



Collection FOUR

July, 2011

The April Reader

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Preface:

The April Reader is a monthly publication of poetry, prose, and other 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:

With growth comes stability- and for the updates page, a certain sense of monotony. Issue 4 has been a sleepy release for TAR, few alterations have been made for fear of ruining the “winning combination” format used currently. However, some changes have occurred:

- TAR issue 1 printable format has been released
- Printable format has become our default format: our website no longer hosts links to “Electronic” editions of TAR
- Luco has lost his editor status due to absence
- A advisory editorial note for submissions containing sexual or otherwise graphic material has been added

While there has been much talk and little action surrounding the possibility of TAR expanding across the net for a larger readership, we feel that the time has come to seriously consider net advertising on a broad scale. Should any readers wish to suggest sites for solicitation, TAR would be grateful to hear your thoughts via email at theaprilreader@gmail.com. Our afterword has more information on this.

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

I Catch Glimpses in Crowds, but it's Never Her

-Anonymous

7:55

The man woke up. He turned off the alarm clock. He took off his blanket. He walked towards the curtains. He put his left hand between the curtains. He opened the curtains. He looked at the city. The sky was blue. He put on pants, then a shirt, then socks, and then shoes. He looked at the mirror. He pinched his cheek. He opened his laptop. It un-slept. He checked facebook. He stopped at:

Juliet Huang

Happy Chinese New Year everybody!

17 minutes ago – Like – Comment

He closed his laptop. He walked to his room door. He opened his room door. He walked to his house door. He opened the house door. He walked down the driveway to the road. He crossed the road. He walked the pathway. He crossed the road. He walked the pathway. He crossed the road. He walked the pathway. He waited. The man turned green. He crossed the road. He walked the pathway. He stopped at the shop door. He opened the shop door. He entered.

“Sup.” he said.

“Hi.” said Marianne.

“What's with all the people outside?”

Marianne shrugged.

“Have I missed out on much?” asked the man.

“A homeless guy came in before and shot everyone. We all died.” laughed Marianne.

12:00

Mandy opened the door. Mandy entered the shop. Mandy was holding a brown paper bag.

“Morning team.” said Mandy to the man and Marianne.

“Has it been busy?” she asked the man and Marianne.

“A ton of people have been coming through, but no sales.” said the man.

“You know, it's probably cause of Market Day.” said Mandy.

Marianne looked at the man. “Market Day!” she said.

“You should definitely check it out,” said Mandy.

“How often is it?” asked the man.

“Just once a year.” said Mandy.

“I guess we better check it out then.” the man said smiling while looking at Marianne.

“Of course” said Marianne looking back at the man.

“Would you like some banana bread?” asked Mandy to the man and Marianne.

“I wouldn't say no.” said the man while smiling.

12:15

“If you could, come back here when you're done.” said Mandy.

“Alright. I'll be right there.” said the man.

An old man placed a pair of pants on the counter.

“Just these?” asked the man. The man checked their price. They were ten dollars.

“Yes.” said the old man.

“Australian?” asked the man. He pressed the 1 key, then the 0 key, then the 00 key.

“Born in Brisbane. But I've been here a good 30 years now.”

The man pressed the pants key. Then he pressed the sub-total key.

“I have family on the gold coast,” said the man, “I went there sometimes as a kid. Saw all the parks and all that. Great place. Eftpos or cash?”

The old man handed over two five dollar notes. The man pressed the cash key. The till opened.

“I've never been back.” said the old man. The man placed the cash in the register.

“You should, your family must miss you.” said the man as he closed the till.

“Would you like a bag with that?”

“No thank you.”

The old man picked up the pants.

“Would you like your receipt?”

“No thank you.”

The old man walked away.

“Sweet ass. Thank you, and have a nice day.”

The man tore off the receipt and threw it in the bin. He walked to the curtains at the back of the shop. The man brushed them aside with his left hand. The man walked through the curtains.

“What's up?”

“I just want to say, thank you. For all you've done. It takes a special kind of person to volunteer.” said Mandy.

“That's OK.” said the man.

“How's school?”

“Same as usual. I've been up to my ears in work, there's just way too much going on this time of year.”

“Calvin said the same. It's a shame to see you both go. But if you're free later, just call us, OK?”

“Sure,” said the man, “I'll be full up till November, but after exams I'm sure I'll be back.”

“Great.” said Mandy.

“Sweet.”

13:05

Netty walked up to the door. Netty opened the door. Netty entered the shop.

“Good afternoon,” said Netty.

“Afternoon, Netty.” said the man.

“Hi,” said Marianne.

Netty walked past the man and Marianne to the curtains. Netty put her right hand between the curtains. Netty opened the curtains. Netty walked through the curtains.

“I guess we can go then,” said the man to Marianne.

“I guess we can.”

The man took off his nametag.

“Here,” said the man as he undid Marianne's nametag.

“Thanks.”

“I'm off.”

“OK.”

The man walked to the door.

“See ya next week,” said Marianne.

“See ya.” said the man.

He opened the door. He walked out of the shop. He walked along George street to St Andrew Street. At the intersection he looked north to Irish street. He walked south to Philip street. Other people also walked the street. As the man moved south. There were more people. There were middle aged people and little children, and there were college children. Some little children wore lion faces. Other children wore zebra faces. Other children wore star faces.

The man stopped at the Philip street junction. Orange netting lined St Andrew Street south of it. Past the orange barrier were stalls and a black trailer. The man on the light was red. On the other side of the road a little girl stood with a man. Two boys walked past them and into the street. A car stopped and honked its horn. The boys made it across the street. The man turned green. The man and the other people crossed the street.

The man walked into the crowd. He walked south. The other side of the trailer was empty except for five microphones and a man lifting speakers. The man walked on. The first stall was selling sweets. They were mostly pink. Inside the stall two young boys were handing cash and sweets to customers. The man reached into his pockets and felt coins. The man took his hands out of his pockets and moved south.

As he moved south there were more people and more stalls. A table was sitting outside of Just Jeans piled with jeans and a sign that said 75% off. A girl sat at the table smiling. The man walked south

to more stalls and people. At the Morris place junction, he saw more stalls heading east. The man walked down Morris place. One table was lined with cheap jewellery and the man sitting behind the cheap jewellery wore a hat turned down over his eyes. Morris place was filled with more stalls selling cheap jewellery. One stall sold plants. The man noticed a green plant in a pot. He checked the price. It was ten dollars.

The man stopped at another stall. A bald man was standing in front of the stall. Behind the stall a brown man was standing. On the stall was a puddle of water.

“Now your normal cloth, it's good for maybe two wipes and then you've got to wring it. Now, when you're wringing it, you're breaking it, see – they aren't made for it. That's why the smart guys at Supa-tech have invented the Supa-Clean. See this (the brown man wiped up the water with a yellow cloth) all gone! Just one wipe, no wringing needed.”

He noticed the residue left on the table.

The man walked further down Morray place, past more jewellery, to Bank street. Bank street had more stalls and less people. A magician was stalled at the end of the street. Three people stood in front of him while he did tricks. The other stall-owners watched them. The man walked towards the town centre.

“Excuse me, sir.” said an old man holding a tray.

“G'day,” said the man.

“Would you like to look at my work.”

The man picked up a piece. It was wood. It was the size

of a thumb. It was shaped like a person. It was carved with tattoos.

“Wow,” said the man, “Must have taken some time.”

“Twelve hours a piece”

The man put the piece on the tray.

“I've only got eftpos sorry.”

“There's a machine just over there,”

“Great.”

The man walked towards the town centre. He passed a crowd of people. He stopped. He looked at the crowd again. He walked on towards the town centre. It started to rain.

Two black trailers sat at opposite ends of the town centre. In one, a man played bag pipes. In the other, a middle aged woman sang country. People sat in front of each. Most sat in front of the woman. A carousel sat between the trailers. On it, children rode horses. Adults watched them riding horses.

The man walked north towards St Andrew Street. The man did not stop at the city centre roundabout junction but walked straight into St Andrew Street.

At St Andrew Street the crowd walked along the pathway under the shop banisters. The stalls sat in the middle of the street were alone except for three college kids, two boys and a girl. They were smiling and their shirts were covered in slightly darker spots, from the rain. The man looked at his shirt. It was covered with slightly darker spots too. He smiled.

The man walked north until he found the black trailer again. A crowd was huddled around the trailer in the rain. They were clapping. Five people stood in the trailer behind the microphones, three women and two men.

“Mary-sue Clements, everybody!” said the man. Mary-sue bowed and the crowd clapped.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Kurtis Phillips.” said the man. Kurtis bowed and the crowd clapped.

“And last, and *probably* least, Ire McKinsey” the man said pointing to himself. The crowd clapped. “Thank you, thank you! We're the Southy Pentuplets. You've all been beautiful.” said Ire.

The crowd clapped and the man clapped too. He walked home.

The man walked the pathway. He stopped. The man turned green. He crossed. He walked the pathway. He stopped. The man turned green. He crossed. He walked the pathway. He stopped. The man turned green. He crossed. He walked the pathway. He stopped. He crossed. He walked the pathway. He stopped. He crossed. He walked up his driveway. He stopped at the door. He opened the door. He entered the house. He walked to the kitchen. He picked up a bag of rice. He poured the rice into the rice cooker. He picked up a cup. He took the cup to the sink. He turned the tap. He put water into the cup. He poured the cup into the rice cooker. He put water into the cup. He poured the cup into the rice cooker. He rinsed the cup. He turned the tap. He put the cup on the drying rack. He put the lid on the rice cooker. He clicked the red button. He watched the rice cooker cook the rice.

