wetness on my head. I wondered if that was how they always looked. I saw a girl jump into a car; I could feel the kiss on her cheek, and the smell of alcohol.

I was sick. I didn't sleep until we buried her.

I think the day of the burial is the most heart breaking. Sure, we cry when they die. We kick frustrated and all that, screaming, but we have to grow tired. Funerals just make it worse. *The people* come together and their sadness streams to the bereaved like they're misery conduits. In them it grows until the final moment when the first earth streams across the casket and it's "so long" forever.

I remember the *tangi* before my sisters. I was thirteen. It was seven years earlier - not that people didn't die during all those years, I just never felt like celebrating it. We were saying farewell to my mother's brother who I'd never met. His name was Chris. He was in his thirties and working at a lumberyard when a chain broke. It dropped the log it was holding straight onto his face. The funeral was closed-casket. When they were lowering him a wire snapped and his casket split open just a little. I still remember how the old ladies cried, while his son and I watched it all stoically.

I remember the morning he was buried. There was a lot of hubbub, so I asked my dad what it was all about. He said it was about time. I said “Oh,” but inside I was happy. I was thrilled that this thing was coming to an end, because I’d be home in time for my favorite Monday morning cartoon. Can you believe that shit? God, I was a bastard.

I remembered Chris again when my mother started crying after a man whispered in her ear, but a bit too loud, because I over heard him say “It’s time, Julia.” And, remembering myself, I looked at the kids out there in the audience. I’d have wished them all death, but I was too tired.

One kid looked sad. I thought, maybe he was her boyfriend – she was a pretty girl, I could understand it if the boys chased her around. Or maybe he was her best friend. They played by the local water hole together after school. He liked her, of course, but he watched on as she went out with all the boys and he never said anything. They’d continue the game all through intermediate and high school until she came from home from college; then he’d confess over drinks that she was all he ever wanted, and she wanted him too, and that’s the story she’d tell her great-grand kids on Sundays over pot-roast. Why didn’t you have the balls, kid? Then she might have been at your house, rather than watching dad as he drank through his last case of Lion Red. But I can’t hold anything against you, because I wasn’t there either. I could have gone home for once and looked after my goddamn sister, but I didn’t. So it fucking goes.

Kiss your family if they run closed-casket funerals, because watching the lid go on is the worst thing in the world. The men come in, still smelling of cemetery, carrying that prison key. They throw it on her and you’re yelling “No!” You want to throw a hand in the way; or tear out the body and run; or throw yourself in too, so that when it all goes black your sister doesn’t have to listen, cold and alone, to the clicks of the clamps, her mother’s muffled cries, the heaves of men, the falling dirt, or the spade as it pats the close of the show.

The casket was too light.

It was polished wood, simple but elegant - only the best for family. I can’t tell you if it was cold or not that day, but condensation streamed from the huffing men in front. I had the back corner, AJ had the other, and our sister’s head was in between. The sound of pitter-pattering told me it was raining. I looked through the fog, and god was crying too - maybe he was sad and he wanted us to cry like him, a sort of cathartic cleansing of his lambs; or maybe they were tears of joy –*Roimata* means tears. My dad called her that because he was so happy when she was born that he cried – so maybe god was happy to be getting a new angel or a new bride. And as we brought my sister to her groom, and I heard the music play: here comes the bride, here comes the bride; but then I remembered that I’m an atheist and there’s no after-life. You die, and that’s that – life has no inherent meaning, just things we make up because we’re programmed to. But it’s alright, because the transience of it all makes life a rare and beautiful thing, so be happy. Eventually I came to my senses, but the song continued until we hit the road.

Us six boys stood by that road side with our tail of mourners, and we watched the cars go by. Their windows were clouded, but in one I saw a little boy moving in the back seat. He whines to his father “Daddy, what’s that?” His father thinks it over, massaging his wife’s hand. He tells his kid without looking back that it’s nothing.