“Sup.” said Nik as he entered the room.

“Sup. Fun day?” said the man

“Not really, you know, work, man. Where have you been?”

“Work.”

“It doesn’t count if you don't get paid.” said Nik.

“I'm pretty sure it does if you hate it,” laughed the man.

00:00

The man woke to a loud noise. He pulled off his blanket. He walked to the curtains. He put his left hand through the curtains. He pulled the curtains apart. He watched the city. A stream of light flew into the sky and exploded.

The Irish Countryman

-Anonymous

Every day is toil, toil, toil. We call these days “good days”, because they allow us to work the entirety of the day. It seems to me, though, that we did little more than work to survive. I increasingly heard people from the city accusing of us of being subsistence farmers: people who work for little more than survival. The city folk saw as us backwards.

My family lived the same way as our father did and his father before him and so on. We lived on a thirty-two cow farm, which is

not to say we had thirty-two cows, but that we could support thirty-two cows.

When we needed supplies that we were not able to make for ourselves, we moseyed over to the nearest town, Ennistymon. If we needed something but Ennistymon did not have it, we traveled to Ennis, the county seat. We would have gone there more often, but the town was a wee-bit too big and noisy for us to take a liking.

We had been going to Ennis a bit more, though, ever since my younger sister married a shopkeeper there the year before, during Shrovetide. It was an unusually fast and early matchmaking, for she was just a lass of seventeen years. Our parents decided they suited each well enough and he was doing well enough to offer a grand dowry.

I did not plan to be marrying anytime soon, but I did not know if I wanted to spend the rest of my life at the farm.

My father would tell me, “I’ve been on this farm since I was but a wee lad, my boy, and my father would tell me the same. There is a certain magical feeling that you only get from working so close to the earth that those city folk don’t be knowing about. There is probably a bit o’ fairy dust sprinkled about to help us. I have never laid me eyes upon one before, but I am for a knowing that they are there. There’s no doubting that.” He would then go back to work with a twinkle in his eye, but I would just sigh.

I was not nearly as sure about the pisherogues as my father. My father carried a deep love for our Irish history and frequently told stories that seemed to be little more than fairy tales, which he sometimes said they were. As in, a fairy told him the story and he was just repeating it.

Likely, I would have been happy to live the rest of my days on the farm if I had not talked with many of the tourists that came to Ennistymon to see the city waterfalls. A lot of them could speak English, so I was able to talk with people from all over the world. A few tried to talk with me in Gaelic, but I cannot speak it well, though my father did.

This seed of a thought, constantly watered by those conversations, had been growing over the years. It is with a bit of sadness, though, that I felt that my thoughts had outgrown my family soil and needed to be transplanted to grow further.

I had not thought of a way to tell my family, though. I am the eldest son and have two younger brothers. I did not know if the farm could run without me.

The turning point for me about whether I should leave or stay was after I met Trevor Derrick. At first, I thought he was rather suspicious, as he would lay against the railing by the waterfall and casually be writing notes.

Eventually I approached him after I continued to see him taking notes. He did not seem the least bit surprised when I walked up to him; rather, it seemed that he was expecting me. I guess he noticed how I was watching him watch others.

He could not be much older than me, so I asked him about his age. To my surprise, he was only twenty-three – a year younger than I. The next thing I asked him was about what he was doing. I did not really understand what he talked about, even though he explained it in great detail. From what I could understand he was there for a project in his school. Why he was still in school, I was not sure. Other tourists had told me they were still in school as well, but I never pressed the matter. I myself had finished school and of that, I was quite proud.

He was here for gathering stories and information about the rural Irish. On one hand, I wanted to help him by bringing him to my father, because he could probably tell me stories as well. On the other hand, my father might be upset and might even make him work if he came to our farm.

I never made the decision. Instead, he asked that, since I was interested, if I would let him come with me. I responded that he could, and we set on our way to the farm. I did not tell him that I did not actually have the authority to decide whether he was permitted to come to the farm, but I learned from the tourists that a boy my age usually had more independence. My father might have been lax in letting me go to town alone but, other than that, he was little different from other Irish fathers.

My father was in the yard when we arrived and he quickly locked his gaze on the stranger, I began to regret bringing him. What did I really know about him?

Trevor did not seem to mind, walked right up to him, and tried to speak in our accent. He failed miserably. My father laughed at his attempt and I was relieved. Trevor frowned and began to speak in Gaelic. This only caused my father to laugh more and Trevor's frown to deepen.

After my father stopped laughing, he said, "You're alright boy, you're alright. A wee bit daft but alright." We all went in to eat after we talked for a bit.

During dinner, as was custom, we talked about our day. Trevor was hit upon the hand with the ladle for writing at the table, but otherwise it went smoothly. I just knew that my father was going to ask Trevor for something tomorrow.

Come morning, we all began our daily chores. The only difference was that by the time I arrived to the table neither my father nor Trevor was there. My mother told me that they had already finished breakfast and had gone out to begin the daily work.

I sat at the table and began my meal. I had gone to town yesterday to buy a loaf of bread so that I could continue to eat slices of bread lathered in butter. There was more than that to eat, but it was my favorite.

We finished eating and the three of us me – and my two brothers – went outside to see where my father and Trevor had gone. We found them with the cows, which Trevor was clumsily trying to milk. My father was clearly amused.

Trevor sighed and said, “Eoin, could you please show me how to do it again?”

“Certainly, certainly lad!” He grasped those udders and milk came right out of them.

“Now try to work on it a bit yourself, I’ll be back a in a few minutes to check up on you. I have to talk with my boys about our arrangement.”

“Our arrangement?” I thought. This did not seem it like it could be good. Not only was I no closer to finding a way to leave, the person who I thought could help wanted the opposite!

We walked outside and left Trevor to milk. “Now my boys, normally I wouldn’t be for letting a stranger come work for us. Nevertheless, we have come to a sort of an agreement. He will be staying with us for a while and helping a bit with the chores, and in return, he will try to help me publish a book of my Irish folk tales. It’s truly a grand deal altogether isn’t it!” He began to roar with laughter.

So it continued like this for a few weeks. Trevor worked on everything that he could, from milking cows, to tilling the fields, to seeing about the other livestock, all the way to traveling to a nearby bog and cutting peat to burn.

After the day was done and the hard work was behind us, Trevor I and would tell each other stories, though I think I learned a lot more from him than he did from me.

Eventually the day came when Trevor said he would be leaving. It saddened me to see him go. He had already fulfilled his part of the bargain by getting my father in contact with a publisher; from there on it was my father’s deal to get them to accept it.

I accompanied Trevor on his trip to see a publisher in Ennis. What a wild and exciting adventure that was! That trip is what made me firmly decide that I needed to leave the farm. As you can see, I eventually did, but that is a story for another time.

“That was quite an interesting story, Mr. McNamara. So that was your first encounter with an anthropologist?”

“Ay lad, it was. However, I did not know it at the time. You’re the second anthropologist I’ve talked with.”

“Ah, so you haven’t seen any others since then. About how long ago did you say this story occurred?”

“Ah well, it must be going on well near forty years now.”

“That’s quite a long time.”

“Indeed lad, it truly is.”

“Is it alright if I come back tomorrow and you can tell me another story?”

“Of course you can lad; I have more than enough stories to last at least a year!”

“I’ll be sure to come back tomorrow then.”

“See to it that you do.”

With that, Randulf Sørensen turns off his tape recorder, leaves and closes the door. He walks back to the hotel where he is staying. The day may end, but work does not.

I Only Got a C in Public Speaking

-Anonymous

I’m dead. Looking back on my life I see a few moments of greatness, but by and large, it was mistake, after mistake, after mistake. The old ladies have invited me out for foosball at six, so I’ll only bother you with the final and worst of them (or best, if you have a penchant for the dramatic).

It was Sunday. 3:15 AM Sunday morning to be precise, and my phone rang, so, naturally, I answered it. How I wish I hadn’t answered, but I did, and when my ‘friend’ Todd said, “Dude, my toilet is stuffed, get over here. There’s shit gushing everywhere”, I being a plumber, immediately answered yes, threw on some pants, and took off for his apartment.

Of course his toilet was working just fine and he’d call me for something less savoury. To make a long story short, my friend was covered in blood, on his floor lay a blonde girl I’d never seen before, he asked me to move the thing, I told him he was insane but then helped him anyway, a cop saw us loading her into a dumpster, Todd vamoosed, and I ran too, or, I would have ran but the girl’s slipper caught on my shirt, and next thing I know 200 pound officer Jenkins is slamming me against the hood of his car telling me I’m a sick bastard with no mention of my Miranda rights.

So then I’m in a cell and this big black fucker is looking at me like I’m a horse with his guts out and Bubba’s a wolf who hasn’t eaten since last Thursday. He tells me I’m sexy. I give him nothing but the finger. He comes at me with his mitts out, looking like a bear. I resist but I’m weak so I lose and then I’m losing my anal virginity while all the other rag-tag homeless men study the invisible spider webs around the cell, hoping that somewhere in their investigation they’ll lose themselves and forget the time that they were me. But as the chicken consumer consumes my arse I catch their eyes and they remember, to misquote Gary Oldman in *Le Professional* (watch it if you haven’t; it’s good), EVERY-thing.

After a week of enjoying more sodomy than a biker at a Hell’s Angels meet when the lights go out, no one’s looking and all the men with beards start spooning, I’m sitting before the Jury of old men and old girls, and we’re watching a slideshow of Lily Martin and the Lawyer’s talking about how she was a promising student, smart, maybe needing to apply herself a little more, but she had bright things in her future. And as he calls me a demonic monster, comparing me to Goebbels, I’m thinking of the track marks on Lily’s arms, and her cold, dead pussy showing full frontal under her mini-skirt as her fully-

exposed arse dangled from the dumpster outside the McDonalds in Delaware.

Click goes the slider, click-click-click, after a final click there's a picture of the girl as I knew her; all bruised and broken and still in the dumpster. The Jury gasps. I gasp too, as it seemed the polite thing to do.

“HOW COULD YOU DO THIS” the man screams, “HOW COULD ANYONE BE SUCH A MONSTER? WELL, YOU PIG, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY?” I try explain but he doesn't quite get it so I give up.

“NO ANSWER EH? WELL WE DON'T EVEN NEED ONE. YOU'RE DONE!” He says, slamming his brief case and my case closed. It took them two minutes to deliberate, and as one man shuffled his glasses, pretending to read the decision, I could see biscuit crumbs falling from his lips as they smacked “On the charges of kidnapping and murder, we find the defendant... guilty.”

Clap-clap, clapped the judges hammer as he sentenced me to the chair, and I screamed innocence, but they took me anyway.

Three years passed on death row. It wasn't great.

Three years passed, and I sat strapped in a chair, staring at a silver screen; and as I heard the audience behind it shuffling, watching me. I probably looked skinny, and dirty, but just a little handsome. In their whispers I heard distinctly one lady tell another that you really could never tell who the weirdos were going to be. Then - there – was – LIGHT!

Just joking,
But really, then – there -- was LIGHT.
Ok, Ok.

Then there was SILENCE, as a thin man who looked uglier than me fondled, creepily I might add, some plastic gum thing, and told me that I was to die by ten-thousand volts to the brain. “Is that all Steve? I think I'll take 50,000 today”, I joked to myself. And when he asked me for the final words, I gave them, but he just sighed that I'm so stubborn, as he popped the plastic gum thing in my mouth. Next thing I know, I'm watching my body from above as it clamps down on the plastic gum thing, looking like, what I now know, the users of my handy work look like when they're testing my wares. And as I watch myself fry and die, I remember Steve, and I conclude, one: never help people, and two: being mute sucks.

The Creature Beside Me

-Azrael Bloom

Editors Note: This piece contains mature subject matter suitable for an adult audience. Viewer discretion is advised.

Her face had cum stains all over it. It was such beautiful whiteout on dark chocolate skin. They weren't mine. I could never defile a woman like her. They were my parrot's.

She loved birds and for her birthday I bought her a bird with a six-inch-attached cock. It had been an experiment over at some animal testing lab. They wanted to find out if women would be or could be compatible with birds and reptiles with attached penises. I had read about it in the news. Well anyway, the animal store worker told me about this bird with a bulging man-cock that no one wanted to take home. I felt an intense pity for the bird and I took it, wrapped it up and put it in her closet for a morning surprise. The parrot (Mr. Squawks) didn't like the wrapping paper that surrounded him so he began to

peck. He pecked the fuck out of that paper, broke out of it and woke her up. She decided to check the closet and found an erect cock on a bird that was, "So precious to her." So, I had to let her suck him off.

I loved her in that moment like a horse loves a girl after fucking her, or a dog loves his boyhood companion - especially after humping his leg. I loved her so much and I wanted to be that bird. Day after day after day passed. She sucked him off more frequently and as I watched him I began to imagine those stains were mine and that I was whitening out her face.

I took flight lessons from a local boy. I gathered chickens from a farm, cut off their heads, drank their blood, and collected their feathers. This was my life for many months. My jealousy grew. Mr. Squawks' cock grew as well, in her perfect, plump, velvet mouth. I wanted to choke the squawk out of him. I sang in the morning and searched gardens for food. I became addicted to flower seeds and chewed them constantly. I painted my skin many bright colors and imagined myself being Mr. Squawks. I bathed in glue and I pasted the feathers, I collected, onto my skin.

I had become Mr. Squawks and we seemed a reflection of each other. She could not tell us apart and her mind melted. For if she sucked me off she would destroy the real Mr. Squawks, and if she went to him I would have to kill them both. There was much hesitation and fear, love and hate, etc. Time was against us as time always is. Fuck the world of clocks. I knew the choice must be chose. She had to suck one of us. Would I - a mere reflection - be the victor? Or would he - The Bird - know the feel of her lips again on his bird-man-dick?

She stared into the abyss. The abyss of us, parrot and man side-by-side in war for the affection of one beautiful woman. Man against man makes a tragic story yet not so tragic or powerful as this.

Man has fallen to man too many times. Stories have no meaning anymore, unless a parrot plays a role. The Birds will rule the world of man-worms. This is the ultimate tragedy. And I had become the role of him (the creature beside me) and I was scared and scarred. I would have her or I would kill her and she heard my voice and she fell to the floor and wept for in that moment she knew I was I and she felt fear spread throughout her soul.

She looked at me and spoke.

"I'm Sorry"

Sorry! The word made me rage with the collected power of ten angry terrorist and one drunken whore. I took the bird and slit his throat. I killed him and bathed in his blood. She looked at me, and with tears in her eyes she cursed my name with something so evil and vile I must not reprint it. Then, to spite my love and my gift of the Bird she jumped from our apartment. She jumped to the street below. Egg yolk and blood flowed from her when she cracked on the sidewalk. I screamed and fell onto our bed.

"NO!"

I screamed again.

"NO!"

Again I screamed and it seemed all I knew was the sound of scream. Then, after hours and onlookers, I noticed a shadow.

The whole world went Sour Skittles. Sharp icy fear surged through me. I hadn't felt such fear since... Father? Why do you choose me again? FATHER I must confess I've always been attracted to you. Please forgive me God, for I am one now with another man. Forgive me for I have sinned and am one with THE BIRD.

I stopped and knew in that instant that Mr. Squawks was in the shadows hiding, waiting, planning, and masturbating. I readied my knife and turned slowly. Slow. S L O W A S F U C K. And then in a heated flash, slash, cut, thrust, and stab I killed the creature once and for all. I wept and screamed and confessed murder to the world. The world confessed it to me as well. I tore off my feathers, painted skin and walked into the bathroom. There I saw myself for the first time in months. What I saw was horrifying. I was a bird yes, but I was without a penis.

Then I remembered that it had fallen off in the war as I was walking on patrol. The field medic could not reattach it so he sent my dick to some scientist to do research with it. I cursed the world at the realization. My dick was on Mr. Squawks! She still loved me but she needed Mr. Squawks. There was no affair or cheating or jealousy. It was me, the bird, the parrot, all along. I ran out of the bathroom and jumped out our apartment window and...

And then I flew.

I flew to her.

Short Story

-Keats

He re-read the letter twice so far, and after the words became stale he fidgeted in his seat until he became aware of how uncomfortable his clothes were, all the while searching for inspiration.

Considering himself to be too young and fraught, he was unable to produce anything of substance. He imagined each sentence read aloud by her over and over; then, reminding himself not to think

too much, he concentrated on how mysterious and complicated his handwriting might seem, and contented himself with this.

He was writing to a girl, and his nervousness dictated that he should stammer even in thought. The tragedy was, of course, that with just a half of the chance he could sweep her off her feet, a rose clenched in his teeth, set her up on his majestic steed and—. Well, it was all besides the point, since she had never written back.

Emma, a mutual friend, would come down from Cambridge to London often, mentioning (once) that she appreciated his letters hugely. He concluded, therefore, that she was flattered, but he couldn't value her words alone. The subsequent interrogation happened in a small café in London, and the entire episode was predictable. The light from the café window had a noticeably unhealthy electric flow about it. The sun began to slide down the horizon, leaving smears of orange on the otherwise unspoiled silhouettes of office blocks and towers.

“It was very sweet of you, she said.”

“Sweet?”

“Yes.”

In the time that it took him to examine her eyes for any sort of betrayal, he counted each individual letter he had sent in the last three years.

“What does that mean?”

“That she thought it was sweet of you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, she liked the letters.”

He recounted the places he had been when writing each

individual sheet.

“Is she well?”

“Very.”

“Happy?”

“All the time.”

“You think so?”

“Certainly.”

He remembered having drifted to another topic, imagining how he must seem. The conversation had slid into tedium, and a clockwork procession of standard call and response emerged. He felt this way often, and it was only with the letters he thought of himself as making an impact and having any meaning.

Emma had gently smoothed out his sleeves. He never minded, or at least never said he did. For a moment, she looked up from her tea to search for something in his eyes that might suggest anything wrong. She knew something was, but always found herself unable to coax the more personal thoughts out of him. Trying to dismiss the disadvantage, she summoned the intimacy of his full forearm, and, waiting for a pause, placed it delicately in the awkward, dense air.