We march on and the song starts again:

Here comes the bride – all these fucking people who barely know her – all dressed in white – they want free food or something, mooches the fucking lot of them – here comes the bride – the rain – all dressed in white – hold it level – la la la la la la la la la la – hold it. I’d trade anyone of them – here comes the bride – I’d trade me too – all dressed in white – I’ll kill him - here comes the bride – she wouldn’t want that – she’s dead; she won’t care – he’ll help too, he hates him more than me – she flinched – her favorite gone – is it me or him – hold it – she’s sliding down head wedged then her neck snaps – hold it – swing goes the gate: swing, swing, swing – fucking gravel shit

roads – fuck that – Harvard, Yale, whatever; she was smart – a painter – a whore – god – old people, old people, old people – hands on face, tearing open lips – such a long road – he’s fat; everyone here’s fat and they’ll die of cardiac arrest – If I dropped it they’d never know – body snatching tribes – this fucking song – here comes the bride, passed away too early – it’s due soon – attachment bullshit – finally, grass; it’s good – the tap, idiots – rainbow’s end. I didn’t want to but we went, and it was perfect. She wore a red dress that day on the luge. We were both laughing, but I lost the picture – “Hey Rehutai, what are you doing?” “Homework. You?” “Same.” “Hey Rehutai, when are you coming back?” “I don’t know, when I feel like it” “Aww, come back now” – no, no, no, no, no, no; yes, I was joking. I’m on the plane right now, just hold tight and I’ll be there. We can buy hokey pokey. Yum. – “Do you think my dress is pretty?” “It sucks” “You suck” – Her cheeks were soft when I pinched them, now they’re cold – “What do you want to be when you grow up?” “Your wife!” “We can’t, we’re related” “Oh. Then I’ll be your daughter!” “You’re my sister” she’s adorable when she’s thinking hard “Then I’ll be your cleaner” “OK deal, but you gotta start now.” “Broom broom broom I’m a vacuum” – “Go away” “Why?” “Because I can’t do this with you here” “Why’s that?” “It’s distracting” “Why’s that?” “Ugh, I wish you’d just go away.” Wish fulfilled. Fuck off. She had pretty hair, especially when it was in pigtails, at those moments I just wanted to eat her. “Rarr I’m a dinosaur coming to get you!” She was adorable when she ran with those stumpy little legs – “But I can’t sleep,” “Alright, but dad’ll kill you.” “Nah uh, daddy loves me.” *Proved her wrong.* “We all love you, but next time watch it in my room. OK?” “Can do kangaroo!” She was like a little heat pack or something. It’s so cold now – I love that trampoline. She’s so small. I bounce and she flies away. Don’t do it too hard, she might not come back down. Mama’s in labor; she looks awful. Babies suck – she gets everything – look at that smile, I think this is the beginning of something beautiful. Give my finger back baby, it’s not yours ... don’t let me go, I’ll be good, I promise. Sorry, girl. It’s time.

I couldn’t watch them bury her. As we set the casket down I could see her arm waving from the broken open lid as the mourners threw dirt and cried. Shhhhk shhhhk shhhk. Some of it hits her little hand. I took a flower from someone and placed it on the coffin. No

one stopped me. I walked back to town and bought something to drink.

By the time I got to the house it was late and the family home was empty. My family had already been through the cleansing and their vow of silence was broken. They were up in the mess hall with the others: eating, drinking, crying, and laughing – someone brings out a guitar and they all sing beautifully, as only my people can.

I sneaked around the back of the house. The trampoline was still there. It was smaller than I remembered and half of the blue safety padding was missing.

Roi giggled as she flew past in the sky on her brand new wings.

“Why are you so sad Rehutai?”

“No one calls me that anymore.”

“What, Rehutai?”

“Yeah.”

“Why? It’s great. I wish it was mine. Rehutai. Rehutai. Rehutai.”

“Hey Roi.”

“Yes, Rehutai?”

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

“Easy! I’ll be your wife. What are you going to be?”

“You can’t be my wife.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

Future Sunset

-ASK

There was a bleep and a fizzle, then a bored woman's voice came through the ComSync system in Officer Thorton's cruiser: "Attention units in the vicinity of South Broadway, we've received a vagrancy report across from Shibak Market in front of the costume shop."