Observing a certain tenderness in her own tone, she had pressed him until he sighed and became silent. The sun slowly let the sodium lamps and cars take over.

Most of what he was writing was simply too dramatic; but the tiny, often tactless voice of sincerity wrestled with his sense of subtlety. The process of writing the letter had become more laborious than he had intended.

He wondered if he should write about himself at all. As always, he was trying to make a point and thus connect truly with another human being and make them feel necessary. The specifics

hardly mattered; her mother died when she was six, and at twenty she wondered if she had made her proud. How profoundly irrelevant it all was, and how ironic that the living should idolise the remains of those before. It was the reverse of reading a book, listening to the work of a great composer, or absorbing a work of art; like a hand stretching through history to hold you reassuringly by the shoulder and say “what you are feeling has been felt because, in some way, we are the same.” It was reaching to the shoulder, and upon finding nothing, reaching further and being disappointed twice. Even if these concepts were fathomable to a naive mind, no response would come of it.

At any rate, she never wrote back.

The insignificance of his own insignificance offended him.

Emma, on the other hand, always tried to respond as soon as possible and, because of this, was eventually reduced to initiating the majority of their contact. He stayed distant, whereas previously she was nearly smothered by his warmth.

Feeling only a vague sense of guilt, he put on some music to suit his mood.

Miles Davis tore through the room with a piercing moan – the horn reminded him of his last dance. He hadn't remembered much of it, except that it was with Emma and he had still needed to be noticed by some other girl. He felt that same sinking sensation and that same sense of selfishness. Once, he had made her feel loved, so that she would know how it felt; then, he withdrew to let her adjust and live.

He would do the same to the girl he was writing to,

eventually. It didn't make a blind bit of difference; the knowing that he had somehow changed someone's life for the better was all he needed.

Never too close to any one person, he did not want to take up too much of them, or invest himself too heavily either.

There was a horrible vulnerability about love, even love of what he supposed was a Platonic kind, or even love for something more abstract: a song, a work of art, or a piece of literature. It was all very dangerous.

His deep introversion changed time. Half the album passed in an instant of self-reflection. Hating the circularity and lack of structure to his ruminations, he turned up the music until he could hardly think. The music ended. The speakers rolled static into the room and he felt clairvoyant.

Everything he ever did, or anyone had ever done, seemed to have some strange, small kind of impact. Even if the effect was tiny, every word had been scratched into someone's mind. Every touch was an imprint and every absence a missed opportunity. No matter how small these things were, they happened.

Throwing a crushed sheet of paper out of his window, he picked up the phone.

“Hello?”

“Is this Emma?”

How surprised she was that he had called, and, no, she was not too busy to catch up at all.

“I'm sorry.”

“What on Earth for?”

“For a great many things.”

She paused, and then simply said, “It's fine.”

“I am, you know.”

“It's fine.”

In a familiar silence, awkward and dense, he stalled.

“I haven't heard from her in a while, you know.”

“I wasn't calling about that.”

“Oh.”

She believed him, but the strangeness still hung there.

“Is everything alright?”

“Would you see me tomorrow?”

“I – I'm not sure I have the time to come all the-”

“If I came to you, I mean.”

She paused again. “You'd come here?”

“Yes.”

He knew what she might say next. There was nothing unfriendly about it.

“You know I'm seeing someone now?”

“Yes.”

Then, after a moment:

“Will he mind?”

“No.”

“I'll see you tomorrow, then. About one o'clock?”

“You don't have to do this.”

“I want to.”

She didn't ask why. She might have smiled as they said

goodbye and hung up. He didn't know and couldn't really tell.

He thought he perceived a change in himself; or, if not that, he felt more aware. Perhaps things did matter. His outlook was, for that moment, warmer: he felt he understood a little more.

Whether this was true or delusional was unimportant.

Both Ways

-Malavox

It's noon. The sun is at its hottest this sizzling August afternoon. You sit in your living room in front of your television. You flip through the channels at a pace few could tolerate, with the volume at an unreasonably high level to compensate for the loud hum produced by the air conditioner. Judge Judy is on, You've watched Judge Judy every day for the last three weeks. You won't today. You decide you need to get outside, You're wasting your summer away. You step outside onto your porch and lock your door.

The heat hits you like a chest high wave in the shallow reaches of the ocean. You dismount the porch and begin a walk you hope will be more entertaining than twenty-four minutes of pseudo-small claims court. As you walk you stumble across a crumpled piece of paper. "The End is Near!" it says. You scoff, and kick the pamphlet out of your path. You don't believe in that kind of stuff. You never have. You continue walking. The fresh air rushes past you as you stroll along, a refreshing change from the constant chill of your AC. You see a hotdog vendor on the corner. "One with everything on it," you tell him. It's delicious. A man hands out pamphlets nearby. Your walk is going well, The sights and smells of

the neighborhood you live in have proved to be entertaining. You decide to walk to the next block before turning around.

You see an attractive woman picking up pamphlets from the sidewalk. You make a move. "Here, let me help you with those." You say. She smiles, and asks your name. "Ralph," you reply. You inquire hers. Its Sarah. "So what are these pamphlets about?" You ask her, She tells you to save your soul before the end. She informs you the end is very near. She doesn't have proof, but she seems sure of this. You find this off-putting, and lose interest. "I'm not interested, sorry," you say. She looks frustrated. "God save you," she retorts with a vacant gaze that creates an uneasiness you can't quite explain.

You turn around and begin your return home. You walk slightly faster as the heat is really picking up. You pass the hotdog vendor, he smiles. As you approach closer to home, the heat reaches its peak. Your air conditioned room sounds like heaven. You quicken your pace. A man handing out pamphlets notices you walking by. "Sir!" he exclaims, "Save your soul!". "Sorry buddy, don't believe in that nonsense," you say. The man follows you. His intentions are good. He truly believes the end is near. He wants to save your soul. You get frustrated, and tell him to leave. He is persistent. You decide to cross the street. "Sir! Wait!" He yells.

It's too late. He was right. The end came in the form of a soccer mom late to pick up her kids in a green minivan. He'll never forget to look both ways.

Museum

-Matthew E.

I could hear the door open in the front room. The bell

rang. Such were my days. Lots and lots of work, people coming in and in, and in, and never out. I rushed to shut the door behind the stranger, who had just entered my... umm... museum? They never shut the door. I turned my attention to the visitor, who had already thrown his rear on my desk. No one ever uses the chair. It's right there!

"What's that smell?" He inquired.

"Authenticity." I chuckled. He nodded. He thought he understood. "So, Garry, is it?"

"Yes sir." The words melted together, much like everything he said. Very much like his life, I assumed. He was a hippie, no other word for it. Maybe "scum." By now Garry had touched, picked up and put back down pretty much everything that wasn't bolted to the desk. Awfully inquisitive. His presence was claustrophobic and a bohemian funk followed him around like a trusty dog. Impressive considering the fact that my museum had a very distinctive, strong and rather poignant aroma of its own.

"Have you done any acting before, Garry?" This time I disrupted the silence.

"Umm, no." The words came out so slowly. It evoked the image of balancing water on the very edge of a bucket. I had never met anyone quite like him. Finally, something to break the routine.

"No worries, you won't have to do much. Just lay there and play dead."

"I like that. I get paid for it, though. Right?"

"Ha ha ha. Yeah. And to think I'm having trouble finding actors."

"This world, man, this world."

"You've got that right. Anyway, do you want to be lying on the floor or maybe in a chair?"

"Floor. Definitely the floor." This time he didn't hesitate one bit.

"Alright," I lead him into one of the back rooms and told him to lie down on the floor next to a previous visitor. "Don't mind the smell. As I said, it's for authenticity's sake. Had this special effects guy over at Broadway mix it for me. No health hazard, you've got my word."

"Is that guy alright?" He was pointing at the aforementioned visitor.

"He showed up no more than an hour ago, I'd just finished applying the make-up, when you arrived. He must've dozed off."

I left to get my "make-up kit" and hoped that Garry wouldn't try and wake up his roommate. It only takes a man so long to realize that maybe the guy with half a head might actually be dead, no matter what I said about make-up and whatnot. When I returned, Garry was half-lying on the floor with his elbows supporting his torso, his palms slapping rhythmically against his abdomen, his eyes set squarely on his company.

"I tell you, man, you're a magician," he said when he heard my footsteps. "If I didn't know any better, I'd think he's dead."

"Enough chatter. Lie down completely so I can see where I have to apply the make-up. Don't want to waste any on the back of your head, where people won't see it." I placed my foot on his chest and aimed my Magnum point-blank between his eyes.

"Hey, man! What the fuck?!" The calm was over and the storm had begun. His pupils dilated so quickly I thought they would pop. He was trying to get up, but I was holding him down with my foot.

"It's not funny, man, get the fuck off of me!"

"Stand still!" I squealed and pulled the trigger.

His face caved in around the nose and the back of his head exploded. And that was that, not much more. I must have overdone it, because there was no exhilaration, nothing. The initial rush was gone. Not that it was about the rush or anything. And it wasn't some deep-seeded psychological "need" to kill. Don't try to profile me, because there ain't nothing to profile. If anything, this was just another one in series of attempts to finally get caught. This wouldn't be the one, though. If he had any family, I doubted if they knew or even cared where he was. I remember my frustration, when this first dawned on me. After all, I was doing all this for the police. To give them the most fucked up case they would ever have. Yup, I knew I'd get some guy his promotion once he'd caught me. Something to justify my otherwise pointless existence.