Officer Thorton tilted his head toward his younger partner. They were three blocks from the location but it was almost time for lunch. Louis Kipper already had his standard issue service helmet pulled over his head when Thorton looked. If that was not a signal enough, the way Kipper's eyes were squinting meant that he was already wearing that big, dumb, child-like smile of his.

Thorton cut off the giddy response brewing behind Kipper's faceplate. His partner's child-like enthusiasm was just too much to endure – just the idea of it broadcasting over the ComSync was too embarrassing for him to think of.

"Dispatch," Thornton said, parroting the woman's tone, "Unit 51-3, en route."

If Kipper felt amiss at being cut-off, it didn't show. The younger officer's eyes stared transfixed out the window, seemingly focused on the vagrant blocks away.

The ComSync blabbered again: "Acknowledged Unit 51-3."

Thornton flicked on the lights, leaving the sirens muted, and set a methodical pace toward Sunset.

The cruiser made quick work of the midday traffic, and swooped gracefully to ground level, its descent thrusters letting out a purposeful exhale as it landed. Thornton set the cruiser's brake and let the lights continue their warning flashes. He pulled on his standard-issue helmet, nodded to Kipper, and initiated the door release.

The doors let out an authoritative hiss and the sounds from the metropolis's street filled the cabin. Thornton and Kipper stepped out of the vehicle, radiating that police-bravado that keeps property values high. Thornton spotted the transient, a man of indeterminable age, clad in clothes browned from dirt and wear, his back leaning against the metal bars of the costume shop's window. A forty-ounce bottle of malt liquor was within the man's reach, and Office Thornton watched as he pushed up the flu-mask to take a swig of the beverage.

Thornton pushed down his face visor and waited for Kipper to walk around from the other side of the cruiser. They unhooked batons from their belts, grasping them tightly as they approached the vagrant. The two officers said not a word when they finally loomed over the man.

"What do you want, man?" the vagrant whined in an almost incoherent way.

Officer Thornton kicked the alcohol bottle and it smashed against the wall, splashing the vagrant and his own pant leg with its contents.

"Aah c'mon, man," wailed the vagrant. "What the fuck was that for?"

Like two alternating pistons, Officer Thornton and Kipper brought their batons down on the vagrant. One-two, one-two, breath in, breath out. The batons' crunching and thudding sounds drowned out the vagrant as his frenzied cries died to whimpers, and then silence.

It took a moment for Officer Thornton to realize he didn't hear the complimenting tha-thunk of his partner's baton. Thornton stopped his repetitions to flip up his soiled visor and glance at Kipper. The other officer just stood there, with his helmet held in his left hand and his baton in his right and at his side, staring off down Sunset Blvd.

"Fuck is wrong with you, Kipper?"

"This city, it's just so fucking beautiful, you know?" Kipper said, half turning to smile at Thornton and then shifting back to his revelation.

Thornton followed his partner's gaze. Sunlight radiated through a hazy sky, surrounding the city's skyscrapers with a warming, spiritual glow.

"Yeah," Thornton nodded, pausing as he took it all in, "it fucking is."

The officers walked back to their cruiser and called in a spray-and-clean.

Paul

-Malavox

You mean Paul? Paul McCray?

You bet your ass I know him, who doesn't know Paul. I mean he's Paul Mc-Fucking-Cray! A local legend, that guy is.

Really? You didn't hear? Pull a chair up then and listen to this.

It's not a long story, guy. Just sit down and listen, eh?

Alright, so it was January last year, and this family was having a Three Kings' Day par-

I don't know man, one of those spic holidays. As if Christmas wasn't good enough for 'em.

Ain't that the truth? Anyway, so it was early January and Paul was on duty late. Patrollin' the streets, fighting crime, you know, big policeman stuff. So, he's on duty and he gets a call that some hotshot is holdin' up that little store on the corner of Beech and Main, the one with the Indian cashier with the Buddhas and shi-

I don't care how many cashiers are Indian, are you gonna let me tell the story or what?

So he goes down to the store and walks in to find the Indian guy bound up and gagged in a way that would suggest he had a lot of bad karma in some past lives, and out of nowhere this broad in a tight little fur coat runs up behind him and starts beating on him with the now empty display rack of Marlboro Lites. This lasts for about point

twenty-five seconds before Paul turns around and introduces her politely to his fist. Now this broad couldn't have weighed any more than 110 pounds, and could almost be considered a dwar-

I haven't a clue man, maybe it's part of his religion to get tied up by vertically challenged skinny broads in fur coats, hell if I know. What I'm tryin' to say is this girl is small, and she just took the full blunt of good ole Paul's right hook, and you know Pauls a big guy. So he takes her now barely conscious body down to the station to check her in and file paperwork and-

I'm gettin' to it! Sheesh brother, you gotta relax. Alright, so he's down at the station, reading rights to what's now this barely conscious little broad with a black eye, when he gets a ring on his radio about a domestic dispute in one of those apartment complexes downtown. So he tells the guard to keep an eye on little miss attempted robbery while he goes out for a bit. He gets in his car and makes his way down to the complex, and of course it's in the shittiest neighborhood in the city.

Exactly. So he pulls up and it looks like everyone and their mother for the surrounding four blocks is standing on the sidewalk lookin' up at this 3rd floor window. It sounds like somethin' out of a bad cop show. You can hear people screamin' and shit bein' thrown, the whole nine yards. So Paul decides he better leg it on upstairs before one of these jackasses hurt themselves. He makes it up to the top floor and there's some old lady waiting by the open door where all the commotions coming from. Being an intelligent guy, Paul stopped to ask her exactly why it sounded like a dinosaur in labor up there before he waltzed into the apartment for a visit. Now here's where it gets interesting: Apparently they were in the middle of opening presents at a party for Three Kings' Day, the spic holiday, and

one of the guys there started buggin' the fuck out.

Exactly what Paul asked. The thing is, no one knew why, it was the weirdest thing. One minute he's opening a card, the next he's throwin' lamps at Abuela Rodriguez.

Yeah, lamps. This guy was freakin' out. So Paul gets his taser all ready to go for reasons that are fairly obvious at this point and heads on into the apartment. It doesn't take long before Julio Juan Carlos III decides he doesn't want Paul around, so within maybe four seconds of his entering the apartment, he's got an end table flying his way.

I shit you not, an end table.

No idea, coulda been a metal one, coulda been wood, but I digress. So Paul quickly jumps outta the way of this flying furniture and pumps good ole JJC3 with a couple volts of a chill pill. He hits the ground and our buddy Paul wastes no time cuffin' him up and reading his rights and all that jazz.

Oh and that's the good part too. According to his girlfriend, he freaked because of what was in the card.

Nope. Guess again?

Not even close. Let me spare you the trouble, it was a Best Buy gift card.

That's what I said too, why would you start flippin' out because you got a gift card? At first I thought the guy was insane, but I guess he did a good deal of opening up to his court ordered therapist.

Yeah, I guess back in '08 he got his mother a Best Buy gift card for Christmas. She didn't believe in gift cards, but he bought one anyway because his girlfriend said cash was tacky or some shit. So he bought her the gift card and she never spent it so after a while he made a fuss about her not using the card, and you know how moms are, so she went out the very next day and drove to Best Buy to please her son and on the way there—BOOM! A ten-car-pile-up, no more Momma Julio Juan Carlos.

Yep. Apparently, now he freaks out at the sight of anything of or related to that store, hell, he can't even see a yellow price tag without shittin' himself in self hate.

How the hell am I gonna make this up?

Dog World, I am a Dog

-Nurse

Hello, I am a dog, and I fuck your couch. Last week I went to your mom's house. Taking care not to disturb the shoes she so carefully arranged by the doorway, I trotted into your old living room. Then I fucked your couch. I fucked your couch. Your couch.