It's funny, though. That hippie just walked into his coffin and lay down under the barrel. I knew I should take something away from this, but what? People will do anything for some money? No, that's not it, nothing novel. Hell, maybe next time.

The Adventures of Boris the Tentacle Monster

-Some Pervert

Editors Note: This piece contains mature subject matter suitable for an adult audience. Viewer discretion is advised.

Rachel didn't know why her university had a "cryptozoology" department. She didn't even really know what it was, or what went on behind the building's frosted glass windows. She was quite excited to be transferred there for her second-term project, but her unfamiliarity with the place had her feeling very lost as she wandered through corridors that seemed far too empty, trying to find the office she had been supposed to meet her supervisor in ten minutes previously.

"Hello?" Rachel poked her head through an open doorway into another room. "Anyone around? No? Jeez," she muttered to herself, "what's the point in such a big building if nobody actually works here?" She set off to continue her walk down the corridor, and then she jumped at a quiet rustling sound coming from behind the door opposite. Glad to have finally found someone else, she knocked on the door, in the hope that whoever it was would be able to at least point her in the right direction.

"Hey! Anyone in there?"

There was no response. She pushed the door open cautiously. What kind of person would just ignore a visitor like that?

Rachel felt something crunch beneath her foot, and peered down to see the jagged edges of broken glass glinting in the light admitted through the doorway. She flicked the room's lights on, in order to get a better look inside.

The glass was strewn across half of the floor, apparently the remains of some sort of large terrarium that had stood upon a wooden cabinet. It had been reduced to an empty metal frame, with jagged glass shards still clinging to its edges. There was a mess of sand and wood chippings in the ruined enclosure's base, along with a half-eaten piece of melon, and an overturned metal dish.

Another rustle came from the room's corner, the source of the sound obscured by the corner of a desk. Rachel took a few steps in order to get a better look, and saw that there was a pile of paper against the wall, which appeared to be twitching and quivering. It shifted once more, and a couple of magazines slid down from on top of it to reveal a patch of something smooth and white.

She wasn't at her most relaxed, wandering around an unfamiliar, deserted building. But it was obvious something had gone wrong here. The thing in the corner, presumably a creature of some kind, might be hurt. She felt obliged to check. Rachel picked up a ruler from the desk and went over to the pile. She smoothed her skirt against her thighs as she squatted down, and prodded it very carefully.

Rachel shrieked as the papers exploded outwards, and something within them made a high-pitched squealing noise. She couldn't see anything at all through the flurry of paper. She stumbled backwards one step, and then felt something soft and warm slam into her face. She raised her hands instinctively, feeling something round and smooth that was apparently trying to attach itself to her head. She tried to scream, and the noise came out as a muffled cry, as whatever it was hugged closer to her face. She felt writhing appendages wrapping themselves around the back of her head.

She staggered backwards blindly, catching her shoulder on the door-frame and tumbling out onto the floor of the corridor. She tried

to cry out once more, and this time she felt something slip between her lips as she opened her mouth: some sort of thin, flexible limb like a many-jointed finger. She sank her fingers into the ball of whatever-it-was attached to the front of her head, and tugged desperately. She felt it quivering, and it let out another squealing noise. The thing in her mouth twitched once, and a gout of thick liquid surged against the back of her throat. She was choking for air, and realized too late that some of it had made its way down her throat while she struggled and retched.

The pressure on her face abated. The mass fell away from her, and she took in a huge lungful of air, spluttering as she spat out the remnants of whatever it had disgorged into her throat. Her tongue was tingling, and her stomach was already starting to feel very strange. She got her first look at the thing that had assailed her, which was lying on the floor at her feet.

The creature's body seemed to lack any defined shape. It was a lump of flesh the size of a small rucksack, its skin milky white with blue stripes that swirled over its body, seemingly at random. Six tentacles radiated from the central mass, each as long as Rachel's arm, and almost as thick, tapering to a blunt tip. The flesh of the body parted in a slit a couple of inches wide, revealing a single eye with a green iris.

The creature blinked at Rachel, and let out a soft trill. One of its tentacles wavered in mid-air, its tip slightly fatter than the others, and moist with some kind of mucous secretion.

She turned to run, managing to take a single stride before she felt a tentacle tightening around her ankle. She sprawled face-first onto the floor, letting out a frantic scream as the appendage slithered up her calf and crept around her thigh. Her skirt rode up around her hips as she slid against the floor,

pulled back by the flexible limb coiling around her leg. She strained her neck to get a look at the creature behind her, trying to kick out. Her muscles felt sluggish, and the numbness on her tongue seemed to suggest that whatever she'd ingested was having a serious effect on her body. Her nails scraped against the floor as she tried to find something to grab on to. Nothing useful presented itself.

The tentacle had made its way further up her inside leg, and was presently joined by another, both of them slithering over her thighs and grasping her legs in a constricting grip. The soft feeling of the tentacles was sickening - they were completely dry, with only a trace of moisture at their tips, and yet they slid over her skin with no resistance at all, their surfaces supple like glove leather. She felt the tips of them probing her skin, gentle prods placed at regular intervals as the tentacles felt their way around her body.

Her legs were completely immovable now - either due to the effects of the creature's toxin, or its crushing grip, she couldn't tell which. She beat her fists against the floor, letting out desperate cries that echoed down the empty corridor to be heard by nobody. One of her legs was hoisted up as the creature rearranged her, and she was flipped over, coming to lie on her back. The creature was much closer now, sitting on the floor between her thighs and making quiet warbling sounds. It blinked its single, limpid eye at her.

"Let me go!" she screamed. She pushed herself off the floor with one arm and swung her fist at the creature. Her arm jolted as it was intercepted mid-air, and Rachel whimpered as she turned to see another tendril wrapped around her wrist. It coiled about her snake-like, drawing her closer to the creature's central body while its tip explored the length of her own limb, creeping up the sleeve of her blouse. A few inches later it was nuzzling the top of her breast, slipping sideways in order to creep down between them. A fourth tentacle was holding her other arm before she even had a chance to think about moving it.

She was totally helpless now. Each arm and leg was grappled by a limb that felt many times stronger than her own. It forced her back down to the ground, and she remembered it still had two tentacles free as she felt another pair of tips sliding up her blouse to stroke against her abdomen. They insinuated their way up her torso, joining the pair that were pinning her arms, which had now coiled around her breasts and were beginning to squeeze her quite uncomfortably. Her screams and struggles were starting to exhaust her. She let out another weak cry for help, and one of the tentacles removed itself from her chest and plunged into her mouth. She gagged and retched as the limb forced its way down into her. Her jaws were forced open wide as she felt its tip nudging the very back of her throat. She bit down as hard as she could, and then made a muffled scream as every tentacle suddenly jerked tight around her. They felt strong enough to crush her. After that she held her jaw open, making uncomfortable sounds from her throat as she tried to suppress her gag reflex. The tentacle in her mouth twisted from side to side, slipping against her tongue.

It was all she could do to let out a stifled groan as the tentacles around her thighs probed at her underwear. With surprising finesse, each tip slipped beneath the waistband of her panties and hooked around, pulling them down and exposing her completely. One of the appendages shuddered as it slipped between her thighs. Apparently the creature found the panties around Rachel's knees to be too restricting, and there was the sound of tearing fabric as it ripped the garment apart as easily as paper. With her legs freed, the creature was able to spread them wide apart. Rachel's thighs twinged with the strain. She scrunched her eyes shut as she felt one of the tentacles' blunt tips prodding against her labia.

It moved up and down, making tight circling motions as if considering what to do next. It deviated downwards, and Rachel tensed her asshole reflexively as the soft tip brushed across it. Something about the quivering of her muscles seemed to excite it. It coiled around and pressed hard against her anus, wriggling energetically. Its companion tentacle found her pussy and took up the same motions as the other had, wandering up and down, and tickling against her as it moved. Rachel's body was shaking as her muscles strained, but there was nothing she could do as the tentacles began their slow intrusions into her.

She felt something moist and sticky as some kind of secretion oozed from the tentacle tips. As the foremost slithered up inside her pussy, she was horrified to realize that part of the wetness was her own. Something about its touch had tricked her genitals into a state of readiness, although that could not have been more different from her conscious thoughts. Despite the horror of the ordeal, Rachel couldn't help but experience a twinge of pleasure as the tentacle bulged out inside her, filling her up and assuming a gentle, steady motion as it slid back and forth. The appendage was supple enough to double back on itself, and she felt its silky skin rubbing against the hard nub of tissue at the apex of her cunt, which had presented itself despite all her efforts to ignore the tingling feelings that the creature was manifesting inside her body.

Rachel gasped, struggling for air around the obstruction in her mouth as the tentacle worked at her nethers. She could hear the liquid sounds as it moved within her, liberally moistened by its own secretions as well as hers. The next intrusion was considerably less pleasant, and she wrung her head from side to side, her hands balled up into tight fists as the second tentacle bored its way into her asshole. It joined its companion tendril in assuming a steady, in-and-out motion, and she felt more of the mucous secretion squelching between her buttocks as the tentacle lubricated its path into her. It seemed to burrow in deeper with each thrust, her asshole forced

wider as the squirming shape filled her body. She could almost feel it in her guts.