A month before that, while you were away on break, that was me. I was careful. Outside, your mother was tending her garden—adorable. Very nice figure. Through your garage this time, I kept telling myself to keep quiet, I crept, panting the whole time. Panting, panting, my tongue out, panting. It was lovely.

It was summer. I am a dog, it is very hot out. A door was left open. Weary, I approached. Shade. It was very cool, indoors the air conditioning was nice. To the left, I see it, a couch! You were downstairs, a TV blaring, your mother in the kitchen preparing a meal. A cold sandwich. What soft, delicate hands. Such light fingers! I fucked your couch but could not tear my eyes away from your baloney on rye.

This past Sunday, late at night. The lights were out in your house, save for one room on the second floor. Scent from today's dinner, a steak, bread rolls, potato. It did not spoil the sweet taste of my lust. I fucked your couch. Above, from the second floor, mirrored uncomfortable noises. I left, satisfied.

Today I come to your house. The doors, locked. Windows closed. A car is still there, on your driveway, but another is missing. Your garden empty. No smell. No lights. I circle once. Again. I hump a bush. Urinate. No way in. I sit, panting, bark. Wait. Then a lady

comes out, in tears, your mother. She sees me, I tilt my head. Bark. She moves outside to the driveway, collapsing in bursts of sobs. What an irresistible scent. The door open, I walked past. I am a dog. I fuck your couch.

The Rabbit (or A Study in Ambiguity)

-Oli G.

*“As a remedy to life in society I would suggest the big city.
Nowadays, it is the only desert within our means.”*

-Albert Camus

And the grey walls are solid. And so it is inside. Because the walls are solid. Indeed, because there are walls at all. Definitely inside. It hops along a few paces; the floor is solid. It's not at the bottom because the bottom wouldn't have a floor. If there was a floor on the bottom then there would be something beneath, it so it wouldn't be the bottom. No, definitely not at the bottom. Probably not at the top. The walls reach above the tips of its ears anyway, and the top has to be at least as high as the walls. Definitely not at the top. Just somewhere then. Inside somewhere, then. It lies down to sleep.

The scene is set and it sleeps.

It wakes. It hops forward a few paces. To go forwards seems natural, but safety should be behind. If it has come from behind then it must have survived there, or it could not have moved forward thus. Forwards or backwards? It doesn't know - it stops and scratches. Perhaps behind was not safe, perhaps it was running. It pads forward, pauses, then continues. Better to be outside, where directions are not so linear. To go forwards seems natural.

It continues, stopping only briefly at intervals to examine gouges in the walls and floor. The walls and floor are solid. It lies down to rest.

It wakes. The walls breathe light. The walls are breathing. It

continues forward once more. Hunger's ache and thirst's trip, and it knows the need for sustenance. Still it continues to slow and check the gouges, now more frequent than before. There is even a scent on these newer scars. This taunts its memory for a time, each time, but it continues.

*

Now it cannot stop for each 'gouge'. They cover the walls, the floor. It is grey; the texture is different. The scent is color. Not abstract color, not metaphorical. It is color. But not visible color, not color of sight. It has memories – are they memories? - of outside. It is compelled.

*

But the color is not of sight. The walls and floor are no longer gouged, they are the gouges. They are made of gouges, yes. And they are gouges. Great gouges, carved by great forces. Hunger and thirst are great forces, it thinks. The floor crumbles at its touch; the walls whisper. The memories crumble; the smell remains. The smell no longer dances on the breath of the walls. It is heavy. And the walls are breathing. It came from behind, and now it hops on until the walls murmur lost lullabies of sleep, of food, and of water. It sleeps.

Its hind legs tremble as it rises. It came from behind. Maybe other things come from behind. But it does not look back. It will not turn back - it has decided to go forward; but it does not look back either.

*

Late in the time, as time walks, it comes across color. Color of sight. Green and bright, small. A spark upon the wall, though the walls are gouges. It approaches and the memory intensifies. Color of sight, color of smell. It savors the tone, the character of the spark – its defiance, their shared history. Then it nibbles the green away and renews its travel with a new impetus, its gait with a new kick. Refresh, new incentive.