The one in her pussy was becoming more energetic, its motions quicker and firmer. Rachel found herself groaning as the tendril coiled around relentlessly, rippling against the walls of her cunt and bringing forth bursts of intense pleasure that felt like her body was betraying her. It withdrew entirely to dance its wet tip across her clitoris, and the stimulation had her thighs tensing and shuddering as the appendage returned within her. As the creature lavished its attentions upon her, Rachel felt the unmistakable sensation of an orgasm starting to build.

The tendril in her mouth began to shift and writhe in concert with the others, sliding across her tongue and tensing against the roof of her mouth. All the creature's movements were becoming more energetic; the pair around her breasts coiled tightly and squeezed them in turn, fluttering their tips over her nipples with tickling touches. The remaining tentacle wandered freely over her body, stroking over her thighs, then her belly, at one point even making its way up to her face to rub against her cheek. The small pleasures of its caresses were all but eclipsed by the power and fervor of the tendril plying her genitals. She was almost aching from the intensity of it. The pain from her asshole had abated a little - perhaps she had become used to the fat tentacle lodged in her anus, slithering in and out, slick with mucus.

The tentacles began to move in time with each other, the two between her legs alternating their thrusts so that one of her holes was always filled. The sixth tentacle took up a permanent position over her clitoris, massaging it with a touch that felt electric on Rachel's skin. Her breasts were squeezed tight before they were released, and that pair of tentacles switched to focusing all their efforts on her nipples, rubbing in opposite

directions over the hard nubs of flesh. The appendage in her mouth withdrew, allowing her to take in a gasping breath which came out quite involuntarily in a long, shuddering cry.

As both the lower tentacles surged into her at once, Rachel's body was finally pushed over the edge into a climax that had her clenching her teeth as she let out a desperate moan. Defeat and horror mingled with hated ecstasy as the creature wrung the orgasm from her shuddering body. The tentacles held her firmly in place as she bucked and writhed within their grip, powerless against her own body's release. Rachel felt twin surges of warm fluid as the tentacles inside her disgorged liquid payloads. The tentacle which had occupied her mouth twitched before sneezing out a long stream of thick, orange slime which coated her chest and draped itself in viscous strands across her face. She drooped backwards onto the floor, gasping for breath, her head swimming from the magnitude of what she had just experienced.

Her straining asshole was finally relieved as the tentacle slithered out from it, retracting across the floor to wind around itself in front of the creature's fat body. One by one, it removed the rest of its appendages, leaving the one in her pussy until the very last. It withdrew it with a wet squelch, and Rachel felt something warm and thick oozing out from her. With some difficulty, she propped herself up to look drowsily at the messy aftermath. She saw the creature before her, the tips of its sinuous arms glistening with orange slime, more of which was splashed against the insides of her thighs and across the floor between her legs. Some streaks of it had a grainy texture, as if there were little particles suspended within the goop.

The creature made the same, soft warbling noise as before, although it sounded lower in pitch now. Its movements were slower as it slithered away across the floor. Rachel knew that the creature could overpower her easily, and there was nothing she could do, nothing she would have done anyway, as the blue-white shape

slipped through the doorway and back into its room. Rachel lay in a daze as she listened to the tinkling sounds of the creature carefully picking its way across the glass, and then rustling noises as it presumably set about rebuilding its nest of paper.

A few more minutes passed, and she felt strong enough to stand. She steadied herself against the wall as she rose on wobbling legs. She picked up the tattered remains of her panties, and saw that it would be pointless to try and wear what was left of them. She wiped the worst of the slime from her face, and, for the first time, let out a quiet sob. The only thought in her mind was that she needed to take a shower. She needed to be clean.

*

Amy waited until six thirty before heading down to her office. The department was quieter in the evenings, and it was unlikely that she'd be disturbed once most of her colleagues had left for the day. She had been looking forward to today for some time, and didn't want anything to spoil her plans.

Free from the day's work and safety regulations, she loosened her black hair from where it was tied back, and allowed it to hang down to her shoulders. She descended the first flight of stairs, and noted that Dr. Bryant was still in his office as she walked past it. She got ten yards further on before he appeared at his doorway.

"Amy!"

She turned to look over her shoulder, merely slowing her pace rather than stopping and risking becoming embroiled in one of Dr. Bryant's frequent reveries of times past.

"What is it?"

"You haven't seen the new girl around the department today, have you? Supposed to meet me this afternoon. Shortish. Brown hair? Freckles? No? Rachel something-or-other."

"Sorry," she said.

"Never mind." He slinked back into his office, muttering something about undergraduates.

Amy descended the scuffed, tread-plate steel steps of the final stairwell, and headed down the corridor. She thought the blank corkboards on the walls looked sad in their nude states, the ragged corners of paper impaled with drawing pins the only things to break up their featureless surfaces. She rounded a corner past the empty boards, and paused a moment as she noted that the door to her office was open. Getting nearer, she saw a few pieces of glass scattered on the floor. Her thoughts immediately turned to what she had been keeping in there, and she hurried over and pushed the door open.

"Boris?"

The lights were already on. She was sure that she wouldn't have left them that way. The stack of articles she had printed out for herself seemed to be distributed across the floor. Then she noticed the smashed remains of the glass case on top of the cabinet, and swore loudly.

"...Boris?"

There came a quiet purring noise from beneath the pile of papers in the corner. She pulled a handful of them aside, and breathed a relieved sigh.

"There you are," she said.

She knelt down and reached her arms into the pile, feeling the familiar, soft warmth of Boris' body. She lifted the creature out from the mess gently, and it coiled one of its tentacles around her arm as she cradled it to her chest.

"What on earth happened? Are you hurt?"

She held it out at arm's length, turning the creature over in her hands and inspecting every part of it. It seemed unhurt, although there were a few shallow scratches at the tips of some tentacles. "Aww. You poor thing. I guess you're getting too big for your tank, aren't you?" she cooed, hugging it close as one of the tendrils snaked up the back of her neck and felt around in her hair. "But breaking out was very naughty. Look at the mess you made."

The creature shifted restlessly in her arms. Amy carried it out into the corridor, pulling the door to behind her. "I'll have to find you something more spacious," she said. "But first..."

She pushed the door of the bathroom open with her shoulder, and walked inside. Boris' weight was beginning to tire her, and she set the creature down on the non-slip plastic floor. Even though the surroundings weren't particularly comfortable, they made cleanup a lot easier. Amy undressed perfunctorily, shrugging out of her t-shirt and draping it, along with her jeans, over the wall of a cubicle. Her undergarments followed. She left her shoes in the corner. Although she'd done this a few times before now, she still had a nervous feeling in her stomach as she stood, completely nude, curling her toes against the slightly-too-cold floor.

She sat down, facing the shapeless, blue-and-white blob. The creature was examining the wall with its tentacles,

prodding gingerly and then suddenly recoiling, only to repeat the process a few seconds later.

Amy spread her legs apart, sitting with her hands on her thighs.

"Here, Boris," she said.

The creature didn't respond. Two of its tentacles flopped around listlessly on the floor, the remainder curling beneath its round body. Amy frowned, and patted her thigh in encouragement. "Come on," she said. She didn't understand. The previous times she'd presented herself to the creature, she had practically been thrown backwards by the force of it launching itself at her and wrapping her in its sinuous tendrils. The creature didn't seem to be its usual self today. It was considerably less energetic.

"Maybe you just need some encouragement," she said. Amy curled her hand between her legs, and began to rub herself. The anticipation of the act meant she was already eager, and it didn't take long at all for her genitals to flush red with the tender pinkness of arousal. She eased a finger inside, sliding it around carefully while she massaged her clitoris with the heel of her hand. Achieving the desired effect, she withdrew her finger, which was now moist and sticky. She scooted over to the creature and held out her hand to it.

"Come on," she said. "I know you recognize that." She took one of the tentacles in her hand and rubbed her finger over the tip. She still wasn't really sure what Boris' sensory capabilities were, but it seemed to use the limbs for examining almost everything about its environment, so some kind of olfactory function didn't seem to be out of the question. She rubbed her hand around the base of the tentacle, then slipped it between the creature's underside and the floor, making sure it could taste her somehow. "Don't keep me waiting," she said.

The creature made a listless sound, and one of its tentacles began to coil around Amy's thigh. She put her arm around its body and hugged it close, pressing her breasts against it, although it didn't seem a likely cue for it to respond to. She had to feel like she was doing everything she could, though. She rested her head on top of the bulbous central body, grinning as she felt its exquisitely smooth skin against her cheek. She planted a kiss on what she assumed passed for the top of Boris' head, and was rewarded with another tentacle gliding across the small of her back, to creep down between her buttocks.

"There we are," she said. "I knew you wanted to, really."

She wrapped her arms around the creature and lay back on the floor, holding it to her chest. There was something pleasant about the creature's warmth, about the way it felt against her, like a hot-water bottle covered in silk. She held one of its appendages up to her face and kissed the tip, just as another began to probe her in the same inquisitive way as it always did, prodding around her genitals as if they were some new terrain to be explored. She encouraged it inside, using her fingers either side of her labia to part a passage inwards. The tentacle slipped in obligingly, and Amy let out a satisfied moan as her anticipation was finally satiated. She took the limb in her hands into her mouth and closed her lips around it, rolling her tongue under it as she sucked gently. The creature responded by pushing its lower tendril in a little further, and Amy smiled around her mouthful of tentacle. She wiggled her hips a little, and the creature at last began to move its extremity around inside her. It slid out and then returned, and the supple skin of the tentacle felt wonderful against the walls of Amy's cunt.