*

The walls sparkle. With color, yes. With moisture, yes. Beads trickle down the rough surface, licking the dust from pockets on their journey. Dusty but clean. A grand journey, it thinks, as it watches them, awaits them, laps them up – the end of the journey. It hops from wall to wall, a joy expressed as much through body as through mind. Simple joy, beautiful. The walls weep happily.

It sleeps, and twitches as it runs fields.

It awakes. Color, joy, company. Company. It came from behind but it didn't look back.

*

The walls whisper warning, but it cannot understand them. Beads flee down their surface; dust embraces them, holds them. The walls insist. It hops from wall to wall, sharp movement. Yesterday echoes; echoing sounds. Every wall clamors.

Don't they know they're misdirecting it? It doesn't know the sound comes from behind.

The walls weep.

The word panic does no justice to the feeling. Muscles need to express their strength, but the mind sees no direction for flight. They tremble. It trembles. Its chest is tight. There is pressure in its ears, wet pressure behind its eyes.

Fear has courage as a component. Fear without courage is despair. It does not despair; it looks behind.

It was somewhere. Something happened somewhere, in time. The world turned on and on and no creature spared it a breath, but for one. Enough; let the world turn.

The Seventh Month

-Virginia Woolf

I was sitting there in the cafe when a fly, a big bastard no smaller than a bee, landed or maybe just fell on my forearm. He was usually probably fast and agile and he'd buzz around town and countryside alike on some aimless yet undeniable and inadvertently unsavory purpose. At least I assumed this is what he did on an average day. Today was a different sort of day for him than that. He was slow and stupid like the sun-encumbered people outside in the square and his weight on my arm was tremendous. The thing about bugs and just vermin in general is that they're always lighter than they look, even if they look pretty light to begin with, but not him. He had substance. There was something *to* him. It was almost presumptuous for him to weigh as much as he did. To be this substantial, as a fly.

I shook him from my arm while wrenching my face into a grimace you'd never see on the face of one of those real men in the war movies. It had to be a look you'd never get if you'd ever charged over a trench or up a hill or charged anywhere really, so I wasn't proud of myself for it. No man in the world wants to cringe at a fly, even if it's this one I'm talking about. He fell from forearm to bag. The black bag with the sprinkling of chalk dust and maybe still a little dried-up seagull shit from a few months back sat in my lap and waited for the fly. The colors couldn't help but to make him look a lot more in his element than when he was crawling over pallid skin decorated sparsely with fine (feminine) hairs. He was a part of the bag and the bag didn't mind him at all but I wasn't going to humor the son of a bitch. I flicked him onto the floor but he still seemed to be doing all right so I drew my grimace a little further and stepped on him and killed him. The crunch was unbelievable. It was ridiculous. It was absurd. This couldn't be a real fly. This was a movie fly. He belonged

in the cinemas.

After the business with the bug I looked out the window in front of me and saw a girl who was taking a break from some kind of little dance they had going on out there. She was hiding in the shade from the malicious rays of the sunlight that wanted to batter their way into her skin and rape it dark. Now back home you can say this about the women: too many of them are sows or other types of livestock but those who aren't will have some nice curves and bodies you can really grab onto in the bedroom and, to the credit of the sows, they had some curves as well. Just more than I like to see. A girl at home would have an ass and the sows would have enough ass to get you through the whole winter. The girls here mostly wouldn't have things like hips and asses and breasts. They're mostly little stick women and their asses won't look any better than my own. The girl outside the window though had everything in order and accounted for. All those things that make women nice company.