She was used to the creature's predilection for invading

both her orifices by now. She had found it uncomfortable the first time she realized it was interested in more than just her pussy, but she had learned to get some enjoyment from its anal incursions. She still let out a grunt as the tentacle forced its way in. She was always amazed at just how deep it seemed to snake up inside her, and the extent of the full feeling between her buttocks as the limb plumped out and twisted gently inside her. Things became a lot less painful after its lubricating mucus began to flow, and the actions of the tentacles quickened as they slithered in and out of her, wet with the secretion. The tentacle in her mouth was likewise moistened with pale orange slime, and she got a whole mouthful of it as the tip squeezed out a particularly large, viscous glob of the stuff. It didn't actually taste terrible. It was a lot better, she thought, than the human analogue. She had given hardly any thought to men since her first time with Boris.

The creature seemed to be more enthusiastic about fucking her now. It always kept two tentacles coiled loosely around Amy's wrists, the rest free to attend to her holes or roam across her body with a regular motion of pressing against her, lifting up and moving a few inches, then repeating the process as if searching methodically for something. Amy yelped and giggled as she felt a wet tip in her ear, and then gently encouraged the tentacle back down onto her chest. "No Boris," she said. "I don't think that'd work."

She drooped back on to the floor and allowed the creature to do as it wished, relaxing her muscles completely as it shifted her limbs this way and that. It poked experimentally at her breasts before giving them a light squeeze, and massaged them for a little while with a rippling motion before apparently deciding its efforts were better focused further down. The end of a tendril traced back and forth in quick motions across her clitoris, which had her thighs twitching, and her breaths coming faster and deeper. The creature seemed to respond to the noises she made, and so she tried giving a deliberate, satisfied-sounding moan. Its pace quickened, with more

of the lubricating mucus making a squishing noise as it was forced out between deep thrusts.

Amy could feel her own muscles down there twitching and tensing, and she knew she wouldn't be able to contain herself for much longer. She clenched her teeth and tried to control herself, wanting desperately to draw the experience out for as long as she could. She slid her hand down against the shaft of the tentacle that was driving into her over and over, and its pace didn't even slow as she wrapped her fingers around it. It had become more solid and firm, its surface coated with a glistening mixture of both their juices. The sight and feel of the appendage had Amy approaching the limit of what she could endure, and she grudgingly acknowledged that the time had come to surrender to the aching, tingling feel around the sites of the tentacles' impalement. She relaxed, letting go of everything she had held in and allowing her orgasm to seize her completely, spreading across her body like a fiery wave. She sagged backwards to the ground, taking shivering breaths as she was overcome with a glowing, post-climax warmth.

The creature was out of sync with her. She was too weakened to do anything as she lay, hearing her pulse pounding in her ears, but a tender soreness told her that the tentacles were still working away at her. It was twenty seconds later when she felt them jerk and emit twin surges of warm slime. A little of the ooze splashed against her chest, and she strained her neck to look down at the tentacle that had squirted it there. The orange color wasn't as vivid as she remembered it, and the texture was a lot smoother. Other times it had been grainy, almost like couscous.

Amy enjoyed the afterglow for as long as she could ignore the cold floor beneath her and the sticky, congealing mess on her belly. Eventually she had to sit, and think about

cleaning up. In the intervening time, the creature had slinked into a corner and curled all its tentacles beneath itself. The way it looked, it could almost be mistaken for a beanbag.

"Just one thing to take care of," she said.

She winced as she eased a pair of fingers into her pussy. She felt around very carefully, and then she frowned at the feeling of the wet insides of her cunt. She pushed further until it started to hurt, and still didn't feel what she was expecting. Amy gave a sigh, and cringed as she introduced a finger into her anus, again feeling around for what she sought. Still nothing. She cast her gaze about the mess on the floor, seeing only the spreading puddles of thin, orange slime.

"Where's your egg?" she said.

She thought back to how reluctant the creature had seemed, and how she had had to coerce it into fucking her. The last time she had been with Boris was five days ago, and she knew that it took twenty-four hours for the creature to produce an egg.

"But that means you already..."

Dr. T

-THRILLHOUSE

I'd never cared for Dr. T. The reason for my distaste always eluded me; it was, perhaps, due to a number of reasons. His white mustache was too bushy for his pale, thin face. He always smelled like the rubbing alcohol they used right before shots. Furthermore, he always talked down to me. But then again, he was quite a bit taller than me as well, even with his queerly arched back. I never quite knew which aspect of him irked me so much, but the question

would frequently arise in my idle mind, and cling to me for several moments.

One morning, lying down on the cool, hardwood floor, I would come to be caught in such a moment. Lying next to me was my dog, his warm fur pressed against my shirtless torso. I lazily ran my fingers through his smooth fur while I stared absently at the white plaster ceiling. The sun, when it managed to peek at me from the cluttered overcast, would caress my skin with its warm radiance, only to fade away seconds later. The dog would sometimes give my palm a quick lick, wag its tail, or briefly turn to give me one of its empty glances. Its breathing was heavy – I could feel its solid torso inhale and deflate. I would try to match the rise and fall of my own chest to the animal's, and maintain that unison for as long as I could. Eventually, I became aware of the fact that the sun had somehow begun to match our rhythm, and I was left to bask in that unity for a time.

Then, I saw her face peer at me from above. It was my mother, who I usually loved very much. She warned me about lying down on the cold floor, and implored me to put on a shirt, because we had to get going. And then I remembered about my appointment with Dr. T, and my stomach sank.

"But I'm fine, honest!" I was about to say, before a burst of two, brief coughs rang from my throat. They were followed by an embarrassed silence, ending with a sudden sneeze which forced me to blink. The sun was gone again when I opened my eyes. Mom had walked away. With a giddy trot, the dog followed her. I didn't love her that morning.

So I got a shirt on and decided I might as well put some socks on as well. "Dr. T – oh geez" I whispered. That morning just wasn't the right morning to go to the doctor. None of them

are. Then, from the hall:

“You ready to go to the doctor, champ?”

Dad always called me champ. Dad is okay, usually. Staring at my feet, I gave a quick nod. But he came over and sat beside me anyway. “Come on, champ! Just a quick visit to the doctor and you can have the rest of the day to yourself.” His heavy hand ruffled my hair a bit. Looking up at him, I meekly smiled and said “Kay!” Then the hand gave an encouraging pat on my knee. “We've gotta see Dr. T, champ. For the cough. Understand?”

I didn't understand, so I let silence lie for me. I still hadn't fully grasped fibbing back then. “I'll go get your mom, and we'll hit the road.” To my relief, he receded into the hall. Another wary sigh flushed through me. The urge to cough tickled through the depths of my throat. I resolved to resist the urge. Fluids accumulated at the top of my lungs. The dull taste of phlegm encroached on my tongue. My sensitivity grew, making me resort to holding my breath. In a quick spasm, a small hack broke through. Through the wall, I heard my parents talking:

“Jeane? Jeane? JEANE? JEANE! JE- oh.”

“I'm right here, Frank. No need to shout.”

“Are you ready to go? His appointment is in fifteen minutes.”

“I've been ready. Where is he? In his room?”

Small, dense footsteps approached my door. She peered in, and pointed at my shirt. “Put on a sweatshirt too – you're already sick!” She said. I complied, even though she was wrong. The thing is, I've known what sick is for as long as I could remember. Sick has a pale scalp glistening with a thin film of sweat. Sick breathes

through the mouth with its pale tongue awkwardly bulging out. Sick has bloodshot eyes. Sick has wrinkles without a smile. Sick is too tired to see you. I wasn't sick.

We were at the doorway, waiting for dad to get his shoes on. I looked for the dog, wanting to pet him one last time, but he was gone. With deliberately slow steps, I left the flat. Outside, the sun was hidden beneath the wall of the apartment complex. As we strolled to the car, my nostrils instinctively flared in preparation for the thick, stagnant odor of gasoline. Inside, sitting in the back, my hands were clasped in my lap. They always got clammy from touching the leather seats.

The ride was long and boring, as all rides to Dr. T are. I gazed at the myriad of wandering pedestrians, each one, in my mind, enjoying a carefree stroll. I tried to imagine where they were headed, and found myself always envious of the imagined destination. Above, in various windows and balconies, I saw dozens of relaxed, idle faces. Smoking on the balcony or sitting in a chair – I wondered why that couldn't have been me at that moment. The dark slate of a sky above me didn't help my mood either. For the time being, all I could look forward to was leaving Dr. T's office and squinting in the bright rays of the sun.

*

Dr. T worked in an old office building on the second floor. It used to belong to a housing company. A blank granite slate, which used to have their company name clearly etched onto it, was still stuck on the lawn before the front entrance. Eventually, the company sank and the building was sold off, office by office. Inside, you could see signs of a hasty renovation: mismatched lighting, adjacent corridors with clashing paint, doors a bit too small for their thresholds, and a

new wing augmented to the rest of the building that always stood out like some sort of weird fungal growth. The renovations happened quite a while ago as well, so every room was always a little dusty, and each window pane was somewhat opaque. So the old slab outside didn't look particularly out of place at all anymore.