I watched her and wondered if I was old enough to be a proper lecher. A real, good, substantial movie lecher with a rumpled suit, maybe even that smelled faintly of cat piss, and thick glasses and a little bag of hard candies all stuck together in a single mass. A single entity. A candy hive. How long can you leave fifty sweaty peppermints, all adhering to their neighbors, in a bag before they start to think for themselves? Figuring I already knew the answer to my original question, I embraced it and sat there watching her as I sweated through my shirt in the heat. After a few minutes of stretching she caught me staring and since I wasn't yet accustomed to my role as lecher I averted the gaze I'd been filling with her hips and legs upward and instead filled it briefly with the bare white ceiling before dropping back to the *National Geographic* I couldn't read a damn word of. The

picture in the magazine showed a man a man displaying a big conqueror's grin, each tooth a monument to his mastery of the natural world. This tamer of the wild sea held, muscles straining, a surprisingly apathetic-looking sea turtle. They made a nice couple. I glanced back out the window and my girl with the unexpected curves had left. Brief moment of panic. How was I to shoulder the yoke of lecher if there's nothing to lech? There. She hadn't gone far but now I needed to turn my head and watch from the window to my right as she laughed and gesticulated with her friends, talking about whatever girls like this talk about. Once again, and more quickly this time she noticed me, possibly having anticipated my leering at her. Once again I have to pretend I wasn't imagining how nice a hot afternoon fuck with this stranger would be. Upon dropping some money on the counter for my bread and coffee I left the shop and entered the bustling throng of bony people, swinging my legs through the fields of crane legs carrying all the stick women who barely weigh enough to make their heels or stilettos (honestly whatever you call them) click on the cobblestone.

It was hot enough outside to make me wonder if it'd be worth it to throw up on the road for the purposes of lightening the load a bit. The little motorcycle men with their beat-to-shit apparel and ill-fitting helmets were yelling for me to go one place or another. The helmets they wore were invariably some hue of red and the men looked like matches you'd find in an old cabinet down in a basement. The matches didn't show any restraint and kept shouting to offer me a ride and since I was lacking options I got on a bike after a cursory appraisal of its state of disrepair. Soon enough we were back at my building and the matchstick was holding out his dirty, weathered hand for a couple of moist bills which I deposited hastily and with a little disgust into his palm. I worried about all the sweat on my chest. How much was mine, and how much had come from the matchstick's back?

The prospect of carrying around another man's sweat on most any part of my body sent me into a state of mild panic so I walked more quickly than usual to my rooms. Along the way I passed by a group of Dutch who'd been the scourge of my personal domestic harmony for the previous few weeks. I took a brief moment away from the sweat panic to remember when the Dutch arrived here. I had happened to be at the station when the train arrived, crawling like a sinuous parasite from one city-organ to another and choosing this one to disgorge its brood. These Dutch were monsters, every one. Their voices weren't unlike the voices you always seem to find on the most corpulent of German tourists. The odor they all exuded was strongly reminiscent of the more stereotypical breed of French whore who espouses the notion that a liberal coating of perfume is as good as or superior to a bath. These fucking Dutch were making me miserable. One of them noticed me. A tall girl. She looked like some kind of extinct flightless bird and upon making eye contact she began crafting a big, dumb, open mouthed smile so I preemptively responded with as caustic a look as I could manage on such short notice.

Back in my place I took two puffs of a cigarette but it was too damn hot to smoke so I threw the thing off the balcony and maybe it landed in someone's cart but I don't know because I never looked. The humidity had soaked through all the little lemon cookies I kept on the coffee table. I got in the bath and the filth of the day clouded up, polluting the water which probably wasn't that clean anyway. Lethargy had more or less taken over after a few minutes submerged so I used my toes to pull the stopper and watched absently as the retreating microcosm of a shoreline formed new islands of my limbs.

POETRY

Creepy computer technician

-Anonymous

You look like an alien, you never breathe.
You stand to close, you never leave me alone.
You either have autism, or you have children in your basement.

Green

-Anonymous

He sits down a drink
'Thanks,' she accepts and smiles
'Where is mine?' I joke

Jessica

-Anonymous

She calls me a noob,
quotes Oscar Wilde,
then laughs to herself on her own.

She nudges up closer,
“The drinks here are cheaper,”
and she looks god damn beautiful in her satin white dress.

One day you'll make some guy real happy.