By routine, we were signed in and led into a small room. The nurse told us he would come shortly, but we all knew by now that it would take a while. For the time being, I simply sat on top of the examining bed, paying no attention to anything in particular. The room was done entirely white, with various metallic utensils and plastics reflecting the glare of the florescent tubes above, which sang endlessly in a low hum. I eventually caught notice of a mirror, and took a moment to look over my reflection. My tired eyes, bored and passive, eventually grew dark circles underneath from the waiting. I also saw that my nose was running. There were tissues set upon a counter top in front of me. I couldn't muster the motivation to wipe my nose.

Dr. T came in after about fifteen minutes. When he saw me, his face contorted into a beaming smile. Each of his mildly stained teeth were displayed in a joyful grin as he bellowed "Why hello there, Johnny!" I smelled the lingering stench of rubbing alcohol on his skin as he shook my hand. "And what brings us here today, sir?" he asked me, with that friendly chuckle in his voice. My mother was the first to speak, in that didactic, lecturing tone of hers: "It's about his cough, Doctor – I'm quite concerned about my young boy here, and I was especially frightened about that nasty bit of flu he caught this past week. There's still some lingering signs on him though (poor thing), and I, as a sincerely concerned mother, am..."

As my mother spoke, Dr. T maintained eye contact with me (because of the height of the bed and his arched back, we were eye-to-eye) with an easy smile on his face, nodding in time to her explanation. Dad chimed in eventually, cutting her off: "Can he take this?" he asked, bluntly, holding up a small bottle of some vile-

tasting cough syrup. I smiled – I liked dad then. Dr. T then began to address my parents with an explanation that I couldn't find myself interested in. In that time, I looked back at the mirror, locking my eyes with those in the reflection. Somehow, I imagined I would have plenty to think about, but I realized I didn't understand enough to make sense of anything. All I could do was focus on the stagnant anxiety sitting in the deep pit of my stomach.

When they finished speaking, I turned to my doctor.

"Dr. Tot?"

"Yes, John?"

"Am I going to to die?"

A pause. Then, chaos: laughter ensued from both dad and the doctor, the former laughing in shrill hysteria and the latter with an amused sort of delight. Mom scolded me, but I couldn't hear her. Confusion took hold of me, followed by resentful shame of being mocked. But I still awaited an answer, so Dr. T sat down on the bed right next to me, and put a supportive hand on my shoulder. Even through my shirt, I could feel the coarse, calloused roughness of his palm. As uncomfortable as I was by his appearance, an appearance so cluttered with oddities I had no choice but to look at it with disdain, my captivation won over. I looked down to him, into his tired and yellowed eyes, in readied expectation.

"Yes, John, you will," he said, frankly.

"And so will I."

POETRY

Bread

-Anonymous

The teacher said for everyone to break.
And he watched as they moved together,
like clumps of bacteria.
And he was alone ----- all sterile,
Wishing more than anything, to be Staphylococcus, and not,
Penicillin.

And when he walked home,
The people crowding the street
Watched him in disgust.
Hiding their children,
Shielding their wives,
Like he was infectious.

And in a park, where he fed birds,
No birds came,
And a dog ran to - then ran away.
Like the bread was spoiled.

And in the evening, at home
He said hello to reflections,
And when he turned they ran away too,

Because no one loves you, because no one loves you.

Plus one and I

-Anonymous

I remember love

I remember a time when she moved in moving ways,
and every glance was just for me and no one else.

I remember rolling around in bed all night picking petals from a
daisy,
which told me, yes, she does.

I remember the first time we fucked – I got her drunk,
But still, it felt like 'making love'.

I remember the times she was late, or dead,
And how every clock tick moved the phone one inch closer.

I remember hunting with her father who knew I knew he knew I
hated it,
but still, the things we do for love.

And I remember the day I looked over at the fat greasy face and the
frizzy mop and wanted to vomit
all over myself -- Oh

I remember love.

Never Wanted Honey

-Preece

Honey seeped out of her eyes like a river of tar.
Down her cheeks into puddles
around her mouth.
She was crying as I fucked her heart out,
but she never wanted it anyway.

She lined up dark lilies all along the floor,
and said there was one for everything we
no longer loved.
She put one into her own hair,
but I never wanted her anyway.

What was it that Mom told us back then?
She said that the world was going to
tear us down into threads.
Give us something and then take it back
but we never wanted it anyway.

Untitled

-Disclosed

Pondering and wandering in the back of my mind

Weaning and waning throughout certain time

Planes of existence organic in nature

Flying buying consuming and dieing

Wishing of the next surprise

Familiarity sinking and rising in tides

Love wading bound by flesh

Abstractions grow within pasts untold

Solitude births the inner beast

Wishing of a certain feast

Ripping and raving how lovely it'd be

To take the knife and cut thee

Hang him by the conforming nails

To cut a few inches of consumer feed

Become of me and enter the body

Power of unsheathed form

Growing and moaning eyes roaming

Overload in residing woes

Authority near how I fear

To kill thyself is certain and pure

Into The Jaws Of Hell

-John Doe

I guess you're right, I might be wrong,

knives out

dinners ready so I suggest you enjoy

hunting for your plates

(aside) savages.

Forget about that thing before.

Sun rays

showing shadows that needn't have a place

at the dinner table.

A light shivering.

The style of the dish saddened me

to core and eat a rotting apple.

(Backstage) Into the jaws of hell...

Tatty Pigeons

-John Doe

You seemed to fly out of the sea

when you landed on the pier

to mill around in idle play,

your feathers ruffled and ashen grey.

To A Lampshade

-John Doe

I'm talking to a lampshade about regret:
I smash it and I'm caught on videotape
thinking of fucking all the girls I've loved
along the road of quiet indecision.
I film myself to watch the graceless fall.

An empty room. A single man. Broken
pieces of an ignorant lampshade. Death
to all inanimate objects. Death before
consumerism. Death before Death.

Why? Lampshade, why?

So I panic, naturally, and lose my head
trying to think of how to stop the world
stealing all my hot secret thoughts.

ESSAYS

Live from the Television Necropolis

-Cornwallis

...But then again. He wouldn't be a nice guy without being used like a nice guy. He lets her crash in her pad, and she wants to dry hump his room band mate buddy. I'm done dissecting the urban life inaccuracies of this show. I can't help it that I'm so street. I always pick the option to keep it real.Oh shit, My god. I just... What was that? Who talks like that. I'm becoming one of them. It's all happening.

Actually, that's a pretty accurate description of how I felt watching this. I was afraid of becoming one of these people. It's a show where your relations to the characters are either love them, hate them, or want to elope with them and I'm not going for any. That's purely on the physical level, since these "real people" are about as real as my morning bowel movement, which is non existent. To describe these characters any deeper then the physical gets tough, since they all fill a stereotype quota. Now that I'm finished discussing the merits of the show on it's sparkle quality level. It's time to get serious.

Since the dawn of the Television Era. We have seen a constant flux of crap and none crap. This is the same for perhaps any art. Recently, it could be said that television has severely dropped in quality, and perhaps every art. We have replaced shows with garden variety contests and reality shows about people disconnected with reality. American television has always had it's escapist side. It's one of it's trademarks. Seems as if now, we have given up more of the reality for the escape. The balance isn't there anymore. Maybe there was never a balance, but there was always a reflection. We, and I say

we which includes me, because excluding myself would be hypocritical and unfair. We are being reflected in that television screen. We want to escape as the world suffocates us. Our little apartments and our little houses keep us protected from nothing, but our illusions run high.

The danger of The Show is simple. It's escapism that substitutes reality. It, like most shows on MTV, and most shows on TV in general, appeal to one sense. The sense that you are the only one. Shows like this exist to make you ether laugh at the down right shallowness of some, or wish for the greed to come take you alive. You are all part of the market. This show is different. It not only appeals to that subconscious ego inflated sense of self worth. It's characters represent something many want. Instead of greed, it's an entire social construct.

There have been shows based on stereotypes before. The rampant obvious racism of some shows back in the 70's don't surprise anyone now. It's just the way of the times I suppose?

Afterword

Once again the TAR would like to thank our submitters for relinquishing their pieces to our editorial processes and our readers for their insightful and colourful comments and criticisms- keep 'em coming! Additional thanks goes out for the help we receive from our freelancing editors and proofers- even the smallest assistance brings closer to meeting our deadlines.

We are always looking to expand our readership and author base. So please tell your friends, or even the people you just call friends but secretly consider them more acquaintances (at this point it would be awkward to make the distinction) about us and urge them to read our releases every month and to submit their own pieces. If you can suggest other online communities that would be accepting of our zine, please contact as us theaprilreader@gmail.com.

Successful solicitation means increased submissions, which can only benefit our readers. Help us make a successful long-term publication.

-TAR

Credits & Information

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Special Thanks to THRILLHOUSE, our Authors, and everyone who took the time to download TAR

And now for an informative word from Wildweasal on

copyright: *Copyright law in the United States states that when you write or create any work, you as the creator of this work, possess ownership of this work at the time of its creation. When you submit something to The April Reader, you still retain the copyright to the work, and you still own what you have submitted. By emailing your work to TAR you are simply giving TAR permission to host this work on our Internet server. There is never a point in time at which TAR becomes the owner of your work and you will always own the work that you have submitted.*

See you next issue,

-TAR