Open window

-by Anonymous

Open window
blind.
Closed forever
six feet under

The Witches

-ASK

There used to be witches.
They had bubbling cauldrons with
unheard of ingredients and parts of animals
no one eats.

Every time the children saw a large crow,
or a black cat, a serpent or lizard.
Part of them would wonder Is this one of the witches' familiars?
What task has she set it?

On Halloween the children would have
their revenge. The witches were always
too busy to remain connected with
their creatures and the children would
do them in.

They used slings and stones to crack
their wings, hammers to smash their skulls,
and boots to grind them to earth.
With the wtichspawn destroyed they
were free to solicit candy.

The Cold, The Rain, and The Light

-Allen Head

The sky seemed to give off a sigh of relief as the rain began,
it had been cloudy all day,
but now the rain came down in sheets
blanketing the earth
and bouncing off the rain coats of those unfortunate enough
to be forced into enduring the weather.
People ran for their cars
with newspapers or briefcases
over their heads
with their necks curved
and their faces blank.
I stood there intrigued, watching the sprawl
without coat or company.
I stood there:
quite cold,
after a while the street emptied out.
The neon lights shined
one read "BAR"
I walked towards it as if in a trance
knowing the warmth
I would find once there.

Mirror

-Allen Head

The glass was still hung in the mirror
though it was fractured and split into several pieces.
And he stood there looking at each reflection,
each with his own opinions
and ideas
on what he did,
what he should do,
and the man staring back at them.
Each reflection stood there within the mirror
needlessly mimicking the man that had created them.
The man stood there for a moment
staring at each reflection thoughtfully,
weighing each reflection's thoughts,
until finally he knocked the mirror off its nail
allowing its glass to drop on the floor,
thus his reflections lay there quietly
no longer mimicking the man,
and no longer expressing each of their own opinions on
what the man did,
what he should do,
and why he shouldn't knock the fucking mirror on the floor.

The Sins of the Father

-Allen Head

The boy stood there
blood pooling around his sneakers
and the smell of death in the air.
He opened his eyes
and saw his father with knife in hand
the body of his mother limp on the floor
her eyes blank and lifeless
just like the rest of her.
Sirens echoed through the room
the red and blue lights flashed on his father's face,
on his curved lips,
his yellow teeth,
his eyes glowed, filled with hate and satisfaction.

Years later,
the boy kneeled on his father's bedside
he looked into those same eyes and saw age and regret and sadness
but the hate stilled lied within them,
Like a sunken boat at the bottom of an ocean
like a distant cliff on the horizon
like the ember of a fire clinging to life on the floor.
The father apologized for what he'd done
his eyed turned blank and lifeless.

The boy stood at the edge of a cliff soon after the death,
the waves carved away at the edges slowly
slowly shaping the cliff creating sharp points like daggers.
His father's ashes in hand sealed within a plastic jar.
the boy unscrewed the jar
and dumped them over the side of the cliff.

They fell quickly downward
as if the wind decided not to carry them.
And he smiled
his lips curved baring his yellow teeth,
his eyes glowed with hate and satisfaction.

Haiku Series

Joseph Brown

Haiku #6 (Visions of Madeleine)

Momentary glance
reveals beautiful red hair
Madeleine walks by

Haiku #4 (Presbyterians on Tuesday)

A young girl asks me
are you going to heaven?
She gives a pamphlet

Haiku #11 (Activity C by grade schooler)

Where do your dreams go?
My dreams don't go anywhere
written by Maggie

I Couldn't Agree More

-Preece

The hurricane swept through
the neighborhood at night
and you said it sounded
like breaking bones.
You said you'd never felt so alone
and I couldn't agree more.
I slept right through it
so when I woke,
the sky was silver
and the power lines had broke.
It tore up my garden, and my home,
I said I'd never felt so alone
and you couldn't agree more.
This is a place we'll wind up in again
because we've been here before.

Afterword

For this issue there is not much to say, hence TAR will only state the obvious. Here's to hoping for a successful issue 3 release and many more,

-TAR Staff

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